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PDF



# FRANCE'S BEST TRIPS

**39** AMAZING  
ROAD TRIPS



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# FRANCE'S BEST TRIPS

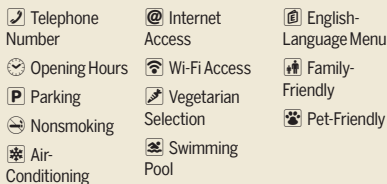
**39** AMAZING  
ROAD TRIPS

This edition written and researched by

**Oliver Berry**

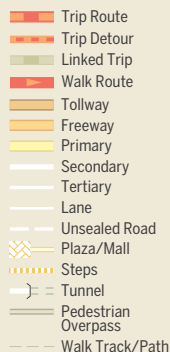
**Stuart Butler, Jean-Bernard Carillet, Gregor Clark,  
Donna Wheeler, Nicola Williams**

## SYMBOLS IN THIS BOOK



## MAP LEGEND

### Routes



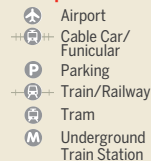
### Boundaries



### Population



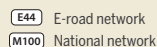
### Transport



### Trips



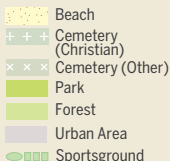
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### Hydrography



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# Classic Trips

Look out for the Classic Trips stamp on our favourite routes in this book.

<b>1</b>	<b>Essential France</b> .....	<b>2 Weeks</b>	39
<b>5</b>	<b>Champagne Taster</b> .....	<b>3 Days</b>	75
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**Provence** Rolling fields of lavender (Trip 22)

# WELCOME TO FRANCE

Iconic monuments, island abbeys, fabulous food, world-class wines – there are so many reasons to plan your very own French voyage.

Whether you're planning on cruising the corniches of the French Riviera, getting lost among the snowcapped Alps or tasting your way around Champagne's hallowed vineyards, this is a nation that's made for road trips. In this book, we've put together 39 unforgettable routes that will plunge you straight into France's heart and soul.

There's a trip for everyone here: family travellers, history buffs, culinary connoisseurs and outdoors adventurers. And if you've only got time for one trip, why not make it one of our 10 Classic Trips, which take you to the very best France has to offer. Turn the page for more.

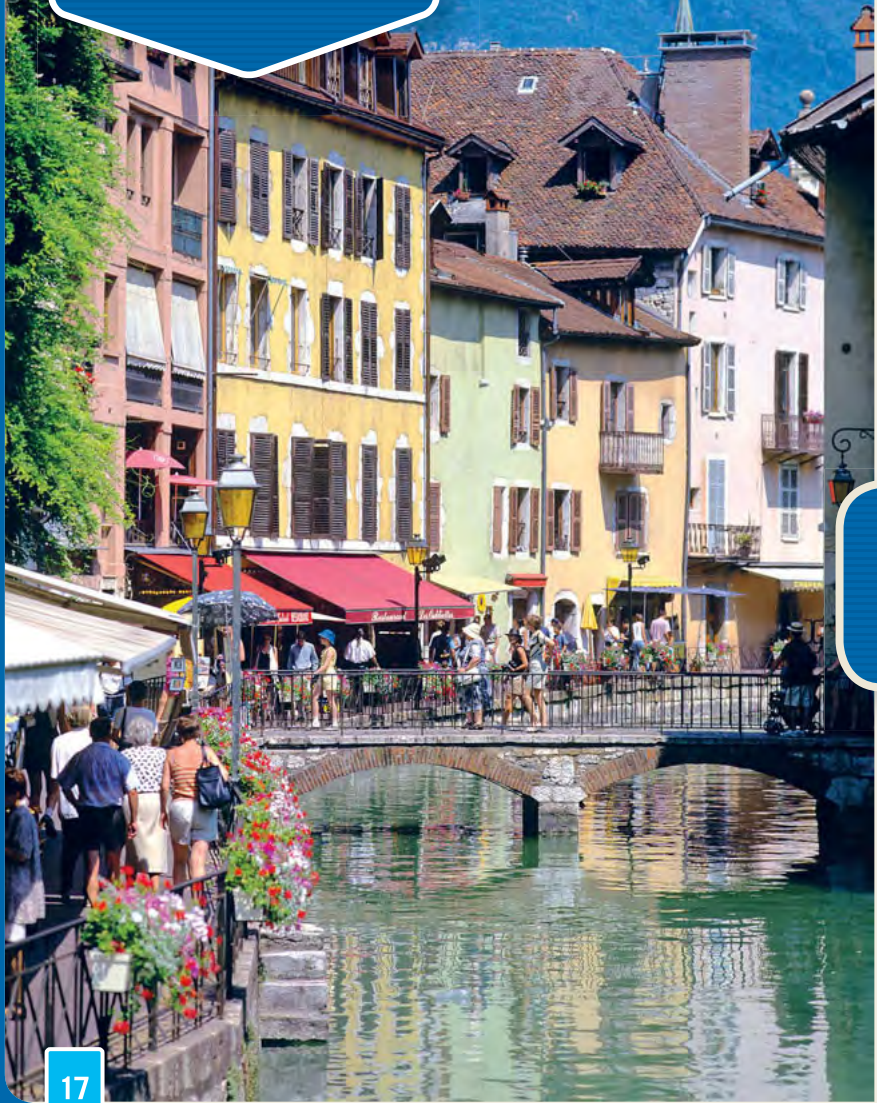
Buckle up, and bon voyage – you're in for quite a ride.





# FRANCE

## *Classic Trips*





9

## What Is a Classic Trip?

All the trips in this book show you the best of France, but we've chosen 10 as our all-time favourites. These are our Classic Trips – the ones that lead you to the best of the iconic sights, the top activities and the unique French experiences. Turn the page to see the map, and look out for the Classic Trip stamp throughout the book.

### 17 Alpine Adventure

Wander the town of Annecy alongside geranium-strewn houses and romantic canals

### 9 D-Day's Beaches

Caen's Mémorial – Un Musée pour la Paix remembers those who died in WWII

### 7 Unesco Treasures

Sunset over Avignon and its Unesco-listed Palais des Papes

RICHARD SUSANTO/GETTY IMAGES ©



7

9

# FRANCE

## Classic Trips

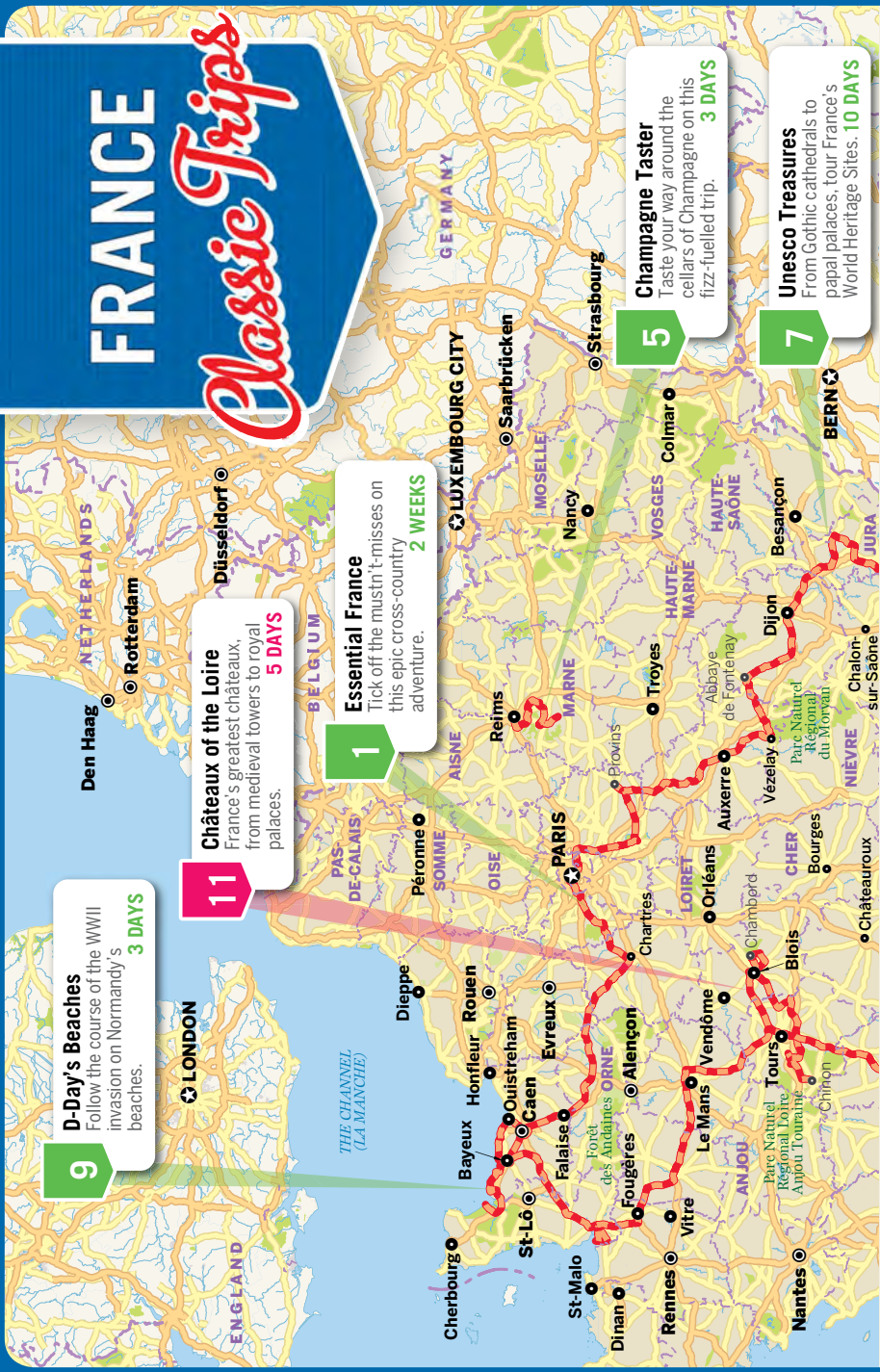
**9** **D-Day's Beaches**  
Follow the course of the WWII invasion on Normandy's beaches. **3 DAYS**

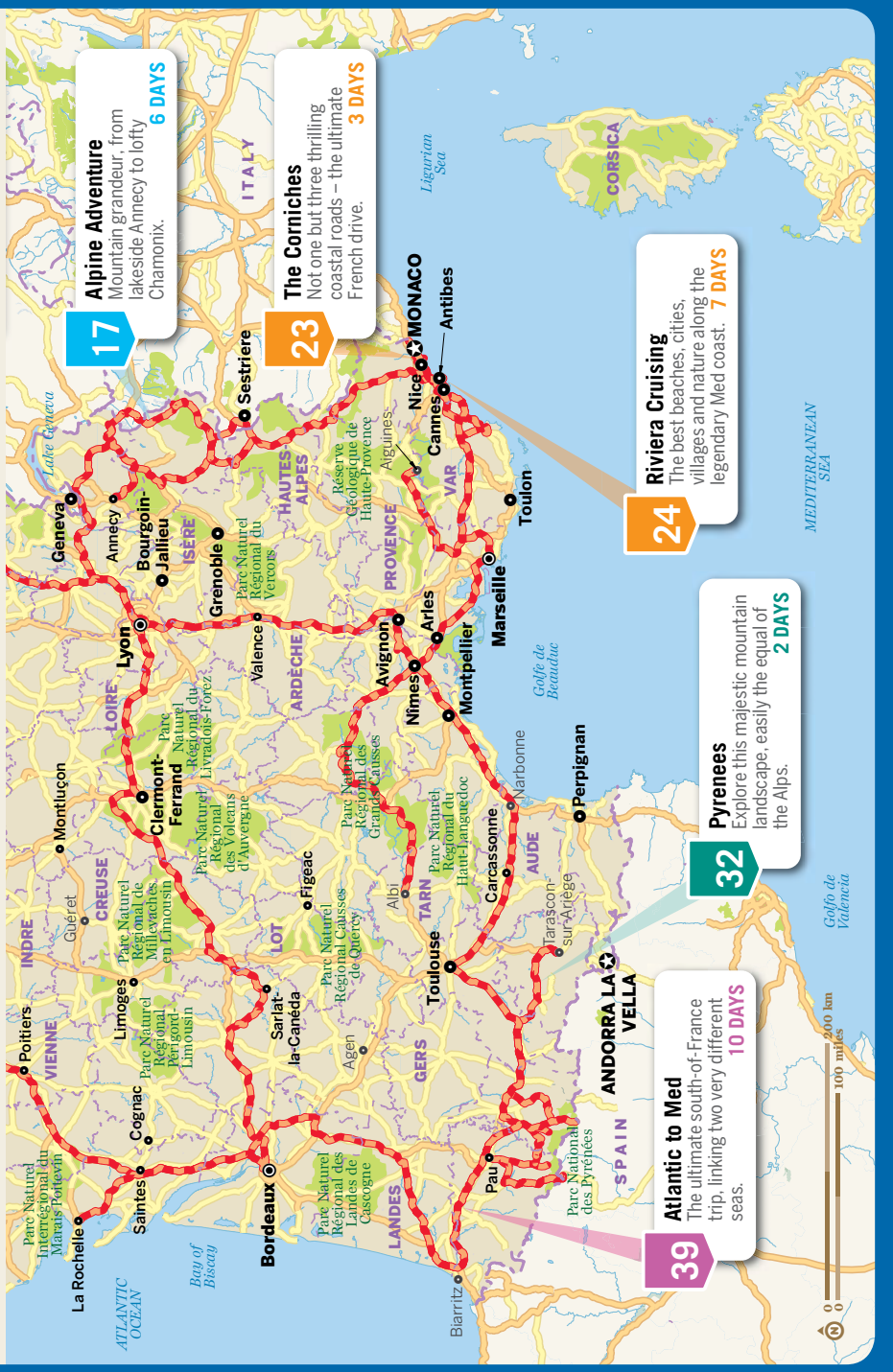
**11** **Châteaux of the Loire**  
France's greatest châteaux, from medieval towers to royal palaces. **5 DAYS**

**1** **Essential France**  
Tick off the mustn't-misses on this epic cross-country adventure. **2 WEEKS**

**5** **Champagne Taster**  
Taste your way around the cellars of Champagne on this fizz-fuelled trip. **3 DAYS**

**7** **Unesco Treasures**  
From Gothic cathedrals to papal palaces, tour France's World Heritage Sites. **10 DAYS**





**17 Alpine Adventure**

Mountain grandeur, from lakeside Annecy to lofty Chamoniex.

**6 DAYS**

**23 The Corniches**

Not one but three thrilling coastal roads – the ultimate French drive.

**3 DAYS**

**24 Riviera Cruising**

The best beaches, cities, villages and nature along the legendary Med coast.

**7 DAYS**

**32 Pyrenees**

Explore this majestic mountain landscape, easily the equal of the Alps.

**2 DAYS**

**39 Atlantic to Med**

The ultimate south-of-France trip, linking two very different seas.

**10 DAYS**



France's best sights and experiences, and the road trips that will take you there.

# FRANCE

## HIGHLIGHTS



### Paris

What is there to say about the City of Light that hasn't been said a thousand times before? Quite simply, this is one of the world's essential cities: sexy, suave, sophisticated and more than a little snooty. There's a lifetime of experiences here, from the treasures of the Louvre to the cafes of Montmartre – but you'll need nerves of steel to brave the traffic.

TRIPS **1** **7**





Paris The Eiffel Tower and Seine River



## HIGHLIGHTS



**Vézère Valley** Prehistoric cave art in the Grotte de Lascaux

## Vézère Valley

Prehistoric people left an astonishing legacy of paintings and sculptures in the caves of the Vézère Valley. These artworks provide a glimpse into the lives of our ancient ancestors – but opinion is divided on what purpose they served. Were they sacred works imbued with magical significance, or simply prehistoric posters? The truth is, no one knows. Decide for yourself on **Trip 36: Cave Art of the Vézère Valley**.

TRIP **36**

## Mont St-Michel

Perched on an island and connected to the Norman coast by a causeway, this 11th-century abbey is one of France's most recognisable sights.

Crowned by spires, ringed by ramparts and thronged by crowds, it looks like it's fallen from the pages of a fairy tale. It's a long climb to the top, but the views are worth every step.

We've linked it with other unmissable sights in **Trip 1: Essential France**.

TRIP **1**

## D-Day Beaches

On 6 June 1944 the largest invasion the world has ever seen stormed ashore on the beaches of Normandy. Now known as D-Day, this audacious assault marked the turning point of WWII, and on **Trip 9: D-Day's Beaches**, you'll see many reminders of the fateful campaign – from the forbidding guns of Longues-sur-Mer to the moving cemetery above Omaha Beach.

TRIP **9**



Pyrenees Hairpin-bend along a country road

## BEST ROADS FOR DRIVING

**The Three Corniches** Cliff roads, sparkling seas, the drive of a lifetime. **Trip** 23

**Gorges du Tarn** Drive through a dramatic ravine in the Cévennes hills. **Trip** 29

**Route des Vins d'Alsace** Meander among vines with views of the Vosges. **Trip** 6

**Col de l'Iseran** Brave the Alps' highest road pass. **Trip** 17

**The Lot Valley** Cruise limestone cliffs beside the Lot River. **Trip** 38

## Pyrenees

With their lofty passes and wide-open skies, the Pyrenees have the wow factor. Running along the Franco-Spanish border, they're home to some of the nation's wildest landscapes, and some of its hairiest roads – although the closest you'll get to a traffic jam here is getting stuck behind a herd of cows. Take **Trip 32: Pyrenees** through quiet valleys, traditional villages and mountain-top observatories.

**TRIP** 32



## HIGHLIGHTS



French Riviera The port and old town at Cannes (Trip 24)

## French Riviera

If it's a top-down, open-road, wind-in-your-hair drive you're after, there's only one corner of France that hits the mark, and that's the flashy Riviera. Synonymous with glitz and glamour since the 19th century, it's still one of Europe's most fashionable spots. **Trip 24: Riviera Cruising** twists through hilltop towns and hairpin-bend roads – just remember to pack a camera and a pair of shades.

**TRIPS** 23 24

### BEST TOWNS FOR WINE-LOVERS

**Beaune** The heart and soul of Burgundy wine. **Trip 15**

**St-Émilion** Winemakers outnumber residents in this honey-stoned town. **Trip 39**

**Bergerac** Lesser-known vintages on the edge of the Dordogne. **Trip 35**

**Épernay** Tour the cellars of Champagne's classic brands. **Trip 5**

**Colmar** Sip Alsatian wines with a view of the canals. **Trip 6**



HIGHLIGHTS



Hilltop villages Dusk over Gordes (Trip 22)



**Châteaux of the Loire** Lavish Château de Chambord (Trip 11)

## Hilltop Villages

From red-roofed hamlets to hillside hideaways, France's *villages perchés* will be a highlight of your trip. Most are medieval, and replete with flower-filled lanes, hidden courtyards and quiet squares. Life ticks along at a snail's pace, and there's nowhere better to settle in for a leisurely lunch.

**Trip 22: Lavender Route** travels through some of Provence's prettiest.

**TRIPS** 6 19 22 37

## Châteaux of the Loire

For sky's-the-limit extravagance, don't miss **Trip 11: Châteaux of the Loire**. Constructed by France's aristocratic elite between the 15th and 17th centuries, these lavish mansions were designed to show off their owners' wealth – something they manage to achieve in spectacular fashion. Chambord's the jewel in the crown, but there are many more to visit.

**TRIPS** 7 11

## Champagne Vineyards

Let's face it – celebrations wouldn't be the same without a bottle of bubbly. The world's most exclusive tiple is produced on a handful of Champagne vineyards, many of which offer tours and the chance to taste the fruits of their labour. **Trip 5: Champagne Taster** takes in tiny family producers as well as big-name châteaux around Épernay and Reims.

**TRIP** 5



## The Camargue

Sprawling across the western edge of Provence, this huge natural wetland is a paradise for nature-lovers, with its population of seabirds, wild horses and pink flamingos. **Trip 28: The Camargue** takes a leisurely wander along the back roads, with plenty of time factored in along the way to immerse yourself in the unique cowboy culture.

TRIP **28**

## Brittany's Coastline

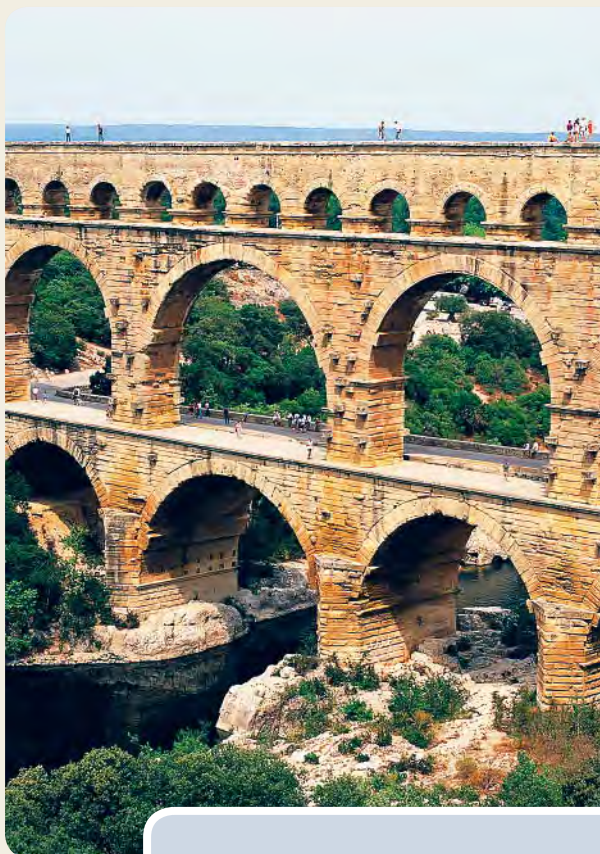
Golden beaches, surf-battered cliffs, quiet creeks, lonely lighthouses – **Trip 10: Breton Coast** is one long parade of postcard views. Some stretches of the coastline are busy, others feel wonderfully wild and empty – so plan your route, pack a decent map and just hit the Breton road.

TRIP **10**



(left) **The Camargue** Pink flamingoes in the wetlands  
(below) **Pont du Gard** Traversing the Roman aqueduct

SAMI SARKIS/GETTY IMAGES ©



## Pont du Gard

The scale of this Roman aqueduct is astonishing: 35 arches straddle the 275m upper tier, and it once carried 20,000 cu metres of water per day. View it from beside the Gard River, clamber along the top deck, or arrive after dark to see it lit up in impressive fashion. It marks the start of **Trip 29: Pont du Gard to Viaduc du Millau**, which travels through the Cévennes to another amazing bridge.

**TRIP** 29

## BEST HILLTOP VILLAGES

**Gordes** The quintessential Provençal village. **Trip** 22

**Vézelay** Get spiritual in this ancient pilgrim village. **Trips** 7 14

**St-Paul de Vence** Dreamy Med vistas drew countless artists. **Trip** 24

**St-Jean Pied de Port** Fortified town overlooking the Spanish border. **Trip** 33

# IF YOU LIKE



Camembert World-famous cheese (Trip 3)

## Art

Impressionist masterpieces, modernist marvels, landmark museums – France's astonishing artistic legacy is guaranteed to be one of the most memorable parts of your trip.

**2 A Toast to Art** Inspiring architecture meets cutting-edge art on this trip via the new Louvre-Lens museum, the Centre Pompidou-Metz and Nancy's art nouveau architecture.

**8 Monet's Normandy** Cruise through the countryside that inspired the impressionists, finishing with a walk around Monet's own lily garden.

**25 Modern Art Meander** Chagall, Cézanne, Picasso and Van Gogh were just a few of the artists who were inspired by the Provençal landscape.

## French Cuisine

French food might be synonymous with sophistication, but there's more to this foodie nation than fine dining – there's a whole culinary culture to experience, whether that's guzzling oysters, hunting for truffles, savouring cheeses or buying fresh baguettes from a village *boulangerie* (bakery).

**3 Tour des Fromages** Taste your way around Normandy's world-famous cheeses – Camembert, Pont L'Évêque, Livarot and more.

**35 Gourmet Dordogne** For rich French food, there's nowhere like the Dordogne, the spiritual home of foie gras and the black truffle.

**20 Rhône Valley** Fill up on Lyonnaise cuisine in a cosy *bouchon* (small bistro), then head for Montélimar to indulge in nougat treats.

## Nature

With seven national parks and a host of other protected areas, France's natural landscapes are ripe for outdoor adventure.

**17 Alpine Adventure** Hike trails and spot wildlife among the peaks and ski resorts of France's highest mountain chain.

**27 Corsican Coast Cruiser** Escape the French mainland for a cruise around the wild landscapes and coastline of Corsica, aptly named the *île de beauté*.

**13 Volcanoes of the Auvergne** Discover this chain of extinct volcanoes that stretches across much of central France.

**28 The Camargue** Keep your eyes peeled for pink flamingos and wild horses in France's largest wetlands.



**Burgundy** Wine maturing in an underground cellar (Trip 15)

## Wine Tasting

If there's one thing France knows about, it's wine. Viticulture has been a cornerstone of French culture for hundreds of years, and the merest mention of the nation's top vineyards makes even hardened sommeliers go weak at the knees.

### 5 Champagne Taster

Cellars echo to the sound of popping corks on this effervescent adventure through Champagne's hallowed brands.

### 15 Route des Grands Crus

Few regions command more cachet in the wine world than Burgundy. Follow the trail along the Côte de Nuits and Côte d'Or.

### 6 Alsace Accents

Glossy vines and traditional villages form the backdrop to this meander along the Route des Vins d'Alsace.

## Architecture

France has never been shy about showing off its taste for extravagant architecture. Castles and palaces, abbeys and cathedrals – France offers them all, and more.

### 11 Châteaux of the Loire

Resplendent châteaux line the banks of the Loire, each one more extravagant than the last.

### 1 Essential France

From Mont St-Michel to the palace of Versailles, this route explores France's unmissable sites.

### 31 Cheat's Compostela

Tick off churches and cathedrals along the old pilgrim route from Le Puy-en-Velay to St-Jean Pied de Port.

### 30 The Cathar Trail

Trek across the parched Languedoc plains, which feature crumbling fortresses and hilltop strongholds.

## Historic Sites

With a history stretching back several millennia, it's little wonder that France is littered with reminders of its past – both ancient and recent.

### 21 Roman Provence

Travel back to the heyday of Gaul with an expedition around southern France's Roman ruins.

### 14 Medieval Burgundy

Once an independent duchy, Burgundy is home to marvellous medieval buildings and timeless villages.

### 4 In Flanders Fields

Take an emotional tour around the battlegrounds and cemeteries of the Great War.

### 9 D-Day's Beaches

The events of D-Day still resonate along the beaches of Normandy, while museums and memorials provide historical context.



# NEED TO KNOW

## CURRENCY

Euro (€)

## LANGUAGE

French

## VISAS

Generally not required for stays of up to 90 days (or at all for EU nationals); some nationalities need a Schengen visa.

## FUEL

Petrol stations are common around main roads and larger towns. Unleaded costs from around €1.60 per litre; *gazole* (diesel) is usually at least €0.15 cheaper.

## RENTAL CARS

ADA ([www.ada.fr](http://www.ada.fr))

Auto Europe ([www.autoeurope.com](http://www.autoeurope.com))

Avis ([www.avis.com](http://www.avis.com))

Europcar ([www.europcar.com](http://www.europcar.com))

Hertz ([www.hertz.com](http://www.hertz.com))

## IMPORTANT NUMBERS

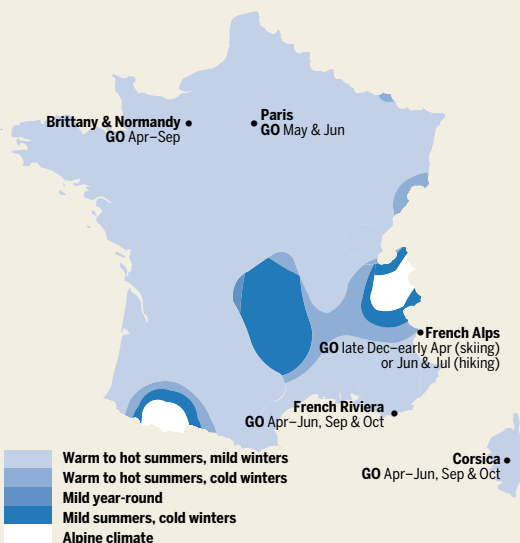
Ambulance (☎15)

Police (☎17)

Fire brigade (☎18)

Europe-wide emergency (☎112)

## Climate



## When to Go

### High Season (Jul & Aug)

- » The main holiday season in France – expect traffic jams and big queues, especially in August.
- » Christmas, New Year and Easter are also busy times to travel.
- » Late December to March is high season in French ski resorts.

### Shoulder Season (Apr–Jun & Sep)

- » Balmy temperatures, settled weather and light crowds make this an ideal time to travel.
- » Hotel rates drop in busy areas such as southern France and the Atlantic coast.
- » The *vendange* (grape harvest) happens in early autumn.

### Low Season (Oct–Mar)

- » Expect heavy discounts on accommodation (sometimes as much as 50%).
- » Snow covers the Alps and Pyrenees, as well as much of central France.
- » Many sights and hotels close down for winter.

## Daily Costs

### Budget: Less than €100

» Double room in a budget hotel: €50–70

» Set lunchtime menus: €10–15

### Midrange: €100–€200

» Double room in a midrange hotel: €70–120

» À la carte mains: €15–20

### Top End: Over €200

» Luxury hotel room: €150–200

» Top-end restaurant meal: menus from €50, à la carte from €80

## Eating

**Cafes** Coffee, drinks and bar snacks.

**Bistros** Serve anything from light meals to sit-down dinners.

**Restaurants** Range from simple *auberges* (country inns) to Michelin-starred wonders.

**Vegetarians** Limited choice on most menus; look out for *restaurants bios* in cities.

In this book, price symbols indicate the cost of a two-course set menu:

€	under €20
€€	€20–40
€€€	more than €40

## Sleeping

**Hotels** France has a wide range of hotels, from budget to luxury. Unless indicated otherwise, breakfast is extra.

**Chambres d'hôte** The French equivalent of a B&B; prices nearly always include breakfast.

**Hostels** Most large towns have a hostel operated by the FUAJ (Fédération Unie des Auberges de Jeunesse).

Price symbols indicate the cost of a double room with private bathroom in high season unless otherwise noted:

€	under €80
€€	€80–180
€€€	more than €180

## Arriving in France

### Aéroport Roissy Charles de Gaulle (Paris)

**Rental cars** Major car-rental agencies have concessions at arrival terminals.

### Trains, buses and RER

To Paris centre every 15 to 30 minutes, 5am to 11pm.

**Taxis** €50 to €60; 30 minutes to Paris centre.

### Aéroport d'Orly (Paris)

**Rental cars** Desks beside the arrivals area.

### Orlyval rail, RER and

**buses** At least every 15 minutes, 5am to 11pm.

**Taxis** €45 to €60; 25 minutes to Paris centre.

## Mobile Phones

Most European and Australian phones work, but turn off roaming to avoid heavy data charges. Buying a French SIM card provides much cheaper call rates.

## Internet Access

Wi-fi is available in most hotels and B&Bs (usually free, but sometimes for a small charge). Many cafes and restaurants also offer free wi-fi to customers.

## Money

ATMs are available everywhere. Most major credit cards are accepted (with the exception of American Express). Larger cities have *bureaux de change*.

## Tipping

By law, restaurant and bar prices are *service compris* (include a 15% service charge). Taxis expect around 10%; round up bar bills to the nearest euro.

## Useful Websites

**France Guide** ([www.franceguide.com](http://www.franceguide.com)) Official website run by the French tourist office.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com/france](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/france)) Travel tips, accommodation, forum and more.

**Mappy** ([www.mappy.fr](http://www.mappy.fr)) Online tools for mapping and journey planning.

**France Meteo** ([www.meteo.fr](http://www.meteo.fr)) The lowdown on the French weather.

**About France** ([www.about-france.com/travel.htm](http://www.about-france.com/travel.htm)) Tips for driving in France.

For more, see *Road Trip Essentials* (p418).

# CITY GUIDE



## PARIS

If ever a city needed no introduction, it's Paris – a trend setter, fashion former and style icon for centuries, and still very much at the cutting edge. Whether you're here to tick off the landmarks or seek out the secret corners, Paris fulfils all your expectations, and still leaves you wanting more.



Paris The city at sunset, viewed from Cathédrale de Notre-Dame

## Getting Around

Driving in Paris is a nightmare. Happily, there's no need for a car. The metro is fast, frequent and efficient; tickets cost €1.70 (day passes €6.70) and are valid on the city's buses. Bikes can be hired from 1800 Vélib (www.velib.paris.fr) stations; insert a credit card, authorise a €150 deposit and pedal away. Day passes cost €1; first 30 minutes free, subsequent 30 minutes from €2

## Parking

Meters don't take coins; use a chip-enabled credit card. Municipal car parks cost €2 to €3.50 an hour, or €20 to €25 per 24 hours.

## Discover the Taste of Paris

Le Marais is one of the best areas for eating out, with its small restaurants and trendy bistros. Don't miss Paris' street markets: the Marché Bastille, rue Montorgueil and rue Mouffetard are full of atmosphere.

## Live Like a Local

Base yourself in Montmartre for its Parisian charm, if you don't mind crowds. Le Marais and Bastille provide style on a budget, while St-Germain is good for a splurge.

## Useful Websites

**Paris Info** (<http://en.parisinfo.com>) Official visitor site.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com/paris](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/paris)) Lonely Planet's city guide.

**Secrets of Paris** ([www.secretsofparis.com](http://www.secretsofparis.com)) Local's blog full of insider tips.

**Paris by Mouth** ([www.parisbymouth.com](http://www.parisbymouth.com)) Eat and drink your way round the capital.

## Trips Through Paris: 1 7



For more, check out our city and country guides. [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)

## TOP EXPERIENCES

### ➔ Eiffel Tower at Twilight

Any time is a good time to take in the panorama from the top of the 'Metal Asparagus' (as Parisians snidely call it) – but the twilight view is extra special ([www.toureffel.fr](http://www.toureffel.fr)).

### ➔ Musée du Louvre

France's greatest repository of art, sculpture and artefacts, the Louvre is a must-visit – but don't expect to see it all in a day ([www.louvre.fr](http://www.louvre.fr)).

### ➔ Basilique du Sacré-Coeur

Climb inside the cupola of this Montmartre landmark for one of the best cross-city vistas ([www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com](http://www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com)).

### ➔ Musée d'Orsay

Paris' second-most-essential museum, with a fabulous collection encompassing originals by Cézanne, Degas, Monet, Van Gogh and more ([www.musee-orsay.fr](http://www.musee-orsay.fr)).

### ➔ Cathédrale de Notre-Dame

Peer over Paris from the north tower of this Gothic landmark, surrounded by gargoyles and flying buttresses ([www.cathedraledeparis.com](http://www.cathedraledeparis.com)).

### ➔ Les Catacombes

Explore more than 2km of tunnels beneath the streets of Montparnasse, lined with the bones and skulls of millions of Parisians ([www.catacombes.paris.fr](http://www.catacombes.paris.fr)).

### ➔ Cimetière Père-Lachaise

Oscar Wilde, Edith Piaf, Marcel Proust and Jim Morrison are just a few of the famous names buried in this wildly overgrown cemetery ([www.perelachaise.com](http://www.perelachaise.com)).

### ➔ Canal St-Martin

Join the locals for a walk or bike ride along the tow-paths of this 4.5km canal, once derelict but now reborn as a haven from the city hustle.



Lyon The Saône River at nightfall

## LYON

For centuries, Lyon has served as a crossroads between France's south and north, as well as a gateway to the nearby Alps. A commercial and industrial powerhouse for over 500 years, it's now a cosmopolitan and sophisticated city, with some outstanding museums and a notoriously lively nightlife.

### Getting Around

Cars aren't much use for getting around Lyon itself. The same €1.60 tickets are valid on all the city's public transport, including buses, trams, the four-line metro and the two funiculars linking Vieux Lyon to Fourvière and St-Just. Day passes cost €4.90.

### Parking

As always, parking is expensive, so pick a hotel with a private car park if you're planning on arriving with wheels.

### Discover the Taste of Lyon

The classic place to eat in Lyon is a *bouchon*

(literally, 'bottle stopper'), a small, cosy bistro that cooks up regional cuisine such as *boudin blanc* (veal sausage) and *quenelles de brochet* (pike dumplings in a creamy crayfish sauce). Afterwards, browse the stalls of the city's wonderful covered market, Les Halles de Lyon.

### Live Like a Local

Vieux Lyon and Presqu'île both have a fantastic range of hotels and guesthouses that combine old Lyonnaise architecture with modern style. Croix Rousse is the handiest area for visiting the Roman remains around Fourvière.

### Useful Websites

**Lyon** ([www.lyon.fr](http://www.lyon.fr)) Official city website.

**My Little Lyon** ([www.mylittle.fr/mylittleyon](http://www.mylittle.fr/mylittleyon), in French) Catch up with the cultural trends.

**Petit Paume** ([www.petitpaume.com](http://www.petitpaume.com), in French) Savvy city guide written by students.

### Trips Through Lyon





Lille Grand' Place

## LILLE

Lille may be France's most underrated major city. This once-tired industrial metropolis has transformed itself into a stylish, self-confident city with a strong Flemish accent. Three art museums, lots of stylish shops and a lovely old town make it well worthy of investigation.

### Getting Around

Driving into Lille is incredibly confusing, even with a good map; just suspend your sense of direction and blindly follow the 'Centre Ville' signs. Lille's buses and two speedy metro lines run until about 12.30am. Tickets cost €1.40; a Pass' Journée (all-day pass) costs €4.10.

### Parking

If you're driving, the best idea is to leave your vehicle at the park-and-ride at Champ de Mars on bd de la Liberté (open from 10am to 6pm or

7pm, closed Saturdays & Sundays, September to March), 1.2km northwest of the centre. It costs €3.25 a day and includes return travel for five people to central Lille on bus 12.

### Discover the Taste of Lille

Lille's proximity to Alsace and Belgium has influenced its cuisine. Cozy *estaminets* (Flemish eateries) serve Lillois specialities such as *carbonade* (braised beef stewed with beer, spiced bread and brown sugar) and *potjevleesch* (jellied chicken, pork, veal and rabbit).

### Live Like a Local

Most hotels are within striking distance of the city centre, but Lille's business focus means many are short on charm. On the plus side, rates drop at weekends.

### Useful Websites

**Lille Tourisme** ([www.lilletourism.com](http://www.lilletourism.com))  
Comprehensive city site.

### Trips Through Lille

2 4



## NICE

The classic metropolis of the French Riviera, Nice has something to suit all moods: exceptional museums, atmospheric street markets, glittering Mediterranean beaches and a rabbit-warren old town, all bathed in radiant year-round sunshine. With its blend of city grit and old-world opulence, it deserves as much time as you can spare.

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### Getting Around

The complicated one-way system and heavy traffic can make driving in Nice stressful, especially in the heat of summer. Walking is the easiest way to get around. There's a handy tram line from the train station all the way to Vieux Nice and place Garibaldi; tickets cost €1 and are valid on buses.

### Parking

Nearly all parking in Nice is *payant* (chargeable) – assuming you manage to find a space. Car parks are usually cheapest (around €2 to €3 per hour, or €17 to €30 per day). All parking meters take coins; car-park pay stations also accept credit cards.



Nice View across the city

## TOP EXPERIENCES

### ➔ Strolling the Promenade des Anglais

Join sun worshippers, inline skaters and dog walkers on this magnificent boulevard, which runs right along Nice's shimmering seafront.

### ➔ Musée Matisse

Just 2km north of the centre, this excellent art museum documents the life and work of Henri Matisse in painstaking detail. You'll need good French to get the most out of your visit ([www.musee-matisse-nice.org](http://www.musee-matisse-nice.org)).

### ➔ Shopping on Cours Saleya

This massive market captures the essence of Niçois life. A chaotic assortment of stalls sells everything from fresh-cut flowers to fresh fish.

### ➔ Parc du Château

Pack a picnic and head to this hilltop park for a panorama across Nice's red-tiled rooftops.

## Discover the Taste of Nice

Head for the alleyways of Vieux Nice (Old Nice) for the most authentic neighbourhood restaurants. Don't miss the local specialities of *socca* (chickpea-flour pancake), *petits farcis* (stuffed vegetables) and *pissaladière* (onion tart topped with black olives and anchovies).

## Live Like a Local

Old town equals atmosphere, but for the best views and classiest rooms you'll want to base yourself near the seafront – the Promenade des Anglais has several landmark hotels. The city's cheapest

hotels are clustered around the train station.

## Useful Websites

**Nice Tourisme** (<http://en.nicetourisme.com>) Informative city website with info on accommodation and attractions.

## Trips Through Nice 23 24



# FRANCE BY REGION



From rugged mountain roads to quiet country lanes, France is a driver's dream. Here's your guide to what each region has to offer, along with suggestions for our top road trips.

## Atlantic Coast & Western France (p353)

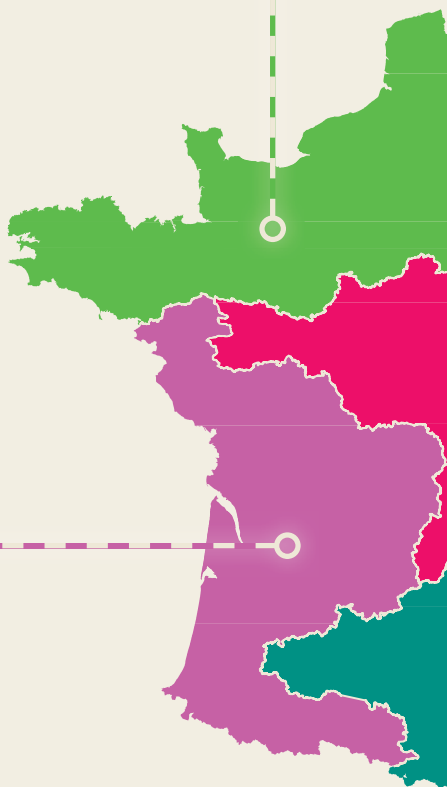
France's west coast is wonderfully varied, stretching from the vineyards of Bordeaux down to the busy beach towns of Arcachon and Biarritz. The southwest is a stronghold of French Basque culture, while the Dordogne and the Lot Valley offer a dreamy vision of the French countryside.

**Gorge on foie gras and hunt for truffles on Trip 35**

## Paris & Northern France (p35)

No French trip would be complete without Paris, still one of the world's most vital cities. Beyond the capital, you could explore artistic connections in Giverny, tour Alsatian vineyards, or delve into the region's war-ravaged past along the beaches of Normandy and in the fields of Flanders.

**Check off Unesco-listed treasures on Trip 7**



## Loire Valley & Central France (p133)

The Loire is rightly famous for its châteaux, but there's more here than over-the-top architecture. A world of wine awaits in Burgundy, and the region's medieval heritage is a must for history buffs. Meanwhile, volcanic vistas unfold in the Auvergne, perhaps France's most undiscovered corner.

**Taste Grand Cru wine on Trip 15**

## Alps & Eastern France (p183)

Mountains spiral skywards and the roads get ever higher as you drive through the Alps and the Jura, both alive with outdoor possibilities. Brave the slopes and hike the trails, then head into the Rhône Valley for hearty food and postcard-pretty villages.

**Enjoy sky-high views on Trip 17**

**Eat in bouchons on Trip 20**

## Provence & Southeast France (p231)

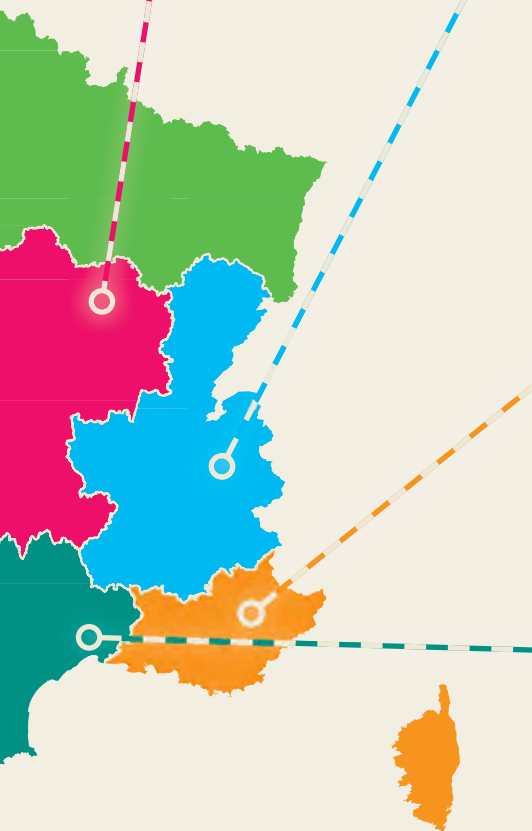
Sparkling beaches, glitzy towns, hilltop hamlets, lavender fields: Provence is the stuff of French-themed dreams. Cruise the corniches, head inland for Roman ruins and Provençal markets, and if you're feeling adventurous, the wild island of Corsica is only a boat ride away.

**Follow the Riviera on Trip 24**

## Pyrenees & Southwest France (p313)

Straddling the Franco-Spanish border, the valleys and passes of the Pyrenees make for fantastic driving, but you'll need to keep your eyes on the road. Switch to the slow lane in the Languedoc, with its laid-back pace of life, Cathar castles and pilgrims' churches.

**Head to the hills on Trip 29**







# Paris & Northern France

**FROM THE BOULEVARDS OF PARIS TO THE CLIFFS OF BRITTANY**, northern France is primed with possibilities – whether that means touring Champagne’s vineyards, sampling Norman cheeses, admiring art in Metz or simply moseying around Rouen’s old town. And with its abundance of coast and countryside, it’s a pleasure to drive, too.

It’s a region whose long (and turbulent) history is plain to see. Two thousand years of royalty, renaissance and revolution have left their mark on the streets of Paris, while the scars of war can still be traced on the fields of Flanders and the beaches of Normandy. Elsewhere, cathedrals and châteaux hint at the splendour of a bygone age, and experimental art museums point to an equally flashy future.

# Paris & Northern France



## *Classic Trip*

### 1 Essential France 2 Weeks

Tick off the mustn't-misses on this epic cross-country adventure. (p39)

### 2 A Toast to Art 7 Days

Visit art galleries in Lens and Metz, then get lost in old Strasbourg. (p51)

### 3 Tour des Fromages 5 Days

Fatten yourself up on this tour of Normandy's creamy cheeses. (p59)

### 4 In Flanders Fields 3 Days

The ghosts of the Great War still linger on the battlefields of northern France. (p67)

## *Classic Trip*

### 5 Champagne Taster 3 Days

Taste your way around the cellars of Champagne on this fizz-fueled trip. (p75)

### 6 Alsace Accents 3 Days

Alsace's rich cuisine and crisp wines combine on this eastern road trip. (p85)

## *Classic Trip*

### 7 Unesco Treasures 10 Days

From Gothic cathedrals to papal palaces, take a tour through France's World Heritage Sites. (p93)



**8 Monet's Normandy 4 Days**  
Investigate the origins of impressionism, from Étretat's cliffs to Monet's lily garden. (p105)

*Classic Trip*

**9 D-Day's Beaches 3 Days**  
Follow the course of the WWII invasion on Normandy's beaches. (p113)

**10 Breton Coast 8 Days**  
Brittany's coastline is all about big beaches and wild views. (p123)

**✓ DON'T MISS**

**Centre Pompidou-Metz**

It's hard to know here which is more avant-garde – the architecture or the art. Take in this groundbreaking gallery on Trip **2**

**Vimy Ridge**

Walk through one of the only surviving trench systems from WWI on Trip **4**

**Musée Bartholdi**

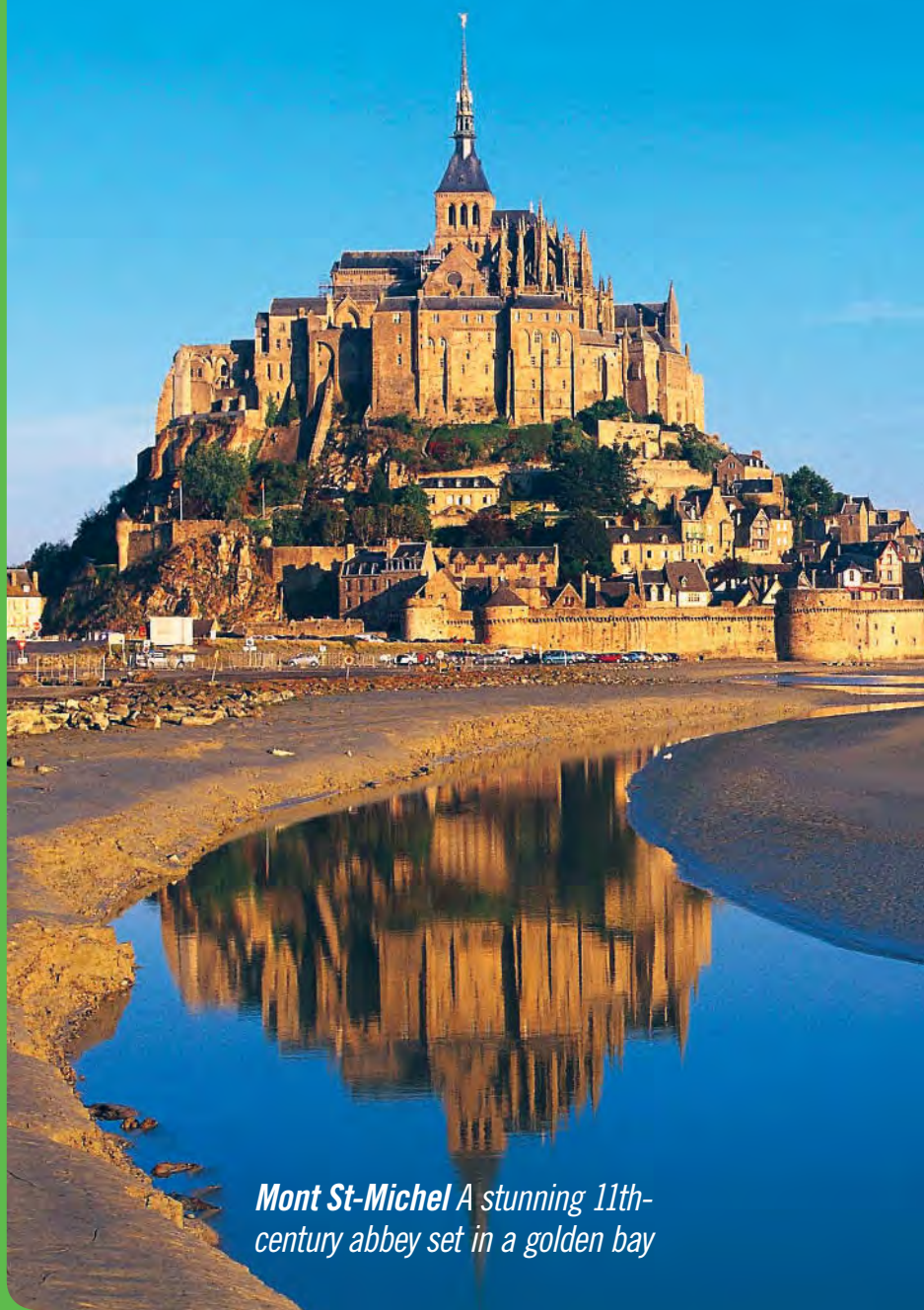
Visit the Colmar home of the man who made Lady Liberty – and see a life-sized model of the statue's earlobe – on Trip **6**

**Distillerie Christian Drouin**

Taste two of Normandy's top tipples – Calvados and cider – at this traditional distillery. Refresh yourself on Trip **3**

**Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux**

This museum in Le Havre contains the best impressionist collection outside Paris. Soak it all in on Trip **8**



*Mont St-Michel* A stunning 11th-century abbey set in a golden bay

# Classic Trip

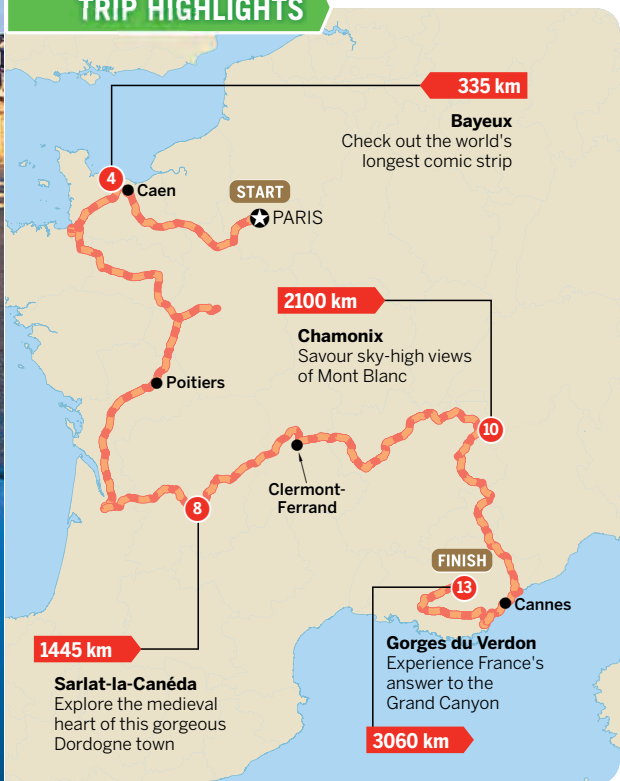


1

## Essential France

*City to city, coast to coast, this grand tour follows a route around some of France's most unmissable sights. There's some epic driving involved, but this is one trip you won't forget in a hurry.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**2 WEEKS**  
 3060KM / 1902 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

April to June.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Overlooking the Parisian panorama from the Basilique du Sacré-Coeur.

### BEST FOR FAMILIES

Brave the space-age rides and roller-coaster thrills of Futuroscope.

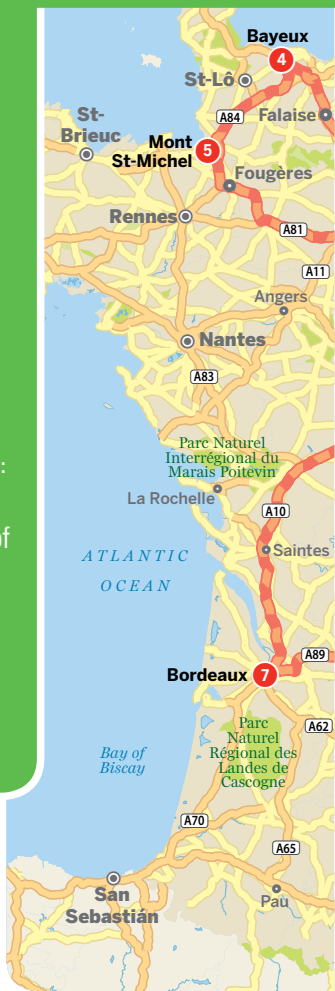


# Classic Trip

## 1

## Essential France

This is the big one – an epic trek that travels all the way from the chilly waters of the English Channel to the gleaming blue Mediterranean. Along the way, you'll stop off at some of France's most iconic sights: the château of Versailles, the abbey of Mont St-Michel, the summit of Mont Blanc and the beaches of the French Riviera. *Allez-y!*



### 1 Paris

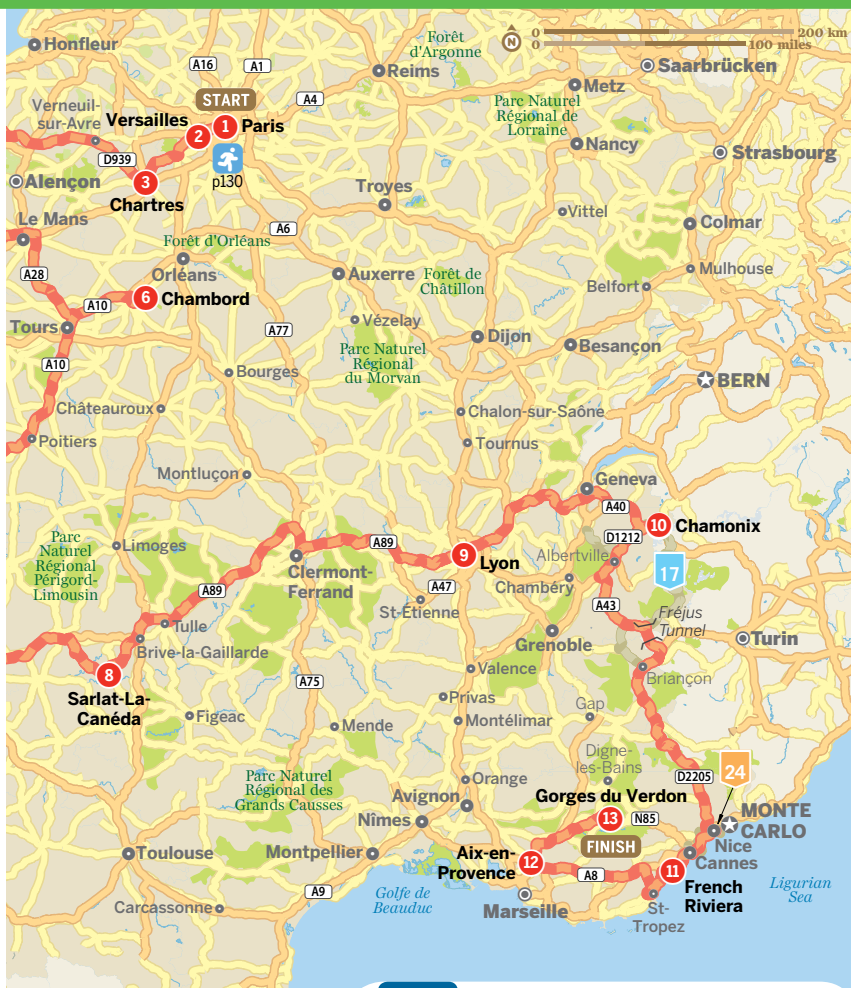
For that essentially Parisian experience, it's hard to beat Montmartre – the neighbourhood of cobbled lanes and cafe-lined squares beloved by writers and painters since the 19th century. This was once a notoriously ramshackle part of Paris, full of bordellos, brothels, dance halls and bars, as well as the city's first can-can clubs. Though its hedonistic heyday has long since passed, Montmartre still retains a villagey charm,

despite the throngs of tourists.

The centre of Montmartre is **place du Tertre**, once the village's main square, now packed with buskers and portrait artists. You can get a sense of how the area would once have looked at the **Musée de Montmartre** ([www.museedemontmartre.fr](http://www.museedemontmartre.fr); 12 rue Cortot, 18e; adult/18-25yr/10-17yr €8/6/4; ☀10am-6pm; 🚇Lamarck-Caulaincourt), which details the area's bohemian past. It's inside Montmartre's oldest building, a 17th-century manor house once

occupied by Renoir and Utrillo.

Nearby, Montmartre's finest view unfolds from the dome of the **Basilique du Sacré-Coeur** ([www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com](http://www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com); place du Parvis du Sacré Coeur; dome €5, cash only; ☀6am-10.30pm, dome 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, to 5.30pm Oct-Mar; 🚇Anvers). On a clear day,



you can see for up to 30km.

To see more Parisian sights, check out our walking tour on p130.

  p48

**The Drive** » From the centre of Paris, follow the A13 west from Porte d'Auteuil and take the exit marked 'Versailles Château'. Versailles is 28km southwest of the city.



## LINK YOUR TRIP

### 17 Alpine Adventure

Chamonix features on our Alps trip, so it's easy to launch a cross-mountain adventure from there.

### 24 Riviera Cruising

Combine this journey with our jaunt down the French Riviera, which begins in Cannes.

# Classic Trip

## 2 Versailles

Louis XIV transformed his father's hunting lodge into the **Château de Versailles** ([www.chateauversailles.fr](http://www.chateauversailles.fr); estate-wide admission €18, palace only €15; ☀8am-6pm Tue-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun Apr-Oct, 8.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-5.30pm Sun Nov-Mar) in the mid-17th century, and it remains France's most majestic palace. The royal court was based here from 1682 until 1789, when revolutionaries massacred the palace guard and dragged Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette back to Paris, where they were ingloriously guillotined.

The architecture is truly eye-popping. Highlights include the

**Grands Appartements du Roi et de la Reine** (State Apartments) and the famous **Galerie des Glaces** (Hall of Mirrors), a 75m-long ballroom filled with chandeliers and floor-to-ceiling mirrors. Outside, the vast park incorporates terraces, flower beds, paths and fountains, as well as the **Grand and Petit Canals**.

Northwest of the main palace is the **Domaine de Marie-Antoinette** (Marie-Antoinette's Estate; admission €10; ☀noon-6.30pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct, to 5.30pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), where the royal family would have taken refuge from the intrigue and etiquette of court life.

✂ p48

**The Drive** » The N10 runs southwest from Versailles through pleasant countryside and forest to Rambouillet. You'll join the D906 to Chartres. All told, it's a journey of 76km.

## VISITING VERSAILLES

Versailles is one of the country's most popular destinations, so planning ahead will make your visit more enjoyable. Avoid the busiest days of Tuesday and Sunday, and remember that the château is closed on Monday. Save time by pre-purchasing tickets on the château's website, or arrive early if you're buying at the door – by noon queues spiral out of control.

You can also access off-limits areas (such as the Private Apartments of Louis XV and Louis XVI, the Opera House and the Royal Chapel) by taking a 90-minute **guided tour** (☎01 30 83 77 88; tours €16; ☀English-language tours 9.30am & 2pm Tue-Sun).

## 3 Chartres

You'll know you're nearing Chartres long before you reach it thanks to the twin spires of the **Cathédrale Notre Dame** ([www.diocese-chartres.com](http://www.diocese-chartres.com); place de la Cathédrale; ☀8.30am-7.30pm, to 10pm Tue, Fri & Sun Jun-Aug), considered to be one of the most important structures in Christendom.

The present cathedral was built during the late 12th century after the original was destroyed by fire. It's survived wars and revolutions remarkably intact, and the brilliant-blue stained-glass windows have even inspired their own shade of paint (Chartres blue). The cathedral also houses the Sainte Voile (Holy Veil), supposedly worn by the Virgin Mary while giving birth to Jesus.

The best views are from the 112m-high **Clocher Neuf** (New Belltower; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €7/4.50/free).

✂ ☰ p48

**The Drive** » Follow the D939 northwest for 58km to Verneuil-sur-Avre, then take the D926 west for 78km to Argentan – both great roads through typical Norman countryside. Just west of Argentan, the D158/N158 heads north to Caen, then turns northwest on the N13 to Bayeux, 94km further.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 4 Bayeux

The **Tapiserie de**

**Bayeux** (Bayeux Tapestry; [www.tapiserie-bayeux.fr](http://www.tapiserie-bayeux.fr); rue de Nesmond; adult/child €7.80/3.80; ☀9am-6.30pm mid-Mar–mid-Nov, to 7pm May-Aug, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm mid-Nov–mid-Mar) is without doubt the world's most celebrated (and ambitious) piece of embroidery. Over 58 panels, the tapestry recounts the invasion of England in 1066 by William I, or William the Conqueror, as he's now known.

Commissioned in 1077 by Bishop Odo of Bayeux, William's half-brother, the tapestry retells the battle in fascinating detail: look out for Norman horses getting stuck in the quicksands around Mont St-Michel, and the famous appearance of Halley's Comet in scene 32. The final showdown at the Battle of Hastings is particularly graphic, complete with severed limbs, decapitated heads, and the English King Harold getting an arrow in the eye.

 p121

**The Drive** » Mont St-Michel is 125km southwest of Bayeux; the fastest route is along the D6 and then the A84 motorway.

## 5 Mont St-Michel

You've already seen it on a million postcards, but nothing prepares you for the real **Mont St-Michel** (☎02 33 89 80 00; [www.monuments-nationaux.fr](http://www.monuments-nationaux.fr); adult/child incl guided tour €9/free; ☀9am-7pm, last entry 1hr before closing). It's one of France's architectural marvels, an 11th-century island abbey marooned in the middle of a vast golden bay.

When you arrive, you'll be steered into one of the Mont's huge car parks. You then walk along the causeway (or catch a free shuttle bus) to the island itself. Guided tours are included, or you can explore solo with an audioguide.

The **Église Abbatiale** (Abbey Church) is reached via a steep climb along the **Grande Rue**. Around the church, the cluster of buildings known as **La Merveille** (The Marvel) includes the cloister, refectory, guest hall, ambulatory and various chapels.

For a different perspective, take a guided walk across the sands with **Découverte de la Baie du Mont-Saint-Michel** (☎02 33 70 83 49; [www.decouvertebaie.com](http://www.decouvertebaie.com); adult/child from €6/4) and **Chemins de la Baie** (☎02 33 89 80 88; [www.cheminsdelabaie.com](http://www.cheminsdelabaie.com); adult/child from €6.50/4.50), both based in Genêts. Don't be

tempted to do it on your own – the bay's tides are notoriously treacherous.

 p49

**The Drive** » Take the A84, N12 and A81 for 190km to Le Mans and the A28 for 102km to Tours, where you can follow our tour through the Loire Valley if you wish (see p137). Chambord is about 75km from Tours via the D952.

## 6 Chambord

If you only have time to visit one château in the Loire, you might as well make it the grandest – and **Chambord** ([www.chambord.org](http://www.chambord.org); adult/child €9.50/free, parking €3, ☀9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar) is the most lavish of them all. It's a showpiece of Renaissance architecture, from the double-helix staircase up to the turret-covered rooftop. With over 440 rooms, the sheer scale of the place is mindboggling – and in the Loire, that's really saying something.

 p145

**The Drive** » It's 425km to Bordeaux via Blois and the A10 motorway. You could consider breaking the journey with stop-offs at Futuroscope and Poitiers, roughly halfway between the two.

## 7 Bordeaux

When Unesco decided to protect Bordeaux's medieval architecture in 2007, it simply listed half

## Classic Trip



© SHUTTERSTOCK/ALICEBOE



© SHUTTERSTOCK/ALICEBOE

### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE PATRICK DESGUÉ, MONT ST-MICHEL WALKING GUIDE



There's nowhere else like Mont St-Michel in France. Most people only visit the island and the abbey, but it's only once you see it from the sands that you appreciate what a unique place this is. Every day the bay is covered by the sea, creating a new landscape which is completely different to the one of the day before. I have been working here as a guide for many years, but I never seem to get tired of it here. I'm not a spiritual man, but there is something magical about this place.

Top: Women crushing walnuts  
Left: Cathédrale St-André, Bordeaux  
Right: Market stall, Aix-en-Provence





PIETRO GONDI/ACQUINERS ©

the city in one fell swoop. Covering 18 sq km, this is the world's largest urban World Heritage Site, with grand buildings and architectural treasures galore.

Top of the heap is the **Cathédrale St-André**, known for its stone carvings and generously gargoyled belfry, the **Tour Pey-Berland** (adult/child €5.50/free; ☀10am-1.15pm & 2-6pm Jun-Sep, shorter hr rest of year). But the whole old city rewards wandering, especially around the **Jardin Public** (cours de Verdun), the pretty squares of **esplanade des Quinconces** and **place Gambetta**, and the city's 4km-long **riverfront esplanade**, with its playgrounds, paths and paddling pools.

🍷🍷 p372

**The Drive** » Sarlat-la-Canéda is a drive of 194km via the A89 motorway, or you can take a longer but more enjoyable route via the D936.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

8 Sarlat-la-Canéda

If you're looking for France's heart and soul, you'll find it among the forests and fields of the Dordogne. It's the stuff of French fantasies: riverbank châteaux, medieval villages, wooden-hulled *gabarres* (barges) and market stalls groaning with foie gras, truffles, walnuts and wines. The medieval

## Classic Trip

town of Sarlat-la-Canéda makes the perfect base, with a beautiful medieval centre and lots of lively markets.

It's also ideally placed for exploring the Vézère Valley, about 20km to the northwest, home to France's finest cave paintings. Most famous of all are the ones at the **Grotte de Lascaux** (☎05 53 51 95 03; www.semitour.com; adult/child €9.50/6; 🕒9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep-early Nov, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm rest of year, closed Jan), although to prevent damage to the paintings, you now visit a replica of the cave's main sections in a nearby grotto.

🍴🏠 p381, p389

**The Drive** » The drive east to Lyon is a long one, covering well over 400km and travelling across the spine of the Massif Central. A good route is to follow the A89 all the way to exit 6, then turn off onto the N89/D89 to Lyon. This route should cover between 420km and 430km.

### 9 Lyon

Fired up by French food? Then you'll love Lyon, with its *bouchons* (small bistros), bustling markets and fascinating food culture. Start in **Vieux Lyon** and the picturesque quarter of **Presqu'île**, then catch the funicular to the top of **Fourvière** to explore the city's Roman ruins and enjoy cross-town views.

Film buffs will also want to make time for the **Musée Lumière** (www.institut-lumiere.org; 25 rue du Premier Film, 8e; adult/child €6.50/5.50; 🕒10am-6.30pm Tue-Sun; 📄Monplaisir-Lumière), where the Lumière Brothers

(Auguste and Louis) shot the first reels of the world's first motion picture, *La Sortie des Usines Lumières*, on 19 March 1895.

🍴🏠 p227

**The Drive** » Take the A42 towards Lake Geneva, then the A40 towards St-Gervais-les-Bains. The motorway becomes the N205 as it nears Chamonix. It's a drive of at least 225km.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 10 Chamonix

Snuggling among snow-clad mountains – including Europe's highest summit, Mont Blanc – adrenaline-fuelled Chamonix is an ideal springboard for the French Alps. In winter, it's a mecca for skiers and snowboarders, and in summer, once the snows thaw, the high-level trails become a trekkers' paradise.

There are two really essential Chamonix experiences. First, catch the dizzying cable car to the top of the **Aiguille du Midi** (place de l'Aiguille du Midi; adult/child return to Aiguille du Midi €45.60/38.50, Plan de l'Aiguille €26.40/22.30; 🕒8.30am-4.30pm) to snap a shot of Mont Blanc.

Then take the combination mountain train and cable car from the **Gare du Montenvers** (35 place de la Mer de Glace; adult/child/family €26.40/22.30/79.20; 🕒10am-4.30pm) to the

## FUTUROSCOPE

Halfway between Chambord and Bordeaux on the A10, 10km north of Poitiers, **Futuroscope** (www.futuroscope.com; adult/child €38/28; 🕒9am-11.30pm, closed Jan-mid-Feb) lies one of France's top theme parks. It's a futuristic experience that takes you whizzing through space, diving into the ocean depths, racing around city streets and on a close encounter with creatures of the future. Note that many rides have a minimum height of 120cm.

You'll need at least five hours to check out the major attractions, or two days to see everything. The park is in the suburb of Jaunay-Clan; take exit 28 off the A10.

**Mer de Glace** (Sea of Ice), France's largest glacier. Wrap up warmly if you want to visit the glacier's sculptures and ice caves.

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**The Drive** » The drive to the Riviera is full of scenic thrills. An attractive route is via the D1212 to Albertville, and then via the A43, which travels over the Italian border and through the Tunnel de Fréjus. From here, the N94 runs through Briançon, and a combination of the A51, N85 and D6085 carries you south to Nice. You'll cover at least 430km.

## 11 French Riviera

If there's one coast road in France you simply have to drive, it's the French Riviera, with its rocky cliffs, maquis-scented air and dazzling Med views. Sun-seekers have been flocking here since the 19th century, and its scenery still never fails to seduce.

Lively **Nice** and cinematic Cannes make natural starts, but for the Riviera's loveliest scenery, you'll want to drive down the gorgeous **Corniche de l'Estérel** to **St-Tropez**, still a watchword for seaside

glamour. Summer can be hellish, but come in spring or autumn and you'll have its winding lanes and fragrant hills practically to yourself. For maximum views, stick to the coast roads: the D6098 to Antibes and Cannes, the D559 around the Corniche de l'Estérel, and the D98A to St-Tropez. It's about 120km via this route.

 p271

**The Drive** » From St-Tropez, take the fast A8 for about 230km west to Aix-en-Provence.

## 12 Aix-en-Provence

Sleepy Provence sums up the essence of *la douce vie* (the gentle life). Cloaked in lavender and spotted with hilltop villages, it's a region that sums up everything that's best about France.

Cruising the back roads and browsing the markets are the best ways to get acquainted. **Carpentras** and **Vaison-la-Romaine** are particularly detour-worthy, while artistic **Aix-en-Provence** encapsulates the classic Provençal vibe, with

its pastel buildings and Cézanne connections.

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**The Drive** » The gorges are 230km northeast of Aix-en-Provence via the A51 and D952.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 13 Gorges du Verdon

Complete your cross-France adventure with an unforgettable expedition to the **Gorges du Verdon** – sometimes known as the Grand Canyon of Europe. This deep ravine slashes 25km through the plateaus of Haute-Provence; in places, its walls rise to a dizzying 700m, twice the height of the Eiffel Tower (321m).

The two main jumping-off points are the villages of **Moustiers Ste-Marie**, in the west, and **Castellane**, in the east. Drivers and bikers can take in the canyon panorama from two vertigo-inducing cliffside roads, but the base of the gorge is only accessible on foot or by raft.

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## Eating & Sleeping

### Paris 1

#### Cul de Poule Modern French €€

(☎01 53 16 13 07; 53 rue des Martyrs, 9e; 2-/3-course menus lunch €15/18, dinner €23/28; ☺lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; **M**Pigalle) Don't be deceived by the plastic chairs outside: this is one of the best kitchens in the Pigalle neighbourhood, with excellent neo-bistro fare. And yes, there is a chicken's *derrière* mounted on the wall.

#### Le Miroir Bistro €€

(☎01 46 06 50 73; 94 rue des Martyrs, 18e; menus lunch €18, dinner €25-40; ☺lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat; **M**Abbesses) This modern bistro is on the Montmartre tourist trail, yet remains a local favourite. There are pâtés and rillettes to start, followed by well-prepared standards like stuffed veal shoulder. The lunch special includes a glass of wine, coffee and dessert.

#### Hôtel Amour Boutique Hotel €€

(☎01 48 78 31 80; www.hotelamourparis.fr; 8 rue Navarin, 9e; s €105, d €155-215; ☺; **M**St-Georges or Pigalle) One of Paris' trendiest hotels, the black-clad Amour (formerly a love hotel by the hour) features original design and artwork in each of the rooms. There are no TVs, but who needs them when you're in love?

#### Hôtel des Arts Hotel €€

(☎01 46 06 30 52; www.arts-hotel-paris.com; 5 rue Tholozé, 18e; s €105, d €140-165; ☺; **M**Abbesses or Blanche) The Hôtel des Arts is a friendly, attractive 50-room hotel, convenient to both place Pigalle and Montmartre. It has comfortable midrange rooms that are excellent value; consider spending an extra €25 for the superior rooms, which have nicer views.

### Versailles 2

#### À la Ferme Southwest French €€

(☎01 39 53 10 81; www.alaferme-versailles.com; 3 rue du Maréchal Joffre; menus lunch €14-24, dinner €20-24; ☺lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Cowhide seats and rustic garlands strung from old wooden beams add a country air 'At the Farm', a temple to grilled meats and cuisine from southwest France.

#### Angelina Tearoom €

(www.angelina-versailles.fr; mains €10-24; ☺10am-6pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct, to 5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar) This tearoom inside the Versailles estate is famed for its decadent hot chocolate. In addition to the branch by the Petit Trianon, there's another inside the palace.

### Chartres 3

#### Le Saint-Hilaire Regional Cuisine €€

(☎02 37 30 97 57; www.restaurant-saint-hilaire.fr; 11 rue du Pont Saint-Hilaire; 2-/3-course menus from €27/42; ☺lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Local products are ingeniously used in to-die-for dishes like stuffed mushrooms with lentils, snails in puff pastry with leek fondue, a seasonal lobster menu, and aromatic cheese platters at this pistachio-painted, wood-beamed charmer.

#### Le Serpente Brasserie, Tearoom €

(☎02 37 21 68 81; www.leserpente.com; 2 Cloître Notre Dame; mains €16-18.50; ☺11am-11pm) Its location slap-bang opposite the cathedral ensures this traditional brasserie and *salon de thé* (tearoom) – one of the oldest in Chartres – is always full. Specialities span everything from pigs' trotters and veal kidneys to fresh fish and salads.

## Best Western Le Grand Monarque

Hotel €€

(📞02 37 18 15 15; www.bw-grand-monarque.com; 22 place des Épars; d/tr from €132/195; 📶📶📶) With its teal-blue shutters gracing its 1779 façade, lovely stained-glass ceiling and treasure trove of period furnishings, the refurbished Grand Monarch is a historical gem and very central. Its restaurant has a Michelin star.

## Hôtel du Boeuf Couronné

Hotel €€

(📞02 37 18 06 06; www.leboeufcouronne.com; 15 place Châtelet; s €65-85, d €75-109; 📶📶) The red-curtained entrance lends a vaguely theatrical air to this two-star Logis guesthouse in the centre of everything. Its summertime terrace restaurant cooks up cathedral-view dining.

## Mont St-Michel 5

### Hôtel Du Guesclin

Hotel €€

(📞02 33 60 14 10; www.hotelduguesclin.com; Grande Rue, Mont St-Michel; d €77-93; 🕒mid-Mar–mid-Nov) This hotel on the Mont is worth recommending for its affordable rates, even in high season – a rarity for the location. Best of all, five rooms have views of the bay – priceless! – as does the on-site restaurant.

### La Bourdetière

B&amp;B €

(📞02 33 68 11 17; www.la-bourdetiére.com; 8 rue Maurice Desfeux, Beauvoir; d €39-43; 🕒Apr–Sep) This charming stone farmhouse in Beauvoir is excellent value. The decor of the four rooms could do with updating, but the rural setting and blissful gardens are tough to top.

## Gorges du Verdon 13

### Auberge du Teillon

Provençal, Gastronomic €€

(📞04 92 83 60 88; www.auberge-teillon.com; D4805, direction Grasse, La Garde; menus €26-38, d €60; 🕒lunch Tue–Sun, dinner Tue–Sat Apr–Jun, Sep & Oct, lunch Wed–Sun, dinner Tue–Sat Jul & Aug, closed Nov–Mar) Roadside *auberge* (country inn) serving the best food this side of Moustiers – pâtés, tender-roasted pigeon and unusual *tarte tatin au foie gras*. Reservations essential; located 5km east of Castellane.

### La Bastide de Moustiers

Gastronomic €€€

(📞04 92 70 47 47; www.bastide-moustiers.com; d from €240, menus €55-75) This splurge-worthy Provençal nest, domain of legendary chef Alain Ducasse, is famous for fine cuisine – hence the helicopter pad in the garden – and provides a chance to dress for dinner, a rarity in Provence.

### La Ferme Ste-Cécile

Gastronomic €€

(📞04 92 74 64 18; D952; menus €27-36; 🕒lunch Tue–Sat, dinner Tue–Sun, closed Nov–mid-Mar) The delicious culinary surprises served on the terrace of this authentic *ferme auberge* (farm restaurant) may include the thinnest slice of Roquefort and pear warmed in filo pastry, or foie gras wrapped in sweet quince.

### La Ferme Rose

Hotel €€

(📞04 92 75 75 75; www.lafermerose.com; chemin de Quinson; d €80-150; 📶📶) This inviting converted farmhouse, now a three-star hotel, contains quirky collectibles – Wurlitzer jukebox, display case of coffee grinders – but its dozen rooms are uncluttered, colourful and airy. Great bathrooms.

*Nancy Spectacular architecture  
in the home of art nouveau*

E. ANDRÉ  
Arch<sup>e</sup> 1903  
A. GENY  
Entrepreneur



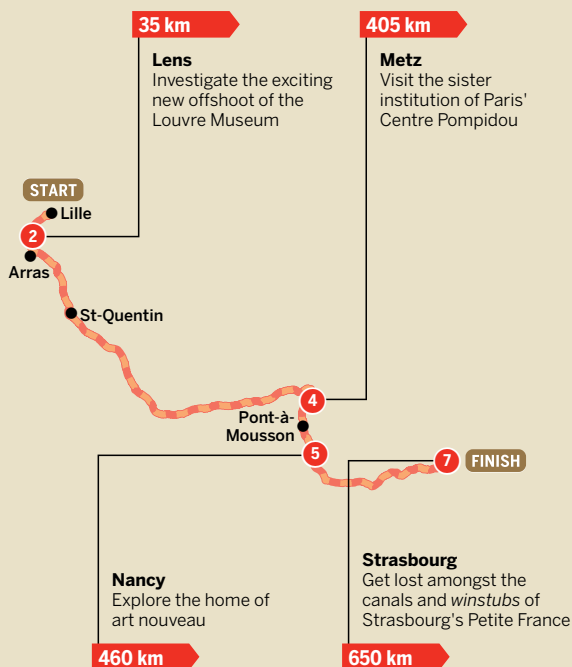


# 2

## A Toast to Art

*One for culture vultures: an artistic expedition across northeastern France, taking in art nouveau in Nancy, glorious glass in Baccarat and avant-garde experimentation in Metz and Strasbourg.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**7 DAYS**  
650KM / 404 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

April to July (avoid the school-holiday crowds).



### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Snap yourself sipping a coffee on Nancy's grand central square, place Stanislas.



### BEST FOR SHOPPING

Strasbourg's old quarters for chocolate, glassware and other souvenirs.

## 2

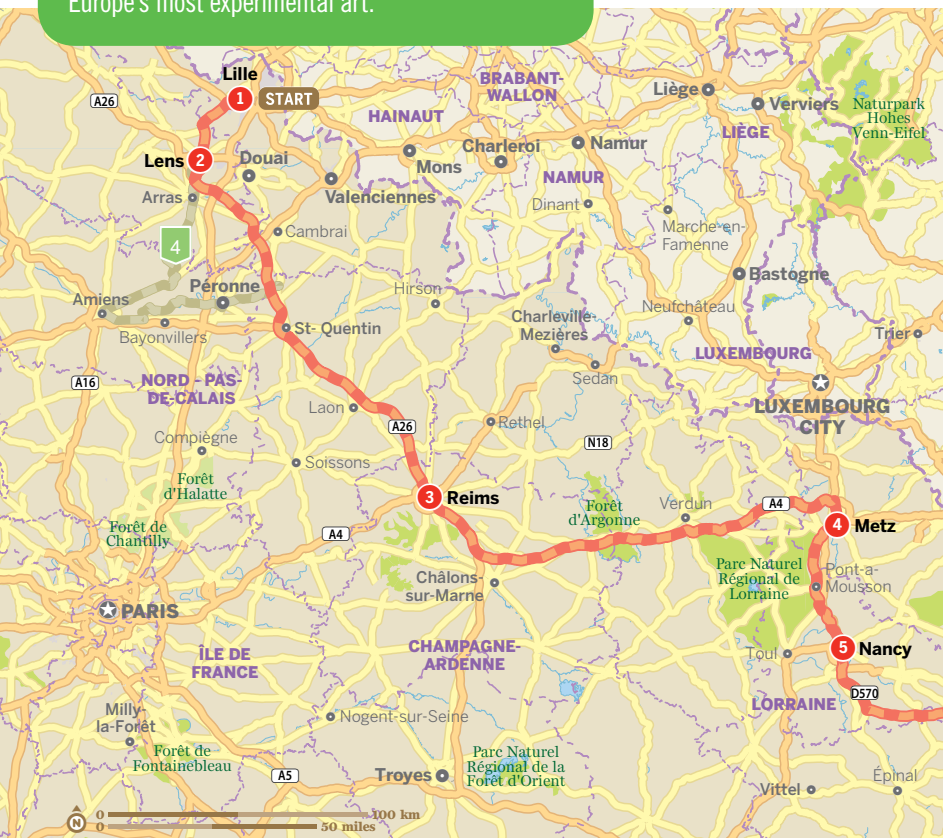
## A Toast to Art

France's northeast is rapidly gaining a reputation as one of the country's most artistic corners, especially since the recent high-profile openings of the Louvre-Lens and Metz's Centre Pompidou – but these glitzy new museums are simply the continuation of a long artistic legacy. This high-culture tour takes in Gothic cathedrals, neoclassical squares, chic crystalware and art nouveau mansions – not to mention some of Europe's most experimental art.

## 1 Lille

Once grimy, now groovy, industrial Lille has reinvented itself as a centre of shopping, art and culture. To underline its renaissance, it's now home to not one but three top-class art museums.

Classic works find a home at the **Palais des Beaux Arts** (Fine Arts Museum; [www.pba-lille.fr](http://www.pba-lille.fr); place de la République; adult/student/child €6.50/4/free; ☎2-6pm Mon, 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), which owns a first-rate collection of Old



Masters, including works by Rubens, Van Dyck and Manet.

Contrast these with the playful – and sometimes just plain weird – works on show at the **Musée d'Art Moderne Lille-Métropole** (📍03 20 19 68 68; www.musee-lam.fr; 1 allée du Musée; adult/student/child €7/5/free; incl temporary exhibits €10/7/free; 🕒10am-6pm Tue-Sun). Big names including Braque, Calder, Léger, Miró, Modigliani and Picasso are the main draws. It's in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 9km east of Gare Lille-Europe.

A few miles north at **La Piscine Musée d'Art et d'Industrie** (www.roubaix-lapiscine.com; 23 rue de l'Espérance, Roubaix; adult/child €4.50/free; incl temporary exhibits €7/free; 🕒11am-6pm Tue-Thu, to 8pm Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun; 🚶Gare Jean Lebas), the building is almost as intriguing as the art: a glorious art deco swimming pool has been beautifully converted into a cutting-edge gallery, showing contemporary paintings and sculptures.

🍴🚶 p73

**The Drive** » The quickest route to Lens is via the A1, but a less hectic route takes the N41 and N47. It's a 37km drive from the outskirts of Lille.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 2 Lens

A depressed coal-mining town 37km south of Lille might not seem like the most obvious place to continue investigation of French art, but *au contraire*. As of December 2012,

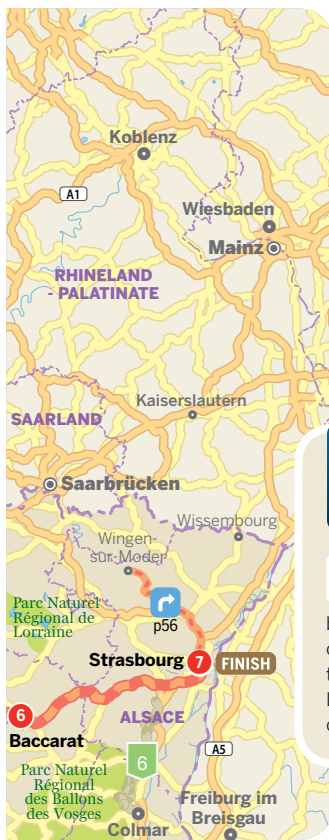
the run-down industrial town of Lens is home to the country's highest-profile new art museum, the **Louvre-Lens** (www.louvre-lens.fr). An offshoot of the Paris original, this impressive new museum aims to broaden access to the Louvre's treasures, and hopefully help kick-start the town's regeneration in the process.

It's early days, so the museum is still very much a work in progress – check the website for the latest news of what's on show.

**The Drive** » This time it's worth taking the motorway. Follow the N17 south of town and join the A26 for 178km to Reims, about a two- to 2½-hour drive away.

### 3 Reims

Along with its towering Gothic cathedral and Champagne connections, Reims is also worth visiting for its splendid **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (8 rue Chanzy; adult/child €3/free; 🕒10am-noon & 2-6pm



#### LINK YOUR TRIP

4

### In Flanders Fields

The main French battlefields of WWII are covered in this emotional tour; loop back at the end to Lille, and it makes an ideal combo with this trip.

6

### Alsace Accents

Our drive along the Route des Vins d'Alsace starts in Strasbourg, so it's an ideal way to extend your journey at the end of this trip.

Wed-Mon), located inside an 18th-century abbey. Highlights include 27 works by Camille Corot (only the Louvre has more), 13 portraits by German Renaissance painters Cranach the Elder and the Younger, lots of Barbizon School landscapes and two works each by Monet, Gauguin and Pissarro. But its most celebrated possession is probably Jacques-Louis David's world-famous *The Death of Marat*, depicting the Revolutionary leader's bloody, just-murdered corpse in the bathtub. It's one of only four known versions of the painting in the world, and is worth the admission fee on its own.

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**The Drive** » Metz is 192km east of Reims via the A4 motorway, another two-hour drive.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

4 Metz

Opened in 2010 to much fanfare, the swoopy, spaceship façade of the **Centre Pompidou-Metz** ([www.centrepompidou-metz.fr](http://www.centrepompidou-metz.fr)).



**TOP TIP:  
PASS NANCY TROIS  
MUSÉES**

This good-value pass gets you into the Musée de l'École de Nancy, the Musée Lorrain and the Musée des Beaux-Arts, and is sold at each museum.

fr; 1 parvis des Droits de l'Homme; adult/child €7/free; ⌚11am-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) fronts France's boldest new gallery. Drawing on the Pompidou's fantastic modern art collection, it's gained a reputation for ambitious exhibitions, such as the recent one spotlighting the graphic works of American conceptual artist Sol LeWitt.

While you're in town, don't miss Metz's amazing **Cathédrale St-Étienne** (place St-Étienne; admission free; ⌚8am-6pm), a lacy wonder lit by kaleidoscopic curtains of stained glass. It's known as 'God's lantern' for good reason – look out for the technicolour windows created by the visionary artist Marc Chagall.

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**The Drive** » The most scenic option to Nancy is the D657, which tracks the banks of the Moselle River. Head southwest on the A31, then take exit 30a (signed to Jouy les Arches). Follow the road through rolling Alsatian countryside as far as Pont-à-Mousson, then continue through town on the D657 all

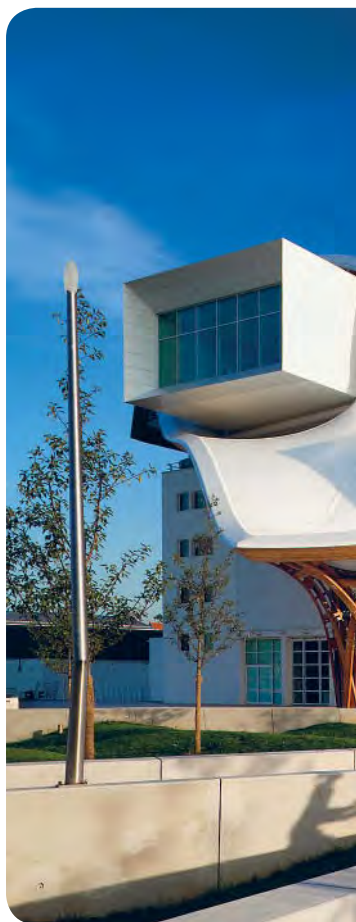
the way to Nancy. It's a point-to-point drive of about 65km.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

5 Nancy

Home of the art nouveau movement, Nancy has an air of grace and refinement that's all its own. Start your art appreciation at the **Musée de l'École de Nancy** (School of Nancy

ARCHITECTS: SHIGEHARU BUN; JEAN-NE GASTINES; PHOTOGRAPHER: WALTER BIRKOWICZ/TTY IMAGES ©





Metz Centre Pompidou-Metz

Museum; [www.ecole-de-nancy.com](http://www.ecole-de-nancy.com); 36-38 rue du Sergent Blandan; adult/child €6/4; 🕒10am-6pm Wed-Sun), an art nouveau showpiece of dreamy interiors and curvy glass, housed in a 19th-century villa 2km southwest of the centre.

Next, head into the city's heart, magnificent **place Stanislas**, a vast neoclassical square that's now a Unesco World

Heritage Site. Designed by Emmanuel Héré in the 1750s, it's encircled by glorious buildings, including the **hôtel de ville** and the **Opéra National de Lorraine**, and contains a treasure trove of statues, rococo fountains and wrought-iron gateways.

On one side of the square is the city's **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (3 place

Stanislas; adult/child €6/free; 🕒10am-6pm Wed-Mon), where Caravaggio, Rubens, Picasso and Monet hang alongside works by Lorraine-born artists, including the dreamlike landscapes of Claude Lorraine and the pared-down designs of Nancy-born architect Jean Prouvé (1901-84).

On nearby Grand Rue, the regal Renaissance





## DETOUR: MUSÉE LALIQUE

### Start 7 Strasbourg

René Lalique was one of the great figures of the art nouveau movement, and the **Musée Lalique** ([www.musee-lalique.com](http://www.musee-lalique.com); Rue du Hochberg, Wingen-sur-Moder; adult/child €6/3; ☀10am-7pm daily, closed Mon Oct-Mar) provides a fitting tribute to his talents.

Opened on the site of the old Hochberg glassworks in 2011, the museum investigates Lalique's fascination with naturalistic forms (especially flowers, insects and foliage), not to mention the curvaceous lines of the female body. The collection illustrates his astonishing breadth of work, from gem-encrusted jewellery to perfume bottles and sculpture.

The museum is 60km north of Strasbourg in Wingen-sur-Moder.

Palais Ducal was once home to the Dukes of Lorraine. It's now the **Musée Lorrain** (64 & 66 Grande Rue; adult/child for both sections €5.50/3.50; ☀10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun), with a rich fine-art and history collection, including medieval statuary and faience (glazed pottery).

  p57

**The Drive** » Head south from Nancy on the main A330 motorway. Take exit 7, signed to Flavigny-sur-Moselle, which will take you onto the rural riverside D570. Stay on this road all the way to Bayon, then cross the river through town, following the D22 east through quiet countryside to Baccarat. It's a drive of 78km.

### 6 Baccarat

The glitzy glassware of Baccarat was

considered the height of sophistication in 18th-century France, and its exquisite crystal could be found gracing mansions and châteaux all over Europe. The **Musée Baccarat** ([www.baccarat.fr](http://www.baccarat.fr), in French; 2 rue des Cristalleries; adult/child €2.50/ free; ☀9am-noon & 2-6pm) displays 1100 pieces, and the boutique out front is almost as dazzling as the museum. Nearby crystal shops sell lesser, and less expensive, brands.

Glass aficionados will also want to stroll across the River Meurthe to the 1950s-built **Église St-Rémy** (☀8am-5pm), whose austere façade conceals a blindingly bright interior containing 20,000 Baccarat panels.


**The Drive** » Take the D590 southeast to Raon-l'Étape, then turn northeast on the

D392A, a lovely back road that winds up through woodland and mountains, offering great views of the Vosges en route. Eventually you'll link up with the D1420, which will take you to Strasbourg. It's a good two-hour drive of about 100km.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 7 Strasbourg

Finish with a couple of days exploring the architectural splendour of Strasbourg and visiting the **Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain** (place Hans

Jean Arp; adult/child €7/free; ☀noon-7pm Tue, Wed & Fri, to 9pm Thu, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun;  Musée d'Art Moderne), a striking glass-and-steel cube showcasing fine art, graphics and photography. The art's defiantly modern: Kandinsky, Picasso, Magritte and Monet canvases can all be found here, alongside curvaceous works by Strasbourg-born abstract artist Hans Jean Arp.

Afterwards, have a good wander around **Grande Île**, Strasbourg's historic and Unesco-listed old quarter, as well as **Petite France**, the canal district.

  p57

# Eating & Sleeping

## Metz 4

### **Restaurant Thierry** Fusion €€

(📍)03 87 74 01 23; www.restaurant-thierry.fr; 5 rue des Piques; menus €20-37; 🕒lunch & dinner Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) Combining Moroccan flair with an attractive setting in a 16th-century town house, this is one of Metz's most coveted tables. An aperitif in the candlelit salon works up an appetite for dishes such as sweet duck *pastilla* (pie) and seafood and dried-fruit tagine. Often full, so call ahead.

### **Hôtel de la Cathédrale** Historic Hotel €€

(📍)03 87 75 00 02; www.hotelcathedrale-metz.fr; 25 place de Chambre; d €75-110; 📶) Classy and historic hotel opposite the cathedral. Climb the staircase to your classically elegant room, with high ceilings, hardwood floors and antique trappings. Book well ahead for a cathedral view.

### **Residhome Metz** Aparthotel €

(📍)03 87 57 97 06; www.residhome.com; 10 rue Lafayette; d €58-65; 📶) Part of a small French chain, Residhome has an excellent price-quality ratio and is two minutes' walk from the station. Light, roomy and done out in contemporary style, the studios and apartments make a comfy self-catering base, with kitchenettes, flat-screen TVs and free internet access.

## Nancy 5

### **La Primatale** International €€

(📍)03 83 30 44 03; www.la-primatale.com, in French; 14 rue de la Primatale; menus €18-28; 🕒lunch & dinner Mon & Wed-Sat, lunch Tue) The food looks as good as it tastes at this upbeat, art-strewn bistro. Clean, bright flavours such as tartar of marinated salmon with dill and star anise and rack of lamb in a herb-olive crust reveal a definite Mediterranean slant.

### **Le V-Four** Bistro €€

(📍)03 83 32 49 48; 10 rue St-Michel; menus €19-50; 🕒lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) With

just a handful of tables, this petit bistro is all about intimacy and understated sophistication. Mulberry chairs and crisp white tablecloths set the scene for original creations like grilled scallops with wasabi cream and tomato confit. Book ahead.

### **Hôtel de Guise** Boutique Hotel €€

(📍)03 83 32 24 68; www.hoteldeguise.com; 18 rue de Guise; s/d/tr/q €68/80/92/98; 📶) Boutique chic meets 17th-century elegance at this backstreet hotel. A wrought-iron staircase sweeps up to old-fashioned rooms, with antique furnishings, inlaid parquet and heavy drapes.

### **Hôtel des Prélats** Historic Hotel €€

(📍)03 83 30 20 20; www.hoteldesprelats.com; 56 place Monseigneur Ruch; s €75-95, d €105-115; 📶) It's not every day you get to sleep in a former 17th-century bishop's palace right next to the cathedral. This elegant hotel plays up the romance in rooms with stained-glass windows, four-poster beds and shimmery drapes. Service is as polished as the surrounds.

## Strasbourg 7

### **Le Gavroche** Mediterranean €€

(📍)03 88 36 82 89; www.restaurant-gavroche.com; 4 rue Klein; menu €38; 🕒lunch & dinner Mon-Fri; 📶) (Porte de l'Hôpital) Bistro food is given a pinch of creativity and southern sunshine at intimate, softly lit Le Gavroche. Mains like veal in a mint crust with crispy polenta and coriander-infused artichoke tagine are followed by zingy desserts like lime tart with lemon-thyme sorbet.

### **Cour du Corbeau** Boutique Hotel €€€

(📍)03 90 00 26 26; www.cour-corbeau.com; 6-8 rue des Couples; r €190-330; 📶) (Porte de l'Hôpital) A 16th-century inn converted into a boutique hotel, Cour du Corbeau wins you over with its half-timbered charm and near-the-river location. Gathered around a courtyard, rooms blend original touches like oak parquet and Louis XV furnishings with mod cons like flat-screen TVs.



*Camembert* Renowned worldwide  
for its delicious soft cheese

CAMEMBERT

Maison du  
Camembert

# Tour des Fromages



# 3

*On this gastronomic drive you'll devour some of the best cheese in France and see where the seaside inspired artists, where Joan of Arc was executed and where Richard the Lionheart prowled.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

70 km

### Honfleur

Savour superfresh seafood at the harbourside restaurants

315 km

### Rouen

Admire the architecture of Rouen's old town

Neufchâtel-en-Bray

7

Pont-l'Évêque

10

FINISH

Les Andelys

3

15 km

### Livarot

Explore the best cheese museum in France

START 1

### Camembert

Learn the secrets of the world-renowned cheese at the Président Farm

0 km

5 DAYS

315KM / 196 MILES

GREAT FOR...



BEST TIME TO GO

In May Pont L'Évêque celebrates all that is cheese during the Fête du Fromage.



ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Snap a shot of the Seine from the platform near the Château Gaillard.



BEST FOR HISTORY

Pay your respects to the memory of Joan of Arc in Rouen.

## 3

# Tour des Fromages

More cheese, please! It's said that in France there is a different variety of cheese for every day of the year. On this driving culinary extravaganza you'll taste, and learn about, some of the very finest of French cheeses. Cheese cravings sated, explore the backstreets of Rouen, build castles made of sand on the seashore and clamber up to castles made of stone in the interior.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 Camembert

Thanks to a delicious soft cheese, the name Camembert is known the world over. Therefore, it can come as a surprise to learn that Camembert is merely a small, but very picturesque, classic Norman village of half-timbered buildings. The big attraction here is of course the aforementioned cheese and you can learn all about it during a guided tour of the **Président**



**Farm** (📞02 33 36 06 60; [www.fermepresident.com](http://www.fermepresident.com); adult/child €3/2; 🕒10am-7pm May-Aug, 10am-5pm or 6pm Sep, Oct, Mar & Apr), an early-19th-century farm restored by Président, one of the region's largest Camembert producers.

**The Drive** » It's a 5km, 10-minute drive along the D246 and then the D16 from Camembert village to the Musée du Camembert in Vimoutiers.

## 2 Musée du Camembert

Recently reopened after two years of extensive

renovations, the small **Musée du Camembert** (📞02 33 39 30 29; 10 Av du Général de Gaulle; adult/child €3/2; 🕒2-5.30pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct), in the village of Vimoutiers, gives you the lowdown on the history and culture of the smelly stuff. It's a privately run affair; you might have to call for them to open up.

**The Drive** » It's another 10-minute drive north to stop 3, Livarot, along the D579.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 3 Livarot

Although not as famous internationally as Camembert, Livarot is a big deal in France.

The town where the cheese of the same name originated is home to probably the best cheese tour in Normandy. **Le Village Fromager** (L'Atelier Fromager; 📞02 31 48 20 10; [www.graindorge.fr](http://www.graindorge.fr); 42 rue du Général Leclerc; 🕒9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-1pm & 3-5.30pm Sun) offers a free tour and

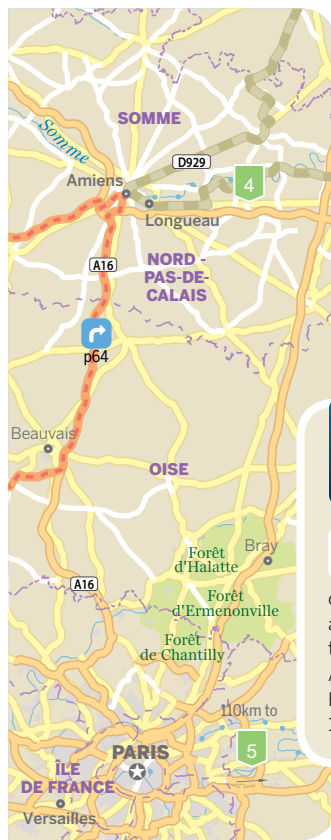
tasting at the Graindorge factory. A self-guided tour accompanied by multimedia displays leads through a series of whiffy viewing rooms where you can watch Livarot, Camembert and Pont l'Évêque being made.

After you've expanded your waistline on the cheese tour, work it all off again with a walk around the town. Its wobbly-wiggly half-timbered buildings make it a real charmer.

**The Drive** » Using the D579 it's only a 15km drive through leafy countryside to Le Domaine Saint Hippolyte, just on the outskirts of the village of St Martin de la Lieue (take the third exit off the roundabout at the entrance to the village).

## 4 Le Domaine Saint Hippolyte

There's fun for all the family at **Le Domaine Saint Hippolyte** (📞02 31 31 30 68; [www.domaine-saint-hippolyte.fr](http://www.domaine-saint-hippolyte.fr); rte de Livarot/D579, St Martin de la Lieue; adult/child €5.90/free;



## LINK YOUR TRIP

### 4 In Flanders Fields

The war memorials of northern France are a powerful symbol of the wastefulness of war. Amiens, the start of our Flanders Fields drive, is 120km from Rouen.

### 5 Champagne Taster

From Rouen it's 284km to Reims and the start of another culinary adventure – this one fuelled by the bubbly stuff.

☎10am-6pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sat, to 7pm Wed), which is both a cheese producer and a retailer where you can witness the process behind turning milk into cheese. There's also a small museum and, most interestingly for children, a working farm where you can pat cows and stroll through the grounds to the river.

**The Drive** » A gentle countryside cruise of just over half an hour (31km) up the D45 and D101 will see you easing into Pont l'Évêque.

### 5 Pont l'Évêque

Since the 13th century this unpretentious little town with rivers meandering through its centre has been known for its eponymous cheese. Although two-thirds of the town was destroyed in WWII, careful reconstruction has brought much of it back to life.

## NORMAN CUISINE

Normandy may be the largest region of France not to contain a single vineyard, but its culinary wealth more than makes up for what it lacks in the wine department – besides, any self-respecting Norman would far rather partake in a locally produced cider or Calvados. This is a land of soft cheeses, apples, cream and an astonishingly rich range of seafood and fish. You simply shouldn't leave Normandy without trying classics like *coquilles St-Jacques* (scallops) and *sole dieppoise* (Dieppe sole). And whatever you do, don't forget your *trou normand* ('Norman hole') – the traditional break between courses for a glass of Calvados to cleanse the palate and improve the appetite for the next course!

Half-timbered buildings line the main street and 1960s stained glass bathes the 15th-century **Église St-Michel** (place de l'Église) in coloured light.

There's no shortage of **cheese shops** in town.

If you're passing through over the second weekend in May, don't miss the **Fête du Fromage**, when the townsfolk throw a little party for cheese – only in France!

**The Drive** » To get to the Distillerie Christian Drouin, your next stop, head out of Pont l'Évêque in a northeasterly direction on the D675. At the roundabout on the edge of the town, take the third exit (rue Saint-Mélaine/D677) and continue for about 2.5km until you see the farm on your left.

### 6 Distillerie Christian Drouin

In case you were starting to wonder if Normandy was merely a one-cheese

pony, pay a visit to the **Distillerie Christian Drouin** (☎02 31 64 30 05; [www.calvados-drouin.com](http://www.calvados-drouin.com); rte de Trouville, Coudray-Rabut; ☎9am-noon & 2-6pm), which will let you in on the delights of Norman cider and Calvados (that other classic Norman tippie). Entrance is free.

**The Drive** » It's a simple enough 17km drive along the D579 to Honfleur and your first sea views (yes, the sun will be out by the time you get there...).

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 7 Honfleur

Long a favourite with painters, Honfleur is



JORNBANK/ISTOCK ©



Les Andelys Medieval village along the Seine

arguably Normandy's most charming seaside town.

On the west side of the **Vieux Bassin** (Old Harbour), with its many pleasure boats, **quai Ste-Catherine** is lined with tall, taper-thin houses – many protected from the elements by slate tiles – dating from the 16th to the 18th centuries. The **Lieutenance**, at the mouth of the old harbour, was once the residence of the town's royal governor.

Initially intended as a temporary structure, the **Église Ste-Catherine** (place Ste-Catherine; ☎9am–6pm) has been standing

in the square for over 500 years. The church is particularly notable for its double-vaulted roof and twin naves, which from the inside resemble a couple of overturned ships' hulls.

🍷🍷 p65

**The Drive** » You've had nice, mellow country lanes so far. Time to speed things up for the 111km race (not too fast, please!) down the A29 to Neufchâtel-en-Brey.

## 8 Neufchâtel-en-Bray

The small market town of Neufchâtel-en-Brey

is renowned for its heart-shaped cheese called, imaginatively, **Neufchâtel**. To buy it in the most authentic way, try to time your arrival to coincide with the Saturday-morning **market**.

