

FRANCE

Today

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Explore the legendary landscapes and terrific tipples of Châteauneuf-du-Pape (page 76)



Bienvenue!

Salut, mes amis and welcome to your springtime issue of *France Today*. Perhaps more than at any other time of the year, this is when we serious Francophiles start to research and plan our next holiday escape to *la belle France*.

The promise of a trip to explore beautiful towns and villages, to indulge in mouthwatering food and superb wine, to embrace France's rich culture and heritage, is at the heart of what we do, and this issue we provide lots of inspiration.

Love the Loire? Or never been before? Either way, with our Great Destination guide to this stunning region's dreamy châteaux, superb gastronomy and idyllic *paysages*, you will surely be tempted to visit – perhaps on two wheels along the spectacular Loire à Vélo cycle route.

Other places we heartily recommend include Saint-Omer, the historic hidden gem in Pas-de-Calais; foodie magnet Vannes in Brittany; the lavender-tinted glory of the Luberon in Provence; wine drinkers' paradise Châteauneuf-du-Pape in Vaucluse; and our pick of France's most eye-catching train stations.

IMAGE © GUENHAËL KESSLER

We also bring city breakers with accessibility concerns a long-overdue guide to exploring Paris. Elsewhere, we doff our beret to three French cultural icons: Bardot, Piaf and Astérix have all contributed, in their own unique way, to the cultural landscape of France and the country's image around the world.

As well as our usual pick of the best restaurants to enjoy right now, and some delicious recipes from Le Bristol in Paris, we also head to Aveyron to discover a winemaking region with a burgeoning reputation.

Love what you read but need more France to sate your appetite? Why not become a France Today Member and enjoy countless additional Francophile treats? There are many members-only videos, talks, in-depth stories, language tips and exclusives to enjoy. It is quick and easy to join, and great value: just visit francetoday.com/become-a-france-today-member.

Alors, a hearty thank you for being part of the *France Today* community and I hope you enjoy the issue... *À bientôt!*



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FRANCE TODAY
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IF YOU'RE HOLDING THIS MAGAZINE, YOU'RE ALREADY HALFWAY TO YOUR NEXT FRENCH ESCAPE

Every two months, we get to whisk you off to sun-warmed markets, long lazy lunches, secret swims, and villages that somehow still feel like a discovery. But between issues, France doesn't exactly sit still. **That's where our free weekly newsletter comes in:** a little midweek holiday for your inbox, landing every Wednesday. Expect fresh ideas, seasonal inspiration, new places to stay, food and wine worth travelling for, and the occasional "how did we not know about this?" spot you'll want to save immediately.

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Feb/Mar 2026

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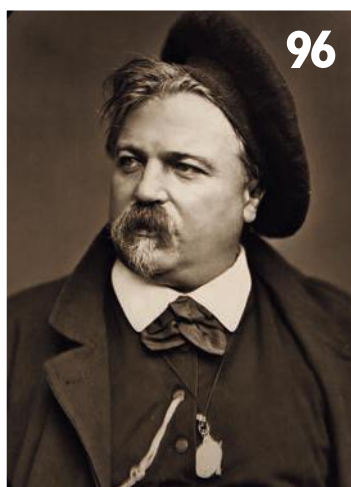
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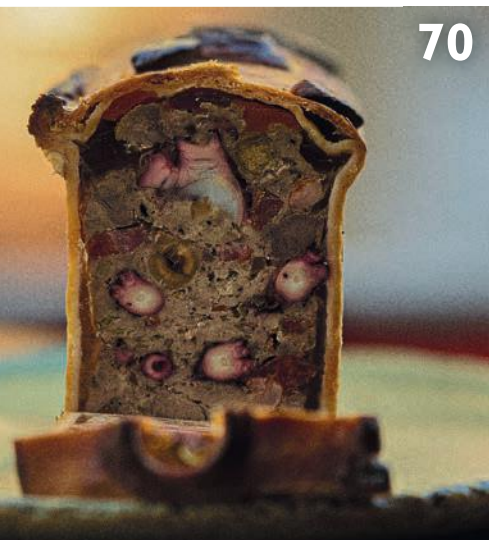
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ON THE COVER

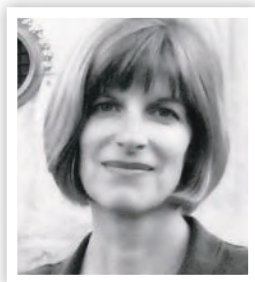
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 © Shutterstock/
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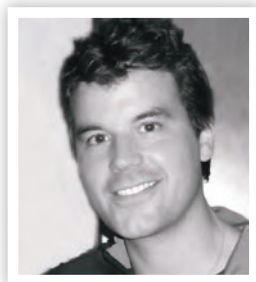
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JENNIFER LADONNE

Journalist and editor Jennifer left Manhattan for Paris in 2004. A regular writer for *France Today*, she also covers restaurants and hotels for *Fodor's Paris* travel guide and is co-author of *Around Paris with Kids*. Her articles have appeared on *Fodors.com* and in the *Huffington Post*.



DOMINIC BLISS

A long-time *France Today* contributor, Dominic is a passionate Francophile with vast experience in reporting on the very best that France has to offer. This issue he explores the rarified world of Châteaufort-du-Pape and celebrates the most famous Gaul of all.



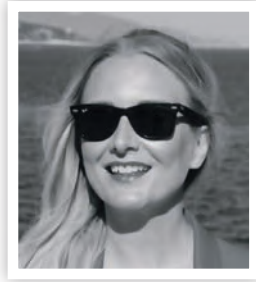
CAROL DRINKWATER

Carol Drinkwater is an award-winning actress and film maker and the best-selling author of *The Olive Farm* series. Her latest book is *One Summer in Provence*, a story of family secrets. As an actress she is best known for her portrayal of Helen Herriot in *All Creatures Great and Small*.



ALEXANDER LOBRANO

À la Carte restaurant writer Alexander is a Connecticut Yankee who's called Paris home for 20 years. He writes the *Eurofile* column for the *New York Times*, and regularly contributes articles on food and travel to *Condé Nast Traveller*, *Forbes Life*, *Savueur* and various other publications.



REBECCA McVEIGH

Rebecca McVeigh is a travel writer, producer and author of the *Fodor's Guide to The French Riviera*. She has also written for *DK Travel*, *Mr & Mrs Smith*, *The Sunday Times Ireland* and *Business Insider* amongst others. Originally from Northern Ireland, she is now based in the south of France.



DOMINIC RIPPON

An ex-wine buyer, wine author and lover of all things French, Dominic sold his wine merchant business, *Strictly Wine*, in 2014, to pursue his lifelong dream of moving to France. He now lives in the shadow of Carcassonne's medieval ramparts, amid the vineyards of Languedoc-Roussillon.



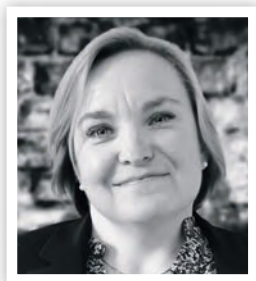
CAROLINE MILLS

Caroline is a freelance writer with a focus on European travel. She has toured all areas of France, but none more so than the Loire Valley where she loves the rich historical culture, rural landscape, exceptional architecture and wine. She is a member of the British Guild of Travel Writers.



ALISON HUGHES

After reading English at university Alison lived in France for eight years in rural Burgundy and later in Paris, returning to the UK in the early 1990s. Former deputy editor of *France Magazine*, she now works as a freelance writer – she has an enduring love of all things French.



ADELE HEIDENREICH

An inclusive tourism consultant and accessibility-focused travel writer, Adele helps destinations communicate accessibility with greater clarity. A native Norwegian, she has lived and worked abroad for more than 20 years and travels extensively for both research and storytelling.

FRANCE

THE BEST OF FRANCE

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EXCLUSIVE
Super Project

Lot €214,200
Ref: A11904 - Beautiful collection of houses on 14 acres to renovate.
7% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
DPE: Not required

Attractive Farmhouse

Haute-Garonne €698,000
Ref: A28245 - 5-bedroom renovated farmhouse on 2 acres with pool.
Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: D Climate class: D

Perfect for B&B

Morbihan €230,050
Ref: A33343 - 7-bedroom house - gîte and self-contained apartment.
7% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
Energy class: E Climate class: E

EXCLUSIVE
Business Potential

Haute-Vienne €224,500
Ref: A34126 - Spacious 6-bedroom house with barns, courtyard and garden.
Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: C Climate class: A

EXCLUSIVE
Blank Canvas

Saône-et-Loire €244,000
Ref: A30768 - Country house to finish renovating. Major works done.
Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
DPE: Not required

Ski Lovers

Savoie €585,000
Ref: A33564 - 4-bedroom flat in the bottom 2 floors of a village house.
Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: E Climate class: B

Peaceful Haven

Dordogne €525,000
Ref: A40425 - Property complex comprising two houses with 5 acres.
Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: B Climate class: B

EXCLUSIVE
Immediate Income!

Gard €679,000
Ref: T101846 - Charming house with pool and three independent gîtes.
Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: C Climate class: C

EXCLUSIVE
Recent Renovation

Vienne €119,682
Ref: A40694 - Freshly renovated 3-bedroom home bursting with charm.
9% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
DPE: Not required

Rental Opportunities

Charente-Maritime €437,780
Ref: A34365 - 2 detached houses with 10 bedrooms and swimming pool.
6% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
Energy class: F Climate class: C

Rural Retreat

Orne €148,000
Ref: A39921 - 3-4 bedroom traditional Colombage with panoramic views.
Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: E Climate class: B

EXCLUSIVE
Priced to sell!

Hautes-Alpes €1,680,000
Ref: A41733 - Stunning 5-bedroom chalet with garden and super views.
5% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
Energy class: C Climate class: A

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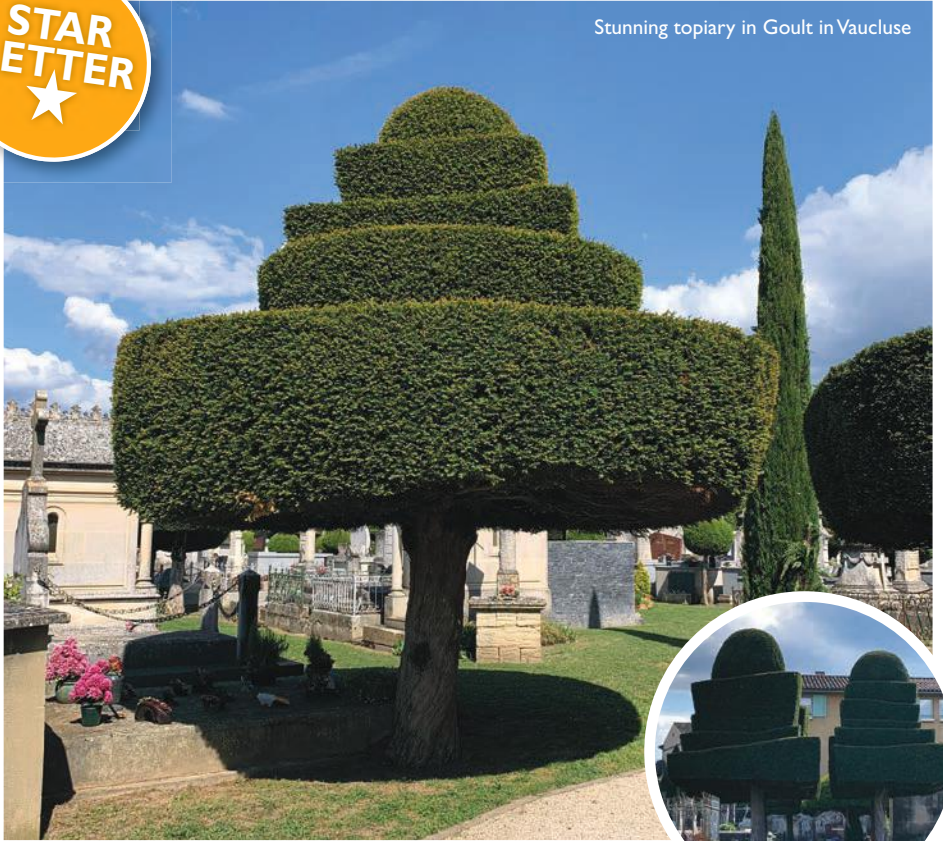
Sophie Lebarcq - Leggett Agent

BOÎTE AUX LETTRES

Here, readers share some of their favourite moments in France...
why not send us yours in time for the next issue?



Stunning topiary in Goult in Vaucluse



Top topiary in Vaucluse

We love the small village of Goult, and on one of our trips there I discovered the cemetery. I felt like I had walked into Alice in Wonderland! All the trees have been meticulously pruned into fanciful shapes. It's a beautiful place. I never did find out who the artist or artists were who do this work. Worth a visit if you are in the Luberon.

Pam Irving, Ct., USA

ON THE TRAIL OF THE MYSTERIOUS SPRING

RE: Reader Ed Chesterton's search for the name of the village with a spring in its centre (Boîte aux lettres, Issue 210)

I believe the name of the village your subscriber Ed Chesterton is looking for is Fontaine-de-Vaucluse, which is an iconic village in the Luberon region. This is where the famous source of the Sorgue river springs forth. The village of Fontaine-de-Vaucluse gave its name to the department.

Robert Williams

Reading

Could the community he is thinking of be Fontaine-de-Vaucluse? It is a charming historical village built around the spring, dating back to Roman times.

Tomi Kent Smith

Tacoma, Washington

Editor Justin says: We await Ed's confirmation and will solve the mystery next issue. Meanwhile, Josie from our digital team thinks it might be Tonnerre in Burgundy!

WRITE TO US



Share your thoughts, tips and memories with us. Please supply your name and address and email us at **letters@francetoday.com**

A DEAD END?

Re: Read the signs, page 27 Issue 210

This month it refers to the Impasse du marche des chevaliers. Why do we use a French term, cul-de-sac, when the French themselves use a completely different word?

Just curious!

Howard Armstrong,
Sheffield

Editor Justin says: The French do use the phrase 'cul-de-sac'. Impasse and cul-de-sac are synonyms for a dead-end street, but impasse is the generic and legal term, while cul-de-sac is more descriptive, often used for a short impasse with a rounded end (like the bottom of a bag – the 'sac'), and also has a figurative meaning for a dead-end situation, although 'impasse' is more commonly used in this case.



When is an impasse a cul-de-sac?

JOIN THE DISCUSSION.

Connect with like-minded Francophiles, and enjoy exclusive online content via the *France Today* social media channels. Here's what you might have missed.

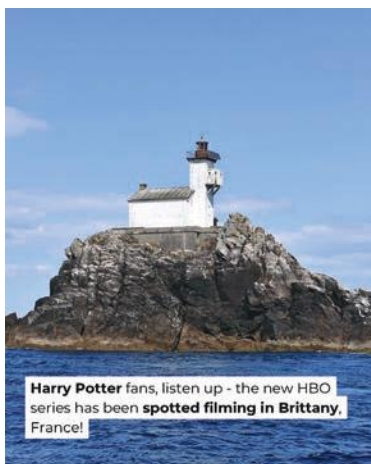
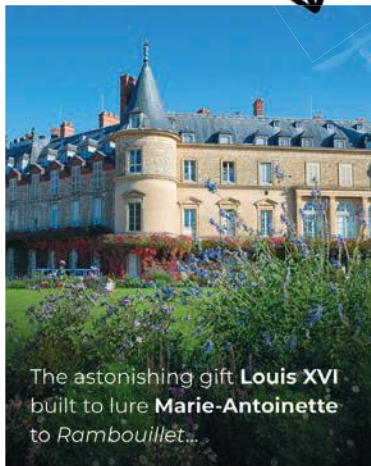
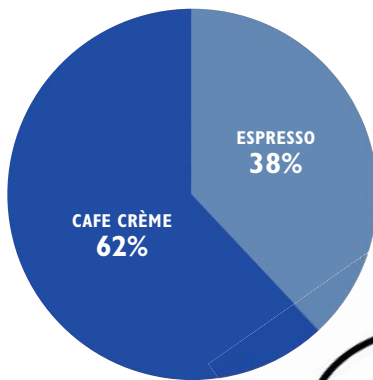


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READER POLL

We asked: *What's your favourite way to drink coffee?*



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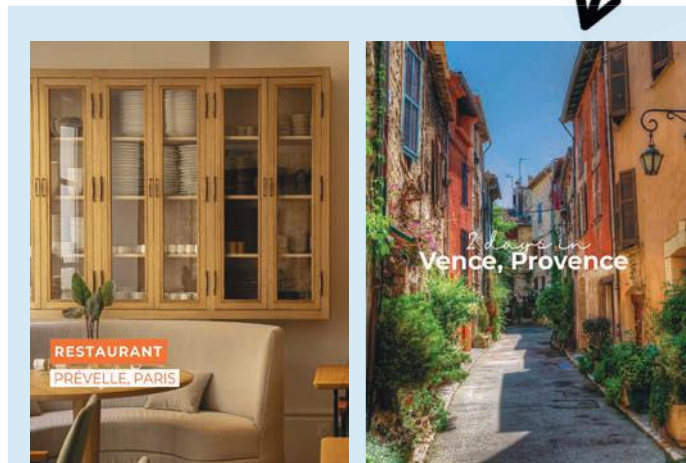
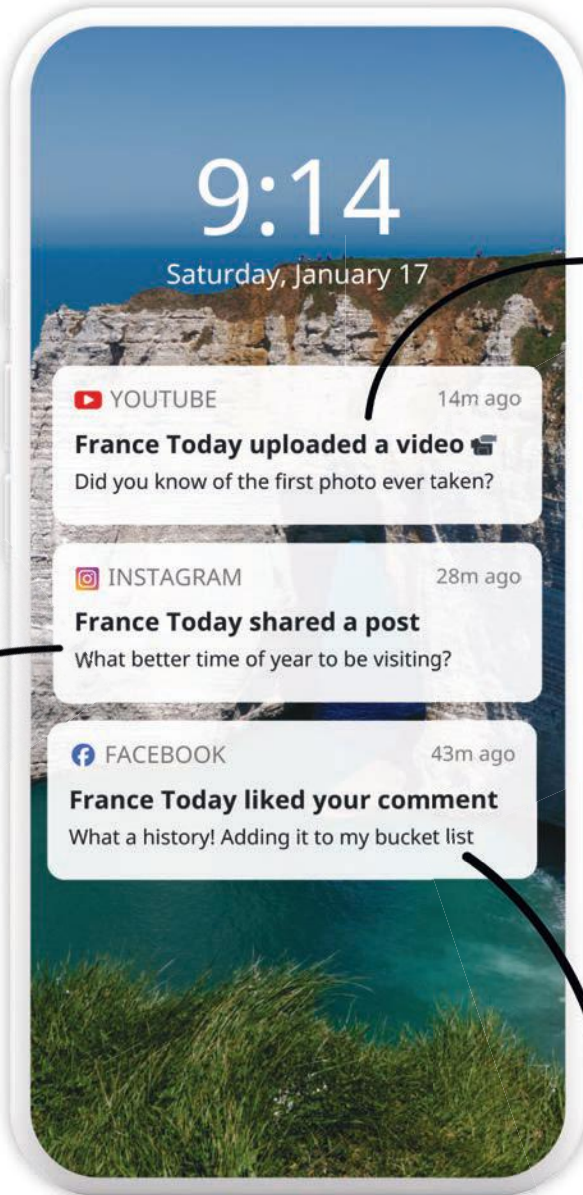
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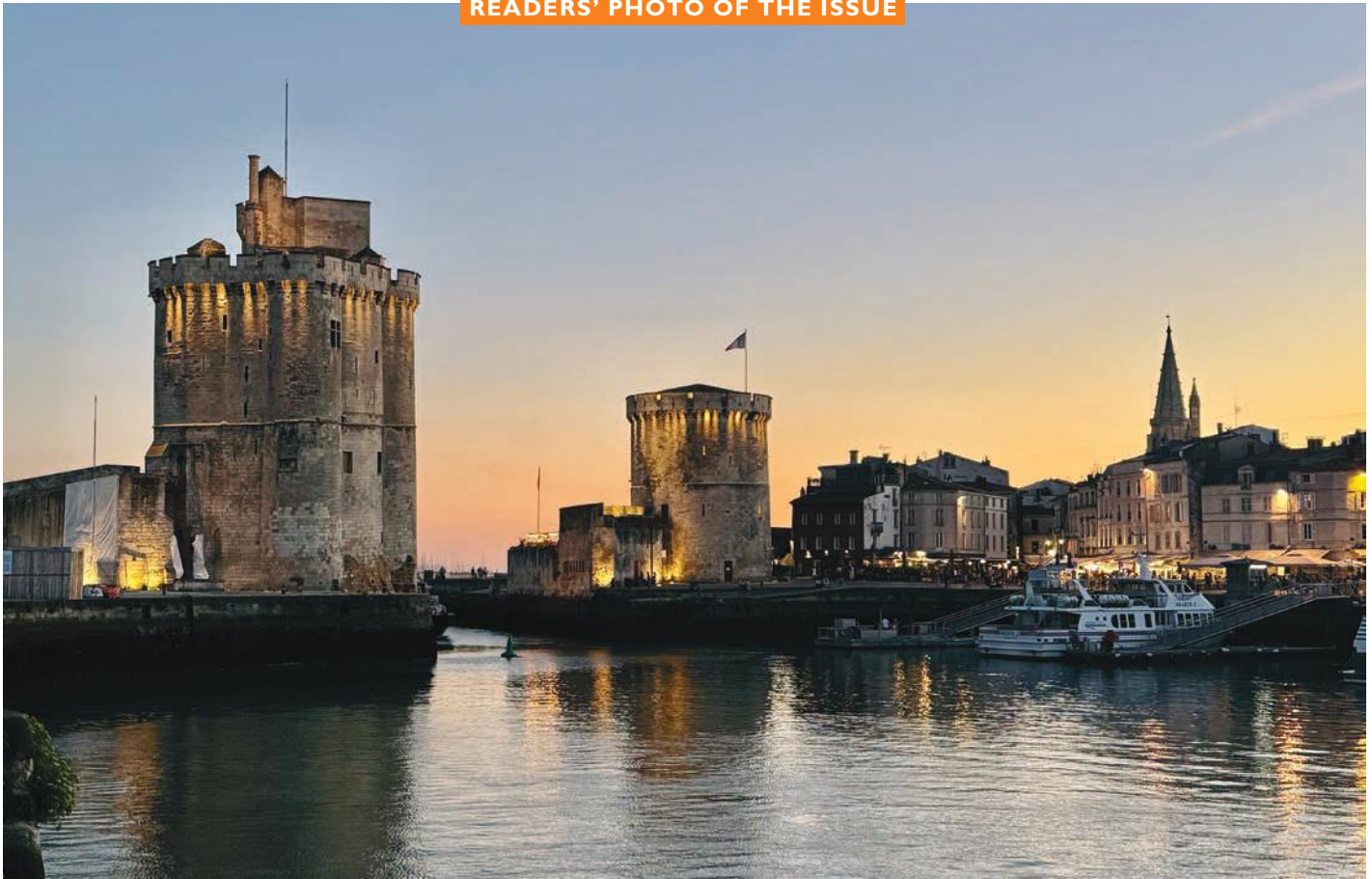
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READERS' PHOTO OF THE ISSUE



The sun sets on le Vieux Port, La Rochelle, by *Amanda Pearsall*



Cathédrale Saint-Vincent de Viviers by *Megan Carney*



Père Lachaise Cemetery by *Nancy Silver*

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LES INFOS

The essential *France Today* round-up of the latest *faits divers*, news and views from around the Hexagon



NOTRE-DAME BREAKS RECORD

In the 12 months since its triumphant reopening in December 2024, Notre-Dame Cathedral drew record crowds that surpassed even its pre-restoration glory. Around 11m visitors flocked to the restored Gothic masterpiece, a 30% increase on the 8m to 9m annual figure previously.

This outpaces the Louvre's 8.7m and the Eiffel Tower's 7m paying guests, with daily queues snaking across the cathedral forecourt despite the appointment-setting app. Officials manage visitor flows during 1,600 services and 650 pilgrimages, blending tourism with spiritual visits. Visitors report appreciating the "authenticity and simplicity" of the five-year project that revived the 12th-century icon. Half of those visiting come from abroad and only a quarter booked their tickets in advance (booking is free but optional). The proportion who visit for tourism compared to worship is not known. Due to the high demand, the cathedral decided to implement a limit of 30,000 visitors a day to ensure that the faithful are never left behind. Booking ahead on the official app, Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris, is therefore strongly advised.

● www.notredamedeparis.fr

SAVE THE CAFÉ Traditional French cafés and bistros have declined steeply, from an estimated 508,000 in the early 20th century to fewer than 40,000 today. In response, the Association des Bistrotset Cafés de France has launched a petition to have them inscribed on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list.

The petition underlines their role as essential social hubs.

www.bistrotsetcafesdefrance.org

Transport briefs



MISSING THE BUS

From March 1, the RoissyBus shuttle connecting Paris Opéra to Charles-de-Gaulle Airport will be replaced by Transdev's bus line 9517, departing from Saint-Denis-Pleyel, allowing travellers to connect with métro lines 13, 14 and RER D. tinyurl.com/paris-bus



BONJOUR, GATWICK

Air France increases its UK service from March 29, with two daily flights to London Gatwick from Paris CDG. This complements the service to Heathrow, which operates six times a day.

www.airfrance.fr



MANNERS MATTER

France is imposing fines of up to €10,000 (€20,000 for repeat offenders) and flight bans of up to four years on disruptive airline passengers. All incidents will be logged in a national database.

tinyurl.com/flightban

FACT

Founded in 1764, Baccarat began as a glassworks in the town of Baccarat, in Lorraine, by royal decree of Louis XV.

**LET THEM PAY MORE!**

Following a similar move by the Louvre Museum, the Château de Versailles has raised entry fees for visitors from outside the European Union. Introduced this year, the ticket for non-EU residents now costs €35, an increase of 9.4%.

● www.chateauversailles.fr

**PRINCE OF THE LEFT BANK**

The Prince de Conti hotel, in the heart of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district, reopens its 17th-century doors after extensive renovations. From tapestries and sumptuous fabrics to the sharpest details, the 23-room boutique hotel promises a haven "where intimacy combines with timeless luxury".

● princedeconti.com

**DINING DESIGN****BEST IN CLASS**

Ducasse Baccarat has been named the most beautiful restaurant in the world

High-end Paris restaurant Ducasse Baccarat has earned the prestigious Prix Versailles 2025 for Architecture and Design for the most stunning dining space in the world. Nestled on the second floor of the historic Maison Baccarat in the chic 16th arrondissement, the venue opened in 2024 as a collaboration between venerated crystal artisans Baccarat and Michelin-starred chef Alain Ducasse. Its allure lies in a masterful fusion of 19th-century grandeur and contemporary artistry, transforming a mansion once owned by art patron Viscountess Marie-Laure de Noailles into a sensory masterpiece. The design of the main dining room, crafted by interior architect Aliénor Béchu with sculptor Jean-Guillaume Mathiaut, features a ceiling of cascading oversized Baccarat crystal droplets shimmering against warm oak-paneled walls. The floor-to-ceiling shelves evoke a cabinet of curiosities, in an interplay of crystal, oak and marble, creating a timeless ambience. Add Alain Ducasse's precise, seasonal cuisine and you have a glittering expression of French art de vivre at its very best.

● www.ducasse-baccarat-paris.com

C'EST PAS VRAI!

From the puzzling to the delightful, it's all part of life in France

**CHEESY PURPOSE**

In Ambierle, Loire, an abandoned railway tunnel has been turned into a cheese-maturing paradise by Maison Mons – and it's open to visitors, so turophiles can explore this unique cave.

**MANE SUSPECTS**

The gendarmerie in Malemort announced that three Shetland ponies, which had escaped their enclosure, had been "apprehended" after "refusing to cooperate with authorities".

**MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE**

A Niort couple on vacation in Cap Ferret found a message in a bottle on the beach. The sender, an Italian woman, launched it eight years ago from Wicklow, Ireland, more than 1,000km away.

**CHUT!**

A former nuclear bunker on the Plateau d'Albion, built in the 1960s and abandoned in 1996, houses an underground laboratory studying silence and natural phenomena 500m below ground.

WHAT'S ON

Experience the best of France right now with a rich selection of festivals, special events and art exhibitions



IMAGES © COTE D'AZUR FRANCE TOURISME/SOUHAYA BOUSSADOUN, COTE D'AZUR TOURISME/AMBRE FRATCELLI, CAMILLE MORENC

COME TO THE CARNIVAL!

The French Riviera comes to life with events to celebrate the start of spring

The French Riviera is bursting with an energetic series of cultural celebrations. The streets of Nice are buzzing during its world-famous Carnival, under the 2026 theme, *Vive la Reine* (Long Live the Queen), honouring inspirational women from history and fiction. The Promenade des Anglais becomes a stage where giant figures parade alongside colourful floats, culminating in the Battle of Flowers and nighttime illuminations. In nearby Villefranche-sur-Mer on February 16, the Combat Naval Fleuri is a spectacular event where over 30 traditional Mediterranean *pointus* fishing boats adorned with thousands of colourful flowers parade in the Port de la Santé, engaging in a joyful 'battle' of flower tossing aimed at the spectators along the quai – a unique fusion of maritime heritage and carnival festivity dating back to 1902. Continuing the floral theme, the celebration of

mimosa is another cherished event, painting the Riviera a cheerful yellow. Held in towns such as Mandelieu-La Napoule and Tanneron, it honours the fragrant flower in late February and early March with parades, traditional music and street festivities. Not far away in Menton, the Fête du Citron (Lemon Festival) welcomes 200,000 visitors between February 14 and March 1 with giant sculptures made from more than 140 tonnes of citrus fruit. Themed *Merveilles du Vivant* (Wonders of Life) this edition blends art, nature, craft fairs and parades. The Débarquement Napoléon festival on March 1-2 in Golfe-Juan, commemorates his historic landing in 1815, accompanied by a lively Imperial Village with period camps, artisans, cavalry charges and artillery fire, creating a captivating blend of history and spectacle.

● provence-alpes-cotedazur.com >>



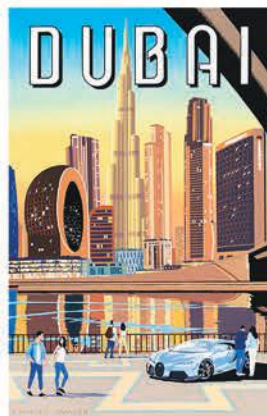
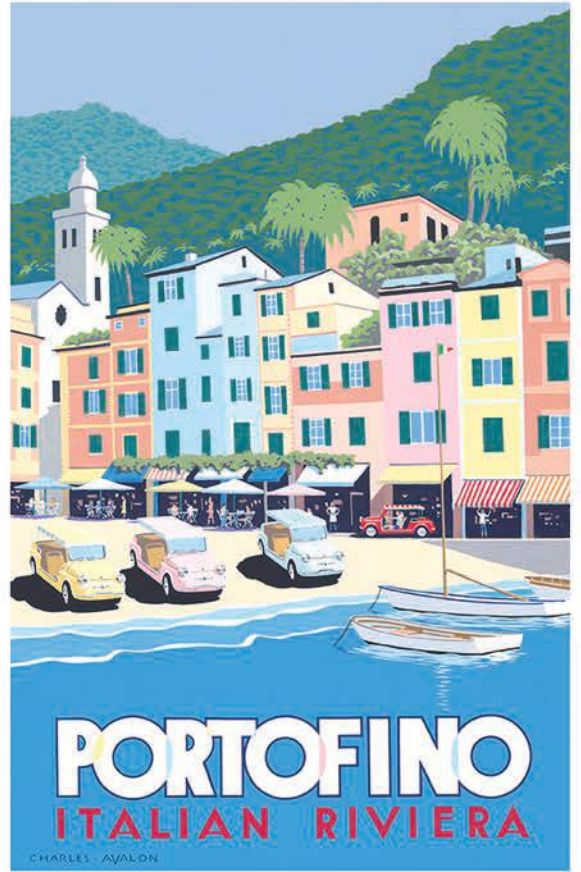
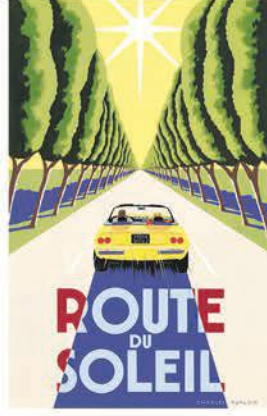
Main and from left: Carnaval de Nice; the Débarquement de Napoléon in Golfe Juan, the Fête du Citron in Menton; Combat Naval Fleuri



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The sarcophagus of a Singer of Amun from Karnak in Egypt c. 1000–664 BC

DON'T MISS

THE MUMMY ENIGMA

The Musée de l'Homme in Paris brings together history, science and art to explore the fascinating and mysterious world of mummies in a new exhibition.

It showcases exceptional mummified bodies alongside funerary objects, scientific documents and contemporary artworks which have been inspired by mummification traditions. The exhibition spans several continents and centuries, revealing diverse mummification techniques practised in cultures from South America, Egypt, Europe and beyond.

For centuries, these preserved bodies have aroused a mixture of fascination and unease, serving as powerful reminders of our own mortality. In a western world where the deceased body is increasingly hidden away and death is often experienced in private, mummies directly challenge our relationship with memory.

The exhibition delves into who these individuals were in their societies, their lives before death, and the meanings their preservation held, and how museum practices have evolved to respect human dignity during display. Visitors are challenged to confront cultural taboos about death and the body while scientific studies using modern medical imaging and biochemistry help reconstruct their lives and societies.

● **Until May 25**

www.museedelhomme.fr



ROMANCE IN STRASBOURG

Surprise your Valentine with a visit to Strasbourg Mon Amour, celebrating love and heartwarming charm across the beautiful capital of Alsace. The picturesque streets fill with romantic illuminations, concerts, dance and cosy chalets. Whether travelling with a significant other, friends, family or solo, visitors can enjoy themed walks, art exhibitions, and gourmet experiences highlighting Alsatian culture in a dreamy, festive atmosphere.

● **February 6–15**

strasbourg-monamour.eu

5 EXHIBITIONS

From the educational and historical to the visually stunning



1 GOOD MOTHERS

From ancient mother goddesses to the Notre-Dame de la Garde basilica in Marseille, the MuCEM covers four millennia, looking at how motherhood has shaped societies.

Until August 31
mucem.org

2 MATISSE AND FRIDA

Bassins des Lumières in Bordeaux unveils a new digital show dedicated to the flamboyant world of Henri Matisse, accompanied by a short-form exhibition dedicated to Frida Kahlo.

Until January 2, 2027
www.bassins-lumieres.com

3 ZOMBIES IN LYON

Beyond the imagery of the contagious undead in film and pop culture, this exhibition takes you to Haiti to trace the origins of the myth, on the fringes of Vodou culture.

Until August 16
museedesconfluences.fr

4 HEARTS IN NANTES

The Dobrée Museum offers a unique exploration of the heart as organ and symbol through 200 works from antiquity to the present day.

Until March 1
www.musee-dobree.fr

5 DYNASTIC JEWELS

The Al Thani Collection and Victoria & Albert Museum present a feast for the eyes at the elegant Hôtel de la Marine, through the sumptuous language of jewellery of the royal courts.

Until April 6
www.hotel-de-la-marine.paris



IN FOCUS

MUSICAL EASTER

The exquisite Easter Festival in Aix-en-Provence has become one of Europe's leading musical events. The festival blends artistic excellence with an outreach mission and attracts the world's top soloists and most celebrated orchestras. This year, co-directors Dominique Bluzet and Renaud Capuçon are delighted to welcome an exceptionally prestigious orchestra in residence: the Munich Philharmonic, conducted by Lahav Shani.

They also remind us that Easter combines joy with solemn introspection, an outlook that reflects their wish to live by Goethe's maxim:

"Take great care of beauty, for the useful will always take care of itself." Every year, one of Bach's two Passions is performed on Good Friday evening. For this edition, the festival will also take place at the Camp des Milles, offering a day of reflection and music exploring the relationship with the sacred.

Venues span the Grand Théâtre de Provence, the Conservatoire Darius Milhaud and the Théâtre du Jeu de Paume, adding to the allure of this unmissable springtime rendezvous.

