

France

She might be a grand old dame in many ways, but *douce France* (sweet France) is still one of the belles of the European ball. Even if you've never set foot on French soil, it's a place that already seems familiar – every time you've gazed at an impressionist painting, watched a New Wave film or sipped sparkling champagne, you've been letting a little bit of Gallic flair seep into your soul.

It's certainly a place where you can enjoy the finer things in life, whether that means wandering around one of France's world-class museums or sitting down to indulge in some of the fabulous cuisine for which the country is justly famous. But modern-day France is a real melting pot, shot through with streaks of Celtic, Basque and North African culture, as well as a reputation for artistic invention and a fondness for the architectural avant-garde. At times, it can make for a volatile mix – something that was clearly demonstrated during the innercity riots and student demonstrations that swept the country in 2005 and 2006.

But with so much history, culture and *joie de vivre* behind her, France always finds her feet again before too long. From the broad boulevards of Paris to the grand chateaux of the Loire Valley, this is the country for which the word 'chic' was invented – seductive and aloof, old-fashioned and forward-looking, enthralling and exasperating in equal measures, but always characterised by a certain *je ne sais quoi*.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 551,000 sq km
- **Capital** Paris
- **Currency** euro (€); A\$1 = €0.60; ¥100 = €0.67; NZ\$1 = €0.50; UK£1 = €1.48; US\$1 = €0.78
- **Famous for** croissants, cheese, the Eiffel Tower, strikes, terrible driving
- **Official Language** French
- **Phrases** *merci* (thank you); *parlez-vous Anglais?* (do you speak English?); *excusez-moi* (excuse me); *s'il vous plaît* (please)
- **Population** 60.2 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 33; international access code ☎ 00



HIGHLIGHTS

- Delve into the delights of France's unforgettable capital, **Paris** (p207).
- Catch some surf along the coast around **Biarritz** (p271).
- Hit the wine trail in **Burgundy** (p276) or **Bordeaux** (p266).
- Indulge your senses (and your stomach) on the **Côte d'Azur** (p304).
- Escape the crowds in the spectacular surroundings of the **Jura** (p294).

ITINERARIES

- **One week** First stop has to be Paris, the unique and utterly unmissable City of Lights, with its grand streets, chichi boutiques and cultural sights. You'll only have time to scratch the surface in a week, but whatever you do make sure you've ticked off Notre Dame, the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, Montmartre and of course the Eiffel Tower before you leave. Then for the rest of the week you'll have time for day trips to Versailles, Chartres and possibly Rouen.
- **Two weeks** After Paris, the rest of France is your oyster – so hop on a TGV (*trains à grande vitesse*; high-speed train) and head for whichever region most takes your fancy. The Loire Valley is crammed with some of the country's finest chateaux, while the Dordogne is littered with fabulous prehistoric cave art. If it's Gallic gastronomy you're after, then make a beeline for the vineyards of Burgundy and the Côte d'Or before swinging south for the French Riviera and the streetside restaurants of Nice and Marseille. And if you're just looking to get away from it all, the clifftops of Brittany, the mountains of the Alps and the beaches of Corsica are just crying out to be explored.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

France's climate is generally temperate and mild except in mountainous areas. The Atlantic brings rain and wind to the northwest. The pleasant Mediterranean climate extends from the southern coast as far inland as the southern Alps, the Massif Central and the eastern Pyrenees, but the mistral winds can sometimes bring sudden storms and heavy showers.

The country is at its best in spring. Summer can be baking hot, especially in the south

HOW MUCH?

- **Bottle of table wine** €4
- **Half-/full-day bicycle hire** €10/15
- **Restaurant meal** €20-30
- **Espresso** €0.90
- **Public transport ticket** €1.40

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** €1.30
- **1L bottled water** €0.80
- **25cL beer – at a bar** €3.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt** €10
- **Crepe** €2

away from the coast. Even Paris can swelter in July and August. It can also be a crowded, traffic-choked and expensive time to travel, especially around the Mediterranean. Autumn by contrast is mellow and pleasant everywhere, and swimming and sunbathing are often viable until October. Winter provides excellent winter sport opportunities in the mountains.

HISTORY

Prehistory

Neanderthals were the first to live in France (about 90,000 to 40,000 BC). Cro-Magnons followed 35,000 years ago and left behind cave paintings and engravings, especially around the Vézère Valley (p275). Neolithic people (about 7500 to 4000 years ago) created France's incredible *menhirs* (standing stones) and *dolmens* (monolithic tombs), best seen around Carnac in Brittany (p251).

The Celtic Gauls arrived between 1500 and 500 BC. They were superseded by the Romans for around five centuries after Julius Caesar took control around 52 BC, until the Franks (thus the name 'France') and the Alemanni overran the country from the east.

The Frankish Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties ruled from the 5th to the 10th century AD. In 732 Charles Martel defeated the Moors, preventing France from falling under Muslim rule. Martel's grandson, Charlemagne (742–814), extended the power and boundaries of the kingdom and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800.

The Early French Kings

The tale of how William the Conqueror and his Norman forces occupied England in 1066 (making Normandy and, later, England, a formidable rival of France) is told in the Bayeux Tapestry (p245). The rivalry between France and England lasted three centuries, reaching its height during the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453).

Following the occupation of Paris by the English allied dukes of Burgundy, John Plantagenet was made regent of France on behalf of England's King Henry VI in 1422. Less than a decade later he was crowned king at Paris' Notre Dame (p214).

Luckily for the French, a 17-year-old warrior called Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc) came

along in 1429. She persuaded Charles VII that she had a divine mission from God to expel the English from France and bring about Charles' coronation in Reims. Following her capture by the Burgundians and subsequent sale to the English in 1430, Joan was convicted of witchcraft and heresy and burned at the stake in Rouen, on the site now marked by the city's cathedral (p244).

The arrival of Italian Renaissance culture during the reign of François I (r 1515–47) saw the construction of some of France's finest chateaux, especially in the Loire Valley (p254).

The 30-year period from 1562 to 1598 was one of the bloodiest periods in French history. Ideological disagreement between



the Huguenots (French Protestants) and the Catholic monarchy escalated into full-scale war – a conflict known as the Wars of Religion.

The Sun King

Louis XIV, Le Roi Soleil (Sun King) ascended the throne in 1643, and spent the next sixty years in a series of wars that gained territory, terrified neighbours and nearly bankrupted the treasury. He also constructed the fabulous palace at Versailles (p228).

Louis XV ascended to the throne in 1715 and shifted the royal court back to Paris. As the 18th century progressed, the *ancien régime* (old order) became increasingly out of step with the needs of the country. Antiestablishment and anticlerical ideas expressed by Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu further threatened the royal regime.

Revolution to Republic

Social and economic crisis marked the 18th century. The general mood of discontent among the French populace, and Louis' refusal to address their concerns, flared into violence when a Parisian mob stormed the prison at Bastille (now a busy roundabout; p216). France was declared a constitutional monarchy but before long, the moderate republican Girondins lost power to the radical Jacobins. Louis XVI was publicly guillotined in January 1793 on Paris' place de la Concorde (p216).

The Reign of Terror between September 1793 and July 1794 saw religious freedoms revoked, churches closed, cathedrals turned into 'Temples of Reason' and thousands beheaded. In the chaos a dashing young Corsican general named Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) stepped from the shadows.

Napoleon Bonaparte

In 1799 Napoleon assumed power and in 1804 Pope Pius VII crowned him emperor of France at Notre Dame. Napoleon waged several wars in which France gained control over most of Europe. Two years later, Allied armies entered Paris, exiled Napoleon to Elba and restored the House of Bourbon to the French throne at the Congress of Vienna (1814–15).

In 1815 Napoleon escaped, entering Paris on 20 May. His glorious 'Hundred Days' back in power ended with the Battle of

Waterloo and his exile to the island of St-Helena, where he died in 1821.

Second Republic to Second Empire

The subsequent years were marked by civil strife and political unrest, with monarchists and revolutionaries vying for power. Louis-Philippe (r 1830–48), a constitutional monarch, was subsequently chosen by parliament, only to be ousted by the 1848 Revolution. The Second Republic was established and Napoleon's nephew, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, was elected president. But in 1851 Louis Napoleon led a coup d'état and proclaimed himself Emperor Napoleon III of the Second Empire (1852–70).

France enjoyed significant economic growth at this time. Paris was transformed under urban planner Baron Haussmann (1809–91) who, among other things, created the 12 huge boulevards radiating from the Arc de Triomphe (p216). But Napoleon III embroiled France in various catastrophic conflicts, including the Crimean War (1853–56) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), which ended with Prussia taking the emperor prisoner. Upon hearing the news, defiant Parisian masses took to the streets demanding a republic be declared – the Third Republic.

The Great War

A trip to the Somme (p243) battlefields goes some way to revealing the unimaginable human cost of WWI. Of the eight million French men called to arms, 1.3 million were killed and almost one million crippled. Much of the war took place in northeastern France – trench warfare using thousands of soldiers as cannon fodder to gain a few metres of territory.

WWII

In 1939, following the invasion of Poland, France joined Britain in declaring war on Germany. Despite constructing a lavish series of defences along its German border (the so-called Maginot Line), by June 1940 France had been overrun and surrendered. Germany divided France into an Occupied Zone (in the north and west) and a puppet state in the south, centred on the spa town of Vichy.

The British Army were driven from France during the Battle of Dunkirk (p242) in 1940. Four years later, on 6 June 1944, Allied forces stormed the coastline of Normandy (p243)

in the largest invasion ever mounted, now known as D-Day. The bloody Battle of Normandy followed and Paris was finally liberated on 25 August.

The Fourth Republic

In the first postwar election in 1945, the wartime leader of the Free French, Général Charles de Gaulle, was appointed head of the government, but quickly sensed that the tide was turning against him and in 1946 he resigned.

Progress rebuilding France's shattered economy and infrastructure was slow. By 1947 France was forced to turn to the USA for loans as part of the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe. The economy gathered steam in the 1950s but the decade marked the end of French colonialism in Vietnam and in Algeria. The Algerian War (1954–62) was particularly brutal, characterised by torture and massacre meted out to nationalist Algerians.

The Fifth Republic

De Gaulle assumed the presidency again in 1958 and drafted a new constitution – the Fifth Republic – which gave considerable powers to the president at the expense of the National Assembly.

Georges Pompidou (1911–74), prime minister under de Gaulle, stepped onto the podium as president and was followed by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (b 1926). In 1981 he was ousted by long-time head of the Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party), François Mitterrand (1916–96).

By 1986 the economy was weakening and in parliamentary elections that year the right-wing opposition led by Jacques Chirac (Paris mayor since 1977) won a majority in the National Assembly.

Presidential elections in 1995 ushered in Jacques Chirac, who was re-elected with an overwhelming majority in 2002 (hardly surprising considering his opponent was the National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen).

In May 2005, a national referendum on the European Constitution was rejected by French voters, causing huge embarrassment to the government, and placing a considerable question mark over the country's pro-European future.

In October and November 2005, the country was rocked by several weeks of running battles between police and gangs of young

people across France. The riots were sparked by the deaths of two teenagers of North African descent who were electrocuted while attempting to hide from the police, and began in the poor, ethnically diverse *banlieue* (suburbs) of Paris, but quickly spread to several of the country's major cities.

More recently, in early 2006, huge student demonstrations hit the streets in protest against a law designed to shake up France's rigidly protected labour market. After several weeks of unrest, the government was forced into an embarrassing U-turn, and the proposed legislation was shelved, leaving the continuing question of France's high unemployment rate (at the time of writing one of the worst in Europe) unanswered.

PEOPLE

France is relatively sparsely populated – 107 people inhabit every square kilometre – although 20% of the national population is packed into the Paris area.

The last 10 years have seen rural and suburban areas steadily gaining population; and Paris and the northeast (except Alsace) losing inhabitants to southern France, where populations are predicted to rise by 30% over the next 30 years.

For much of the last two centuries, the birth-rate in France has been steadily falling, but that trend now seems to have reversed. By 2050 the population of mainland France is expected to reach 64 million – five million more than in 2000.

Multicultural France has always drawn immigrants from the rest of Europe and its former colonies, especially those in North Africa. Immigrants today form 7.4% (4.3 million) of the population yet only 36% have French citizenship, which is not conferred automatically at birth. Racial tensions – so clearly on display during the 2005 riots – are fuelled by the extreme-right Front National (National Front), headed by the politician Jean-Marie Le Pen.

RELIGION

Since the Revolution, secular France has maintained a rigid distinction between church and state. Some 55% of French identify themselves as Catholic, but no more than 10% attend church regularly. Another one million are Protestant, while France's Muslim community is around 5 million. Over

half of France's 600,000-strong Jewish population (Europe's largest) lives in and around Paris.

ARTS Literature

France has made huge contributions to European literature. The philosophical work of Voltaire (1694–1778), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, dominated the 18th century. A century later the poems and novels of Victor Hugo – *Les Misérables* and *Notre Dame de Paris* (The Hunchback of Notre Dame) among them – became landmarks of French Romanticism.

In 1857 two literary landmarks were published: *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert (1821–80) and Charles Baudelaire's collection of poems, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil). Émile Zola (1840–1902) meanwhile strove to convert novel-writing from an art to a science in his series, *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

Symbolists Paul Verlaine (1844–96) and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98) aimed to express mental states through their poetry. Verlaine's poems, with those of Arthur Rimbaud (1854–91) are seen as French literature's first modern poems.

After WWII, the existentialist movement developed around the lively debates of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) and Albert Camus (1913–60) over coffee and cigarettes in Paris' Left Bank cafés.

Contemporary authors include Françoise Sagan, Pascal Quignard, Jean Auel, Emmanuel Carrère and Stéphane Bourguignon. Also popular are Frédéric Dard (alias San Antonio), Léo Malet and Daniel Pennac.

Cinema

Cinematographic pioneers, the Lumière brothers, shot the world's first-ever motion picture in March 1895 and French film flourished in the following decades. The post-WWII *nouvelle vague* (New Wave) filmmakers, such as Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, pioneered the advent of modern cinema, using fractured narratives, documentary camerawork and highly personal subjects.

Big-name stars, slick production values and nostalgia were the dominant motifs in the 1980s, as filmmakers switched to

costume dramas, comedies and 'heritage movies'. Claude Berri's depiction of pre-war Provence in *Jean de Florette* (1986), Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990) and *Bon Voyage* (2003), set in 1940s Paris – all starring France's best-known (and biggest-nosed) actor Gérard Depardieu – found huge audiences in France and abroad.

Two of France's most recent cinematic successes couldn't be more different. *La Haine* (1995) directed by Mathieu Kassovitz, documented the bleak reality of life in the Parisian suburbs, and looks even more relevant in the wake of the recent ethnic riots. At the other end of the spectrum, *Le Fabuleux Destin de Amélie Poulain* (*Amélie*; 2001) is a feel-good story about a Parisian do-gooder, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, and was a massive international hit.

Music

There's more to French music than accordions and Édith Piaf.

French musical luminaries – Charles Gounod (1818–93), César Franck (1822–90) and *Carmen*-creator Georges Bizet (1838–75) among them – were a dime a dozen in the 19th century. Claude Debussy (1862–1918) revolutionised classical music with *Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun); while Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) peppered his work, including *Boléro*, with sensuousness and tonal colour.

Jazz hit 1920s Paris, which post-WWI hoisted the likes of Sidney Bechet, Kenny Clarke, Bud Powell and Dexter Gordon.

The *chanson française* (a tradition dating from the troubadours of the Middle Ages) was revived in the 1930s by Piaf and Charles Trenet. In the 1950s the Left Bank cabarets nurtured *chansonniers* (cabaret singers) such as Léo Ferré, Georges Brassens, Claude Nougaro, Jacques Brel and Serge Gainsbourg.

French pop music has evolved massively since the 1960s *yéyé* (imitative rock) days of Johnny Hallyday. Particularly strong is world music, from Algerian *rai* and other North African music (artists include Natacha Atlas) to Senegalese *mbalax* (Youssou N'Dour) and West Indian *zouk* (Kassav, Zouk Machine). One musician who combines many of these elements is Paris-born Manu Chao.

Another hot musical export is Parisian electronic music from bands such as Daft

Punk and Air. French rap was spearheaded in the 1990s by Senegal-born Paris-reared rapper MC Solaar, and today is a popular genre in its own right; hard-core rappers include Parisian heavyweights Booba of Senegalese origin and Rohff (whose fourth album, *Au delà de mes Limites*, released in 2005, sold 30,000 copies in the first week).

And for some inexplicable reason, the French still absolutely *love* Johnny Hallyday. Go figure.

Architecture

Southern France is the place to find France's Gallo-Roman legacy, especially at the Pont du Gard (p319), and the amphitheatres in Nîmes (p318) and Arles (p304).

Several centuries later, architects adopted Gallo-Roman motifs in *roman* (Romanesque) masterpieces such as Poitiers' Église Notre Dame la Grande (p263).

Impressive 12th-century Gothic structures include Avignon's massive pontifical palace (p303), the seminal cathedral at Chartres (p229), and of course, Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris (p214).

Under Napoleon, many of Paris' best-known sights – the Arc de Triomphe, the Arc du Carrousel at the Louvre and the Assemblée Nationale building – were designed.

Art Nouveau (1850–1910) combined iron, brick, glass and ceramics in new ways. See it for yourself at Paris' metro entrances and in the Musée d'Orsay (p210).

French political leaders have long sought to immortalise themselves by building public edifices. Georges Pompidou commissioned the once-reviled – now much-revered – Centre Beaubourg (p215) in Paris while François Mitterrand commissioned several contemporary architectural landmarks, including IM Pei's glass pyramid (p215) at the Louvre.

Painting

An extraordinary flowering of artistic talent occurred in 19th- and 20th-century France. The impressionists, who endeavoured to capture the ever-changing aspects of reflected light, included Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

They were followed by the likes of Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin and Georges Seurat. A little later the Fauves, the most famous of

whom was Henri Matisse, became known for their radical use of vibrant colour. France was also where cubism was pioneered, principally by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

France, Western Europe's largest country, is hugged by water or mountains along each side except its northeastern boundary, a relatively flat frontier abutting Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium. Inland, five major river systems cross the country.

Europe's highest peak, Mt Blanc (4807m), spectacularly tops the French Alps which stagger along France's eastern border from Lake Geneva to the Côte d'Azur. North of Lake Geneva the gentle Jura Range runs along the Swiss frontier, while the rugged Pyrenees lace France's 450km-long border with Spain.

The ancient Massif Central covers one-sixth (91,000 sq km) of the country and is renowned for its chain of extinct volcanoes.

Wildlife

France is blessed with a rich variety of flora and fauna, with more mammals (around 110) than any other country in Europe. Couple this with its 363 bird species, 30 amphibian types, 36 varieties of reptiles and 72 kinds of fish, and wildlife watchers are in paradise.

The Alps and Pyrenees shelter the marmot, the nimble chamois (mountain antelope) and the *bouquetin* (Alpine ibex). Red and roe deer and wild boar are common in lower-altitude forested areas.

The wolf, which disappeared from France in the 1930s, was seen in the Parc National du Mercantour in 1992. The brown bear disappeared from the Alps in the mid-1930s. The 300-odd bears living in the Pyrenees at that time have dwindled to one orphaned cub following the controversial shooting of its mother – the last female bear of Pyrenean stock – by a hunter in 2004. However another 12 to 18 bears of Slovenian origin also call the Pyrenees home.

National Parks

The proportion of land protected in France is low relative to the country's size: six small *parcs nationaux* (national parks) fully protect just 0.8% of the country. Another 7%

is protected by 42 *parcs naturels régionaux* (regional parks) and a further 0.4% by 136 smaller *réserves naturelles* (nature reserves).

Environmental Issues

Summer forest fires are an annual hazard. Wetlands, essential for the survival of a great number of species, are shrinking. More than two million hectares – 3% of French territory – are considered important wetlands, but only 4% of this land is protected.

France generates around 80% of its electricity from nuclear power stations – the highest ratio in the world – with the rest coming from carbon-fuelled power stations and renewable resources (mainly wind farms and hydro-electric dams).

FOOD & DRINK Staples & Specialities

France is rightly renowned across the world for its cuisine. There's an enormous range of cuisine that can be broadly classed as 'French', from the rich, classic dishes of Burgundy, Périgord, Lyon and Normandy to the Mediterranean flavours of Provence, Languedoc and Corsica. Broadly speaking, the hot south tends to favour olive oil, garlic and tomatoes, while the cooler north favours cream and butter. Coastal areas specialise in mussels, oysters and saltwater fish. Wherever you choose to eat, one thing's for sure – you certainly won't go hungry.

Nothing is more French than *pain* (bread). More than 80% of all French people eat it at every meal. The classic French bread is the long, thin baguette (and the similar but fatter *flûtes*), but there are countless other varieties.

France has nearly 500 varieties of *fromage* (cheese). The choice on offer at a *fromagerie* (cheese shop) can be overwhelming, but *fromagers* (cheese merchants) always allow you to sample and are usually happy to advise.

Traditionally charcuterie is made only from pork, though a number of other meats – from beef and veal to chicken and goose – are used in making sausages, blood puddings, hams and other cured and salted meats. Pâtés, terrines and *rillettes* (potted meats) are essentially charcuterie and are prepared in many different ways.

The traditional French breakfast is usually coffee, French bread and jam, occasionally accompanied by a croissant or a *pain au*

chocolat (chocolate croissant). Meats, yogurts, cereals and fresh fruit are also sometimes eaten at breakfast.

Drinks

There are dozens of wine-producing regions throughout France, but the principal regions are Alsace, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, Languedoc-Roussillon, the Loire region and the Rhône. Areas such as Burgundy comprise many well-known districts, including Chablis, Beaujolais and Mâcon, while Bordeaux encompasses Médoc, St-Émilion and Sauternes among many others.

The *bière à la pression* (draft beer) is served by the *demi* (about 33cL). Northern France and Alsace produce some excellent local beers.

The most popular nonalcoholic beverages consumed in France are coffee and mineral water. If you prefer tap water rather than bottled water, ask for *une carafe d'eau* (a jug of water).

The most common coffee is espresso. A small espresso, served without milk, is called *un café noir*, *un express* or simply *un café*. *Café crème* is espresso with steamed milk or cream.

Where to Eat & Drink BISTROS & BRASSERIES

A bistro (often spelled *bistrot*) can be simply a pub or bar with snacks and light meals, or a fully fledged restaurant. Brasseries – which can look very much like cafés – serve full meals, drinks and coffee from morning till late at night.

RESTAURANTS

The restaurant comes in many guises. Generally they specialise in a particular variety of food (eg regional, traditional, Vietnamese). You can generally get an excellent French meal for under €30.

Restaurants almost always have a *carte* (menu) posted outside. Most offer at least one fixed-price, multicourse meal, known as a *menu* or *menu du jour* (daily menu). This usually offers an entrée, such as salad, pâté or soup; a main dish, including the *plat du jour* (daily special); and a final course (cheese or dessert).

Boissons (drinks) cost extra unless the *menu* says *boisson comprise* (drink included), in which case you may get a beer or a glass of

mineral water. If the *menu* has *vin compris* (wine included), you'll probably be served a 25cL *pichet* (jug) of house wine.

Vegetarians & Vegans

Vegetarians and vegans will have a tough time in many parts of France. Specialist vegetarian restaurants are few and far between, and most menus are still very meat-heavy, although vegetarian choices and *produits biologiques* (organic products) are becoming more and more common.

PARIS

pop 2.15 million

What can be said about the sexy, sophisticated City of Lights that hasn't already been said a thousand times before? Quite simply, this is one of the world's great metropolises, a trend-setter, market-leader and cultural capital for over a thousand years and still going strong. This is the place that gave the world the cancan and the cinematograph, a city that reinvented itself during the Renaissance, bopped to the beat of the Jazz Age and positively glittered during the *belle époque* (beautiful era). As you might expect, Paris is strewn with historic architecture, glorious galleries and cultural treasures galore, but the modern-day city is much more than just a museum piece. It's a heady hotchpotch of cultures and ideas – a place to stroll the boulevards, shop till you drop or just do as the Parisians do and watch the world buzz by from a streetside café. Savour every moment.

HISTORY

The Parisii, a tribe of Celtic Gauls, settled the Île de la Cité in the 3rd century BC. In 508 AD, Clovis I made Paris his seat in the newly united Gaul. Paris prospered during the Middle Ages and flourished during the Renaissance when many of city's most famous buildings were erected.

The excesses of Louis XVI and his queen, Marie-Antoinette, led to an uprising of Parisians on 14 July 1789 and the storming of the Bastille prison – kick-starting the French Revolution.

In 1851 Emperor Napoleon III oversaw the building of a more modern Paris, with wide boulevards, sculptured parks and a sewer system. Following the disastrous

Franco-Prussian War and the establishment of the Third Republic, Paris entered perhaps its most resplendent period, the *belle époque*, famed for its Art Nouveau architecture and artistic and scientific advances. By the 1930s, Paris had become a centre for the artistic avant-garde, an era cut short by the Nazi occupation of 1940–44.

The compact city centre is surrounded by the *banlieue*, a network of sprawling suburbs mostly occupied by Paris' ethnic communities. In late 2005, the city was rocked by violent clashes between police and angry youths from the *banlieue*; the violence spread to many other French cities and took several weeks to bring under control.

ORIENTATION

Central Paris is quite small: around 9.5km (north to south) by 11km (east to west). Excluding the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes, its total area is 105 sq km. The Seine River flows east–west through the city; the Rive Droite (Right Bank) is north of the river, while the Rive Gauche (Left Bank) is to the south.

Paris is divided into 20 *arrondissements* (districts), which spiral clockwise from the centre. City addresses always include the number of the *arrondissement*.

The city has 372 metro stations and there is almost always one within 500m of where you need to go.