Appetite satisfied, it's now time for some culture. Check out the **Musée Mathon-Durand** (☎02 35 93 06 55; Grande Rue Saint-Pierre; adult/child €2.35/free; ☎3–6pm Tue–Sun), inside a gorgeous medieval building that once belonged to a knight. He's long since gone off to fight dragons in the sky, and today the





## DETOUR: AMIENS

### Start 8 Neufchâtel-en-Brey

One of France's most awe-inspiring Gothic cathedrals is reason enough to make a detour to Amiens, the comfy, if reserved, former capital of Picardy. The **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (place Notre Dame; north tower adult/child €5.50/free; ☺cathedral 8.30am-6.15pm daily, north tower afternoon only Wed-Mon) is the largest Gothic cathedral in France and a Unesco World Heritage Site. Begun in 1220, the magnificent structure was built to house the **skull of St John the Baptist**, shown – framed in gold and jewels – in the northern outer wall of the ambulatory. Connoisseurs rave about the soaring Gothic arches, the unity of style and the immense interior, but for locals the 17th-century statue known as the **Ange Pleureur** (Crying Angel), in the ambulatory directly behind the over-the-top baroque high altar, remains a favourite.

From Neufchâtel-en-Brey head 73km (one hour) down the A29 toll road. In order to rejoin the main part of the trip, take the A16 toll road via Beauvais (129km, one hour and 50 minutes) straight to stop 9, Les Andelys.

house contains a small museum of local culture.

**The Drive** » The most obvious route between Neufchâtel-en-Brey and stop 9, Les Andelys, is along the A28, but that means skirting around Rouen – time it badly and you'll be sitting in traffic breathing in carbon monoxide. Instead, take the more serene D921 back road. Going this way should take you about 80 minutes to cover the 75km.

### 9 Les Andelys

On a hairpin curve in the Seine lies Les Andelys

(the 's' is silent), the old part of which is crowned by the ruins of Château Gaillard, the 12th-century hilltop fastness of Richard the Lionheart.

Built from 1196 to 1197, **Château Gaillard** (☎02 32 54 41 93; adult/child €3.15/2.60; ☺10am-1pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon mid-Mar–mid-Nov) secured the western border of English territory along the Seine until Henry IV ordered its destruction in 1603. Fantastic views of the Seine's white cliffs

can be enjoyed from the platform a few hundred metres up the one-lane road from the castle.

 p65

**The Drive** » It's a 45km, 50-minute scamper (well, as long as you don't hit rush-hour traffic) down the D6014 to your final stop, Rouen.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 10 Rouen

With its elegant spires, beautifully restored medieval quarter and soaring Gothic cathedral, the ancient city of Rouen is one of Normandy's highlights. It was here that the young French heroine Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc) was tried for heresy.

Rouen's stunning **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (place de la Cathédrale; ☺2-6pm Mon, 7.30am-7pm Tue-Sat, 8am-6pm Sun) is the famous subject of a series of paintings by Monet.

Rue du Gros Horloge runs from the cathedral west to **place du Vieux Marché**, where you'll find the thrillingly bizarre **Église Jeanne d'Arc**, with its fish-scale exterior. It sits on the spot where the 19-year-old Joan was burned at the stake.

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# Eating & Sleeping

## Honfleur 7

### **Le Bréard** **Gastronomic €€€**

(☎02 31 89 53 40; www.restaurant-lebreard.com; 7 rue du Puits; menus €29-55; 🕒lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) *The place to go in Honfleur for gastronomique specialties of the highest order, served in two chic, modern dining rooms. The cuisine is wonderfully imaginative and gleaned from every region of France.*

### **Le Gambetta** **Modern French €€**

(☎02 31 87 05 01; 58 rue Haute; mains €15-20, menu €23; 🕒lunch Sat-Wed, dinner Fri-Wed) Honfleur's latest addition to the restaurant scene, Le Gambetta is well worth seeking out. The decor is a lovely mix of traditional and modern touches, and the food is deliberately eclectic; seafood predominates, but everything has a creative twist.

### **La Maison de Lucie** **Boutique Hotel €€€**

(☎02 31 14 40 40; www.lamaisondelucie.com; 44 rue des Capucins; d €150-200, ste €250-315; 📞📺) This marvellous little hideaway has just 10 rooms and two suites, which ensures intimacy. Some of the bedrooms have Moroccan-tile bathrooms and boast fantastic views across the harbour to the Pont de Normandie.

## Les Andelys 9

### **Hôtel & Restaurant de la Chaîne d'Or** **Hotel €€**

(☎02 32 54 00 31; www.hotel-lachainedor.com; 27 rue Grande, Petit Andely; r €94-149, lunch menus €20-65; 🕒closed Jan, restaurant closed

Wed mid-Apr–mid-Oct, dinner Sun & all day Mon & Tue mid-Oct–mid-Apr; 📞📺) *Right on the Seine, this little rural hideaway, packed with character, is rustically stylish without being twee. The classy restaurant is one of the best for miles around.*

## Rouen 10

### **Les Nymphéas** **Traditional French €€**

(☎02 35 89 26 69; www.lesnymphéas-rouen.com; 7-9 rue de la Pie; mains €29-37, menus €34-52; 🕒lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) *Its formal table settings arrayed under 16th-century beams, this fine restaurant serves cuisine based on fresh ingredients. Let chef Patrick Kukurudj and his team seduce you with meat and fish dishes accompanied by divinely inspired sauces.*

### **Minute et Mijoté** **Bistro €**

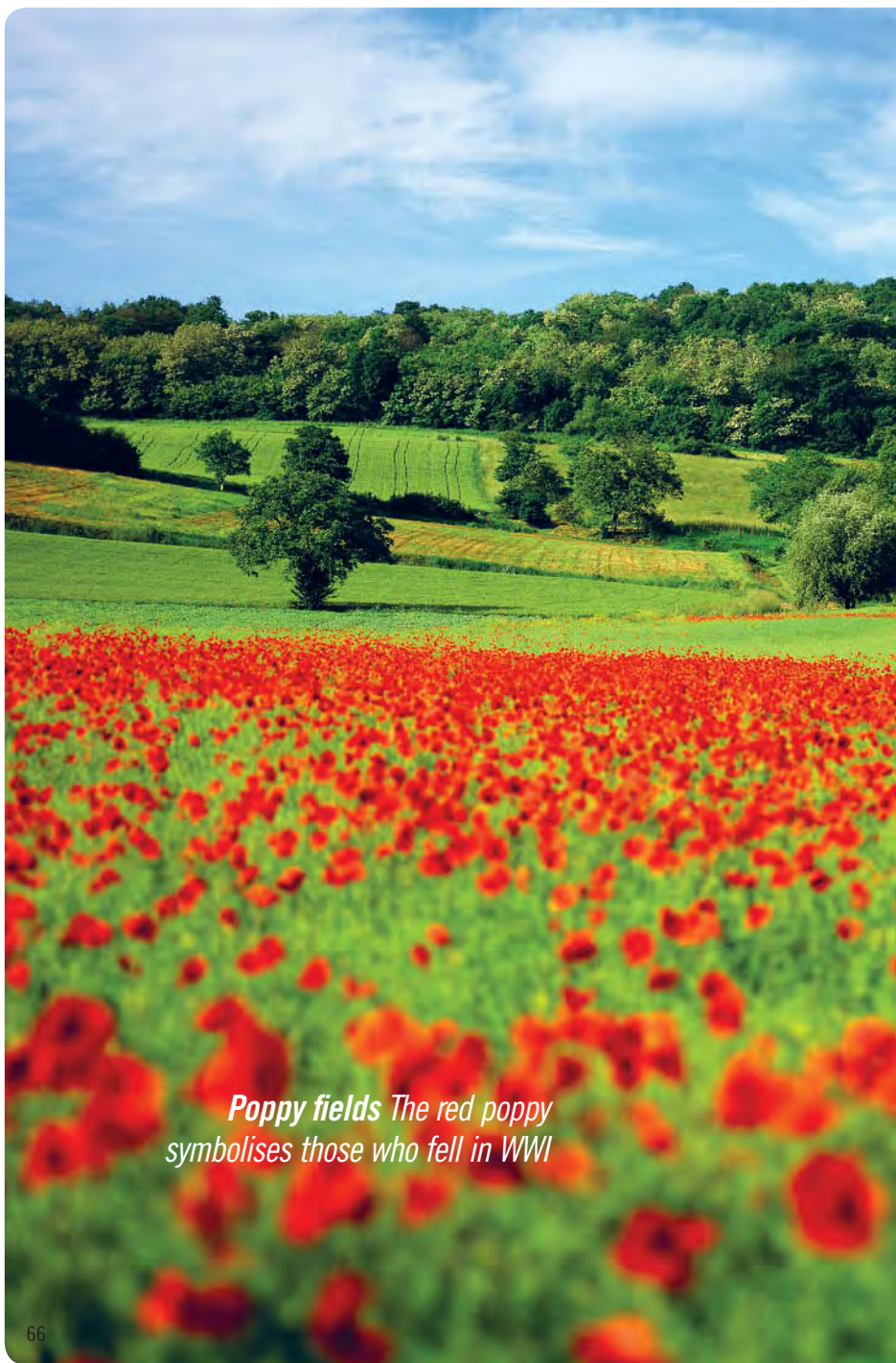
(58 rue de Fontenelle; mains €20, menus €13-30; 🕒lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) *This smart bistro is one of our favourite finds in Rouen. The trademark here is freshness and great value for money, hence its fast-growing reputation.*

### **Hôtel de Bourgtheroulde** **Hotel €€€**

(☎02 35 14 50 50; www.hotelsparouen.com; 15 place de la Pucelle; r €240-380; 📞📺📺) *This stunning conversion of an old private mansion brings a dash of glamour and luxury to Rouen's hotel scene. Rooms are large and gorgeously designed, with beautiful bathrooms.*

### **La Boulangerie** **B&B €€**

(☎06 12 94 53 15; www.laboulangerie.fr; 59 rue St-Nicaise; d €77-92, q €150; 📞📺) *Tucked into a quiet side street slightly off the historic quarter, this adorable B&B occupying a former bakery offers three pleasingly decorated rooms.*



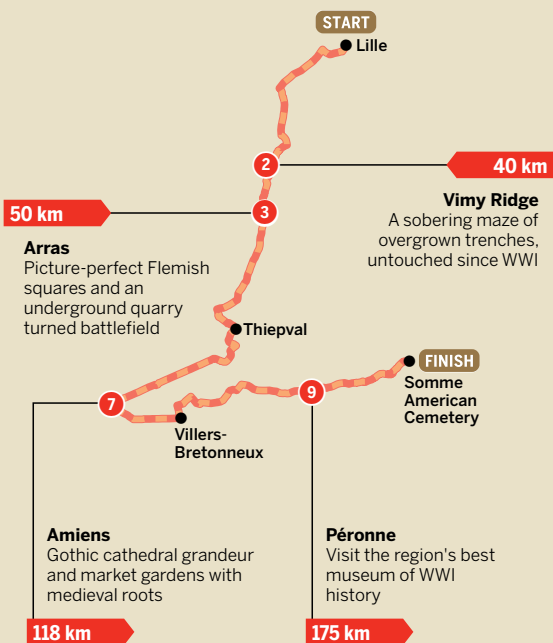
*Poppy fields* The red poppy symbolises those who fell in WWI

# In Flanders Fields

# 4

*WWI history comes to life in this tour of the battlefields where Allied and German troops endured three years of trench warfare. Stopovers in Lille, Arras and Amiens offer an urban counterpoint.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**3 DAYS**  
225KM / 140 MILES

## GREAT FOR...



## BEST TIME TO GO

March to November; some sites close in winter.



## ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The staggering list of missing soldiers' names at Thiepval.



## BEST FOR HISTORY

Carrière Wellington, Arras' riveting quarry turned battlefield.

# 4 In Flanders Fields

Shortly after WWI broke out in 1914, Allied troops established a line of resistance against further German advances in the northern French countryside near Arras, resulting in one of the longest and bloodiest standoffs in modern military history. This tour of Flanders and Picardy takes in France's most important WWI battle memorials, along with the great cities of Lille, Arras and Amiens.

## 1 Lille

A convenient gateway to northern France's WWI battlefields, cosmopolitan Lille offers an engaging mix of grand architecture and Flemish culture. Stop in for dinner at an *estaminet* (traditional Flemish restaurant) and stroll around the gorgeous pedestrianised centre, whose highlights include the **Vieille Bourse**, a 17th-century Flemish Renaissance extravaganza decorated with caryatids and cornucopia, and the neo-Flemish **Chambre de Commerce**, crowned by a gilded clock atop a 76m-high spire.

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**The Drive** » Take the N41, N47 and D55 45km southwest to Vimy Ridge.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 2 Vimy Ridge

More than any other site in northern France, the vast crater-pocked battlefield at Vimy allows visitors to imagine the horrors of trench warfare. A long tree-lined drive ushers you into the surreally serene landscape of grass-covered century-old bunkers where 3598 Canadian soldiers lost their lives in April 1917 while taking 14km-long Vimy Ridge from the Germans. Climb to the ridgeline to see the striking allegorical **WWI**





**memorial**, then visit the **welcome centre** ([www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/memorials](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/memorials); 10am-6pm, closed mid-Dec-mid-Jan) for a **guided tour** (☀ hourly 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Feb-Nov) of the tunnels and trenches, preserved exactly as they were when the guns fell silent.

**The Drive** » Follow the D55, N17 and D917 12km into Arras.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 3 Arras

Contemplating the picture-perfect, reconstructed Flemish-style façades of Arras' two gorgeous market squares (**Grand' Place** and **Petite Place**) today, it's hard to believe that the city centre was largely reduced to rubble in WWI. For a more palpable sense of Arras' wartime realities, head 1km southeast of town to **Carrière Wellington** ([www.carriere-wellington.com](http://www.carriere-wellington.com); rue Delétoile; adult/child



#### LINK YOUR TRIP

### 2 A Toast to Art

From Vimy, detour 9km to Lens for this tour of northern France's arts scene.

### 9 D-Day's Beaches

Relive Europe's other great war on this tour of Normandy's D-Day sites.

€6.80/3.10; ☺ tours  
10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm,  
closed Christmas-mid-Jan),  
a remarkable quarry  
turned museum that  
served as the staging  
area for an ambitious  
Allied surprise attack on  
the Germans on 9 April  
1917. Prior to the attack,  
a corps of 500 New  
Zealand miners worked  
round the clock for five  
months expanding Arras'  
medieval quarries to  
accommodate kitchens,  
a hospital and several  
thousand Commonwealth  
troops. Reminders of  
this chapter in history  
are everywhere, from  
Maori-language graffiti  
to candle burn marks  
from the Easter Mass  
celebrated underground  
the day before the  
troops surged from their  
subterranean hideout  
into the German front  
lines.

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**The Drive** » Take the  
D919, D174 and D73 31km  
southwest to the Newfoundland  
Memorial, detouring briefly  
at kilometre 15 to the Alette  
Indian and Chinese Cemetery,  
where Chinese and Hindi  
inscriptions mark the graves  
of Indian soldiers and Chinese  
noncombat labourers.

#### 4 Newfoundland Memorial

On 1 July 1916 the  
volunteer Royal  
Newfoundland Regiment  
stormed entrenched  
German positions and

was nearly wiped out.  
Like Vimy, the evocative  
**Mémorial Terre-Neuvien  
de Beaumont-Hamel**  
preserves the battlefield  
much as it was at  
fighting's end. Climb  
to the bronze caribou  
statue, on a hillside  
surrounded by native  
Newfoundland plants, for  
views of the shell craters,  
barbed-wire barriers and  
zigzag trenches that still  
fill with mud in winter.  
The on-site **welcome  
centre** ([www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/memorials](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/memorials); ☺10am-6pm)  
offers guided tours.

**The Drive** » Head 5km east-southeast on the D73 through tiny Beaumont-Hamel, across a pretty stream valley, past Ulster Tower Memorial (site of a Northern Irish war monument and a homey tearoom) and on to the easy-to-spot Thiepval memorial.

#### 5 Thiepval

On a lonely, windswept hilltop, the towering **Thiepval memorial** to 'the Missing of the Somme' marks the site of a German stronghold that was stormed on 1 July 1916 with unimaginable casualties. Thiepval catches visitors off guard both with its monumentality and its staggering simplicity. Inscribed below the enormous arch, visible from miles around, are the names of 73,367 Commonwealth soldiers whose remains were never recovered or

identified. A seemingly endless roll call of regiments runs down each column, with the alphabetised names of individual soldiers emphasising the relentless and arbitrary nature of war. The glass-walled **visitors centre** (☺10am-6pm) has excellent displays describing the battle and its context.

**The Drive** » A 7km ride through rolling hills along the D151 and D20 brings you through La Boisselle to La Grande Mine.

#### 6 La Boisselle

Just outside this hamlet, the 100m-wide, 30m-deep **Lochnagar Crater** looks like the site of a meteor impact. Colloquially known as **La Grande Mine**, it was created on 1 July 1916 by about 25 tonnes of ammonal laid by British sappers attempting to breach the German lines.

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**The Drive** » Backtrack along the D20 to the D929, then turn left (southwest) 35km to Amiens.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 7 Amiens

Amiens' pedestrianised city centre offers a delightful break from the battlefields. Climb the north tower of the 13th-century **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (place Notre Dame; north tower adult/child



Newfoundland Memorial

€5.50/free; ☺cathedral  
8.30am-6.15pm daily, north  
tower afternoons Wed-Mon)  
for stupendous views  
of town, and don't miss  
the free 45-minute **light  
show** that bathes the  
façade in vivid medieval  
colours nightly in  
summer. (See p64 for  
more on the cathedral.)

Across the Somme  
River, gondola-like boats  
offer tours of Amiens' vast  
market gardens, the  
**Hortillonnages** (54  
bd Beauvillé; adult/child  
€5.90/5.20; ☺1.30-4.30pm),  
which have supplied the  
city with vegetables and  
flowers since the Middle  
Ages.

Literature buffs will  
love the **Maison de Jules  
Verne** ([www.jules-verne.net](http://www.jules-verne.net);  
2 rue Charles Dubois; adult/  
child €7/3.50; ☺10am-12.30pm  
& 2-6.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri,  
2-6.30pm Tue, 11am-6.30pm  
Sat & Sun), the turreted  
home where Jules Verne  
wrote many of his best-  
known works.

🍴🍷 p73

**The Drive** » Take the D1029  
19km east to Villers-Bretonneux.

## 8 Villers- Bretonneux

During WWI, 46,000  
of Australia's 313,000  
volunteer soldiers

met their deaths on  
the Western Front  
(14,000 others perished  
elsewhere). In the village  
of Villers-Bretonneux, the  
**Musée Franco-Australien**  
(Franco-Australian Museum;  
[www.museeaustralien.com](http://www.museeaustralien.com);  
9 rue Victoria; adult/child €5/3;  
☺9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)  
displays a collection of  
highly personal WWI  
Australiana, including  
letters and photographs  
that evoke life on the  
front. The names of  
10,982 Australian  
soldiers whose remains  
were never found  
are engraved on the  
32m-high **Australian**





## DETOUR: THE RAILROAD CAR WHERE THE WAR ENDED

### Start 10 Somme American Cemetery

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, WWI officially ended at **Clairière de l'Armistice** (Armistice Clearing), 7km northeast of the city of Compiègne, with the signing of an armistice inside the railway carriage of Allied supreme commander Maréchal Ferdinand Foch. In the same forest clearing, in a railroad car of similar vintage, the **Musée de l'Armistice** ([www.musee-armistice-14-18.fr](http://www.musee-armistice-14-18.fr); adult/child €5/3; ☎10am-5.30pm, closed Tue Oct-Mar) commemorates these events with memorabilia, newspaper clippings and stereoscopic photos that capture all the mud, muck and misery of WWI; some of the furnishings, hidden away during WWII, were the ones actually used in 1918.

From the Somme American Cemetery, take the D1044, D1 and D1032 86km southwest towards Compiègne, then follow signs 8km east along the N1031 and D546 to Clairière de l'Armistice.

**National War Memorial**, 2km north of town.

**The Drive** » From the Australian memorial, take the D23 briefly north, then meander east through pretty rolling country, roughly paralleling the Somme River along the D71, D1 and D1017 into Péronne.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 9 Péronne

Housed in a massively fortified château, Péronne's award-winning museum, **Historial de la Grande Guerre** ([www.historial.org](http://www.historial.org); Château de Péronne; adult/child €7.50/3.80;

☎10am-6pm, closed mid-Dec-mid-Jan) provides a superb overview of WWI's historical and cultural context, telling the story of the war chronologically, with equal space given to the French, British and German perspectives. Visually engaging exhibits, including period films and bone-chilling engravings by Otto Dix, capture the aesthetic sensibilities, enthusiasm, patriotism and unimaginable violence of the time.

For excellent English-language brochures

about the battlefields, visit Péronne's **tourist office** (☎03 22 84 42 38; [www.hautesomme-tourisme.com](http://www.hautesomme-tourisme.com); 16 place André Audinot; ☎10am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat), opposite the museum.

**The Drive** » The American cemetery is 24km east-northeast of Péronne via the D6, D406 and D57.

### 10 Somme American Cemetery

In September 1918, just six weeks before WWI ended, American units, flanked by their Commonwealth allies, launched an assault on the Germans' heavily fortified Hindenburg Line. Some of the fiercest fighting took place near the village of Bony. At the nearby **Somme American Cemetery** ([www.abmc.gov](http://www.abmc.gov); ☎9am-5pm), criss-crossing diagonals of crosses and stars of David mark the graves of 1844 American soldiers who fell here; the names of 333 other men whose remains were never recovered are inscribed on the walls of the adjacent **Memorial Chapel**.

**The Drive** » From here, it's an easy drive back to Arras (69km via the A26), Lille (96km via the A26 and A1) or Amiens (98km via the A29).

# Eating & Sleeping

## Lille 1

### Au Vieux de la Vieille Flemish €

(www.estaminetlille.fr; 2-4 rue des Vieux Murs; mains €10-14; ☺ lunch & dinner) Old-time prints, antiques and fresh hops hanging from the rafters create the cosy ambience of a late 19th-century Flemish village at this beloved *estaminet* (traditional Flemish eatery). On sunny days, sit outdoors on picturesque cobblestoned place de l'Oignon. Specialties include *carbonade* (braised beef stewed with Flemish beer, spice bread and brown sugar) and *potjevleesch* (jellied chicken, pork, veal and rabbit).

### L'Hermitage Gantois Design Hotel €€€

(☎ 03 20 85 30 30; www.hotelhermitagegantois.com; 224 rue de Paris; d €219-455; @ ☺) This five-star hotel creates enchanting, harmonious spaces by complementing its rich architectural heritage with refined ultramodernism. Behind a Flemish-Gothic façade, the 67 rooms are huge and sumptuous, with Starck accessories next to Louis XV-style chairs and bathrooms that sparkle with Carrara marble. One of the four courtyards is home to a 220-year-old wisteria that's been declared a historic monument. The still-consecrated chapel was built in 1637.

## Arras 3

### Carpe Diem Bistro €

(☎ 03 21 51 70 08; 8 bis rue des Petits Viéziers; mains €14-16, lunch menus €12; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Mon) This cosy, beamed-ceilinged eatery serves delicious grilled meats, accompanied by your choice of eight sauces and side dishes such as green beans, basmati rice and beer-braised endives.

### Hôtel Diamant Hotel €€

(☎ 03 21 71 23 23; www.arras-hotel-diamant.com; 5 place des Héros; r €75-86, apt for 2/4/6 people €125/145/165; ☺) Snag a room overlooking the Petite Place and the belfry at this small, ultracentral hotel, or opt for the fully equipped apartment next door with kitchen and laundry facilities. Regular serenades from the chiming bells and the bustle of the Saturday market outside your window may be pluses or minuses, depending on your perspective!

## La Boisselle 6

### Old Blighty Tea Room Tearoom €

(www.oldblightysomme.com; 1 rue Georges Cuvillier; sandwiches & snacks from €5; ☺ 10.30am-5pm Thu-Mon, noon-4pm Tue) Two minutes from the mine crater, this British-run tearoom makes for a convivial midday break.

## Amiens 7

### Le T'chiot Zinc Bistro €€

(18 rue de Noyon; menus €13-27; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Bistro-style decor reminiscent of the belle époque provides an inviting backdrop for tasty Picard specialties such as *caqhuse* (pork in a cream, wine vinegar and onion sauce).

### Grand Hôtel de l'Univers Hotel €€

(☎ 03 22 91 52 51; www.hotel-univers-amiens.com; 2 rue de Noyon; s €67-89, d €88-156; @ ☺) This venerable hotel has an enviable park-side location in the city's pedestrianised heart. The immaculate, comfortable rooms surround a four-storey atrium; some on the 4th floor enjoy cathedral views.

*Champagne Sip your way through  
the region's famed vineyards*



# Classic Trip

## Champagne Taster



# 5

*From musty cellars to vine-covered hillsides, this oenological adventure explores the world's favourite celebratory tippie. Cleanse your palate and ready your taste buds: it's time to quaff.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**3 DAYS**  
85KM / 53 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

April to June for spring sunshine or September and October to see the Champagne harvest.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Overlooking glossy vineyards from the Phare de Verzenay.

### BEST FOR CULTURE

Sip Champagne in the cellars of Moët et Chandon.

# Classic Trip

## 5

## Champagne Taster

'My only regret in life is that I didn't drink enough Champagne,' wrote the economist John Maynard Keynes, but by the end of this tour, you'll have drunk enough bubbly to last several lifetimes. Starting and ending at the prestigious Champagne centres of Reims and Épernay, this fizz-fuelled trip includes stops at some of the world's most famous producers – with ample time for tasting en route.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 1 Reims

There's nowhere better to start your Champagne tour than the regal city of **Reims**. Several big names have their *caves* (wine cellars) nearby. **Mumm** (☎03 26 49 59 70; www.ghmumm.com; 34 rue du Champ de Mars; tours €11; ☺ tours 9am-11am & 2-5pm daily, closed Sun Nov-Feb), pronounced 'moon', is the only *maison* in central Reims. Founded in 1827, it's the world's third-largest Champagne producer. One-hour tours

explore its enormous cellars, filled with 25 million bottles of bubbly, and include tastings of several vintages.

North of town, **Taittinger** (☎03 26 85 84 33; www.taittinger.com; 9 place St-Niçaise; tours €16; ☺ tours 9.30-11.50am & 2-4.20pm, closed Sat & Sun Dec-mid-Mar) provides an informative overview of how Champagne is actually made – you'll leave with a good understanding of the production process, from grape to bottle. Parts of the cellars occupy Roman





stone quarries dug in the 4th century.

Before you leave town, don't forget to drop by **Waïda** (5 place Drouet d'Erlon; ☺ Tue-Sun), an old-fashioned confectioner which sells Reims' famous *biscuits roses* (pink biscuits), a sweet treat traditionally nibbled with a glass of Champagne.

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**The Drive** » The countryside between Reims and Épernay is carpeted with vineyards, fields and back roads that are a dream to drive through. From Reims, head south along the D951 for 13km. Near Mont Chenot, turn onto the D26, signposted to Rilly and the 'Route Touristique du Champagne'. The next 12km takes you through the pretty villages of Rilly-la-Montagne and Mailly-Champagne en route to Verzenay.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

**2 Verzenay**

Reims marks the start of the 70km **Montagne**



LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP

**1 Essential France**

Lying 150km west of Épernay, Paris marks the beginning of our epic journey around France's most essential sights.

**2 A Toast to Art**

Pick up our art-themed tour in Reims, where it takes in the city's renowned Musée des Beaux Arts.

# Classic Trip

**de Reims Champagne Route**, the prettiest (and most prestigious) of the three signposted road routes which wind their way through the Champagne vineyards. Of the 17 Grand Cru villages in Champagne, nine lie on and around the Montagne, a hilly area whose sheltered slopes and chalky soils provide the perfect environment for viticulture (grape growing).

Most of the area's vineyards are devoted to the pinot noir grape. You'll pass plenty of producers offering *dégustation* (tasting) en route. It's up to you how many you visit – but whatever you do, don't miss the panorama of vines from the top of the **Phare de Verzenay** (Verzenay Lighthouse; www.lepharedeverzenay.com; D26; adult/child €3/2, incl museum €7/4; ☀10am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 5.30pm Sat & Sun, closed Jan-Mar), a lighthouse constructed as a publicity gimmick in 1909. Nearby, the **Jardin Panoramique** (admission free) demonstrates the four authorised techniques for tying grapevines to guide wires.

**The Drive** » Continue south along the D26 for 3km.

## 3 Verzy

This small village is home to several small vineyards that provide an interesting contrast to the big producers.

**Étienne and Anne-Laure Lefevre** (☎03 26 97 96 99; www.champagne-etienne-lefevre.com; 30 rue de Villers) run group tours of their family-owned vineyards and cellars – if you're on your own, ring ahead to see if you can join a pre-arranged tour. There are no flashy videos or multimedia shows – the emphasis is firmly on the nitty-gritty of Champagne production.

**The Drive** » Stay on the D26 south of Verzy, and enjoy wide-open countryside views as you spin south to Ambonnay. Detour west onto the D19, signed to Bouzy, and bear right onto the D1 along the northern bank of the Marne River. When you reach the village of Dizi, follow signs onto the D386 to Hautvillers. It's a total drive of 32km or 45 minutes.

## 4 Hautvillers

Next stop is the hilltop village of Hautvillers, a hallowed name among Champagne aficionados: it's where a Benedictine monk by the name of Dom Pierre Pérignon is popularly believed to have created Champagne in the late 16th century. The great man's tomb lies in front of the altar of the **Église Abbatiale** (abbey church: ☀daily).

The village itself is well worth a stroll, with a jumble of lanes, timbered houses and stone-walled vineyards. On place de la République, the **tourist office** (☎03 26 57 06 35; www.tourisme-hautvillers.com; ☀9.30am-1pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) hands out free maps detailing local vineyard walks; one-hour guided tours cost €3 (€5 with a tasting).

Steps away is **Au 36** (www.au36.net, in French; 36 rue Dom Pérignon; ☀10.30am-1pm & 3-7pm Thu-Tue), a wine boutique with a 'wall' of Champagne quirkily arranged by aroma. There's a tasting room upstairs; a two-/three-glass session costs €10/15.

**The Drive** » From the centre of the village, take the rte de Cumières for grand views across the vine-cloaked slopes. Follow the road all the way to the D1, turn left and follow signs to Épernay's *centre-ville*, 6km to the south.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 5 Épernay

The prosperous town of **Épernay** is the self-proclaimed *capitale du champagne* and is home to many of the most illustrious Champagne houses. Beneath the streets are an astonishing 110km of subterranean cellars, containing an estimated 200 million bottles of vintage bubbly.

Most of the big names are arranged along the grand av de Champagne. **Moët & Chandon** (☎03 26 51 20 20; www.moet.com; 20 av de Champagne; adult incl 1/2 glasses €16.50/23; 🕒 tours 9.30-11.30am & 2-4.30pm, closed Sat & Sun mid-Nov–mid-Mar) offers frequent and fascinating one-hour tours of its

prestigious cellars, while at nearby **Mercier** (☎03 26 51 22 22; www.champagnemercier.fr; 68-70 av de Champagne; adult incl 1/2/3 glasses €11/16/19; 🕒 tours 9.30-11.30am & 2-4.30pm, closed mid-Dec–mid-Feb) **tours take place** aboard a laser-guided underground train.

Serious quaffers might prefer the intimate tours at **Comtesse Lafond** (☎03 86 39 18 33; www.deladoucette.net, in French; 79 av de Champagne; 3-glass tasting €9, incl cellar tour €14; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-5.30pm), owned by wine magnate Baron Patrick de Ladoucette. Tastings of three Champagnes

## CHAMPAGNE KNOW-HOW

### Champagne Types

- » **Blanc de Blancs** Champagne made using only chardonnay grapes. Fresh and elegant, with very small bubbles and a bouquet reminiscent of 'yellow fruits' such as pear and plum.
- » **Blanc de Noirs** A full-bodied, deep golden Champagne made solely with black grapes (despite the colour). Often rich and refined, with great complexity and a long finish.
- » **Rosé** Pink Champagne (mostly served as an aperitif) with a fresh character and summer-fruit flavours. Made by adding a small percentage of red pinot noir wine to white Champagne.
- » **Prestige Cuvée** The crème de la crème of Champagne. Usually made with grapes from Grand Cru vineyards and priced and bottled accordingly.
- » **Millésimé** Vintage Champagne produced from a single crop during an exceptional year. Most Champagne is nonvintage.

### Champagne Sweetness

- » **Brut** Dry; most common style; pairs well with food.
- » **Extra Sec** Fairly dry but sweeter than Brut; nice as an aperitif.
- » **Demi Sec** Medium sweet; goes well with fruit and dessert.
- » **Doux** Very sweet; a dessert Champagne.

### Serving & Tasting

- » **Chilling** Chill Champagne in a bucket of ice 30 minutes before serving. The ideal serving temperature is 7°C to 9°C.
- » **Opening** Grip the bottle securely and tilt it at a 45-degree angle facing away from you. Rotate the bottle slowly to ease out the cork – it should sigh, not pop.
- » **Pouring** Hold the flute by the stem at an angle and let the Champagne trickle gently into the glass – less foam, more bubbles.
- » **Tasting** Admire the colour and bubbles. Swirl your glass to release the aroma and inhale slowly before tasting the Champagne.





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## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

DAVID LEVASSEUR,  
CHAMPAGNE  
MAKER



We've been making Champagnes at our vineyard for three generations, starting with my grandfather. We're typical of many of the small Champagne producers along the Route du Champagne – a traditional family-run business. If you really want to understand Champagne, visit the winemakers' cellars and see first-hand how they work. Of course, you must also visit the av de Champagne in Épernay, where all the *'grandes maisons'* are based – it's magnificent.

Top: Cramant vineyard  
Left: Pinot meunier grapes  
Right: Marne River with Épernay in background



YVES TALENS/GETTY IMAGES ©

take place in either the house's elegant salon or the manicured gardens.

Finish with a climb up the 237-step tower at **De Castellane** (☎03 26 51 19 11; [www.castellane.com](http://www.castellane.com), in French; 64 av de Champagne; adult incl 1 glass €10; 🕒tours 10am-noon & 2-6pm, closed Christmas-mid-Mar), which offers knockout views over the town's rooftops and vine-clad hills.

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**The Drive** » Head south of town along av Maréchal Foch or av du 8 Mai 1945, following 'Autres Directions' signs across the roundabouts until you see signs for Cramant. The village is 10km southeast of Épernay via the D10.

## 6 Cramant

You'll find it hard to miss this quaint village, as the northern entrance is heralded by a two-storey-high Champagne bottle. From the ridge above the village, views stretch out in all directions across the Champagne countryside, taking in a patchwork of fields, farmhouses and rows upon rows of endless vines. Pack a picnic and your own bottle of bubbly for the perfect Champagne country lunch.

**The Drive** » Continue southeast along the D10 for 7km, and follow signs to Le-Mesnil-sur-Oger.

## THE SCIENCE OF CHAMPAGNE

Champagne is made from the red pinot noir (38%), the black pinot meunier (35%) or the white chardonnay (27%) grape. Each vine is vigorously pruned and trained to produce a small quantity of high-quality grapes. Indeed, to maintain exclusivity (and price), the designated areas where grapes used for Champagne can be grown and the amount of wine produced each year are limited.

Making Champagne according to the *méthode champenoise* (traditional method) is a complex procedure. There are two fermentation processes, the first in casks and the second after the wine has been bottled and had sugar and yeast added. Bottles are then aged in cellars for two to five years, depending on the *cuvée* (vintage).

During the two months in early spring that the bottles are aged in cellars kept at 12°C, the wine turns effervescent. The sediment that forms in the bottle is removed by *remuage*, a painstakingly slow process in which each bottle, stored horizontally, is rotated slightly every day for weeks until the sludge works its way to the cork. Next comes *dégorgement*: the neck of the bottle is frozen, creating a blob of solidified Champagne and sediment, which is then removed.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 7 Le Mesnil-sur-Oger

Finish with a visit to the excellent **Musée de la Vigne et du Vin** (☎03 26 57 50 15; [www.champagne-launois.fr](http://www.champagne-launois.fr), in French; 2 av Eugène Guillaume, cnr D10; adult incl 3 flutes Champagne €7.50; ☺ tours 10am Mon-Fri, 10.30am Sat & Sun), where

a local wine-growing family has assembled a collection of century-old Champagne-making equipment. Among the highlights is a massive 16-tonne oak-beam grape press from 1630. Reservations can be made by phone or online; ask about the availability of English tours when you book.

Round off your trip with a dinner at **Le**

**Mesnil** (☎03 26 57 95 57; [www.restaurantlemesnil.com](http://www.restaurantlemesnil.com), in French; 2 rue Pasteur; menus €19.50-26; ☺ closed Wed, dinner Sun), a quintessentially French restaurant that takes its culinary cue from the seasons – washed down, of course, with a flute or two of vintage Champagne.

## Eating & Sleeping

### Reims 1

#### **Brasserie Le Boulingrin** Brasserie €€

(📞)03 26 40 96 22; www.boulingrin.fr; 48 rue de Mars; menus €18.50-29; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A genuine, old-time brasserie – the decor and zinc bar date back to 1925 – whose ambience and cuisine make it an enduring favourite.

#### **Le Foch** Gastronomic €€€

(📞)03 26 47 48 22; www.lefoch.com, in French; 37 bd Foch; menus lunch €31, dinner €48-80; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat, lunch Sun) Described as 'one of France's best fish restaurants' by food critic Michael Edwards, Michelin-starred Le Foch serves up cuisine that is as beautiful as it is delicious.

#### **Hôtel de la Paix** Hotel €€€

(📞)03 26 40 04 08; www.bestwestern-lapaix-reims.com; 9 rue Buirette; d €170-220; 📶 @ 🚰 🚿) This contemporary, Best Western-affiliated hotel is just off cafe-lined place Drouet d'Erlon. Relax in your choice of pool, Jacuzzi, hammam or courtyard garden.

#### **Les Telliers** B&B €€

(📞)09 53 79 80 74; http://telliers.fr; 18 rue des Telliers; s €76, d €87-110, tr €123, q €142; 📶 🚰 🚿) On a quiet alley near the cathedral, this bijou B&B extends one of Reims' warmest *bienvenues*. The high-ceilinged rooms ooze art deco character, with ornamental fireplaces, polished oak floors and the odd antique.

### Épernay 5

#### **La Cave à Champagne** Regional Cuisine €€

(📞)03 26 55 50 70; www.la-cave-a-champagne.com, in French; 16 rue Gambetta; menus €18-34; 🕒 lunch & dinner Thu-Mon, lunch Tue) 'The

Champagne Cellar' is a local favourite for *chamenoise* cuisine such as artichoke hearts with snails in parsley cream, or duck cooked in grape juice. Sample four different Champagnes for €24.

#### **La Grillade Gourmande** Regional Cuisine €€

(📞)03 26 55 44 22; www.lagrilladegourmande.com, in French; 16 rue de Reims; menus €19-55; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) An inviting bistro, ideal for char-grilled meats and rich dishes such as crayfish pan-fried in Champagne and lamb roasted in rosemary and honey. Diners spill onto the covered terrace in the warm months.

#### **La Table Kobus** Brasserie €€

(📞)03 26 51 53 53; www.latablekobus.com, in French; 3 rue du Docteur Rousseau; menus €19.50-45; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, lunch Thu & Sun) French cuisine, both traditional and creative, is the speciality at this *fin-de-siècle* brasserie.

#### **Hôtel Jean Moët** Historic Hotel €€

(📞)03 26 32 19 22; www.hoteljeanmoet.com; 7 rue Jean Moët; r €125-190; 📶 🚰 🚿) Housed in an 18th-century mansion, this old-town hotel is big on atmosphere, with its skylit tearoom, antique-meets-boutique-chic rooms and cellar bar, C Comme.

#### **Le Clos Raymi** Historic Hotel €€

(📞)03 26 51 00 58; www.closraymi-hotel.com, in French; 3 rue Joseph de Venoge; s €115, d €155-175; 📶) Staying here is like being a personal guest of Monsieur Chandon himself, who occupied this luxurious house over a century ago. The seven romantic rooms all have high ceilings, French windows and parquet floors.

***Dambach-la-Ville** A pretty medieval  
village painted in pinks and browns*





## 6

# Alsace Accents

*French and German cultures collide in Alsace, renowned for cosy winstubs and centuries-old wine culture. Enjoy castles, vineyards, pastel-shaded towns and the canals of Colmar.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**3 DAYS**  
105KM / 66 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

May to October for the best chance of sunshine.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

As you're punting along the flower-decked canals of Colmar in a romantic rowboat.

### BEST FOR FAMILIES

Watching the storks at the Centre de Réintroduction Cigognes & Loutres.

## 6

# Alsace Accents

Gloriously green and reassuringly rustic, the Route des Vins d'Alsace is one of France's most evocative drives. Vines march up the hillsides to castle-topped crags and the mist-shrouded Vosges, and every mile or so a roadside cellar or half-timbered village invites you to stop and raise a toast. The official route runs between Marlenheim and Thann, but we've factored in a stop at Colmar, too.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 Obernai

Sitting 31km south of Strasbourg (take the A35 and turn off at exit 11) is the typically Alsatian village of **Obernai**. Life still revolves around the market square, where you'll find the 16th-century town hall, the Renaissance **Puits aux Six Seaux** (Six Bucket Well) and the bell-topped **Halle aux Blés** (Corn Exchange). Visit on Thursday mornings for the weekly market.

There are lots of flower-decked alleyways to explore – don't miss **ruelle des Juifs** – and you can access the town's

13th-century ramparts in front of the **Église St-Pierre et St-Paul**.

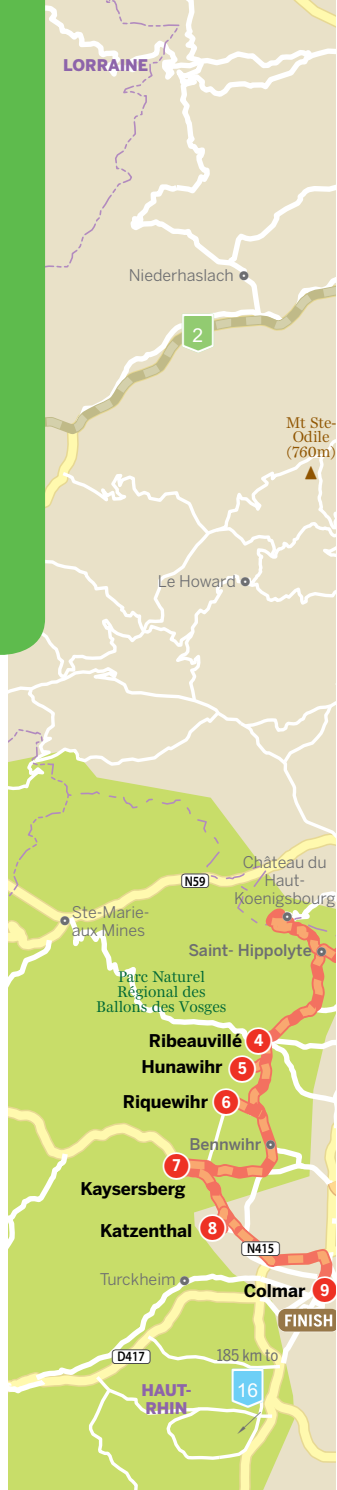
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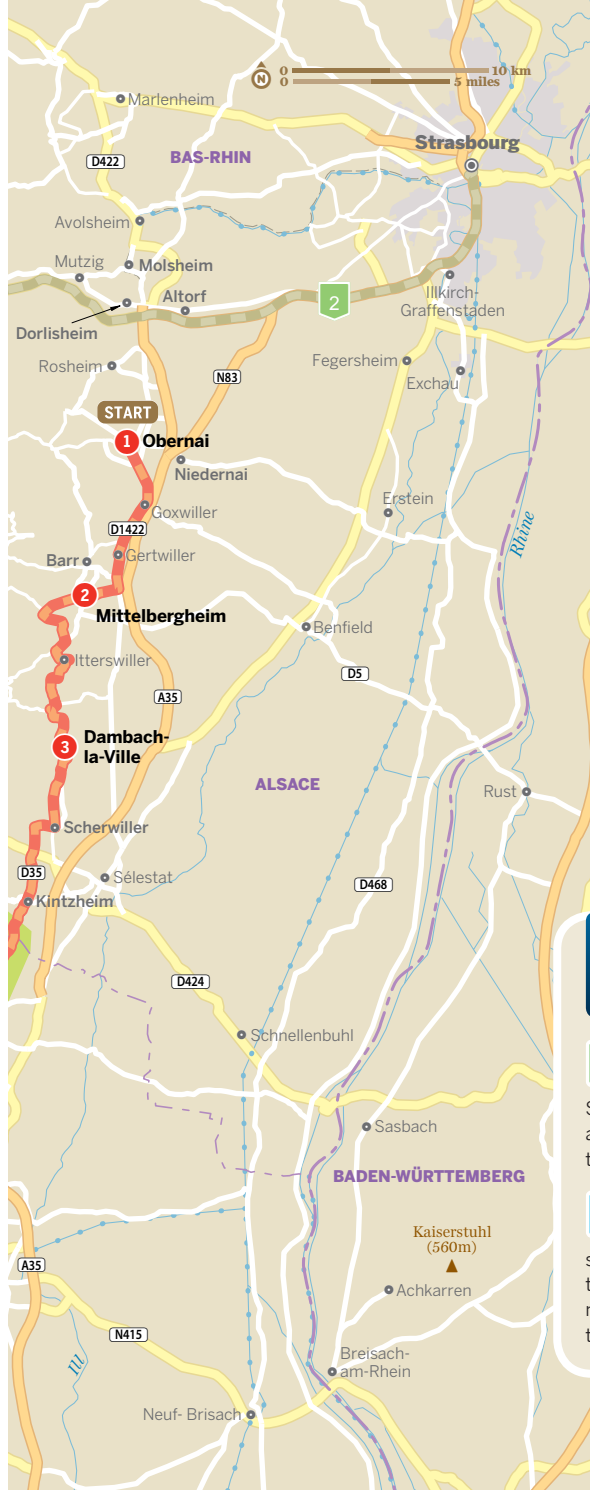
**The Drive** » Follow the D422 and D1422 for 9km south of Obernai, then turn off onto the D62. Mittelbergheim is another 1.5km west, among dreamy vine-covered countryside.

### 2 Mittelbergheim

Serene and untouristy, hillside Mittelbergheim sits amid a sea of grapevines and wild tulips, its streets lined with red-roofed houses.

Like most Alsatian towns, it's home to numerous wineries, each marked by a wrought-iron sign. **Domaine Gilg** ([www.domaine-gilg.com](http://www.domaine-gilg.com), in





French; 2 rue Rotland; ☺8am-moon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 9.30-11.30am Sun) is a family-run winery that's won many awards for its Grand Cru sylvaners, pinots and rieslings.

From the car park on the D362 next to the cemetery, a vineyard trail winds towards the twin-towered **Château du Haut Andlau** and the forested Vosges.

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**The Drive** » Follow rue Principale onto the D425, signed to Eichhoffen. The road winds through lush Alsatian countryside and becomes the D35 as it travels to Dambach-la-Ville, 12km south.

**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

**3 Dambach-la-Ville**

Dambach is another chocolate-box village, with lots of pre-1500 houses painted in



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

**2 A Toast to Art**

Our art tour ends in Strasbourg, so it's a natural addition to this trip along the Route des Vins d'Alsace.

**16 The Jura**

Travel 170km southwest to Besançon to take a jaunt through the mountains and plateaus of the Jura.



ice-cream shades of pistachio, caramel and raspberry. To the southwest is the **Château du Haut Koenigsbourg** ([www.haut-koenigsbourg.fr](http://www.haut-koenigsbourg.fr); adult/child €8/free; ☀9.15am-5.15pm), a turreted castle hovering above vineyards and hills. The castle dates back nine centuries, but it was rebuilt (with typical grandiosity) by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1908. The wraparound panorama from its pink-granite ramparts alone is worth the admission fee.

**The Drive** » Stay on the D35, which becomes the D1B as it nears Ribeauvillé, 22km south. It's a truly lovely drive, travelling through carpets of vines and quiet villages. You'll see the turn-off to the château about halfway to Ribeauvillé.

#### 4 Ribeauvillé

Nestled snugly in a valley and presided over by a castle, medieval Ribeauvillé is a Route des Vins must – so you'll definitely share it with crowds during the busy season. Along the main street, keep an eye out for the 17th-century **Pffifferhüs** (Fifers' House; 14 Grand' Rue), which once housed the town's fife-playing minstrels; the **hôtel de ville** (across from 64 Grand' Rue) and its Renaissance fountain; and the nearby clock-topped **Tour des Bouchers** (Butchers' Bell Tower).

It's also worth stopping in at the **Cave**

**de Ribeauvillé** (2 rte de Colmar; ☀8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm Sat & Sun), France's oldest winegrowers' cooperative, founded in 1895. It has an interesting viniculture museum and offers free tastings of its excellent wines. It's two roundabouts north from the tourist office.

🍷🍷 p91

**The Drive** » Hunawihr is 2.5km south of Ribeauvillé.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 5 Hunawihr

*Cigognes* (white storks) are Alsace's most emblematic birds. They feature in many folk tales and are believed to bring good luck (as well as newborn babies). They've been roosting on rooftops here for centuries, but their numbers fell dramatically during the 20th century as a result of environmental damage and habitat loss.

Thankfully, conservation programs have helped revive the birds' fortunes. The **Centre de Réintroduction Cigognes & Loutres** (Stork & Otter Reintroduction Centre; [www.cigogne-loutre.com](http://www.cigogne-loutre.com), in French; adult/child €9/6; ☀10am-6.30pm, closed mid-Nov–Mar) houses more than 200 storks, plus cormorants, penguins, otters and sea lions.

**The Drive** » Backtrack to the D1B and travel 4km south,

following signs to Riquewihr. Distant hills unfold to the south as you drive.

#### 6 Riquewihr

Competition is stiff, but Riquewihr just may be *the* most enchanting town on the Route des Vins. Medieval ramparts enclose a maze of twisting lanes and half-timbered houses, each brighter and lovelier than the next.

On rue du Général de Gaulle, the **Maison de Hansi** (adult/child €2/free; ☀10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm, closed Tue-Feb-Jun & Jan) offers a glimpse into the imagination of



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Colmar View along the canal

Colmar-born illustrator Jean-Jacques Waltz (1873–1951), aka Hansi, whose idealised images of Alsace are known around the world.

Meanwhile, the **Tour des Voleurs** (Thieves' Tower; admission €3, incl Dolder €5; ☎10.30am–1pm & 2–6pm Easter–1 Nov) houses a gruesome torture chamber that's guaranteed to enthrall the kids.

🍴 p91

**The Drive** » A scenic minor road winds 7km south from av Méquillet in Kaisersberg to Kientzheim, then joins the D28 for another 1km to Kaisersberg.

## 7 Kaisersberg

Just 10km northwest of Colmar, Kaisersberg is

another instant heart-stealer with its backdrop of vines, castle and 16th-century bridge. An old-town saunter brings



### TOP TIP: DRIVING THE ROUTE DES VINS

The Route des Vins is signposted, but a copy of Blay's colour-coded map **Alsace Touristique** (€5.50) comes in handy. Tourist offices supply free English-language maps – *The Alsace Wine Route* and *Alsace Grand Cru Wines* – detailing Alsace's prestigious AOC regions, and there's info online at [www.alsace-route-des-vins.com](http://www.alsace-route-des-vins.com).

Parking can be a nightmare in the high season, especially in Ribeauvillé and Riquewihr; your best bet is to park outside the town centre and walk for a few minutes.

you to the Renaissance **hôtel de ville** and the red-sandstone **Église Ste Croix** (☀9am-4pm), whose altar has 18 painted panels of the Passion and the Resurrection.

Kaysersberg was also the birthplace of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), a musicologist, doctor and winner of the Nobel Peace prize. His house is now a **museum** (126 rue du Général de Gaulle; adult/child €2/1; ☀9am-noon & 2-6pm Easter-early Nov).

**The Drive** » Take the N415 southeast of Kaysersberg for 7km, passing through Ammerschwihr and then following signs to Katzenthal.

## 8 Katzenthal

A mere 5km south of Kaysersberg, Katzenthal is great for tiptoeing off the tourist trail. Grand

Cru vines ensnare the hillside, topped by the medieval ruins of Château du Wineck, where walks through forest and vineyard begin.

It's also a great place for some wine tasting thanks to **Vignoble Klur** (☎03 89 80 94 29; www.klur.net; 105 rue des Trois Epis; min 3-night stay apt €90-150; ♿), an organic, family-run winery that also offers cookery classes, vineyard walks and back-to-nature holidays.

**The Drive** » Rejoin the D415. Colmar is another 8km south and is clearly signed.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 9 Colmar

At times the Route des Vins d'Alsace fools you into thinking it's 1454, but in Colmar the illusion is complete.

It's a town made for wandering. Mosey around the canal quarter of **Petite Venise** (Little Venice), then head along **rue des Tanneurs**, with its rooftop verandahs for drying hides, and **quai de la Poissonnerie**, the former fishermen's quarter. Afterwards, hire a **rowboat** (per 30min €6) beside the rue de Turenne bridge for that Venetian vibe.

The town also has some intriguing museums. The star attraction at the **Musée d'Unterlinden** (www.musee-unterlinden.com; 1 rue d'Unterlinden; adult/child €8/5; ☀9am-6pm Mon-Sun) is the **Rétable d'Issenheim** (Issenheim Altarpiece), a medieval masterpiece that depicts scenes from the New Testament in vivid detail.

Meanwhile, the **Musée Bartholdi** (www.musee-bartholdi.com, in French; 30 rue des Marchands; adult/child €5/3; ☀10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Mar-Dec) is the birthplace of sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, architect of the Statue of Liberty. Highlights include a full-sized model of Lady Liberty's left ear (the lobe is watermelon-sized!) and the family's sparkingly bourgeois apartment.

Look out for the miniature version of the statue on the rte du Strasbourg (N83), erected to mark the centenary of Bartholdi's death.

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### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE: INSIDER'S ALSACE

The Route des Vins is different from France's other wine regions. There are no grand châteaux, but there is a real neighbourly feel – our doors are always open. My favourite seasons are autumn, when the scent of new wine is in the air, and spring, when the cherry trees are in bloom.

There's an Alsatian wine for every occasion. Try a light, citrusy sylvaner with *tarte flambée* or foie gras, or a crisp, dry riesling with fish or *choucroute* (sauerkraut). Gewürztraminer is round and full of exotic fruit and spices, making it the ideal partner for Munster cheese, charcuterie and Asian food. Muscat is aromatic and flowery – great with asparagus or as an aperitif. Pick full-bodied pinot noirs for red meat.

Francine Klur of Vignoble Klur, Katzenthal (p90)

# Eating & Sleeping

## Obernai 1

### La Fourchette des Ducs

Gastronomic €€€

(📞03 88 48 33 38; www.lafourchettedesducs.com; 6 rue de la Gare; menus €95-130; 🕒dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Chef Nicolas Stamm adds imagination to Alsatian ingredients at this two-Michelin-starred restaurant.

### Winstub La Dime

Alsatian €

(📞03 88 95 54 02; 5 rue des Pélerins; menus €12-22; 🕒lunch & dinner Thu-Tue; 🍷) Precisely as an Alsatian *winstub* should be: beamed and bustling with diners tucking into earthy dishes like fat pork knuckles and *zweibelkuchen* (onion tart).

### Le Gouverneur

Historic Hotel €€

(📞03 88 95 63 72; www.hotellegouverneur.com; 13 rue de Sélestat; s €55-80, d €60-90, tr €70-100, q €80-110; 📶🍷) The perfect balance between rustic and contemporary, with petite rooms decked out in vivid colours and modern art.

## Mittelbergheim 2

### Hôtel Gilg

Historic Hotel €

(📞03 88 08 91 37; www.hotel-gilg.com; 1 rte du Vin; s €55-65, d €60-90, menus €32-72) This 17th-century half-timbered pile makes a romantic stop. A spiral staircase leads up to spacious pastel rooms, and the rustic restaurant serves classic French-Alsatian cuisine.

## Ribeauvillé 4

### Auberge du Parc Carola

International €€

(📞03 89 86 05 75; www.auberge-parc-carola.com, in French; 48 rte de Bergheim; menus lunch €17-20, dinner €27-58; 🕒lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) This elegant *auberge* (country inn) is

overseen by much-lauded chef Michaela Peters. Pick a table under the trees and tuck into honey-glazed suckling pig and wild garlic polenta.

### Hôtel de la Tour

Historic Hotel €€

(📞03 89 73 72 73; www.hotel-la-tour.com; 1 rue de la Mairie; s €72-96, d €78-104; 📶) In a quaint, comfy rooms, some with views of the Tour des Bouchers.

## Riquewihr 6

### Table du Gourmet

Gastronomic €€€

(📞03 89 49 09 09; www.jlbrendel.com; 5 rue de la Première Armée; menus €38-98; 🕒lunch & dinner Fri-Mon, dinner Thu) Jean-Luc Brendel is the culinary force behind this Michelin-starred venture, lodged inside a Zen-meets-medieval house, and known for its natural flavours.

## Colmar 9

### L'Atelier du Peintre

Gastronomic €€

(📞03 89 29 51 57; 1 rue Schongauer; menus lunch €20-25, dinner €37-72; 🕒lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) With its art-covered walls and exciting cuisine, this Michelin-starred bistro lives up to its 'painter's studio' name. Seasonal dishes like roast lamb with creamed artichokes are served with serious panache.

### Le Petit Gourmand

Alsatian €€

(📞03 89 41 09 32; 9 quai de la Poissonnerie; menus €25-27; 🕒lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This cornflower-blue *winstub* sits on a river pontoon and serves regional specialities such as *tarte aux oignons* (onion tart) and *baeckeoffe* (Alsatian stew with riesling).

### Hôtel les Têtes

Historic Hotel €€

(📞03 89 24 43 43; www.maisondestetes.com; 19 rue des Têtes; d €118-152, menus €25-66; 📶🍷) Luxurious but never precious, this smart hotel has rooms with wood panelling, marble bathrooms and romantic views.



*Palais des Papes Inside Avignon's  
immense Gothic cathedral*

# Classic Trip

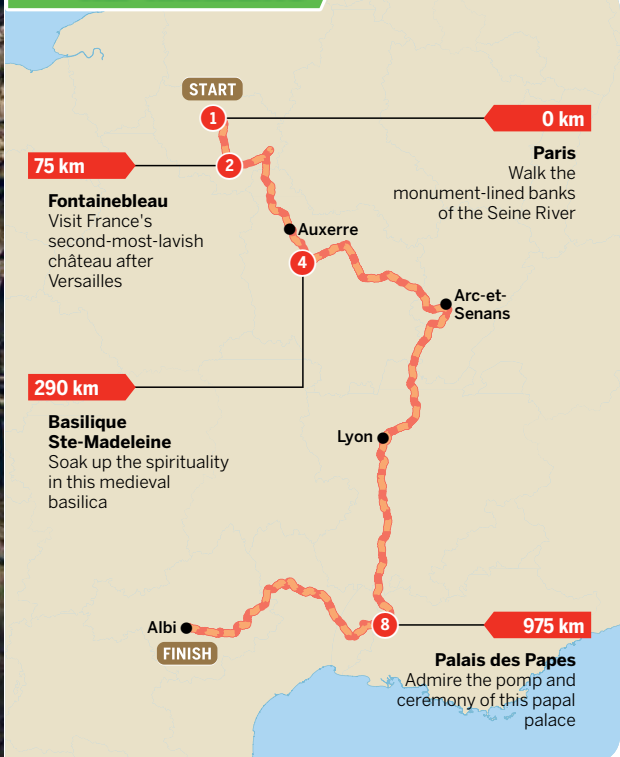
## Unesco Treasures



# 7

*This top-to-tail adventure is a must for lovers of French history and architecture. Tour across France to some of its most precious assets, all inscribed on Unesco's list of World Heritage Sites.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**10 DAYS**  
1156KM / 718 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

April to June or September and October to avoid the main French holiday periods.



### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Standing on the viewing platform of the Eiffel Tower.



### BEST FOR ART

The world-class collection at the Musée Toulouse-Lautrec in Albi.

# Classic Trip

## 7

## Unesco Treasures

When it comes to World Heritage Sites, France is in the European premier league, with an impressive 35 (topped only by Spain and Italy). This cross-country tour explores some of our favourites – both well known and off the beaten track.

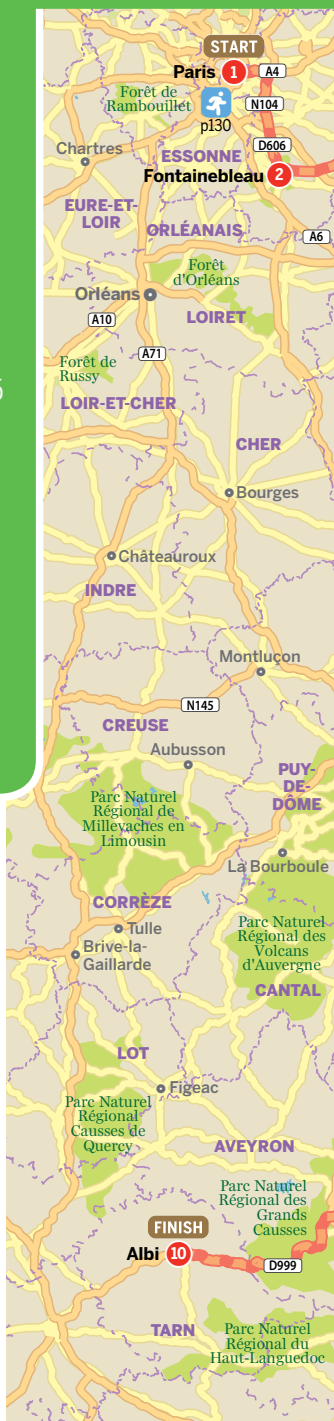
### 1 Paris

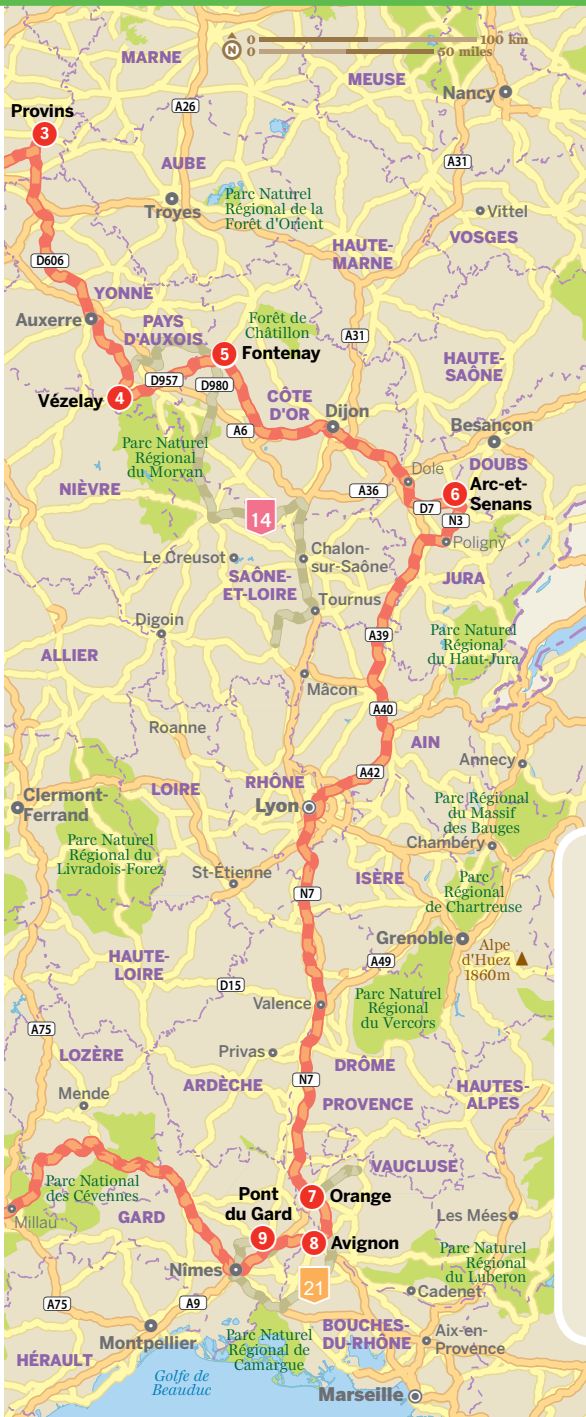
In 1991, the banks of the River Seine were designated as a World Heritage Site in recognition of the central role the river has played in the city's history.

The site encompasses much of the city centre, from the Pont de Sully (east of the Île de la Cité) to the Pont d'Iéna (west of the Parc du Champ de Mars). Also included are the city's famous boulevards, laid out by

Baron Haussmann in the 19th century.

Walking from east to west, you'll pass a string of Parisian landmarks. Start at the **Cathédrale de Notre Dame** ([www.cathedraledeparis.com](http://www.cathedraledeparis.com); 6 place du Parvis Notre Dame, 4e; admission free; ☎7.45am-7pm), arguably the world's most precious Gothic structure. Afterwards, walk along bd St-Germain, stopping at the **Église St-Germain des Prés** ([www.eglise-sgp.org](http://www.eglise-sgp.org); 3 place St-Germain des Prés, 6e; ☎8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun), Paris' oldest





standing church, and **Les Deux Magots** ([www.lesdeuxmagots.fr](http://www.lesdeuxmagots.fr); 170 bd St-Germain, 6e; ☎7.30am-1am), a favourite literary hang-out for many early-20th-century writers and philosophers.

Spend the afternoon at the **Musée d'Orsay** ([www.musee-orsay.fr](http://www.musee-orsay.fr); 62 rue de Lille, 7e; adult/under 25yr/under 18yr €9/6.50/free; ☎9.30am-6pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, to 9.45pm Thu), which houses the country's top collection of impressionist, post-impressionist and art nouveau masterpieces.

Finish with a twilight climb up the **Eiffel Tower** ([www.tour-eiffel.fr](http://www.tour-eiffel.fr); lift to 3rd fl adult/12-24yr/4-12yr €14/12.50/9.50, lift to 2nd fl €8.50/7/4, stairs to 2nd fl €5/3.50/3; ☎lifts & stairs 9am-midnight mid-Jun-Aug, lifts 9.30am-11pm, stairs 9.30am-6pm Sep-mid-Jun) for



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

### 14 Medieval Burgundy

Vézelay also features as a stop on our trip through Burgundy's rich medieval heritage.

### 21 Roman Provence

If Orange's amphitheatre and the Pont du Gard have whetted your appetite for Roman ruins, why not link up with our longer tour?



## Classic Trip

a twinkling view across Paris's night-time streets.

If you're still hankering to see more of Paris, try our walking tour on p130.

 p102

**The Drive** » The most direct route to Fontainebleau from Paris is on the A6 motorway, but there's a more peaceful route on the N104/D606. Head east from Paris on the A4, and look out for signs to the N104, indicated to Troyes. This route covers about 75km.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 2 Fontainebleau

It might not quite hit the ostentatious heights of Versailles, but in many ways the **Château de Fontainebleau** ([www.musee-chateau-fontainebleau.fr](http://www.musee-chateau-fontainebleau.fr); adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €10/8/free, full château tours €21/18/free; ☺château 9.30am-6pm Wed-Mon Oct-Mar, Sep, to 5pm Wed-Mon Oct-Mar, gardens 9am-dusk) is a more rewarding place to visit. The crowds are nothing like as intense as at Versailles, but the history and heritage are just as fascinating. The entire palace complex has been protected by Unesco since 1981.

Built by Louis IX, overhauled during the Renaissance by François I and later enlarged

by Henri II, Catherine de Médici and Henri IV, Fontainebleau is a harmonious blend of architectural eras. Highlights include the **Grandes Appartements**, the 30m-long **Salle de Bal** (ballroom), the gilded **Salle de Trône** (Throne Room) and the **Chambre de l'Impératrice** (Empress' Bedroom), designed for Marie-Antoinette but never used. Private tours (in French) explore other areas.

Outside, the château's **gardens** are equally extraordinary, and include the Jardin de Diane, a formal garden created by Catherine de Médici, a 17th-century Jardin Français (French Garden) designed by Le Nôtre and an informal Jardin Anglais (English Garden), laid out in 1812. The Grand Canal was excavated in 1609 and predates the canals at Versailles by more than half a century.

 p102

**The Drive** » Take the D210 east of Fontainebleau. You'll drive through the Forêt Dominiiale de la Champagne and cross under the A5 motorway, then join the D403 to Provins. Plan on 55km.

## 3 Provins

The walled town of Provins ([www.provins.net](http://www.provins.net)) is listed by Unesco as the 'Town of Medieval Fairs', and it certainly does a convincing job of transporting you back into the Middle Ages (though, thankfully, minus the stink, plague and squalor). The town is home to over 150 medieval structures including the **Tour César** (adult/child €4.30/2.80; ☺10am-6pm Mar-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb), the church of **Saint Quiriace** (admission free) and the **Grange aux Dîmes** (Tithe Barn; adult/child €4.30/2.80; ☺10am-6pm Mar-Aug, Sat & Sun only Sep-Feb), where you can watch a live re-enactment of a medieval market. Elsewhere you can explore the town's ramparts, fortified

## PROVINS TICKETS

If you're planning on visiting all the museums and shows in Provins, you'll find it cheaper to buy a combination ticket, known as the **Pass Provins**. The most expensive pass (adult/child €29/19, family of four €88) covers all the town's monuments plus the two main shows, and gives you discounts on other spectacles and events. It stays valid for a year; buy online to save time.

gates and over 10km of underground tunnels.

But it's the medieval-themed spectacles that most convincingly bring the period to life. Between April and November there are regular displays of falconry, horsemanship and medieval warfare (complete with trebuchets and jousting), as well as a weekly banquet on Saturday, where you can tuck into medieval food while being entertained by troubadours, acrobats and jugglers.

**The Drive** » Take the D403 south, then detour south onto the D412 and D976. You'll join up with the D606, a great road that passes through the pleasant towns of Sens and Auxerre and runs south, detouring onto the D951 for the final stretch to Vézelay. You'll cover about 160km.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 4 Vézelay

France isn't short of churches, but there are few that capture the same sense of spirituality as Vézelay's. Jutting out from a rocky outcrop surrounded by flat fields, it's one of France's most gorgeous holy structures.

The centrepiece of the town is the **Basilique Ste-Madeleine** ([www.basiliquedevezelay.org](http://www.basiliquedevezelay.org)).

Founded in the 880s, it's had a chequered history: it was trashed by the Huguenots, desecrated

during the Revolution and, to top off the human ravages, repeatedly struck by lightning. But the basilica was saved by 19th-century architect Viollet-le-Duc, who rebuilt its western façade and preserved its priceless stone carvings, including the famous tympanum (decorative arch) depicting Christ surrounded by the apostles. Viollet-le-Duc's work was rewarded when the basilica was awarded World Heritage status in 1979.

Beyond the basilica itself, Vézelay is an absolute pleasure to wander, with a muddle of cobbled lanes and carefully restored medieval buildings. Don't miss the view from the park behind the church, which affords knockout views across lush Burgundian countryside.

 p102

**The Drive** » Drive east from Vézelay on the D957, a winding road that runs through Avallon and crosses through delightful Burgundian forests and fields. Just north of the village of Bierry-les-Belles-Fontaines, turn off onto the D957A, signed to Montbard. Follow signs to Montbard, then to the Abbaye de Fontenay. It's a drive of around 63km.

### 5 Fontenay

Many of France's great medieval abbeys were razed to rubble during the Revolution and the

Reign of Terror, which makes the survival of the **Abbaye de Fontenay** (Fontenay Abbey; ☎03 80 92 15 00; [www.abbayedefontenay.com](http://www.abbayedefontenay.com); adult/child €9.50/5.50; 🕒10am-6pm Apr-11 Nov, 10am-noon & 2-5pm 12 Nov-Mar) all the more important.

Founded in 1118 and restored a century ago before becoming UNESCO listed in 1981, this serene Cistercian abbey gives a unique insight into monastic life during the Middle Ages. You can sit in the refectory where the monks would have eaten their meals, wander the landscaped gardens where they would have raised their crops and livestock, and even peep inside their barrel-vaulted dormitory and metal forge – the earliest surviving example in Europe. There's even a monastic fish pond.

**The Drive** » Head back towards Montbard and turn onto the D905, following signs to Dijon. Drive through the city, tracking signs to the D905/Dole. Once you reach Dole, you need to find the D7, so following signs to Poligny, then Pontarlier, should get you in the right area. Once you're on the D7, it runs to Arc-et-Senans. All told you'll cover about 165km.

### 6 Arc-et-Senans

Hidden among the verdant plateaus of the Jura mountains, the village of Arc-et-Senans conceals one of France's

# Classic Trip



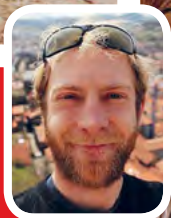
PHILIP LEE HANNEY/GETTY IMAGES ©



NICOLA BERTANICO/GETTY IMAGES ©

## WHY THIS IS A CLASSIC TRIP

OLIVER BERRY,  
AUTHOR



Following the Unesco trail across France provides a great introduction to the country's history and landscapes, and also makes sure you'll tick off some of the most important sights along the way. We've picked out a mix of the essential and the esoteric in this trip but, for me, there are two experiences here that sum up everything I love about France: sipping a coffee on the banks of the Seine, and cruising down the Canal du Midi in a river barge. You'll never feel more French.

Top: Théâtre Antique, Orange  
Left: Medieval festival, Provins  
Right: Cathédrale Ste-Cécile, Albi





ANAM JEAN-PAUL/HEMIS/REBETTY IMAGES ©

more peculiar Unesco-protected sites. This area was once the country's most important centre of salt production – a vital ingredient for preserving food in the days before refrigeration. Lying 35km west of Besançon, the 18th-century **Saline Royale** (Royal Saltworks; [www.salineroyale.com](http://www.salineroyale.com), in French; adult/child €7.50/3.50; ☉9am–noon & 2–6pm) was envisaged by its designer, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, as an 'ideal city', with workers' accommodation and industrial buildings blended into one harmonious whole. Although his urban dream was never fully realised, his semicircular salt works are one of France's finest examples of 18th-century industrial architecture, and have been a Unesco World Heritage Site since 1982.

**The Drive** » The next stage is a long one – between 390km and 425km – depending on your route. The easiest option is also the fastest. Backtrack to Dole, and pick up the A39, A40 and A42 motorways towards Lyon. South of Lyon, you can follow the more peaceful N7 along the banks of the Rhône as it runs south into Provence and on to Orange.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

7 Orange

Provence is littered with Roman remains, but to get a sense of the majesty of Roman Gaul, you have to head to Orange's

# Classic Trip

**Théâtre Antique** ([www.theatre-antique.com](http://www.theatre-antique.com); adult/child €8.50/6.50, 2nd child free; ☀9am-6pm, to 4.30pm Nov-Feb) – France’s answer to the Colosseum. In its heyday, this massive amphitheatre would have staged gladiatorial contests, mock battles and other large-scale spectacles for up to 10,000 spectators. It’s in a remarkably good state of repair, considering it’s over 2000 years old – the 37m-high stage wall is one of the best preserved anywhere in the world.

Nearby, Orange’s 1st-century **Arc de Triomphe** stands on the Via Agrippa, the city’s ancient thoroughfare, and commemorates various military victories in stunning stone relief.

  p103

**The Drive** » Take the D976 southwest across the Rhône to Roquemaure, then follow signs to Avignon and the D6580. It’s a varied drive of 30km that travels through classic Provençal vistas.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 8 Avignon

When Pope Clement V abandoned Rome in 1309 to settle in Avignon, this southern city became the seat of Catholic power in Europe. Though the popes only remained

here for 70-odd years, they somehow found time to build themselves the immense **Palais des Papes** ([www.palais-des-papes.com](http://www.palais-des-papes.com); place du Palais; adult/child €6/3; ☀9am-8pm Jul & early-mid-Sep, to 9pm Aug, to 7pm mid-Mar-Jun & mid-Sep-Oct, to 6.30pm early-mid-Mar, to 5.45pm Nov-Feb), France’s largest Gothic structure, which has been on the Unesco list since 1995.

The rooms are mostly bare these days, but the gargoyle-covered rooftop view is a wraparound wonder. The immense scale of the palace testifies to the popes’ wealth; the 3m-thick walls, portcullises and watchtowers emphasise their insecurity.

Outside, the **place du Palais**, graced with a 4.5-ton golden statue of the Virgin Mary, is also included within the World Heritage Site – as is the **Pont St-Bénézet** (adult/child €4.50/3.50; ☀9am-8pm, 9.30am-5.45pm Nov-Mar), considered by many to be France’s finest medieval bridge. Combination tickets with the Palais des Papes get a €3 discount.

  p103

**The Drive** » The Pont du Gard is 26km west via the N100 and D6100.

### 9 Pont du Gard

Many of Provence’s Roman remains have

made it onto Unesco’s radar, including this monumental aqueduct over the River Gard. It’s a structure that demonstrates ancient Rome’s unique combination of art, architecture and engineering, and was built to carry water from Gaul’s wet interior to the dry plains of the south, where wine and crops were cultivated. You can walk across the bridge’s top tier or, better still, hire a canoe to float under its mighty spans.

**The Drive** » The most scenic route to Albi is to follow our drive on p317 through the Parc National des Cévennes to Millau, then pick up the D999 west to Albi.

### 10 Albi

The provincial town of Albi earned its place on the World Heritage list in 2010 thanks to the **Cathédrale Ste-Cécile** (place Ste-Cécile; adult/child €2/free; ☀9am-6.30pm), which looks closer to some Tolkienesque tower than a place of worship. Its fortified façade is a result of the many religious wars that marked the medieval era, particularly the persecution of the Cathars during the early 13th century. The cathedral was supposed to project the power of the medieval church, and it certainly makes a statement – it’s one of the



## DETOUR: CANAL DU MIDI

### Start 10 Albi

Stretching for 240km between Toulouse and Sète, the Canal du Midi is one of the great waterways of southern France. Completed in 1681 and classified as a World Heritage Site since 1996, the canal was designed to provide a trading route between major French ports: with the Canal de Garonne, it forms part of the 'Canal des Deux Mers' (Canal of the Two Seas), which enables boats to travel all the way from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean.

It's a work of art as much as engineering, lined with stately lime trees, pattering houseboats and gorgeous riverside towns. You can cycle along the tow-paths or, better still, hire a boat and head out onto the canal proper from towns along the canal's route – Toulouse, Agde, Béziers, Narbonne and Sète all make good bases.

It's also worth stopping at the **Musée Canal du Midi** ([www.museecanaldumidi.fr](http://www.museecanaldumidi.fr); bd Pierre-Paul Riquet; adult/child €4/2; 🕒10am-7pm) in St-Ferréol, which explores the history of the waterway and the life of its chief engineer, Paul Riquet.

largest brick structures on earth.

Apart from its pretty old town, Albi's other selling point is as the birthplace of artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who depicted the bars and

brothels of turn-of-the-20th-century Paris in his own inimitable style. The **Musée Toulouse-Lautrec** ([www.museetoulouselautrec.net](http://www.museetoulouselautrec.net); place Ste-Cécile; adult/student €5.50/2.50; 🕒9am-6pm Jun-Sep, closed

noon-2pm & all day Wed-Mon Tue Oct-Mar) has France's top collection of his works outside the Musée d'Orsay, ranging from portraits to posters.

🔪🔪 p103

## Eating & Sleeping

### Paris 1

#### Brasserie Lipp

Brasserie €€

(☎01 45 48 53 91; 151 bd St-Germain, 6e; mains €17-24; ☀11.45am-12.45am; 🚗St-Germain des Prés) Waiters in black waistcoats, bowties and long white aprons serve brasserie favourites such as *choucroute garnie* and *jarret de porc aux lentilles* (pork knuckle with lentils) at this celebrated wood-panelled establishment.

#### L'AOC

Regional Cuisine €€

(☎01 43 54 22 52; www.restoaoc.com; 14 rue des Fossés St-Bernard, 5e; 2-/3-course lunch menus €21/29, mains €18-32; ☀lunch & dinner Tue-Sat; 🚗Cardinal Lemoine) The concept here revolves around Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) status, meaning everything has been produced according to strict guidelines within a tiny geographical area.

#### Hôtel Crayon

Boutique Hotel €€€

(☎01 42 36 54 19; www.hotelcrayon.com; 25 rue du Bouloi, 1e; s €129-249, d €149-299; 📶📶📶📶; 🚗Les Halles or Sentier) Line drawings by French artist Julie Gauthron adorn walls and doors at this creative boutique hotel. Rooms sport a different shade of each floor's chosen crayon colour.

#### L'Hôtel

Boutique Hotel €€€

(☎01 44 41 99 00; www.l-hotel.com; 13 rue des Beaux Arts, 6e; d €285-795; 📶📶📶📶; 🚗St-Germain des Prés) This award-winning hotel is the stuff of Parisian legend: rock- and film-star patrons fight to sleep in room 16, where Oscar Wilde died in 1900, or in the art deco room 36 of dancer Mistinguett.

### Fontainebleau 2

#### Côte Sud

Regional Cuisine €€

(☎01 64 22 00 33; 1 rue Montebello; lunch menu €14.50, mains €16.50-22; ☀lunch & dinner

daily) Dishes at this welcoming bistro have a southern accent, such as *daube de sanglier* (wild boar stew). Bring your appetite.

#### Dardonville

Pâtisserie €

(24 rue des Sablons; ☀7am-1.30pm & 3.15-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 7am-1.30pm Sun) Join the queues for melt-in-your-mouth macarons and amazing breads at this exceptional pâtisserie and *boulangerie* (bakery).

#### Hôtel de Londres

Hotel €€

(☎01 64 22 20 21; www.hoteldelondres.com; 1 place Général de Gaulle; d €100-180; 📶📶📶) Classy, cosy and beautifully kept, the 16-room 'Hotel London' is charmingly furnished in reds and royal blues. The priciest rooms (eg room 5) have balconies with dreamy château views.

#### La Guérinière

B&B €

(☎06 13 50 50 37; bales-tier.gerard@wanadoo.fr; 10 rue de Montebello; d €70; 📶) This charming B&B provides some of the best-value accommodation in town. Owner M Bales-tier speaks English and has five rooms, each named after a different flower.

### Vézelay 4

#### Hôtel Le Compostelle

Hotel €

(☎03 86 32 28 63; www.lecompostellevezelay.com; 1 place du Champ-de-Foire; d €50-66; ☀closed Jan-mid-Feb; 📶) Eighteen spotless, practical rooms afford romantic views of the valley or the village.

#### Les Glycines

Historic Hotel €

(☎03 86 32 35 30; www.glycines-vezelay.com; rue St-Pierre; s €40, d €72-94; 📶) A 1763 bourgeois town house built and enveloped in ancient wisteria is now a hotel that's overflowing with old-fashioned character. The 11 rooms are all named after famous artists, and solid regional fare is served in the restaurant.

**Orange 7** **À la Maison****Bistro €**


(☎04 90 60 98 83; 4 place des Cordeliers; menus lunch €12.50-15, dinner €25-32, mains €10-16; ☺lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) There's no lovelier spot on a warm night than the leafy fountain courtyard at this simple bistro, which serves consistently good, honest cooking.

 **Hôtel Arène****Hotel €€**

(☎04 90 11 40 40; www.hotel-arene.fr; place de Langes; d €88-132; 📞📺📶🚰🚰) With the best and biggest bathrooms in Orange, the Arène is the closest you'll get to business class. Kids love the two heated pools (one indoors, one out); parents appreciate the family-sized rooms.

**Avignon 8** **Cuisine du Dimanche** **Provençal €€**

(☎04 90 82 99 10; www.lacuisinedudimanche.com; 31 rue Bonneterie; mains €15-25; ☺lunch & dinner daily Jun-Sep, Tue-Sat Oct-May) Spitfire chef Marie shops every morning at Les Halles to find the freshest ingredients for her earthy flavour-packed cooking. Reserve.

 **L'Epice and Love** **Traditional French €**

(☎04 90 82 45 96; 30 rue des Lices; mains €11-12; ☺dinner Mon-Sat) Tables are cheek by jowl at this tiny bohemian restaurant – a favourite for straightforward bistro fare, stews, roasts and other French dishes. Cash only.

 **Hôtel Boquier****Hotel €**

(☎04 90 82 34 43; www.hotel-boquier.com; 6 rue du Portail Boquier; d €50-70; 📞📺) The owners' infectious enthusiasm informs this

upbeat, colourful, small, central hotel; try for themed rooms Morocco or Lavender. Excellent value.

 **Le Limas****B&B €€**

(☎04 90 14 67 19; www.le-limas-avignon.com; 51 rue du Limas; d/tr from €120/200; 📞📺) Chic B&B in an 18th-century town house straight out of *Vogue Living* – minimalist white decor complements antique fireplaces and 18th-century spiral stairs. Breakfast on the terrace is a treat, as is bubbly owner Marion.

**Albi 10** **L'Epicurien****Modern French €€€**

(☎05 63 53 10 70; www.restaurantlepicurien.com; 42 place Jean Jaurès; menus €19-48; ☺Tue-Sat) The steel-grey and glass façade says it all: this establishment is a temple to contemporary French cuisine, run by Swedish chef Rikard Hult and his wife, Patricia. Presentation takes precedence over portions.

 **La Maison****B&B €**

(☎05 63 38 17 35; www.chambre-hote-albi.com; 40 bd Andrieu; s €60-75, d €75-90; 📞) In contrast to Albi's olde-worlde feel, this B&B is a model of modernity. The three rooms are sharp, sexy and swish. It also has a garden and parking.

 **La Tour Sainte Cécile****B&B €€**

(☎05 81 40 51 52; www.toursaintececile.com; 14bis rue Saint Cécile; d €130-180; 📞) Built from stout brick with its own tower (hence the name), this attractive *chambre d'hôte* (B&B) has four regal rooms stuffed with period detail. The Toulouse-Lautrec room is reached via its own spiral staircase. Rates include entry to the Toulouse-Lautrec museum.



*Normandy A dramatic view over  
Étretat's famous white cliffs*

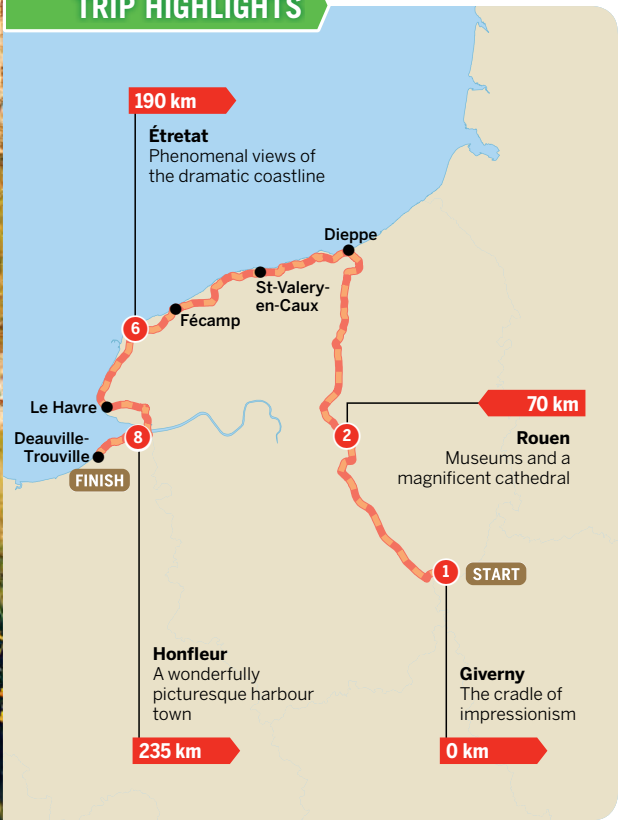




# Monet's Normandy

*This eclectic trip takes art lovers on a fascinating spin around eastern Normandy. En route you'll hit the key landscapes and cities that inspired Monet, the father of impressionism.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**4 DAYS**  
290KM / 180 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

Any time from September to June for perfectly nuanced light.



### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Snap the truly extraordinary coastal vista from the cliff top in Étretat.



### BEST FOR CULTURE

Rouen has plenty of top-quality museums and historic buildings.

## 8

# Monet's Normandy

Be prepared for a visual feast on this three-day trip around the eastern part of Normandy – the cradle of impressionism. Starting from the village of Giverny, location of the most celebrated garden in France, you'll follow in the footsteps of Monet and other impressionist megastars, taking in medieval Rouen, the dramatic Côte d'Albâtre, Le Havre, Honfleur and Trouville. This is your chance to see first-hand why so many painters were attracted to this place.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 Giverny

The tiny country village of Giverny is a place of pilgrimage for devotees of impressionism. Monet lived here from 1883 until his death in 1926, in a rambling house – surrounded by flower-filled gardens – that's now the immensely popular **Maison et Jardins de Claude Monet** (☎02 32 51 28 21; www.fondation-monet.com; adult/child €9/5; 🕒9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct). His pastel-pink



house and Water Lily studio stand on the periphery of the garden (called 'Clos Normand'), with its symmetrically laid out gardens bursting with flowers.

**The Drive** » It's a 70km trip (one hour) to Rouen. Head to Vernon and follow signs to Rouen along the A13. A more scenic (but longer) route is via Les Andelys, along the east bank of the Seine.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 2 Rouen

With its elegant spires and atmospheric medieval quarter complete with narrow lanes and wonky half-timbered houses, it's no wonder that Rouen has inspired numerous painters,



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

### 3 Tour des Fromages

From Honfleur or Rouen you can embark on a gastronomic drive, and taste and learn about some of the best cheese in France at various cheese museums.

### 9 D-Day's Beaches

From Trouville, it's an easy 50km drive west to Caen, the obvious starting point for the D-Day beaches.

including Monet. Some of his works, including one of his studies of the stunning **Gothic cathedral** (place de la Cathédrale), are displayed at the splendid **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (📍02 35 71 28 40; www.rouen-musees.com; esplanade Marcel

Duchamp; adult/child €5/ free; 🕒10am-6pm Wed-Mon). **Feeling inspired? Sign up for an art class with the tourist office** (📍02 32 08 32 40; www.rouentourisme.com; 25 place de la Cathédrale;

🕒9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Sun & holidays) and create your own Rouen Cathedral canvas from the very room in which Monet painted his series of that building.

If you're at all interested in architectural glories, the 14th-century **Abbatiale St-Ouen** (place du Général de Gaulle), which is a marvellous example of the Rayonnant Gothic style, is a must-see abbey. Also don't miss **Église St-Maclou** (place Barthélémy) and the ornate **Palais de Justice** (Law Courts; rue aux Juifs) – both are typical examples of the Flamboyant Gothic style.

🍴🏠 p111

**The Drive** » Follow signs to Dieppe. Count on 45 minutes for the 65km trip.

### 3 Dieppe

Sandwiched between limestone cliffs, Dieppe

is a small-scale fishing port with a pleasant seafront promenade. Still used by fishing vessels but dominated by pleasure craft, the **port** makes for a bracing sea-air stroll. High above the city on the western cliff, the 15th-century **Château-musée** (📍02 35 06 61 99; www.dieppe.fr; rue de Chastes; adult/child €4/2; 🕒10am-noon & 2-6pm, closed Tue Oct-May) is the town's most imposing landmark. Monet immortalised **Pourville**, a seaside village on the western outskirts of Dieppe.

**The Drive** » Take the scenic coastal roads (D75 and D68), rather than the inland D925, via the resort towns of Pourville, Varengeville-sur-Mer, Quiberville, St-Aubin-sur-Mer, Sotteville-sur-Mer and Veules-les-Roses (35km, 45 minutes).

### 4 St-Valery en Caux

You're now in the heart of the scenic Côte d'Albâtre (Alabaster Coast), which stretches from Dieppe southwest to Étretat. With its lofty bone-white cliffs, this wedge of coast is a geological wonder world that has charmed a generation of impressionists, including Monet. Once you get a glimpse of sweet little St-Valery en Caux, with its delightful port, lovely stretch of stony beach and majestic cliffs, you'll see why.

🍴🏠 p111

**The Drive** » Take the coastal road (D79) via Veulettes-sur-Mer. Count on an hour for the 36km trip.

## 5 Fécamp

After all that driving along the Côte d'Albâtre, it's time to stop for a glass of **Bénédictine** at the **Palais de la Bénédictine** (☎02 35 10 26 10; www.benedictinedom.com; 110 rue Alexandre Le Grand; adult/child €7.50/3.20; 🕒 tickets sold 10am-noon & 2-5.30pm, closed Jan). Opened in 1900, this unusually ornate factory is where all the **Bénédictine** liqueur in the world is made.

Be sure to drive up north to **Cap Fagnet** (110m), which offers gobsmacking views of the town and the coastline.

**The Drive** » Follow signs to Étretat (17km, along the D940). You could also take the D940 and turn off onto the more scenic D11 (via Yport).

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 6 Étretat

Is Étretat the most enticing town in Normandy? It's picture postcard everywhere you look. The dramatic white cliffs that bookend the town, the **Falaise d'Aval** to the southwest and the **Falaise d'Amont** to the northeast, will stick in your memory. Once at the top, you'll pinch yourself to see if it's real – the views are sensational.

Such irresistible scenery made Étretat a favourite of painters, especially Monet, who produced more than 80 canvases of the scenery here.

**The Drive** » Follow signs to Le Havre (28km, along the D940 and the D147). Count on about half an hour for the journey.

## 7 Le Havre

It was in Le Havre that Monet painted the defining impressionist view. His 1873 canvas of the harbour at dawn was entitled *Impression: Sunrise*. Monet wouldn't recognise present-day Le Havre. All but obliterated in September 1944 by Allied bombing raids, the city centre was totally rebuilt after the war by Belgian architect Auguste Perret. Make sure you visit the fantastic **Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux** (☎02 35 19 62 62; 2 bd Clemenceau; adult/child €5/free; 🕒 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Sat & Sun), which houses a truly fabulous collection of impressionist works – the finest in France outside of Paris, with canvases by Monet, Eugène Boudin, Camille Corot and many more. Then head to the fashionable seaside suburb of **Ste-Adresse**, just north of the centre – another favourite retreat for Monet.

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**Honfleur** Harbourside reflection of the town

## CLAUDE MONET

The undisputed leader of the impressionists, Claude Monet was born in Paris in 1840 and grew up in Le Havre, where he found an early affinity with the outdoors.

From 1867 Monet's distinctive style began to emerge, focusing on the effects of light and colour and using the quick, undisguised broken brushstrokes that would characterise the impressionist period. His contemporaries were Pissarro, Renoir, Sisley, Cézanne and Degas. The young painters left the studio to work outdoors, experimenting with the shades and hues of nature, and arguing and sharing ideas. Their work was far from welcomed by critics; one of them condemned it as 'impressionism', in reference to Monet's *Impression: Sunrise* when exhibited in 1874.

From the late 1870s Monet concentrated on painting in series, seeking to recreate a landscape by showing its transformation under different conditions of light and atmosphere. In 1883 Monet moved to Giverny, planting his property with a variety of flowers around an artificial pond, the Jardin d'Eau, in order to paint the subtle effects of sunlight on natural forms. It was here that he painted the *Nymphéas* (Water Lilies) series.

For more info on Monet and his work, visit [www.giverny.org](http://www.giverny.org).

**The Drive** » Follow signs to Pont de Normandie, which links Le Havre to Honfleur (toll €5.50).

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 8 Honfleur

Honfleur is exquisite to look at. (No, you're not dreaming!) Its heart is the amazingly picturesque **Vieux Bassin** (Old Harbour), from where explorers once set sail for the New World. Marvel at the extraordinary 15th-century wooden **Église Ste-Catherine** (place Ste-Catherine; ☎9am-6pm), complete with a roof that from the inside resembles an upturned boat, then wander the warren of flower-filled cobbled streets lined with wooden and stone buildings.

Honfleur's graceful beauty has inspired numerous painters, including Eugène Boudin, an early impressionist painter born here in 1824, and Monet. Their works are displayed at the **Musée Eugène Boudin** (☎02 31 89 54 00; [www.musees-honfleur.fr](http://www.musees-honfleur.fr); 50 rue de l'Homme de Bois; adult/child €5.80/4.30; ☎10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon mid-Mar-Sep, 10am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri Oct-mid-Mar).



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**The Drive** » From Honfleur it's a 14km trip to Trouville along the D513 (about 20 minutes).

#### 9 Deauville-Trouville

Finish your impressionist road trip in style by heading southwest to the twin seaside resorts of

Deauville and Trouville, which are only separated by a bridge but maintain distinctly different personalities. Exclusive, expensive and brash, Deauville is packed with designer boutiques, deluxe hotels and public gardens of impossible neatness, and is home to two racetracks and a high-profile American film festival.

Trouville, another veteran beach resort, is more down to earth. During the 19th century the town was frequented by writers and painters, including Monet, who spent his honeymoon here in 1870. No doubt he was lured by the picturesque port, the 2km-long sandy beach lined with opulent villas and the laid-back seaside ambience.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Rouen 2

### **Les Nymphéas** Traditional French €€


(☎02 35 89 26 69; www.lesnymphéas-rouen.com; 7-9 rue de la Pie; mains €29-37, menus €34-52; ☺lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Its formal table settings arrayed under 16th-century beams, this fine restaurant serves cuisine based on fresh ingredients. Let chef Patrick Kukurudz and his team seduce you with meat and fish dishes accompanied with divinely inspired sauces.

### **Hôtel de Bourgheroulde** Hotel €€€

(☎02 35 14 50 50; www.hotelsparouen.com; 15 place de la Pucelle; r €240-380;    ) This stunning conversion of an old private mansion is a showstopper. There's a pool (you can see through the lobby bar's glass floor down into it), a sauna and a spa in the basement, two restaurants and a sleek lobby bar.

## St-Valery en Caux 4

### **La Maison des Galets** Hotel €

(☎02 35 97 11 22; www.lamaisondesgalets.com; 22 cours Le Perrey; s €53, d €65-80, restaurant mains €15-18, menus €19-35; ☺restaurant lunch & dinner Fri-Tue; ) This solid two-starrer on the seafront is an excellent bet. Most of the rooms have had a modern-day refit and feature squeaky-clean bathrooms. The on-site restaurant is well worth considering for its meaty dishes and seafood.

## Le Havre 7

### **La Petite Auberge** Traditional French €€

(☎02 35 46 27 32; www.lapetiteauberge-lehavre.fr; 32 rue de Ste Adresse; mains €13-25, menus

€20-40; ☺lunch & dinner Tue & Thu-Sat, dinner Wed, lunch Sun) This gem of a place is possibly Le Havre's most charming dining option, with a low-beamed dining room that whispers of romance. Seafood dominates the inventive yet traditional menu, but there's plenty of room for meaty dishes, too.

### **Hôtel Vent d'Ouest** Boutique Hotel €€



(☎02 35 42 50 69; www.ventdouest.fr; 4 rue de Caligny; d €110-170, q €184;  ) This stylish establishment is decorated in maritime fashion, with nautical memorabilia downstairs and a range of posh cream-walled, sisal-floored rooms upstairs. Facilities include a restaurant, a tearoom and a sparkling spa.

## Honfleur 8

### **Le Bréard** Gastronomic €€€

(☎02 31 89 53 40; www.restaurant-lebreard.com; 7 rue du Puits; menus €29-55; ☺lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Le Bréard is the place to go in Honfleur for *gastronomique* specialities of the highest order. Served in two chic, modern dining rooms.

### **La Maison de Lucie** Boutique Hotel €€€

(☎02 31 14 40 40; www.lamaisondelucie.com; 44 rue des Capucins; d €150-200, ste €250-315;  ) This marvellous little hideaway has just 10 rooms and two suites. Some of the bedrooms, panelled in oak, have Moroccan-tile bathrooms and boast fantastic views across the harbour. There's a chic Jacuzzi in the old brick-vaulted cellar.



*Normandy American Cemetery &  
Memorial A place to remember*



# Classic Trip

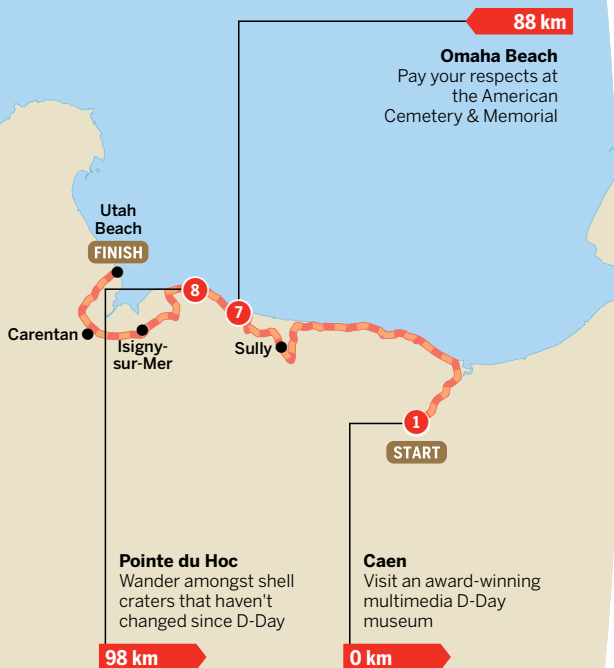


# 9

## D-Day's Beaches

Explore the events of D-Day, when Allied troops stormed ashore to liberate Europe from Nazi occupation. From war museums to landing beaches, it's a fascinating and sobering experience.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**3 DAYS**  
142KM / 88 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

April to July, to avoid summer-holiday traffic around the beaches.



### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Standing next to the German guns at Longues-sur-Mer.



### BEST FOR HISTORY

The Caen Mémorial provides you with a comprehensive D-Day overview.

# Classic Trip

9

## D-Day's Beaches

The beaches and bluffs are quiet today, but on 6 June 1944 the Normandy shoreline witnessed the arrival of the largest armada the world has ever seen. This patch of the French coast will forever be synonymous with D-Day (known to the French as Jour-J), and the coastline is strewn with memorials, museums and cemeteries – reminders that though victory was won on the Longest Day, it came at a terrible price.



## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 1 Caen

Situated 3km northwest of Caen, the award-winning **Mémorial – Un Musée pour la Paix** (Memorial – A Museum for Peace; ☎02 31 06 06 45; www.memorial-caen.fr; esplanade Général Eisenhower; adult/child €18.80/16.30; 🕒9am–6.30pm, closed Jan & Mon mid-Nov–mid-Dec) is a brilliant place to begin with some background on the historic events of D-Day, and the wider context of WWII. Housed

in a purpose-designed building covering 14,000 sq metres, it's an immersive experience, using sound, lighting, film, animation and audio testimony to evoke the grim realities of war, the trials of occupation and the joy of liberation.

The visit begins with a whistle-stop overview of Europe's descent into total war, tracing events from the end of WWI through to the rise of fascism in Europe, the German occupation of France and the Battle of Normandy. A second

section focuses on the Cold War. There's also an underground gallery dedicated to winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, located in bunkers used by the Germans in 1944.

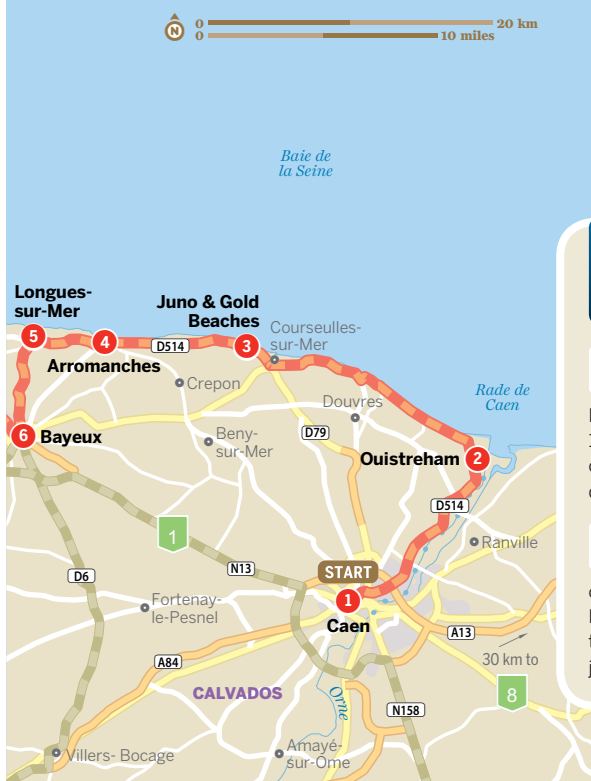
On your way round, look out for an original Typhoon fighter plane and a full-size Sherman tank.

🔧🚗 p121

**The Drive** » From the museum, head northeast along Esplanade Brillaud de Laujardière, and follow signs to Ouistreham. You'll join the E46 ring road; follow it to exit 3a (Porte d'Angleterre), and merge onto the D515 and D84 to Ouistreham. Park on the seafront on bd Aristide Briand. In all it's a trip of 18km.

## 2 Ouistreham

On D-Day, the sandy seafront around Ouistreham was code named **Sword Beach**



## LINK YOUR TRIP

## 1 Essential France

The island abbey of Mont St-Michel is about 140km from the Normandy coastline, about two hours' drive via the A84 motorway.

## 8 Monet's Normandy

From the end of our Monet-themed trip at Fécamp, drive southwest on the A29 and A13 to Caen, a journey of just under 130km.

# Classic Trip

and was the focus of attack for the British 3rd Infantry Division.

There are precious few reminders of the battle now, but on D-Day the scene was very different: most of the surrounding buildings had been levelled by artillery fire, and German bunkers and artillery positions were strung out along the seafront. Sword Beach was the site of some of the most famous images of D-Day – including the infamous ones of British troops landing with bicycles, and bagpiper Bill Millin piping troops ashore while under heavy fire.

**The Drive** » Follow the seafront west onto rue de Lion, following signs for 'Overlord – L'Assaut' onto the D514 towards Courseulles-sur-Mer, 18km west. Drive through town onto rue de Ver, and follow signs to 'Centre Juno Beach'.

## 3 Juno & Gold Beaches

On D-Day, Courseulles-sur-Mer was known as **Juno Beach**, and was stormed mainly by Canadian troops. It was here that the exiled French General Charles de Gaulle came ashore after the landings – the first 'official' French soldier

## D-DAY DRIVING ROUTES

There are several signposted driving routes around the main battle sites – look for signs for 'D-Day-Le Choc' in the American sectors and 'Overlord – L'Assaut' in the British and Canadian sectors. A free booklet called *The D-Day Landings and the Battle of Normandy*, available from tourist offices, has details on the eight main routes.

Maps of the D-Day beaches are available at *tabacs* (tobacconists), newsagents and bookshops in Bayeux and elsewhere.

to set foot in mainland Europe since 1940. He was followed by Winston Churchill on 12 June and King George VI on 16 June. A Cross of Lorraine marks the historic spot.

The area's only Canadian museum, **Centre Juno Beach** (☎02 31 37 32 17; www.junobeach.org; adult/child €6.50/5; ☎9.30am-7pm Apr-Sep) has exhibits on Canada's role in the war effort and the landings, and offers guided tours of Juno Beach (€5) from April to October.

A short way west is **Gold Beach**, attacked by the British 50th Infantry on D-Day.

**The Drive** » Drive west along the D514 for 14km to Arromanches. You'll pass a car-park and viewpoint marked with a statue of the Virgin Mary, which overlooks Port Winston and Gold Beach. Follow the road into town and signs to Musée du Débarquement.

## 4 Arromanches

This seaside town was the site of one of

the great logistical achievements of D-Day. In order to unload the vast quantities of cargo needed by the invasion forces without capturing one of the heavily defended Channel ports, the Allies set up prefabricated marinas off two landing beaches, code named **Mulberry Harbour**. These consisted of 146 massive cement caissons towed over from England and sunk to form a semicircular breakwater in which floating bridge spans were moored. In the three months after D-Day, the Mulberries facilitated the unloading of a mind-boggling 2.5 million men, four million tonnes of equipment and 500,000 vehicles.

At low tide, the stanchions of one of these artificial quays, **Port Winston** (named after Churchill), can still be seen on the sands at Arromanches.

Beside the beach, the **Musée du Débarquement**

(Landing Museum; ☎02 31 22 34 31; www.normandy1944.com; place du 6 Juin; adult/child €7/5; 🕒9am-6pm, closed Jan) explains the logistics and importance of Port Winston.