● **March 28 – April 12**
festivalpaques.com

IMAGES ©ROUTE DU ROCK/FACEBOOK, UNLIMITED, FESTIVAL/FACEBOOK, TOMORROWLAND, WINTER/FACEBOOK, SIA, 2026



FARMING POW-WOW The International Agricultural Show in Paris is the major annual showcase for agriculture in all its diversity. Don't miss one of France's largest and most popular annual events, celebrating French farming, regional products and gastronomy, all under the ruminating eye of this edition's mascot, a proud Brahman breed representative called Biguine. February 21 – March 1 www.salon-agriculture.com

LET'S GO

We're rocking and rolling the winter blahs away



LA ROUTE DU ROCK – WINTER
 The buzz never stops in this music festival in Saint-Malo and Rennes, focusing on rock and post-punk acts and emerging talent in a seaside setting.
 March 4–7
www.laroutedurock.com



CHAMONIX UNLIMITED
 Chamonix-Mont-Blanc blends electronic music, DJ sets at high-altitude venues such as Aiguille du Midi, skiing and lively Alpine parties for a winter experience to remember.
 March 25–29
www.unlimited-festival.com



TOMORROWLAND WINTER
 The Alpine edition of the electronic music festival takes place in Alpe d'Huez. Some 25,000 festival-goers gather at 2,000m to enjoy world-class DJs, music and skiing in a spectacular mountain setting.
 March 21-28
winter.tomorrowland.com »



PERSPECTIVE

FROZEN ARRIVAL

Disneyland Paris is unveiling its most ambitious transformation yet. The resort's second park will be reborn as Disney Adventure World, with the spectacular World of Frozen as its crown jewel – a life-sized recreation of Arendelle that brings the beloved Disney animation to life. This expansion effectively doubles the size of what was formerly Walt Disney Studios. Visitors will step through Adventure Way, a grand new promenade featuring 14 dining venues and a charming *Tangled*-inspired attraction, before reaching the shores of Adventure Bay, a central lake which hosts an innovative nighttime spectacular featuring 379 choreographed drones. The World of Frozen transports guests to a Scandinavian village, crowned by a 36m North Mountain and Elsa's glittering Ice Palace. The Frozen Ever After attraction takes families by boat through snowy forests and troll valleys, whilst the bay hosts A Celebration in Arendelle, a musical show featuring Viking longships and beloved characters. The next-generation robotics bring Olaf to life, and fans can meet Anna and Elsa in the castle's Portrait Gallery, while the tavern and boutique offer Nordic-inspired cuisine and shopping. With Marvel Avengers Campus and Worlds of Pixar already open, and a Lion King area planned, it's an exciting new chapter for Disneyland Paris.

● Opening March 29

www.disneylandparis.com

HERMÈS JUMP Bringing together the best riders in the world, this 16th edition of the Saut Hermès show jumping competition at the Grand Palais is the ultimate rendezvous on the equestrian calendar. Take a stroll around the stands before settling in the bleachers to cheer on the athletes and admire a unique show. **March 20–22** www.sauthermes.com



3

FOR SPORTS

Bounce, jump, dribble and run to these exciting athletic meets



HARLEM GLOBE TROTTERS

In France as part of their 100th anniversary tour, the masters of basketball bring their signature blend of comedy, sportsmanship and gravity-defying tricks.

March 10 to April 1

harlemglobetrotters.com



RUN TO PARIS

Paris's Hoka half-marathon attracts runners of all levels, combining sport with sightseeing in a fun atmosphere. It's a great way to prep for the full Schneider Electric Marathon on April 12.

March 8

www.hokasemideparis.fr



SIX NATIONS 2026

France will defend their title starting February 5 with a home game against Ireland at Stade de France, and against Italy on February 22 near Lille. The tournament ends March 14 with France hosting England at Stade de France. Catch the thrill of this premier competition in person.

February 5 – March 14

www.ffr.fr

IMAGES © HARLEM GLOBE TROTTERS/FACEBOOK, A.S.O./MORGAN ROYE, SIX NATIONS RUGBY/FACEBOOK, DISNEY HERMÈS

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JOIE DE VIVRE

Our pick of splendid things great and small that showcase the joy of French life, from what to buy to where to go...

WATERSPORTS

NAUTICAL AND NICE



If 2026 is the year that your Francophile passions take an adventurous turn, then the seaside activity offerings from watersports centre Voiles et Galets – set against Normandy's famed limestone *falaises* (cliffs) at Étretat – could be just the thing to get the blood pumping. What could be more thrilling and rejuvenating than sailing, kayaking or standup paddleboarding through the iconic arches at this Alabaster Coast site? Voiles et Galets is run by qualified trainers Ramsès and Clara, and activities are conducted for groups of between four and eight people. It is also possible to join an existing group, so book in advance. Participants must be able to swim; minimum age is 14.

● www.voilesetgalets.com



ON AIME “I want to restore jewellery to its essence: an intimate gesture, a symbol, an extension of oneself,” says Neije bijoux maker Myriam Bober. Necklace pictured, €216. neije.com/en

Little black book

Looking for a blooming fabulous flowery visit this printemps? Here's our pick of springtime sensations



MAULÉVRIER

The Parc Oriental de Maulévrier in Maine-et-Loire, Pays de la Loire, was created by Alexandre Marcel, a famous orientalist architect, between 1899 and 1912. In spring, enjoy a tranquil picnic in the park as it celebrates hanami – the blossoming of white and pink cherry trees.

www.parc-oriental.com/en



EYRIGNAC

At Le Manoir d'Eyrignac in Salignac-Eyvigues, Dordogne – admired for its stunning topiary art – tulips, alliums, lilies, lupins, alstroemeria and dahlias take centre stage in springtime.

www.eyrignac.com/en



VILLA EPHRUSSI

The French Riviera is blessed with beautiful gardens, none more eye-catching than those of Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat. Springtime sees its stunning azaleas in full bloom.

en.tourisme-alpesmancelles.com



FASHION

agnès b. x LOUVRE

Art meets fashion in a bold, super-stylish new collection of clothing and accessories from French designer agnès b., inspired by the Louvre's timeless works.

For the collection, which ranges from T-shirts and skirts to cardigans and scarves, the designer immersed herself in the light and poetry of two landscapes by French classicist painter Claude Gellée, known as Claude Lorrain (1600–1682), seeking to put the works 'into clothing' and 'into motion'.

"These are trippy landscapes, open to the sea, to the beyond, to otherness," says agnès b., in tribute to the artist who made light a central theme of his works and inspired the likes of Turner and the Impressionists.

The designer, born in 1941, first visited the Louvre aged 11 or 12. "I was stopped in my tracks by *Man with a Glove* [by Titian]," she says.

Sample prices: knee-length skirt, €350; white cotton T-shirt with 'j'kiffe le Louvre' screen print, €85.

● www.agnesb.com



ON ÉCOUTE

GIMS

French rap sensation was 2025 streaming king



Congo-born rapper-singer Gims dominated French music streams in 2025

The undisputed king of the French streaming charts for 2025 was Gims, real name Gandhi Djuna, who was born in 1986 in Kinshasa, Congo, and moved to France aged two.

When Spotify released their Wrapped summary of the year's most streamed songs, Gims had four tunes in the top 10, with *Ciel* topping the list with a remarkable 144 million plays.

What is so impressive and unusual about Gims is his broad appeal with the French public across all age

brackets and social classes – children and grown-ups alike love his super-catchy, polished pop-rap. *France Today* can attest to this, having fallen for the singer in Stockholm syndrome style after being forced to play Gims on repeat by their children! Our own favourites? *Game Over* and *Parisienne*.

Passionate about hip-hop from an early age and formerly a member of rap group Sexion d'Assaut, Gims cites the likes of Nate Dogg, Marvin Gaye, Michael Jackson, 50 Cent and Eminem as his main musical inspirations.

His trademark look features sunglasses at all times for professional public appearances – which, he says, means when he takes them off he can walk down the street without being recognised!

IF YOU LIKE THIS, YOU MIGHT LIKE...



NATE DOGG

Gims was a fan of the American R&B singer, rapper and songwriter who died aged 41 in 2011.

The very best of
Shift Reco



MARVIN GAYE

Like many rappers, Gims was strongly influenced by the cool soul singer on the Motown label.

The very best of
Universal



EMINEM

Gims cites the Detroit rapper as his greatest influence for vocal flow and bouncing off the beat.

Curtain call
Interscope Records



INSTAFRANCE

For your chance to be featured, use **#francetodaymagazine**

1. Amazing nocturnal lightshow, Domaine de Trévarez, as seen by **breizhhollgaret**
2. Burgundy's sublime Abbaye de Fontenay pictured in winter **abbayedefontenay**
3. Christmas tree and drinks on the beach in Nice, as snapped by **travelais** >>



IMAGES © VAN RYSEL

TWO-WHEELED TECH

When it comes to cycling, no country on earth is more passionate about the joy of two-wheeled exercise than France. Exploring the beautiful countryside by bike is not just a pastime but a way of life for French people of all ages, so why not join them in 2026 with a great biking break?

Needless to say, the country also makes superb, advanced technology bikes, clothing and accessories for both professional and amateur riders.

Founded in 2019, Van Rysel is aimed at all cyclists whatever their level, objective or outlook on cycling. Its name means 'from Lille' in Flemish, reflecting the Nord city where the bikes are designed, assembled and tested, close to the famed cobbled roads of the Paris-Roubaix race.

Among its latest models is the EDR CF ULTRA (pictured above, from £4,000); designed for long rides, it strikes the perfect balance between comfort and efficiency. New clothing from Van Rysel includes the fleece-lined, breathable winter road cycling jacket EDR-Green, priced £69.99.

● www.vanryselcycling.com



Van Rysel embodies French advanced cycling technology in bikes and clothing



SKI LIKE A CHAMP Ski lesson booking platform Maison Sport now offers tuition in France for all skier levels, with instructors including British Olympic skier Graham Bell. maisonsport.com/en

3

ideas for...
**STYLISH
BACKPACKS**

From a trackable connected beauty to ethically made carry-alls, here are three super French sacs-à-dos



TRACK YOUR SAC

The Scapade AirPack is a premium backpack with a waterproof, durable shell that oozes style and security – it is compatible with Apple Find My so you can pair it to your phone and track it. €149.99.

scapade.net



FOR ADVENTURERS

Founded in 2013, NEO is committed to local and responsible manufacturing at its workshop on the shores of Lake Annecy. Arcalod Nomad, €216.67.

neo-backpacks.fr



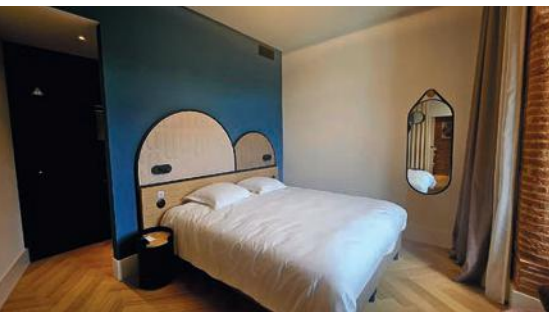
MADE WITH ETHICS

Upcycled elegance is the watchword of Saint-Lazare. This minimalist backpack, made from nautical canvas and automobile rubber, is lightweight, ergonomic and secure, and is available in a range of colours, priced €139.

saintlazare.fr



WIN
A TWO-NIGHT STAY
FOR TWO IN ALBI
WORTH
€300



WIN A TWO-NIGHT STAY IN A 4* HISTORIC RIVERSIDE HOTEL IN ALBI

One lucky France Today reader will win a two-night stay for two people, with breakfast included, at the 4* Mercure Albi Rives du Tarn.

Set on the banks of the Tarn, this distinctive hotel occupies a listed 18th-century former water mill, its warm brick façade a reminder of Albi's long architectural tradition.

Carefully restored, the building retains its historic character while offering comfortable, contemporary accommodation in a peaceful riverside setting. Guest rooms are quiet and well equipped, with views over the river; the old town or the unmistakable silhouette of Sainte-Cécile Cathedral.

The location makes it an ideal base for exploring Albi on foot. The Berbie Palace and the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum are both close by, as are the city's medieval quarters, where narrow streets open onto lively squares lined with cafés and independent shops, perfect for browsing.

For those keen to explore further afield, the hotel offers e-bike rental, ideal for cycling along the Tarn or heading towards the Pratgraussals outdoor leisure area.

Dining is available at the hotel's restaurant, La Vermicellerie, which serves regional dishes for lunch and dinner, along with a generous breakfast buffet each morning. In summer, meals can be taken on the lovely terrace, which offers panoramic

views across the river and the city beyond. There is also a bar serving local Gaillac wines and beers.

Inside, every detail has been thought of to ensure guests enjoy a comfortable stay. Rooms offer adjustable air conditioning, minibars, hot and cold beverages, LED TVs, and bathrooms with a bath or shower.

Free wi-fi and private parking are available, and the welcoming and helpful staff speak English, French and Spanish.

The prize, which is worth €300, includes a two-night stay in a double room for two people, with breakfast on both mornings. Dates subject to availability.

● <https://all.accor.com/hotel/1211/index.en.shtml>

IMAGES © MERCURE ALBI RIVES DU TARN

Enter this competition at www.francetoday.com/competitions where you can also see the full terms and conditions

LA CULTURE

Culture editor **Sylvia Edwards Davis** brings us her selection of cultural delights to enjoy right now in France

SPOTLIGHT

LOVE AND RENOIR



Dance at Bougival (1883)
by Renoir

The Musée d'Orsay, in collaboration with the National Gallery in London and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, presents 'Renoir and Love', a major retrospective exploring how love – in all its forms – shaped the art of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, one of the central figures of French Impressionism and a major painter of modern life in the 19th century.

Between the mid-1860s and the 1880s, Renoir developed a fluid, luminous style, focusing on relationships between men and women. The exhibition explores this dimension of his work, addressing not only romantic love but also the broader place he gives to relationships within social life. In seeking “something pleasant, joyful and pretty”, does Renoir shy away from the harsher realities of poverty, labour, alcoholism and exploitation, or does he allude to them more discreetly?

His major large-scale works are fuelled by the complex and universal notion of love, but there are more layers than first meet the eye. Viewed through this prism, the exhibition offers a renewed perspective on paintings so famous and so familiar to us that it has become difficult to grasp their full radicalism.

● March 17 – July 29

www.musee-orsay.fr

FIVE CONTINENTS

The Musée du Louvre has opened its new Gallery of the Five Continents, a permanent space dedicated to global cultures in collaboration with the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac. The redesigned rooms, in what was the Sessions pavilion, bring together around 130 works from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania, to highlight shared themes such as power, the sacred, and our relationship with nature.

● www.louvre.fr

5 NOT TO MISS

Fabulous exhibitions from painting to photography



1 INCREDIBLE NAHMAD COLLECTION

Musée des Impressionnismes Giverny presents around 60 works from one of the world's most prestigious private collections, including Monet, Picasso, Degas and Renoir.
March 28 – June 21
www.mdig.fr

2 ART DECO

La Cité de l'Architecture revisits the 1925 International Exposition, a springboard for the Art Deco style that shaped architecture and arts.
Until March 29
www.citedelarchitecture.fr

3 FRANÇOIS MORELLET

The Centre Pompidou-Metz pays tribute to François Morellet in '100 Per Cent', bringing together 100 paintings of “rules and disorder”.
April 3 – September 28
centrepompidou-metz.fr

4 LILLE ART UP!

This contemporary art fair highlights emerging galleries and innovative 'Horizons Nouveaux', showcasing a wide range of creations by French and international artists.
March 12–15
lilleartup.com

5 LEE MILLER

The Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris dedicates a major retrospective to American Surrealist photographer and war correspondent Lee Miller, with Tate Britain and the Art Institute of Chicago.
April 3 – July 26
www.mam.paris.fr



EXPOSITION

UNIVERSAL MATISSE

Henri Matisse turned to cut-outs in his later years, largely because of health issues that limited his mobility. Unable to paint in the traditional way, he replaced brushes with scissors, creating a direct and fluid line that fused his lifelong explorations of form and colour. He described this process as a move towards simplification and universality, allowing a sense of “youthful spontaneity” despite physical constraints. The dazzling retrospective ‘Matisse: 1941–1954’ at the Grand Palais explores this creative final chapter of Matisse’s career, bringing together more than 230 works from the Centre Pompidou and international collections. It shows how painting remained central to his thinking, even as cut-outs took on greater importance, with ever more space, intensity and colour. This is a rare opportunity to see key series gathered together, including *Interiors of Vence* (1947–1948), *Jazz*, *Themes and Variations*, the main elements of the programme for the Chapel of Vence, the monumental panels *The Sheaf* and *Acanthus*, and, exceptionally reunited for the occasion, the large cut-out figures including the celebrated *Blue Nudes*.

● **March 24 – August 2**
www.grandpalais.fr

Did you know...?

NARROW ESCAPE

Pierre-Auguste Renoir was very nearly executed by Paris Commune radicals in 1871 while painting on the banks of the Seine, as they mistook him for a spy. Lucky for Renoir, Commune leader Raoul Rigault recognised him as the man who had previously saved his life when, near starvation and in need of shelter, he had begged the painter for help to hide from Napoleon III’s police.



READ THE SIGNS

Urban perfection

Avenue Kléber is one of Paris’s grand Haussmannian boulevards, linking the Arc de Triomphe at Place Charles de Gaulle to the Trocadéro in a 15-minute walk through one of the city’s most prestigious districts. The broad, tree-lined avenue is named after Jean-Baptiste Kléber, a French general celebrated for his victories during the Revolutionary Wars. Assassinated in Cairo in 1800, Kléber became a republican hero, prompting the street’s renaming from Avenue du Roi-de-Rome, a reference to Napoleon II. In



the 1850s, the avenue was incorporated into Baron Haussmann’s grand redesign, becoming one of the 12 star-like avenues radiating from the Arc de Triomphe. Over time, its prestigious buildings have hosted royalty in exile, the German command during the Occupation, UNESCO, and diplomatic moments including the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on Vietnam in 1973. Today, the walk passes elegant addresses such as The Peninsula Paris, discreet embassies, high-end residences and designer boutiques. Grand façades and ornate balconies reflect the refined character of the 16th arrondissement, a textbook example of Haussmannian urbanism. »



DISCOVERY

GLOBAL WARNING

The Jeu de Paume celebrates the late British photographer Martin Parr's work in the context of the global disorder of our times, through various series produced from the late 1970s to the present day. His lens saw it before we did. For 50 years, Parr had consistently presented a striking portrait of social imbalance and the excesses of our lifestyles. Through his numerous series, which began in the British Isles and Ireland and then spread to all five continents in the 1990s, recurring themes emerge: over-tourism, the reliance on cars, addiction to technology, unbridled consumerism, and humanity's uneasy relationship with the natural world. With hindsight, images that once appeared light-hearted reveal a more unsettling reading of modern life.

● *Until May 24*

jeudepaume.org

LA VIE ROMANTIQUE IS BACK The Musée de la Vie Romantique opens a new chapter following major renovations that restored the historic charm of George Sand's former home, while modernising the visitor experience and improving accessibility. The revamped galleries and displays celebrate the



artists, writers and salons of the Romantic era in this charming haven of peace in the 9th arrondissement.

Opening February 14

museevieromantique.paris.fr

3

FOR
STYLE

A journey through centuries of fashion



TWO MASTERS

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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BAUDELAIRE

The 19th-century poet and essayist Charles Baudelaire rarely strayed far from the streets of his beloved Paris, and it was the transformation of these streets that inspired his most enduring work, *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Published in 1857, it captured the tensions of a changing Paris as only a *flâneur* could.



IN CONVERSATION WITH...

Known for his books about his life in Brittany, author Mark Greenside delves into his latest work, *I'm Finally, Finally French!* Discover his humorous and poignant experiences as an outsider navigating French culture, plus his reflections on the intricacies of the French language and village life *en France*.





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A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

Stephen's elderly (and ribald) companion laments the muddy conditions in Paris



BY STEPHEN CLARKE

IMAGE © MARIE LIS

“AFTER RAIN, THE PATHWAYS IN THE TUILERIES ALWAYS TURN INTO A SORT OF MIXING BOWL FOR CEMENT. NO WONDER LOUIS XIV MOVED OUT TO VERSAILLES”

From top: Mushrooms for sale at the market; rain is a regular feature in Paris; the Musée de l'Orangerie in the Jardin des Tuileries

Standing outside a café the other day, I got talking to an old chap who lives in my *quartier* here in the north of Paris. He has an apartment in one of the huge tower blocks that were built in the 1980s, apparently during a period when the city council forgot that architects existed. Brutalism is trendy now, but these buildings never will be. They have all the grace of a rotting potato.

The old chap told me that for this reason, his building has been *en travaux* (having work done) for the past decade or so. Substandard materials are being replaced and 'attractive' cladding added, with workers gazing in through his windows from each new outbreak of scaffolding.

The old chap lives on the 28th floor and could enjoy a wonderful view of Montmartre and the Eiffel Tower – if only his apartment were on the side that faces the tourists' dream. But he looks out towards the *périphérique*, a clutch of railway lines and a horizon of suburban sprawl.

MUDDY UNDERFOOT

When he told me all this, he wasn't really complaining. Something else was bothering him. Something more seasonal. "My whole street has turned into the Somme," he said.

I wondered for a moment whether trench warfare had broken out. Or had he seen the ghosts of Henry V's archers on their way to Agincourt?

He explained that the pavement and road had been dug up as part of a plan to plant shrubs and create a cycle lane. Most of Paris is undergoing this metamorphosis at the moment, but rain had turned the old chap's morning stroll to the Sunday market into a trek across a battlefield.

He showed me his shoes, ordinary leather slip-ons, that were crusted with mud. Unlike the Somme's clays, though, this was light in colour, presumably because of the sand that Paris uses as a foundation for its paving stones.



Not to be outdone, I lifted a foot to show my expensive blue training shoe spattered with white. The previous day I had been to the Orangerie in the Tuileries, to remind myself of its excellent permanent collection of early 20th-century Parisian art (Modigliani, Utrillo, Soutine et al). And after rain, the pathways in the Tuileries always turn into a sort of mixing bowl for cement. No wonder Louis XIV moved out to Versailles.

The old chap nodded. "Every November, when they give us our flu vaccinations," he said, "they should also distribute rubber boots. It's the only way to walk around Paris in the winter and early spring." I didn't like to play the ecology card and suggest that one pair of boots per lifetime would be enough. We Parisians only get muddy feet if we walk in parks after rain – or across building sites.

A TRIP TO MARKET

"Still, mud can come in useful," the old chap said. He pointed to his shopping bags that were overflowing with seasonal vegetables – leeks, celery, a bunch of small fresh beetroot, a tray of mushrooms. Our local market sells exotic imports like avocados and pineapples, but all winter it is jammed with seasonal produce, a lot of it grown in the countryside around Paris.

In these days of disappearing seasons, our market, like the mud, is always a reminder of where we are in the calendar.

"Do you go to the mushroom stall?" the old chap asked me. "No, the queue is always too long, and he sells out so fast," I confessed.

He laughed. "Yes, I always get there before nine. And I always make the same joke. I tell him, you're lucky, your queue gets longer every week." This was an obscene pun. As well as a line, *queue* in French means a male member.

I laughed politely. In French, puns like that are not seasonal, they're perennial. That poor mushroom seller must know exactly where he is every Sunday morning. **FT**

● Stephen Clarke's latest book, *Charles Frederick Worth, the Englishman who invented Parisian Haute Couture*, is about the 19th-century Brit behind the fashion industry.



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CITY FOCUS SAINT-OMER

Shakespeare's First Folio, aviator Douglas Bader and rink hockey are all part of Saint-Omer's rich cultural heritage, as **Caroline Mills** discovers



Fabien Barengo surges forwards, controlling the ball as he speeds down the wing past a determined defence and slams the ball into the goal. There's a moment of celebration as Barengo's SCRA rink hockey teammates crowd around their captain, whose strike is one of 11 goals pushed beyond the reach of the Roubaix goalie, left floundering on all fours.

The SCRA (Skating Club de la Région Audomaroise), founded in 1934 and based at the Salle des Sports du Brockus in Saint-Omer, take the game in their stride, giving the opposition a thorough drubbing. This local derby is part of the national league's premier division, and this elite team are French champions for the 12th time. With the sound of loyal fans singing, drumming and the waving of billowing flags, I've not had so much excitement on a Saturday night in France for a while. Rink hockey is not necessarily what springs to mind for visitors to Saint-Omer, which is perhaps best known for its





IMAGES © .TOURISME EN PAYS DE SAINT-OMER, CAROLINE MILLS



Clockwise from left: Notre-Dame de Saint-Omer cathedral; one of the masterpieces of the cathedral is a 16th-century astrological clock with its original workings; the tourism office garden with the cathedral behind; the SCRA Saint-Omer team acknowledge fans after the match

Saint-Omer only became French with the coronation of Louis XIV. Prior to that, the town had passed through the hands of the Flemish, Vikings, the Duchy of Burgundy and the Habsburgs, before becoming part of the Spanish Netherlands.

They've all left their mark, as is evident from the link between the 7th century Abbaye de Saint-Bertin, founded by Bishop Audomar – or Saint-Omer as he became known – and the 8th century cathedral, a collegiate church of notable stature. The abbey is in ruins. All that's left is an atmospheric stone plinth for amorous pigeons, weeds growing on empty windowsills; its Gothic archways must be completed in the mind's eye, the stone having been pilfered in past centuries for building elsewhere.

A SPANISH INFLUENCE

The creamy stone cathedral, by contrast, stands decorously squat and fat in the town centre, surrounded by some of Saint-Omer's grand historic residences.

Though Saint Omer's tomb remains within the cathedral, his relics disappeared during the French Revolution. Also of note beneath the single tower is an impressively large 18th-century organ, used for summer concerts, a vast painting from Rubens' workshop (Rubens was painter to the Spanish court, hence the link), and an outstanding 16th-century astrological clock. So, too, is reference, in stone, to the Sun King who, in 1677, »



marshes, the Audomarais, one of the last productive cultivated marshes in France. But the sport is an important part of the town's rich and varied cultural heritage.

Saint-Omer's 1,000 years of history are crammed into a few enjoyable hours scouring the town with Cécile, a guide from the Maison du Patrimoine – more on that later – and Denis Xavier, a longstanding resident who spent his working life as a doctor at the local hospital and now, in retirement, works as a greeter, giving free guided tours of his beloved town.

I meet Monsieur Xavier at the entrance of the town's public garden, a 20-hectare park with formal French gardens filled with topiary and colourful flowers next to English-style parkland. I could easily spend a full day in the park, but Denis is keen to show me the sky-high ramparts to the city – fortifications revised by the revered military engineer Vauban but originally built when Saint-Omer was under Spanish rule. Yes, Spanish rule. It's hard for my head to fathom with Saint-Omer so close to England (and so far away from Spain) but



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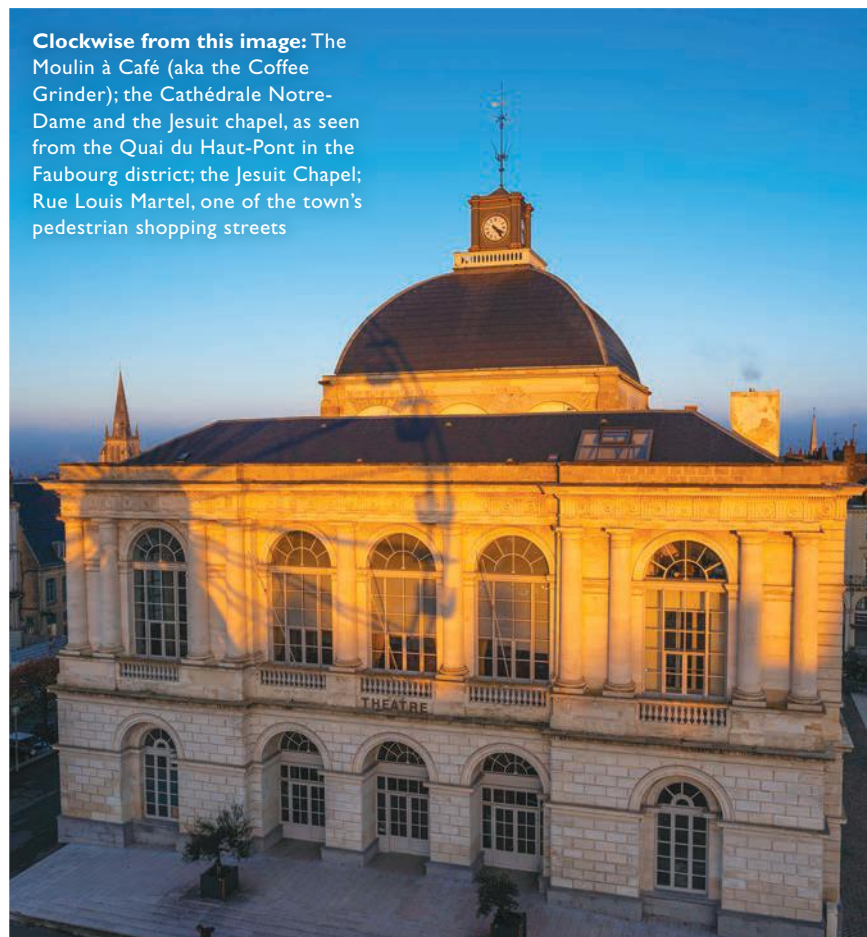


entered the church on a horse. There are fine views of the cathedral from the courtyard garden beside the tourist information office, a quiet orchard in which to reflect on the cathedral's masterful stonework. But I find my favourite perspective of the building is a long-distance view from the Quai du Haut-Pont. From here – where market gardeners of the *marais* regard themselves as Flemish – the Canal du Haut-Pont, lined by a charismatic jumble of rooftops, appears to stretch like a ribbon towards the foot of the cathedral.

Otherwise, one of the most impressive buildings in Saint-Omer is the Jesuit Chapel. Its enormous façade of red brick and stone, with scrollwork ornamentation, can also be seen across the rooftops. The English Jesuit College educated many Catholic scholars who, due to their religion, were not allowed to attend Oxford or Cambridge. One such was Charles Carroll, who



Clockwise from this image: The Moulin à Café (aka the Coffee Grinder); the Cathédrale Notre-Dame and the Jesuit chapel, as seen from the Quai du Haut-Pont in the Faubourg district; the Jesuit Chapel; Rue Louis Martel, one of the town's pedestrian shopping streets





“THE JESUIT CHAPEL’S ENORMOUS FAÇADE OF RED BRICK AND STONE CAN BE SEEN ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS”

left Maryland to study at the college, only to return to sign the United States Declaration of Independence. The grand chapel is rarely open to the public, but the town’s library, which is housed within the former college, is – and it should not be missed. Inside, beyond the modern-day shelves of modern-day books one might expect, is the *salle patrimoniale*. The vast room is lined with ceiling-high wooden shelving that came from the Abbaye de Saint-Bertin, as did much of the 35,000-strong collection of immense leather-bound books.

CULTURAL RICHES

There is a homely warmth about the grand carpeted room that was built to accommodate the bookshelves. Parallel rows of comfortable moss green armchairs, each with a reading lamp, are positioned along the centre of the library, sandwiched between display cases presenting a rotating selection from the collection. The collection contains some of Saint-Omer’s most extraordinary treasures: a Gutenberg Bible and a First Folio of Shakespeare’s plays. It is one of my favourite places to visit in Pas-de-Calais.

Well, that, and Le Moulin à Café – the Coffee Grinder – the once derogatory, now affectionate name for the building housing Saint-Omer’s theatre. Originally opened in 1841, the Italian Renaissance theatre is, like the library, one of those buildings that feels unexpectedly grand for a small town in northern France. Restored and reopened in 2019, the Italian-style horseshoe auditorium is a sumptuous circle of rich red and gleaming gold beneath an immense painted dome, from which dangles a glamorous chandelier. »

UNMISSABLE SAINT-OMER



SCRA SAINT-OMER

For a great night out, head to the Salle des Sports du Brockus when SCRA Saint-Omer are playing. With a clubhouse and bar to boot, guests are always welcome. Match tickets can be bought in advance.

scrasaintomer.com



ASCENSEUR À BATEAUX DES FONTINETTES

This boat lift, on the Canal de Neufossé in Arques, is the only one of its kind in France. It is modelled on the Anderton Boat Lift in Cheshire and is a marvel of steel and structural engineering. The small museum offers an insight into the unique world of the bargemen and their families in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

LA COUPOLE

This is the Second World War site from where it was proposed to fire V-2 rockets into England. Within the history centre are outstanding, hard-hitting exhibitions on the history of the site, its relationship to the space race during the Cold War, and the genocide in northern France. There is also an excellent 3D planetarium for an immersive experience.

lacoupole-france.com/en



LA MAISON DU MARAIS

Discover the heritage and way of life of the market gardeners who have toiled the rich Marais Audomarois for centuries. In addition to exhibitions to learn more about the marshes, visitors can board a traditional *bacôve* (flat-bottomed boat) and tour the canal system in this UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

www.lamaisondumarais.com/en



LE MOULIN À CAFÉ & THÉÂTRE LA BARCAROLLE

Guided visits are possible of this fully restored theatre on Place du Maréchal Foch, though the best way to experience it is by attending one of the many shows or concerts.

www.labarcarolle.org





From top: The contemporary staircase in the newly restored Maison du Patrimoine; the Games Room at the Musée Sandelin, which is laid out across the salons of the grand house

For artwork, I head to the Musée Sandelin, housed in a former 18th-century mansion. Upon arrival, visitors can follow a self-guided tour highlighting masterpieces among the fine collection of paintings, porcelain and pottery, jewellery, and extraordinary Romanesque mosaic flooring recovered from the Abbaye de Saint-Bertin.

It is the rooms themselves, restored in 2024, that are the true masterpieces. The museum is laid out across the salons of the grand house, inviting visitors to imagine past soirées. A card table sits in the Games Room, music seems to play as if awaiting guests, and the architecture becomes as much a draw as the artworks on the walls.

I manage to fit one last visit into my bulging itinerary. The Maison du Patrimoine, which opened in July 2025, is a visitor centre dedicated to the cultural history of the town and surrounding villages as a designated Ville et Pays d'art et d'histoire. There's much to interact with – drawers to open,



IMAGES © TOURISME EN PAYS DE SAINT-OMER

“IT’S WHERE DOUGLAS BADER WAS HOSPITALISED HAVING BEEN SHOT DOWN OVER NORTHERN FRANCE”

buttons to press, games to play; children will enjoy this space as much as adults, and it’s free to visit. The extraordinary bespoke-designed contemporary curving staircase is unmissable.

Overlooking the central Place du Maréchal Foch I sit in the cosy bar-stooled Queen Victoria pub (yes, really), pondering which of the 13 local beers on tap might best quench my thirst. I am reminded just how many links to Britain there are in this remarkable little Flemish-looking town. Not only is there the First Folio and the fashion for English pub names (Le Dickens is next door), but Saint-Omer is the spiritual birthplace of the Royal Air Force – a commemorative memorial on a windswept aerodrome above the town explains the story. It’s also the town where in the Second World War, British pilot Douglas Bader was hospitalised having been shot down over northern France during German Occupation. The former hospital is on Rue Saint-Bertin, one of the most prestigious addresses in town.

My five-day stay in Saint-Omer was not long enough to sample everything the town has to offer. The beer, the cultural history and the rink hockey are just too good to stay away for long. But only 24 miles from Calais, it’s an easy place to revisit. **FT**

SAINT-OMER ESSENTIALS



GETTING THERE

BY TRAIN

Take the **Eurostar** from London St Pancras to Lille-Europe. Lille-Flandres to Saint-Omer is 3h 20m; Paris Gare du Nord to Saint-Omer is 2h 20m.

BY CAR

Le Shuttle Folkestone to Coquelles or **DFDS, P&O Ferries**, or **Irish Ferries Dover** to Calais, then A26 to Saint-Omer.

WHERE TO STAY



Palais de la Cathédrale

is a magnificent, recently restored townhouse opposite the cathedral. With two homely double bedrooms (one en suite, the other with private bathroom), each includes a seating and dining area with microwave and

kettle. It’s possible to rent both rooms for families or groups.

www.le-colegram-restaurant-du-palais-de-la-cathedrale.com/en

WHERE TO EAT



Enjoy fabulous food in elegant, classical rooms at **Le Colegram**, on the ground floor of Palais de la Cathédrale. For something less formal, **Le Phare Café** on Rue de Dunkerque offers an excellent rustic menu in hip surroundings, or Michelin-listed **Boucan**, in Le Moulin à Café, serves a delicious prix-fixe or street-food style menu, cooked in front of you.

TOURIST INFORMATION

www.visitpasdecalais.com

en.tourisme-saintomer.com

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Quiet luxury in **THE LUBERON**



Rebecca McVeigh takes an off-season luxury road trip through the heart of Provence



The Château de Lourmarin

Provence is always a good idea, but here's a secret: its true magic unfolds not in the sun-soaked summer, but in the golden hush of autumn. John Keats' "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" is nowhere more deeply experienced than in the central Provençal region of the Luberon.

The cicada song may have ceased but so has the crushing heat and heaving crowds of July and August. The air is crisp, the morning mist clings to the Luberon mountains. The endless vineyards and impossibly pretty villages bathe in soft sunlight as autumn turns *le paysage* shades of russet and gold. The effect is nothing short of cinematic.

There is space in this gentler season to fully appreciate local rhythms, and take in Provence's singular beauty. As co-author of *Fodor's Guide to Provence and the French Riviera*, I feel lucky to call the south of France home. It's a region that has captured my heart.

Of course in this part of the world, we are spoiled for choice when it comes to luxe hotels and fine dining. But the Luberon in particular has its own brand of luxury, one that is relaxed, low-key and a world away from the showy glitz of the Riviera. It is the perfect place for a deeply restorative break.

Join me for a luxurious road trip and discover the very best the region has to offer. Get set for fairytale hotels, divine domaines, gorgeous gastronomy and for fans of a certain Netflix hit, a touch of déjà vu.