INFORMATION Discount Cards

Carte Musées-Monuments (Museums-Monuments Card; ☎ 01 44 61 96 60; 1/3/5 days €18/36/54) Includes entry to some three dozen sights in Paris – including the Louvre, the Centre Pompidou and the Musée d'Orsay – and another 22 in the Île de France, including parts of the châteaux at Versailles. It's available from tourist offices, Fnac outlets, RATP information desks and major metro stations.

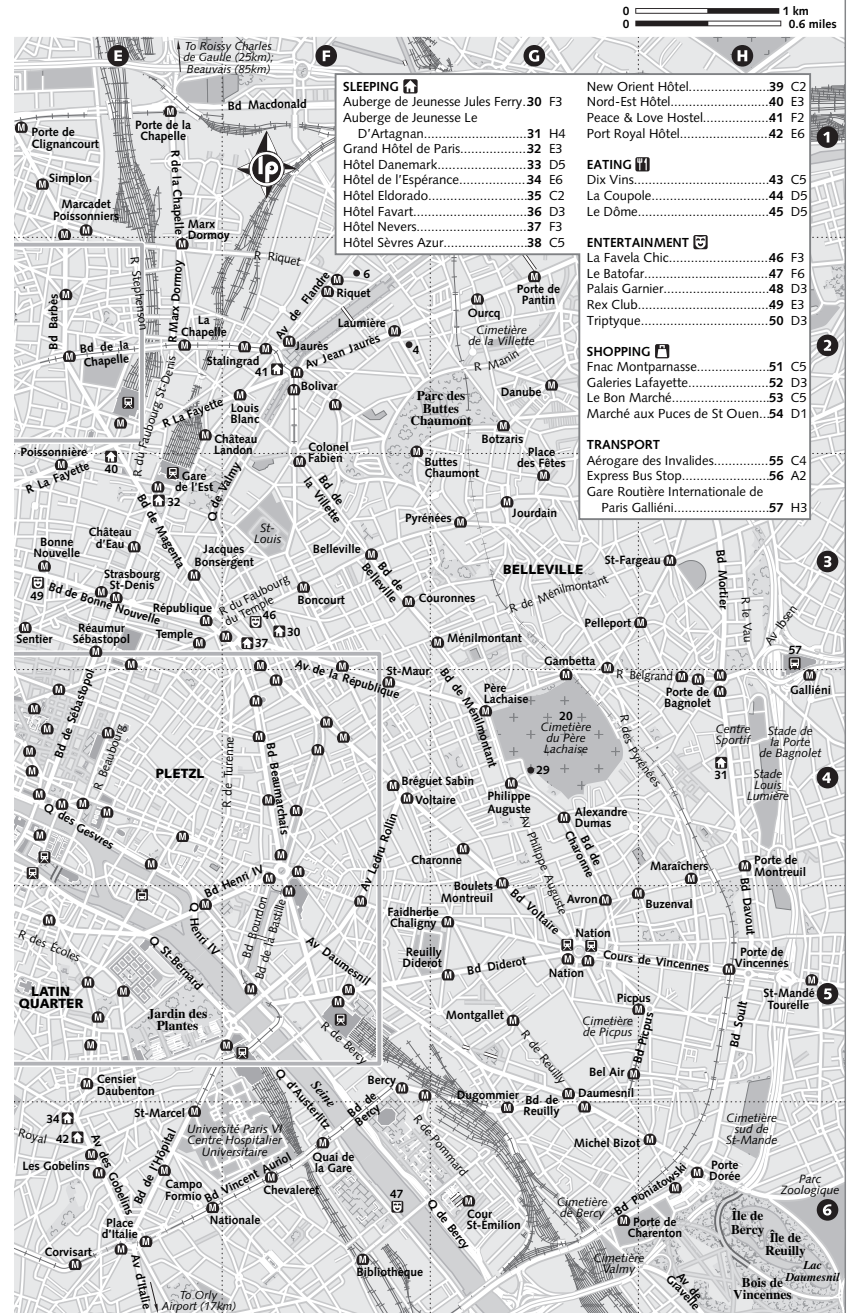
Internet Access

Phonecard-operated internet terminals are dotted all over Paris. A 120-unit *télécarte* buys two hours' connection while a 50-unit one is worth about 50 minutes.

Internet cafés are also liberally scattered around the city:

Cyber Cube (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 56 80 08 08; www.cybercube.fr; 9 rue d'Odessa, 14e; per min €0.15, per 5/10hr €30/40; ☎ 10am-10pm; M Montparnasse Bienvenue)

PARIS



Web 46 (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 40 27 02 89; 46 rue du Roi de Sicile, 4e; per 15/30/60min €2.50/4/7, 5hr €29; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Fri, to 9pm Sat, noon-midnight Sun; M St-Paul)

XS Arena Les Halles (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 40 13 02 60; 31 rue Sébastopol, 1er; per 1/2/3/4/5hr €3/6/8/10/11; ☎ 24hr; M Les Halles) Near the Forum des Halles.

XS Arena Luxembourg (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 43 44 55 55; 17 rue Soufflot, 5e; per 1/2/3/4/5hr €3/6/8/10/11; ☎ 24hr; M Luxembourg) Central branch of this internet-café chain.

Internet Resources

Metropole Paris (www.metropoleparis.com) Excellent online magazine in English.

Paris Pages (www.paris.org) Links to museums and cultural events.

Paris tourist office (www.parisinfo.com)

Laundry

There's a *laverie libre-service* (self-service laundrette) on every corner in Paris; your hotel or hostel can point you to one.

Medical Services

American Hospital (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 46 41 25 25; www.american-hospital.org; 63 blvd Victor Hugo, 92200 Neuilly-sur-Seine; M Pont de Levallois Bécon) Provides 24-hour emergency medical and dental care.

Hertford British Hospital (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 46 39 22 22; www.british-hospital.org; 3 rue Barbès, 92300 Levallois-Perret; M Anatole France)

Urgences Médicales de Paris (Paris Medical Emergencies; ☎ 01 53 94 94 94, 01 48 28 40 40) Runs 24-hour emergency house calls.

Money

Post offices with a Banque Postale offer the best exchange rates, and accept banknotes in various currencies as well as travellers cheques issued by Amex or Visa. *Bureaux de change* (currency-exchange offices) in Paris are usually faster, open longer and give better rates than commercial banks.

Post

Most *bureaux de poste* (post offices) in Paris are open 8am to 7pm weekdays and 8am or 9am till noon on Saturday. *Tabacs* (tobacconists) usually sell postage stamps.

Main post office (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 40 28 76 00; 52 rue du Louvre, 1er; ☎ 24hr; M Sentier or Les Halles) Opens round the clock for letters and poste restante mail. Other services, including currency exchange, are available during regular opening hours.

Tourist Information

Office de Tourisme et de Congrès de Paris (Paris Convention & Visitors Bureau; Map pp212-13; ☎ 08 92 68 30 00; www.parisinfo.com; 25-27 rue des Pyramides, 1er; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Jun-Oct, 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun Nov-May; M Pyramides) About 500m northwest of the Louvre.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Paris is generally a safe city, and you'll be fine if you employ some common sense. Stations that are best avoided at night include Châtelet-Les Halles; Château Rouge in Montmartre; Gare du Nord; Strasbourg St-Denis; Réaumur Sébastopol; and Montparnasse Bienvenüe. Women *do* travel alone on the metro at night, though not all who do so feel 100% comfortable.

Pickpocketing is a problem – notorious areas include Montmartre, Pigalle, the Forum des Halles, below the Eiffel Tower, and on the metro during rush hour.

SIGHTS Left Bank

EIFFEL TOWER

It's impossible to imagine Paris without its most famous landmark, the **Tour Eiffel** (Eiffel Tower; Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 44 11 23 23; www.tour-eiffel.fr; lifts to 1st/2nd/3rd platform €4.50/8/11, children 3-11yr €2.50/4.50/6, stairs to 1st & 2nd platforms €4; ☎ lifts 9.30am-11pm Sep-mid-Jun, 9am-midnight mid-Jun-Aug, stairs 9.30am-6pm Sep-mid-Jun, 9am-midnight mid-Jun-Aug; M Champ de Mars-Tour Eiffel or Bir Hakeim), but the 'metal asparagus', as some Parisians snidely called it, faced fierce opposition from Paris' artistic elite when it was built for the 1889 Exposition Universelle (World Fair). The tower was almost torn down in 1909, and was only saved by the new science of radiotelegraphy (it proved to be the perfect spot for transmitting antennas). The city should be thankful it's still standing – some 5.8 million people make their way to the top each year, and Paris just wouldn't be the same without it.

The **Jardins du Trocadéro** (Trocadero Gardens; Map pp208-9; M Trocadéro), whose fountains and statue garden are grandly illuminated at night, are accessible across Pont d'Iéna from the Eiffel Tower.

MUSÉE D'ORSAY

The **Musée d'Orsay** (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 40 49 48 14; www.musee-orsay.fr; 62 rue de Lille, 7e; adult/senior

& 18-25yr €7.50/5.50, under 18yr & 1st Sun of month free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Tue, Wed, Fri-Sun, to 9.45pm Thu; M Musée d'Orsay or Solférino), housed in a turn-of-the-century train station facing the Seine, displays France's national collection of paintings, sculptures and objets d'art produced between the 1840s and 1914. Many visitors head straight to the upper level to see the impressionist paintings by Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Sisley, Degas and Manet and the postimpressionist works by Cézanne, Van Gogh, Seurat and Matisse, but there's also lots to see on the ground floor, including some early works by Manet, Monet, Renoir and Pissarro. The middle level has some superb Art Nouveau rooms.

Tickets remain valid all day, so you can come and go as you please. The reduced entrance fee of €5.50 applies to everyone after 4.15pm (8pm on Thursday) and all day Sunday.

PANTHÉON

The domed landmark now known as the **Panthéon** (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 44 32 18 00; www.monum.fr; place du Panthéon, 5e; adult/18-25yr €7.50/5, under 18yr & 1st Sun Oct-Mar free; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 6.15pm Oct-Mar; M Luxembourg) was commissioned as an abbey church in 1750, and was completed in 1789. The crypt houses the tombs of Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, Jean Moulin and Nobel Prize-winner Marie Curie, among many others. Inside the Panthéon you'll find a working model of Foucault's Pendulum, which demonstrates the rotation of the earth; it wowed the scientific establishment when it was presented here in 1851.

CATACOMBES

The problems posed by Paris' overflowing cemeteries were solved in 1785 by exhuming the bones and storing them in the tunnels of three disused quarries. One, created in 1810, is now known as the **Catacombes** (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 43 22 47 63; www.catacombes.paris.fr; in French; 1 av Colonel Henri Roi-Tanguy, 14e; adult/senior & student/14-25yr €5/3.50/2.50, under 14 free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun; M Denfert Rochereau). After descending 20m (130 steps) below street level, visitors will follow 1.6km of underground corridors stacked with the bones and skulls of millions of Parisians. Spooky, but super.

MUSÉE RODIN

The **Musée Rodin** (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 44 18 61 10; www.musee-rodin.fr; 77 rue de Varenne, 7e; adult/senior & 18-25yr €7/5, under 18 & 1st Sun free, garden only €1; ☎ 9.30am-5.45pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, to 4.45pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar; M Varenne), is both a sublime museum and one of the most relaxing spots in the city, with a lovely garden full of sculptures and shade trees. The museum houses casts of some of Rodin's most celebrated works, including *The Thinker* and *The Kiss*.

MUSÉE NATIONAL DU MOYEN ÂGE

The **Musée National du Moyen Âge** (National Museum of the Middle Ages; Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 53 73 78 16, 01 53 73 78 00; www.musee-moyenage.fr; Thermes & Hôtel de Cluny, 6 place Paul Painlevé, 5e; adult/senior, student & 18-25yr €6.50/4.50, under 18yr & 1st Sun of month free; ☎ 9.15am-5.45pm Wed-Mon; M Cluny-La Sorbonne or St-Michel) is housed in two structures: the frigidarium (cooling room) and Gallo-Roman baths dating from around AD 200, and the late-15th-century Hôtel de Cluny, considered the finest example of medieval civil architecture in Paris. The spectacular displays at the museum include statuary, illuminated manuscripts, armaments, furnishings and objects made of gold, ivory and enamel.

JARDIN DU LUXEMBOURG

When the weather is fine Parisians flock to the terraces and chestnut groves of the 23-hectare **Jardin du Luxembourg** (Luxembourg Garden; Map pp212-13; ☎ 7am-9.30pm Apr-Oct, 8am-sunset Nov-Mar; M Luxembourg) to relax and sunbathe.

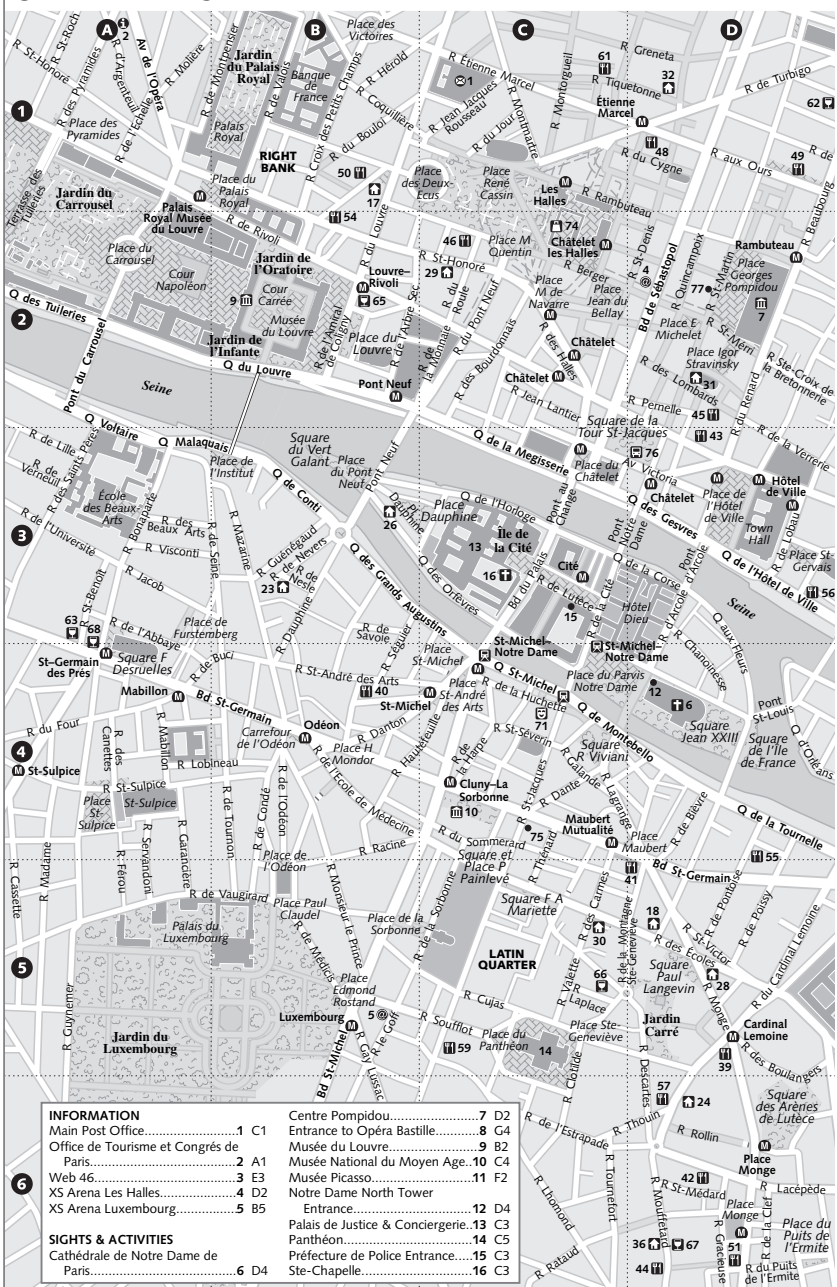
HÔTEL DES INVALIDES

The **Hôtel des Invalides** (Map pp208-9; M Varenne or La Tour Maubourg) was built in the 1670s by Louis XIV as housing for 4000 *invalides* (disabled war veterans). On 14 July 1789, a mob forced its way into the building and seized 28,000 rifles before heading to the prison at Bastille, starting the revolution.

CHAMP DE MARS

Running southeast from the Eiffel Tower, the grassy **Champ de Mars** (Field of Mars; Map pp208-9; M Champ de Mars-Tour Eiffel or École Militaire), named after the Roman god of war, was originally a parade ground for the nearby 18th-century École Militaire (Military Academy). This vast, French-classical building (1772) counted Napoleon among its graduates.

CENTRAL PARIS

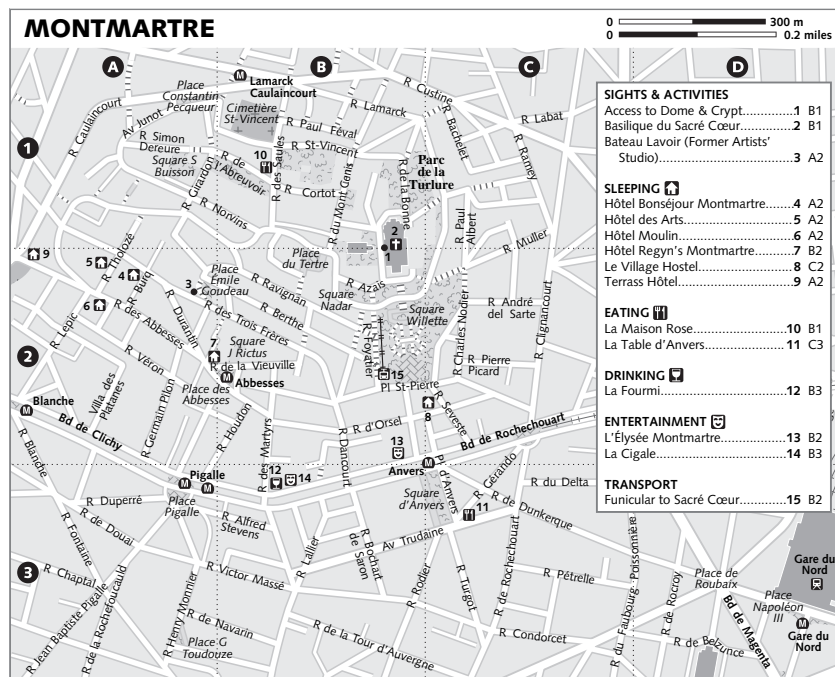


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The Islands

ÎLE DE LA CITÉ

The site of the first settlement in Paris around the 3rd century BC and later the Roman town of Lutèce (Lutetia), the **Île de la Cité** (Map pp212–13) remained the centre of royal and ecclesiastical power throughout the Middle Ages. The seven decorated arches of Paris' oldest bridge, **Pont Neuf** (Map pp212-13; **M**) Pont Neuf) have linked the Île de la Cité with both banks of the Seine since 1607.

ÎLE ST-LOUIS

The smaller of the Seine's twin islands, **Île St-Louis** (Map pp212-13; **M**) Pont Marie) is just downstream from the Île de la Cité. The streets and quays of Île St-Louis are lined with 17th-century houses, art galleries and upmarket shops, and somehow it feels a world away from the hustle and thrum filling the rest of the city. The areas around **Pont St-Louis**, the bridge across to the Île de la Cité, and **Pont Louis Philippe**, the bridge to the Marais, is one of the most romantic spots in Paris.

CATHÉDRALE DE NOTRE DAME DE PARIS

The **Cathédrale de Notre Dame de Paris** (Cathedral of Our Lady of Paris; Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 34 56 10; place du Parvis Notre Dame, 4e; admission free, audioguide €5; ☎ 8am-6.45pm Mon-Fri, to 7.45pm Sat & Sun; **M**) Cité) is the true heart of Paris; in fact, distances from Paris to every part of France are measured from place du Parvis Notre Dame, the square in front of Notre Dame.

Notre Dame is one of the masterpieces of French Gothic architecture, famed for its stunning stained-glass rose windows, leering gargoyles and elegant flying buttresses, as well as a monumental 7800-pipe organ. Constructed on a site occupied by earlier churches (and, a millennium before that, a Gallo-Roman temple) it was begun in 1163 and completed by the mid-14th century. Architect Viollet-le-Duc carried out extensive renovations in the 19th century. The interior is 130m long, 48m wide and 35m high and can hold 6000 worshippers. There are free tours in English at noon Wednesday and Thursday and 2.30pm Saturday.

The entrance to the **tours de Notre Dame** (Notre Dame towers; ☎ 01 53 10 07 00; www.monum.fr;

rue du Cloître Notre Dame; adult/student & 18-25yr €7.50/5, under 18yr & 1st Sun Oct-Mar free; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-5.30pm Oct-Mar), is from the North Tower. The 387 spiralling steps bring you to the top of the west façade, where you'll come face-to-face with the 13-tonne bell Emmanuel in the South Tower and will have a spectacular view of Paris. No hunchbacks, though, despite what you may have heard from Victor Hugo.

STE-CHAPELLE

The most exquisite of Paris' Gothic monuments, **Ste-Chapelle** (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 53 40 60 97; www.monum.fr; 4 blvd du Palais, 1er; adult/18-25yr €6.50/4.50, under 18yr & 1st Sun Oct-Mar free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mar-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Feb; **M**) Cité), is tucked within the walls of the Palais de Justice (Law Courts). Built in just under three years, Ste-Chapelle was consecrated in 1248. The chapel was conceived by Louis IX to house his collection of sacred relics, now kept in the treasury of Notre Dame.

Right Bank

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

The vast Palais du Louvre was constructed as a fortress by Philippe-Auguste in the early 13th century and rebuilt in the mid-16th century. In 1793, the Convention turned it into the **Musée du Louvre** (Louvre Museum; Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 40 20 53 17; www.louvre.fr; permanent collections/permanent collections & temporary exhibits €8.50/13, after 6pm Wed & Fri €6/11, under 18yr & from 6pm Fri under 26yr permanent collections free, 1st Sun of month free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon, Thu, Sat & Sun, to 9.45pm Wed & Fri; **M**) Palais Royal-Musée du Louvre), one of France's (if not the world's) finest museums.

When the museum opened in the late 18th century it contained some 2500 paintings, sculptures and objets d'art; today a staggering 35,000 exhibits are on display. The collection is mind-bogglingly diverse, ranging from Islamic artworks and Egyptian artefacts through to one of the world's greatest collections of Greek and Roman antiquities (including the *Venus de Milo* and the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*). But it's the Louvre's astonishingly rich collection of paintings that draws most visitors; highlights include signature works by Raphael, Botticelli, Delacroix and Titian, Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* and of course Leonardo da Vinci's mischievous *La Joconde*, better known as the

Mona Lisa. If you have time, don't miss the section devoted to objets d'art, which houses a series of fabulously extravagant salons and rooms, including the lavish apartments of Napoleon III's Minister of State.

The museum is divided into four sections: the Sully, Denon and Richelieu Wings and the Hall Napoleon. You'll only scratch the surface in a single day's visit, and museum fatigue can be a real problem at the Louvre – you'll enjoy it much more if you don't try and pack too much into one day.

The main entrance and ticket windows in the Cour Napoleon are covered by the 21m-high glass **Grande Pyramide**. The queues are always heavy at the main entrance; the smaller entrances at the Carrousel du Louvre, 99 rue de Rivoli, or from the Palais Royal-Musée du Louvre metro station are usually quieter. You can avoid the queues completely by buying tickets in advance from the ticket machines in the Carrousel du Louvre, by ringing ☎ 08 92 68 36 22 or ☎ 08 25 34 63 46, or by booking online at www.louvre.fr. Tickets are also available at Fnac (p223) for an extra €1.50. Tickets remain valid for the whole day.

JARDIN DES TUILERIES

The formal, 28-hectare **Jardin des Tuileries** (Tuileries Garden; Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 40 20 90 43; ☎ 7am-9pm late Mar-late Sep, to 7.30pm late Sep-late Mar; **M**) Tuileries or Concorde) was laid out in its present form – more or less – in the mid-17th century by André Le Nôtre, who also created the gardens at Versailles (p228). The Tuileries soon became the most fashionable spot in Paris for parading about in one's finery; today it is a favourite of joggers. It forms part of the Banks of the Seine World Heritage site as listed by Unesco in 1991.

CENTRE POMPIDOU

The **Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou** (Georges Pompidou National Centre of Art & Culture; Mapp212-13; ☎ 01 44 78 12 33; www.centrepompidou.fr; place Georges Pompidou, 4e; **M**) Rambuteau) is the most successful art and cultural centre in the world.

The Centre Pompidou, also known as the Centre Beaubourg, has amazed visitors since it was inaugurated in 1977, not only for its outstanding collection of modern art, but also for its radical architectural statement; it was among the first buildings to have its 'insides' turned outside. But it all began to look

somewhat *démodé* by the late 1990s, hence the recent €85-million renovation, complete with theatre, cinema and dance spaces and a super-stylish restaurant.

The 4th and 5th floors are occupied by the **Musée National d'Art Moderne** (MNAM, National Museum of Modern Art; adult/senior & 18-25yr €10/8, under 18 & 1st Sun of month free; ☎ 11am-9pm Wed-Mon), France's national collection of art dating from 1905 onwards. If you're into surrealism, cubism or contemporary art, this is the place to head for.

HÔTEL DE VILLE

Gutted during the Paris Commune of 1871, Paris' **Hôtel de Ville** (City Hall; Map pp212-13; ☎ 08 20 00 75 75, 01 42 76 50 49; www.paris.fr; place de l'Hôtel de Ville, 4e; 📍 Hôtel de Ville) was rebuilt in the neo-Renaissance style (1874-82). There's a **Salon d'Accueil** (Reception Hall; 29 rue de Rivoli, 4e; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat), which dispenses copious amounts of information and brochures and is used for temporary exhibitions, usually with a Paris theme. The Hôtel de Ville faces the majestic place de l'Hôtel de Ville, used from the Middle Ages to the 19th century to stage many of Paris' celebrations, rebellions, book burnings and public executions.