**The Drive** » Continue west along the D514 for 6km to the village of Longues-sur-Mer. You'll see the sign for the Batterie de Longues on your right.

## 5 Longues-sur-Mer

At Longues-sur-Mer you can get a glimpse of the awesome firepower available to the German defenders in the shape of two 150mm artillery guns, still housed in their concrete casements. On D-Day they were capable of hitting targets over 20km away – including Gold Beach (to the east) and Omaha Beach (to the west). Parts of the classic D-Day film, *The Longest*

*Day* (1962), were filmed here.

**The Drive** » Backtrack to the crossroads and head straight over onto the D104, signed to Vaux-sur-Aure/Bayeux for 8km. When you reach town, turn right onto the D613, and follow signs to the 'Musée de la Bataille de Normandie'.

## 6 Bayeux

Though best known for its medieval tapestry (see p43), Bayeux has another claim to fame: it was the first town to be liberated after D-Day (on the morning of 7 June 1944).

It's also home to the largest of Normandy's 18 Commonwealth military cemeteries – the **Bayeux War Cemetery**, situated on bd Fabien Ware. It contains 4848 graves of soldiers from the UK and 10 other countries – including

Germany. Across the road is a memorial for 1807 Commonwealth soldiers whose remains were never found. The Latin inscription reads: 'We, whom William once conquered, have now set free the conqueror's native land'.

Nearby, the **Musée Mémorial de la Bataille de Normandie** (Battle of Normandy Memorial Museum; bd Fabien Ware; adult/child €7/3.80; 🕒9.30am-6.30pm May-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Oct-Apr) explores the battle through photos, personal accounts, dioramas and film.

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**The Drive** » After overnighting in Bayeux, head northwest of town on the D6 towards Port-en-Bessin-Huppain. You'll reach a Super-U supermarket after about 10km. Go round the roundabout and turn onto the D514 for another 8km. You'll see signs to the

## D-DAY IN FIGURES

Code named 'Operation Overlord', the D-Day landings were the largest military operation in history. On the morning of 6 June 1944, swarms of landing craft – part of an armada of over 6000 ships and 13,000 aeroplanes – hit the northern Normandy beaches, and tens of thousands of soldiers from the USA, the UK, Canada and elsewhere began pouring onto French soil. The initial landing force involved some 45,000 troops; 15 more divisions were to follow once successful beachheads had been established.

The majority of the 135,000 Allied troops stormed ashore along 80km of beaches north of Bayeux (code named (from west to east) Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword). The landings were followed by the 76-day Battle of Normandy, during which the Allies suffered 210,000 casualties, including 37,000 troops killed. German casualties are believed to have been around 200,000; another 200,000 German soldiers were taken prisoner. About 14,000 French civilians also died.

For more background and statistics, see [www.normandiemoire.com](http://www.normandiemoire.com) and [www.6jun1944.com](http://www.6jun1944.com).

# Classic Trip



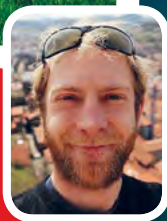
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WALTER REINHOLD/NEWS PHOTO IMAGES ©

## WHY THIS IS A CLASSIC TRIP

OLIVER BERRY,  
AUTHOR



You'll have heard the D-Day story many times before, but there's nothing quite like standing on the beaches where this epic struggle played out. D-Day marked the turning point of WWII and heralded the end for Nazism in Europe. Paying your respects to the soldiers who laid down their lives in the name of freedom is an experience that'll stay with you forever.

Top: Arromanches and Gold Beach  
Left: Normandy American Cemetery & Memorial  
Right: Pointe du Hoc



MORNING CAMP/LEVE/SUR/SHUTTERSTOCK IMAGES ©

'Cimetière Americain' near the hamlet of Le Bray. Omaha Beach is another 4km further on, near Vierville-sur-Mer.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

**7 Omaha Beach**

If anywhere symbolises the courage and sacrifice of D-Day, it's Omaha – still known as 'Bloody Omaha' to US veterans. It was here, on the 7km stretch of coastline between Vierville-sur-Mer, St-Laurent-sur-Mer and Colleville-sur-Mer, that the most brutal fighting on D-Day took place. US troops had to fight their way across the beach towards the heavily defended cliffs, exposed to underwater obstacles, hidden minefields and withering crossfire. The toll was heavy: of the 2500 casualties at Omaha on D-Day, over 1000 were killed, most within the first hour of the landings.

High on the bluffs above Omaha, the **Normandy American Cemetery & Memorial** ([www.abmc.gov](http://www.abmc.gov); Colleville-sur-Mer; ☎9am-5pm) provides a sobering reminder of the human cost of the battle. Featured in the opening scenes of *Saving Private Ryan*, this is the largest American cemetery in Europe, containing the graves of 9387 American soldiers, and a memorial to 1557 comrades 'known only unto God'.



## Classic Trip

White marble crosses and stars of David stretch off in seemingly endless rows, surrounded by an immaculately tended expanse of lawn. The cemetery is overlooked by a large colonnaded memorial, centred on a statue dedicated to the spirit of American youth. Nearby is a reflective pond and a small chapel.

**The Drive** » From the Vierville-sur-Mer seafront, follow the rural D514 through quiet countryside towards Grandcamp-Maisy. After about 10km you'll see signs to 'Pointe du Hoc'.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 8 Pointe du Hoc

West of Omaha, this craggy promontory was the site of D-Day's most audacious military exploit. At 7.10am, 225 US Army Rangers commanded by Lt Col James Earl Rudder scaled the sheer 30m cliffs, where the Germans had stationed a battery of artillery guns trained onto the beaches of Utah and Omaha. Unfortunately, the guns had already been moved inland, and Rudder and his men spent the next two days repelling



## DETOUR: COUTANCES

### Start 9 Utah Beach

The lovely old Norman town of **Coutances** makes a good detour when travelling between the D-Day beaches and Mont St-Michel. At the town's heart is its Gothic **Cathédrale de Coutances** (parvis Notre-Dame; admission free; ☺9am-7pm). Interior highlights include several 13th-century windows, a 14th-century fresco of St Michael skewering the dragon, and an organ and high altar from the mid-1700s. You can climb the lantern tower on a **tour** (adult/child €7/4; ☺ in French 11am & 3pm Mon-Fri, 3pm Sun Jul & Aug).

Coutances is about 50km south of Utah Beach by the most direct route.

counterattacks. By the time they were finally relieved on 8 June, 81 of the rangers had been killed and 58 more had been wounded.

Today the **site** (📍02 31 51 90 70; admission free; ☺9am-5pm), which France turned over to the US government in 1979, looks much as it did on D-Day, complete with shell craters and crumbling gun emplacements.

**The Drive** » Stay on the D514 to Grandcamp-Maisy, then continue south onto the D13 dual carriageway. Stay on the road till you reach the turn-off for the D913, signed to St-Marie-du-Mont/Utah Beach. It's a drive of 44km.

#### 9 Utah Beach

The D-Day tour ends at St-Marie-du-Mont, aka

**Utah Beach**, assaulted by soldiers of the US 4th and 8th Infantry Divisions. The beach was relatively lightly defended, and by midday the landing force had linked with paratroopers from the 101st Airborne. By nightfall, some 20,000 men and 1700 vehicles had arrived on French soil, and the road to European liberation had begun.

Today the site is marked by military memorials and the **Musée du Débarquement** (Landing Museum; 📍02 33 71 53 35; www.utah-beach.com; Ste-Marie du Mont; adult/child €7.50/3; ☺9.30am-7pm) inside the former German command post.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Caen 1

### **A Contre Sens** Modern French €€

(📞02 31 97 44 48; www.acontresenscaen.fr; 8 rue Croisiers; mains €28-32, menus €22-48; 🕒lunch Wed-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) Under the helm of young chef Anthony Caillot, meals are thoughtfully crafted and superbly presented. Given its quality, A Contre Sens is remarkably good value, especially at lunchtime.

### **Le Bouchon du Vaugueux** Norman €€

(📞02 31 44 26 26; www.bouchonduvaugueux.com; 4 rue Graindorge; menus €15-28; 🕒lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Caen's most popular and buzzing restaurant. You may well be the only foreigner here, so don't expect a translation of the chalkboard menu – but if your French is up to it, you'll enjoy modern Norman cooking and well-priced wines. Book ahead.

### **Hôtel des Quatrans** Hotel €€

(📞02 31 86 25 57; www.hotel-des-quatrans.com; 17 rue Gémare; s €68-81, d €80-95; 📶) The outside might look like a set of concrete boxes, but inside this typically modern hotel you'll find a surprising range of comfy, unfussy rooms, handy for exploring the city centre.

### **La Maison de Famille** B&B €€

(📞06 61 64 88 54; www.maisondefamille.sitew.com; 4 rue Elie de Beaumont; d €70-90, q €105-130; 📶) A divine four-room town house B&B. Each room has personality: Baldaquin has a romantic four-poster bed, wooden floors and an old fireplace, while families plump for spacious Sous Les Toits ('Under the Roof') or garden-side Suite Jardin. Private parking is a bonus.

## Bayeux 6

### **La Rapière** Norman €€

(📞02 31 21 05 45; 53 rue St-Jean; menus €15-34; 🕒lunch & dinner Fri-Tue) Housed in a late-1400s mansion, this beamed restaurant specialises in Normandy staples such as terrine, duck, and veal with Camembert. Four fixed-price menus assure a splendid meal on any budget.

### **Le Pommier** Norman €€

(📞02 31 21 52 10; www.restaurantlepommier.com; 38-40 rue des Cuisiniers; menus €15-30; 🕒closed Sun Nov-Mar & mid-Dec-mid-Jan, lunch & dinner daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Sat Nov-mid-Dec & mid-Jan-Mar, closed mid-Dec-mid-Jan; 📶) A celebration of all things Norman, Le Pommier's menus include such classics as Caen-style tripe and steamed pollock. A vegetarian menu – a rarity in Normandy – is also available.

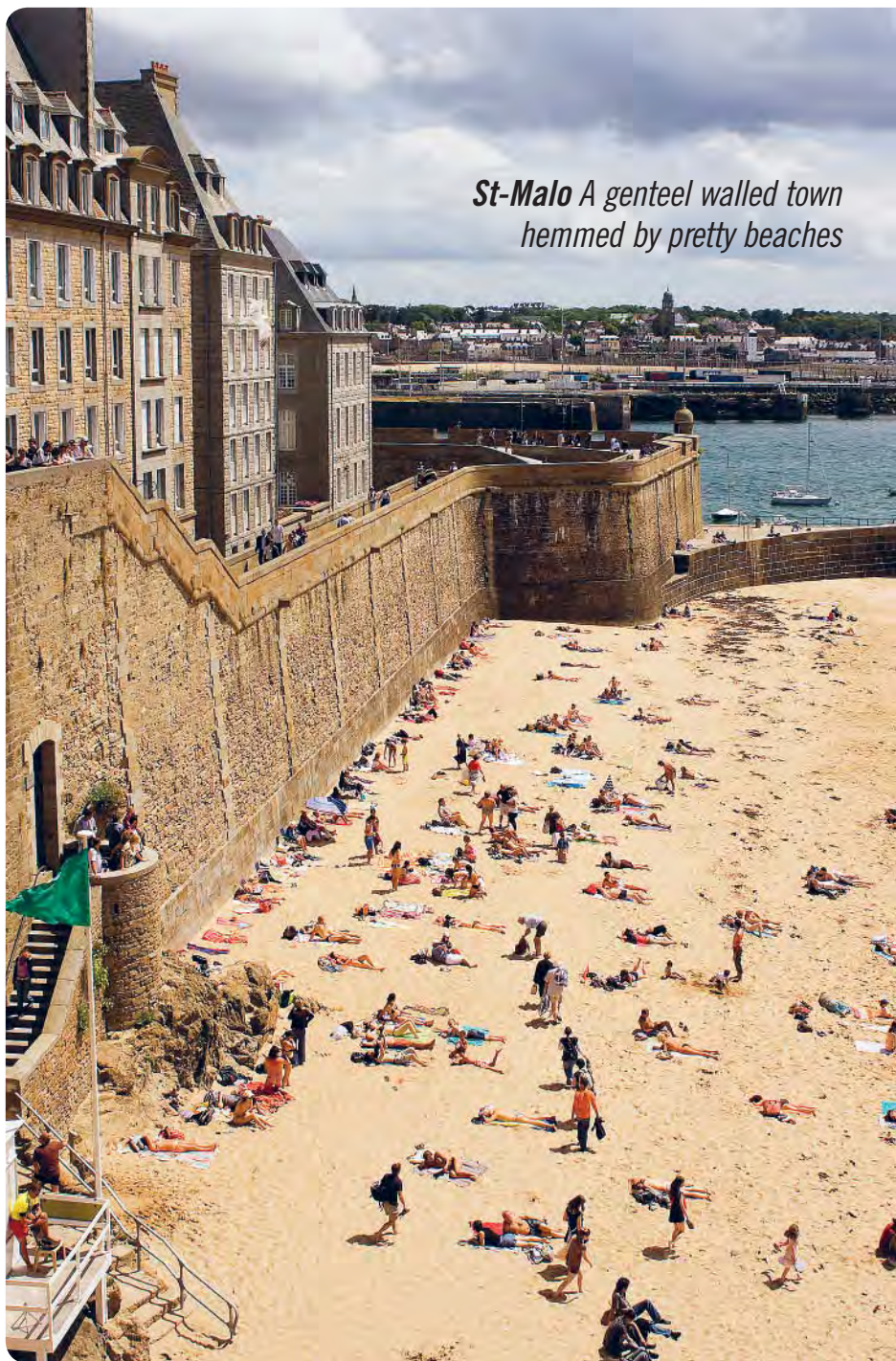
### **Les Logis du Rempart** B&B €

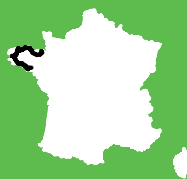
(📞02 31 92 50 40; www.lecornu.fr; 4 rue Bourbesneur; d €60-80, q €130; 📶) This three-room *maison de famille* (guesthouse) oozes old-fashioned cosiness. Our favourite, the Bajocasse, has a parquet floor and Toile de Jouy wallpaper. There's a tasting shop downstairs that sells homemade Calvados and cider, and breakfast features organic apple juice and apple jelly.

### **Villa Lara** Boutique Hotel €€€

(📞02 31 92 00 55; www.hotel-villalara.com; 6 place de Québec; d €180-280, ste €290-450; 📶) Clean lines, trendy colour schemes and minimalist motifs distinguish this new boutique hotel, which also has a bistro and a gym. The best rooms are blessed with views of the cathedral.

*St-Malo A genteel walled town  
hemmed by pretty beaches*





# 10

## Breton Coast

*On this maritime-flavoured drive you'll experience serene seaside towns, sparkling beaches, dramatic storm-lashed headlands and the world's greatest concentration of megalithic sites.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

**8 DAYS**  
540KM / 336 MILES

#### GREAT FOR...



#### BEST TIME TO GO

April and May can see fine sunny weather and no crowds.

#### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Standing on the precipice of the cliffs of Pointe de Pen-Hir.

#### BEST FOR FAMILIES

Splashing about on the beaches of Concarneau or Carnac.



# 10 Breton Coast

This is a trip for explorers who want to experience a very different slice of French life. Instead of the Eiffel Tower, fine wine and sun-soaked beaches, you'll take in a drama-filled coastline, medieval towns, prehistoric mysticism and a proud Celtic streak.



## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 St-Malo

Once renowned for being a haven for pirates and adventurers, the enthralling walled town of St-Malo is today a genteel mast-filled port hemmed by pretty beaches and guarded by an array of offshore islands. The walled quarter of **Intra Muros** is arguably the most interesting urban centre in Brittany, but it's not as old as it appears. Most of the town was flattened in WWII and has since been lovingly rebuilt.

Beyond the walls of Intra Muros is the **Fort de la Cité**, which was

used as a German base during WWII. One of the bunkers now houses the **Mémorial 39-45** (☎02 99 82 41 74; adult/child €6/3; 🕒 guided visits 10.15am, 11am, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm & 5pm), which depicts St-Malo's violent WWII history.

🍴🛏 p129

**The Drive** » The 33km, half-hour drive along the N136 between St-Malo and Dinan is through a largely built-up area and offers little of interest. Be warned that this road, like most others around St-Malo, can be subject to heavy traffic and delays.

### 2 Dinan

Set high above the fast-flowing River Rance, Dinan's old town is like

something straight out of the Middle Ages, with narrow cobblestoned streets and squares lined with crooked half-timbered houses. The appeal isn't lost on summer visitors, but by around 6pm it's as though someone has waved a magic wand: most of the deluge

English Channel  
(La Manche)

0 40 km  
0 20 miles



PARIS & NORTHERN FRANCE **10** BRETON COAST

vanishes and a sense of calm falls over the town.

**The Drive** » If time allows, take the wiggly, and very slow (count on a 3½-hour drive) coastal D786 between Dinard and Roscoff. Highlights include the pretty port of Paimpol and the breathtaking Côte de Granit Rose, which extends either side of the town of Perros-Guirec. This leg is 209km.

6

LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP

9

**D-Day's  
Beaches**

Combining a drive around the Breton coast with the war memorials of Normandy is easy. Caen is 174km along the A84 from St-Malo.

12

**Caves & Cellars  
of the Loire**

From Vannes it's 264km to Montsoreau, where you can pick up our tour of the Western Loire's cave dwellings and wine cellars.

### 3 Roscoff

Set around an arcing harbour studded with granite cottages and seafront villas, Roscoff is one of the more captivating cross-channel ferry ports.

After you've explored the town, set sail for the peaceful **Île de**

**Batz**, which sits a short way offshore. The mild island climate supports the luxuriant **Jardins**

**Georges Delaselle** (📞02

98 61 75 65; www.jardin

-georgesdelaselle.fr; adult/child

€5/2.50; 🕒1-6.30pm Jul &

Aug, 2-6pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct),

with over 1500 plants

from all five continents.

Ferries (adult/child return €8/4, bikes €8, 15 minutes each way) between Roscoff and Île de Batz run every 30 minutes in July and August; less frequently the rest of the year.

🔪🚗 p129

**The Drive** » Taking the D69, D18 and D791, allow one hour and 40 minutes to drive the 86km between Roscoff and Crozon, the main town on the Presqu'île de Crozon. The route takes you through the western edge of the Parc Naturel Régional d'Armorique, a beautiful region of rocky uplands and myth-shrouded forests that blends into the Presqu'île de Crozon.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 4 Presqu'île de Crozon

With long sweeps of golden sand, silent loch-like estuaries bordered by dense forest, pretty rocky coves lapped by azure waters, and huge cliffs hammered by slate-grey Atlantic swells, the anchor-shaped Crozon Peninsula is without doubt one of the most scenic spots in Brittany.

At the western extremity of the peninsula, **Camaret-sur-Mer** is a classic fishing village that lures artists. Three kilometres south

## MIGHTY MEGALITHS

Two perplexing questions arise from the region's Neolithic menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs, tumuli and cairns. Just *how* did the original constructors hew, then haul these blocks (the heaviest weighs 300 tonnes), millennia before the wheel and the mechanical engine reached Brittany? And *why*?

Theories and hypotheses abound, but the vague yet common consensus is that they served some kind of sacred purpose.

Sign up for a one-hour guided visit at the **Maison des Mégalithes** (📞02 97 52 29 81; rte des Alignements; tours adult/child €6/free; 🕒10am-8pm Jul & Aug, to 5.15pm Sep-Apr, to 7pm May & Jun). Tour times vary considerably depending on the time of year, but they run regularly in French in summer and at least once or twice a day at other times. English tours are usually held at 3pm Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from early July to late August. Because of severe erosion, the sites are fenced off to allow the vegetation to regenerate. However, between 9am and 5pm from October to March you can wander freely through some parts.

Opposite the Maison des Mégalithes, the largest menhir field – with 1099 stones – is the **Alignements du Ménéac**, 1km north of Carnac-Ville; the eastern section is accessible in winter. From here, the D196 heads northeast for about 1.5km to the equally impressive **Alignements de Kermario** (which is open year-round). Climb the stone observation tower midway along the site to see the alignment from above.

For some background, the **Musée de Préhistoire** (📞02 97 52 22 04; www.museedecarnac.fr; 10 place de la Chapelle, Carnac-Ville; adult/child €5/2.50; 🕒10am-6pm) will do very nicely.



Roscoff

of the village is the spectacular **Pointe de Pen-Hir** headland.

Nearby **Morgat** is one of the prettier resorts in this part of Brittany, with colourful houses piled up at one end of a long sandy beach.

✂ p129

**The Drive** » Using the D63 it's just 55km from Crozon, the main town on the peninsula, to Quimper. Along the way you'll be rewarded with pretty views westward over the sea.

## 5 Quimper

Small enough to feel like a village, with its slanted

half-timbered houses and narrow cobbled streets, and large enough to buzz as the troubadour of Breton culture and arts, Quimper is the Finistère region's thriving capital.

At the centre of the city is the **Cathedral St-Corentin** (☎8.30am-noon & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-noon & 2-6.30pm Sun), with its distinctive kink, said to symbolise Christ's inclined head as he was dying on the cross. Beside the cathedral, the superb **Musée Départemental Breton**

(☎02 98 95 21 60; 1 rue du Roi Gradlon; adult/child €4/free; ☎9am-6pm) showcases

Breton history, furniture, costumes, crafts and archaeology.

**The Drive** » Rather than taking the faster N165 between Quimper and Concarneau, meander along the more scenic D783. Even on this slower road you only need 30 minutes to travel the 22km between the two towns.

## 6 Concarneau

The sheltered harbour of Concarneau is one of the busiest fishing ports in Brittany and is a hugely popular summer-holiday destination. In the middle of the harbour is the old quarter of the



**Ville Close**, encircled by medieval walls and crammed with enchanting old stone houses.

Surrounding the town are numerous highly attractive **beaches** and coves, which are sheltered from the anger of the Atlantic and are ideal for families.

**The Drive** » Cross the scenic River Moros on the D783 and trundle for 16km (30 minutes) through rural scenery to Port-Aven.

## 7 Port-Aven

The tiny village of Pont-Aven, nestled in the ‘valley of willows’, is a delightful place to break your journey eastward. Long ago discovered by artists, it’s brimming with galleries. For an

insight into the town’s place in art history, stop by the **Musée des Beaux-Arts de Pont-Aven** (☎02 98 06 14 43; www.museepontaven.fr; place de l’Hôtel de Ville; adult/child €4.50/free; ☀10am–12.30pm & 2–6.30pm, closed Jan).

**The Drive** » From Port-Aven to Carnac it’s a fast but dull one-hour (81km) drive down the N165 dual carriageway past the large industrial city of Lorient.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 8 Carnac

With enticing beaches and a pretty town centre, Carnac would be a popular tourist town even without its collection of magnificent **megalithic sites**, which predate Stonehenge by around 100 years. The area surrounding the town has 3000 of these

upright stones – the world’s largest concentration – most around thigh-high, erected between 5000 and 3500 BC. For more information on the stones and visiting the sites, see p126.

 p129

**The Drive** » Rather than taking the N165 to Vannes, opt for the coastal route. From Carnac head down to Carnac Plage and follow the coastal road to attractive La Trinité-sur-Mer. Join the D781 and then the D28 inland to Auray (well worth a poke around). From here join the D101, which swings into Vannes. This 40km route takes just over an hour.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 9 Vannes

Street art, sculptures and intriguing galleries pop up unexpectedly through the half-timbered, cobbled city of Vannes, which has a quirky, creative bent. Surrounding the walled old town is a flower-filled moat. Inside, you can weave through the web of narrow alleys ranged around the 13th-century Gothic **Cathédrale St-Pierre**.

The nearby Golfe du Morbihan is one of France’s most attractive stretches of coastline. From April to September, **Navix** (☎08 25 13 21 00; www.navix.fr) runs a range of cruises (from €14.90 per person).

 p129



## DETOUR: JOSSÉLIN

### Start 9 Vannes

In the shadow of an enormous, witch’s-hat-turreted 14th-century castle, the story-book village of Josselin lies on the banks of the River Oust, 43km northeast of Vannes. Place Notre Dame, a beautiful square of 16th-century half-timbered houses, is the little town’s heart, but it’s for the magnificent **Château de Josselin** (☎02 97 22 36 45; www.chateaujosselin.com; adult/child €8/5.20; ☀11am–6pm mid-Jul–Aug, 2–6pm Apr–mid-Jul, 2–5.30pm Sep) that you’d really make this detour. The treasure-filled château can only be visited by guided tour.

From Vannes it’s an easy one-hour drive along the D126 through an increasingly green and rural landscape of cows and forests.

# Eating & Sleeping

## St-Malo 1

### **Le Bistro de Jean** Bistro €

(☎)02 99 40 98 68; 6 rue de la Corne-de-Cerf; mains €15-19, menus from €12; ☺lunch & dinner Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, dinner Wed & Sat) Peer through the windows of this lively and highly authentic bistro in Intra Muros and you'll find it packed at lunchtimes with loyal locals all enjoying the best bistro meals in St-Malo.

### **La Rance Hotel** Boutique Hotel €

(☎)02 99 81 78 63; www.larancehotel.com; 15 quai Sébastopol; r €65-84; 📶) This is a fabulous little hotel with searing white rooms decorated with hand-painted wooden ship-communication flags. Chantal and Thierry are warm and helpful hosts, and there's a nice little garden and a charming breakfast room.

## Roscoff 3

### **L'Ecume des Jours** Regional Cuisine €€

(☎)02 98 61 22 83; quai d'Auxerre; menus €15-55; ☺lunch & dinner Thu-Mon Sep-Jun, Thu-Tue Jul & Aug) Regarded as the best restaurant in town, this elegant place serves magnificent and inventive local dishes that marry seafood tastes with landlubbers' delights.

### **Le Temps de Vivre** Boutique Hotel €€

(☎)02 98 19 33 19; www.letempsdevivre.net; 19 place Lacaze Duthiers; d from €145; 📶) This glamorous place is hidden away in a lovely stone mansion complete with its own tower just opposite the church. With fantastic sea views from some rooms, decor that's a great blend of

modernity and tradition, and friendly staff, this is one of Roscoff's very best options. There's a car park nearby.

## Presqu'île de Crozon 4

### **Saveurs et Marées** Seafood €€

(☎)02 98 26 23 18; 52 bd Plage, Morgat; menus €14-45; ☺lunch & dinner daily Mar-Jan) Our pick of Morgat's clutch of restaurants is this lemon-yellow cottage overlooking the sea with its breezy dining room, sunny terrace and consistently good, locally caught seafood.

## Carnac 8

### **Plume au Vent** B&B €€

(☎)06 16 98 34 79; www.plume-au-vent.com; 4 Venelle Notre Dame; d €90) This two-room *chambre d'hôte* (B&B) in the town centre is all mellow shades of blue and grey, hundreds of neatly bound books, knick-knacks discovered washed up on the high-tide line and polished-cement showers and sinks.

## Vannes 9

### **Hôtel Villa Kerasy** Boutique Hotel €€

(☎)02 97 68 36 83; www.villakerasy.com; 20 av Favrel-et-Lincy; d €141-198; ☺closed mid-Nov-mid-Dec; 📶) On entering this smart hotel you'll discover an exotic world of spices and far-away tropical sea ports. Rooms are individually decorated in Indian and Far Eastern styles, and the garden, crowded with Buddha statues and koi-filled ponds, is a little slice of Japan.



# STRETCH YOUR LEGS PARIS

**Start** Place de la Concorde

**Finish** Place du Panthéon

**Distance** 4.5km

**Duration** Three hours

Paris is one of the world's most strollable cities, whether that means window-shopping on the boulevards or getting lost among the lanes of Montmartre. This walk starts by the Seine, crosses to the Île de la Cité and finishes in the Latin Quarter, with monuments and museums aplenty en route.

Take this walk on Trips



## Place de la Concorde

If it's Parisian vistas you're after, the place de la Concorde makes a fine start. From here you can see the Arc de Triomphe, the Assemblée Nationale (the lower house of parliament), the Jardin des Tuileries and the Seine. Laid out in 1755, the square was where many aristocrats lost their heads during the Revolution, including Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. The obelisk in the centre originally stood in the Temple of Ramses at Thebes (now Luxor).

**The Walk** » Walk east through the Jardin des Tuileries.

## Jardin des Tuileries

This 28-hectare landscaped **garden** (☀️7am-7.30pm, 9pm or 11pm) was laid out in 1664 by André Le Nôtre, who also created Versailles' gardens. Filled with fountains, ponds and sculptures, the gardens are now part of the Banks of the Seine World Heritage Site, created by Unesco in 1991.

**The Walk** » Walk across place du Carrousel onto the Cour Napoleon.

## Musée du Louvre

Overlooking the Cour Napoleon is the mighty Louvre, with its controversial 21m-high glass **Grande Pyramide**, designed by IM Pei in 1989. Nearby is the **Pyramide Inversée** (Upside-Down Pyramid), which acts as a skylight for the underground Carrousel du Louvre shopping centre.

**The Walk** » Continue southeast along the riverside Quai du Louvre to the Pont Neuf metro station.

## Pont Neuf

As you cross the Seine, you'll walk over Paris' oldest bridge – ironically known as the 'New Bridge', or Pont Neuf. Henri IV inaugurated the bridge in 1607 by crossing it on a white stallion.

**The Walk** » Cross the Pont Neuf onto the Île de la Cité. Walk southeast along Quai des Horloges, and then turn right onto bd du Palais.



## Conciergerie

On bd du Palais, the elegant **Conciergerie** ([www.monuments-nationaux.fr](http://www.monuments-nationaux.fr); 2 bd du Palais, Île de la Cité, 1e; adult/child €8.50/free; ☎9.30am-6pm; **M**Cité) is a royal palace that became a prison and torture chamber for enemies of the Revolution. The 14th-century Salle des Gens d'Armes (Cavalrymen's Hall) is Europe's largest surviving medieval hall.

The nearby church of **Sainte-Chapelle** (combined ticket with Conciergerie €12.50/combined) has stunning stained glass.

**The Walk** >> Continue east along rue de Lutèce, then cross place du Parvis Notre Dame and walk towards the cathedral.

## Cathédrale de Notre Dame

At the eastern end of Île de la Cité, show-stopper **Notre Dame** ([www.cathedraledeparis.com](http://www.cathedraledeparis.com); 6 place du Parvis Notre Dame, 4e; admission free; ☎7.45am-7pm) is the heart of Paris in more ways than one – it's from here that all distances in France are measured.

Built in stages between the 11th and 15th centuries, it's on a gargantuan scale; the interior alone is 130m long,

48m wide and 35m high. Don't miss the three rose windows, the 7800-pipe organ and a walk up the gargoyle-covered Gothic towers.

**The Walk** >> Cross the river on Pont au Double and follow rue Lagrange to bd St-Germain. Then take rue des Carmes and rue Valette south to the place du Panthéon.

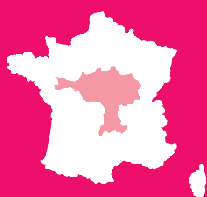
## Panthéon

Once you reach the left bank you'll be in the Latin Quarter, the centre of Parisian higher education since the Middle Ages, and still home to the city's top university, the Sorbonne.

It's also where you'll find the **Panthéon** ([www.monum.fr](http://www.monum.fr); place du Panthéon; adult/child €8.50/free; ☎10am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar), the neoclassical mausoleum where some of France's greatest thinkers are entombed, including Voltaire, Rousseau and Marie Curie.

**The Walk** >> It's a long walk back, so it's easier to catch the metro. Walk east to place Monge, take Line 7 to Palais Royal Musée du Louvre, then Line 1 west to Concorde.





# Loire Valley & Central France

**WORLD-RENOWNED CHÂTEAUX AND FINE WINES** may be the two most obvious reasons to visit central France, but they're only the tip of the iceberg. This region was also once the site of Europe's grandest volcanoes, its largest concentration of cave dwellings and some of its finest medieval architecture. When you've had your fill of château gawking and vineyard hopping, make some time for roads less travelled: wind through the Auvergne's magnificent landscape of green pastures and vestigial cinder cones; go underground to discover the Loire's ancient troglodyte culture; or spend a week exploring Burgundy's medieval churches, abbeys and walled towns.

Central France is also prime walking and cycling country; look for paths wherever you go.

# Loire Valley & Central France



*Classic Trip*

## 11 Châteaux of the Loire 5 Days

Tour France's greatest châteaux, from austere medieval towers to exuberant royal palaces. (p137)

## 12 Caves & Cellars of the Loire 3 Days

Discover the Loire's subterranean world: wine cellars, cave dwellings and mushroom farms. (p147)

## 13 Volcanoes of the Auvergne 4 Days

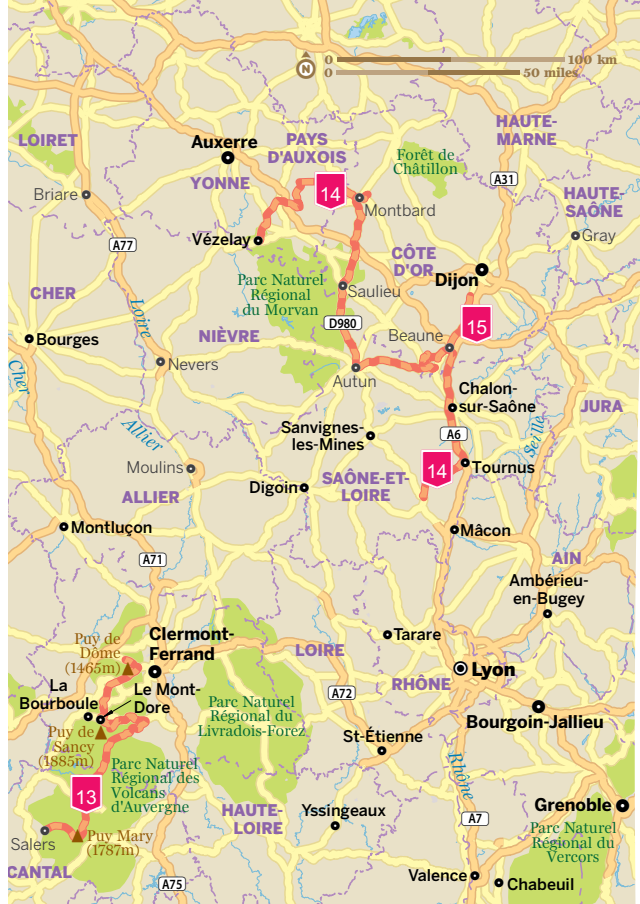
Green pastures, volcanic scenery, fabulous hiking and some of France's finest cheeses. (p157)

## 14 Medieval Burgundy 6 Days

Search for medieval treasures in Burgundy's churches, monasteries and fortified villages. (p165)


## 15 Route des Grands Crus 2 Days

Sample France's most venerable vintages on this wine lover's tour of Burgundy. (p173)





## DON'T MISS


### Hôtel Grand St-Michel, Chambord

Wake up to sunrise over Chambord's turrets and stroll the grounds before the tour buses arrive. Stay here on Trip 


### Chapelle Ste-Radegonde, Chinon

Behind a red door in a stone wall is a cave church with 12th-century frescos. Discover it on Trips  


### Ancient Green Volcanoes, Auvergne

The Auvergne's three dormant volcanoes are a hiker's paradise. Climb them on Trip 

### Temptation of Eve, Musée Rolin, Autun

This startlingly sensual image is the work of 12th-century stone carver Gislebertus. See it on Trip 

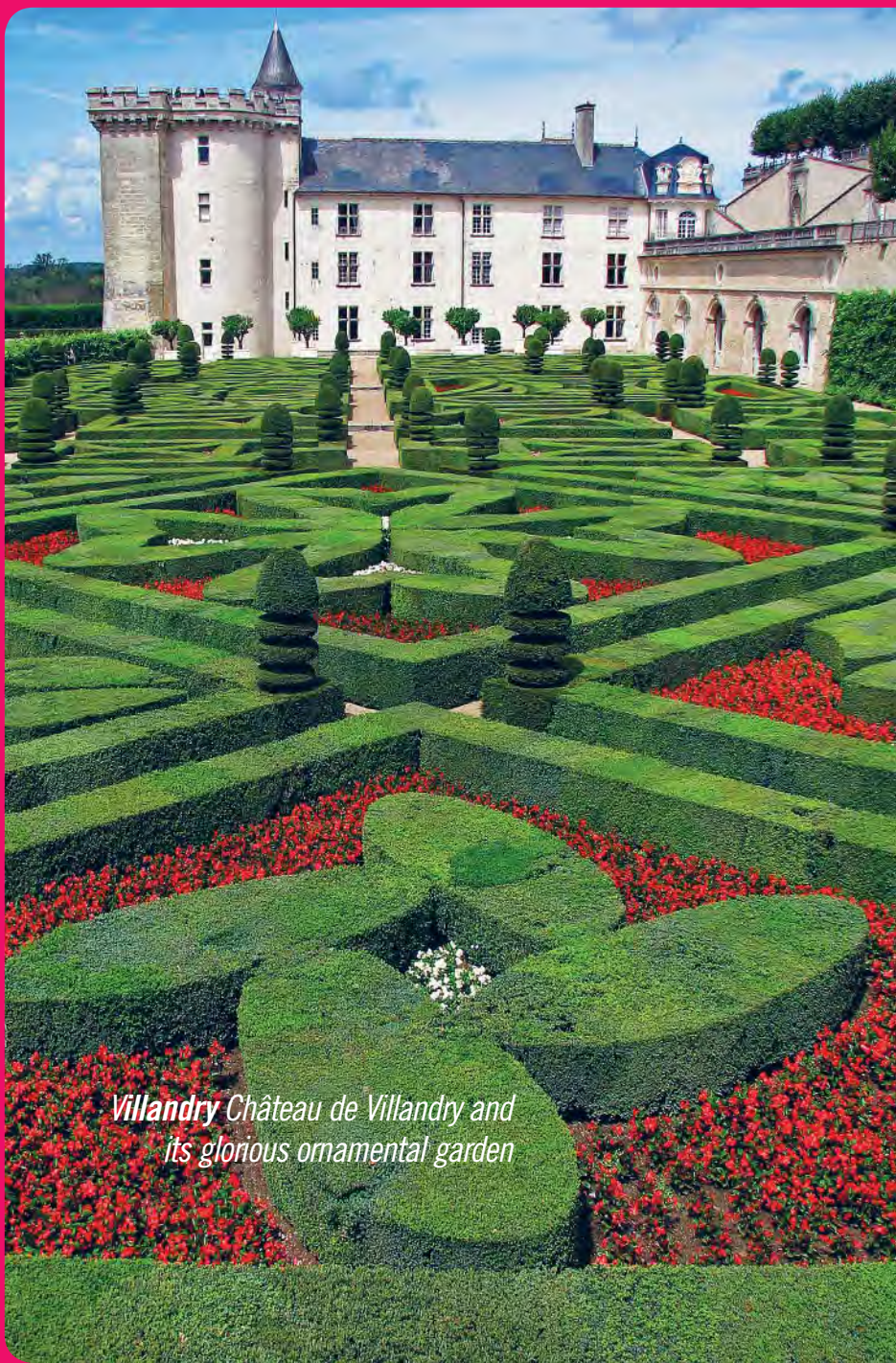
### Caveau de Puligny-Montrachet

Sample some of Burgundy's extraordinary white wines without breaking the bank. Enjoy on Trip 



Amboise Château Royal d'Amboise (Trip 11)





*Villandry Château de Villandry and  
its glorious ornamental garden*

# Classic Trip

## Châteaux of the Loire



# 11

*For centuries, France's great river has been the backdrop for royal intrigue and extravagant architecture. This trip weaves together nine of the Loire Valley's most classic châteaux.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

225 km

#### Chambord

France's château superstar, a royal hunting lodge on steroids

106 km

#### Amboise

Charles VIII's Loire-side birthplace, and Da Vinci's last home

Chinon  
START

Villandry

4

6

5

Blois

9

FINISH

#### Azay-le-Rideau

A Renaissance jewel on a secluded green island

44 km

#### Chenonceau

Wander a dreamscape of reflected arches and riverside gardens

93 km

5 DAYS

225KM / 140 MILES

GREAT FOR...



BEST TIME TO GO

May and June for good cycling weather; July for gardens and special events.



ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Chenonceau's graceful arches reflected in the Cher River.



BEST TWO DAYS

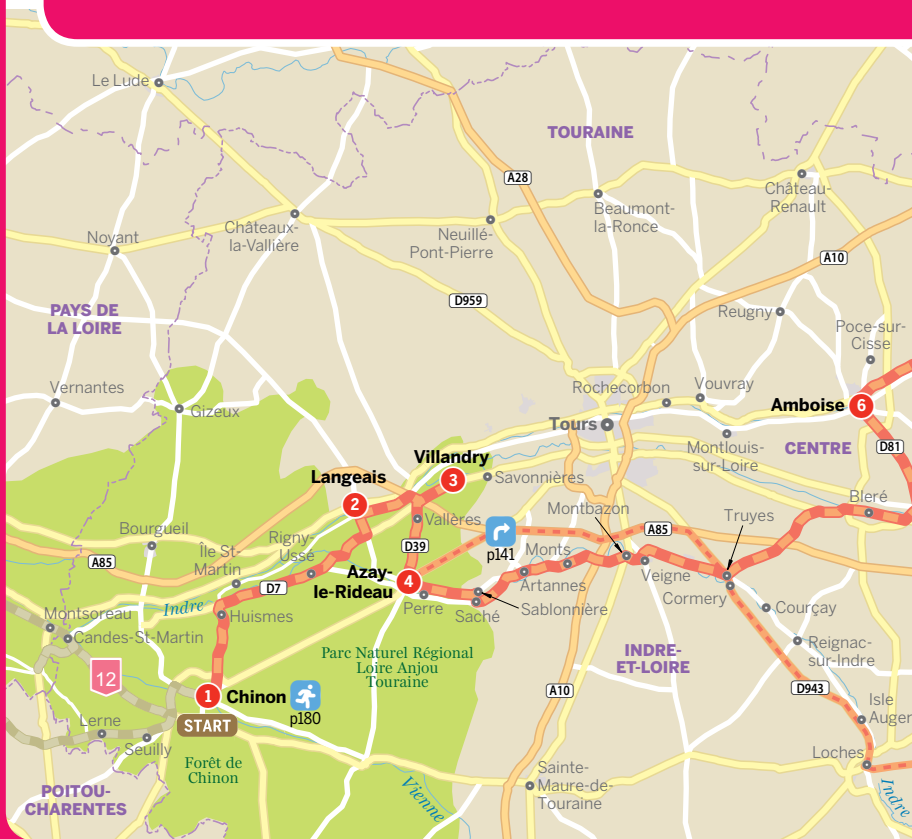
The stretch between Chenonceau and Chambord takes in all the classics.

# Classic Trip

## 11

## Châteaux of the Loire

From warring medieval counts to the kings and queens of France, countless powerful figures have left their mark on the Loire Valley. The result is France's most diverse and magnificent collection of castle architecture. This itinerary visits nine of the Loire's most iconic châteaux, running the gamut from austere medieval fortresses to ostentatious royal palaces; midway through, a side trip leads off the beaten track to four lesser-known châteaux.



## 1 Chinon

Tucked between its medieval fortress and the Vienne River, Chinon is a lovely place to start exploring the magnificent châteaux of central France. The town is forever etched in France's collective memory as the place where Joan of Arc first met future King Charles VII in 1429. Take in all the highlights on our walk (p180), and stay overnight to appreciate the town's relaxed pace.

 p145

**The Drive** » Follow the D16 north of Chinon for 10km, then head 15km east on the D7 past the fairy-tale Château d'Ussé (the inspiration for *Sleeping Beauty*) to Lignières, where you catch the D57 3km north into Langeais.

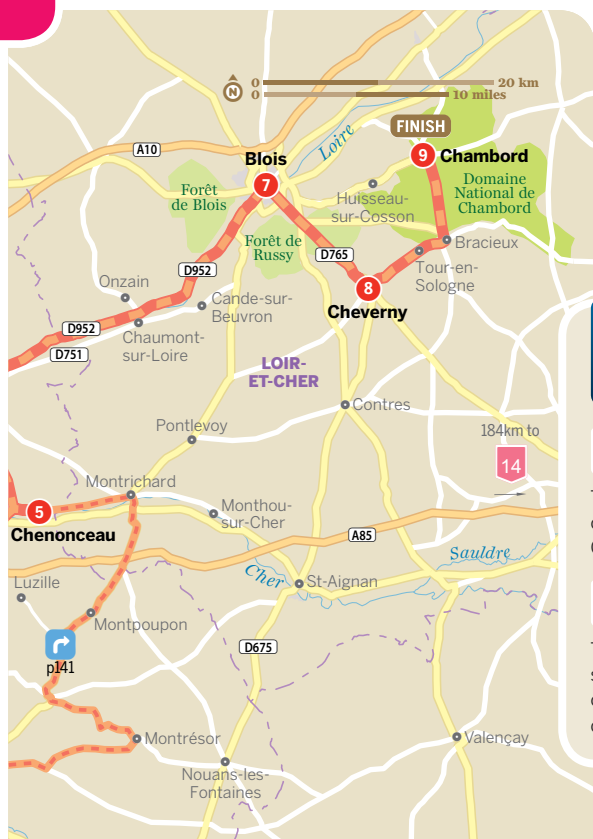
## 2 Langeais

Built in the 1460s to cut off the likely invasion route from Brittany, **Château de Langeais** ([www.chateau-de-langeais.com](http://www.chateau-de-langeais.com); adult/child €8.50/5; ☎9.30am-6.30pm Apr-mid-Nov, 10am-5pm mid-Nov-Mar) was designed first and foremost as

a fortress. Ironically, three decades later this was the very same château where Charles VIII married Anne of Brittany, bringing about the historic union of France and Brittany and effectively ending the threat of Breton invasion.

One of the few châteaux with its original medieval interior, the castle (reached via a creaky drawbridge) is fantastically preserved inside and out, its flag-stoned rooms filled with 15th-century furniture, its crenellated ramparts and defensive towers jutting out from the jumbled rooftops of the surrounding village.

Up top, stroll the castle's **ramparts** for a soldier's-eye view of the town: gaps underfoot enabled boiling oil, rocks and ordure to be dumped on attackers. Across the courtyard,



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

### 12 Caves & Cellars of the Loire

Tour wineries and centuries-old cave dwellings between Chinon and Saumur.

### 14 Medieval Burgundy

Three hours east of Blois, steep yourself in the world of Burgundy's medieval churches and abbeys.

## Classic Trip

Langeais' ruined **keep**, constructed in 992 by the granddaddy of medieval power mavens, Foulques Nerra, is the oldest such structure in France.

🍴 p145

**The Drive** » Backtrack south across the Loire on the D57, then follow the riverbank east 10km on the D16 to Villandry.

### 3 Villandry

Renowned for its glorious landscaped gardens, **Château de Villandry**

(www.chateauvillandry.com;

château & gardens adult/

child €9.50/5.50, gardens

only €6.50/4; 🕒9am-6pm

Apr-Oct, earlier closing Nov-

Mar, closed mid-Nov-Dec)

was the brainchild of Jean le Breton, François I's finance minister and Italian ambassador.

Today visitors can stroll pebbled walkways through 6 hectares of formal **water gardens**, a **maze**, **vineyards** and multiple themed gardens including the fabulous 16th-century **potager** (kitchen garden), where even the vegetables are laid out in regimental colour-coordinated fashion. The gardens bloom between April and October, although they're most spectacular in midsummer.

For bird's-eye views across the gardens and the nearby Loire and Cher Rivers, climb to the top of the **donjon** (keep), the only medieval remnant in this otherwise Renaissance-style château.

**The Drive** » Go southwest 4km on the D7, then turn south 7km on the D39 into Azay-le-Rideau.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 4 Azay-le-Rideau

Romantic, moat-ringed

**Azay-le-Rideau** (azay-le-

rideau.monuments-nationaux.

fr/en; adult/child €8.50/free;

🕒9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-

5.15pm Oct-Mar) is one of

France's absolute gems, wonderfully adorned

with slender turrets,

geometric windows and

decorative stonework,

all wrapped up within a

shady landscaped park

on a natural island in

middle of the Indre River.

Built in the 1500s, the

château's most famous

feature is its open **loggia**

**staircase**, in the Italian

style, overlooking the

central courtyard and

decorated with the royal

salamanders and ermines

of François I and Queen

Claude. In summer, one

of the region's oldest

and best **son et lumière**

**(sound and light) shows**

is projected onto the

castle walls nightly.

**The Drive** » Follow the D84 east 6km through the tranquil Indre valley, then cross the

river south into Saché, home to an attractive château and Balzac museum. From Saché continue 26km east on the D17, 11km northeast on the D45 and 9km east on the D976. Cross north over the Cher River and follow the D40 east 1.5km into Chenonceau.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 5 Chenonceau

Spanning the languid

Cher River via a series

of supremely graceful

arches, **Château de**

**Chenonceau** (www.

chenonceau.com; adult/

child €11/8.50; 🕒from 9am

year-round, closes 5pm to

8pm depending on month)

is a study in elegance,

with its remarkable

architecture, exquisite

landscaping and fabulous

furnishings.

Several noteworthy

women have left their

mark on Chenonceau,

hence its alternative

name, Le Château des

Dames (Ladies' Château).

The distinctive arches

were added by Diane

de Poitiers, mistress of

King Henri II. Henri's

widow, Catherine de

Médici, added the yew-

tree **labyrinth** and the

western rose garden.

In the 18th century,

the aristocrat Madame

Dupin made Chenonceau

a centre of fashionable

society and attracted

guests including

Voltaire and Rousseau.

Legend has it that she

also single-handedly

saved the château from

destruction during the

Revolution, thanks to her popularity with local villagers.

The château's *pièce de résistance* is the 60m-long window-lined **Grande Galerie** spanning the Cher, scene of many a wild party over the centuries. The gallery was legendarily also used as an escape route for refugees fleeing the Nazi occupation during WWII,

when the Cher marked the boundary between free and occupied France.

In summer, don't miss the chance to stroll Chenonceau's illuminated grounds at night during the **Promenade Nocturne** (adult/child €5/free).

**The Drive** » Follow the D81 north 13km into Amboise; 2km south of town, you'll pass the Mini-Châteaux theme park, whose intricate scale models

of 44 Loire Valley châteaux are great fun for kids!

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

6 Amboise

Elegant Amboise perches on the Loire's southern bank, overlooked by the fortified 15th-century **Château Royal d'Amboise** ([www.chateau-amboise.com](http://www.chateau-amboise.com); adult/child €10/7; ☀ from 9am year-round, closes



DETOUR:

SLEEPY CHÂTEAUX OF THE SOUTH

Start 4 Azay-le-Rideau

Escape the crowds by detouring to four less-visited châteaux between Azay-le-Rideau and Chenonceau.

First stop: **Loches**, where Joan of Arc, fresh from her victory at Orléans in 1429, famously persuaded Charles VII to march to Reims and claim the French crown. The undisputed highlight here is the **Cité Royale** ([www.chateau-loches.fr](http://www.chateau-loches.fr); adult/child €7.50/5.50; ☀ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Mar), a royal citadel that spans 500 years of French château architecture in a single site, from Foulques Nerra's austere 10th-century **keep** to the Flamboyant Gothic and Renaissance styles of the **Logis Royal**. To get here from Azay-le-Rideau, head 55km east along the D751, A85 and D943.

Next comes the quirky **Château de Montrésor** ([www.chateaudemontresor.fr](http://www.chateaudemontresor.fr); adult/child €8/4; ☀ 10am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 6pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), 19km east of Loches on the D760, still furnished much as it was over a century ago when it belonged to Polish count, financier and railroad magnate Xavier Branicki. The eclectic decor includes a Cuban mahogany spiral staircase, a piano once played by Chopin and a treasury room filled with Turkish hookahs and other spoils from the 17th-century Battle of Vienna.

Next, head 20km north on the D10 and D764 to **Château de Montpoupon** ([www.chateau-loire-montpoupon.com](http://www.chateau-loire-montpoupon.com); adult/child €8/4.50; ☀ 10am-7pm), idyllically situated in rolling countryside. Opposite the castle, grab lunch at the wonderful **Auberge de Montpoupon** ([www.aubergedemontpoupon.com](http://www.aubergedemontpoupon.com); menus €21-67; ☀ lunch & dinner daily).

Continue 12km north on the D764 to **Château de Montrichard**, another ruined 11th-century fortress constructed by Foulques Nerra. After visiting the château, picnic in the park by the Cher River, or go wine tasting at **Caves Monmousseau** ([www.monmousseau.com](http://www.monmousseau.com); 71 rte de Vierzon; tours adult/child €3.50/free; ☀ 10am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm).

From Montrichard, head 10km west on the D176 and D40 to rejoin the main route at Chenonceau.

# Classic Trip



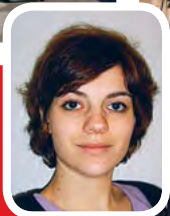
CHRISTOPHE LEHEN/GETTY IMAGES ©



MARC BOZIER/GETTY IMAGES ©

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

ELSA SAUVÉ,  
CHÂTEAU DE  
CHAMBORD



The double-helix staircase that whisks visitors from Chambord's ground floor to its rooftop keep is the highlight, the magic being that two people can see each other go up and down it without their paths ever crossing. A magnificent view of the estate unfolds from the rooftop terrace, an unforgettable place with its sculpted chimney and turrets, really a place of contemplation and daydream.

Top: St Hubert Chapel, Château Royal d'Amboise  
Left: Château de Chambord  
Right: Château de Langeais



INCHEMISTOCK/ALAMY ©

4.45pm to 7pm depending on month). Thanks to the château's easily defensible position, it saw little military action, serving more often as a weekend getaway from the official royal seat at nearby Blois. Charles VIII, born and bred here, was responsible for the château's Italianate remodelling in 1492.

Just up the street, Amboise's other main sight is **Le Clos Lucé** ([www.vinci-closluce.com](http://www.vinci-closluce.com); adult/child €13.50/8.50; ☀9am-7pm Feb-Oct, 10am-6pm Nov-Jan), the grand manor house where Leonardo da Vinci took up residence in 1516 and spent the final years of his life at the invitation of François I. Already 64 by the time he arrived, da Vinci spent his time sketching, tinkering and dreaming up new contraptions, scale models of which are now abundantly displayed throughout the home and its expansive gardens.

🔧🏰 p145

**The Drive** » Follow the D952 northeast along the Loire's northern bank, enjoying 35km of beautiful river views en route to Blois. The town of Chaumont-sur-Loire makes a pleasant stop for lunch (see p146) or for its imposing château and gardens.

## 7 Blois

Straddling a rocky escarpment on the Loire's northern bank, the **Château Royal de Blois**



# Classic Trip

(www.chateaublois.fr; place du Château; adult/child €9.50/4; ☀9am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Oct-Mar) bears the creative mark of several successive French kings. More a showpiece than a military stronghold, its four grand wings offer a superb overview of Loire Valley architectural styles, with elements of Gothic (13th century), Flamboyant Gothic (1498–1503), early Renaissance (1515–24) and classical (1630s).

Highlights include the **loggia staircase**, decorated with salamanders and curly 'F's (François I's heraldic symbols); the **studiolo**, within whose elaborately panelled walls Catherine de Médici allegedly maintained secret cupboards for stashing poisons; and the 2nd-floor **king's apartments**, which witnessed one of the bloodiest episodes in French royal history. In 1588 Henri III had his arch-rival, Duke Henri I de Guise, murdered here by royal bodyguards (the king himself hid behind a tapestry). Period paintings chronicle the gruesome events.

**The Drive** » Cross the Loire and continue 16km southeast into Cheverny via the D765 and D102.

## 8 Cheverny

A masterpiece of French classical architecture, beautifully proportioned

**Château de Cheverny** (www.chateau-cheverny.fr; adult/child €9/6; ☀9.15am-6.15pm Apr-Sep, 9.45am-5pm Oct-Mar) was built between 1625 and 1634 by Jacques Hurault, an *intendant* (royal administrative official) to Louis XII, and has been continuously inhabited by the same family for four centuries. Highlights of the sumptuously furnished interior include a **formal dining room** decorated with scenes from *Don Quixote* and a **children's playroom** filled with Napoléon III-era toys.

Outside amid sprawling lawns, Cheverny's **kennels** house pedigree hunting dogs; feeding time, known as the **Soupe des Chiens**, takes place daily at 5pm. Behind the château, the 18th-century **Orangerie**, which sheltered priceless artworks including the *Mona Lisa* during WWII, is now a tearoom.

Tintin fans may recognise the château's façade as the model for Captain Haddock's ancestral home, Marlinspike Hall.

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**The Drive** » Take the D102 10km northeast into Bracieux, then turn north on the D112 for the final 8km run through the forested Domaine National de Chambord (Europe's largest hunting reserve). Catch your first

dramatic glimpse of France's most famous château on the right as you arrive in Chambord.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 9 Chambord

For over-the-top splendour, nothing compares to **Château de Chambord** (www.chambord.org; adult/child €9.50/free, parking €3; ☀9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar), one of the supreme examples of French Renaissance architecture.

Begun in 1519 as a weekend hunting lodge by François I, it quickly snowballed into France's most ambitious (and expensive) royal architectural project. When construction finally ended 30-odd years later, the castle boasted some 440 rooms, 365 fireplaces and 84 staircases, all built around a rectangular **keep**, crossed by four great hallways and flanked at the corners by circular bastions. Up through the centre of it all winds Chambord's crowning glory, the famous **double-helix staircase** designed by Leonardo da Vinci, with two intertwining flights of stairs leading up to the great **lantern tower** and rooftop, from where you can survey the landscaped grounds and marvel at the exuberant jumble of cupolas, turrets, chimneys and lightning rods.

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# Eating & Sleeping

## Chinon 1

### **Hostellerie Gargantua**

Historic Hotel €€

(📞02 47 93 04 71; www.hotel-gargantua.com; 73 rue Haute St-Maurice; d €55-81; 📶) Superior rooms with fireplaces or château views are worth the extra cash at this turret-topped medieval mansion with spiral staircases, pitch-dark wood and solid stone.

## Langeais 2

### **Au Coin des Halles**

Traditional French €€

(📞02 47 96 37 25; www.aucoindeshalles.com; 9 rue Gambetta; menus lunch €16-19, dinner €24-49; 🕒 lunch Fri-Tue, dinner Thu-Tue) Enjoy bargain-priced gourmet lunches on the terrace at this elegant family-run bistro paces from Langeais' château.

## Amboise 6

### **Auberge de Launay**

Traditional French €€€

(📞02 47 30 16 82; www.aubergedelaunay.com; Le Haut Chantier, Limeray; menus €19.50-38; 🕒 lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) This renowned country inn 8km east of Amboise incorporates herbs and vegetables from the kitchen garden into classic meat, fish and poultry dishes, accompanied by a superb wine list, divine artisanal cheese platters and desserts like wine-poached pears.

### **La Fourchette** Traditional French €

(📞06 11 78 16 98; 9 rue Malebranche; lunch/dinner menus €15/24; 🕒 lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Fri & Sat) Chef Christine's down-to-earth home cooking makes you feel like you've been invited to her house for lunch; daily specials include spare ribs, roast chicken and veal stew.

### **Le Manoir Les Minimes**

Design Hotel €€€

(📞02 47 30 40 40; www.manoirlesminimes.com; 34 quai Charles Guinot; d €131-205, ste €290; 📶📺📶) This riverside pamper-palace would put most châteaux to shame. The best rooms have tall windows opening onto Loire or castle views.

### **Au Charme Rabelaisien** B&B €€

(📞02 47 57 53 84; www.au-charme-rabelaisien.com; 25 rue Rabelais; d €92-175; 🕒 late Mar-Oct; 📶📺) Three comfy rooms share a grassy yard, a swimming pool and free enclosed parking at this centrally located haven.

## Chaumont-sur-Loire

### **La Madeleine de Proust**

Traditional French €€

(📞02 54 20 94 80; 33 rue du Maréchal Leclerc; menus €21-28; 🕒 lunch Wed-Sun, dinner daily) Fresh local produce features in dishes such as crispy pan-fried trout with herb-sautéed zucchini at this unpretentious eatery below Château de Chaumont.

## Cheverny 8

### **La Levraudière**

B&B €

(📞02 54 79 81 99; www.lalevraudiere.fr; 1 chemin de la Levraudière; d €66-69) Amid 3 hectares of grassland, this peaceful and meticulously kept 19th-century farmhouse offers crisp linens and delicious breakfasts with homemade jams.

## Chambord 9

### **Hôtel Grand St-Michel** Hotel €€

(📞02 54 20 31 31; www.saintmichel-chambord.com; place St-Louis; d €60-106; 📶) This faded two-star hotel directly opposite Château de Chambord offers the unforgettable experience of wandering the château grounds alone at dawn or dusk, observing deer and wild boars in the adjacent park.

***Rochemenier** Explore incredible  
underground troglodyte farmsteads*





# 12

## Caves & Cellars of the Loire

*This tour of caves, wine cellars and châteaux explores the best of the western Loire Valley, home to habitations troglodytiques (cave dwellings) and some of France's finest food and wine.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

0 km

#### Saumur

Home to triple sec, fine dining and France's most acrobatic horses

Brissac

FINISH  
St-Hilaire-St-Florent

10 Doue-la-Fontaine

#### Rochemenier

Explore 1930s cave-dwelling traditions

98 km

START

1 Brézé

2 Fontevraud-l'Abbaye

#### Turquant

Cave-riddled cliffs converted to restaurants and galleries

9 km

39 km

#### Chinon

Stroll medieval streets in Joan of Arc's footsteps

3 DAYS

160KM / 100 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

May for greenery; September and October for harvest.



### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Turquant's cliff face, with converted cave dwellings and windmill.



### BEST FOR WINE-TASTING

The 15km stretch between St-Hilaire-St-Florent and Montsoreau.

## 12

## Caves &amp; Cellars of the Loire

The Loire Valley's soft, easily excavated *tuffeau* (limestone) has been interwoven with local culture for millennia. From Merovingian quarries that did a booming international trade in early Christian sarcophagi, to medieval and Renaissance châteaux, to modern restaurants, mushroom farms and wine cellars adapted from cave dwellings, this tour offers an introduction to local troglodyte culture as well as ample opportunities to savour the region's renowned gastronomy and wines.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 1 Saumur

Start your tour in sophisticated Saumur, one of the Loire Valley's great gastronomic and viticultural centres.

For an overview of the region's wine producers, along with free tastings, head to the riverside

**Maison du Vin** (7 quai Carnot; ☎10.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sat). Next, explore Saumur's other claim to fermented fame at **Distillerie Combiér** ([www.combiér.fr](http://www.combiér.fr); 48 rue



Beaurepaire; adult €4; ☺3-5 guided visits per day, 10am-12.30pm & 2-7pm Tue-Sun), where triple sec liqueur was invented in 1834; tours of the still-functioning distillery offer an evocative, behind-the-scenes look at gleaming century-old copper stills, vintage Eiffel machinery and fragrant vats full of Haitian bitter oranges. Around town, make sure to try Saumur's iconic aperitif, *soupe saumuroise* – made with triple sec, lemon juice and sparkling wine.

Other Saumur highlights include the fairy-tale 13th-century **Château de Saumur** ([www.ville-saumur.fr/visites.cfm](http://www.ville-saumur.fr/visites.cfm); adult/child €9/5; ☺10am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) and the **École Nationale d'Équitation** (☑02 41

53 50 60; [www.cadrenoir.fr](http://www.cadrenoir.fr); rte de Marson; guided visits adult/child €7/5; ☺mornings Tue-Sat & afternoons Mon-Fri Apr-mid-Nov), a renowned equestrian academy that's long been responsible for training France's elite Cadre Noir cavalry division and Olympic riding teams. Take a one-hour guided visit (four to 10 daily), or book ahead for one of the not-to-be-missed **Cadre Noir presentations** (adult/child €16/9), semi-monthly 'horse ballets' that show off the horses' astonishing discipline and acrobatic manoeuvres.

🍷🍴 p154

**The Drive** » East of Saumur, the D947 meanders 10km through the towns of Souzay-Champigny and Parnay, home to several tasting rooms,

including Château Villeneuve, Clos des Cordeliers, Château de Parnay and Château de Targé. Troglodyte dwellings pockmark the cliff face to your right as a hilltop windmill signals your arrival in Turquant.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 2 Turquant

Backed by chalk-coloured, cave-riddled cliffs, picturesque Turquant is a showcase for the creative adaptation of historic troglodyte dwellings. The town's 'main street' runs parallel to the D947, past a handful of art galleries, restaurants and other enterprises featuring designer windows and colourful doors wedged into the cliff face. Turn right off the main road to **Le Troglo des Pommes Tapées** ([letrogloidespommetapees.fr](http://letrogloidespommetapees.fr); 11 rue des Ducs d'Anjou; adult/child €6/3.50; ☺2-6.30pm Tue, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Wed-Sun mid-Feb-mid-Nov), a giant cave house whose owners have revived the ancient art of oven-drying and painstakingly hammering apples into



## LINK YOUR TRIP

**1 Essential France**  
Head east to Chambord to join this country-wide circuit of iconic French sights.

### 11 Châteaux of the Loire

In Chinon, connect to this classic tour of the Loire Valley's most famous châteaux.

the local delicacy known as *pommes tapées*.

Guided cave tours are followed by tastings of dried apples simmered in red wine. Turquant's *tuffeau* (limestone) cliffs have also been adapted for use as wine cellars by producers such as

#### La Grande Vignolle

(www.filliatreau.com) and

#### Domaine des Amandiers

(www.domaine-des-amandiers.com).

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**The Drive**  It's just a 3km hop, skip and jump to Montsoreau along the D947 and D751. Alternatively, follow the narrow Route des Vins (parallel and slightly south of the D947) to the 16th-century windmill Moulin de la Herpinière, then continue into Montsoreau via tiny Chemin de la Herpinière.


### 3 Montsoreau

Looming impressively above the Loire, **Château de Montsoreau** (www.chateau-montsoreau.com; adult/child €9/6;  10am-7pm May-Sep, 2-6pm Apr, Oct-mid-Nov & weekends Mar, closed mid-Nov-Feb) was built in 1455 by one of Charles VII's advisers, and later immortalised in Alexandre Dumas' novel, *La Dame de Monsoreau*. The crowning attraction here is the dazzling view from the rooftop, extending from the Loire's confluence with the Vienne to the domes and turrets of Saumur. On weekends, enjoy

free wine tasting in the castle's cellars.


Nearby, the **Maison du Parc** (www.parc-loire-anjou-touraine.fr; 15 av de la Loire;  9.30am-7pm) offers information on the Parc Naturel Régional Loire-Anjou-Touraine, which protects 2530 sq km of the surrounding landscape.

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**The Drive**  Follow the D751 1km southeast into Candès-St-Martin, enjoying pretty river views on your left.

### 4 Candès-St-Martin

Recognised as one of France's prettiest villages, Candès-St-Martin occupies an idyllic spot at the confluence of the Vienne and the Loire Rivers. A long-time pilgrimage site, the town's 12th- to 13th-century **church** venerates the spot where St Martin died in 397. Wander down to the benches overlooking the waterfront along rue du Confluent (a pleasant spot for a picnic), or follow the brown 'Panorama Piétons' signs above the church for higher-altitude perspectives.

**The Drive**  Snake 6km south along the D751, D7 and D947, following signs for Fontevraud-l'Abbaye. From the D7/D947 junction, a worthwhile 800m detour leads northwest to the artisanal soap factory Savonnerie Martin de Candre.



CHOCUREL, ANNAUDGETTY/MADES ©

### 5 Abbaye de Fontevraud

This huge 12th-century complex was once one of Europe's largest ecclesiastical centres. The highlight here is the massive, movingly simple **abbey church**, notable for its soaring pillars, Romanesque domes and the polychrome tombs of four Plantagenets: Henry II, King of England (r 1154-89); his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine (who retired to Fontevraud after Henry's death); their son Richard the Lionheart; and Isabelle of Angoulême. Adjacent



**Chinon** The village's hilltop château

buildings include a cavernous, multi-chimneyed kitchen, prayer halls, a barrel-vaulted refectory and exhibits on Fontevraud's use as a prison from the French Revolution until 1963.

**The Drive** » Backtrack 5km to the D751 and follow it 13km southeast toward Chinon. Immediately after crossing the Vienne River, take the D749 east 3km, paralleling the riverfront into town.

**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

**6 Chinon**

Renowned for its hilltop château and charming medieval quarter (see

our walking tour, p180), the riverside village of Chinon is home to several fine restaurants and AOC red wines, making it a prime candidate for an overnight stay. For customised half-day tours of nearby wine-growing regions, including Chinon, Cravant, Saumur-Champigny, St-Nicolas-de-Bourgeuil and Touraine, contact bilingual Chinon native **Alain Caillemer** (☎02 47 95 87 59; [dcaillemer@rand.com](mailto:dcaillemer@rand.com); half-day tours per couple €75).

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**The Drive** » Zigzag 8km southwest of Chinon through lovely rolling farmland along the D749A, D751E, D759, D24 and D117, following signs for La Devinière.

**7 Musée Rabelais**

Set among fields and vineyards with sweeping views to the private château of Coudray Montpensier, **La Devinière** is the birthplace of François Rabelais – doctor, Franciscan friar, theoretician and author – and the inspiration for his five satirical Gargantua and Pantagruel novels. The farmstead's rambling



buildings hold the **Musée Rabelais** ([www.musee-rabelais.fr](http://www.musee-rabelais.fr); adult/child €5/4; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm daily, closed Tue Oct-Mar), featuring early editions of Rabelais' work and a Matisse portrait of the author. The winding cave network underneath hosts rotating special exhibitions.

**The Drive** » Follow the D117 8km west through the gorgeous village of Seully, home to an 11th-century abbey, then continue 13km west-northwest along the D48, D50, D310, D110 and D93 into Brézé.

## 8 Château de Brézé

Off-the-beaten-track **Château de Brézé** ([www.chateaubreze.com](http://www.chateaubreze.com); adult/child €11/6; ☎10am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, closed Jan) sits atop an extensive network of subterranean rooms and passages that account for more square footage than the castle itself. A self-guided tour takes you through the original troglodyte dwelling directly under the château, then crosses a deep moat to other caves adapted by the castle's owners for use as kitchens, wine cellars and defensive bastions. Finish your visit with a scenic climb to the château's rooftop, followed by a *dégustation* (tasting) of Saumur wines from the surrounding vineyards.

**The Drive** » Chart a meandering 22km course through relatively flat farm country into Doué-la-Fontaine via the D93, D162, D163 and D960.

## 9 Doué-la-Fontaine

At the southeastern edge of this mid-sized town, stop to visit the fascinating **Troglodytes et Sarcophages** (☎06 77 77 06 94; [www.troglo-sarcophages.fr](http://www.troglo-sarcophages.fr); adult/child €4.80/3.30; ☎2.30-7pm daily Jun-Aug, Sat & Sun May, closed Sep-Apr), a Merovingian quarry where sarcophagi were produced from the 6th to the 9th centuries and exported via the Loire as far as England and Belgium. In summer book ahead for atmospheric lantern-lit evening tours (adult/child €7.50/5.50).

Near by, **Les Perrières** ([www.ville-douelafontaine.fr/perrieres](http://www.ville-douelafontaine.fr/perrieres); adult/child €4.50/3; ☎2-6.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) is a vast network of 18th- and 19th-century stone quarries sometimes called the 'cathedral caves' due to their lofty sloping walls that resemble Gothic arches.

**The Drive** » Skirt the southern edge of Doué-la-Fontaine via the D960 for 4km, then continue 5km north on the D761 to the Rochemenier exit. Follow signs the remaining 1.5km into Rochemenier.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 10 Rochemenier

In peaceful countryside northwest of Doué-la-

Fontaine, the museum-village of **Rochemenier** ([www.troglodyte.info](http://www.troglodyte.info); adult/child €5.50/3; ☎9.30am-7pm Apr-Oct, 2-6pm Sat & Sun Nov, Feb & Mar) preserves the remains of two troglodyte farmsteads that were inhabited until the 1930s, complete with houses, stables and an underground chapel. Throughout the complex, farm tools and photos of former residents evoke the hard-working spirit and simple pleasures that defined life underground for many generations. Displays in the last room focus on international cave-dwelling cultures, including places as far-flung as China and Turkey.

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**The Drive** » Return to the D761, then follow it 15km northwest to Brissac-Quincé, where signs direct you 1.5km further to the château.

## 11 Château de Brissac

France's tallest castle, the imposing **Château de Brissac** ([www.chateau-brissac.fr](http://www.chateau-brissac.fr); guided tours adult/child €10/4.50; ☎10am-12.15pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct) is spread over seven storeys and 204 rooms. Built by the Duke of Brissac in 1502, the château has an elegant interior filled with posh furniture, ornate tapestries, twinkling chandeliers and



## DETOUR: ANGERS

### Start 11 Château de Brissac

Historic seat of Anjou's powerful counts and dukes, bustling Angers revolves around the impressive **Château d'Angers** ([angers.monuments-nationaux.fr](http://angers.monuments-nationaux.fr); 2 promenade du Bout-du-Monde; adult/child €8.50/free; ☎9.30am-6.30pm May-Aug, 10am-5.30pm Sep-Apr). The castle's walls of blue-black schist loom above the Maine River, ringed by gardens, battlements and 17 watchtowers. Inside is one of Europe's great medieval masterpieces, the **Tenture de l'Apocalypse**. Commissioned around 1375, this stunning 104m-long series of tapestries illustrates scenes from the Book of Revelation, complete with the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the Battle of Armageddon and the seven-headed Beast.

Opposite the château, taste and learn about the region's well-regarded wines at the **Maison du Vin de l'Anjou** ([mdesvins-angers@vinsdeloire.fr](mailto:mdesvins-angers@vinsdeloire.fr); 5bis place du Président Kennedy; ☎2.30-7pm Mon, 10am-1pm & 2.30-7pm Tue-Sat). Afterwards stroll through Angers' pedestrianised centre, where you'll find cafes, restaurants, art museums and the fabulous **Maison d'Adam** (place Ste-Croix), a remarkably well-preserved medieval house decorated with bawdy carved figurines.

To get here, head 28km northwest from Brissac on the D748, A87 and A11, following signs for Angers-Centre.

luxurious bedrooms – even a private theatre. Around the house, 8 sq km of grounds are filled with cedar trees, 19th-century stables and a vineyard, boasting three AOC vintages; free tastings are included in the guided visit.

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**The Drive** » Follow the D55 6km northeast, then wind 15km east-southeast on the D751 through forests and sunflower fields to rejoin the Loire at Gennes. From here, a particularly scenic stretch of the D751 follows the Loire's sandy banks 12km to St-Hilaire-St-Florent. Along the way, the small towns of St-Georges-des-Sept-Voies (p155) and Chênehutte-Trèves-Cunault (p155) offer

enticing eating and sleeping options.

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### 12 St-Hilaire-St-Florent

This western suburb of Saumur is crowded with wineries and cave-based attractions. At the **Musée du Champignon** (Mushroom Museum; [www.musee-du-champignon.com](http://www.musee-du-champignon.com); D751; adult/child €8/6; ☎10am-7pm mid-Feb–mid-Nov), learn oodles of mushroom facts and trivia as you wander deep into a cave where countless varieties of fungi are cultivated; next door, **Pierre et Lumière** ([www.pierre-et-lumiere.com](http://www.pierre-et-lumiere.com); D751; adult/child €8/6; ☎10am-7pm Apr-Sep, to

12.30pm & 2-6pm Feb, Mar, Oct & Nov) displays intricate limestone sculptures of famous Loire Valley monuments. East towards Saumur, a host of tasting rooms invites you to sample local AOC and AOP vintages including Crémant de Loire and Saumur Brut; well-established wineries along this route include **Ackerman** ([www.ackerman.fr](http://www.ackerman.fr)), **Gratien et Meyer** ([www.gratienmeyer.com](http://www.gratienmeyer.com)), **Langlois Château** ([www.langlois-chateau.fr](http://www.langlois-chateau.fr)) and **Veuve Amiot** ([www.veuveamiot.fr](http://www.veuveamiot.fr)).

**The Drive** » A quick 3km scoot along the D751 and D161 returns you to downtown Saumur.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Saumur 1

### **Le Gambetta** Gastronomic €€

(☎)02 41 67 66 66; www.restaurantlegambetta.com; 12 rue Gambetta; lunch menus €23.50-28.50, other menus €30-96; ☺lunch Tue & Thu-Sun, dinner Tue & Thu-Sat) This fantastic regional restaurant combines refined elegance with knock-your-socks-off creativity. The parade of dishes ranges from exquisitely presented classics (rosemary-and-thyme roasted pork) to unexpectedly delicious innovations (wasabi *crème brûlée*). Several menus include wine pairings, and all are punctuated by surprise treats from the kitchen.

### **L'Escargot** Traditional French €€

(☎)02 41 51 20 88; 30 rue du Maréchal Leclerc; menus €18-33; ☺lunch Thu, Fri, Sun & Mon, dinner Thu-Mon) A Saumur fixture for over half a century, this place is all about traditional recipes done really well: *escargots* with garlic, parsley and 'three butters' (flavoured with herbs, walnuts and Roquefort); red mullet with fresh thyme, olive oil and vegetables; or a frozen triple sec soufflé with *crème anglaise* and berry coulis.

### **Château de Verrières** Castle Hotel €€€

(☎)02 41 38 05 15; www.chateau-verrieres.com; 53 rue d'Alsace; r €170-240, ste €280-310; ☺☺) Every room is unique, but the feel is universally plush and regal at this impeccable 1890 château, ensconced within the woods and ponds of a 1.6-hectare English-style park. Features include antique writing desks, original artwork, wood panelling, fantastic bathrooms and free parking. Some rooms have views of the sun rising over Saumur's château.

### **Château de Beaulieu** B&B €€

(☎)02 41 50 83 52; www.chateaubeaulieu.fr; 98 rte de Montsoreau; d €85-120, ste €140-200; ☺☺) Irish expats Mary and Conor welcome you to their sprawling home with a glass of *crémant* (sparkling wine), delicious homemade breakfasts and a wealth of friendly advice on surrounding attractions. The mood among the

generally gregarious clientele is one of extended family. Sun yourself by the pool or play billiards in the grand salon. Parking is free.

## Turquant 2

### **L'Hélianthe** Traditional French €€

(☎)02 41 51 22 28; www.restaurant-helianthe.fr; ruelle Antoine Cristal; lunch/dinner menus €21/30; ☺lunch & dinner Thu-Tue Apr-mid-Nov, lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Fri-Sun mid-Nov-Mar) At this troglodyte eatery dug into the cliffside, the menu revolves around traditional ingredients including river fish and 'ancient vegetables' (Jerusalem artichokes, beets, rutabagas, sweet potatoes etc).

### **Demeure de la Vignole** Design Hotel €€

(☎)02 41 53 67 00; www.demeure-vignole.com; 3 impasse Marguerite d'Anjou; d €105-145, ste €150-260; ☺☺) This upscale hideaway, built partially into a cliff face above Turquant, offers four gorgeously redecorated troglodyte rooms and a subterranean swimming pool.

## Montsoreau 3

### **Le Saut aux Loups** Regional Cuisine €€

(☎)02 41 51 70 30; www.troglo-sautauxloups.com; rte de Saumur; menus €19.50-23.50; ☺lunch daily late Feb-mid-Nov, plus dinner Fri & Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep) Tuck into fresh fungi at this troglodyte restaurant, then take a tour (€5.90) of the adjacent caves.

## Chinon 6

### **Les Années 30** Traditional French €€

(☎)02 47 93 37 18; www.lesannees30.com; 78 rue Voltaire; menus €27-43; ☺lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) Expect the kind of meal you came to France to eat: exquisite attention to flavours and detail, served up in relaxed intimacy. The interior dining room is golden-lit downstairs and cool blue upstairs, with twin fireplaces

enhancing the cosy atmosphere; in summer dine under the street-side pergola, in the heart of Chinon's old quarter.

 **Hôtel Diderot** Hotel €

(📞02 47 93 18 87; www.hoteldiderot.com; 4 rue de Buffon; s €46-68, d €56-86; 📶) Draped with roses and crammed with polished antiques, this gorgeous town house is run by a friendly trio of siblings who impart the kind of glowing charm you'd expect of a much pricier hotel. Breakfast includes a rainbow of homemade jams, plus locally produced goat cheese with honey and 'crack-your-own' walnuts. Parking is €7 on site, or free down the street.

**Rochemenier** 10

 **Les Délices de la Roche** B&B €

(📞02 41 50 15 26; www.delicesdelarochecom; s/d €50/55; 📶) Friendly young hosts Henri and Sabrina rent out five simple rooms in the peaceful countryside adjacent to Rochemenier's troglodyte village. The adjoining restaurant serves dinner (€22) with advance reservations.

**Château de Brissac** 11

 **Château de Brissac** B&B €€€

(📞02 41 91 22 21; www.chateau-brissac.fr; r €390; 🛏) Sleep in a canopied bed surrounded by 16th-century Flemish tapestries, then wake up to breakfast served by the Marquis and Marquise de Brissac themselves! The four opulently decorated guest rooms in France's tallest château offer an unparalleled insider's look at this fabulous country estate, owned


since 1502 by the Cossé-Brissac family, whose relatives include the Veuve Clicquot of Champagne fame, and whose guests have included King Louis XIII.

**St-Georges-des-Sept-Voies**

 **Auberge de la Sansonière** Traditional French €€

(📞02 41 57 57 70; www.auberge-sansoniere.com; menus €18-41; 🕒lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Surrounded by sunflower fields, this old stone country inn with wood-beamed dining room serves exquisite traditional French menus that emphasise fresh local fish and vegetables.

**Chênehutte-Trèves-Cunault**

 **La Cave aux Moines** Regional Cuisine €€

(📞02 41 67 95 64; www.cave-aux-moines.com; menus €20-24; 🕒lunch & dinner daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep, lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Fri-Sun rest of year) Deep inside a limestone cave, this unique restaurant 9km northwest of Saumur specialises in mushrooms, snails and *fouées* (fire-baked breads).

 **La Prieuré** Historic Hotel €€€

(📞02 41 67 90 14; www.grandesetapes.fr; Chênehutte-les-Tuffeaux; r €135-282; 📶🛏) Commanding stunning views of the Loire from its hilltop perch, this hotel occupies a 12th-century priory with luxurious château-style embellishments. The 25 hectares of grounds include hiking trails through the forest, rose gardens, a swimming pool and a kids' play area.

*The Auvergne Experience the wild  
beauty of this volcanic landscape*



# Volcanoes of the Auvergne



# 13

*Green pastures and volcanic scenery feature on this tour of the Parc Naturel Régional des Volcans d'Auvergne. Get ready for great hiking, hearty mountain meals and acclaimed cheeses.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

12 km

### Puy de Dôme

The Auvergne's favourite pointy-headed icon

38 km

### Le Mont-Dore

A hiker's playground surrounded by stunning peaks

200 km

### Salers

Cobbled streets, cow pastures, volcanoes and superb cheese

FINISH 9

Puy Mary (1787m)

Puy de Sancy (1885m)

START

2

Orcival

5

St-Nectaire

4 DAYS

200KM / 125 MILES

GREAT FOR...



BEST TIME TO GO

May to September for warm weather and snow-free trails.



ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The symmetrical crags of Roches Tuilière and Sanadoire framing the lush greenery below Col de Guéry.



BEST FOR FAMILIES

The volcanic theme park Vulcania.

# 13 Volcanoes of the Auvergne

Aeons ago, Europe's biggest volcanoes shaped the landscape of south-central France, blowing their tops with awe-inspiring force. On this trip you'll experience the wild beauty of the Auvergne's vestigial volcanoes — Puy de Dôme, Puy de Sancy and Puy Mary — but you'll also discover a tamer Auvergne whose picturesque patchwork of eroded cinder cones and verdant pastures is home to family-friendly hiking trails, symphonies of cowbells and some of France's finest cheeses.

## 1 Vulcania

For a dramatic introduction to volcano-land, start at this educational, highly entertaining **theme park** 15km west of Clermont-Ferrand. The brainchild of two French geologists, it has such highlights as the dynamic 3-D film **Awakening of the Auvergne Giants**, depicting volcanic eruptions complete with air blasts and water spray, and the **Cité des Enfants** (Kids' City), with activities specially geared to three- to seven-year-olds.

**The Drive** » Head southeast 7km along the D941 to the D942, where full-on views of

Puy de Dôme beckon you 2km southwest to the junction with the D68 at the mountain's base.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 2 Puy de Dôme

Towering above the surrounding landscape, the symmetrical **volcanic cone** of Puy de Dôme (1464m) was already an iconic Auvergnat landmark long before the Romans built a temple to Mercury atop it in the 1st century. Climb to the summit via the 45-minute **Chemin des Muletiers** footpath (following the contours of the old Roman road), or hop aboard spiffy new cog railway the **Panoramique des Dômes** ([www.panoramiquedesdomes.fr](http://www.panoramiquedesdomes.fr);





adult/child €9.50/3.80; ☀8am-7.30pm). Either way, you'll be rewarded with stunning views of the Chaîne des Puys, a 40km expanse of extinct cinder cones stretching to the horizon. The summit is also prime hang-gliding territory; operators such as **Aero Parapente** (☎06 61 24 11 45; www.aeroparapente.fr; ☀Apr-Oct) will take you soaring over the surrounding countryside for €80.

**The Drive** » The 17km drive to Orcival skirts Puy de Dôme's southern flanks on the D942, then continues southwest on the D216 and D27, passing through increasingly hilly and pastoral countryside dotted with lovely stone and slate barns.

### 3 Orcival

Backed by a leafy green hillside and bisected by a rushing stream, photogenic Orcival



## LINK YOUR TRIP

### 36 Cave Art of the Vézère Valley

Detour four hours west of Le Mont-Dore to discover France's oldest cave art.

### 37 Dordogne's Fortified Villages

Explore centuries-old castles and fortified villages along the Dordogne River, three hours downstream from Le Mont-Dore.



clusters around a gorgeous Romanesque church that houses one of the Auvergne's most famous *vierges noires* (black Virgins typical of the region). An object of veneration throughout the year, she's paraded through the streets with special fanfare on Assumption Day (15 August). The town also springs to life on Saturday morning, when a colourful market fills the main square. In summertime, head 2km north of town to visit the elegant grounds of **Château de Cordès** ([www.chateau-cordes-orcival.com](http://www.chateau-cordes-orcival.com); adult/child €3/free; ☀10am-noon & 2-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 2-6pm Sun May & Jun), laid out by Versailles garden designer Le Nôtre.

🏠 p163

**The Drive** » The D27 climbs 8km through verdant hills and evergreen forest to a spectacular viewpoint just before Col de Guéry (1268m), where the dramatic volcanic crags Roche Tuilière (1288m) and Roche Sanadoire (1286m) rise in perfect symmetry from the farmland below.

#### 4 Col de Guéry

This mountain pass, flanked by the Auvergne's highest lake, offers varied opportunities for outdoor recreation. A 7km loop trail leads to splendid views over the headwaters of the Dordogne River, while

chilly **Lac de Guéry** (1250m) offers excellent fishing for trout and perch. Purchase fishing licences (€6 per day) at the Auberge du Lac de Guéry on the lakeshore.

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**The Drive** » Spellbinding mountain views unfold as you approach the Massif du Sancy, a wall of peaks that's often snowcapped late into the season. A sinuous 9km drive along the D983 and D996 drops you straight into downtown Le Mont-Dore.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 5 Le Mont-Dore

Ringed by rugged peaks at the heart of the Parc Naturel Régional des Volcans d'Auvergne, this historic spa town makes a great base for exploring the surrounding high country. A **télépherique** (gondola; one-way/return €6.90/9.10; ☀9am-12.10pm & 1.30-5pm mid-Apr-Sep) whisks hikers through a landscape of precipitous crags to the foot of **Puy de Sancy** (1885m), France's tallest volcano; across town, a tortoise-slow but creakily atmospheric 1890s-vintage **funiculaire** (funicular; rue René Cassin; one-way/return €3.90/5.20; ☀10am-12.10pm & 2-5.40pm mid-May-Sep) lumbers up to Salon du Capucin, an upland plateau where well-marked trails fan out in all directions. Several fine hikes and mountain-biking routes

GUY CHRISTIAN/HEMIS PHOTO IMAGES ©

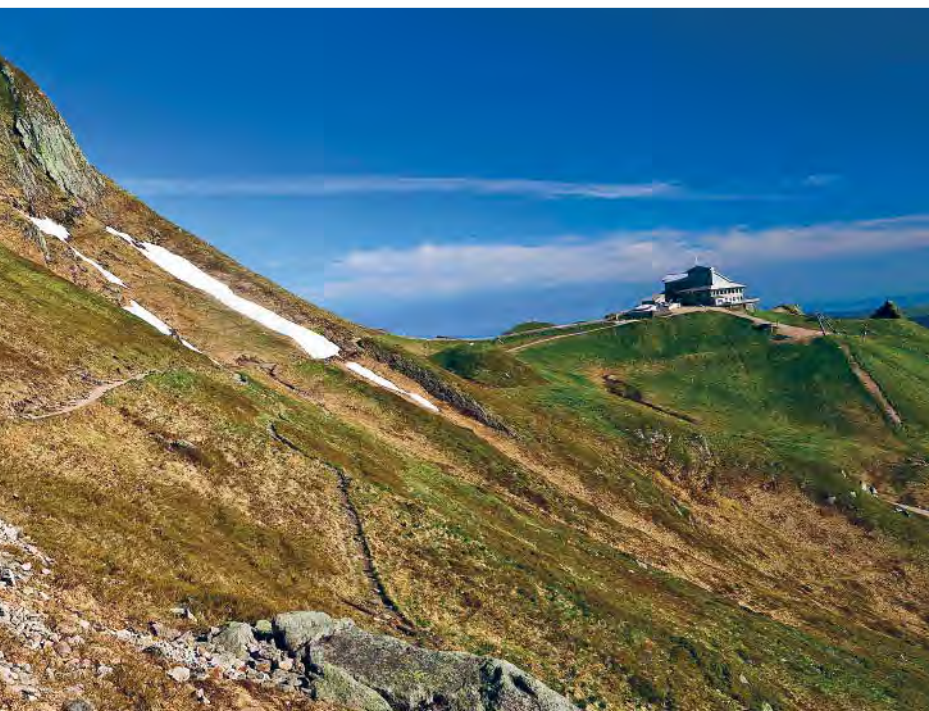


also start in downtown Le Mont-Dore, including the **Chemin de la Grande Cascade**, which leads to a 32m-high waterfall.

For route guides and high-resolution topo maps, visit the tourist office, in a riverside park downtown. Nearby streets are filled with outdoors-oriented shops and purveyors of local charcuterie and cheeses such as **La Boutique du Bougnat** (1 rue Montlosier; ☀9am-12.30pm & 3-7pm).

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**The Drive** » Begin with a spectacular traverse of 1451m Col de la Croix St-Robert,



**Puy de Dôme** A hiker heads up the mountain

passing through 17km of wide-open high country along the D36. Next jog 6km downhill along the D637, enjoying pretty views of the Chaudefour Valley and Lac de Chambon, popular with boaters, hikers and campers. Finally follow the D996 9km past Muroi's hilltop castle into St-Nectaire.

## 6 St-Nectaire

Tiny St-Nectaire is famous for its 12th-century Romanesque church, stunningly set against a mountain backdrop, and its herds of happy bovines, who make this one of the Auvergne's dairy capitals. From the upper town

(St-Nectaire-le-Haut), climb 3km on the D150 to **La Ferme Bellonte** ([www.st-nectaire.com](http://www.st-nectaire.com); Farges; ☀ milking 6.30-7.30am & 4.30-5.30pm, cheese making 8.30-10am Tue-Sat & 6-7.30pm daily, cave tours 10am-noon & 2-5pm), a working farm that offers free milking and cheese-making demonstrations twice daily, plus guided tours of the caves across the street where the cheese is aged.

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**The Drive** » Follow the D996 7km downstream to tiny Rivallet, then head southwest 15km on the D978 into Besse, watching

on the left for the medieval cliff dwellings Les Grottes de Jonas, which include a chapel, spiral staircases and a manor house carved directly into the rock.

## 7 Besse-en-Chandesse

Basalt-brick cottages, cobbled lanes and a lovely old belfry are reason enough to visit this pretty mountain village, but hikers and mountain bikers will also appreciate the fine network of trails surrounding **Lac Pavin**, a crater lake 6km west of town. For a taste of mountain

culture, visit during the **Transhumance de la Vierge Noire**, when local cows are herded to rich upland pastures on 21 July and back downhill in late September, accompanied by street fairs and fireworks.

**The Drive** » Leave the Massif du Sancy behind and head south 82km towards the wilder, less populated Monts du Cantal. A curvy course through farmland and river valleys along the D978 and D678 leads to a supremely scenic, sustained climb along the D62 and D680, bringing you face to face with Puy Mary, southernmost of the Auvergne's three classic peaks.

## 8 Puy Mary

Barely wide enough to accommodate parked cars, the vertiginous mountain pass of Pas de Peyrol (1589m) hugs the

base of pyramid-shaped Puy Mary (1787m), the Cantal's most charismatic peak. A trail, complete with staircases for the steeper sections, leads to the summit (about one hour round-trip). At the trailhead, the **Maison du Site** ([www.puymary.fr](http://www.puymary.fr); ☺mid-May–mid-Nov) sells IGN's 1:75,000 *Monts du Cantal* topo map and several local hiking guides, including Les Sentiers d'Emilie dans le Cantal, which highlights kid-friendly walks.

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**The Drive** » The 20km descent along the D680 switchbacks steeply through a wonderland of high-country scenery before plunging into fragrant evergreen forest and following a long ridgeline into Salers.

## CHEESE COUNTRY

The Auvergne produces some of France's finest cheeses, including five Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) and Appellation d'Origine Protégée (AOP) varieties: the semihard, cheddar-like Cantal and premium-quality Salers, both made from the milk of high-pasture cows; St-Nectaire, rich, flat and semisoft; Fourme d'Ambert, a mild, smooth blue cheese; and Bleu d'Auvergne, a powerful, creamy blue cheese with a Roquefort-like flavour.

To taste them on their home turf, follow the signposted **Route des Fromages** ([www.fromages-aop-auvergne.com](http://www.fromages-aop-auvergne.com)) linking local farms and producers. A downloadable map is available on the website.

Local cheeses figure strongly in many traditional Auvergnat dishes, including *aligot* (puréed potato with garlic and Tomme cheese) and *truffade* (sliced potatoes with Cantal cheese), usually served with a huge helping of *jambon d'Auvergne* (local ham).

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 9 Salers

Pretty Salers perches on a hilltop surrounded by rolling fields full of long-horned brown cattle that produce the region's eponymous AOC cheese. With a compact core of 16th-century stone buildings and long views up towards Puy Mary, it's a relaxing place to linger. Find park information at **Maison de la Ronade** (place Tyssandier d'Escous; teas €2.90; ☺3.30-6.30pm) on the picturesque central square, where the elderly owner serves 120 varieties of tea in his bookshelf-lined 15th-century drawing room. Local day hikes range from an easy 75-minute circuit of the stone-walled pastures surrounding town to high-mountain rambles through wide-open country around the base of 1592m-high **Puy Violent**. Another 2.5km walk from town leads to the **Maison de la Salers** ([www.maisondelasalers.fr](http://www.maisondelasalers.fr); adult/child €7/4.50; ☺10am-noon & 2-6pm Feb-Oct), where videos, exhibits and a tasting room introduce visitors to Salers' cheese-making culture.

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# Eating & Sleeping

## Orcival 3

### **Hôtel Notre Dame** Hotel €

(📍) 04 73 65 82 02; s €42, d €49-53, menus €13-26; (📞) The seven snug refurbished rooms at this family-run hotel are serenaded by the *basilique's* bells tolling next door and the rushing stream out back. Breakfasts at its rustic restaurant include homemade blueberry preserves and a tempting selection of local cheeses.

## Col de Guéry 4

### **Auberge du Lac de Guéry** Auvergnat €€

(www.auberge-lac-guery.fr; d incl breakfast/half-board/full board €80/128/156, menus €21-42; 🕒 lunch Thu-Tue, dinner daily) In an unbeatable position right on the lakeshore, this cosy country inn serves fresh fish straight from the lake.

## Le Mont-Dore 5

### **La Golmotte** Auvergnat €€

(www.aubergelagolmotte.com; D996; menus €16-37; 🕒 lunch & dinner daily) This mountainside eatery 3km above town is a perfect spot to get introduced to *truffade* (sliced potatoes with Cantal cheese), *aligot* (puréed potato with garlic and Tomme cheese and other Auvergnat classics).

### **Grand Hôtel** Hotel €

(📍) 04 73 65 02 64; www.hotel-mont-dore.com; 2 rue Meynadier; s/d/q €59/69/89; (📞) Built in 1850, this ultracentral and newly renovated Le Mont-Dore landmark provides more comfort and style than its budget prices would imply. Boutiquery bedrooms, including some two-room family suites, come with thick duvets, deep tubs and new wood flooring. There's also a sauna and Jacuzzi (€5 extra).

## St-Nectaire 6

### **Le Chastel Montaigu** B&B €€

(📍) 04 73 96 28 49; www.lechastelmontaigu.com; d €140-150; 🕒 Apr-Oct) Head 11km east of St-Nectaire on the D996 to this fairy-tale castle on its own private hilltop. Rebuilt from ruins using authentic medieval materials, the four rooms are filled with heavy stone, rich fabrics and antique wall hangings. One has its own private turret terrace, and all have blindingly good views across the valley. Minimum two-night stay.

## Puy Mary 8

### **Auberge d'Aijean** B&B €

(📍) 04 71 20 83 43; www.auberge-puy-mary.com; La Gandilhon, Lavigerie; d €52-56, q €100-105) With front-row views of Puy Mary, this rustic inn 8km below the summit is a perfect high-country base.

## Salers 9

### **La Martille** Auvergnat €€

(www.restaurant-salers.fr; rue de la Martille; menus from €18; 🕒 lunch & dinner daily) Head to La Martille's pleasant outdoor terrace for solid, reasonably priced Auvergnat dishes: Salers steaks, stuffed cabbage, and the full line-up of meat, cheese and potato fare.

### **Hôtel Saluces** Hotel €€

(📍) 04 71 40 70 82; www.hotel-salers.fr; rue de la Martille; d €68-99; (📞) A stone's throw from Salers' pretty central square, the town's nicest hotel offers nine spacious rooms with modern amenities in a historic stone building with a sunny interior courtyard.

**Vézelay** *A lovely hilltop village rises from lush, rolling countryside*



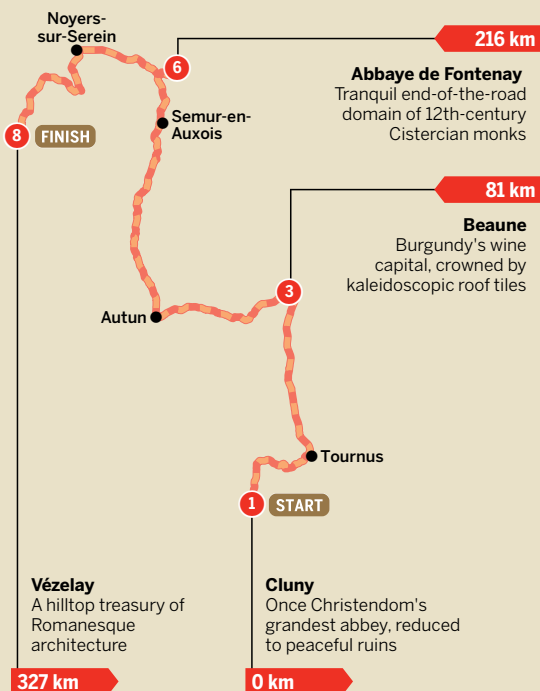
# Medieval Burgundy



# 14

*Fortified hill towns, medieval monasteries, exquisite Romanesque capitals and multicoloured tiled roofs share the stage with rolling vineyards and verdant hiking trails on this idyllic meander.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**6 DAYS**  
327KM / 203 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

From May wildflower season through to the October wine harvest.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Vézelay's sinuous sweep of stone houses crowned by a hilltop basilica.

### BEST FOR OUTDOORS

The riverside walking trails around Noyers-sur-Serein.

# 14 Medieval Burgundy

Between the Middle Ages and the 15th century, Burgundy saw a tremendous flowering of ecclesiastical architecture, from Cistercian and Benedictine monasteries to Romanesque basilicas, coupled with active patronage of the arts by the powerful Dukes of Burgundy. This medieval meander shows you all the highlights, while mixing in opportunities for wine tasting and walking in the gorgeous rolling countryside that makes Burgundy one of France's most appealing regions.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

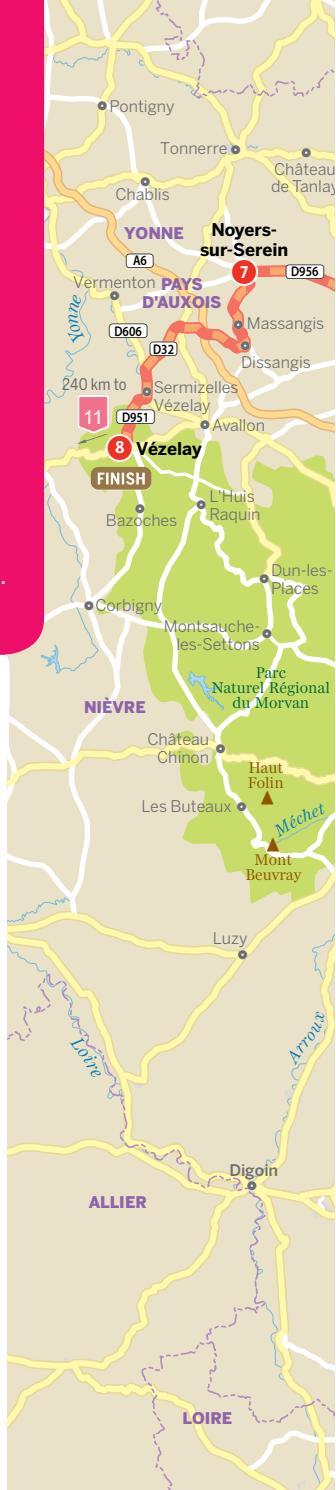
### 1 Cluny

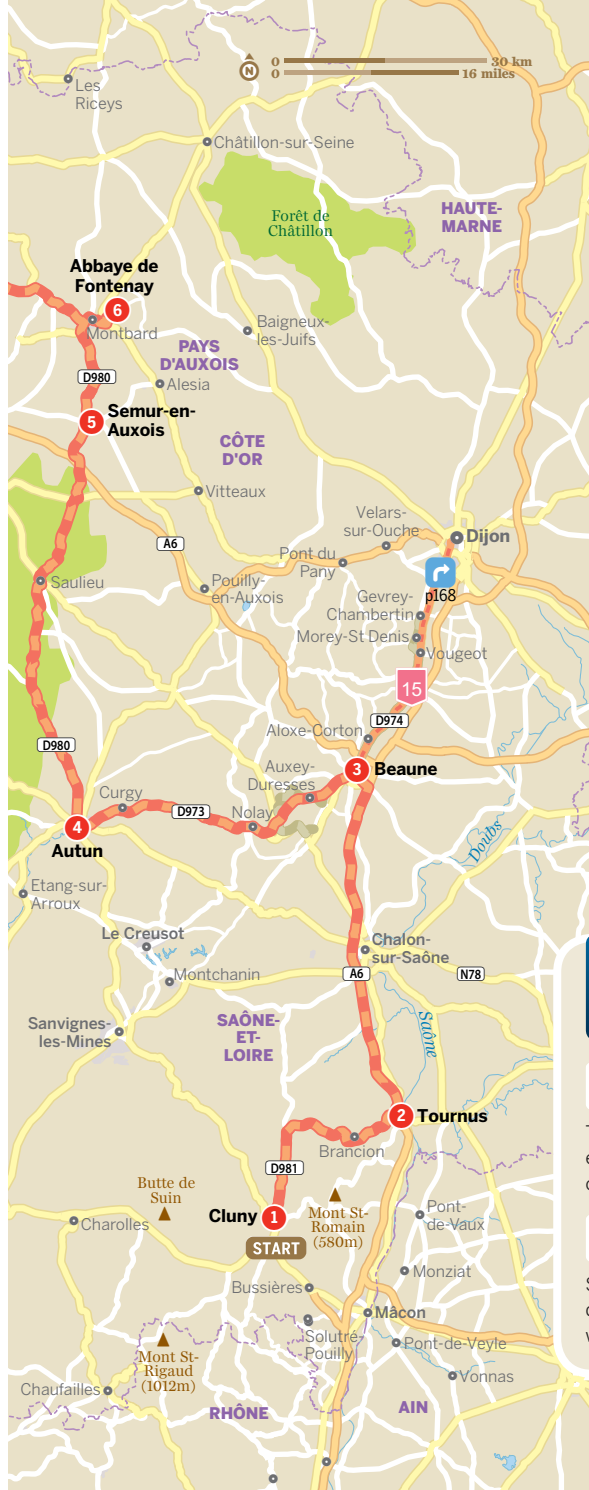
Built between 1088 and 1130, the monumental Benedictine **Abbaye de Cluny** ([cluny.monuments-nationaux.fr](http://cluny.monuments-nationaux.fr); adult/child €9.50/free; ☀9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 7pm Jul & Aug, to 5pm Oct-Mar) – Christendom's largest church until the construction of St Peter's in Rome – once held sway over 1400 monasteries stretching from Poland to Portugal. Today you'll need a good imagination to conjure up the abbey's 12th-century glory, but its fragmentary remains, bordered by the giant shade trees of the grassy **Parc Abbatial**,

are a delightful place to wander.

Get oriented at the **Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie**, with its scale model of the Cluny complex and 3-D 'virtual tour' of the abbey's original medieval layout, then climb the **Tour des Fromages** (adult/child €2/free; ☀10am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm, closed Sun Nov-Mar) for a bird's-eye view of the abbey's remains, including the striking octagonal **Clocher de l'Eau Bénite** (Tower of the Holy Water) and the **Farnier** (Granary), where eight splendid capitals from the original church are displayed.

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**The Drive** » Head 13km north along the D981 to Cormatin, with its Renaissance-style château, then squiggle 25km east along the D14 past Chapaize's 11th-century Église St-Martin, Ozenay's château and the medieval hill town of Brancion before descending into Tournus.

## 2 Tournus

Tournus' superb 10th- to 12th-century Benedictine abbey, **Abbatiale St-Philibert** (☀8.30am-7pm), makes a striking first impression, with its austere Romanesque façade peeking out through a medieval stone gate flanked by twin rounded towers; its apse holds an extremely rare 12th-century **floor mosaic** of the calendar and the zodiac, discovered by chance in 2002. The medieval centre also boasts fine restaurants – good for a lunch stop.

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**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

## 11 Châteaux of the Loire

Three hours west of Vézelay, explore the Loire Valley's classic châteaux.

## 15 Route des Grands Crus

Switch gears in Beaune to discover Burgundy's best wines.



**The Drive** » From Tournus, zip 56km straight up the A6 to Beaune.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 3 Beaune

Burgundy's prosperous and supremely appealing viticultural capital, Beaune, is surrounded by vineyards producing an impressive array of appellations including Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune. Sipping local vintages at sunset on a cafe terrace here is one of France's great pleasures. For a grand tour of the region's renowned wineries, see p173.

The architectural jewel of Beaune's historic centre is the **Hôtel-Dieu des Hospices de Beaune**

(www.hospices-de-beaune.com; rue de l'Hôtel-Dieu; adult/child €7/3; ☀9am-

5.30pm), a 15th-century charity hospital topped by stunning turrets and pitched rooftops covered in multicoloured tiles. Interior highlights include the barrel-vaulted **Grande Salle** with its dragon-embellished beams; an 18th-century **pharmacy** lined with ancient flasks; and the multipanelled 15th-century Flemish masterpiece **Polyptych of the Last Judgement**.