Wine tasting at Château Saint-Pierre de Méjans



Le Moulin four-star boutique hotel is housed in an 18th-century olive oil mill

DAY 1

CHÂTEAU SAINT-PIERRE DE MÉJANS AND LE MOULIN, LOURMARIN

First things first. How do we get there? The Luberon is located in the heart of Provence, two hours from the Côte d'Azur, and is easily accessible from Avignon (30 minutes), Marseille (one hour) and Aix-en-Provence (40 minutes). You can travel by train from the UK via Eurostar to Paris then take the TGV to Avignon or fly direct to Marseille airport. To visit the various towns and villages, a hire car is the smart choice.

We start our adventure (as we mean to continue) with wine at Château Saint-Pierre de Méjans, which was once a priory and dates as far back as 1118. Today, the sacred spaces of the Romanesque Chapel are used for reflection, meditation and yoga retreats. Can wine and wellness mix? They certainly do here. Our guide, Valérie, gives us a masterclass in Luberon wine: the appellation offers wines with body and suppleness, with fresh and fruity whites and rosés, and reds which punch with pepper and spice.

Next it's on to the captivating town of Lourmarin, a Plus Beau Village de France. The château keeps a watchful eye over the comings and goings of village life while playing host to a plethora of cultural events, including an indie electropop music festival. Stroll the narrow, cobbled streets of the town where you will discover cafés, restaurants and cute boutiques.

Lourmarin is home to the utterly charming Provençal hideaway Le Moulin, a four-star boutique Beaumier Hotel. This 18th-century olive oil mill combines

oh-so-cool contemporary decor with nods to its pastoral past, and boasts a beautiful pool hidden within its secret gardens. Dining at Bacheto, the hotel's restaurant, is a sociable affair where Provençal sharing plates are the order of the day, followed by equally delightful desserts (*la mousse au chocolat* is absolutely divine – and enormous).

DAY 2

BASTIDE DU LAVAL AND DOMAINE DE FONTENILLE

We arrive at Bastide du Laval, an organic olive oil mill and estate in the Luberon regional nature reserve, on the very first day of the harvest. Once picked, the olives are pressed immediately, using the cold extraction method to retain the essential aromas, and those all-important polyphenols. Bastide du Laval's oils have been awarded numerous prizes in competitions both in France and abroad.

For lunch we head to the sleepy village of Vaugines, where, set beside the babbling fountain in the town square, Insitio serves up authentic Provençal fare with panache.

The boutique hotel and vineyard Domaine de Fontenille encapsulates the easy elegance of Provence and is a must for wine lovers and those seeking to indulge in a little quiet luxury. Throw open your bedroom shutters to reveal the showstopping grounds lined with towering cedars and century-old plane trees. The large, heated pool (open from April to the end of October) is set amid verdant lawns and surrounded by sunloungers with a poolside bar for delicious afternoon spritzes. Although there is no kids' club, children are >>

“NOTHING SAYS PROVENCE QUITE LIKE THE SIGHT – AND SCENT – OF LAVENDER ROLLING TO THE HORIZON IN WAVES OF VIOLET”



Dine on the terrace at the breathtaking La Bastide de Gordes



welcome, and there is space to run, pétanque to play and donkeys to meet. The hotel is dog-friendly too. At the private cellars, Antoine and his team will guide you through the Domaine’s winemaking process and philosophy. Red, white, sparkling and alcohol-free varieties are all available. *Bonne dégustation!*

DAY 3
MUSÉE DE LA LAVANDE AND LA BASTIDE DE GORDES, AIRELLES

Nothing says Provence quite like the sight – and scent – of lavender rolling to the horizon in waves of violet. For generations, the Lincélé family have cultivated and distilled Provence’s ‘blue gold’ and now share their secrets at The Lavender Museum. It makes for a fascinating and hands-on visit, with

IMAGES © DESTINATION LUBERON, LA POZE, FRANCIS AMIAND, RENÉE KEMPS



DAY 4

L'ISLE-SUR-LA-SORGUE AND L'ISLE DE LÉOS

Set on the River Sorgue at the foot of the Monts de Vaucluse, the market town of L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue hosts some 300 antiques specialists, making it a Nirvana for antiques lovers. Water wheels bear testament to its industrial past when paper mills, silk and wool spinning, and oil, flour and sawmills were plentiful.

One such waterwheel can be found at L'Isle de Léos, the Luberon's stylish new five-star retreat, which opened its doors in 2025. After all that busy sightseeing, it's time for rest and rejuvenation. Sauna and steam away your stress, enjoy the sensorial and outdoor pool or turn back the clock with a bespoke facial or body treatment at the spa. By day, the hotel's restaurant, La Roue, serves excellent-value bistro lunches; by night, it transforms into a stage for fine dining with a twist – a five-course blind tasting that surprises and delights at every turn.

As autumn deepens and the sun dips behind ochre hills, our Luberon road trip draws to a close, and I am more madly in love with Provence than ever. **FT**

● **Rebecca was a guest of Destination Luberon and Atout France.**

Clockwise from above: The striking hilltop town of Gordes; charming L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue; enjoy a dip in the pool at L'Isle de Léos; dine on the terrace at the breathtaking La Bastide de Gordes; the enchanting Domaine de Fontenille; olive groves at Bastide du Laval

delightful craft and art workshops, plus an audio-guided museum. It's a deep dive into the rich history and fragrant world of Provence. Open every day from April until December 23.

Our journey now winds toward the medieval hilltop village of Gordes. Although I've lived for almost a decade in the south of France, my first glimpse of Gordes still stole my breath away. As befits one of France's most gorgeous towns, it's here that you'll find one of the country's most iconic hotels: La Bastide de Gordes by Airelles, which rises beyond the realm of five stars and holds the coveted title of Palace. Eagle-eyed *Emily in Paris* fans may recognise the hotel's restaurant terrace, with its sweeping vistas over the Luberon massif, as the spot where Emily and Gabriel dined beneath the Provençal sky.

A stay at the hotel is, quite simply, heavenly. Families are well catered for, and while parents indulge in a well-earned Sisley Spa session or a long, lazy lunch, kids can dive into their own adventure. With a dedicated pool, games galore, and a packed schedule of fun – from treasure hunts and magic shows to crafts and stargazing – they'll be just as reluctant to leave as you are.



● **Fodor's Guide to Provence & the French Riviera 2025** is available to buy now priced at £14.99
<https://amzn.eu/d/ao5h5UQ>

LUBERON ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE

British Airways, EasyJet and **Ryanair** fly direct from the UK to Marseille.

BY TRAIN AND CAR

Eurostar from London St Pancras to Paris or Lille then TGV to Avignon and hire a car.

WHERE TO STAY

Le Moulin, Lourmarin

www.beaumier.com/en/properties/le-moulin-hotel

Domaine de Fontenille

www.domainedefontenille.fontenille-collection.com

La Bastide de Gordes, Airelles

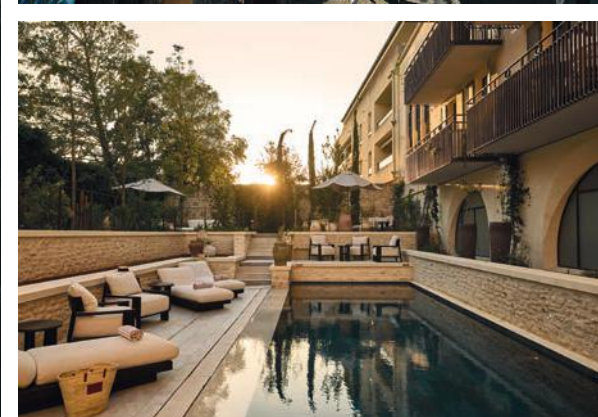
airelles.com

L'Isle de Léos

isledeleos.com

CONTACTS

www.destinationluberon.com



REGIONAL NEWS

From new attractions to special events, we look at the latest in culture and tourism across *La Belle France*



BEST IN FRANCE

Parc Astérix has been voted Best Park in France at the Parcs Fans Awards for the fourth year in a row. It is the latest in a long list of accolades, including Les Quais de Lutèce being named Best Hotel Experience in France, Toutatis voted Best Roller Coaster, and Peur sur le Parc winning Best Seasonal Event for Halloween in 2025. Together, these awards underline Parc Astérix's place among Europe's leading family and tourist destinations. And far from resting on its laurels, it has unveiled plans for an ambitious €250m investment programme by 2030 – the largest in its history – including a fourth hotel with 300 rooms, a new themed restaurant seating 450 and several new rides. Perhaps the biggest surprise will come in 2028 with Londinium, a London district inspired by the story *Astérix in Britain*. In addition, building on its success in France, Parc Astérix will open a site in Germany in 2030-2031. Operator Compagnie des Alpes has announced a gradual transformation of Belantis Park, one of the largest amusement parks in eastern Germany, with a first teaser area coming in the spring of this year.

There's no stopping the Gauls!

● parcasterix.fr

SURPRISING ALBI The city of Albi has made the fifth spot on Forbes' 2026 European Best Destinations, standing out amid flashier places such as Florence and Dubrovnik.

Forbes highlights Albi's UNESCO-listed 13th-century cathedral above the River Tarn, the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum and the "colourful façades and vibrant cultural scene, making Albi one of southern France's most elegant heritage escapes".

In brief



NEW IN COURCHEVEL

Rosewood Hotels' first mountain resort opened this winter in Courchevel. With 1960s-inspired luxury, Le Jardin Alpin offers 51 rooms and three signature apartments, with ski-in/ski-out access to Les Trois Vallées' slopes. rosewoodhotels.com



BURGUNDY ABROAD

China will recognise 70 Burgundy wines as having PGI status, giving them formal legal protection. China had previously recognised only two: Gevrey-Chambertin and Mâcon, alongside all Bordeaux AOP and IGP appellations listed since 2016. www.vins-bourgogne.fr



MINIMAL CHIC

Nordelaia boutique hotel in Beaulieu-sur-Mer, is transforming a 1960s building on the seafront into a calm, minimalist haven conceived by Yakusha Studio. Overlooking the harbour, the chic property offers 33 rooms, and a rooftop terrace with sea views. surmer.nordelaia.com

IMAGES © SYLVAIN CAMBON, ROSEWOOD HOTELS, VÉRONIQUE PAGNIER/WIKICOMMONS, YAKUSHA STUDIO

FACT

Marseille's Bonne Mère statue is hollow and houses a narrow internal staircase to allow worker access for maintenance



BEACON SHINES AGAIN

Marseille's iconic Bonne Mère statue, crowning the basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde, has been given a dazzling new lease of life after an extensive restoration project. Perched atop the city's highest hill at 150m, this 10-tonne, 11m-tall golden Virgin and Child – now adorned with over 40,000 fresh gold leaf sheets – remains one of Marseille's most recognisable landmarks.

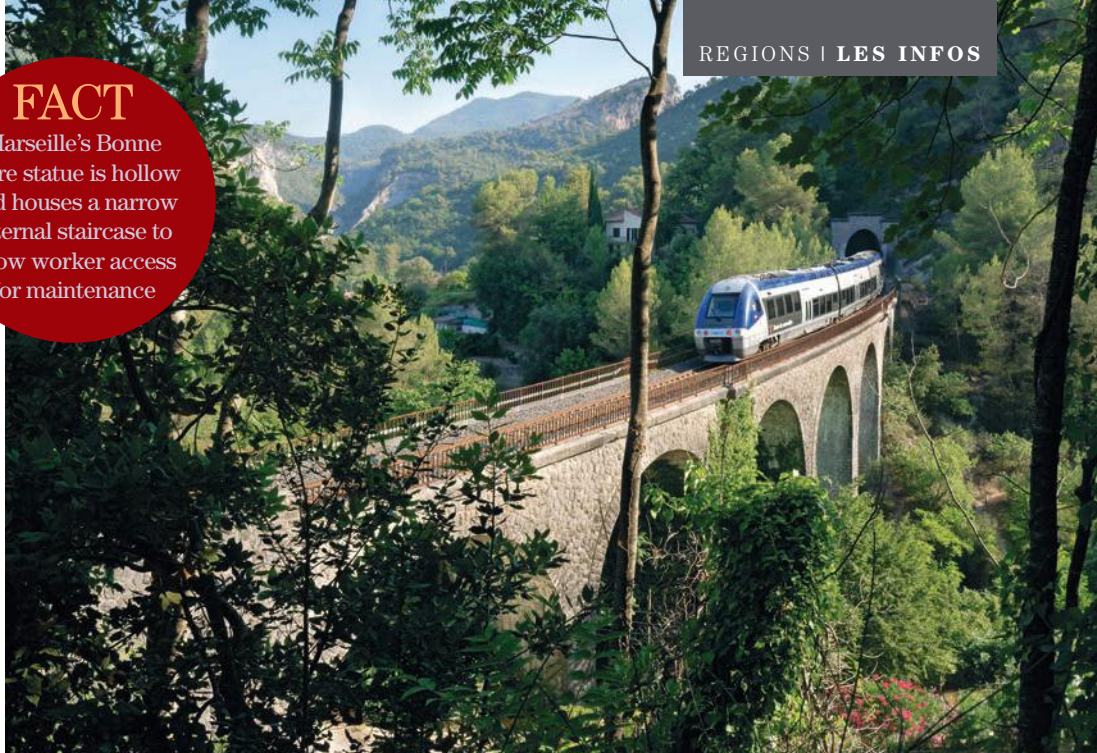
● www.marseille.fr



PROTECTED PORCELAIN

The European Commission has announced that it will grant protection to the artisanal skill of Limoges porcelain-making under the geographical indication system. So far, the European Union has protected mainly agricultural geographical indications, such as Parma ham or champagne.

● porcelainedelimoges.fr



ALL ABOARD

TRAIN OF WONDERS

The Train des Merveilles journeys from Nice to Tende in the Roya Valley

The Train des Merveilles, linking Nice to Tende, reopened this winter after 15 months of renovations, offering travellers a spectacular journey from the Côte d'Azur to the Alps. This engineering marvel climbs over and through more than 100 bridges, viaducts and tunnels, including dramatic 360-degree loops in the Roya Valley. Passengers glimpse imposing peaks, riverside towns such as Breil-sur-Roya, and hilltop villages such as Sospel and Saorge, all en route to Tende at 800m above sea level. Modern, air-conditioned carriages ensure comfort on the two-hour journey. The route of the Train des Merveilles is recognised as one of the most stunning railway landscapes in Europe. Construction started in 1883 and it was a formidable feat of engineering for its time. Some of the structures were damaged during the Second World War to stop supplies reaching German troops stationed in Haute Roya. The line was fully reopened in 1979 and has now been given a full revamp to bring it into the 21st century. From the Mediterranean coast to the spectacular Mercantour National Park, it travels through a striking sequence of contrasting landscapes.

● www.menton-riviera-merveilles.fr

SNOW SPENDING

France tops Europe for budget-friendly ski resorts, according to a new ranking by travel platform Holidu, starting with these four most affordable slopes



ARTOUSTE – LARUNS

Near the Spanish border, Artouste, at 2,000m altitude, costs on average €43.50 per person per day (pppd), including ski pass and accommodation.

artouste.fr



LANS-EN-VERCORS

Three types of skiing in the heart of the Vercors Regional Nature Park, easily accessible from Grenoble, Lyon and Valence, for €44.20 pppd.

www.vercors-experience.com



RÉALLON

Perched above Lake Serre-Ponçon in the Alps, over 30km of ski slopes await at 1,560m and 2,115m above sea level, at an average of €45 pppd.

www.serreponcon.com/reallon



AUTRANS-LA SÛRE

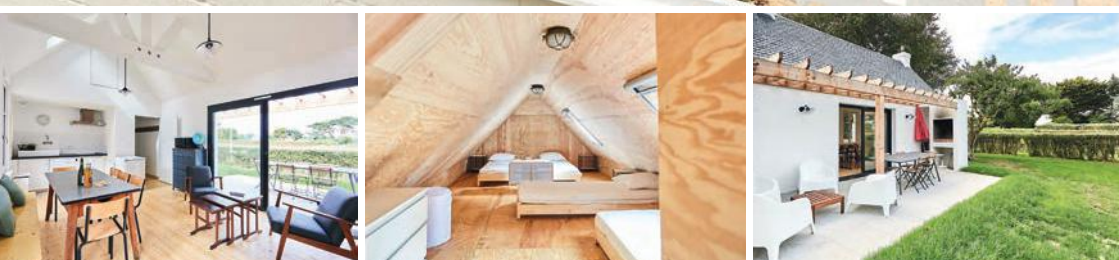
Ten minutes from Autrans, the resort offers breathtaking views of the Vercors mountains, the Belledonne massif and Mont Blanc, all for €45.50 pppd.

station.autrans-meaudre.fr

IMAGES © PHOTO PAUL SMIT/TINTON RIVIERA MERVEILLES, ALEXEY FEDORENKO/SHUTTERSTOCK, POUYAT MUSÉE NATIONAL ADRIEN DUBOUCHÉ, ARTOUSTE/FACEBOOK, LANS-EN-VERCORS TOURISME/FACEBOOK, FABRIEN THIBAUT

WHERE TO STAY

When it comes to finding a place to stay, France is a visitor's paradise. Enjoy browsing our eclectic accommodation picks...



ISLAND RETREAT

BACK TO BRETON SCHOOL!

Enjoy a unique *rentrée* feel on your holidays with a stay at this cute and very cool former school, located in the heart of Morlaix Bay, on Callot Island, just a few metres from the coast at Carantec. The house, converted by the local municipality in 2018, can accommodate up to 10 guests and is equipped with all modern conveniences, including a kitchen, living room, dining room, bedroom, bathroom and shower room. Stays are arranged according to a predefined schedule, with keys collected from Carantec Tourist Office.

● <https://tinyurl.com/2ukhn72m>

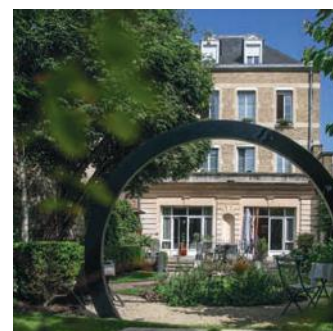


CENTRE STAGE Actor and singer Patrick Bruel and his team created Domaine de Léos in L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, Vaucluse, to promote a sincere, sustainable and sensory Provençal *art de vivre*. L'Isle de Léos is the domaine's wonderful hotel, with a top-class spa and restaurant. isledeleos.com/en



RURAL ESCAPE

Renovated in 2023, Le Chalet sits on spacious grounds with a lake view in the heart of the Limousin countryside in Haute-Vienne. It has two bedrooms, a barbecue on the terrace and fishing on the lake! www.lechaletlimousin.fr/en-GB



A SACRED STAY

Make your city break to champagne country even more memorable with a special stay at La Demeure des Sacres, a stunning B&B in Reims. Its four lovely rooms ooze elegance and tranquility. www.la-demeure-des-sacres.com/en/home



MAGICAL MENTON

Located just 100 metres from the sea in Menton, Villa Genesis provides five-star Riviera luxury across 30 rooms. It reopens after the winter break on February 1. www.villagenesis.com

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Riviera Experience

rivieraexperience.com



Justin Postlethwaite looks at the history of France's railway stations and picks out some of the country's must-see terminal buildings



2

4

3

2

5

1

GORGEOUS GARES

Offering restful journeys, sublime views, great value and impressive timeliness – plus clear ecological benefits compared to air and internal-combustion transport – the French rail network is admired around the world.

But for many commuters and visiting Francophiles alike, the point of arrival or departure in a town or village – *la gare* (rooted in the Old French word *garir* or *garer*, meaning to guard or shelter) – is also a place to be explored and cooed at. The country is blessed with dozens of eye-pleasing terminals, from major TGV hubs to tiny village outposts with just a few passing trains a day.

Private initiatives saw the creation of France's early train lines – the first was the 21km one inaugurated in 1827 to transport coal from the mines of Saint-Étienne to the Loire, all pulled by horses. Ten years later came the first train line dedicated to passengers, and the State intervened to organise and regulate the network, leading in 1938 to the creation of the nationalised SNCF (Société



1

nationale des chemins de fer français). At the time, it employed an astonishing 515,000 railway workers.

Other notable waypoints in the rail travel timeline include electrification in 1955, with a new single-phase industrial frequency power system that was subsequently adopted for high-speed rail; the TGV's first world speed record (380 km/h) in 1981; and in 1987, the launch of TER (Transport express régional) trains, which signalled closer collaboration between SNCF and the regions.

As for the stations, many of the grandest that still serve as buzzing hubs today originated in the middle of the 19th century, in line with the boom of

industrialisation and urbanisation. Imposing yet inviting, they were monumental emblems of progress and modernity, key locations in France's collective and social history.

So too were those built in subsequent eras, right up to present-day France, with award-winning *gares* such as Saint-Denis–Pleyel metro station north of Paris – the future gateway to the Grand Paris Express due for completion in 2031 – inaugurated by President Macron in June 2024. It points to the continued collective need and desire for rail travel, with attractiveness allied to function.

As ever, our pick of good-looking *gares* is subjective and intends to showcase the unmissables. If you have a favourite and wish to send us photos, email us at letters@francetoday.com. All aboard!

1 LIMOGES, HAUTE-VIENNE, NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE

Widely acknowledged as the most impressive looking railway station in France, the original wooden Gare de Limoges-Bénédictins opened in 1856. The version we see now, with elements of

“MEASURING MORE THAN 300M IN LENGTH, METZ’S PLATFORMS ARE BIG ENOUGH TO ACCOMMODATE TROOPS ON HORSEBACK”

Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Neoclassicism, was designed by the architect Roger Gonthier and erected between 1924 and 1929. Instead of sitting alongside the station’s 10 lines, it was built over them, while the huge dome (*coupole*) and clock tower (*campanile*) lend it a striking silhouette. Spot too the decorative limestone sculpture work by Henri Frédéric Varennes, and vast stained glass windows by master glassmaker Francis Chigot. It was listed as a monument historique in 1975. Tours of the station are available with Limoges’ City of Art and History tour guides.

www.destination-limoges.com/en

2 METZ, MOSELLE, GRAND EST

France has the Germans to thank for this neo-Romanesque beauty, commissioned by Wilhelm II, the last German Emperor, and completed in 1908 during the first annexation of Metz into the German Empire, the previous station having been destroyed by fire in 1872. Measuring more than 300m in length, it was conceived to move the most soldiers in the shortest possible time from France to Russia, with a direct line to Berlin and platforms big enough to accommodate not just troops on foot but those on horseback too!

Its epic scale aside, there is also plenty of rich ornamentation and design detail in medieval and Germanic style to enjoy: bas-reliefs depicting first-class passengers, stained glass windows, historiated capitals, basalt lions, friezes with Celtic motifs, and oriental palmettes (fan-shaped leaves of a palm tree). It’s a truly magnificent site to visit.

www.tourisme-metz.com/en

3 GARE DE LYON, PARIS

For Parisians, this beloved Belle Époque train station signifies holiday



escapes and trips to and from the sunny south. The Gare de Lyon is the northern terminus of the Paris–Marseille line (with stops in Lyon, hence its name), and one of the capital’s six mainline hubs.

Replacing the previous station built in 1855, it was designed by Toulon architect Marius Toudoire and was unveiled for the 1900 World’s Fair.

Among the visual treats are a 67m tower with a clock measuring 6.4m in diameter and, inside, the large fresco painted by Jean-Baptiste Olive, depicting the places one could visit by hopping aboard and heading south.

For foodies, the Gare de Lyon also houses a must-visit eatery, Le Train Bleu. With its gilded mouldings, ceiling



frescoes, glittering chandeliers and club chairs, it makes for a spectacular dining experience, whether you are catching a train or not.

parisjetaime.com/eng

4 TROUVILLE-DEAUVILLE, CALVADOS, NORMANDY

This small but perfectly formed Côte Fleurie seaside station – whose evolution is largely due to the tourist pull of Normandy’s burgeoning coastal leisure pursuits from the 1860s – owes its existence to the financier and politician, Charles, Duke of Morny. He got permission to extend the Paris-Saint-Lazare-Lisieux railway line up to the Calvados coastline and it was inaugurated on July 1, 1863.

However, today’s version, a very cute *gare* in the Neo-Norman architectural style (using local materials such as brick, pottery tiles from Bavent and faux timber modelling), arrived in 1931 when the original passenger building was demolished and replaced by architect Jean Philippot’s creation. On the main north-west elevation, you cannot miss the three gables decorated with the coats of



arms of the towns of Deauville and Trouville – the two adjoining towns the station serves – and a clock. The station was declared an historic monument in July 2010.

www.indeauville.fr/en
en.trouvillesurmer.org

5 LA ROCHELLE, CHARENTE-MARITIME, NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE

First conceived in 1906 to improve access for visitors to the burgeoning seaside resort, construction of architect Pierre Esquié’s majestic, monumental station began in 1909, but was interrupted by the First World War and work did not resume until 1919. Finally inaugurated in November 1922, it is dominated by a 45m-high bell tower (*Grosse Horloge*), taller than the famous towers at the port town’s harbour entrance.

The façade is decorated with engravings inspired by marine fauna while the passenger hall is adorned with a large mosaic of sailing ships by A. Biret.

www.nous-larochelle.fr/en **FT**

BACK ON TRACK



One of the most visited train stations in France hasn’t seen long-distance train action since 1939. The **Gare d’Orsay** was built in 1900 for the Paris Exposition, serving as the terminus for the Paris-Orléans line, but by the 1930s, its short platforms and enclosed design made it unsuitable for steam locomotives. Plans to convert the disused station into a museum were announced in 1977 by President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, and in 1986 it reopened as the Musée d’Orsay. It is served by its eponymous RER station.

www.musee-orsay.fr/en

LE MOT JUSTE

Hazel Smith looks at the Académie française's centuries-long battle for linguistic purity



HAZEL SMITH

The Académie française is a fiercely proud cultural institution whose aim is to protect the purity of the French language. Dating back to the late 1620s, it symbolises the respect the French have for their native tongue... although for some, it is an absurd anachronism.

Once a clandestine gathering of like-minded men who mused over literature and linguistics, news of their meetings eventually reached the ears of a sympathetic Cardinal Richelieu, who offered them official recognition in 1635. Ironically, most of the members would have been happier to remain cloistered away.

The Académie sought to refine the French language through specific rules, making the language pure and eloquent. Members proposed to “cleanse the language from the impurities it has contracted in the mouths of the common people, from the jargon of the lawyers, from the misuses of ignorant courtiers, and the abuses from the pulpit”.

Below: Académie member Florian Zeller; Louis Duchesne, secrétaire perpétuel of the Académie française, formally receives Marshal Hubert Lyautey following his election in 1912



AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB

The 40 life members of the Académie are known as ‘the Immortals’. New members are chosen by the Immortals; no rank or nationality is necessary, only a recognised contribution to the French language. Notable past members include writers Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas-fils; scientists Louis Pasteur and Jacques Cousteau; presidents Clemenceau and Poincaré; and playwrights Ionesco and Jean Cocteau. Most recently, playwright and director Florian Zeller was elected to the Académie at the age of 46, making him one of its youngest members in modern times. Since 2010, members have been required to be under 75 when elected. With five vacant seats, the Académie



The Académie française is housed in the Palais de l'Institut in Paris

“NEW MEMBERS ARE CHOSEN BY THE IMMORTALS; NO RANK OR NATIONALITY IS NECESSARY, OTHER THAN A RECOGNISED CONTRIBUTION TO THE FRENCH LANGUAGE”

currently has 35 members, five of them women. After centuries of exclusion, women were finally admitted in 1980 with the election of novelist Marguerite Yourcenar.

Since its beginnings, the Académie has been entrusted to compile a Dictionnaire de l'Académie française. The first edition was published in 1694. The ninth edition was completed with the publication of its final volume, R to Zzz, and was formally presented to President Emmanuel Macron in November 2024. Work on it had begun in 1986, and its publication came 89 years after the previous complete edition, published in the early 1930s. New words, which appear yearly in other dictionaries, have been ignored: the Académie prefers not to accept newfangled terms.

AN ONGOING BATTLE

The Académie feels that English words, such as email, selfie, or hashtag, are a threat to French culture. Instead, French substitutes, such as *courriel* for email and *mot-dièse* for hashtag, are promoted. However, most French people are perfectly happy to use words such as *le selfie*, *le sandwich*, *le brunch* and *le week-end*.

Debates flare whenever English infiltrates, but the Académie's disapproval has little effect: legally, it has never had a say in what words people can use. Yet in 1994, the Toubon Law supported the Académie, requiring French to be used in official communications, advertising campaigns and the workplace. A win at last in the Académie française's ongoing battle to guard traditional French from the encroaching language of convenience. **FT**



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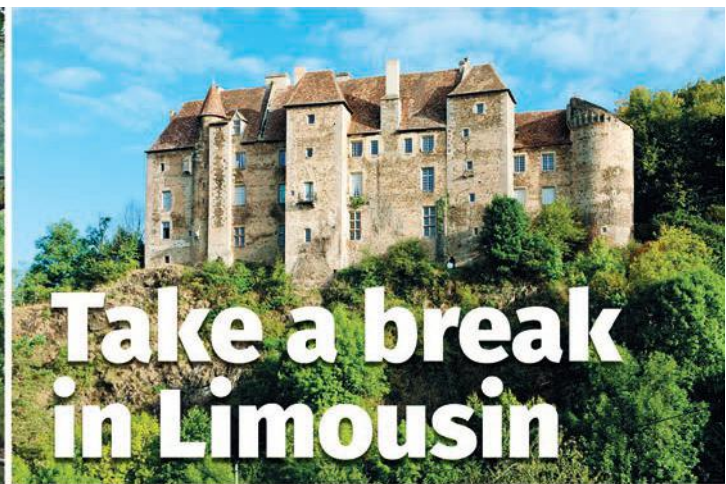


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OCCUPATION

airborne-museum.org

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HOW ACCESSIBLE IS PARIS?

Adele Heidenreich tackles the city on crutches, showing how Paris can be approached in manageable pockets to create a smoother visit for those who rely on obstacle-free accessibility

Paris is a city of scale and age, where wide boulevards, soaring monuments and river views attract millions each year. For travellers with mobility challenges, though, the size can quickly feel overwhelming. Alongside the city's splendour are practical hurdles such as broken lifts, uneven cobblestones and countless stairs.

Encouragingly, staff at venues are attentive, guiding visitors with needs past queues and ensuring viewpoints remain accessible. Many reduce or waive admission fees for travellers with disabilities and a companion. At the busiest attractions, separate lines are generally in place, showing how the city reaches out to make its treasures accessible to those who need extra consideration.

Even so, the sheer scale of Paris is most rewarding when explored in smaller, concentrated sections, conserving both energy and time while still showcasing the grandeur that makes the capital unforgettable.

THE SPIRITUAL HEART

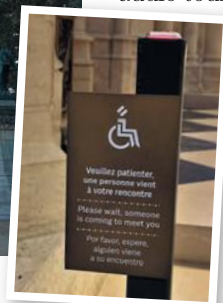
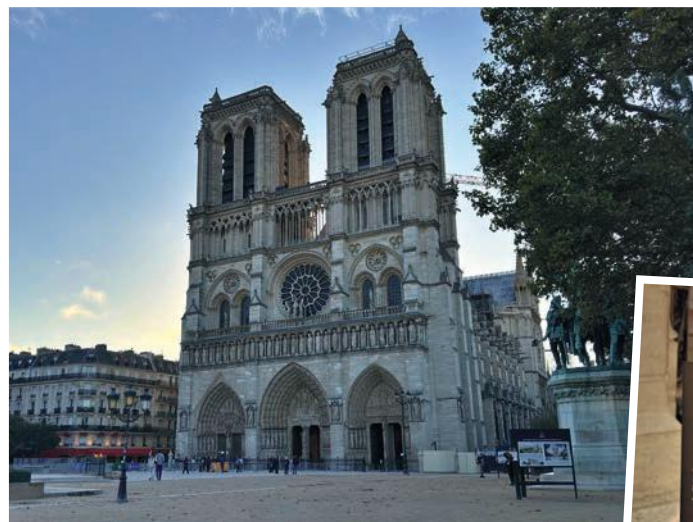
At the very heart of Paris lies the Île de la Cité, the island in the Seine where the city was first founded, and where its spiritual life has been centred for centuries. Crowned by Notre-Dame and Sainte-Chapelle, it remains one of the most symbolic locations in the capital.



From top: The Luxembourg Gardens are a beautiful spot to spend some time exploring; Notre-Dame is thoroughly accessible to people in wheelchairs; inset, the call button for the ramp at Notre-Dame

Notre-Dame, which reopened in December 2024 after five years of restoration, rises with renewed splendour. The towers and flying buttresses remain as awe-inspiring as ever, and inside, the vast nave is softened by light streaming through tall windows. The forecourt is step-free, and a clearly marked wheelchair entrance allows visitors requiring accessible entry to bypass the crowds. Inside, there is ample space for self-guided audio tours, while access to the area behind the altar is provided by staff through a button that activates a ramp over three steps.

Sainte-Chapelle, 450m from Notre-Dame, dazzles with Gothic elegance. The upper chapel is an unforgettable sight, with stained glass rising like a kaleidoscopic roof of light, making it one of the most spectacular interiors in Paris. Although the main access currently involves a few steps due to





restoration works, staff direct visitors with accessibility needs to a nearby step-free route; they can also provide access via a lift to the upper chapel, removing the need to climb the narrow spiral staircase.

The Luxembourg Gardens, 1km further south, are one of the city's most beautiful open spaces. Expansive, airy and carefully designed, it rarely feels crowded despite its popularity. Wide paths, shaded benches and seasonal flowerbeds invite visitors to linger, and step-free access at either end leads to the central fountain and basin; many paths are compacted gravel, though, which can be cumbersome for wheels.

The gardens sit on the southern edge of the slightly hilly Latin Quarter, which brims with bookshops and cafés and where many older establishments still have steps. The Panthéon, Paris's famous mausoleum, crowned with a neoclassical dome, reveals a magnificent interior with sweeping

arches, where Foucault's Pendulum demonstrates the earth's rotation. A ramp at the side entrance ensures the grandeur is within reach of all.

ART AND COMMERCE

North of the Seine lies a cluster of attractions that combine shopping, contemporary art and one of the world's most visited museums. Forum des Halles, once Paris's central food market, is now a lively shopping plaza filled with cafés and boutiques, and it has lifts and escalators.

Beside it stands the Bourse de Commerce, home to the Pinault Collection. The circular building blends historic stonework with cutting-edge installations, and the striking dome ceiling alone is worth the visit. The galleries are arranged in three circular floors, compact in scale but entirely step-free with smooth surfaces and lifts, making it one of the city's »

“ALL OF THE LOUVRE’S MAIN GALLERIES ARE SERVED BY LIFTS AND WHEELCHAIRS CAN BE BORROWED AT NO COST”

most straightforward museums to navigate. Some 800m further on, the Louvre is immense yet unmissable. Beyond its masterpieces, the architectural entrance through the glass Pyramid leads into a light-filled concourse that feels strikingly modern in contrast to the historic wings. All main galleries are served by lifts and wheelchairs can be borrowed at no cost. Staff are proactive in guiding visitors through accessible entrances, including a dedicated queue to see the Mona Lisa. While the crowds gather here, many other wings of the museum remain surprisingly quiet, offering a more relaxing experience.

If energy allows, the nearby Pont des Arts is a scenic place to linger. Once famous for its love locks, this pedestrian-only bridge opens onto sweeping views of the Seine. Its flat wooden deck is accessible via steps or a gentle ramp, and at sunset it becomes one of the most romantic vantage points in the city.

BOHEMIAN HEIGHTS

Montmartre captures a different flavour of Paris, with winding lanes, artists at work and the gleaming white Sacré-Cœur Basilica crowning the hill. Its steps are famous, as is the view from the summit, stretching across the city’s rooftops and monuments. People-watching here is a popular pastime, with cafés and squares buzzing from morning until late at night.

Depending on where you begin, the summit can be reached via the accessible funicular railway, which offers a step-free alternative to the steep staircases. Cars can also drop passengers at the top of the steps near the main entrance. At the basilica, wheelchair access requires circling three-quarters of the way around to the Hôtellerie Éphrem, where a gate buzzer admits visitors to a lift leading directly to a side entrance. Inside the hotel, accessible toilets are available, a welcome addition in such a busy area. The neighbourhood itself is richly atmospheric, filled with shops, cafés and narrow streets that



Clockwise from above: Famous sights with good accessibility include the Grand Palais; the Louvre, where you can borrow wheelchairs free of charge; Sacré Coeur in Montmartre; and the Eiffel Tower, which affords breathtaking views over Paris even when seated



All exhibition areas and services at the Musée d'Orsay are fully accessible

reflect its bohemian past. Traffic on narrow roads and weekend crowds can be difficult to navigate, but Montmartre remains one of the city’s most distinctive and memorable districts.

VIEWS FROM ABOVE

Paris can be seen from many angles, but the most striking are from bus, boat and the Eiffel Tower. An open-top bus tour is one of the most efficient ways to cover ground. The low-floor vehicles have wide aisles, priority seating and wheelchair bays. The upper deck is only accessible by stairs, but the lower level offers excellent visibility through large windows. It’s a great way to conserve energy as audio guides add historical colour along the route, which covers key landmarks.