MUSÉE PICASSO

The **Musée Picasso** (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 71 25 21; www.musee-picasso.com; 5 rue de Thorigny, 3e; adult/18-25yr €7/5.50 Wed-Sat & Mon, admission for all Sun €5.50, under 18 & 1st Sun of month free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Wed-Mon Apr-Sep, to 5.30pm Wed-Mon Oct-Mar; 📍 St-Paul or Chemin Vert), housed in the mid-17th-century Hôtel Salé, is one of Paris' best-loved art museums and includes more than 3500 of the master's works. You can also view paintings from his collection, including work by Cézanne, Matisse, Modigliani and Degas.

PLACE DE LA BASTILLE

The Bastille, built during the 14th century as a fortified royal residence, is the most famous monument in Paris that no longer exists; the notorious prison was demolished by a revolutionary mob on 14 July 1789. The **place de la Bastille** (Map pp212-13; 📍 Bastille) in the 12e, where the prison once stood, is now a busy traffic roundabout.

ÉTOILE & CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES

A dozen avenues radiate from the world's largest traffic roundabout, **place de l'Étoile**

(Map pp208-9; 📍 Charles de Gaulle Étoile) – officially called place Charles de Gaulle; first among these is the av des Champs-Élysées. This broad boulevard, whose name refers to the 'Elysian Fields' of Greek mythology, links place de la Concorde with the Arc de Triomphe. Symbolising the style and *joie de vivre* of Paris since the mid-19th century, the avenue remains one of the city's swankiest shopping districts.

ARC DE TRIOMPHE

The **Arc de Triomphe** (Triumphal Arch; Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 55 37 73 77; www.monum.fr; viewing platform adult/18-25yr €8/6, under 18yr & 1st Sun of month Oct-Mar free; ☎ 10am-11pm Apr-Sep, to 10.30pm Oct-Mar; 📍 Charles de Gaulle-Étoile) is 2.2km northwest of place de la Concorde. Commissioned in 1806 by Napoleon to commemorate his victories, it remained unfinished when he started losing battles and then entire wars, and wasn't completed until 1836. Since 1920, the body of an **unknown soldier** from WWI has lain beneath the arch; his fate and that of countless others is commemorated by a memorial flame rekindled each evening around 6.30pm.

The **viewing platform** (up 284 steps) affords fine views of the dozen surrounding avenues, many named after Napoleonic generals (including ultra-exclusive av Foch, Paris' widest boulevard).

PLACE DE LA CONCORDE

Place de la Concorde (Map pp208-9; 📍 Concorde) was laid out between 1755 and 1775. The 3300-year-old pink granite obelisk in the middle of the square once stood in the Temple of Ramses at Thebes (today's Luxor); Muhammad Ali, viceroy and pasha of Egypt, gave it to France in 1831.

MONTMARTRE & PIGALLE

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries bohemian **Montmartre** (Map p214; 📍 Anvers or Abbesses) attracted numerous writers and artists, including Picasso, who lived at the studio called **Bateau Lavoisier** (Map p214; 11bis Émile Goudeau; 📍 Abbesses) from 1908 to 1912. Montmartre retains an upbeat ambience that all the tourists in the world couldn't spoil.

A few blocks southwest of Montmartre is neon-drenched **Pigalle** (Map p214; 📍 Pigalle), 9e and 18e, a red-light district that also boasts plenty of trendy nightspots, clubs and cabarets (including the original Moulin Rouge).

BASILIQUE DU SACRÉ CŒUR

The **Basilique du Sacré Cœur** (Basilica of the Sacred Heart; Map p214; ☎ 01 53 41 89 00; www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com; place du Parvis du Sacré Cœur, 18e; ☎ 6am-11pm; 📍 Anvers), perched at the top of the Butte de Montmartre (Montmartre Hill), was built from contributions pledged by Parisian Catholics after the humiliating Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Some 234 spiralling steps lead to the spectacular panorama from the basilica's **dome** (admission €5; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar).

CIMETIÈRE DU PÈRE LACHAISE

The world's most-visited graveyard, **Cimetière du Père Lachaise** (Père Lachaise Cemetery; Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 55 25 82 10; admission free; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat, 9am-6pm Sun mid-Mar-early Nov; 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat, 9am-5.30pm Sun early Nov-mid-Mar; 📍 Philippe Auguste, Gambetta or Père Lachaise) opened its one-way doors in 1804. Among the 800,000 people buried here are Chopin, Molière, Balzac, Proust, Gertrude Stein, Colette, Pissarro, Seurat, Modigliani, Sarah Bernhardt, Yves Montand, Delacroix, Édith Piaf and even the 12th-century lovers, Abélard and Héloïse. The graves of **Oscar Wilde** (Division 89) and **Jim Morrison** (Division 6) are perennially popular. Free maps are available from the **conservation office** (Map pp208-9; 16 rue du Repos, 20e).

TOURS

Fat Tire Bike Tours (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 56 58 10 54; www.fattirebiketoursparis.com; 24 rue Edgar Faure, 15e; tours adult/student €24/22; office ☎ 9am-7pm; 📍 Duplex) Offers four-hour English-language tours of the city at 11am March to November, with additional tours mid-May to July. Night tours are also available; check the website.

Bateaux Mouches (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 42 25 96 10; www.bateauxmouches.com, in French; Port de la Conférence, 8e; adult/concession €8/4, under 4 free; ☎ every 15-30min mid-Mar-mid-Nov; 📍 Alma Marceau) Based on the Right Bank near the Pont de l'Alma, this is the most famous riverboat company in Paris. Cruises on 1000-seat boats run at 11am, 2.30pm, 4pm, 6pm and 9pm from mid-November to mid-March, with additional winter cruises depending on demand.

SLEEPING

The student travel agency **OTU Voyages** (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 40 29 12 22; www.otu.fr, in French; 119 rue St-Martin, 4e; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat; 📍 Rambuteau), opposite Centre Pompidou, can *always* find you accommodation, even in summer. The finder's fee is €15.

Alcôve & Agapes (☎ 01 44 85 06 05; www.bed-&-breakfast-in-paris.com) arranges B&B accommodation in Paris for between €60 and €195 for a double.

Louvre & Les Halles

BUDGET

Centre International BVJ Paris-Louvre (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 53 00 90 90; www.bvjhotel.com; 20 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1er; dm €25, d per person €28; ☎ 📍; 📍 Louvre-Rivoli) This modern hostel run by the Bureau des Voyages de la Jeunesse has single-sex rooms for two to eight people. There's usually space (even in summer) if you stop by early, but you must be under 35 and there are no kitchen facilities.

Hôtel Tiquetonne (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 36 94 58; fax 01 42 36 02 94; 6 rue Tiquetonne, 2e; s €30-40, d €50; 📍 Étienne Marcel) If you're looking for good-value digs smack in the middle of party town, this vintage 47-room cheapie is clean and comfortable and some rooms are quite large.

MIDRANGE

Hôtel St-Honoré (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 36 20 38; paris@hotelsthonore.com; 85 rue St-Honoré, 1er; s/d/tw/q €59/74/83/92; 📍 Châtelet) Between the Palais Royal and the Seine and at the eastern end of a very upmarket shopping street, this offers some fairly cramped rooms and a few more spacious ones for three and four people.

Marais & Bastille


BUDGET


Hôtel Baudin (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 47 00 18 91; hotelbaudin@wanadoo.fr; 113 av Ledru Rollin, 11e; s €29-52, d €35-62, tr €40-76; 📍 Ledru Rollin) This old-fashioned hostelry has 17 brightly coloured rooms, ranging from ultra cheap (with hand basins and hall showers) to slightly more expensive (with private shower or bath and toilet). Reception is on the 1st floor.

Maison Internationale de la Jeunesse et des Étudiants (MIJE; ☎ 01 42 74 23 45; www.mije.com; dm €27, s/tw/tr per person €42/32/28; ☎ 📍) runs three hostels in renovated *hôtels particuliers* (private mansions) in the heart of the Marais, and you won't find a better budget deal in Paris. Costs are the same for all three; reservations at any of the MIJE hostels can be made via the central switchboard or emailing; they'll hold you a bed till noon. The annual membership fee costs €2.50.



MIJE Fourcy (Map pp212-13; 6 rue de Fourcy, 4e; 📍 St-Paul) The largest MIJE hostel with 185 beds. A three-course






menu at the in-house restaurant costs €10.50; two-courses cost €8.50. Both menus include a drink.



MJE Fauconnier (Map pp212-13; 11 rue du Fauconnier, 4e;  St-Paul or Pont Marie) A 122-bed hostel two blocks south of MJE Le Fourcy.



MJE Maubuisson (Map pp212-13; 12 rue des Barres, 4e;  Hôtel de Ville or Pont Marie) The pick of the three hostels, half a block south of the *mairie* (town hall) of the 4e.




MIDRANGE

Hôtel Jeanne d'Arc (Map pp212-13;  01 48 87 62 11; www.hoteljeannedarc.com; 3 rue de Jarente, 4e; s €58-96, d €82-96, tr €115, q €145;  St-Paul) This cosy, 36-room hotel near place du Marché Ste-Catherine is ideally located for the museums, bars and restaurants of the Marais and has a country-tinged atmosphere – but everyone knows about it, so book early.



Hôtel Castex (Map pp212-13;  01 42 72 31 52; www.castexhotel.com; 5 rue Castex, 4e; s €85-115, d & tw €95-140, ste €160-220;     Bastille) Equidistant from Bastille and the Marais, the 30-room Castex retains some of its 17th-century elements, including a vaulted stone cellar-cum-breakfast room and Toile de Jouy wallpaper. Try to get one of the independent rooms (1 and 2) off the patio.

Hôtel du Septième Art (Map pp212-13;  01 44 54 85 00; hotel7art@wanadoo.fr; 20 rue St-Paul, 4e; s & d €85-135, tw €90-135;  St-Paul) This film-themed hotel has a black-and-white movie motif running throughout, right down to the tiled floors and bathrooms. The 23 guest rooms spread over five levels (no lift) are sizeable and imaginatively decorated.

Hôtel de la Bretonnerie (Map pp212-13;  01 48 87 77 63; www.bretonnerie.com; 22 rue St-Croix de la Bretonnerie, 4e; s & d €116-149, tr & q €174, ste €180-205;  Hôtel de Ville) This charming hotel in the heart of the Marais has a touch of old-world class – each of the 22 guestrooms and seven suites is richly decorated in its own individual style; some have four-poster and canopy beds.



Hôtel Caron de Beaumarchais (Map pp212-13;  01 42 72 34 12; www.carondebeaumarchais.com; 12 rue Vieille du Temple, 4e; s & d €125-162;    St-Paul) This 18th-century-style hotel has to be seen to be believed. The lavish lobby, with its pianoforte, gilded mirrors and candelabra, sets the tone – the idea is to recreate the atmosphere of an upmarket 18th-century townhouse, and although some of the rooms are a bit small, you'll feel every inch the aristocrat.

TOP END

Hôtel St-Merry (Map pp212-13;  01 42 78 14 15; www.hotelmarais.com; 78 rue de la Verrerie, 4e; d & tw €160-230, tr €205-275, ste €335-407;  Châtelet) This medieval number in the Marais is housed in the former presbytery of the Église St-Merry, complete with beamed ceilings, church pews and wrought-iron candelabra. The rich Gothic atmosphere is fantastic – but on the downside, there's no lift, no air-con and no TVs.

The Islands




BUDGET*




Hôtel Henri IV (Map pp212-13;  01 43 54 44 53; 25 place Dauphine, 1er; s €27-34, d €35-72, tr €47;  Pont Neuf or Cité) Perched on the tip of the Île de la Cité, this rickety old hotel has 20 tattered and worn rooms, but you won't often find something this romantic at such a knock-down price in Paris. Hall showers cost €2.50 and breakfast is included.

Latin Quarter & Jardin des Plantes



The Latin Quarter offers the best value on the Left Bank, especially compared with the sky-high prices of the hotels in the neighbouring 6e.

BUDGET




Young & Happy Hostel (Map pp212-13;  01 47 07 47 07; www.youngandhappy.fr; 80 rue Mouffettard, 5e; dm €21-23, d per person €24-26;   Place Monge) It's a little rough around the edges, but this friendly hostel in the Latin Quarter remains popular with an old-school backpacking crowd. Dorms are small and sleep two to eight people; arrive before 8am if you want a bed in summer. The 2am curfew is strictly enforced.



Centre International de Séjour BVJ Paris-QuartierLatin (Map pp212-13;  01 43 29 34 80; www.bvj.hotel.com; 44 rue des Bernardins, 5e; dm €26, s/d per person €35/28;   MaubertMutualité) This 100-bed hostel on the Left Bank is a branch of the Centre International BVJ Paris-Louvre and has the same rules. All rooms have showers and telephones.




MIDRANGE





Port Royal Hôtel (Map pp208-9;  01 43 31 70 06; www.portroyal.fr; 8 blvd de Port Royal, 5e; s €41-89, d €52.50-89;  Les Gobelins) It's hard to imagine that this 46-room hotel, managed by the same family for three generations, still only bears one star. The spotless, quiet rooms

overlook either the street or a small glassed-in courtyard.

Hôtel St-Jacques (Map pp212-13;  01 44 07 45 45; www.hotel-saintjacques.com; 35 rue des Écoles, 5e; s €52-80, d €90-118, tr €145;   Maubert Mutualité) This stylish 38-room hotel has balconies overlooking the Panthéon. The décor has been thoroughly updated since *Charade* was filmed here in the 1960s, but a few 19th-century features (trompe l'œil ceilings, iron staircase) still remain.

Hôtel de l'Espérance (Map pp208-9;  01 47 07 10 99; www.hoteldelesperance.fr; 15 rue Pascal, 5e; s €71-79, d €79-87, tw €87, tr €102;  Censier Daubenton) The 'Hotel of Hope', just south of lively rue Mouffettard, is a quiet, immaculately kept 38-room place with faux antique furnishings.



Hôtel Minerve (Map pp212-13;  01 43 26 26 04; www.hotel-paris-minerve.com; 13 rue des Écoles, 5e; s €84-132, d €98-132, tr €150-152;   Cardinal Lemoine) This 54-room hotel is owned by the same family who runs the Familia Hôtel. The reception is kitted out with Oriental carpets and antique books, and some rooms have French frescoes and reproduction 18th-century wallpaper. Eight rooms have views of Notre Dame, and a couple have their own tiny courtyards.

Hôtel des Grandes Écoles (Map pp212-13;  01 43 26 79 23; www.hotel-grandes-ecoles.com; 75 rue du Cardinal Lemoine, 5e; s & d €105-130, tr €125-150;    Cardinal Lemoine or Place Monge) This wonderful, welcoming hotel has one of the loveliest situations in the Latin Quarter, tucked away in a courtyard off a medieval street with its own garden. Rooms 29 to 33 have direct access to the garden.

St-Germain, Odéon & Luxembourg



The well-heeled St-Germain des Prés is the quintessential place to stay in central Paris,

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hôtel Danemark (Map pp208-9;  01 43 26 93 78; www.hoteldanemark.com; 21 rue Vavin, 6e; s €115-132, d €132-152;   Vavin) The eclectic rooms at this chic boutique hotel southwest of the Jardin de Luxembourg are an imaginative mix of contemporary décor and period character – think slinky lighting, modern art and hip bathrooms, offset by the occasional spot of exposed stonework.

but you'll need to bring your spare change – budget places just don't exist in this part of town.


MIDRANGE

Hôtel de Nesle (Map pp212-13;  01 43 54 62 41; www.hoteldesneleparis.com; 7 rue de Nesle, 6e; s €55-75, d €75-100;  Odéon or Mabillon) A relaxed, colourfully decorated hotel with 20 rooms, half of which are painted with murals taken from (mostly French) literature. Even better is the huge back garden complete with pathways, trellis and a small pond.




Hôtel Sèvres Azur (Map pp208-9;  01 45 48 84 07; www.hotelesvresazur.com; 22 rue de l'Abbé Grégoire, 6e; s €85-95, d €90-115, tr €135;  St-Placide) On a quiet street between Montparnasse and St-Germain, this 31-room hotel offers great value. The modern, bedrooms are bold and brightly shaded – choose from street or courtyard views.



Clichy & Gare St-Lazare

BUDGET

Hôtel Eldorado (Map pp208-9;  01 45 22 35 21; www.eldoradohotel.fr; 18 rue des Dames, 17e; s €25-50, d & tw €45-70, tr €50-80;  Place de Clichy) This bohemian place is one of Paris' grooviest finds, with 40 colourfully decorated rooms in the main building and a pleasant garden annexe.

MIDRANGE

New Orient Hôtel (Map pp208-9;  01 45 22 21 64; www.hotel-paris-orient.com; 16 rue de Constantinople, 8e; s €82-105, d €99-105, tw €105-130, tr & q €140;   Europe) A personality-packed hotel with 30 cosy, ever-so-slightly twee rooms, some of which have small balconies.

Hôtel Favart (Map pp208-9;  01 42 92 59 83; www.hotel-paris-favart.com; 5 rue Marivaux, 2e; s €89-110, d €110-135, tr €130-160, q €155-176;   Richelieu Drouot) With 37 rooms facing the Opéra Comique, the Favart is a stylish Art Nouveau hotel that feels like it never let go of the *belle époque*. It's especially handy for the department stores on blvd Haussmann.

Gare du Nord, Gare de l'Est & République

The areas around the Gare du Nord and Gare de l'Est are far from the prettiest parts of Paris, but you will find plenty of decent-value hotels. Place de la République is convenient for the nightlife areas of Ménilmontant.

BUDGET

Peace & Love Hostel (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 46 07 65 11; www.paris-hostels.com; 245 rue La Fayette, 10e; dm €17-21, d per person €21-26; 📍; 📱; 🚗; 🚲; 🚿; 🏠; 🍷) Jaurès or Louis Blanc This modern-day hippy hang-out is a groovy (if overcrowded) hostel with beds in 20 smallish, shower-equipped rooms for two to four people. There's a great kitchen and eating area, but most of the action revolves around the ground floor bar (open till 2am).

Auberge de Jeunesse Jules Ferry (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 43 57 55 60; www.fuaj.fr; 8 blvd Jules Ferry, 11e; dm €20, d per person €20; 📍; 📱; 🚗; 🚲; 🚿; 🏠; 🍷) République or Goncourt This official hostel, three blocks east of place de la République, is decidedly institutional and the two- to six-person rooms could use a refit but, on the upside, there's no curfew. You'll pay an extra €2.90 per night without an HI card.

Auberge de Jeunesse Le D'Aragnan (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 40 32 34 57; www.fuaj.fr; 80 rue Vitruve, 20e; dm €21.50; 📍) Porte de Bagnolet With 435 beds on seven levels, this is the largest hostel in France. Dorms have two to eight beds, and there's a bar, cinema and laundry facilities.

Hôtel Nevers (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 47 00 56 18; www.hoteldenevers.com; 53 rue de Malte, 11e; s & d €35-53, tr €66-78; 📍; 📱; 🚗) Oberkampf This family-run budget hotel is around the corner from place de la République. The 32 guestrooms are sparsely furnished, but cat-lovers will appreciate the friendly feline welcome.

MIDRANGE

Nord-Est Hôtel (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 47 70 07 18; hotel.nord.est@wanadoo.fr; 12 rue des Petits Hôtels, 10e; s/d/tr/q €63/73/97/123; 📍; 📱; 🚗) Poissonnière This unusual 30-room hotel, charmingly located on the 'Street of Little Hotels', is set back from the street and fronted by a small terrace.

Grand Hôtel de Paris (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 46 07 40 56; grand.hotel.de.paris@gofornet.com; 72 blvd de Strasbourg, 10e; s/d/tr/q €77/83/102/119; 📍) Gare de l'Est The Grand Hôtel de Paris is just south of the Gare de l'Est on blvd de Strasbourg. It has 49 soundproofed rooms and makes a pleasant bolt-hole if you're in the area.

Montmartre & Pigalle

Montmartre is one of the most charming neighbourhoods in Paris, with a clutch of midrange and top-end hotels. The area east of Sacré Cœur can be rough; it might be prudent to avoid Château Rouge metro station at night.

BUDGET

Le Village Hostel (Map p214; ☎ 01 42 64 22 02; www.villagehostel.fr; 20 rue d'Orsel, 18e; dm €20-23, d per person €23-27, tr per person €21.50-25; 📍; 📱; 🚗; 🚲; 🚿; 🏠; 🍷) Anvers 'The Village' is a fine 25-room hostel with beamed ceilings and views of Sacré Cœur. Beds are in rooms for four to six people, all with showers and toilets. Kitchen facilities are available, and there's a popular bar too. Curfew is 2am.

Hôtel Bonsejour Montmartre (Map p214; ☎ 01 42 54 22 53; www.hotel-bonsejour-montmartre.fr; 11 rue Burq, 18e; s €25, d €32-48, tr €59; 📍) Abbesses The 'Good Stay' at the top of a quiet street is a perennial budget favourite. It's a simple place – no lift, linoleum or parquet floors – but it's welcoming and at the time of research was receiving a much needed face-lift. Some rooms have little balconies and at least one room offers a fleeting glimpse of Sacré Cœur. Hall showers cost €2.

MIDRANGE

Hôtel Moulin (Map p214; ☎ 01 42 64 33 33; www.hotelmoulin.com; 3 rue Aristide Bruant, 18e; s €55-63, d €59-67, tw €67-70; 📍; 📱; 🚗) Abbesses or Blanche There are 27 good-sized, well-equipped rooms in a main building and a garden annex at this quiet little hotel, owned by a welcoming Korean family.

Hôtel des Arts (Map p214; ☎ 01 46 06 30 52; www.arts-hotel-paris.com; 5 rue Tholozé, 18e; s €68, d & tw €82, tr €97; 📍; 📱; 🚗) Abbesses or Blanche The 'Arts Hotel' is a friendly and attractive 50-room place convenient to both place Pigalle and Montmartre, nestled near the Moulin de la Galette, one of Montmartre's old-style windmills.

Hôtel Regny's Montmartre (Map p214; ☎ 01 42 54 45 21; www.paris-hotels-montmartre.com/hotel_regny; 18 place des Abbesses, 18e; s €72-92, d & tw €84-104, tr €104-124; 📍; 📱; 🚗) Abbesses This 22-room hotel should be one of your first choices if you want to stay in old Montmartre and not break the bank. It's just opposite the metro station, and some of the dinky rooms have views over Paris.

TOP END

Terrass Hotel (Map p214; ☎ 01 46 06 72 85; www.terrass-hotel.com; 12 rue Joseph de Maistre, 18e; s €208-280, d 248-320, ste €360; 📍; 📱; 🚗; 🚲; 🚿; 🏠; 🍷) Blanche This sedate and stylish hotel at the southwestern corner of Montparnasse Cemetery has 100 spacious, impeccably designed rooms and suites. For the ultimate Parisian experience,

junior suite 703 has stunning views of the Eiffel Tower from the Jacuzzi and 802 boasts its own private terrace.

EATING

Paris likes to think of itself as the culinary capital of France, and the city has a plethora of classically French cafés, bistros and brasseries. But modern-day Paris is a gastronomic melting-pot, and you'll find some of the city's best food at tiny restaurants serving traditional Vietnamese, Caribbean and North African cuisine.

Louvre & Les Halles

Tana (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 33 53 64; 36 rue Tiquetonne, 2e; mains €9-20; 📍; 📱; 🚗) dinner; 📍) Étienne Marcel In a street where each restaurant is more original than the next, Tana takes the tart. The mixed hors d'oeuvre for two and the *homok pla* (fish steamed in banana leaf, €10) are both excellent.

Joe Allen (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 36 70 13; 30 rue Pierre Lescot, 1er; mains €13-16.50, lunch menu €13; 📍; noon-1am; 📍) Étienne Marcel An American-style favourite in Paris for some 35 years, Joe Allen is little bit of New York in Paris. Ribs (€16.50) are a speciality.

Le Petit Mâchon (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 60 08 06; 158 rue St-Honoré, 1er; mains €14-22, lunch menu €16.50; 📍; lunch & dinner Tue-Sun; 📍) Palais Royal-Musée du Louvre An upbeat bistro with Lyon-inspired specialities. Try the *saucisson de Lyon* (Lyon sausage) studded with pistachios.

L'Épi d'Or (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 36 38 12; 25 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1er; mains €16-22, 2-/3-course menu €18/22; 📍; 📱; 🚗) lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat; 📍) Louvre-Rivoli This oh-so-Parisian bistro serves classic dishes such as *gigot d'agneau* (leg of lamb), lovingly cooked for seven hours.

Self-catering options include **Franprix Les Halles** (Map pp212-13; 35 rue Berger, 1er; 📍; 8.30am-7.50pm Mon-Sat; 📍) (Châtelet) and **Ed l'Épicier Marais** (Map pp212-13; 80 rue de Rivoli, 4e; 📍) (Hôtel de Ville).

Marais & Bastille

The Marais is one of Paris' premier neighbourhoods for eating out. If you're looking for quick eats, check out the small noodle shops along rue Au Maire, 3e (Map pp212-13, 📍) Arts et Métiers) or the falafel and shwarma (kebabs) restaurants along rue des Rosiers, 4e (Map pp212-13; 📍) St-Paul).

Piccolo Teatro (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 72 17 79; 6 rue des Écouffes, 4e; mains €9-12, lunch menu €9-15;

📍) lunch & dinner; 📍) St-Paul) This intimate restaurant serves excellent vegetarian food in a stone-walled dining room packed with cosy little tables.