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**The Drive** » A super-scenic 49km drive along the D973 weaves southwest through gorgeous vineyard country, climbing past La Rochepot's striking 13th-century castle before turning due west to Autun.

#### 4 Autun

Two millennia ago, Autun (Augustodunum)

was one of Roman Gaul's most important cities. Its next heyday came 1100 years later, when **Cathédrale St-Lazare** (place du Terreau; ☀8am-7pm) was built to house St Lazarus' sacred relics. Climb through the old city's narrow cobblestone streets to see the cathedral's fantastical Romanesque capitals and famous 12th-century **tympanum** depicting the Last Judgement, carved by Burgundy's master sculptor Gislebertus. Across the street, the **Musée Rolin** (5 rue des Bancs; adult/child €5/free; ☀9.30am-noon & 1.30-6pm Wed-Mon) houses Gislebertus' precociously sensual masterpiece, the *Temptation of Eve*, alongside Gallo-Roman artefacts and modern paintings.



### DETOUR: DIJON

#### Start 3 Beaune

Long-time capital of medieval Burgundy, Dijon was the seat of power for a series of enlightened dukes who presided over the region's 14th- and 15th-century golden age, filling the city with fine art and architecture. From Beaune follow the D974 42km north through the vineyards into downtown Dijon, then park and explore the city's treasures on foot.

Topping the list of must-see attractions are the 13th-century **Église Notre Dame** (place Notre-Dame) with its remarkable façade of pencil-thin columns and leering gargoyles; the **Palais des Ducs et des États de Bourgogne** (place de la Libération), the Burgundy dukes' monumental palace, which also houses Dijon's superb art museum, the **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (mba.dijon.fr; tours adult/child €6/3; ☀10am-5pm Wed-Mon); and the **historic mansions** that line surrounding streets, especially rue des Forges, rue Verrerie, rue Vannerie and rue de la Chouette.

For complete coverage of this engaging city, see Lonely Planet's *France* guide.



**Abbaye de Fontenay** The medieval abbey's arched interior

Roman treasures around town include the town gates **Porte d'Arroux** and **Porte St-André**, the 16,000-seat **Théâtre Romain**, the **Temple de Janus** and the **Pierre de Couhard**, a 27m-high remnant of a Gallo-Roman pyramid.

Autun makes an excellent base for exploring the nearby **Parc Naturel Régional du Morvan** ([www.parcdumorvan.org](http://www.parcdumorvan.org)); the park's website offers downloadable hiking, biking and equestrian itineraries.

**The Drive** » The D980 runs 70km north from Autun to Semur-en-Auxois; halfway

along, there's a fine collection of Romanesque capitals at Saulieu's 12th-century **Basilique de St-Andoche**.

## 5 Semur-en-Auxois

Perched on a granite spur, surrounded by a hairpin turn in the Armançon River and guarded by four massive pink-granite bastions, Semur-en-Auxois was once an important religious centre boasting no fewer than six monasteries.

Pass through the two concentric medieval gates, **Porte Sauvigne** and **Porte Guillier**, onto pedestrianised **rue**

**Buffon**, where you can sample a few *semurettes* (local dark-chocolate truffles) at **Pâtisserie Coeur** ([les-semurettes.com](http://les-semurettes.com); 14 rue Buffon; ☺8am-7pm Tue-Sun) before continuing west to **Promenade du Rempart** for panoramic views from atop Semur's medieval battlements.

Semur is especially atmospheric at night, when the ramparts are illuminated, and around Pentecost, when the **Fêtes Médiévales du Roi Chaussé** fill the streets with medieval-themed parades and markets.

**The Drive** » Follow the D980 20km north into Montbard,

then hop 2km east on the D905 before joining the sleepy northbound D32 for the idyllic 3km home stretch into Fontenay.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 6 Abbaye de Fontenay

Founded in 1118 and restored to its medieval glory a century ago, the Unesco-listed **Abbaye de Fontenay** ([www.abbayedefontenay.com](http://www.abbayedefontenay.com); adult/child €9.50/5.50, incl guided tour €11.50/6.50; ☀10am-noon & 2-5pm) offers a fascinating glimpse of the austere, serene surroundings in which Cistercian monks lived lives of contemplation, prayer and manual labour. Set in a bucolic wooded valley, the abbey includes an unadorned Romanesque church, a barrel-vaulted monks' dormitory, landscaped gardens and Europe's first metallurgical factory, with a remarkable water-driven forge from 1220.

From the parking lot, the **GR213 trail** forms part of two verdant walking circuits: one to Montbard (13km return), the other (11.5km) through Touillon and Le Petit Jailly. Maps and botanical field guides are available in the abbey shop.

**The Drive** » Backtrack to the D905, follow it 14km west-northwest to Rougemont, then take the westbound D956 21km into Noyers.

## 7 Noyers-sur-Serein

Tucked into a sharp bend in the Serein River, picturesque medieval Noyers is surrounded by pastureland and wooded hills. The town's cobbled streets, accessed via two imposing **stone gateways**, lead past 15th- and 16th-century gabled houses, wood and stone archways and several art galleries.

Noyers is a superb base for **walking**. Just outside the clock-topped southern gate, **Chemin des Fossés** threads its way between the Serein and the village's 13th-century fortifications, 19 of whose original 23 towers still remain. The 9km **Balade du Château**, marked in red, follows the Serein's right bank past an utterly ruined château.

In summer, the **Rencontres Musicales de Noyers** ([www.musicalesdenoyers.com](http://www.musicalesdenoyers.com)) bring classical concerts and jazz sessions to town.

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**The Drive** » Snake 14km southward through the peaceful Serein valley via the D86, then head 11km west on the D11 from Dissangis to Joux-la-Ville before charting a southwest course down the D32, D9, D606 and D951 for the final 24km run into Vézelay.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 8 Vézelay

Rising from lush rolling countryside and crowned

by a venerable medieval basilica, Vézelay is one of France's loveliest hilltop villages. Founded in the 9th century on a former Roman and then Carolingian site, the magnificent **Basilique Ste-Madeleine** ([www.basiliquedevezelay.org](http://www.basiliquedevezelay.org)) gained early fame as a starting point for the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route. Among its treasures are a 12th-century **tympaanum**, with a carving of an enthroned Jesus radiating his holy spirit to the Apostles; several beautifully carved Romanesque **capitals**, including the Mystical Mill, which depicts Moses grinding grain into a flour sack held by St Paul; and a mid-12th-century **crypt** reputed to house one of Mary Magdalene's bones. Concerts of sacred music are held here from June to September.

The **park** behind the basilica affords wonderful views and walking access to the verdant Vallée de Cure. From **Porte Neuve**, Vézelay's old town gate, a footpath descends via the 12th-century chapel of **La Cordelle** to the village of **Asquins**. Another nice walk is the **Promenade des Fossés**, which circumnavigates Vézelay's medieval ramparts.

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# Eating & Sleeping

## Cluny 1

### **La Table d'Héloïse** Burgundian €€

(📞03 85 59 05 65; www.hostelleriedheloise.com; rte de Mâcon; menus €19-49; 🕒lunch Fri-Tue, dinner Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) Dine on the light-filled riverside veranda at this charming family-run restaurant serving traditional Burgundian fare including tender Charolais steak, *fricassée d'escargots* (snail stew) and sensational homemade desserts.

### **Le Clos de l'Abbaye** B&B €

(📞03 85 59 22 06; www.closdelabbaye.fr; 6 place du Marché; d/tr/q/ste €70/85/105/170; 📶) This handsome old house beside the abbey offers four comfortable, colour-coordinated bedrooms and a lovely, kid-friendly garden. The hosts help guests discover the region's little-known treasures.

## Tournus 2

### **Le Bourgogne** Burgundian €€

(📞03 85 51 12 23; 37 rue du Dr Privey; menus from €21; 🕒lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) A few steps south of the abbey, this husband-and-wife team serves delicious, authentic and well-priced *cuisine bourguignonne* (Burgundy cuisine), accompanied by an excellent selection of local wines.

## Beaune 3

### **Caves Madeleine** Traditional French €

(📞03 80 22 93 30; 8 rue du Faubourg Madeleine; mains €12-25, lunch menus €15; 🕒lunch & dinner Mon-Wed & Sat, dinner Fri) At this convivial restaurant, locals tuck into French classics such as *blanquette de veau* (veal stew) at long shared tables surrounded by wine racks.

### **Hôtel des Remparts** Historic Hotel €€

(📞03 80 24 94 94; www.hotel-remparts-beaune.com; 48 rue Thiers; d €80-160; 📶📶📶) Set

around two delightful courtyards, rooms in this 17th-century town house have red-tiled or parquet floors and simple antique furniture; the nicest come with exposed beams and a fireplace. Parking is €10.

## Noyers-sur-Serein 7

### **Les Millésimes** Burgundian €€

(📞03 86 82 82 16; www.maison-paillot.com; place de l'Hôtel de Ville; menus €23-42; 🕒lunch & dinner Tue-Sun, closed Jan-Mar) This culinary haven in a meticulously restored medieval house with large fireplace specialises in *terroir* (regional) creations ranging from *jambon au chablis* (ham flavoured with Chablis wine) to *tourte à l'Époisses* (pie with Époisses cheese).

### **Moulin de la Roche** B&B €

(📞03 86 82 68 13; www.bonadresse.com/bourgogne/le-moulin-de-la-roche.htm; rte d'Auxerre; d €70-80; 📶📶) Housed in a renovated mill (complete with a millwheel in the living room!), this welcoming two-room B&B sits on three gorgeous hectares overlooking the River Serein.

## Vézelay 8

### **Le Bougainville** Traditional French €€

(📞03 86 33 27 57; 26 rue St-Etienne; menus €26-31; 🕒lunch & dinner Thu-Mon; 📶)

The smiling owner serves rich French and Burgundian specialities alongside a *menu du jardinier* featuring lighter vegetarian options.

### **Cabalus** Historic Hotel €

(📞03 86 33 20 66; www.cabalus.com; rue St-Pierre; d €58) Just below the cathedral, this supremely atmospheric 12th-century abode offers four spacious rooms with sturdy beams, ancient tiles and stone walls.



*Burgundy Sensational vineyards  
set amid historic surrounds*

# Route des Grands Crus



# 15

*The picture-book Route des Grands Crus laces together Burgundy's most reputed vineyards. And, yes, opportunities abound for pleasurable wine tasting in historic surrounds.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

7 km

### Château du Clos de Vougeot

A magnificent wine-growing estate

29 km

### Beaune

The opulent capital of Burgundian wines

Château de La Rochepeot

### St-Romain

Sensational views and a bucolic atmosphere

45 km

FINISH

Pommard

START

Gevrey-Chambertin

Nuits-St-Georges

39 km

### Château de Meursault

Wine tasting in a grandiose setting

2 DAYS

62KM / 38 MILES

## GREAT FOR...



## BEST TIME TO GO

May, June, September and October for a symphony of colour and quiet roads.

## ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The views from the cliffs that tower above St-Romain are hallucinogenic.

## BEST FOR FOODIES

Beaune is a great place to try Burgundian specialities like snails.

# 15

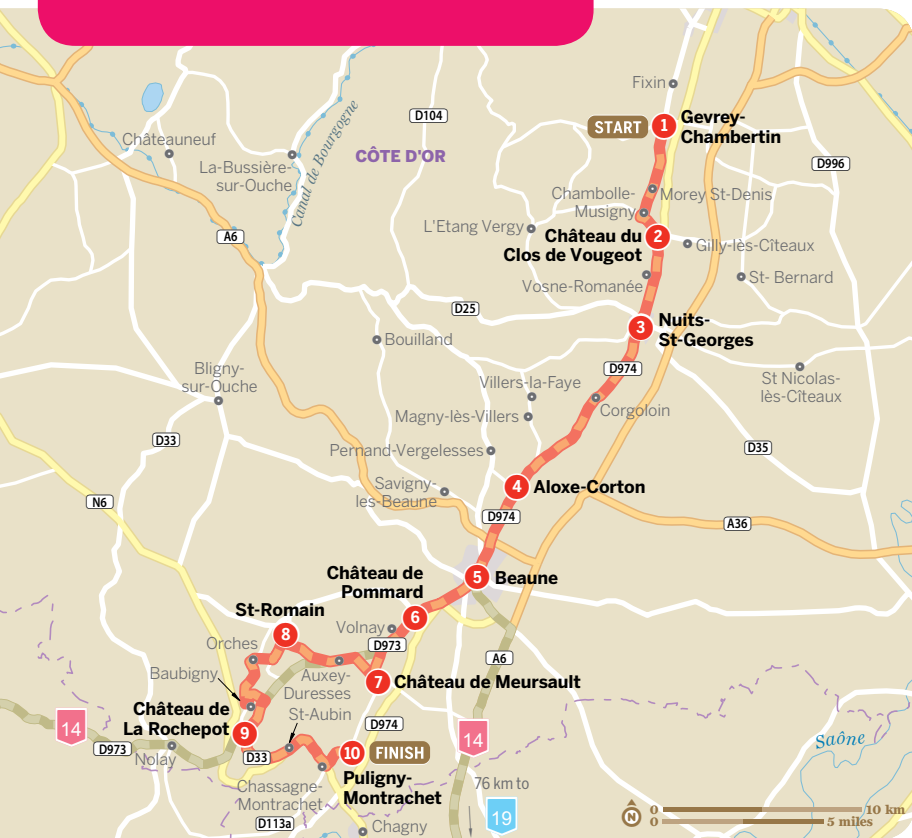
## Route des Grands Crus

Swinging from Gevrey-Chambertin to Puligny-Montrachet, this route is like a 'greatest hits' of Burgundy, with its bucolic views, patchwork of immaculate hand-groomed vines, atmospheric wine cellars and attractive stone villages. If you're looking for an upscale wine château experience, you've come to the right place. Now is your chance to sample some of the most prestigious reds and whites in the world.

### 1 Gevrey-Chambertin

Kick-start your epicurean adventure by visiting this picturesque village, which enjoys a world-class reputation among wine enthusiasts – it produces nine out of the 32 Grands Crus wines from Burgundy. All are reds made from pinot noir.

**The Drive** » From Gevrey-Chambertin it's a relaxed drive along the D122 to Château du Clos de Vougeot, 7km south via Morey St-Denis and Chambolle-Musigny.



## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 2 Château du Clos de Vougeot

An essential stop on the Route des Grands Crus, the magnificent wine-producing **Château du Clos de Vougeot** (📍03 80 62 86 09; www.closdevougeot.fr; Vougeot; adult/child €4/3.10; 🕒9am-5.30pm) is regarded as the birthplace of Burgundian wines. Originally the property of the Abbaye de Cîteaux, 12km southeast from here, the 16th-century country castle served as a getaway for the monks, who stored their equipment and produced their wines here for several centuries. Tours uncover the workings of enormous wine presses and casks.



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

### 14 Medieval Burgundy

It's easy to combine this trip with our itinerary focusing on medieval Burgundy, either from Beaune or La Rochepot.

### 19 Beaujolais Villages

In the mood for more full-bodied wines? Motor 1¼ hours south to Villefranche-sur-Saône and make your way up to Roche de Solutré.

**The Drive** » Pick up the D974 to Nuits-St-Georges, 4.5km south via Vosne-Romanée.

## 3 Nuits-St-Georges

It's worth spending a little time in attractive Nuits-St-Georges. Splashed around town are a dozen domaines selling superb reds and whites, but an essential port of call on any wine-tasting itinerary is **L'Imaginarium** (📍03 80 62 61 40; www.imaginarium-bourgogne.com; av du Jura; adult/child €8/5; 🕒2-7pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue-Sun). This gleaming modern museum is a great place to learn about Burgundy wines and winemaking techniques. It's fun and entertaining, with movies, exhibits and interactive displays.

Architecture buffs should take a look at the appealing 17th-century belfry of the former town hall and the Romanesque **Église St-Symphorien**, slightly away from the town centre.

**The Drive** » Continue along the D974 towards Beaune. After passing through the village of Ladoix-Serrigny, look out for the sign to Château Corton-André on the right. It's a 10-minute drive from Nuits-St-Georges (11.5km).

## 4 Aloxe-Corton

Surrounded by manicured vineyards, tiny Aloxe-Corton is a real charmer. It's

great for wine lovers, with producers handily scattered around the village. A good starting point is **Domaines d'Aloxe-Corton** (📍03 80 26 49 85; place du Chapitre; 🕒10am-1pm & 3-7pm Thu-Mon Apr-mid-Nov), a polished wine shop representing several makers of the terrific Aloxe-Corton *appellation* (delectable reds and whites).

No visit to Aloxe-Corton would be complete without visiting the high-flying **Château Corton-André** (📍03 80 26 28 79; www.pierre-andre.com; 🕒10am-1pm & 2.30-6pm). With its splendid cellars and tiled roofs, it's a wonderful place for a tasting session in atmospheric surrounds.

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**The Drive** » Pick up the busy N74 to Beaune, 5.5km due south.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 5 Beaune

Beaune's *raison d'être* and the source of its *joie de vivre* is wine: making it, tasting it, selling it, but most of all, drinking it. Consequently Beaune is one of the best places in all of France for wine tasting.

The amoeba-shaped old city is enclosed by thick stone **ramparts**, which are lined with overgrown gardens and ringed by a pathway that makes for a lovely stroll.



The most striking attraction of Beaune's old city is the magnificent **Hôtel-Dieu des Hospices de Beaune** (see p168).

Underneath Beaune's buildings, streets and ramparts, millions of dusty bottles of wine are being aged to perfection in cool, dark cellars.

The bacchanalian

**Marché aux Vins** (www.marcheauxvins.com; 2 rue Nicolas Rolin; admission €10; ☺9.30-11.30am & 2-5.30pm Sep-Jun, 9.30am-5.30pm Jul & Aug) is a one-stop shop to taste, learn about and buy Burgundy wines.

Using a *tastevin* (a small silver cup), sample an impressive 15 wines in the candle-lit former Église des Cordeliers and its cellars. Another venerable winery is

**Bouchard Père & Fils** (www.bouchard-pereetfils.com; 15 rue du Château; ☺10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun Apr-Nov, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat Dec-Mar), housed in a medieval fortress.

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**The Drive** » Take the D974 (direction Autun), then the D973 to Pommard (5.5km).

## 6 Château de Pommard

For many red wine lovers, a visit to the superb **Château de Pommard** (☎03 80 22 12 59; www.chateaudepommard.com;

15 rue Marey-Monge; guided tours incl tasting adult/child €21/free; ☺9.30am-6pm Apr-Nov) is the ultimate Burgundian pilgrimage. The impressive cellars contain many vintage bottles.

**The Drive** » Follow signs to Meursault (5km), via Volnay. Château de Meursault is signposted in the centre of the village.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 7 Château de Meursault

One of the most elegant of the Route des Grands Crus châteaux, **Château de Meursault** (☎03 80 26 22 75; www.chateau-meursault.com; rue Moulin-Foulot; admission incl tasting €15; ☺9.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm Sep-Jun, 9.30am-6pm Jul & Aug) has beautiful grounds and produces prestigious white wines. You'll be struck by the 14th-century cellars.

✂ 🍷 p179

**The Drive** » From the centre of Meursault, follow signs to Auxey-Duresses and Nolay (D23), then signs to Auxey-Duresses and St-Romain (D17E). Then take the D973 (direction Auxey-Duresses). Leaving Auxey-Duresses, take the D17E to Auxey-le-Petit and St-Romain (6.5km from Meursault).

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 8 St-Romain

Off-the-beaten-path St-Romain is a bucolic village situated right



CHATELIS ORFÈVRE/ORBIS ©

where vineyards meet pastureland, forests and cliffs. For drop-dead views over the village and the valley, drive up to the panoramic viewpoint (it's signposted), which is perched atop a cliff near the ruins of a castle.

✂ 🍷 p179

**The Drive** » Pass through St-Romain and follow signs to



**St-Romain** Oak wine barrels being made for Burgundy vineyards

Falaises along the D17, then turn left onto the D17 (direction Falaises, Orches, Baubigny). It's a lovely drive with scenic vistas until you reach Baubigny. In Baubigny take the D111D to La Rochepot. It's an 8km drive from Meursault.

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## 9 Château de La Rochepot

With its conical towers and multicoloured

tile roofs rising from thick woods above the ancient village of La Rochepot, the **Château de La Rochepot** (📍03 80 21 71 37; [www.larochepot.com](http://www.larochepot.com); La Rochepot; adult/child €8/4; 🕒10am-5.30pm Wed-Mon) is a dream come true for photographers and history buffs. This marvellous medieval fortress offers fab

views of surrounding countryside.

**The Drive** » Look for the D973 (direction Nolay); after 200m look for the left-hand turn onto the D33 that plunges down to St-Aubin. In St-Aubin turn left onto the D906 (direction Chagny), and eventually turn left onto the D113A to Puligny-Montrachet (10km from La Rochepot). It's a journey of 10km.

## BURGUNDY WINE BASICS

Burgundy's epic vineyards extend approximately 258km from Chablis in the north to the Rhône's Beaujolais in the south and comprise 100 Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC). Each region has its own appellations and traits, embodied by a concept called *terroir* – the earth imbuing its produce, such as grapes, with unique qualities.

Here's an ever-so-brief survey of some of Burgundy's major growing regions:

- » **Côte d'Or vineyards** The northern section, the **Côte de Nuits**, stretches from Marsannay-la-Côte (near Dijon) south to Corgoloin and produces reds known for their robust, full-bodied character. The southern section, the **Côte de Beaune**, lies between Ladoix-Serrigny and Santenay and produces great reds and great whites. Appellations from the area's hilltops are the **Hautes-Côtes de Nuits** and **Hautes-Côtes de Beaune**.
- » **Chablis & Grand Auxerrois** Four renowned chardonnay white-wine appellations from 20 villages around Chablis. Part of the **Auxerrois vineyards**, **Irancy** produces excellent pinot noir reds.
- » **Châtillonnais** Approximately 20 villages around Châtillon-sur-Seine producing red and white wines.
- » **Côte Chalonnaise** The southernmost continuation of the Côte de Beaune's slopes is noted for its excellent reds and whites.
- » **Mâconnais** Known for rich or fruity white wines, like the Pouilly-Fuissé chardonnay.

### Want to Know More?

Take a class!

**École des Vins de Bourgogne** (📞03 80 26 35 10; [www.ecoledesvins-bourgogne.com](http://www.ecoledesvins-bourgogne.com); 6 rue du 16e Chasseurs, Beaune) Offers a variety of courses.

**Sensation Vin** (📞03 80 22 17 57; [www.sensation-vin.com](http://www.sensation-vin.com); 1 rue d'Enfer, Beaune; 🕒10am-7pm) Offers introductory tasting sessions (no appointment needed) as well as tailor-made courses.

### 10 Puligny-Montrachet

Puligny-Montrachet makes a grand finale to your trip. Beloved of white wine aficionados (no reds in sight), this bijou appellation is

revered thanks to five extraordinary Grands Crus. At the **Caveau de Puligny-Montrachet** (📞03 80 21 96 78; [www.caveau-puligny.com](http://www.caveau-puligny.com); 1 rue de Poiseul; 🕒9.30am-noon & 2-8pm Mar-Oct) you can sample various local

wines in a comfortable and relaxed setting. This wine bar-cellar is run by knowledgeable Julien Wallerand, who provides excellent advice (in decent English).

📍 p179

# Eating & Sleeping

## Aloxe-Corton 4

### Villa Louise Hôtel

Hotel €€

(📞03 80 26 46 70; [www.hotel-villa-louise.fr](http://www.hotel-villa-louise.fr); 9 rue Franche; d €100-195;    ) This tranquil mansion houses elegant, modern rooms, each of them dreamily different. The expansive garden stretches straight to the edge of the vineyard and a separate gazebo shelters the sauna and pool. Genteel Louise Perrin presides, and has a private cave (wine cellar) perfect for wine tastings.

## Beaune 5

### Le P'tit

#### Paradis

Modern Burgundian €€

(📞03 80 24 91 00; 25 rue Paradis; menus €28-36; 🕒lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) This intimate restaurant on a narrow medieval street is known for *cuisine élaborée* (creatively transformed versions of traditional dishes) made with fresh local products.

### Loiseau des

#### Vignes



Gastronomic €€€

(📞03 80 24 12 06; 31 rue Maufoux; menus €20-95; 🕒lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) A culinary shrine. Expect stunning concoctions ranging from caramelised pigeon to *quenelles de sandre* (dumplings made from pike fish), all exquisitely presented. In summer, the verdant garden is a plus.

### Abbaye de

#### Maizières

Historic Hotel €€

(📞03 80 24 74 64; [www.beaune-abbaye-maizieres.com](http://www.beaune-abbaye-maizieres.com); 19 rue Maizières; d €118-190;  ) This character-laden establishment inside a 12th-century abbey oozes history, yet most rooms have been luxuriously modernised. Some rooms boast Cistercian stained-glass windows and exposed beams; those on the top floor offer views over Beaune's famed multicoloured tile roofs.

## Meursault 7

### Le Chevreuil –

#### La Maison de la Mère Daugier

Modern Burgundian €€

(📞03 80 21 23 25; place de la République; menus €23-58; 🕒lunch & dinner Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) Chef Tiago is known for his creative take on regional staples. The dining room's country-chic, with plenty of light, wood and stone for that down-home feel, and the menu takes the cream of traditional Burgundian and gives it a 21st-century spin.

## St-Romain 8

### Les Roches

Burgundian €€

(📞03 80 21 21 63; [www.les-roches.fr](http://www.les-roches.fr); Bas Village; menus €29; 🕒lunch & dinner Mon & Thu-Sun) In the heart of the village, this sweet little spot with a pleasant outdoor setting serves farm-fresh fare and well-executed Burgundian specialties, including snails and bœuf bourguignon.

### Domaine Corgette

B&B €€

(📞03 80 21 68 08; [www.domainecorgette.com](http://www.domainecorgette.com); rue de la Perrière; d €85-110;  ) The sun-drenched terrace at this renovated winery looks out on the dramatic cliffs. Tucked in the centre of the village, its rooms are light and airy, and retain classic touches like fireplaces and wooden floors. Good English is spoken.

## Puligny-Montrachet 10

### La Maison d'Olivier Leflaive

Boutique Hotel €€€

(📞03 80 21 37 65; [www.olivier-leflaive.com](http://www.olivier-leflaive.com); place du Monument; d €160-220; 🕒closed Jan) Occupying a tastefully renovated 17th-century village house, this 13-room venture delivers top service and classy comfort, and there's an on-site restaurant. Best of all, it offers personalised wine tours and tastings. Perfect for wine lovers.



# STRETCH YOUR LEGS CHINON

**Start/Finish** Hostellerie  
Gargantua

**Distance** 3km

**Duration** Three hours

This relaxed walk leads you through Chinon's medieval centre from one end to the other, visiting both the lower town and the historic castle above, culminating in a scenic stroll along the cave-riddled cliff face to the east.

Take this walk on Trips



## Hostellerie Gargantua

Renowned author François Rabelais (c 1483–1553) grew up in Chinon; this atmospheric **hotel** (73 rue Haute St-Maurice), housed in a Gothic palace that once served as headquarters for the king's representative in Chinon, is one of several places bearing Rabelais-related names that you'll find scattered throughout the old town. On the same street, look for the **Hôtel du Gouverneur**, an impressive town house with a double-flighted staircase ensconced behind a carved gateway.

**The Walk** » Head east a few paces along rue Haute St-Maurice to the museum on the opposite side of the street.

## Musée d'Art et d'Histoire

This small municipal **museum** (44 rue Haute St-Maurice; adult/child €3/free; 🕒 2.30–6.30pm Wed–Mon May–mid-Sep, 2–6pm Fri–Mon mid-Sep–mid-Nov & mid-Feb–Apr, closed mid-Nov–mid-Feb) has a collection of Chinon-related art and archaeological finds dating from prehistory to the 19th century, including a painting of Rabelais by Delacroix. Outside the museum is the intersection of two medieval streets, whose half-timbered buildings are said to have housed Joan of Arc while she awaited her audience with the dauphin Charles.

**The Walk** » Continue east along rue Haute St-Maurice, which soon changes its name to rue Voltaire. Look for the Caves Peinctes de Chinon in the cliff face to your left.

## Caves Peinctes de Chinon

Hidden at the end of a cobbled alleyway off rue Voltaire are the **Caves Peinctes de Chinon** (impasse des Caves Peinctes; admission €3; 🕒 guided tours 11am, 3pm, 4.30pm & 6pm Tue–Sun Jul & Aug), a network of former quarries that were converted into wine cellars during the 15th century. Local winegrowers run tours of the *caves* (wine cellars) in summer.

**The Walk** » Return to rue Voltaire, then walk diagonally across the street to La Cave Voltaire.



## La Cave Voltaire

A great place for a mid-afternoon snack or an evening drink, **La Cave Voltaire** ([www.lacavevoltaire.fr](http://www.lacavevoltaire.fr); 13 rue Voltaire) stocks over 200 wines from the Chinon region and beyond. Tasty platters of local cheese and charcuterie are served with hearty fresh bread at pavement tables with nice views up to Chinon's castle.

**The Walk** » Follow rue Voltaire three blocks east into Chinon's picturesque main square, place du Général de Gaulle, then turn left (uphill) two blocks and take the free elevator to the upper town. Once up top, turn left and climb to the castle.

## Forteresse Royale de Chinon

Chinon's star attraction is this fabulous **castle** ([www.forteresse-chinon.fr](http://www.forteresse-chinon.fr); adult/child €7.50/5.50; ☎9.30am-7pm May-Aug, to 5pm or 6pm rest of year). The 12th-century **Fort St-Georges** and **Logis Royal** (Royal Lodgings) date from the Plantagenet court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, while the 14th-century **Tour de l'Horloge** (Clock Tower) houses exhibits commemorating Joan of Arc's

1429 meeting with the future Charles VII. For stupendous panoramas, climb atop the 13th-century **Fort du Coudray**.

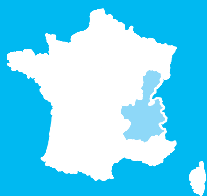
**The Walk** » Descend rue du Puy des Bancs to rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, turn left and continue two blocks to St-Mexme church. Climb left of the church on rue de Pitoche, then follow rue du Coteau Ste-Radegonde 500m past cave-pockmarked cliffs to Chapelle Ste-Radegonde.

## Chapelle Ste-Radegonde

Surrounded by abandoned troglodyte dwellings, this mystical, half-ruined medieval **chapel** (rue du Coteau Ste-Radegonde; adult/child €3/free; ☎3-6pm Sat & Sun May, Jun & Sep, 3-6pm Wed-Mon Jul & Aug) is built partly into a cave, accessed by a red door in an old stone wall. The chapel's 12th-century 'Royal Hunt' fresco is said to represent members of the Plantagenet royal family; inside, a staircase descends to a subterranean spring associated with a pre-Christian cult.

**The Walk** » Retrace your steps to Hostellerie Gargantua via St-Mexme church, rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau and place du Général de Gaulle.





# Alps & Eastern France

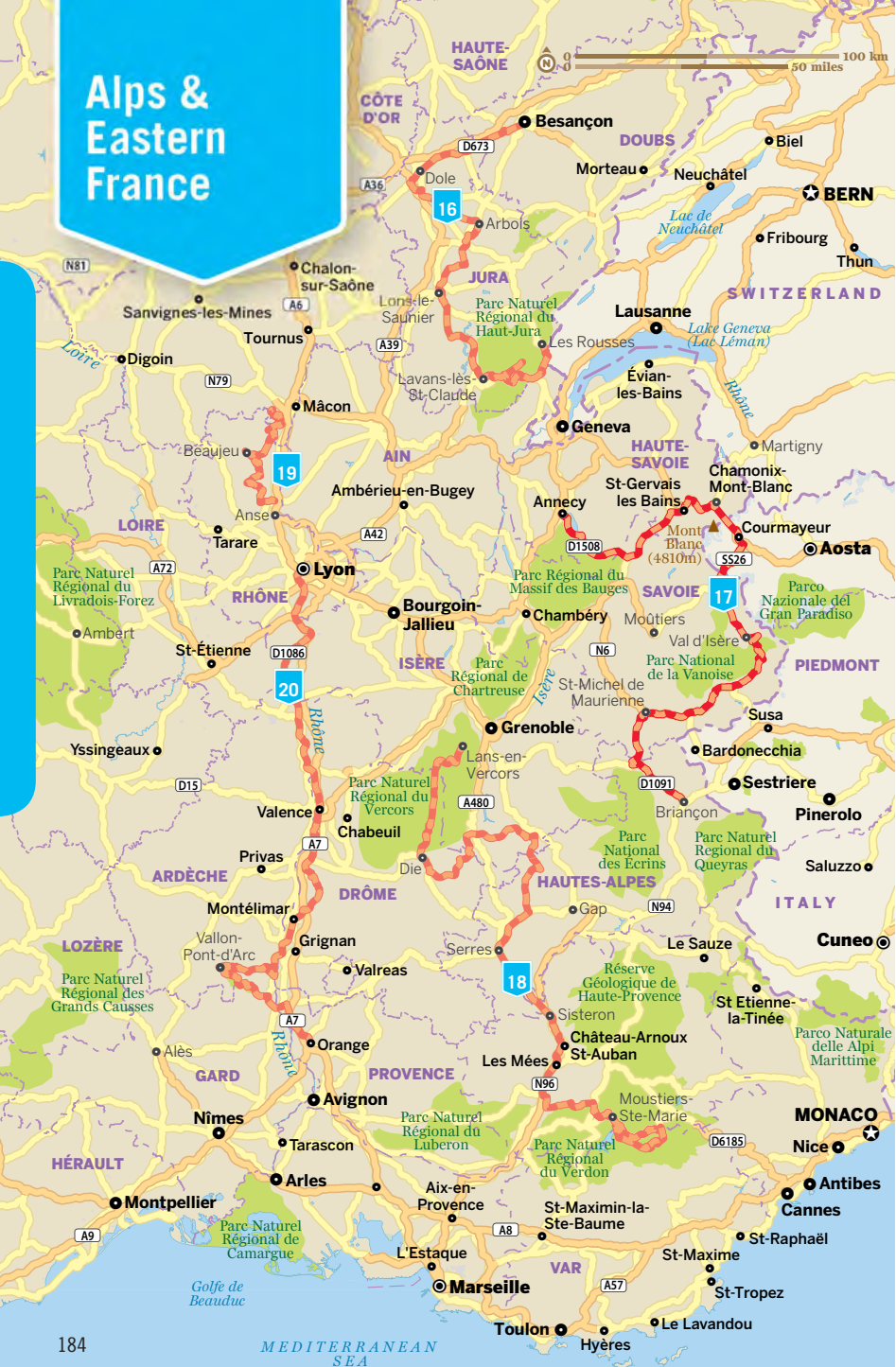
**FROM THE RHÔNE RIVER TO EUROPE'S HIGHEST MOUNTAIN**, eastern France is a crazy quilt of inspirational landscapes.

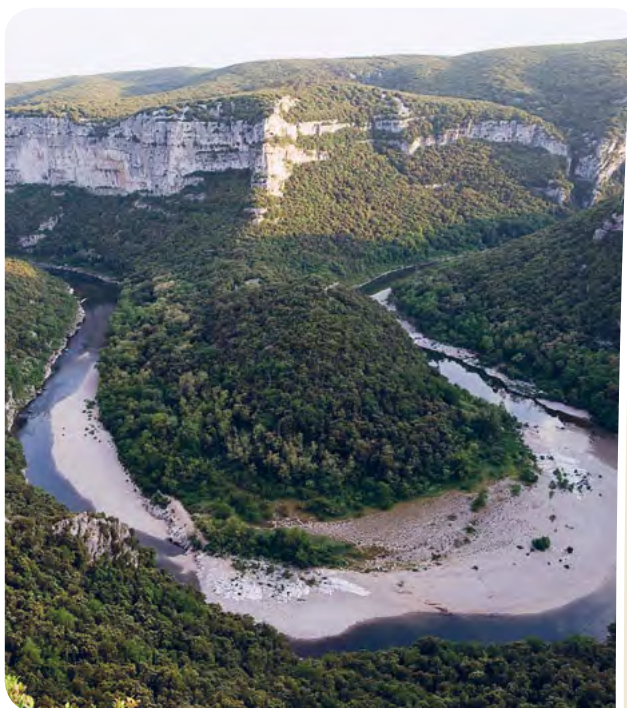
Our five itineraries head in all directions from Lyon. To the northwest, narrow roads snake through the vine-covered Beaujolais; to the south, the Rhône flows through increasingly sunny country past Gallo-Roman ruins, medieval hilltop fortresses and precipitous gorges.

East lie the mountains: the Jura, land of Comté cheese and golden wine; the Vercors' poppy-strewn plateaus and limestone peaks; Haute-Provence's lavender fields and multihued canyons; and, towering high above, the Alps, where France's most spellbinding high-country scenery revolves around hulking Mont Blanc.



# Alps & Eastern France





Rhône Valley Gorges de l'Ardèche (Trip 20)

16

### The Jura 5 Days

Mellow out amid bucolic highlands and rolling vineyards in this off-the-beaten-track region. (p187)

*Classic Trip*

17

### Alpine Adventure 6 Days

Revel in France's high-country grandeur, from lakeside Annecy to top-of-the-world Chamonix. (p195)

18

### Foothills of the Alps 6 Days

Hike verdant meadows and rugged canyons where the Alps and Provence meet. (p205)

19

### Beaujolais Villages 2 Days

Explore the unhurried villages, gentle landscapes and renowned reds of the Beaujolais. (p213)

20

### Rhône Valley 5 Days

Follow eastern France's great river from Lyon's bistros to Orange's Roman theatre. (p221)



**DON'T MISS**

### Château-Chalon

This is the perfect spot to sample the Jura's distinctive 'yellow' wine. Stay in a turreted B&B on Trip **16**

### Bonneval-sur-Arc

Hidden on Europe's highest mountain pass, this village in Vanoise National Park is a nature-lover's hideaway. Escape here on Trip **17**

### Gîte d'Alpage de la Molière

Homemade raspberry pie and spectacular mountain views welcome hikers at this eatery. Rest your feet here on Trip **18**

### Domaine des Vignes du Paradis – Pascal Durand

This family-run domaine welcomes visitors. Stop in to sip award-winning St-Amour reds on Trip **19**

### Sentier Aval des Gorges

Driving the Gorges de l'Ardèche scenic route is spectacular. Discover this easy-to-miss trail on Trip **20**

*The Jura A waterfall skims mossy rocks in this region of wild terrain*





16

# The Jura

*On this trip through the extraordinarily diverse Jura region, you'll examine magnificent citadels, explore some of the wildest terrain in France, discover yellow wine and enjoy the mellow Jura vibe.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

0 km

### Besançon

Seek out the Vauban citadel and the stellar Musée des Beaux-Arts

1

START

85 km

### Arbois

Learn about the local speciality wine, *vin jaune*, in this bucolic village

3

115 km

### Château-Chalon

Peer over the precipice in picturesque Château-Chalon

6

205 km

### Parc Naturel Régional du Haut-Jura

Act like an explorer in one of the least known corners of France

7

FINISH

● Les Rousses

5 DAYS

227KM / 141 MILES

GREAT FOR...



BEST TIME TO GO

Come between June and September, when the sun shines. Avoid the freezing winter.



ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Snap the hawks' view from the top of the Tlesiège Val Mijoux.



BEST FOR FAMILIES

Exploring the highlands of the Parc Naturel Régional du Haut-Jura.

# 16 The Jura

Bleak and often cold, the high Jura mountains stand as a total contrast to the cheery lowlands, famed for buttercup-coloured wine. And 'contrast' sums up this trip well. One day can see you checking out Egyptian mummies, another will see you sampling local cheeses and still another will have you dangling above the earth in a chairlift. Despite all that, the Jura remains one of the least visited territories in France.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

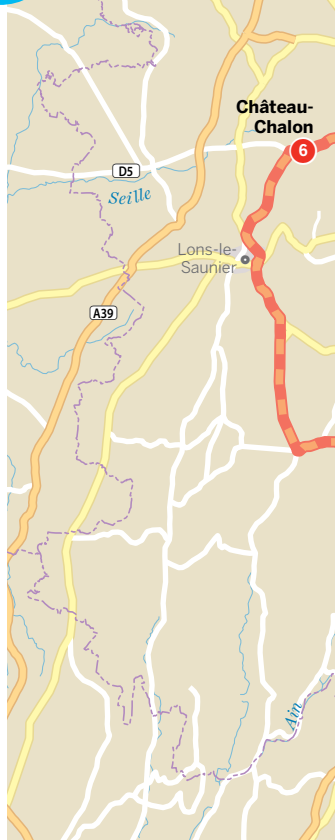
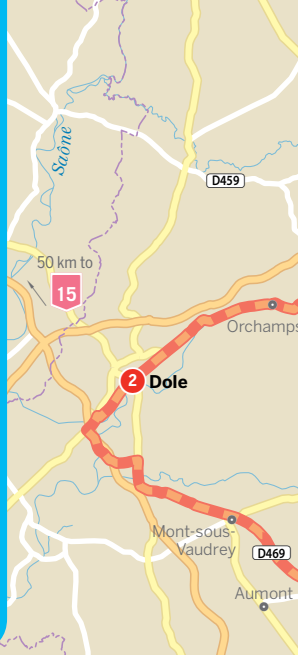
### 1 Besançon

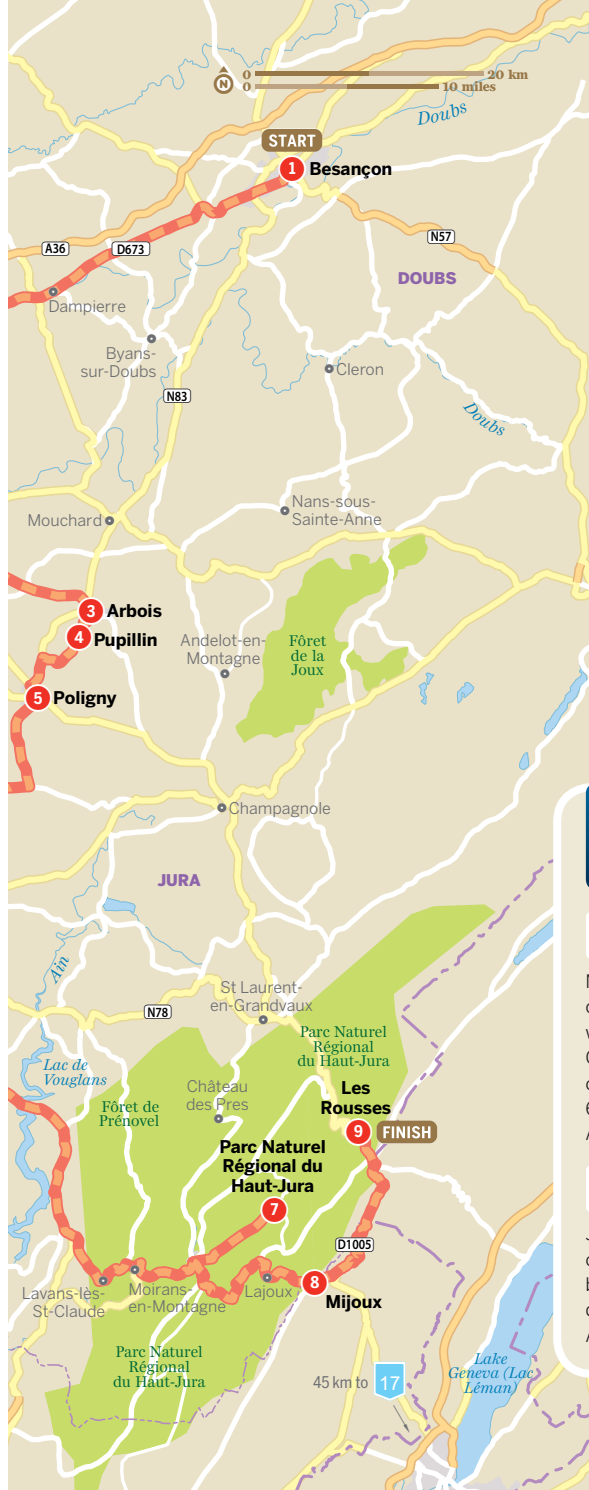
Home to a monumental Vauban citadel and France's first public museum, and birthplace of Victor Hugo and the Lumière brothers, Besançon has an extraordinary background and yet, remarkably, despite charms such as its graceful 18th-century old town and first-rate restaurants, it remains something of a secret.

The Unesco-listed **Citadelle de Besançon** ([www.citadelle.com](http://www.citadelle.com), in French; rue des Fusillés de la Résistance; adult/child €9.20/6.10; ☀9am-6pm)

is a formidable feat of engineering, designed by the prolific Vauban for Louis XIV in the late 17th century. Inside (and included in the ticket price) are a number of **museums**.

Founded in 1694, the **Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie** ([www.musee-arts-besancon.org](http://www.musee-arts-besancon.org), in French; 1 place de la Révolution; adult/child €5/free; ☀9.30am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon) is France's oldest museum. The stellar collection includes such archaeological exhibits as Egyptian mummies, neolithic tools and Gallo-Roman mosaics, and boasts a cavernous drawing cabinet with 5500 works including





Dürer, Delacroix, Rubens, Goya, Matisse and Rodin masterpieces.

 p193

**The Drive** » From Besançon you can opt for the fast A36 (51km, 45 minutes) or the marginally slower but more enjoyable D673 (46km, 55 minutes) to Dole.

## 2 Dole

Almost every town in France has at least one street, square or garden named after Louis Pasteur, the great 19th-century chemist who invented pasteurisation and developed the first rabies vaccine. In the Jura it is even more the case, since the illustrious man was a local lad: he was born in 1822 in the

## LINK YOUR TRIP

### 15 Route des Grands Crus

Need a drink before starting our Jura tour? Combine it with our Route des Grands Crus drive; its starting point of Gevrey-Chambertin is 62km from Dole along the A39.

### 17 Alpine Adventure

If the heights of the Jura appeal then you'll love our Alpine Adventure, which begins in Lyon, a 135km drive from Mijoux down the A42.

well-preserved medieval town of Dole.

A scenic stroll along the Canal des Tanneurs in Dole's historic tanner's quarter brings you to Pasteur's childhood home, **La Maison Natale de Pasteur** ([www.musee-pasteur.com](http://www.musee-pasteur.com); 43 rue Pasteur; adult/child €5/free; ☺10am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun), now an atmospheric museum housing exhibits including his cot, first drawings and university cap and gown.

**The Drive** » It's a 45-minute, 37km doddle down the D905 and D469 to Arbois.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 3 Arbois

The bucolic village of Arbois is well worth a visit. In 1827 the Pasteur

family settled here, and Louis' laboratory and workshops are on display at **La Maison de Louis Pasteur** (83 rue de Courcelles; adult/child €6/3; ☺guided tours 9.45-11.45am & 2-6pm, closed mid-Oct-Mar).

If science is a bit too dusty for you then may we tempt you with a glass of wine? Arbois sits at the heart of the Jura wine region, renowned for its *vin jaune*. The history of this nutty 'yellow wine' is told in the **Musée de la Vigne et du Vin** ([www.juramusees.fr](http://www.juramusees.fr); adult/child €3.50/2.80; ☺10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon), housed in the whimsical, turreted Château Pécauld. Afterwards clear your head by walking the 2.5km-long **Chemin**

**des Vignes** trail, which wends its way through the vines. It starts from the steps next to the Château Pécauld.

🍷 p193

**The Drive** » Clamber steeply uphill for five minutes (3km) along the D246 to reach the spectacularly situated village of Pupillin.

### 4 Pupillin

High above Arbois is tiny Pupillin, a cute yellow-brick village famous for its wine production. Some 10 *caves* (wine cellars) are open to visitors.

**The Drive** » Head southwest out of Pupillin on the N83 and in 15 minutes (9km) you'll have dropped to the small town of Poligny.

## LIQUID GOLD

Legend has it that *vin jaune* (yellow wine) was invented when a winemaker found a forgotten barrel, six years and three months after he'd initially filled it, and discovered its contents miraculously transformed into a gold-coloured wine.

A long, undisrupted fermentation process gives Jura's signature wine its unique characteristics. Savagnin grapes are harvested late and their sugar-saturated juices left to ferment for a minimum of six years and three months in oak barrels. A thin layer of yeast forms over the wine, which prevents it from oxidising, and there are no top-ups to compensate for evaporation (called *la part des anges* – 'the angels' share'). In the end, 100L of grape juice ferments down to 62L of *vin jaune* (lucky angels), which is then bottled in special 0.62L bottles called *clavelin*. *Vin jaune* is renowned for its ageing qualities, with prime vintages easily keeping for more than a century. A 1774 vintage, a cool 220 years old at the time, was sipped by an awestruck committee of experts in 1994.

**La Percée du Vin Jaune** ([www.percee-du-vin-jaune.com](http://www.percee-du-vin-jaune.com)) festival takes place annually in early February to celebrate the first tasting of the vintage produced six years and three months earlier. Villages take it in turn to hold the two-day celebrations, at which the new vintage is blessed and rated, and street tastings, cooking competitions, cellar visits and auctions keep *vin jaune* aficionados fulfilled.



Arbois View across a vineyard

## 5 Poligny

Need a little cheese to accompany all that wine? Comté is the indisputable cheese king of the Jura, and the small town of Poligny is the ‘capital’ of an industry that produces 40 million tonnes of the venerable foodstuff a year. Learn how 450L of milk is transformed into a 40kg wheel of the tangy cheese, smell some of its 83 aromas, and have a nibble at the **Maison du Comté** ([www.maison-du-comte.com](http://www.maison-du-comte.com); av de la Résistance; adult/child €4/2.50; ☎ guided tours 2pm,

3.15pm & 4.30pm, closed Nov-Mar). Dozens of *fruitières* (cheese cooperatives) are open to the public. Poligny’s **tourist office** (☎ 03 84 37 24 21; [www.ville-poligny.fr](http://www.ville-poligny.fr); place des Déportés; ☀ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Sat) stocks an abundance of info on cheesemakers and wineries in the region.

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**The Drive** ➤ Take the D68 out of town, and after about 4km veer right onto the D96. After a further 4km, make a sharp right onto the D5 and cruise through pretty countryside into Château-Chalon. It’s 15km in total.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 6 Château-Chalon

Despite a name that conjures up images of grand castles, Château-Chalon is actually a pocket-sized medieval village of honey-coloured stone perched on a hilltop and surrounded by vineyards known for their legendary *vin jaune*.

🏠 p193

**The Drive** ➤ Leave Château-Chalon in a northeasterly direction on the D5 and then double back to the D70 and the town of Lons-le-Saunier.



## HOT BOX, CHRISTMAS ICE & JESUS

It's hot, it's soft and it's packed in a box. Vacherin Mont d'Or is the only French cheese to be eaten with a spoon – hot. Made between 15 August and 15 March with *lait cru* (unpasteurised milk), it derives its unique nutty taste from the spruce bark in which it's wrapped. Connoisseurs top the soft-crust cheese with chopped onions, garlic and white wine, wrap it in aluminium foil and bake it for 45 minutes to create a *boîte chaude* (hot box). Only 11 factories in the Jura are licensed to produce Vacherin Mont d'Or.

Mouthe, 15km south of Métabief Mont d'Or, is the mother of *liqueur de sapin* (fir-tree liqueur). *Glace de sapin* (fir-tree ice cream) also comes from Mont d'Or, known as the North Pole of France due to its seasonal subzero temperatures (record low: -38°C). Sampling either is rather like ingesting a Christmas tree. Then there's *Jésus* – a small, fat version of *saucisse de Morteau* (Morteau sausage), easily identified by the wooden peg on its end, attached after the sausage is smoked with pinewood sawdust in a traditional *tuyé* (mountain hut).

From here the D52, D470 and D436 will be your route into the high-mountain bliss of the Parc Naturel Régional du Haut-Jura and the village of Lajoux. In total it's 90km and 1½ hours.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 7 Parc Naturel Régional du Haut-Jura

Experience the Jura at its rawest in the Haut-Jura Regional Park, an area of 757 sq km stretching from Chapelle-des-Bois in the north almost to the western tip of Lake Geneva.

A great place to start is the **Maison du Parc** ([www.parc-haut-jura.fr](http://www.parc-haut-jura.fr); Lajoux; adult/child €5/3; ☀10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun), a visitor centre with an interactive sensorial museum that explores the region and its history through sound, touch and smell. The Maison du Parc is in the village

of Lajoux, 19km east of St-Claude and 5km west of Mijoux on the Swiss border.

**The Drive** » From the Maison du Parc the D436 will have you switchbacking 5km down the valley into the village of Mijoux.

#### 8 Mijoux

From close to the small ski resort of Mijoux there are some fabulous panoramas of Lake Geneva embraced by the French Alps and Mont Blanc. For the best views, ride the **Telesiège Val Mijoux** (chairlift; adult/child return €7/4.50; ☀10.30am-1pm & 2.15-5.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Jul-late Aug) from Mijoux or drive to the **Col de la Faucille** (7km along the D936), high above the village.

**The Drive** » It's a 20-minute, 22km drive along the D936 and D1005 to Les Rousses through forest and pastureland.

#### 9 Les Rousses

The driving tour comes to a close in the resort of Les Rousses, on the northeastern edge of the park. This is the park's prime sports hub for winter (skiing) and summer (walking and mountain biking) alike. The resort comprises four small, predominantly cross-country ski areas: Prémanon, Lamoura, Bois d'Amont and the village Les Rousses. Find out more at the **Maison du Tourisme** (Fort des Rousses; ☀9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun), home to the **tourist office** (☎03 84 60 02 55; [www.lesrousses.com](http://www.lesrousses.com), in French) and the **ESF** (☎03 84 60 01 61; [www.esf-lesrousses.com](http://www.esf-lesrousses.com)) ski school.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Besançon 1

### **Le Saint-Pierre** Modern French €€€

(📞)03 81 81 20 99; www.restaurant-saintpierre.com, in French; 104 rue Battant; menus €38-70; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Crisp white tablecloths, exposed stone and subtle lighting are the backdrop for intense flavours, such as lobster fricassee with spinach and herb ravioli, which are expertly paired with regional wines. The three-course *menu marché* including wine and coffee is excellent value at €38.

### **Charles Quint Hôtel** Historic Hotel €€

(📞)03 81 82 05 49; www.hotel-charlesquint.com; 3 rue du Chapitre; d €89-145; 📶 🚰) This discreetly grand 18th-century town house turned nine-room boutique hotel is sublime, with period furniture, sumptuous fabrics, a garden with a tiny swimming pool and a wood-panelled dining room. Find it slumbering in the shade of the citadel, behind the cathedral.

## Arbois 3

### **La Balance** Regional Cuisine €€

(📞)03 84 37 45 00; 47 rue de Courcelles; menus €16.50-36.50; 🕒 lunch & dinner Thu-Mon, lunch Tue; 🚰) With its lunches favouring local, organic produce, La Balance Mets et Vins

provides the perfect coda to a wine-loving trip. Its signature *coq au vin jaune et aux morilles* casserole and *crème brûlée* doused in *vin jaune* are must-tastes, as are the wine menus with five glasses of either Jura wine (€17) or *vin jaune* (€25).

## Poligny 5

### **Hôtel de la Vallée Heureuse** Hotel €€

(📞)03 84 37 12 13; www.hotelvalleeheureuse.com; rte de Genève; s €95-125, d €125-150, q €175, menus €28-65; 📶 🚰) You will indeed be *heureuse* (happy) to stumble across this beautifully converted 18th-century mill, which sits in riverside parkland and affords gorgeous forest and mountain views. The country retreat has tastefully decorated rooms and a restaurant specialising in Jura cuisine.

## Château-Chalon 6

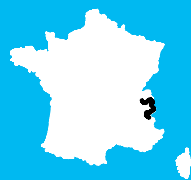
### **Le Relais des Abbesses** B&B €€

(📞)03 84 44 98 56; www.chambres-hotes-jura.com; rue de la Roche; d €75, dinner €25) At this turreted *chambre d'hôte* (B&B), Agnès and Gérard have attractively decorated the rooms with hardwood floors, romantic canopy beds and Asian antiques. They are both fine cooks and dinner is an absolute treat, whether it's in the elegant dining room or on the terrace overlooking the countryside.

*The Alps Breathtaking Mont Blanc  
views from on top of the world*



# Classic Trip

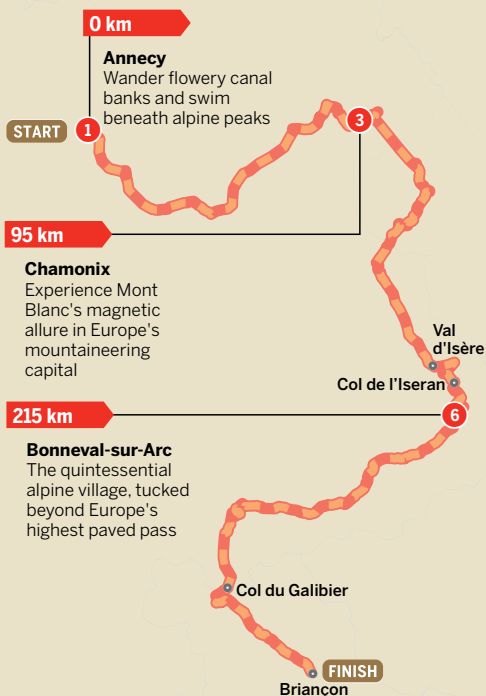


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## Alpine Adventure

*Combining take-your-breath-away grandeur with a delightful dose of French mountain culture, France's Alps provide a stunning and incomparable setting for a summer road trip.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**6 DAYS**  
 363KM / 225 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

Mid-June to mid-September – mountain passes are snow-free.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Alpine crags and colourful boats reflected in the lake at Annecy.

### BEST TWO DAYS

The section between Annecy and Chamonix: the French Alps' most classic scenery.

# Classic Trip

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## Alpine Adventure

A study in superlatives, this outdoorsy ramble through the heart of the French Alps runs from Annecy (France's prettiest lake) to Mont Blanc (western Europe's highest peak) to Col de l'Iseran (Europe's highest mountain pass) to Bonneval-sur-Arc (one of France's most beautiful villages). Along the way you'll have ample opportunities for high-adrenaline mountain adventure – hiking, mountain biking, white-water rafting, vertigo-inducing cable-car rides and crossings of the French Alps' most spectacular passes.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 1 Annecy

There's no dreamier introduction to the French Alps than Annecy. The mountains rise steep, wooded and snow-capped above startlingly turquoise Lac d'Annecy, providing a sublime setting for the medieval town's photogenic jumble of geranium-strewn houses, romantic canals and turreted rooftops.

Summer is the prime time to visit, when everyone is outdoors,

socialising at pavement cafes, swimming in the lake (among Europe's purest) and boating, walking or cycling around it. Evening street performers feature during July's **Les Noctibules** festival, and there are lakeside fireworks during August's **Fête du Lac**.

Wander through the narrow medieval streets of the **Vieille Ville** (Old Town) to find the whimsical 12th-century **Palais de l'Isle** (3 passage de l'Île; adult/child €3.50/1.50; ☀10.30am-6pm) on a





triangular islet in the Canal du Thiou. Next stroll the tree-fringed lakefront through the flowery **Jardins de l'Europe**, linked to the popular picnic spot **Champ de Mars** by the graceful **Pont des Amours** (Lovers' Bridge) and presided over by the perkily turreted **Château d'Anney** (rampe du Château; adult/child €5/2.50; ☎10.30am-6pm).

**Cycling paths** encircle the lake, passing by several pretty **beaches** en route. **Boats** (per hr €15-50) can be hired along the canal-side quays, and several companies offer **adventure sports**. For details, visit Anney's **tourist office** (☎04 50 45 00 33; [www.lac-anney.com](http://www.lac-anney.com); Centre Bonlieu; ☎9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, to 12.30pm & 1.45-6pm Sun).

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## LINK YOUR TRIP

### 16 The Jura

Discover the tamer pleasures of eastern France's 'other' mountains, three hours north of Anney.

### 18 Foothills of the Alps

Join this nature-lover's jaunt through high-country plateaus and dramatic canyons, two hours west of Briançon.

# Classic Trip

**The Drive** » This 70km drive starts with a pretty southeastern run along Annecy's lakeshore, passing through the wildlife-rich wetlands of Bout du Lac on the lake's southern tip before continuing east on the D1508, then northeast on the D1212 and D909 into St-Gervais.

## 2 St-Gervais-les-Bains

Basking in the shadow of Mont Blanc, St-Gervais-les-Bains is a postcard-perfect Savoyard village, centred on a baroque church and old-fashioned carousel.

**Panoramic hiking trails** in the Bettex, Mont d'Arbois and Mont Joly areas head off from town. Some of the best mountain-biking terrain is marked between Val d'Arly, Mont Blanc and Beaufortain.

For spirit-soaring mountain views with zero effort, board the **Tramway du Mont Blanc** (rue de la Gare; return to Bellevue/Mont Lachat €27.50/30.50; ☀9am-4.50pm), France's highest train. Since 1913 it has been labouring up to Bellevue (1800m) in winter and Mont Lachat (2113m) in summer.

Train buffs will also love the narrow-gauge **Mont-Blanc**

**Express** (www.ter-sncf.com), which trundles along a century-old rail line from St-Gervais-Le Fayet station to Martigny in Switzerland. For info, enter 'Mont-Blanc Express' into the website's 'Rechercher sur le site' pane.

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**The Drive** » The 24km route to Chamonix follows the D902, N205 and D243 into the heart of the Alps.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 3 Chamonix

An outdoors playground of epic proportions, Chamonix sits directly at the foot of western Europe's highest peak, the pearly white massif of Mont Blanc (4810m).

Climbers with the necessary skill, experience and stamina flock here for the incomparable **Mont Blanc ascent**. If you're not quite ready to scale 'the big one', consider circumnavigating it on the classic six- to 10-day **Tour du Mont Blanc**, which takes in majestic glaciers and peaks in France, Italy and Switzerland; local outfitters organise excursions including half-board in *refuges* (mountain huts), lift tickets and luggage transport. Other peak experiences include Chamonix's dozens of **day hikes** (p199), the

unforgettable cable-car ascent to **Aiguille du Midi** (p202) and the **train ride** (adult/child/family €26.40/22.30/79.20) to France's largest glacier, the glistening 200m-deep **Mer de Glace** (Sea of Ice).

Chamonix has an unparalleled menu of adrenaline sports including **rafting**, **canyoning**, **mountain biking** and **paragliding** down from the heights of Planpraz (2000m) or Aiguille du Midi (3842m). For details, visit the **tourist office** (☎04 50 53 00 24; www.chamonix.com; 85 place du Triangle de l'Amitié; ☀8.30am-7pm).

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**The Drive** » From Chamonix, take the E25 southeast 17km through the Mont Blanc Tunnel into Italy. From the Aosta/Courmayeur exit, continue 31km southwest back towards France along the SS26. Once across the border, follow the D1090 and D84 southwest, then the D902 southeast for a total of 40km into Val d'Isère.

## 4 Val d'Isère

This world-renowned, end-of-the-valley resort is home to the gargantuan Espace Killy skiing area, named after French triple Olympic gold medallist Jean-Claude Killy. Even in July, you can ski the **Pisaillas Glacier** above town, though many summer visitors also come to hike, mountain bike and enjoy off-season hotel discounts.

## HIKING CHAMONIX

Chamonix boasts 350km of spectacular high-altitude trails, many reached by cable car. In June and July there's enough light to walk until at least 9pm. Here are a few recommended walks to get you started.

» **Lac Blanc** From the top of **Les Praz l'Index Télépherique** (cable car; one-way/return €20/24) or at **La Flégère** (€12/14), the line's midway point, gentle 1¼- to two-hour trails lead to 2352m Lac Blanc, a turquoise-coloured lake ensnared by mountains. Stargazers can overnight at the **Refuge du Lac Blanc** (☎04 50 47 24 49; dm incl half-board €49; ☀mid-Jun-Sep), a wooden chalet favoured by photographers for its top-of-Europe Mont Blanc views.

» **Grand Balcon Sud** This easygoing trail skirts the western side of the valley, stays at around 2000m and commands a terrific view of Mont Blanc. Reach it on foot from behind Le Brévent's *télécabine* station.

» **Grand Balcon Nord** Routes starting from the Plan de l'Aiguille include the challenging Grand Balcon Nord, which takes you to the dazzling Mer de Glace, from where you can walk or take the Montanvers train down to Chamonix.

The trails weaving into the nearby valleys of **Parc National de la Vanoise** are a hiker's dream. For more of a challenge, play among the peaks at neighbouring La Daille's two **via ferrate** fixed-rope routes.

**Mountain biking** (VTT) is big in Val, especially since the resort hosted stages of the UCI World Cup in 2012. Five lifts offer cyclists access to 16 downhill routes, seven endurance runs and two cross-country circuits. Bike rental is available at local sport shops. **Bureau des Guides** (☎06 14 62 90 24; www.guides-montagne-valdisere.com) arranges guided hiking, mountain biking, canyoning and rock-climbing excursions.

Visit the **tourist office** (☎04 79 06 06 60; www.valdisere.com; place Jacques Moufflier; ☀8.30am-7.30pm)

for details on family-friendly activities, from donkey trekking to farm visits.

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**The Drive** » Prepare for a dizzying climb as you leave Val d'Isère, steeply switchbacking 17km up the D902 to Col de l'Iseran.

### 5 Col de l'Iseran

No doubt about it, you're really far above sea level here! Indeed, the D902 over Col de l'Iseran

(2770m) is the highest paved through road in Europe. Meteorological conditions at the summit are notoriously fickle – witness the Tour de France stage that was supposed to pass through here on 8 July 1996 but had to be rerouted due to snow and -5°C temperatures!

**The Drive** » Spellbinding views unfold as you navigate the D902's hairpin turns 14km downhill into Bonneval-sur-Arc.



### TOP TIP: WINTER DRIVING

Parts of this route (notably the northern stretches around Annecy and Chamonix) are accessible to drivers in winter, but the high mountain passes further south are strictly off-limits outside summer. See p422 for further notes on driving in the French mountains.



# Classic Trip



## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

**6 Bonneval-sur-Arc**

Heralded as one of the *plus beaux villages de la France* (prettiest villages in France), this high mountain hamlet is filled with stone and slate cottages that wear their winter preparations proudly (notice all the woodpiles up on 2nd-floor porches).

Bonneval makes a tranquil base for exploring the 530-sq-km **Parc National de la Vanoise** ([www.parcnational-vanoise.fr](http://www.parcnational-vanoise.fr)), whose rugged snowcapped peaks, mirror-like lakes and vast glaciers dominate the landscape between the Tarentaise and Maurienne Valleys.

This incredible swath of wilderness was designated France's first national park in 1963, protecting habitat for marmots, chamois and France's largest colony of ibexes, along with 20 pairs of golden eagles and the odd bearded vulture.

The park is a hiker's heaven between June and September. The **Grand Tour de Haute Maurienne** ([www.hautemaaurienne.com](http://www.hautemaaurienne.com)), a seven-day hike around the upper reaches of the valley, takes in national-park highlights. For information on local day hikes, visit Bonneval-sur-Arc's **tourist office** (☎04 79 05 95 95; [www.bonneval-sur-arc.com](http://www.bonneval-sur-arc.com); ☀9am-noon & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat).

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**The Drive** » Cruise 55km down the Arc River valley on the D902 through Lanslebourg and Modane to St-Michel de Maurienne, then climb 35km through the ski resort of Valloire to the ethereal heights of Col du Galibier.

**7 Col du Galibier**

The signposts say you're simply crossing the departmental border from Savoie into the Hautes Alpes. The landscape says that you've entered another universe. Col du Galibier (2642m) is a staggeringly beautiful Alpine pass, whose forbidding remoteness may make you feel like the last living person on earth. To the west lies the Parc National des Écrins, a 918-sq-km expanse of high

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

ERIC FAVRET,  
MOUNTAIN GUIDE,  
COMPAGNIE DES  
GUIDES DE CHAMONIX

The best-ever Mont Blanc view? No hesitation: the Traverse from Col des Montets to Lac Blanc. I love swimming in mountain lakes, so I like to stop at Lac des Chéserys, just below, where it's quieter: what's better than a swim in pure mountain water, looking at Mont Blanc, the Grandes Jorasses and Aiguille Verte? This is what I call mountain landscape perfection!

Left: Canal du Thiou and château, Annecy  
Right: Val d'Isère ski resort



NEIL EMERSON/ROBERT HANNO/GETTY IMAGES ©

## Classic Trip

mountain wilderness. Stop and savour the top-of-the-world feeling before returning to the squiggling ribbon of roadway below.

**The Drive** » Despite the distance on the signpost (35km), the incredibly twisty and scenic descent into Briançon on the D902 and D1091 feels longer; stupendous views will stop you in your tracks every couple of minutes. Enjoy every horn-tooting, head-spinning, glacier-gawping moment, with views of thundering falls, sheer cliffs and jagged peaks razoring above thick larch forests.

### 8 Briançon

Perched astride a high rocky outcrop, the

fairy-tale walled city of Briançon affords views of the snowcapped Écrins peaks from almost every corner. The centre's Italian ambience is no coincidence; Italy is just 20km away.

Briançon's old town is a late-medieval time capsule, its winding cobbled lanes punctuated by shuttered, candy-coloured town houses and shops selling whistling marmots. The steep main street, **Grande Gargouille**, links two town gates, **Porte de Pignerol** and **Porte d'Embrun**. Crowning the old city is the massive **Fort du Château**. Daily **guided walks** are run by **Service du Patrimoine** (☎04 92 20 29 49; Porte de Pignerol; adult/child €7/5.50; ☀2-5.30pm Mon, 9am-noon & 2-5.30pm Tue-Fri).

Briançon's biggest drawcard is its Unesco-

listed ensemble of 17th- and early-18th-century structures designed by pioneering French military architect Vauban, including the old town's signature **star-shaped fortifications**, the coral-pink **Collégiale Notre Dame et St Nicolas**, several nearby **forts** and the **Pont d'Asfeld** bridge.

There are outstanding **hiking** opportunities in the mountains of nearby **Parc National des Écrins** ([www.ecrins-parcnational.fr](http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr)). Pick up maps and info at the **Maison du Parc** (☎04 92 21 08 49; place du Médecin-Général Blanchard; ☀2-6pm Mon-Fri). For guided treks, glacier traverses, mountain biking, rafting, kayaking, canyoning and *via ferrate*, check with **Bureau des Guides et Accompagnateurs** (☎04 92 20 15 73; [www.guides-briancon.fr](http://www.guides-briancon.fr)).

## AIGUILLE DU MIDI

A jagged needle of rock rearing above glaciers, snowfields and rocky crags, 8km from the hump of Mont Blanc, the Aiguille du Midi (3842m) is one of Chamonix's most distinctive landmarks. If you can handle the height, don't miss taking a trip up here; the 360-degree views of the French, Swiss and Italian Alps are breathtaking.

All year round the vertiginous **Téléphérique de l'Aiguille du Midi** (place de l'Aiguille du Midi; adult/child return to Aiguille du Midi €45.60/38.50, Plan de l'Aiguille €26.40/22.30; ☀8.30am-4.30pm), one of the world's highest cable cars, climbs to the summit. Halfway up, Plan de l'Aiguille (2317m) is a terrific place to start hikes or paraglide. In summer you'll need to obtain a boarding card (marked with the number of your departing *and* returning cable car) in addition to a ticket. Bring warm clothes; even in summer the temperature rarely rises above -10°C up top!

From the Aiguille du Midi, between late June and early September you can continue for a further 30 minutes of mind-blowing scenery – think suspended glaciers, spurs, seracs and shimmering ice fields – in the smaller bubbles of the **Télécabine Panoramique Mont Blanc** (adult/child return from Chamonix €70/59.20; ☀8.30am-3.30pm) to Pointe Helbronner (3466m) on the Franco-Italian border.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Annecy 1

### L'Esquisse Regional Cuisine €€

(📞04 50 44 80 59; www.esquisse-annecy.fr; 21 rue Royale; menus lunch €19-22, dinner €29-60; 🕒lunch & dinner Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) Book ahead at this intimate six-table bistro, whose owners' passion shines through in the service, wine list and menus singing with integral flavours, from wild mushrooms to spider crab.

### Hotel Splendid Boutique Hotel €€

(📞04 50 45 20 00; www.hotel-annecy-lac.fr; 4 quai Eustache Chappuis; s/d €109/121; 📶🚶♿) 'Splendid' sums up the lakefront position of this friendly, family-oriented hotel, with breezy views from its boutique-chic, parquet-floored rooms.

## St-Gervais-les-Bains 2

### Les Dômes de Miage Campground €

(📞04 50 93 45 96; www.camping-mont-blanc.com; 197 rte des Contamines; campsites €23-28.50; 🕒May-mid-Sep; 📶) Mont Blanc is your wake-up call at this beautifully set, well-equipped campground with on-site restaurant and playground.

## Chamonix 3

### Les Vieilles Luges Traditional French €€

(📞06 84 42 37 00; www.lesvieillesluges.com; Les Houches; menus €20-35; 🕒lunch & dinner daily) At this dreamy 250-year-old farmhouse, reached via a scenic 20-minute hike from Maison Neuve chairlift, Julie and Claude spoil you with their home-cooked *boeuf bourguignon* and creamy *farçon* (prepared with potatoes, prunes and bacon). Magic!

### Auberge du Manoir Hotel €€

(📞04 50 53 10 77; aubergedumanoir.com, in French; 8 rte du Bouchet; s €109-122, d €126-176, q €178; 📶♿) Ablaze with geraniums in summer, this beautifully converted farmhouse has it all: pristine mountain views, quaint but never cloying pine-panelled rooms, an outdoor hot tub and a bar. Tasty breakfasts feature fruit, homemade yoghurt, cakes and tarts.

## Val d'Isère 4

### L'Étable d'Alain Savoyard €€

(📞04 79 06 13 02; www.fermedeladroit.com, in French; mains €22-29; 📶♿) Feast on deliciously gooey *fondues* and *raclette* (an Alpine speciality consisting of boiled potatoes and melted cheese) at this attractively converted stable, watched by cud-chewing cows in the family dairy barn next door.

### Chalet Hôtel Sorbiers Hotel €€

(📞04 79 06 23 77; www.hotelsorbiers-valdisere.com; Val Village; s/d/tr/q summer €75/104/141/152; 📶♿) This cosy, chalet-style hotel has a sunny garden and well-kept rooms with wood trappings, balconies and Jacuzzi bathtubs. Ample breakfasts include fresh pastries, eggs and bacon.

## Bonneval-sur-Arc 6

### Auberge d'Oul B&B €

(📞04 79 05 87 99; www.auberge-oul.com; dm/d/q incl breakfast €25/58/104, incl half-board €36/80/148) Smack on the village square, this flowery-balconied, slate-walled *gîte* (self-catering cottage) has one seven-person dorm and three rustic but spotless rooms; add a few euros for home-cooked mountain meals.



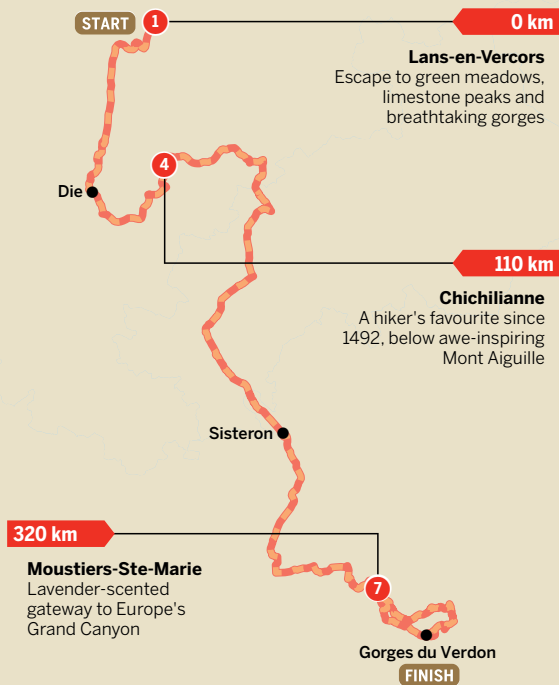
*Gorges du Verdon Paddle the  
magnificent emerald waters*



# Foothills of the Alps

*This exhilarating outdoor adventure links two gorgeous, wild landscapes – the high green meadows and peaks of the Vercors, and the rugged canyon country of the Alpes de Haute Provence.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**6 DAYS**  
475KM / 295 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

June and September, for good weather without peak summer crowds.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The dizzying view of the Gorges du Verdon from Belvédère de l'Escale.

### BEST FAMILY HIKE

The high-country loop from La Molière, near Lans-en-Vercors.

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## Foothills of the Alps

In the transition zone between the Alps and Provence lie some of France's most magnificent and least explored landscapes. Extending from the Vercors plateau to the Verdon River, this trip starts in poppy-strewn pastures where cowbells jingle beneath limestone peaks and ends among the lavender fields and arid gorges of Haute Provence. Along the way, there's plenty of outdoorsy excitement for the entire family.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 1 Lans-en-Vercors

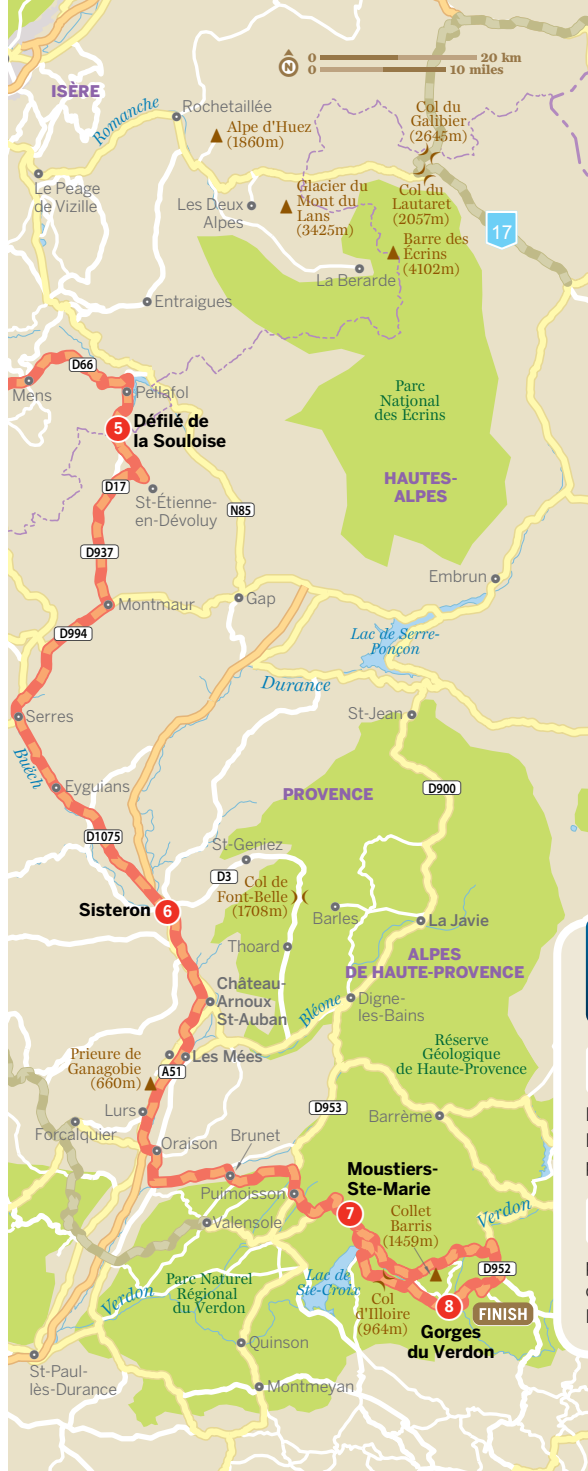
Pristine Lans-en-Vercors (elevation 1020m) is idyllically set among the gently rolling pastures, plateaus and chiselled limestone peaks of the 1750-sq-km **Parc Naturel Régional du Vercors**, 28km southwest of Grenoble. With stunning vistas and wildlife including marmots and chamois, the park draws families seeking low-key outdoor adventure. Hikers of any age will enjoy the easy, supremely scenic 7km high-country loop from **La Molière** to **Pas de Bellecombe**, with its built-in lunch

stop at Gîte d'Alpage de la Molière (p211). To reach the trailhead, go 20km north of Lans-en-Vercors via Autrans, following the D106 and a partly unpaved forest road. Alternatively, **Accompagnateurs Nature et Patrimoine** (☎04 76 95 08 38; www.accompagnateur-vercors.com) offers **guided walks** (full day adult/child €26/19) throughout the Vercors.

🍴🏠 p211

**The Drive »** Follow the D531 southwest from Lans-en-Vercors, descending to enter the magnificent Gorges de la Bourne after about 10km.





## 2 Gorges de la Bourne

Cliff walls up to 600m high crowd in around the main road in this magical stretch of gorges cut by a rushing river coming off the Vercors plateau. Watch for narrow turnouts alongside the roadway where you can pull off and admire the views.

**The Drive** » Near the end of the gorges, bear left on the D103 and proceed 20km south through the pretty mountain villages of St-Julien-en-Vercors and St-Martin-en-Vercors. At St-Agnan-en-Vercors continue 5km south on the D518 to the Grotte de la Luire.

## 3 Grotte de la Luire

The Vercors was a hotbed of the French Resistance in WWII. This **cave** (adult/child €7/4.50; ☉10am-6pm Jul-Sep, tours 11am, 2pm & 3.30pm Wed, Sat



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

## 17 Alpine Adventure

Head northeast from Lans-en-Vercors to explore France's most awe-inspiring peaks.

## 22 Lavender Route

Wander the purple-fringed back roads of Provence, west of Moustiers-St-Marie.



& Sun May, Jun & Oct) outside the town of St-Agnan-en-Vercors served as a field hospital for Resistance fighters for five days in July 1944 before German troops raided it, killing many patients on site and taking the rest to Grenoble to be shot or deported. Memorial plaques mark the site, and lantern-lit tours are offered in summer.

**The Drive** » The D518 travels 30km south to Die, culminating in a switchbacking descent from Col de Rousset. The D93 and D539 continue southeast 14km through sun-drenched farmland to Châtillon-en-Diois, a good lunch stop (p211). The final 31km stretch along the D120 and D7 snakes over Col de Menée (1457m) to Chichilianne, affording spellbinding views of Mont Aiguille en route.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 4 Chichilianne

Its lovely hayfields strewn with red poppies in late spring, Chichilianne has deep roots in mountaineering history, dating back to 1492 when Antoine Deville scaled massive cube-shaped Mont Aiguille by order of King Charles VIII (accompanied by stonemasons and master carpenters who helped build ladders and attach ropes!). Long nicknamed the ‘inaccessible mountain’, and celebrated by writers such as Rabelais, Mont Aiguille continues to

capture the imagination of all who venture near.

Superb high-country hikes around Chichilianne include the **Sentier des Charenches** up Mont Aiguille’s southern flanks, and the six-hour loop to the Vercors plateau via **Pas de l’Essaure** and **Pas de l’Aiguille** (look for the monument to Resistance fighters who battled the Nazis at these high altitudes). Lower-elevation walks in surrounding valleys include the family-oriented 5km loop, **Sentier des Artisans de la Terre**. For trail guides and maps, visit the **Maison du Mont Aiguille** (☎04 76 34 44 95; www.maisondumontaiguille.fr).

🚶 p211

**The Drive** » Follow the D7 and D526 east 17km to Mens, then cruise another 19km east on the D66 through hayfields backed by the Dévoluy massif’s sawtooth ridgeline. Wind 8km south on the D66A and D537, descending to the Souloise River. Just before the bridge, turn left onto the D217, following signs for ‘Sources des Gillardes’ and parking at the trailhead.

### 5 Défilé de la Souloise

Forming the border between the *départements* of Isère and Hautes Alpes, the sheer-faced **Souloise Gorge** is an idyllic spot to get out and stretch your legs. From the parking

area, an easy there-and-back hike (200m each way) leads to the **Sources des Gillardes**, France’s second-largest natural spring. Alternatively, continue downriver on the delightful **Canyon de l’Infernet** trail, through fragrant evergreen forest sandwiched between grey and orange rock walls. About 1km along, cross a bridge and loop back up the opposite bank to the parking area.

**The Drive** » Follow the D537 and D937 south through tiny St-Disdier, enjoying stunning views of the Massif de Dévoluy’s austere rocky face, punctuated by the pencil-shaped spire of the

QUIZOU FRANK/ANEMIST/GETTY IMAGES ©





**Chichilienne** The village backed by mountains

11th-century Mère Église. Zigzag south along the D117 (5km southeast), D17 (7km southwest) and D937 (16km south over Col de Festre). From here, follow the D994, D1075 and D4075 south 54km into Sisteron.

## 6 Sisteron

Perched on a promontory high above the Durance River, Sisteron's stunner is its **citadel** ([www.citadellesisteron.fr](http://www.citadellesisteron.fr); adult/child €6.10/2.70; ☀9am-6pm Apr-mid-Nov). For centuries this imposing fortress guarded the strategic narrow passage between Dauphiné and Provence – though Napoléon did somehow sneak past here

with 1200 soldiers after escaping Elba in 1815! Today it still commands bird's-eye perspectives of Sisteron's medieval streets, the eye-catching stratified rock face

**Rocher de Baume** and the Durance Valley beyond. Architectural highlights include a 13th-century *chemin de ronde* (parapet walk) and a powder magazine designed by French military architect Vauban. On summer evenings the hilltop comes alive with open-air dance and classical-music concerts during the **Festival des Nuits**

**de la Citadelle** ([www.nuitsdelacitadelle.fr](http://www.nuitsdelacitadelle.fr)).

🚗 p211

**The Drive** » Zip 39km down the A51 to Oraison. Take the D4 (5km), D907 (10km) and D108 (4km) southeast, climbing through Brunet to the Valensole plateau. Cruise 7km east through lavender fields on the D8, take the D953 (4km) into Puimoisson (passing roadside lavender stand Maison du Lavandin), and wind 14km into Moustiers-Ste-Marie along the D56 and D952.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 7 Moustiers-Ste-Marie

Nicknamed Etoile de Provence (Star of

## DRIVING THE GORGES DU VERDON

This spine-tingling drive is one of France's classic road trips. A complete circuit of the Gorges from Moustiers-Ste-Marie involves 140km (about four hours without stops) of relentless hairpin turns on precarious rim-side roads, with spectacular scenery around every bend. The only village en route is La Palud-sur-Verdon (930m). In summer, expect slow traffic; opportunities to pass are rare.

From Moustiers, aim first for the **Route des Crêtes** (D952 & D23; ☺ closed 15 Nov–15 Mar), a 23km-long loop with 14 lookouts along the northern rim – ensure you drive the loop clockwise: there's a one-way portion midway. En route, the most thrilling view is from **Belvédère de l'Escale**, an excellent place to spot vultures. After rejoining the D952, the road corkscrews eastward, past **Point Sublime**, which overlooks serrated rock formations dropping to the river.

Return toward Moustiers via the **Corniche Sublime** (D955 to D90, D71 and D19), a heart-palpitating route along the southern rim, passing landmarks including the **Balcons de la Mescla** (Mescla Terraces) and **Pont de l'Artuby**, Europe's highest bridge.

Provence), enchanting Moustiers-Ste-Marie straddles the base of towering limestone cliffs – the beginning of the Alps and the end of Haute-Provence's rolling prairies. Winding streets climb among tile-roofed houses, connected by arched stone bridges spanning the picturesque creek (Le Riou) that courses through the village centre.

A 227m-long chain bearing a shining gold star stretches high above the village, legendarily placed there by the Knight of Blacas upon his safe return from the Crusades. Below the star, the 14th-century **Chapelle Notre Dame de Beauvoir** (guided tours adult/child €3/free) clings to the cliff ledge like an eagle's nest. A steep trail climbs beside a waterfall to the chapel, passing 14

stations of the cross. On 8 September, a 5am Mass celebrates the Virgin Mary's nativity, followed by flutes, drums and breakfast on the square.

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**The Drive** » The trip to Gorges du Verdon is a classic; see the boxed text above.

### 8 Gorges du Verdon

Dubbed the Grand Canyon of Europe, the breathtaking **Gorges du Verdon** slice 25km through Haute-Provence's limestone plateau. The narrow canyon bottom, carved by the Verdon's emerald-green waters, is only 8m to 90m wide; its steep, multihued walls, home to griffon vultures, rise as high as 700m – twice as tall as the Eiffel Tower! One of France's most scenic drives takes in

staggering panoramas from the vertigo-inducing cliffside roads on either side (see the boxed text).

The canyon floors are only accessible by foot or raft. Dozens of blazed trails traverse untamed countryside between Castellane and Moustiers, including the classic **Sentier Martel**, which uses occasional ladders and tunnels to navigate 14km of riverbanks and ledges. For details on 28 walks, pick up the excellent English-language *Canyon du Verdon* (€4.70) at Moustiers' **tourist office** (☎ 04 92 74 67 84; www.moustiers.fr; ☺ daily, hours vary). Rafting operators include **Guides pour l'Aventure** (www.guidesaventure.com) and **Aboard Rafting** (www.rafting-verdon.com).

# Eating & Sleeping

## Lans-en-Vercors 1

### Gîte d'Alpage de la Molière

Regional Cuisine €€

(📞06 09 38 42 42; gitedelamoliere.aufilduvercors.org; menus €15-28; ☀️lunch daily Jun-Sep) High above Lans-en-Vercors, this welcoming trailside refuge with incomparable views serves simple mountain fare (savoury vegetable tarts, salad with smoked trout, and raspberry, blueberry and walnut pies) on umbrella-shaded picnic tables astride an Alpine meadow.

### À la Crécia

Farmstay €

(📞04 76 95 46 98; www.gite-en-vercors.com; in French; 436 Chemin des Cléments; s/d/tr/q €58/63/78/93, dinner €19) Goats, pigs and poultry rule the roost at this renovated 16th-century, solar-powered farm. Rooms are stylishly rustic with beams, earthy hues and mosaic bathrooms. Dinner is a feast of farm-fresh produce.

## Châtillon-en-Diois

### Restaurant du Dauphiné

Regional Cuisine €€

(📞04 75 21 13 13; place Pierre Dévoluy; menus €15-25; ☀️lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Bright Provençal sunlight, purple shutters and a flowery, tree-shaded front terrace make this roadside eatery a delightful lunch stop. The food is equally divine – from leg of local lamb to savoury Moroccan stew to fish simmered with citrus, star anise and fresh herbs.

## Chichilianne 4

### Au Gai Soleil de Mont-Aiguille

Hotel €

(📞04 76 34 41 71; www.hotelgaisoleil.com; r €45-67; 📶) At the foot of charismatic Mont Aiguille, this simple inn has fabulous views,

superb access to local hiking routes, a rustic country restaurant and a spa and Jacuzzi for soaking weary muscles at trail's end.

## Sisteron 6

### Le Mas St-Joseph

B&B €

(📞04 92 62 47 54; www.lemassaintjoseph.com; Châteauneuf-Val-St-Donat; s/d/tr/q €58/64/83/102; ☀️Apr-Oct; 📶) This converted farmhouse with hot tub and shared kitchen sits on a pastoral hillside, 14km southwest of Sisteron along the D951. Wooden beams and stone walls make the whitewashed rooms feel extra special. *Tables d'hôte* (set menus at a fixed price) including wine cost €22.

## Moustiers-Ste-Marie 7

### La Ferme Ste-Cécile

Gastronomic €€

(📞04 92 74 64 18; www.ferme-ste-cecile.com; D952; menus €28-38; ☀️lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Tue-Sun) The delicious culinary surprises served on the terrace of this authentic *ferme auberge* (farm restaurant) may include the thinnest slice of Roquefort and pear warmed in filo pastry, or foie gras wrapped in sweet quince. This is a meal for connoisseurs, from a chef who expects you to linger.

### La Treille Muscate

Provençal €€

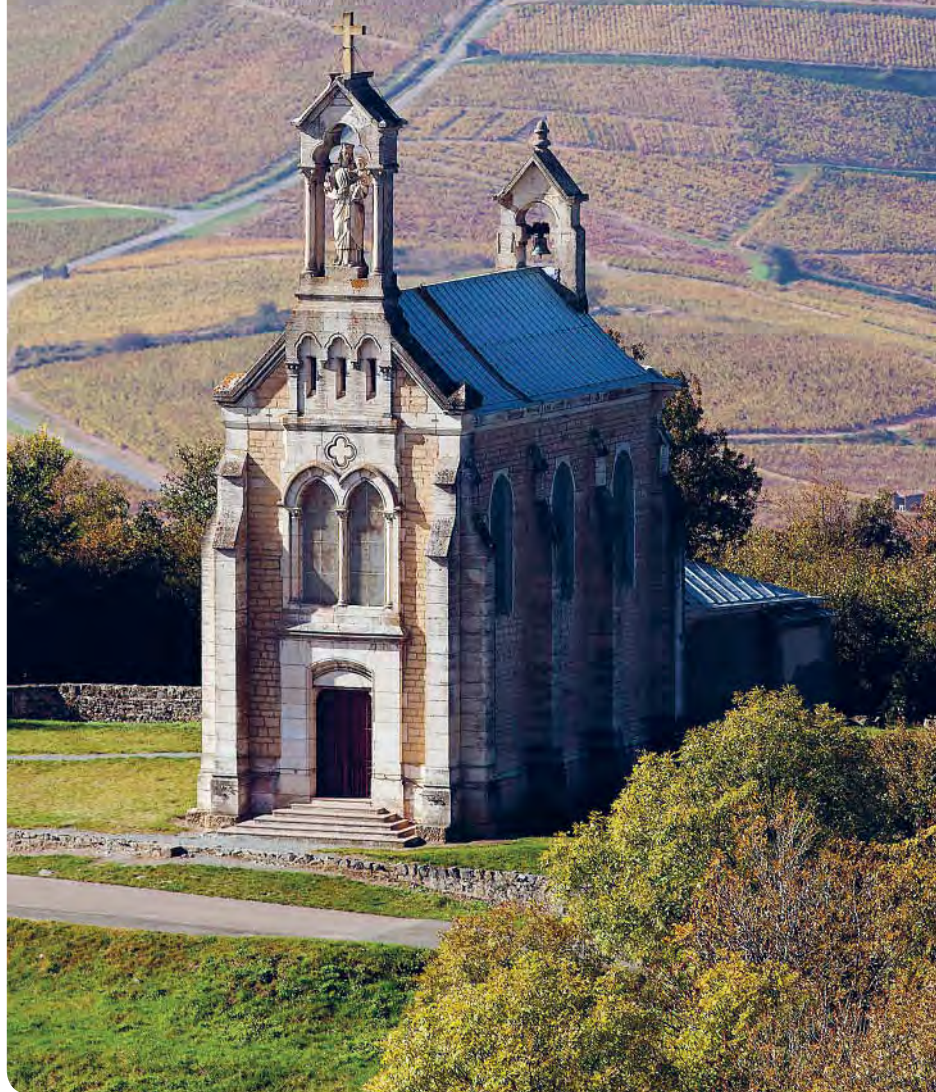
(📞04 92 74 64 31; www.la-treille-muscate.com; place de l'Église; lunch/dinner menus from €20/29; ☀️lunch Fri-Tue, dinner Fri-Wed) This mid-village terrace restaurant offers exceptional Provençal cooking with a fabulous view.

### Le Petit Ségriès

Farmstay €

(📞04 92 74 68 83; www.gite-segries.fr; r incl breakfast €69-79; 📶📶📶) Sylvie and Noël offer five colourful, airy rooms in their rambling country farmhouse outside Moustiers. Family-style *tables d'hôte* featuring fresh lamb, rabbit and mountain honey (€21, including wine) are served at a massive chestnut table.

*Mont Brouilly A petite hilltop chapel sits atop vast vineyards*

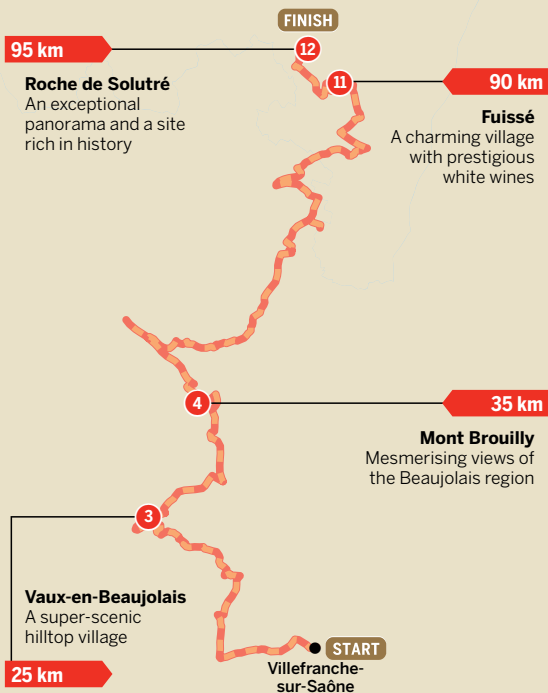




# Beaujolais Villages

*With its lush green hills, cute villages and well-tended vineyards, Beaujolais is a landscape painting come to life. Explore its quaint localities, taste some excellent wines and enjoy the hush.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**2 DAYS**  
**95KM / 59 MILES**

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

April to June,  
 September and  
 October for a  
 patchwork of colours.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Enjoy a panorama over the entire region from Mont Brouilly.

### BEST FOR FOODIES

Vaux-en-Beaujolais prides itself on its Michelin-starred restaurant.

## 19

## Beaujolais Villages

Ah, Beaujolais, where the unhurried life is complemented by rolling vineyards, beguiling villages, old churches, splendid estates and country roads that twist into the hills. Once you've left Villefranche-sur-Saône, a rural paradise awaits and a sense of escapism becomes tangible. Be sure to factor in plenty of time for wine tasting.

### 1 Villefranche-sur-Saône

Your trip begins with a stroll along lively Rue Nationale, where you'll find most of the shops and the Gothic **Collégiale Notre-Dame des Marais**, which boasts an elegant façade and a soaring spire. An excellent starting point for oenophiles, the **tourist office** (☎04 74 07 27 40; www.villefranche-beaujolais.fr; 96 rue de la Sous-Préfecture; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) houses the **Espace des Vins du Beaujolais**, where you'll have the chance to learn about and sample the Beaujolais' 12 AOCs

(Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée).

**The Drive** » At a roundabout about 800m south of the Collégiale, look out for the brown sign to 'Route des Vins du Beaujolais'. Pass through Gleizé, Lacenas, Denicé, St-Julien and Blacé before reaching Salles-Arbussonnas en Beaujolais. Count on a good half-hour to cover the 16km trip.

### 2 Salles-Arbussonnas en Beaujolais

As you pass through Salles-Arbussonnas, keep an eye out for the superb **priory** (adult/child €4.50/free; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Apr-Oct) and the adjoining **cloister**, which date from the 12th century.

5 Beaujeu

Mont Brouilly 4

RHÔNE

Vaux-en-Beaujolais

Salles-Arbussonnas en Beaujolais



**The Drive** » Continue along the D35 to Vaux-en-Beaujolais (6.5km).

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 3 Vaux-en-Beaujolais

The village of Vaux-en-Beaujolais emerges like a hamlet in a fairy tale. You can't but be dazzled by the fabulous backdrop – it's perched on a rocky spur ensnared by a sea of vineyards. Don't leave Vaux without enjoying the fruity aroma of Beaujolais-Villages (the local appellation) at **La Cave de Clochemerle** (☎04 74 03 26 58; [www.cavedeclochemerle.com](http://www.cavedeclochemerle.com); ⌚10am-12.30pm & 3-8pm), housed in atmospheric cellars.

🍷 🏠 p219



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

### 15 Route des Grands Crus

For more wine tasting and rolling vineyards, make a beeline for the Route des Grands Crus, which unfolds south of Dijon. Head to Mâcon and follow signs to Dijon.

### 20 Rhône Valley

For a change of scene, head to Lyon (via Mâcon) and discover the hidden gems of the Rhône Valley.



**The Drive** » Take the D133 to Le Perréon, then follow signs to St Étienne des Oullières and Odenas. In Odenas, follow signs to Mont Brouilly (13km from Vaux-en-Beaujolais).

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 4 Mont Brouilly

It would be a crime to explore the Beaujolais and not take the scenic road that leads to Mont Brouilly (485m), crowned with a small chapel. Hold on to your hat and lift your jaw off the floor as you approach the lookout at the summit – the view over the entire Beaujolais region and the Saône valley will be etched in your memory forever.

**The Drive** » Drive down to St-Lager, then take the D68 to Cercié and continue along the D337 to Beaujeu (9km from Mont Brouilly).

### 5 Beaujeu

The historic Beaujolais wine capital, Beaujeu is an enchanting spot

to while away a few hours. The **Caveau des Beaujolais-Villages** (☎04 74 04 81 18; place de l'Hôtel de Ville; ☀10.30am-1pm & 3.30-8pm daily May-Sep, closed Mon Oct-Apr), located in the basement of the tourist office, is a great place to sip some excellent Beaujolais-Villages and Brouilly. It's also worth popping your head into the rewarding **Les Sources du Beaujolais** (☎04 74 69 20 56; place de l'Hôtel de Ville; museum adult/child €6/3; ☀10am-7pm Jul & Aug, to noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Mar-Jun & Sep-Dec), across the square from the tourist office. Housed in a wonderful Renaissance building, this produce shop hosts a small museum that focuses on traditional Beaujolais life and customs.

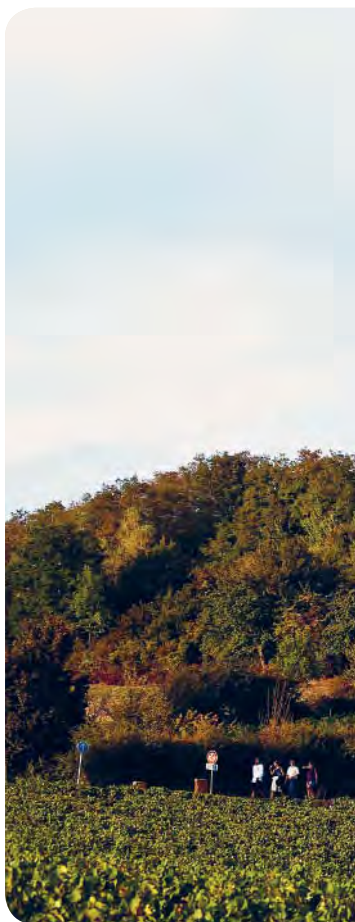
**The Drive** » Head to Lantignié along the D78 and continue to Régnié-Durette, where you'll see signs to Villié-Morgon. The full drive covers just over 9km.

## WHEN BEAUJEU GOES WILD

A colourful time to motor in Beaujeu is around the third week in November. At the stroke of midnight on the third Thursday (ie Wednesday night), the *libération* (release) or *mise en perce* (tapping; opening) of the first bottles of cherry-bright Beaujolais Nouveau is celebrated around France and the world. In Beaujeu there's free Beaujolais Nouveau for all as part of the **Sarmentelles de Beaujeu** – a giant street party that kicks off on the Wednesday leading up to the Beaujolais Nouveau's release for five days of wine tasting, live music and dancing.

### 6 Villié-Morgon

Morgon wine, anybody? Expand your knowledge of the local appellation with a tasting session at the vaulted **Caveau de Morgon** (☎04 74 04 20 99; Château de Fontcrenne; ☀10am-noon & 2-6pm Mar-Dec), which occupies a grandiose 17th-century château in the heart of





**Roche de Solutré** Rocky outcrop above vineyards

town – it can't get more atmospheric than that.

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**The Drive** » From Villié-Morgon, it's a relaxed 10km drive to Fleurie via Chiroubles. Follow the D18 and the D86 to Chiroubles, then signs to Fleurie.

## **7** Fleurie

Beaujolais' rising star, Fleurie red wines are

said to be sensuous, offering a combination of floral and fruity notes. A superb experience,

**Château du Bourg** (☎04 74 69 81 15, 06 08 86 49 02;

[www.chateau-du-bourg.com](http://www.chateau-du-bourg.com); Le Bourg: ☎by reservation), run by the Matray brothers (ask for Denis, who speaks passable English), offers free tastings in a cool bistro-like setting and can arrange vineyard

tours and cellar visits on request (€12). Tip: Grille-Midi, its signature vintage, is unforgettable.

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**The Drive** » Take the D68 towards Chénas; after about 3km turn right onto the D68E towards Romanèche Thorins and you'll soon reach Moulin à Vent. It's a 4km drive from Fleurie.

## 8 Moulin à Vent

Reason itself to visit this drowsy hamlet is the heritage-listed **Moulin à Vent** (Windmill).

Dubbed the 'King of Beaujolais', the Moulin à Vent appellation is a particularly charming wine to sample in situ: its **Caveau du Moulin à Vent** (☎03 85 35 58 09; ☀10am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Thu-Mon Sep-Jun), across the road from the windmill, provides a prime wine-tasting opportunity.

**The Drive** » From Moulin à Vent retrace your route back towards Chénas and take the D68 to Juliéas. It's an easy 6.6km drive.

## 9 Juliéas

One of the best-kept secrets in Beaujolais is this delightful village famed for its eponymous vintage. A beauty of a castle, the 16th-century **Château de Juliéas** (☎06 85 76 95 41; www.chateaudejulienas.com; ☀by reservation) occupies a delightful estate; tours can be arranged by phoning ahead. No doubt you'll be struck by the cellars, the longest in the region. Tours can be followed by an *aperi'vin* (tasting and snacks; €16). Another atmospheric venture set in a château, **La Cave des Producteurs** (☎04 74 04

41 66; www.cave-de-julienas.fr; ☀by reservation) is a large cooperative which can organise vineyard tours and cellar visits.

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**The Drive** » Follow the road to St-Amour Bellevue along the D17E and the D486ter (3.5km from Juliéas).

## 10 St-Amour Bellevue

Not to be missed in St-Amour: the **Domaine des Vignes du Paradis – Pascal Durand** (☎03 85 36 52 97; Le Bourg; www.saint-amour-en-paradis.com; ☀10am-6pm).

This award-winning domaine run by the fifth generation of vintners welcomes visitors to its intimate cellars and sells St-Amour wines at unbeatable prices.

 p219

**The Drive** » Follow the D186 towards Chânes. In Bourgneuf, take the D31 to St-Vérand. From St-Vérand, follow signs to Chaintré and continue to Fuissé. It's a 10km trip from St-Amour.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 11 Fuissé

If you like peace, quiet and sigh-inducing views, you'll love this absolutely picturesque stone town nestled in a small valley carpeted by manicured vineyards. You've now left Beaujolais – Fuissé is part of Burgundy. It's famous for its prestigious

whites of the Pouilly-Fuissé appellation. You can attend tastings at various cellars around town or, for the ultimate experience, at the magnificent **Château de Fuissé** (☎03 85 35 61 44; www.chateau-fuisse.fr; Le Plan; ☀10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Oct-Mar).

**The Drive** » From Fuissé follow signs to Chasselas along the D172. After about 3.5km, turn right onto the D31 (direction Tramayes). Drive another 2km to a right-hand turn onto the D54 (direction Solutré-Pouilly). Count on 15 minutes for the 7km trip.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 12 Roche de Solutré

A lovely 20-minute walk along the Sentier des Roches will get you to the top of the rocky outcrop known as the Roche de Solutré (493m), from where Mont Blanc can sometimes be seen, especially at sunset. For some cultural sustenance, make a beeline for the nearby **Musée de Préhistoire de Solutré** (☎03 85 35 85 24; www.musees-bourgogne.org; Solutré; adult/child €3.50/free; ☀10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Oct-Mar), which displays finds from one of Europe's richest prehistoric sites.

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# Eating & Sleeping


## Vaux-en-Beaujolais **3**

### Auberge de Clochemerle **Hotel €**

(📍)04 74 03 20 16; www.aubergedeclochemerle.fr; rue Gabriel Chevallier; d €78-85, menus €37-72; ☺ restaurant lunch Thu-Sun, dinner Wed-Mon Jun-Aug, lunch & dinner Wed-Sun Sep-May;   A pleasant combination of modern and traditional, this atmospheric hotel has seven stylishly refitted rooms, some with vineyard views. Dining at its Michelin-starred restaurant is a treat.