The bus stop at the Eiffel Tower is also a starting point for many river cruises, making it simple to combine the two. However, this is where the accessibility falters. Although vessels are frequently promoted as wheelchair-accessible, reaching them is a challenge. Embarkation points sit well below street level, reached by long staircases or distant cobbled inclines. For now, these cruises remain impractical for those unable to manage stairs.



The Eiffel Tower, by contrast, offers a far better experience. Accessible entrances and lifts carry visitors to fully accessible floors, offering jaw-dropping panoramic views that can be enjoyed even when seated. The grounds are extensive and although signage for accessible routes can be confusing, staff are on hand to help. The result is an experience that delivers both the thrill of height and a true sense of the city's scale.

GETTING AROUND

Public transport is a challenge in Paris. The metro is largely impractical, with lifts only serving certain exits and many stations relying on escalators and staircases. Interchanges between lines often involve long underground passages and maze-like layouts, while escalator and lift breakdowns make journeys unpredictable. The bus network is modern and fully wheelchair-accessible, yet the size of the city means

trips often require multiple changes, adding both time and complexity.

Taxis and ride-hailing services provide a more reliable option. Bolt is affordable, while Uber is the only operator with fully adapted wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Keeping both apps installed is advisable, ensuring flexibility when moving between areas of the city. **FT**



Priority access at the train station and, inset, at the Eiffel Tower

PARIS ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

BY SEA

Brittany Ferries offers crossings from Portsmouth to Caen or Le Havre. SNCF trains to Paris Saint-Lazare take approx two hours, or take the A13 motorway from Caen (145 miles) or the A131 and A13 from Le Havre (130 miles).

www.brittany-ferries.co.uk

BY TRAIN

Eurostar connects London to Paris Gare du Nord in two hours. www.eurostar.com/uk-en

BY AIR

Paris is served by both Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports, with a wide choice of international flights.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Brittany Ferries Accessibility

www.brittany-ferries.co.uk/information/travel-advice/disabled-passengers

Eurostar Accessibility

www.eurostar.com/rw-en/travel-info/travel-planning/accessibility

Paris Tourism

parisjetaime.com/eng

Visiting Paris with a Disability

parisjetaime.com/eng/practical-paris/visiting-paris-with-a-disability-i053

WHERE TO EAT

Many Paris restaurants are housed in older buildings, so a few entrance steps are

common, although staff are generally eager to assist. Wheelchair-friendly toilets are rare. A reliable tip is to dine in shopping centres and stores such as the upscale Printemps, where restaurants are fully accessible by default. Larger hotels like the Four Seasons and Mandarin Oriental also provide excellent, step-free dining options, though they tend to sit at the higher end of the price range.

Fully accessible dining options:

Tribeca Rue Cler – Italian-inspired dining, 36 Rue Cler, 7th, tinyurl.com/Tribeca-Paris

IKË, Printemps Haussmann – French-Japanese seafood, 8th floor, 64 Boulevard Haussmann, 9th, www.printemps.com/uk/en

Le Meurice – Michelin-starred, 228 Rue de Rivoli, 1st, www.dorchestercollection.com/paris/le-meurice



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The Panthéon is one of Paris's greatest landmarks

Travellers hopping on the Eurostar train to France from London can make the most of an extra perk as they disembark in Paris or Lille. An exclusive offer gives visitors a double dose of culture with a 2-for-1 entrance fee to eight of the country's finest museums and heritage sites, their permanent collections and temporary exhibitions.

Perched on a hill in Paris' Marais district, the **Panthéon** was first a church dedicated to Sainte Geneviève before it was renamed after the Revolution. It became the national necropolis in 1791 and has housed the remains of major French figures since then. From Victor Hugo and Voltaire to Napoleon and Marie Curie, personalities that have played a significant role in French politics and culture have been 'pantheonised' after their death as a final homage. Lawyer and politician Robert Badinter was the latest to enter the Pantheon and an exhibition dedicated to his lifelong fight for justice is running until March 8.

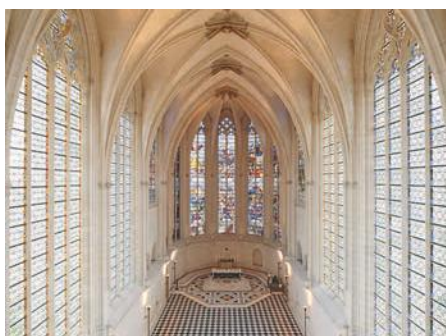
You could also explore the stunning **Hôtel de la Marine** in Paris, formerly the royal furniture storehouse, which has been transformed into a hub of

craftsmanship and culture with a working traditional chandelier-making studio and a cookery school within the palace. An exhibition of the jewels of Europe's historic dynasties is in the Al Thani Collection galleries until April 6.

Behind the walls of the **Basilique Saint-Denis**, on the outskirts of Paris, lie more grand figures of French history. The Saint-Denis cathedral and basilica is also the royal necropolis and houses the tombs of 40 kings and 26 queens of France. Ongoing restorations are returning the monument, with its impressively tall spire, to full glory. A new visitor circuit offers glimpses of the restoration works behind the scenes.

The **Château de Vincennes** has witnessed centuries of France's history but has also seen its fair share of intrigue. Did you know the real D'Artagnan served Louis XIV at Vincennes? Or that it was the scene of a spectacular prison break, or even of an alleged generational curse? Find out more by visiting the historic monument on the eastern edge of Paris.

Built between 1928 and 1931 in Poissy, just outside Paris, **Villa Savoye** is one of Le Corbusier's most influential works and



Sainte-Chapelle at the Château de Vincennes

a landmark of modern architecture.

Conceived as a weekend retreat for the Savoye family, the house's clean lines and functional design marked a radical break from traditional domestic architecture. This year marks the 10th anniversary since Le Corbusier's works joined UNESCO's World Heritage list and is the perfect moment to revisit Villa Savoye.

Another grand house to visit is the **Château de Maisons**, built in the 17th century and designed by François Mansart. It embodies the transition from Renaissance to classical architecture and was the height of aristocratic taste under



The stunning Château de Maisons

King Louis XIV. Currently, an exhibition traces the youth of the Comte d'Artois, later known as King Charles X.

Near Lille, don't miss the **Villa Cavrois**. Built between 1929 and 1932, Villa Cavrois is a striking Modernist residence designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens for industrialist Paul Cavrois. Conceived as a luxurious family home, it combined cutting-edge design with advanced comfort, incorporating light and functionality into every detail.

Finally, for French language enthusiasts, the **Cité internationale de la langue française** is a must-see. Housed in the refurbished **Château de Villers-Cotterêts**, in the Aisne département, the Cité hosts themed exhibitions following the origins, influences and evolutions of the French language. The latest exhibition puts on show historical manuscripts dating from the Middle Ages to today. **FT**

www.monuments-nationaux.fr/en

www.eurostar.com/uk-en/

[deals/2for1/#Participating-museums](#)

ALL ABOARD: CULTURAL ADVENTURES AWAIT

If you're planning a culture-filled city break in France, the Eurostar 2-for-1 museum offer will unlock some of the country's most celebrated cultural sites. Proof that the journey itself can be just as rewarding as the destination.

CONDITIONS

- Available to adults with an outbound ticket to Paris or Lille from London.
- Show your Eurostar ticket at the museum ticket booth or book directly online using your train ticket.
- Redeem your offer within 5 days of the date of your outbound ticket.

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Breizhtronomie

A FOODIE'S TOUR DE VANNES

Alison Hughes enjoys some Breton hospitality on a taste sensation tour of the charming Morbihan town of Vannes



IMAGES © SHUTTERSTOCK, ALISON HUGHES



“TURNING DOWN BY THE SIDE OF THE CATHEDRAL, BERTRAND DREW OUR ATTENTION TO A BRONZE MOTIF IN THE PAVING STONES SIMILAR TO THE SCALLOP SHELLS MARKING THE WAY TO COMPOSTELA”

This image, above and right: Half-timbered buildings in Vannes; the bronze motif featuring the stoat; Alison's fellow food tour members



We were a small group who gathered outside the town hall in Vannes to start our food tour in the company of our *compagnon gourmand*, Bertrand. A proud Breton, Bertrand has a background in tourism and hospitality and first came across the idea of food tours while working in India and thought it would be a great way to celebrate Breton cuisine.

Vannes is a perfect place to explore on foot – the sort of place where you can freely wander, soaking up the history and the visual treat of half-timbered buildings and pavement cafés. But it's even better if you have a knowledgeable guide and tastings along the way.

Starting near the hôtel de ville – reminiscent of the one in Paris – we were soon in the old quarter of the town in Place Henri IV with the imposing façade of the Cathédrale Saint-Pierre stretching up to the heavens. Close by is one of the oldest buildings in Vannes, La Cohue. Dating back to 13th century, it was first a market hall, then briefly became home to the Breton parliament in exile, before being used as a theatre and now an art museum.

Turning down by the side of the cathedral, Bertrand drew our attention to a bronze motif in the paving stones similar in style to the scallop shells marking the way to Compostela. It is a representation of a stoat (*hermine* in French) wearing a scarf, which is the Breton emblem symbolising purity and bravery. Legend has it that Anne de Bretagne was out hunting one day when she spotted a stoat with its pristine winter coat refusing to cross a muddy stream. Taking this as a sign of purity and bravery, she adopted the maxim *plutôt la mort que la souillure* (rather death than defilement) as her personal motto. Brittany's connection with the animal, however, predates Anne: it appears on chivalric arms as early as the 13th century. Today, *l'hermine* has pride of place on the black-and-white Breton flag and turns up endlessly in tourist shops. »



To whet our taste buds, we stopped outside the indoor market where Bertrand produced a tub of biscuits – time for *une petite devinette* (guessing game). Most of us correctly guessed *blé noir* (buckwheat) as the main ingredient, but sesame seeds and seaweed proved more elusive. The result is a crisp, savoury biscuit that works well with cheese and is gluten-free too.

Blé noir or *sarrasin* is, of course, the main ingredient for making *galettes* (savory crêpes) but we learned that in the past it was served as part of the main course, as a filler, often alongside bone marrow and vegetables. Much of Breton cooking has its roots in the simple ingredients that were readily available: dairy, vegetables, fruit and seafood.

OFF TO MARKET

Heading inside the marketplace we were invited to sit down while Breton hot dogs – aka *galettes-saucisses*, galettes wrapped around a sausage – were being prepared, to be washed down with a slug of local cider, *bien sûr*. Purists don't add sauces such as ketchup or mustard. Likewise, *la complète* (a galette with ham, cheese and a fried egg) is the traditional way to eat a savory crêpe; the addition of smoked salmon, mushrooms and ratatouille, however delicious, are modern inventions. Bernard then surprised us again by singing 'the sausage song', an anthem adopted by Rennes football supporters while eating their favourite half-time snack:

*Galette-saucisse, je t'aime, j'en mangerai des kilos
 ...Et si tu m'abandonnes,
 Alors je m'empoisonne
 Avec des tripes de Caen
 Et des rillettes du Mans.*

Next it was time to weave our way through the Saturday shoppers to Véro's cheese stall. Véronique Cauvin stocks more than 250 types of cheese and dairy products, but we were here to sample the Breton ones – a Tome de Rhuy's, a chèvre aux algues, a Trappe de Timadeuc and a Pavé Breton. Véro studied at renowned culinary school Ferrandi Paris, and offers her services as a chef for private functions as well as manning the cheese stall. She also has more than 25 cookery books to her name. We were feeling quite replete by this time, but we knew we had several more treats in store. Vannes has a separate

From left: Véro's cheese stall in the market; Gwenaël Le Labourier discusses oysters; savoury cream puffs from Les Nuages de Gege; Les Nuages de Gege's shopfront; making kouign-amann at François' shop



indoor market dedicated to fish and seafood and this was our next stop. Here we met Gwenaël Le Labourier, an oyster and mussel farmer, who was busy shucking oysters for his customers. One of our party, impressed by Gwenaël's biceps, wanted to know how much the racks of oysters weighed (up to 25kg), how long they took to reach maturity (three years) and whether he came from a family of oyster farmers (no). In fact, unusually (as it is often a father-to-son profession) after helping out a neighbour one day, Gwenaël just took to it and has been working in the industry since the age of 15.

Questions over, it was time to sample the prepared oysters and mussels, so we took ourselves outside with the tray of goodies, and Bernard produced a bottle of Muscadet-sur-lie, the perfect accompaniment for shellfish. You might be of the opinion of one of the group ("too slippery", said with a shudder) but if you've never tried oysters before, this would be the perfect chance to do so.

IMAGES © SHUTTERSTOCK, ALISON HUGHES



Les Halles des Lices is a treat for food lovers

The tour was beginning to feel like one of those safari suppers where each course is eaten at a different location. We were now on to desserts and first stop was the tiny shop Les Nuages de Gege, which specialises in cream puffs – choux pastry filled with fresh cream with a variety of savoury and sweet flavours, from smoked salmon to chocolate ganache. Géraldine, the creator of the business, swapped a career in audiovisual in Paris for this delightful little shop tucked down a side street in Vannes. The fresh ingredients of the *nuages* (clouds) mean they need to be consumed within 24 hours – no problem when they are this delicious.

CULTURAL INSIGHTS

For our last ‘course’ we returned to the main square to try a true Breton speciality, kouign-amann (literally butter cake). Again, the ingredients are very simple – a kind of bread dough, butter and sugar, which are layered up to resemble puff pastry. The cake originated in Douarnenez, Finistère, but has been adopted throughout Brittany and has become popular as street food as far afield as Indonesia. François, who learned his trade from his parents, has the ideal premises in the heart of Vannes, where everything is freshly made on-site, and he was doing a roaring trade when we arrived at his eponymous shop. A warm, buttery treat was the perfect way to round off our food tour.

Looking back, it proved an unusually rich way to get under the skin of a place: I came away with a sharper sense of Vannes’ history, a Breton song lodged in my head, and a genuine feel for the region’s culture. One word of advice: if you take the tour, have a very light breakfast! **FT**



VANNES ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

Brittany Ferries operates overnight sailings from Portsmouth to Saint-Malo, which is about a two-hour drive from Vannes.
www.brittany-ferries.co.uk

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel Le Branhoc – Brit Hotel Auray
A 2-star hotel 20km from Vannes.
5 route du Bono, 56400 Auray
hotel-auray.brithotel.com

FOOD TOUR & PRODUCERS

Breizhtronomie Food Tour
Walking tours are available around Vannes,

Auray and Concarneau and take on average three hours. Prices start at €55 per person and include all tastings. Family tours of 1.5 hours are also available. Tours in English on certain dates or by arrangement.
breizhtronomie-food-tour.com/en

La Ferme de Kerroui

A farm producer specialising in poultry.
Halles des Lices, 56000 Vannes
lafermedekerroui.com

Véro – Crèmes et Fromages

Halles des Lices, 56000 Vannes
www.facebook.com/VEROcremesetfromages

Gwenaël Le Labourier

Halle aux Poissons de Vannes, 56000 Vannes
Site ostréicole, 56000 Le Tour-du-Parc

Les Nuages de Gege

7 rue de la Poissonnerie, 56000 Vannes
www.facebook.com/lesnuagesdegege

François

6 Place des Lices, 56000 Vannes

TOURIST INFORMATION

Golfe du Morbihan/Vannes tourism

6 Quai Eric Tabarly, 56000 Vannes
www.golfedumorbihan.bzh

TASTE THE TERROIR

Your regular serving of news, views, *dégustations* and other titbits from the rich and varied larder of *la Belle France*



Clockwise from left: Philippe Teulier, of Domaine Cros; cypress trees on the picturesque hillside; rows of vines



THE SECRET VINEYARDS OF AVEYRON

On the rugged edge of the Massif Central, **Dominic Rippon** uncovers a corner of France where vineyards cling to cliffs and tradition is being reborn

France is blessed with a wealth of beautiful wine regions. Think of Alsace's fairy-tale hillsides, Jura's subalpine slopes, or the Roussillon, where vineyards stretch south into the Pyrenees. Yet Aveyron, little known outside its borders, might just outshine them all. Here in the northernmost reaches of Occitanie, vines are woven into the wild foothills of the Massif Central, a stunning landscape of dizzying terraces and timeless stone villages.

Part of Aveyron's mystery lies in its small scale. The heart of production is Marcillac, a patchwork of only 200 hectares just north of Rodez. The star here is the Fer Servadou grape, known locally as Mansois: an ancient cousin of Cabernet, it thrives in this high, rocky terrain. Thick-skinned and resilient, it produces dark, spicy cassis-scented reds, with a freshness sharpened by the cool altitude and a ripeness coaxed by warm autumn breezes. Until the 1960s, however, these hills were better known for digging

coal than for tending vines, as wine cellars churned out thin, rough piquette to slake the thirst of the miners.

When the pits closed, growers had to change course: vines were replanted, production scaled back, and ancient terraces were reshaped to allow for the passage of modern equipment.

Out of that transformation, quality began to emerge and recognition followed. The vineyards of Marcillac gained appellation status in 1990, and in 2011 Estaing, Côtes de Millau, and Entraygues-Le Fel joined the fold. These smaller areas specialise in lively whites made from Chenin Blanc and Mauzac, while Fer Servadou again shapes the reds – either as a pure varietal or blended with Gamay. In Côtes de Millau, to the south, Syrah adds a distinctly Mediterranean accent to the wines.

Today, the region is gradually finding its voice again. What were once dismissed as humble 'miners' wines' are now capturing

the attention of sommeliers and more adventurous drinkers. Cooperative cellars like the Vignerons du Vallon have led the revival, inspiring young winemakers to reclaim the dramatic terraces and rediscover the beauty of working some of France's most striking vineyard landscapes.

DOMINIC'S CHOICE

- **Domaine du Mioula**

www.marcillac.net

Choice wine: *'Terres d'Ors' 2022*
IGP Aveyron Blanc

- **Domaine du Cros**

www.domaine-du-cros.com

Choice wine: *Marcillac Rouge 'Les Rougiers' 2018*

- **Domaine Laurens**

www.domaine-laurens.com

Choice wine: *Marcillac Rouge 'Cuvée de Flars' 2021*



THIS YEAR'S MICHELIN STARS TO BE REVEALED IN MONACO

France's chefs and restaurateurs will be watching closely on March 16, when the Michelin Guide France 2026 is revealed. New stars and special awards will all be announced in the long-awaited annual ceremony which can make – or remake – reputations overnight.

This year, the ceremony is being held in Monaco for the first time, at the Grimaldi Forum, a choice that draws attention to the gastronomic pull of the Principality and, more broadly, the south-east of France. In recent years, Michelin has deliberately moved the event around the country, with ceremonies staged in Tours in 2024 and Metz last year, as a way of highlighting regional excellence. International Director Gwendal Poullennec described Monaco as “rich in a living culinary heritage”.

As ever, the Guide will celebrate France's richly varied dining scene, from long-established institutions to ambitious newcomers. First published in 1900, the Michelin Guide has long rewarded consistency, craft and culinary confidence, earning its place as the bible of gastronomy. The event will be streamed live on Michelin's social media channels.

● www.michelin.com



Gourmet Trails...

THE SAUSAGE CAPITAL

Every March, the quiet streets of Mortagne-au-Perche come alive with one of Normandy's most distinctive gastronomic celebrations, the Foire au Boudin. This year, the three-day event will be held on March 13-15, transforming the town into what many call France's capital of boudin noir – a sausage made from pig's blood.

This lively showcase of rural terroir and tradition has been a fixture of local life for more than six decades, drawing thousands of visitors eager to savour one of the Perche region's emblematic products. Originally conceived in 1962 to revitalise a traditional spring fair, the Foire au Boudin has grown into a popular festival that combines gastronomy with conviviality and craft.

Across the weekend, producers and artisans from the region and beyond gather in marquees and along the town's lanes. A competition for the best boudin noir brings together *charcutiers* to present their blood sausage according to strict quality criteria, while demonstrations and culinary workshops offer a closer look at traditional methods.

Boudin noir is one of Europe's oldest recorded sausages, with recipes for blood-based sausages appearing in *De re coquinaria*, a Roman recipe book dating from the 4th–5th century.

The fair also includes a *dîner spectacle* on the Friday evening, where locals and visitors share food and festivity. Meanwhile, the exhibition space showcases other regional products from cheeses and charcuterie to ciders and terrines – so even if blood sausage doesn't tickle your taste buds, you won't go hungry.

● foire-au-boudin.fr



Pick up some boudin noir and rustle up some hearty French rural fare

LE SANDWICH

THREE FRENCH CLASSICS YOU CAN EAT ON THE GO...



JAMBON BEURRE

This is fast food at its most perfect: a fresh baguette, generously spread with salty butter, and thick slices of good ham. Eat it at a Parisian café, and reflect on the fact that sometimes the simplest things are the best.



PAN BAGNAT

This Niçois classic takes round bread soaked in olive oil and packs it with tuna, tomatoes, olives and anchovies. Left to rest, it tastes even better when the juices have soaked in. Best enjoyed overlooking the Mediterranean.



CROQUE MONSIEUR

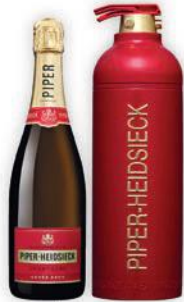
It's the most famous French sarnie for a reason. This café classic of ham, Gruyère and béchamel layered between bread, then grilled until molten and blistered, is rich, indulgent and ever so moreish.

BON APPÉTIT

Your tasty and topical round-up of what's cooking this issue, plus our choice of great products and foodie news

TEMPTING TIPPLES

A *France Today* round-up of excellent apéro and dining options



EMERGENCY FIZZ!

Piper-Heidsieck has launched its Champagne 'Code Rouge', presented in a limited-edition red and gold case shaped like a vintage fire extinguisher.

● **Selfridges, £65.99**



CLOSE TO CHAMPAGNE

Moillard's premium Crémant de Bourgogne is crafted from 100% Chardonnay and aged for 12 months on lees for finer, creamier bubbles.

● **Tesco, £16**



A SUSTAINABLE SIP

Domaine Lafage, Moutou, Côtes Catalanes, uses biochar to combat rising drought stress and improve soil water management.

● **Strictly Wine, £24.50**



FRENCH BUFFET BOOM

If you are limiting your French gastronomic experiences to traditional bistros, brasseries and Michelin-starred restaurants, then you are not in step with the country's culinary times – the major boom over the last couple of years has been in all-you-can-eat buffets with set prices.

Where Asian buffets led the way, now *à volonté* (unlimited) French cuisine too is being offered in places such as Brique Machine (with its unstuffy vibe and modern, funky decor), Les Grands Buffets Lyonnais (typical lunch menu price, €29), and the original king of the scene, the seriously gastronomic Les Grands Buffets in Narbonne. For the ravenous, they offer great value and the chance to try many different items on the menu, with an emphasis on quality, local sourcing, gastronomic experiences and themed offerings. Refill, anyone?

● **briquehouse.com; les-grands-buffets-lyonnais.fr; www.lesgrandsbuffets.com**

EN SAISON Leafy green blettes

(Swiss chard) are common in French markets at this time of year. Perfect for a gratin, Nice's *tourte de blettes* or the Aveyron speciality, *farçous* (fritters).



Teatime treats



JUST DESSERTS

More tantalising teatime delights from Bonne Maman

Bonne Maman's quest for dessert dominance continues apace with the launch of its latest puddings, including Pear & Vanilla Yoghurt, an irresistible new flavour pairing luxuriously creamy yoghurt with generous pieces of juicy, ripe pear and a hint of vanilla. Then there is Le Brownie, a pack of five truly indulgent, moist and deeply chocolatey brownies, generously topped with crunchy pecan nuts. And finally, we have Petits Blueberry Muffins – 16 little muffins bursting with flavour and generously dotted with pieces of candied blueberries.

That's le goûter sorted!

● **Waitrose, Sainsbury's**

NEW TASTE OF FRANCE

Taste of France Issue 10 arrives in March, with spring firmly in the air. We bring you cherries from Céret, pink garlic from Lautrec and champagne celebrations in Épernay. Join us as we explore the salt flats of Camargue, take a gourmet journey through Provence, chat to Michelin-starred chef Hélène Darroze and tempt you with mouthwatering recipes.

● **francemedia.shop**



OH CHERRY, OH BABY

Readers looking for a secret gourmet ingredient to lend some wow factor to their baking, desserts, or even their cocktails are spoilt for choice thanks to the traditions and craftsmanship of French producers.

As an example, Griottines are wild sour cherries that have been pitted and macerated in a kirsch liqueur made from a secret recipe. Renowned throughout the world, they are at once tender yet retain some bite, and are highly prized in baking, savoury cooking and mixology. Available in their classic form, or expertly blended with Rhum Saint James by Grandes Distilleries Peureux, they are great in a Black Forest gateau or clafoutis, or with duck.

● **From €14.60; www.distilleriespeureux.com**



In Evron (Mayenne), 420 rib steaks were artfully arranged on a colossal

grill, resulting in a meaty masterpiece tipping the scales at a staggering

32kg – a new world record for the largest côte de bœuf ever cooked

IMAGES © LES GRANDS BUFFETS LYONNAIS/FACEBOOK; SHUTTERSTOCK

NICE FOOD TOPS LYON

Inter-city rivalries are common in France, from Bordeaux and Toulouse (rugby especially) to Paris and Marseille (football); but when it comes to regional cuisine there is also a fierce sense of one-upmanship.

The latest culinary bragging rights belong to Nice, the Riviera gem which is home to classic dishes such as *pissaladière*, *pan bagnat* and *socca*, for it was ranked the 13th city in the world for its local cuisine at the international Taste Atlas Awards. Its position is way ahead of Lyon, the city traditionally dubbed the home of French gastronomy, which came in 32nd. Naples was first.

● **www.tasteatlas.com/best/cities**



Recipes from Le Bristol

The magnificent **Le Bristol hotel** in Paris offers some of the capital's must-try dining experiences. From a sumptuous new history of the hotel we present four delicious recipes for you to try at home

NORMANDY SCALLOPS AND WATERCRESS GNOCCHI WITH CAVIAR AND SMOKED POTATO CRÈMEUX

A feast for the eyes and the taste buds, this dish expresses the perfect harmony between land and sea.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

For the potato foam

Generous ½ cup (4½ oz/125 g) Ratte potatoes
 ⅓ cup (2½ fl oz/65 g) cream, smoked
 ¼ cup (2 fl oz/56 g) cooking water infused with the Ratte potato skins
 2 ½ tbsp (1 ⅓ fl oz/35 g) oil, smoked

For the scallops

12 very large scallops
 Oil
 Mignonette pepper and Guérande sea salt

For the watercress jus

½ bunch watercress
 Mineral water

For the watercress coulis

1 bunch watercress
 Olive oil

For the matured caviar

¼ cup (1 ½ oz/40 g) matured caviar

For the Ratte potato gnocchi

½ cup (3 ½ oz/100 g) Ratte potatoes
 2 tsp (⅓ fl oz/10 g) egg yolk
 1 tsp (7 g) watercress coulis
 5 tsp (⅓ oz/10 g) all-purpose flour
 2 tsp (¼ oz/8 g) grated Parmesan cheese
 Salt

For the garnish

Watercress

METHOD

For the potato foam

1 Peel and boil the whole potatoes in unsalted water; then pass through a fine sieve (or fine potato ricer).

2 Smoke the liquid cream in a mixing bowl with a smoke gun for 2 x 10 minutes, then cover with plastic wrap.

3 Blend the potatoes, cream, cooking water, and smoked oil together while hot.

4 Adjust the seasoning, transfer to a siphon and inject gas.

5 Keep the foam warm at around 140°F (60°C).

For the watercress jus

1 Blend the watercress with mineral water, then strain through paper towels.

2 Use the jus to thin the watercress coulis, which should have a thick consistency.

For the watercress coulis

1 Remove the watercress leaves from the stems, setting aside 20 leaves for the garnish.

2 Boil in salted water; drain, and blend, adding a little of the jus to adjust the consistency.

3 Add a little fresh watercress, pass through a fine sieve and chill over ice.

For the Ratte potato gnocchi

1 Bake the Ratte potatoes on a layer of coarse salt at 350°F (180°C/gas mark 4), 0% humidity.

2 Skin the potatoes while still hot and sieve the flesh.

3 Mix all the ingredients and season to taste.

4 Make marble-sized balls and shape into 20 gnocchi using the back of a fork, lightly floured.

5 Plunge the gnocchi into boiling water and cook till they rise to the surface. Drain, then coat with the watercress coulis.

For the scallops

1 Put a little oil in a skillet and when hot sear the scallops on each side for 1 min 30 sec. Season with a pinch of Mignonette pepper and Guérande sea salt.

To serve

1 Drizzle each plate with the watercress coulis, then arrange 5 gnocchi on top with »



IMAGES © THE SOCIAL FOOD/THOMAS DHELLEMPEL, FROM LE BRISTOL, PARIS, FLAMMARION

Onion soup with beef consommé
See overleaf for recipe



3 scallops in between. Top each gnocchi with a watercress leaf.

2 Pour a little of the coulis into a sauce boat and add the potato crèmeux on top.

3 Serve separately with the matured caviar.

ONION SOUP WITH BEEF CONSOMMÉ

Onion soup is an integral part of France's culinary heritage. According to legend, it was invented by Louis XV himself. Now you don't need to be royalty to enjoy it day or night, thanks to room service at Le Bristol.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

For the beef consommé

1 lb (500 g) beef (preferably on the bone for a better flavour)

6 pt (3 L) water

1 onion, 2 carrots, 1 leek, 2 stalks celery

1 bouquet garni (thyme, bay leaf, parsley, leek)

1 tsp salt

1/3 tsp (2 g) black peppercorns

2 cloves

6 juniper berries

For the onion soup

4 large yellow onions

1/2 stick (2 oz/50 g) butter

Scant 1/2 cup (3 1/2 fl oz/100 ml) dry white wine

4 1/4 cups (35 fl oz/1 L) beef consommé

4 slices sourdough bread

1 1/4 cups (5 1/4 oz/150 g) grated Gruyère cheese

Thyme (optional)

Bay leaf (optional)

Salt and pepper

METHOD

For the beef consommé (prepared in advance)

1 Place the beef in a large saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil over a high heat.

2 Peel and halve the onion. Place both halves in a skillet, cut side down, and leave on the heat until the onion is black.

3 Once the water has come to a boil, reduce the heat to low and skim off any surface foam. Roughly chop the carrots, leek, and celery, and add them with the charred onion, bouquet garni, cloves, juniper berries, salt, and black peppercorns.

4 Simmer the consommé over a low heat for at least 3 hours: the longer the simmering time, the better the flavour will be. Top up with more water as necessary.

5 Once the consommé has simmered long enough and the vegetables are tender, remove the meat and vegetables from the pan with a skimmer. Set aside to use in another dish.

6 Strain the consommé to remove any impurities until it is clear; then use it for the onion soup.

For the onion soup

1 Thinly slice the onions.

2 Melt the butter in a large saucepan.

3 Add the sliced onions and cook gently for 30 to 40 minutes until golden, stirring regularly to stop them from burning.

4 Pour the dry white wine over the onions and simmer for a few minutes to allow the alcohol to evaporate.

5 Add the beef consommé and simmer over a low heat for 30 minutes, adding a sprig of thyme and a bay leaf if desired.

6 Preheat the oven to broiler mode and toast the bread slices until crisp.

7 Spoon the onion soup into oven-proof bowls.

8 Place a slice of toasted bread on top of each bowl, then generously cover with grated Gruyère.

9 Place the bowls under the broiler for a few minutes, until the cheese is melted and golden.

10 Serve the onion soup while it is piping hot.

100% VANILLA CUSTARD TART

Sweet, creamy and crunchy: a memorable and celebrated tart.

Serves 1

INGREDIENTS

To make 1 tart

2 oz (60 g) pâte sucrée

1 1/3 cups (1 1/4 oz/35 g) pecan praline

3/4 oz (20 g) whole toasted pecans

1 1/4 cups (9 1/4 fl oz/270 g) custard

For the custard

1/2 cup (4 3/4 fl oz/140 g) whole milk

1 vanilla pod

3/4 oz (22 g) sugar

1 oz (30 g) egg yolks

Scant 1/2 oz (12 g) cornstarch

Generous 1 pinch (0.5 g) salt

1/3 cup (2 3/4 fl oz/40 g) single cream

1/4 stick (3/4 oz/20 g) butter

For the pâte sucrée

1/4 cup (1 1/4 oz/35 g) powdered sugar

1 tbsp (8 g) ground almonds

Generous 1 pinch (0.5 g) salt

Scant 1 cup (3 oz / 85 g) flour

Scant 1/2 stick (1 1/2 oz/45 g) butter

2 drops (1 g) vanilla extract

1/2 oz (15 g) beaten egg

For the pecan praline

3/4 oz (20 g) sugar

1 tsp (5 g) water

1/4 cup (1 oz/30 g) pecans

1 pinch salt



IMAGES © THE SOCIAL FOOD, FROM LE BRISTOL, PARIS. FLAMMARION

METHOD**For the custard (to make the day before)**

1 Bring the milk to a boil, then split the vanilla pod and add it to the milk. Cover with plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator overnight.

2 The next day, strain the milk through a fine-mesh sieve to remove the vanilla seeds. Bring the infused milk to a boil with half the sugar.

3 Meanwhile, in a mixing bowl mix the egg yolks, cornstarch, remaining sugar and salt. Add the boiled milk and mix well. Pour the mixture into a saucepan and bring to a boil. After 2 minutes, add the cream and butter and mix with a stick blender.

4 Set aside, cover with plastic wrap touching the surface and allow to cool for at least two hours.

For the pâte sucrée

1 Preheat the oven to 325°F (165°C/gas mark 3).

2 In a mixing bowl, mix the sugar, ground almonds, salt, and flour; add the vanilla extract and rub in the butter. Add the eggs, put in a food processor and knead to a smooth paste. With a rolling pin, roll out to a thickness of $\frac{1}{16}$ in (2 mm), then chill in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours.

3 Cut out into rounds 4 in (10 cm) in diameter and strips 2 x 12 in (5 x 31 cm). Line a mould 4 in (10 cm) in diameter and 2 in (5 cm) deep with the pastry. Fill with baking beans or pie weights and bake blind for 25 minutes until golden in colour.

For the pecan praline

1 In a saucepan, heat the sugar and water to 248°F (120°C), then add the pecans. Stir carefully until the mixture caramelises, taking care not to allow the sugar to burn.

2 Set the mixture aside to cool. Add the salt and mix in a food processor to obtain a smooth paste.

To assemble

1 Keep the pastry case in the mould and spread 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ cups (1 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz/35 g) of pecan praline in the bottom.

2 Then arrange $\frac{3}{4}$ oz (20 g) of toasted pecans on top to add crunch and texture. Finally, fill the case with the well-mixed custard.

3 Place in the oven at 325°F (160°C/gas mark 3) for 25 minutes.

BACON CLUB SANDWICHES

Comforting and fun, a club sandwich can be enjoyed alone, with a partner or with the family, and at any time of day... And it's at home in every language!



Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

For the sandwich filling

- 4 eggs**
- 3 free-range chicken fillets**
- 1 sprig thyme**
- 1 clove garlic**
- Oil**
- Butter**
- 8 rashers bacon**
- 4 plum tomatoes**

For the mayonnaise

- 5 egg yolks**
- 5 tbsp Dijon mustard**
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp (8 g) salt**
- 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups (19 fl oz/540 ml) grapeseed oil**
- Scant $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (1 $\frac{3}{4}$ fl oz/50 ml) white vinegar**
- 1 lettuce heart, chopped**

To serve

- 16 slices sandwich bread, toasted**
- 16 bamboo skewers**

METHOD

For the sandwich filling

1 Preheat the oven to 320°F (160°C/gas mark 4).

2 Boil the eggs for 9 minutes, then cool them in iced water. Shell and slice them when cold.

3 In a skillet, brown the chicken fillets in oil and butter with the thyme and garlic. Transfer the fillets to the preheated oven for 12 minutes to finish cooking.

4 Fry the bacon rashers until crisp.

5 Remove the stems of the tomatoes, slit the skins and plunge them into simmering water for 1 minute, then into iced water to loosen the skin. Peel and slice tomatoes.

For the mayonnaise

1 Whisk the egg yolks with the mustard and salt, then gradually whisk in the grapeseed oil until creamy.

2 Add the vinegar and the chopped lettuce heart.

To assemble the club sandwiches

1 Spread 4 slices of toasted bread with mayonnaise.

2 Top one slice with a sliced egg.

3 Top the second slice with a sliced tomato.

4 Top the third slice with a sliced chicken breast and 2 bacon rashers.

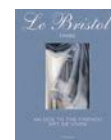
5 Place the fourth slice on top, toasted side up.