Le Trumiou (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 77 63 98; 84 quai de l'Hôtel de Ville, 4e; mains €13-21, menus €17.50 & €19; 📍) Hôtel de Ville This no-frills bistro is a Parisian institution; if you're looking for an authentic French menu at reasonable prices, you won't do better. The *confit de canard* (duck preserve) is excellent.

L'Ambassade d'Auvergne (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 72 31 22; 22 rue du Grenier St-Lazare, 3e; mains €14-21, menu €27; 📍) lunch & dinner; 📍) Rambuteau The 100-year-old 'Auvergne Embassy', is the place to head to if you are really hungry. The sausages and hams of the Auvergne are famous throughout France, as are the lentils from Puy.

Le Petit Marché (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 72 06 67; 9 rue Béarn, 3e; mains €14-19, lunch menu €14; 📍) lunch & dinner; 📍) Chemin Vert This great little bistro just up from the place des Vosges attracts a mixed crowd with its hearty cooking and friendly service.

404 (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 74 57 81; 69 rue des Gravilliers, 3e; couscous & tajines €14-24, lunch menu €17; 📍) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily, brunch to 4pm Sat & Sun; 📍) Arts et Métiers As comfortable a Maghreb (North African) caravanserai as you'll find in Paris, the 404 has excellent couscous and *tajines* (Moroccan casseroles) and superb grills (€12 to €22).

Bofinger (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 72 87 82; 5-7 rue de la Bastille, 4e; mains €16.50-37.50, 2-/3-course menu €23/30; 📍) lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat & Sun; 📍) Bastille Founded back in 1864, this place is reputedly the oldest brasserie in Paris. Bofinger specialises in Alsatian-inspired *choucroute* (sauerkraut with assorted meats; €17.50 to €19).

There are food shops, convenience stores and delicatessens along rue St-Antoine. There's also a branch of the famous delicatessen **Le Nôtre** (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 53 01 91 91; 10 rue St-Antoine, 4e; 📍; 9.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat & Sun; 📍) Bastille).

There are a few supermarkets in the area:

Franprix Hôtel de Ville (Map pp212-13; 87 rue de la Verrerie, 4e; 📍; 9am-9pm Mon-Sat; 📍) Hôtel de Ville)
Franprix Marais (Map pp212-13; 135 rue St-Antoine, 4e; 📍; 9am-8.30pm Mon-Sat; 📍) St-Paul)
Monoprix (Map pp212-13; 71 rue St-Antoine, 4e; 📍; 9am-9pm Mon-Sat; 📍) St-Paul)

Latin Quarter & Jardin Des Plantes

Rue Mouffetard, 5e (Map pp212-13; **M** Place Monge or Censier Daubenton), and the surrounding streets are filled with cheap restaurants, sandwich shops and crepe stalls, but whatever you do, avoid the area around rue de la Huchette (locally known as 'Bacteria Alley').

Le Foyer du Vietnam (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 45 35 32 54; 80 rue Monge, 5e; mains €6-8.50, menu €8.50 & €12.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; **M** Place Monge) A favourite meeting spot for the capital's Vietnamese community, serving simple meals such as 'Saigon' or 'Hanoi' soup (noodles, soya beans and pork flavoured with lemon grass, coriander and chives).

Les Cinq Saveurs d'Ananda (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 43 29 58 54; 72 rue du Cardinal Lemoine, 5e; mains €9.50-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun; **M** Cardinal Lemoine) Set back from the place de la Contrescarpe, this semivegetarian restaurant is extremely popular with health-food lovers. All ingredients are farm-fresh and 100% organic.

Le Petit Pontoise (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 43 29 25 20; 9 rue de Pontoise, 5e; mains €15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner; **M** Maubert Mutualité) This busy brasserie features a blackboard menu full of seasonal delights, ranging from foie gras with figs (€12) to *poulet fermier avec pommes purée* (roasted farm chicken served with mashed potato; €13).

Perraudin (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 46 33 15 75; 157 rue St-Jacques, 5e; mains €15-29, lunch menu €18; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri; **M** Luxembourg) Perraudin has hardly changed since it first opened its doors in 1910, and makes the perfect place to try classics such as *bœuf bourguignon* (beef marinated and cooked in red wine with mushrooms, bacon, onions and carrots; €15), *gigot d'agneau* (€16) or *confit de canard* (€16).

Chez Allard (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 43 26 48 23; 41 rue St-André des Arts, 5e; mains €19-35, 2-/3-course menu €24/32; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; **M** St-Michel) A charming bistro where the staff couldn't be kinder (a welcome surprise in Paris) and the food is superb. Try the *canard aux olives vertes* (duck with green olives).

Place Maubert, 5e, becomes a lively food market on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings. There are provisions shops nearby, including a great cheese shop called **Crémier des Carmes** (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 43 54 50 93; 47ter blvd St-Germain, 5e; ☎ 7.30am-1pm & 3.30-8pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat; **M** Maubert Mutualité).

Supermarkets include the following:

Champion (Map pp212-13; 34 rue Monge, 5e; ☎ 8.30am-9pm Mon-Sat; **M** Cardinal Lemoine)
Ed l'Épicier (Map pp212-13; 37 rue Lacépède, 5e; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7.30pm Sat; **M** Place Monge)
Franprix (Map pp212-13; 82 rue Mouffetard, 5e; ☎ 8.30am-8.50pm Mon-Sat; **M** Censier Daubenton or Place Monge)

Montparnasse

Since the 1920s the area around blvd du Montparnasse has been one of the city's premier avenues for enjoying that most Parisian of pastimes: sitting in a café and checking out the scenery on two legs.

La Coupole (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 43 20 14 20; 102 blvd du Montparnasse, 14e; mains €12.50-32, lunch menu €15; ☎ 8am-1am Sun-Thur, to 1.30am Fri & Sat; **M** Vavin) This 450-seat brasserie (est 1927) has hardly changed since the days of Sartre, Soutine, Man Ray and Josephine Baker. Book for lunch, but you'll have to queue for dinner.

Dix Vins (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 43 20 91 77; 57 rue Falguière, 15e; lunch menu €20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri; **M** Pasteur) This tiny little restaurant is so popular you will probably have to wait at the bar even if you've booked. Excellent value, good service and stylish décor.

Montmartre & Pigalle

Montmartre's restaurants vary widely in quality, especially during the busy summer season, so choose carefully.

La Maison Rose (Map p214; ☎ 01 42 57 66 75; 2 rue de l'Abreuvoir, 18e; mains €14.50-16.50, menu €16.50; ☎ lunch & dinner to 11pm Mar-Oct, lunch Thu-Mon, dinner to 9pm Mon, Thu-Sat Nov-Feb; **M** Lamarck Caulaincourt) The tiny 'Pink House', just north of place du Tertre, is the quintessential intimate Montmartre bistro.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Le Dôme (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 43 35 25 81; 108 blvd du Montparnasse, 14e; mains €29-56; ☎ lunch & dinner; **M** Vavin) An Art Deco extravaganza dating from the 1930s, and still a quintessential Parisian dining experience, Le Dôme is a monumental place for a meal, with the emphasis on the freshest seafood such as *huitres* (oysters) and *sole meunière* (sole sautéed in butter and garnished with lemon and parsley).

La Table d'Anvers (Map p214; ☎ 01 48 78 35 21; 2 place d'Anvers, 9e; mains €18, 2-/3-course lunch menu €15/23; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat; **M** Anvers) This local favourite serves up great Mediterranean/Provençal dishes in addition to boasting some very decent fixed-price menus.

DRINKING

Paris is justly famous for its café culture, but these days there's a huge range of drinking establishments, especially in the Marais and along the Grands Boulevards. Happy hour sometimes lasts till around 9pm, but remember you'll always pay more in the central arrondissements than in the outskirts.

Louvre & Les Halles

Le Fumoir (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 92 00 24; 6 rue de l'Amiral Coligny, 1er; ☎ 11am-2am; **M** Louvre-Rivoli) 'The Smoking Room' is a huge colonial-style bar-café just opposite the Louvre. It's a fine place to sip top-notch gin from quality glassware while nibbling on olives; during happy hour (6pm to 8pm) cocktails are all around half-price at €6.

Marais & Bastille

Andy Wahloo (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 71 20 38; 69 rue des Gravilliers, 3e; ☎ noon-2am; **M** Arts et Métiers) Casablanca meets candy store in this trendy, multicoloured cocktail lounge. During happy hour (5pm to 8pm) a cocktail/beer is €5/3 – after that it doubles.

Café des Phares (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 42 72 04 70; 7 place Bastille, 4e; ☎ 7am-3am Sun-Thur, to 4am Fri & Sat; **M** Bastille) If you like Camus with your coffee, head for the city's original philocafé. Debates take place at 11am Sundays.

Latin Quarter & Jardin des Plantes

Le Piano Vache (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 46 33 75 03; 8 rue Laplace, 5e; ☎ noon-2am Mon-Fri, 9pm-2am Sat & Sun; **M** Maubert Mutualité) Just down the hill from the Panthéon, 'The Mean Piano' is a grungy underground venue with regular bands and DJs playing mainly rock, reggae and pop.

Le Vieux Chêne (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 43 37 71 51; 69 rue Mouffetard, 5e; ☎ 4pm-2am Sun-Thur, to 5am Fri & Sat; **M** Place Monge) 'The Old Oak' is supposedly the oldest bar in Paris, and it's still popular with students and jazz fans. Happy hour lasts till 9pm, with half-pints for €2.50 (usually €3.50).

St-Germain, Odéon & Luxembourg

Café de Flore (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 45 48 55 26; 172 blvd St-Germain, 6e; ☎ 7.30-1.30am; **M** St-Germain des Prés) The Flore is an Art Deco café where the red upholstered benches, mirrors and marble walls haven't changed since the days when Sartre, de Beauvoir, Camus and Picasso bent their elbows here.

Les Deux Magots (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 45 48 55 25; 170 blvd St-Germain, 6e; ☎ 7-1am; **M** St-Germain des Prés) This erstwhile literary haunt is best known as the favoured hangout of Sartre, Hemingway, Picasso and André Breton. Everyone has to sit on the terrace at least once for a coffee (€4), beer (€5.50) or the famous hot chocolate served in porcelain jugs (€6).

Montmartre & Pigalle

La Fourmi (Map p214; ☎ 01 42 64 70 35; 74 rue des Martyrs, 18e; ☎ 8am-2am Mon-Thur, 10am-4am Fri-Sun; **M** Pigalle) A perennial Pigalle favourite, the 'Ant' buzzes all day and night; it's hip without being overly pretentious.

ENTERTAINMENT

For the low-down on Paris after dark, pick up *Pariscope* (€0.40) or *Officiel des Spectacles* (€0.35), both published on Wednesday. **Zurban** (www.zurban.com, in French; €1), also published on Wednesday, offers a fresher look at entertainment in the capital.

For up-to-date listings on clubs and venues, pick up a copy of *LYLO (Les Yeux, Les Oreilles)*, literally 'Eyes and Ears', available at cafés, bars and clubs across town.

Radio FG (www.radiofg.com, in French; 98.2MHz FM) and **Radio Nova** (www.novaplanet.com, in French; 101.5MHz FM) are also good sources of information, or for club listings check out www.france-techno.fr (in French) or www.parisinfo.com (in French).

You can buy tickets for cultural events at many ticket outlets, including **Fnac** (☎ 08 92 68 36 22; www.fnac.com) and at most **Virgin Megastore branches** (www.virginmega.fr), for a small commission.

Cinemas

Expect to pay up to €9 for a first-run film. Students, and those under 18 and over 60 will usually receive discounts of about 25% except on Friday nights and weekends. On Wednesday (and sometimes Monday) cinemas give discounts of 20% to 30% to everyone.

Live Music

OPERA & CLASSICAL

Opéra National de Paris (ONP; ☎ 08 92 89 90 90; www.opera-de-paris.fr, in French) This opera splits its season between the Palais Garnier, its original home built in 1875, and the Opéra Bastille, which opened in 1989. Both opera houses also stage ballets and classical music concerts. The season runs from September to July.

Opéra Bastille (Map pp212-13; 2-6 place de la Bastille, 12e; **M** Bastille) Tickets are available from the **box office** (Map pp212-13; 130 rue de Lyon, 12e; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri; **M** Bastille) two weeks before the date of the performance, but are often sold out well in advance. Operas and ballets cost anywhere between €6 and €114; seats with limited visibility are often available from the box office for €6 to €9. Students, and people under 26 and over 65 can purchase any unsold tickets for just €20 15 minutes before curtains-up.

Palais Garnier (Map pp208-9; place de l'Opéra, 9e; ☎ box office 11am-6.30pm Mon-Sat; **M** Opéra) Tickets and prices at the box office of the city's original opera house are similar to those at the Opéra Bastille.

ROCK, POP & INDIE

Le Bataclan (☎ 01 43 14 00 30; 50 blvd Voltaire, 11e; admission €15-50; ☎ box office 3-7pm Mon-Sat; **M** Oberkampf or St-Ambroise) Built in 1864, this small concert hall is one of Paris' most eclectic venues, hosting rock, dance, comedy and techno acts from France and further afield.

La Cigale (Map p214; ☎ 01 49 25 89 99; 120 blvd de Rochechouart, 18e; admission €22-45; ☎ box office noon-7pm Mon-Fri; **M** Anvers or Pigalle) An enormous old music hall seating up to 2000 people, with a regular programme of live gigs and international artists.

L'Élysée Montmartre (Map p214; ☎ 01 55 07 16 00; www.elyseemontmartre.com; 72 blvd de Rochechouart, 18e; admission €10-35; **M** Anvers) This huge old music hall has an impressive domed roof and is one of the better venues to go to in Paris for one-off rock and indie concerts. There are club nights and big-name DJs at the weekend.

Café de la Danse (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 47 00 57 59; www.cafedeladanse.com, in French; 5 Passage Louis-Philippe, 11e; admission €8-30; ☎ box office noon-6pm Mon-Fri; **M** Bastille) Reliable venue for modern dance and rock, world-music and folk gigs.

JAZZ & BLUES

After WWII, Paris was Europe's most important jazz centre and it is again very much à la mode; the city's better clubs attract top international stars.

Le Caveau de la Huchette (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 43 26 65 05; 5 rue de la Huchette, 5e; adult Sun-Thu €11, Fri & Sat €13, student €10; ☎ 9pm-2.30am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat; **M** St-Michel) Housed in a medieval *caveau* (cellar), this club is where virtually all the jazz greats have played since the end of WWII.

Nightclubs

Paris has a thriving club scene, and there are some mighty fine DJs based here, but the scene moves fast, so check local listings for the latest tips.

Le Batofar (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 56 29 10 33; www.batofar.net, in French; admission free-€15; ☎ 9pm-midnight Mon & Tue, 9pm or 10pm-4am to 6am Wed-Sun; **M** Quai de la Gare or Bibliothèque) A long-standing club housed inside an old tugboat opposite 11 quai François Mauriac, 13e. Expect electronica and techno for the most part, as well as some big-name DJs.

Triptyque (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 40 28 05 55; www.letryptique.com; 142 rue Montmartre, 2e; admission €3-10; ☎ 9pm-2am Sun-Wed, to 5am Thu-Sat; **M** Grand Boulevards) A vast club split over three underground rooms, with a play list spanning electro, hip-hop and funk, as well as jazz and live acts.

Rex Club (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 42 36 10 96; 5 blvd Poissonnière, 2e; admission €8-13; ☎ 11.30pm-6am Wed-Sat; **M** Bonne Nouvelle) The Rex reigns supreme in the house and techno scene and regularly hosts local and international DJs.

La Favela Chic (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 40 21 38 14; www.favelachic.com, in French; 18 rue du Faubourg du Temple, 10e; admission €10; ☎ 7.30pm-2am Tue-Fri, 9.30pm-4am Sat; **M** République) The ambience is more shantytown than chic in this restobar-cum-dancehall, which shimmies to the sound of samba and classic Brazilian pop.

SHOPPING

Le Bon Marché (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 44 39 80 00; www.bonmarche.fr; 24 rue de Sèvres, 7e; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 10am-9pm Thu, 9.30am-8pm Sat; **M** Sèvres Babylone) Opened by Gustave Eiffel as Paris' first department store in 1852.

Galleries Lafayette (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 42 82 34 56; www.gallerieslafayette.com; 40 blvd Haussmann, 9e; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat; to 9pm Thu;

M Auber or Chaussée d'Antin) Paris' premier department store features a wide selection of fashion and accessories.

Marché aux Puces de St-Ouen (Map pp208-9; www.les-puces.com; rue des Rosiers, av Michelet, rue Voltaire, rue Paul Bert & rue Jean-Henri Fabre, 18e; ☎ 9am or 10am-7pm Sat-Mon; **M** Porte de Clignancourt) Paris' *marchés aux puces* (flea markets) are an essential shopping stop – you might even find a few gems among all the tat and bric-a-brac. This is one of the largest, grouped into 10 separate areas (eg Marché Serpette and Marché Biron for antiques, Marché Malik for second-hand clothing).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

AÉROPORT D'ORLY

The small **Orly airport** (ORY; ☎ 01 49 75 15 15, flight info 08 92 68 15 15; www.adp.fr) is about 18km south of the city.

AÉROPORT PARIS-BEAUVAIS

The international airport at **Beauvais** (BVA; ☎ 03 44 11 46 86; www.aeroportbeauvais.com), 80km north of Paris, is used by Ryanair for its European flights, including those between Paris and Dublin, Shannon and Glasgow.

AÉROPORT ROISSY CHARLES DE GAULLE

Roissy Charles de Gaulle (CDG; ☎ 01 48 62 22 80, 08 92 68 15 15; www.adp.fr) is Paris' main international airport, 30km northeast of Paris. Terminals (Aérogares) 1 and 25 are used by international and domestic carriers.

Bus

Eurolines links Paris with destinations in Western and central Europe, Scandinavia and Morocco. The main **Eurolines office** (Map pp212-13; ☎ 01 43 54 11 99; www.eurolines.fr; 55 rue St-Jacques, 5e; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sat; **M** Cluny-La Sorbonne) is in the city centre.

Gare Routière Internationale de Paris-Gallieni (Map pp208-9; ☎ 08 92 89 90 91; 28 av du Général de Gaulle, 93541 Bagnolet; ☎ 8am-10pm; **M** Gallieni), the city's international bus terminal, is in the suburb of Bagnolet.

Train

Paris has six major train stations, each handling traffic to different parts of France and Europe.

Gare d'Austerlitz (Map pp208-9; blvd de l'Hôpital, 13e; **M** Gare d'Austerlitz) Spain and Portugal; Loire Valley and

non-TGV trains to southwestern France (eg Bordeaux and Basque Country).

Gare de l'Est (Map pp208-9; blvd de Strasbourg, 10e; **M** Gare de l'Est) Luxembourg, Switzerland (Basel, Lucerne, Zurich), southern Germany (Frankfurt, Munich) and points further east; areas east of Paris (Champagne, Alsace and Lorraine).

Gare de Lyon (Map pp212-13; blvd Diderot, 12e; **M** Gare de Lyon) Parts of Switzerland (eg Bern, Geneva, Lausanne), Italy and points beyond; TGV Sud-Est trains to areas southeast of Paris, including Dijon, Lyon, Provence, the Côte d'Azur and the Alps.

Gare du Nord (Map p214; rue de Dunkerque, 10e; **M** Gare du Nord) The UK, Belgium, northern Germany, Scandinavia, Moscow; terminus of the high-speed Thalys trains to/from Amsterdam, Brussels, Cologne and Geneva and Eurostar to London; trains to northern France, including TGVs to Lille and Calais.

Gare Montparnasse (Map pp208-9; cnr av du Maine & blvd de Vaugirard, 15e; **M** Montparnasse Bienvenue) Brittany and places en route from Paris (eg Chartres, Angers, Nantes); TGVs to Tours, Nantes, Bordeaux and southwestern France.

Gare St-Lazare (Map pp208-9; cnr rue St-Lazare & rue d'Amsterdam, 8e; **M** St-Lazare) Normandy (eg Dieppe, Le Havre, Cherbourg).

GETTING AROUND To/from the Airports

AÉROPORT D'ORLY

Getting to and from Orly airport is easy; there are lots of buses shuttling between the airport and the city. Apart from RATP bus 183, all services call at both terminals. Tickets are sold on board. Children under 11 usually pay half-price.

Air France Bus 1 (☎ 08 92 35 08 20; www.cars-airfrance.com, in French) This *navette* (shuttle bus; single/return €8/12, 30 to 45 minutes, every 15 minutes from 6am to 11pm) runs to/from Gare Montparnasse (Map pp208-9) and Aérogare des Invalides (Map pp208-9) in the 7e. The bus also stops at Porte d'Orléans or Duroc metro stations on request.

Noctilien Bus 31 (☎ 08 92 68 77 14, 08 92 68 41 14 in English) Part of the RATP night service, Noctilien bus No 31 links Gare de Lyon, Place d'Italie and Gare d'Austerlitz in Paris with Orly-Sud (€5.60, one hour, every hour from 12.30am to 5.30pm).

Orlybus (☎ 08 92 68 77 14) This RATP bus (€5.80, 30 minutes, every 15 to 20 minutes from 6am to 11.30pm from Orly, 5.35am to 11pm to Orly) runs to/from Denfert Rochereau metro stations (Map pp208-9) in the 14e and makes several stops in the eastern 14e.

Orlyval (☎ 08 92 68 77 14) This RATP service links Orly with the city centre via a shuttle train and the RER (€9.05,

35 to 40 minutes, every four to 12 minutes from 6am to 11pm). A shuttle train runs between the airport and Antony RER station (eight minutes) on RER line B; to get to Antony from the city (26 minutes), take line B4 towards St-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse. Orlyval tickets are valid on the RER and for metro travel within the city.

RATP Bus 183 (☎ 08 92 68 77 14) This is a slow public bus that links Orly-Sud (only) with Porte de Choisy metro station (€1.40 or one metro/bus ticket, one hour, every 35 minutes from 5.35am to 8.35pm).

RER C (☎ 08 90 36 10 10) An Aéroports de Paris (ADP) shuttle bus links the airport with RER line C at Pont de Rungis-Aéroport d'Orly RER station (€5.65, 50 minutes every 15 to 30 minutes from 5.35am to 11.30pm from Orly, 5.06am to 12am to Orly). From the city, take a C2 train towards Pont de Rungis or Massy-Palaiseau. Tickets are valid for onward travel on the metro.

Private shuttle buses provide door-to-door service for about €26 for a single person (from €17 per person for two or more). Book in advance and allow for numerous pick-ups and drop-offs.

Allô Shuttle (☎ 01 34 29 00 80; www.alloshuttle.com)

Paris Airports Service (☎ 01 46 80 14 67; www.paris-airportservice.com)

Shuttle Van ParisShuttle (☎ 08 00 69 96 99; www.parishuttle.com)

World Shuttle (☎ 01 46 80 14 67; www.world-shuttles.com)

A taxi between central Paris and Orly will cost €40 to €45 and take 30 minutes.

AÉROPORT PARIS-BEAUVAIS

Express Bus (☎ 08 92 68 20 64) leaves Parking Pershing (Map pp208–9; M) Porte Maillot at 1 blvd Pershing in the 17e, just west of Palais des Congrès de Paris, three hours before Ryanair departures and leaves the airport 20 to 30 minutes after each arrival, dropping off just south of Palais des Congrès on place de la Porte Maillot (€16.90, one to 1¼ hours, 8.05am to 10.40pm from Beauvais, 5.45am to 8.05pm to Beauvais). Tickets can be bought from the **Ryanair** (☎ 03 44 11 41 41) counter at the airport or from a kiosk in the car park.

A taxi between central Paris and Beauvais will cost €110 during the day and €150 at night and on Sundays.

AÉROPORT ROISSY CHARLES DE GAULLE

Roissy Charles de Gaulle has two train stations, CDG1 and CDG2. Both stations are

served by RER line B3. A free shuttle bus links each of the terminals with the train stations.

There are a number of public-transport options running between Aéroport Roissy Charles de Gaulle and central Paris. Tickets for public buses can be purchased on board.

Air France bus 2 (☎ 08 92 35 08 20; www.cars-airfrance.com, in French) This service (single/return €12/18, 35 to 50 minutes, every 15 minutes from 5.45am to 11pm) links the airport with the Arc de Triomphe just outside 2 av Carnot in the 17e (Map pp208–9; M) Charles de Gaulle-Étoile and the Palais des Congrès de Paris (Map pp208–9; M) Porte Maillot at blvd Gouvion St-Cyr in the 17e.

Air France bus 4 (☎ 08 92 35 08 20; www.cars-airfrance.com, in French) This service (single/return €12/18, 45 to 55 minutes, every 30 minutes 7am to 9pm) links the airport with Gare de Lyon (Map pp212–13) and Gare Montparnasse (Map pp208–9).

Noctilien Bus 121 & 140 (☎ 08 92 68 77 14, 08 92 68 41 14, in English) Part of RATP's night service. Links Montparnasse, Châtelet and Gare du Nord with Roissy Charles de Gaulle (€7, every hour from 12.30am to 5.30pm) and bus No 140 links Gare du Nord and Gare de l'Est with the airport.

RATP Bus 350 (☎ 08 92 68 77 14) This bus (€4.20 or three metro/bus tickets, 1¼ hours, every 30 minutes from 5.45am to 7pm) links Aéroports 1 and 2 with Gare de l'Est (Map pp208–9) and Gare du Nord (Map p214).

RATP Bus 351 (☎ 08 92 68 77 14) Links place de la Nation (Map pp208–9; M) Nation at av du Trône in the 11e, with Roissy Charles de Gaulle (€4.20 or three metro/bus tickets, 55 minutes, every 30 minutes from 7am to 9.30pm from Roissy Charles de Gaulle, 8.30am to 8.20pm to Roissy Charles de Gaulle).