## Villié-Morgon **6**

### Château de Bellevue **B&B €€**

(📍)04 74 66 98 88; www.chateau-bellevue.fr; Bellevue; d €95-160;   For the ultimate château experience, you can't do better than this attractive venture nestled amid seas of vineyards. Françoise Barret will welcome you in perfect English (she has lived in the US) and offer you a personalised tour of the winery and the cellars.

## Fleurie **7**



### Auberge du Cep **Traditional French €€**

(📍)04 74 04 10 77; place de l'Église; mains €18-25; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Traditional cooking at its best. Feast on regional specialities such as pike-perch, snails, perfectly fried frogs' legs, and rosy tenderloin of Charolais beef (France's best) in a rustic dining room.

## Juliéna **9**

### Chez La Rose **Hotel €€**

(📍)04 74 04 41 20; www.chez-la-rose.fr; Le Bourg; d €85-110, ste €110-170, menus €21-52; ☺ restaurant lunch Wed, Sat & Sun, dinner Tue-


Sun;    This charming inn features 13 rooms in various buildings scattered around the village. They're all equipped to the highest standard, but the vast suites are the ones to aim for. Dinner at the restaurant is a gourmet affair, with standouts like *coq au vin de Juliéna* (chicken cooked in Juliéna wine) and Charolais beef fillet.

## St-Amour Bellevue **10**

### L'Auberge du Paradis **Boutique Hotel €€€**

(📍)03 85 37 10 26; Le Bourg; d €140-240, menus €60; ☺ restaurant dinner Wed-Sun;    Beaujolais' iconic, much-beloved inn occupies a village house restyled into an urban-chic, design-led boutique hotel. Oh, and there's the fantastic restaurant – the creative, inspired cooking (expect top-quality ingredients served with a symphony of spices) draws diners from afar.

### Le Paradis de Marie **B&B €€**

(📍)03 85 36 51 90; www.leparadisdemarie.com; Le Bourg; d €85, caravans €95;  Have a decadently bucolic rest at this relaxing place, a lovingly restored stone mansion exquisitely situated not far from the main street. The five rooms open onto a courtyard, while the romantically furnished gypsy caravan in the garden will please those in search of an offbeat experience.

## Solutré **12**

### La Courtille de Solutré **Traditional French €€**

(📍)03 85 35 80 73; www.lacourtilledesolutre.fr; Le Bourg; menus €23-36; ☺ lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Wed-Sat Sep-Jun) Chef Adrien Yparraguirre does traditional dishes exceptionally well, with a creative twist. Sit on the shady terrace or head into the rustic-chic interior.



*Quenelles de brochet Indulge in  
a Rhône Valley gourmet speciality*



20

# Rhône Valley

*The mighty Rhône flows from the Alps to the Mediterranean. Trace its course from Lyon to Provence, visiting gourmet restaurants, Gallo-Roman ruins and spectacular river gorges along the way.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**5 DAYS**  
300KM / 186 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

June and July for festivals in the Roman theatres of Lyon, Vienne and Orange.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The Pont d'Arc, a stunning stone archway over the Ardèche River.

### BEST FOR FOODIES

Lyon's beloved *bouchons* (convivial neighbourhood bistros).

# 20 Rhône Valley

Food and history are recurring themes on this multifaceted meander down the Rhône, from the fabled eateries of Lyon to the Gallo-Roman museum at Vienne, the nougat factories of Montélimar and the ancient theatre at Orange. As you work your way downriver to Provence, you'll also encounter imposing hilltop fortresses, slow-paced southern villages and one of France's prettiest river gorges.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 Lyon

This strategic spot at the confluence of the Rhône and Saône Rivers has been luring people ever since the Romans named it Lugdunum in 43 BC. Climb Fourvière hill west of town to witness the successive waves of human settlement, spread out in chronological order at your feet: a pair of Gallo-Roman theatres in the foreground, Vieux Lyon's medieval cathedral on the Saône's near banks, the 17th-century *hôtel de ville* (town hall) on the peninsula between the rivers, and, beyond the

Rhône, modern Lyon's skyscrapers backed by the distant Alps.

With its illustrious history and renowned gastronomy, France's third-largest city merits at least a two-day visit. Supplement our walking tour of Lyon's quintessential sights (p228) with a visit to Croix Rousse, the 19th-century silk-weaver's district where Jacquard looms still restore fabrics for France's historical monuments, and don't leave town without eating in at least one of the city's incomparable *bouchons* (see the boxed text, p226).

  p227

**The Drive** » Shoot 33km down the A7 to Vienne, enjoying close-up views of the Rhône en route.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 2 Vienne

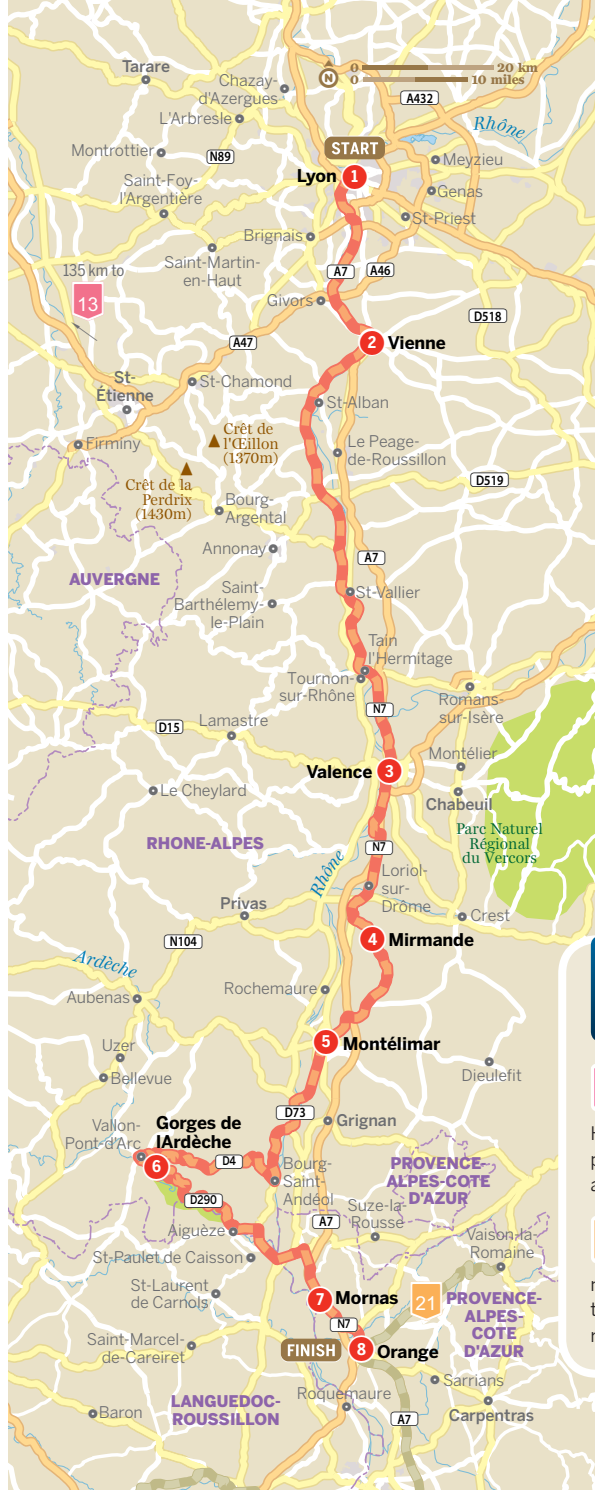
France's Gallo-Roman heritage is alive and well in this laid-back riverfront city, whose back streets hide a trio of jaw-dropping ruins: the 1st-century-BC **Temple d'Auguste et de Livie**, with its splendid Corinthian columns; the **Pyramide de la Cirque**, a 15.5m-tall obelisk that once pierced the centre of a hippodrome; and the 1st-century-AD **Théâtre Romain** (adult/child €2.70/free; ☎9.30am-1pm & 2-6pm, closed Mon Sep-Mar), which relives its glory days as a performance venue each summer during Vienne's two-week **jazz festival** ([www.jazzavienne.com](http://www.jazzavienne.com)).

Across the river, a treasure trove of Gallo-Roman artefacts is displayed at the **Musée Gallo-Romain** ([www.musees-gallo-romains.com](http://www.musees-gallo-romains.com); D502, St-Romain-en-Gal; adult/child €4/free; ☎10am-6pm Tue-Sun).

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**The Drive** » Follow the D386, D1086 and D86 for 48km south, threading the needle between the Rhône and the pretty mountains of the Parc Naturel Régional du Pilat. At Sarras cross the bridge to St-Vallier, then continue 32km south on the N7 through classic Côtes du

Rhône wine country around Tain l'Hermitage into Valence.



### 3 Valence

With its warm weather, honey-coloured light and relaxed cadence, it's easy to see why Valence advertises itself as the northern gateway to Provence. At lunchtime, make a beeline for **Le 7** (p227), a stylish eatery with an excellent wine list that's part of the Pic family's award-winning, multigenerational restaurant empire, or pack yourself a picnic at the Pic-affiliated gourmet grocery, **L'Épicerie** (210 av Victor Hugo; ☎9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 12.30pm Sun). Afterwards visit **Maison Nivon** (17 av Pierre Semard; suisses €2.20; ☎6am-7pm Tue-Sun) for a *suisse*, Valence's classic orange-rind-flavoured pastry in the shape of a Swiss Vatican guard. Around the corner, gawk at the



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

### 13 Volcanoes of the Auvergne

Head west of Lyon for this pastoral meander among ancient green peaks.

### 21 Roman Provence

From Orange, head northeast and further south to delve deeper into Roman ruins.



allegorical sculpted heads adorning the façade of the wonderful 16th-century **Maison des Têtes** (57 Grande Rue).

 p227

**The Drive** » Cruise 28km south along the N7, then wind 5km through orchard-covered hills on the D57 into Mirmande.

#### 4 Mirmande

Surrounded by pretty orchard country, this hilltop gem of stone houses and sleepy medieval streets was once a major centre of silkworm production. It then became an artists' colony in the 20th century, when Cubist painter André Lhote made his home here. Volcanologist-cinematographer Haroun Tazieff later served as the town's mayor, adding to Mirmande's cultural cachet and earning it recognition as one of *les plus beaux villages de la France* (France's prettiest villages).

With a couple of charming hotels, Mirmande makes an inviting overnight stop. Activities include browsing for treasures at **Porte des Gaultiers** ([www.portedesgaultiers.fr](http://www.portedesgaultiers.fr)), an artsy boutique by the arched 14th-century town gate, and wandering up to the 12th-century Romanesque **Église de Ste-Foy**, where concerts

and art exhibits are held in summertime and beautiful Rhône Valley views unfold year-round.

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**The Drive** » Snake 12km southeast on the D57 over Col de la Grande Limite (515m) into medieval Marsanne, then continue 17km southwest into Montélimar on the D105 and D6.

#### 5 Montélimar

An obligatory stop for sweet teeth, Montélimar is famous for its delectable nougat made from almonds, lavender honey, pistachios, sugar, egg white and vanilla. To taste this sweet delight at the source, visit one of Montélimar's small producers, such as **Diane-de-Poytiers** ([www.diane-de-poytiers.fr](http://www.diane-de-poytiers.fr); 99 av Jean-Jaurès; ☎8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sat Jul & Aug, Mon-Fri rest of yr). Afterwards burn off the calories with a climb to **Château des Adhémar** ([chateaux.ladrome.fr](http://chateaux.ladrome.fr); adult/child €3.50/free; ☎10am-noon & 2-6pm Apr-Oct, 2-6pm Wed-Mon Nov-Mar), whose 12th-century fortifications hold a Romanesque chapel and a rotating series of art exhibits.

**The Drive** » Follow the D73 southwest for 10km across the Rhône into Viviers, follow the river 15km south into Bourg-St-Andéol, then squiggle 30km along the D4 past St-Remèze's lavender museum to Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, western gateway to the Gorges de l'Ardèche.

J. JOURNÉ/GETTY IMAGES



#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 6 Gorges de l'Ardèche

These steep and spectacular limestone gorges cut a curvaceous swath through the high scrubland along the Ardèche River, a tributary of the Rhône. The real showstopper,



Mornas Église Notre-Dame du Val-Romigier

near the gorges' western entrance, is the **Pont d'Arc**, a sublimely beautiful natural stone arch. Stop here to camp, swim or join one of the many paddling tours down the river. Further east, the **Sentier Aval des Gorges** descends steeply for 2km to the heart of the gorges, granting hikers access to two primitive campgrounds

at Bivouac de Gournier and Bivouac de Gaud. For information about local flora, fauna and recreational opportunities, visit the **Maison de la Réserve** (☎04 75 98 77 31; [www.gorgesdelardeche.fr](http://www.gorgesdelardeche.fr)).

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**The Drive** » From Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, the breathtaking D290 zigzags for 29km along

the canyon's rim, with 11 viewpoints revealing dazzling vistas of horseshoe bends, and kayakers in formation far below. Exiting the gorges, take the D200 for 2km south through pretty medieval Aiguèze, then continue 22km southeast across the Rhône into Mornas via the D901, D6086, D994 and N7.

## 7 Mornas

Perched on some precipitous cliffs, the

## BOUCHONS

A *bouchon* might be a 'bottle stopper' or 'traffic jam' elsewhere in France, but in Lyon it's a cosy, traditional bistro specialising in regional cuisine. *Bouchons* originated in the early 1900s when many bourgeois families had to let go their in-house cooks, who then set up their own restaurants.

Kick-start your meal with a *communard*, an aperitif of red Beaujolais wine and *crème de cassis* (blackcurrant liqueur), then move on to a *pot* – a 46cL glass bottle adorned with an elastic band to prevent drips – of local Brouilly, Beaujolais, Côtes du Rhône or Mâcon.

Next comes the entrée, perhaps *tablier de sapeur* (breaded, fried tripe), *salade lyonnaise* (green salad with bacon, croutons and poached egg), or *caviar de la Croix Rousse* (lentils in creamy sauce). Hearty main dishes include *boudin noir aux pommes* (blood sausage with apples), *quenelles de brochet* (pike dumplings in a creamy crayfish sauce) and *andouillette* (sausage made from pigs' intestines).

For the cheese course, choose between *fromage blanc* (a cross between cream cheese and natural yoghurt); *cervelle de canut* ('brains of the silk weaver'; *fromage blanc* mixed with chives and garlic, a staple of Lyon's 19th-century weavers); or local St Marcellin ripened to gooey perfection.

Little etiquette is required in *bouchons*. Mopping your plate with a chunk of bread is fine, and you'll usually sit elbow to elbow with your fellow diners at tightly wedged tables (great for practising your French!).

11th- to 14th-century  
**Forteresse de Mornas**  
 (www.forteresse-de-mornas.com; guided tour adult/child €8/6; 🕒 tours 11am, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm, 5pm daily Jul & Aug, Sat & Sun Apr-Jun & Sep) makes a dramatic backdrop for the pretty village below. Built by the medieval Counts of Toulouse, it commands outstanding views west to the Rhône and east to Mont Ventoux. A trail climbs 137 vertical metres from the village past the 12th-century Romanesque **Église Notre-Dame du Val-Romigier** to the fortress, where costumed

guides offer historical re-enactments. Medieval fever also grips Mornas in September during **La Médiévale de Mornas**, a popular annual festival and crafts market.

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**The Drive** » Zip 12km southeast down the N7 into Orange, whose magnificent 2000-year-old Arc de Triomphe provides a fitting welcome.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 8 Orange

Sun-drenched Orange is a dream destination for fans of ancient ruins. The city's outstanding

**Théâtre Antique** (www.theatre-antique.com; adult/child €8.50/6.50; 🕒 9am-6pm, to 4.30pm Nov-Feb), one of only three Roman theatres in the world with a perfectly preserved stage wall, shines brightest during summer performances such as the epic international opera festival **Chorégies d'Orange** (www.choregies.asso.fr; tickets €50-240). North of town, Orange's second Roman treasure is the exquisitely carved 1st-century-AD **Arc de Triomphe**. For sleeping and eating listings in Orange, see p242.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Lyon 1

### **Café des Fédérations** Bouchon €€

(📞)04 78 28 26 00; www.lesfedeslyon.com; 8-10 rue Major Martin; lunch/dinner menus from €19/25; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Black-and-white photos of old Lyon hang on wood-panelled walls at this Lyonnais classic. From hearty appetisers (lentils in mustardy sauce, *rosette de Lyon* sausage) to a perfect *baba au rhum* (rum-soaked yeast cake) for dessert, this is *bouchon* dining at its finest.

### **Le Bouchon des Filles** Bouchon €€

(📞)04 78 30 40 44; 20 rue Sergent Blandan; menus €25; 🍷 dinner daily, lunch Sun) The light, fluffy *quenelles* (flour, egg and cream dumplings) at this contemporary *bouchon*, run by an enterprising crew of young women with deep roots in the local food scene, are as good as you'll find anywhere in Lyon.

### **Cour des Loges** Hotel €€€

(📞)04 72 77 44 44; www.courdesloges.com; 2-8 rue du Bœuf; d/ste from €250/530; 🍷📶🚰) Stylish historic details (Italianate loggias) meet modern comforts (an on-site spa) at this exquisite hotel composed of four 14th- to 17th-century houses wrapped around a *trabouze* (secret passageway).

## Vienne 2

### **La Pyramide** Gastronomic €€€

(📞)04 74 53 01 96; www.lapyramide.com; 14 bd Fernand-Point; lunch menus €62, dinner menus €117-172; 🍷 lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) In an apricot-coloured villa with powder-blue shutters, this foodie favourite is helmed by double-Michelin-starred local chef Patrick Henriroux, whose high-end *menus* (set-priced meals) feature lobsters, foie gras, black truffles, scallops and other seasonal treats. His adjacent Espace PH3 offers simpler food at more down-to-earth prices.

## Valence 3

### **Le 7** Bistro €€

(📞)04 75 44 15 32; www.pic-valence.com; 285 av Victor Hugo; menus €18-30; 🍷 lunch & dinner daily) Anne-Sophie Pic, France's only three-Michelin-star female chef, reigns over Valence gastronomy, as her father and grandfather did before her. *Menus* at her top-of-the-line Restaurant Pic run from €90 to €330, but if your pockets aren't quite that deep, this elegantly relaxed bistro next door serves fab *menus* at a fraction of the price.

## Mirmande 4

### **L'Hôtel de Mirmande** Hotel €€

(📞)04 75 63 13 18; www.hotelmirmande.fr; d €80-140; 📶) A haven of tranquillity, this simple hotel has friendly staff and a perfect location in the gorgeous stone-walled heart of the village.

## Gorges de l'Ardèche 6

### **Camping du Pont d'Arc** Campground €

(📞)04 75 88 00 64; www.campingdupontdarc.com; campsites from €21) Adjacent to stunning Pont d'Arc, this tree-shaded three-star campground has its own riverside beach and offers boat trips down the gorges.

## Mornas 7

### **Le Manoir** Hotel €€

(📞)04 90 37 00 79; www.hotel-le-manoir.com; N7; d €57-100; 📶) With views straight up to Mornas' imposing fortress, this roadside inn blends Provençal country charm with proximity to Orange's more urban attractions.



# STRETCH YOUR LEGS LYON

**Start/Finish** Basilique Notre Dame de Fourvière

**Distance** 3km

**Duration** 2½ hours

Stroll through two millennia of Lyonnais history, from the Gallo-Roman settlement of Lugudunum to Lyon's avant-garde 20th-century opera house; along the way, three secret medieval passageways and a pedestrian bridge across the Saône River are thrown in just for fun.

Take this walk on Trip



## Basilique Notre Dame de Fourvière

Start at this massive hilltop **basilica** ([www.fourviere.org](http://www.fourviere.org); place de Fourvière; ☀8am-7pm), whose terrace offers stunning panoramas of Lyon, the Rhône and Saône Rivers, and even distant Mont Blanc on clear days.

**The Walk** » Head southwest along rue Roger Radisson for 250m to the Gallo-Roman Museum.

## Musée de la Civilisation Gallo-Romaine

Ancient Gallo-Roman artefacts from the Rhône Valley are displayed at this hillside **museum** ([www.musees-gallo-romains.com](http://www.musees-gallo-romains.com); 17 rue Cléberg; adult/child €4/free; ☀10am-6pm Tue-Sun). Next door are two ancient Roman theatres, the 10,000-seat **Théâtre Romain** and the smaller **odéon**.

**The Walk** » Descend rue Cléberg 200m, then turn left into leafy Parc des Hauteurs, following the main path downhill 400m to Montée St-Barthélémy. Turn right and continue downhill 200m on Montée des Chazeaux to rue St-Jean, then turn right and walk 50m to the cathedral.

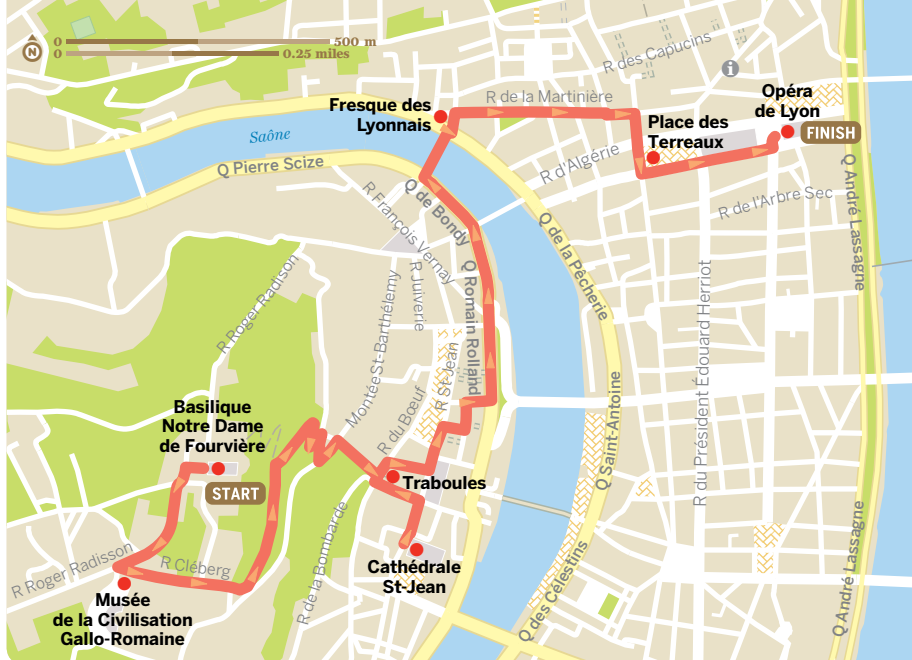
## Cathédrale St-Jean

This partly Romanesque, partly Flamboyant Gothic **cathedral** (place St-Jean, 5e; ☀8am-noon & 2-7pm) was built between the late 11th and early 16th centuries. Don't miss the **astronomical clock** in the north transept, which chimes elaborately at noon, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm daily.

**The Walk** » Walk 50m north on rue St-Jean, then turn left and walk 50m along rue de la Bombardé, stopping at house number 14 (on your right).

## Traboules

Throughout Vieux Lyon, secret passages known as **traboules** (from the Latin *transambulare*, 'to walk through') wind through apartment blocks and courtyards, up stairs and down corridors, connecting streets with one another in unexpected ways. In all, 315 passages link 230 streets, with a combined length of 50km.



Some *traboules* date from Roman times, while others were constructed by *canuts* (silk weavers) in the 19th century to transport silk in inclement weather. Resistance fighters found them equally handy during WWII.

**The Walk** » Enter the *traboule* at number 14 and navigate to its exit at 31 rue du Boeuf; next, open the door at 27 rue du Boeuf and cross to 54 rue St-Jean; finally, cross from 27 rue St-Jean to 6 rue des Trois Maries. Now follow the Saône River 600m north and cross the Passerelle St-Vincent pedestrian bridge to Lyon's most famous mural.

## Fresque des Lyonnais

Well-known Lyonnais peer out from this seven-storey **mural** (cnr rue de la Martinière & quai de la Pêcherie), including loom inventor Joseph-Marie Jacquard, superstar chef Paul Bocuse and the yellow-haired Little Prince, created by author-aviator Antoine de St-Exupéry.

**The Walk** » Head 400m east on rue de la Martinière, then go south one block on rue Paul Chenavard into place des Terreaux.

## Place des Terreaux

The centrepiece of Lyon's beautiful **central square** is a 19th-century **fountain** sculpted by Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi (of Statue of Liberty fame). Fronting the square's eastern edge is the ornate **hôtel de ville** (town hall).

**The Walk** » From the south side of place des Terreaux head 250m east on rue Joseph Serlin to the Opéra.

## Opéra de Lyon

Lyon's neoclassical 1831-built **opera house** sports a striking semi-cylindrical glass-domed roof, added in 1993 by renowned French architect Jean Nouvel. On summer evenings, free jazz concerts are performed under the arches up front.

**The Walk** » From Hôtel de Ville station, where you're now standing, ride the metro three stops back to Vieux Lyon station, then return to Fourvière via funicular.





# Provence & Southeast France

**WITH ITS SHIMMERING COAST AND RUSTIC PROVENÇAL HEART,** the Mediterranean south has a timeless allure. Driving here you'll travel through wildly divergent landscapes: cinematic coastline, rugged hinterland and bucolic valleys.

The Cote d'Azur's glamorous cities, deep-blue Med and chic hilltop villages never fail to delight. Inland, you'll weave between fragrant fields, forested gorges and Roman ruins. Skip over the sea to the unspoilt island delights of Corsica or be engulfed in the lush green wetlands of the Camargue.

Along the way you'll connect with the poets, painters and writers who flocked here during the 20th century, chasing sun and inspiration.



# Provence & Southeast France



**21 Roman Provence 7 Days**  
Provence's impressive Roman treasures line up along this leisurely drive. (p235)

**22 Lavender Route 4–5 Days**  
The region at its prettiest, with flowery fields and rustic villages. (p245)

*Classic Trip*

**23 The Corniches 3 Days**  
Not one but *three* thrilling coastal roads – the ultimate French drive. (p253)

*Classic Trip*

**24 Riviera Cruising 7 Days**  
The best beaches, cities, villages and nature along the Med coast. (p263)

**25 Modern Art Meander 7 Days**  
A cross-region route that traces the haunts of modern art's greatest. (p273)

**26 Southern Seduction en Corse 10 Days**  
This jaunt along Corsica's southern coast takes in plenty of history. (p283)

**27 Corsican Coast Cruiser 5 Days**  
Discover western Corsica's majestic mountain peaks and covetable sandy coves. (p293)

**28 The Camargue 4 Days**  
Loop through the wild, lush wetlands where bulls and white horses roam. (p303)



## DON'T MISS

### The Road up Mont Ventoux

Relive 14 gruelling Tour de France ascents from behind the wheel. Feel the cycling love on Trip [22](#)

### Le Merenda, Nice

The simple, sunny, bold standards at this tiny bistro are Nice on a plate. Sample on Trips [23](#) [24](#) [25](#)

### Hôtel Nord-Pinus, Arles

What other hotel (or city) boasts embedded Roman columns and bullfighters' trophies? Visit on Trips [21](#) [25](#) [28](#)

### Orange's Roman Arc de Triomphe

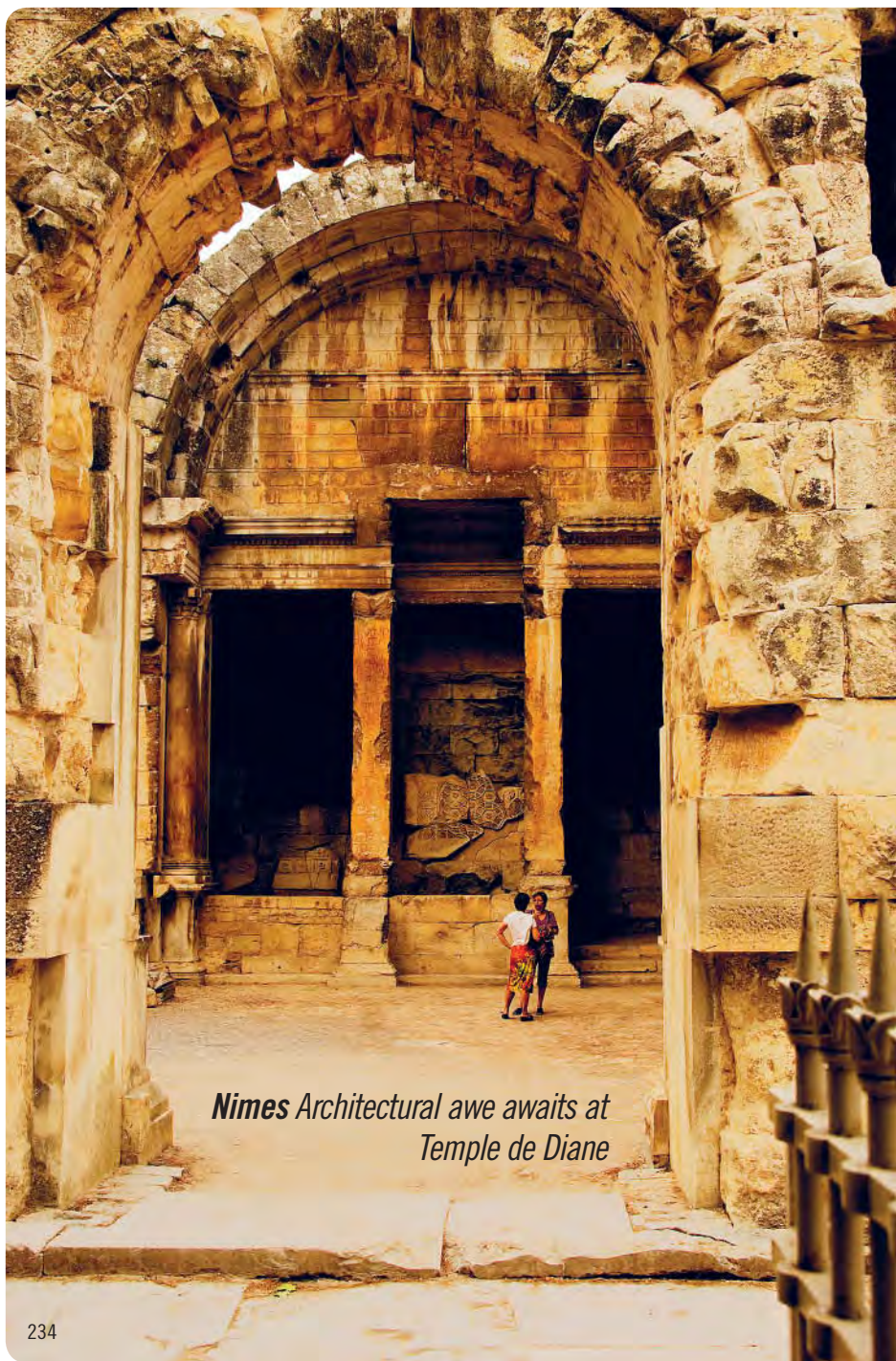
This monument's detailed carvings are a fascinating peek into what got your average Roman foot soldier excited. Get close on Trip [21](#)

### Pastis

Always ask for this aniseed-flavoured liqueur by brand. We like the herbal Henri Bardouin or the spicy Janot. Sip on Trips [21](#) [22](#) [23](#) [24](#) [25](#) [28](#)



Mont Ventoux Cycling to the observatory



*Nîmes Architectural awe awaits at  
Temple de Diane*



21

# Roman Provence

*Survey Provence's incredible Roman legacy as you follow ancient routes through the region's river gorges and vineyards, gathering provisions as you go.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

**7 DAYS**  
205KM / 127 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

Ruins open year-round, but avoid August's heat and crush.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO



The Pont du Gard, illuminated every night in summer.

### BEST FOR CULTURE

Balmy nights at Orange's Théâtre Antique are magic; July includes the Chorégies d'Orange.



## 21

# Roman Provence

Provence was where Rome first truly flexed its imperial muscles. Follow Roman roads, cross Roman bridges and grab a seat in the bleachers at Roman theatres and arenas. Thrillingly, you'll discover that most of Provence's Roman ruins aren't ruins at all. Many are exceptionally well preserved, and some are also evocatively integrated into the modern city. With Provence's knockout landscape as a backdrop, history never looked so good!

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 Nîmes

Nîmes' bizarre coat of arms – a crocodile chained to a palm tree! – recalls the region's first, but definitely not last, horde of sun-worshipping retirees. Julius Caesar's loyal legionnaires were granted land here to settle after hard years on the Nile campaigns. Two millennia later, their ambitious town blends seamlessly with the bustling, workaday French streetscapes



of the modern city. An impressively intact 1st-century-AD **Amphitheatre** (adult/child €7.80/4.50; ☀9am-6.30pm) makes for a majestic traffic roundabout. Locals nonchalantly skateboard or window-shop on the elegant place that's home to an astonishingly beautiful and preciously intact 1st-century-AD temple, the **Maison Carrée** (place de la Maison Carrée; adult/child €4.50/3.70; ☀10am-6.30pm). Skip the 22-minute film and instead stroll over to the elegant **Jardins de la Fontaine**. The remains of the **Temple de Diane** are in its lower northwest corner and a 10-minute uphill walk brings you to the crumbling, 30m-high



## LINK YOUR TRIP

### 20 Rhône Valley

Join up with this trip in Orange for several great Roman sites in Vienne, and Lyon's Roman theatres and great Gallo-Roman museum.

### 24 Riviera Cruising

The Cote d'Azur shares the Roman treasures, and many of them are in superb locations; head east from Arles to Aix, then take the E80 to Cannes to join this trip.



## TOP TIP: PADDLING THE RIVER GARD

Get your first glimpse of the Pont du Gard from the river by paddling 8km downstream from Collias, 4km west of the D981. **Kayak Vert** (☎04 66 22 80 76; www.canoe-france.com/gardon) and **Canôë Le Tourbillon** (☎04 66 22 85 54; www.canoe-le-tourbillon.com), both based near the village bridge, rent out kayaks and canoes (€20 per person for two hours) from March/April to October.

**Tour Magne** (adult/child €2.70/2.30; ☀9.30am-6.30pm). Built in 15 BC as a watchtower and display of imperial grunt, it is the only one that remains of several that once spanned the 7km-long ramparts.

 p242

**The Drive** » The D6086 is direct, but sacrifice 15 minutes, and take route d'Uzès (D979). This way, leave Nîmes' snarly traffic behind and suddenly find yourself on a quiet stretch of winding road skirting grey rocky gorges and past honey-stone villages. Cut east via Sanilhac-Sagriès on the D112, then turn off at Begude's roundabout.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 2 Pont du Gard

You won't get a sneak peek of the **Pont du Gard** (☎04 66 37 50 99; www.pontdugard.fr; parking €18, after 8pm €10; ☀7am-1am) on approach. Nature (and clever placement of car parks and visitor centres) has created one bravura reveal. Spanning the gorge is a magnificent

three-tiered aqueduct, a marvel of 1st-century engineering. It was built around 19 BC by Agrippa, Augustus' deputy, and it's huge: the 275m-long upper tier, 50m above the Gard, has 35 arches. Each block (the largest weighs over 5 tonnes) was hauled in by cart or raft. It was once part of a 50km-long system that carried water from nearby Uzès down to thirsty Nîmes. It's a 400m wheelchair-accessible walk from car parks on both banks of the river to the bridge itself, with a shady café en route on the right. Swim upstream for unencumbered views, though downstream is also good for summer dips, with shaded wooden platforms set in the flatter banks. Want to make a day of it? There's **Museo de la romanité**, an interactive, information-based museum, plus a children's area, and a peaceful 1.4km botanical walk, Mémoires de Garrigue.

 p242

**The Drive** » Kayaking to the next stop would be more fun, and more direct, but you'll need to hit the highway for 40 minutes to Arles – the A9 that skirts back towards Nîmes and then the A54.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 3 Arles

Arles, formerly known as Arelate, was part of the Roman Empire from as early as the 2nd century BC. It wasn't until the 49–45 BC civil war, however, when nearby Massalia (Marseille) supported Pompey (ie backed the wrong side), that it became a booming regional capital.

The town today is delightful, Roman cache or no, but what a living legacy it is. **Les Arènes** (Amphithéâtre; adult/child incl Théâtre Antique €6.50/free; ☀9am–7pm) is not as large as Nîmes', but it is spectacularly sited and occasionally still sees blood spilled, just like in the good old gladiatorial days (it hosts bullfights and *courses Camarguaises*, which is the local

variation). Likewise the 1st-century **Théâtre Antique** (☎04 90 96 93 30; bd des Lices, enter on rue de la Calade; incl in Amphithéâtre admission; ☀9am–7pm) is still regularly used for alfresco performances.

Just as social, political and religious life revolved around the forum in Arelate, the busy plane-tree-shaded **place du Forum** buzzes with cafe life today. Sip a pastis here and spot the remains of a 2nd-century temple embedded in the façade of the **Hôtel Nord-Pinus**. Under your feet are **Cryptoportiques** (place du Forum; adult/child €3.50/free; ☀9am–noon & 2–7pm) – subterranean foundations and buried arcades. Access the underground galleries, 89m long and 59m wide, at the **hôtel de ville** (town hall; place de la République).

Emperor Constantin's partly preserved 4th-century private baths, the **Thermes de Constantin** (rue du Grand Prieuré; adult/child €3/free; ☀9am–noon & 2–7pm), are a few minutes' stroll



JIM RICHARDSON/GETTY IMAGES ©

away, next to the quai. Southwest of the centre is **Les Alyscamps** (adult/child €3.50/free; ☀9am–7pm), a necropolis founded by the Romans and adopted by Christians in the 4th century. It contains the tombs of martyr St Genest and Arles' first bishops. You may recognise it: Van Gogh and Gauguin both captured the avenues


## ROMAN PROVENCE SWAT LIST

- » *The Roman Provence Guide* (Edwin Mullins)
- » *The Roman Remains of Southern France* (James Bromwich)
- » *Southern France: An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (Henry Cleere)
- » *Ancient Provence: Layers of History in Southern France* (Jeffrey Wolin)



**Site Archéologique de Glanum** Ancient Roman triumphal arch

of cypresses on canvas (though only melancholy old Van Gogh painted the empty sarcophagi).

 p242, p281, p309

**The Drive** » Take the D17 to Fontvielle, then turn off and follow the D78F/D27A to Baux-de-Provence, then the D5. This minor detour takes you past beautiful dry white rocky hills dotted with scrubby pine; the trip will still only take around 45 minutes. There's on-site

parking at Glanum. If heading into St-Rémy, there's parking by the tourist office (parking Jean-Jaurès) and north of the periphery (parking Général-de-Gaulle).

#### **Glanum**


Such is the glittering allure of the gourmet delis, interiors boutiques and smart restaurants that line St-Rémy-de-

Provence's circling boulevards and place de la République that a visit to the **Site Archéologique de Glanum** ( 04 90 92 23 79; [239](http://glanum.monuments-nationaux.fr/en; rte des Baux-de-Provence; adult/child €7/4.50, parking €2.20; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm daily Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) is often an afterthought. But</p></div><div data-bbox=)



the **triumphal arch** (AD 20) that marks Glanum's entrance, 2km south of St-Rémy, is far from insignificant. It's pegged as one of France's oldest and is joined by a towering **mausoleum** (30–20 BC). Walk down the main street and you'll pass the mainstays of Roman life: baths, a forum and marketplace, temples and town villas. And beneath all this Roman handiwork lies the remnants of an older Celtic and Hellenic settlement, built to take advantage of a sacred spring. Van Gogh, as a patient of the

neighbouring asylum, painted the olive orchard that covered the site until its excavation in the 1920s.

 p242, p281

**The Drive** » It's the A7 all the way to Orange, 50km of nondescript driving if you're not tempted by a detour to Avignon on the way.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 5 Orange

It's often said if you can only see one Roman site in France, make it Orange. And yes, the town's Roman treasures are gobsmacking and

unusually old; both are believed to have been built during Augustus Caesar's rule (27 BC–AD 14). Plus, while Orange may not be the Provençal village of popular fantasy, it's a cruisy, decidedly untouristy town, making for good-value accommodation and hassle-free sightseeing (such as plentiful street parking one block back from the theatre).

At a massive 103m wide and 37m high, the stage wall of the **Théâtre Antique** ([www.theatre-antique.com](http://www.theatre-antique.com); adult/child €8.50/6.50, 2nd child free:

## SALVE, PROVINCIA GALLIA TRANSALPINA

It all starts with the Greeks. After founding the city of Massalia, now Marseille, around 600 BC, they spent the next few centuries establishing a long string of ports along the coast, planting olives and grapes as they went. When migrating Celts from the north joined forces with the local Ligurians, resistance to these booming colonies grew. The Celto-Ligurians were a force to be reckoned with; unfortunately they were about to meet ancient history's biggest bullies. In 125 BC the Romans helped the Greeks defend Massalia, and swiftly took control.

Thus begins the Gallo-Roman era and the region of Provincia Gallia Transalpina, the first Roman *provincia* (province), the name from which Provence takes its name. Later Provincia Narbonensis, it embraced all of southern France from the Alps to the Mediterranean and the Pyrenees.

Roads made the work of empire possible, and the Romans quickly set about securing a route that joined Italy and Spain. Via Aurelia linked Rome to Fréjus, Aix-en-Provence, Arles and Nîmes; the northbound Via Agrippa followed the Rhône from Arles to Avignon, Orange and onwards to Lyons. The Via Domitia linked the Alps with the Pyrenees by way of the Luberon and Nîmes.

With Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul (58–51 BC), the region truly flourished. Under the emperor Augustus, vast amphitheatres, triumphal arches and ingenious aqueducts – the ones that propel this trip – were constructed. Augustus celebrated his final defeat of the ever-rebellious Ligurians in 14 BC, with the construction of the monument at La Turbie (p255) on the Cote d'Azur.

The Gallo-Roman legacy may be writ large and loud in Provence, but it also persists in the everyday. Look for it in unusual places: recycled into cathedral floors or hotel façades, in dusty cellars or simply buried beneath your feet.

☉9am-6pm Mar-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Feb) dominates the surrounding streetscape. Minus a few mosaics, plus a new roof, it's one of three in the world still standing in their entirety, and originally seated 10,000 spectators. Admission includes an informative, if a bit overdramatic, audio guide, and access to the **Musée d'Orange** (📍04 90 51 17 60; museum only adult/child €5.50/4.50; ☉9.15am-7pm summer, shorter hours in winter) across the road. Its collection includes friezes from the theatre with the Roman motifs we love: eagles holding garlands of bay leaves, and a cracking battle between cavalymen and foot soldiers.

For bird's-eye views of the theatre – and phenomenal vistas of rocky Mont Ventoux and the Dentelles – follow montée Philbert de Chalons, or montée Lambert, up **Colline St-Eutrope**, once the ever-vigilant Romans' lookout point.

To the town's north, the **Arc de Triomphe** stands on the ancient Via Agrippa (now the busy N7), 19m high and wide, and a stonking 8m thick. Restored in 2009, its richly animated

reliefs commemorate 49 BC Roman victories with images of battles, ships, trophies, and chained, naked and utterly subdued Gauls.

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**The Drive** » Northeast, the D975 passes through gentle vineyard-lined valleys for 40 minutes, with views of the Dentelles de Montmirail's limestone ridges along the way (the D977 and D23 can be equally lovely). Parking in Vaison can be a trial; nab a spot by the tourist office (place du Chanoine Saute), or try below the western walls of the Cité Médiévale, if you don't mind a walk.

## 6 Vaison-la-Romaine

Is there anything more telling of Rome's smarts than a sturdy, still-used Roman bridge? Vaison-la-Romaine's pretty little **Pont Romain** has stood the test of time and severe floods. Stand at its centre and gaze up at the walled, cobbled-street hilltop Cité Médiévale, down at the fast-flowing River Ouvèze.

Vaison-la-Romaine is tucked between seven valleys and has long been a place of trade. The ruined remains of **Vasio Vocontiorum**, the Roman city that flourished here between the 6th and 2nd centuries BC,

fill two central **Gallo-Roman sites** (adult/child €8/3.50; ☉closed Jan). Dual neighbourhoods lie on either side of the tourist office and av du Général-de-Gaulle. The Romans shopped at the colonnaded boutiques and bathed at **La Villasse**, where you'll find **Maison au Dauphin**, which has splendid marble-lined fish ponds.

In **Puymin**, see nobleman's houses, mosaics, a workmen's quarter, a temple, and the still-functioning 6000-seat **Théâtre Antique** (c AD 20). To make sense of the remains (and gather your audio guide), head for the **archaeological museum**, which revives Vaison's Roman past with incredible swag – superb mosaics, carved masks, and statues that include a 3rd-century silver bust and marble renderings of Hadrian and his wife, Sabina. Admission includes entry to the soothing 12th-century Romanesque cloister at **Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Nazareth** (cloister €1.50; ☉10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm, closed Jan & Feb), a five-minute walk west of La Villasse and, like much of Provence, built on Roman foundations.

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# Eating & Sleeping

## Nîmes 1

### Au Plaisir des Halles French €€

(📞) 04 66 36 01 02; 4 rue Littré; mains €24-30; 🕒 Tue-Sat) Ingredients here are the freshest available, and the lunchtime three-course menu (set-priced meal; €20) is excellent value. Consider ordering local-speciality *brandade* (whipped salted codfish). There's a great list of Languedoc wines.

### Jardins Secrets Boutique Hotel €€€€

(📞) 04 66 84 82 64; www.jardinssecrets.net; 3 rue Gaston Maruejols; d from €200; 🏠 📶 🚿) Yes, it has a secret garden, and a very lushly planted one at that. Tucked away in a central town house, this is a small, deliciously luxurious hotel, with toile de Jouy drapes, classical murals, random curiosities, French windows and claw-foot baths. A rare find in down-to-earth Nîmes.

### Royal Hôtel Hotel €€

(📞) 04 66 58 28 27; www.royalhotel-nimes.com; 3 bd Alphonse Daudet; r €60-80; 🏠 📶) This raffishly bohemian, 21-room hotel is eternally popular. Many rooms overlook dynamic place d'Assas – an invigorating view, but summer nights are noisy. Light sleepers should book patio rooms.

## Pont du Gard 2

### Lisa M Modern French €€€€

(📞) 04 66 22 92 12; www.lisam.fr; 3 place de la Madone, Vers-Pont-du-Gard; menus €58; 🕒 dinner Wed-Sun) A chef with a very contemporary culinary ethos turns out light, seasonal, often exotically spiced dishes in an atmospheric village house that was once a convent. Up the wonderful staircase are two beautiful sandstone-clad rooms (double €140). Terraces look onto the delightfully sleepy village (as does the rooftop plunge pool); you'll never know the Pont is so close. Note: it can be tricky to find.

### La Maison B&B €€

(📞) 04 66 81 25 151; www.chambres-provence.com; place de l'Eglise, Blauzac; s/d from €105/120; 🏠 📶) This B&B makes a tranquil base halfway between Uzès and the Pont, and offers mountain views, a pretty garden and a pool. The Ferrara room is especially charming, though all rooms use a nice mix of local, Asian and contemporary furnishings.

## Arles 3

### L'Atruche Modern French €€

(📞) 04 90 49 73 63; 5 rue Dulau; lunch menu €18, mains €29; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This modern, inviting restaurant run by husband and wife team Fabien and Ouria assembles perfect market-fresh dishes. Dishes are creative but earthy, while desserts are extravagant.

### Hôtel Arlatan Historic Hotel €€

(📞) 04 90 93 56 66; www.hotel-arlatan.fr; 26 rue du Sauvage; d €85-157, apt €177-247; 🕒 mid-Mar-mid-Nov; 🏠 📶 🚿) The heated swimming pool, pretty garden and plush rooms decorated with antique furniture are just some of the things going for this hotel. Oh, and, yes, those foundations visible through a glass floor in the lobby are Roman.

## Glanum 4

### La Cuisine des Anges Bistro €€

(📞) 04 90 92 17 66; www.angesetfees-stremy.com; 4 rue du 8 Mai 1945; lunch/dinner menu €14/27; 🕒 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily Jun-Aug, lunch & dinner Thu-Sat, dinner Sun Sep-May, closed Nov; 🏠) Light, simple Provençal dishes derive from organic local ingredients at this cosy village bistro with a wood-floored dining room and zinc-topped tables. Upstairs is a *chambre d'hôte*, Le Sommeil des Fées, with five B&B rooms (€74 to €94).

### Taberna Romana Bistro €€

(📞) 04 90 92 65 97; www.taberna-romana.com; rte des Baux; menus €16-26; 🕒 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) Drinks come with a panorama

over the ruined city of Glanum, or you can settle in for lunch with a history geek-pleasing menu that revives ancient Roman recipes, including legionnaires' favourites like honeyed red wine, pork balls and spiced beans.

### **Hotel de l'Image** Boutique Hotel €€

(📞04 90 92 51 50; www.hotel-image.fr; 36 bd Victor Hugo, St-Rémy; d from €130: 📶📺🚰) Conveniently located on the southern side of St-Rémy's circling boulevard, this midsize, modern place has smart rooms adorned simply with contemporary photography. The perfect extra if you're here in the hot, hectic days of summer: a 2-hectare park facing the Alpilles.

## Orange 5

### **Le Glacier** Hotel €€

(📞04 90 34 02 01; www.le-glacier.com; 46 cours Aristide Briand; d €50-110; 📶@📺) All 28 rooms are individually decorated, and impeccably maintained by charming owners, who pay attention to detail. Also rents bikes (half-/full day €12/16) and has secure, free bike parking.

### **Hôtel l'Herbier d'Orange** Hotel €

(📞04 90 34 09 23; www.lherbierdorange.com; 8 place aux Herbes; s/d/tr incl breakfast €59/69/79; 📶@📺🚰) Bright high-ceilinged rooms, sparkling bathrooms and friendly enthusiastic owners place this small basic hotel a notch above. Evening aperitif included.

### **Camping Le Jonquier** Campground €

(📞04 90 34 49 48; www.campinglejonquier.com; 1321 rue Alexis Carrel; per 2 people €20-26; 🌞Easter-Sep; 📶📺🚰🚰) Good for active travellers: pool, minigolf, tennis, Ping Pong, hot tub...and very handy to the Arc de Triomphe.

## Vaison-la-Romaine 6

### **Le Bateleur** Provençal €€

(📞04 90 36 28 04; www.le-bateleur.com; 1 place Théodore Aubanel; lunch menus €17-22, dinner menus €27-40; 🌞closed Mon, dinner Sun & Thu) The best seats at this simple Provençal dining room overlook the river, but you'll need no distractions from the beautifully presented regional cooking. Lunch includes wine and coffee.

### **La Lyriste** Provençal €€

(📞04 90 36 04 67; 45 cours Taulignan; menus €18-36; 🌞Wed-Sun) The contemporary Provençal menu at this charming bistro emphasises seasonal regional ingredients in dishes ranging from *bourride* (fish stew) to a foie-gras tasting menu (€36). In summer book a table on the terrace.

### **Hôtel Le Burrhus** Design Hotel €


(📞04 90 36 00 11; www.burrhus.com; 1 place de Montfort; d €55-87; 📶) On Vaison's vibrant central square, this hotel may look quaint, but its 38 rooms have ultramodern decor with designer fittings, original artwork and mosaic bathrooms. No elevator. Parking (€7) must be booked ahead.

### **L'Évêché** B&B €€

(📞04 90 36 13 46; http://eveche.free.fr; rue de l'Évêché; d €92-140) With groaning bookshelves, vaulted ceilings, higgledy-piggledy staircase and intimate salons, this five-room *chambre d'hôte*, in the medieval city, is a treat. Loan bikes are complimentary.

### **Camping du Théâtre Romain** Campground €

(📞04 90 28 78 66; www.camping-theatre.com; chemin de Brusquet; per 2 people €21; 🌞mid-Mar-mid-Nov; 📶📺) Opposite the Théâtre Antique, with a good pool. Some patches are nicely tree-shaded, others are very sunny.



*Lavender Sunrise intensifies the purple hue near Valensole*



22

# Lavender Route

*Banish thoughts of grandma's closet. Get out among the purple haze, sniff the heady summer breezes and navigate picturesque hilltop towns, ancient churches and pretty valleys.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

4 km

### Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque

Sublimely simple 12th-century abbey framed by rows of lavender

50 km

### André Boyer

Wonderful sweet shop and baker turns out traditional treats

Banon

Forcalquier

Plateau de Valensole

2 ● Gordes

START

FINISH

### Prieuré de Salagon

Ethno-botany at its most fragrant and seductive

135 km

4-5 DAYS

210KM / 130 MILES

## GREAT FOR...



## BEST TIME TO GO

July is purple prime time, but June's blooms still impress.



## ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The road just north of Sault is a particularly stunning spot.



## BEST FOR OUTDOORS

Mont Ventoux has brilliant hiking trails and is hallowed ground for cycling fans.

# 22

## Lavender Route

The Luberon and Vaucluse may be well-trodden (and driven) destinations, but you'll be surprised at how rustic they remain. This trip takes you to the undoubtedly big-ticket (and exquisitely beautiful) sights but also gets you exploring back roads, sleepy villages, big skies and one stunner of a mountain. And yes, past fields, and fields of glorious purple blooms.

### 1 Gordes

The tiered village of Gordes sits spectacularly on the white-rock face of the Vaucluse plateau. It's a traditional base for those on the lavender trail, high on many tourists' must-see lists, and a favourite with posh Parisians. Gordes' star attraction is its 11th-century château, though doing laps in the cliff-side pool at the **Bastide de Gordes** can't be too bad. In truth, the thrill lies in glimpsing the village from a slight



distance – come sunset, the village glows gold.



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**The Drive** » Head northwest of Gordes off the D177 with 4km of perfect Provence out your window. The descent down to the abbey is narrow, treacherous in rain, and tricky in sunshine when everyone is blinded by the lavender and pulls over. And yes, if you can, do pull over for a photograph.

**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

**2 Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque**

Isolated and ridiculously photogenic, this 12th-

century Cistercian **abbey** ( 04 90 72 05 72; [www.senanque.fr](http://www.senanque.fr); guided tour in French adult/child/family €7/3/20;  tours by reservation) is famously framed by lavender from mid-June through July. The abbey was founded in 1148 and is still home to a small number of monks. The cloisters have a haunting, severe beauty; reservations are essential to visit inside but out of high season they can be made on-site (conservative dress and silence are required). Tours begin around 10am,

so for some tranquil time with the lavender, arrive well before then.

**The Drive** » The way out of the abbey has you heading north. Continue up the D177 then turn right onto the D244 and follow the signs to Murs, a very winding 9.5km drive accompanied by wheat fields and vineyards. From here it's about 25 minutes to the next stop.

**3 St-Saturnin-lès-Apt**

St-Saturnin-lès-Apt is a refreshingly ungentrified village, with marvellous views of the surrounding Vaucluse plateau punctuated by purple fields – climb to the ruins atop the village for a knockout vista. At **Moulin à Huile Jullien** ([www.moulin-huile-jullien.com](http://www.moulin-huile-jullien.com); rte d'Apt;  Mon-Sat) see how olives are milled into



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

**18 Foothills of the Alps**

Swap rolling hills for spectacular gorges and then alpine air: take the D6 and D852 to Moustiers-Ste-Marie, or drop in at Sisteron from Forcalquier.

**21 Roman Provence**

From Roman Provence's last stop in Vaison-la-Romaine, it's a gorgeous drive to Gordes via Carpentras and Venasque.



**TOP TIP:  
LAVENDER: FINDING  
THE GOOD OIL**

When shopping for oil, the sought-after product is fine lavender (in French, *lavande fine*; in Latin, *L. officinalis*), not spike lavender (*L. latifolia*) or the hybrid lavandin (*Lavandula x intermedia*). The latter are higher in camphor; they're used in soaps and body-care products but rarely in fine perfumery. They're also used to adulterate true lavender oil. Look for oil that's clearly labeled and lacks a harsh camphor note.

oil (with honey and oil tastings thrown in). See *lavande fine* growing at **Château du Bois** (📍04 90 76 91 23; www.lechateauDubois.com), a winding, but gorgeous, drive 20km to the northeast, with 800,000 sq metres of peaceful plantings. (Note, this is a farm only; the shop and museum is in Coustellet.)

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**The Drive** » Spot the pretty 17th-century windmill, Le Château les Moulins, 1km north, off the D943 toward Sault, then look out for the magnificent views of the red-tinged escarpment and the rust-coloured village of Roussillon. The views of Mont Ventoux only get more spectacular as you approach Sault, a 35-minute drive away.

**TRIP HIGHLIGHT****4 Sault**

This drowsily charming, isolated hilltop town mixes its lavender views with plum orchards and scattered forest. Town hot spot is **André Boyer** (📍04 90 64 00 23; place de

l'Europe), keeping farmers, cyclists and mountaineers in honey and almond nougat since 1887; its lavender marshmallows and the local speciality *pognes* (an orange-scented brioche) are also must-tries. Head to **GAEC Champelle** (📍04 90 64 01 50; www.gaec-champelle.fr; rte de Ventoux), a roadside farm stand northwest of town, whose products include great buys for cooks. The lavender up here is known for its dark, OK...deep purple, hue.

**The Drive** » This is one great 25km. Head out of town on the D164; when you hit the D974, fields give way to dense, fragrant forest (impromptu picnic, perhaps?). Above the tree line, strange spots of Alpine scrub are gradually replaced by pale bald slopes. These steep gradients have often formed a hair-raising stage of the Tour de France – the road is daubed with Tour graffiti and many fans make a brave two-wheeled homage.

**5 Mont Ventoux**

If fields of flowers are intoxicating, Mont

Ventoux (1912m) is awe-inspiring. Nicknamed *le géant de Provence* – Provence's giant – its great white hulk is visible from much of the region. *Le géant* sparkles all year round – once the snow melts, its lunar-style limestone slopes glimmer in the sun. From its peak, clear-day vistas extend to the Alps and the Camargue.

Even summer temperatures can plummet by 20°C at the top; it's also twice as likely to rain; and the relentless mistrals blow 130 days a year, sometimes exceeding 250km/h. Bring a cardigan and scarf!

**The Drive** » Go back the way you came to Sault, then head east to Banon on the D950 for another 40 minutes.

**6 Banon**

A tasty, nonfloral diversion: little village, big cheese. Bustling Banon is famous for its chèvre de Banon, a goat's-milk cheese wrapped in a chestnut leaf. Fromagerie de Banon sells its cheese at the Tuesday-morning market, and at wonderful cheese-and-sausage shop **chez Melchio** (📍04 92 73 23 05; place de la République; ☎8am-7pm Jul & Aug, 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Wed-Sun Sep-Jun), which is unbeatable for picnic supplies. Tuck into cheese-and-charcuterie

plates at **Les Vins au Vert** (📍04 92 75 23 84; www.lesvinsauvert.com; rue Pasteur; mains €12-16; 🕒 Wed-Sun); make reservations for Thursday to Saturday nights.

**The Drive** » Follow the D950 southeast for 25km to Forcalquier, as the scenery alternates between gentle forested slopes and fields.

## 7 Forcalquier

Forcalquier has an upbeat, slightly bohemian vibe, a holdover from 1960s and '70s, when artists and back-to-the-landers arrived, fostering a now-booming organics ('*biologiques*' or bio) movement. Saffron is grown here, absinthe is distilled, and the town is also home to the L'Université Européenne des Senteurs & Saveurs (UESS; European University of Scents and Flavours). To see it all in action, time your visit for the Monday morning market.

Climb the steep steps to Forcalquier's gold-topped **citadel** and octagonal **chapel** for more sensational views; on the way down note the once-wealthy seat's ornately carved wooden doorways and grand bourgeois town houses. Prefer to work your senses overtime? UESS' **Couvent des Cordeliers** (📍04 92 72 50 68; www.

CHRIS HILLER/ALAMY



**Priuré de Salagon** A 13th-century priory near Mane

couventdescordeliers.com) conducts workshops (€40 to €50) in perfume making, wine tasting, and aromatherapy in Forcalquier's 13th-century convent.

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**The Drive** » Find yourself in a gentle world, all plane-tree arcades, wildflowers and, yes, lavender. Around 4km south on the D4100 you'll come to our

next stop, just before the pretty town of Mane.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 8 Priuré de Salagon

This beautiful 13th-century priory, located on the outskirts of Mane, is today home to a garden museum, the **Jardins Salagon** (📍04 92 75 70 50;



### TOP TIP: BEST PRODUCE MARKETS

The Luberon (p250) has groaning markets run from 8am to 1pm; they're particularly thrilling in summer.

**Monday** Forcalquier

**Tuesday** Apt, Gordes, St-Saturnin-lès-Apt

**Wednesday** Gargas

**Thursday** Roussillon

**Friday** Bonnieux, Lourmarin

**Saturday** Apt, Manosque

**Sunday** Coustellet, Villars

www.musee-de-salagon.com; adult/child €7/5; ☎10am-8pm daily Jun-Aug, to 6pm Wed-Mon Sep-Apr, closed Jan; 📶). This is ethno-botany at its most poetic and sensual: wander through recreated medieval herb gardens, fragrant with native lavender, mints and mugworts. The bookshop is inviting, too.

The walled town of **Mane** is lovely for strolling. Or for a mysterious, potentially curative detour, visit remote **Église de Châteauneuf**, where a hermit church sister concocts natural remedies and makes jam. Head 800m south of Mane to the **Hôtel Mas du Pont Roman**, then turn right and either park and walk, or drive the bumpy final 3km. Be warned: the good sister doesn't always reveal herself. Just in

case, bring a picnic and consider it an adventure.

**The Drive** » Get on the D13, then follow the signs to the D5, for about 30 minutes.

## 9 Manosque

Manosque has two lovely fountains and a historic cobblestoned core, but the traffic and suburban nothingness make visiting a nuisance. Why swing by? Just southeast is the home of **l'Occitane** (www.occitane.com; Zone Industrielle St-Maurice; ☎10am-7pm Mon-Sat), the company that turned traditional lavender-, almond- and olive oil-based Provençal skincare into a global phenomenon. Factory tours can be booked through the **tourist office** (☎04 92 72 16 000); the shop offers a flat 10% discount, and the odd bargain.

**The Drive** » Leave the freeways and ring roads behind and cross the Durance River towards the quieter D6 (from where it will take around 20 minutes to reach the town of Valensole); make sure you check the rear-view mirrors for mountain views to the northwest as you do.

## 10 Plateau de Valensole

Things get very relaxed once you hit the D6, and the road begins a gentle climb. Picnic provisions packed, wind down your windows. This dreamily quiet plateau has Provence's greatest concentration of lavender farms, and a checkerboard of waving wheat and lavender rows stretch to the horizon, or at least until Riez. Fine picnic spots and photo ops are not hard to find.



## DETOUR: THE LUBERON

### Start: 8 Prieuré de Salagon

The Luberon's other, southern, half is equally as florally blessed. Lavender carpets the **Plateau de Claparèdes** between **Buoux** (west), **Sivergues** (south), **Auribeau** (east) and **Saignon** (north). Cycle, walk or motor through the lavender fields and along the northern slopes of **Mourre Nègre** (1125m) – the Luberon's highest point, accessible from **Cucuron**. The D113 climbs to idyllic lavender distillery **Les Agnels** (☎04 90 74 34 60; www.lesagnels.com; rte de Buoux, btwn Buoux & Apt; free tours mid-Jul–mid-Aug), which distils lavender, cypress and rosemary. The small on-site spa has a lavender-scented swimming pool. Stay at **Chambre de Séjour avec Vue** (☎04 90 04 85 01; www.chambreavecvue.com; rue de la Bourgade; r €80-100) in tiny, hip Saignon, which perches on high rocky flanks, its narrow streets crowning a hill ringed with craggy scrub and petite lavender plots, with incredible vistas across the Luberon to Mont Ventoux.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Gordes 1

### **Le Mas Tourteron** Gastronomic €€€

(☎)04 90 72 00 16; www.mastourteron.com; chemin de St-Blaise; menus from €35; 🍴 lunch & dinner Wed-Sat, lunch Sun) Surrounded by flourishing gardens, the stone dining room has a cosy, boho-chic feel, befitting chef Elisabeth Bourgeois' cooking. Menus are inventive and seasonal, with legendary desserts and an impressive wine menu. It's signposted off the D2, 3.5km south of Gordes. Reservations essential.

### **Le Mas de la Beaume** B&B €€

(☎)04 90 72 02 96; www.labeaume.com; entrance Gordes village; d €125-180; 📶 🚰 🚿) In a stunning hilltop locale at the village's edge, this impeccable five-room place is like a Provençal postcard come to life (never mind summertime traffic over the garden wall). Think yellow-washed stone walls and bunches of lavender dangling from wood beams. Plan a lie-in; breakfast is delivered to your room.

### **Auberge de Carcarille** Hotel €€

(☎)04 90 72 02 63; www.auberge-carcarille.com; rte d'Apt; r €88-115, lunch menus €20, dinner menus €35 to €50; 📶 🚰 🚿 🚻) Tucked in a valley 3km east of Gordes, this mid-size, great-value hotel has spotless if conservatively decorated rooms, and a big garden. Consider half-board: the restaurant serves good regional cooking.

## St-Saturnin-lès-Apt 3

### **Le Restaurant L'Estrade** Bistro €

(☎)04 90 71 15 75; 6 av Victor Hugo; menus from €15) Word of mouth keeps this super-friendly village restaurant buzzing. The menu

showcases the season's freshest ingredients – simple stuff but expertly prepared. A good lunch stop; call ahead to secure a table.

### **Mas de Cink** Self-Contained €€

(☎)06 11 99 80 88; www.lemasdecink.com; Hameau des Blanchards; per 3 nights from €200, per week €300-900; 📶 🚰 🚿) Apartments evocatively blend northern contemporary cool with earthy Provençal comfort in this sprawling old farmhouse and barn. All have fully equipped kitchens, and a couple are suitable for larger groups. Private terraces and trellised outdoor dining areas overlook a wild garden, lavender fields and vineyards. Happy, lazy days!

## Forcalquier 7

### **Restaurant Le 9** Provençal €€

((☎)04 92 75 03 29; www.le9-forcalquier.fr; av Jean Giono; lunch menus €13-18, dinner menus €20-26; 🍴 daily Jul & Aug, Thu-Mon Sep-Jun). High up behind the citadel, with a panoramic terrace, Le 9 is Forcalquier's most reliable address with fresh-from-the-farm ingredients transformed into bold bistro fare. On Fridays there's a classic grand aioli. Make reservations.

### **Couvent des Minimes** Luxury Hotel €€€

(☎)04 92 74 77 77; www.couventdesminimes-hotelspa.com; Chemin des Jeux de Mai, Mane; r from €235; 📶 🚰 🚿) The Pays de Forcalquier's only top-end digs occupies a beautiful sandstone convent, with a l'Occitane spa and an aromatic garden. Luxe rooms are nicely textural (though entry-level ones are tiny). Le Cloître serves up a wonderfully creative, locally sourced menu on a lovely terrace in summer (the dining room proper is a tad corporate). Check online for last-minute half-price room rates.

***Roquebrune*** *Glorious coastal  
views over terracotta roofs*



# Classic Trip



# 23

## The Corniches

*This trio of spectacular coastal roads makes for one of the world's most cinematic drives. There are glamorous towns ahead, and some vertiginous bends. Get ready for a jaw-dropping experience.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

**3 DAYS**  
75KM / 47 MILES

**GREAT FOR...**



**BEST TIME TO GO**

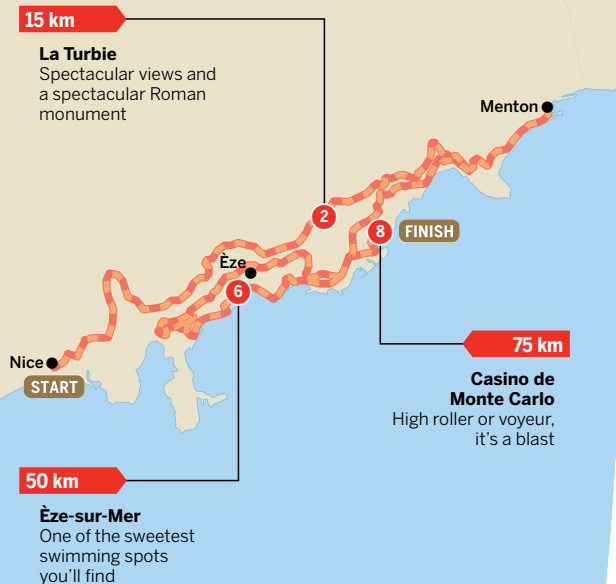
Avoid August's traffic, but otherwise enjoy winter or summer.

**ESSENTIAL PHOTO**

Under Augustus' Trophée des Alpes in La Turbie, with Monaco far beneath you.

**BEST FOR GLAMOUR**

Pull up a cliffside seat for aperitifs on Château Eza's charming stone terrace.



# Classic Trip


## 23 The Corniches

Don't save the best for last. Say goodbye to Nice from on high, and head onto Napoléon's cliff-hanging Grande Corniche, taking its sweep all the way to the Italian border. Come to your senses as you skim the waterfront on the Corniche Inférieure (aka Basse Corniche), then there are more bedazzling vistas along the Moyenne Corniche before your triumphal entry into Monaco. There's method to the double-back madness – it's all about eastbound views.



## 1 Nice

You'll begin your trip in Nice (a great place to sleep and gather snacks and supplies), heading out through Riquier on the D2564. The trip, and the thrilling views, officially begins at **l'Observatoire de Nice** (☎04 92 00 30 11; bd de l'Observatoire; adult/child €6/3) up on the summit of Mont Gros. Take it all in, wander the beautiful parkland and get ready to *really* drive.

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**The Drive** » This is, without a doubt, 12 spectacular kilometres. Note that the Parc Naturel Départemental de la Grande Corniche will be on your left and stretches almost all the way to La Turbie. Pull over and make use of its picnic tables and dozens of hilly trails – Guides RandOxygène ([www.randoxygene.org](http://www.randoxygene.org)) has maps.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 2 La Turbie

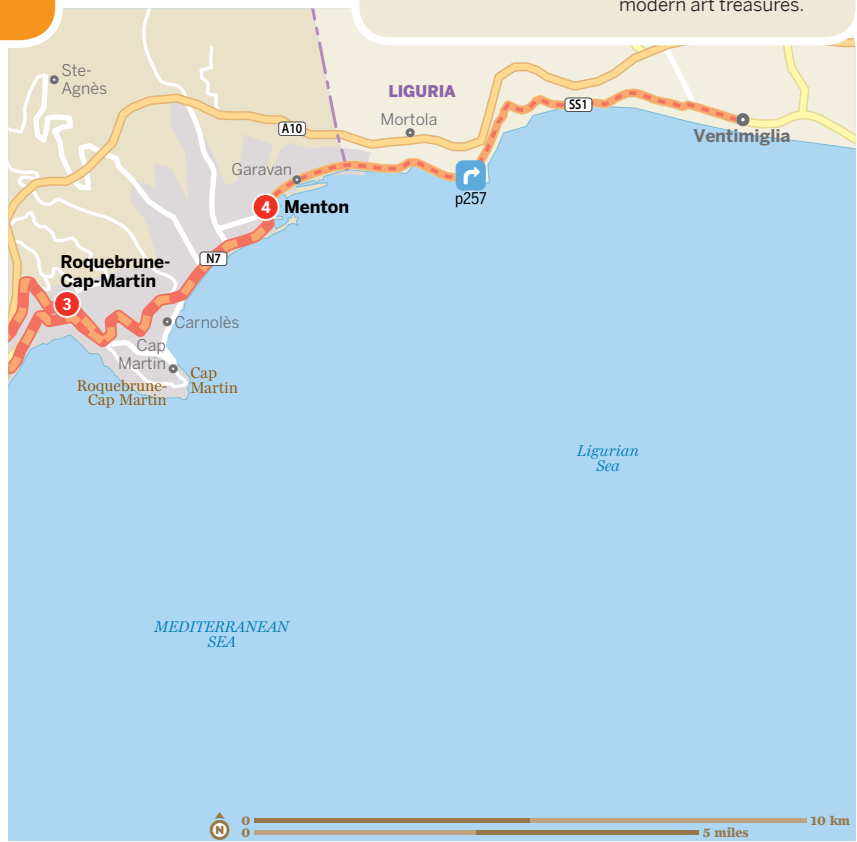
If you were approaching from the east, you might mistake the **Trophée des Alpes** (18 av Albert Ie; adult/student/child €5.50/4/free; ☎10am-1pm & 2.30-5pm



### LINK YOUR TRIP

**24 Riviera Cruising**  
Join this trip at Cap Ferrat or Nice to continue the Cote d'Azur adventure.

**25 Modern Art Meander**  
Combine these routes between Menton and Nice to discover more modern art treasures.





## Classic Trip

Tue-Sun) for a nuclear reactor or a concrete smelter, so gigantic is its scale. From the west, though, you can't miss the stunning classical façade. Yes, it's a triumphal Roman monument! Built by Emperor Augustus in 6 BC to celebrate his victory over the remaining Celto-Ligurian Alpine tribes that had resisted Roman sovereignty, this amazing tower teeters on the highest point of the old Roman road. It's a joy to visit, with dramatic views of Monaco, and a wooded park setting.

La Turbie often plays bridesmaid to Èze's bride, but it's something of an insider favourite; it's a real town going about its

business, nonchalantly blessed with one of the world's most sublimely lovely locations. It's a magical place for a meal or, even better, an overnight stay.

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**The Drive** » Monte Carlo may sparkle and beckon below, but keep your eyes on the road; the principality will keep for another day. Stay on the D2564 to skirt Monaco for another amazing 10km, then turn right into the D52 to Roquebrune.

### 3 Roquebrune-Cap-Martin


This village of two halves feels a world away from the urban glitz of nearby Monaco: the coastline around Cap Martin remains relatively unspoilt, as if Roquebrune had left its clock on medieval time. The historic half of the town, Roquebrune itself, sits 300m high on a

pudding-shaped lump. It towers over the Cap, but they are, in fact, linked by innumerable, *very* steep steps.


The village is delightful, free of tack, and there are sensational views of the coast from the main village square, **place des Deux Frères**. Of all Roquebrune's steep and tortuous streets, **rue Moncollet** – with its arched passages and stairways carved out of rock – is the most impressive. Scurry upwards to find architect Le Corbusier's grave at the **cemetery** at the top of the village (in section J, and, yes, he did design his own tombstone).

**The Drive** » Continue along the D52 towards the coast, following promenade du Cap-Martin all the way along the seafront to Menton. You'll be there in 10 minutes, traffic permitting.

## CABANON LE CORBUSIER

On a rocky parcel of land between the railway line and the sea, surrounded by eucalypts, **Cabanon Le Corbusier** (promenade Le Corbusier, Cap Martin; guided tours €8;  guided tours only 10am Tue & Fri), French architect Le Corbusier's midcentury beach shack, draws design pilgrims from around the world. Come for the architecture, but also for a glimpse of the Riviera that drew the creative classes long before the days of super-yachts and Michelin-star dining.

The *cabanon* was designed using the Modulor, a mathematical benchmark based on the height of a man with his arms held up. It's tiny, and yet a perfect distillation of Corbusier's high Modernist ideals, a place created in which to live a simple, sensual life. It was the only building he ever designed for himself; he declared it 'extravagant in comfort and gentleness'.

Visits are only possible with two-hour guided tours run by the Roquebrune-Cap-Martin **tourist office** ( 04 93 35 62 87; [www.roquebrune-cap-martin.com](http://www.roquebrune-cap-martin.com); 218 av Aristide Briand).



## DETOUR: ACROSS THE ITALIAN BORDER

### Start: 3 Menton

Menton's leafy 'suburbs' reach right to the border with Italy, so getting two countries out of your Côte d'Azur jaunt is simple and highly recommended.

Join hordes of bargain-conscious French shoppers heading to Ventimiglia (Vintimille in French) for the daily **produce market**. Stock up on fruit and fabulous deli and baked goods, such as mozzarella-stuffed peppers, chard tarts, parmesan and *tallegio* cheeses, and *bresaola* (air-dried salt beef). The larger **Friday market** sprawls along the seafront for more than 1km, offering fresh produce as well as general market stalls. It's so popular it routinely results in border gridlock. Unless you're keen to pick up imitation leather goods and bargain clothes, go another day. The town is also known for its cheap alcohol outlets, a good bet for spirits and aperitifs, but not so great for wine.

Hey, you're in Italy! That means pasta for lunch, so head to **Pasta & Basta** (☎39 184 230878; 20/A Via Marconi, Maria San Giuseppe, Ventimiglia; mains €15-20; 🕒lunch & dinner Tue-Sun, lunch Mon; 🚗) via the underpass before the town to the perpetually redeveloping port area (don't ask when it will be finished). Various house-made fresh pasta can be matched with a large menu of sauces. Go for a Ligurian speciality: Genovese pesto or *salsa di noci* (a pesto-like blond walnut sauce), and wash it down with a carafe of local white, such as a pale and refreshing *pigato*.

If you've got time, head down the valley to **Dolceaqua**, a steeply sited medieval charmer. If you'd prefer to lunch here, the cute wine bar **Re** (☎39 184 205085; Via del Castello 34; 10.30am-10pm Wed-Mon) does regional standards like borage-stuffed ravioli with a glass of wine and coffee for €10. It's marvellous how essentially Italian it all feels, when you'll be back in France in mere minutes.

For further information, see our *Italy's Best Trips* guide.

### 4 Menton

Menton's townscape reads like a history book. Its hilltop **Vieille Ville** (old city) is Ligurian to its core, a veritable mini-Genoa, while its sprawling gardens and belle époque mansions are a legacy of its 19th-century Brit invasion (it was *the* place to cough your last, darling). Meander the historic quarter all the way to the **Cimetière du Vieux Château** (montée du Souvenir; 🕒7am-8pm May-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Apr) for

great views. From place du Cap a ramp leads to the south's grandest baroque church, the Italianate **Basilique St-Michel Archange** (place de l'Église St-Michel; 🕒10am-noon & 3-5.15pm Mon-Fri, 3-5.15pm Sat & Sun), its creamy façade flanked by a towering steeple.

Menton's famed sunny microclimate is a botanist's dream, and there are many historic gardens to wander, including the **Jardin Botanique Exotique du Val Rahmeh** (www.jardins-menton.fr; av St-Jacques; adult/child €8.50/free; 🕒10am-

12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Wed-Mon) where terraces overflow with exotic fruit-tree collections, and the beautiful, once abandoned **Jardin de la Serre de la Madone** (☎04 93 57 73 90; www.serredelamadone.com; 74 rte de Gorbio; adult/student/child €8/4/free; 🕒10am-6pm Tue-Sun), overgrown with rare plants. The tourist office's dedicated **garden website** (www.jardins-menton.fr) has a comprehensive list and opening times.

🚶🚗 p261

**The Drive** » Leave Menton on the D6007, the Moyenne

*Classic Trip*



Corniche, skirting the upper perimeter of Monaco. Veer left onto the D37 and follow the signs to Cap d'Ail, around a 30-minute trip all up.

## 5 Cap d'Ail

Ditch the car for a day, hang out on hedonist's favourite **Plage Mala** (a tiny gravel cove where a couple of restaurants double up as private beach and cocktail bars) or do some spectacular coastal walking. Monaco's stretch aside, you can hike the 13km along the **Sentier du Littoral** between Cap d'Ail and Menton without passing a car. Follow the rugged coastline from Mala to Plage Marquet in the Fontvieille neighbourhood of Monaco. The path then picks up at the other end of Monaco, in Larvotto,

from where you can walk to Menton along the beaches and wooded shores of Cap Martin, including the beautiful **Plage Buse**. The walk is easy going (although often tricky in bad weather) and well marked; walk small sections and include beach stops and lunch. This is also a good place to stay overnight if you're shy of Monaco's hotel rates.



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**The Drive** » Take the D6098 west out of Cap d'Ail for 5km, passing through the giant headland via a tunnel, and then emerge on the coast at Èze-sur-Mer on av de la Liberté.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 6 Èze-sur-Mer

Èze-sur-Mer can seem a bit dull from the road. But do pull up on av de la

Liberté and find a park. Keep your eyes peeled for the underpass, near the main bus stop, which takes you to the beach, hidden behind a row of cute old beach houses. It's a sweet, intimate stretch of pebbles fronted by a gentle cove and bookended with dark mountains. Head to one of the low-key beach clubs, such as friendly **Papaya Beach** ( 04 93 01 50 33; [www.papayabeach.fr](http://www.papayabeach.fr); 28 av de la Liberté;  Easter-Oct), and sit back and watch the odd luxury yacht bobbing beyond the pontoon. There's a nice public strip here, too.

**The Drive** » Continue towards Cap Ferrat. Past Beaulieu-sur-Mer's marina, turn into the D133 at the roundabout (signposted Èze village/Moyenne Corniche). Turn right after 4km into the Moyenne Corniche; another

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

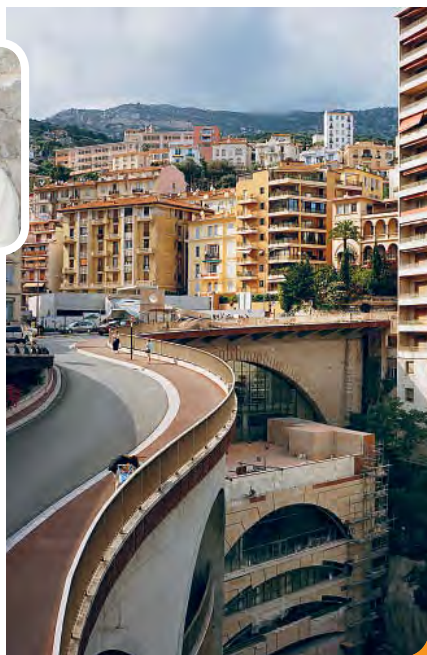
### LEE (LINO) LATEGAN-MCGREGOR, REAL ESTATE AGENT, NICE

Cheap and chic does exist on the Riviera, even in Monaco. Lounge about on imported sand with the glitterati on the beach along av Princess Grace, then head up to quaint L'Estragon in Monaco-Ville for €9 pizzas and an evening stroll. Want to party with the rich and famous? La Rascasse in Monaco's port has happy hour every night until 11pm – that's €7 cocktails in one of the area's coolest, and hottest, outdoor DJ bars.

Left: Marina, Menton  
Right: Monte Carlo



KAI WIECHMANN/GETTY IMAGES ©



# Classic Trip

1km or so along are a number of safe spots to stop and admire the view. From here it's around 10 minutes to Èze. Turn right to park at the Fragonard sign.

## 7 Èze

This rocky little village perched on an impossible peak is the jewel in the Riviera crown. The main attraction is technically the **medieval village**, with small higgledy-piggledy stone houses and winding lanes (and, yes, galleries and shops). It's undoubtedly delightful but it's the ever-present views of the coast that are truly mesmerising. They just get more spectacular from **Jardin d'Èze** (adult/child €4/free; ☀9am-sunset), a surreal cactus garden at the top of the village, so steep and rocky it may have been purpose-built for mountain goats. It's also where you'll find the old castle ruins; take time to sit, draw a deep breath and gaze, as few places on earth offer such a panorama.

On your way down, look for some horrible histories remnants: the village back door, known as the **Moor's Gate**, where the Saracens invaded in the 8th century; and a strategically placed hole near the village entrance

where boiling oil and shot were launched.

You've already dipped your toes in the Med at Èze-sur-Mer, but if you're up for it, scamper back down via the *steep chemin de Nietzsche* (45 minutes one way); this German philosopher wrote parts of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* while staying in Èze and enjoyed a daily walk down this uber-path.

Èze gets *very* crowded between 10am and 5pm; if you prefer a quiet wander, plan to be here early in the morning or before dinner. Or even better, stay in the village.

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**The Drive** » Stay on the D6007 for the 20-minute descent into Monte Carlo. Avoid temptation to make like Mark Webber when you see your first red and white marked shoulders – this is F1 territory. The Casino de Monte Carlo is well signposted; there's a massive underground car park opposite the fountain, by allées des Boulingrins.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 8 Monaco

This confetti principality squeezed into just 200 hectares is fabulous, absurd, banal and delicious all at once. Come to be part of the gilded, giddy circus or just play voyeur; either way, it's a blast. For conspicuous consumption at its most naked and theatrical, head to the **Casino de Monte Carlo** (www.montecarlocasinos.com; place

du Casino; Salon Europe/Salons Privés €10/€20; ☀Salon Europe noon-late daily, Salons Privés from 4pm Thu-Sun), or for a ringside seat on the action take an outside table at the historic **Café de Paris** (www.montecarloresort.com; place du Casino; mains €17-53; ☀7am-2am).

Take in the city from the **Jardin Exotique** (www.jardin-exotique.mc; 62 bd du Jardin Exotique; adult/child €7/3.70; ☀9am-dusk), where succulents and cacti tumble down the slopes of Moneghetti through a maze of paths, stairs and bridges.


Keen sailor Albert I, great-grandfather of the current Prince Albert, established the **Musée Océanographique de Monaco** (www.oceano.org; av St-Martin; adult/child €13/6.50; ☀9.30am-7pm); its centrepiece **aquarium** features a 6m-deep lagoon, and it's as absorbing as it is huge.

Head to **Le Rocher**, Monaco's old quarter, for a sense of the original town, if not for its souvenir shops and ice-cream sellers. Perfect for an early-evening stroll, or for added royal pomp, time your visit to coincide with the 11.55am **changing of the guard** at the Grimaldi palace; the Carabiniers du Prince sport high helmets with fetching red tassels. To get here, park at the port and take the path up through the shady **Jardins St-Martin**.

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# Eating & Sleeping

## La Turbie 2


 **Café de la Fontaine** Modern French €€  
(☎04 93 28 52 79; 4 av Général de Gaulle; mains €13-18; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This inconspicuous village bistro often doesn't get a second glance. Take a tip from the clued-up Monégasques: it's where Michelin-starred chef Bruno Cirino's gets back to his culinary roots with simple dishes like *osso bucco à la Niçoise*.

## Menton 4

 **Maison Martin et Fils** Modern French €€  
(☎04 93 35 74 67; www.martin-et-fils-restaurant06.fr; 7 rue des Marins; menus from €16) Come for a house-made menu that highlights local specialities such as zucchini-flower beignets and *soca* (chickpea fritter)-wrapped burgers. Tucked behind Menton's covered market.

 **All Seasons Menton** Design Hotel €€  
(☎04 92 10 95 25; www.all-seasons-hotels.com; 10 rue Villarey; d/f €90/140; 📶 @ 📺) This little chain hotel gets it right. Bright accented rooms with balconies are comfortable, bathrooms are slick and staff are charming. Online discounts are generous.

## Cap d'Ail 5

 **Hôtel Normandy** Hotel €€  
(☎04 93 78 77 77; www.hotelnormandy.no; 6 allée des Orangers; d from €89; 📶). Rooms here have real charm with their simple, old-school furniture and venetian mirrors; some have amazing sea views.


## Èze 7

 **Château Eza** Gastronomic €€€  
(☎04 93 41 12 24; www.chateaueza.com; rue de la Pise; mains €39-65) This 10-bed hotel has an excellent Michelin-starred gastronomic restaurant where the seasonal menu will impress as much as the views. The cute stone bar is open to the public, and the staff is welcoming.

 **Domaine Pins Paul** B&B €€  
(☎04 93 41 22 66; www.domainepinspaul.fr; 4530 av des Diabes Bleus; d €175; 📶 @ 📺) Swim in the pool with panoramic views of the sea and Èze village. Rooms in this grand Provençal *bastide* (fortified town) are beautiful and the surrounding fragrant woods perfect for a stroll.

## Monaco 8

 **Bouchon** Bistro €€  
(☎97 77 08 80; www.bouchon.mc; 11 av Princesse Grace, Monte Carlo; mains €21-32; 🕒 7am-11pm) This Lyonnais *bouchon* (bistro) might be a box-ticker (we could be in Manhattan), but its dark charm works. Standards are done 'correctly' and a weekly changing lunch menu is a bargain at €17. Bonus: they'll make you a big salad or omelette outside lunch and dinner time.

 **Tip Top** Pizzeria €  
(11 rue Spélugues, Monte Carlo; mains €12-24; 🕒 24hr; 📶) This is where Monégasques gather all night long for pizza, pasta and gossip, and it's a good late-night bet in a town that can be surprisingly sleepy.

 **Columbus** Boutique Hotel €€€  
(☎92 05 90 00; www.columbushotels.com; 22 av des Papalins, Monte Carlo; d from €230; 📶 @ 📺) Smart Fontvieille rooms, beautifully decorated in designer greys, elegant striped fabrics and 'back to nature' bathrooms. All have little balconies and views.

*Nice Stroll along sun-kissed cours  
Saleya for a mellow Riviera vibe*



# Classic Trip

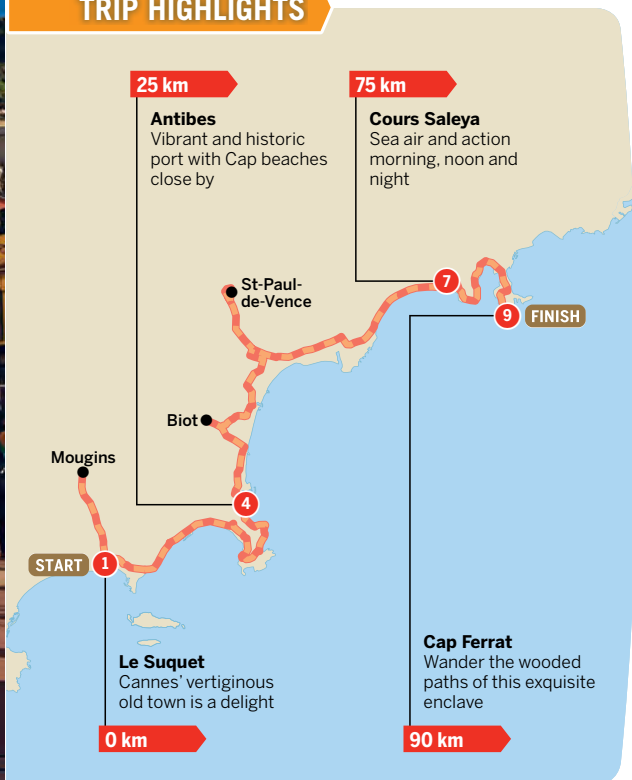


# 24

## Riviera Cruising

*This seductive Riviera route takes you to the coast and its dazzling, decadent cities, and inland to its clutch of chic hilltop villages. Along the way there are some deliciously serene surprises.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**7 DAYS**  
85KM / 53 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

June or September – you'll avoid the crowds but still can swim.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

On the 22 red-carpeted steps leading up to the cinema at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes.

### BEST FOR OUTDOORS

Find a secluded spot for a divine dip on Cap Ferrat's west coast.



# Classic Trip

## 24 Riviera Cruising

From the glitz of Cannes to the hushed wealth of Cap Ferrat, you'll discover the Riviera of Picasso, F Scott Fitzgerald and a million paparazzi pictures. But this is not just a landscape of the imagination. Along the way, the sun-kissed cuisine of Nice will enchant, the sea will sparkle, and you'll breathe in the scent of wooded isles and feel the cobbles of hilltop villages beneath your feet.



## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 1 Cannes

Join the hard-to-faze Cannois who come to **bd de la Croisette** (aka La Croisette) to stroll beneath the celebrated palms (at night all is bathed in coloured lights). It's often heaving, sometimes it's verging on vulgar, but La Croisette is *always* exhilarating.

Take in the sweep of the bay and the Estérel mountains, and drop into the elegant **Hotel Martinez** or the **Carlton**

**InterContinental** for tea. Walk west and you'll hit the imposing **Palais des Festivals** (Festival Palace; bd de la Croisette; 1½hr guided tours adult/child €3/free; ☺ tours 2.30pm Jun-Apr), host of the world's most glamorous film festival.

Head further west and you'll hit old Cannes. Follow **rue St-Antoine** and snake your way up **Le Suquet**, Cannes' atmospheric original village. Pick up the region's best produce at **Marché Forville** (☺ 7am-1pm Tue-Sun), a couple of blocks back from the port.

Not seduced? Natural beauty is all around; peace-seeking locals head to the **Lérins**, two islands a 20-minute boat ride away. Tiny and traffic-free, they're fragrantly forested, perfect for walks or a picnic. Boats from the islands leave from quai des Îles, on the western side of the harbour: **Riviera Lines** ([www.riviera-lines.com](http://www.riviera-lines.com); adult/child return €12/7.50) to Île Ste-Marguerite; **Compagnie Planaria** ([\[-ilesdelerins.com\]\(http://-ilesdelerins.com\); adult/child €13/6\) to Île St-Honorat.](http://www.cannes</a></p>
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🍴🏠 p271

**The Drive** ➤ Head directly north on the D6285 (bd Camot) from central Cannes. Mougins is 15 minutes away if you clear the bd de la Farage in good time.

## 2 Mougins

Picasso lived in little Vieux Mougins from 1961 until his death. These days it's an elite Anglo-expat favourite, with prestigious hotel-restaurants, great golfing and France's most sought-after international school. Happily, despite its pristine pulchritude, it's far from intimidating and has plenty to see.

The **Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins** ([www.mouginsmusee.com](http://www.mouginsmusee.com); 32 rue Commandeur; adult/student/child €15/8/5; ☺ 9.30am-7pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar, to 8.30pm daily Apr-Oct) contains 600 works spanning 5000 years. The concept? Juxtapose antiquities with seminal modern works to



## LINK YOUR TRIP

### 27 Corsican Coast Cruiser

For some fabulous contrasts, take the ferry to Île Rousse from Nice, a six-hour crossing.

### 39 Atlantic to Med

Jump on this trip in Nice for a cross-France coast-to-coast adventure.

## Classic Trip

illuminate how ancient civilisations inspired neoclassical, modern and contemporary art. On a different scale completely, but exciting in its own way, **Musée de la Photographie André Villers** (Porte Sarrazine; admission free; ☀10am-12.30pm & 2-7pm Tue-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat & Sun) has

fascinating black-and-white photos of Picasso and others of his Riviera milieu, and also hosts excellent temporary exhibitions.

At the **Les Jardins du MIP** ([www.museesdegrasse.com](http://www.museesdegrasse.com); 979 chemin des Gourettes, Mouans-Sartoux; adult/child €3/free; ☀10am-6pm Apr-Oct), a living extension of Grasse's **Musée International de la Parfumerie**, you can pick, rub and smell your way around its

plant collection that's organised by olfactory families (woody, floral, ambered, fougère etc).

✂ p271

**The Drive** » Double back towards Cannes, turning left into bd d'Alsace, continuing along bd Vautin and bd Alexandre III, following the signs on to the D6007. The av des Frères Roustan, before Golfe Juan, skirts the waterfront, turning into the bd du Littoral, which takes you right into Juan-les-Pins, a 30-minute drive if you don't hit a traffic snarl.



### DETOUR:

### CORNICHE DE L'ESTÉREL & ST-TROPEZ

#### Start 1 Cannes

St Tropez might be the destination but this detour is just as much about the journey. West of Cannes, take the winding **Corniche de l'Estérel** (also called Corniche d'Or, the 'Golden Coast'; the N98). The Touring Club de France opened this narrow and tortuous 30km road in 1903 for driving pleasure as much as for utility: the views are spectacular, and small summer resorts and dreamy inlets are dotted along it. It gets very busy in summer – if you're in a hurry take the N7 or A8 instead.

Around 10km along, at **Le Trayas**, the rugged jewel-like *calanques* (tiny coves) begin. Behind you the wild country of Massif de l'Estérel rises up, its beautiful red slopes dotted with gnarly oaks, juniper and wild thyme. Beaches run the gamut of possibilities: sandy, pebbled, nudist, cove-like, you name it. But wherever you go, the sea remains that crystal-clear turquoise and deep blue.

You'll then reach the towns of **St Raphael** and **Fréjus**, both with good sleeping and eating options. Visit the Roman ruins in Fréjus or wander its old town's maze of pastel buildings, then head back to the coast road for a final hour.

Brigitte Bardot came to St Tropez in the '50s and transformed the peaceful fishing village into a sizzling jet-set favourite. Tropeziens have thrived on their sexy image ever since. At the **Vieux Port**, yachts like spaceships jostle for millionaire moorings, famous faces shop for K Jacques' Tropezien sandals, cashed-up kids dance until dawn at **Nikki Beach** ([www.nikkibeach.com/sttropez](http://www.nikkibeach.com/sttropez); rte de l'Épi) and the restaurants are really fabulous, if only you weren't picking up the tab.

There is another side to this village trampled by 100,000 visitors a day in summer. Out of season, you'll find the St Tropez of mesmerising quaint beauty and 'sardine scales glistening like pearls on the cobblestones' that charmed Guy de Maupassant (1850–93). It's perfect for meandering cobbled lanes in the old fishing quarter of **La Ponche** or sipping pastis at a **place des Licès** cafe.

### 3 Juan-les-Pins

Be prepared for an initial let-down if your imagined Juan-les-Pins is the one of vintage tinted postcards, all *palazzo* pants and picture hats. Today the 'strip' is far less cinematic, with only a few traces of its early-20th-century architecture and the glamour turned down a notch. Spend some time here, though, and Juan's old-fashioned knack for fun and relaxation are winning. Get to know its charming little bars, shops and restaurants in the town's pedestrianised heart behind **av Maupassant**, settle in at a beach club or head to the western end of **bd du Littoral** where there's a small public patch of soft sand and showers.

  p280

**The Drive** » You could gun this in 20 minutes, but we suggest taking your time. Head south, hugging the coast, taking in the manicured lawns and rugged seascapes. Stop for a drink with literary ghosts at Hotel Cap du Eden Roc. Cut across bd Kennedy to the east coast, lingering in Plage de la Salis for a swim or an unbeatable view of Antibes and beyond. Antibes is just a short hop along the waterfront.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 4 Antibes



With its harbour full of pleasure boats, its 16th-century ramparts and narrow cobblestoned

### PINK WINE TIME



At the end of a long day's drive, you've undoubtedly earned an *apéro* – a pre-dinner drink. So what's on the menu?

The wine of the south is rosé. Banish thoughts of sickly sweet new-world styles. The pink stuff here is dry, fresh and crisp. Under French law it cannot be a blend; rather, it's made in the same manner as reds and with dark-skinned grapes, but with far shorter skin contact. Depending on the magic combination of grape and timing, the colour of rosé runs a glorious spectrum from the most delicate pinks to warm deep salmons.

There are several Provençal Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée (AOCs), including the Cote de Provence itself, which takes in St Tropez. The only super local appellation is the tiny Bellet, high in the hills 10 minutes northwest of Nice.

Enjoyed your first *pichet* (little jug) and want to taste more? In Nice, talk to the *cavistes* (cellarmen) at **Cave de la Tour** (3 rue de la Tour), or in Antibes try wine bar **Les Sens** (04 93 74 57 06; 10 rue Sade; 10am-midnight Tue-Sat).

streets festooned with flowers, Vieux Antibes is the quintessential Mediterranean port. The **Musée Picasso** (p277) is a highlight, both for its location and collections. Don't miss the views from the sea walls, from sprawling Nice to the snowy peaks of the Alps. If you're here in the morning, the excellent **Marché Provençal** (cours Masséna; 7am-1pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun, daily Jul & Aug) will be in full swing.

  p271, p280

**The Drive** » Brave the traffic on the D6007 and turn left on the roundabout onto the D4 (after about 4.5km), then head directly to Biot; with luck this should be a 20-minute stretch.

### 5 Biot

This 15th-century hilltop village is as fashionable and well-to-do as its hinterland neighbours but retains the air of a real town – it's a lovely place for a laid-back stroll or lingering in the village square. It was once an important earthenware manufacturer (and one-time headquarters of the Knights Templar, then the Knights of Malta), but today it is known for its signature bubbled glasswork. The famous **Verrerie de Biot** (04 93 65 03 00; www.verrieriebiot.com; chemin des Combes; 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Sun) is at the

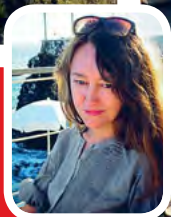
# Classic Trip



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JANORA MACONELLO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



## WHY THIS IS A CLASSIC TRIP

DONNA WHEELER,  
AUTHOR

This legendary drive is one that we can all imagine (flash car and film-star beau, right?). But the experience surpasses cliché – it's infinitely richer, and brims with history, culture and natural beauty. Spend a dreamy day with the monks on Île St-Honorat or a few hours poring over the collection at Mougins' Musée de la Photographie André Villers and you'll see what I mean.

Top: St-Paul de Vence  
Left: Vieux Nice  
Right: Harbour, Cannes





DOUGLAS PARSONS/GETTY IMAGES ©

foot of the village – watch skilled glass-blowers at work and browse their galleries and shop. Back down on the road to Antibes is the **Musée National Fernand Léger** (p277).

**The Drive** » Leave Biot on the D4; after 1.4km turn left into chemin des Cabots. Continue as it winds down onto the D6007. After 3km turn left into D2085 (av du Grasse). Dogleg to the D336 (the av des Alpes), then veer right onto rte des Cerres to St-Paul de Vence. St-Paul is closed to traffic; car parks fill up in high season.

## 6 St-Paul de Vence

Strolling the narrow streets is how you'll pass the time in picturesque St-Paul: the village has been beautifully preserved and the panoramas from the ramparts are stunning. The main artery, **rue Grande**, is lined with shops and galleries. The highest point in the village is occupied by the **Église Collégiale**; the adjoining **Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs** was redecorated by Belgian artist Folon.

St-Paul was a favoured haunt of artists; today the village claims a Rolling Stone, philosopher prince Bernard Henri Levy and actress Arielle Dombasle. The **tourist office** (☎04 93 32 86 95; www.saint-paul-devence.com; 2 rue Grande; ☎10am-7pm) runs themed guided tours (1½ hours, adult/child £5/free) that

# Classic Trip

delve into the town's illustrious past.

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**The Drive** » You'll return the way you came, then jump on the A8 to Nice. Take exit 50 for the Promenade des Anglais, an 18km drive. There's a real thrill following the Baie des Anges – the beach vibe is instantly intoxicating.


## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 7 Nice

With its unusual mix of real-city grit, old-world opulence, year-round sunshine and exceptional location, Nice pleases everyone from backpackers to romance-seeking couples and families. If you're suffering glam-overload on this trip, kick back at a cafe on cours Saleya in **Vieux Nice** or relax on a bench on the legendary **Promenade des Anglais** and clock an epic sunset.

Eating options are some of the best you'll find in France, the nightlife is buzzing and the art scene is thriving. In fact, civic pride is at an all-time high with a new garden set to snake its way up the **Promenade du Paillon**, and bars, restaurants and shops popping up in the rapidly gentrifying port area. This is a great

base, with a good range of hotels.

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**The Drive** » At the port get on the D6098 to Ville Franche. As you climb up the hill, don't miss the fantastic historic architecture and the sparkling blue of the Mediterranean. There's car parking on your right, just before the exit to the old town.

### 8 Ville Franche

Heaped above a postcard-perfect harbour, this picturesque village overlooks the Cap Ferrat peninsula and, with its deep *rade* (harbour), is the port of call for super-sized cruise ships. Walk down into the 14th-century **vieille ville** (old city). Its tiny, evocatively named streets, broken by twisting staircases and glimpses of the sea, is reason enough to visit and it feels so Italian you'll find yourself saying '*ciao*' to the local old ladies perched on their front steps. Don't miss arcaded **rue Obscure**, an ancient fully enclosed street, a block in from the water.

Artist Jean Cocteau managed to convince local fishermen to let him paint the neglected 14th-century **Chapelle St-Pierre** (admission €2.50; ☎10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon). He transformed it with a barrage of mystical frescos and a beautiful pattern.

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**The Drive** » Head back onto the D6098, skirting the bay on high, for a spectacular 10-minute drive. After 2km, turn right onto the D25 to reach the entrance of Cap Ferrat.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 9 Cap Ferrat

As you head down this narrow isthmus you leave the coast's crowds behind and enter the fragrant and leafy, walled realm of the ultrawealthy.

The best way to experience the Cap (besides an invite from Bill Gates or Bono) is to swing by the **tourist office** (☎04 93 76 08 90; www.saintjeancapferrat.fr; 59 av Denis Séméria; ☎9am-4pm Mon-Fri) and grab a trail map. There are some 14km of easygoing eucalyptus-scented paths skirting the exquisite coastline.

#### Villa Santo Sospir

(☎04 93 76 00 16; www.villasantosospir.fr; 14 av Jean Cocteau; admission €12; ☎by appointment), tucked away on the Cap's far point, was the home of actress Francine Weisweiler. Jean Cocteau, whilst a houseguest, covered the walls with his signature mythological illustrations. The views and interiors are stunning, and the villa has a touching human scale and warmth. Tours are led by Weisweiler's former nurse and friend, and delightfully peppered with anecdotes about her and Cocteau's exploits.

# Eating & Sleeping


## Cannes 1

 **Mantel** Modern European €€  
(☎04 93 39 13 10; www.restaurantmantel.com; 22 rue St-Antoine; menus €25-38; ☺Fri-Mon, dinner Tue & Thu) Discover why Noël Mantel is the hotshot of the Cannois gastronomic scene at his refined old-town restaurant. Service is stellar and the seasonal cuisine spot on (poached octopus *bourride*-style is Cannes on a plate).

 **Hôtel Le Canberra** Boutique Hotel €€  
(☎04 97 06 95 00; www.hotel-cannes-canberra.com; 120 rue d'Antibes; d from €155; 📶📺📶📶) Wow, a Cannes hotel that's reasonably priced, glamorous and intimate. A couple of blocks back from La Croisette, Le Canberra impresses with impeccable service, black marble bathrooms and a heated pool (April to October).

## Mougins 2


 **L'Amandier** Modern French €€  
(☎04 93 90 00 91; www.amandier.fr; 48 av Mallet; menus from €29; ☺Fri-Tue) Young chef Denis Fétiisson has brought Roger Vergé's baby back to its former glory. Set in an old mill, it's considered casual in these parts, but comes with chandeliers and breathtaking views. Various themed *menus* (fixed-price meals) let you shape your culinary experience.

 **La Cave de Mougins** Delicatessen, Wine Bar €  
(www.lacavedemougins.com; 50 av Charles Mallet) Come for the stunning vaulted ceiling, events-packed calendar (tastings, 'meet the winemakers' evenings, little concerts etc) and atmospheric terrace. During the day, nibble on pâté and cheese platters with a glass of wine.

## Antibes 4

 **Hôtel La Jabotte** B&B €€  
(☎04 93 61 45 89; www.jabotte.com; 13 av Max Maurey; s/d €124/142; 📶📺) Just 10 rooms and an individual sense of style give this hotel a charming *chambre d'hôte* feel. It's only 50m from the sea at Salis and a 20-minute stroll from Vieil Antibes. Complimentary breakfast is served on the garden patio.

## Nice 7

 **La Merenda** Niçois €€  
(4 rue Raoul Bosio; mains €12-15; ☺Mon-Fri) Simple, on-the-money Niçois cuisine by former Michelin-starred chef Dominique Le Stanc draws the crowds to this hectic, pocket-sized bistro. No credit cards, no phone bookings.

 **Hôtel La Pérouse** Boutique Hotel €€€  
(☎04 93 62 34 63; www.hotel-la-perouse.com; 11 quai Rauba Capeu; d from €195; 📶📺📶📶) A small, genteel, hushed hotel built into the rock cliff next to Tour Bellanda. Bright front rooms have magnificent views out to sea; others look over the lemon trees and pool. Service here is far from stuffy, but exceptionally attentive. A bargain in winter.