6 Repeat with the other 3 club sandwiches.

To serve

1 Use 4 bamboo skewers to secure each club sandwich.

2 Trim the crusts on all sides, then cut into 4 triangles. **LT**



● *Extracted from*
Le Bristol Paris: An Ode to the French Art de Vivre
by Laure Verchère
(Flammarion, 2025)



BY ALEXANDER LOBRANO

CALL ME OLD-FASHIONED

Alexander Lobrano explores corners of Paris which capture the romance of the past, and Sylvia Edwards dines on the Riviera

À LA RENAISSANCE, PARIS

Tucked away in a residential corner of the very residential 11th arrondissement – the preferred precinct of younger, arty Parisians – this café with a big zinc bar, pink neon signage, wooden banquettes and a cracked tile floor has been a hit ever since it opened in 1919. Open daily from 8am to 1am (the kitchen is closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays), the reason the locals cherish it is that it feels unselfconsciously like Paris – the real Paris, and not some irritating, treacherous version of it as seen through the eyes of an American movie studio or streaming company.

This is also why there was a collective shudder among its regulars when word got out that Régine Robert, who had run it for the last 32 years, was passing it along to a new team.

“God, I hope they don’t ruin it. I mean, it’s my café, I’m in and out of it all day,” fretted a friend who lives nearby. And then she called back a few days later. “So I think everything’s going to be OK. Régine sold to Carina Soto Velásquez and Joshua Fontaine of Quixotic Projects – you know, Candelaria and the Mary Celeste, or the kind of hipster places we actually like. So let’s have lunch.” On my way to meet China for the midday meal, I stopped to stare at a wall with four different levels of wonderfully ghastly, old-fashioned French wallpaper exposed in the course of an ongoing demolition. Seeing these intimate slices of someone else’s life exposed in broad daylight brought a pang for the exhilaratingly foreign Frenchness of Paris as I found it when I

moved here from London to take a job with a New York style magazine in 1986. So much of it has blurred and vanished.

China was already sitting on one of the wooden banquettes at a table in the hidden back dining room. “It’s heaven to be back here,” she said. “Ever since I walked through the door I’ve been seized by a desperate desire to run next door and buy a pack of Marlboro reds. This place makes me want to smoke, because it shoots me back in time so unexpectedly, back to the days when I did smoke, like most people, and we drank wine at lunch, which was always an hors d’oeuvres like marinated leeks, grated carrot or celery root salad, followed by a *plat du jour* like *hachis Parmentier* (French shepherd’s pie) or a *bavette* (flank steak) with shallot and red sauce. Then a crème caramel or apple crumble and a little espresso and it was stealthily slipping back into the office at 2.30pm in the hope that no one noticed.” I told her about the *traiteur* in the rue

This page: Savour a slice of old-fashioned Frenchness at À la Renaissance thanks to Joshua Fontaine and Carina Soto Velásquez



Cambon where the propriétaire wore a pink Vichy smock every day, smoked big hams in the fireplace of her country house and made everything from scratch, including the lashings of mayonnaise she used in her *salade piémontaise* (potatoes, ham or sausage, hard-boiled egg, tomato and chopped cornichons) and *salade russe* (a *macédoine* of finely diced vegetables). She also made stunningly delicious terrines. Everyone in the office I worked in went into shock when we returned from our month-long August holiday to find that the *traiteur* had been gutted and turned into a luxury shoe shop while we were lying on the beach.

In those days, no one ate at their desks and the heart of the city was a hive of teeming café-bistros at noon. Now takeaway burgers, salads and sandwiches rule the roost as a relentless work culture had throttled the Parisian tradition of a proper hot meal at lunchtime.

At À la Renaissance, they’re determined to revive the good times again, which is why there’s a €23 chalkboard lunch menu that gets you a pass or

“THE FOOD WAS SIMPLE AND SOOTHING, AND THE FLAVOUR CONSTELLATIONS WERE PROFOUNDLY AND ETERNALLY FRENCH”

two at the buffet of hors d'oeuvres – yes, grated carrot salad, lentil salad, etc. – and then you get to choose between two mains and desserts. We both chose the pork braised in cream sauce spiked with mustard and cider, and the apple crumble for dessert. The food was authentic and homey, simple and soothing, and the flavour constellations were profoundly and eternally French.

The nice new owner poured us a juicy natural Chiroubles to start, and then a surprisingly good organic Pinot Noir from near Cahors. So the restaurant will remain well-known for its excellent and fairly priced list of natural wines, and China and I agreed that we'll definitely come here soon for dinner, when the menu is much more ambitious, including sautéed *cèpes* and a thick *faux-filet* (sirloin) with tarragon sauce, a perfect pretext to get into a bottle of wine or two.

The French have a world-weary phrase: *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* (The more things change, the more they stay the same), and sometimes that's a very good thing indeed.

● 87 rue de la Roquette, 11th arrondissement.
Tel. (33) 01 43 79 83 09. www.alarennaissance.com.
Lunch menu €23, à la carte €45.

PANTOBAGUETTE, PARIS

Despite the centrifuge of gentrification, Paris is still a city where it's easy to find a brilliant hole-in-the-wall restaurant, or a laid-back place serving excellent and really original food in an off-the-beaten-track corner of the city.

A perfect example is Pantobaguette, which deliciously expresses the frisky, fun-loving, creative personality of the north-facing slope of Montmartre, or the part of this storied neighbourhood that very few tourists ever find their way to. An old friend recently ended up living here after a divorce, and when he called me one night to say he'd found a perfect canteen just a few doors down from his new flat, I happily joined him for dinner a few nights later.

I liked everything about this curious Basque-Asian place from the moment I stepped in the door, since the servers were friendly and the menu, by Rodolphe Graffin, a French chef who'd worked in Korea for several years, fascinated. Since Sven knew the ropes, I let him order, and so we began with an exceptionally luscious *pâté en croûte* of duck and scallops and *cœufs ajitsuke* (soft-boiled eggs marinated in sweet soy sauce and mirin). Next up, cauliflower tempura with gochujang mayonnaise and a Thai salad; a *talao*



(Basque flatbread made with corn flour) garnished with broccoletti, Fourme d'Ambert cheese and fig ketchup; and sea bream with white beans from Paimpol in Brittany, a *kombu* (seaweed) *sabayon* and peppery nasturtium leaves.

All of these dishes were delicious, and intriguing as they showed off just how cosmopolitan and open to foreign flavours, ingredients and cooking techniques contemporary French cooking has become. If young French chefs are eager to usher in these new elements, they also impose a rigorous technical precision in terms of cooking an ingredient to perfection and also insist that these intriguing new foreign ingredients respect the subtlety that is the essence of Gallic gastronomic seduction. Pantobaguette is a fascinating restaurant that's well worth finding your way to in this quiet corner of Paris.

● 16 Rue Eugène Sue, 18th arrondissement, Paris.
Tel. (33) 01 88 48 40 70. www.pantobaguette.fr.
Average à la carte €40.

MELBA, QUISSAC

A recurrently mournful metric of the French press ever since I moved across the Channel to Gaul almost 30 years ago is the tragic depopulation of rural France. This village-emptying exodus began in the middle of the 19th century with the opening of France's extensive system of rail lines and the country's accelerating industrialisation, which created jobs for the masses in such big smoky cities as Lille and Lyon. »



This page: Basque-Asian food is served up at Pantobaguette in Paris



This page: Elouan and Léa Tréhin provide excellent food and a warm welcome at Melba in Quissac

Now, though, things look to be changing in the opposite direction, because the Covid epidemic taught a lot of big city dwellers how lovely life can be in the country. In fact, France's superb TGV train system, along with Amazon, Netflix, etc., means that these days, rural life is only as isolated as anyone wants it to be.

A delicious corollary to this very happy pastoral renewal is that it's increasingly easy to find a really excellent restaurant in a small, off-the-beaten-track town like Quissac, in the Languedoc between Montpellier and Nîmes. Arriving here to go to dinner at Melba, the new restaurant that's a word-of-mouth hit, we walked down a busy high street lined with lively cafés and traditional one-of-a-kind shops, like an old-fashioned *quincaillerie* (ironmonger or hardware store), before we reached the warm, intimate restaurant of chef Elouan Tréhin and his wife, Léa, in a former shopfront. Stepping into the taupe dining room with soft lighting, blonde wood tables and chairs and Léa's warm welcome, we immediately knew we'd eat well here. That said, we never expected to have one of the best meals we'd ever eaten in France.

Léa explained that they'd lived and worked in the French Alps for several years, and then had decided to return home to a place that was

IMAGES © MALO TRÉHIN, HÉRVÉ FABRE, SYLVIA EDWARDS-DAVIS



“THE BEST DISH WAS PIGEON IN A RUDDY SAUCE OF ITS OWN GIZZARDS WITH FERMENTED RHUBARB”

affordable and where a sane work-life balance might be possible. So they'd opened a bistro in Quissac where the self-taught Elouan immediately developed an eager clientele of regulars. The thing was, he really wanted to cook in a more ambitious register, so they remodelled their restaurant and reopened with an offer of prix-fixe tasting menus in September.

We chose the Vidourle, a five-course menu for €64, which began with an assortment of stunningly beautiful and original hors d'oeuvres, including mackerel and foie gras in a potent and deeply reduced bouillon spiked with Chablis ratafia, a ton-sur-ton miniature on the theme of Jerusalem artichokes, and then a stunning homemade pâté en croûte with passion fruit coulis, lobster with citrus fruits, and the best dish of the evening, pigeon from the Costières de Nîmes in a ruddy sauce of its own gizzards with fermented rhubarb.

The succulent, garnet-coloured breast of pigeon was exquisitely well-cooked in a plate that demonstrated a playful but steely gastronomic creativity, and this was ultimately the prevailing theme of this delightful meal.

“My pleasure is when I look into the dining room [from his open kitchen] and see someone experiencing a moment of pure pleasure,” the chef told us when we chatted briefly at the end of our dinner here – which made me suspect that our facial expressions during the meal had made him very happy indeed.

● 6 rue du Pont, Quissac. Tel. (33) 04 66 77 74 90, www.restaurantmelba.com. Prix-fixe €64, €89, dinner only.

BISTRONOMIQUE BEACH, CAGNES-SUR-MER

Guest review by **Sylvia Edwards-Davis**



On a recent visit to the seaside resort of Cagnes-sur-Mer on the Côte d'Azur, we came upon Bistronomique Beach. You usually find me on the culture pages of this magazine, but after I enthused about the experience, Alec kindly invited me to guest in his À la Carte column – a responsibility I do not take lightly.

Our trip marked our silver wedding anniversary. We were married in a 13th-century abbey in a village just four miles inland, and hesitated to revisit the area for fear of overwriting a charmed memory. We needn't have worried because this visit turned out to be just as magical.

The restaurant is attached to the Royalmar Hotel, which has a spectacular front-row position on the Mediterranean; a few steps across the



promenade and your toes are in the crystalline water. You can see all the way to Nice airport on the left and Cap d'Antibes to the right. Cagnes-sur-Mer offers the buzz of the Riviera without the crowds, especially in early autumn when tourists have thinned but the sun still shines bright.

Our anniversary dinner started with a fine flute of extra-brut Irroy champagne (an independent producer under Maison Taittinger) and a courtesy amuse-bouche on its own porcelain pedestal. One bite of seared sesame tuna with a drop of miso mayonnaise, and we exchanged a quick flick of the eyebrows. We were in expert hands. At this point executive chef Frédéric Geens came by to congratulate us on the occasion. It soon transpired that this jovial chef from Brussels had trained in the Michelin-star kitchens of chef Thierry Marx and Alain Passard's L'Arpège. We had stumbled on a splendid chance to have a Michelin-adjacent meal in a less formal table – and what a view!

I had the egg parfait with girolles and porcini mushrooms, and Dave opted for the silky butternut squash velouté. Worth the trip just for those starters. Then came my grilled octopus, roasted potatoes, chanterelle mushrooms and chorizo, and Dave's truffle-filled chicken roulade. A goat's cheese and white chocolate *bavarois* with a raspberry coulis for dessert proved that imagination can bring together unexpected partners in a little cloud of heaven – a suitable metaphor for the occasion.

The front of the house, in the able hands of Stephano and Anaïs, has a panoramic terrace overlooking the sea and a trellised area for al fresco drinks. The restaurant changed hands in the summer of 2025 and underwent a full overhaul. When we thanked Chef Geens for the masterful experience, we heard between the lines that he may aim for a Michelin star (not for the accolade itself, but for the discipline and collective pursuit of excellence it would inspire).

Before we took off on a long walk along the promenade, a thimble of pink Italian digestif infused with hibiscus was the perfect send-off. The residual rosy twilight transitioned to the uplit palm trees reflecting on the water – it was one of those moments when time stands still, and you feel so grateful for the gift of highly-trained professionals who love what they do and do it so well.

● 22 Promenade de la Plage, Cagnes-sur-Mer. Tel (33) 04 93 73 39 52. www.bistronomiquebeach.com. Lunch menu €39, average à la carte €70. **FT**

This page: Gastronomic excellence beside the Mediterranean in Cagnes-sur-Mer courtesy of Chef Frédéric Geens





10 reasons to visit THE MUSÉE RODIN IN PARIS

Nestled in its very own gardens in the heart of Paris, the Musée Rodin, which was created by the father of modern sculpture himself, offers one of the city's most enchanting museum experiences

1 AN EXCEPTIONAL PLACE

The Musée Rodin, with its seven-acre gardens, is a rare haven of calm in the heart of Paris. Situated between the Invalides and the Musée d'Orsay, it offers a serene escape from the city's bustle. Behind its discreet gates lies a world apart, where art replaces traffic noise and time seems to slow, inviting unhurried wandering between galleries and garden paths.

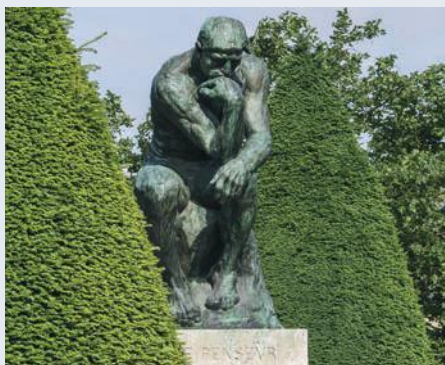
2 AN HISTORIC SETTING

Thanks to Auguste Rodin's donation of his artworks to the French state in 1916, on the condition that they be exhibited in this mansion, the former Hôtel Biron now houses the artist's collection. This elegant and harmonious 18th-century residence has tall windows, antique boiseries and a monumental staircase forming an ideal backdrop for sculpture. Eighteen rooms trace Rodin's career in chronological order, from early experiments to mature masterpieces. Clay studies sit alongside plaster, bronze and marble, revealing how ideas evolved from first sketch to finished form.



3 THE SCULPTURE GARDEN

Nearly three hectares of formal French gardens surround the mansion, offering a constantly evolving experience throughout the seasons. Bronzes emerge among roses, lawns and clipped hedges, shifting in mood with light and weather. *The Thinker* rises from the flowerbeds,



The Burghers of Calais gather beneath the lindens and *The Gates of Hell* align dramatically with the Eiffel Tower. Overlooking it all, the dome of Les Invalides anchors the garden firmly within the Parisian landscape.

4 THE KISS

If Paris is the capital of love, the museum is one of its most romantic addresses. Rodin's *The Kiss* has long been a place of pilgrimage for lovers, and each year it becomes the focal point of the Soirée LOVE, a Valentine's Day event that draws couples from around the world to celebrate beneath one of sculpture's most famous embraces.

5 THE AGE OF BRONZE

The Age of Bronze marked a decisive turning point in Rodin's career. Its extraordinary realism caused a scandal upon its unveiling, with critics accusing him of having cast the figure directly from a living model. The charge, later dismissed, overlooked his exceptional skill as a modeller. The controversy nonetheless propelled Rodin into the public eye and led to the commission for *The Gates of Hell*.

6 THE GATES OF HELL

Commissioned by the French state in 1880 for a museum that never opened, *The Gates of Hell* became Rodin's lifelong project. Inspired by Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, he worked on

the monumental doors for decades, populating their surface with a turbulent world of figures. Many later emerged as independent sculptures, including *The Thinker*, *The Kiss*, *Ugolin and His Children* and *The Three Shades*.

7 CAMILLE CLAUDEL

Camille Claudel met Rodin when she entered his studio as a student. Struck by her exceptional talent, he came to value her artistic judgement, and their personal and creative partnership lasted 10 years. It informed some of Rodin's most sensual works, including *The Eternal Spring*. A room is dedicated to Claudel's own sculpture, offering a chance to appreciate her voice too.


8 TAKE A BREAK

After time spent among the galleries and bronzes, the café offers a welcome pause. Nestled within the Sculpture Garden, Café L'Augustine invites visitors to enjoy a coffee, a fresh salad or a pastry from Maison Lenôtre before returning to Rodin's world.

9 A FAMILY EXPERIENCE

The museum is thoughtfully designed to welcome families and young visitors. This year marks the return of the Atelier Rodin for its fifth edition, running from April 11 to September 6. Created for children from six months to 12 years old, this dedicated space introduces sculpture through hands-on activities, games and sensory exploration. Free to visit and with no booking required, it offers families an easy and relaxed way to engage with Rodin's work.

10 SHOP FOR SOUVENIRS

With every trip comes the pleasure of taking home a souvenir. In the museum shop, you can find gifts at all price points, including casts made from the original moulds of the works. 

● www.musee-rodin.fr/en

**MUSÉE
RODIN
PARIS**



LA PENSEE
RODIN OFFERT
SOUSCRIPTION
PEUPLE
MCMVI



**MEET
THE ICONS***

* Rencontrez les icônes
© musée Rodin



THE SPIRIT OF CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE

Galet-strewn vineyards shape Châteauneuf-du-Pape's powerful wines amid fiercely protected traditions, as **Dominic Bliss** discovers



Smooth, beige, oblong and ranging in length up to 20cm or so, they're known as *galets ronds* or *galets roulés*. These stones, covering the soil in the vineyards, are what make Châteauneuf-du-Pape so different from France's other wine-growing regions. In the warmer months they soak up the sun's heat, transmitting it back once night has fallen into the clusters of grapes hanging above, thereby accelerating the ripening process. They also stop the soil drying out during the mercilessly hot Provençal summers, and protect it from erosion by the Mistral. By causing rain to evaporate quickly, the stones also prevent certain vine diseases. It's safe to say, without the *galets*, Châteauneuf-du-Pape might never have become one of France's most famous wine-growing regions.

On a mild day in December, long after the grapes had been harvested, I wandered the vineyards on the edge of town. Even in winter, with the vines cut back and denuded of their leaves, it

was bright and light, as the weak sun glistened off the slick, wet *galets*. In some vineyards, once the grapes have been harvested, winemakers allow sheep to roam between the rows of vines, to keep the vegetation in check through their nibbling. Many of the little flocks are guarded by burly dogs, as I discovered when I strayed too close.

RELIGIOUS BEGINNINGS

Châteauneuf-du-Pape is a small town in the Vaucluse department, on the western edge of Provence, close to the River Rhône. With a population of just over 2,000, it covers 10 square miles, with virtually every bit of available soil dedicated to growing vines. It was in the 14th century, when the papacy installed itself in nearby Avignon, rather than Rome, that the town got its name. Pope John XXII was rather keen on the local tittle, and under his reign and patronage, viticulture flourished. Once he had overseen the construction of a new castle

The château and vineyards
of Châteauneuf-du-Pape



(*château neuf*) – now ruined and home to crows – on the town’s central hill, Châteauneuf-du-Pape was firmly placed on the map. Over the following centuries, the wine produced here grew enormously in reputation. Poets and writers such as Frédéric Mistral, Alphonse de Lamartine, Alexandre Dumas and Alphonse Daudet were all fans, becoming unofficial ambassadors of the brand.

Then, after the First World War, under the leadership of winemaker Baron Pierre Le Roy de Boiseaumarié, the vineyard owners joined forces and, in 1933, succeeded in having their wine decreed as France’s first Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée, setting the prototype for all future AOC rules. The appellation included strict production rules over cultivation methods, minimum alcohol content, grape varieties and grape sorting. At the time, the baron declared: “May this policy of quality never be abandoned. We are not made for standardised production. No! We are unbeatable in the aspects where the artisan

becomes an artist. Quality is the hallmark of French genius.” Nowadays, there are more than 300 winemakers plying their trade in Châteauneuf-du-Pape’s vineyards, some with large estates, others with barely a couple of hectares. Altogether there are 3,200 hectares of official Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC vineyards, stretching across five communes, and producing 12m bottles in an average year. Up to 13 grape varieties can be used, with grenache dominating. Up to 93 per cent of the wine is red.

The official body that governs the production of AOC wine here is the Maison des Vins de Châteauneuf-du-Pape. “Red wines reveal a wide aromatic palette: ripe fruits, blackcurrant, blackberries, spices, roasted notes, liquorice, prunes and leather,” it explains. “While they can be enjoyed in their youth – starting at around two years, where they develop elegant fruit aromas – they also assert themselves over time, unveiling a more significant tannic structure, intense and deep bouquets, and notes of undergrowth.” »



Clockwise from top: the wine cellar barrel and coat of arms at Château de la Gardine; chef Jean-Claude Altmayer; enjoy Michelin-star dining at Mère Germaine; Domaine St Patrice; Jas des Papes; in the vineyards at Jas des Papes; Château la Nerthe

And this is what the Maison says of its whites: “With their golden hue, they are rich in notes of white fruits and honeysuckle and narcissus flowers, which evolve towards subtle honeyed notes and toasted aromas with age, while offering a fresh, persistent, balanced and smooth sensation in the mouth.”

Another key aspect of these wines is the trademark emblem you find on each bottle. Featuring a papal tiara and the keys of Saint Peter, it is surrounded by the inscription “Châteauneuf-du-Pape contrôlé”, written in Gothic letters.

There are plenty of ways to discover this great wine in its own back yard. At the Musée du Vin Brotte (www.museedevinbrotte.com), on Avenue Pierre de Luxembourg, you can enjoy an educational tour and a tasting. At Vinadea Maison des Vins & Vinothèque (www.vinadea.com), on Rue Maréchal Foch, you can taste five wines from five local estates.

ESTATE VISITS

But much more interesting are the wine estates themselves. There are at least 60 of these open to the public, dotted around the town and its outskirts, some offering traditional tours and tastings, others where you can tour on bikes, electric scooters, Segways, 4x4 vehicles or Citroën 2CVs. I enjoyed tastings at Château la Nerthe (www.chateaulanerthe.com), Château de la Gardine (www.gardine.com), Le Jas des Papes (www.lejasdespapes.com), Domaine St Patrice (www.stpatrice.com) and Château Maucoil (chateau-maucoil.com).

At Maucoil, which has 45 hectares of vines, wine has been

made since the 17th century and some plots planted in 1895 still exist today. Out on the northern edge of town, the château offers courses in a whole range of culinary and oenological activities, ranging from vineyard tours and gastronomic lunches to wine tasting, wine blending and a cooking class.

I opted for the latter, under the guidance of chef Jean-Claude Altmayer, an affable chap who runs his kitchen with equal parts charm and wit. There was a roaring fire in the hearth and a heavy-set oak table on which he had laid out the ingredients for the lunch he and I were to prepare. This included leeks, onions and a wide selection of herbs, many from the château’s own kitchen garden. There were bright orange scallops, red mullet, and pigeons, plucked and gutted. But most impressive of all were the handful of black truffles, from which a deep, earthy smell was emanating.

After lunch, Jean-Claude had a little surprise in store. Donning dark sunglasses and a backwards-turned baseball cap, he launched into some sort of rap – a coarse version of the old French song, *Sur le pont d’Avignon*. But his pièce de résistance was at the end of the meal when he offered me a copy of a cookbook he had published. Before handing it over, using his kitchen gas-lighter, he set fire to one of the pages, slamming the book shut just before it erupted into flames. Confused, I asked him what he meant by the stunt. “A chef I once studied under told me that, whenever I prepare a meal, I should always be sure to burn something,” he told me.

The highlight of my stay in Châteauneuf-du-Pape was dinner at the town’s Michelin-starred restaurant, La Mère Germaine (www.lameregermaine.com). Owner Arnaud Strasser bought



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“LEAST 60 WINE ESTATES
ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC,
DOTTED AROUND
THE TOWN AND ITS
OUTSKIRTS”



the run-down restaurant in 2020, just before Covid, and renovated it alongside its accompanying hotel. The result is wonderful, as anyone who dines here and enjoys the views west over the Rhône Valley will discover. But it hasn't been an easy ride for Belgian-born Strasser and his Parisian wife, Isabelle. Over a delicious dinner of turbot and pigeon, Arnaud told me he is still very much considered an outsider in this small Provençal town. “Fifty per cent of locals have accepted me and 50 per cent haven't,” he admits before correcting himself. “Actually, I'm not sure. Maybe it's more like 70 per cent, 30 per cent.”

LOCAL PRIDE

With such precious vineyards here, it's no surprise the local viticulture has become something of a cabal. When you can produce wine this good, why would you allow outsiders or cooperatives in on the action? The other barrier to entry is the ridiculously high cost of land. Strasser told me vineyards are officially priced around €550,000 a hectare, before adding: “In reality, though, it's more like €1.2m a hectare.” Add to this the fact that any parcels of land coming up for sale tend to be small and detached. No wonder the lion's share remains under the ownership and operation of local families.

Determined to find out if Châteauneuf-du-Pape really was closed to outside investment, before I departed, I asked one local winemaker who had previously been president of the region's young winemakers association: “There's a joke in Châteauneuf-du-Pape,” he told me. “A winemaker would rather sell his vineyards to a cousin whom he hated than to a friendly outsider he didn't know.” In the end, Châteauneuf-du-Pape's character lives as much in its wines as in the locals and traditions that guard them so fiercely. **FT**

CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

BY AIR

Marseille Provence Airport is linked to numerous UK cities by multiple airlines.

BY TRAIN

There are TGV stations at Orange and Avignon, with local connections to Sorgues and Courthézon.

BY CAR

Châteauneuf-du-Pape is close to the A7 and A9 autoroutes.

WHERE TO STAY & EAT

La Mère Germaine

There are two restaurants here – one with a Michelin star – as well as an adjoining 12-room hotel. www.lameregermaine.com

L'Hostellerie du Château des Fines Roches

This four-star crenellated château was built at the end of the 19th century, but appears much older. There's a hotel, a restaurant and a spa.

chateaufinesroches.com

CONTACTS

For **wine tourism information**, visit en.chateauneuf.com/oenotourisme

For **general tourism information**, visit the regional websites: www.provenceguide.co.uk

provence-alpes-cotedazur.com

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ÉDITH PIAF

Dominic Bliss follows the legendary chanteuse from a childhood of poverty to international fame

La *Vie en Rose*. Conduct a worldwide poll on the most famous French songs of all time and this classic is sure to be close to the top. Written in 1945 and released two years later, it launched the international career of Parisian singer Édith Piaf. The lyrics – which she wrote herself, scribbling them on a tablecloth in a café on the Champs-Élysées – speak of blissful romance and optimism, a beacon of hope as France recovered from the brutality of German occupation.

Piaf enjoyed plenty more musical success during her career, most notably with *Hymne à l'Amour* (1946), *Milord* (1959), and that other timeless classic, *Non, je ne regrette rien* (1960). By the time of her death in 1963, she had recorded hundreds of songs, many self-penned, and most in the style of chansons réalistes or chanson française.

On top of her guttural, vibrato delivery, her greatest strength, especially given her petite size, was the power of her voice. “Her style epitomised that of the classic French chanson: highly emotional, even melodramatic, with a wide, rapid vibrato that wrung every last drop of sentiment from a lyric,” explains music writer Steve Huey on the online database AllMusic. “She preferred melancholy, mournful material, singing about heartache, tragedy, poverty and the harsh reality of life on the streets.”

It was a world Piaf knew all too well. Born Édith Giovanna Gassion in December 1915 in a working-class neighbourhood of Paris called Belleville, she faced a childhood of poverty. Her father, Louis Gassion, was an acrobatic street performer, her mother, Annetta Maillard, a singer and circus performer. Abandoned by her mother, Piaf later lived with her paternal grandmother, Maman Tine, who ran a brothel in the Normandy town of Bernay, where the prostitutes fussed over her, becoming her surrogate mothers in a way.

THE LITTLE SPARROW

As a youngster, Piaf was almost blind due to acute keratitis. She liked to tell the (almost certainly fictitious) story of how, one Sunday, the prostitutes accompanied her on a pilgrimage to honour a local saint, after which her eyesight was miraculously restored. At 14, Piaf joined her father on his travels around France while he performed as a street acrobat. Initially she would collect tips from onlookers but, one day, she sang a song at the end of her father’s act, which the crowd adored, showering her with coins. From then on her father had her sing at the end of every show.

Back in Paris, Piaf continued her singing, earning pocket money by performing on the streets, in cafés and in army barracks. Mixing with prostitutes,



pimps and petty criminals, she endured an impoverished and uncomfortable youth that would colour her future, even after she achieved worldwide fame.

Her lucky break came in October 1935 when, while singing in the street, she was noticed by nightclub owner Louis Leplée, who offered her a regular spot at his cabaret, Le Gerny’s, for 40 francs a night. Leplée took her under his wing, taught her the basics of stage presence, beefed up her repertoire of songs and gave her the stage name La Môme Piaf – Parisian slang for The Little Sparrow.

Carolyn Burke, author of *No Regrets: The Life of Édith Piaf*, describes Piaf’s opening night, a performance that launched her career: “Nearly paralysed with stage fright, she made the sign of the cross while Leplée told the audience he had found his new attraction in the street. Édith came onto a stage lit by harsh orange spots. It was as if a guttersnipe had invaded the inner sanctum. Yet as the guests, electrified by her voice, put down their glasses, Édith sensed that she held them. She threw up



A plaque marks 72 Rue de Belleville as the singer’s birthplace, although her birth certificate says otherwise

Clockwise from this image: Édith Piaf performing in the late 1950s; her grave in Père Lachaise Cemetery; some of her finest performances were at L'Olympia in Paris

“HER WIDE, RAPID VIBRATO WRUNG EVERY LAST DROP OF SENTIMENT FROM A LYRIC”

her arms at the end of the song. There was silence, then wild applause and shouts of ‘bravo.’

In the audience that night was actor and singer Maurice Chevalier. “That kid sings straight from the guts,” he famously said. Before long, Piaf was performing live on Parisian radio station Radio-Cité. In December 1935 she cut her first record – singing *L'Étranger*, *Les Mômes de la Cloche* and two songs in Parisian slang – and acted in her first film, *La Garçonne*, released the following year.

But her career almost derailed the moment it started. In April 1936, Leplée was shot dead in his apartment. Due to her links to Paris's underworld, Piaf immediately became a suspect and was questioned extensively by the police. It wasn't until almost a year later that her name was finally cleared.

By then, she had teamed up with lyricist Raymond Asso. If Piaf was a sort of Parisian Eliza Doolittle, then Asso was her Professor Higgins. Piaf later wrote: “It took him three years to cure me. Three years of patient affection to teach me

that there was another world beyond that of prostitutes and pimps. Three years to cure me of Pigalle, of my chaotic childhood... to become a woman and a star instead of a phenomenon with a voice that people listened to as if being shown a rare animal at a fair.”

It was during the German occupation of France in the Second World War that her star began to rise. She was regularly seen performing in Parisian nightclubs and brothels, the latter often frequented by Nazi officers. After the war, she was accused of collaborating with the occupying forces, and it wasn't until the French Resistance spoke in her favour – explaining how she had performed at prisoner-of-war camps in Germany and had helped prisoners escape – that she was exonerated.

After *La Vie en Rose* brought her worldwide attention, she spent the 1950s touring Europe and the Americas, performing on The Ed Sullivan Show eight times, and twice at the Carnegie Hall. She had multiple lovers over the years, including the French singer and

actor Yves Montand and the American movie star John Garfield, and was married to French singer Jacques Pills and Greek singer Théo Sarapo. But her greatest love of all was the French boxing champion Marcel Cerdan, who died in a plane crash in 1949, and for whom she later recorded *L'Hymne à l'Amour*.

TORMENT AND TRAGEDY

In 1951, Piaf broke several bones in a car accident and was prescribed morphine for the pain. She became addicted to the drug, alongside alcohol, a situation made worse by two subsequent and near-fatal car crashes.

Despite her health problems, her fame continued to grow. She released dozens of records and appeared in several movies, right up until her death.

In early 1963, she slipped into a coma caused by liver cancer. Eventually, in the October of that year, in the Provençal town of Grasse, she died at the age of 47, with these last words: “Every damn thing you do in this life, you have to pay for.” Her husband, Sarapo, secretly drove her body to Paris so fans would think she had died in her home town.

Anyone wishing to follow in Piaf's footsteps has quite the selection of places to visit. At 72 Rue de Belleville, in Paris's 20th arrondissement, is a plaque marking the building she was supposedly born in – although her birth certificate states that the nearby Hôpital Tenon was her actual place of birth. At 54 rue Pierre-Charron, in the 8th, stands the former site of Le Gerny's, the cabaret where she enjoyed her first real success, while on Boulevard des Capucines, in the 9th, is the concert hall L'Olympia, where some of her finest Parisian performances took place.

In Place Édith Piaf, in the 20th arrondissement, fans will find a statue of the singer and Bar de la Place Édith Piaf, filled with memorabilia and tributes. The Musée Édith Piaf (musee-edithpiaf.com) is housed in her former apartment at 5 Rue Crespin, in the 11th arrondissement. There are plans to build a second museum in Grasse, near where she died.

Her final resting place is in Paris's Père Lachaise Cemetery. More than 40,000 mourners accompanied the funeral cortege, bringing the capital's traffic to a halt. The weekend following her death, more than 300,000 of her records were sold. Many were purchased by the ordinary working-class Parisians whose stories The Little Sparrow had so faithfully told in her songs. **FT**

SPRING COMES EARLY

Carol finds February glows in Menton, where the Lemon Festival banishes winter blues



BY CAROL DRINKWATER

“THE FESTIVAL IS A SENSATIONALLY UPLIFTING EXPERIENCE: BRASS BANDS, DANCING IN THE STREETS, FLOATS APLENTY”

Below and right: One of the many enormous works of art created from citrus fruits; don't miss the Jean Cocteau Museum in Menton

There is a bit of a dull patch after Christmas when the joys and camaraderie of welcoming in the New Year are behind us. Even in one of the sunniest and bluest-sky places in Europe, February can be – dare I say it? – a colourless month.

Historically, it is the wettest month of the year along the Côte d'Azur. We do have the almond trees in heavenly-scented pink blossom and we have our lemons and oranges to brighten up the land. Our breakfast vitamin C is guaranteed thanks to the fat and super-juicy eating oranges we planted a few years back. Tangerines and clementines, too, though they seem to be slow growers, the fruits barely bigger than our olives!

If we need a further injection of winter's golden fruits, there is the Fête du Citron in Menton, close to the Italian border. Menton has the mildest climate along this littoral. Sub-tropical with especially good air, it was in past times a health resort for those suffering from bronchial illnesses and lung diseases. Robert Louis Stevenson and Katherine Mansfield were but two renowned writers who wintered in Menton.

MENTON'S GOLDEN TOUCH

Today, 200,000 visitors arrive each February to celebrate Menton's Lemon Festival, which in 2019 was awarded Intangible Cultural Heritage status by the French Ministry of Culture. This year it starts on Valentine's Day and will party through to March 1. The theme will be Wonders of Life, which strikes me as a much-needed

philosophy right now. If you haven't stayed in this pretty, hilly seaside town, this is the moment. The festival is a sensationally uplifting and quite crazy experience: brass bands, throngs of people dancing in the streets, floats aplenty, excellent food and oodles of it. If you can't bear to leave and are still in Menton as the fête is winding down, keep an eye out for the sale of the 140 tonnes of fruits used for the floats. Citrus fruits aplenty can be purchased by Mentonnais citizens and tourists alike.

While you are filling up your suitcase, leave space for a jar or two of master jam maker Maison Herbin's *citron*-flavoured jams. These



IMAGES © SHUTTERSTOCK

confitures will add zest to your toast. Never tasted Menton lemon ravioli, an artisanal speciality? Well, as they say, you haven't lived. You might also find yourself a pint of the unique Menton lemon beer. Personally, I prefer a shot of citronella as an apéritif.

MORE REASONS TO LINGER

There is also a marvellous Orchid Show to see and the Winter Garden to visit before you fly off. Nothing to do with the floats and Golden Fruit Parade but while in town, do slip into the Jean Cocteau Museum. Housed in Le Bastion down at the port, it is an inspiring tribute to a genius, an artist who loved the south of France and has left us several examples of his work all along the coast. Perhaps we should create the Jean Cocteau Route!

So, that has cheered up February and got us dancing through to March. The days are getting longer now. My spirits are rising. I am preparing the outline for a new novel, but before I chain myself to my desk, this is the season for nature blossoming, for landscape, for exotic gardens. The weather is kind, walking is not a hot bother and the stunning arrays of flowers will knock you dead. When you live in the south of France, there is no dull month. **FT**

● **Carol Drinkwater** is an award-winning actress and author. Her latest novel is *One Summer in Provence*.