RER B (☎ 08 90 36 10 10) RER line B3 links CDG1 and CDG2 with the city (€8, 30 minutes, every four to 15 minutes from 4.56am to 12.15am from Roissy Charles de Gaulle, 4.56am to 11.56pm to Roissy Charles de Gaulle). Take any RER line B train whose four-letter destination code begins with E (eg EIRE); a shuttle bus (every five to eight minutes) will ferry you to the appropriate terminal.

Roissybus (☎ 08 92 68 77 14) This direct bus links both terminals with rue Scribe (M) Opéra in the 9e (€8.40, one hour, every 15 to 20 minutes from 5.45am to 11pm).

The four shuttle-van companies listed in the Orly section (p225) will take you from Roissy Charles de Gaulle to your hotel for €25 for one person or €17 per person for two or more people. Book these shuttles in advance.

Taxis to/from the city centre cost from €40 to €55, depending on the traffic and time of day.

Car & Motorcycle

You'll need nerves of steel to drive in Paris, but it can be done. The fastest way across the city by car is usually via the *boulevard périphérique*, the ring road that encircles the city.

In many parts of Paris you pay €1.50 to €2 an hour for street parking. Municipal parking garages usually charge €4 per hour and about €25 for 24 hours. Beware of Paris' notoriously ticket-happy traffic wardens.

Car rental companies:

Avis (☎ 08 02 05 05 05; www.avis.fr)

Budget (☎ 08 25 00 35 64; www.budget.fr, in French)

Europcar (☎ 08 25 35 83 58; www.europcar.fr, in French)

Hertz (☎ 08 25 86 18 61; www.hertz.fr)

Smaller agencies can offer much more attractive deals. Check the *Yellow Pages* under 'Location d'Automobiles: Tourisme et Utilitaires'.

Public Transport

Paris' public transport system is mostly operated by the **RATP** (Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens; ☎ 08 92 68 77 14; www.ratp.fr).

The same RATP tickets are valid on the metro, the RER, buses, the Montmartre funicular and Paris' three tram lines. They cost €1.40 per ticket or €10.70 (€5.35 for children aged four to 11) for a *carnet* (book of tickets) of 10. Tickets and transport maps are available at all metro stations.

BUS

Paris' bus system runs between 5.45am and 12.30am Monday to Saturday. Services are reduced on Sunday and public holidays (when buses run from 7am to 8.30pm) and from 8.30pm to 12.30am daily when a *service en soirée* (evening service) of 20 buses operates.

After the metro lines have closed, 35 Noctilien (www.noctilien.fr) night buses kick in, departing every hour from 12.30am to 5.30am. The buses serve the main train stations and cross the major arteries of the city. Many routes pass through place du Châtelet (1er) west of the Hôtel de Ville. Look for blue 'N' or 'Noctilien' signs at bus stops.

Short bus rides (ie rides in one or two bus zones) cost one metro/bus ticket (€1.40); longer rides require two tickets. Remember to cancel (*oblitérer*) it in the *composteur* next to the driver. A single ride on a Noctilien bus costs €2.80.

METRO & RER NETWORK

Paris' underground network consists of two interlinked systems: the **Métropolitain** (metro) with 14 lines and 372 stations; and the **RER** (Réseau Express Régional), a network of suburban train lines.

Each metro train is known by the name of its terminus. On lines that split into several branches (such as line 3, 7 and 13), the terminus is indicated on the cars with back-lit panels, and often on electronic signs on the station platforms. The last train on each line begins its run between 12.35am and 1.04am. The metro starts up again around 5.30am.

The RER is faster than the metro, but the stops are further apart. Some of Paris' attractions, particularly those on the Left Bank, can be reached more easily by the RER than by metro.

RER lines are known by an alphanumeric combination – the letter (A to E) refers to the line, the number to the spur it will follow to the suburbs.

Always keep your ticket until you exit from your station; you may be stopped by a *contrôleur* (ticket inspector) and fined (€25 to €45).

TOURIST PASSES

The Mobilis card and its coupon allows unlimited travel for one day in two to eight zones (€5.40 to €18.40), but you'd need to make at least six metro trips in a day (based on the *carnet* price) to break even on this pass.

Paris Visite passes offer discounted entry to certain museums and activities and discounts on transport fares. The version covering one to three zones costs €8.35/13.70/18.25/26.65 for one/two/three/five days.

TRAVEL PASSES

The cheapest way to use public transport in Paris is to get a Carte Orange, a combined metro, RER and bus pass. A weekly Carte Orange (*coupon hebdomadaire*) costs €15.70 for zones 1 and 2 and is valid from Monday to Sunday. To buy your first Carte Orange, take a passport-size photograph to any metro or RER ticket window.

Taxi

The *prise en charge* (flag-fall) in a Parisian taxi is €2. Within the city limits, it costs

€0.77 per kilometre for travel between 7am and 7pm Monday to Saturday, and €1.09 per kilometre from 7pm to 7am at night, all day Sunday and on public holidays. Each piece of baggage over 5kg costs €1 extra, as do pick-ups from stations.

Twenty-four-hour taxi companies include the following:

Abeille Radio Taxi (☎ 01 42 70 00 42)

Alpha Taxis (☎ 01 45 85 85 85)

ASTC (☎ 01 42 88 02 02)

Taxis Bleus (☎ 01 49 36 10 10)

Taxis-Radio Étoile (☎ 01 42 70 41 41)

AROUND PARIS

Bordered by five rivers – the Epte, Aisne, Eure, Yonne and Marne – the area around Paris is rather like a giant island, which explains why it's often referred to as the Île de France. In past centuries, this was where you'd find the country retreats of the French kings – most notably at the extravagant châteaux of Versailles and Fontainebleau. These days the royal castles have been joined by a kingdom of a rather more magic kind.

DISNEYLAND PARIS

In 1992, Mickey Mouse, Snow White and friends set up shop on reclaimed sugar-beet fields 32km east of Paris, at a cost of €4.6 billion. Though not quite as over-the-top as its American cousins, **Disneyland Paris** (☎ 08 25 30 60 30, UK 0 870 503 0305, USA 407-WDISNEY, 407-934 7639; www.disneylandparis.com; adult/child €42/34, Passe-Partout ticket adult/child €51/43, under 3 free) is still capable of packing in the crowds – some 12 million visitors strolled through its gates last year.

One-day admission fees to either the main Disneyland theme park or Walt Disney Studios Park include unlimited access to rides and activities. A Passe-Partout ticket allows entry to both parks for one day.

VERSAILLES

pop 85,300

The prosperous, leafy and ever-so bourgeois suburb of Versailles, 21km southwest of Paris, is the site of the grandest and most famous chateau in France. It served as the kingdom's political capital and royal court for more than a century, from 1682 to 1789 – the year revolutionary mobs massacred the palace guard and dragged Louis XVI and

Marie-Antoinette back to Paris where they eventually had their heads lopped off.

Sights

The Château de Versailles (Versailles Palace; ☎ 01 30 83 77 88; www.chateauversailles.fr; admission to the palace adult/under 18yr €8/free, admission to Grand & Petit Trianon €5/free, joint ticket incl guided tour high/low season €20/15.50; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 5.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) was built in the mid-17th century during the reign of Louis XIV – the Roi Soleil (Sun King) – to project the absolute power of the French monarchy. Jointly designed by the architect Louis Le Vau (later replaced by Jules Hardouin-Mansart), the painter and interior designer Charles Le Brun, and the landscape artist André Le Nôtre, it's a fabulous monument to the wealth and ambition of the French aristocracy.

The 580m-long palace itself is split into several wings, each with its own astonishing array of grand halls, wood-panelled corridors and sumptuous bedchambers, including the **Grand Appartement du Roi** (King's Suite) and the **Galerie des Glaces** (Hall of Mirrors), a 75m-long ballroom with 17 huge mirrors on one side. Outside the main palace are the vast **landscaped gardens**, filled with canals, pools and neatly trimmed box hedges, and two outbuildings, the **Grand Trianon** and the **Petit Trianon**.

There are **guided tours** (1 1/1/2hr adult €5/7/8, 10-17yr €4/5.50/7; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 3.45pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) around parts of the chateau not otherwise open to the public, although you'll need to book ahead in the high season.

Alternatively, the **Office de Tourisme de Versailles** (☎ 01 39 24 88 88; www.versailles-tourisme.com; 2bis av de Paris; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon, 9am-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-7pm Tue-Sat, to 6pm Sun Oct-Mar) offers tours (€8) of the chateau year-round.

Sleeping

Royal Hôtel (☎ 01 39 50 67 31; www.royalhotelversailles.com; 23 rue Royale; d €58-67, tr €85) In the delightful St-Louis neighbourhood, this hotel displays some character and a deep fondness for patterned wallpaper. The smallest rooms are on the verge of being pretty, with an odd mix of bulk furnishings and old-fashioned touches.

Hôtel d'Angleterre (☎ 01 39 51 43 50; www.hotel-angleterre-versailles.com; 2bis rue de Fontenay; s €55-66, d & tw €72-87) Less than 300m from the chateau entrance, and around the corner from the

Jeu de Paume, is this charming 18-room hotel. The clean, attractive rooms are very modern – aside from the red velvet curtains and squishy mattresses. Some rooms are considerably smaller and pokier than others.

À la Ferme (☎ 01 39 53 10 81; 3 rue du Maréchal Joffre; starters €6-10, mains €10.50-15, lunch/dinner menu €14.50/21.80; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) 'At the Farm' specialises in grilled meats and the cuisine of southwestern France. It's cheaper and more relaxed than a lot of restaurants in the area.

Crêperie St-Louis (☎ 01 39 53 40 12; 33 rue du Vieux Versailles; menus €10-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) A warm little Breton place that's very popular at lunch, with sweet and savoury crepes (€3 to €8.50).

If you're entering outdoor **Marché Notre Dame** (place du Marché Notre Dame; ☎ 7.30am-1.30pm Tue, Fri & Sun) from the tourist office, enter via passage Saladin (33 av de St-Cloud). There are also **food halls** (☎ 7am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 7am-2pm Sun) surrounding the marketplace.

Getting There & Away

RER line C5 (€2.55) takes you from Paris' Left Bank RER stations to Versailles–Rive Gauche station, which is only 700m southeast of the chateau. The last train to Paris leaves shortly before midnight.

SNCF operates up to 70 trains a day from Paris' Gare St-Lazare (€3.40) to Versailles–Rive Droite, which is 1.2km from the chateau. The last train to Paris leaves just after midnight.

CHARTRES

pop 40,250

The magnificent 13th-century cathedral of Chartres, crowned by twin spires – one Gothic, the other Romanesque – is arguably the most famous and most beautiful in France, rivalled only by Notre Dame and Rouen in terms of scale and spectacle. Surrounded by farmland 88km southwest of Paris, the cathedral completely dominates the medieval town and the surrounding countryside, and makes a great day trip from Paris.

The **Office de Tourisme de Chartres** (☎ 02 37 18 26 26; www.chartres-tourisme.com; place de la Cathédrale; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-5.30pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm & 2.30-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) rents **audioguide tours** (per 1/2 people €5.50/8.50) of the medieval city (1½ hours).

Sights

The 130m-long cathedral **Cathédrale Notre Dame de Chartres** (Cathedral of Our Lady of Chartres; ☎ 02 37 21 22 07; www.cathedrale-chartres.com, in French; place de la Cathédrale; ☎ 8.30am-6.45pm), is one of the crowning architectural achievements of Western civilisation. The original Romanesque cathedral was devastated in a fire in 1194, but remnants of it remain in the **Portail Royal** (Royal Portal) and the 103m-high **Clocher Vieux** (Old Bell Tower, also known as the South Tower). The rest of the cathedral predominantly dates from the 13th century, including many of the 172 glorious **stained-glass windows**, which are renowned for the depth and intensity of their blue tones.

A platform emerges some 70m up the 112m-high **Clocher Neuf** (New Bell Tower or North Tower; adult/concession €6.50/4.50, under 18 & 1st Sun of certain months free; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2pm-5.30pm Sun May-Aug, 9.30am-noon & 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Sep-Apr), with superb views of the cathedral's three-tiered flying buttresses and 19th-century copper roof.

Eating

Le Grill Pélagie (☎ 02 37 36 07 49; 1 av Jehan de Beauce; mains €10-15, menu €11.50-18.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This is a popular place specialising in grills and Tex-Mex dishes such as quesadillas (€6.50) and fajitas (€14 to €16).

Café Serpente (☎ 02 37 21 68 81; 2 Cloître Notre Dame; dishes €13.50-15; ☎ 10am-11pm) This atmospheric brasserie and *salon de thé* (tea-room) is conveniently located opposite the cathedral.

Le Tripot (☎ 02 37 36 60 11; 11 place Jean Moulin; mains €13.50-24, lunch menu €15; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Mon-Sat) This wonderful little place just down from the cathedral is one of the best bistros in Chartres.

There's a **covered market** (place Billard; ☎ 7am-1pm Sat), just off rue des Changes south of the cathedral. It dates from the early 20th century; there are many food shops surrounding it.

Getting There & Away

Some 30 SNCF trains a day (20 on Sunday) link Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€12.40, 55 to 70 minutes) with Chartres, all of which pass through Versailles-Chantiers (€10.10, 45 to 60 minutes).

CHAMPAGNE

The rural countryside of Champagne is, of course, best-known for producing the world's bubbly supply. Although there are many pretenders to the crown, only wine produced in designated local areas (known as *appellations*), then aged, bottled and labelled according to strict regulations, can be labelled as true champagne. The town of Épernay, south of Reims, is home to many of the region's most famous vintages, and the top place for a spot of *dégustation* (tasting).

REIMS

pop 206,000

Along with Épernay, the neat, orderly town of Reims (pronounced something like 'rance') is one of the most important centres of champagne production. From 816 until 1825, French monarchs began their reigns with a coronation ceremony in Reims' famed cathedral, which remains the city's most impressive landmark. Like much of the rest of the city, the cathedral has been heavily restored since the devastating bombardments that laid waste to Reims during WW1.

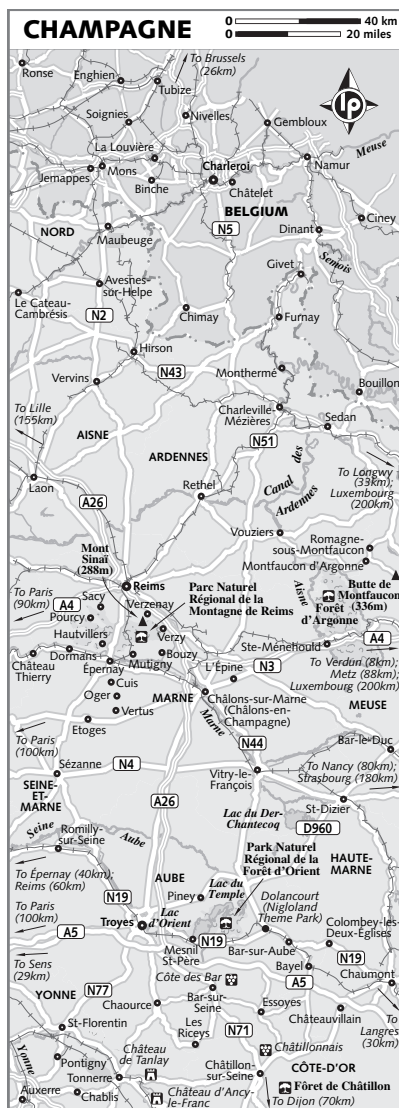
Orientation & Information

The train station is about 1km northwest of the cathedral, across square Colbert from place Drouet d'Erlon, the city's major night-life centre. Virtually every street in the city centre is one-way.

There's internet access in the courtyard of a shopping arcade at **Clique et Croque Cybercafé** (27 rue de Vesle; per min €0.07; ☎ 10am-12.30am Mon-Sat, 2-9pm Sun). The **tourist office** (☎ 03 26 77 45 00; www.reims-tourisme.com; 2 rue Guillaume de Machault; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun & holidays mid-Apr-mid-Oct, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun & holidays mid-Oct-mid-Apr) sells Le Pass Citadine (€12), which includes a champagne house tour, an all-day bus ticket, entry to all four municipal museums and a box of *biscuits roses* (pink biscuits), traditionally nibbled with champagne. There's also a **branch post office** (2 rue Cérés).

Sights & Activities

The **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (☎ approx 7.30am-7.30pm, closed Sun morning Mass), a Gothic edifice begun in 1211 and completed around a century later, was for centuries the venue for all French royal coronations – including that of



Charles VII, who was crowned here on 17 July 1429, with Joan of Arc at his side.

Following the extensive damage caused during WW1, the cathedral was restored with funds donated largely by John D Rockefeller; reconsecration took place in 1938, just in time for the next war. Today, the 138m-long cathedral is more interesting for

its dramatic history than for its heavily restored architectural features. Notable sights include the western façade's 12-petalled **great rose window**, a 15th-century **astronomical dock**, and decorative windows designed by painter Marc Chagall.

CHAMPAGNE CELLARS

Some of the most celebrated names in Champagne production have their base in Reims, complete with *caves* (cellars) and tasting tours.

Taittinger (☎ 03 26 85 84 33; www.taittinger.com; 9 place St-Niçaise; tours adult/under 12yr €7/free) An excellent place to come for a clear, straightforward presentation on how champagne is actually made – no clap-trap about 'the champagne mystique' here!

Mumm (pronounced moom; ☎ 03 26 49 59 70; www.mumm.com; 34 rue du Champ de Mars; tours adult/under 16yr €7.50/free) Founded in 1827 and now the world's third-largest producer (eight million bottles a year).

Pommery (☎ 03 26 61 62 55; www.pommery.com; 5 place du Général Gouraud; tours adult/student & 12-17yr/under 12yr €8/6/free) Cellar tours take you 30m underground to Gallo-Roman quarries and 25 million bottles of bubbly.

Sleeping

Centre International de Séjour (CIS; ☎ 03 26 40 52 60; www.cis-reims.com; chaussée Bocquaine; 1-2-/3-bed dm €20/13.50/12, with shower & toilet €32/18/14.50; ☎ 24hr; ☎) The 85 brightly painted rooms are institutional and pretty drab, but this friendly hostel makes a decent budget base. To get there take bus B, K, M or N to the Comédie stop or bus H to the Pont de Gaulle stop.

Hôtel de la Cathédrale (☎ 03 26 47 28 46; hoteldela.cathedrale@wanadoo.fr; 20 rue Liebigier; d/q from €60/80) Charm, graciousness and some very shiny brass greet guests at this family-run two-star place, whose 17 tasteful rooms are smallish but pleasingly chintzy.

Grand Hôtel de l'Univers (☎ 03 26 88 68 08; www.hotel-univers-reims.com; in French; 41 blvd Foch; d from €78) This venerable three-star place has 42 large rooms, tastefully appointed, with high ceilings and bathrooms big enough to do jumping jacks in.

Eating & Drinking

Place Drouet d'Erlon, the focal point of Reims' nightlife, is lined with pizzerias, brasseries and sandwich places.

L'Apostrophe (☎ 03 26 79 19 89; 59 place Drouet d'Erlon; 2-course weekday menu €14, mains €13-21.50)

This stylish *café/brasserie* specialises in highbrow chatter and mean *piscines* (enormous multiperson cocktails), along with excellent French and international cuisine.

Brasserie Le Boulingrin (☎ 03 26 40 96 22; 48 rue de Mars; menu €17.50-24; ☎ Mon-Sat) Offers a mini-trip back in time with original 1920s décor, including an old-time zinc bar. The culinary focus is on meat and fish.

Le Continental (☎ 03 26 47 01 47; 95 place Drouet d'Erlon; menu €22-55; ☎ meals noon-2.30pm & 7-11.30pm) Built in the early 20th century, this classy, marble-floored place serves up panoramic views and classic French dishes such as *magret de canard* (duck breast fillet). It opens all afternoon for drinks.

Self-caterers should try the **food market** (place du Boulingrin; ☎ to 1.30pm Wed) or **Monoprix supermarket** (21 rue de Châtivesle; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat).

Getting There & Away

Direct services link Reims with Épernay (€5.50, 24 to 46 minutes, 23 daily weekdays, 14 daily weekends) and Paris' Gare de l'Est (€21.60, 1¼ hours, 10 to 15 daily). In town, tickets and information are available at the **Boutique SNCF** (☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat) inside the Centre Bourse shopping centre. Journeys to Paris will take just 45 minutes once the long-awaited TGV Est Européen line starts running in June 2007.

ÉPERNAY

pop 26,000

Home to a number of the world's most famous champagne houses, well-to-do Épernay, 25km south of Reims, is the best place in Champagne for sampling a bit of the bubbly. Beneath the streets of the town, some 200 million of bottles of champagne are slowly being aged, just waiting around to be popped open for some fizz-fuelled celebration.

Orientation

Mansion-lined av de Champagne, where many of Épernay's champagne houses are based, stretches eastwards from the town's commercial heart around place des Arcades, rue Général Leclerc and rue St-Thibault.

Information

Cyberm@nia (11 place des Arcades; per hr €3; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat, 2-8pm Sun) Internet access.

Main post office (place Hugues Plomb)

Tourist office (☎ 03 26 53 33 00; www.ot-epernay.fr, in French; 7 av de Champagne; ☹ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun & holidays mid-Apr–mid-Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Oct–mid-Apr) Has details on cellar visits and walking routes in the area.

Champagne Houses

Dignified razzle-dazzle is the name of the game at Épernay's many champagne houses. Several *maisons* (houses) offer informative tours, followed by tasting and a visit to the factory-outlet champagne shop.

Moët & Chandon (☎ 03 26 51 20 20; www.moët.com; adult/12-17yr €8/4.70; 18 av de Champagne; ☹ tours 9.30-11.15am & 2-4.15pm, closed Sat & Sun mid-Nov–Mar) Arguably the number-one name in the world of champagne production. A Methusalem of vintage 1995 Dom Perignon is a snip at €6000.

De Castellane (☎ 03 26 51 19 11; www.castellane.com, in French; 64 av de Champagne; adult/10-17yr €7/5; ☹ tours 10.30-11.15am & 2.30-5.15pm mid-Mar–Dec, Sat & Sun Jan–mid-Mar, closed 3 weeks Jan) Tours take in the *maison's* bubbly museum, dedicated to the *méthode champenoise*.

Mercier (☎ 03 26 51 22 22; www.champagnemercier.com; 68-70 av de Champagne; adult/12-17yr €6.50/3; ☹ tours 9.30-11.30am & 2-4.30pm mid-Feb–mid-Dec, closed Tue & Wed mid-Feb–early-Mar & mid-Nov–mid-Dec) The most popular marque in France has the flashiest tour – highlights include a 160,000L champagne barrel and a lift that plummets 30m underground into the musty champagne cellars.

Sleeping

Hôtel St-Pierre (☎ 03 26 54 40 80; hotel.saintpierre@wanadoo.fr; 1 rue Jeanne d'Arc; d €36, with hand basin €24) In an early 20th-century mansion that has hardly changed in half a century, this one-star place has 15 simple rooms that retain the charm and atmosphere of yesteryear.

Hôtel Les Berceaux (☎ 03 26 55 28 84; www.lesberceaux.com; 13 rue des Berceaux; d €77-86) This three-star institution, founded in 1889, has 27 comfortable rooms, each different and all with a modern Champenoise ambience.

Le Clos Raymi (☎ 03 26 51 00 58; www.closraymi-hotel.com; 3 rue Joseph de Venoge; d from €130) Staying at this delightful three-star place is like being a personal guest of Monsieur Chandon of champagne fame, whose luxurious home this was over a century ago. The seven romantic rooms have giant beds, 3.7m-high ceilings, ornate mouldings and parquet floors.

Eating

La Cave à Champagne (☎ 03 26 55 50 70; 16 rue Gambetta; menu €15-36; ☹ Thu-Tue) Well-regarded by locals for its Champenoise cuisine, including *potée à la Champenoise* (poultry and pork oven-baked with cabbage).

Places to pick up picnic supplies include the **covered market** (Halle St-Thibault; rue Gallice; ☹ 8am-noon Wed & Sat), and **Traiteur** (9 place Hugues Plomb; ☹ 8am-12.45pm & 3-7.30pm, closed Sun & Wed).

The **Hôtel Les Berceaux** has two in-house eateries: **Restaurant Patrick Michélon** (menu €30-64; ☹ Wed-Sun), a gastronomic restaurant whose specialities include truffles (in season) and blackcurrant sorbet; and **Le Sept** (menu €16-22), a more popularly priced bistro with traditional French fare.

Getting There & Around

The **train station** (place Mendès-France) has direct services to Nancy (€25.10, two hours, five or six daily), Reims (€5.50, 24 to 46 minutes, 23 daily weekdays, 14 daily weekends) and Paris' Gare de l'Est (€18.60, 1¼ hours, eight to 13 daily).

TROYES

pop 123,000

Troyes has an old city graced with some of the finest Renaissance and medieval architecture in France. The streets are lined with half-timbered houses and gabled buildings, though few would be familiar to Chrétien de Troyes, who penned courtly romances here in the 12th century – the city was almost totally rebuilt after a 1524 fire.

Orientation & Information

The main commercial street is rue Émile Zola. Most of the city's sights and activities are in the Old City, centred on the 17th-century town hall and Église St-Jean.

The main **tourist office** (☎ 03 25 73 36 88; rue Mignard; ☹ 10am-7pm Jul–mid-Sep, 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun & holidays Apr-Jun & mid-Sep–Oct) is in the city centre, and there's a second **annexe** (☎ 03 25 82 62 70; 16 blvd Carnot; ☹ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat except holidays year-round, 10am-1pm Sun & holidays Nov-Mar) at the train station.