## Ville Franche 8

 **Hôtel Welcome** Boutique Hotel €€€  
(☎04 93 76 27 62; www.welcomhotel.com; 3 quai Amiral Courbet; d from €192; 📶📺📶) Teetering on the edge of Ville Franche's picturesque port, the Welcome has 35 individually decorated rooms, some Cocteau-themed, others Provençal, others art deco; all share sea views





*St-Paul de Vence Stop in for top art at impressive Fondation Maeght*



# 25

## Modern Art Meander

*Provence is where many 20th-century artists found their greatest source of inspiration. Cross this photogenic, good-time region and discover its vibrant, creative history along the way.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

**7 DAYS**  
340KM / 211 MILES

#### GREAT FOR...



#### BEST TIME TO GO

Winter – how it used to be done.



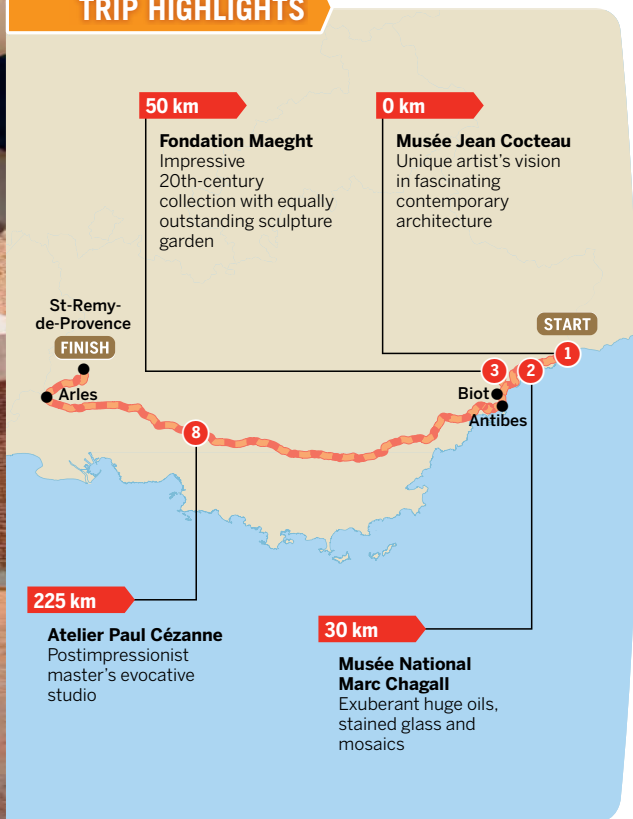
#### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

A snap in the bar of La Colombe d'Or is a nice trophy for art groupsies.



#### BEST TWO DAYS

Concentrate on Picasso on the Cote d'Azur, or combine Van Gogh and Cézanne in Provence proper (Arles, Aix and St-Rémy).



## 25

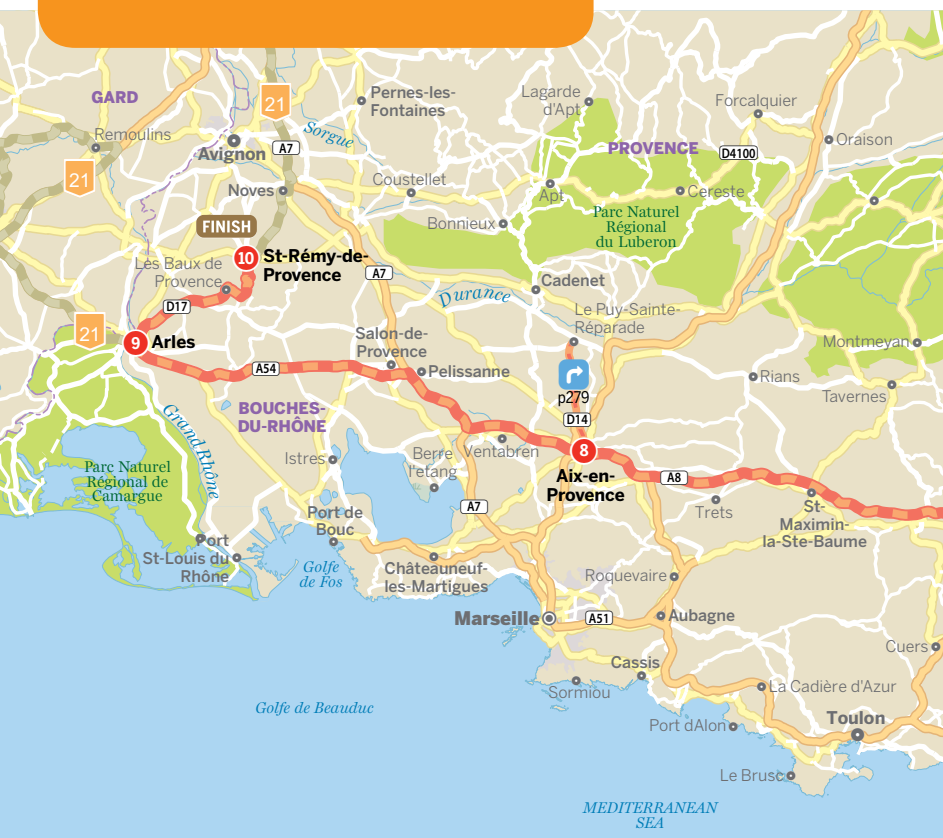
## Modern Art Meander

There's a particular kind of magic that happens when you connect with a work of art in the place it was created. This trip includes the region's stellar art museums, but also takes you to the bays, beaches, fields, hilltop eyries, bars and bustling boulevards where the Modern masters lived, worked and partied. And it's all bathed in Provence's glorious, ever-inspirational light.


## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 1 Menton

Menton is known for two things: lemons and an exceptionally sunny climate. The recent opening of the **Musée Jean Cocteau Collection Séverin Wunderman** (2 quai Monléon; adult/child €6/free; ☎10am-6pm Wed-Mon) will give Menton a new claim to fame. The artist-poet Jean Cocteau was an honoured adopted son of the town; the collection focuses mainly on Cocteau's illustrations, but



also includes his poetic, experimental films. You can catch delightful glimpses of palms and sparkling sea from slashes in the skin of Rudy Ricciotti's architecturally ambitious building. Cocteau decorated the local **Salle des Mariages** (Registry Office; place Ardoino; adult/child €2/free; ☎8.30am-noon & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri) in 1957, and don't miss his rendering of France's official mascot, Marianne.

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**The Drive** » Take the coast road – the gorgeous basse

corniche – for about 45 minutes via Roquebrune St-Martin.

**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

**2 Nice**

The Cote d'Azur capital is home to two iconic

museums. The **Musée National Marc Chagall** ([www.musee-chagall.fr](http://www.musee-chagall.fr); 4 av Dr Ménard; adult/child €7.50/5.50; ☎10am-5pm Wed-Mon Oct-Jun, to 6pm Jul-Sep) houses the largest public collection of

**LINK YOUR TRIP**

**21 Roman Provence**

The 20th-century artists were inspired by this heritage; join in Arles or St-Rémy (and the sunflower therapy around Nîmes is sweet).

**23 The Corniches**

Cruise the three spectacular roads at the Cote d'Azur's heart, between this trip's two stops Nice and Menton, with art galore.



works by Marc Chagall, including monumental paintings, tapestries and glasswork. It's set in an impressive contemporary space perched high over the city. Up in the leafy quarter of Cimiez, the **Musée Matisse** ([www.musee-matisse-nice.org](http://www.musee-matisse-nice.org);

164 av des Arènes de Cimiez; ☺10am-6pm Wed-Mon) overlooks an olive-tree-studded park and Roman ruins. Its beautiful Genoese villa houses a charming, if slightly underwhelming, permanent collection.

Do also make the most of Nice's burgeoning antiques and vintage scene. Browse **rue Delfy** and the streets running from place Garibaldi towards the port. The most serious dealers can

be found in **rue Segurane** and the **puce** (flea market; cnr rue Robilant & quai Lunel).

🔪🚗 p271, p280, p310

**The Drive** » The coast road between Nice and Cannes is often gridlocked, so jump on the A8 to Cagnes-sur-Mer, about a 15-minute drive, then exit to the D336 to St-Paul de Vence. From here on, the inland run is pretty. Signs to Fondation Maeght appear 500m before the entrance to the village.

### 3 St-Paul de Vence

Chagall, Picasso, Soutine, Léger and Cocteau 'discovered' this hilltop medieval village and were joined by the showbiz set, such as Yves Montand and Roger Moore. Chagall is buried in the **cemetery** at the

village's southern end (immediately to the right as you enter).

St-Paul's fortified core is beautifully preserved but gets overrun in high summer. Escape to the **pétanque pitch**, just before the entrance to the village proper, where many a tipsy painter or tousled film star has had a spin.

Below the village, the **Fondation Maeght** ([www.fondation-maeght.com](http://www.fondation-maeght.com); 623 chemin des Gardettes; adult/student/child €14/9/free; ☺10am-6pm) has one of the largest private collections of 20th-century art in Europe, in a Sert-designed building that's a masterpiece itself. There's a Giacometti courtyard, sculptures dotted across the deeply terraced gardens, coloured-glass windows by Braque and mosaics by Chagall.

Head north to **Vence** and look for the blue-and-white ceramic roof tiles of Matisse's **Chapelle du Rosaire** ([www.vence.fr/the-rosaie-chapel.html](http://www.vence.fr/the-rosaie-chapel.html); 466 av Henri Matisse; adult/child €4/2; ☺2-5.30pm Mon, Wed & Sat, 10-11.30am & 2-5.30pm Tue & Thu). Inside, an architecturally stark space is dominated by madly playful **stained-glass windows** in glowing blue, yellow and green, while sketchy, almost brutal, Stations of the Cross are rendered on tile; the artist declared

## DIY ART COLLECTION: BROCANTE BROWSING

OK, it's highly unlikely you'll come across an obscure Picasso etching for a song. Those New York decorators and Parisian dealers will have got there first. But the *brocante* (vintage and antique) markets of Provence do continue to turn up interesting midcentury ceramics, paintings and works on paper. Banish the thought of excess baggage: these are trip mementos you'll treasure for life.

Get up early and join the locals (a regular mooch around the *puce* – flea market – is an integral part of French life), with dealers at their most charming and chatty first thing in the morning. **Isle sur La Sorgue** (an hour's drive northwest of Aix-en-Provence) is known for its sprawling stalls, and runs each weekend. Both **Nice** and **Aix-en-Provence** also have weekly meets (Nice's *cours Saleya* hosts on Monday mornings, Aix's on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday on place Verdun). **Arles** holds one on the first Wednesday of the month on the bd des Lices.

it 'the fruit of my whole working life'.

  p280

**The Drive** » Head back the way you came to Cagnes, then go south for 10 minutes towards Antibes. The Musée Léger is just inland from the freeway, 2km before Biot. Look out for its brown sign.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 4 Musée National Fernand Léger

Just below the charming little village of Biot, the **Musée National Fernand Léger** (www.

musee-fernandleger.fr; Chemin du Val de Pôme, Biot; adult/child €5.50/free; ☺10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Apr) has an excellent monograph collection that captures Léger's wonderful intellectual curiosity as well as his arresting visual style.

**The Drive** » Head directly across the coast and then south to Antibes for about 15 minutes.

### 5 Antibes & Juan-les-Pins

'If you want to see the Picassos from Antibes, you have to see them in Antibes.' So said the artist himself.

Picasso and Max Ernst were captivated by this pretty port town (as was a restless Graham Greene). Do as Picasso commanded, and head to the **Musée Picasso** (www.antibes-juanlespins.



LAURENT DELLEPPELLO/GETTY IMAGES ©



Aix-en-Provence Atelier Paul Cézanne

com; Château Grimaldi, 4 rue des Cordiers; adult/student/child €6/3/free; ☺10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Sun) in the 14th-century Château Grimaldi, his studio after WWII. Look for works featuring the serenely beautiful face of Françoise Gilot, Picasso's partner of 10 years (he met Gilot in an Antibes' restaurant).

Park to explore Vieux Antibes, then hop in the car to clock **Hôtel du Cap Eden Roc**. This summer favourite of Hemingway, Picasso and others featured as the thinly disguised, fictional *Hôtel des Étrangers* in F Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* (1934).

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**The Drive** » Take the D6107 out of Antibes, and connect with the D6007, parallel to the coast, a 20-minute trip.

### 6 Vallauris

Picasso discovered this potters' village in 1947, along with his own passion for clay. He produced thousands of works here for the next eight years (many on display at the Musée Picasso in Antibes) as well as his last great political composition, a collection of dramatic murals, now part of the **Musée Picasso La Guerre et la Paix** (☎04 93 64 71 83; www.musee-picasso-vallauris.fr; place de la Libération; adult/child €3.25/free; ☺10am-noon & 2-5pm Wed-Mon). Picasso left Vallauris another gift: a dour bronze, **L'Homme au Mouton**, on place Paul Isnard (adjoining place de la Libération). But his greatest legacy was the revival of the centuries-old local ceramics industry; exuberant '60s

pieces by the likes of Roger Capon are now highly collectable, and the town is today dotted with potteries.

**The Drive** » The D803 will get you out of Vallauris, then to the Chemin des Collines to Le Cannet, a 6km flit.

## 7 Le Musée Bonnard

Pierre Bonnard's luminous, quiet, intensely personal paintings are often overlooked in the fast and furious narrative of the avant-garde. Bonnard had a base in Le Cannet from 1922, and lived here almost continuously during the last decade of his life. The collection at **Le Musée Bonnard** (☎04 93 94 06 06; www.museebonnard.fr; 16 bd Sadi Carnot, le Cannet; adult/child/family €5/3/10; ☀10am-8pm Apr-Oct, 10am-6pm Oct-Apr) includes fascinating early pieces and ephemera, but it's the local light and colour of the artist's mature works that are truly unforgettable, for fans and new converts alike.

**The Drive** » Make sure you're fed and fuelled up before hitting the A8 west, with a 1½-hour drive to Aix-en-Provence. Once there, head north on the ring road, eyes peeled for the D14 exit, then veer right into the av Paul Cézanne. Note, the street is steep and there's no marked parking.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 8 Aix-en-Provence

Oil renderings by post-impressionist Paul Cézanne of the hinterland of his hometown are forcefully beautiful and profoundly revolutionary, their use of geometric layering to create depth making way for the abstract age to come. For art lovers, Aix is hallowed ground.

The painter's last studio, **Atelier Paul Cézanne** (www.atelier-cezanne.com; 9 av Paul Cézanne; adult/child €5.50/2; ☀10am-noon & 2-6pm, closed Sun winter), 1.5km north of town, has been painstakingly preserved. The painterly clutter is set-dressed, yes, but it's still a sublimely evocative space with soaring iron windows and sage walls

washed with a patina of age. Further up the hill **Terrain des Peintres** (opposite 62 av Paul Cézanne) is a wonderful terraced garden from the Cézanne, among others, painted Montagne Ste-Victoire.

Visits to his other two sites must be booked ahead on the official **tourism website** (www.aixenprovencetourism.com): **Le Jas de Bouffan** (☎04 42 16 10 91; adult/child €5.50/2), his country manor west of the centre, and his rented cabin at **Les Carrières de Bibémus** (Bibémus Quarries; ☎04 42 16 10 91; adult/child €6.60/3.10), by a quarry on the edge of town. The latter is where he produced most of his sublime Montagne Ste-Victoire paintings.

The city's excellent **Musée Granet** (www.museegranet-aixenprovence.fr; place St-Jean de Malte; adult/child €4/free; ☀11am-7pm Tue-Sun) has nine of Cézanne's paintings, though often not on display at the same time (ironically, back in the day, the then director turned down donations by the painter himself).

🗝️ 📍 p281



### TOP TIP: JEAN COCTEAU TRAIL

The dreamy work of Jean Cocteau makes a wonderful mini-trip itinerary. See his murals at Villa Santo Sospir (p270), and discover more of his Cote d'Azur legacy on the **Route Jean Cocteau** (www.le-sud-jean-cocteau.org).

**The Drive** » For this one-hour drive, start by getting back onto the A8 and head towards Salon-de-Provence; just before the town, take the A54 (aka E80) to Arles. Note that the N113 merges with this road from St-Martin-de-Crau.



## DETOUR: CHÂTEAU LA COSTE

**Start:** 8 Aix-en-Provence

Hello 21st century! If you're partial to site-specific installation, don't miss **Château la Coste** (☎04 42 61 92 92; www.chateau-la-coste.com; 2750 Route de la Cride, Le Puy Sainte Réparate; art walk adult/child €12/free; ☺ art walk & wine shop 10am-7pm).

Taking a traditional domaine surrounded by wooded hills, Irish property developer Paddy McKillen has created one of the south's most compelling, and idiosyncratic, contemporary art collections. A 90-minute walk takes you out into the landscape, discovering works by artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Sean Scully, Tatsuo Miyajima and Richard Serra. In all there are 20 pieces, with more to come. McKillen also has chosen a roll-call of architects to design the modern structures: a 'floating' gallery/visitors centre is by Tadeo Ando, and the cellars by Jean Nouvel. Book ahead for a guided cellar visit.

If you don't have time for the hike, taste excellent organic whites, reds and rosés in the shop, and lunch at the casual restaurant between a Louise Bourgeois spider and an Alexander Calder – bliss!

From Aix, take the D14 north. The road splits after 10km, but stay on the D14, which becomes a flawless country drive. Château la Coste is well signposted from there.

### 9 Arles

Let's get this out of the way: though he painted 200-odd canvases in Arles, there's no Vincent Van Goghs to see. Instead, come to retrace the streetscapes that fill his bursting canvases, like the **cafe** from *Café Terrace at Night* (1888), which still sits on the place du Forum. Pick up a detailed Van Gogh walking map from the tourist office.

Arles today has an enduring creative vibe and a booming art and artisan scene, concentrated southwest of place du Forum and towards the *quai*.

It's also host to an exciting international photography festival, **Les Rencontres d'Arles Photographie** (www.rencontres-arles.com) running from early July to September.

✂ 🏠 p242, p281, p309

**The Drive** » From Arles head to the D17. This is a 45-minute direct drive, but the Alpilles landscape is one worth slowing down for. Join the D5 after 20km or so, then the Monastère St-Paul de Mausole is 2km before town.

### 10 St-Rémy-de-Provence

St-Rémy might be chic, but like Arles, it hasn't got a Van Gogh. A couple

of kilometres south of the town, though, the **Monastère St-Paul de Mausole** (☎04 90 92 77 00; www.cloitresaintpaul-valetudo.com; adult/child €4/3, guided tour €8; ☺9.30am-7pm Apr-Sep, 10.15am-5pm Oct-Mar) is a tranquil, if terribly poignant, part of the Van Gogh story. The painter admitted himself to the asylum here in 1889, and his stay proved to be one of his most productive periods (it was here that he painted his irises). View a reconstruction of his room and stroll the gardens and Romanesque cloister that feature in several of his works.

✂ 🏠 p242, p281



# Eating & Sleeping

## Menton 1

### **Hôtel Victoria** Design Hotel €€

(☎)04 93 35 65 90; www.hotel-victoria.fr; 7 promenade du Cap Martin, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin; s/d from €134/144; 📶 @ 📺) Fans of Modernist design (Eileen Gray and Le Corbusier in particular) make a beeline for this sensational hotel. Blue and white rooms reference the looping, graphic signature of the great architect, the lobby and restaurant feature some original furniture and lithographs. All rooms are on the 1st floor and those facing the sea have balconies.

## Nice 2

### **Chez Palmyre** Niçois €

(☎)04 93 85 72 32; 5 rue Droite; menu €15; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) A new chef has breathed new culinary life into this fabulously atmospheric little restaurant, seemingly unchanged for its long life, and turns out Niçois standards with a light hand. Service is sweet, the price is fantastic; book ahead, even for lunch.

### **Hôtel Windsor** Boutique Hotel €€

(☎)04 93 88 59 35; www.hotelwindsornice.com; 11 rue Dalpozzo; d €120-175; 📶 @ 📺) A super-central belle-époque façade hides this fun, friendly hotel (not to mention its lush tropical garden). There are artist-designed, conceptual rooms, and ones with sweet water-washed murals; check the website to see which suits your style.

### **La Moma** B&B €€

(www.moma-nice.com; 5 av des Mousquetaires; d €100; 📶) A homey, stylish and creative place to stay, with well-connected artist hosts, and two beautifully decorated, if small, guest rooms. A great choice to avoid negotiating Nice traffic – it's located to the city's north with easy access to the A8, and is only a few tram stops away from the centre.

## St-Paul de Vence 3

### **Le Tilleul** Modern French €€

(☎)04 93 32 80 36; place du Tilleul; menu €25, mains €18-25; 🕒 lunch & dinner; 📶) Under the shade of a big *tilleul* (linden) tree, this is a gem. Considering its location on the ramparts, it could have easily plumbed the depths of a typical tourist trap; instead, beautifully presented dishes (such as saffron mussel gratin with melting leeks) grace your table.

### **La Colombe d'Or** Traditional French €€€

(☎)04 93 32 80 02; www.la-colombe-dor.com; place de Gaulle; mains €30-55; 🕒 lunch & dinner mid-Dec–Oct; 📶) Once upon a time, impoverished artists paid for meals here in kind (a Léger mosaic here, a Picasso painting there) and writer James Baldwin propped up the bar. If you can score a table, it's as fabulous as it sounds. The menu is surprisingly, comfortingly uncomplicated (terrines, rabbit stew, carpaccio). It's also a hotel (double €310) with a lovely pool, heated year-round, and *objet-clad* rooms.

## Antibes & Juan-les-Pins 5

### **Le Broc en Bouche** Modern French €€

(☎)04 93 34 75 60; 8 rue des Palmiers; mains €15-30; 🕒 closed Tue dinner & Wed) No two chairs, tables or lights are the same at this lovely bistro: instead, every item has been lovingly sourced from salvage. The same level of care and imagination goes into the cuisine that combines Provençal and oriental flavours.

### **Mademoiselle** Hotel €€

(☎)04 93 61 31 34; www.hotelmademoiselle.com; 109 av du Docteur Dautheville, Juan-les-Pins; d €120; 📶 🚿) Stay over in Juan to grab some beach time at this stop. This design-conscious hotel fronts a central town house with a cute tearoom, bringing Parisian cool to the Riviera. Generous details abound (after a long day on the road, you may just find fresh-baked samples from the on-site pastry chef by your bed).

**Aix-en-Provence 8****Amphitryon** Provençal €€

(☎04 42 26 54 10; www.restaurant-amphitryon.fr; 2-4 rue Paul Doumer; menus €25-40; ☺Tue-Sat) Run by a fiery duo, Amphitryon enjoys a solid reputation among Aix's bourgeoisie, particularly in summer for its market-driven creative cooking and cloister-garden. Attached is the Comptoir de l'Amphi (mains €12 to €18).

**Hôtel Cézanne** Design Hotel €€€

(☎04 42 91 11 11; http://cezanne.hotelaix.com; 40 av Victor Hugo; d €179-249; 📶@📶) Aix's cutest little design hotel is light and clean lined. Tip: the less expensive 'luxe' rooms are more charming than the suites. Reserve ahead for free parking.

**Arles 9****Le Gibolin** Bistro €€

(☎04 88 65 43 14; 13 rue des Porcelet; menu €25; ☺lunch & dinner Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, Wed-Sat Oct-May) Delight in consummate home cooking while the friendly patroness bustles between tables. A cute shopfront in one of Arles' coolest 'hoods, it's a wine bar too so expect expert local pairings.

**Hôtel Nord-Pinus** Hotel €€€

(☎04 90 93 44 44; www.nord-pinus.com; place du Forum; d €160-310; 📶) Like St-Paul's La

Colombe d'Or, the Nord-Pinus is more than a hotel: it's living theatre. Lounge, corridors and stairwells are lined with vintage bullfighting posters, photographs by and of past guests (some famous, others notorious) and evocative Arlesian artefacts. Moody-hued rooms are spacious, with original tiled floors and enormous baths and balconies. The bar here screams lost weekend. (Parking is an extra €18.)

**St-Rémy-de-Provence 10****Mas de l'Amarine** Modern French €€

(☎04 90 94 47 82; www.mas-amarine.com; ancienne voie Aurélia; mains €28-36, r from €250) Five minutes east of town by car, this design-oriented *auberge* is filled with fashion-forward details that complement the stylised cooking. Many ingredients come from the magnificent gardens surrounding the former farmhouse. Reservations essential. Upstairs are five bright, special rooms.

**La Maison du Village** Boutique Hotel €€€

(☎04 32 60 68; www.lamaisonduvillage.com; 10 rue du 8 Mai 1945; d €170-210; 📶@📶) This hotel is St-Rémy all over – exclusive, eclectically stylish and appealing to all the senses. Gorgeous rooms come in a number of configurations and there's an on-site Diptyque shop.

*Plage de Palombaggia Corsica's  
postcard-perfect coastal idyll*



# Southern Seduction en Corse



# 26

*From edgy urban vibe to tranquil green lanes and cliff-carved coastline, this trip takes history fiends and culture vultures on a dramatic spin around the best of southern Corsica.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**10 DAYS**  
260KM / 160 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

Spring or late summer to beat the crowds on the coast road and heat on the beach.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The cliffs of Bonifacio snapped afloat a boat.

### BEST FOR HEART-POUNGING HIKES

The Col de Bavella is hot, but nothing beats the hike down the king's staircase in Bonifacio.

# Southern Seduction en Corse


Starting with your foot on the pedal in the Corsican capital, this 10-day journey ducks and dives along the island's most dramatic coastal roads and mountain passes in southern Corse (Corsica). Mellow green hikes, gold-sand beaches and crisp turquoise waters to break the drive and stretch your legs are never far away, and for archaeology buffs there's the added bonus of some of France's most extraordinary prehistoric sites.


## 1 Ajaccio

Napoléon Bonaparte's hometown and the capital of France's ravishing Île de Beauté aka Corsica, this charismatic city on the sea thoroughly spoils with fine art in **Palais Fesch** ([www.musee-fesch.com](http://www.musee-fesch.com); 50-52 rue du Cardinal Fesch; adult/child €8/5; ☎10.30am-6pm Mon, Wed & Sat, noon-6pm Thu, Fri & Sun, to 8.30pm Fri Jul & Aug) and a beautiful bay laced with palm trees. Afterwards hike 12km west to **Pointe de la Parata** to watch



the sunset turn the **Îles Sanguinaires** (Bloody Islands) vivid crimson. Later, savour drinks beneath the stars on a trendy waterfront terrace at Port Tino Rossi.

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**The Drive**  From Ajaccio port, pick up the N193 and subsequent N196 to Bonifacio. After 12km turn right onto the D302, direction Pila Canale (a brown sign reads 'Filitosa'), and prepare for the sudden grand view of Ajaccio city below as the road climbs. Bear right onto the D255 and wind along peaceful green lanes via the D55, D355, D757 and D57 to Filitosa.

**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

**2 Filitosa**

Nowhere is more evocative of ancient Corsican civilisation than this archaeological



**23 The Corniches**


Pop your car on the ferry in Bastia and sail to Nice for more mountainous, hairpin-laced *corniches* (coastal roads) with giant blue views.

**27 Corsican Coast Cruiser**

Completely smitten? Motor north from Ajaccio and up to Île Rousse to cruise the island's west coast.

site ripe with olive trees, pines and the intoxicating scent of *maquis* (herbal scrub). Visit around noon when the sun casts dramatic shadows on the carved statues and menhirs woven around trees and circling sheep pastures.

Corsica developed its own megalithic faith around 4000 BC to 3000 BC, and many of the stones at **Filitosa** (04 95 74 00 91; www.filitosa.fr; adult/child €6/4; 8am-sunset Easter-Oct) date from this period. The menhirs are particularly unusual, including some with detailed faces, anatomical features like rib cages, even swords and armour.


**The Drive**  Wind your way back to the D57 and meander south to the sea along the D157 to join the southbound N196 just north of Propriano. Count on about 40 minutes to cover the 30km trip to Sartène.

**3 Sartène**


With its ramshackle granite houses, shaded shabby streets and secretive alleys, this sombre town evokes the rugged spirit of rural Corsica, notorious for banditry and bloody vendettas in the 19th century.

A colourful time to motor in is on Good Friday during the **Procession du Catenacciu**, celebrated since the Middle Ages.

Barefoot, red-robed and cowed, the Catenacciu (literally 'chained one'; penitent) lugs a massive 35kg wooden cross through town in a re-enactment of Christ's journey to Calvary. The rest of the year, cross and 17kg penitent chain hang inside **Église Ste-Marie** (place Porta).

Don't leave without filling your picnic hamper with cheese, sausage, honey and wine from **La Cave Sartenaise** (place Porta; daily Apr-Oct).

 p290

**The Drive**  From Sartène it is an easy one-hour drive along the southbound N196 to Bonifacio. Slow down along the final leg – coastal views are glittering and you might well want to jump out for a dip.

**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

**4 Bonifacio**

With its glittering harbour, incredulous cliff-top perch and stout citadel teetering above the cornflower-blue waters of the **Bouches de Bonifacio**, this Italianate port is an essential stop. Sun-bleached town houses, dangling washing lines and murky chapels secreted in a postcard web of alleyways hide within the old citadel, while down at the harbour, kiosks tout must-do boat trips through gin-clear waters to **Îles Lavezzi**.

Park at the harbour and walk up **montée du Rastello** and **montée St-Roch** to the citadel gateway with 16th-century drawbridge. Inside is the 13th-century **Bastion de l'Étendard** (adult/child €2.50/free; ☀9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) with a history museum. Stroll the ramparts to **place du Marché** and **place de la Manichella** for jaw-dropping views of the legendary cliffs. Then hike down the **Escalier du Roi d'Aragon** (King of Aragon's stairway; adult/child €2.50/free; ☀9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct), a steep staircase cut into the southern cliff-face to the water. Legend says its 187 steep steps were carved in a single night by Aragonese troops during the siege of 1420. In truth, the steps led to an underground freshwater well, in a cave on the seashore.

🍴🛏 p290

**The Drive** » From the harbour, head north along the N198 towards Porto-Vecchio. Count on about 45 minutes to cover the 35km from Bonifacio to the Plage de Palombaggia turn-off, signposted on the large roundabout south of Porto-Vecchio town proper.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 5 Plage de Palombaggia

When it comes to archetypal 'idyllic beach',

MICHEL BUSTILLET/GETTY IMAGES ©





**Bonifacio** Harbour backed by the citadel



it's impossible to think past immense **Plage de Palombaggia**, the pine-fringed beach that stars on most Corsica postcards. (Imagine sparkling turquoise water, long stretches of sand edged with pine trees and splendid views over the **Îles Cerbicale**. Melting into its southern fringe are the equally picture-perfect expanses of sand and lapping shallow waters of **Plage de la Folacca**. This irresistible duo is sure to set your heart aflutter.

  p291

**The Drive** » Join route de Palombaggia in its anticlockwise loop around the peninsula, afterwards joining the busy N198 briefly for its final sprint into Porto-Vecchio. Spend a pleasant hour mooching along at a relaxed, view-savouring pace.

## 6 Porto-Vecchio

Shamelessly seductive and fashionable, Porto-Vecchio is the Corsican St-Tropez, the kind of place that lures French A-listers and wealthy tourists. Its picturesque backstreets, lined with restaurant terraces and designer shops, has charm in spades – presided over with grace by the photogenic ruins of an old Genoese citadel.

Small and sleepy by day, Porto-Vecchio sizzles

in season when its party reputation dons its dancing shoes and lets rip for a hot night out. Cafes and bars cluster place de la République and along the seafront. On the town's southern outskirts, **Via Notte** (www.vianotte.com; rte de Porra; ☀ daily May-Sep), with 5000-odd revellers and superstar DJs most summer nights, is the hottest club in Corsica and one of the most famous in the Med.

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**The Drive** » Leave Porto-Vecchio by the winding D368 and follow it through the heavily wooded Forêt de l'Ospédale – excellent walks and picnic spots – to the rural hamlet of L'Ospédale (1000m), 18km northeast. Continue on the same road through more forest and loads more exhausting wiggles to Zonza, 20km north again. It'll take a good hour for the entire journey.

## 7 Zonza

The chances are you've had a temporary surfeit of superb seascapes, so take a couple of days out to explore the **Alta Rocca** wilderness, a world away from the bling and glitz of the coast. At the south of the long spine that traverses Corsica, the area is a bewildering combination of dense, mixed evergreen–deciduous forests and granite villages strung over rocky ledges.

No mountain village plunges you more dramatically into its heart than Zonza, a hamlet overshadowed by the iconic **Aiguilles de Bavella** (Bavella Needles), granite pinnacles like shark's teeth that jab the skyline at an altitude of more than 1600m. Hiking is the thing to do in this wild neck of the woods.

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**The Drive** » Allow up to half an hour for the go-slow, bend-laced drive that climbs slowly and scenically up from Zonza to the mountain pass at 1218m, 10km north.

## 8 Col de Bavella

No number of hairpins or sheer drops can prepare you for the spectacular drama that awaits you atop the Bavella Pass (1218m), the perfect perch for marvelling close-up at the **Aiguilles de Bavella**. Depending on the time of day and weather, these gargantuan granite spikes glimmer red, gold, crimson, ginger or dark broody burgundy.

Short and long hikes are a dime a dozen, and when the drinking in of outdoor action and intoxicating alpine views is done, there is unforgettable feasting on roasted baby goat and wild pig stew at the **Auberge du Col de Bavella** (☎04 95 72 09 87; www.auberge-bavella.com;



## DETOUR: PREHISTORIC CORSICA

### Start **7** **Zonza**

This short but startling loop dives into the heart of ancient Corsica. To create a perfect weekend, combine it with an overnight stay at the island's best boutique-farm spa.

From Zonza drive 9km south along the D268 to **Levie**, unexpected host to the **Musée de l'Alta Rocca** (adult/child €5.50/3; ☀9.30am-6pm daily May-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Apr), a local history and ethnographical museum.

Continue south along the D268 and after 3km turn right onto rte du Pianu (D20), a narrow lane signposted 'Cucuruzzo Capula Site Archéologique'. Soon after you arrive at **A Pignata** (☎04 95 78 41 90; www.apignata.com; rte du Pianu; d incl half-board €180-260, tree house €300; ☀Apr-Oct; ♿♿), a chic mountain retreat where you can gorge on Alta Rocca mountain views crossed by swirling clouds from a poolside chaise longue. Fronted by brothers Antoine and Jean-Baptiste, the farmhouse spa with vegetable garden and pigs (that become the most mouth-melting charcuterie) is class. Its 18 rooms are contemporary and its restaurant (*menu* €40) is the best in southern Corsica. For heaven on earth, go for the impossibly romantic tree house for two.

Next morning, continue along the same D20 road for five minutes to the **Site Archéologique Cucuruzzo Capula** (☎04 95 78 48 21; www.cucuruzzu.fr; adult/child €5.50/3; ☀9.30am-7pm Jun-Sep, to 6pm Apr, May & Oct), 3.7km in all from the D268. Allow two hours to explore the archaeological site. Enthralling for kids and adults alike, an evocative 3km interpretive trail takes you on foot between giant boulders coloured bright green with moss to the Bronze Age *castelli* (castles) of Cucuruzzo and Capula. Along the way kids can duck into the earliest natural-rock shelters used by prehistoric man (he was small) and poke around the remaining rooms of a stronghold where, a few centuries later, man butchered wild boar, cooked broth, spun wool and fashioned thongs from stretched animal skins.

Backtrack to the D268 and turn left (north) back to Levie and beyond to Zonza.

place de la Fontaine; mains €13-21, menu €24; ☀lunch & dinner Apr-Oct) on the pass. If you want to stay overnight, the Corsican inn has dorm beds (per person including half-board €36).

**The Drive** » Steady your motoring nerves for relentless hairpins on the perilously steep descent along the D268 from the Col de Bavella to the Col de Larone, 13km northeast, and onwards north through the hills to Solenzara on the coast. Allow at least an hour for the entire 30km trip.

### **9** **Solenzara**

The town itself is not particularly worthy of a postcard home. What gives this seaside resort on Corsica's eastern coast natural appeal is its handsome spread of sandy beaches and the journey to it – one of the most stunning (and nail-biting) drives on Corsica. So steep and narrow is the road in places that it's not even single lane, while hazy

views of the tantalising Mediterranean far below pose an unnerving distraction. Once through the thick pine forest of the **Forêt de Bavella**, the road drops across the **Col de Larone** (608m) to eventually meet the banks of the **River Solenzara**. When the extreme driving gets too much, pull over and dip your toes in the crystal-clear river water – there are swimming and picnic spots aplenty.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Ajaccio 1

### Le 20123

Corsican €€

(📞04 95 21 50 05; www.20123.fr; 2 rue du Roi de Rome; menus €34.50; 🕒dinner Tue-Sun) You won't find many more character-filled places in Corsica than this fabulous country inn with village fountain and twinkling night stars. Everyone feasts on the same four-course *menu*, built from local produce and traditional recipes, and – most fabulously of all – unchanged for 25 years.

### U Pampasgiolu

Corsican €€

(📞04 95 50 71 52; 15 rue de la Porta; mains €15-30; 🕒dinner Mon-Sat) The rustic arch-vaulted dining room of this Ajaccio institution is packed with punters nearly every night of the week. They come for the first-rate Corsican food made from carefully chosen ingredients. Go à la carte, or choose from the *planche spuntinu* (snack selection) or *planche de la mer* (fish and seafood selection) for a great assortment of Corsican specialities served on wooden platters.

### Hôtel Kallisté

Hotel €€

(📞04 95 51 34 45; www.hotel-kalliste-ajaccio.com; 51 cours Napoléon; s/d €77/95; 📶📶📶) Find this functional but stylish hotel a short walk along Ajaccio's main shopping street. Should you require wheels, the hotel conveniently shares its ground-floor reception space with a couple of car-hire companies, and covered parking is free. Rooms are all exposed brick, neutral tones and terracotta tiles, and the morning starts well with a copious buffet breakfast for just €4.

## Sartène 3

### Domaine de Croccano

B&B €€

(📞04 95 77 11 37; www.corsenature.com; rte de Granace, D148; d €79-90; 🕒Jan-Nov) Some 3.5km out of town on the road to Granace, this lovely old farmhouse is surrounded by fields with grazing horses. As well as cooking up old-fashioned rooms and homemade breakfasts, the owners run guided horse-riding rambles

amid the *maquis*, all with stunning views over Sartène and the sea.

## Bonifacio 4

### Domaine de Licetto

Corsican €€

(📞04 95 73 19 48; www.licetto.com; rte du Phare de Pertusato; menu incl drinks €38; 🕒dinner Mon-Sat Apr-mid-Oct) For an authentic Corsican experience, this place is hard to beat. The gargantuan, no-choice, five-course *menu* is a culinary feast based on local ingredients sourced from small-scale farmers. *Menu* stalwarts include lamb and *aubergines à la bonificienne*. It's right in the *maquis*, on the way to Phare de Pertusato.

### Kissing Pigs

Corsican €€

(📞04 95 73 56 09; quai Banda del Ferro; mains €9-15; 🕒lunch & dinner daily) Soothingly positioned by the harbour, this widely acclaimed restaurant and wine bar serves savoury fare in a seductively cosy interior, complete with wooden fixtures and swinging sausages. It's famous for its cheese and charcuterie platters. For the indecisive, the combination *moitié-moitié* (half-half) is perfect. The Corsican wine list is another hit.

### Domaine de Licetto

Hotel €€

(📞04 95 73 03 59; www.licetto.com; rte du Phare du Pertusato; s €55-85, d €70-105, q €115-175; 🕒Apr-Oct) Tucked in the *maquis* a couple of kilometres east of Bonifacio, this motel is lovely. Its seven minimalist rooms sport stylish bathrooms, well-chosen furnishings and private terraces with table and chairs to enjoy the surrounding peace and quiet. Best up, dump the car and walk into town – along the panoramic cliff-top coastal path.

### Hôtel Genovese

Design Hotel €€€

(📞04 95 73 12 34; www.hotel-genovese.com; rte de Bonifacio; d €210-250; 🕒Oct-Mar; 📶📶📶) Chic and stylish, this uber-cool hotel built on the ramparts is hard to resist. Its swimming pool is the last word in pool design, interior furnishings are bright and fresh, and each of its 14 rooms is different. Spoil yourself.

## Plage de Palombaggia 5

 **Tamaricciu** Mediterranean €€

(📞)04 95 70 49 89; www.tamaricciu.com; rte de Palombaggia; mains €15-32; ☺ lunch Apr, May & Sep, lunch & dinner Jun-Aug) **Complete a perfect day in beach paradise with an apéro and dinner at the hippest of the beach dining spots scattered on the Palombaggia sands.** This address screams St-Tropez with its chic wooden-decking terrace and first-class views of the turquoise surf. Cuisine is lots of grilled fish beautifully presented.


 **A Littariccia** B&B €€

(📞)04 95 70 41 33; www.littariccia.com; rte de Palombaggia; d €85-220; 🏠) Find bucolic bliss at this attractive B&B that boasts a *faaabolous* location. Your heart will lift at the dreamy views over the Med; your soul will find peace in the six button-cute rooms; and your body will relax in the small pool. Not all rooms come with sea view.

 **Le Belvédère** Hotel €€

(📞)04 95 70 54 13; www.hbcorsica.com; rte de Palombaggia; d €210-255; ☺ mid-Apr-Dec; 📶📶📶) Built from an old family estate tucked between eucalyptuses, palm and pine on the seashore, this 15-room hotel is divine. Decor is an exotic mix of stone, wood, marble and wrought iron. Public areas lounge between natural rock and sand, and the sea-facing pool? You'll be hard-pushed to move.

## Porto-Vecchio 6

 **A Cantina** Traditional French €

(📞)04 95 25 95 89; www.orriu.com; 5 cours Napoléon; mains €14-24; ☺ lunch & dinner May-Sep) Gourmets will be in heaven at this *bar à vin*, with an atmospheric old-stone interior packed to the rafters with sausages and cold meats hung up to dry, and cheeses. Lunch platters range from light to feisty, and the *formules apertives* (pre-dinner drinks with nibbles) are inspired. Don't miss the fresh Brocciu cheese sold in season in the adjoining boutique.

## Zonza 7

 **Chez Pierrot** B&B €€

(📞)04 95 78 63 21; d incl half-board €110) Southern Corsica's most idiosyncratic venture, this multifaceted address – *gîte*, B&B, restaurant and equestrian centre – is run by the charismatic Pierrot, at home here since childhood. Find it on Plateau de Ghjallicu, 5km uphill from Quenza, 10km from Zonza.

 **Hameau de Cavanello** B&B €€

(📞)04 95 78 66 82; www.locationzonza.com; s/d €77/89; 📶📶) This reliable sleep with cosy rooms and wonderful pool nesting in hectares of green meadows and forests is 2km from Zonza (in the direction of Col de Bavella).



*Corsica Rocky coastline and alluring blue waters near Ajaccio*

# Corsican Coast Cruiser



# 27

*Few coastlines are as ravishing or varied as the seashore ribbon that unfurls on this five-day trip around western Corsica. For some daredevil action, detour inland to the island's deepest canyon.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

10 km

### Tramway de la Balagne

Discover the secret cove of your dreams aboard the rickety Trembler

île Rousse  
START

2

Calvi

3

20 km

### Le Matahari

Lunch on the sand at one of Corsica's most coveted beach dining spots

90 km

### Porto

Cruise from Porto to the dazzling Réserve Naturelle de Scandola

100 km

### Les Calanques de Piana

See red, blazing red, between fantastic rock formations

Ajaccio

FINISH

5 DAYS

185KM / 115 MILES

GREAT FOR...



BEST TIME TO GO

April to July and September for quiet roads and blue-sky views.



ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Snap blazing-red rock formations at Les Calanques de Piana.



BEST FOR BOAT TRIPS

Set sail from Porto for some of Corsica's most breathtaking coastal scenery.

## 27

# Corsican Coast Cruiser

Keep both hands firmly on the wheel during this high-drama ride along Corsica's hairpin-laced west coast. Dangerously distracting views out the window flit from glittering bay and bijou beach to sawtooth peak, blazing-red rock and *maquis*-cloaked mountain; while the road — never far from the dazzling big blue — gives a whole new spin to the concept 'Go Slow': you won't average much more than 35km/h for the duration of the trip.

## 1 Île Rousse

Sun-worshippers, celebrities and holidaying yachties create buzz in this busy beach town straddling a long, sandy curve of land backed by mountains and herb-scented *maquis*.

Begin the day on Île Rousse's central tree-shaded square, **place Paoli**, overlooked by the 21 classical columns of the Greek Temple-styled **food market**, built around 1850. Get lost in the rabbit warren of old-town alleys around the square, and at noon sip a pre-lunch aperitif on the terrace of venerable **Café des Platanes** (place Paoli)

and watch old men play boules.

Later, take a sunset stroll past a Genoese watchtower and lighthouse to the russet-coloured rock of **Île de la Pietra**, from which the town, founded by Pascal Paoli in 1758, gets its colourful name. Sea kayaking around the promontory and its islets is an outdoor delight.

  p300

**The Drive** » From the roundabout at the western end of town, pick up the N197 towards Calvi; buy fresh fruit for the journey from the open-air stall signposted 'Marche Plein Air' on the roundabout.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 2 Alagajola

This gloriously old-fashioned, bucket-and-spade address makes a great base. Its golden-sand beach is one of Corsica's longest and loveliest, and budget accommodation options are superb. If your idea of luxury is drifting off to the orchestra of crashing waves, and frolicking on the sand in pyjamas fresh out of bed at dawn, there is no finer place to stay.

Next morning, jump aboard the *trinighellu* (trembler) aka the **Tramway de la Balagne**, a dinky little seaside train that trundles along sand-covered tracks between Île Rousse and Calvi, stopping on request only at hidden coves and bijou beaches en route.

 p300

**The Drive** » Continue towards Calvi on the coastal N197 and in the centre of Lumio, 6km south of Alagajola, turn right following signs for 'Plage de l'Arinella'. Twist 2.6km downhill past leafy walled-garden *residences secondaires* to the turquoise water lapping onto Plage de l'Arinella.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 3 Plage de l'Arinella

If there is one crescent of sand in Corsica you must not miss, it's this serene,



MEDITERRANEAN  
SEA



rock-clad cove with one of Corsica's finest beach restaurants and dramatic views of the citadel of Calvi. Lunch here is a trip highlight.

From the stylish, shabby-chic interior of **Le Matahari** (☎04 95 60 78 47; www.lematahari.com; mains €20-30; 🕒lunch Tue-Sun Apr, Sep & Oct, lunch & dinner daily May-Aug) to the big windows looking out to Calvi beyond the waves, this hip beach spot is one very special hideaway. Wooden tables, strung on the sand and topped with straw parasols, immediately evoke a tropical paradise, while cuisine is creative – think *penne à la langouste* (lobster), squid, fresh *morue* (codfish) or a



LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP

### 25 Modern Art Meander

Sail by car ferry from Ajaccio to Nice and follow in the footsteps of Picasso, Van Gogh and others along the mythical French Riviera.

### 26 Southern Seduction en Corse

Corsica is so seductive you might well find yourself extending your trip with this 10-day motor from Ajaccio around the island's southern tip to Porto on the east coast.

300 km to



simple tuna steak pan-fried to pink perfection.

**The Drive** » Motor back up the hill to join the coastal N197 and continue south for another 15 minutes, around the Golfe de Calvi, to Calvi. The best spot to park is at the top of town, across from the entrance to the citadel.

#### 4 Calvi

Basking between the fiery orange bastions of its 15th-century citadel and the glittering waters of a moon-shaped bay, Calvi feels closer to the chichi sophistication of a French Riviera resort than a historic Corsican port. Palatial yachts and private cruisers jostle for space along its harbourside, while high above the quay the watchtowers and battlements of the town's Genoese stronghold stand guard, proffering sweeping views inland to Monte Cinto (2706m).

Set atop a lofty promontory, Calvi's massive fortified **citadel** has fended off everyone down the centuries, from Franco-Turkish raiders to Anglo-Corsican armies. Wraparound views from its five feisty bastions certainly have the wow-factor, and **Chez Tao** (rue St-Antoine; ☺ Jun-Sep), a wildly hip and lavish music bar around since 1935, is the spot to lap them up, cocktail in hand.

🍴 📍 p300

**The Drive** » Across from the citadel, pick up the coastal road D81B signposted 'Rte de Porto – Bord de Mer'. Before driving off, don't miss the old shabby square shaded by rare Ombu trees with gnarled and knotted trunks, and sweet honey-producing flowers.

#### 5 Pointe de la Ravelleta

Within seconds of leaving town, you're deep in the hot sun-baked *maquis* (herbal scrubland), with a low stone wall being the only separator between white-knuckled passenger and green drop down to emerald water below. After 4km the magnificent cape of Pointe de la Ravelleta – the nearest Corsican point to the French mainland – pops into view, with a toy-like white lighthouse at its tip and dusty walking trails zigzagging between the scrub and the ocean. Park and indulge in a signposted 1.5km hike to **Chapelle Notre Dame de la Serra** or a 20-minute sea-bound stroll for lunch at **Mara Beach** (📍 04 95 65 48 30; Plage de l'Alga; mains €15-20; ☺ lunch Apr-Oct), a Robinson Crusoe-style beach hut in a turquoise-water creek.

**The Drive** » Continue south on the D81B. After the *champ de tir* (military shooting range), savour a brief reprieve from the big coastal views as the road ducks inland between the mountainous 703m hulk of Capu di a Veta

© SHUTTERSTOCK/ERIC HILBERT/ALAMY





**Porto** Promontory and beach

(left) and fields of grazing sheep (right). At the first road fork, 35km south of Calvi, bear right along the D81 signposted 'Galeria 5km, Porto 49km', and at the second fork, bear left.

## 6 Col de la Croix

Having driven for a good hour around relentless hairpins, you might be tempted to stop on **Col de Palmarella** (406m), a mountain pass with fine views of the W-shaped bay of the Golfe de Girolata far below. Pull over to photograph the blazing blue Mediterranean ensnared by the flaming-red rock of **Punta Rossa** (right), the dollhouse-sized hamlet of Girolata tucked in the creek of the bay, and the menacing dark green of forested **Capo d'Osani** (left). But save the picnic lunch and sun-fuelled siesta for **Col de la Croix** (260m), about 10km further south.

Park in the car park and pick up the dusty footpath behind the snack bar signposted '*Panorama – Table d'Orientation*'. Climbing gently uphill for 20 minutes through typical Corsican *maquis*, the path suddenly staggers out of the Mediterranean bush into a mind-blowing panorama of fiery red and smouldering black-green capes, blue bay and the spaghetti road you've successfully navigated to get here. An orientation

table tells you what's what.

Back at the roadside *buvette* (snack bar), longer walking trails lead downhill to the seaside hamlet of **Girolata** (1½ hours, 7km) and to **Plage de Tuara** (45 minutes).

**The Drive** » Count on a good half-hour of relentlessly bend-laced motoring to cover the 25km from Col de la Croix south to Porto. The final five minutes reward you with a sudden dramatic narrowing of the road and dramatic roadside rock formations that flame a brilliant red. Go even slower than slow.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 7 Porto

The crowning glory of the west coast, Porto sits sweet at the foot of a thickly forested valley trammelled on either side by crimson peaks. Split by a promontory, the village itself is topped by a restored **Genoese tower** (adult €2.50; ☀9am-9pm Jul & Aug, 11am-7pm Sep-Jun) built in the 16th century to protect the gulf from Barbary incursions. Scale the russet-coloured rocks up to the square tower, take in the tiny local-history exhibition inside, then stroll to the bustling marina where a footbridge crosses the estuary to a eucalyptus grove and pebble beach. April to October, boats sail from the marina to the shimmering seas around the magnificent,

Unesco-protected marine reservation of the **Réserve Naturelle de Scandola**.

🍷🍷 p300

**The Drive** » Cruise 12km south along the same coastal D81 towards the village of Piana. When you see red you know you've hit the next stop.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 8 Les Calanques de Piana

No amount of hyperbole can capture the astonishing beauty of these sculpted cliffs teetering above the Golfe de Porto. Rearing up from the sea in staggering scarlet pillars, teetering columns, towers and irregularly shaped boulders of pink, ochre and ginger, Les Calanques flames red in the sunlight and is among Corsica's most iconic, awe-inspiring sights. And as you sway around switchback after switchback along the rock-riddled 12km stretch of the D81 south of Porto towards the village of **Piana**, one mesmerising vista piggy-backs another.

For the full technicolour experience of this natural ensemble of gargantuan proportion, park up and savour Les Calanques on foot. Several trails wind their way around these dramatic rock formations unwittingly shaped like



## DETOUR: GORGES DE SPELUNCA

### Start 7 Porto

If you crave a break from blue, head inland to the hills to **Ota** and **Évisa**, a twin set of enigmatic mountain villages that dangle defiantly above a plunging canyon blanketed with thick woods of pine, oak and chestnut. Quintessentially Corsican, these magical mountain hideaways are a haven for hikers, positioned halfway along the **Mare e Monti hiking trail** and within striking distance of Corsica's answer to the Grand Canyon, the unforgettable **Gorges de Spelunca**.

Until the D84 was carved out from the mountainside, the only link between the two villages was a tiny mule track via two Genoese bridges, the **Ponte Vecchju** and **Ponte Zaghlia**. The trail between the villages is a fantastic day hike (five hours return), winding along the valley floor past the rushing River Porto and soaring orange cliffs, some more than a kilometre high. Or follow the shorter two-hour section between the bridges; pick up the trail at the arched road-bridge 2km east of Ota.

Carpeting the slopes east of Évisa is **Forêt d'Aitone**, home of Corsica's most impressive stands of *laricio* pines. These arrow-straight, 60m-high trees once provided beams and masts for Genoese ships.

South of Porto, the D84 wiggles direct to Évisa, 22km east and a good 30 minutes of go-slow, blind-bend driving. Or opt for the narrower, slower D12 to the north that detours to the village of Ota before hooking up with the same D84.

dogs' heads, dinosaurs and all sorts; trails start near **Pont de Mezzanu**, a road bridge on the D81 about 3km north of Piana. Afterwards, splurge on lunch at Corsica's most mythical hotel, **Les Roches Rouges** (p300).

**The Drive** » Driving drama done with, it is a relatively easy 70km drive south along the D81 to the Corsican capital of Ajaccio.

### 9 Ajaccio

Corsica's capital is all class – and seduction. Commanding a lovely sweep of the bay, the city breathes confidence and has a real whiff of the Côte d'Azur. Mosey

around the centre with its mellow-toned buildings and vibrant cafe culture, stroll the marina and trendy beach-clad route des Sanguinaires area, and congratulate yourself on arriving in the city – several hundred hairpin bends later – in one piece!

Napoléon Bonaparte was born here in 1769, and the city is dotted with sites relating to the diminutive dictator. The **Salon Napoléonien** ([www.musee-fesch.com](http://www.musee-fesch.com); av Antoine Sérafini; adult/child €2.30/1.50; ☎2-5.45pm Mon, 9-11.45am & 2-5.45pm Tue-Fri Jun-Sep, 9-11.45am & 5.45pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) displays Napoléonic medals, portraits, busts and a frescoed ceiling of

Napoléon and entourage; and his childhood home is now the **Maison Bonaparte** ([www.musee-maisonbonaparte.fr](http://www.musee-maisonbonaparte.fr); 18 rue St-Charles; adult/child €7/5.50; ☎10.30am-12.30pm & 1.15-6pm Tue-Sun).

The Oscar for most fascinating museum goes to Ajaccio's fine arts museum, established by Napoléon's uncle, inside **Palais Fesch** ([www.musee-fesch.com](http://www.musee-fesch.com); 50-52 rue du Cardinal Fesch; adult/child €8/5; ☎10.30am-6pm Mon, Wed & Sat, noon-6pm Thu, Fri & Sun, to 8.30pm Fri Jul & Aug). France's largest collection of Italian paintings outside the Louvre hangs here.

✂️ 🏠 p290, p301

# Eating & Sleeping

## Île Rousse 1

### U Libecciu

Seafood €€

(📞)04 95 60 13 82; www.ulibecciu.com; rue Notre-Dame; mains €15-28; 🕒lunch & dinner daily Apr-Oct) Named after Corsica's westerly wind, this address is hip. Cuisine is creative (mussels cooked in Cap Corse liqueur are to die for), desserts are famously decadent, and, should you be wondering what's up with the empty 1919 rum bottles on the shelves, the house *cocktail du siècle* mixes rum, strawberries and basil to sweet perfection.

### Hôtel Le Splendid

Hotel €

(📞)04 95 60 00 24; www.le-splendid-hotel.com; av Comte Valéry; s €60-95, d €74-105, tr €102-145, q €130-184; 📧📧) The Splendid is splendid in value, attitude and proximity to the beach (footsteps away). The tiny pool for a dip, the generous breakfast buffet and the free parking are icing on the cake. Look for the pretty pink building and giant palm trees a block from the seafront promenade.

## Alagajola 2

### L'Escale Bungalows, Self-Contained €

(📞)04 95 60 60 80; www.lescale.biz; Plage d'Aregno; d €50-80; 🕒Apr-Oct) Beach bums rejoice! This cluster of 20 self-catering apartments and 50 spick-and-span rooms – with bathroom, comfy bed, terrace and five-star sea view – sit inside low-lying cream bungalows plump on the sand, at the northern end of Alagajola on Alegno Beach.

### Hôtel de la Plage Santa Vittoria

Hotel €€

(📞)04 95 35 17 03; www.hotelplage-vittoria-corse.com; d €76-118, with sea view €80-128; 🕒Apr-Oct) With a history dating to 1870 and a flawless sea view, this family run affair on the sand is Alagajola's peachiest hotel choice.

## Calvi 4

### A Candella

Traditional Corsican €€

(📞)04 95 65 42 13; 9 rue Ste-Antoine; mains €15-25; 🕒lunch & dinner daily Apr-Oct) One of a handful of addresses to eat within the citadel, A Candella stands out for its romantic, golden-hued terrace of stone with pretty flowers in pots and olive trees. The sea view is the most marvellous you could ever hope for.

### Hôtel Le Magnolia

Hotel €€

(📞)04 95 65 19 16; www.hotel-le-magnolia.com; rue Alsace Lorraine; d €70-150; 🕒Apr-Nov; 📧📧📧) An oasis from the harbourside fizz, this attractive mansion sits behind a beautiful high-walled courtyard garden pierced by a handsome magnolia tree. Pretty much every room has a lovely outlook – Calvi rooftops, garden or sea – and connecting doubles makes it an instant hit with families.

## Porto 7

### Hôtel-Restaurant

Le Maquis

Traditional Corsican €€

(📞)04 95 26 12 19; www.hotel-lemaquis.com; cnr D214 & D81; mains €20-30, d €94-114; 🕒lunch & dinner daily Apr-Oct) This character-filled eatery in a granite house high above the harbour is much loved by locals and tourists alike. The food's a delight, with a tempting menu based on traditional Corsican cooking. There's a cosy all-wood interior but, for preference, reserve a table on the balcony – brilliant views! There are also some rooms available.

## Piana

### Les Roches Rouges Historic Hotel €€

(📞)04 95 27 81 81; www.lesrochesrouges.com; D81; s €102-123, d €114-136, tr €156-176, q €177-213; 🕒Apr-Oct; 📧) Built in 1912 on

the northern fringe of Piana village, vintage Red Rocks remains one of Corsica's quirkiest addresses. Faded grandeur at its best, a meal in its gourmet restaurant or a room with sea view is worth every cent. At the very least partake in a drink on the romantic stone terrace to savour the truly extraordinary coastal vista.

## Ajaccio 9

 **L'Altru Versu** Gastronomic €€  
(📞04 95 50 05 22; www.laltruversu.com; rte des Sanguinaires, Les Sept Chapelles; mains €20-30; 🕒lunch & dinner daily Jun-Sep, Tue-Sun Oct-May; 🚗) Ajaccio's top-notch restaurant belongs to the creative Mezzacqui brothers who are passionate gastronomes and excellent singers – they hitch on their guitars and serenade guests each Friday and Saturday night.

## **Le Bilboq – Chez Jean Jean**

Seafood €€€

(📞04 95 51 35 40; 1 rue du des Glacis; mains around €50; 🕒dinner daily) In business for decades, this Ajaccio icon is famous for *langouste aux spaghetti* (lobster with spaghetti; €12 per 100g), eaten al fresco in a tiny pedestrian street. Knock it all down with a well-chosen Corsican wine, and enter seventh heaven.

## **Palazzu u Domu** Hotel €€€

(📞04 95 50 00 20; www.palazzu-domu.com; 17 rue Bonaparte; d €220-270; 🚗@📶) Bold contemporary design inside the historic 1760 mansion of Duke Pozzo di Borgo is what Ajaccio's stylish four-star hotel, footsteps from the water, is all about. The bijou patio garden in the heart of old Ajaccio is an irresistible touch.

*Stes-Maries-de-la-Mer* Pretty pink  
flamingoes dot the lush landscape





28

# The Camargue

*Take this semicircular tour from Arles to the coast and loop back again to experience Provence at its most wild, lush and lovely. Welcome to a watery, dreamlike landscape that's like no other.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

35 km

### Église des Stes-Maries

A 12th-century church housing the town's namesakes

START/  
FINISH

0 km

### Place Paul Doumer

Possibly Provence's hippest square

Étang de Vaccarès

Le Sambuc

105 km

### Salin de Badon

Flamingos swoop over wetlands as you walk

Le Point de Vue

125 km

### Plage de Piémanson

End-of-the-earth feel with miles of windswept beach

4 DAYS

190KM / 118 MILES

GREAT FOR...



BEST TIME TO GO

May, July and September – if you like it hot and can handle a mosquito or two.



ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Point de Vue for its salty backdrop and flocks of flamingos taking flight.



BEST FOR ROMANTICS

Dinner by the hearth in the timber-beamed 17th-century kitchen of Mas de Peint.



# 28 The Camargue

Leave Arles and the highway behind and suddenly you're surrounded by the Camargue's great yawning green, and an equally expansive sky. It won't be long until you spot your first field of cantering white horses, or face off with a black bull. This is not a long trip, but one that will plunge you into an utterly unique world of cowboys, fishermen, beachcombers, the Roma and all their enduring traditions.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT



### 1 Arles

Befitting its role as gateway to the Camargue, Arles has a delightfully insouciant side. Long home to bohemians of all stripes, it's a great place to hang up your sightseeing hat for a few languorous hours (or days). Soak it in from the legendary bar at the Hôtel Nord-Pinus (p281), with its bullfighting trophies and enthralling photography collection, or pull up a



table on lively **place Paul Doumer**, where Arles' new generation makes its mark. Make a beeline for Saturday-morning's **market** (bd des Lices) and pack a Camargue-worthy picnic basket with local goats' cheese, olives and *saucisson d'Arles* (bull-meat sausage), or do likewise on Wednesday mornings on bd Émile Combes.

With precious little parking within the old town, unless you're staying at a hotel with a garage (usually an expensive extra), opt for the secure municipal facilities on bd des Lices (€7 per day).

  p309, p242, p281

**The Drive** » Take the D35A across the Grand Rhône at the Pont de Trinquette, then follow signs to the D570 – you'll soon be in no doubt you've entered the Camargue. Continue south on the D570 until Pont de Gau,

4km before you hit the coast, around 30 minutes all up.

## 2 Parc Ornithologique de Pont de Gau

Itching to get in among all that green? **Parc Ornithologique de Pont de Gau** (04 90 97 82 62; www.parcornithologique.com; Pont de Gau; adult/child €7/4; ☀9am-sunset), a 60-hectare bird park, makes for a perfect pit stop. As you meander along 7km of trails, flamingos pirouette overhead; while the pink birds can't help play diva, the marshes here also secret every bird species that call the Camargue wetlands home, including herons, storks, egrets, teals and raptors.

**The Drive** » Continue south on the D570. The last stretch of road into Stes-Mariés-de-la-Mer is dotted with stables – little-white-horse heaven, so get out your camera.



### 21 Roman Provence

Slot in the Camargue trip's loop south from either Nîmes or Arles.

### 25 Modern Art Meander

Need some culture after all this nature? Start in Arles.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 3 Stes-Mariés-de-la-Mer

Apart from a stretch of fine sand beaches – some 30km – the main attraction at this rough-and-tumble beach resort is the hauntingly beautiful **Église des Stes-Mariés** (place de l'Église), a 12th-century church that's home to a statue of Sara-la-Kali, or black Sara. The crypt

houses her alleged remains, along with those of Marie-Salomé and Sainte Marie-Jacobé, the Mariés of the town's name. Shunned by the Vatican, this paleo-Christian trio has a powerful hold on the Provençal psyche, with a captivating back story involving a boat journey from Palestine and a cameo from Mary Magdalene. Sara is the patron saint of the *gitans* (Roma people), and each 24 May, thousands come to town to pay their respects and party hard. Don't miss the ex-voto paintings that line the smoke-stained walls, personal petitions to Sara that are touching and startlingly strange in turns.

This town is the easiest spot to organise *promenades à cheval* (horseback riding); look for Fédération Française d'Équitation (FFE) accredited places, such as the friendly **Les Cabanes de Cacharel** (04 90 97 84 10; www.cabanedecacharel.com) on the easterly D85A.

  p309

**The Drive** » The scenic D85A rejoins the D570, then, after 10 minutes or so, turn right into the D37. Stop at Méjanès for supplies or to visit the legendary fish restaurant Le Mazet du Caccarés. The D36B dramatically skims the eastern lakeshore; it's a 20-minute journey but is worth taking your time over.

#### 4 Étang de Vaccarès

This 600-sq-km lagoon, with its watery labyrinth of peninsulas and islands, is where the wetlands are at their most dense, almost primordial. Much of its tenuous shore forms the **Réserve Nationale Camargue** and is off-limits, making the wonderful nature trails and wildlife observatories at **La Capelière** (📞04 90 97 00 97; www.reserve-camargue.org; adult/child €3/1.50; 🕒9am-1pm & 2-6pm Apr-Sep, Wed-Mon Oct-Mar; 🚰) particularly precious. The 1.5km-long **Sentier des Rainettes** (Tree-Frog Trail) takes you through tamarisk woodlands and the grasses of brackish open meadows.

**The Drive** » Continue on the D36B past Fiérouse for around 10 minutes.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 5 Salin de Badon

Before you leave **La Capelière**, grab your permits for another outstanding reserve site, once the **royal salt works** (adult/child €3/1.50). Around the picturesque ruins are a number of observatories and 4.5km of wild trails – spy on flamingos wading through springtime iris. True birdwatchers mustn't miss a night in the **gîte** (dm €12) here, a bare-bones cottage in a priceless location.

**The Drive** » Continue south until you meet the D36, turning right. Stop in Salin de Giraud for bike hire and fuel (there's a 24/7 gas station) or visit the salt works. The D36 splits off

to cross the Rhône via punt, but you continue south on the D36D, where it gets exciting: spectacular salt pans appear on your right, the river on your left.

#### 6 Domaine de la Palissade

Along the D36D, **Domaine de la Palissade** (📞04 42 86 81 28; www.palissade.fr; rte de la Mer; adult/child €3/free; 🕒9am-5pm Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Wed & Sun Nov-Feb) organises **horse treks** (from 1hr adult/child €16/14) where you'll find yourself wading across brackish lakes and through a purple haze of sea lavender. It will also take you around lagoons and scrubby glasswort on foot, or give you a free map of the estate's marked walking trails. Don't forget to rent binoculars; best €2 you'll spend this trip!



### DETOUR: AIGUES-MORTES

#### Start 3 Stes-Maries-de-la-Mer

Located over the border from Provence in the Gard, Aigues-Mortes sits a winding 28km northwest of Stes-Maries-de-la-Mer at the Camargue's far western extremity. Its central axis of streets often throngs with tourists, and shops spill out Camargue-themed tack, but the town is none the less magnificent, set in flat marshland and completely enclosed by rectangular ramparts and a series of towers. Come sundown, things change pace, and its squares are a lovely place to join locals for a relaxed *apéro* (pre-dinner drink). Established by Louis IX in the mid-13th century to give the French crown a Mediterranean port, it was from here that the king launched the seventh Crusade (and persecuted Cathars). The **Tour de Constance** (adult/child €6.50/free; 🕒10am-7pm May-Aug, 10am-5.30pm Sep-Apr) once held Huguenot prisoners; today it's the start of the 1.6km wall-top circuit, a must-do for heady views of salt mountains and viridian plains. Park on bd Diderot, on the outside of the northwestern wall.



Camargue horses

**The Drive** » The next 3.7km along the rte de la Mer is equally enchanting, with flocks of birds circling and salt crystals flashing in the sun. Stop when you hit the sea.

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**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

### 7 Plage de Piémanson

Just try and resist the urge to greet the Med with a wild dash into

the waves at this lovely, windswept beach. Unusually, camping is allowed here from May to September, and hundreds of campervans line up along the dunes for the duration of the *belle saison*. It's a scene that's as polarising of opinion as it is spectacular. Basic facilities and a patrolled section of sand are right at the end of rte de la

Mer; head east for the popular nudist beach.

**The Drive** » Backtrack north along the D36, just before Salin de Giraud, look for a car park and a small black shack on your right.

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### 8 Le Point de Vue

This lookout provides a rare vantage point to take in the stunning scene of pink-stained



## TOP TIP: ARLES SAVVY

Grab *Arles For Cool Tourists!*, a folding brochure with a simple city map and spot-on listings of restaurants, bars and shops. It also covers the Camargue.

*salins* (saltpans) and soaring crystalline mountains. As fruitful as it is beguiling, this is Europe's largest salt works, producing some 800,000 tonnes per year. A small shop (the aforementioned black shack) sells *sel de Camargue* (Camargue salt) by the pot or sack, bull sausages and tins of fragrant local olive oil.

**The Drive** » Heading north on D36 for 20 minutes, Le Mas de Peint is on your right before Le Sambuc, while La Chassagnette's fork and trowel shingle is on the left to its north.

### 9 Le Sambuc

This sleepy town's outskirts hide away a couple of the region's best restaurants and its most upscale lodgings. *Manadier* (bull estate

owner) Jacques Bon, son of the family who owns hotel Le Mas de Peint, hosts Camargue farm-life demonstration days, **Journées Camarguaises** (☎04 90 97 28 50; www.manade-jacques-bon.com; adult/child incl lunch €38/19; ☺ monthly in summer), with music, *gardians* (cowboys) doing their thing and *taureau au feu de bois* (bull on the barbie). But if it's boots-'n'-all *gardian* style you're after, pull up a stool at the roadside **Café du Sambuc** (rte du Sambuc): bull couscous and a jug of rosé for loose change, and staff adorned with horse and Camargue cross tattoos.

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**The Drive** » Continue north on the D36, where you'll re-meet

the D570 heading to Arles, a 25km stretch in all.

### 10 Arles

Back in Arles, visit the magnificent **Les Arènes** (Roman Amphithéâtre; adult/child incl Théâtre Antique €6.50/free; ☺9am-7pm). Buy tickets for concerts at the **Bureau de Location** (box office; ☎08 91 70 03 70; www.arenas-arles.com; ☺9.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat). Note, the Camargue take on the bullfight, the *course Camarguaise*, does not end in bloodshed. Well, not much. Rather, *razeteurs*, brave amateurs wearing skin-tight white shirts and trousers, snatch rosettes and ribbons tied to the horns of the *taureau* with a sharp comb. Victory is never as certain as the fact that, at some point, the bull will charge and the *razeteurs* will leap the arena's barrier, and the crowd will cheer.

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# Eating & Sleeping

## Arles 1 10

### **Le Galoubet** Modern French €€

(📞04 90 93 18 11; 18 rue Docteur Fanton; lunch/dinner menu €18/27; 🕒dinner Mon, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) With one simple room and a romantic trellised terrace, this restaurant hits the sweet spot between casual and considered. The staff is warm and the chef confidently handles both delicate sauced dishes and the region's big-flavoured favourites.

### **Hôtel de l'Amphithéâtre** Historic Hotel €€€

(📞04 90 96 10 30; www.hotelamphitheatre.fr; 5-7 rue Diderot; s/d/tr/q from €57/67/117/137; 📶📺📶) Set in an exquisitely earthy 17th-century town house, suites have pretty terraces and rooftop views, and guests of all budgets can enjoy courtyard breakfasts in summer and a roaring fire in winter.

### **La Pousada** B&B €€

(📞06 74 44 39 77; www.lapousada.net; 9 rue Croix Rouge; s/d €90/115; 🕒Mar-Nov; 📶📺) A chic little guesthouse that combines evocative pan-Mediterranean decor with excellent extras for independent-minded travellers: there's a kitchen and a selection of local produce for purchase, as well as bicycles and library.

## Stes-Maries-de-la-Mer 3

### **La Cabane aux Coquillages** Seafood €

(rue Théodore Aubanel; menu from €18.50; 🕒lunch & dinner Mar-Nov) Come to this pocket-sized fish shop for crustaceans; half-a-dozen oysters (as nature intended them, ie with a glass of crisp white wine) cost €8.50.

### **L'Auberge Cavalière** Farmstay €€

(📞04 90 97 88 88; www.aubergecavaliere.com; rte d'Arles/D570; d €145-190, tr €145-180; 📶📺📶) These thatched-roof cottages along a lake edge woo with manicured grounds and a restaurant (menus €32 to €38) serving up homemade bread, bull steaks and biodynamic produce. Find it set back from the D570 about 1.5km north of Stes-Maries-de-la-Mer.

### **Mas de la Fouque** Design Hotel €€€

(📞04 90 97 81 02; www.masdelafouque.com; rte du Petit Rhône/D38; d from €230; 📶📺) A few minutes' drive from Stes-Maries central, this newly refurbished ecosensitive hotel on the Étang des Launes feels deliciously remote. Decoration is a very 'now' combination of local *vide grenier* (car-boot sale) finds, posh midcentury pieces, and locally sourced linens and matting. Yes, there's a spa.

## Le Sambuc 9

### **La Chassagnette** Gastronomic €€€

(📞04 90 97 26 96; www.chassagnette.fr; menus from €85, mains €35; 🕒lunch & dinner daily Jul & Aug, Thu-Mon Apr-Oct, Thu-Sun Nov-Mar) Ducasse prodigy Armand Arnal cooks up a stunningly creative *menu* and grows much of the organic produce himself; beautiful terraces are draped to keep mosquitoes at bay.

### **Le Mas de Peint** Gastronomic €€€

(📞04 90 97 20 62; www.masdepeint.com; d/ste from €260/395; 🕒mid-Mar-mid-Nov; 📶📺📶) This is the ultimate in gentrified rustic quarters. The atmospheric wood-beamed kitchen **restaurant** (lunch/dinner menu from €39/55; lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Fri-Wed) and casual poolside place are open to nonguests.



# STRETCH YOUR LEGS NICE

**Start/Finish** Hotel Negresco,  
Promenade des Anglais

**Distance** 7km

**Duration** 2.5 hours

Get to know Nice's bustling heart with this walk that begins with a seaside stroll, then takes you into the tangled alleys of the old town and finally up and over the city's soaring headland to the port. Along the way shop, eat and drink with the fun-loving Niçois.

Take this walk on Trips



## Promenade des Anglais

Nice to a tee, the Prom seductively blends hedonism with history, pumping beach clubs with quiet seaside gazing. Why 'Anglais'? English expats paid out-of-work citrus farmers to build the Prom in 1822 – a civic win-win. Don't miss the palatial façades of belle époque Hôtel Negresco and art deco Palais de la Méditerranée.

**The Walk** » Turn up av de Verdun past palms and posh shops to the place Masséna. Take in the elegant Italian architecture, then head down the steps. Take rue de l'Opéra, a quick walk to our next stop.

## Rue St-François de Paule

Window-shop, pick up snacks or do your take-home gift hit in one go on this elegant street just back from the seaside. First stop: **Moulin à Huile d'Olive Alziari** ([www.alziari.com.fr](http://www.alziari.com.fr); 14 rue St-François de Paule) for superb local olive oil, tapenade (olive spread) and olives. Head west to the florid **Opera House**; across the road is **Henri Auer Confiserie** ([www.maison-auer.com](http://www.maison-auer.com); 7 rue St-François de Paule), a film-set-perfect sweet shop; pick up *amandes enrobé* (cocoa-dredged chocolate-covered almonds).

**The Walk** » Continue on past soap sellers and wine bars and into the open square. This eventually becomes cours Saleya.

## Cours Saleya

A top tourist destination that remains Niçois to the core, this bustling market square does different moods according to the hour. Greet the day with espresso and a banter with the produce and flower sellers, lunch with locals or get rowdy after dark with the town's cool kids and students.

**The Walk** » Any of the streets running away from the beach take you to rue de la Préfecture.

## Vieux Nice

Soak in the labyrinthine streets of Nice's old town, stumbling upon Baroque gems like **Cathédrale Ste-**



**Réparate** (place Rossetti). Stop to eat – book **Le Bistrot d'Antoine** (☎04 93 85 29 57; 27 rue de la Préfecture; mains €13-18; ☺lunch & dinner Tue-Sat), or grab an apéritif at **Les Distilleries Idéales** (24 rue de la Préfecture; ☺9am-12.30am) and snack at **Lou Pilha Leva** (10 rue Collet; ☺9am-midnight). Grab the best gelato this side of the border at **Fenocchio** (2 place Rossetti; ☺9am-midnight).

**The Walk** » Take the stairs at rue Rossetti (or the lift at rue des Ponchettes). Skip the next stop if you can't face the climb and instead follow quai Rauba Capeu around the headland, passing the massive war memorial on the way.

### Colline du Château

On a rocky outcrop towering over Vieux Nice, the **Parc du Château** (☺8am-6pm winter, to 8pm summer) offers a panorama of the whole city – Baie des Anges on one side, the port on the other. Fabulous for picnics (there's a waterfall) or let kids loose in the playground.

**The Walk** » Take the Montée de Montfort down the hill. Turn right and wander back along pretty

rue Ségurane down to quai Lunel, stopping at the Marché aux Puces on the way.

### Port Lympia

Be prepared for yacht envy. Want to get out on the water for a better gawp? In summer **Le Passagin** (☺10am-7pm) will ferry you across the mouth of the port.

**The Walk** » Skirt the water and then head up rue Cassini or rue Bonaparte to take in the port's increasingly hip shops and bars.

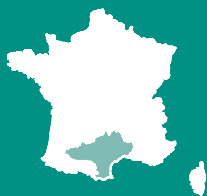
### Place Garibaldi

Named for Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi, who was born in Nice, this stately Italianate square is a low-key favourite of locals, who come to sit in its cafes, eat gelato, visit its indie cinema and meet at the fountain. Kick back with them at **Café Turin** (www.cafedeturin.fr; mains from €15; ☺8am-10pm), oysters and icy rosé optional.

**The Walk** » Head back to the start directly along bustling bd Jean Jaurès, soon to be lined with spectacular gardens.







# Pyrenees & Southwest France

**PEAKS TO PLAINS, VALLEYS TO VILLAGES, MOUNTAINS TO MED:** the southwest encompasses the French landscape in all its drama and diversity. Stretching from the dog's-tooth peaks of the Pyrenees all the way to the scrubby, sun-baked plains of the Languedoc, it's a region that's made for driving.

In the west, you'll meander across mountain passes and delve into remote valleys where life still feels timeless and traditional. As you move east, you'll discover the two sides of the Languedoc: Bas-Languedoc, with its flat plains, sprawling vineyards and laid-back coastal cities, and Haut-Languedoc, home to the wild hills and rocky gorges of the Parc National des Cévennes.

# Pyrenees & Southwest France



## 29 Pont du Gard to Viaduc du Millau 5 Days

Traverse the crags and causses of the Cévennes, with a landmark bridge at either end. (p317)

## 30 The Cathar Trail 3 Days

Head into Bas-Languedoc's backcountry to discover its Cathar castles. (p325)

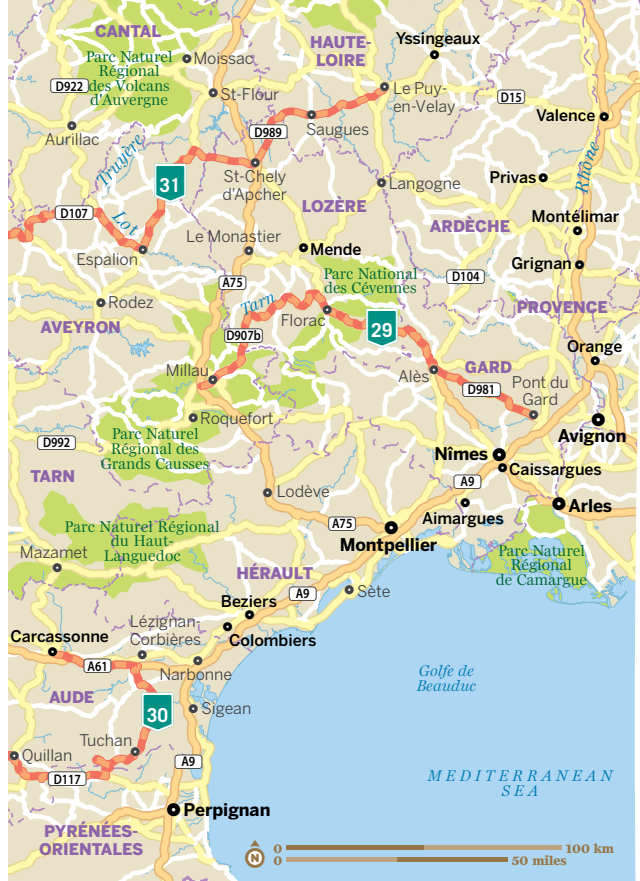
## 31 Cheat's Compostela 7 Days

Take a spiritual trip along one of France's oldest pilgrimage routes. (p333)

## *Classic Trip*

## 32 Pyrenees 7 Days

Explore this majestic mountain landscape, easily the equal of the Alps. (p341)



## DON'T MISS

### Le Puy-en-Velay

Climb inside a giant statue of the Virgin Mary for views across this Auvergnat town. Take them in on Trip **31**

### Lac de Gaube

One of the Pyrenees' finest trails leads to the glittering Lac de Gaube. Catch the cable car to the trail on Trip **32**

### Chaos de Montpellier-le-Vieux

An otherworldly landscape of limestone pillars has been created here by centuries of natural erosion. Walk among it on Trip **29**

### Col d'Aubisque

The col is one of the Pyrenees' highest road passes. Competitors in the Tour de France have to pedal it, so count yourself lucky to just drive it on Trip **32**

### Roquefort

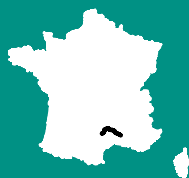
Descend into murky, mould-covered cellars to find out how this pungent fromage is made. Sample a piece on Trip **29**



Pont du Gard (Trip 29)

*Viaduc de Millau Gravity-defying  
bridge that's stunning by night*





29

# Pont du Gard to Viaduc du Millau

*This trip begins and ends with a river, traversing hills and gorges in between. Start at the Pont du Gard, France's greatest Roman aqueduct, and finish by crossing the space-age Viaduc du Millau.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**5 DAYS**  
205KM / 128 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

April to July.



### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The Pont du Gard from your boat on the river.



### BEST FOR FAMILIES

Canoeing through the towering cliffs of the Gorges du Tarn.

# Pont du Gard to Viaduc du Millau

Languedoc's known for its fine coastline and even finer wines, but on this trip you'll explore a different side to this peaceful corner of France. Inland, the landscape climbs into the high hills and river ravines of the Parc National des Cévennes, beloved by walkers, kayakers and nature-lovers alike. The scenery is truly grand, but keep your eyes on the tarmac, as some of the roads are hairy.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 Pont du Gard

The trip begins 21km northeast of Nîmes at the **Pont du Gard** ([www.pontdugard.fr](http://www.pontdugard.fr)), France's finest Roman aqueduct. At 50m high and 275m long, and graced with 35 arches, it was built around 19 BC to transport water from Uzès to Nîmes. A **museum** (☎9am-7pm) explores the bridge's history, and walking trails wind through the surrounding scrubland,



offering some of the best views of the bridge.

There are car parks on both riverbanks, about 400m from the bridge. Parking costs a flat €5; admission for up to five people costs €18.

Crowds can be large in summer; consider visiting in the evening, since parking is free after 7pm and the bridge is impressively illuminated after dark.

**The Drive** » Drive northwest from the Pont du Gard along the D981 for 15km to Uzès.

## 2 Uzès

Northwest of the Pont du Gard is Uzès, a once-wealthy medieval town that grew rich on the proceeds of silk, linen and, bizarrely, liquorice.

It's also home to the **Duché Château** ([www.duche-uzes.fr](http://www.duche-uzes.fr); admission €12, incl guided tour adult/12-17yr/7-11yr €17/13/11; ☀10am-noon & 2-6pm), a castle that belonged to the powerful Dukes of Uzès for more than 1000 years. You can climb to the top of the Tour Bermonde for a

magnificent view across the town's rooftops.

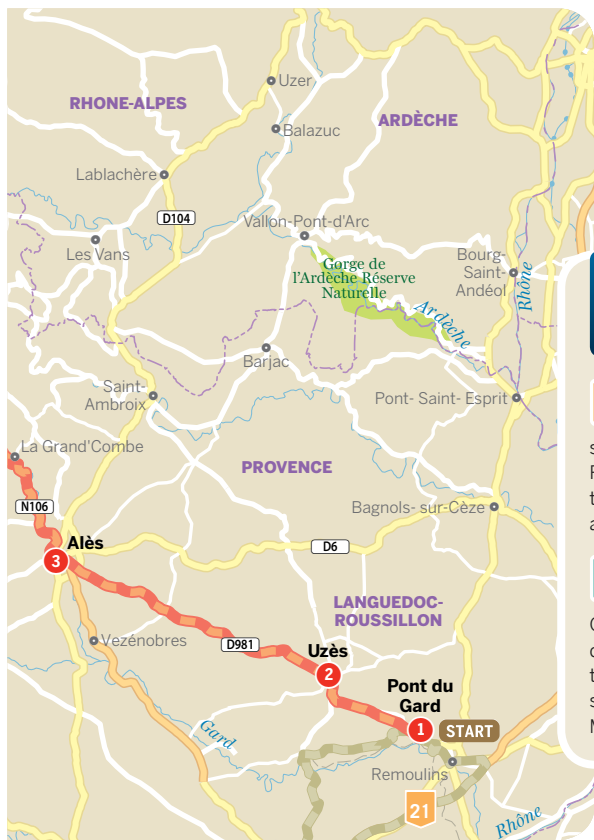
If you've got a sweet tooth, don't miss the nearby **Musée du Bonbon** (Pont des Charrettes; adult/child €7/4; ☀10am-1pm & 2-6pm daily Jul-Sep, Tue-Sun Feb-Jun & Oct-Dec), a candy museum belonging to the Haribo brand. Join in with a tasting session, or just pick up some treats for the road.

 p323

**The Drive** » Continue through the countryside along the D981. Alès is 33km northwest; the Mine Témoin and the Train Vapeur des Cévennes are both well signed.

## 3 Alès

A short drive across wooded countryside brings you to Alès, once one of France's main coal-mining centres. The last mine closed down



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

### 21 Roman Provence

Our tour through southern France's Gallo-Roman legacy also passes through Pont du Gard, so it's a perfect add-on.

### 31 Cheat's Compostela

Our Chemin de Compostela drive is an ideal route back to the Atlantic Coast. It starts 180km northeast of Millau in Le Puy-en-Velay.



in 1986, but at the **Mine Témoin** ([www.mine-temoin.fr](http://www.mine-temoin.fr); chemin de la Cité Ste-Marie; adult/child €8/5; ☀9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mar-mid-Nov) there are more than 700m of murky tunnels to explore. Equipped with a safety helmet, you catch the rattling cage into the darkness. It's an experience that's definitely not designed for claustrophobes. Tours are in French, but English guidebooks are available.

If you fancy a break from driving, a trip aboard the **Train à Vapeur des Cévennes** ([www.trainavapeur.com](http://www.trainavapeur.com); adult/child return €14/9; ☀Apr-Oct) is just the ticket. This vintage steam train chugs 13km between St-Jean du Gard and Anduze, a journey of 40 minutes. En route, you'll stop at a 150-year-old bamboo garden called the **Bambouseraie de Prafrance** ([www.bambouseraie.com](http://www.bambouseraie.com); adult/child €8.60/5.10; ☀9.30am-7pm, closed Dec-Feb).

**The Drive** » The 66km stretch of the N106 between Alès and Florac is a memorable drive, slowly looping up through the forested hillsides into the high Cévennes. Petrol stations are few and far between, so remember to fill your tank.

#### 4 Florac

Northwest from Alès, you'll begin the long, winding drive up into the **Parc National des Cévennes** ([www.celevennesparcnational.fr](http://www.celevennesparcnational.fr)).

Created in 1970, this wild expanse of hills, gorges and empty plateaus covers 910 sq km of Upper Languedoc. Famously featured in Robert Louis Stevenson's classic 1878 travelogue, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*, it's still a remote and sparsely populated landscape, home to rare species including vultures, beavers, otters, roe deer and golden eagles.

The riverside town of Florac makes an ideal base, draped along the west bank of Tarnon River, a tributary of the Tarn. There's not much to see in town, but it's a good place to stretch your legs: Florac's **Maison du Parc** (☎04 66 49 53 01; [www.celevennesparcnational.fr](http://www.celevennesparcnational.fr); ☀9am-6.30pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-12.15pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr), sells information kits (€5 each) describing various circular hikes from town.

🏠 p323

**The Drive** » Head on from Florac along the N106, and keep your eyes open for the sharp left turn onto the D31. The road teeters along the edge of the gorge as it passes through Ispagnac and tracks the river to Ste-Enimie, 28km from Florac.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 5 Gorges du Tarn

West of Florac, the rushing River Tarn has carved out a series of sheer slashes into the



JAN WINDHAGEN/ALAMY ©

limestone known as the Gorges du Tarn. Running southwest for 50km from Ispagnac, this spectacular ravine provides one of Languedoc's most scenic drives. In summer the cliffside road becomes one long traffic jam, though – you'll find spring or autumn are more relaxing times to travel.

Until the road was constructed in 1905,



**Gorges du Tarn** Paddlers along the limestone ravine

the only way through the gorges was by boat. Piloting your own kayak is still the best way to experience the scenery; the villages of **Ste-Enimie** and **La Malène** both have lots of companies offering river trips.

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**The Drive** » The cliff-side D907B runs all the way to Le Rozier, 36km to the southwest of Ste-Enimie. It's a superbly scenic

drive, so don't rush, and leave ample time for photo ops. When you get to Le Rozier, crawl your way up the hairpin bends of the D29 and turn left onto the D110 to the Chaos de Montpellier-le-Vieux, another 9km.

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## **6** Parc Naturel Régional des Grandes Causses

Around the gorges of the western Cévennes, the

Rivers Tarn, Jonte and Dourbie have created four high *causses* ('plateaux' in the local lingo): Sauveterre, Méjean, Noir and Larzac, each slightly different in geological character. You could spend several days touring along the tangled roads that cut between them, but the D996 along the **Gorges de la Jonte**



## DETOUR: ROQUEFORT

**Start:** 7 Millau

The village of Roquefort, 25km southwest of Millau via the D992 and the D999, is synonymous with its famous blue cheese, produced from the milk of local ewes who live in natural caves around the village. Marbled with distinctive blue-green veins caused by microscopic mushrooms known as penicillium roquefort, this powerfully pungent cheese has been protected by royal charter since 1407, and was the first cheese in France to be granted AOC (Appellations d'Origines Contrôlées) status in 1925.

There are seven AOC-approved producers in the village, three of which (La Société, Le Paipillon and Gabriel Coulet) offer cellar visits and tasting sessions. The cellars of four other producers (Roquefort Carles, Le Vieux Berger, Vernières Frères and Les Fromageries Occitanes) aren't open to the public, but they all have shops where you can sample the village's illustrious cheese.

is particularly detour-worthy.

South of Le Rozier is the **Chaos de Montpellier-le-Vieux** ([www.montpellierleieux.com](http://www.montpellierleieux.com); adult/child €5.95/4.80; ☀9am-7pm Jul & Aug, ☀9am-5.30pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Nov), where centuries of erosion have carved out a landscape of amazing limestone formations, often given fanciful names, such as the Sphinx and the Elephant. Three walking trails cover the site, or you can cheat and catch the tourist train (adult/child €3.85/2.90) instead.

**The Drive** ➤ Continue along the narrow D110 towards Millau, 18km to the southwest. There are a couple of great roadside lookouts on the way, as well as a

trail to the top of the local peak known as Puncho d'Agast.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 7 Viaduc du Millau

Finish your road trip with a spin over the gravity-defying **Viaduc de Millau** ([www.leviaducdemillau.com](http://www.leviaducdemillau.com); ticket €8.60), the famous road bridge that hovers 343m above the River Tarn. Designed by the British architect Norman Foster, the bridge contains over 127,000 cu metres of concrete and 19,000 tonnes of steel, but somehow still manages to look like a gossamer thread, seemingly supported by nothing more than seven needle-thin pylons.

It's such a wonderful structure, it's worth seeing twice. Begin with the drive across: head north of Millau on the D911, and then turn south onto the A75 motorway.

Once you've crossed the bridge, turn off at exit 46, and loop back to Millau along the D999 and D992, which passes directly underneath the bridge and gives you an unforgettable ant's-eye view. En route, you'll pass the bridge's visitor centre, **Viaduc Espace** (☀10am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar).

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# Eating & Sleeping

## Uzès 2

### **Hostellerie Provencale** Hotel €€

(📞)04 66 22 11 06; www.hostellerieprovencale.com; 1-3 rue de la Grande Bourgade; d €98-148; (📶) This nine-room hotel shimmers with the colours of Provence: terracotta floors, butter-yellow walls, and patches of exposed stone. The downstairs restaurant, La Parenthèse, serves regional cuisine. Breakfast is pricey: €13 in the restaurant, €16 on the terrace.

### **Château d'Arpailargues** Hotel €€€

(📞)04 66 22 14 48; www.chateaudarpailargues.com; rue du Château; d €125-240; (📶) A regal residence in an 18th-century château once occupied by Frank Liszt's muse, Marie de Flavigny. Rooms have period features such as fireplaces, beams and flagstone floors. There's a solid restaurant, too. It's 4km from Uzès.

## Florac 4

### **Grand Hôtel du Parc** Hotel €

(📞)04 66 45 03 05; www.grandhotelduparc.fr; 47 av Jean Monestier; r €52-72; ☺ mid-Mar–mid-Nov; (📶) Shuttered and spacious, this venerable hotel has 55 pleasant rooms, but the main selling points are the gardens, terrace and outdoor pool.

### **La Ferme de la Borie** Farmstay €

(📞)04 66 45 10 90; www.encevennes.com; La Salle Prunet; d €38-47, tw €48-59, tr €58-71, meals €12-15; ☺ Mar–Nov) Run by organic farmer Jean-Christophe Barthes, who'll happily show you how to make cheese, jams or the perfect rustic loaf. Meals are available, too. To get here, turn right onto the narrow C4, signed La Borie, about a kilometre southeast of Florac on the N106.

## Gorges du Tarn 5

### **La Pause** B&B €

(📞)05 65 62 63 06; www.hebergement-gorgesdutarn.com; rte de Caplac; s €42, d €53-58, f €75-102; (📶) At the gorges' southern end in Le Rozier, La Pause has three rooms in pinks and yellows, plus a couple of suites. Breakfast jams – fig, quince, cherry and more – are homemade by your hostess, Pierrette Espinasse.

### **Manoir de Montesquiou** Hotel €€

(📞)04 66 48 51 12; www.manoir-montesquiou.com; r €82-117, ste €150; (📶) This 16th-century manor overlooks the bridge in La Malène. The rooms are trad – half-tester beds, antique furniture – and some are reached via the house's spiral staircase. Ask about half-board deals.

## Millau 7

### **Château de Creissels** Castle Hotel €€

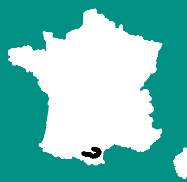
(📞)05 65 60 16 59; www.chateau-de-creissels.com; r new wing €71-85, old wing €108; ☺ Mar–Dec; (📶) In Creissels, 2km southwest of Millau on the D992, this castle offers old-style rooms in its 12th-century tower, plus modern ones in the wings. Regional cuisine is served in the brick-vaulted cellar or on the garden terrace.

### **Hôtel La Capelle** Hotel €

(📞)05 65 60 14 72; www.hotel-millau-capelle.com; 7 place de la Capelle; d €39-61, f €49-90; (📶) Budget hotel in a former leather factory, with boxy rooms decked out in crimson bedspreads and generic wallpapers. It's short on wow, but the cheap rates appeal.

*Foix Dusk descends on turreted  
Château des Comtes de Foix*



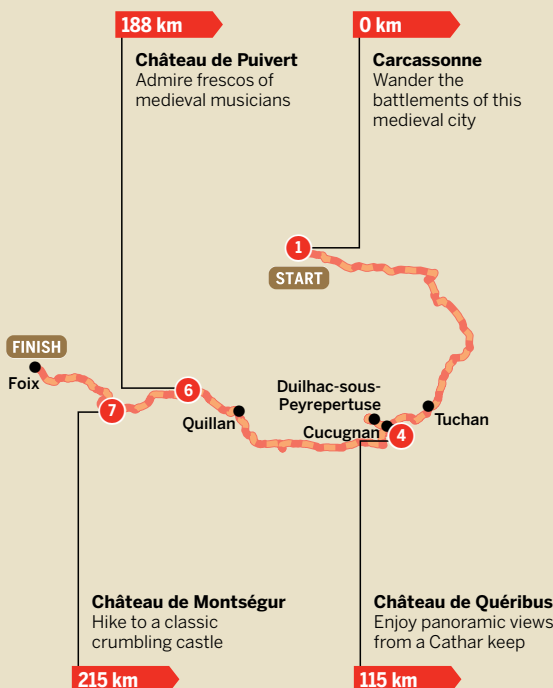


30

# The Cathar Trail

*From the fairy-tale towers of Carcassonne to the tumbledown walls of Montségur, this cross-country trip explores the main Cathar strongholds of sunbaked southwest France.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**3 DAYS**  
 247KM / 153 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

September to November when the summer heat has passed.



### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The view from the ramparts of Carcassonne.



### BEST FOR HISTORY

Go in search of the Holy Grail in Montségur.



These days Carcassonne is one of the Languedoc's biggest tourist draws, and its cobbled streets can feel uncomfortably crowded in summer. Try and time your visit for early or late in the day when the hordes have headed home.

 p331

**The Drive** » From Carcassonne, take the A61 east for 36km towards Narbonne. Turn off at exit 25, signed to Lezignan-Corbières, and follow the D611 across the sunbaked countryside for 46km. Just before you reach Tuchan, look out for a white sign with a blue castle

pointing to 'Aguilar'. Drive up this minor track to the car park.

## 2 Château d'Aguilar

When the Albigensian Crusade forced the Cathars into the mountains between France and the province of Aragon, they sought refuge in a line of frontier strongholds. The first of these is the **Château d'Aguilar** (Tuchan; adult/child €3.50/1.50; ☎9am-7pm Apr-mid-Sep, 11am-5pm mid-Sep-Nov), which squats on a low hill near the village of Tuchan. It's the smallest

of the castles, and is crumbling fast – but you can still make out the six corner turrets along with the hexagonal outer wall.

**The Drive** » Take the D611 through Tuchan, emerging from the narrow streets onto dry, vine-covered slopes. You'll reach a roundabout; turn left onto the D14, signed to Padern and Cucugnan. After 15km, note the turn-off to the Château de Quéribus on the D123 as you bypass Cucugnan. Continue 9km northwest towards Duilhac-sous-Peyrepertuse. There's an easy-to-miss left-hand turn to the Château de Peyrepertuse just before the village.

## 3 Château de Peyrepertuse

The largest of the Cathar castles is **Peyrepertuse** ([www.chateau-peyrepertuse](http://www.chateau-peyrepertuse))



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

### 31 Cheat's Compostela

Make a longish detour off our version of the Chemin de St-Jacques by driving southeast of Moissac for 165km to Carcassonne, with an optional stop in Toulouse en route.

### 32 The Pyrenees

Foix sits on the eastern edge of the Pyrenees, so our Pyrenean tour makes a natural next stage – although you'll have to do it in reverse.



.com; Duilhac-sous-Peyrepertuse; adult/child €8.50/3, audio guide €4; ☀9am-8pm Apr-Sep, shorter hr rest of yr), with a dizzying drop of 800m on either side. Several of the original towers and many sections of ramparts are still standing. In July and August the castle holds falconry displays and a two-day medieval festival, complete with knights in period armour.

**The Drive** » Backtrack along the D14 for 9km to the turn-off onto the D123 near Cucugnan. The road twists and turns steeply into the dusty hills. Keep your eyes peeled for the Quéribus turn-off as you drive another 3km uphill.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 4 Château de Quéribus

Perilously perched 728m up on a rocky hill, **Quéribus** ([www.cucugnan.fr](http://www.cucugnan.fr); Cucugnan; adult/child €5/3, audio guide €4; ☀9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-7pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar) was the site of the Cathars' last stand in 1255. Its interior structure is fairly well preserved:



#### TOP TIP: PASSEPORT DES SITES DU PAYS CATHARE

This pass is available from local tourist offices and gives discount admission to 20 local sites, including all the main Cathar castles and the abbeys at St-Hilaire, Lagrasse and Villelongue.

the **Salle du Pilier** inside the central keep still features its original Gothic pillars, vaulting and archways. There's also a small house that has been converted into a theatre, and shows a film documenting the story of the castle through the eyes of one of the castle's curates.

The top of the keep is reached via a narrow staircase and offers a truly mind-blowing view stretching to the Mediterranean and the Pyrenees on a clear day.

**The Drive** » Drive back down to the turn-off, and turn left. Continue along this road (the D19) for 8km to the small town of Maury. Take the D117 for 25km to Lapradelle. The next castle is signed from here, another 3km south.

### 5 Château de Puilaurens

If it's the classic hilltop castle you're after, **Puilaurens** (Lapradelle; adult/child €4/2; ☀9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-7pm Jun & Sep, to 5pm rest of yr) is it. With its turrets and lofty location, it's perhaps the most dramatic of the

Cathar fortresses, and boasts all the classic medieval defences: double defensive walls, four corner towers and crenellated battlements. It's also said to be haunted by the White Lady, a niece of Philippe le Bel.

**The Drive** » Backtrack to the D117 and follow it west for 36km to Puivert, skirting through hills, fields and forests. Just before you reach the village, there's a sharp right turn to the château, near a white barn. It is 1km further up a steep track.

BRUNO BOUANI/GETTY IMAGES ©





**Carcassonne** The city viewed across autumnal trees

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

**6** **Château de Puivert**

Built during the late 12th century, the **Château de Puivert** ([www.chateau-de-puivert.com](http://www.chateau-de-puivert.com); adult/child €5/3; 🕒9am-7pm May-mid-Nov, 10am-5pm Sun-Fri mid-Dec-Apr) belonged to the aristocratic Congost family, who were high-profile members of the Cathar movement. It was besieged in 1210 by Thomas Pons de Bruyères-le-Chatel, who subsequently took control of the castle and oversaw its redevelopment.

Camped on a 605m-high promontory, Puivert still boasts much of its medieval footprint. Five of the eight corner towers remain, and the central keep has four vaulted rooms including the **Salle des Musiciens**, decorated with frescos of medieval troubadours – including a flautist, guitarist, bagpiper, tambourine man and hurdy-gurdy player.

**The Drive** » Take the D117 west of Puivert for 13km to Bélesta. As you drive through town, spot signs to ‘Fougax et B/Querigut/Château de Montségur’. The village is another 14km further,

spectacularly perched above the forested slopes; follow the winding road past the village until you see the castle’s roadside car park.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

**7** **Château de Montségur**

For the full Monty Python medieval vibe – not to mention a good workout – tackle the steep 1207m climb to the ruins of the **Château de Montségur** ([www.montsegur.fr](http://www.montsegur.fr); adult/child €4.50/2; 🕒9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 11am-4pm Dec-Feb). It was here, in 1242, that

## WHO WERE THE CATHARS?

In many ways, the Cathars were the fundamentalists of their day: a sect of ultra-devout Christians known for their rigid beliefs and disdain for the teachings of the established church.

Their name derives from the Greek word *katharos*, meaning 'pure'. They believed that though humans were fundamentally evil, salvation could be attained through religious devotion.

Preaching in *langue d'oc*, the local tongue, the Cathars believed in a form of reincarnation, rejected the doctrine of original sin, welcomed women into prominent roles, and remained profoundly critical of the worldliness and corruption of the mainstream church. The most devout of all were the *parfaits* (perfects), who abstained from sex and ate a strict vegetarian diet.

The Cathars' anti-establishment beliefs inevitably placed them on a collision course with Catholic Rome. In 1208, local lords embarked on a bloody crusade sanctioned by Pope Innocent III. After long sieges, the major Cathar centres in Béziers, Carcassonne, Minerve and the fortresses of Montségur, Quéribus and Peyrepertuse were taken and thousands of people were burned as heretics (in Béziers alone, as many as 20,000 faithful are thought to have been slaughtered). The bloodletting continued until 1321, when the burning of the last 'perfect', Guillaume Bélibaste, marked the end of Catharism in Languedoc.

The useful **Pays Cathare** ([www.payscathare.org](http://www.payscathare.org)) website has plenty of background history on the Cathars, and details major sites.

the Cathar movement suffered its heaviest defeat; attacked by a force of 10,000 royal troops, the castle fell after a gruelling nine-month siege, and 220 of the defenders were burnt alive when they refused to renounce their faith.

Montségur has also been cited as a possible location for the Holy Grail, which was supposedly smuggled out

of the castle in the days before the final battle.

The original castle was razed to rubble after the siege, and the present-day ruins largely date from the 17th century.

**The Drive** » Continue on the D117, turning onto the busy D20 to Foix, 32km northwest.

### 8 Foix

Complete your trip through Cathar country

with a visit to the **Château des Comtes de Foix** (☎05 61 05 10 10; adult/child €4.50/3.30; 🕒10am-6pm summer, shorter hr rest of yr), nestled among the foothills of the Pyrenees. It's in a more complete state of repair than many of the Cathar fortresses you've seen, and gives you some idea of how they may have looked in their medieval heyday.

🗝️🏰 p331, p349

# Eating & Sleeping

## Carcassonne 1

### Au Comte Roger French €€

(📞)04 68 11 93 40; [www.comteroger.com](http://www.comteroger.com); 14 rue Saint-Louis; lunch menu €19-27, dinner menu €38; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Starched tablecloths, a pergola-covered patio and nouvelle cuisine-style dishes presented with flair by chef Pierre Mesa make this the best option in La Cité for sit-down dining – just don't expect the portions to be large.

### Hotel du Château Hotel €€€

(📞)04 68 11 38 38; [www.hotelduchateau.net](http://www.hotelduchateau.net); d €120-280; 🏠 🚗 🚶 🚿) You get the best of both worlds at this flashy hotel: knockout nighttime views of La Cité's amber ramparts, coupled with the convenience of staying outside the walled town. The 16 rooms are snazzily finished with wood, exposed stone and boutique-style furnishings, and you can admire wonderful castle views from the heated pool and Jacuzzi.

### La Maison Vieille B&B €€

(📞)04 68 25 77 24; [www.la-maison-vieille.com](http://www.la-maison-vieille.com); 8 rue Trivaille; d €85; 🏠 🚶) Charm oozes out of every nook and cranny at this amber-stone B&B. The rooms are enormous, and decorated in supremely good taste: Barbecane in soothing blues, Cité with exposed brick, Prince Noir with a white sofa and roll-top bath. Breakfast is served in the courtyard garden.

### Bloc G B&B €€

(📞)04 68 47 58 20; [www.bloc-g.com](http://www.bloc-g.com); 112 rue Barbecane; d €90-120; 🏠) Not what you'd

expect in Carcassonne – a trendy, minimalist B&B that wouldn't look out of place in Paris' fashionable quarters. It's part bistro, part design gallery, part 'chambres urbaines' – the decor is stripped back to the minimum, with stark white walls offset by arty prints and retro bits of furniture.