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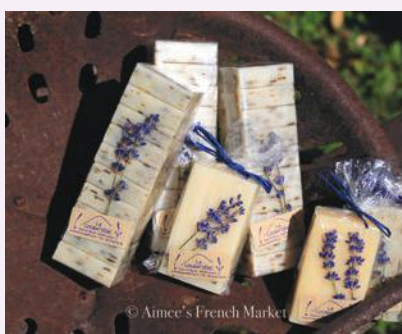
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Parallel text

MARDI GRAS IN FRANCE

From Nice to Dunkirk, carnival celebrates the coming of spring across France

The carnival passes
the Fontaine du
Soleil in Place
Masséna in Nice




 En France, Mardi gras est une fête populaire qui marque la fin de l'hiver et annonce l'arrivée du Carême, une période traditionnellement associée à la sobriété et à la retenue. Bien que de moins en moins de personnes suivent le Carême, les traditions festives le précédant subsistent. Avant d'entrer dans ces jours plus austères, les Français profitent de moments festifs, souvent rythmés par des défilés en costumes extravagants et des douceurs sucrées.

L'un des événements les plus célèbres est le Carnaval de Nice, réputé pour ses chars décorés, ses parades de personnages fantastiques et ses batailles de fleurs. Chaque année, la ville se transforme en un véritable bal costumé à ciel ouvert, attirant des visiteurs du monde entier. À Dunkerque, dans le nord du pays, le carnaval est tout aussi emblématique : les participants forment de grandes « bandes », où l'on avance en chantant et en se tenant par les bras. L'ambiance y est conviviale, parfois un peu folle, mais toujours chaleureuse.

Dans de nombreuses régions, on célèbre aussi Mardi gras de manière plus simple. Les familles et les écoles organisent des bals costumés, des concours de déguisements, et surtout, on prépare des crêpes, des beignets ou des bugnes. Ces gourmandises symbolisent l'idée de profiter des derniers excès avant le Carême et ses 40 jours d'abstinence et de jeûne.

Pour les visiteurs, Mardi gras offre une excellente opportunité pour découvrir la diversité des traditions françaises. Qu'il s'agisse d'un grand carnaval ou d'une fête de quartier, cette journée placée sous le signe de la fantaisie met en valeur l'importance du partage et offre une parenthèse colorée et joyeuse après les longs mois d'hiver.

 In France, Mardi Gras is a popular celebration that marks the end of winter and announces the arrival of Lent, a period traditionally associated with sobriety and restraint. Although fewer and fewer people observe Lent, the festive traditions that precede it remain. Before entering into these more austere days, the French enjoy festive moments, often filled with parades featuring extravagant costumes and sweet treats.

One of the most famous events is the Nice Carnival, known for its decorated floats, parades of fantastical characters, and its flower battles. Each year, the city transforms into an open-air costume ball, attracting visitors from all over the world. In Dunkirk, in the north of the country, the carnival is just as iconic: locals take part in large 'bandes', where participants move forward arm in arm while singing. The atmosphere there is welcoming, sometimes a little wild, but always warm.

In many regions, Mardi Gras is also celebrated in a simpler way. Families and schools organise costume balls, fancy-dress competitions, and above all, they prepare crêpes, doughnuts or *bugnes*. These treats symbolise the idea of enjoying the last indulgences before Lent and its 40 days of abstinence and fasting.

For visitors, Mardi Gras offers an excellent opportunity to discover the diversity of French traditions. Whether it's a large carnival or a neighbourhood celebration, this day of silliness highlights the importance of sharing and provides a colourful and joyful break after the long winter months.

Next time: *A (short) history of the Cannes Film Festival*

WORDSEARCH LE CARNAVAL

M	X	P	D	É	R	E	V	E	M	I	D	G
A	Y	Q	É	V	L	U	R	A	I	O	C	V
Q	C	K	G	W	T	I	S	A	S	U	N	W
U	U	J	U	C	U	Q	F	X	F	Y	P	V
I	D	X	I	B	U	N	Y	É	U	N	Z	O
L	P	O	S	E	V	R	F	V	D	Q	A	Y
L	W	W	E	E	U	Q	U	R	R	E	P	F
A	U	B	M	J	R	Z	A	E	E	B	Y	W
G	V	W	E	A	A	R	X	T	S	F	W	A
E	N	C	N	T	H	S	Ê	F	O	U	L	E
G	C	T	T	A	C	F	M	W	M	B	B	B
S	E	T	T	E	L	L	I	A	P	O	M	T
T	O	G	V	U	J	F	N	Z	N	F	O	Y

FIND THE FRENCH FOR...
 Costume, Mask, Wig, Parade,
 Float, Party, Crowd, Make-up,
 Glitter, Brass band

ANSWERS...

fanfare
 déguisement, masque, perruque, défilé,
 char, fête, foule, maquillage, paillettes,

CHERCHEZ L'INTRUS

Métro, avion,
tapis, vélo
*

Vert, mouton,
pourpre, blanc
*

Institutrice, élève,
cahier, hôpital

VRAI OU FAUX ?

La baguette est inscrite au patrimoine immatériel de l'UNESCO



Qui suis-je?

Je suis né à Paris, en juin 1975.

Je suis humoriste et comédien franco-marocain.

Je suis connu pour mes sketches sur scène mais également pour mes rôles dans des films comme *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* ou *Astérix et Obélix : Mission Cléopâtre*.

Je suis... ?



ANSWERS...

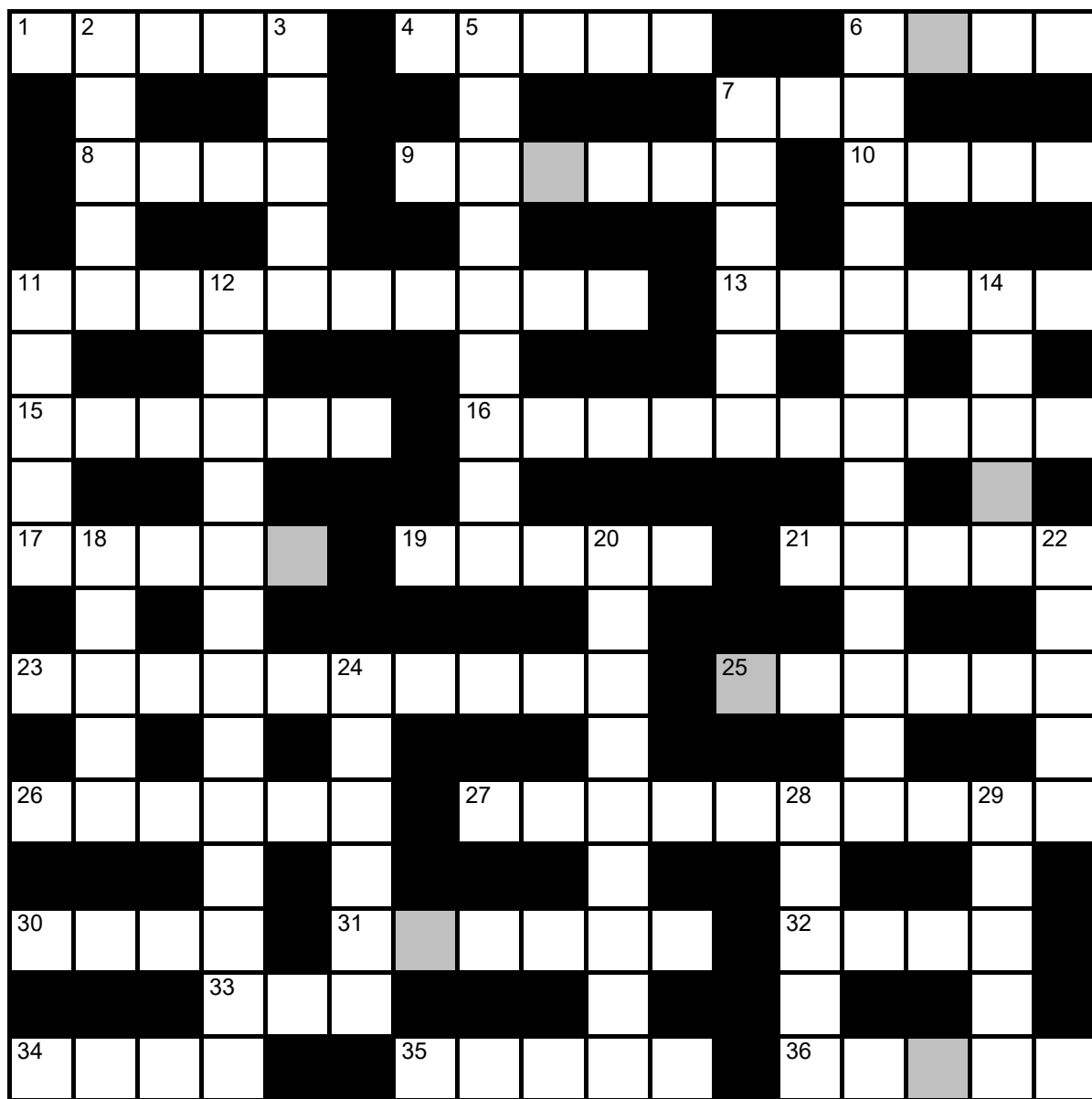
2022 *Virelangue*: Five dogs are chasing six cats **Qui suis-je?** Jamel Debbouze
 2022 *Cherchez l'intrus*: tapis, mouton, hôpital **Vrai ou Faux ?** True – the baguette has been listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage since

MOTS CROISÉS

Complete the grid (answers in French) and note all the letters in the grey squares.

Read from left to right, top to bottom to find the name of a French town.

Visit francetoday.com/crossword to see this and previous crossword answers.



COMPILED BY PISTOL

ACROSS

- 1 School (5)
- 4 Glass (5)
- 6 Priest (4)
- 7 Peak (of a mountain) (3)
- 8 On this side (4)
- 9 Star (in the sky) (6)
- 10 This (4)
- 11 Care and attention (10)
- 13 Fingers (6)
- 15 To tell a story of, recount (6)
- 16 Puncture-proof (of a tyre) (10)
- 17 To fume with anger (5)
- 19 Year (5)
- 21 'I think' – 'Je ...' (5)

- 23 Skull and crossbones (4-2-4)

- 25 Glory (6)
- 26 Network (radio, TV) (6)
- 27 Varnishing, glazing (10)
- 30 Without (4)
- 31 To go fishing (6)
- 32 Same (4)
- 33 Summer (3)
- 34 Pink (4)
- 35 Wool (5)
- 36 To shave (5)

DOWN

- 2 Frame (of a picture) (5)
- 3 Pond (5)

- 5 Maintenance (9)
- 6 'We will acclimatise' – 'nous ...' (13)
- 7 To lose (6)
- 11 To undermine, erode (5)
- 12 Ulterior motive (7-6)
- 14 Embankment (5)
- 18 Undersheet, drawsheet (5)
- 20 Surgeon (9)
- 22 Pupil (in the classroom) (5)
- 24 Team (6)
- 28 To sow (5)
- 29 War (5)

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French gastronomy



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Also join us as we explore spa town Vichy, savour the seafood of the Opal Coast and discover Cantal's famous church-belfry ham.

We revisit the favourite haunts of the Impressionists, celebrate 100 gastronomic years of Le Bristol Paris and meet chef of the moment Matthew Ryle.

Plus there's wine wisdom, foodie news, the best restaurants, shopping, cocktails and, bien sûr, some deliciously comforting seasonal recipes.

For lovers of French gastronomy, this is essential winter reading. **Bon appétit!**

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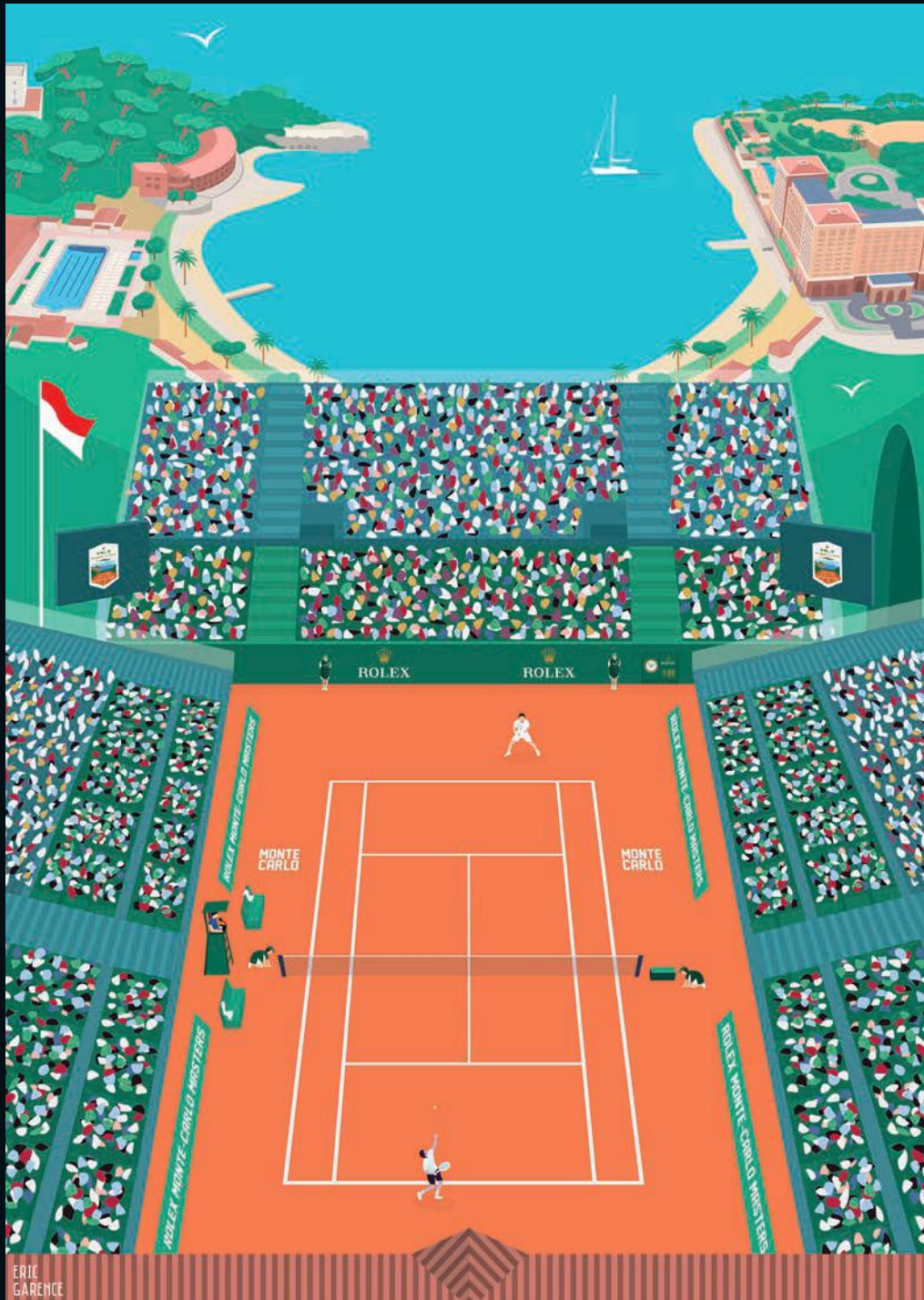
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Our pick of the very best books and movies to come out of *la belle France*, from old favourites to new releases

INSPIRATION



BRIGITTE BARDOT

The actress who became one of the most recognisable icons of postwar France

Actress, sex symbol, animal lover. Brigitte Bardot fused screen presence, popular music and fashion into a single, world-changing image of postwar France and in doing so became a global symbol of modern femininity.

Born Brigitte Anne-Marie Bardot in Paris in 1934, she trained as a ballet dancer before being spotted as a teenager on the cover of *Elle*. Early film roles in the 1950s hinted at promise, but it was *And God Created Woman* (1956), directed by her then husband Roger Vadim, that made her famous overnight. Set in Saint-Tropez, the film presented Bardot as a new, thoroughly modern kind of screen heroine – spontaneous, provocative and unapologetically free – and turned the sleepy fishing town into a byword for Mediterranean glamour.

Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, Bardot worked prolifically, appearing in more than 40 films. She moved easily between popular comedies and more ambitious projects, collaborating with directors such as Louis Malle (*Vie privée*, 1962), Jean-Luc Godard (*Le Mépris*, 1963) and Henri-Georges Clouzot (*La Vérité*, 1960). While critics were sometimes divided

over her acting, her screen presence was undeniable, and filmmakers repeatedly used her image to explore themes of desire, celebrity and female independence.

Alongside cinema, Bardot also recorded a number of pop songs, collaborating with leading figures of French popular music, including Serge Gainsbourg. Her influence on fashion was equally lasting – we still wear Bardot tops today. She also, controversially at the time, popularised the bikini and, less shockingly, the ballet flat.

Bardot retired from filmmaking in 1973, withdrawing almost entirely from public life. She lived surrounded by her animals at La Madrague, her house on the outskirts of Saint-Tropez. In 1986 she founded the Fondation Brigitte Bardot, a registered charitable foundation dedicated to the protection of animals. Her later years were marred by racism: she ended up in court numerous times charged with inciting racial hatred.

Yet her impact as an actress, singer and style icon endures and when she died last December, aged 91, 'BB' was mourned not only in France but around the world.

10-SECOND

CV

A screen star's life in one take

IMAGE © ALAMY

Name: Brigitte Anne-Marie Bardot

Born: September 28, 1934, in Paris

Early career: As a teenager, Bardot was a ballet dancer, attending the prestigious the Conservatoire de Paris. Her first film role was in

the 1952 French comedy *Le Trou Normand*.

I know the face... Of course you do! Even if you've never seen one of her films, her tousled hair and stunning looks made her one of the most photographed women in the world.

What should I watch?

Vadim's film *And God Created Woman* is iconic, but critics largely agree her best film is Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963). It tells the tale of a screenwriter's marriage unravelling as his wife comes to believe he has

compromised her to advance his career.

C'est pas vrai!

In 1969, Bardot became the first celebrity model for Marianne, the national symbol of the French Republic. Busts of her likeness appeared in town halls across France. »



CINÉ



L'ÉTRANGER

Directors: François Ozon **Starring:** Benjamin Voisin, Rebecca Marder, Pierre Lottin, Denis Lavant

François Ozon's austere, absorbing film follows Albert Camus's existential anti-hero amid the heat-soaked, unequal world of colonial Algiers.

Set in Algiers in 1938, Meursault is a detached office worker whose emotional indifference becomes both his defining trait and, ultimately, his undoing. He attends his mother's funeral without visible grief, resumes his routines, begins a casual relationship with Marie, and drifts into the orbit of his violent neighbour Raymond. When a killing occurs on a sun-blasted beach, the act itself matters less than Meursault's refusal to perform the expected emotions that society demands.

Camus's 1942 novel is one of the most widely read works in the French language, famous for its cool prose and its exploration of the absurd: a world without inherent meaning, in which honesty is often punished more harshly than crime.

In this stylish adaptation, Ozon embraces that severity. Shot in black and white, the film favours stillness, silence and bodily sensation – heat, light, sweat – over psychological explanation. The first half unfolds almost wordlessly, allowing the environment and Meursault's passivity to speak for themselves, while the trial that follows exposes a society more outraged by his failure to cry than by the murder itself.

Benjamin Voisin's Meursault is withdrawn yet oddly luminous, his blankness never tipping into caricature. Rebecca Marder's Marie is given greater depth than in the book, emerging as a warm figure who understands Meursault. Ozon also sharpens the colonial context, underlining the invisibility of the Arab victim. Faithful in spirit rather than detail, this intelligent film respects Camus's vision while insisting on its continued relevance.

T'AS PAS CHANGÉ

Director: Jérôme Commandeur

Starring: Laurent Lafitte, Vanessa Paradis



Built around the brittle pleasures and quiet cruelties of nostalgia, this film follows three 50-somethings as they attempt to relive their high school glory by staging a 30-year reunion, only to discover that their memories flatter no one. Jérôme

Commandeur directs with a light but probing touch, balancing comedy with genuine melancholy. Beneath the jokes lies a sharper reckoning, with ageing, male entitlement and long-ignored bullying rising to the surface. Anchored by Laurent Lafitte's faded pop idol and a wonderfully dry turn from Vanessa Paradis, it is funny, uncomfortable and unexpectedly tender.

JEUNES MÈRES

Directors: Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne

Starring: Babette Verbeek, Elsa Houben



Set in a home for young mums in Liège, Belgium, this is a quietly affecting portrait of five teenage women facing motherhood amid instability and loss. Observed with empathy and trademark restraint by brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, the film traces the young women's daily struggles with fractured families, toxic relationships and addiction. It is at times deeply moving, while also allowing for moments of humour and tenderness. Meanwhile, the ensemble cast's performances feel very natural, keeping the film from veering into sentimentality. The film won both Best Screenplay and the Ecumenical Jury Prize at Cannes in 2025.

WATCH ONLINE



MADemoiselle HOLMES

Cosy crime fans will love following the adventures of Charlie, a socially awkward Paris police officer who has always lived in the shadow of her late mother. When a car accident jolts her out of her routine, Charlie discovers a new and unexpected confidence and sharp instinct, revealing a talent for investigation. As she grapples with complex cases and mysterious deaths, she learns she is a distant descendant of Sherlock Holmes. A blend of great locations, likeable characters and clever crime storytelling makes this the perfect viewing for a night in. Put the kettle on!

● Available on Channel 4/PBS

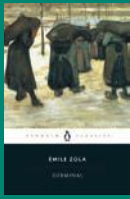
CLASSIC FILM



L'ATALANTE (1934)

This poetic romance follows a young bride who joins her husband on his working barge, travelling between Paris and the provinces. Isolated by life afloat, she is drawn to the city's temptations, causing the couple's separation and reconciliation. Jean Vigo's only feature (he died at 29) combines documentary detail with striking visual invention.

LIBRARY



GERMINAL

Set amid the coalfields of northern France, Émile Zola's bruising novel plunges readers into the lives of miners ground down by poverty, danger and exploitation. Drawing on firsthand research, this powerful novel exposes industrial capitalism at its rawest, charting hunger, strikes and simmering revolt through the fate of Étienne Lantier. Published in 1885, the book shocked contemporaries with its physical detail and moral fury.

THE ART OF ANTIQUING IN FRANCE

Flea Markets – Brocantes – Antique Shops
Sharon Santoni

£30 Flammarion

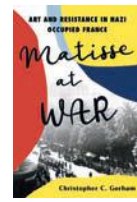


Rooted in decades of on-the-ground experience, this richly illustrated guide opens the doors to France's flea markets, brocantes and antique shops, revealing how to buy with confidence. Moving well beyond surface charm, it explains what to collect, how to assess quality and provenance, and how different regions shape distinctive styles, from Provençal textiles to refined tableware and vernacular furniture. Interviews with specialist dealers sit alongside practical advice, while photographs illustrate real places and real objects rather than fantasy interiors. A substantial resources section adds lasting value, with a nationwide shopping guide, glossary, useful French phrases for buyers and a detailed index. Both inspirational and methodical, the book captures the thrill of the hunt while demystifying a world that can feel opaque to outsiders. It will appeal to seasoned collectors and curious newcomers alike, offering a wonderful introduction to the enduring appeal of French antiques.

MATISSE AT WAR

Art and Resistance in Nazi-Occupied France
Christopher C. Gorham

£25.99 Citadel Press



This fascinating book revisits one of the most contested periods of Henri Matisse's life: the years before and during the Second World War. Long accused of political passivity, Matisse emerges here as a far more complex figure, negotiating artistic survival amid censorship, occupation and personal risk. Drawing on extensive correspondence, archival sources and family testimony, Gorham places the painter's work alongside the experiences of those closest to him, including relatives involved in the Resistance. The book traces Matisse's movements between Paris, Nice and New York, examining how war reshaped his art, reputation and moral standing. Meticulously researched, this is both biography and cultural history, illuminating the pressures faced by artists under Vichy rule. Thoughtful and revisionist without being polemical, *Matisse at War* deepens our understanding of creativity under constraint and the ethical ambiguities of making art in wartime.

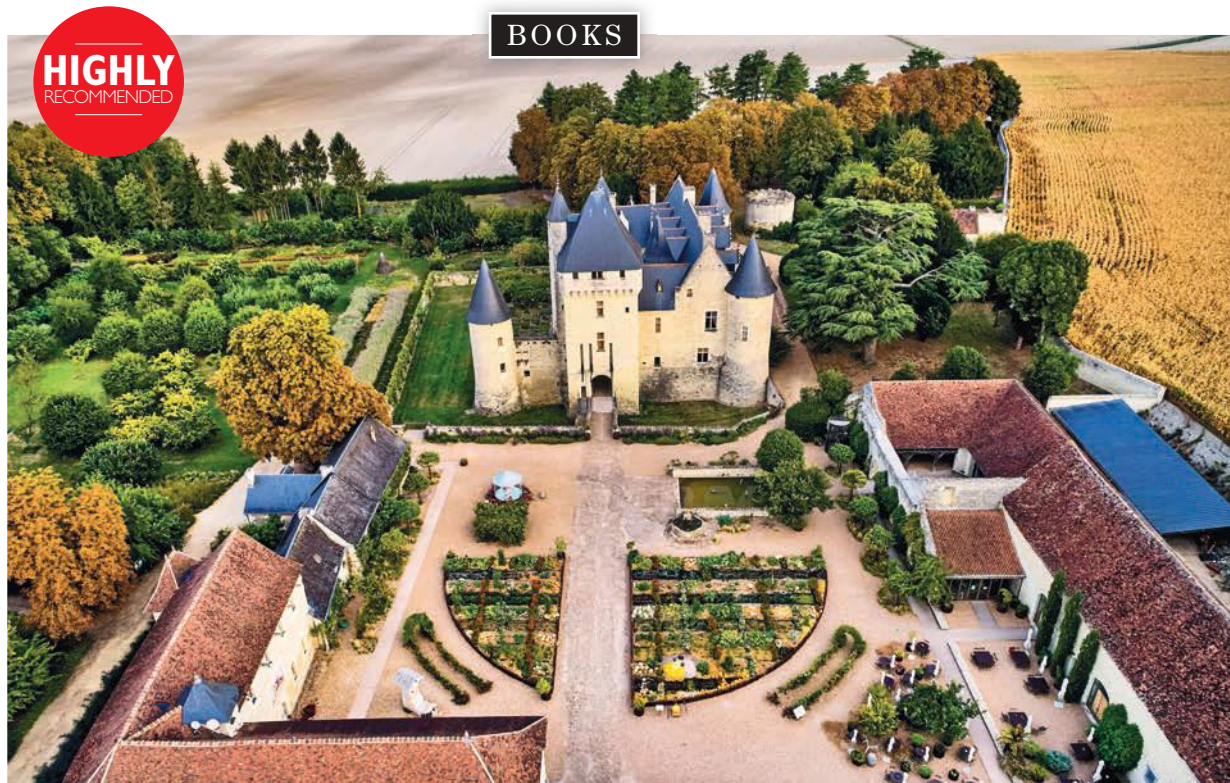
MEET THE AUTHOR



DENIS DIDEROT (1713–1784)

Diderot was one of the Enlightenment's most interesting minds. Born in 1713 in Langres, he rose from impoverished Parisian writer to become the driving force behind the *Encyclopédie*, a vast intellectual project that sought to catalogue all human knowledge and quietly undermine religious and political authority. Its publication brought censorship, police surveillance and periods of house arrest. Alongside philosophy, Diderot wrote novels, art criticism and plays, championing reason and moral freedom. Late patronage from Catherine the Great secured his finances. He died in Paris in 1784, just before his ideas helped reshape Europe.

BOOKS



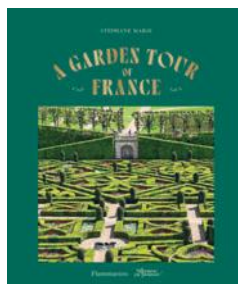
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

IMAGE © ANDREA PISTOLESI HEMISFER, FROM A GARDEN TOUR OF FRANCE FLAMMARION

The splendid gardens at the Château du Rivau in the Loire Valley

A GARDEN TOUR OF FRANCE

Stéphane Marie £35 Flammarion



This garden tour is a lavishly illustrated celebration of France's extraordinary garden culture, guided by one of the country's most trusted horticultural voices. Spanning 27 gardens across 10 regions, the book moves from formal parterres and château labyrinths to kitchen gardens, water gardens and Mediterranean exotica. Marie combines travel writing with horticultural insight, introducing the gardeners behind each space and explaining how climate, history and personal vision shape their designs. Nearly 300 photographs invite slow, absorbing browsing, while clear plant notes and practical visitor information ground the romance in reality. Both armchair escape and travel companion, this is an elegant, informative portrait of France seen through its gardens – diverse, inventive and deeply rooted in place.

ASTÉRIX MARCHES ON

Dominic Bliss charts how a plucky Gaul from a 1959 magazine became a 400-million-selling cultural force, spawning films, games and a theme park, while poking fun at history, empire and modern-day France in 120 languages

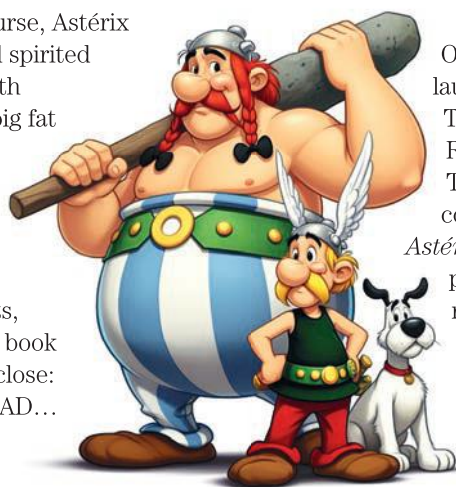
“**T**he year is 50 BC. Gaul is entirely occupied by the Romans. Well, not entirely... One small village of indomitable Gauls still holds out against the invaders.”

These are the lines that set the scene at the start of the Astérix comic books, each adventure starring two of the best-known cartoon characters in French literature. The small chap is, of course, Astérix himself – diminutive in size but valiant and spirited thanks to a secret potion that arms him with superhuman strength. His sidekick is the big fat one, Obélix, who, when he’s not loyally assisting his friend in bashing the invading Romans, is found delivering menhir stones or feasting on wild boar.

With global sales of 400m copies and translations into 120 languages and dialects, Astérix is the best-selling European comic book series of all time. Others don’t even come close: not Lucky Luke, not the Smurfs, not 2000 AD... not even Tintin.

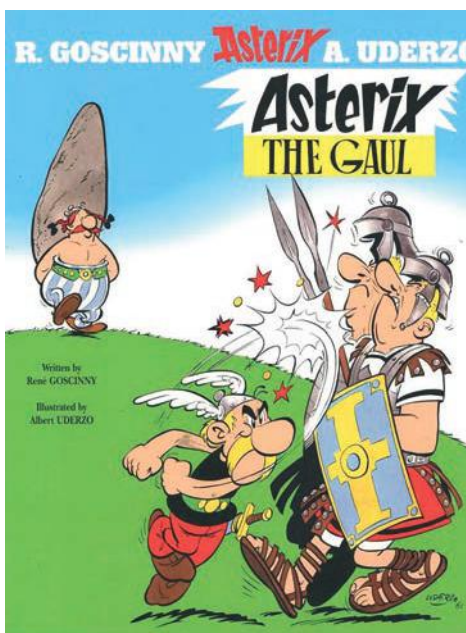
There have been 41 Astérix books in all, the latest, *Astérix en Lusitanie*, published in October 2025. This time our two intrepid heroes travel to Lusitania – modern-day Portugal – where, as Astérix says, they plan to “try out the delicious local specialities, beat up a few fresh Romans and, who knows, perhaps meet some charming young ladies”. Since he first appeared in the late 1950s, Astérix has grown far beyond the confines of the comic strip. As well as

all the books, there have been films – both live action and animated – board games, video games and, most recently, a new Netflix cartoon series. And just north of Paris, in Plailly, there’s Parc Astérix, a theme park dedicated to the characters which, since 1989, has offered a distinctly French alternative to the more Americanised Disneyland Paris nearby, welcoming 2.8m visitors a year.



It was 66 years ago, in 1959, that Astérix and Obélix first saw the light of day, appearing in the launch issue of a French magazine called *Pilote*. Two of the magazine’s founders were writer René Goscinny and illustrator Albert Uderzo. The two plucky Gauls they created went on to conquer the world. The first comic book, *Astérix le Gaulois* (*Astérix the Gaul*), was published in French in 1961, followed by regular sequels. Sales increased exponentially with each adventure and English-language versions started in 1969.

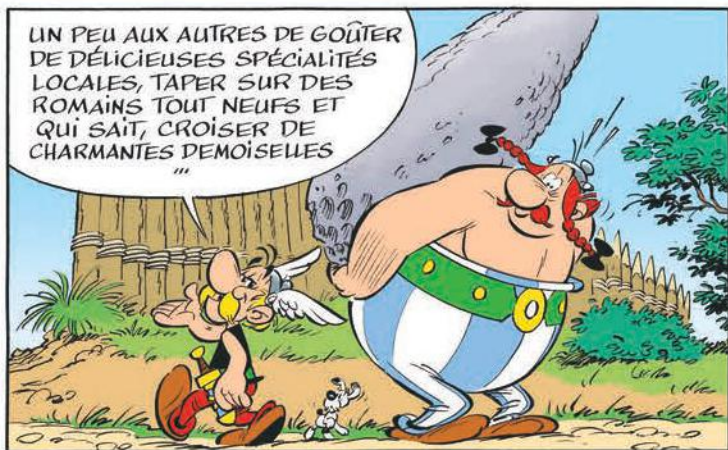
During that post-Second World War period, Astérix was in many ways a personification of his nation. Having been occupied by Nazi Germany and attempting to redefine itself as its colonial empire declined, France needed a hero. With his winged helmet and handlebar moustache, the small but fearless Gaulish tribesman stepped up to fill the role. From their tiny little enclave in Armorica (modern-day Brittany), the friends’ struggle against the occupying Romans was an obvious metaphor for French resistance during the war. Others have >>



IMAGES © SHUTTERSTOCK, ALAMY, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, LES ÉDITIONS ALBERT-RENÉ

Above and from left: Obélix, Astérix and Idéfix, who is known in English as Dogmatix; Albert Uderzo; *Astérix the Gaul*; René Goscinny; an extract from *Astérix en Lusitanie*, which was published in October

Astérix EN LUSITANIE



ASTÉRIX © OBÉLIX © IDEFIX © / © 2025 HACHETTE LIVRE - GOSCINNY - LUDERZO Les aventures d'Astérix sont une création de René Goscinny et d'Albert Uderzo.

"ASTÉRIX'S GAULISH VILLAGE IS A SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE AGAINST OPPRESSION, OF DAVID AGAINST GOLIATH"



From top: Fabcaro, left, and Didier Conrad have worked on the two most recent albums; Obélix is Astérix's larger-than-life chum

suggested it represents French anxiety at post-war American-led globalisation. Although the hilarious slapstick of Goscinny and Uderzo's stories appealed to younger readers, the ingenious word play, the political satire and the mockery of European national stereotypes meant adult readers were hooked too.

No country, not even France itself, was immune from playful ridicule. In *Astérix chez les Bretons* (*Astérix in Britain*), the locals are portrayed as overly polite and preoccupied with drinking tea. In *Astérix chez les Helvètes* (*Astérix in Switzerland*), they are obsessed with fondue, cuckoo clocks, neutrality and yodelling. In *Astérix chez les Belges* (*Astérix in Belgium*), there are comic references to Belgian celebrities, the Battle of Waterloo and mussels and chips.

The books served a historical function, too, giving youngsters and adults alike a popular reference for aspects of the Roman Empire such as gladiators, legionaries, banquets and slavery. Many volumes were even translated into Latin and Greek, with accompanying teachers' guides.



UNIVERSAL APPEAL

When Goscinny died of a heart attack in 1977, readers implored Uderzo to continue the series and he duly obliged, although later there were legal battles, buyouts and a revolving door of new writers and illustrators. The last two editions were created by writer Fabcaro and illustrator Didier Conrad.

Uderzo, who died in 2020, always struggled to explain the enduring appeal of his and Goscinny's creation. "We are like magicians who don't know how they do a trick," he once said. Another time he suggested: "It's David against Goliath. Everyone can identify with the image of retribution against things that are bigger than us."

Céleste Surugue, chief executive at the current publishers, Les Éditions Albert-René, says the stories work on multiple levels. "They combine visual gags, wordplay, historical references and cultural nods," he says. "They appeal to both children and adults. Astérix gently pokes fun at everyone through a series of national and international clichés. It all

shows that, beyond our apparent differences, we are united by the same humanity." Surugue highlights the universal human values in the comic books. "Our indomitable Gauls embody laughter, freedom, solidarity and friendship. Also, Astérix's Gaulish village is a symbol of resistance against oppression, of David against Goliath, which resonates in many cultural contexts and in all eras." He also pays homage to the inventiveness of the many translators who have rewritten the books in other languages. "For humour to work abroad, translators often have to adapt rather than translate literally," he says.

BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE

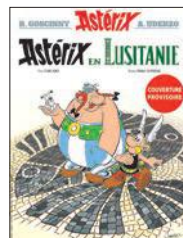
Two translators who deserve special mention are Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge who worked on the first 36 albums, brilliantly transposing the original French wordplay, cultural references and quirky humour for the English-speaking world. Most memorable were their genius alternatives to the characters' names, so that Obélix's dog Idéfix becomes Dogmatix; the village chief Abraracourcix becomes Vitalstatistix; the village elder Agecanonix becomes Geriatrix; the bard Assurancetourix becomes Cacophonix; and the fishmonger Ordralfabétix becomes Unhygienix. Without Bell and Hockridge's ingenious work, it's possible Astérix would not have won such global acclaim.