Sights

The best way to explore Troyes' old town is on foot. You'll find some of the oldest buildings along **rue Paillot de Montabert**, rue

Champeaux and **rue de Vauluisant**. Just off rue Champeaux (between No 30 and 32) is the narrow **ruelle des Chats** (Alley of the Cats), which feels like a time hole into the 16th century.

The **Cathédrale St-Pierre et St-Paul** (☹ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, to 5pm Sun & holidays Sep-Jun, closed Mon Nov-Mar) is something of an architectural mishmash, incorporating elements from every period of Champenoise architecture. In 1429, Joan of Arc and Charles VII stopped here on their way to his coronation in Reims.

The **Musée d'Art Moderne** (☎ 03 25 76 26 80; place St-Pierre; adult/student under 25yr €5/free; ☹ 11am-6pm, closed Mon & hols) features works by Derain, Dufy, Matisse, Modigliani, Picasso, Soutine and local favourite Maurice Marinot, amassed by local entrepreneurs Pierre and Denise Lévy, who founded the Lacoste chain.

The **Musée St-Loup** (☎ 03 25 76 21 68; 1 rue Chrestien de Troyes; adult/student under 25yr €4/free; ☹ 10am-noon or 1pm & 2-6pm, closed Tue & holidays), has a varied collection of medieval sculpture, archaeology and natural history.

Also worth a look is the **Apothicairerie de l'Hôtel-Dieu-le-Comte** (☎ 03 25 80 98 97; quai des Comtes de Champagne), a wood-panelled pharmacy from the early 1700s.

Sleeping

Hôtel Le Trianon (☎ 03 25 73 18 52; 2 rue Pithou; d with hand basin/shower €25/34; ☹ reception 11am-8pm Mon, 6.30am-8pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) At this gay-friendly place the rainbow flag flies proudly from the balcony. The eight rooms, above a jaunty yellow bar, are spacious, if a little ordinary.

Hôtel Les Comtes de Champagne (☎ 03 25 73 11 70; www.comtesdechampagne.com; 56 rue de la Monnaie; d/q from €47/63, s/d with hand basin from €30/35, s with shower from €41) For centuries, the same massive wooden ceiling beams have kept this super-welcoming place from collapsing into a pile of toothpicks. A huge and very romantic double goes for €69.

Hôtel Arlequin (☎ 03 25 83 12 70; www.hotelarlequin.com; 50 rue de Turenne; d from €53.50, with shower €39.50; ☹ reception 8am-12.30pm & 2-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-12.30pm & 6.30-10pm Sun & holidays) The 22 cheerful rooms at this charming, custard-yellow hostelry come with antique furnishings, high ceilings and commedia dell'arte playfulness.

Eating

Pizzeria Giuseppino (☎ 03 25 73 92 44; 26 rue Paillot de Montabert; pasta & pizzas €7-9.50; ☹ Tue-Sat) Serves crispy, ultra-thin pizza widely considered to be Troyes' best.

Le Jardin Gourmand (☎ 03 25 73 36 13; 31 rue Paillot de Montabert; menu €16.50; ☹ closed Mon lunch & Sun) Elegant without being overly formal this place boasts a decent wine list including 25 vintages available by the glass; there is a terrace in summer.

La Mignardise (☎ 03 25 73 15 30; 1 ruelle des Chats; menu €19-45; ☹ closed dinner Sun & Mon) An elegant restaurant whose traditional French cuisine is served under ancient wood beams, 19th-century mouldings and ultra-modern halogen lamps.

Valentino (☎ 03 25 73 14 14; 35 rue Paillot de Montabert; menu €22-46; ☹ noon-1.30pm & 7.30-9.30pm, closed lunch Sat, dinner Sun & Mon) A modern fusion restaurant, combining classic French ingredients and savoir-faire with East Asian flavours.

For self-catering try the **covered market** (☹ 8am-12.45pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Thu, 7am-7pm Fri & Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun) or the **Monoprix supermarket** (71 rue Émile Zola; ☹ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat).

Getting There & Away

The **bus station office** (☎ 03 25 71 28 42; ☹ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Fri), run by Courriers de l'Aube, is in a corner of the train station building. Troyes is on the rather isolated line linking Basel (Bâle; Switzerland) and Mulhouse (Alsace) with Paris' Gare de l'Est (€21.10, 1½ hours, 12 to 14 daily).

ALSACE & LORRAINE

Perched on the border between France and Germany, the neighbouring regions of Alsace and Lorraine are where the worlds of Gallic and Germanic culture meet head-on, but despite its Teutonic overtones, this is still very much part of France.

STRASBOURG

pop 427,000

To most people, Strasbourg is best known as one of Europe's main seats of power. The European parliament, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights are all based here (when they're not busy in Brussels), and despite its rather bureaucratic image, you'll find Strasbourg a

STRASBOURG

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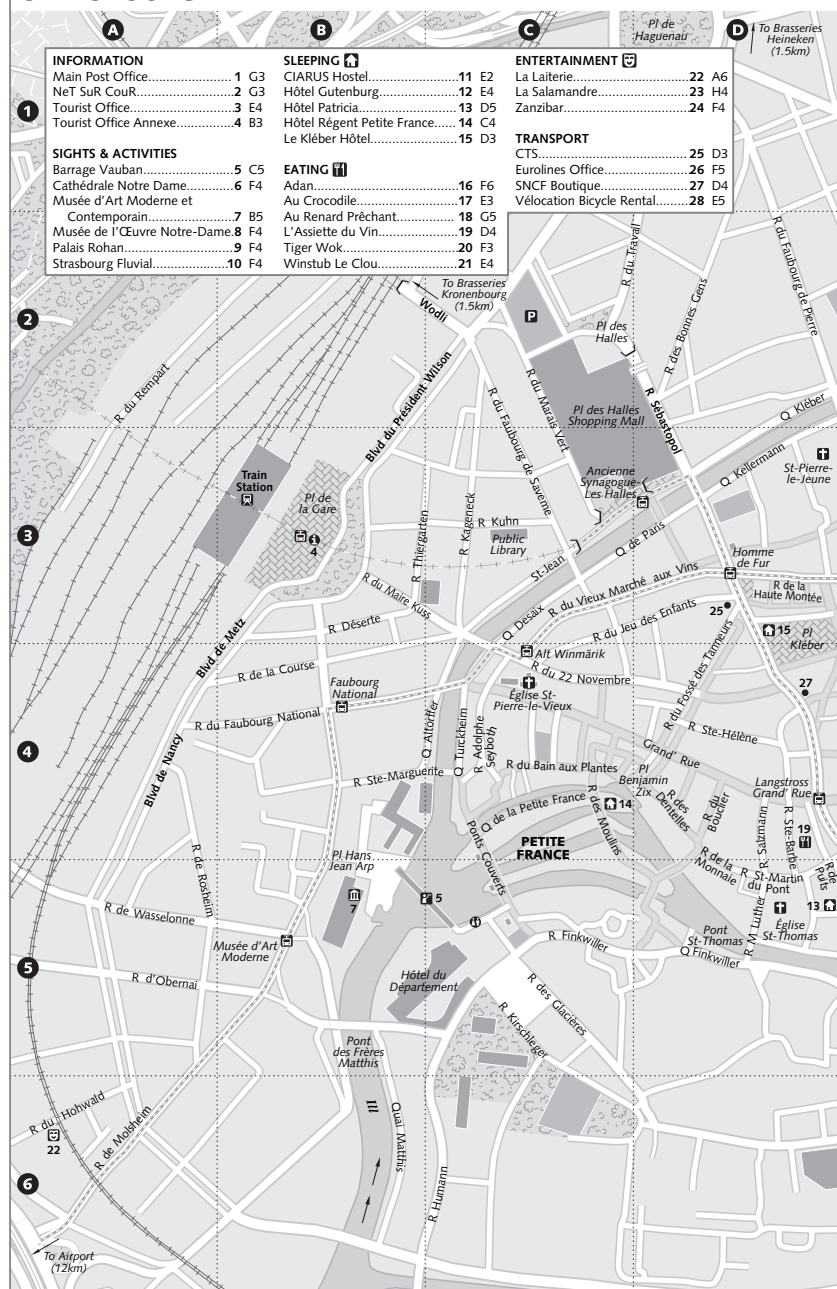
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cosmopolitan and surprisingly fun city. Bicycles buzz along the canals and the city swings by night when students and politicians alike head for the many pubs and *winstubs* (Alsatian restaurants) that line the streets of the old town. Strasbourg's excellent museums and rosy-pink cathedral are worth exploring, and when you need to quench your thirst, you can take a tour of one of two huge lager breweries just outside the city centre.

Orientation

The train station is 400m west of the Grande Île (Big Island), the core of ancient and modern Strasbourg, whose main squares are place Kléber, place Broglie (*broag-lee*), place Gutenberg and place du Château. The Petite France area, in the Grande Île's southwestern corner, is subdivided by canals. The European parliament building is 2km northeast of the cathedral.

Information

Main post office (5 av de la Marseillaise; tram stop République)

NeT SuR CouR (☎ 03 88 35 66 76; 18 quai des Pêcheurs; per hr €2; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 2-8pm Sat & Sun; tram stop Gallia) Well-equipped internet café.

Tourist office (☎ 03 88 52 28 28; www.ot-strasbourg.fr; 17 place de la Cathédrale; ☎ 9am-7pm) The Strasbourg Pass (€10.60), a coupon book valid for three days, offers discounts on local sights. One-and-a-half-hour MP3 tours of the old city cost adult/student €6/3.

Tourist office annexe (☎ 03 88 32 51 49; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Sep & Dec, to 12.30pm & 1.45-6pm Apr, May, Oct & Nov, closed Sun Jan-Mar & Nov; tram stop Gare Centrale) At the time of research it was housed in front of the train station in a temporary building.

Sights & Activities

The enchanting **Grande Île**, with its public squares, busy pedestrianised areas and up-market shopping, is paradise for an aimless amble. The narrow streets of the **old city** are especially enchanting at night, particularly around the cathedral, but for Alsatian atmosphere, **Petite France** is the place to explore – a chocolate-box confection of half-timbered buildings, peaceful canals and geranium-filled window boxes. The best views of the Ill River are from the terrace at **Barrage Vauban** (admission free; ☎ 9am-7.30pm), a dam built to prevent river-borne attacks on the city.

Strasbourg's lacy, candy-coloured Gothic **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (admission free; ☎ 7am-7pm)

is one of the marvels of European architecture. The west façade was completed in 1284, but the 142m spire, the tallest of its time, wasn't finished till 1439. The 30m-high contraption just inside the southern entrance is the *horloge astronomique* (astronomical clock), a late-16th-century clock that strikes solar noon every day at 12.30pm. The 66m-high **platform** (☎ 03 88 43 60 40; adult/student & under 18yr €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) above the façade affords a spectacular stork's-eye view of Strasbourg.

Occupying a group of magnificent 14th- and 16th-century buildings, the world-renowned **Musée de l'Œuvre Notre-Dame** (☎ 03 88 32 88 17; 3 place du Château; adult/student under 25yr & senior/under 18yr with audioguide €4/2/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) has one of Europe's premier collections of Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance sculptures, 15th-century paintings and stained glass.

The **Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain** (Museum of Modern & Contemporary Art; ☎ 03 88 23 31 31; place Hans Jean Arp; adult/student under 25yr & senior/under 18yr €5/2.50/free; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, noon-10pm Thu, 10am-6pm Sun; tram stop Musée d'Art Moderne) has an exceptional collection of works representing every major art movement of the past century.

The **Palais Rohan** (☎ 03 88 52 50 00; 2 place du Château; each museum adult/student under 25yr & senior/under 18yr €4/2/free, whole complex adult/student under 25yr & senior/under 18yr €6/3/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon) was built between 1732 and 1742 as a residence for the city's bishops. It houses several museums including the **Musée Archéologique**, which has exhibits from the Palaeolithic period to AD 800.

Tours

Strasbourg Fluvial (☎ 03 88 84 13 13, ☎ 03 88 32 75 25; behind Palais Rohan; adult/student under 25yr €7.50/4; ☎ nightly May-Sep, 10.30am, 1pm, 2.30pm & 4pm Dec-Feb, more frequent when warmer) Boat excursions (70 minutes) with English commentary are run by this outfit.

Brasseries Kronenbourg (☎ 03 88 27 41 59; siege.visites@kronenbourg-fr.com; 68 route d'Oberhausbergen; adult/student/12-18yr/family €5/4/3/14; tram stop Ducs d'Alsace) Some 2.5km northwest of the Grande Île, offers thirst-quenching brewery tours several times daily (including a beer or three).

Brasseries Heineken (☎ 03 88 19 57 55; 4 rue St-Charles) About 1.5km north of town it has free, two-hour brewery tours during the week.

Call or email either of the breweries to make a reservation, and remember to ask when tours are conducted in English.

Sleeping

It is *extremely* difficult to find last-minute accommodation from Monday to Thursday when the European parliament is in session (generally for one week each month) – contact the tourist office for dates. Many hotels apply high-season rates during European parliament sessions and in May, June, September, October and December.

CIARUS Hostel (☎ 03 88 15 27 88; www.ciarus.com; 7 rue Finkmatt; 8-/4-/2-bed dm incl breakfast €20/24/26.50; ☎) This welcoming, 101-room hostel is so stylish it even counts a number of European parliament members among its regular clients. By bus, take No 2, 4 or 10 to the Place de Pierre stop.

Hôtel Patricia (☎ 03 88 32 14 60; www.hotelpatricia.fr; 1a rue du Puits; d from €43, with hand basin €32, hall shower €2; ☎ reception 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun; ☎) The dark, rustic interior, simple furnishings and Vosges sandstone floors of this former convent make for an atmospheric night's sleep.

Le Kléber Hôtel (☎ 03 88 32 09 53; www.hotel-kleber.com; 29 place Kléber; d €52-75; ☎) The 30 rooms are named after fruits, spices, pastries and other high-calorie treats and are decorated accordingly. Meringue is all white, of course, while Noisette is light brown and makes you feel like you're inside a giant hazelnut. Dieters might want to avoid Pavlova or Kougelopf.

Hôtel Gutenberg (☎ 03 88 32 17 15; www.hotel-gutenberg.com; 31 rue des Serruriers; d €65-98; ☎ ☎) One of the city's best-value two-star hotels, just two blocks from the cathedral. The 42 tasteful rooms have antique touches and sparkling, all-tile bathrooms.

Hôtel Régent Petite France (☎ 03 88 76 43 43; www.regent-hotels.com; 5 rue des Moulins; d from €255, ste €350-465; ☎ ☎) Guests of this luxurious four-star hotel enjoy romantic watery views, a sauna, and marble bathrooms worthy of a Roman emperor.

Eating & Drinking

Strasbourg is a gastronome's dream. Just south of place Gutenberg, rue des Tonneliers and nearby streets are lined with midrange restaurants of all sorts. Inexpensive eateries can be found along rue des Frères, especially towards place St-Étienne.

Au Renard Prêchant (☎ 03 88 35 62 87; 33 place de Zurich; mains €9.50-16.50; ☎ closed Sun & lunch Sat) A stuffed, bespectacled *renard* (fox) presides over this warm, woody and very Alsatian restaurant, housed in a 16th-century chapel. *Gibier* (game) bagged by Molsheim-area hunters is a winter speciality.

Adan (☎ 03 88 35 70 84; www.adan.fr, in French; 6 rue Sédillot; menu €12.50; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) An informal vegetarian-organic restaurant with tasty soups, salads and quiches.

Tiger Wok (☎ 03 88 36 44 87; 8 rue du Faisan; dinner €14, all-you-can-eat €23; ☎ lunch & dinner) Locals tired of pigs' knuckles and foie gras flock to this wokkery, where you choose your ingredients (veggies, fish, meat) and then watch them being stir-fried by your own personal *wokeur*.

Winstub Le Clou (☎ 03 88 32 11 67; 3 rue du Chaudron; mains from €20; ☎ closed Sun, holidays & lunch Wed) A typical *winstub* (literally 'wine room'), where diners sit together at long tables with paisley tablecloths. Specialities include *baeckeoffe* (meat stew) and *wädele braisé au pinot noir* (ham knuckles in wine).

L'Assiette du Vin (☎ 03 88 32 00 92; 5 rue de la Chaîne; lunch menu with wine €23; ☎ dinner daily, lunch Tue-Fri) The décor changes with the seasons as does the French cuisine, inspired by what's available fresh in the marketplace. The award-winning wine list encompasses 250 vintages.

Au Crocodile (☎ 03 88 32 13 02; www.au-crocodile.com; 10 rue de l'Outre; 2-/3-course lunch menu €56/78, with wine €83/110; ☎ Tue-Sat) This superb restaurant has the hushed solemnity of a true temple of French gastronomy. Specialities include *foie de canard cuit en croûte de sel* (duck liver cooked in a crust of salt; €55). Reservations are a good idea, especially on Friday and Saturday. Look out for the eponymous stuffed croc suspended above the foyer.

Entertainment

Strasbourg's nightlife is both busy and buzzy. Details on cultural events appear in the free monthly *Spectacles* (www.spectacles-publications.com, in French), available at the tourist office.

Zanzibar (☎ 03 88 36 66 18; 1 place St-Étienne; concerts usually €4-6; ☎ 4pm-4am, may be closed Aug) A laid-back bar in the heart of the Grande Île's student quarter, with regular gigs held in the Dantesque cellar.

La Laiterie (☎ 03 88 23 72 37; www.artefact.org, in French; 11-13 rue du Hohwald; ☎ closed Jul, Aug &

Christmas-early Jan; tram stop Laiterie) One kilometre southwest of the station, this is Strasbourg's most vibrant venue for live music.

La Salamandre (☎ 03 88 25 7942; www.lasalamandre-strasbourg.fr, in French; 3 rue Paul Janet; admission Fri & Sat €5, other nights €3-4; ☎ 9pm-4am Wed-Sun Oct-Apr, 10pm-4am Wed-Sat May-Sep) Billed as a *bar-club-spectacles*, this disco has theme nights each Friday (salsa, 1980s etc).

Getting There & Away

Strasbourg's **airport** (SXB; ☎ 03 88 64 67 67; www.strasbourg.aeroport.fr) is 12km southwest of the city centre (towards Molsheim) near the village of Entzheim. The **Navette Aéroport**, run by CTS, links the Baggersee tram stop with the airport (€5 incl tram, 15 minutes, thrice hourly until at least 10.30pm).

Eurolines buses stop 2.5km south of the **Eurolines office** (☎ 03 90 22 14 60; 6D place d'Austerlitz; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat; tram stop Lycée Couffignal) near Stade de la Meinau (the city's main football stadium), on rue du Maréchal Lefèbvre.

Train tickets are available at the **SNCF Boutique** (5 rue des France-Bourgeois; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat). The train station (at the time of research undergoing a major refit) is linked to Metz (€20.40, 1¼ to 1¾ hours, four to eight daily), Nancy (€19.70, 1¼ hours, 10 to 17 daily) and Paris' Gare de l'Est (€50.30, four to 4¾ hours, nine to 13 daily), as well as various local destinations.

Getting Around

Four tram lines form the centrepiece of Strasbourg's public transport network, run by **CTS** (☎ 03 88 77 70 70; 56 rue du Jeu des Enfants). The main hub is at place de l'Homme de Fer. Single bus/tram tickets, sold by bus drivers and the ticket machines, cost €1.20. The Tourpass (€3.20), valid for 24 hours, is sold at tourist offices and tram stops.

Strasbourg is one of Europe's most bike-friendly cities. The city's **Vélocation system** supplies bikes (per half-/whole day €4/7, Monday-to-Friday €10, plus €100 deposit) from various outlets:

City centre (☎ 03 88 24 05 61; 10 rue des Bouchers; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 2-6.30pm or 7pm May-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr; tram stop Porte de l'Hôpital)

Train station (☎ 03 88 23 56 75; 4 rue du Maire Kuss; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon & 2-7pm Sat, also open 9.30am-noon & 2-7pm Sun & holidays Jun-Aug; tram stop Alt Winnmärk)

MASSIF DES VOSGES

The **Parc Naturel Régional des Ballons des Vosges** covers about 3000 sq km in the south of the Vosges range. In the warm months, the gentle, rounded mountains, deep forests, glacial lakes and rolling pastureland are a paradise for cyclists, with an astounding 10,000km of marked trails.

For information contact the **Maison du Parc** (☎ 03 89 77 90 34; www.parc-ballons-vosges.fr, in French; 1 cour de l'Abbaye; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-mid-Sep, 2-6pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-May, also open 10am-noon Mon-Fri during school holidays) in Munster.

NANCY

pop 331,000

Delightful Nancy has an air of refinement found nowhere else in Lorraine. With a magnificent central square, several fine museums and sparkling shop windows, the former capital of the dukes of Lorraine seems as opulent today as it did in the 16th to 18th centuries, when much of the city centre was built.

Orientation & Information

Pedestrians-only place Stanislas connects the medieval Vieille Ville (Old Town), centred on the Grande Rue, with the 16th-century Ville Neuve (New Town) to the south. The train station is 800m southwest of place Stanislas.

The **tourist office** (☎ 03 83 35 22 41; www.ot-nancy.fr; place Stanislas; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun & holidays Apr-Oct, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun & holidays Nov-Mar) is inside the Hôtel de Ville.

Sights

Neoclassical **place Stanislas**, whose 250th anniversary was celebrated with great fanfare in 2005, is one of the most beautiful public spaces in Europe. The rococo fountains, gilded gateways and opulent buildings that surround the square form one of the finest ensembles of 18th-century architecture anywhere in France.

The highlight of a visit to Nancy is the brilliant **Musée de l'École de Nancy** (School of Nancy Museum; ☎ 03 83 40 14 86; 36-38 rue du Sergent Blandan; adult/student & senior €6/4; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Wed-Sun), which brings together a heady collection of furnished rooms and curvaceous glass produced by the Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) movement.

The **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (Fine Arts Museum; ☎ 03 83 85 30 72; 3 place Stanislas; adult/student & senior

€6/4; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon) includes a superb collection of Daum-made Art Nouveau glass and a rich selection of 14th- to 18th-century paintings.

The 16th-century Palais Ducal, former residence of the dukes of Lorraine, now houses the **Musée Historique Lorrain** (Lorraine Historical Museum; ☎ 03 83 32 18 74; 64 & 66 Grande Rue; adult/student €5/3.50, Wed students free; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon), dedicated to fine arts and to regional art and folklore.

Sleeping

Hôtel des Portes d'Or (☎ 03 83 35 42 34; www.hotel-lesportesdor.com; 21 rue Stanislas; d €50-60) This cosy two-star hostelry, superbly situated near place Stanislas, has 20 charming rooms with upholstered doors. It's often full so call ahead.

Hôtel de Guise (☎ 03 83 32 24 68; www.hotel deguise.com; 18 rue de Guise; d €59-95; ☎) A grand stone staircase leads to extra-wide hallways and 48 bright, spacious rooms at this old hotel, partly dating from the 17th century. The bathrooms are as modern as the 18th-century hardwood floors are charmingly creaky.

Hôtel des Prélats (☎ 03 83 30 20 20; www.hotel desprelats.com; 56 place Monseigneur Ruch; d €92; ☎ ☎; tram stop Cathédrale) In a grand building that's been a hotel since 1906, this two-star hotel, completely renovated in 2005, has 41 rooms with parquet floors, huge beds and antique furnishings.

Eating & Drinking

Rue des Maréchaux is lined with reasonably priced eateries. There are lots of cheapies around the covered market along rue St-Dizier and rue des Quarte Égises.

NANCY FANCIES

Bergamotes de Nancy are hard candies made with bergamot, a citrus fruit – used to flavour Earl Grey tea – that grows on the slopes of Mt Etna (Sicily). The only confectioner allowed to sell *bergamottes* (with two Ts) is **Lefèvre-Lemoine** (Au Duché de Lorraine; 47 rue Henri Poincaré; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 12.30pm Sun; tram stop Nancy Gare), founded in 1840. One of its old-fashioned sweets tins made a cameo appearance in the film *Amélie*.

Aux Délices du Palais (☎ 03 83 30 44 19; 69 Grande Rue; 1st course or dessert €4, mains €8; ☎ Mon-Fri) Billing itself as *bistronomique*, this informal place serves everything from chicken *tajine* to beef fajitas to endive tartes.

Brasserie Excelsior (☎ 03 83 35 24 57; 50 rue Henri Poincaré; after-10pm menu €19/29; ☎ 8am-12.30am Mon-Sat, 8am-11pm Sun, lunch noon-3pm & dinner 7pm-closing time; tram stop Nancy Gare) Built in 1910, this sparkling brasserie's Art Nouveau décor is unforgettable, and the food's pretty good, too.

Le Ch'timi (*shtee-mee*; ☎ 03 83 32 82 76; 17 place St-Epvre; ☎ 9am-2am Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun) The place to go for beer, with 150 brews, including 16 on tap.

There's a **covered market** (place Henri Mangin; ☎ 7am-6pm Tue-Thu, to 6.30pm Fri & Sat; tram stop Point Central) and a **Monoprix supermarket** (☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat).

Getting There & Away

The **train station** (place Thiers; tram stop Nancy Gare) is on the line from Paris' Gare de l'Est (€37.80, 2¾ to 3¼ hours, 13 to 17 daily) to Strasbourg (€19.70, 1¼ hours, 10 to 17 daily). Tickets can be purchased at the **SNCF office** (18 place St-Epvre; ☎ 12.30-6pm Mon, 9.30am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Fri).

NORTHERN FRANCE

Tucked into the northeast corner of France, this is one of the most densely populated and industrial areas in the country and the site of many of the most notorious battlefields of WWI. The region is made up of three separate areas – Flanders (Flandre or Flandres), Artois and Picardy (Picardie).