## Foix 8

### Château de Beauregard Hotel €€

(📞)05 61 66 66 64; [www.chateaubeauregard.net](http://www.chateaubeauregard.net); av de la Résistance, St-Girons; d €120-160, ste €160-200; 🏠 🚗) If you've always wanted to play lord of the manor, try this opulent château complex in St-Girons, halfway between St-Gaudens and Foix along the D117. Topped by turrets and surrounded by 2½ hectares of private gardens, it's full of quirky touches (such as bathrooms hidden away in the castle's corner towers). Throw in a garden pool, a candlelit spa and a superb Gascon restaurant, and you have a castle getaway par excellence.

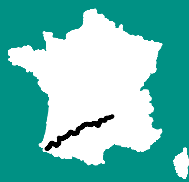
### Hôtel les Remparts Hotel €€

(📞)05 61 68 12 15; [www.hotelremparts.com](http://www.hotelremparts.com); 6 cours Louis Pons Tarde; r €80-120; 🏠) This is one of the area's smartest hotels, a nine-room beauty in Mirepoix that's awash with decorative tics (rough stone, twisted willow, stripped-wood floors), and boasts a delightful breakfast salon with its original beams and chimney. Young chef Nicolas Coutand has turned the restaurant into a notable dining destination, too.

***Cahors** Medieval Pont Valentré  
once defended the walled town*



# Cheat's Compostela



# 31

*Follow in the footsteps of pilgrims on this holiest of road trips, which follows one of the main routes across France en route to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

0 km

### Le Puy-en-Velay

Puff your way around this volcanic town in the Massif Central

349 km

### Cahors

Explore Cahors' shady old city and Romanesque cathedral

Agen

Saugues

1

START

Espalion

2

4

FINISH

7

Pau

### St-Jean Pied de Port

Look out from the ramparts towards the Spanish border

725 km

### Conques

Wander around the classic pilgrimage church of St-Foy

220 km

7 DAYS

725KM / 450 MILES

## GREAT FOR...



## BEST TIME TO GO

May to September, to make the most of the summer sunshine.



## ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Being dwarfed beside Le Puy's huge statue of the Virgin Mary.



## BEST FOR CULTURE

Comparing the tympanum (decorative arch) of churches in Condom, Cahors and Moissac.

## 31

# Cheat's Compostela

During the Middle Ages, countless pilgrims undertook the long trek along the Chemin de St-Jacques, as it's known in France, in the hope of earning spiritual salvation and some extra brownie points in the afterlife. We've chosen to follow one of the oldest routes between Le Puy-en-Velay and St-Jean-Pied-de-Port: on the way you'll visit iconic churches, historic cities and a giant iron statue of the Virgin Mary.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 Le Puy-en-Velay

Your journey begins at the striking town of Le Puy-en-Velay, where pilgrims would traditionally have earned a blessing at the Unesco-listed **Cathédrale Notre-Dame** ([www.cathedraledupuy.org](http://www.cathedraledupuy.org); cloister adult/child €7.50/free; ☀9am-noon & 2-5pm, to 6.30pm in summer). Among the Romanesque archways and Byzantine domes is a statue of St Jacques



himself, the patron saint of Compostela pilgrims.

While you're here, it's well worth visiting Le Puy's other ecclesiastical sights. Perched on the top of an 85m-high volcanic pillar is the **Chapelle St-Michel d'Aiguilhe** (www.rochersaintmichel.fr; adult/child €3/1.50; ☀9am-6.30pm), Le Puy's oldest chapel (established in the 10th century). Carved directly into the rock, its cave-like atmosphere and 12th-century frescos create an otherworldly atmosphere.

On another nearby peak is an enormous cast-iron statue of the Virgin Mary, aka **Notre Dame de France** (adult/child €4/2.50; ☀9am-6pm). A creaky spiral staircase winds its way to the top of the 22.7m-tall, 835-ton statue; you can peep out through portholes for dizzying vistas over town.

🍴🏠 p339

**The Drive** » From Le Puy to Conques, it's a scenic half-day drive of around 220km. Take the twisty D589, passing through the spectacular Gorges de l'Allier to Saugues. Follow the

D989 under the A75 highway, then join the D921 to Espalion. The last stretch along the D920, D107 and D141 tracks the course of the Lot River, turning briefly onto the D910 to Conques.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 2 Conques

The next stop for medieval pilgrims would have been Conques – or more specifically, the **Abbey Church of St-Foy**, built to house the holy relics of its namesake saint, a young woman martyred during the 4th century. In fact, the relics proved so popular that the original 8th-century church had to be rebuilt with extra chapels, a higher roof and a viewing gallery to accommodate the pilgrim traffic.

It's a classic example of a pilgrimage church: simple and serene, with architectural flourishes



#### LINK YOUR TRIP

32

### Pyrenees

For fantastic mountain scenery, veer off 140km south of Condom at Pau to begin our Pyrenees trip.

38

### The Lot Valley

You can do two trips in one by incorporating our trip through the beautiful Lot Valley as your route from Cahors to Figeac.



kept to a minimum. It's laid out to a cruciform (cross-shaped) design, the traditional layout for pilgrimage churches. Also note the elegant columns, decorated with scenes from the life of St Foy.

Outside, look out for the **tympanum** (decorative arch) above the main doorway depicting the Day of Last Judgment – a popular theme for Compostela churches.

**The Drive »** Backtrack north to the Lot River and turn left onto the D42. Follow signs to Decazeville, then turn west onto the D840 to Figeac, just over 54km from Conques.

### 3 Figeac

During the Middle Ages, riverside Figeac was a major ecclesiastical centre. All the four monastic orders (Franciscans, White Friars, Dominicans and Augustinians) were established here, and the town had a large hospice for accommodating pilgrims (later turned into Figeac's hospital, appropriately named Hôpital St-Jacques).

Though most of Figeac's monastic buildings were torn down during the Revolution, a few still remain. On place Vival, there's an arcaded 13th-century building that was part of Figeac's lost abbey; it's now home to the tourist office.

You can pick up a leaflet called *Les Clefs de la Ville* (€0.30), which details the town's other medieval buildings.

**Rue de Balène** and **rue Caviale** offer rich pickings; they're lined with 14th- and 15th-century houses, many with stone carvings and open-air galleries on the top floor, once used for drying leather.

 p405

**The Drive »** The prettiest drive to Cahors is along the D662, which runs for a scenic but slow 75km along a dramatic gorge carved out by the Lot River (a trip covered in detail on p399). A faster alternative is via the D13 and D653, which takes about an hour from Figeac.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 4 Cahors

Now best known for its wine, the walled city of Cahors once earned a lucrative trade from passing pilgrims. A prosperous (and well-protected) city, Cahors also has an impressive Romanesque cathedral, the **Cathédrale St-Étienne** (☺ cloister Jun-Sep), which is similar in style to the Cathédrale St-Front in Périgueux. Consecrated in 1119, the cathedral's airy nave is topped by two huge cupolas which, at 18m wide, are the largest in France.

Some of the frescos are from the 14th century, but the side chapels



DANA DAQU 08/11/07/TTM IMAGES ©

and carvings in the cloister mainly date from the 16th century. On the cathedral's north façade is another carved **tympanum**, depicting Christ surrounded by fluttering angels and pious saints.

At the top of the old city, the **Tour du Pape Jean XXII** (3 bd Léon Gambetta) was part of a 14th-century mansion belonging to Jacques Duèse, who went on to become Pope John XXII.

Cahors' medieval bridge, the **Pont Valentré**, was part of the town's defences during the 14th century.



Conques Tympanum detail, Abbey Church of St-Foy

## 🗝️ p405

**The Drive** » The D653 travels 61km southwest to Moissac, passing through a delightful landscape of woods, fields and sleepy villages.

### 5 Moissac

Moissac's crowning glory is the monumental **Abbaye St-Pierre** (place Durand de Bredon), one of France's finest Romanesque abbeys. Above the south portal is yet another marvellous **tympanum**: completed in 1130, it depicts St John's vision of the Apocalypse, with Christ flanked by

the Apostles, angels and 24 awestruck elders.

Outside, the columns of the **cloister** (adult/child €5/3.50; ☀9am-7pm) are topped with carved capitals depicting foliage, figures or biblical scenes. Sadly, the Revolution took its toll – nearly every face is smashed.

Entry to the abbey is via the **tourist office** ([www.moissac.fr](http://www.moissac.fr); 6 place Durand de Bredon; ☀9am-7pm).

## 🗝️ p339

**The Drive** » The easiest route for the 85km trip to Condom travels west on the D813 to Valence, crosses the river and

then joins the A62 highway (toll charge). Take exit 7 onto the D931, a much quieter road that meanders through rural countryside all the way to Condom.

### 6 Condom

Despite its snigger-inducing name, Condom actually has nothing to do with contraceptives – its name dates from Gallo-Roman times, when it was known as Condatomagus.

Established as a Roman port on the River Baise, the town's Flamboyant Gothic **Cathédrale St-Pierre** (place St-Pierre) was the

## CHEMIN DE ST-JACQUES

Ever since the 9th century, when a hermit named Pelayo stumbled across the tomb of the Apostle James (brother of John the Evangelist), the Spanish town of Santiago de Compostela has been one of Christendom's holiest sites.

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is traditionally known as the *Camiño de Santiago* (Chemin de St-Jacques in French; Way of St James in English). Early pilgrims were inspired to undertake the arduous journey in exchange for fewer years in purgatory. Today the reward is more tangible: walkers or horse riders who complete the final 100km to Santiago (cyclists the final 200km) qualify for a Compostela Certificate, issued on arrival at the cathedral.

The modern-day GR36 roughly follows the Via Podensis route from Le Puy. Find out more at [www.webcompostela.com](http://www.webcompostela.com) and [www.csj.org.uk](http://www.csj.org.uk).

main point of interest for pilgrims. The tentlike cloister, covered by a vaulted roof was designed to offer them wet-weather protection while they were waiting to pay their religious dues.

Condom's other claim to fame is as the home of Armagnac, a potent brandy brewed since medieval times as a medicinal tonic, but now drunk as an after-dinner *digestif*. There are many distilleries around town, but one

of the best is **Armagnac Ryst-Dupeyron** (36 rue Jean Jaurès; ☺10am-noon & 2-6.30pm Mon-Fri), where you can taste vintage brandies in a turn-of-the-century cellar.

Nearby, the teeny **Musée de l'Armagnac** (2 rue Jules Ferry; adult/child €2.20/1.10; ☺10am-noon & 3-6pm) has a small collection of vintage Armagnac-making equipment.

🔧🏠 p339

**The Drive** » The last stretch to St-Jean Pied de Port is an

epic 230km via the A65 and A64 highways, so you might like to break it up by combining it with stops detailed in our tours of the Pyrenees (p341) or the Atlantic Coast (p407).

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 7 St-Jean Pied de Port

Your pilgrimage ends at the walled town of St-Jean Pied de Port, the last stop for Compostela pilgrims on French soil before crossing the Spanish border, 8km away.

With its cobbled lanes and impressive ramparts, it's one of southwest France's most authentically medieval towns, so it makes a fitting end to your trip. The foundations of the **Église Notre Dame du Bout du Pont** are said to be as old as the town itself, but the building itself was rebuilt in the 17th century.

While you might be ending your pilgrimage here, spare a thought for the real pilgrims – for them, there's still another 800km to go before they reach journey's end at Santiago de Compostela's famous cathedral.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Le Puy-en-Velay 1

### **La Parenthèse** Regional Cuisine €€

(📍)04 71 02 83 00; 8 av rue de la Cathédrale; menus €19-27; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) This cosy spot serves traditional dishes such as *tartare de saumon et lentilles vertes du Puy* (smoked salmon with Le Puy lentils) and sizzling pots of *aligot* (cheesy, garlicky potato purée).

### **François Gagnaire** Gastronomic €€€

(📍)04 71 02 75 55; www.francois-gagnaire-restaurant.com; 4 av Clément Charbonnier; menus €28-145; 🕒 lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat; 📞) Book well ahead for François Gagnaire's flagship restaurant. The no-holds-barred *inspiration gourmande*, including wines, costs €145.

### **Hôtel du Parc** Hotel €€

(📍)04 71 02 40 40; www.hotel-du-parc-le-puy.com; 4 av Clément Charbonnier; d €92-114, ste €159-199; 📞 @ 📶) Minimalist-chic rooms and stylish suites are the norm at this 15-room hotel, adjacent to François Gagnaire's Michelin-starred restaurant.

### **Hôtel Le Régina** Hotel €€

(📍)04 71 09 14 71; www.hotelrestregina.com; 34 bd Maréchal Foyolle; s €58-75, d €65-95, ste €101-123; 📞 @ 📶) Topped by a neon-lit art deco turret, the Régina's rooms are individually decorated (our favourite is room 207, with its pop art Chrysler building mural), and some have air-conditioning.

## Moissac 5

### **Le Moulin de Moissac** Hotel €€

(📍)05 63 32 88 88; www.lemoulindemoissac.com; esplanade du Moulin; d €89-166, mains €18-55; 📞) Housed in a 15th-century grain mill

overlooking the Tarn, rooms at this riverside hotel have French windows opening onto river-view balconies. Elsewhere, you'll find a waterside restaurant, a smart sauna-spa and a cellar-style Jacuzzi.

### **Au Château** B&B €€

(📍)05 63 95 96 82; www.au-chateau-stn.com; St Nicolas de la Grave; r €62-116; 📞 @ 📶 📺 🚿) This village B&B 10km south of Moissac offers five enormous rooms, which blend modern touches (wood floors, flat-screen TVs, funky fabrics) into the house's 18th-century shell. There's a heated pool and it's very family-friendly.

## Condom 6

### **La Table des Cordeliers** Gastronomic €€€

(📍)05 62 68 43 82; www.latabledescordeliers.fr; 1 rue des Cordeliers; menus €25-67; 🕒 Tue-Sat) Overseen by Eric Sampietro, one of the region's culinary big-hitters, Condom's top gastronomic restaurant is housed in a former chapel complete with vaulted arches and cloister garden.

### **Les Trois Lys** Hotel €€

(📍)05 62 28 33 33; www.lestroislys.com; 38 rue Gambetta; d €130-190, menus €40-45; 📞 @ 📶) Pricey, but if it's antiques and architecture you're after, this is the town's premier proposition. There are 10 rooms set around the 18th-century mansion, and a classy restaurant downstairs.

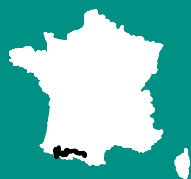
### **Hôtel Continental** Hotel €

(📍)05 62 68 37 00; www.lecontinental.net; 20 rue Maréchal Foch; s from €45, d from €49, menus €21-29; 📞) This waterfront hotel offers great value, with spick-and-span rooms and an excellent restaurant. Front rooms overlook the river but suffer from road noise; garden rooms are quieter.

**Lac de Gaube** *Sapphire-tinted lake  
beneath peaks of snowy splendour*



# Classic Trip



# 32

## Pyrenees

*Traversing hair-raising roads, sky-top passes and snow-dusted peaks, this trip ventures deep into the unforgettable Pyrenees. Buckle up – you're in for a roller coaster of a drive.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**7 DAYS**  
522KM / 324 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

June to September, when the road passes are open.



### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Standing on top of the Pic du Midi.



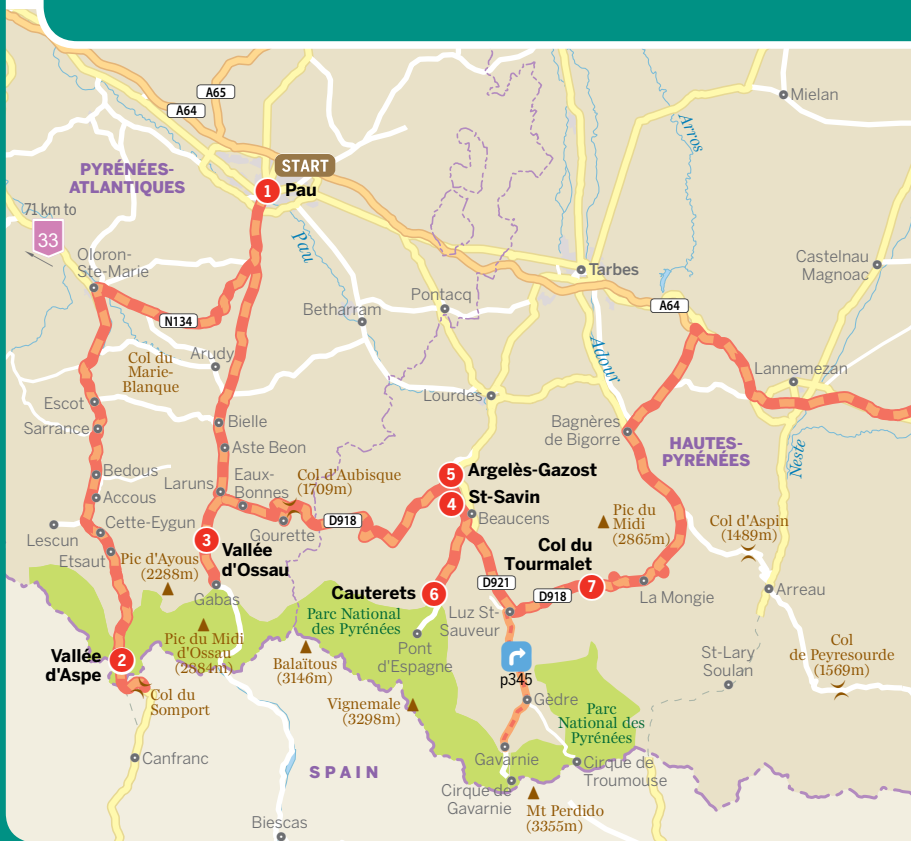
### BEST FOR OUTDOORS

Hiking to the Lac de Gaube near Cauterets.

# Classic Trip

## 32 Pyrenees

They might not have the altitude of the Alps, but the Pyrenees pack a mighty mountain punch, and if you're an outdoors-lover, you'll be in seventh heaven here. With quiet villages, rustic restaurants, spectacular trails and snowy mountains galore, the Pyrenees are a wild adventure – just remember to break in your hiking boots before you arrive.



## 1 Pau

Palm trees might seem out of place in this mountainous region, but Pau (rhymes with 'so'), has long been famed for its mild climate. In the 19th century this elegant town was a favourite wintering spot for wealthy Brits and Americans, who left behind many grand villas and smart promenades.

Its main sight is the **Château de Pau** ([www.musee-chateau-pau.fr](http://www.musee-chateau-pau.fr); adult/18-25yr €6/4.50, incl temporary exhibitions

€8/6.50; ☀9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-6.45pm, garden longer hr), built by the monarchs of Navarre and transformed into a Renaissance château in the 16th century. It's

home to a fine collection of Gobelins tapestries and Sevres porcelain.

Pau's tiny old centre extends for around 500m around the château, and boasts many



## LINK YOUR TRIP

30

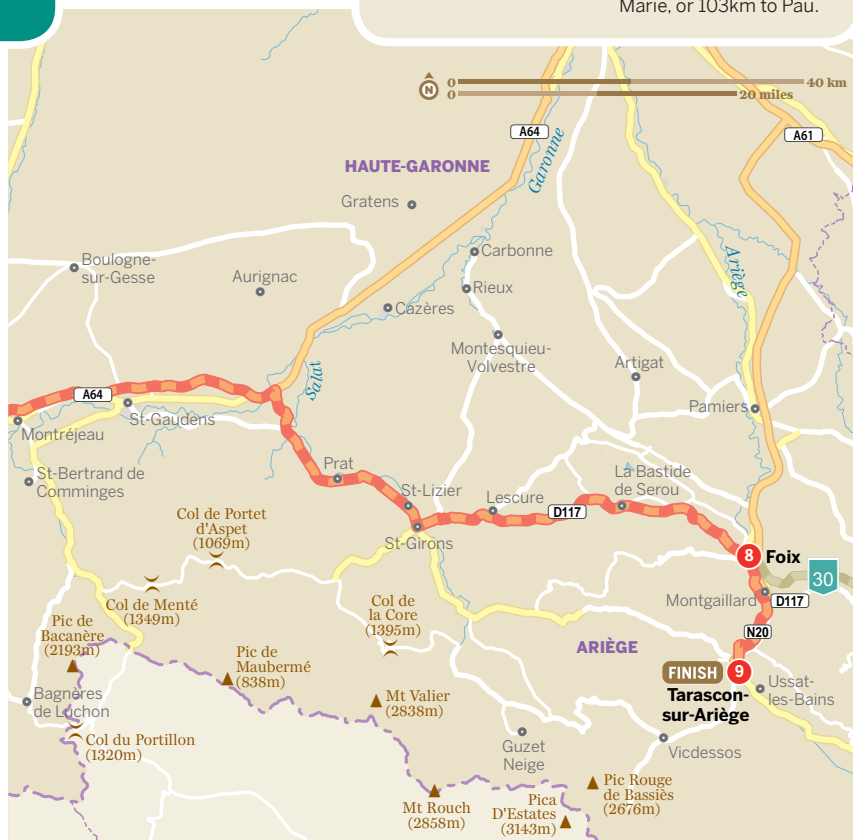
### The Cathar Trail

From Foix, it's only a short drive from the mountains before you reach the heart of the Cathar lands and its amazing châteaux.

33

### Basque Country

This Pyrenean trip makes a natural extension of our themed trip through the French Basque country. From St-Jean Pied de Port, it's 71km to Oloron-St-Marie, or 103km to Pau.





## Classic Trip

attractive medieval and Renaissance buildings.

Note that street parking in Pau is nearly all *payant* (chargeable), so it's worth choosing a hotel with its own car park.

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**The Drive** » To reach the Vallée d'Aspe from Pau, take the N193 to Oloron-Ste-Marie. The first 30km are uneventful, but over the next 40km south of Oloron the mountain scenery unfolds in dramatic fashion, with towering peaks stacking up on either side of the road.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 2 Vallée d'Aspe

The westernmost of the Pyrenean valleys makes a great day trip from Pau. Framed by mountains and bisected by the Aspe River, it's awash with

classic Pyrenean scenery. The main attraction here is soaking up the scenery. Allow yourself plenty of time for photo stops, especially around pretty villages such as **Sarrance**, **Borcé** and **Etsaut**.

Near the quiet village of **Bedous**, it's worth detouring up the narrow road to **Lescun**, a tiny hamlet perched 5.5km above the valley, overlooking the peak of **Pic d'Anie** (2504m) and the cluster of mountains known as the **Cirque de Lescun**.

The valley comes to an end 25km further south near the **Col du Somport** (1631m), where a controversial tunnel burrows 8km under the Franco-Spanish border. The return drive to Pau is just over 80km.

**The Drive** » To reach the Vallée d'Ossau from Pau, take the N134 south of town, veering south onto the D934 towards Arudy/Laruns. From Pau to Laruns, it's about 42km.

#### 3 Vallée d'Ossau

More scenic splendour awaits in the Vallée d'Ossau, which tracks the course of its namesake river for a spectacular 60km. The first part of the valley as far as Laruns is broad, green and pastoral, but as you travel south the mountains really start to pile up, before broadening out again near Gabas.

Halfway between Arudy and Laruns, you can spy on some of the Pyrenees' last griffon vultures at the **Falaise aux Vautours** (Cliff of the Vultures; [www.falaise-aux-vautours.com](http://www.falaise-aux-vautours.com); adult/child €7/5; ☀10.30am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm, closed Jan & Mar). Once a common sight, these majestic birds have been decimated by habitat loss and hunting; they're now protected by law. Live CCTV images are beamed from their nests to the visitors centre in Aste-Béon.

The ski resort of **Artouste-Fabriges**, 6km east of Gabas, is linked by cable car to the **Petit Train d'Artouste** ([www.train-artouste.com](http://www.train-artouste.com); adult/child €22.50/18), a miniature mountain railway built for dam workers in the 1920s. The train is only open between late May and September; reserve ahead and allow four hours for a visit.

## THE TRANSHUMANCE

If you're travelling through the Pyrenees between late May and early June and find yourself stuck behind a cattle-shaped traffic jam, there's a good chance you may have just got caught up in the Transhumance, in which shepherds move their flocks from their winter pastures up to the high, grassy uplands.

This ancient custom has been a fixture on the Pyrenean calendar for centuries, and several valleys host festivals to mark the occasion. The spectacle is repeated in October, when the flocks are brought back down before the winter snows set in.

**The Drive** » The D918 between Laruns and Argelès-Gazost is one of the Pyrenees' most breathtaking roads, switchbacking over the lofty Col d'Aubisque. The road feels exposed, but it's a wonderfully scenic drive. You'll cover about 52km, but allow yourself at least 1½ hours. Once you reach Argelès-Gazost, head further south for 4km along the D101 to St-Savin.

#### 4 St-Savin

After the hair-raising drive over the Col d'Aubisque, St-Savin makes a welcome refuge. It's a classic Pyrenean village, with cobbled lanes, quiet cafes and timbered houses set around a fountain-filled main square.

It's also home to one of the Pyrenees' most respected hotel-restaurants, **Le Viscos** (☎05 62 97 02 28; www.hotel-leviscos.com; 1 rue Lamarque; r €99-123, full board €67, menus €27-89; 🍷📶), run by celeb chef Jean-Pierre St-Martin, known for his blend of Basque, Breton and Pyrenean flavours (as well as his passion for foie gras). After dinner, retire to one of the cosy country rooms and watch the sun set over the snowy mountains.

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**The Drive** » From St-Savin, travel back along the D101 to Argelès-Gazost. You'll see signs to the Parc Animalier des Pyrénées as you approach town.



## DETOUR: CIRQUE DE GAVARNIE

### Start: 6 Cauterets

For truly mind-blowing mountain scenery, it's well worth taking a side trip to see the Cirque de Gavarnie, a dramatic amphitheatre of mountains 20km south of Luz-St-Saveur. It's a walk of about two hours from the village, and you'll need to bring sturdy footwear.

There's another spectacular circle of mountains 6.5km to the north, the **Cirque de Troumouse**. It's reached via a hair-raising 8km toll road (€4 per vehicle; open April to October). There are no barriers and the drops are really dizzying, so drive carefully.

#### 5 Argelès-Gazost

Spotting wildlife isn't always easy in the Pyrenees, but thankfully the **Parc Animalier des Pyrénées** (www.parc-animalier-pyrenees.com; adult/child €12/8; ☀9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct) does all the hard work for you. It's home to a menagerie of endangered Pyrenean animals including wolves, marmots, lynxes, giant ravens, vultures, racoons, beavers and even a few brown bears (the European cousin of the grizzly bear).

**The Drive** » Take the D921 south of Argelès-Gazost for 6km to Pierrefitte-Nestales. Here, the road forks; the southwest branch (the D920) climbs up a lush, forested valley for another 11km to Cauterets.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 6 Cauterets

For alpine scenery, the century-old ski resort

of Cauterets is perhaps the signature spot in the Pyrenees. Hemmed in by mountains and forests, it has clung on to much of its *fin-de-siècle* character, with a stately spa and grand 19th-century residences.

To see the scenery at its best, drive through town along the D920 (signed to the 'Pont d'Espagne'). The road is known locally as the **Chemins des Cascades** after the waterfalls that crash down the mountainside; it's 4 miles of nonstop hairpins, so take it steady.

At the top, you'll reach the giant car park at **Pont d'Espagne** (Spanish Bridge; per day €5.50, over 12 hr €8). From here, a combination *télécabine* and *télesiege* (adult/child €11.50/9.50) ratchets up the mountainside allowing access to the area's trails – including the popular hike to the

# Classic Trip



sapphire-tinted **Lac de Gaube**.

 p349

**The Drive** » After staying overnight in Cauterets, backtrack to Pierrefitte-Nestalas, and turn southeast onto the D921 for 12km to Luz-St-Saveur. The next stretch on the D918 is another mountain stunner, climbing up through Barèges to the breathtaking Col du Tourmalet.

**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

**7 Col du Tourmalet**

Even in the pantheon of Pyrenean road passes, the Col du Tourmalet commands special respect. At 2115m, it's the highest road pass in the Pyrenees, and usually only opens between June and October. It's often used as a punishing mountain stage in the

Tour de France, and you'll feel uncomfortably akin to a motorised ant as you crawl up towards the pass.

From the ski resort of La Mongie (1800m), a cable car climbs to the top of the soaring **Pic du Midi** (www.picdumidi.com; adult/child €32/22; ☀9am-7pm Jun-Sep, 10am-5.30pm Oct-May). This high-altitude observatory commands otherworldly views – but it's often blanketed in cloud, so make sure you check the forecast before you go.

**The Drive** » The next stage to Foix is a long one. Follow the D918 and D935 to Bagnères-de-Bigorre, then the D938 and D20 to Tournay, a drive of 40km. Just before Tournay, head west onto the A64 for 82km. Exit onto the D117, signed to St-Girons. It's another 72km to Foix.

**8 Foix**

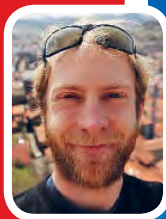
Foix is a quiet mountain town, but it's an excellent base for exploring the eastern Pyrenees. Looming above town is the triple-towered **Château des Comtes de Foix** (☎05 61 05 10 10; adult/child €4.50/3.30; ☀10am-6pm summer, shorter hr other times), constructed in the 10th century as a stronghold for the counts of Foix. The interior is rather bare, but there's a small museum, and the view from the battlements is glorious. There's usually at least one daily tour in English in summer.

Afterwards, head 4.5km south to **Les Forges de Pyrène** (☎05 34 09 30 60; adult/child €8/4.70;

**WHY THIS IS A CLASSIC TRIP**  
**OLIVER BERRY, AUTHOR**

The craggy peaks of the Pyrenees are home to some of France's rarest wildlife and most unspoilt landscapes, and every twist and turn in the road seems to reveal another knockout view – one of my personal favourites is the amazing road over the Col d'Aubisque, which feels closer to flying than driving. I love the traditional way of life here, too. Visit during the Transhumance (see p344) to be treated to one of France's great rural spectacles.

Left: Cauterets ski resort  
Right: Château de Pau



ESCUDEIRO PATRICK GETTY IMAGES ©

## Classic Trip

☀️10am-7pm summer, shorter hr other times) a fascinating 'living museum' that explores Ariège folk traditions. Spread over 5 hectares, it illustrates traditional trades such as glass blowing, tanning, thatching and nail making, and even has its own blacksmith, baker, and cobbler.

🏠 p349, p331

**The Drive** ➤ Spend the night in Foix, then head for Tarascon-sur-Ariège, 17km south of Foix on the N20. Look out for brown signs to the Parc de la Préhistoire.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 9 Tarascon-sur-Ariège

Thousands of years ago, the Pyrenees were home to thriving communities of hunter-gatherers, who used the area's caves as shelters and left behind many stunning examples of prehistoric art.

Near Tarascon-sur-Ariège, the **Parc de la Préhistoire** (📍05 61 05 10 10; Tarascon-sur-Ariège: adult/child €9.90/6; ☀️10am-6pm) provides a handy primer on the area's ancient past. It's a mix of multimedia exhibits and hands-on outdoor displays, exploring everything from prehistoric carving to the art of animal-skin

tents and ancient spear-throwing.

About 6.5km further south, the **Grotte de Niaux** (📍05 61 05 88 37; adult/child €9.40/5.70; ☀️tours hourly 10.15am-4.15pm, extra tours in summer) is home to the Pyrenees' most precious cave paintings. The centrepiece is the **Salon Noir**, reached after an 800m walk through the darkness and decorated with bison, horses and ibex. To help preserve the delicate paintings, there's no artificial light inside; you're given a torch as you enter. The cave can only be visited with a guide. From April to September there's usually one daily tour in English at 1.30pm. Bookings are advisable.

## ROAD PASSES IN THE PYRENEES

The high passes between the Vallée d'Ossau, the Vallée d'Aspe and the Vallée de Gaves are often closed during winter. Signs are posted along the approach roads indicating whether they're *ouvert* (open) or *fermé* (closed). The dates given below are approximate, and depend on seasonal snowfall.

**Col d'Aubisque** (1709m; ☀️May-Oct) On the D918, linking Laruns in the Vallée d'Ossau with Argèles-Gazost in the Vallée de Gaves. An alternative that's open year-round is the D35 between Louvie-Juzon and Nay.

**Col de Marie-Blanque** (1035m; ☀️May-Oct) The shortest link between the Vallée d'Aspe and the Vallée d'Ossau is the D294, which corkscrews for 21km between Escot and Bielle.

**Col du Pourtalet** (1795m; ☀️most of the year) The main crossing into Spain generally stays open year-round except during periods of exceptional snowfall.

**Col du Tourmalet** (2115m; ☀️Jun-Oct) Between Barèges and La Mongie, this is the highest road pass in the Pyrenees. If you're travelling east to the Pic du Midi (for example from Cauterets), the only alternative is a long detour via Lourdes and Bagnères-de-Bigorre.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Pau 1

 **Le Majestic** Traditional French €€  
(☎08 92 68 06 89; 9 place Royale; lunch menus €15-24, dinner menus €28-39; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Top-notch French cuisine on central place Royale. The atmosphere is formal – ice-white tablecloths, razor-sharp napkins – but it suits the sophisticated food, heavy on quality ingredients such as turbot, sea bass, Bigorre pork and Pyrenean lamb.

 **Hôtel Bristol** Hotel €€  
(☎05 59 27 72 98; www.hotelbristol-pau.com; 3 rue Gambetta; s €75-91, d €82-99, f €110-120; 📶) Pau's best midrange option, in a quintessentially French 19th-century building that offers surprisingly modern rooms. Cool whites are the keynote, but stripy fabrics, throws and modern art liven things up considerably. Ask for a balcony overlooking the mountains.

 **Hôtel Roncevaux** Hotel €€  
(☎05 59 27 08 44; www.hotel-roncevaux.com; 25 rue Louis Barthou; d €82-160; 📶) Modern, business-orientated hotel that's part of the Logis chain. There are four room categories, from 'Confort' to 'Luxe' – 'Grand Confort' are the best compromise between price and comfort.

## St-Savin 4

 **Hôtel des Rochers** Hotel €  
(☎05 62 97 09 52; www.lesrochershotel.com; 1 place du Castillou; d/tr/f €57/78/95; 📶) If you can't get a room at Le Viscos (p345), this cute hotel in St-Savin makes a useful fall-back. It has plain rooms, friendly owners and a decent restaurant with home-cooking and valley views from the dining room.


## Cauterets 6

 **Hôtel du Lion d'Or** Hotel €€  
(☎05 62 92 52 87; www.liondor.eu; 12 rue Richelieu; d €88-147; 📶) This sweet alpine-style hotel, under the Logis umbrella, oozes mountain character. Knick-knacks and curios are dotted throughout the building, and the restaurant serves up classic Pyrenean cuisine in cosy surroundings.

 **Hôtel-Restaurant Astérides-Sacca** Hotel €€  
(☎05 62 92 50 02; www.asterides-sacca.com; 11 bd Latapie-Flurin; r €52-76; 📶) closed Oct & Nov) This *grande-dame* hotel is on Cauterets' prettiest street, lined with well-preserved 19th-century buildings and often used as a film set. Rooms come in checks or floral fabrics, and the restaurant is splendid.

## Foix 8

 **Hôtel Restaurant Lons** Hotel €€  
(☎05 34 09 28 00; www.hotel-lons-foix.com; 6 place Dutilh; r from €55, menus €18.50-25.70) A traditional and very cosy Logis-affiliated hotel in the middle of Foix, in a super spot overlooking the river. Rooms are fairly functional, but the river-view restaurant serves solid regional cuisine.

 **Auberge les Myrtilles** B&B €  
(☎05 61 65 16 46; www.auberge-les-myrtilles.com; Salau; r €63.50-67.50, with half-board €91.50-96.50; 📶 🚰) This mountain retreat in Salau 10km west of Foix, is tailor-made for active types: owners Anouk and René are mad-keen hikers and bikers. Expect simply furnished rooms and a beamed restaurant serving filling Ariègeois cuisine: try the local speciality of *azinat*, a hot pot of sausage, duck and vegetables.



# STRETCH YOUR LEGS TOULOUSE

**Start** Place Wilson

**Finish** Quai de la Daurade

**Distance** 3km

**Duration** Three hours

Known to the locals as ‘La Ville Rose’ (The Pink Town), the vibrant city of Toulouse has a sun-baked southern air, a reminder that Languedoc lies just to the south. It’s France’s fourth-largest city, and is well worth a stroll for its buzzing markets, cafe culture and atmospheric old quarter.

Take this walk on Trips

39

## Les Halles Victor Hugo

Start on place Wilson and head along rue Victor Hugo to Toulouse’s covered **food market** ([www.marchevictorhugo.fr](http://www.marchevictorhugo.fr); place Victor Hugo; ☺around 8am–5pm), where shoppers stock up on fresh meat and veg. Look out for the long, curly *saucisse de Toulouse*, the city’s trademark sausage.

For a quintessentially Toulousien experience, join the locals at the busy **restaurants** (menus €10–20; ☺lunch Tue–Sun) on the 1st floor.

**The Walk** » Follow rue du Périgord, then head north along rue du Taur.

## Basilique St-Sernin

This **basilica** (place St-Sernin; ☺8.30am–noon & 2–6pm Mon–Sat, 8.30am–12.30pm & 2–7.30pm Sun) is one of France’s finest Romanesque structures. It’s topped by a soaring spire and octagonal tower, and inside is the tomb of St Sernin himself, sheltered beneath a sumptuous canopy. The basilica was an important stop on the Chemin de St-Jacques pilgrimage route.

**The Walk** » Head south on rue du Taur all the way to place du Capitole.

## Place du Capitole

At the end of rue du Taur, you’ll emerge onto **place du Capitole**, Toulouse’s grand main square, where Toulousiens turn out on sunny evenings to sip a coffee or an early aperitif.

On the eastern side is the 128m-long façade of the **Capitole**, the city hall, built in the 1750s. Inside is the Théâtre du Capitole, one of France’s most prestigious opera venues. To the south are the alleys of the **Vieux Quartier**, the heart of old Toulouse.

**The Walk** » Take rue de la Pomme, which runs southwest to another cafe-lined square, place St-Georges. Before you reach it, turn right onto rue des Arts, then right onto rue de Metz, where you’ll find the museum entrance.

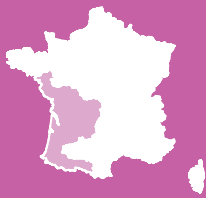
## Musée des Augustins

Toulouse’s fabulous fine arts **museum** ([www.augustins.org](http://www.augustins.org); 21 rue de Metz; adult/child









# Atlantic Coast & Western France

**THE ATLANTIC COAST IS WHERE FRANCE GETS BACK TO NATURE.** Much more laid-back than the Med, this is the place to slow the pace right down.

Driving through this region is all about quiet country roads winding through vine-striped hills, glimpsed views of dead-at-noon villages and the occasional foray into energetic cities such as Bordeaux.

The region's wine is famous worldwide, and to wash it down you'll find fresh-from-the-ocean seafood wherever you go and plenty of regional delicacies including snails in the north, foie gras further south and, in the unique Basque regions, chilli-tinted dishes filled with hints of Spain.

# Atlantic Coast & Western France



**33 Basque Country 7 Days**  
Uncover the unique world of the Basques on this compact trip. (p357)

**34 Heritage Wine Routes 5 Days**  
You like wine? You like good food? You'll love this trip. (p365)

**35 Gourmet Dordogne 3 Days**  
The Dordogne region is renowned for its gourmet goodies – discover why on this trip. (p375)

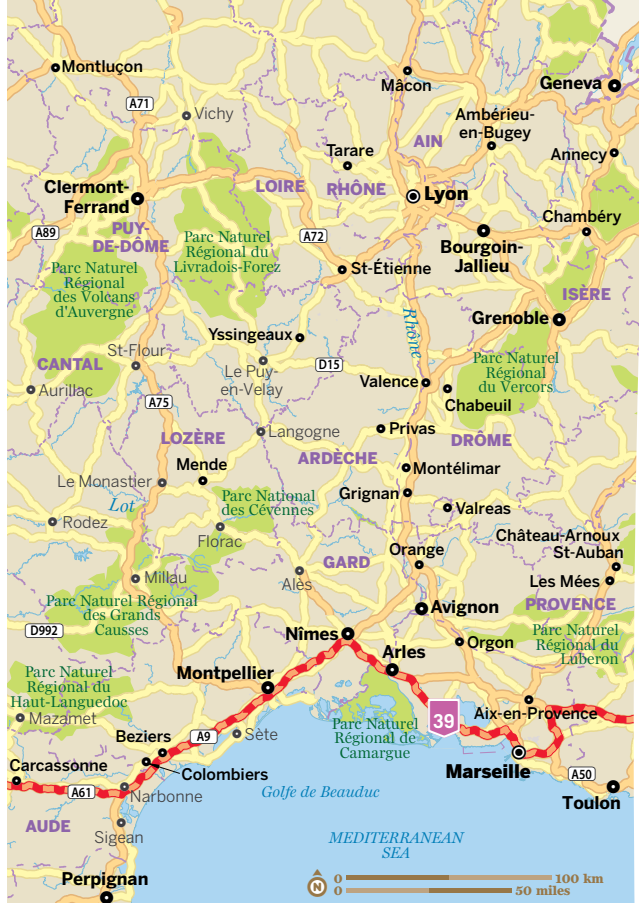
**36 Cave Art of the Vézère Valley 3 Days**  
Uncover some of France's oldest artworks: the cave paintings of Cro-Magnon humans. (p383)

**37 Dordogne's Fortified Villages 5 Days**  
Discover the fortified villages and castles of the rural Dordogne. (p391)

**38 The Lot Valley 3 Days**  
Tour the twisting rivers, limestone gorges and vintage vineyards of the Lot. (p399)

*Classic Trip*

**39 Atlantic to Med 10 Days**  
Running between two very different seas, this is the ultimate south-of-France trip. (p407)



## DON'T MISS

### St-Cyprien

An expert resident in the village offers truffle hunts. Accompany the hounds on Trip **35**

### Musée National de la Préhistoire

A brilliant place to do your homework on the Vézère Valley's cave art. Bone up on Trip **36**

### Domme

Explore this spectacular hilltop village, with its views over the Dordogne valley. Take it all in on Trip **37**

### Najac

This fairytale castle offers some of the most breathtaking views in southwest France. Explore it on Trip **37**

### Tapas

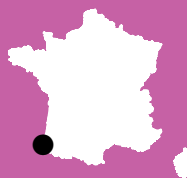
Tuck into these tasty bites and wonder whether you're in France, Spain or somewhere else altogether. Indulge yourself on Trip **33**



**La Roque Gageac** A barge passes the village on the Dordogne River (Trip 35)



*Basque Country Bayonne festival  
antics in Basque red and white*



# 33

## Basque Country

*Feisty and independent, the Basque Country is famous for the glitzy resort of Biarritz. But on this tour you'll also fall for delightful fishing ports, chocolate-box villages and jade-green rolling hills.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

30 km

**St-Jean de Luz**  
Taste traditional Basque seafood dishes

START  
Bayonne

13 km

**Biarritz**  
Treat yourself to tapas and watch surfers tackle the waves

Sare  
Ainhoa

72 km

**Espelette**  
Potter about a picturesque Basque village

St-Étienne de Baïgorry

FINISH

117 km

**St-Jean Pied de Port**  
Walk in the footsteps of millions of pilgrims

**7 DAYS**  
117KM / 73 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

September and October offer the best combination of weather and low crowds.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Looking across Grande Plage in Biarritz from the southern headland.

### BEST FOR CULTURE

Absorbing the Basque spirit of old Bayonne.

# 33 Basque Country

Driving into the village of Espelette you'll be struck by how different everything is from other parts of the country. The houses are all tarted up in the red and white of Basque buildings, streamers of chilli peppers hang from roof beams, and from open windows comes a language you don't recognise. As you'll discover on this tour, being different from the rest of France is exactly how the proud Basques like it.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 Bayonne

Surrounded by sturdy fortifications and splashed in red and white paint, Bayonne is one of the most attractive towns in southwest France. Its perfectly preserved old town and shoals of riverside restaurants are an absolute delight to explore.

Inside the **Musée Basque et de l'Histoire de Bayonne** (☎05 59 59 08 98; [www.musee-basque.com](http://www.musee-basque.com); 37 quai des Corsaires; adult/



child €6.50/free; ☀️10am-6.30pm) the seafaring history, traditions and cultural identity of the Basque people are all explored.

The twin towers of Bayonne's Gothic **Cathédrale Ste-Marie** (☀️10-11.45am & 3-6.15pm Mon-Sat, 3.30-6.15pm Sun, cloister 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm) soar above the city. Construction began in the 13th century, and was completed in 1451.

🔨 p363

**The Drive** » Bring a towel because we're taking the 13km

(25 minute) beach-bums route to Biarritz. Follow the River Adour out of Bayonne down allée Marines and av de l'Adour. At the big roundabout turn left onto bd des Plages and take your pick from any of the beaches along this stretch. This road will eventually lead into Biarritz.

TRIP HIGHLIGHT

2 Biarritz

As ritzy as its name suggests, this stylish coastal town took off as a resort in the mid-19th century when Napoléon III and his Spanish-born wife, Eugénie, visited regularly. Along its rocky coastline are architectural hallmarks of this golden age, and the belle-époque and art deco eras that followed. Although it retains a high glamour quotient (and high prices to match), it's also a magnet for vanloads of surfers, with some of Europe's best waves.

Biarritz' raison d'être is its fashionable beaches, particularly the central **Grande Plage** and

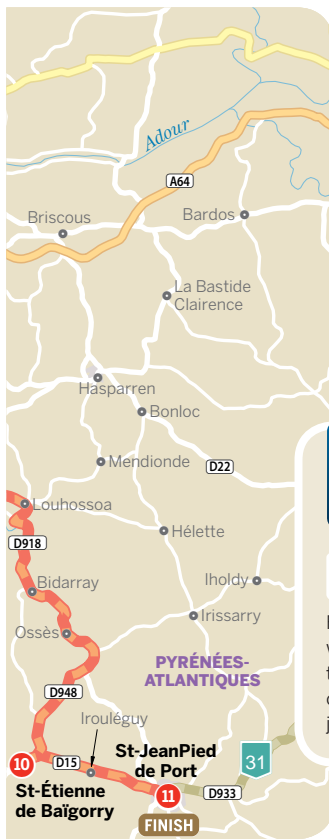
**Plage Miramar**, which are lined end to end with sunbathing bodies on hot summer days.

For a look under the waves, check out the **Musée de la Mer** (☎️05 59 22 75 40; www.museedelamer.com; esplanade du Rocher de la Vierge; adult/child €13/9.50; ☀️9.30am-midnight Jul & Aug, shorter hr rest of year), rich in underwater life from the Bay of Biscay and beyond.

For life further afield, have a poke about the stunning collections of Asian art at the **Musée d'Art Oriental Asiatica** (☎️05 59 22 78 79; www.museeasiatica.com; 1 rue Guy Petit; adult/student/child €7/5/3; ☀️10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 2-7pm Sat & Sun).

🔨 p363

**The Drive** » It's a 4km, 10-minute drive south out of Biarritz down rue Gambetta and rue de Madrid to the Cité de l'Océan. On the way you'll pass some fantastic stretches of sand just calling for you to dip a toe in the sea or hang-ten on a surfboard.



LINK YOUR TRIP

31 Cheat's Compostela

From St-Jean Pied de Port work your way in reverse through our cheat's version of this ancient spiritual journey.

34 Heritage Wine Routes

From Bayonne it's a 192km pine tree-scented drive to the capital of wine, Bordeaux, and the start of our wine tour.



### 3 Cité de l'Océan

We don't really know whether it's fair to call Biarritz's new showpiece, **Cité de l'Océan** (📍05 59 22 75 40; www.citedeloccean.com; 1 av de la Plage; adult/child €10.50/7; 🕒10am-10pm), a mere 'museum'. At heart it's a museum of the ocean but in reality this is entertainment, cutting-edge technology, theme park and science museum all rolled into one spectacular attraction. Inside the eye-catching building you'll learn how the ocean was born and watch giant squid and sperm whales do battle.

**The Drive** » It's an easy 6km drive down the D911 (av de Biarritz) and the D810, passing through the village of Bidart, to the ocean views of pretty Guéthary. Traffic can be awful.

### 4 Guéthary

Built onto cliffs overlooking the ocean south of Biarritz, this red and white seaside village has gained a reputation as the Basque Country's chichi resort of choice for the jet set. The pebble beach below the village offers safe bathing for all the family while the offshore reefs offer some exceptional surf for the brave.

**The Drive** » It's another seriously traffic-clogged 7km down the D810 to St-Jean de Luz. This short hop should only take 10 minutes but it rarely does! Sadly, there's no worthwhile alternative route.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 5 St-Jean de Luz

If you're searching for the quintessential Basque

seaside town – with atmospheric narrow streets and a lively fishing port pulling in large catches of sardines and anchovies that are cooked up at authentic restaurants – you've found it.

St-Jean de Luz' beautiful banana-shaped sandy **beach** sprouts stripy bathing tents from June to September. The beach is sheltered from Atlantic swells and is among the few child-friendly beaches in the Basque Country.

With plenty of boutique shops, little cafes and pretty buildings, walking the streets of the pedestrianised town centre is a real pleasure. Don't miss the town's finest church, the **Église St-Jean Baptiste** (rue Gambetta; 🕒8.30am-noon & 2-7pm), which has a splendid interior with a magnificent baroque altarpiece.

🍷 🍷 p363

**The Drive** » The 15km, 20-minute, drive down the D918 and D4 to Sare is a slow road through the gorgeous gentle hills of the pre-Pyrenees. From the village of Sare, which is well worth a wander, hop onto the D306 for a further 7km (10 minutes) to the Grottes de Sare.

### 6 Grottes de Sare

Who knows what the first inhabitants of the **Grottes de Sare** (www.grottesdesare.fr; adult/

## TAPAS ON THE SEASHORE

The influence of Spain is everywhere in the French Basque country, and that includes the cuisine. All the Basque coastal towns have a tapas bar or two, but in Biarritz the pickings are especially rich. The following are our favourites:

**Bar Jean** (5 rue des Halles; tapas €1-2) The most original, and delicious, selection of tapas in the city is served up with a flamenco soundtrack.

**Le Comptoir du Foie Gras/Maison Pujol** (1 rue du Centre; tapas €1) This quirky place morphs from a shop selling jars of outstanding foie gras in the day to a tapas bar in the evening. Expect the tapas to be foie gras heavy.

**Bar du Marché** (📍05 59 23 48 96; 8 rue des Halles; tapas €1-2.50) First opening its doors in 1938, this is another authentic tapas bar beside the market.



Bayonne

child €8/4; ☀️ 10am-7pm) – who lived some 20,000 years ago – would make of today’s whiz-bang technology, including lasers and holograms, during the sound-and-light shows at these caves. Multilingual 45-minute tours take you through a gaping entrance via narrow passages to a huge central cavern adorned with stalagmites and stalactites.

**The Drive** » To get to our next stop, Ainhoa, retrace your steps back to Sare and then jump onto the D4. After 14km and 20 minutes it’s job done. If you’re feeling adventurous you

could weave your way there on any number of minor back roads or even cross briefly into Spain and drive via the lovely village of Zugarrmudi.

## 7 Ainhoa

Beautiful Ainhoa’s elongated main street is flanked by imposing 17th-century houses, half-timbered and brightly painted. The fortified **church** has the Basque trademarks of an internal gallery and an embellished altarpiece.

🗝️ p363

**The Drive** » It’s 6km down the D20 to our next halt, Espelette.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 8 Espelette

The whitewashed Basque town of Espelette is famous for its dark-red chillies, an integral ingredient in traditional Basque cuisine. In autumn the walls of the houses are strung with rows of chillies drying in the sun. To learn more about the chillies, and taste and buy chilli products visit **l’Atelier du Piment** (☎️ 05 59 93 90 21; www.atelierdupiment.com; admission free; ☀️ 9am-7pm) on the edge of town.

🗝️ p363



## DETOUR: SAN SEBASTIÁN

### Start: 5 St-Jean de Luz

Spain, and the elegant and lively city of San Sebastián, is just a few kilometres along the coast from St-Jean de Luz and put simply, San Sebastián is not a city you want to miss out on visiting. The town is set around two sickle-shaped beaches, at least one of which, **Playa de la Concha**, is the equal of any city beach in Europe. But there's more to the city than just looks. With more Michelin stars per capita than anywhere else in the world, and arguably the finest tapas in Spain, many a culinary expert has been heard to say that San Sebastián is possibly the worlds best food city.

By car from St-Jean de Luz, it's just a short 20-minute jump down the A64 (and past an awful lot of toll booths!), or you can endure the N10, which has no tolls but gets so clogged up that it will take you a good couple of hours to travel this short distance.

**The Drive** » It's an exceedingly pretty 6km (10 minutes) down the D249 to the cherry capital, Itxassou.

### 9 Itxassou

Famed for its cherries, as well as the beauty of its surrounds, Itxassou is a classic Basque village that well rewards a bit of exploration. The cherries are used in the region's most famous cake, *gateau Basque*, which is available pretty much everywhere you look throughout the Basque Country.

**The Drive** » It's 28km (about 30 minutes) down the D918 and D948 to St-Étienne de Baïgorry. On the way you'll pass the village of Bidarray, renowned for its white-water rafting, and some pretty special mountain scenery.

### 10 St-Étienne de Baïgorry

The riverside village of St-Étienne de Baïgorry

is tranquillity itself. Like so many Basque settlements, the village has two focal points: the **church** and the **fronton** (court for playing *pelota*, the local ball games). It's the kind of place to while away an afternoon doing nothing very much at all.

**The Drive** » It's a quiet 11km (20 minute) drive along the rural D15 to our final stop St-Jean Pied de Port. The thirsty will be interested to know that the hills around the village of Irouléguay, which you pass roughly around the halfway point, are home to the vines that produce the Basque Country's best-known wine.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 11 St-Jean Pied de Port

At the foot of the Pyrenees, the walled town of St-Jean Pied de Port was for centuries the last stop in France for pilgrims heading south over the Spanish border

and onto Santiago de Compostela in western Spain. Today it remains a popular departure point for hikers attempting the same pilgrim trail.

St-Jean Pied de Port isn't just about hiking boots and God though; its old core, sliced through by the River Nive, is an attractive place of cobbled streets and geranium-covered balconies. Specific sights worth seeking out include the **Église Notre Dame du Bout du Pont**, which was thoroughly rebuilt in the 17th century. Beyond Porte de Notre Dame (the main gate into the old town) is the photogenic **Vieux Pont** (Old Bridge), the town's best-known landmark.

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# Eating & Sleeping

## Bayonne 1

### La Feuillantine **Gastronomic €€€**

(☎05 59 46 14 94; www.lafeuillantine-bayonne.com; 21 quai Amiral Dubourdieu; menus €25-67, mains €25) This colourful riverside place might be quite small, but the culinary skills of chef Nicolas Bertegui have received virtually universal praise in the mainstream French media.

## Biarritz 2

### Casa Juan Pedro **Seafood €**

(☎05 59 24 00 86; Port des Pêcheurs; mains €7-10) Down by the old port is this cute little fishing-shack restaurant. The gregarious atmosphere ensures that you can wash down your tuna, sardines or squid with plenty of friendly banter from both the staff and other customers.

### Hotel de Silhouette **Designer Hotel €€€**

(☎05 59 24 93 82; www.hotel-silhouette-biarritz.com; 30 rue Gambetta; d from €220; 🚗🚗) This fabulous hotel has designer rooms that have a dollop of big-city attitude, but in order to remind you that the countryside is close at hand there are a couple of 'sheep' in the garden.

## St-Jean de Luz 5

### Buvette des Halles **Seafood €**

(☎05 59 26 73 59; bd Victor Hugo; dishes €7-14; ☺6am-2pm & 7-11pm, closed Tue Sep-Jun) Tucked into a corner of the covered market, this minuscule restaurant serves goat's cheese, Bayonne ham, grilled sardines, fish soup, mussels and much more outside beneath the plane trees between June and September. The rest of the year you can eat tucked up inside, but go early for the best pickings.

### La Devinière **Boutique Hotel €€**

(☎05 59 26 05 51; www.hotel-la-deviniere.com; 5 rue Loquin; d €120-180; 📶) You have to love a place that forsakes TVs for antiquarian books. Beyond the living room, with its piano and comfy armchairs, there's a delightful small patio equipped with lounges, and the rooms are stuffed full of antique furnishings including old writing desks.

## Ainhoa 7

### Ithurria **Basque €€€**

(☎05 59 29 92 11; www.ithurria.com; d from €135, menus €39-62; 🚗🚗🚗) For a memorable meal, stop at the Michelin-starred Ithurria, set inside in an old pilgrims' hostel. Superb local dishes and an impressive wine list will put a smile on your face.

## Espelette 8

### Maison d'hôte Irazabala **B&B €**

(☎06 07 14 93 61; www.irazabala.com; 155 Mendiko Bidea; s/d €60/80; 📶) This beautiful Basque farmhouse is situated in the middle of wild flower meadows and offers breathtaking views over a raised rumple of green mountains. The four rooms are easily the equal of the setting and you'll struggle to tear yourself away from the garden. It's a short way out of town (follow signs for the campsite, after which it's signed).

## St-Jean Pied de Port 11

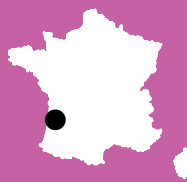
### Chez Arrambide **Gastronomic €€€**

(menus €42-110, mains €30-52; ☺closed Tue Sep-Jun) This twin-Michelin-starred restaurant, inside the (overpriced) Hôtel Les Pyrénées, is where chef Firmin Arrambide works wonders (such as truffe and foie-gras lasagne) with seasonal market produce.

*St-Émilion Drive into Bordeaux's  
most alluring wine town*



# Heritage Wine Routes



# 34

*This is the trip for those who appreciate the finer things in life: great wine, fabulous regional cuisine and gentle driving through glorious vine-ribboned countryside studded with grand châteaux.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

**5 DAYS**  
245KM / 152 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

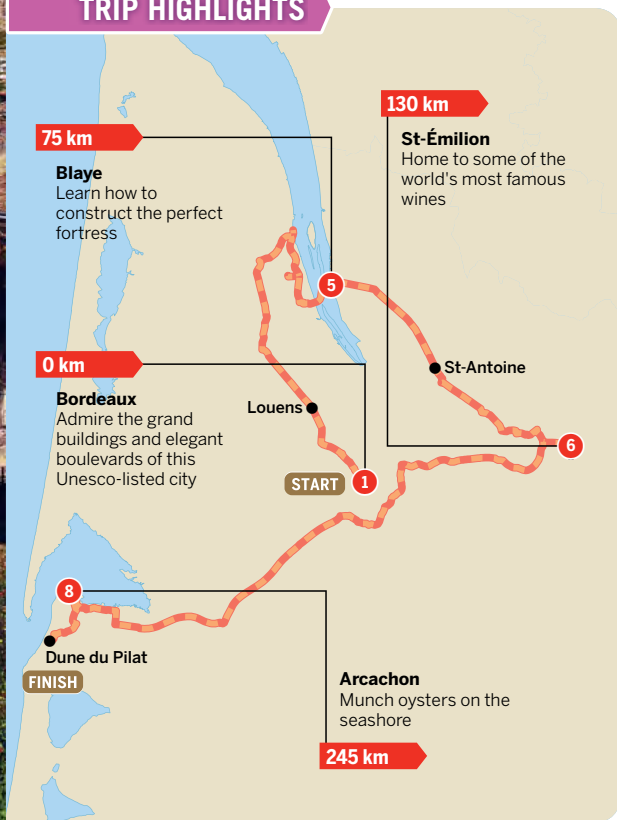
September and October: the grape harvest takes place, oysters are in season

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Over the red roofs of St-Émilion from the place des Créneaux.

### BEST FOR FOODIES

Slurping fresh oysters at Bordeaux's Marché des Capucins.



## 34

## Heritage Wine Routes

10am: The southern sun warms your face and you're standing in a field surrounded by vines heavy with ready to burst grapes. 1pm: Cutlery clinks, tummies sigh in bliss and you're on a gastronomic adventure in a top-class restaurant. 7pm: Toes in the sand and Atlantic breeze in the hair and you down an oyster in one. All this and more awaits you on this refined culinary trip.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 1 Bordeaux

Stately Bordeaux is a city of sublime food, even better drink and long, lazy sun-drenched days. It's true that for a city of its size and standing, actual physical tourist attractions are somewhat thin on the ground, but come here with an empty tummy and eye for fine architecture and you'll find that Bordeaux more than satisfies your cravings.



Gallo-Roman statues and relics dating back 25,000 years are among the highlights at the impressive **Musée d'Aquitaine** (20 cours Pasteur; permanent exhibitions free, temporary exhibitions adult/student/child €5/2.50/free; ☎11am-6pm Tue-Sun). Upstairs is a small collection of statues and masks from the former French African and Oceania colonies. Ask to borrow an English-language catalogue.

**The tourist office** (☎05 56 00 66 00; www.bordeaux-tourisme.com; 12 cours du 30 Juillet; ☎9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-6.30pm Sun) runs a packed program of bilingual Bordeaux city tours, including a wheelchair-accessible two-hour



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

### 33 Basque Country

From Arcachon drive 182km through the forests of Les Landes to Bayonne and our Spanish-flavoured Basque Country tour.

### 35 Gourmet Dordogne

Slip some truffle hunting into your wine tour. From St-Émilion it's a mere 100km to Périgueux and our Gourmet Dordogne drive.



## TOP TIP: OYSTERS AT CAPUCINS

A classic Bordeaux experience is a Saturday morning spent slurping oysters and white wine from one of the seafood stands at **Marché des Capucins** (6 oysters & glass of wine €6; ☎7am-noon). Afterwards you can peruse the stalls while shopping for the freshest ingredients to take on a picnic.

**morning walking tour** (adult/child €8.50/6; ☎10am Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri & Sun) and a **night-time walking tour** (adult/child €16/11) that takes in Bordeaux' floodlit buildings and monuments. Contact the tourist office for details of dozens of other tour options, including gourmet food and wine tours as well as river cruises in the warmer months. All tours take a limited number of participants; reserve ahead.

For more on things to see in the city see our walking tour, p416.

🍷🍷 p372

**The Drive** » It's a 23km trip along the D1 from Bordeaux to La Winery. Technically this should take around 40 minutes, but traffic around Bordeaux can be dreadful so allow a bit longer.

### 2 La Winery

Part giant wine shop, part grape-flavoured theme park, and part wine museum, **La Winery** (☎05 56 39 04 90; www.lawinery.fr; Rond-

Point des Vendangeurs, D1) is a vast glass-and-steel wine centre that mounts concerts and contemporary-art exhibits alongside various fee-based tastings, including innovative ones that determine your *signe œnologique* ('wine sign') costing from €16 (booking required). It stocks over 1000 different wines.

**The Drive** » It's 29km (30 minutes) from La Winery to Pauillac along the D1215, which becomes ever more rural.

### 3 Pauillac

Northwest of Bordeaux, along the western shore of the Gironde Estuary – formed by the confluence of the Garonne and Dordogne Rivers – lie some of Bordeaux' most celebrated vineyards. On the banks of the muddy Gironde, the port town of Pauillac is at the heart of the wine country, surrounded by the distinguished Haut-Médoc, Margaux and St-Julien appellations.



The Pauillac wine appellation encompasses 18 *crus classés* including the world-renowned Mouton Rothschild, Latour and Lafite Rothschild. The town's tourist office houses the **Maison du Tourisme et du Vin** (☎05 56 59 03 08; www.pauillac-medoc.com; 🕒9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sun), which has information on the area's many châteaux and how to visit them.

**The Drive** » It only takes about 15 minutes to cover the 10km between Pauillac and the next stop. Take the D2 south out of Pauillac for 7.3km and then turn right towards Lachesnaye, continue for around 1.5km, and then turn right up to Château Lanessan.



## DETOUR: COGNAC

### Start: 5 Blaye

On the banks of the River Charente amid vine-covered countryside, the picturesque town of Cognac, home of the double-distilled spirit that bears its name, proves that there's more to southwest France than just wine.

The best-known Cognac houses are open to the public, running tours of their cellars and production facilities, and ending with a tasting session. The **tourist office** (☎05 45 82 10 71; www.tourism-cognac.com; 16 rue du XIV Juillet; 🕒9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) can give advice on current opening hours of each Cognac house.

It's 85km from Blaye to Cognac, much of which is along the A10 highway. From Cognac you can cut down to stop 6, St-Émilion, in two hours on the D731 followed by the busy N10.

### 4 Château Lanessan

There are so many châteaux around here with such a confusing web of opening times and visiting regulations that it can be hard to know where to begin. One of the easiest to visit is **Château Lanessan** (☎05 56 58 94 80; www.lanessan.com; Cussac-Fort-Medoc; 🕒advance reservation), which offers daily hour-long tours throughout the year including ones tailored to children and hard-to-please teenagers; advance reservations required.

**The Drive** » Getting to Blaye involves splashing over the River Gironde on a car ferry – how exciting! Return to the D2 and

MICHAEL BUSSELL/ROBERT HARRINGTON/TTMAGS ©



head south to Lamarque where you hop on-board the ferry (passenger/car €3.20/13.70, departures every 1½ hours in July and August) for the short crossing to Blaye. It's 11km from the château to the ferry.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 5 Blaye

If you want a lesson in how to build a protective citadel, then the spectacular **Citadelle**



**Paulliac** Wine casks are inspected in a vineyard cellar

**de Blaye** (admission free) is about as good an example as you could hope to find. Largely constructed by that master fortress-builder Vauban in the 17th century, it was a key line of defence protecting Bordeaux from naval attack. It was inscribed onto the Unesco World Heritage List in 2008.

**Guided tours** (adult/

child €5/3; 🕒 2.30pm daily Jun-Sep) in English are available through the tourist office.

**The Drive** ➤ From Blaye to St-Émilion is a simple 50km drive. From Blaye take the D137 toward St-André de Cubzac, where you join the D670 to Libourne. After a bit of time stuck in traffic you continue down to St-Émilion. It should take an hour but traffic means it will probably take longer!

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**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

**6 St-Émilion**

The medieval village of St-Émilion perches above vineyards renowned for producing full-bodied red wines and is easily the most alluring of all the region's wine towns.

The only way to visit the town's most interesting historical

sites is with one of the tourist office's varied **guided tours** (adult €7-14, child free).

The tourist office organises two-hour afternoon **château visits** (adult/child €14/free). It also runs various events throughout the year, such as **Les Samedis de l'Oenologie** (adult €77; ☺Sat), which combines a vineyard visit, lunch, town tour and wine-tasting course.

For a fun and informative introduction to wine tasting, get stuck into some 'blind' tastings at **L'École du Vin de St-Émilion** ([www.vignobleschateaux.fr](http://www.vignobleschateaux.fr);

4 rue du Clocher; tasting course €29; ☺3pm Apr-Oct, by reservation Nov-Mar). The adjacent

**Maison du Vin** (place Pierre Meyrat; class €21; ☺mid-Jul-mid-Sep) also offers bilingual 1½-hour wine-tasting classes.

Reserve all tours in advance.

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**The Drive** » To get to the next stop you've simply no option but to endure the ring road around Bordeaux. Make sure you don't do this at rush hour! Head toward Bordeaux on the N89, then south down the A63 following signs to Arcachon and then Gujan Mestras. It's a

100km journey that should, but probably won't, take an hour.

## 7 Gujan Mestras

All that wine must be giving you a giddy head by now (and frankly that's not great on a driving tour) so let's take a break from the grape and head to the seaside to eat oysters in the area around Gujan Mestras. Picturesque oyster ports are dotted around the town, but the best one to visit is **Port de Larros**, where locally harvested oysters are sold from wooden shacks. To learn more about these

## ON THE WINE TRAIL

Thirsty? The 1000-sq-km wine-growing area around the city of Bordeaux is, along with Burgundy, France's most important producer of top-quality wines.

The Bordeaux region is divided into 57 appellations (production areas whose soil and microclimate impart distinctive characteristics to the wine produced there) that are grouped into seven families, and then subdivided into a hierarchy of designations (eg *premier grand cru classé*, the most prestigious) that often vary from appellation to appellation. The majority of the Bordeaux region's reds, rosés, sweet and dry whites and sparkling wines have earned the right to include the abbreviation AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) on their labels, indicating that the contents have been grown, fermented and aged according to strict regulations that govern such viticultural matters as the number of vines permitted per hectare and acceptable pruning methods.

Bordeaux has more than 5000 châteaux, referring not to palatial residences but rather to the properties where grapes are raised, picked, fermented and then matured as wine. The smaller châteaux sometimes accept walk-in visitors, but at many places, especially the better-known ones, you have to make advance reservations. Many close during the *vendange* (grape harvest) in October.

Whet your palate with the Bordeaux tourist office informal introduction to wine and cheese courses (adult €25) where you sip three different wines straight from the cellar and sup on cheese.

Serious students of the grape can enrol at the **École du Vin** (Wine School; ☎05 56 00 22 66; [www.bordeaux.com](http://www.bordeaux.com); 3 cours du 30 Juillet), within the Maison du Vin de Bordeaux, across the street from the tourist office. Introductory two-hour courses (adult €25) are held Monday to Saturday from 10am to noon between July and September.

delicious shellfish, the small **Maison de l'Huître** (adult/child €4.50/2.50; ☎10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat) has a display on oyster farming, including a short film in English.

**The Drive** » It's 10, sometimes traffic-clogged, but well-signposted, kilometres from Gujan Mestras to Arcachon.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 8 Arcachon

The seaside town of Arcachon has lured bourgeois Bordelaise since the end of the 19th century. Its four little quarters are romantically named for each of the seasons, with villas that evoke the town's golden past amid a scattering of 1950s architecture.

Arcachon's sandy beach, **Plage d'Arcachon**, is flanked by two piers. Lively **Jetée Thiers** is at the western end. In front of the eastern pier, **Jetée d'Eyrac**, stands the town's turreted **Casino de la Plage** built by Adalbert Deganne in 1953 as an exact replica of Château de Boursault in the Marne. Inside, it's a less-grand blinking and bell-ringing riot of poker machines and gaming tables.

On the tree-covered hillside south of the Ville d'Été, the century-old **Ville d'Hiver** (Winter

Quarter) has over 300 villas ranging in style from neo-Gothic through to colonial.

For a different view of Arcachon and its coastline, take to the ocean waves on one of the boat cruises organised by **Les Bateliers Arcachonnais** (UBA; ☎05 57 72 28 28; www.bateliers-arcachon.com; Île aux Oiseaux adult/child €15/10, Banc d'Arguin adult/child €20/14). It offers daily, year-round cruises around the **Île aux Oiseaux**, the uninhabited 'bird island' in the middle of Arcachon bay. It's a haven for tern, curlew and redshank, so bring your binoculars. In summer there are regular all-day excursions (11am to 5.30pm) to the **Banc d'Arguin**, the sand bank off the Dune du Pilat.

🍷🍷 p373

**The Drive** » Dune du Pilat is 12km south of Arcachon down



### TOP TIP: OYSTER TASTE TEST

Oysters from each of the Bassin d'Arcachon's four oyster-breeding zones hint at subtly different flavours. See if you can detect these:

**Banc d'Arguin** – milk and sugar

**Île aux Oiseaux** – minerals

**Cap Ferret** – citrus

**Grand Banc** – roasted hazelnuts

the D218. There are restrictions on car access in summer for the last part of the route.

### 9 Dune du Pilat

This colossal sand dune (sometimes referred to as the Dune de Pyla because of its location in the resort town of Pylasur-Mer) stretches from the mouth of the Bassin d'Arcachon southwards for almost 3km. Already the largest in Europe, it's spreading eastwards at 4.5m a year – it has swallowed trees, a road junction and even a hotel.

The view from the top – approximately 114m above sea level – is magnificent. To the west you can see the sandy shoals at the mouth of the Bassin d'Arcachon, and dense dark-green pine forests stretch from the base of the dune eastwards almost as far as the eye can see.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Bordeaux 1

### **La Tupina** Regional Cuisine €€€

(📞)05 56 91 56 37; www.latupina.com; 6 rue Porte de la Monnaie; menus €18-65, mains €27-45) Filled with the aroma of soup simmering inside an old *tupina* ('kettle' in Basque) over an open fire, this place is feted far and wide for its seasonal southwestern French specialities such as a mini-casserole of foie gras and eggs or goose wings with potatoes and parsley. It's a 10-minute walk upriver from the city centre.

### **Le Cheverus Café** Bistro €

(📞)05 56 48 29 73; 81-83 rue du Loup; menus from €11.40; ☺(Mon-Sat) In a city full of neighbourhood bistros, this is one of the most impressive. It's friendly, cosy and chaotically busy (be prepared to wait for a table at lunchtime). The food tastes fresh and home-cooked and it dares to veer slightly away from the bistro standards of steak and chips. The lunch *menus*, which include wine, are an all-out bargain.

### **La Boîte à Huîtres** Oysters €€

(📞)05 56 81 64 97; 36 cours du Chapeau Rouge; lunch menu €19, 6 oysters from €10) This rickety, wood-panelled little place feels like an Arcachon fisherman's hut. It's a sensation that's quite appropriate because this is by far the best place in Bordeaux to munch on fresh Arcachon oysters. Traditionally they're served with sausage but you can have them in a number of different forms, including with that other southwest delicacy, foie gras.

### **Ecolodge des Chartons** B&B €€

(📞)05 56 81 49 13; www.ecolodgedeschartons.com; 23 rue Raze; incl breakfast s €96-118, d €98-134; 🏠) The owners of this *chambre d'hôte* have stripped back and lime-washed the stone walls of an old town house, scrubbed the wide floorboards and polished up the antique furniture to create a deliciously pleasant place, hidden away in a little side street off the quays in Bordeaux' Chartons wine merchant district. There's nearby street parking.

### **L'Hôtel Particulier** Boutique Hotel €€€

(📞)05 57 88 28 80; www.lhotel-particulier.com; 44 rue Vital-Carles; apt from €97, d from €168; 🏠) When you step into this fabulous boutique hotel and find a thousand eyes staring at you from the reception walls, and lampshades made only of feathers, you realise you've stumbled upon somewhere special. The rooms don't disappoint and are highly extravagant affairs with huge fireplaces, carved ceilings, free-standing bath tubs and quality furnishings throughout.

### **Les Chambres au Coeur de Bordeaux** B&B €€

(📞)05 56 52 43 58; www.aucoeurdebordeaux.fr; 28 rue Boulan; s/d incl breakfast from €85/95; 🏠) This recently renovated town house is now a swish B&B run very much along the lines of a small boutique hotel. Its five charming rooms are a very Bordeaux-appropriate mix of the old and the new, and each evening a free aperitif is offered at 7pm.

## St-Émilion 6

### **Restaurant Hostellerie de Plaisance** Gastronomic €€€

(📞)05 57 55 07 55; www.hostellerie-plaisance.com; place du Clocher; menus €105-150; ☺(lunch Tue-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat) Award-winning chef Philippe Etchebest cooks up food like you've never had before at his double-Michelin-starred restaurant housed in a dining room of eggshell blue and white gold inside the hotel of the same name. The 'discovery menu' allows you to do just that in about eight courses. Advance reservations essential.

### **L'Huîtres Pie** Seafood €€

(📞)05 57 24 69 71; 11 rue de la Porte Bouqueyre; menus €22-52; ☺(closed Tue & Wed) Arcachon oysters and other seafood feature heavily in the dishes on offer here, but if slippery shellfish don't do it for you, tuck into one of the hearty meat or fish dishes. You can eat inside or outside on the pleasant olive-shaded courtyard.

**🏠 Grand Barrail** **Historic Hotel €€€**

(📞05 57 55 37 00; www.grand-barrail.com; rte de Libourne/D243; r from €320; 🚗📶🚰) Grand doesn't even begin to describe this immense 1850-built château, 3km from the village, with its decadent on-site spa, stone-flagged heated swimming pool and regal rooms. Undoubtedly the best seat in its restaurant (*menus* from €29) is the corner table framed by 19th-century stained glass that would make the average church green with envy.

**🏠 Hôtel-Restaurant du Palais Cardinal** **Historic Hotel €€**

(📞05 57 24 72 39; www.palais-cardinal.com; place du 11 Novembre 1918; s €71-142, d €88-166; 📶🚰) Run by the same family for five generations, this hotel puts a little more thought into its dress sense than many St-Émilion hotels. The heated pool is set in flower-filled gardens and framed by sections of the original medieval town-wall fortifications, dating from the 13th century. Its well worth partaking in the gastronomic fare served at its restaurant.

**Arcachon 8****🍴 Aux Mille Saveurs****Traditional French €€**

(📞05 56 83 40 28; 25 bd du Général Leclerc; menus €19-50; 🕒 closed Wed & dinner Sun & Tue) In a light-filled space of flowing white table cloths, this genteel restaurant is renowned for its traditional French fare artistically presented on fine china.

**🏠 Hôtel le Dauphin** **Historic Hotel €€**

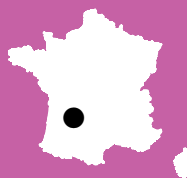
(📞05 56 83 02 89; www.dauphin-arcachon.com; 7 av Gounod; s/d from €112/122; 🚗📶🚰) Don't miss this late-19th-century gingerbread place with patterned red-and-cream brickwork. An icon of its era, it's graced by twin semicircular staircases, magnolias and palms. Plain but spacious rooms are well set up for families. Parking is free.

**🏠 Park Inn** **Design Hotel €€**

(📞05 56 83 99 91; www.parkinn.fr; 4 rue du Professeur Jolyet; d from €155; 🚗📶) Arcachon's version of this chain is utterly distinctive, thanks to its vivid swirled carpet, candy-striped curtains and primary-coloured modular furniture. It's a bit like bouncing around in a preschoolers' playground.



***Black truffles*** Savour the star ingredient of Dordogne gastronomy



35

# Gourmet Dordogne

*The Dordogne is definitely a place that thinks with its stomach. This foodie tour indulges in the region's gastronomic goodies, from walnuts and truffles to fine wine and foie gras.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

114 km

### Bergerac

Educate your palate by tasting Bergerac's vintage wines

51 km

### St-Cyprien

Join an expert on a hunt for the elusive *truffe noire* (black truffle)

Vergt

Mortemart

START

7

5

1

3

FINISH

Gageac-et-Rouillac

0 km

### Sarlat-la-Canéda

Browse the stalls of Sarlat's atmospheric street markets

17 km

### Carsac-Aillac

Visit a local goose farm and try some foie gras

3 DAYS

138KM / 85 MILES

## GREAT FOR...



## BEST TIME TO GO

September and October for harvest markets; December and March for truffle season.



## ESSENTIAL PHOTO

A picnic among the endless vines surrounding Bergerac.



## BEST FOR FOODIES

Shop till you drop at Sarlat's chaotic street market.



## 35

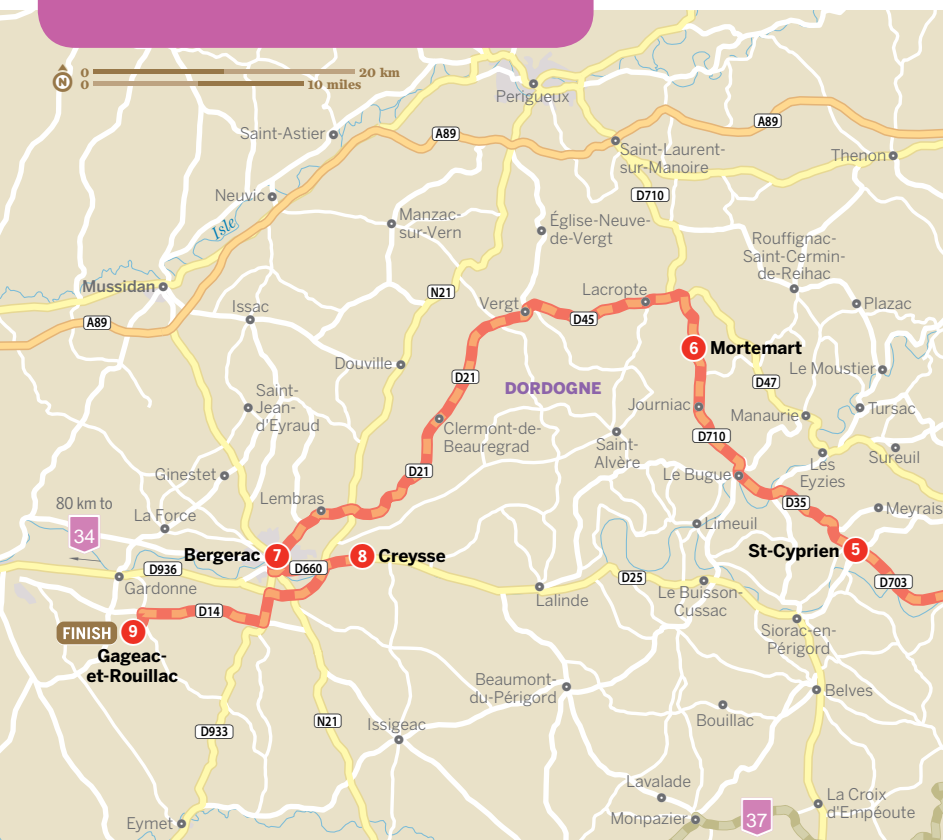
Gourmet  
Dordogne

If you enjoy nothing better than soaking up the sights, sounds and smells of a French market, you'll be in seventh heaven in the Dordogne. This region is famous for its foodie traditions, and immersing yourself in its culinary culture is one of the best – and tastiest – ways to experience life in rural France.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 1 Sarlat-la-Canéda

Start in the honey-stoned town of Sarlat-la-Canéda, which hosts a wonderful **outdoor market** on Saturday mornings. Local farmers set up their stalls on the cobbled place de la Liberté, selling seasonal treats such as cèpe mushrooms, duck terrines, foie gras, walnuts and even *truffes noires* (black truffles). There's also an atmospheric **night**



**market** (☀6-10pm) on Thursdays from mid-June to September, and **truffle markets** (☀Sat morning) from December to February.

Even if you're not here on market day, you can shop for foodie souvenirs at Sarlat's **covered market** (☀8.30am-2pm daily), housed in the converted Église Ste-Marie. While you're here, don't miss a trip up the tower in the **panoramic lift** (adult/child €5/4; ☀Apr-Dec), overlooking Sarlat's slate rooftops.

🍴🏠 p381

**The Drive** ▶ Travel 9km east of Sarlat on the D47 towards the village of Sainte-Nathalène. You'll pass walnut groves and wooded copses lining the roadsides. The Moulin de la Tour is on a back road north of the village, signed to Proissans, Salignac and St-Crépin-et-Carlucet; you'll see the sign after another 1.5km.

## 2 Sainte-Nathalène

One of the Dordogne's most distinctive flavours is the humble *noix* (walnut). It's been a prized product of the Dordogne for centuries, and is still used in many local recipes – cakes, puddings, pancakes and breads, as well as liqueurs and *huile de noix* (walnut oil). At the **Moulin de la Tour** (☎05 53 59 22 08; www.moulinde.latour.com; ☀9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat), the region's last working watermill, you can watch walnut oil being made and stock up with nutty souvenirs. Don't miss the *cerneaux de noix au chocolat*

(chocolate-covered walnuts) and *gâteau de noix* (walnut cake).

**The Drive** ▶ Backtrack to the junction in Sainte Nathalène, turn left and follow road signs to St-Vincent-Le-P/RD704. Continue along this minor road until you reach the D704A. Cross straight over and follow white signs to Le Bouyssou. It's a drive of 8km or 15 minutes.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 3 Carsac-Aillac

Alongside black truffles, the Dordogne is famous for its foie gras (fattened goose liver). As you drive around, you'll see duck and goose farms dotted all over the countryside, many of which offer guided tours and *dégustation* (tasting).

### L'Élevage du Bouyssou

(☎05 53 31 12 31; elevage.bouyssou@wanadoo.fr; ☀shop 8am-6pm, tours 6.30pm daily) is a family-run farm to the north of Carsac-Aillac. If it's your kind of thing, owners Denis and Nathalie Mazet run tours and



## LINK YOUR TRIP

### 34 Heritage Wine Routes

The hallowed vineyards of Bordeaux lie 96km to the west of Bergerac along the D936.

### 37 Dordogne's Fortified Villages

Most of the region's best *bastides* (fortified towns) lie to the south of the Dordogne River. Head south from La Roque Gageac for 6km to begin in Domme.

demonstrate *la gavage* – the controversial force-feeding process that helps fatten up the goose livers. You can also buy homemade foie gras in the shop.

**The Drive** » Travel south from Carsac-Aillac and turn left onto the D703 for 12km towards La Roque Gageac. You'll have lovely views across the river, and the banks are lined with medieval villages dangling over the water. Stop for photos at the Cingle de Montfort viewpoint, which overlooks a picturesque bend backed by a medieval château.

#### 4 La Roque Gageac

The lovely D703 tracks the course of the Dordogne River and passes through a string of lovely riverside villages, including La Roque Gageac.

If you feel like burning off some of the calories acquired on this trip, the village is an ideal place to do it: several companies hire out kayaks and canoes for exploring the river, including **Canoe Dordogne** (☎05 53 29 58 50; www.canoe-dordogne.fr; canoe & kayak trips €6-24) and **Canoe Vacances** (☎05 53 28 17 07; www.canoevacances.com; La Peyssière; canoeing €10-20).

✦ p381

**The Drive** » From La Roque Gageac, St-Cyprien is 15km further west along the river. It's a gorgeous drive that passes several medieval châteaux (see p396) en route. Once you reach

St-Cyprien, continue north on the D49 for another 6.5km, and look out for the easy-to-miss right turn to Lussac/Péchalifour.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 5 St-Cyprien

In the village of St-Cyprien you can indulge in another of the Dordogne's great gastronomic gems – the *perle noire* of the Périgord, otherwise known as the black truffle. At **Truffière de Péchalifour** (☎05 53 29 20 44; www.truffe-perigord.com), expert Édouard Aynaud offers hour-long truffle-hunting trips (☼11am Tue-Sat Jul & Aug) assisted by his keen-nosed hounds. The best time to visit is during truffle season from December to March, when he runs half-/full-day trips around the *truffières* (truffle-growing areas) that include a chance to try the rarefied fungi over a picnic lunch.

If you have time, stop at the nearby **Domaine de la Voile Blanche** (☎05 53 29 57 34; www.domaine-voile-blanche.com), where the Dalbavie family run tours around their vineyard.

**The Drive** » From Lussac, backtrack to the D35 and turn northwest towards the bustling town of Le Bugue, following signs to Périgueux onto the D710. It's about 13km to Mortemart; there's a sign to the boar farm just before the village.



LOUIS-JURENT GRANJON/GETTY IMAGES ©

#### 6 Mortemart

Next up is **Les Sangliers de Mortemart** (☎05 53 03 21 30; www.elevage-sangliers-mortemart.com; adult/child €3/1.50; ☼10am-7pm summer, 1-5pm winter), where you can see wild boars being raised in semi-freedom on a farm just outside Mortemart. These



**Truffle hunting** A farmer and his pig searching for truffles

porky cousins of the modern pig were once common across France, but their numbers have been reduced by habitat restriction and hunting.

The boars are fed a rich diet of *chataignes* (chestnuts), which gives the meat a distinctive nutty, gamey flavour. It's a key ingredient in the hearty stew known as *civet de sanglier*, as well

as pâtés and country terrines. Naturally enough, there's a farm shop where you can buy boar-themed goodies.

**The Drive** » From Mortemart, the nicest drive to Bergerac follows the D45 and D21, a drive of 51km through classic Dordogne countryside. Once you reach town, leave your car in the car park on quai Salvette, and walk towards the centre along rue des Récollets.

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TRIP HIGHLIGHT

**7 Bergerac**

It's not as famous as Bordeaux and St-Émilion, but Bergerac is still an essential stop for wine-lovers. Vineyards carpet the countryside around town, producing rich reds, fragrant whites and fruity rosés – but with 13 AOCs (Appellations d'Origines

## TRUFFLE SECRETS

Few ingredients command the same culinary cachet as the *truffe noire* (black truffle), variously known as the *diamant noir* (black diamond) or, hereabouts, the *perle noire du Périgord* (black pearl of the Périgord). The gem references aren't just for show, either: a vintage truffle crop can fetch as much as €1000 per kilogram at seasonal markets.

A subterranean fungus that grows naturally in chalky soils (especially around the roots of oak trees), this mysterious mushroom is notoriously capricious; a good truffle spot one year can be bare the next, which has made farming them practically impossible.

The art of truffle-hunting is a closely guarded secret; it's a matter of luck, judgement and experience, with specially trained dogs (and occasionally pigs) to help in the search.

The height of truffle season is between December and March, when special truffle markets are held around the Dordogne, including in Périgueux and Sarlat.

Contrôlées), and more than 1200 wine-growers, the choice is bewildering.

Thankfully, the town's **Maison des Vins** (☎05 53 63 57 57; www.vins-bergerac.fr; 1 rue des Récollets; ☀10am-12.30pm & 2-7pm) knows all the best vintages, offers wine-tasting courses and organises vineyard visits. You could spend at least another couple of days touring the local vineyards, using Bergerac as a base.

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**The Drive** » Creysse is 9km east of Bergerac along the D660.

### 8 Creysse

Many Bergerac vineyards are open to the public, including the prestigious

### Château de Tiregand

(☎05 53 23 21 08; www.chateau-de-tiregand.com; tours adult/child €3/2), which is mainly known for its Pécharmant wines; it runs tours and tasting sessions in its cellars. English tours run at 2.30pm from June to August.

**The Drive** » South of Bergerac, you'll really start to get out into wine country, with vineyards and châteaux lining the roadsides. Gageac-et-Rouillac is 15km southwest of Bergerac off the D14, not far from Saussignac. Take the D936 west of town, and look out for the left turn onto the D15.

### 9 Gageac-et-Rouillac

Bergerac's largest vineyards lie to the

south of town. Driving round among the rows of vines is a pleasure in itself, especially if you indulge in a bit of *dégustation*. The village of Gageac-et-Rouillac is home to **Clos d'Yvigne** (☎05 53 22 94 40; www.closdyvigne.com; Gageac et Rouillac), a small vineyard run by Patricia Atkinson, a British expat who moved to France in 1990. She arrived knowing next to nothing about winemaking; since then, she's tripled the vineyard's size and written about her experiences in two bestselling books. Phone ahead to make sure the vineyard's open.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Sarlat-la-Canéda 1

### **Le Grand Bleu** Gastronomic €€€

(📞)05 53 29 82 14; www.legrandbleu.eu; 43 av de la Gare; menus €36-65; 🕒lunch Thu-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Run by head chef Maxime Lebrun, this Michelin-starred restaurant is known for creative cuisine that makes maximum use of luxury produce: truffles, lobster, turbot and St-Jacques scallops all feature, and every *menu* starts with a *mise-en-bouche* treat.

### **Jardins de Harmonie** Traditional French €€

(📞)05 53 31 06 69; www.lesjardinsdharmonie.com; mains €21-35, menus €22-48; 🕒lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) This upmarket restaurant has a gorgeous setting, with table lamps, crimson chairs and white linen crammed in between rough stone walls. The food is classic French with contemporary touches: foie gras with Madagascan vanilla, or duck breast smoked in tea.

### **Villa des Consuls** B&B €€

(📞)05 53 31 90 05; www.villaconsuls.fr; 3 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau; d €82-103, apt €124-184; 📶) Despite its Renaissance exterior, the enormous rooms here are modern through and through, with shiny wood floors, sofas and original roof trusses. Self-catering apartments are dotted round town, all offering period plushness.

### **La Maison des Peyrat** Hotel €€

(📞)05 53 59 00 32; www.maisondespeyrat.com; Le Lac de la Plane; r €56-103) This beautifully renovated 17th-century house, formerly a nun's hospital and later an aristocratic hunting lodge, is set on a hill about 1.5km from the town centre. The 11 generously sized rooms are plain, but ooze country charisma. The restaurant's very good, too.

## La Roque Gageac 4

### **La Belle Étoile** Traditional French €€

(📞)05 53 29 51 44; www.belleetoile.fr; Le Bourg; d €55-75, ste €130, menus €26-42; 🕒Apr-Oct; 📶)

A great place to eat (and stay) is this waterfront hotel-restaurant known for its sophisticated French food. Local specialities such as truffles, walnuts and foie gras feature heavily, and there's a vine-shaded terrace for when the weather's fine.

## Bergerac 7

### **La Ferme de Biorne** Regional Cuisine €€

(📞)05 53 57 67 26; www.biorne.com; menus €19-23; 🕒Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) This rural *ferme auberge* (farm restaurant), 12km northwest of Bergerac, raises its own birds for the restaurant table, including goose, quail and duck. Definitely book ahead. Cosy *gîtes* (€300 to €980 for four people) are also available.

### **L'Imparfait** Regional Cuisine €€

(📞)05 53 57 47 92; www.imparfait.com; 6-10 rue des Fontaines; menus €26-32; 🕒lunch & dinner) Chef Hervé Battistin has made this sweet little restaurant a real local favourite, thanks to artful French food served up in a pretty 12th-century cloister. It's popular, so reserve ahead.

### **Château les Merles** Boutique Hotel €€€

(📞)05 53 63 13 42; www.lesmerles.com; d €150-200, ste €155-240, apt €225-340; 📶) Behind its 19th-century neoclassical façade, this boutique château 15km east of Bergerac is a study in modish minimalism, with elegantly monochrome rooms and a ravishing fusion restaurant (five-/eight-course *menu* £41/49). There's even a 9-hole golf course.

### **Château Les Farcies du Pech'** B&B €€

(📞)06 30 19 53 20; www.vignoblesdubard.com; Hameau de Pécharmant; d €110; 🕒mid-Mar-mid-Nov) Part of a conglomerate of four renowned wineries, this beautiful château-vineyard is the choice for oenophiles. All five rooms scream rustic chic, with original stonework and hardwoods for vintage character. The owner, Marie, will gladly arrange tours of local vineyards.

*Vézère Valley Explore prehistory at  
Musée National de Préhistoire*



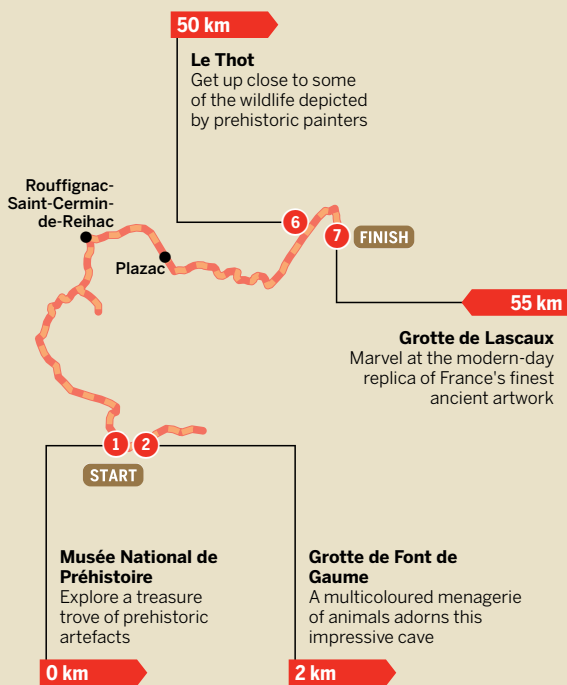


36

# Cave Art of the Vézère Valley

*The limestone caves of southwest France contain some of Europe's finest examples of prehistoric art. This tailored trip explores the most famous ones, including the frescos of the Grotte de Lascaux.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**3 DAYS**  
196KM / 122 MILES

## GREAT FOR...



## BEST TIME TO GO

April to June, when most caves are open, but the summer crowds haven't arrived.



## ESSENTIAL PHOTO

The minimalist façade of the Musée National de Préhistoire.



## BEST FOR FAMILIES

The prehistoric zoo at Le Thot contains ancient animals such as bison, reindeer and ibex.



## 36

## Cave Art of the Vézère Valley

This trip feels like catching a time capsule into the prehistoric past. Hidden deep underground in the murky caves of the Vézère and Lot Valleys, Cro-Magnon people left behind a spectacular legacy of ancient artworks, ranging from rock sculptures to multicoloured murals – and this is one of the few places in the world where it's possible to see their work up close.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 1 Les-Eyzies-de-Tayac

This small one-street tourist town is right in the middle of the Vézère Valley, 9km northwest of Sarlat-la-Canéda. Most of the area's major caves are within half-an-hour's drive, so it makes a useful base for exploring, and for a quick primer on prehistoric art there's nowhere better than the **Musée National de Préhistoire** (☎05 53 06 45 45; www.musee-prehistoire



-eyzies.fr; 1 rue du Musée; adult/child €5/3, 1st Sun of month free; ☀9.30am-6pm, closed Tue), home to France's most comprehensive collection of prehistoric artefacts. Inside you'll find lots of fascinating Stone Age tools, weapons and jewellery, as well as animal skeletons and original rock friezes taken from the caves themselves: look out for the famous one of a bison licking its flank. Panels are mostly in French, but explanatory sheets in English are available.

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**The Drive** » To get to Font de Gaume from Les-Eyzies, follow the D47 east towards Sarlat, and look out for the brown signs pointing to Font de Gaume.



**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

35

### Gourmet Dordogne

It's easy to combine this trip with our gourmet guide to the Dordogne – take the D47 to Sarlat-la-Canéda.

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### The Lot Valley

From Cabrerets, you'll be roughly halfway along our Lot Valley route, 3km west of St-Cirq Lapopie and 32km east of Cahors.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 2 Grotte de Font de Gaume

Now you've got the background, it's time to see some real cave art. Just 1km northeast of Les-Eyzies is **Font de Gaume** (📍05 53 06 86 00; fontdegaume@monuments-nationaux.fr; adult/child €7.50/free; ☀9.30am-5.30pm mid-May-mid-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm mid-Sep-mid-May, closed Sat year-round), an underground cavern that contains the only multicoloured paintings still open to the public. Around 14,000 years ago, the prehistoric artists created a gallery of over 230 animals, including reindeer, horses, mammoths and bears, as well as a dramatic 'Chapelle des Bisons' (Bison Chapel). Reservations are essential: the 45-minute tours are usually in French, but English tours are offered in summer.

**The Drive** » Continue along the D47 for 1km from Font de Gaume and turn off at the brown sign for the Grotte de Combarelles.

### 3 Grotte des Combarelles

Prehistoric artists weren't just skilful painters – they also knew how to sculpt. About 1.5km further east of Font de Gaume,

this narrow **cave** (📍05 53 06 86 00; fontdegaume@monuments-nationaux.fr; adult/child €7.50/free; ☀same as Font de Gaume) contains many engravings that cleverly use the natural contours of the rock to sculpt the animals' forms: look out for mammoths, horses, reindeer and a mountain lion that seems to leap out from the rock face. The cave's walls are also covered with geometric symbols and shapes that have so far eluded interpretation. Six- to eight-person group tours last about an hour and can be reserved through the Font de Gaume ticket office.

**The Drive** » Travel 1km further east of Combarelles, then turn left onto the twisty D48. You'll travel into a pleasant wooded valley. Continue for 7km, following the road up the hillside towards the Cap Blanc car park. The museum entrance is a short walk downhill along a rough track.

### 4 Abri du Cap Blanc

This ancient **sculpture gallery** (📍05 53 06 86 00; adult/child €7.50/free; ☀10am-6pm mid-May-mid-Sep, 10am-noon & 2-6pm mid-Sep-mid-May, closed Sat year-round) makes a fascinating comparison with Combarelles. It was used as a natural shelter 14,000 years ago by Cro-Magnon people, who left behind an amazing 40m-long frieze of

horses and bison, carved directly into the rear wall of the cave using flint tools. Originally the cave would have been open to the elements, but it's now housed inside a modern museum.

**The Drive** » Backtrack to Les-Eyzies, then follow the D47 northwest along the valley, turning right onto the D32 after about 11km. The road becomes narrower and travels through scrubby woodland. Follow the signs to the 'Grotte Préhistorique de Rouffignac' for another 7km.

## 5 Grotte de Rouffignac

After staying overnight in Les-Eyzies, get an early start at the astonishing **Grotte de Rouffignac** (☎05 53 05 41 71; www.grottederouffignac.fr; adult/child €6.50/4.20;

☀9am-11.30am & 2-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-11.30pm & 2-5pm rest of yr), often known as the 'Cave of 1000 Mammoths' thanks to its plethora of painted pachyderms. The paintings are spread along the walls of a subterranean cavern that stretches for 10km – fortunately, you visit aboard a rickety electric train, so there's no chance of getting lost. Along the way is an amazing frieze of 10 mammoths in procession. You'll also see many hollows in the cave floor, scratched out by long-extinct cave bears. Tickets are sold at the cave entrance; wrap up warm, as it's chilly below ground.

**The Drive** » From the Grotte de Rouffignac, retrace your route to the D32, and follow

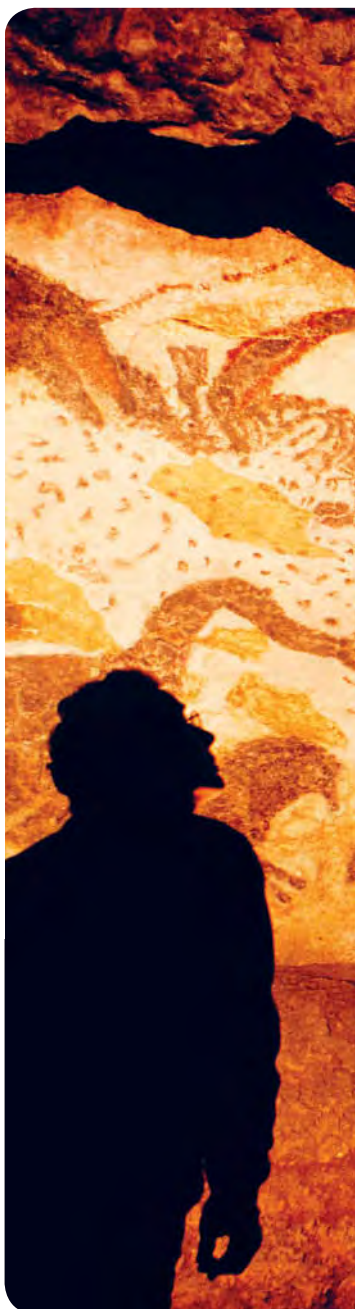


## DETOUR: GROTTE DE PECH MERLE

### Start: 1 Les-Eyzies-de-Tayac

To complete your cave tour, it's worth taking the longish 92km trip southeast to the **Grotte de Pech-Merle** (☎05 65 31 27 05; www.pechmerle.com; adult/child €9/5; ☀9.30-noon & 1.30-5pm Apr-Oct), one of only a handful of decorated caves to be discovered around the Lot Valley. It contains galleries of mammoths, goats and bison, as well as a famous panel featuring two dappled horses. Most haunting of all, the cave's walls are covered with human hand tracings, as well as a set of footprints, left behind by an adolescent artist between 15,000 BC and 10,000 BC.

Guided tours are in French, but explanatory sheets in English are available. Reserve ahead, as visitor numbers are limited to 700 per day.





Grotte de Lascaux Cave painting detail

## PREHISTORY 101

If you're visiting the cave paintings around the Vézère, it helps to know a little about the artists who created them. Most of the paintings date from the end of the last ice age, between 20,000 BC and 10,000 BC, and were painted by Cro-Magnon people – descendants of the first *Homo erectus* settlers who arrived from North Africa between 700,000 BC and 100,000 BC.

Cro-Magnon people lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, using caves as temporary hunting shelters while they followed their prey (including mammoths, woolly rhinoceros, reindeer and aurochs, an ancestor of the modern cow).

Generally, they painted the animals they hunted using mineral paints derived from magnesium and charcoal (black), ochre (red/yellow) and iron (red). Although no one is certain what the purpose of the paintings was, it's assumed they served some kind of magical, religious or shamanic significance.

Painting seems to have ceased around 10,000 BC, about the same time that humans settled down to a more fixed lifestyle of farming and agriculture.

signs to Montignac, making turns onto the D6 and D45. Northeast of Thonac, turn onto the D706 and look out for the sign to Le Thot shortly afterwards.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 6 Le Thot

It's well worth visiting **Le Thot** (☎05 53 50 70 44; www.semitour.com; adult/child €7/4.50, joint ticket with Grotte de Lascaux €12.50/8.50; 🕒10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep-early Nov, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm rest of yr, closed Jan), where you can see some of the real-life beasts depicted by prehistoric artists – including reindeer, stags, horses, ibex and European bison. Sadly, though, you'll have to put

up with fibreglass models of extinct species such as woolly mammoths.

**The Drive** » Turn back onto the D706 and head towards Montignac, about 10km northeast. Once you reach town, cross the bridge and follow av du 4ème Septembre, then look out for brown signs to the Grotte de Lascaux, perched on a hilltop 1km south of town.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

#### 7 Grotte de Lascaux

Sometimes known as the Sistine Chapel of cave art, the **Grotte de Lascaux** (☎05 53 51 95 03; www.semitour.com; adult/child €9.50/6; 🕒9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep-early Nov, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm rest of yr, closed Jan) is home to France's most

famous – and finest – prehistoric paintings.

The 600-strong menagerie is vividly depicted in shades of red, black, yellow and brown, ranging from reindeer, aurochs, mammoths and horses to a huge 5.5m-long bull, the largest cave drawing ever found.

The original cave has been closed to the public since 1963, but a painstaking replica has been created nearby. There are several guided tours every hour, including several in English. From April to October, tickets are sold *only* at the ticket office next to Montignac's tourist office.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Sarlat-la-Canéda

### Plaza Madeleine Hotel €€

(📞05 53 59 10 41; www.hoteldelamadeleine-sarlat.com; 1 place de la Petite Rigaudie; d €99-179; 📶📺🚰) Smack bang in the centre of town, this elegant shuttered hotel has benefited from a much-needed decorative overhaul, and it now offers an attractive mix of modern and traditional. Classy rooms subtly evoke a bygone era, with vintage phones and shuttered windows, while a solarium and Finnish sauna create a modern boutique feel.

### Hôtel St-Albert Boutique Hotel €€

(📞05 53 31 55 55; www.hotel-saintalbert.eu; place Pasteur; d €55-96; 📶) A small, chic hotel with the barest of boutique touches: chocolate-and-cream tones and posh bath goodies make it feel closer to a metropolitan crash pad than an old-town *auberge*, but rooms are on the small side.

## Les-Eyzies-de-Tayac 1

### Hôtel des Glycines Hotel €€€

(📞05 53 06 97 07; www.les-glycines-dordogne.com; 4 av de Laugierie; d €95-165, ste €195-235; 📶📺🚰) Les-Eyzies' old post house has been converted into this posh pad. Rooms range from cream-and-check 'classics' to full-blown private suites, complete with private terrace and garden outlook. Avoid the 'courtyard rooms', which overlook the main road out of Les-Eyzies. The hotel's gastronomic restaurant (*menus* from €45) is a suitably pampering affair – gourmets should go for the *menu truffe* (€95).

### Hôtel Le Cro-Magnon Hotel €€€

(📞05 53 06 97 06; www.hostellerie-cro-magnon.com; 54 av de la Préhistoire; d €82-95; 📶📺🚰) closed Dec-Feb; 📶📺🚰) This wisteria-clad hotel has been around since the 1850s and was often used as a base by pioneering prehistorians. It's more modern these days. Although the flowery rooms have a touch of the chain hotel about them, the corridors built straight into the rock face add quirky appeal. Dining is good value in the beam-ceilinged restaurant.

## Montignac 6

### Hostellerie la Roseraie Hotel €€€

(📞05 53 50 53 92; www.laroseraie-hotel.com; 11 place des Armes; d €85-185; 📶📺🚰) Apr-Oct; 📶📺🚰) The name's the giveaway: this mansion in Montignac boasts its own gorgeous rose garden, set around box-edged grounds and a palm-tinged pool. Rococo rooms certainly aren't cutting edge, but they're lovely if you like rosy pinks, floral patterns and garden views. Truffles, chestnuts, pork and guinea fowl find their way onto the seasonal menu, and on warm summer nights the canopy-shaded terrace is an utter delight.