Without Astérix, it's also possible children worldwide would never have learned so much about the Roman Empire and Ancient Gaul's place within it. "For many foreign readers, Astérix is indeed the main gateway to the Gallo-Roman era, but this is also true for many children in France," Surugue adds. "We laugh with Astérix but we also learn. The quality of the writing allows French history and culture to shine through globally with a smile. Astérix is a very good cultural ambassador for France. He embodies his nation – he is rebellious, attached to its traditions, but also capable of self-mockery."

At 66 years old, if Astérix inhabited modern-day France, he would be ready for retirement.

In fact, he'd probably be donning a *gilet jaune* and protesting at President Macron's pension reforms. Which leads us to wonder where our diminutive hero will be in another 66 years' time. "He's in better shape than ever," Surugue insists. "Whether that's in the French or the foreign editions of the books, or with the theme park, or with Alain Chabat's wonderful Netflix series."

While Surugue and his colleagues are currently concentrating on the latest Astérix book, they naturally have an eye on the future. "Yes, of course, we're thinking about new exciting projects," he says. "But we always want to look after our famous character with both ambition and prudence. With 66 years of history behind him and a very long future in front, Astérix deserves the very best." **FT**



● The latest Astérix comic book, **Astérix in Lusitania**, was published in French and English on October 23, 2025.



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LOOKALIKES WITH LONGEVITY



Justin Postlethwaite salutes the Paris waxworks museum where historic figures and modern celebrities draw the crowds

While not quite as scandalous and criminally serious as the October 2025 Louvre jewellery heist, the kidnapping of Emmanuel Macron's waxwork likeness from Musée Grévin by Greenpeace activists last June was equally audacious.

Police told reporters that the environmentalists had entered the Paris museum as tourists, then changed clothes to pose as museum workers before purloining the grinning presidential doppelganger out through an emergency exit under a blanket. The dummy was then plonked outside the capital's Russian embassy in protest at Macron's attitude towards French companies that continue to do business with Russia since the invasion of Ukraine.

The model was left for police to find, after another photo shoot at the Paris headquarters of energy company EDF to protest France's imports of Russian energy, and the story gave Musée Grévin some serious free promotion. More publicity followed – this time surely with

keen marketing savvy – last November when the museum installed a new waxwork of Diana, Princess of Wales, wearing a replica of the famous Christina Stambolian-designed 'revenge dress' that she wore in June 1994, shortly after Prince Charles publicly confessed to infidelity. "This bold look, which broke with British royal tradition, was quickly dubbed the 'revenge dress' and interpreted as an act of self-reclamation, a powerful image of assertive femininity, renewed confidence and a symbol of resilience," said a Grévin statement.

EVER-CHANGING GALLERY

That Musée Grévin, which opened on June 5, 1882, continues to draw attention nearly 150 years later is largely due to its ever-evolving roster of zeitgeist lookalikes reflecting trends in the worlds of cinema, pop and sport, which sit alongside historical figures from politics and science (it welcomed Marie Curie last year). The approach is nothing if not populist (it receives up to 900,000 visitors a year), with recent additions

including French social media influencer Léna Situations in December 2024. There are photo opps galore, with everyone from rapper GIMS to Marie-Antoinette up for a selfie, with no complaints. Some 200 waxworks are on display at a time.

Recent interactive innovations based on historic events lend the museum a true contemporary flavour, with visitors having the chance to Paint in the Homo Sapiens Grotto; Fight alongside Vercingétorix; Participate in Napoleon Bonaparte's Council of War; and Take part in a Parade with General de Gaulle.

The building in which the museum is housed, at 10, boulevard Montmartre, lends further visitor appeal, featuring a grand marble staircase; an Italian-style theatre constructed in 1900 by architect



Marie Curie is among the historical figures you can see at Musée Grévin

Gustave Rives; the famed Hall of Mirrors, made by Eugène Hénard for the Exposition Universelle in 1900 (it was brought from the Trocadéro to the Grévin in 1906); and the Dome and the Hall of Columns, a baroque framework by Esnault-Pelterie, all glitzy gilt and mosaics, created in 1882 to house the first waxwork celebrities.

It was all the brainchild of Arthur Meyer, journalist and founder of the daily newspaper *Le Gaulois*, who had the idea of showing his readers the people who made the headlines (the press did not use photographs at the time) in 3D. He enlisted the caricaturist, theatre costume designer and sculptor, Alfred Grévin, who became so integral to the project that his name went above the door.

While the list of famous faces is in perpetual evolution, one thing has not changed – natural beeswax is still used to craft the figures, because, says the museum, "its texture is astonishingly close to the look of human skin and it keeps its shape over the years, without ever shrinking or changing colour." **FT**

● www.grevin-paris.com/en

"EVERYONE FROM RAPPER GIMS TO MARIE-ANTOINETTE IS UP FOR A SELFIE"



French actress Audrey Fleurot with her waxwork at Musée Grévin; inset, Alfred Grévin in 1870





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ROMANTIC REVIVAL

Following extensive renovations, the Musée de la Vie Romantique in Paris is set to reopen to the public in February



A view of the Musée de la Vie Romantique undergoing renovation works in September 2025

Back in September 2024, the Musée de la Vie Romantique (the Museum of Romantic Life) in Paris' 9th arrondissement closed its doors for major refurbishment works to the exterior façade and the interior, which needed freshening up and modernising, while also reconnecting with the building's history. The museum will be reopening on February 14, 2026, just in time for Valentine's Day.

Located at the foot of Montmartre hill, in the Nouvelle Athènes district, the listed building was built in 1830 and immediately purchased by painter Ary



Façade of the House of Ary Scheffer (1865) by Arie Johannes Lamme

Scheffer, who set up two painting studios in the property. In the 1980s, it was opened as a museum by the City of Paris – an annex to the Musée Carnavalet, in fact – before hosting temporary exhibitions and taking on the name of Musée de la Vie Romantique.

RECONNECTING WITH HISTORY

The 17-month refurbishment has restored the house's original character, based on a painting preserved in the Dordrecht Museum in the Netherlands. The façade has been coated in lime in the traditional 19th-century style, all the windows and carpentry have been refitted with that time's technique and the shutters have been painted in their original, light brown colour.

Inside, the exhibition space has been reimagined to reflect the atmosphere of an artist's home from the 1830s, rather than purely a museum. Each room has been designed around a colour scheme, while remaining in keeping with the décor introduced in the 1980s, when the museum first opened. An improved path also leads visitors to the pretty Rose Bakery tea shop which is set in the museum's greenhouse.

LA VIE ROMANTIQUE

The museum now offers an entirely new presentation of the collections, within a

redesigned itinerary. Built around an enriched scholarly narrative and a sensitive approach, it places the painter Ary Scheffer (1795–1858), a central figure of Romanticism, centre stage in his former home and studio.

Dedicated to 'romantic life', the ground floor highlights Scheffer's place within the artistic milieu of the time, showcasing other prestigious figures of the era, such as Frédéric Chopin, Pauline Viardot and Eugène Delacroix. An entire room is devoted to George Sand, an emblematic figure of the Romantic movement and a close friend of Scheffer's.

Upstairs, visitors will discover four essential themes of Romanticism: nature and landscape, emotion, literature, and the fantastic, which together celebrate and weave connections between painting, literature and music. Similarly, a wide range of interpretive features have been integrated into the exhibition spaces, with music, readings, soundscapes and other digital tools all designed to allow visitors to experience a poetic immersion in the Romantic period.



Ary Scheffer's Studio by Arie Johannes Lamme

An inaugural temporary exhibition, dedicated to the painter Paul Huet (1803–1869), his whimsical landscapes and the visual motif of the sky, will be running until August 30 this year.

Set within one of Paris' most atmospheric neighbourhoods, the Musée de la Vie Romantique's reimagined exhibition space offers a cosy encounter with Romanticism, striking a perfect balance between emotion and art history. It is once again an enchanting stop for anyone seeking a more poetic side of the City of Love. ■

● Musée de la Vie Romantique

Hôtel Scheffer-Renan, 16 Rue Chaptal 75009
Paris. Tel: +33 (0)1 55 31 95 67.

museevieromantique.paris.fr

Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10am to 6pm.
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LOIRE VALLEY RENAISSANCE

A two-hour drive from Paris, the Loire – once a favourite day trip – is now a cherished getaway, prized for its natural beauty, outstanding cuisine and beautiful lodgings catering to your wellbeing. By **Jennifer Ladonne** »

IMAGE © PHILIPPE ARMANET



The renowned vineyards surrounding the hilltop town of Sancerre



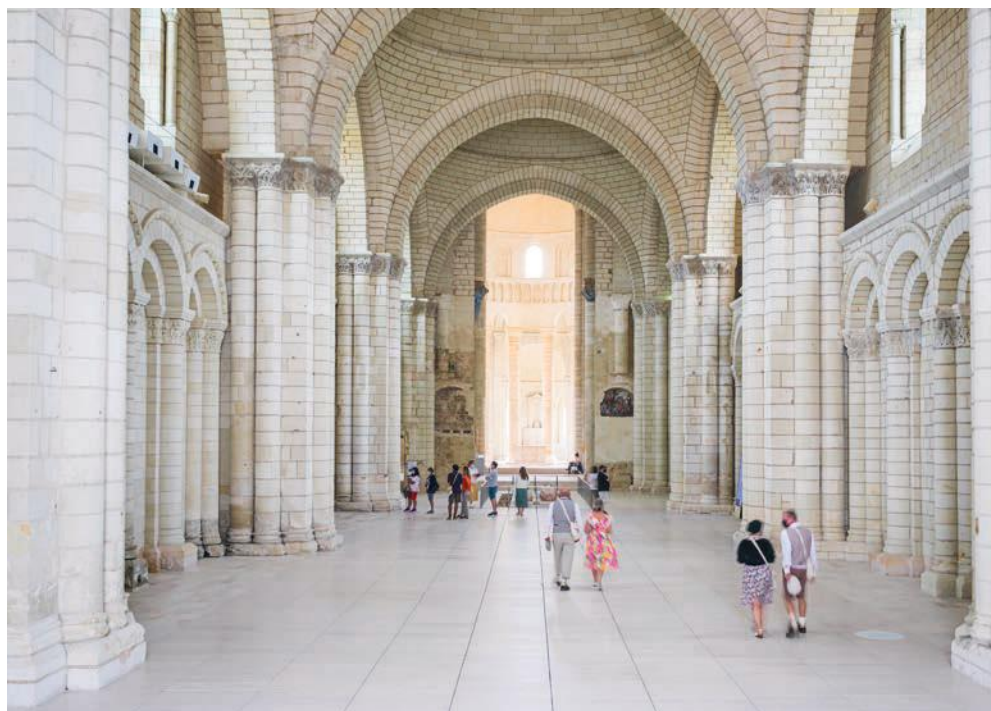
“VISIT A WINE ESTATE, OR WANDER THE REGION’S PICTURESQUE VILLAGES”



So much more than its storybook châteaux, the Loire Valley offers attractions aplenty, and each town and village has a character and pleasures all its own. Travelling by car or bike (on the famous Loire à Vélo bike route) affords experiences inaccessible to day-tripping château-seekers arriving by tour bus.

In recent years, chefs, hoteliers and local policy makers have sought to broaden the Loire’s appeal beyond its – admittedly splendid – châteaux and forge a new identity as a getaway destination focused on nature, sustainable dining and wellbeing, as well as a centre for the arts.

The Loire Valley, as defined by UNESCO’s cultural heritage designation, stretches west from Sully-sur-Loire, just east of Orléans, to Chalonnes-sur-Loire, near Angers, and encompasses one of France’s richest wine regions, extending from Sancerre in the east to Chinon further west. It covers a distance of approximately 155 miles (250km), which can be traversed by car in less



IMAGES © PHILIPPE ARMANET, CHRISTOPHE MARTINIANI/TOURISME, PPR WAELAERT



Clockwise from this image: Wine lovers won't want to miss Sancerre; the magnificent 14th-century Apocalypse Tapestry; enjoy a stroll through Sancerre's vineyards; the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud is a haven for art fans

Orléans, Amboise, Blois, Tours and Angers, making forays into the countryside to see the major châteaux and their gardens, visit a wine estate, or wander the region's picturesque villages, many of which are topped with a château. While visiting the great châteaux is a given, visitors will also find plenty of quirky, off-the-beaten-path museums, often housed in châteaux, that express some of the lesser-known facets of the region's rich and fascinating history.

Arts festivals and exhibitions at museums and châteaux (both public and private) highlight French and international contemporary art, while garden festivals showcase wildly creative talents that push the boundary between traditional garden design and landscape art. Pilgrims and art lovers can make a beeline for the superb Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud, led by 36 formidable women over six centuries, with its art museum, hotel and Michelin-starred restaurant, or marvel at the incomparable 14th-century Apocalypse Tapestry, its epic story unfurling over 70 luminous panels in the twilight of Angers' medieval fortress.

A culinary pilgrimage to the new gastronomic temples dotting the towns and countryside is an ideal way to sample the bounty of the Loire's »



than three hours, yet is so stocked with things to see and do, it merits a week or more, depending on your bucket list.

ROYAL BACKSTORY

Since Gallo-Roman times, the River Loire was the region's main thoroughfare and provided a barrier against invading armies, notably the English. France and England fought over the valley for centuries: it belonged to England under the Anjou Plantagenets between 115 and 1216 and again during the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), before reverting to France at the end of the Hundred Years' War and later coming into its own under François I.

Towns arose from the early fortifications and many of those medieval edifices were repurposed or gave way to extravagant pleasure castles exhibiting fabulous gardens and all the glories of the Italian Renaissance – the splendid châteaux you see today. Travelling the Loire is simple: just follow the river through the major towns of





“BESIDES BEING ONE OF FRANCE’S MOST DIVERSE WINE REGIONS, THE LOIRE IS KNOWN AS ‘THE GARDEN OF FRANCE’”



From top: The natural beauty of the Loire Valley is perfect for exploring; chef Christophe Hay champions the Loire’s produce; half-timbered splendour in Tours

gardens and vineyards. Every bucket list will be different, and visitors are increasingly choosing a longer stay to explore the richness of the Loire, basing themselves at one or two destination hotels with the amenities that suit them, whether it’s a fabulous spa, exceptional dining, luxurious trappings, or a relaxing retreat in the heart of nature – or all of the above.

EAT, DRINK AND BE RESTED

Besides being one of France’s most diverse wine regions, the Loire is known as ‘the garden of France’ and a new generation of chefs is highlighting its abundance of fruits and vegetables.

Christophe Hay, one of the Loire’s most celebrated chefs, is leading the charge, bringing his love for his native land and all its natural bounty to every item on the plate in his luminous Michelin two-star restaurant across the river from Blois. While his five-acre garden provides everything from asparagus to lemons, Hay is perhaps best known as a champion of the local river fish. “The best inspiration for me is the fish from the Loire,” he says. “In a three-star Michelin restaurant, you always have the same fish (the lobster, langoustine, sole, *dorade* etc.), but in France you have beautiful fish from the Loire, a UNESCO-classified river.”

The restaurant is housed in the five-star Fleur de Loire hotel, opened by Hay three years ago in a 17th-century building on the banks of the Loire. Along with elegantly contemporary rooms, the hotel has a gourmet bistro, bakery and tea room, all with glorious views of the river. An easy walk to the Château de Blois, the hotel is a quick drive to numerous châteaux, vineyards and villages.

Les Sources de Cheverny, a 15-minute drive from Blois, invites visitors to drop the hectic pace and linger a while. “Guests can relax here, enjoy the spa, the woods, nature and gastronomy,” says Alice Tourbier, who owns the hotel with her husband, Jérôme. “There’s so much to do in the area.” Set on a 110-acre wooded estate, the hotel emphasises wellbeing through forest walks, tennis, cycling, swimming, spa treatments and gourmet cuisine, partly sourced from the estate gardens. Guests can choose from rooms in the 17th-century château, a stone grange, a barn, or a cluster of contemporary wooden lodges set in the tall grasses around a pond. Sitting directly on the Loire à Vélo bicycle route, the estate is a 10-minute bike ride (provided by the hotel) from the Château de Cheverny and is within riding distance of the Château de Chambord and the Château de Chenonceau.

Ten minutes from Tours by car, Loire Valley Lodges takes unwinding and unplugging a step further in 18 wi-fi-free treehouses perched >>



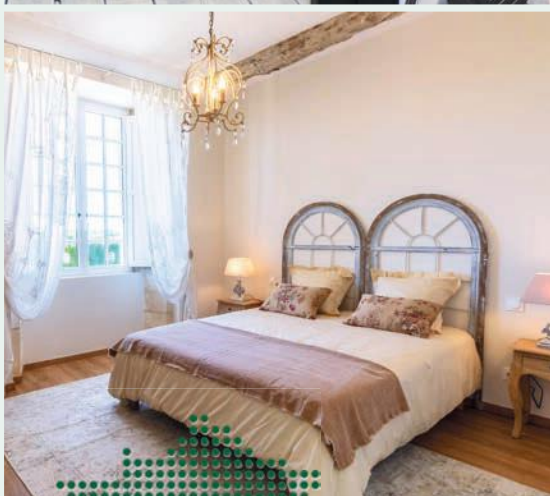
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From top: The charming town of Amboise; the Château de Langeais; the Château de Cheverny

among towering oaks in the heart of a 750-acre forest. Each artist-designed cabin comes with a giant outdoor terrace, a whirlpool spa and wraparound floor-to-ceiling windows for full immersion in nature. Breakfasts are delivered in picnic baskets raised from your terrace on a pulley. Forest-bathing walks are encouraged and there's an outdoor swimming pool and bikes for traversing the estate's miles of wooded trails, which are dotted with sculptures from the owner's contemporary art collection. Loire Valley Lodges is an easy drive from Amboise, the Cité Royale de Loches and some of the Loire's most famous châteaux: Chenonceau, Azay-le-Rideau, Amboise, Clos-Lucé, Chaumont-sur-Loire, Chambord, Cheverny, Villandry and Langeais.

LIVE THE CHÂTEAU LIFE

For those who crave the royal touch, the Loire's newer château hotels have upped the ante in royally catering to your every need. "Above all, we want you to feel completely at home," says Mira



IMAGES © SHUTTERSTOCK

"AS THE MIGHTY CHÂTEAUX AROSE, BUILT FROM TUFFEAU LIMESTONE, A SHADOW WORLD OF CAVE DWELLINGS TOOK SHAPE"

Grebenstein, Château Louise de La Vallière's chatelaine who greets every guest with a glass of the estate's refreshing sparkling wine. Though I doubt many guests have homes like this one: the extravagant interiors and sumptuous rooms are filled with precious antiques, tapestries and artworks. The gastronomic restaurant's multiple course-menu is served according to 17th-century protocol, with a wine list geared toward connoisseurs. The spa features top beauty brands, a sauna, hot tub and pool. A 1940s Morgan touring car is on hand to explore the countryside.

TROGLODYTE DWELLING

The Loire is riddled with prehistoric caves. As the mighty medieval and Renaissance châteaux arose, built from the region's snowy tuffeau limestone, a shadow world of cave dwellings took shape. Many visitors never notice this strange and fascinating aspect of the region, but it's a delight to explore: you can sleep, dine and taste fine wines in caves hewn deep into the cliffsides.

Part manor, part prehistoric cave, Les Hautes Roches, set on a high perch overlooking the River Loire, exudes a quiet luxury. With generous >>

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From top: The beautiful Château de Montrésor; Chédigny; inside the Château de Montrésor

windows, cool limestone walls, chic furnishings, carved fireplaces and bathrooms, and lovely views of the Loire, you'll hardly know you're in a cave (you can also opt for a contemporary room in the manor). The acclaimed gourmet restaurant serves its refined fare inside or on a spacious stone terrace overlooking the river. The pretty riverside village of Rochecorbon is an easy walk away. Here, you can visit the pretty chateau, taste Touraine wines at the troglodyte Maison Lacheteau and have lunch at a *guinguette*, a traditional riverside tavern. Les Hautes Roches is on the outskirts of Tours, making for an easy drive to a dozen of the great châteaux and some lovely villages.

Nearer Amboise, at the medieval Château de Pray hotel, Chef Arnaud Philippon's Michelin-starred restaurant is set in a soaring troglodyte dining room lined with artworks and lit by romantic candlelight in the evening.

MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES

It's easy to overlook the Loire's quieter pleasures when visiting its blockbuster châteaux. If you're



IMAGES © SHUTTERSTOCK | LADONNE

“WANDER THE COBBLED STREETS OF RAVISHING MONTRÉSOR, WINDING UP TO ONE OF THE LOVELIEST PRIVATE CHÂTEAUX”

travelling by car, be sure to stop at a few of the region's 12 Plus Beaux Villages and others that carry the Village Fleuri classification for their exceptional flowers and gardens.

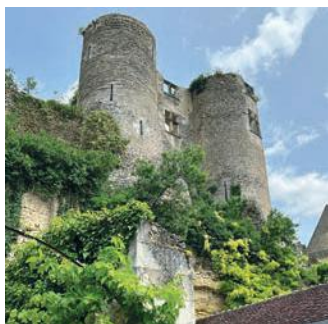
Tiny Chédigny is best known for its profusion of flowers spilling over doorways and arbours, and growing wild along its picturesque stream. Wander through the village to discover charming boutiques and cafés. Saint-Dyé-sur-Loire, an ancient port town on the River Loire, was a popular meeting place for Parisian painters, writers and poets thanks to photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, who lived here. Pablo Picasso owned a house here, too. Wander the cobbled streets of ravishing Montrésor, winding up to the Château de Montrésor, one of the Loire's loveliest private châteaux. On the way, you'll enjoy picture-perfect views of the village and countryside. After your wander, enjoy a fabulous home-cooked meal at charming L'École Gourmand restaurant.

At the eastern border of the Loire, a stone's throw from Burgundy, charming Sancerre is the perfect getaway, especially for wine lovers, who will enjoy the many tasting rooms of the wine-rich region. The exquisite Les Hauts de Sancerre hotel, which opened in July 2025, is an ideal bolthole. **FT**

12 MUST-SEE CHÂTEAUX

You'll be spoilt for choice when it comes to châteaux but here are 12 of our favourites to start with

For more
Riviera
inspiration visit
www.loirevalley-france.co.uk



CHÂTEAU DE MONTRÉSOR

This storybook château, perched high on a cliff overlooking stunning Montrésor and the surrounding countryside, is filled with 15th-century treasures and an impressive art collection.
chateaudemontresor.com/en



CITÉ ROYALE DE LOCHES

This picturesque hilltop fortress comprises an entire royal village. See the Logis Royal, the meeting place of 16-year-old Joan of Arc and Charles VII, the 15th-century Donjon, and stroll the gardens and cobbled streets for splendid views.
citeroyaleloches.fr/en



CHÂTEAU DE VILLANDRY

The renaissance château's interiors are a delight, but its magnificent gardens are the draw. Covering 22 acres, they comprise an intricate mosaic of hedges, colourful blooms, an ornamental lake, woods and 1,200 lime trees.
www.chateauvillandry.fr



CHÂTEAU DE LANGEAIS

This beautiful pre-Renaissance château's vast moat, crenellated ramparts and corner towers are right out of a fairy tale. Inside, Aubusson tapestries and waxwork figures recreate the wedding of Anne of Brittany and Charles VIII.
chateau-de-langeais.com/en



FORTERESSE ROYALE DE CHINON

This dramatically situated fortress, perched on a rocky promontory overlooking the village and river, was home to the Plantagenet kings and queens and hosted Joan of Arc in 1429.
forteressechinon.fr/en



CHÂTEAU D'AZAY-LE-RIDEAU

Built on an island in the River Indre, this romantic Renaissance château is celebrated for its intricate stonework, steep corner turrets and graceful windows, all reflected in the water.
www.azay-le-rideau.fr/en



DOMAINE DE CHAUMONT-SUR-LOIRE

This supremely elegant château hosts an important collection of contemporary art and plays host to the Loire's most respected contemporary arts and garden festivals.
domaine-chaumont.fr/en/home



CHÂTEAU ROYAL DE BLOIS

Spanning four major periods of architecture under the reign of seven French kings, highlights include the spiral loggia staircase and royal bedchambers, plus the tremendous views.
en.chateaublois.fr



CHÂTEAU DE CHEVERNY

This peerless château is a rare example of early-17th-century classical architecture. As spectacular inside as out, there's a pervasive cosiness and delightful touches for children. The gardens are also a must-see.
www.chateau-cheverny.fr/en



CHÂTEAU DE CHENONCEAU

Beautifully reflected in the River Cher, which it straddles, this château is filled with period furnishings and boasts beautiful gardens and a petting zoo, making it ideal for families.
www.chenonceau.com/en



CHÂTEAU DU CLOS LUCÉ

This stately mansion pays homage to Leonardo da Vinci, its most famous resident, who died here in 1519. The artist's ingenious inventions are on display and an immersive space in the magnificent gardens tells his story.
www.vinci-closluce.com/en



CHÂTEAU D'ANGERS

This medieval château-fortress dating back to the 10th century houses the remarkable Apocalypse Tapestry, one of the world's largest and most important early tapestries. Formal gardens add to its charm.
www.chateau-angers.fr >>

THINGS TO SEE & DO

Châteaux are a major attraction, but there's so much more to do in the Loire

For more travel inspiration visit www.francetoday.com/travel-in-france



An installation by French artist Miguel Chevalier at the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire

LOIRE FESTIVALS

The Festival International des Jardins, held at the beautiful Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire, is the leading garden festival in France. Every year, the top international names in garden and landscape design are given carte blanche to let their imagination run wild. Held from May till November, the festival is renowned throughout Europe for the extraordinary quality of its exhibits. domaine-chaumont.fr/en/international-garden-festival

Each year the **Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire Centre d'Arts et Nature** invites internationally acclaimed artists and photographers to create original, site-specific works on the theme of nature. Set within the château and across its 32 hectares, you'll discover top artistic talent alongside the château's exceptional permanent collection. domaine-chaumont.fr/en/centre-arts-and-nature

Orléans's biennial **Festival de Loire** is Europe's largest gathering of traditional riverboats, and it magically recreates the bustling 19th-century port life along the Loire, featuring maritime exhibitions, regattas, live performances, rowing races, boat jousts and local gastronomy. www.tourisme-orleansmetropole.com/en

Held each autumn, the **AR(t) CHIPEL** contemporary art festival, in partnership with Paris's Centre Pompidou, pairs artworks from the Pompidou collection with works by local artists at historic sites across the Loire Valley, many of which are normally closed to the public. www.centrepompidou.fr/en/lieu/artchipel-festival

CYCLING

Among the world's most beautiful cycling paths, **Loire à Vélo's** 560 mile (900 km) route runs past storybook châteaux, scenic rivers, and the beautiful UNESCO-designated landscape of the Loire. Along the way, cyclists can enjoy hotels at every comfort level, food, wine tastings, repair stops,



Gravel cycling in Angers

parking and a special transport train. Check the website for bike rentals. www.loirebybike.co.uk

Every year, gravel cycling enthusiasts flock to Angers to participate in the **Nature is Bike festival**, held in late May. This citywide celebration highlights

the 1,000 km of gravel paths that lead from the centre of Angers to the sea and beyond. natureisbike.com/en

VINEYARDS & TASTINGS



Château d'Epiré vigneron Paul Bizard

The Loire Valley is one of France's most diverse wine regions and scores of winemakers offer tastings and wine experiences. The **Vins de Loire website** is an excellent resource to find a tasting, tour or other wine-themed activity along the Route de Loire or near wherever you plan to be. www.vinsdeloire.fr/en

Wine tasting in a **troglydote cave** is an experience not to be missed while in the Loire. tinyurl.com/troglydote-wine

GUIDED TOURS

Bilingual guide **Aurzelle da Silva** leads tailored tours, spinning bygone times into a riveting story – with a refreshing sense of humour. With a master's degree in medieval art history, and articles published in French

scholarly journals, Da Silva can get as fascinatingly geeky as you like. www.loirepassionguide.fr

BOAT TOURS

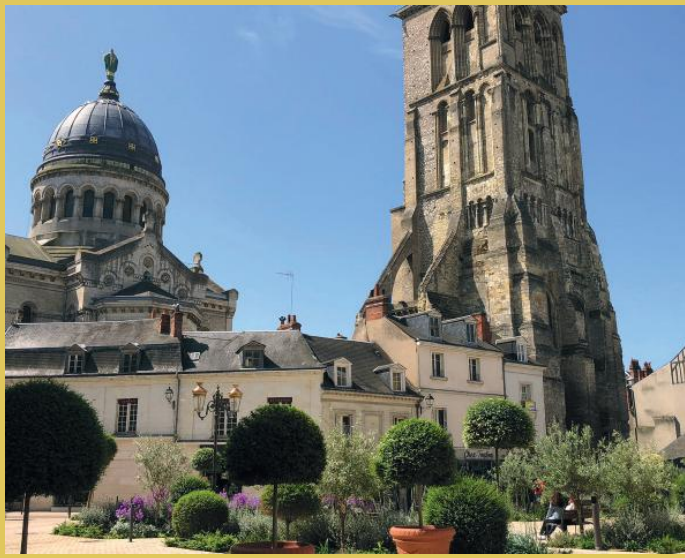
For 80 years, **La Bélandre – Chenonceaux en Bateaux** has navigated the romantic River Cher. Boats cast off near the village of Chisseaux, 2km from Château de Chenonceaux. Join a tour on a sightseeing boat or hire a silent electric boat for four to meander under the château's arched bridge and view its famous reflection. Parking is plentiful and boats leave frequently. www.labelandre.com

HOT AIR BALLOON RIDES

Positive Altitude's balloons take you over Cheverny, Chambord, Chaumont-sur-Loire, or Chenonceaux, depending on the wind direction, as well as many other gems. Flights cost from €200 to €680 for a private VIP tour. www.positive-altitude.fr >>



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WHERE TO EAT & STAY

The quality and quantity of luxury accommodation has exploded, but there are still bargains to be found

SANCERRE

Les Hauts de Sancerre

A recent restoration transformed this château into one of the Loire's most beautiful hotels. Eight guest rooms offer serenity and transcendent views over the village and vineyards. At night, the airy breakfast room becomes an elegant gastronomic restaurant. hautsdesancerre.com/en



Les Hauts de Sancerre

Folklore

This welcoming townhouse hotel two steps from Sancerre's main square offers four stylish guest rooms equipped with every comfort needed for a delightful stay. A pretty outdoor terrace and gourmet café are a bonus. www.folklore-sancerre.fr/en

BLOIS, CHEVERNY, CHAMBORD

La Borde en Sologne

The hotel's elegant guest rooms, spa, gastronomic restaurant, two pools, tennis courts, vegetable gardens that furnish the gourmet restaurant and miles of wooded walking paths add up to a refreshing country getaway. www.laborde-sologne.fr/en

Les Sources de Cheverny, Le Favori

At this country spa hotel guests can stay in the château or a contemporary cabin by a pond. The Michelin-star Le Favori and L'Auberge bistro spotlight local, sustainable dishes. Walk in the woods or grab a bike and pedal to nearby Cheverny, Chambord, or Chenonceau. www.sources-hotels.com/valde Loire/en

Les Hauts de Loire

This former hunting lodge on a 200-acre estate features antiques, a full-service Clarins spa, a pool, lovely woodland walks, and spacious, relaxing guest rooms in the manor or adjacent coach



The restaurant at the Château Louise de La Vallière

house. The stellar restaurant is renowned for its style and service. www.hautsdeloire.com/en

AMBOISE, CHENONCEAUX, LOCHES

Fleur de Loire, Restaurant Christophe Hay

Romantic views of the River Loire and the Château de Blois are your constant companions at this beautiful hotel, where the star of the show is two-star chef Christophe Hay's exceptional restaurant, serving the bounty of the Loire. fleurdeloire.com/en

Château Louise de La Vallière

Live like a royal among extravagant interiors and sumptuous rooms filled with precious antiques, tapestries and every imaginable comfort. A gastronomic restaurant, spa, pool, e-bikes and gourmet picnic baskets for romantic escapades complete your royal visit. www.chateaulouise.com/en

VOUVRAY, TOURS, SAUMUR

Les Hautes Roches

Part manor, part cave, this luxe lodging exudes a quiet luxury amidst the soothing elements of stone and water. The acclaimed



Caviar at Hôtel Fleur de Loire

restaurant has an enchanting terrace overlooking the Loire. www.leshautsroches.com/en

Loire Valley Lodges, Ardent

Perched cabins among towering trees in the heart of a 750-acre forest have terraces with hot tubs and floor-to-ceiling windows to immerse you in nature. Ardent gourmet restaurant serves seasonal dishes in a restored farmhouse. loirevalleylodges.com/en/home

Château du Rivau, Jardin Secret

This storybook château is famous for its contemporary art collection

and award-winning gardens that supply the gastronomic restaurant. Guest rooms offer all the charm of a medieval castle with 21st-century amenities. www.chateaudurivau.com/en

Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud, L'Ermitage

This hotel's luxe minimalist chic would please the medieval monks who once lived here. Michelin-starred chef Thibaut Ruggeri prepares local gourmet dishes sourced from the kitchen garden. Guests can explore the abbey grounds in private at night. www.fontevraud.fr/en

ANGERS, ANJOU

Château de Noirieux

This romantic château, with a lovely park, pool and spa, encompasses historic buildings dating back to the 15th century, de luxe rooms and one of the best restaurants around. chateaudenoirieux.com/en

Domaine de la Soucherie

This wine estate outside Angers is ideal for a delightful stay in four beautiful guest rooms (or a charming cottage). Tastings of the estate's Anjou, Savennières and Côtes du Layon wines complete the experience. www.soucherie.fr

LOIRE VALLEY ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE BY PLANE

Depending on your city or country of origin, you can reach the Loire region via Tours, Nantes or Paris airports.



BY TRAIN

TGV and local trains from Paris go direct to Orléans, Tours, Saint-Pierre-des-Corps, Amboise, Blois, Angers and Sancerre, and between cities.

BY CAR

You can rent a car most easily in Tours, Saint-Pierre-des-Corps and the larger cities. To drive from Paris follow the A10 to Orléans or Blois and follow the D951 and D952 for points alongside the River Loire.

TOURIST OFFICES

www.loirevalley-france.co.uk (Centre-Val de Loire)
www.atlantic-loire-valley.com (Pays de la Loire)

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There's no particular need to rush when crossing the road in France



WHY YOU CAN'T HURRY A FRENCH PERSON



A French pedestrian's unexpected burst of speed prompts **Justin Postlethwaite** to ponder cross-Channel courtesy and contrariness

Credit where credit is due – or, as the French rather cerebrally, indeed biblically, say, “rendre à César ce qui est à César”, which translates as ‘render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s’. The credit in question relates to a recent, scarce sighting in France: a pedestrian crossing a *passage piéton* (zebra crossing) at a pace faster than a lazy Burgundian *escargot*. I say ‘scarce’ because experience tells me that a French person crossing the road is in no hurry whatsoever, and will never succumb to the unspoken social pressure of ‘getting a bit of a move on’ just to placate waiting road users. Of course, I am not referring to those who are genuinely unable to ‘get a move on’ for whatever reason, be this medical or otherwise.

On this occasion, not only did the pleasant pedestrian – a hip young man of about 20 years old with his hands in

his pockets and a skinny *clope* hanging nonchalantly from his thin-moustache-topped mouth – increase his speed beyond standard walking pace. He actually moved up a gear into the faux-jogging motion that indicates someone doing their best to please impatient drivers (of which I am not one, I like to think). He removed the roll-up from his mouth and smiled courteously; I raised my hand in appreciation at the faux-jog, and everyone was the better for this fleeting coming together of Anglo-French manners.

A FRENCH EXCEPTION

The reason this occurrence stood out is because the French – and I am more than happy to be corrected by readers who feel otherwise – are generally not people-pleasers*. The most obvious example of this, which any reader who has ordered a *café au lait* on a Parisian

“I CAN ACCEPT THE *SERVEURS*’ SNIFFY ALOOFNESS – IT LENDS A CERTAIN AMUSING THEATRICALITY TO PROCEEDINGS”

sidewalk terrace will attest to, is the famed ‘rudeness’ of the capital’s waiters. Our columnist Stephen Clarke, who lives in Paris, has alluded to this regularly and amusingly in his sideways glance at life in the City of Light.

Personally, I can accept the *serveurs*’ sniffy aloofness – it lends a certain amusing theatricality to proceedings – provided that the service is effective and courteous (which it usually is). In their mind, they are merely being professional and have little inclination, or time, to engage in idle chit-chat. The French have a collective sense of self-assuredness and focus regarding the job in hand.

TO EACH HIS OWN

The contrarian that I am, I much prefer this sullenness to the boutique sycophancy which is creeping into the French shopping experience – nothing gets my goat (*ça me rend chèvre*, say the French!) quite like being jumped upon by an eager clothes shop employee who, before one has even reached the first rail of polo shirts, enquires if you are looking for “*quelque chose en particulier aujourd’hui?*”.