LILLE

pop one million

In recent decades the once-grimy industrial city of Lille has transformed itself – with generous government help – into a glittering and self-confident cultural and commercial hub. Highlights for the visitor include an attractive old town with a strong Flemish accent, three renowned art museums, stylish shopping, some fine dining and a cutting-edge nightlife scene.

Orientation

Place du Général de Gaulle separates Lille's main shopping precinct (around pedestrianised rue Neuve) from the narrow streets

of Vieux Lille (Old Lille) to the north. Lille's two train stations, old-fashioned Gare Lille-Flandres and ultramodern Gare Lille-Europe, are 400m apart on the eastern edge of the city centre.

Information

4 Players (9 rue Maertens; per 10min/1hr prepaid €0.50/3; ☎ 11am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-11.30pm Sat, 2-10pm Sun) Internet café.

Post office (8 place de la République) Changes money and has a Cyberposte.

Tourist office (☎ 08 91 56 20 04; www.lilletourism.com; place Rihour; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun & holidays) A brochure (€2) outlines four walking tours. City maps cost €0.30.

Sights

Vieux Lille, which begins north of place du Général de Gaulle, is justly proud of its restored 17th- and 18th-century houses. The old brick residences along **rue de la Monnaie** now house chic shops and boutiques. Other intriguing buildings include the ornate 17th-century **Vieille Bourse** (Old Stock Exchange; place du Général de Gaulle) and the Art Deco home of *La Voix du Nord* (1932), the leading regional daily newspaper.

Lille's world-renowned **Palais des Beaux-Arts** (☎ 03 20 06 78 00; place de la République; adult/12-25yr/under 12yr €4.60/3/free; ☎ 2-6pm Mon, 10am-6pm Wed-Sun; M République Beaux Arts) possesses a first-rate collection of 15th- to 20th-century paintings, including works by Rubens, Van Dyck and Manet.

If Paris can turn a disused train station into a world-class museum, why not take an Art Deco municipal swimming pool (built 1927-32) and transform it into a temple of the arts? **La Piscine Musée d'Art et d'Industrie** (☎ 03 20 69 23 60; 23 rue de l'Espérance, Roubaix; adult €3; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Thu, 11am-8pm Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun; M Gare Jean Lebas), 11km northeast of central Lille, showcases fine arts and sculpture in a delightfully watery environment.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 03 20 57 08 94; lille@fuaj.org; 12 rue Malpart; dm with breakfast €16; ☎ closed 24 Dec-late Jan; M Mairie de Lille) This spartan former maternity hospital now houses 165 beds in three-to-seven-bed dorms. Toilets and showers are down the hall.

Hôtel Le Globe (☎ 03 20 57 29 58; 1 blvd Vauban; d €38, with shower €34) The large rooms have

French windows that look out on the Citadelle and (in most cases) chimneys that add a dollop of old-fashioned charm – just try and ignore the lumpy pillows.

Hôtel de France (☎ 03 20 57 14 78; hotel.de.france.lille@wanadoo.fr; 10 rue de Béthune; s/d from €45/50) You can't get much more central than this two-star place, whose 33 rooms are awkwardly laid out but functional. Some of the top-floor rooms have great views but there's no lift.

Hôtel Brueghel (☎ 03 20 06 06 69; www.hotel-brueghel.com; 5 parvis St-Maurice; s/d €74/80) The two-star rooms are a mix of modern and antique, though they don't have as much Flemish charm as the lobby. The wood-and-wrought-iron lift dates from the 1920s.

Grand Hôtel Bellevue (☎ 03 20 57 45 64; www.grandhotelbellevue.com; 5 rue Jean Roisin; d from €125) This three-star Best Western was grandly built at the turn of the century. A creaky *belle époque* lift trundles guests to the 60 spacious rooms, which have high ceilings and antique-style French furnishings.

Eating

Vieux Lille has a varied selection of restaurants, many of them serving Flemish specialities such as *carbonnade* (braised beef stewed with beer and brown sugar).

La Source (☎ 03 20 57 53 07; 13 rue du Plat; 2-course menu €8-13; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Fri) An organic food shop founded way back in 1979 and now a Lille institution, great for vegetarian, fowl and fish *plats du jour*.

La Voûte (☎ 03 20 42 12 16; 4 rue des Débris St-Étienne; menu €10.50-18.50; ☎ closed Sun & Mon) Regional dishes such as *carbonnade* (€13) and *lapin à la flamande* (rabbit in a white-wine and prune sauce, €13), are served in this bistro-cum-estaminet (tavern).

Le Palais (☎ 03 20 74 53 47; 4 rue du Palais de Justice; mains €11-15; ☎ closed Sun & dinner Mon) Serves solid French-Flemish cuisine at fair prices, including *potjevlesch* (a gelled pâté made with pork, rabbit, fowl and veal).

À l'Huitrière (☎ 03 20 55 43 41; www.huitriere.fr; 3 rue des Chats Bossus; lunch menu €44, menu dégustation €110; ☎ noon-2pm & 7-9.30pm, closed dinner Sun & about 21 Jul-22 Aug) On the 'Street of the Hunchback Cats', this venerable seafood restaurant is packed with Art Deco atmosphere, and has held a Michelin star since 1930. Book ahead on Friday, Saturday and holidays.

Lille's **covered food market** (place Nouvelle Avenue; ☎ 8am-2pm Tue-Thu, to 8pm Fri & Sat, to 3pm Sun

& holidays; M Gambetta) is about 1.2km southwest of the centre in the Wazemmes district. Right outside, the city's largest **outdoor market** (☎ 7am-1.30pm or 2pm Tue, Thu & Sun) is at its liveliest on Sunday. The largest supermarket is **Carrefour** (Euralille shopping centre; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat).

Dining

Chocolaterie Vandyck (☎ 03 28 82 07 72; 4 rue des Bouchers; ☎ 2-7pm Tue & Wed, 10am-7pm Thu-Sat, 3-7.30pm Sun) Hot chocolate (€4.50 to €7.50) and chocolate pralines are the highlights at this delightful *salon de chocolat* (chocolate room).

Café Citoyen (Citizen Café; ☎ 03 20 13 15 73; http://cafecitoyen.org, in French; 7 place du Vieux Marché aux Chevaux; plat du jour €8.30; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Fri, 2-7pm Sat) This volunteer-run ethical café is relaxed and very friendly – internet access is free if you order an organic beer or a cup of fair-trade coffee.

L'illustration Café (☎ 03 20 12 00 90; 18 rue Royale; ☎ 2pm-2am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) This mellow, smoky bar attracts artists and intellectuals in the mood to exchange weighty ideas or just shoot the breeze.

Café Le Relax (☎ 03 20 54 67 34; 48 place de la Nouvelle Avenue; ☎ 10.30am-at least midnight Tue-Sun; M Gambetta) A genuine, unadulterated *café de quartier* (neighbourhood café) where locals pop by for a cup of espresso or a cold Pelforth blonde, and to run into friends, especially after exploring nearby Wazemmes market.

Getting There & Away

Eurolines (☎ 03 20 78 18 88; 23 parvis St-Maurice; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 1-6pm Sat, longer hr Jul-Aug) serves Brussels (€14, 1½ to two hours), Amsterdam (€41, six hours) and London (€34, six hours). Buses depart from blvd de Leeds, to the left as you arrive at Gare Lille-Europe from av Le Corbusier.

Lille's two train stations are one stop apart on metro line 2. Gare Lille-Flandres is used by regional services and TGVs to Paris' Gare du Nord (€35.40, at peak hours €48.40, 64 minutes, 23 daily Monday to Friday, 15 daily Saturday and Sunday). Gare Lille-Europe handles everything else, including Eurostars to London (1¼ hours), TGVs/Eurostars to Brussels (weekday/weekend €24/15.50, 40 minutes, 11 to 13 daily) and TGVs to Nice (€110.30 or €130.40, 7¼ hours, two direct daily).

Getting Around

Lille's two speedy metro lines, two tramways and bus lines – several of which cross into Belgium – are run by **Transpole** (☎ 08 20 42 40 40), which has an **information window** (☎ closed Sunday) in the Gare Lille-Flandres metro station.

CALAIS

pop 75,000

You have to feel sorry for poor old Calais – it's one of the most visited towns in France, thanks to the daily mass of cross-Channel ferry traffic, but almost no-one stops for longer than it takes to exit the ferry terminal and hightail it out of town. You can't really blame them – apart from some pleasant restaurants and Rodin's *The Burghers of Calais*, there's not much to keep even the most enthusiastic visitor entertained for more than a few hours.

Orientation & Information

The train station is located 650m south of the main square, place d'Armes, and 700m north of Calais' commercial district, which is centred around blvd Léon Gambetta and place du Théâtre. On foot, the car ferry terminal is 1.5km northeast of place d'Armes. The Channel Tunnel's vehicle loading area is approximately 6km southwest of the town centre.

The **tourist office** (☎ 03 21 96 62 40; www.calais-cotedopale.com; 12 blvd Georges Clemenceau; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat, also open 10am-1pm Sun Jul & Aug) provides all the usual information.

Sights

Calais' Flemish Renaissance-style **town hall** (1911-25) houses the town's main sight – Rodin's famous sculpture *Les Bourgeois de Calais* (1895), honouring six local citizens who, in 1347, held off the besieging English forces for more than eight months. When he eventually conquered the city, Edward III was so impressed by their efforts (and the entreaties of his consort Philippa) he spared both the Calaisiens and their six leaders.

Original WWII artefacts fill the **Musée de la Guerre** (☎ 03 21 34 21 57; adult/student/family of 5 incl audioguide €6/5/14; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Sep, 11am-5pm Wed-Mon Feb-Apr, noon-5pm Wed-Mon Oct & Nov), housed in a concrete bunker that used to be German naval headquarters.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 03 21 34 70 20; www.auberge-jeunesse-calais.com; av Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny; dm €16.50, s €21; ☎ 24hr) Modern, well equipped and just 200m from the beach, this 87-bed hostel is served by bus 3 or 9.

Hôtel La Sole Meunière (☎ 03 21 96 86 66; 53 rue de la Mer; s/d/q €47/54/80) A family-run two-star place named after the ground-floor restaurant, which – you guessed it – specialises in butter-sautéed sole. The best rooms have views of the port.

Hôtel Richelieu (☎ 03 21 34 61 60; www.hotel-richelieu-calais.com, in French; 17 rue Richelieu; d/q €55/110) Fifteen cheery rooms, each one outfitted with antique furniture redeemed by the owner from local markets.

Eating

Rue Royal and place d'Armes are lined with touristy restaurants.

Au Cadre Vert (☎ 03 21 34 69 44; 3 rue André Gerschell; mains €8-12; ☎ closed Sun, lunch Sat & lunch Wed) A family-run French restaurant known for its generous portions and reasonable prices. Specialities include *magret de canard* in raspberry sauce and *côte de bœuf sauce peurrotte* (beef ribs in mushroom sauce).

Aux Mouettes (☎ 03 21 34 67 59; 10 rue Jean Pierre Avron; menu €16-32; ☎ closed Mon & dinner Sun) Fisherfolk sell their daily catch across the street at the quay, so this restaurant unsurprisingly specialises in the very freshest seafood.

For self-catering there is a **food market** (place d'Armes; ☎ Wed & Sat morning) and a **Match supermarket** (place d'Armes; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat year-round, to noon Sun Jun-Aug). Outside the city centre are several monumental *hypermarchés* (large supermarkets) catering for cross-Channel shoppers, including **Cité Europe** (☎ 03 21 46 47 48; www.cite-europe.com; boulevard du Kent; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, to 9pm Fri, 9am-8pm Sat).

Getting There & Around

BOAT

Every day, 32 to 40 car ferries from Dover dock at Calais' busy car ferry terminal, about 1.5km northeast of place d'Armes.

P&O Ferries Car ferry terminal (☎ 03 21 46 10 10; ☎ 6am-10pm); Calais town centre (41 place d'Armes)

SeaFrance Car ferry terminal (☎ 03 21 46 80 05; ☎ 5.45am-10.45pm); Calais town centre (☎ 03 21 19 42 42; 2 place d'Armes)

Buses (€1.50 or £1, hourly from about 10am to 7pm or 7.30pm) link both Gare Calais-Ville and place d'Armes with the car ferry terminal.

Hoverspeed, the company that pioneered the use of cross-Channel hovercraft, ceased operations in late 2005.

BUS

Cariane Littoral (☎ 03 21 34 74 40; 10 rue d'Amsterdam) operates express BCD services from Calais to Boulogne (€6.90, 40 minutes, four daily Monday to Friday, twice Saturday) and Dunkirk (€7.40, 45 minutes, 12 daily Monday to Friday, thrice Saturday).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

To reach the Channel Tunnel's vehicle loading area at Coquelles, follow the road signs on the A16 to the Tunnel Sous La Manche (Tunnel under the Channel) at exit 13.

TRAIN

Calais has two train stations: Gare Calais-Ville in the city centre; and Gare Calais-Fréthun, a TGV station 10km southwest of town near the Channel Tunnel entrance. They are linked by the free Navette TER, a bus service operated by Cariane Littoral.

Gare Calais-Ville is linked to Boulogne (€6.90, 28 to 48 minutes, 17 daily Monday to Saturday, nine on Sunday), Dunkirk (€7.40, 50 minutes, six daily on weekdays, three or four daily on weekends) and Lille-Flandres (€14.70, 1¼ hours, 19 daily on weekdays, 10 daily on weekends).

Calais-Fréthun is served by TGVs to Paris' Gare du Nord (€37.20 or €50.60, 1½ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, thrice Sunday) as well as the Eurostar to London.

DUNKIRK

pop 209,000

Dunkirk (Dunkerque), made famous and flattened almost simultaneously during the Allied evacuation of 1940, was rebuilt in a utilitarian and pretty uninspiring fashion after the war. Charming it may not be, but the port has an interesting maritime museum and a pleasant beach resort, perfect for a leisurely stroll on a summer's day.

Orientation & Information

The train station is 600m southwest of Dunkirk's main square, place Jean Bart. The

beach and esplanade are 2km northeast of the centre in Malo-les-Bains.

Dunkirk's **tourist office** (☎ 03 28 66 79 21; www.lesdunesdeflandre.fr; rue de l'Amiral Ronarc'h; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Sun & holidays, no midday closure Jul & Aug) is inside a 58m-high **belfry** (adult €3).

Sights

The **Musée Portuaire** (Harbour Museum; ☎ 03 28 63 33 39; www.museeportuaire.com; 9 quai de la Citadelle; adult/student €4/3; ☎ 10am-12.45pm & 1.30-6pm Wed-Mon, no midday closure Jul & Aug) will delight ship-model lovers of all ages. Forty-five-minute **guided tours** (€6/5, incl museum €8/6.50) take visitors aboard several historic water-craft, including the *Duchesse Anne*, built for the German merchant marine in 1901.

The faded seaside resort of **Malo-les-Bains** is 2km northeast of Dunkirk's city centre. Its promenade-lined beach, **Plage des Alliés**, is named in honour of the Allied troops evacuated from here in 1940. The **British Memorial** (route de Furnes), honouring more than 4500 British and Commonwealth soldiers missing in action from 1940, is 1.5km southeast of the tourist office.

Getting There & Away

For links to Calais, see opposite. Most trains to Lille stop at Lille-Flandres (€12.20, 35 to 70 minutes, 15 to 30 daily).

Ferries run by **Norfolk Line** (☎ in the UK 0870-870 1020, in France 03 28 28 95 50; www.norfolkline.com) link the car ferry port, 20km west of the town centre, with Dover.

BATTLE OF THE SOMME MEMORIALS

The Battle of the Somme, a WWI Allied offensive waged northeast of Amiens, was designed to relieve pressure on the beleaguered French troops at Verdun. On 1 July 1916, British, Commonwealth and French troops went 'over the top' in a massive assault along a 34km front. But German positions proved virtually unbreachable, and on the first day alone, 21,392 Allied troops were killed and another 35,492 were wounded.

By the time the offensive was called off in mid-November, some 1.2 million lives had been lost on both sides. The British had advanced 12km, the French 8km. The Battle of the Somme has become a metaphor for the meaningless slaughter of war and its killing fields have become a site of pilgrimage.

NORMANDY

The land of Camembert and Calvados (an apple-flavoured aperitif), Normandy is a largely rural region where cows far outnumber their two-legged neighbours. Dotted with lush fields and winding hedgerows, Normandy is where you'll find the historic beaches of D-Day, the soaring spires of the Mont St-Michel and the stunning Bayeux Tapestry – the world's largest comic strip.

ROUEN

pop 108,750

With its elegant spires and soaring Gothic cathedral – one of the most stunning in northern France – the ancient city of Rouen is one of Normandy's highlights. Badly damaged during WWII, the city has since been lavishly restored, and the medieval quarter is filled with half-timbered houses and punch-drunk, polished-up buildings. The young French heroine Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc) was tried for heresy and burned at the stake in the central square in 1431. Rouen makes an ideal base for exploring northern Normandy and Monet's home in Giverny.

Orientation

The main train station (Gare Rouen-Rive Droite) is at the northern end of rue Jeanne d'Arc, the main thoroughfare running south to the Seine. The old city is centred around rue du Gros Horloge between the place du Vieux Marché and the cathedral.

Information

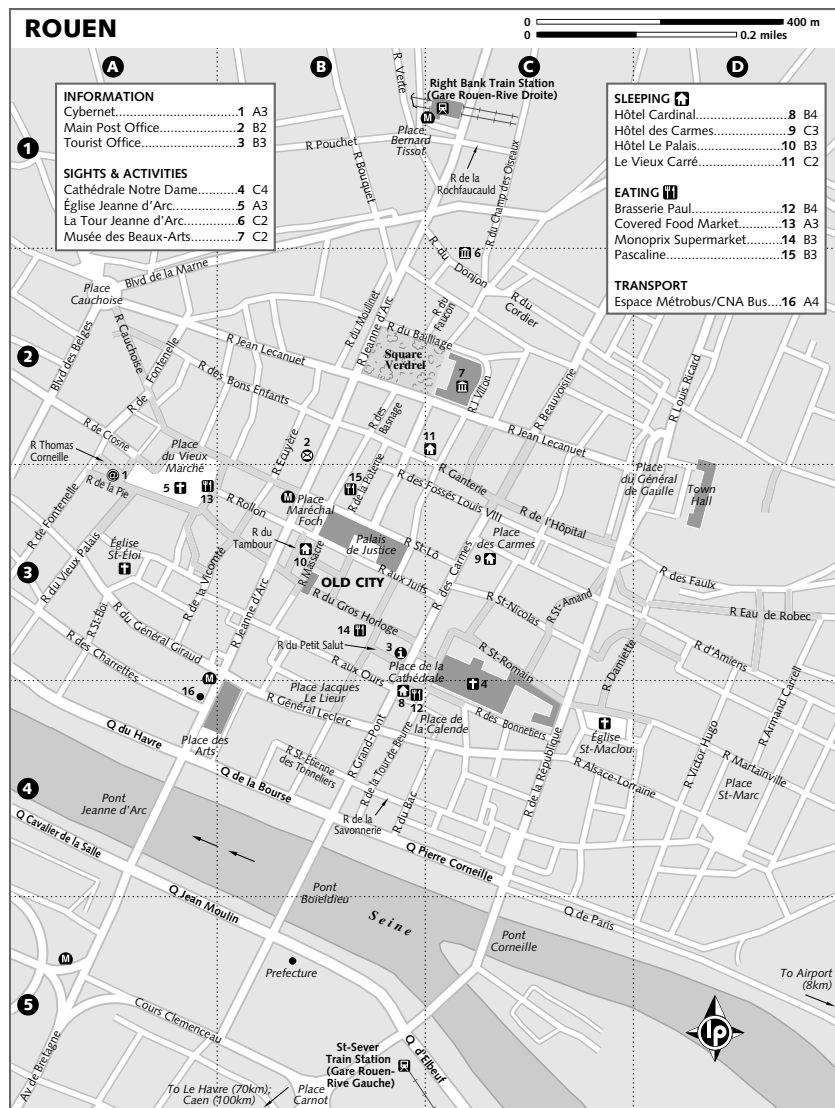
Cybernet (☎ 02 35 07 73 02; 47 place du Vieux-Marché; per hr €4; ☎ 10am-10pm) Internet café.

Main post office (45 rue Jeanne d'Arc) Has a Cyberpost terminal.

Tourist office (☎ 02 32 08 32 40; www.mairie-rouen.fr; 25 place de la Cathédrale; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Sun May-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-Apr) Opposite the west façade of the cathedral.

Sights

The main street of the old city, rue du Gros Horloge, runs from the cathedral to **place du Vieux Marché**, where 19-year-old Joan of Arc was executed in 1431. An iron cross outside the futuristic **Église Jeanne d'Arc** (☎ 10am-12.15pm & 2-6pm, closed Fri & Sun morning) marks the site.



Rouen's **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (☎ 8am-6pm Tue-Sun, 2-6pm Mon) is a masterpiece of French Gothic architecture, and is the famous subject of a series of paintings by Monet. From June to mid-September, as dusk falls over the square, Monet's canvases are projected onto the front of the cathedral as part of a dazzling light show. Best of all, it's free.

The **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (☎ 02 35 71 28 40; 26bis rue Jean Lecanuet; adult/student €3/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon) features paintings from the 15th to the 20th centuries, including work by Caravaggio, Rubens, Modigliani and (of course) a painting of Rouen Cathedral by Monet.

La Tour Jeanne d'Arc (☎ 02 35 98 16 21; rue du Donjon; adult €1.50; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Wed-Sat &

Mon, 2-6.30pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Wed-Sat & Mon, 2-5.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) is where Joan of Arc was imprisoned before her execution.

Sleeping

The 'Bon Weekend' scheme offers two weekend nights for the price of one in some hotels, but you must book eight days ahead.

Hôtel Le Palais (☎ 02 35 71 41 40; 12 rue du Tambour; r from €30) Top hotel for value in town, bang in the middle of things near the Palais de Justice and the Gros Horloge. Don't expect too many spoils – the rooms are basic and not all have bathrooms, but Rouen is on your doorstep.

Hôtel des Carmes (☎ 02 35 71 92 31; www.hoteldescarmes.fr.st, in French; 33 place des Carmes; r €45-61; P) This sweet little streetside hotel offers imaginative rooms, decked out with patchwork quilts and vibrant colours.

Le Vieux Carré (☎ 02 35 71 67 70; www.vieux-carre.fr; 34 rue Ganterie; d €55-57) This half-timbered hotel is a fantastic find. Downstairs there's an old-fashioned *salon de thé*, crammed with faded photos and overloaded bookshelves, and upstairs you'll find smartly styled rooms with garden or courtyard views.

Hôtel Cardinal (☎ 02 35 70 24 42; www.cardinal-hotel.fr; 1 place de la Cathédrale; s €47-59, d €58-72) What this modern hotel lacks in character, it more than makes up for in location – the Cardinal sits in a fantastic spot right opposite the cathedral, and the top-floor rooms have balconies overlooking the square.

Eating

Au Temps des Cerises (☎ 02 35 89 98 00; 4-6 rue des Banaque; lunch menu €10.50, dinner menu from €15; ☎ closed Sun, Mon & lunch Sat) There's no better place to check out Normandy's famous cheeses than this ever-popular restaurant. Choose your cheesy poison – the menu is packed with *tartiflette* (potato tart), fondue and endless varieties of *croûtes* (pies) – and tuck in.

Pascaline (☎ 02 35 89 67 44; 5 rue de la Poterie; menus €13-16) This bustling bistro serves up traditional cuisine in typically French surroundings – net curtains, wooden tables and chuffing coffee machines abound.

Brasserie Paul (☎ 02 35 71 86 07; 1 place de la Cathédrale; mains €10-25) The classic Rouennaise brasserie – think starchy service, plush red seats and overhead fans (there's even a self-playing pianola). The menu is crammed with regional dishes, including Simone de Beauvoir's favourite smoked duck salad.

Dairy products, fish and fresh produce are on sale at the **covered food market** (place du Vieux Marché; ☎ 6am-1.30pm Tue-Sun), and there's a **Monoprix supermarket** (65 rue du Gros Horloge).

Getting There & Away

Regional bus information is dispensed by **Espace Métrobus** (☎ 02 35 52 92 00; 9 rue Jeanne d'Arc). Buses leave from quai du Havre and quai de la Bourse.

Trains to Paris' Gare St-Lazare (€18.50, 70 minutes, six to eight daily), Caen (€20.70, two hours, 12 daily) and Dieppe (€9, 45 minutes, 12 to 15 daily) depart from Gare Rouen-Rive Droite. The Gare Rouen-Rive Gauche south of the river handles regional services.

BAYEUX

pop 15,000

There's one reason why several million visitors descend on Bayeux every year – a 70m-long piece of embroidered cloth known to the French as *La Tapisserie de la Reine Mathilde*, and to the rest of the world as the Bayeux Tapestry. Bayeux' winding streets are crammed with higgledy-piggledy period buildings, including a fine Gothic cathedral and lots of wooden-framed Norman houses, and the city makes a perfect launching pad for exploring the invasion beaches just to the north.