### Hotel le Lascaux Hotel €

(📞05 53 51 82 81; www.hotel-lascaux.jimdo.com; 109 av Jean-Jaurès; d €62-92; 📶) Despite the old-timey candy-stripe awnings, rooms at this family-owned hotel are bang up to date, with cool colour schemes, distressed wood furniture and sparkling bathrooms. The superior rooms have more space, and some overlook the shady back garden.

*Rocamadour Pilgrimage town  
clinging precariously to the cliffside*





37

# Dordogne's Fortified Villages

*The Dordogne spoils for choice with its hilltop history. This trip links some of the region's distinctive bastides (fortified villages) and medieval castles, and takes in holy Rocamadour.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

130 km

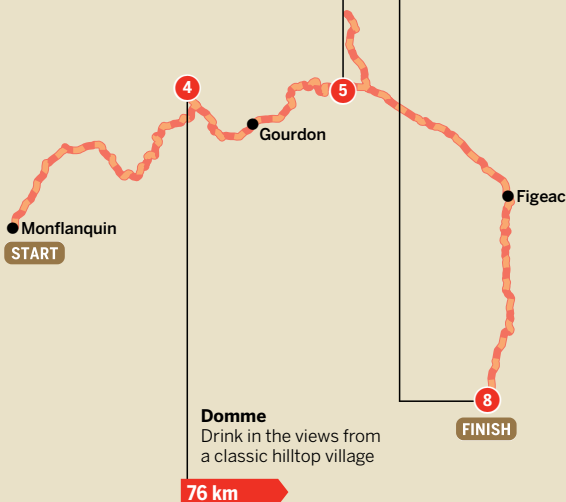
### Rocamadour

Follow in the footsteps of countless pilgrims at this holy town

270 km

### Najac

Stand on the battlements of a storybook castle



5 DAYS

270KM / 168 MILES

## GREAT FOR...



## BEST TIME TO GO

April to July, to make the most of the spring weather.



## ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Looking out across the Dordogne valley from Domme's spectacular belvédère.



## BEST FOR HISTORY

Najac's hilltop castle is a classic example of medieval military architecture.

76 km



# Dordogne's Fortified Villages

The Dordogne may be a picture of tranquillity now, but during the Middle Ages it was frequently a battleground. The Dordogne River marked an important strategic frontier between English and French forces during the Hundred Years War, and the area's many châteaux and fortified villages remain as a reminder of this war-torn past. Most distinctive of all are the *bastide* towns, encircled by defensive walls and protected by sturdy ramparts.

## 1 Monflanquin

Founded in 1256, this small *bastide* makes an excellent place to start your tour of France's defensive architecture. Founded in 1256, it has the classic *bastide* structure: a rectangular layout, a grid of straight streets, and an arcaded market square, with a church tucked into one corner. Originally the town would have also been ringed by ramparts, but these have long since been plundered. The central place des Arcades



still hosts its weekly market on Thursday morning, just as it has done since the Middle Ages.

**The Drive** » The quickest route to Monpazier heads 22km northwest across quiet farmland, following the minor D272. You'll pass into woodland near Vergt-de-Biron, and then turn right onto the D2 towards Monpazier.

## 2 Monpazier

Monpazier is perhaps the best example of *bastide* architecture in southwest France. It's crisscrossed by arrow-straight streets, all of which lead to the market square on **place Centrale**, lined by arcaded walkways and tall houses built from lemon-yellow stone. In one corner, there's an old *lavoir* that was still being used for washing

clothes right up to the end of the 19th century.

The town itself was founded in 1284 by a representative of Edward I (king of England and duke of Aquitaine). It had a turbulent time during the Wars of Religion and the Peasant Revolts of the 16th century, but despite numerous assaults it survived the centuries remarkably unscathed. Most unusually of all, its defensive walls are still largely intact.

**The Drive** » Take the D660 east from Monpazier, and follow it for 21km through the countryside.

## 3 Villefranche-du-Périgord

The amber town of Villefranche-du-Périgord once occupied an important strategic position on the frontier between the historic regions of Agen and Quercy. It was founded in 1261 by Alphonse de Poitiers, a brother of the French king Louis IX, and still possesses most of its medieval layout, including the original arcaded square, pillared marketplace and fortified church, all of which date from the 13th century. It's a bit off the beaten track and a touch neglected in spots, which means its often much quieter than some of the area's better-known *bastides*.

**The Drive** » The drive to Domme is particularly pleasant, veering across hilltops and passing through oak and beech woodland. Start on the minor D57 towards Besse, turning onto the D60 at St-Pompont, followed by the D46 to Domme – it's just over 33km in all, or 40 minutes. Parking is tricky in the village, so leave your car outside the walls and walk up.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 4 Domme

For panoramic views, there's nowhere in the Dordogne that can top Domme. Teetering on an outcrop high above the river valley, this hilltop *bastide* still boasts most of its 13th-century ramparts as well as three original fortified gateways.

Approached via a tortuous switchback road from the valley below, it's the perfect defensive stronghold – a fact not lost on Philippe III of France, who founded the town in 1281 as a bastion against the English. The town's cliff-top position is best appreciated from the esplanade du Belvédère and the adjacent promenade de la Barre, which both offer an unforgettable outlook across the valley.

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**The Drive** » The most pleasant route to Rocamadour travels southeast via the D46 and the towns of St-Martial-de-Nabirat and Gourdon. From here, pick up the twisty D673, which crosses underneath



## 35 Gourmet Dordogne

Head north from Domme for 14km along the D46 to link up with our gastronomic road trip around the Dordogne.

## 38 The Lot Valley

This trip combines well with our route along the Lot Valley – just turn off at Figeac.

the A20 motorway. Soon afterwards there's a wonderful windy section with fine views across the Ouyse River and the cliffs around Rocamadour. Most of Rocamadour's car parks are above the old city in L'Hospitalet. All in, the journey covers 54km.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 5 Rocamadour

Clinging precariously to a rocky cliffside, the holy town of Rocamadour looks like something out of *Lord of the Rings*. It's been an important pilgrimage destination since the Middle Ages thanks to the supposedly miraculous powers of its *Vierge Noire* (Black Madonna), which is now housed in the Chapelle de Notre Dame, one of several chapels that make up the town's **Sanctuaires** (Sanctuaries).

The old town itself (known as La Cité) consists of one long medieval thoroughfare, overflowing (just as in the pilgrims' day) with souvenir shops and touristy restaurants. One of the medieval gateways is still standing at the end of the Grande Rue.

From here, a stone staircase switchbacks up the cliff to the Sanctuaries, emerging next to Rocamadour's 14th-century **château** (admission €2; ☺8am-9pm). During the Middle Ages, pilgrims would have climbed the steps

on their knees as a demonstration of piety, but these days you can cheat by catching a combo lift and cable car.

**The Drive »** From the town's main car parks in L'Hospitalet, head north along the D873 and follow the signs to Martel, 22km away.

### 6 Martel

Known as *la ville aux sept tours* (the town of seven towers) thanks to its turret-topped skyline, this delightful village was the ancient capital of the Vicomte de Turenne. It's crammed with fascinating architecture, best seen around the place de la Halle. The **covered market** still boasts many of its medieval roof beams, and one of the town's namesake towers can be seen above the **Palais de la Raymondi** (built for a 13th-century tax collector but now home to the village's tourist office). You'll spot the other towers as you wander round town, including **La Tour Tournemire**, a square tower which once served as a prison, and the **Cordeliers Tower**, the only remains of a 13th-century Franciscan monastery. Try to time your visit with the lively markets on Wednesday and Saturday.

🏠 p397

**The Drive »** Spend the night in Martel, then pick up the D840

GUY CHRISTIAN/GETTY IMAGES ©





Martel Place de la Halle covered market



## DETOUR: CHÂTEAU DE BEYNAC

### Start 4 Domme

The riverbanks of the Dordogne are lined with medieval châteaux, mostly built as defensive fortresses during the 12th and 13th centuries. One of the most dramatic is the **Château de Beynac** ([www.beynac-en-perigord.com](http://www.beynac-en-perigord.com); Beynac-et-Cazenac; adult/child €7.50/3.20; ☀10am-6pm or 7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Jan-Mar, closed Nov & early Dec), a cliff-top castle 10km northwest of La Roque, protected by 200m cliffs, a double wall and double moat. From the battlements, there's a dizzying view over the picture-perfect village of **Beynac-et-Cazenac**, which featured in the Lasse Hallström movie *Chocolat* (2000), starring Johnny Depp and Juliette Binoche.

There are several other châteaux to explore nearby. Situated 4.5km southwest is the **Château de Castelnaud** ([www.castelnaud.com/uk](http://www.castelnaud.com/uk); adult/child €8.20/4.10; ☀9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm or 7pm Feb-Jun & Oct-mid-Nov, 2-6pm mid-Nov-Jan), another quintessential castle that houses a museum of medieval warfare.

Another 4km further is the **Château de Milandes** ([www.milandes.com](http://www.milandes.com); Castelnaud-la-Chapelle; adult/child €9/5.80; ☀9.30am-7.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6.30pm or 7pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct), which was famously owned by the glamorous African-American music-hall star Josephine Baker (1906-75), who bought it in 1936.

all the way to Figeac, a historic riverside town that makes a good spot to stop for coffee and cake. From here, continue south on the D922 to Villefranche de Rouergue. Plan on covering the 95km in 1¾ hours.

**Collégiale Notre Dame**, with its never-completed bell tower and choir stalls, ornamented with a menagerie of comical and cheeky figures.

and fluttering flags rise from the battlements, surrounded on every side by dizzying *falaises* (cliffs) dropping to the Aveyron River far below.

**The Drive** » The D922 continues all the way to Najac, 23km south of Villefranche.

The castle is reached via a steep 1.2km-long cobbled street from **place du Faubourg**, the village's central square. It's a masterpiece of military planning: its cliff-top position meant it was practically unassailable, and it became a key stronghold during the Middle Ages. Its architecture is beautifully preserved, and the view from the central keep is simply superb.

### 7 Villefranche de Rouergue

Villefranche's origins as a *bastide* are barely recognisable beneath the modern roads and busy shopping streets – it's only once you get right into the old town that they become apparent. At the centre is the arcaded **place Notre Dame** – another typical example of a *bastide* square. Nearby is the square-pillared 15th-century

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 8 Najac

If you were searching for a film set for Camelot, you've found it. Najac's soaring hilltop **castle** (adult/child €4.50/3; ☀10.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-1.30pm & 3-5pm, 6pm or 7pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Nov) looks as if it's fallen from the pages of a fairy tale: slender towers

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# Eating & Sleeping

## Domme 4

### La Guérinière B&B €€

(📞)05 53 29 91 97; www.la-gueriniere-dordogne.com; Cénac et St-Julien; d €80-95; (📶🚰) Surrounded by 6-hectare grounds complete with a tennis court, rooms at this family-friendly *chambre d'hôte* are all named after flowers: our faves are Mimosa, with its sloping roof and Chinoiserie wardrobe, and the supersize Bleuett room. Book ahead for the *table d'hôte* dinner (€25 including wine), using mostly organic produce. It's about 5km south of Domme along the D46.

### L'Esplanade Hotel €€

(📞)05 53 28 31 41; www.esplanade-perigord.com; rue du Pont-Carral; d €120-160, menus €35-70; (📶🚰) Teetering on the edge of Domme's ramparts, this family-owned hotel has two main selling points: a top-notch country restaurant and truly mindboggling valley views. Rooms are frilly and frippy, decorated in pastel shades and upholstered armchairs.

## Martel 6

### Château de Termes B&B €€

(📞)05 65 32 42 03; www.chateau-de-termes.com; St-Denis-lès-Martel; gîtes per night €59-110, per week €250-490; (📶) This family-friendly *gîte* complex is set around a cute mini-château. It has something to suit all needs: spacious, countrified rooms, and two- to six-person *gîtes* available nightly or by the week. It's very kid-friendly – with badminton, ping-pong, skittles and heated pool – and the owners can help organise canoe hire and horse-riding trips.

### Manoir de Malagorse B&B €€€

(📞)05 65 27 14 83; www.manoir-de-malagorse.fr; Cuzance; d €150-180, ste €280-310) Situated 8km northwest of Martel in quiet Cuzance, this period house is a chic combo of sleek lines, soothing colours and fluffy fabrics: some rooms feature worn roof trusses, others polished wooden floors; all are gorgeous. The five-course home-cooked dinner (€42) is superb.

### Relais Sainte-Anne Hotel €€€

(📞)05 65 37 40 56; www.relais-sainte-anne.com; d €95-155, ste €185-275; (📶🚰) The pick of places to stay in the village itself, with 16 individually decorated rooms that blend country comforts with contemporary flair. Its restaurant utilises produce directly from Martel's markets.

## Najac 8

### La Salamandre Regional Cuisine €€

(📞)05 65 29 74 09; rue du Barriou; menus €18-36; (🕒)lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Simple but charming, this little restaurant is a treat for its local dishes and wonderful panoramic terrace overlooking the castle.

### Oustal del Barry Hotel €€

(📞)05 65 29 74 32; www.oustaldelbarry.com; place du Faubourg; s €49, d €59-77, menus €19-43.50, cooking courses incl 4 nights half-board €400; (📶) The best place to stay in Najac, a wonderfully rustic *auberge*, with haphazard rooms filled with trinkets and furniture to match its timber-framed façade. Even if you're not staying here, be sure to stop by its country restaurant, renowned for its traditional southwest cuisine.

***St-Cirq-Lapopie*** *The Lot's  
famously photogenic hilltop village*



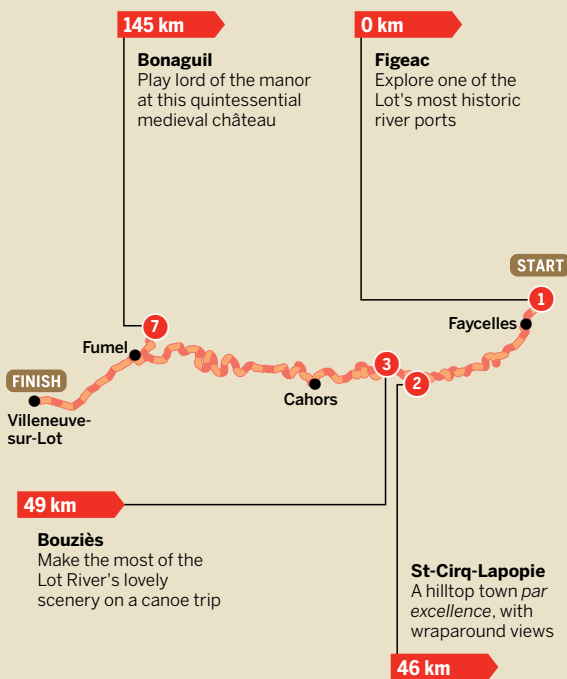


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# The Lot Valley

*This scenic drive snakes along a plunging canyon carved out by the Lot River. It's bookended by the riverside towns of Figeac and Villeneuve-sur-Lot, and veers through wine country.*

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**3 DAYS**  
181KM / 113 MILES

## GREAT FOR...



## BEST TIME TO GO

March to June, when the valley's at its most tranquil.



## ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Standing on top of St-Cirq-Lapopie's sky-top ruined château.



## BEST FOR FAMILIES

Paddling down the Lot River in a canoe from Bouziès.



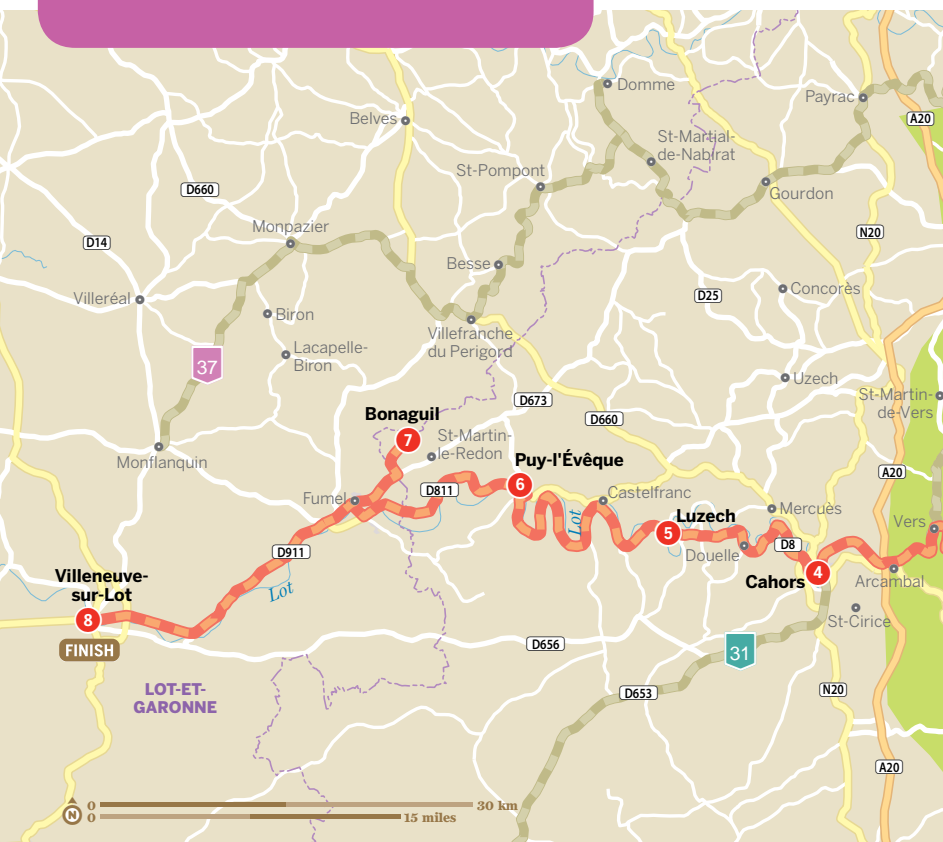
# 38 The Lot Valley

For river scenery, the Lot is right up there alongside the Loire and the Seine. Over countless millennia, it's carved its way through the area's soft lemon-yellow limestone, creating a landscape of canyons, ravines and cliffs, best seen on the zigzagging 80km-odd section between Figeac and Cahors. It's a journey to savour: take your time, pack a picnic and soak up the vistas.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 1 Figeac

The riverside town of Figeac has a rough-and-ready charm that makes a refreshing change after many of the Lot's prettified towns. Traffic buzzes along the river boulevards and the old town has an appealingly lived-in feel, with shady streets lined with ramshackle medieval and Renaissance houses, many with open-air galleries on the top floor (once used for drying leather).



Founded by Benedictine monks, the town was later an important medieval trading post and pilgrims' stopover.

Figeac is also famous as the birthplace of François Champollion (1790–1832), the Egyptologist and linguist whose efforts in deciphering the Rosetta Stone provided the key for cracking Egyptian hieroglyphics. Explore his story at the **Musée Champollion** ([www.musee-champollion.fr](http://www.musee-champollion.fr); place Champollion; adult/child €5/2.50; ☎10.30–12.30pm & 2–6pm Wed–Mon Apr–Jun, Sep

& Oct, 10.30am–6pm daily Jul & Aug, 2–6pm Wed–Mon Nov–Mar).

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**The Drive** » The corkscrew drive west of Figeac along the D662 is a classic, tracking the course of the Lot River all the way to Cahors. The 46km stretch to St-Cirq-Lapopie is particularly scenic, at some points cut directly into the cliffside, at others snaking along the peaceful riverbanks. Take it slow and enjoy the drive.

**TRIP HIGHLIGHT**

**2 St-Cirq-Lapopie**

This famously photogenic hilltop village teeters at

the crest of a sheer cliff, high above the Lot. It's a delightful tangle of red-roofed houses, cobbled streets and medieval buildings, many of which now house potteries and artists' studios. The village is essentially one long, steep main street; at the top is the ruined **château**, which has a magnificent viewing terrace that overlooks the whole Lot Valley. It's a magical setting, but be warned: if it's peace and tranquillity you're looking for, you won't find it in high summer.

There are two pricey car parks at the top of the village, but it's more sensible to take advantage of the free one at the bottom of the hill and follow the pedestrian trail up to the main street.

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**LINK  
YOUR  
TRIP**

**31 Cheat's Compostela**

This route intersects with our road-trip version of the Chemin de St-Jacques at Cahors and Figeac.

**37 Dordogne's Fortified Villages**

Our *bastide* tour begins at Monflanquin, 20km north of Villeneuve-sur-Lot.

**The Drive** » Head downhill from St-Cirq-Lapopie, cross the river and rejoin the D662. Bouziès is 3km west.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 3 Bouziès

Just west of St-Cirq, this riverside hamlet is an ideal place to get out on the water – either on a boat cruise or under your own steam. **Les Croisières de St-Cirq-Lapopie** (☎05 65 31 72 25; www.lot-croisieres.com) runs regular river cruises on its small fleet of boats, including aboard an open-topped *gabarre*, a flat-bottomed barge that was once the traditional mode of river transport in this region of France.

Alternatively, if you prefer to act as your own captain, **Kalapca** (☎05 65 24 21 01; www.kalapca.com/uk; half-/full day €30/40) hires out kayaks and canoes, perfect for experiencing the gorgeous river scenery at your own pace. Trip lengths range from 4km to 22km; rates include minibus transport to your chosen start-point.

**The Drive** » The twisty route west to Cahors is another fine drive, travelling for 28km along the gorge and affording dramatic views nearly all the way. There are plenty of pleasant places to stop for a picnic by the river. Once you reach Cahors, follow signs to the 'Centre-Ville'. Parking is free along the river and on place Charles de Gaulle.

### 4 Cahors

Nestled in a U-shaped *boucle* (curve) in the Lot, Cahors is the area's main city. With its balmy weather and scarlet-stone buildings, it has the air of a sunbaked Mediterranean town. Pastel-coloured buildings line the shady squares of the old medieval quarter, crisscrossed by a labyrinth of alleyways, cul-de-sacs and medieval quays. It's also an important winegrowing area, with vineyards stretching out across the surrounding hills.

The town's main landmark is the impressive **Pont Valentré**, one of France's most iconic medieval bridges. Built as part of the town's defences in the 14th century, the parapets projecting from two of its three tall towers were designed to allow defenders to drop missiles on attackers below. It's also worth stepping inside the **Cathédrale St-Étienne**, Cahors' beautiful 12th-century cathedral, a harmonious blend of Romanesque and Gothic styles.

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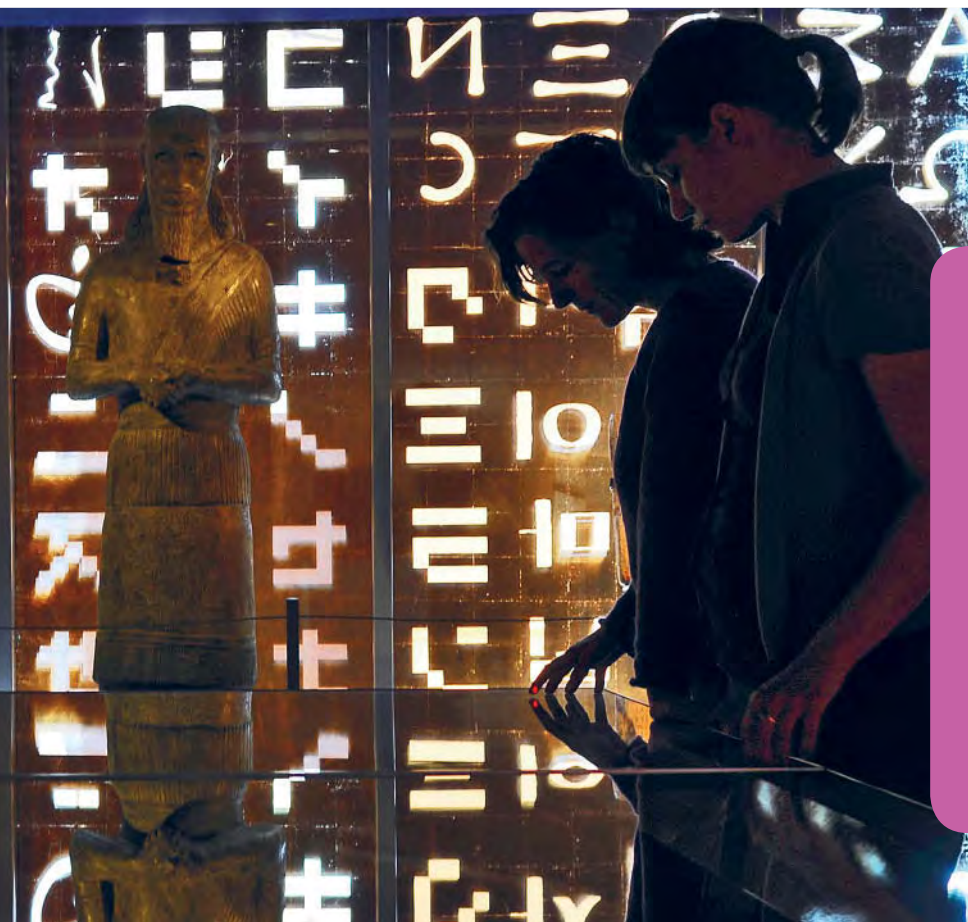
**The Drive** » Head west of town via the D8, following signs to Luzech and Pradines.



OLIVIERO TOSCANI/GETTY IMAGES ©

### 5 Luzech

Downstream from Cahors, the lower Lot twists its way through the rich **vineyards** of the Cahors AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) region. It's up to you whether you wish to take advantage of the signs offering *dégustation* (tasting). Otherwise,



**Figearc** Visitors explore an exhibit at the Musée Champollion

carry on along the road, passing the dams at Luzech, whose medieval section sits at the base of a *donjon* (keep), and **Castelfranc**, with a dramatic suspension bridge.

**The Drive** » West of Luzech, stay on the minor D8, which hugs the south bank of the river. The road affords super vistas of the local vineyards and the river's many hairpin curves.

You'll reach Puy l'Évêque after 36km, or around 45 minutes' driving.

## 6 Puy l'Évêque

On a rocky hillside above the northern bank of the Lot, Puy l'Évêque was one of the most important medieval ports in the Lot Valley, and its quays are lined with once-grand merchants'

houses – some have been carefully restored; others are a little worse for wear. The old town is also well worth a stroll, with many fine stone mansions and tumbledown medieval buildings, best appreciated from the road bridge that spans the Lot just outside town.

**The Drive** » To get to the Château de Bonaguil, continue



## DETOUR: CHÂTEAU DE BIRON

### Start: 7 Bonaguil

If you enjoyed the castle architecture of Bonaguil, you might like to cut across country to the nearby **Château de Biron** ([www.semitour.com](http://www.semitour.com); adult/child €7/4.50; ☎10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm or 6pm Feb-Nov, closed Dec & Jan), a glorious mishmash of styles, having been fiddled with by eight centuries of successive heirs. It's particularly notable for its slate turrets, state rooms and double loggia staircase, supposedly modelled on one at Versailles; the oldest part of the castle is the 12th-century keep.

It's had mixed fortunes over the centuries, and was finally sold in the early 1900s to pay for the extravagant lifestyle of a particularly irresponsible heir. It's since featured in countless films, including Luc Besson's *Jeanne d'Arc* (Joan of Arc; 1999) and Bernard Tavernier's *La Fille d'Artagnan* (D'Artagnan's Daughter; 1994).

west along the D911 for 14km towards Fumel. About 1km east of town, there's a right turn onto the D673, signed to Gourdon/Bonaguil. Follow signs for another 8km, making sure not to miss the left turn onto the D158.

#### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 7 Bonaguil

There's one unmistakable reason to stop in the village of Bonaguil, and that's to wander round its imposing feudal **château** (☎05 53 71 90 33; [www.bonaguil.org](http://www.bonaguil.org); St-Front-sur-Lémance; adult/child €7/4; ☎10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm or 6pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Oct, closed Nov-Feb), a fine example of late-15th-century

military architecture, with towers, bastions, loopholes, machicolations and crenellations built directly into the limestone cliffs. Guided tours in English run several times daily in July and August.

**The Drive** » Loop back onto the D673, making a short detour via the pretty little village of St-Martin-le-Redon if you wish. Follow signs through Fumel onto the D911 all the way to Villeneuve-sur-Lot.

### 8 Villeneuve-sur-Lot

Last stop on the trip is the river town of Villeneuve-sur-Lot, which began life as a *bastide*

but has long since been swallowed up by more modern architecture. The centre of the old town is guarded by two medieval gateways, the **Porte de Paris** and the **Porte de Pujols** (the other six are no longer standing); in between runs the main thoroughfare of rue de Paris and the arcaded *bastide*-style square of place Lafayette, surrounded by shops and cafes. Along the river, look out for the **Pont Vieux**, a 13th-century bridge that was supposedly modelled on the Pont Valentré in Cahors, although its defensive towers have disappeared.

# Eating & Sleeping

## Figeac 1

### Hostellerie de l'Europe Hotel €

(☎)05 65 34 10 16; www.hotel-europe-figeac.com; 51 allée Victor Hugo; r €59-75, half-board per person €54-79, menus €14.50-34; ☺ restaurant lunch Sun-Thu, dinner Sat-Thu; 🏠☎🚰) This efficient Inter Hotel near the river has an excellent restaurant, La Table de Marinette. The half-board deals are great value.

### Hôtel La Grézalide Hotel €€

(☎)05 65 11 20 40; www.grezalide.com; Grèzes; d €77-157, tr €117-137, q €137-177; 🏠☎🚰) This rural retreat is 21km west of Figeac near Grèzes. It's in a 17th-century house set around a courtyard garden and heated pool. Rooms are full of period architecture, and the public rooms are stuffed with sculptures (the owners are both art aficionados).

## St-Cirq-Lapopie 2

### Le Gourmet Regional Cuisine €€ Quercynois

(☎)05 65 31 21 20; www.restaurant-legourmet-quercynois.com; rue de la Peyrolierie; ☺ lunch & dinner daily) The village's fanciest table, offering a *menu* of biblical proportions, from *nougat de porc* (pork medallions) to country *cassoulet* (stew). The in-house deli sells treats including *cèpe* mushrooms, gingerbread and chestnut cake.

### Auberge de Sombrol Hotel €

(☎)05 65 31 26 08; www.lesombrol.com; r €52-80, menus lunch €15-22, dinner €28, 50; ☺ restaurant lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat; 🏠) In the centre of St-Cirq-Lapopie is this treacle-stoned house with seven cosy doubles and a titchy attic room. The restaurant offers tasty Quercy cuisine.

### Hôtel Le Saint Cirq Hotel €€

(☎)05 65 30 30 30; www.hotel-lesaintcirq.com; Tour de Faure; d €68-118, ste €140-160) This luxurious hotel in Tour de Faure boasts fine views of St-Cirq-Lapopie. The traditional rooms are lovely, with tiled floors and French windows onto the garden, but it's the 'Seigneurale' rooms which really dazzle: sunken baths, slate bathrooms and all. It's about 1km east of St-Cirq.

## Cahors 4

### Le Bergougnoux Traditional French €

(☎)05 65 35 62 92; 77 Rue Bergougnoux; menus lunch €12, dinner €16; ☺ lunch & dinner daily) Country cuisine à la *grande mère* is the speciality of this homely eatery, secreted along a backstreet in the old town. Sophisticated it isn't, but for *pot au feu* (hot-pot) or *suprême de poulet* (creamy chicken), it's just the ticket.

### Le Marché Fusion €€

(☎)05 65 35 27 27; www.restaurantlemarche.com; 27 place Jean-Jacques Chapon; menus lunch €16-19, dinner €23-40; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This contemporary restaurant dabbles in French-meets-fusion flavours such as satay tuna and roast beef in soy marinade.

### Hôtel Jean XXII Hotel €

(☎)05 65 35 07 66; www.hotel-jeanxxii.com; 2 rue Edmond-Albé; s €51, d €62-69, tr €76; 🏠) Next to the Tour Jean XXII, this excellent little hotel mixes original stone and wood with a dash of metropolitan minimalism.

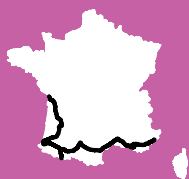
### Grand Hôtel Terminus Hotel €€

(☎)05 65 53 32 00; www.balandre.com; 5 av Charles de Freycinet; d €77-100, ste €130-160, menus €18-75; ☺ lunch Tue-Sat, dinner daily; 🏠☎) Built c 1920, Cahors' venerable station hotel evokes an air of faded grandeur. Its chandelier-lit restaurant, Le Balandre, serves classic French food and runs cooking courses.

*La Rochelle* Arcaded walkways  
and luminous limestone façades



# Classic Trip



# 39

## Atlantic to Med

*Salty Atlantic ports, pristine mountain vistas, the heady bouquet of fine wine, reminders of Rome and Hollywood glam: this classic trip from sea to sea takes you through the best of southern France.*

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS



**10 DAYS**  
 1498KM / 931 MILES

### GREAT FOR...



### BEST TIME TO GO

Spring or autumn, for fine weather without the summer crowds.

### ESSENTIAL PHOTO

Pose like a film star on the steps of Palais des Festivals et des Congrès in Cannes.

### BEST FOR FAMILIES

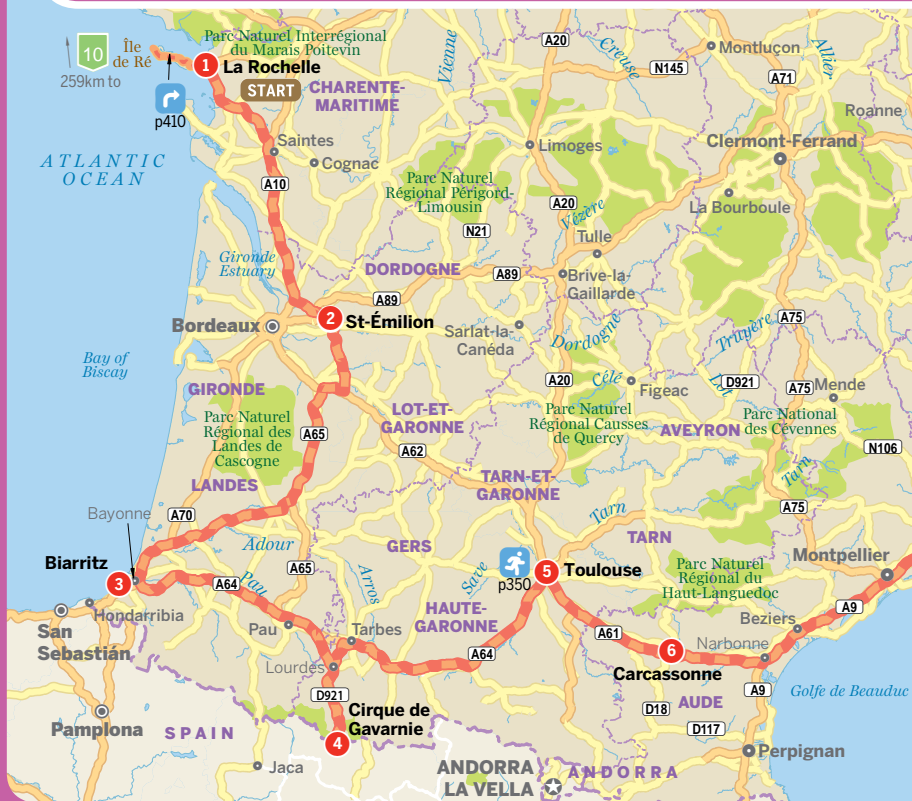
La Rochelle, with child-friendly attractions and stunning looks.



# Classic Trip

## 39 Atlantic to Med

In May the film starlets of the world pour into Cannes to celebrate a year of movie-making. Let them have their moment of glam – by the time you've finished scaling Pyrenean highs, chewing Basque tapas, acting like a medieval knight in a turreted castle and riding to the moon in a spaceship, you too will have the makings of a prize-winning film.



TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 1 La Rochelle

Known as La Ville Blanche (the White City), La Rochelle is home to luminous limestone façades, arcaded walkways, half-timbered houses and ghoulish gargoyles glowing in the bright coastal sunlight. One of France's foremost seaports from the 14th to the 17th century, it remains a great seafaring centre and one of the most attractive cities in France.

There are several **defensive towers** (adult/child €8.50/free; ☀10am-6.30pm) around the harbour area that once served to protect the town at night in times of war. They can be climbed for stunning views.

La Rochelle's number-one tourist attraction is the state-of-the-art **aquarium** ([www.aquarium-larochelle.com](http://www.aquarium-larochelle.com); quai Louis Prunier; adult/child €14.50/11; ☀9am-11pm). Highlights include UFO-like rays and fearsome sharks, teeth-gnashing piranhas, timid turtles and the

bizarre half-newt, total fish mudskippers.

🔧🛠️ p415

**The Drive** ▶ Using the main A10 toll road it's 187km (about 2½ hours) to St-Émilion. Turn off the A10 at exit 39a, signed for Libourne. Skirt this industrial town and follow the D243 into St-Émilion.

## 2 St-Émilion

Built of soft honey-coloured rock, the medieval village of St-Émilion produces some of the world's finest red wines. Visiting this pretty town, and partaking in some of the tours and activities on offer, is the easiest way to get under the (grape) skin of Bordeaux wine production.

The tourist office runs several **guided**



### LINK YOUR TRIP

#### 10 Breton Coast

The wind-swept coast of Brittany is a wild tonic to the south's refined atmosphere. Drive three hours north of La Rochelle to pick up the trip in Vannes.

#### 23 The Corniches

Starting in Nice, where this trip ends, the Corniches drive takes you through the glitz and glamour of the French Riviera.

## Classic Trip

**tours** (adult/child €7-14/free) as well as two-hour afternoon **château visits** (adult/child €14/free). Be sure to reserve ahead.

**The Drive** » The obvious route from St-Émilion to Biarritz is down the N10 via Bordeaux, but it's likely to be slow going for the next couple of years thanks to major road works. Instead, take the D670 to Sauveterre-de-Guyenne, the D672 to Langon, the A65 to Mont-de-Marson and the D824 toward Dax before joining the A63 to Biarritz. It's 257km (about 3½ hours).

### 3 Biarritz

This coastal town is as ritzy as its name makes out. Biarritz boomed as a resort in the mid-19th century due to the regular visits by Napoléon III and his Spanish-born wife, Eugénie. Along its rocky coastline are architectural hallmarks of this golden age, and the belle époque and art deco eras that followed.

Biarritz is all about its fashionable beaches, especially the central **Grande Plage** and **Plage Miramar**. In the heat of summer, you'll find them packed end to end with sun-loving bathers.

**The Drive** » It's 208km (2¾ hours) to the village of Gavarnie. Take the A64 toll road, turn off at exit 11 and take the D940 to Lourdes (worth a look for its religious Disneyland feel), then continue south along the D913 and D921.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 4 Cirque de Gavarnie

The Pyrenees certainly doesn't lack impressive scenery, but your first sight of the Cirque de Gavarnie is guaranteed to raise a gasp. This breathtaking mountain amphitheatre is one of the region's most famous sights, sliced by thunderous waterfalls



### DETOUR: ÎLE DE RÉ

#### Start 1 La Rochelle

Bathed in the southern sun, drenched in a languid atmosphere and scattered with villages of green-shuttered, whitewashed buildings with red Spanish-tile roofs, Île de Ré is one of the most delightful places on the west coast of France. The island spans just 30km from its most easterly and westerly points, and just 5km at its widest section. But take note: the secret's out and in high season it can be almost impossible to move around and even harder to find a place to stay.

On the northern coast about 12km from the toll bridge that links the island to La Rochelle is the quaint fishing port of **St-Martin-de-Ré**, the island's main town. Surrounded by 17th-century fortifications (you can stroll along most of the ramparts), the port town is a mesh of streets filled with craft shops, art galleries and sea-spray ocean views.

The island's best **beaches** are along the southern edge – including unofficial naturist beaches at **Rivedoux Plage** and **La Couarde-sur-Mer** – and around the western tip (northeast and southeast of Phare-des-Baleines). Many beaches are bordered by dunes that have been fenced off to protect the vegetation.

From La Rochelle it's 24km and a half-hour drive to St-Martin-de-Ré via a very expensive toll bridge (€8 mid-September to mid-June, €16 mid-June to mid-September).

and ringed by sawtooth peaks, many of which top out at over 3000m.

There are a couple of large car parks in the village of Gavarnie, from where it's about a two-hour walk to the amphitheatre. Wear proper shoes, as snow lingers along the trail into early summer. Between Easter and October you can clip-clop along on a horse or donkey (around €25 for a round-trip).

**The Drive** » Retrace your steps to Lourdes, then take the N21 toward Tarbes and veer off onto the A64 toll road to reach Toulouse. It takes nearly three hours to cover the 228km.

## 5 Toulouse

Elegantly situated at the confluence of the Canal du Midi and the Garonne River, the vibrant southern city of Toulouse is often known as La Ville Rose, a reference to the distinctive hot-pink stone used to build many of its buildings.

Toulouse's magnificent main square, **place du Capitole**, is the city's literal and metaphorical heart. To the south of the square is the city's **Vieux Quartier** (Old Quarter), a tangle of lanes and leafy squares.

The sky's the limit at the fantastic **Cité de l'Espace** (☎08 20 37 72 33; www.cite-espace.com/en; av Jean Gonord; adult €19.50-23, child €14-15;

☎9.30am-7pm mid-Jul-Aug, 9.30am-5pm or 6pm Sep-Dec & Feb-mid-Jul, closed Jan). Since WWII, Toulouse has been the centre of France's aerospace industry, developing many important aircraft (including Concorde and the Airbus A380) as well as components for many international space programs. The museum brings this interstellar industry vividly to life through hands-on exhibits including a shuttle simulator, a planetarium, a 3-D cinema and a simulated observatory.

For more on the city, see p350.

🍴🏠 p415

**The Drive** » It's an easy 95km (one hour) down the fast A61 to Carcassonne. Notice how the vegetation becomes suddenly much more Mediterranean about 15 minutes out of Toulouse.

## 6 Carcassonne

Perched on a rocky hilltop and bristling with zigzagging battlements, stout walls and spiky turrets, from afar the fortified city of Carcassonne looks like something out of a children's storybook and is most people's perfect idea of a medieval castle.

Today around four million tourists a year stream through the city gates in search of knights in armour and damsels

in distress. Instead they find a lot of tacky souvenir shops. Even so, this is a fascinating place to explore, and, when it's bathed in afternoon sunshine and highlighted by dark clouds, Carcassonne is simply breathtaking.

**The Drive** » Continue down the A61 to the Catalan-flavoured town of Narbonne, where you join the A9 (which can get very busy in summer) and head east to Nîmes. From there the A54 will take you into Arles. Allow just over two hours to cover the 223km and expect lots of toll booths.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

## 7 Arles

Arles' poster boy is the celebrated impressionist painter Vincent van Gogh. If you're familiar with his work, you'll be familiar with Arles: the light, the colours, the landmarks and the atmosphere, all faithfully captured. But long before Van Gogh rendered this grand Rhône River locale on canvas, the Romans valued its worth. Today it's the reminders of Rome that are probably the town's most memorable attractions.

**At Les Arènes**  
(Amphithéâtre; adult/child incl Théâtre Antique €6.50/free; ☎9am-7pm) slaves, criminals and wild animals (including giraffes) met their dramatic demise before a jubilant 20,000-strong

# Classic Trip



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© SHUTTERSTOCK/FRANCESCO/ALAMY.COM



## WHY THIS IS A CLASSIC TRIP

STUART BUTLER,  
AUTHOR

The scenic highlight of this trip is undoubtedly the Pyrenees. Many people would say that the Cirque de Gavarnie is, if you'll excuse the pun, the high point, but for an even more heart-wrenching view try the nearby Cirque de Troumouse. To reach it involves a stomach-churning drive that's absolutely not for vertigo sufferers. The turnoff is signed near the village of Gèdre, 6.5km north of Gavarnie.

Top: Canal du Midi, Carcassonne

Left: Rue St-Ferréol, Marseille

Right: Les Arènes, Arles





LUIGI VACCARELLA/SIMULACRUMS

crowd during Roman gladiatorial displays.

### The **Théâtre Antique**

☎ 04 90 96 93 30; bd des Lices, enter on rue de la Calade; admission incl in Amphithéâtre ticket; 🕒 9am-7pm), which dates from the 1st century BC, is still regularly used for alfresco concerts and plays.

🗝️ 📖 p415

**The Drive** ➤ From Arles take the scenic N568 and A55 route into Marseille. It's 88km (an hour's drive) away.

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## 8 Marseille

With its history, fusion of cultures, *souq*-like markets, millennia-old port and *corniches* (coastal roads) along rocky inlets and sun-baked beaches, Marseille is a captivating and exotic city.

Ships have docked for more than 26 centuries at the city's birthplace, the colourful Vieux Port (Old Port), and it remains a thriving harbour to this day. Guarding the harbour are **Bas Fort St-Nicolas** on the south side and, across the water, **Fort St-Jean**, founded in the 13th century by the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem. At the time of writing, the national **Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée** (Museum of European & Mediterranean Civilisations;

## Classic Trip

☎04 96 13 80 90; www.musee-europemediterranee.org; ☺1-7pm Wed, Thu & Sat) was getting set to open a brand-new 40,000-sq-m state-of-the-art museum here in 2013.

From the Vieux Port, hike up to the fantastic history-woven quarter of **Le Panier**, dubbed Marseille's Montmartre as much for its sloping streets as its artsy ambience. It's a mishmash of lanes hiding artisan shops, *ateliers* (workshops) and terraced houses strung with drying washing.

**The Drive** » To get from Marseille to Cannes take the northbound A52 and join the A8 toll road just east of Aix-en-Provence. It's 181km and takes just under two hours.

### 9 Cannes

The eponymous film festival only lasts for two weeks in May, but thanks to regular visits from celebrities the buzz and glitz are in Cannes year-round.

The imposing **Palais des Festivals et des Congrès** (Festival Palace; bd de la Croisette; guided tours adult/child €3/free) is the centre of the glamour. Climb the red carpet, walk down the auditorium, tread the stage and learn about cinema's most prestigious event on a **guided tour** (adult/child €3/free; ☺2.30pm Jun-Apr). The 1½-hour tourist-office-run tours take place several times a month, except in May.

**The Drive** » Leave the motorways behind and weave along the D6007 to Nice, taking in cliffs framing turquoise Mediterranean waters and the yachties' town of Antibes. It's

31km and, on a good day, takes 45 minutes.

### TRIP HIGHLIGHT

### 10 Nice

'Most people come here for the light. Me, I'm from the north. What moved me are January's radiant colours and luminosity of daylight.' The words are Matisse's, but they could be those of any painter – or, in fact, of any visitor who comes to Nice, for it's true: the light here is magical. The city has a number of world-class sights, but the star attraction is probably the city itself. Atmospheric, beautiful and photogenic, it's a wonderful place to stroll or watch the world go by, so make sure you leave yourself plenty of time to soak it all in.

For more on the city, see p310.

✂ p415



## DETOUR: AIX-EN-PROVENCE

### Start 7 Arles

Aix-en-Provence is to Provence what the Left Bank is to Paris: an enclave of bourgeois-bohemian chic. Art, culture and architecture abound here. A stroller's paradise, the highlight is the mostly pedestrian old city, **Veil Aix**. South of cours Mirabeau, **Quartier Mazarin** was laid out in the 17th century, and is home to some of Aix's finest buildings. Place des Quatre Dauphins, with its fish-spouting **fountain** (1667), is particularly enchanting. Further south still is the peaceful **parc Jourdan**, home to the town's Biodrome Municipal, where locals gather beneath plane trees to play *pétanque*.

From Arles it's a simple 77km (one-hour) drive down the A54 toll road to Aix-en-Provence. To rejoin the main route take the A51 and A7 for 32km (30 minutes) to Marseille.

# Eating & Sleeping

## La Rochelle 1

### **Le Soleil Brille Pour**

**Tout Le Monde** International, Vegetarian €€

(📞)05 46 41 11 42; 13 rue des Cloutiers; menus/ mains from €13/9.50; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat; 📍) There's a distinctly bohemian air to this excellent little place, decked out in hippy colours. Some highly original dishes originate from the kitchen, many of them inspired by the tropical French islands of Réunion and Martinique.

### **Trianon de la Plage** Historic Hotel €€

(📞)05 46 41 21 35; www.hoteltrianon.com; 6 rue de la Monnaie; r €80-111.; ☺ closed Jan; 📍) A fading world of art deco stained-glass windows, curly-whirly staircases, a grand dining room and multihued rooms dominate this character-laden hotel. The in-house restaurant (mains €15 to €18) has well-priced, high-quality meals.

## Toulouse 5

### **Chez Navarre** Regional Cuisine €€

(📞)05 62 26 43 06; 49 Grande Rue Nazareth; menus €13-20; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) Fancy rubbing shoulders with the locals? Then this wonderful *table d'hôte* is definitely the place, with honest Gascon cuisine served up beneath a creaky beamed ceiling at communal candlelit tables.

### **Les Bains Douches** Hotel €€€

(📞)05 62 72 52 52; www.hotel-bainsdouches.com; 4 & 4bis rue du Pont Guilhemery; d €140-210, ste €280-330; 📍) If it's style you want, it's style you'll find at this ubercool establishment:

shimmering chrome, sleek surfaces, statement light fittings and a salon-bar that wouldn't look out of place in Paris' more fashionable *arrondissements*.

## Arles 7

### **Le Cilantro** Provençal €€€

(📞)04 90 18 25 05; www.restaurantcilantro.com; 31 rue Porte de Laure; mains €41; ☺ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat; 📍) Chef Jérôme Laurant, a born-and-bred local lad, runs this hot spot and combines local ingredients with world spices to create accomplished dishes from local beef, fish and duck.

### **Hôtel de l'Amphithéâtre** Historic Hotel €€

(📞)04 90 96 10 30; www.hotelamphitheatre.fr; 5-7 rue Diderot; s/d/tr/q from €57/67/117/137; 📍 @ 📍) Crimson, chocolate, terracotta and other rich earthy colours dress the exquisite 17th-century stone structure of this stylish hotel, with narrow staircases, roaring fire and alfresco courtyard breakfasts.

## Nice 10

### **Le Chantecler** Gastronomic €€€

(📞)04 93 16 64 00; www.hotel-negresco-nice.com; Le Negresco, 37 promenade des Anglais; menus €90, mains €55-68; ☺ dinner Wed-Sun, lunch Sun) Make sure you're in a grand mood if you're going to splash out at this two-Michelin-star restaurant: every dish is the most exquisite creation, both in cuisine and presentation, and there's a seemingly endless succession of appetisers, palate cleansers and petits fours.





# STRETCH YOUR LEGS BORDEAUX

**Start/Finish** Cathédrale  
St-André

**Distance** 5km

**Duration** 1½ hours

Bordeaux looks good. In fact it looks so good that it has been granted World Heritage status. With pedestrian-friendly streets and stately architecture, this is a city made for exploring on foot. This walking tour reveals the city at its finest.

Take this walk on Trips



## Cathédrale St-André

Lording over the city, the cathedral dates from 1096, but most of what you see today was built in the 13th and 14th centuries. Next door is the gargoyled, 50m-high Gothic belfry, **Tour Pey-Berland** (adult/child €5.50/free; ☺10am-1.15pm & 2-6pm Jun-Sep, shorter hours rest of year), erected between 1440 and 1466.

**The Walk** » Head up rue Elisée Reclus and turn right to enter the small but elegant Jardin de la Mairie, where you'll find the Musée des Beaux-Arts.

## Musée des Beaux-Arts

The evolution of Occidental art from the Renaissance to the mid-20th century is on view at this **museum** (20 cours d'Albret; ☺11am-6pm mid-Jul-mid-Aug). Occupying two wings of the 1770s-built Hôtel de Ville (city hall), the museum was established in 1801; highlights include 17th-century Flemish, Dutch and Italian paintings.

**The Walk** » Continue down cours d'Albret, across place Gambetta and onto cours Georges Clemenceau. At place Tourny turn left onto rue Fondaudège and then take the second right.

## Jardin Public

For art of a different sort take a stroll through these gorgeous **gardens** (cours de Verdun). On sunny days it can seem as though half of Bordeaux has come to feed the ducks here.

**The Walk** » Exit the park via cours de Verdun, then head down cours du Maréchal Foch, turn left onto rue Ferrère and continue to CAPC.

## CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain

Built in 1824 as a warehouse for French colonial produce such as coffee, cocoa, peanuts and vanilla, the cavernous Entrepôts Lainé building creates a dramatic backdrop for cutting-edge modern art at the **CAPC** (rue Ferrère, Entrepôt 7; ☺11am-6pm Tue & Thu-Sun, to 8pm Wed). The contrast between the works on display here and those in the Musée des Beaux-Arts could hardly be greater.



**The Walk** » Follow the river along the quai des Chartrons to the esplanade des Quincones. Walk through this square, past the Girondins monument, and continue 100m down cours du 30 Juillet to the Maison du Vin de Bordeaux.

## Bar du Vin

Time for a drink? In Bordeaux there's only one place to wet the whistle. Wine's holy of holies, the **Bar du Vin** (3 cours du 30 Juillet; glasses of wine from €2; ☺11am-10pm Mon-Sat), inside the hallowed **Maison du Vin de Bordeaux**, is the place to come for a tipples with people who really know their wine from their beer.

**The Walk** » With a wine-induced skip in your step continue 150m down Bordeaux's swankiest street to the magnificent Grand Théâtre.

## Grand Théâtre

Designed by Victor Louis (of Chartres cathedral fame), this 18th-century theatre is a breathtaking venue for operas, ballets and classical-music concerts. Guided behind-the-scenes

tours of the building (€3) are possible on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons at 3pm, 4pm and 5pm.

**The Walk** » Turn left behind the theatre and walk down the attractive cours du Chapeau Rouge, home to a number of decent restaurants. Turn right and walk along the waterfront to place de la Bourse.

## Place de la Bourse & Quai de la Douane

Surrounded by magisterial public buildings that attest to Bordeaux's 18th-century wealth is the **place de la Bourse**. Opposite, the quai de la Douane has been given a facelift and now incorporates playgrounds and a wafer-thin 'swimming pool' that hot and sticky young Bordelaise roll about in during summer.

**The Walk** » Head up rue Fernand Philippart to place du Parlement with its numerous cafes, then weave along rue du pas-St-George, rue St-Siméon and rue de la Merci to turn left onto rue de Cheverus and back to the cathedral.

# ROAD TRIP ESSENTIALS

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# France Driving Guide

*With stunning landscapes, superb highways and one of the world's most scenic and comprehensive secondary road networks, France is a road-tripper's dream come true.*

## DRIVING LICENCE & DOCUMENTS

Drivers must carry the following at all times:

- ▶ passport or an EU national ID card
- ▶ valid driving licence (*permis de conduire*; most foreign licences can be used in France for up to a year)
- ▶ car-ownership papers, known as a *carte grise* (grey card)
- ▶ proof of third-party liability *assurance* (insurance)

An International Driving Permit (IDP) is not required when renting a car but can be

## Driving Fast Facts

- ▶ **Right or left?** Drive on the right
- ▶ **Manual or automatic?** Manual
- ▶ **Legal driving age** 18
- ▶ **Top speed limit** 130km/h on *autoroutes* (highways, motorways)
- ▶ **Signature car** Citroën 2CV

useful in the event of an accident or police stop, as it translates and vouches for the authenticity of your home licence.

## Road Trip Websites

### AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATIONS

**RAC** ([www.rac.co.uk/driving-abroad/france](http://www.rac.co.uk/driving-abroad/france)) Info for British drivers on driving in France.

### CONDITIONS & TRAFFIC

**Bison Futé** ([www.bison-fute.equipement.gouv.fr](http://www.bison-fute.equipement.gouv.fr))

**Les Sociétés d'Autoroutes** ([www.autoroutes.fr](http://www.autoroutes.fr))

### ROUTE MAPPING

**Mappy** ([www.mappy.fr](http://www.mappy.fr))

**Via Michelin** ([www.viamichelin.com](http://www.viamichelin.com))

## INSURANCE

Third-party liability insurance (*assurance au tiers*) is compulsory for all vehicles in France, including cars brought from abroad. Normally, cars registered and insured in other European countries can circulate freely. Contact your insurance company before leaving home to make sure you're covered, and to verify whom to call in case of a breakdown or accident.

In a minor accident with no injuries, the easiest way for drivers to sort things out with their insurance companies is to fill out a *Constat Amiable d'Accident Automobile* (accident report), a standardised way of recording important details about what happened. In rental cars it's usually in the packet of documents in the glove compartment. Make sure the report includes any proof that the accident was not your fault. If it was your fault you may be liable for a

## Local Expert: Driving Tips

France driving tips from Bert Morris, Research Consultant for IAM ([www.iam.org.uk](http://www.iam.org.uk)) and former Motoring Policy Director for the AA:

- ➔ First thing if you're British: watch your instinct to drive on the left. Once I was leaving a supermarket using the left-turn exit lane. I turned by instinct into the left lane of the street and nearly had a head-on collision. My golden rule: when leaving a parking lot, petrol station or motorway off-ramp, do it on the right and your instinct to stay right will kick in.
- ➔ French law says to give way to traffic on the right, even when you're on a main road. So I advise people to ease off on the foot whenever you get to a junction.
- ➔ Never go below a third of a tank, even if you think there's cheaper petrol further down the road; sometimes the next station's a long way off. My approach is, don't fret about cost; you're on holiday!

hefty insurance deductible/excess. Don't sign anything you don't fully understand. If necessary, contact the **police** (☎17).

French-registered cars have their insurance-company details printed on a little green square affixed to the windscreen (windshield).

## HIRING A CAR

To hire a car in France, you'll need to be older than 21, with an international credit card. Drivers under 25 usually must pay a surcharge.

All car-hire companies provide mandatory third-party liability insurance, but prices and conditions for collision-damage waiver insurance (CDW, or *assurance tous risques*) vary greatly from company to company. Purchasing the CDW can substantially reduce the *franchise* (deductible/excess) that you'll be liable for if the car is damaged or stolen, but car-hire companies sometimes charge exorbitant rates for this protection; if you travel frequently, sites like [insurance4carhire.com](http://insurance4carhire.com) may provide a cheaper alternative. Your credit card may also cover CDW if you use it to pay for the rental; verify conditions and details with your card issuer.

Arranging your car hire from home is usually considerably cheaper than a walk-in rental, but beware of online offers that don't include CDW or you may be liable for up to 100% of the car's value.

Be sure your car has a spare tyre (it's not uncommon for rentals to be missing these).

International car-hire companies:

- Avis** ([www.avis.com](http://www.avis.com))
- Budget** ([www.budget.com](http://www.budget.com))
- Europcar** ([www.europcar.com](http://www.europcar.com))
- Hertz** ([www.hertz.fr](http://www.hertz.fr))
- National-Citer** ([www.nationalcar.com](http://www.nationalcar.com))
- Sixt** ([www.sixt.com](http://www.sixt.com))

French car-hire companies:

- ADA** ([www.ada.fr](http://www.ada.fr))
- DLM** ([www.dlm.fr](http://www.dlm.fr))
- France Cars** ([www.francecars.fr](http://www.francecars.fr))
- Locauto** ([www.locauto.fr](http://www.locauto.fr))
- Renault Rent** ([www.renault-rent.com](http://www.renault-rent.com))
- Rent a Car Système** ([www.rentacar.fr](http://www.rentacar.fr))

Internet-based discount brokers:

- Auto Europe** ([www.autoeurope.com](http://www.autoeurope.com))
- DriveAway Holidays** ([driveaway.com.au](http://driveaway.com.au))
- Easycar** ([www.easycar.com](http://www.easycar.com))
- Holiday Autos** ([www.holidayautos.co.uk](http://www.holidayautos.co.uk))

Rental cars with automatic transmission are rare in France; book well ahead for these.

For insurance reasons, rental cars are usually prohibited on ferries, for example to Corsica.

## BRINGING YOUR OWN VEHICLE

Any foreign motor vehicle entering France must display a sticker or licence plate identifying its country of registration. Right-hand-drive vehicles brought from the UK or Ireland must have deflectors affixed to

the headlights to avoid dazzling oncoming traffic.

## MAPS

Michelin's excellent, detailed regional driving maps are highly recommended as a companion to this book, as they will help you navigate back roads and explore alternative routes; IGN's maps are ideal for more specialised activities such as hiking and cycling. Look for both at newsagents, bookshops, airports, supermarkets, tourist offices and service stations along the autoroute.

➔ **Institut Géographique National** (IGN; [www.ign.fr](http://www.ign.fr)) Publishes regional fold-out maps as well as an all-France volume, *France – Routes, Autoroutes*. Has a great variety of 1:50,000-scale hiking maps, specialised

*cyclocartes* (cycling maps) and themed maps showing wine regions, museums etc.

➔ **Michelin** ([boutiquecartesetguides.michelin.fr](http://boutiquecartesetguides.michelin.fr)) Sells excellent, tear-proof yellow-orange 1:200,000-scale regional maps tailor-made for cross-country driving, with precise coverage of smaller back roads.

## ROADS & CONDITIONS

France has one of Europe's densest highway networks. There are four types of intercity roads:

➔ **Autoroutes** (highway names beginning with A) Multilane divided highways, usually with tolls (*péages*). Generously outfitted with rest stops.

➔ **Routes Nationales** (N, RN) National highways. Some sections have divider strips.

## Road Distances (KM)

Bordeaux	184
Brest	811 623
Caen	764 568 376
Cahors	307 218 788 661
Calais	164 876 710 339 875
Chambéry	860 651 120 800 523 834
Cherbourg	835 647 399 124 743 461 923
Clermont-Ferrand	564 358 805 566 269 717 295 689
Dijon	807 619 867 548 378 572 273 671 279
Grenoble	827 657 1126 806 501 863 56 929 300 302
Lille	997 809 725 353 808 112 767 476 650 505 798
Lyon	831 528 1018 698 439 755 103 820 171 194 110 687
Marseille	700 651 1271 1010 521 1067 344 1132 477 506 273 999 314
Nantes	513 326 298 292 491 593 780 317 462 656 787 609 618 975
Nice	858 810 1429 1168 679 1225 410 1291 636 664 337 1157 473 190 1131
Paris	771 583 596 232 582 289 565 355 424 313 571 222 462 775 384 932
Perpignan	499 451 1070 998 320 1149 478 1094 441 640 445 1081 448 319 773 476 857
Strasbourg	1254 1066 1079 730 847 621 496 853 584 335 551 522 488 803 867 804 490 935
Toulouse	300 247 866 865 116 991 565 890 890 727 533 923 536 407 568 564 699 205 1022
Tours	536 348 490 246 413 531 611 369 369 418 618 463 449 795 197 952 238 795 721 593

Bayonne  
Bordeaux  
Brest  
Caen  
Cahors  
Calais  
Chambéry  
Cherbourg  
Clermont-Ferrand  
Dijon  
Grenoble  
Lille  
Lyon  
Marseille  
Nantes  
Nice  
Paris  
Perpignan  
Strasbourg  
Toulouse

- ➔ **Routes Départementales** (D) Local highways and roads.
- ➔ **Routes Communales** (C, V) Minor rural roads.

The latter two categories, while slower, offer some of France's most enjoyable driving experiences.

Motorcyclists will find France great for touring, with high-quality roads and stunning scenery. Just make sure your wet-weather gear is up to scratch.

Note that high mountain passes, especially in the Alps, may be closed from as early as September to as late as June. Conditions are posted at the foot of each pass ('ouvert' on a green background means open, 'ferme' on a red background means closed). Snow chains or studded tyres are required in wintry weather.

## ROAD RULES

Enforcement of French traffic laws has been stepped up considerably in recent years. Speed cameras are increasingly common, as are radar traps and unmarked police vehicles. Fines for many infractions are given on the spot.

### Speed Limits

Speed limits outside built-up areas (unless signposted otherwise):

- ➔ **Undivided N and D highways** 90km/h (80km/h when raining)
- ➔ **Non-autoroute divided highways** 110km/h (100km/h when raining)
- ➔ **Autoroutes** 130km/h (110km/h when raining)

Unless otherwise signposted, a limit of 50km/h applies in *all* areas designated as built up, no matter how rural they may appear. You must slow to 50km/h the moment you come to a town entry sign; this speed limit applies until you pass a town exit sign with a diagonal bar through it.

You're expected to already know the speed limit for various types of roads; that's why most speed-limit signs begin with the word *rappel* (reminder). You can be fined for going as little as 10km over the speed limit.

### Alcohol

- ➔ The blood-alcohol limit is 0.05% (0.5g per litre of blood) – the equivalent of two glasses of wine for a 75kg adult.
- ➔ Police often conduct random breathalyser tests. Penalties can be severe, including imprisonment.

### Motorcycles

- ➔ Riders of any two-wheeled motorised vehicle must wear a helmet.
- ➔ No special licence is required to ride a motorbike whose engine is smaller than 50cc, which is why rental scooters are often rated at 49.9cc.
- ➔ As of 1 January 2013, all riders of motorcycles 125cc or larger must wear high-visibility reflective clothing measuring at least 150 sq cm on their upper bodies.

### Child Seats

- ➔ Up to age 10 (or 1.4m tall), children must use a size-appropriate child seat or booster.

## Priority to the Right

Under the *priorité à droite* (priority to the right) rule, any car entering an intersection from a road on your right has the right of way. Don't be surprised if locals courteously cede the right of way when you're about to turn from an alley onto a highway, yet boldly assert their rights when you're the one zipping down a main road.

*Priorité à droite* is suspended on some main roads marked with a yellow diamond-shaped sign. The same sign with a diagonal bar through it reinstates the *priorité à droite* rule.

At roundabouts where you don't have the right of way (ie the cars already in the roundabout do), you'll see signs reading *vous n'avez pas la priorité* (you do not have right of way) or *cédez le passage* (yield/give way).

## Driving Problem-Buster

**I can't speak French; will that be a problem?** While it's preferable to learn some French before travelling, French road signs are mostly of the 'international symbol' variety, and English is increasingly spoken among the younger generation. Our Language chapter can help you navigate some common roadside emergency situations; in a worst-case scenario, a good attitude and sign language can go a long way.

**What should I do if my car breaks down?** Safety first: turn on your flashers, put on a safety vest (legally required, and provided in rental-car glove compartments) and place a reflective triangle (also legally required) 30m to 100m behind your car to warn approaching motorists. Call for **emergency assistance** (☎112) or walk to the nearest orange roadside call box (placed every 2km along French *autoroutes*). If renting a vehicle, your car-hire company's service number may help expedite matters. If travelling in your own car, verify before leaving home whether your local auto club has reciprocal roadside-assistance arrangements in France.

**What if I have an accident?** For minor accidents you'll need to fill out a *constat amiable d'accident* (accident statement, typically provided in rental-car glove compartments) and report the accident to your insurance and/or rental-car company. If necessary, contact the **police** (☎17).

**What should I do if I get stopped by the police?** Show your passport (or EU national ID card), licence and proof of insurance. See our Language chapter for some handy phrases.

**What's the speed limit in France and how is it enforced?** Speed limits (indicated by a black-on-white number inside a red circle) range from 30km/h in small towns to 130km/h on the fastest *autoroutes*. If the motorbike police pull you over, they'll fine you on the spot or direct you to the nearest *gendarmerie* to pay. If you're caught by a speed camera (placed at random intervals along French highways), the ticket will be sent to your rental-car agency, which will bill your credit card, or to your home address if you're driving your own vehicle. Fines depend on how much you're over the limit.

**How do French tolls work?** Many French *autoroutes* charge tolls. Take a ticket from the machine upon entering the highway and pay as you exit. Some exit booths are staffed by people; others are automated and will accept only chip-and-PIN credit cards or coins.

**What if I can't find anywhere to stay?** During summer and holiday periods, book accommodation in advance whenever possible. Local tourist offices can sometimes help find you a bed during normal business hours. Otherwise, try your luck at national chain hotels such as Etap and Formule 1 (p427), which are typically clustered at *autoroute* exits outside urban areas.

- ➔ Children under 10 cannot ride in the front seat (unless the back is already occupied by other children under 10).
- ➔ A child under 13kg must travel in a backward-facing child seat.

### Other Rules

- ➔ All passengers, including those in the back seat, must wear seat belts.
- ➔ Mobile phones may be used only if equipped with a hands-free kit or speakerphone.
- ➔ Turning right on a red light is illegal.



## France Playlist

**Bonjour** Rachid Taha and Gaetan Roussel

**Coeur Vagabond** Gus Viseur

**La Vie en Rose** Édith Piaf

**Minor Swing** Django Reinhardt

**L'Americano Akhenaton**

**Flower Duet from Lakmé** Léo Delibes

**De Bonnes Raisons** Alex Beaupain

➔ All vehicles driven in France must carry a high-visibility safety vest, a reflective triangle, a spare set of headlight bulbs and (as of 1 July 2012) a portable, single-use breathalyser kit. Non-compliant drivers are subject to fines.

For pictures and descriptions of common French road signs, see the inside back cover.

## PARKING

In city centres, most on-the-street parking places are *payant* (metered) from 9am to 7pm Monday to Saturday (sometimes with a midday break). Buy a ticket at the nearest *horodateur* (coin-fed ticket machine) and place it on your dashboard with the time stamp clearly visible. Bigger cities also have public parking garages.

## FUEL

- ➔ Diesel (*gazole* or *gasoil*) – €1.35/L; many cars in France run on diesel.
- ➔ Essence (gas/petrol), or *carburant* (fuel) – €1.50/L for 95 unleaded (SP95).
- ➔ Filling up (*faire le plein*) is most expensive at *autoroute* rest stops, cheapest at supermarkets.
- ➔ When renting a car, ask whether it runs on *gazole* or *essence*.
- ➔ At the pump, diesel nozzles are generally yellow, unleaded gas nozzles green.

➔ Many petrol stations close on Sunday afternoon; even in cities, staffed stations are rarely open late.

➔ After-hours purchases (eg at supermarkets' fully automatic 24-hour stations) can only be made with a credit card that has an embedded PIN chip. If you don't have a chip-and-PIN card, try to get one from your card company before leaving home; chip-and-PIN cards are also required at many toll booths and train-ticket dispensers throughout France.

## SATELLITE NAVIGATION SYSTEMS

Sat-nav devices can be helpful in navigating your way around France. They're commonly available at car-rental agencies, or you can bring your own from home. Accuracy is more dependable on main highways than in small villages or on back roads; in rural areas, don't hesitate to fall back on common sense, road signs and a good Michelin map if your sat nav seems to be leading you astray.

## SAFETY

Never leave anything valuable inside your car, even in the boot (trunk). Note that thieves can easily identify rental cars, as they have a distinctive number on the licence plate.

Theft is especially prevalent in the south. In cities like Marseille and Nice, occasional aggressive theft from cars stopped at red lights is also an issue.

## RADIO

For news, tune in to the French-language France Info (105.5MHz), the multilanguage RFI (738kHz or 89MHz in Paris) or, in northern France, the BBC World Service (648kHz) and BBC Radio 4 (198kHz). Popular national FM music stations include **NRJ** ([www.nrj.fr](http://www.nrj.fr)), **Skyrock** ([www.skyrock.fm](http://www.skyrock.fm)) and **Nostalgie** ([www.nostalgie.fr](http://www.nostalgie.fr)).

In many areas, Autoroute Info (107.7MHz) has round-the-clock traffic information.



# France Travel Guide

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

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### AIR

#### International Airports

Rental cars are available at all international airports listed below.

**Paris Charles de Gaulle** (CDG; [www.aeroportsdeparis.fr](http://www.aeroportsdeparis.fr))

**Paris Orly** (ORY; [www.aeroportsdeparis.fr](http://www.aeroportsdeparis.fr))

**Aéroport de Bordeaux** ([www.bordeaux.aeroport.fr](http://www.bordeaux.aeroport.fr))

**Aéroport de Lille** ([www.lille.aeroport.fr](http://www.lille.aeroport.fr))

**Aéroport Lyon-Saint Exupéry** ([www.lyonaeroports.com](http://www.lyonaeroports.com))

**EuroAirport** (Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg; [www.euroairport.com](http://www.euroairport.com))

**Aéroport Nantes Atlantique** ([www.nantes.aeroport.fr](http://www.nantes.aeroport.fr))

**Aéroport Nice Côte d'Azur** (société. [nice.aeroport.fr](http://nice.aeroport.fr))

**Aéroport International Strasbourg** ([www.strasbourg.aeroport.fr](http://www.strasbourg.aeroport.fr))

**Aéroport Toulouse-Blagnac** ([www.toulouse.aeroport.fr](http://www.toulouse.aeroport.fr))

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### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Entering France from other parts of the EU is usually a breeze – no border checkpoints and no customs – thanks to the Schengen Agreement, signed by all of France's neighbours except the UK, the Channel Islands and Andorra. For these three, old-fashioned document and customs checks are still the norm when exiting France (as well as when entering from Andorra).

### Channel Tunnel

The Channel Tunnel (Chunnel), inaugurated in 1994, is the first dry-land link between England and France since the last ice age.

High-speed **Eurotunnel Le Shuttle** ([www.eurotunnel.com](http://www.eurotunnel.com)) trains whisk cars and motorcycles in 35 minutes from Folkestone through the Chunnel to Coquelles, 5km southwest of Calais. Shuttles run 24 hours, with up to three departures an hour during peak time. LPG and CNG tanks are not permitted; gas-powered cars and many campers and caravans have to travel by ferry.

Eurotunnel sets its fares the way budget airlines do: the earlier you book and the lower the demand for a particular crossing, the less you pay; same-day fares can cost a small fortune. Fares for a car, including up to nine passengers, start at £30.

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### SEA

**P&O Ferries** ([www.poferries.com](http://www.poferries.com)) and **DFDS Seaways** ([www.dfdsseaways.co.uk](http://www.dfdsseaways.co.uk))

both operate regular trans-Channel car ferry service from England to France (primarily from Dover to Calais, with less frequent services from Dover to Dunkirk).

**Brittany Ferries** ([www.brittanyferries.com](http://www.brittanyferries.com)) offers additional services from Plymouth, Portsmouth and Poole to the French ports of Roscoff, St-Malo, Cherbourg and Caen.

Ferry companies typically offer discounts for advance booking and/or off-peak travel. Seasonal demand is a crucial factor (Christmas, Easter, UK and French school holidays, July and August are especially busy), as is the time of day (an early-evening ferry can cost much more than one at 4am).

For the best fares, check **Ferry Savers** ([www.ferrysavers.com](http://www.ferrysavers.com)).

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### TRAIN

Rail services link France with virtually every country in Europe. The **Eurostar** ([www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)) whisks passengers from London to Paris in 2¼ hours.

You can book tickets and get train information from **Rail Europe** ([www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com)). In France ticketing is handled by the national railway company **SNCF** ([www.sncf.com](http://www.sncf.com)). High-speed train travel between France and the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria is covered by **Railteam** ([www.railteam.co.uk](http://www.railteam.co.uk)) and **TGV-Europe** ([www.tgv-europe.com](http://www.tgv-europe.com)).

**Avis** ([www.avis.fr](http://www.avis.fr)), in partnership with **SNCF** ([www.voyages-sncf.com/train/train-avis](http://www.voyages-sncf.com/train/train-avis)), has rental-car agencies in most major French railway stations. Cars booked through the SNCF website may be picked up from an SNCF representative after hours if the Avis office is closed.

## DIRECTORY A–Z

### ACCOMMODATION

Be it a fairy-tale château, a boutique hide-away or floating pod on a lake, France has accommodation to suit every taste, mood and pocket.

#### Categories

Budget covers everything from hostels to small, simple family-run places; midrange means a few extra creature comforts such as satellite TV and free wi-fi; and top-end places stretch from luxury five-star palaces with air conditioning, pools and restaurants to boutique-chic chalets in the Alps.

#### Costs

Accommodation costs vary wildly between seasons and regions: what will buy you a night in a romantic *chambre d'hôte* (B&B) in the countryside may only get you a dorm bed in a major city or high-profile ski resort.

#### Reservations

Midrange, top-end and many budget hotels require a credit-card to secure a reservation. Tourist offices can often advise on

availability and reserve for you, sometimes charging a small fee.

#### Seasons

- ➔ In ski resorts, high season is Christmas, New Year and the February-March school holidays.
- ➔ On the coast, high season is summer, particularly August.
- ➔ Hotels in inland cities often charge low-season rates in summer.
- ➔ Rates often drop outside the high season – in some cases by as much as 50%.
- ➔ In business-oriented hotels in cities, rooms are most expensive from Monday to Thursday and cheaper over the weekend.
- ➔ In the Alps, hotels usually close between seasons, from around May to mid-June and from mid-September to early December; many addresses in Corsica only open April to October.

#### B&Bs

For charm, it's hard to beat privately run *chambres d'hôte* (B&Bs), available throughout rural France. By law a *chambre d'hôte* must have no more than five rooms and breakfast must be included in the price; some hosts prepare home-cooked evening meals (*table d'hôte*) for an extra charge of €20 to €30. Pick up lists of *chambres d'hôte* at local tourist offices, or consult the websites below:

**Bienvenue à la Ferme** ([www.bienvenue-a-la-ferme.com](http://www.bienvenue-a-la-ferme.com)) Farmstays.

**Chambres d'hôtes de Charme** ([www.guidesdecharme.com](http://www.guidesdecharme.com)) Boutique B&Bs.

**Chambres d'Hôtes France** ([www.chambresdhotefrance.com](http://www.chambresdhotefrance.com))

**en France** ([www.bbfrance.com](http://www.bbfrance.com)) B&Bs and *gîtes* (self-catering cottages).

**Fleurs de Soleil** ([www.fleursdesoleil.fr](http://www.fleursdesoleil.fr)) Stylish *maisons d'hôte*, mainly in rural France.

**Gîtes de France** ([www.gites-de-france.com](http://www.gites-de-france.com)) France's primary umbrella organisation for B&Bs and *gîtes*. Search for properties by region,

### Practicalities

- ➔ **Time** France uses the 24-hour clock and is on Central European Time, which is one hour ahead of GMT/UTC. During daylight-saving time, from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October, France is two hours ahead of GMT/UTC.
- ➔ **TV & DVD** TV is Secam; DVDs are zone 2; videos work on the PAL system.
- ➔ **Weights & Measures** France uses the metric system.

## Sleeping Price Ranges

The following price ranges refer to a double room with private bathroom in high season (breakfast is not included, except at B&Bs).

- € less than €80
- €€ €80–180
- €€€ more than €180

theme (with kids, by the sea, gourmet, etc), activity (fishing, wine tasting etc) or facilities (pool, dishwasher, fireplace, baby equipment etc).

**Guides de Charme** ([www.guidesdecharme.com](http://www.guidesdecharme.com)) Upmarket B&Bs.

**Samedi Midi Éditions** ([www.samedi midi.com](http://www.samedi midi.com)) *Chambres d'hôte* organised by location or theme.

## Camping

Camping is extremely popular in France. There are thousands of well-equipped campgrounds, many considerably placed by rivers, lakes and the sea. *Gîtes de France* and *Bienvenue à la Ferme* coordinate camping on farms.

- ➔ Most campgrounds open March or April to late September or October; popular spots fill up fast in summer, when it's wise to book ahead.
- ➔ Economisers should look out for local, good-value but no-frills *campings municipaux* (municipal campgrounds).
- ➔ Many campgrounds rent mobile homes with mod cons like heating, kitchen and TV.
- ➔ Camping 'wild' in nondesignated spots (*camping sauvage*) is illegal in France.
- ➔ Campsite offices often close during the day.

Websites with campsite listings searchable by location, theme and facilities:

**Camping en France** ([www.camping.fr](http://www.camping.fr))

**Camping France** ([www.campingfrance.com](http://www.campingfrance.com))

**Guide du Camping** ([www.guideducamping.com](http://www.guideducamping.com))

**HPA Guide** (<http://camping.hpaguide.com>)

## Hostels

Hostels in France range from spartan rooms to hip hang-outs with perks aplenty.

- ➔ In university towns, *foyers d'étudiant* (student dormitories) are sometimes converted for use by travellers during summer.

➔ A dorm bed in an *auberge de jeunesse* (youth hostel) costs from €10.50 to €28 depending on location, amenities and facilities; sheets are always included, breakfast more often than not.

➔ Hostels by the sea or in the mountains sometimes offer seasonal outdoor activities.

➔ French hostels are 100% non-smoking.

## Hotels

We have tried to feature well-situated, independent hotels that offer good value, a warm welcome, at least a bit of charm and a palpable sense of place.

Hotels in France are rated with one to five stars, although the ratings are based on highly objective criteria (eg the size of the entry hall), not the quality of the service, the decor or cleanliness.

➔ French hotels rarely include breakfast in their rates. Unless specified otherwise, prices quoted don't include breakfast, which costs around €7/10/20 in a budget/midrange/top-end hotel.

➔ A double room generally has one double bed (sometimes two singles pushed together!); a room with twin beds (*deux lits*) is usually more expensive, as is a room with a bathtub instead of a shower.

➔ Feather pillows are practically nonexistent in France, even in top-end hotels.

➔ All hotel restaurant terraces allow smoking; if you are sensitive to smoke sit inside or carry a respirator.

## Chain Hotels

Chain hotels stretch from nondescript establishments near the *autoroute* (motorway, highway) to central four-star hotels with character. Most conform to certain standards of decor, service and facilities (air conditioning, free wi-fi, 24-hour check-in etc), and offer competitive rates as well as last-minute, weekend and/or online deals. Countrywide biggies include:

## Book Your Stay Online

For more accommodation reviews by Lonely Planet authors, check out <http://hotels.lonelyplanet.com>. You'll find independent reviews, as well as recommendations on the best places to stay. Best of all, you can book online.

**B&B Hôtels** ([www.hotel-bb.com](http://www.hotel-bb.com)) Cheap motel-style digs.

**Best Western** ([www.bestwestern.com](http://www.bestwestern.com)) Independent two- to four-star hotels, each with its own local character.

**Campanile** ([www.campanile.com](http://www.campanile.com)) Good-value hotels geared up for families.

**Citôtel** ([www.citotel.com](http://www.citotel.com)) Independent two- and three-star hotels.

**Contact Hôtel** ([www.contact-hotel.com](http://www.contact-hotel.com)) Inexpensive two- and three-star hotels.

**Etap** ([www.etaphotel.com](http://www.etaphotel.com)) Ubiquitous chain.

**Formule 1** ([www.hotelformule1.com](http://www.hotelformule1.com)) Non-descript roadside cheapie.

**Ibis** ([www.ibishotel.com](http://www.ibishotel.com)) Midrange pick.

**Inter-Hotel** ([www.inter-hotel.fr](http://www.inter-hotel.fr)) Two- and three-star hotels, some quite charming.

**Kyriad** ([www.kyriad.com](http://www.kyriad.com)) Comfortable midrange choices.

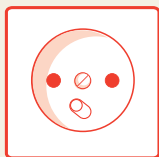
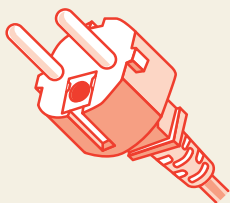
**Novotel** ([www.novotel.com](http://www.novotel.com)) Family-friendly chain.

**Première Classe** ([www.premiereclasse.com](http://www.premiereclasse.com)) Motel-style accommodation.

**Sofitel** ([www.sofitel.com](http://www.sofitel.com)) Range of top-end hotels in major French cities.

## ELECTRICITY

European two-pin plugs are standard. France has 230V at 50Hz AC (you may need a transformer for 110V electrical appliances).



230V/50Hz

## FOOD

Food-happy France has a seemingly endless variety of eateries; categories listed below are found throughout the country: The Eating & Sleeping sections of this guide include phone numbers for places that require reservations (typically higher-end bistros or family-run enterprises such as *tables d'hôte*).

➔ **Auberge** Country inn serving traditional fare, often attached to a B&B or small hotel.

➔ **Ferme auberge** Working farm that cooks up meals – only dinner usually – from local farm products.

➔ **Bistro** (also spelt *bistrot*) Anything from a pub or bar with snacks and light meals to a small, fully fledged restaurant.

➔ **Brasserie** Much like a cafe except it serves full meals, drinks and coffee from morning until 11pm or later. Typical fare includes *choucroute* (sauerkraut) and *moules frites* (mussels and fries).

➔ **Restaurant** Born in Paris in the 18th century, restaurants today serve lunch and dinner five or six days a week.

➔ **Cafe** Basic light snacks as well as drinks.

➔ **Crêperie** (also *galetterie*) Casual address specialising in sweet crêpes and savoury *galettes* (buckwheat crêpes).

➔ **Salon de Thé** Trendy tearoom often serving light lunches (quiche, salads, cakes, tarts, pies and pastries) as well as black and herbal teas.

➔ **Table d'hôte** (literally 'host's table') Some of the most charming B&Bs serve *table d'hôte* too, a delicious homemade meal of set courses with little or no choice.

## Eating Price Ranges

The following price ranges refer to a two-course set menu (ie entrée plus main course or main course plus dessert), with tax and service charge included in the price.

€ less than €20

€€ €20–40

€€€ more than €40

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

The rainbow flag flies high in France, a country that left its closet long before many of its European neighbours. *Laissez-faire* perfectly sums up France's liberal attitude towards homosexuality and people's private lives in general. Paris, Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Montpellier and Toulouse are among the many cities with thriving gay and lesbian scenes. Attitudes towards homosexuality tend to be more conservative in the countryside and villages. France's lesbian scene is less public than its gay male counterpart.

### Publications

**Damron** ([www.damron.com](http://www.damron.com)) Publishes English-language travel guides, including the *Damron Women's Traveller* for lesbians and the *Damron Men's Travel Guide* for gays.

**Spartacus International Gay Guide** ([www.spartacusworld.com](http://www.spartacusworld.com)) A male-only guide with more than 70 pages devoted to France, almost half of which cover Paris. iPhone app too.

### Websites

**France Queer Resources Directory** ([www.france.qrd.org](http://www.france.qrd.org)) Gay and lesbian directory.

**French Government Tourist Office** ([www.us.franceguide.com/special-interests/gay-friendly](http://www.us.franceguide.com/special-interests/gay-friendly)) Information about 'the gay-friendly destination par excellence'.

**Gay France** ([www.gay-france.net](http://www.gay-france.net)) Insider tips on gay life in France.

**Gayscape** ([www.gayscape.com](http://www.gayscape.com)) Hundreds of links to gay- and lesbian-related sites.

**Gayvox** ([www.gayvox.com/guide3](http://www.gayvox.com/guide3)) Online travel guide to France, with listings by region.

**Tasse de Thé** ([www.tassedethe.com](http://www.tassedethe.com)) A *webzine lesbien* with lots of useful links.

➔ If accessing dial-up ISPs with your laptop, you'll need a telephone-plug adaptor, available at large supermarkets.

## MONEY

### ATMs

Known as *distributeurs automatiques de billets* (DAB) or *points d'argent* in French, ATMs are the cheapest and most convenient way to get money. Those connected to international networks are ubiquitous and usually offer an excellent exchange rate.

### Cash

You always get a better exchange rate in-country, but if arriving in France by air or late at night, you may want to bring enough euros to take a taxi to a hotel.

### Credit & Debit Cards

➔ Credit and debit cards, accepted almost everywhere in France, are convenient and relatively secure and usually offer a better exchange rate than travellers cheques or cash exchanges.

➔ Credit cards issued in France have embedded chips – you have to type in a PIN to make a purchase.

➔ Visa, MasterCard and Amex can be used in shops and supermarkets and for train travel, car hire and motorway tolls, though some places (eg 24-hour petrol stations, some autoroute toll machines) only take French-style credit cards with chips and PINs.

➔ Don't assume that you can pay for a meal or a budget hotel with a credit card – enquire first.

➔ Cash advances are a supremely convenient way to stay stocked up with euros, but getting cash with a credit card involves both fees (sometimes US\$10 or more) and interest – ask your credit-card issuer for details. Debit-card fees are usually much less.

### Moneychangers

➔ In Paris and major cities, *bureaux de change* (exchange bureaux) are open longer hours, give faster and easier service and often have better rates than banks.

➔ Some post-office branches exchange travellers cheques and banknotes; most won't take US\$100 bills.

## INTERNET ACCESS

➔ Wireless (wi-fi) access points can be found at major airports, in many hotels and at some cafes.

➔ Some tourist offices and numerous cafes and bars tout wi-fi hot spots that let laptop owners hook up for free.

➔ To search for free wi-fi hot spots in France, visit [www.hotspot-locations.co.uk](http://www.hotspot-locations.co.uk) or [www.free-hotspot.com](http://www.free-hotspot.com).

➔ Internet cafes are becoming less rife, but at least one can still be found in most large towns and cities. Prices range from €2 to €6 per hour.

## Tipping Guide

By law, restaurant and bar prices are *service compris* (include a 15% service charge), so there is no need to leave a *pourboire* (tip). If you were extremely satisfied with the service, however, you can – as many locals do – leave a small ‘extra’ tip for your waiter or waitress.

<b>bars</b>	round to nearest euro
<b>hotel cleaning staff</b>	€1-1.50 per day
<b>hotel porters</b>	€1-1.50 per bag
<b>restaurants</b>	5-10%
<b>taxis</b>	10-15%
<b>toilet attendants</b>	€0.20-0.50
<b>tour guides</b>	€1-2 per person

## OPENING HOURS

Below are standard hours for various types of business in France (note that these can fluctuate by an hour either way in some cases). For individual business listings in this book, we’ve only included opening hours where they differ significantly from these standards:

<b>banks</b>	9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri or Tue-Sat
<b>bars</b>	7pm-1am Mon-Sat
<b>cafes</b>	7am or 8am-10pm or 11pm Mon-Sat
<b>nightclubs</b>	10pm-3am, 4am or 5am Thu-Sat
<b>post offices</b>	8.30am or 9am-5pm or 6pm Mon-Fri, 8am- noon Sat
<b>restaurants</b>	lunch noon-2.30pm, dinner 7-11pm six days a week
<b>shops</b>	9am or 10am-7pm Mon- Sat (often with lunch break noon-1.30pm)
<b>supermarkets</b>	8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-12.30pm Sun

## PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

The following *jours fériés* (public holidays) are observed in France:

- New Year’s Day** (Jour de l’An) 1 January.
- Easter Sunday and Monday** (Pâques and lundi de Pâques) Late March/April.
- May Day** (Fête du Travail) 1 May.
- Victoire 1945** 8 May – commemorates the Allied victory in Europe that ended WWII.
- Ascension Thursday** (Ascension) May – celebrated on the 40th day after Easter.
- Pentecost/Whit Sunday and Whit Monday** (Pentecôte and lundi de Pentecôte) Mid-May to mid-June – celebrated on the seventh Sunday after Easter.
- Bastille Day/National Day** (Fête Nationale) 14 July – the national holiday.
- Assumption Day** (Assomption) 15 August.
- All Saints’ Day** (Toussaint) 1 November.
- Remembrance Day** (L’*onze novembre*) 11 November – marks the WWI armistice.
- Christmas** (Noël) 25 December.

## SAFE TRAVEL

France is generally a safe place to travel, though crime has risen substantially in recent years. Property crime is much more common than physical violence; it’s extremely unlikely that you will be assaulted while walking down the street. Always

check your government's travel advisory warnings.

Hunting is traditional and commonplace throughout rural France, and the season runs from September to February. If you see signs reading 'chasseurs' or 'chasse gardée' strung up or tacked to trees, think twice about wandering into the area.

## Natural Dangers

- ➔ There are powerful tides and strong undertows at many places along the Atlantic coast, from the Spanish border north to Brittany and Normandy.
- ➔ Only swim in *zones de baignade surveillée* (beaches monitored by life guards).
- ➔ Be aware of tide times and the high-tide mark if walking on a beach.
- ➔ Thunderstorms in the mountains and the hot southern plains can be extremely sudden and violent.
- ➔ Check the weather report before setting out on a long walk and be prepared for sudden temperature drops if you're heading into the high country of the Alps or Pyrenees.
- ➔ Avalanches pose a significant danger in the Alps.

## Theft

There's no need to travel in fear, but it is worth taking a few simple precautions against theft.

- ➔ Break-ins to parked cars are not uncommon. Never leave anything valuable inside your car, even in the boot (trunk).
- ➔ Aggressive theft from cars stopped at red lights is occasionally a problem, especially in Marseille and Nice. As a precaution, lock your car doors and roll up the windows in major urban areas.
- ➔ Pickpocketing and bag snatching (eg in dense crowds and public places) are prevalent in big cities, particularly Paris, Marseille and Nice. Be especially vigilant for bag-snatchers at outdoor cafes and beaches.

---

## TELEPHONE

### Mobile Phones

- ➔ French mobile-phone numbers begin with 06 or 07.

➔ France uses GSM 900/1800, which is compatible with the rest of Europe and Australia but not with the North American GSM 1900 or the totally different system in Japan (though some North Americans have tri-band phones that work in France).

- ➔ Check with your service provider about roaming charges – dialling a mobile phone from a fixed-line phone or another mobile can be incredibly expensive.
- ➔ It may be cheaper to buy your own French SIM card – and locals you meet are much more likely to ring you if your number is French.
- ➔ If you already have a compatible phone, you can slip in a SIM card (€20 to €30) and rev it up with prepaid credit, though this is likely to run out fast as domestic prepaid calls cost about €0.50 per minute.
- ➔ Recharge cards are sold at most *tabacs* and newsagents.
- ➔ SIMs are available at the ubiquitous outlets run by France's three mobile-phone companies, **Bouygues** ([www.bouyguestelecom.fr](http://www.bouyguestelecom.fr)), **Orange** ([www.orange.com](http://www.orange.com)) and **SFR** ([www.sfr.com](http://www.sfr.com)).

### Phone Codes

- ➔ **Calling France from abroad** Dial your country's international access code, then 33 (France's country code), then the 10-digit local number *without* the initial zero.
- ➔ **Calling internationally from France** Dial 00 (the international access code), the *indicatif* (country code), the area code (without the initial zero if there is one) and the local number. Some country codes are posted in public telephones.
- ➔ **Directory enquiries** For *public service des renseignements* (directory enquiries) dial 11 87 12 (€1.46 per call, plus €0.45 per minute), or use the service for free online at [www.118712.fr](http://www.118712.fr).
- ➔ **Emergency numbers** Can be dialled from public phones without a phonocard.
- ➔ **Hotel calls** Hotels, *gîtes*, hostels and *chambres d'hôte* are free to meter their calls as they like. The surcharge is usually around €0.30 per minute but can be higher.
- ➔ **International directory enquiries** For numbers outside France, dial 11 87 00 (€2 to €3 per call).



## Phonecards

- ➔ For explanations in English and other languages on how to use a public telephone, push the button engraved with a two-flags icon.
- ➔ For both international and domestic calling, most public phones operate using either a credit card or two kinds of *télécartes* (phonecards): *cartes à puce* (cards with a magnetic chip) issued by Orange (formerly France Télécom) and sold at post offices for €8 or €15; and *cartes à code* (cards where you dial a free access number and then the card's scratch-off code), sold at *tabacs*, newsagents and post offices.
- ➔ Phonecards with codes offer *much* better international rates than Orange chip cards or Country Direct services (for which you are billed at home by your long-distance carrier).
- ➔ The shop you buy a phonecard from should be able to tell you which type is best for the country you want to call. Using phonecards from a home phone is much cheaper than using them from public phones or mobile phones.

## TOILETS

Public toilets around France are signposted WC or *toilettes*. These range from spiffy 24-hour mechanical self-cleaning toilets costing around €0.50 to hole-in-the-floor *toilettes à la turque* (squat toilets) at older establishments and motorway stops. In the most basic places you may need to supply your own paper.

The French are more blasé about unisex toilets than elsewhere, so save your blushes when tiptoeing past the urinals to reach the ladies' loo.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

Almost every city, town, village and hamlet has a clearly signposted *office de tourisme* (government-run tourist office) or *syndicat d'initiative* (tourist office run by local merchants). Both can supply you with local maps as well as details on accommodation, restaurants and activities such as walking, cycling or wine tasting. Useful websites:

- ➔ **French Government Tourist Office** ([www.franceguide.com](http://www.franceguide.com)) The low-down on

sights, activities, transport and special-interest holidays in all of France's regions. Brochures can be downloaded online. There are links to country-specific websites.

- ➔ **Réseau National des Destinations Départementales** ([www.fncdt.net](http://www.fncdt.net)) Listing of CRT (regional tourist board) websites.

## TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

While France presents evident challenges for *handicapés* (people with disabilities) – namely cobblestone, cafe-lined streets that are a nightmare to navigate in a wheelchair, a lack of curb ramps, older public facilities and many budget hotels without lifts – you can still enjoy travelling here with a little careful planning.

Whether you are looking for wheelchair-friendly accommodation, sights, attractions or restaurants, these associations and agencies can help:

- ➔ **Association des Paralysés de France** (APF; [www.apf.asso.fr](http://www.apf.asso.fr)) National organisation for people with disabilities, with offices throughout France.
- ➔ **Tourisme et Handicaps** ([www.tourisme-handicaps.org](http://www.tourisme-handicaps.org)) Issues the 'Tourisme et Handicap' label to tourist sites, restaurants and hotels that comply with strict accessibility and usability standards. Different symbols indicate the sort of access afforded to people with physical, mental, hearing and/or visual disabilities.

## VISAS

For up-to-date details on visa requirements, see the website of the **Ministère des Affaires Étrangères** (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en)) and click 'Coming to France'. Visas are not required for EU nationals or citizens of Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, and are required only for stays greater than 90 days for citizens of Australia, the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and many Latin American countries.



# Language

The sounds used in spoken French can almost all be found in English. There are a couple of exceptions: nasal vowels (represented in our pronunciation guides by **o** or **u** followed by an almost inaudible nasal consonant sound **m**, **n** or **ng**), the 'funny' **u** (**ew** in our guides) and the deep-in-the-throat **r**. Bearing these few points in mind and reading our pronunciation guides below as if they were English, you'll be understood just fine.

## BASICS

<b>Hello.</b>	<i>Bonjour.</i>	bon-zhoor
<b>Goodbye.</b>	<i>Au revoir.</i>	o-rer-vwa
<b>Yes./No.</b>	<i>Oui./Non.</i>	wee/non
<b>Excuse me.</b>	<i>Excusez-moi.</i>	ek-skew-zay-mwa
<b>Sorry.</b>	<i>Pardon.</i>	par-don
<b>Please.</b>	<i>S'il vous plaît.</i>	seel voo play
<b>Thank you.</b>	<i>Merci.</i>	mair-see

### You're welcome.

*De rien.* der ree-en

### Do you speak English?

*Parlez-vous anglais?* par-lay-voov ong-glay

### I don't understand.

*Je ne comprends pas.* zher ner kom-pron pa

### How much is this?

*C'est combien?* say kom-byun

## ACCOMMODATION

### Do you have any rooms available?

*Est-ce que vous avez des chambres libres?* es-ker voo za-vay day shom-brer lee-brer

### How much is it per night/person?

*Quel est le prix par nuit/personne?* kel ay ler pree par nwee/per-son

## DIRECTIONS

### Can you show me (on the map)?

*Pouvez-vous m'indiquer (sur la carte)?* poo-vay-voov mun-dee-kay (sewr la kart)

### Where's ...?

*Où est ...?* oo ay ...

## EATING & DRINKING

### What would you recommend?

*Qu'est-ce que vous conseillez?* kes-ker voo kon-say-yay

### I'd like ..., please.

*Je voudrais ..., s'il vous plaît.* zher voo-dray ... seel voo play

### I'm a vegetarian.

*Je suis végétarien/ végétarienne.* zher swee vay-zhay-ta-ryun/ vay-zhay-ta-ryen (m/f)

### Please bring the bill.

*Apportez-moi l'addition, s'il vous plaît.* a-por-tay-mwa la-dee-syon seel voo play

## EMERGENCIES

### Help!

*Au secours!* o skoor

### I'm lost.

*Je suis perdu/perdue.* zhe swee-pair-dew (m/f)

## Want More?

For in-depth language information and handy phrases, check out Lonely Planet's *French Phrasebook*. You'll find it at [shop.lonelyplanet.com](http://shop.lonelyplanet.com), or you can buy Lonely Planet's iPhone phrasebooks at the Apple App Store.

windscreen  
pare-brise  
par-breez

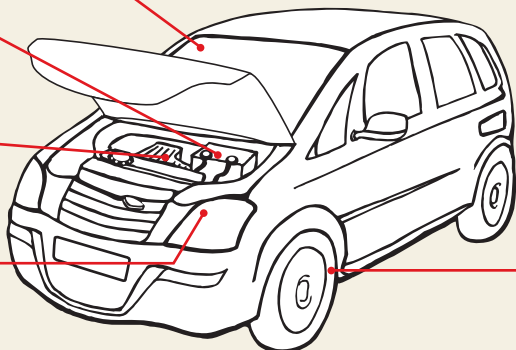


petrol  
essence  
es-son

battery  
batterie  
ba-tree

engine  
moteur  
mo-ter

headlight  
phare  
far



tyre  
pneu  
pner

## Signs

<b>Cédez la Priorité</b>	Give Way
<b>Sens Interdit</b>	No Entry
<b>Entrée</b>	Entrance
<b>Péage</b>	Toll
<b>Sens Unique</b>	One Way
<b>Sortie</b>	Exit

### Does that include insurance?

Est-ce que l'assurance  
est comprise? es-ker la-sew-rons  
ay kom-preez

### Does that include mileage?

Est-ce que le kilométrage  
est compris? es-ker ler kee-lo-may-trazh  
ay kom-pree

### What's the speed limit?

Quelle est la vitesse  
maximale permise? kel ay la vee-tes  
mak-see-mal per-meez

### Is this the road to ...?

C'est la route pour ...? say la root poor ...

### Can I park here?

Est-ce que je peux  
stationner ici? es-ker zher per  
sta-syo-nay ee-see

### Where's a service station?

Où est-ce qu'il y a une  
station-service? oo es-keel ya ewn  
sta-syon-ser-vees

### Please fill it up.

Le plein, s'il vous plaît. ler plun seel voo play

### I'd like (20) litres.

Je voudrais (vingt)  
litres. zher voo-dray (vung)  
lee-trer

### Please check the oil/water.

Contrôlez l'huile/l'eau,  
s'il vous plaît. kon-tro-lay lweel/lo  
seel voo play

### I need a mechanic.

J'ai besoin d'un  
mécanicien. zhay ber-zwun dun  
may-ka-nee-syun

### The car/motorbike has broken down.

La voiture/moto est  
tombée en panne. la vwa-tewr/mo-to ay  
tom-bay on pan

### I had an accident.

J'ai eu un accident. zhay ew un ak-see-don

### I'm ill.

Je suis malade. zher swee ma-lad

### Call the police!

Appelez la police! a-play la po-lees

### Call a doctor!

Appelez un médecin! a-play un mayd-sun

## ON THE ROAD

I'd like to hire a/an ... Je voudrais louer ... zher voo-dray loo-way ...

**4WD** un quatre-quatre un kat-kat

**automatic/  
manual** une auto-  
matique/  
manuel ewn o-to-  
ma-teek/  
ma-nwel

**motorbike** une moto ewn mo-to

### How much is it daily/weekly?

Quel est le tarif par  
jour/semaine? kel ay ler ta-reef par  
zhoor/ser-men

# BEHIND THE SCENES

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Front (clockwise from top):  
The medieval fortress

of Carcassonne, Luigi Vaccarella/4Corners; Vase of sunflowers on a table with an antique chair, Barbara Van Zanten/Lonely Planet Images; A red Citroën 2CV car, Ruairidh Stewart/Corbis  
Back: Rows of lavender in bloom, Provence, David Tomlinson/Lonely Planet Images.









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## OUR WRITERS



### OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end –

broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.



**Oliver Berry** My first trip to France was a family holiday to Provence at the age of two, and I've been back many times since while working on Lonely Planet's bestselling *France* guide. I've covered nearly every corner of L'Hexagone on my travels, but I have an especially soft spot for Corsica and the Pyrenees. When not in France, I can usually be found wandering the beaches and cliff-tops of my home county, Cornwall. I'm also a regular contributor to many other websites, newspapers and magazines, including *Lonely Planet Traveller*. Check out my latest travels at [www.oliverberry.com](http://www.oliverberry.com).

**My Favourite Trip** **32** **Pyrenees** I'm a sucker for wild places, and they don't get much wilder than the snow-dusted mountains and quiet valleys of the Pyrenees.

Read more about Oliver at: [lonelyplanet.com/members/oliverberry](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/oliverberry)



**Stuart Butler** My first encounters with southwest France came on family holidays. When I was older I spent every summer surfing off the beaches of the southwest until one day I found myself so hooked on the region that I was unable to leave – I've been here ever since. When not writing for Lonely Planet I hunt for uncharted surf on remote coastlines. The results of these trips appear frequently in the world's surf media. My website is [www.stuartbutlerjournalist.com](http://www.stuartbutlerjournalist.com).

**My Favourite Trip** **33** **Basque Country** I'd never tire of driving this route; bumping between postcard-pretty villages, strolling Biarritz' waterfront and clambering around the Pyrenean foothills.

Read more about Stuart at: [lonelyplanet.com/members/stuartbutler](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/stuartbutler)

## ← MORE WRITERS

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Paper in this book is certified against the Forest Stewardship Council™ standards. FSC™ promotes environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.





**Jean-Bernard Carillet** As a Paris-based (and Metz-born) journalist and photographer, I was delighted to rediscover my own turf. For this Lonely Planet title I couldn't resist the temptation of exploring Burgundy and Beaujolais, if only to sample some of the best wines in the world. I confess a penchant for the Meursault whites (in Burgundy) and the Fleurie reds (in Beaujolais).

**My Favourite Trip** **8** **Monet's Normandy**

As a Parisian, I regularly set off to coastal Normandy (favourite area: Côte d'Albâtre) to savour a seafood platter.



**Gregor Clark** My first epic French road trip came on Bastille Day at age 20. Nearly broke and hitchhiking towards my next fruit-picking job, I landed a 400km lift from a lost tourist and proceeded to spend the night winding through the fireworks-lit streets of every little village in Haute-Provence. To this day, I love nothing better than aimlessly wandering France's back roads in search of hidden villages and unexpected treasures. I contribute regularly to Lonely Planet's European and South American guidebooks.

**My Favourite Trip** **18** **Foothills of the Alps**

for the landscape's beautiful transition from the high-mountain greenery of the Vercors to the arid majesty of the Verdon.

Read more about Gregor at: [lonelyplanet.com/members/gregorclark](https://lonelyplanet.com/members/gregorclark)



**Donna Wheeler** I've been visiting France for many years, but I really got to know the south when living just over the border in Turin. I'm the author of several Lonely Planet guidebooks and have published elsewhere on art, architecture and design, history, and food. I'm also a creative consultant and travel experience planner. My Australian childhood was one epic coastal road trip, hunting down the best swimming spots and seafood dinners – something that stood me in good stead for this assignment.

**My Favourite Trip** **28** **The Camargue**

for the wonderful, wayward city of Arles and the wetlands' untamed viridian beauty.



**Nicola Williams** Originally from Britain, I've lived in France for over a decade. From my hillside house on the southern shore of Lake Geneva, it's a quick and easy motor to the Alps (call me a ski fiend...), Paris (art buff...), southern France (foodie...). For this Lonely Planet title I clocked up 2500km – all at a graceful average speed of 38km/h – on the island of Corsica. I blog at [tripalong.wordpress.com](http://tripalong.wordpress.com) and tweet @Tripalong.

**My Favourite Trip** **26** **Southern Seduction**

**en Corse** The dramatic contrasts in landscape, peaking with that cinematic hike down Bonifacio's Escalier du Roi d'Aragon to the sea's edge, get me every time.

Read more about Donna at: [lonelyplanet.com/members/donnawheeler](https://lonelyplanet.com/members/donnawheeler)

Read more about Nicola at: [lonelyplanet.com/members/nicolawilliams](https://lonelyplanet.com/members/nicolawilliams)

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