Those more forgiving than myself would call this common courtesy. I call it professional people-pleasing. The French might say *lèche-bottes* (bootlicker) since there is no direct translation of ‘people-pleaser’, which actually infers a gentler approach.

In my head, I want to reply ‘*Un peu de tranquillité, s’il vous plaît*’, (a little peace, please) but ingrained British politeness makes me blurt: ‘*Non, je regarde un peu, merci*’. (No, I’m just looking, thanks). In short, *à chacun son goût* – slow down and let the French do things their way.

*As a disclaimer, and call me a *lèche-bottes*, but there are exceptions to all of the above examples, notably in the wonderful French tourism industry, in which *France Today* is fully immersed – it is packed with passionate purveyors of pleasure. **FT**

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Eco-tourism and green living in France are endlessly evolving – here we bring you the latest news and developments



Sailing across the Channel

Above: You can now take the adventurous, low-carbon cross-Channel option from Dover to Boulogne-sur-Mer thanks to SailLink

After the ferry, the Shuttle and the Eurostar, there is now a new option for foot passengers and cyclists to cross the English Channel: by sailboat, thanks to a new service from SailLink connecting Boulogne-sur-Mer and Dover:

Adventurers are invited to spend the day aboard Echoes, a 17-metre catamaran designed for 12 passengers, joining the crew – Andrew, Stephanie and Joris – and taking an active part in the sailing on a four- to five-hour Channel crossing, the exact duration depending on weather and wind conditions.

“Today, we have the opportunity to merge the best of modern technology, advanced navigation, safety systems and vessel design with the timeless simplicity of sailing,” says SailLink of its low-carbon Channel crossing. Even passport control is simple, with border authorities coming directly to the pontoon.

● www.sailink.co.uk

BIRD BOOST Since France’s 2018 ban on the neonicotinoid family of pesticides, there has been a small rise in the numbers of some insectivorous bird species, with blackbirds and blackcaps up by 2% to 3%, according to a study by the journal *Environmental Pollution*. Up to 57% of birds in Europe’s agricultural environments have disappeared in the past 40 years.

In brief

A HOT TOPIC

Some 174 municipalities in the Isère department of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes have banned homeowners from lighting fires in open fireplaces, unless they introduce more efficient combustion measures. The move is to “significantly reduce pollutant emissions linked to wood heating”.



TRULY GREEN DINING

Domaine de Beaulieu, at Busnes near Béthune (Nord) – whose restaurant holds a Michelin Green Star – has developed a genuine ecosystem. The estate grows its own herbs, fruit and vegetables (80% of what is cooked comes from its own garden). Water from the manor moat is reused, and as much as possible is composted, including the brasserie napkins.

● ledomainedebeaulieu.fr/en



ORNE OF PLENTY

Bagnoles-de-l’Orne in Orne, Normandy, has won a Platinum Award at the international Green Destinations 2025 conference. “Bagnoles is the first town in France to be promoted to this rank, which is a tremendous opportunity for our department, greatly enhancing its visibility and appeal,” said Conseil départemental president Christophe de Balorre.

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FRANCE

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A CAMPER'S
GUIDE TO THE
REGIONS



**NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE, BRITTANY, PAYS DE LA LOIRE,
OCCITANIE, AUVERGNE-RHÔNE-ALPES,
PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR »**



THE JOY OF CAMPING IN FRANCE

A bird's eye view of Yelloh! Village Le Sérignan Plage in Languedoc; the swimming pool area at the Yelloh! Village Le Sérignan Plage; fun for the kids at Yelloh! Village Les Grands Pins in Gironde



French tourism is in rude health and statistics confirm it. According to provisional figures from INSEE (the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, the body which is responsible for the production and analysis of the country's official statistics), visitor numbers for the 2025 summer season were up 3.7% compared to the 2024 season.

Of course, everyone needs a place to stay when holidaying in the Hexagon, so numbers for tourist accommodation reflect the rise, recording an increase of 9.1m overnight stays compared to 2024, reaching 257.8m overnight stays. This exceeded the historic levels

of the 2023 summer season which hit 249.8m. By far the most popular option for tourists, says INSEE, are campsites: with 124.9m overnight stays in 2025, *les campings* remain the most popular type of accommodation and continue to grow (up 3.2%, or 3.9m more overnight stays than in 2024).

"While domestic customers remain predominant, accounting for more than two-thirds of summer overnight stays in collective tourist accommodation, visitors from other countries continue to drive tourist numbers in 2025," says INSEE. 'Non-resident' customers, who have been very present since the end of

the pandemic, are still a driver for growth: up 6.8% in 2025, or 5.3m more overnight stays than in 2024.

Campsites were more attractive to non-resident customers, rising by 2.4%, which is why our Camping Guide 2026 is so pertinent – this tourism trend is here to stay, with more and more people opting for stays in natural, rural or coastal settings. "Campsites are still the preferred form of accommodation for seaside holidays (68.5m overnight stays in 2025) and account for nearly two-thirds of total coastal visitor numbers," reports INSEE. "This increase in attendance affects the entire coastline of metropolitan France, but is

more pronounced in campsites on the north and west coasts."

One standout figure relates to mountain stays, which are benefiting from an ever-increasing number of non-resident campsite customers, with 22.6m overnight stays.

La Fédération française de camping et de caravaning (FFCC, the French Federation of Camping and Caravanning), a non-profit association for outdoor tourists in France founded in 1938, proudly says: "Camping was the undisputed champion of summer 2025."

WHAT MAKES FRENCH CAMPING SO POPULAR? France is the number one



camping destination in Europe. Driven by customer demand and expectations regarding comfort and facilities, the market has changed drastically in recent years with quality improvements across the board. A major factor for many who choose camping is great value and affordability.

French camping options are impressively diverse. They range from ‘wild camping’ – pitching up with your own tent or camping car; to registered but ‘undeveloped’ camping with basic facilities; and ‘developed’ camping, easily the most popular, with a wide range of accommodation on offer, from wonderfully-equipped

mobile homes and trailers, to luxury chalets, motor homes and quirkier choices such as teepees, beachside cabins and treetop hideaways.

As anyone who has enjoyed a stay on a French ‘developed campsite’ will confirm, this is a very convivial and relaxed option – many people return year after year to the same campsite as they feel so at home there. Some larger campsites feel more like friendly villages with bars, *boulangeries*, restaurants, evening entertainment and boutiques selling locally-made produce and crafts.

For those visiting France *en famille*, camping is a natural choice, with most

French campsites geared up to entertain and amuse youngsters with exceptional swimming pools, water parks and play areas, kids’ clubs and other activities to guarantee a memorable stay for the whole family.

FRENCH CAMPSITE RATINGS AND LABELS

To find the perfect French campsite for your needs, start by swotting up on the various star ratings and labels – relating to site size, facilities, quality and sustainability commitments – that can be awarded.

First, check the all-important star rating, which is attributed by the local authority according to stringent guidelines. As the European Consumer Centre France states: “The conditions governing the classification of French campsites are very strict. For hygienic and environmental reasons, all campsite operators must notify the town hall or the prefecture. They then receive a classification according to a star-rating system, from one to five stars. Criteria such as total surface of the campsite, amenities, pitch size, pitch number and number of toilet facilities belong to the rating system. Prices also generally reflect the number of stars of the campsite, but can vary from one season to another.”

Each category refers to a specific camping experience:

★ One-star campsites

Small campsites, individual shower cubicles with possibly cold water, dish-washing sinks, pitch over 70m². Prices start from €8 per night for a pitch.

★★ Two-star campsites

A reception during the day, individual shower cubicles

with hot water, individual washbasins, amenities for small electrical equipment, pitch over 70m².

★★★ Three-star campsites

Warden attendance 24/7, a reception in two foreign languages including English, tiled floors in washing areas, equipped children’s play areas, a wider range of services (internet access, beverage dispenser...), pitch over 80m². Prices can range from €32 to €40 per night for four people.

★★★★ Four-star

campsites

Private washing cubicles with hot water, dish-washing and clothes-washing sinks with hot water, pitches over 80m², paved roads within the site and food stores on the campsite or close by. Prices can range from €20 to €50 per night for four people.

★★★★★ Five-star

campsites

A reception in three languages including English, swimming pool (this is compulsory), internet access, optional services (such as a spa, massage and tennis) and pitches over 80m².

QUALITÉ TOURISME LABEL

This label – the only one awarded by the French state to tourism professionals for the calibre of their welcome and services – ensures quality stays for guests, from cleanliness to adapted services. However, it will be replaced by December 31, 2026 by the new ‘Destination d’excellence’ label.

According to the French government website: “It takes over the essentials of the Qualité Tourisme system, in particular the guarantee of a high level of quality in terms of hospitality and raises the bar in terms of eco-responsibility and »

information for the disabled on the accessibility of the services on offer. It is managed by Atout France.”

TOURISME & HANDICAP LABEL

This label and symbol guarantee welcome services, accessibility and comfort for everyone across a wide range of establishments, including accommodation, tourist offices, leisure facilities, museums and much more. It is a reliable indication of a site’s accessibility, taking into account four types of impairments: motor, visual, auditory and mental.

CAMPING QUALITÉ LABEL

Another marker is the Camping Qualité badge, strictly objective criteria for the awarding of which were first introduced back in 1999. “Camping Qualité represents a guide for continuous improvement but also and above all, the secret to creating holidays where nothing is left to chance. For you, it is an official badge which will allow you to be sure that you are choosing quality,” says the Camping Qualité organisation.

A campsite can attain the badge regardless of location or star category. “It’s hard to believe that so many different campsites can comply with identical quality standards,” adds Camping Qualité. “That they can is thanks to the professionalism of their managers and the respect they have for you. They are committed to the Camping Qualité approach and, in certain cases, have been for many years. They all share the same passion, wherever the location of their campsite, the number of pitches, the star category or whether they are a private or municipal concern. They



Dining en famille at the restaurant Lou Pas d’Oc at Yelloh! Village Le Sérignan Plage in the Hérault department

must all comply with a grid of criteria that are strictly identical for all.”

The six criteria for awarding the label are :

- ✓ **A warm welcome**
- ✓ **Immaculate cleanliness**
- ✓ **Accurate and correct information**
- ✓ **Well-maintained and private pitches**
- ✓ **Care and respect for the environment**
- ✓ **An eco-friendly policy**

“Each point is regularly checked in independent inspections, for the purposes of perfectionism, objectivity and transparency,” they say. “Quality means nothing unless is it monitored and not subject to self-checks.”

You can read more about Camping Qualité’s ethos and its affiliated campsites (which currently number about 300) at campingqualite.com/en.

CLEF VERTE (GREEN KEY) LABEL

A sustainability label for tourism accommodation and restaurants first developed in France in 1998, this is awarded by Teragir, a non-profit organisation recognised as being in the public interest, which was founded in 1983. The Clef Verte label is the leading eco-label for tourist establishments in France, both in terms of the number of establishments awarded the label and its long history.

Criteria for qualification are:

Respect for the land – the Green Key label’s criteria require respect for nature and people, in particular by controlling water and energy consumption and managing waste in an environmentally-friendly way, as well as providing leisure activities that do not harm nature and

promoting the region’s various natural assets and stakeholders.

The pleasure of sustainable tourism – choosing a Clef Verte establishment does not mean giving up pleasure or comfort; quite the contrary! They offer a healthier, more natural living environment, raise holidaymakers’ awareness and encourage those who wish to do their bit for more environmentally-friendly holidays and more responsible travel.

At the same price – the Green Key label doesn’t mean higher prices. It applies to all categories and all types of restaurant and accommodation: camping or nature *gîtes*, eco-friendly hotels, youth hostels or responsible B&Bs, tourist residences or sustainable vacation villages.

At time of going to press in January 2026, there are 323 campsites with the Clef Verte

label, searchable at the website (French only): www.laclefverte.org. Click on *Etablissements* at the top of the page then use the drop-down menu to tick *Campings*. All those campsites with the label then appear, both in a list and on a map to the right. You can then further hone your search via the *Destination* drop-down menu, before selecting *Campagne* (Countryside), *Mer* (Seaside), *Montagne* (Mountain) or *Ville* (Town) according to preference.

WHERE WILL YOU GO CAMPING?

Now that you know how to assess the quality of a campsite, which region will you pick to go camping in?

As always when compiling our Camping Guide, choosing ‘the best’ region is subjective – readers will already have their personal favourites and, of course,

their budget and travel access will also inform their choice. What we aim to do here is present a brief overview of the most popular French camping regions and what they offer in terms of activities, culture, history and day trips for anyone staying at a campsite. We also picture some of the campsites you can book within these regions. Happy camping!

PAYS DE LA LOIRE



This region in western France comprises the departments of Loire-Atlantique, Maine-et-Loire, Mayenne, Sarthe and Vendée (which is the French department with the largest volume of campsites). The regional capital is Nantes.

Popular for its blend of culture, history and nature, featuring Atlantic beaches, châteaux, historic towns >>

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From top: Bel Air, a 5-star campsite in Les Sables d’Olonne, Vendée; the wellbeing space at Camping Les Biches in Saint-Hilaire-de-Riez

In the heart of the pine forest the adventure begins

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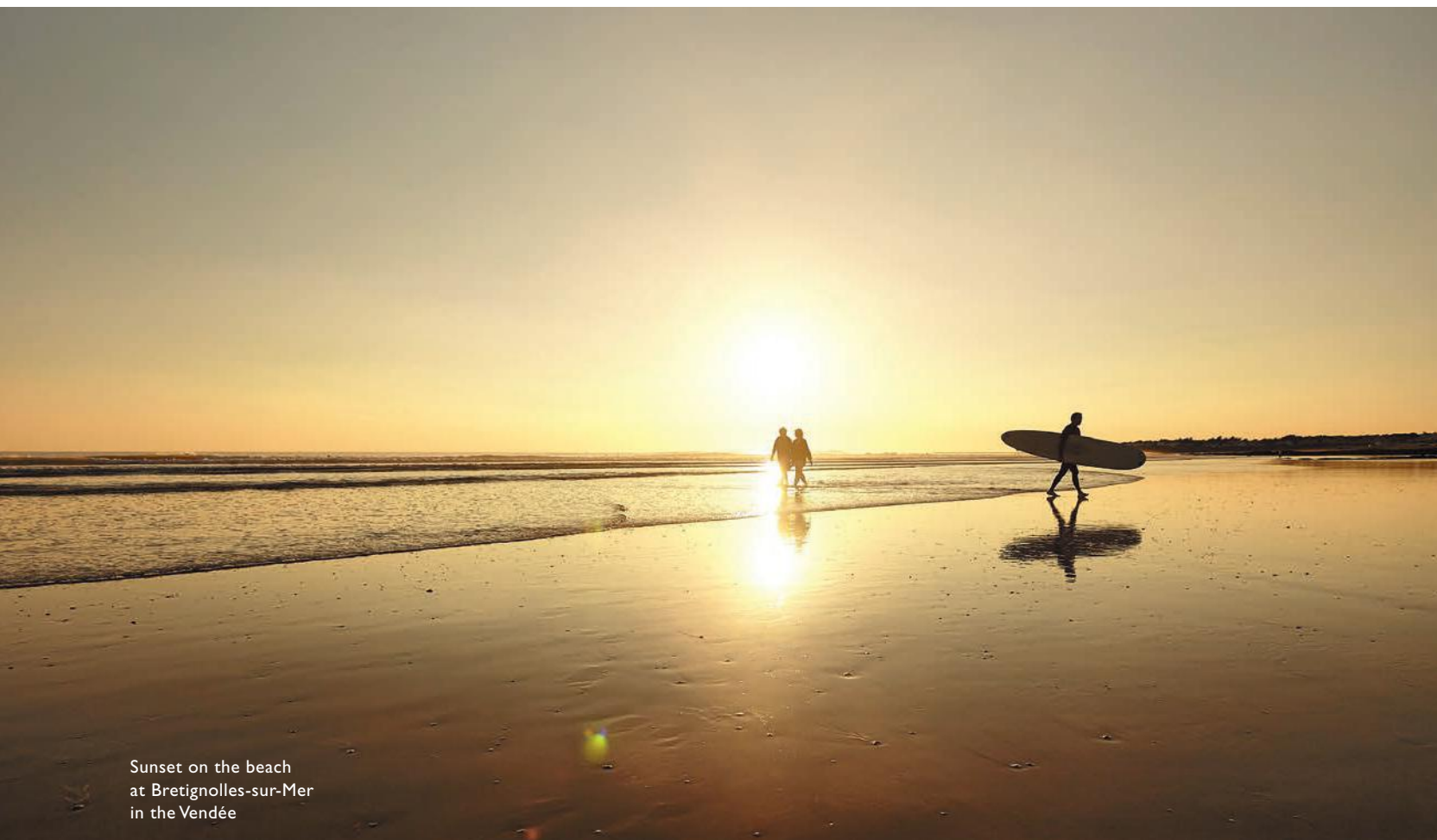
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Sunset on the beach
at Bretignolles-sur-Mer
in the Vendée

and vineyards, Pays de la Loire is a fabulous camping destination. Its key attractions include the world-renowned, epic-scale theme park Puy du Fou, the Château d'Angers, the historical Plantagenet city of Le Mans (don't miss La Nuit des Chimères, its magical summer light show) and many family-friendly seaside resorts such as La Baule – which is perfect for a thalssotherapy break.

The Vendée coastline, an extensive ribbon of sand flanked by dunes, pine forests and the Vélodyssée cycle route, features great resorts such as Saint-Jean-de-Monts and Les Sables-d'Olonne (departure point for the Vendée Globe sailing race every four years), and cute fishing villages such as Saint-Gilles-Croix-de-Vie, which is paradise for sardine-loving foodies. Noirmoutier and Île d'Yeu are two of the region's off-shore gems.

IMAGE © ALEXANDRE LAMOUREUX

Cyclists can pootle along the Loire à Vélo bike route, taking in sites such as the majestic Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, steeped in 900 years of history and, further west, Saumur, with its perched castle, Cadre Noir equestrian performance centre and the surrounding troglodytic villages carved into the stone. Sample local wines Muscadet, Saumur, Savennières and Jasnières and meet the amazing mechanical creations of Nantes' Machines of the Isle.

● **Pays de la Loire tourist board**


www.enpaysdelaloire.com

BRITTANY




Brittany, on France's northwestern tip, provides

unique camping experiences just a short ferry trip from the UK. Here are some ideas for exploring seaside »



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A jousting show at Orangerie de Lanniron in Quimper

delights, natural wonders and historic urban intrigue in this fantastically rich and rugged region.

Myth and mystery abound in rural Brittany. The forest of Brocéliande is the cradle of King Arthur's tales and home to unspoilt countryside. You can explore the forest trails *en famille* on foot, bike or horseback, using the 200 or so signposted routes for guidance. For more history,

head to the 1,000-year-old fortress town of Fougères in Ille-et-Vilaine, where the epic defensive complex of the castle is a sight to behold, or Carnac, where you will marvel at fields of ancient *menhirs* (standing stones).

Further coastal charm is found along the Pink Granite coast and island gems Belle-Île-en-Mer and Bréhat, while an exceptional destination is the







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IMAGES © ORANGERIE DE LANNIRON/YELLOH VILLAGE

From top: The bar at Yelloh! Village Les Mouettes in Carantec; enjoy a 5-star getaway at Yelloh! Village Mané Guernehué in Baden

picturesque village of Erquy, with its beautiful beach nestled in the heart of Côtes-d'Armor. Elsewhere, villages such as Rochefort-en-Terre – voted France's favourite village in 2016 – and riverside beauty Dinan are adorable.

Quiberon Peninsula, the Gulf of Morbihan, the Crozon peninsula... all provide impressive coastal options.

Brittany's capital, Rennes, is an historic gem packed with superb produce markets and cultural events. With its cobbled streets, half-timbered houses and restful green spaces, it's perfect for a day out. Quimper, too, is a lovely base for a camping break, with floral bridges over the Odet and the Gothic Cathédrale Saint-Corentin.

Those campers arriving from the UK via the ferry at Saint-Malo should stop awhile among the granite ramparts and explore the

quaint streets, lovely boutiques and fantastic seafood restaurants.

● **Brittany tourist board**
www.brittanytourism.com

NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE



This is a massive region stretching from Limousin down to the Pays Basque, with countless holiday gems on offer via a diverse array of landscapes both rural and coastal, as well as beautiful villages and cultured towns and cities... not to mention iconic food and wine.

The mighty Nouvelle-Aquitaine region – the largest in France – boasts no fewer than 12 departments: Charente, Charente-Maritime, Corrèze, Creuse, Deux-Sèvres, Dordogne, Gironde, Haute-Vienne, Landes, Lot-et-Garonne, Pyrénées-Atlantiques and Vienne >>

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An incomparable atmosphere emanates from this place, to be discovered, which has received numerous distinctions.

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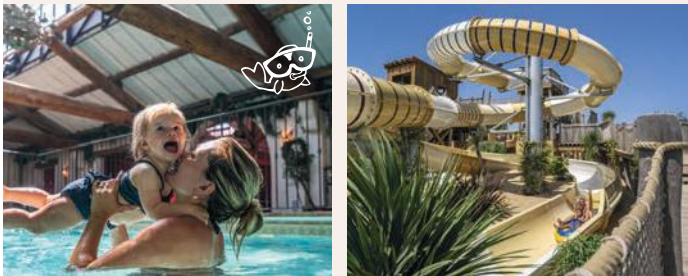
Fun for all the family at Yelloh! Village Les Grands Pins

– which cover a whopping one eighth of the country's land mass. This points to a truly diverse set of tourism attractions to suit all tastes.

Spanning the southwest of the Hexagon, it boasts the cream of Francophile hotspots, such as Saint-Émilien and Bordeaux (the region's capital), Biarritz and the Basque Country, Arcachon, La Rochelle, Île de Ré, Poitiers, the Dordogne Valley and Dordogne classics

such as Bergerac and Sarlat-la-Canéda, Angoulême, Cognac country, the Landes Atlantic coast, Limoges and the Limousin.

Such epic proportions bring a rich line-up of *paysages* to discover: lush forests, picture-postcard islands, sandy beaches, magnificent mountains and serene lakes mean that campers really are spoilt for choice. For culture vultures and history fans, there are >>



Swim and unwind at Yelloh! Village Les Grands Pins

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Yelloh! Village Les Grands Pins has amenities such as a *boulangerie*

plenty of great cities to explore, from picturesque riverside Bayonne with its historic buildings, cobbled streets, iconic ham and enormous annual fête (this year's takes place from July 15-19), to beautiful Poitiers, just 20 minutes from hi-tech theme park Futuroscope – an absolute must-visit for

families camping in the area. Charente-Maritime, with its long sandy beaches and idyllic seaside resorts, is ideal for family breaks – spend the day exploring the beautiful, historic port of La Rochelle, then pop over to the charming Île de Ré, perfect for a relaxing bike ride and a spot of oyster tasting.

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Relaxing over a drink or a bite to eat at Yelloh! Village Les Grands Pins

For a water-based sojourn with a difference, head inland to the Deux-Sèvres department, home to the Marais Poitevin, a network of tranquil waterways to be explored by boat – find a port and pier in places such as Coulon or La Garette. Children love to discover the wonders of prehistory and

the Dordogne Valley is blessed with some fine relics. Lascaux Cave, with its astonishing paintings, is located near the village of Montignac in the Dordogne. Follow the snaking path of the mighty river – perhaps enjoying a canoe trip near La Roque-Gageac – and you will also spot perched riverside >>



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Île de Ré

castles and troglodyte houses carved into the sheer rock faces.

Enjoy a visit to pretty Sarlat-la-Canéda on market day and try some of its famous goose and duck dishes. Meanwhile, Bergerac is another dreamy Périgord town, a labyrinth of charming streets and cute squares – stop and say *bonjour* to the statue of Cyrano de Bergerac!

Wine lovers should head to the Gironde, home to many world-famous wines. Among the must-see villages is Saint-Émilion, home to the first vineyard listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, while the departmental capital is Bordeaux, a beautiful, elegant city which is home to the emblematic Cité du Vin museum – essential viewing for wine lovers.

Over in the Landes, you'll find the pine Forêt des Landes, the largest in Europe with plenty of wonderful campsites, from big, family-friendly affairs to smaller, more intimate hideaways; or venture into the rolling hills and sunflower fields of Lot-et-Garonne – a department dotted with *bastides* and castles and a great river tourism scene.

Nestling up against the Spanish border you'll find the Pyrénées-Atlantiques (home to classy and historic Pau, with its spectacular views of the Pyrenees), offering holidaymakers everything from hiking in the mountains to relaxing by the coast (Biarritz!) to exploring the many pretty villages in Béarn and Pays Basque.

Limousin, to the north of Nouvelle-Aquitaine, is one of the most sparsely populated



areas of France and the leisurely tourist will enjoy meandering through its perfectly preserved medieval towns and villages. Original Plus Beau Village Collonges-la-Rouge, with its red sandstone buildings, is a sight to behold – Mortemart and Turenne are also on the Plus Beaux list.

If it's culture you're after, departmental capital Limoges is famous as a centre for fine porcelain (it remains the gold standard for tableware) and enamelware. It also boasts a lovely old medieval centre and its train station is among the prettiest in the whole of France, while Saint-Étienne cathedral is a Gothic gem remarkable for its stained-glass windows and gargoyles.

● **Nouvelle-Aquitaine**
tourist board
www.nouvelle-aquitaine-tourisme.com/en

IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

OCCITANIE



Comprised of the former regions of Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées, Occitanie is blessed with a wide variety of stunning destinations. Steeped in history, heritage and culture, it boasts the best of the sea, mountain, town and country.

This is the second largest region in France, so selecting places to visit on a day trip from your campsite in Occitanie requires a plan, such is the slew of options. How about the big ticket unmissables? History lovers should not miss the Cité Médiévale de Carcassonne, a citadel built in the 12th century and listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1997. Marvel at its 52 towers and ramparts as you >>



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IMAGES © SHUTTERSTOCK/YELLOHVILLAGE

Fun on toboggans at Yelloh! Village Le Sérignan Plage

approach before exploring the olde worlde streets and alleys where elegant boutiques, bars and restaurants complete a magical visitor experience.

Next is the majestic aqueduct, Pont du Gard, located half an hour from historic Nîmes in the Gard. The most-visited ancient monument in France, it is a lovely spot for family bathing (it has a supervised play area and beach).

For food and history lovers, a visit to the glorious, bustling and friendly 'pink city' of Toulouse should be on everyone's Occitanie wish-list. Don't miss the Saint-Sernin Basilica and the Jacobin Convent, a gem of southern French Gothic architecture, and enjoy a cassoulet lunch on the iconic Place du Capitole.

For youngsters, a trip to the 2,500m² Cité de l'Espace is the next best thing to going into space.

If exploring nature is your thing on holiday, the Gorges du Tarn (the Tarn river canyon) is hard to beat. Heading south, Occitanie's coastline is a true camper's paradise, with endless sandy beaches (such as the glorious Sérignan plage) and lovely Mediterranean ports, few more vibrant and characterful than Sète, with its canals, quays and pretty little squares.

Another unmissable destination for families holidaying on the coast of the former Languedoc-Roussillon is Sigean safari park, between Narbonne and Perpignan in Aude, which covers around 300 hectares and is home to about 3,800 animals and 160 species.

Meanwhile, the Camargue is another wildlife haven, located between the Mediterranean and the Rhône delta. It is packed with exceptional, multi-coloured biodiversity >>



Yelloh! Village Le Sérignan Plage is ideal for a family holiday



A fishing cabin at Yelloh! Village Le Sérignan Plage



Bathing and kayaking at Pont d'Arc in Ardèche

AUVERGNE-RHÔNE-ALPES



To call the landscapes of this region – which is home

to Auvergne's chain of volcanic mountains and the mighty Alps – impressive is a real understatement.

In terms of natural wonders, the eye-pleasing, natural stone arch the Pont d'Arc, in Ardèche, is hard to beat. The department is a wonderful destination for camping, with lots of gorgeous riverside idylls (grab a kayak or canoe and explore the scenery from the water).

Elsewhere, Mont Blanc is Europe's highest point and the winter Alpine ski options are well known. But come summertime when campsites are calling you, high-altitude resorts switch to biking and hiking mode, with excellent facilities and swathes of flower-filled meadows and

including its famous black bulls, white horses and pink flamingos.

Finally, the Hautes-Pyrénées, Occitanie's most westerly, mountainous department, is superb for summertime campers and hikers – choose from gentle routes through the rolling

foothills and plains, or the waymarked trails of the Louron valley, Gavarnie and Grand Tourmalet. You can see fabulous flora and fauna as you explore on foot, by bike or on horseback.

The *très chic* resort of Saint-Lary is an authentic Pyrenean village with a

lively medieval centre and all kinds of family-friendly activities on offer, from climbing to archery to ice skating.

- **Occitanie tourist board**
www.visit-occitanie.com/en
- **Hautes-Pyrénées tourist board**
www.pyrenees-holiday.com

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The emerald waters of La Paloma beach in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat

grassy slopes to explore. For a little R&R or some local wine tasting, head to the charming spa towns of Évian and Thonon and the delightful Côtes du Rhône vineyards, which stretch from Vienne to Tournon.

Any list of great places to visit in this region should include France's unofficial capital of gastronomy, Lyon, located at the meeting point of the Rhône and Saône rivers. Explore Vieux Lyon's history of silk-making, network of *traboules* (shortcuts linking streets through one or more buildings) and the iconic Place Bellecour, with its mighty equestrian statue of Louis XIV, before indulging in the city's legendarily hearty *bouchon* gastronomy.

Auvergne's lush greenery is unmatched and it has many superb natural regional parks. At a height of 1,465m, Puy de Dôme overlooks a range of 80

volcanoes that make up the Chaîne des Puys – you can reach the top in just 15 minutes aboard the scenic Panoramique des Dômes train. The Rhône-Alpes, meanwhile, boasts picture-postcard Lake Geneva and Lake Annecy, providing wonderful areas for campers to enjoy a summer break with a spot of boating, swimming, windsurfing and plenty of other watersports to enjoy besides.

And for campers who enjoy visiting cities for the day, the region is blessed. Well worth taking in are Saint-Étienne and Grenoble, the historic city of Clermont-Ferrand (don't miss the fantastic Vulcania theme park, a kids' favourite) and pretty Le Puy-en-Velay, which is the prefecture of the Haute-Loire department.

● **Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes tourist board**

www.auvergnerrhonealpes-tourisme.com/en

PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR



Now formally known as **Région Sud, PACA**

epitomises all the joys of sunny southern French camping thanks to its winning combination of great weather, glitzy Riviera resorts, fine museums, beach coves and an idyllic hinterland.

With its historic hilltop villages such as Mougins, Saint-Paul de Vence, Gourdon and Èze, scented lavender fields all around (pop to villages such as Sault) and the sparkling Mediterranean coastline with its elegant resorts and beautiful beaches (Cannes! Antibes! Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat!), Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur really is holiday heaven on earth.

In peak season it gets very busy so be sure to book your campsite well ahead of

time. Head inland for a little peace away from the summertime throng on the coast: families with a passion for the outdoors should head to the Gorges du Verdon, France's answer to the Grand Canyon. Accessed via a breathtaking corniche road around the rim of the gorge, this area of outstanding beauty is a haven for intrepid hikers and has lots of safe swimming and canoeing.

Love a little history? Check out the Roman ruins in Arles (Bouches-du-Rhône) or culturally rich Avignon (Vaucluse), then explore the region's two major cities, Marseille and Nice, before taking your pick of small but perfectly formed coastal gems such as Bormes-les-Mimosas and Saint-Tropez (both in the Var department).

● **Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur tourist board**

provence-alpes-cotedazur.com/en **FT**

THE INNOCENT FLIRT

A seaside stranger offers **Kristin** a poetic perspective on French accents



BY KRISTIN
ESPINASSE

The French love to *flâner*, *glâner* and *flirter*, and on a crisp morning recently I experienced all three while chatting beneath a parasol pine, blocks from the sea.

I was returning from my walk when I noticed the tree-cutters had moved on. There, where their *camions* had been parked, lay a sprinkling of branches – perfectly sized for kindling. After collecting a few handfuls, I straightened up, easing the kink in my back.

A little farther along the *trottoir*, I saw a man walking toward me. The sun was rising higher now, the crisp air turning mild. As he shed his coat, I smiled and said, “*Oui, ça commence à chauffer!*” “*Rassurez-vous,*” he teased, smiling back. “*Je n’enlève pas plus que ça!*”

His comment might have been a bit *déplacé*. But my creep-o-meter immediately registered *assez innocent* on its scale of *louche*, *dangereux*, and hurry, run for your life! Besides, he was at least twice my age and I’m 58. Well... maybe he wasn’t that old. As he approached, I noticed his vibrant smile and longish silver locks.

“*Vous avez un accent charmant!*” he began. “*Oh, ce n’est pas terrible,*” I answered automatically. We were standing in front of Le Cosmos, a maze of apartment buildings nestled among the freshly trimmed pines. The birds had already returned to the branches, and I could

“THE BIRDS HAD RETURNED TO THE BRANCHES, AND I COULD BARELY HEAR MONSIEUR ABOVE THEIR CHEERFUL RACKET. HE ASKED ME A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT MYSELF...”

barely hear Monsieur above their cheerful racket. He asked me a few questions about myself: where I was from (*Amérique*), where exactly (*le sud-ouest*), how I liked France (I love it), and how long I had lived here (32 years).

A POETIC LESSON

In return he shared a few things about himself: his name (Arthur), his favourite film (*À l’Est d’Eden* – “*Il faut le voir!*”), his nationality (*Arménien*) and even his hobby (*astronomie* – fitting, given we stood in front of Le Cosmos).

Our conversation ended with a gentle scolding from Arthur. “I gave you a compliment on your accent, but you didn’t accept it. Music is the highest art – what is an accent if not music?”

I thanked Arthur for the most poetic lesson on perception. There is no such thing as a false note when it comes to French accents. The next time I open my mouth, I’ll smile as the symphony begins – and I’ll think of Arthur, the innocent flirt who made me feel good about my French. **FT**

Below: Le Cosmos, where Kristin met her flirty astronomer; inset, a poster for *East of Eden*, starring James Dean



IMAGES © KRISTIN ESPINASSE

FRENCH VOCABULARY

FLÂNER = to stroll, to wander

GLÂNER = to gather, to glean

FLIRTER = to flirt

LE CAMION = truck

LE TROTTOIR = sidewalk, pavement

ÇA COMMENCE À CHAUFFER = It’s starting to get hot

RASSUREZ-VOUS. JE N’ENLÈVE PAS PLUS QUE ÇA = Don’t worry. I’m not taking any more than that off

DÉPLACÉ = inappropriate, out of place

ASSEZ INNOCENT = quite harmless

LOUCHE = shady

DANGEREUX = dangerous

VOUS AVEZ UN ACCENT CHARMANT = You have a charming accent

OH, CE N’EST PAS TERRIBLE = Oh, it’s not terrible

AMÉRIQUE = America

LE SUD-OUEST = the Southwest

À L’EST D’EDEN = East of Eden

IL FAUT LE VOIR = You must see it

ARMÉNIEN = Armenian

ASTRONOMIE = astronomy

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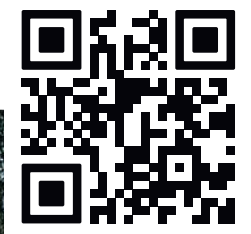
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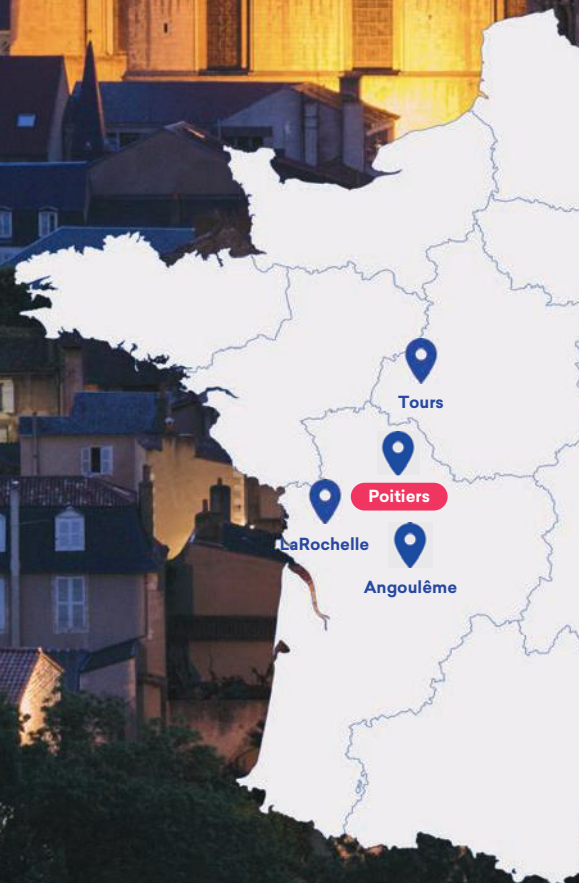
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