

Interview to Florence Blas, Communication manager of Gîtes-de-France

Q - What are Gîtes-de-France? And what relationship is there with ENRx? In what projects are you involved in?

Gîtes de France is the **French leader in green tourism**. It is a **label of quality**, which qualifies the lodging in rural environment for their equipment, their environment and the hosting capacity of owners, no matter whether they are rural lodging, bed & breakfast or group lodging.



Gîtes de France has been partner of ENRx for many years, that is why we wanted to formalize our collaboration by signing a convention in 2014, with the same objective:

- participate in the development of sustainable tourism in the territories of Regional Natural Parks, particularly through accommodation and outdoor sports activities
- pool all resources useful for the organization, development, promotion and evaluation of these activities.

At the scale of the Nord Pas de Calais region:

- promote the principles of sustainable tourism in the Gîtes de France Nord Pas de Calais, particularly through activities to promote knowledge of regional trees fruit and vegetable varieties.

Beyond the reciprocal valuation of the actions of our institutions, we have developed “housing” themes:

- Gîtes Panda
- Gites Form, Nature, Well Being
- the Gardens showcases



Q - What does the label “Gîtes Panda” consists of? Which type of accommodations can get it?

The "**Gîtes Panda**" are Gîtes de France® accommodations, (Gîtes, Bed and Breakfast, Group Gîtes) to which the **WWF** grants its label when they meet three conditions:

1. *Preservation of biodiversity and the protection of nature:* gardens and natural spaces are true refuges for fauna and flora. ;
2. *Eco habitat:* healthy and natural materials are used in building renovation, energy saving devices, etc .;
3. *Ecocitizenship:* waste sorting, composting, rainwater recovery, biodegradable cleaning products, valued soft mobility, etc. are an integral part of the functioning of the house.

The lodgings, rooms of Hosts or Lodgings of Group "Panda" must be located near a hiking trail, encouraging nature observation.

What the "Panda Cottage" should do to make available to its clients any means promoting the observation of nature:

- Guides to observe fauna and local flora
- A pair of binoculars
- Hiking maps; guides to identify local fauna and flora,

At the same time, the owner of Gite Panda accommodation is committed to educating the tourist on the knowledge and protection of the environment, the practice of an eco-friendly attitude

Q - What is the interest of the “Showcase gardens” project in which Gîtes de France is involved? How does it work? How many tourist accommodations participate? What is the acceptance of customers?

The objective of the "**Jardins Vitrines**" is the preservation and enhancement of local vegetable varieties with tourist customers.

A first presentation of the process allowed the involvement of about twenty volunteers, members of Gites de France; they were given a **kit of seeds of 12 regional vegetables varieties** by the Regional Center of Genetic Resources and are committed to present each one of these vegetables, make them taste or offer them to their customers while explaining the object of this experimentation.

ENRx and Gites de France wished to extend the network outside the territories of regional natural parks: in 2018, 28 members will cultivate and cook regional vegetables for tourists, some of whom will return home with new recipes, others with seeds...

2018 should see the establishment of common signing posts for these vegetable gardens as well as the publication of a collection of recipes.

Q - Why did you promote the “Parks, Nature, Sports and Health” project? What should be the compromise from the tourist accommodations? Is this label helping the participating tourist accommodations in getting more customers?

The label "Fitness, Nature, Well Being" is based on several observations:

- 3 regional natural parks in Nord Pas de Calais, prone to the practice of nature sports;
- A large part of the Gites de France tourist accommodation located in the Regional Nature Parks territories;
- Many organized sports events and accompanying families, potential visitors;
- A population in need of physical activities.

Gites de France owners are already Ambassadors of sustainable tourism. They now want to become ambassadors of nature sports.

Gîtes de France and ENRx worked closely on an endorsement of qualification to the charter of quality Gites de France in order to attract clients such as sportsmen, professionals or amateurs, to adapt to their needs, and at the same time, to sensitize non sporty people on the benefit of practicing physical exercise as a source of health and well-being, especially if it is a sport of nature, accessible to everyone.

Q. What is your role in the IMPACT Interreg Europe project?

Pioneers of green tourism in France, artisans of the development of a sustainable tourism and actors of the maintenance of an economic activity in rural area, are the reasons for which ENRX has attached the Gîtes de France of Nord Pas de Calais to the IMPACT program with an objective: to take B&B owners on innovative projects, promoting the protection of biodiversity and the involvement of local stakeholders while enriching the experiences of European partners.