Orientation & Information

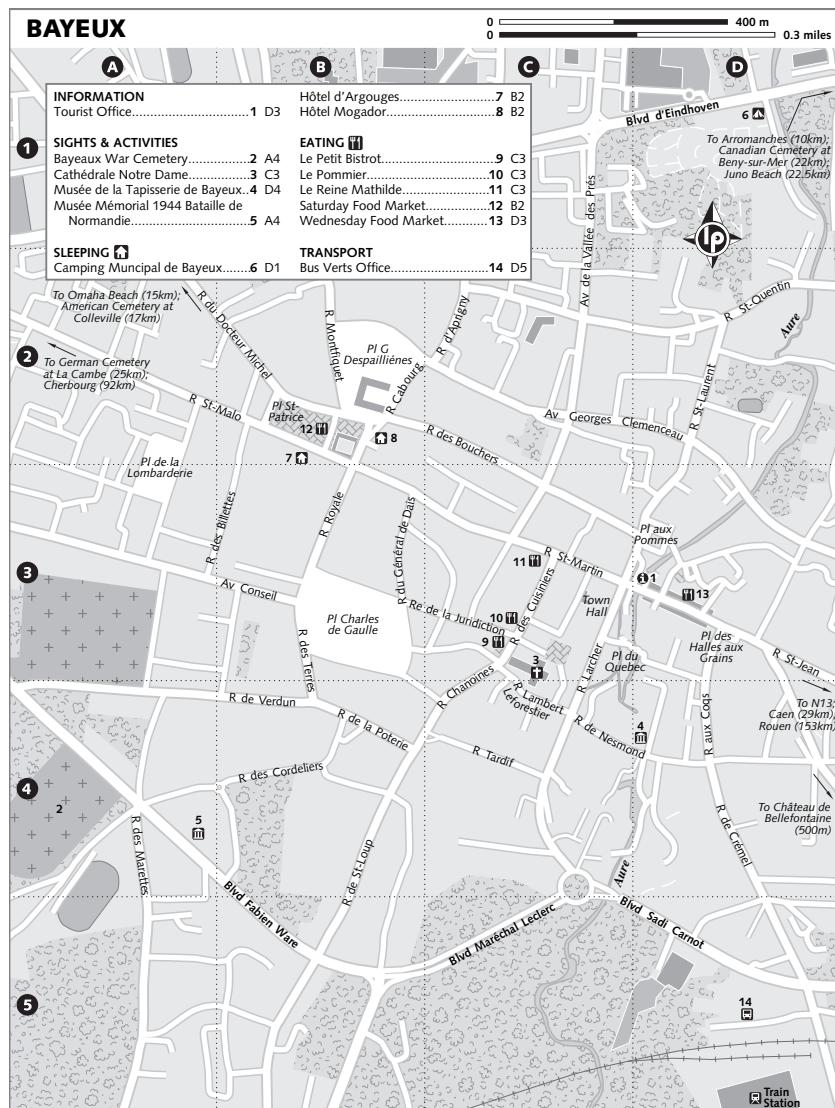
The Cathédrale Notre Dame, the major landmark in the centre of Bayeux and visible throughout the town, is 1km northwest of the train station.

Just off the northern end of rue Larcher is the **touristoffice** (☎ 02 31 51 28 28; www.bayeux-tourism.com; pont St-Jean; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9-1pm & 2-6pm Sun Jun-Aug, 9.30-12.30pm & 2-6pm daily Apr-May & Sep-Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar).

Sights

The **Bayeux Tapestry** was commissioned by Bishop Odo of Bayeux, William the Conqueror's half-brother, to commemorate the opening of Bayeux' cathedral in 1077. The 70m-long tapestry recounts the story of the Norman conquest of England in 1066 across 58 remarkable scenes – look out for Halley's comet and the graphic scenes of the battle itself, complete with severed limbs and lopped-off heads.

The tapestry is housed in the **Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux** (☎ 02 31 51 25 50; rue de



Nesmond; adult/student incl admission to Musée Baron Gérard €8/3; ☎ 9am-6.30pm mid-Mar-Apr & Sep-Nov, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Dec-mid-Mar, 9am-7pm May-Aug). An audioguide is included.

The spectacular **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (place de la Liberté; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Oct-Jun, to 7pm Jul-Sep) is a fine example of Norman Gothic architecture, dating from the 13th century.

The recently refurbished **Musée Mémorial 1944 Bataille de Normandie** (☎ 02 31 92 93 41; blvd Fabien Ware; adult/student €6/3; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm May-mid-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm mid-Sep-Apr), houses one of Normandy's main collections of D-Day memorabilia, including tanks, vintage weapons, documents, photos and lots of military hardware.

The **Bayeux war cemetery** (☎ 02 21 21 77 00; blvd Fabien Ware), west of the war museum, is the largest of the Commonwealth military cemeteries in Normandy. It contains 4868 graves of soldiers from the UK and 10 other countries (including Germany). 1807 other Commonwealth soldiers whose bodies were never found are commemorated on the memorial across the road.

Sleeping

Camping Municipal de Bayeux (☎ 02 31 92 08 43; blvd d'Eindhoven; camp sites per adult/site €3.50/4; ☎ mid-Mar-mid-Nov) This camping ground is about 2km north of the town centre. Bus 3 stops three times daily at nearby Les Cerisiers.

Hôtel Mogador (☎ 02 31 92 24 58; hotel.mogador@wanadoo.fr; 20 rue Alain Chartier; d €46-51; ☎) A reliable if slightly run-down hotel on the main market square. Floral curtains and the odd exposed beam conjure up some character, and there's a small garden courtyard that makes a lovely spot for morning croissant.

Hôtel d'Argouges (☎ 02 31 92 88 86; dargouges@aol.com; 21 rue St-Patrice; d €80-100; ☎) This stately 18th-century mansion is now a graceful hotel, centred around an enclosed carriageyard. The more expensive rooms are packed with old furniture and period features.

Château de Bellefontaine (☎ 02 31 22 00 10; www.hotel-bellefontaine.com; 49 rue de Bellefontaine; s €60-90, d €90-135, ste €120-180; ☎) Surrounded by 2 hectares of groomed parkland just outside Bayeux, this majestic 18th-century castle is top of the heap in terms of luxury. If you can afford them, the beautifully appointed park-view suites are the rooms to choose.

Eating

Open-air food markets are held on rue St-Jean on Wednesday mornings, and on place St-Patrice on Saturday mornings.

La Reine Mathilde (☎ 02 31 92 00 59; 47 rue Saint-Martin; cakes €3-6) This sumptuous *patissier* and *salon de thé* serves the kind of wickedly indulgent cakes that would send Marie-Antoinette into overdrive.

Le Petit Bistrot (☎ 02 31 51 85 40; 2 rue du Bienvenu; mains €14-22; ☎ closed Sun & Mon Sep-Jun) An excellent spot for down-to-earth regional cooking, served in a tiny dining room decked out with sunny colours, plain wooden tables and terracotta floor tiles.

Le Pommier (☎ 02 31 21 52 10; 40 rue des Cuisiniers; menus €21.50-28.50; ☎ closed Tue & Wed low season) For

something more upmarket, this smart restaurant dishes up Norman specialities such as roast duck in apple sauce and steamed rabbit, as well as a selection of classic French dishes.

Getting There & Away

Bus Verts (☎ 08 10 21 42 14), opposite the train station, runs daily buses to Caen, leaving from the train station and place St-Patrice. Bus Verts also runs regular buses to the D-Day beaches (see below).

There are regular trains to Caen (€5.30, 20 minutes) and Cherbourg (€14, one hour), as well as direct services to Paris' Gare St-Lazare (€30.40, five daily).

D-DAY BEACHES

The D-Day landings, code-named 'Operation Overlord', were the largest military operation in history. Early on 6 June 1944, 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 on D-Day – called Jour J in French – were followed by the Battle of Normandy, which ultimately led to the liberation of Europe from Nazi occupation. Caen's **Mémorial museum** (below) provides the best overview of the Battle of Normandy, and there are many small D-Day museums dotted around the area. Once on the coast, several well-signposted routes link the main battle sites.

The most brutal fighting on D-Day took place 15km northwest of Bayeux along the stretch of coastline now known as **Omaha Beach**. Dune-lined **Juno Beach**, 12km east of

CAEN MÉMORIAL

Caen's hi-tech museum, **Mémorial – Un Musée pour la Paix** (Memorial – A Museum for Peace; ☎ 02 31 06 06 44; www.memorial-caen.fr, in French; adult/student & 10-18yr €17.50/16, WWII veterans free; ☎ 9am-7pm Feb-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Dec, closed Jan) uses sound, lighting, film, animation and lots of fantastic exhibits to vividly explore the events of WWII, the D-Day landings and the ensuing Cold War. Tickets remain valid for 24 hours, so you can split your visit over two days. The museum also runs tours (p248) of the D-Day beaches.

Arromanches, was stormed by Canadian troops on D-Day. Little remnants of the fighting remains on the beaches apart from the occasional concrete bunker – these days they're as popular with summer holiday-makers as history buffs.

To make it possible to unload cargo without having to capture one of the heavily defended Channel ports, the Allies established two prefabricated breakwaters code-named Mulberry Harbours. One of them, Port Winston, can still be viewed at low tide at Arromanches, a seaside town 10km northeast of Bayeux.

Perched above Omaha Beach, the **American Military Cemetery** (☎ 02 31 51 62 00; ☎ 9am–6pm mid-Apr–Sep, 9am–5pm Oct–mid-Apr) at Colleville-sur-Mer, 17km northwest of Bayeux, is the largest American cemetery in Europe, containing the graves of 9387 American soldiers and a memorial to 1557 others whose remains were never found.

Tours

Caen Mémorial (☎ 02 31 06 06 45; www.memorial-caen.fr; afternoon tour adult/under 18yr & veteran €67.50/54, morning tour per person €54; ☎ tours 9am & 1pm Apr–Sep, 1pm Oct–Mar) The museum conducts minibuses around the landing beaches. The price includes entry to the museum.

D-Day Tours (☎ 02 31 51 70 52; www.d-daybeaches.com; BP 48525, 14400 Bayeux; adult/student/under 10yr €75/65/40) Offers day tours of the main D-Day sites.

Getting There & Away

From Bayeux, bus No 70, run by **Bus Verts** (☎ 08 10 21 42 14), goes west to Colleville-sur-Mer, Omaha Beach, Pointe du Hoc and Grandcamp-Maisy. Bus 74 (75 during summer) serves Arromanches, Gold and Juno Beaches, and Courseulles. The company runs several extra routes around the D-Day beaches during the summer months.

MONT ST-MICHEL

pop 42

The slender towers and sky-scraping turrets of the abbey of Mont St-Michel are one of the classic postcard images of Northern France. Rising from flat white sands, the abbey sits atop a small island encircled by stout ramparts and battlements, connected to the mainland by an old causeway. Legend has it that the abbey was founded in the 8th century, when Aubert, the bishop

of Avranches, was visited by the archangel Michael in a dream.

There are a few expensive hotels on the Mont itself, but most people choose to stay at Beauvoir, opposite the Mont, or Pontorson, about 9km inland from the bay.

Information

Mont St-Michel tourist office (☎ 02 33 60 14 30; www.ot-montsaintmichel.com; ☎ 9am–7pm Jul & Aug, to noon & 2–5.30pm Sep–Jun) Up the stairs to the left inside Porte de l'Avancée. A detailed map of the Mont is available for €3.50.

Pontorson tourist office (☎ 02 33 60 20 65; mont.st-michel.pontorson@wanadoo.fr; place de l'Église; ☎ 9am–noon & 2–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–noon & 3–6pm Sat, 10am–noon Sun Apr–Sep, 9am–noon & 2–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–noon & 3–6pm Sat Oct–Mar) Has information about walking tours and local events.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Haliotis (☎ 02 33 68 11 59; www.camping-haliotis-mont-saint-michel.com; Pontorson; camp sites per adult/site €4.50/4; ☎ Apr–Nov; 📍) Just off Blvd Général Patton, this complex has a heated pool, bike hire, tennis courts and an on-site bar.

Centre Duguesclin (☎ /fax 02 33 60 18 65; aj@ville-pontorson.fr; Blvd du Général Patton, Pontorson; dm €11–14; ☎ year-round) One kilometre west of the train station, this modern, renovated hostel offers four- to six-bed rooms and kitchen facilities. The hostel closes from 10am to 6pm, but there's no curfew.

Hôtel de Bretagne (☎ 02 33 60 10 55; www.lebretagnepontorson.com; 59 rue du Couësson, Pontorson; s €35–48, d €39–64) This timber-fronted hotel looks shabby from the outside, but the flowery bedspreads and frilly curtains add a touch of brightness to the bedrooms themselves. The downstairs restaurant offers local specialities such as oysters with Camembert and scallops cooked in cider (lunch menu €11, dinner menu €15 to €38).

Hôtel Montgomery (☎ 02 33 60 00 09; www.hotel-montgomery.com; 13 rue du Couësson, Pontorson; s €47–55, d €57–160, ste €115–250; 📍) This 16th-century mansion boasts a vine-covered Renaissance façade and a selection of quirky rooms along its creaky wood-panelled corridors. The most expensive have huge four-poster beds and hefty Renaissance furniture. The downstairs restaurant is the best in Pontorson for French cuisine (dinner menu €16 to €25).

La Mère Poulard (☎ 02 33 89 68 68; Grande Rue; lunch menu €29–39, dinner menu €45–65; ☎ 11am–10pm) At the base of the Mont, this tourist institution churns out its famous *omelettes à la Mère Poulard* (soufflé omelettes) at astronomical prices. Autographed photos of visiting film stars and politicians adorn the walls.

Getting There & Away

Courriers Bretons (☎ 02 33 60 11 43) runs between Pontorson and Mont St-Michel (€1.80, 15 minutes, seven to 10 daily) and also to/from St-Malo (€8, one hour).

Local trains from Pontorson include Caen (€21.70, 2¼ hours, two daily) and Cherbourg (via Lison, €23.30, 2½ to three hours, two daily).

BRITTANY

Flung out on the far west of France, Brittany is in many ways a nation apart, thanks to its status as the last outpost of traditional Celtic culture in the country. With its own unique language – closely related to other Celtic languages such as Cornish and Welsh – and a calendar packed with colourful festivals and events, Brittany is one of France's most fascinating regions – it's also blessed with lots of beautiful beaches and the oldest standing stones this side of Stonehenge.

QUIMPER

pop 59,400

Small enough to feel like a village with its timbered houses and cobblestone streets, and large enough to serve as a centre for Breton culture and arts, Quimper (*kam-pair*) is Finistère's thriving capital. Derived from the Breton word *kemper*, meaning 'confluence', Quimper sits at the juncture of the small Odet and Steir Rivers.

The **tourist office** (☎ 02 98 53 04 05; www.quimper-tourisme.com, in French; place de la Résistance; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–12.45pm & 3–5.45pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–6pm or 6.30pm Mon–Sat Sep–Jun, 10am–12.45pm Sun Jun & 1–15 Sep) arranges weekly guided tours in July and August.

Sights

Quimper's **Cathédrale St-Corentin** (☎ 9.30–noon & 1.30–6.30pm Mon–Sat May–Oct, 9am–noon & 1.30–6.30pm Mon–Sat Nov–Apr, 1.30–6.30pm Sun year-round) was begun in 1239 but only completed in

the 1850s, with the addition of its dramatic twin spires.

The **Musée Départemental Breton** (☎ 02 98 95 21 60; 1 rue du Roi Gradlon; adult/child €4/2.50; ☎ 9am–6pm Jun–Sep, 9am–noon & 2–5pm Tue–Sat & 2–5pm Sun Oct–May) is housed in the former bishop's palace. Superb exhibits showcase the area's history, furniture, costumes, crafts and archaeology. Adjoining the museum is the **Jardin de l'Évêché** (Bishop's Palace Garden; admission free; ☎ 9am–5pm or 6pm).

Quimper's local crafts include exquisite faïence pottery, best seen at the **Musée de la Faïence** (☎ 02 98 90 12 72; 14 rue Jean-Baptiste Bousquet; adult/child €4/2.50; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Sat mid–Apr–mid-Oct).

The **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (☎ 02 98 95 45 20; 40 place St-Corentin; adult/child €4/2.50; ☎ 10am–7pm Jul & Aug, 10am–noon & 2–6pm Wed–Mon Apr–Jun & Sep–Oct, 10am–noon & 2–6pm Wed–Sat & Mon, 2–6pm Sun Nov–Mar), in the town hall, displays European paintings from the 16th to early 20th centuries.

Sleeping

Camping Municipal (☎ /fax 02 98 55 61 09; av des Oiseaux; camp sites from €8.50; ☎ Apr–Sep) An attractive wooded camping ground 1km west of the old city. Take bus 1 from the train station to the Chaptal stop.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 02 98 64 97 97; quimper@fuaj.org; 6 av des Oiseaux; dm incl breakfast €14.50, bedding €3; ☎ Apr–Sep) Beside Camping Municipal, Quimper's seasonal youth hostel has self-catering facilities.

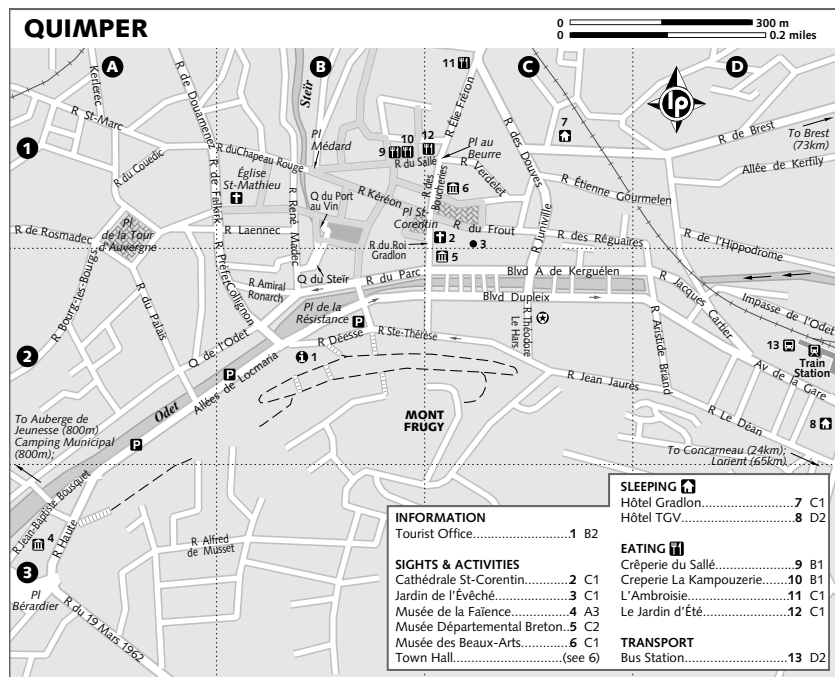
Hôtel TGV (☎ 02 98 90 54 00; www.hotel-tgv.com; 4 rue de Concarneau; d €36–46) The best bet of several hotels around the train station, the TGV has 22 small but bright rooms. Light sleepers beware: the adjacent bar can be noisy at night.

Hôtel Gradlon (☎ 02 98 95 04 39; www.hotel-gradlon.com; 30 rue de Brest; d €69–155; ☎ closed 20 Dec–20 Jan) Quimper's most charming hotel is this former 19th-century coach house, recently renovated and set around a rose garden.

Eating

Crepes are king in Quimper, but fine-diners won't be disappointed either.

Crêperie du Sallé (☎ 02 98 95 95 80; 6 rue du Sallé; galettes €3–9; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue–Sat) Locals crowd into this traditional restaurant for Breton crepes including *saucisse fumée* (smoked sausage) and *Forestière* (made with mushrooms, fatty bacon and cheese).



Crêperie La Krampouzerie (☎ 02 98 95 13 08; 9 rue du Sallé; mains from €7; ☞ dosed Sun & Mon) This rustic restaurant creates crepes and *galettes* puff-pastry cakes) using local ingredients such as *algues d'Ouessant* (seaweed from the Île de Ouessant) and homemade ginger caramel.

Le Jardin d'Été (☎ 02 98 95 33 00; 15 rue du Sallé; lunch menu €14, dinner menu €23-27.50; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Occupying a glassed-in terrace strung with lanterns, 'the summer garden' is strictly for gourmards, with specialities including duck mousse and coquilles St-Jacques (scallops).

L'Ambroisie (☎ 02 98 95 00 02; www.ambroisie-quimper.com; 49 rue Elie Fréron; menu €22-60; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, lunch Sat, closed mid-Jun-mid-Jul) Quimper's most celebrated gastronomic restaurant makes the most of regional produce in dishes such as quail in cider sauce and almond cake with strawberries.

Getting There & Away

CAT/Connex Tourisme (☎ 02 98 90 68 40) bus destinations include Brest (€6, 1¼ hours) and Douarnenez (€2, 35 minutes, six to 10 daily).

Caudal (☎ 02 98 56 96 72) runs buses to Concarneau (€2, 45 minutes, seven to 10 daily).

There are frequent trains to Brest (€14, 1¼ hours, up to 10 daily), Rennes (€30.10, 2½ hours, five daily) and Paris (Gare Montparnasse; €68.20, 4¼ hours, eight daily).

CARNAC

pop 4600

Stand aside, Stonehenge – Carnac (Garnag in Breton) has the world's greatest concentration of megalithic sites. Predating Stonehenge by around 100 years, there are more than 3000 of these upright stones, most around thigh-high, erected between 5000 and 3500 BC.

Situated about 32km west of Vannes, Carnac has two parts: the old stone village, Carnac-Ville, and, 1.5km south, the seaside resort of Carnac-Plage.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 02 97 52 13 52; www.ot-carnac.fr; 74 av des Druides, Carnac-Plage; ☞ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 3-7pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon or 12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun)

Tourist office annexe (☎ 02 97 52 13 52; place de l'Église, Carnac-Ville; ☞ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Apr-Sep & school holidays)

Sights

Carnac's mighty **megaliths** stretch some 13km north from Carnac-Ville to the village of Locmariaquer. No-one's quite sure what purpose these cromlech cairns served, although theories abound – depending on which book you read, the Carnac stones signify just about everything from sun worship to a phallic fertility cult. Even more mysterious is the thorny question of their construction – just *how did* the builders hew and haul these vast granite blocks several millennia before the wheel arrived in Brittany, let alone the JCB.

With no less than 1099 stones, the **Alignements du Ménez**, 1km north of Carnac-Ville, is the largest menhir field. Some 1.5km northeast are the **Alignements de Kermario**, and 500m further on the **Alignements de Kerlescan**. Between June and September, seven buses a day run between the two sites and both Carnac-Ville and Carnac-Plage.

Between 10am and 5pm from October to May, you can wander freely through many sites, but during the rest of the year, you can only visit on a 1½-hour **guided tour** (€4), organised by the **Maison des Mégalithes** (☎ 02 97 52 89 99; route des Alignements; admission free; ☞ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, to 5.15pm Sep-Apr, to 7pm May-Jun).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping des Menhirs (☎ 02 97 52 94 67; www.lesmenhirs.com; 7 allée St-Michel, Carnac-Plage; camp sites €29; ☞ May-late Sep; ☞) There are more than 15 camping grounds in and around Carnac, including this luxury complex 300m north of the beach, complete with sauna (€4), and cocktail bar.

Auberge Le Ratelier (☎ 02 97 52 05 04; www.le-ratelier.com; 4 Chemin du Douet, Carnac-Ville; d €43-55; ☞ Feb-Dec) This rustic eight-room hotel – a former farmhouse with low ceilings with traditional timber furnishings – is in a quiet street southwest of place de l'Église. Feast on gourmet seafood at its wood-beamed restaurant (menu €17 to €40; open lunch and dinner May to September, closed Wednesday October to December and February to April).

Hôtel Le Bateau Ivre (☎ 02 97 52 19 55; fax 02 97 52 84 94; 71 blvd de la Plage, Carnac-Plage; s €64-114,

d €83-160; ☞) The Bateau Ivre is one of Carnac's more upmarket hotels. All rooms have a balcony and overlook the beach, which is lined with jaunty yellow-and-white bathing tents in summer.

Crêperie au Pressoir (☎ 02 97 52 01 86; village du Ménez; galettes €3-7.50; ☞ lunch & dinner Easter-Aug) This artisan creperie is in a traditional long Breton house, right in the middle of a 70-strong *chromlech'h* (circle of menhirs).

Getting There & Away

The main bus stops are in Carnac-Ville outside the police station on rue St-Cornély and in Carnac-Plage beside the tourist office. **Cariane Atlantique** (☎ 02 97 47 29 64) buses go to Auray (€3.80), Vannes (€6.30) and Quiberon (€3.80).

The nearest year-round train station is in Auray, 12km to the northeast. SNCF has an office in the Carnac-Plage tourist office.

Getting Around

Hire bikes for around €9/17 per half-/full day from **Lorcy** (☎ 02 97 52 09 73; 6 rue de Courdiac, Carnac-Ville) and **Le Randonneur** (☎ 02 97 52 02 55; 20 av des Druides, Carnac-Plage).

ST-MALO

pop 52,700

The port of St-Malo, battered by swelling seas and encircled by sturdy ramparts, became a key port during the 17th and 18th centuries, and an important base for merchant ships and government-sanctioned privateers (otherwise known as pirates). These days St-Malo is a summertime haven, especially for British tourists, for whom the city is just a short cross-Channel ferry-hop away.

Orientation

St-Malo consists of the harbour towns of St-Malo and St-Servan plus the suburbs of Paramé and Rothéneuf to the east. The old walled city of St-Malo is known as *Intra-Muros* (within the walls) or *Ville Close*. From the train station, it's a 15-minute walk westwards along av Louis Martin.

Information

Cybermalo (☎ 02 99 56 07 78; 68 chaussée de Sillon; per 15min/1hr €1.50/4; ☞ 10am-1am Mon-Sat, 11am-11pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 11am-9pm Tue-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat, 3-8pm Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun) Internet access along the seafont.

Main post office (1 blvd de la République)

Tourist office (☎ 08 25 13 52 00, 02 99 56 64 43; www.saint-malo-tourisme.com; esplanade St-Vincent; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm or 6.30pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Sun Easter-Jun & Sep)

Sights

For the best views of the walled city, stroll along the **ramparts**, constructed at the end of the 17th century under military architect Vauban. You can make a complete circuit (around 2km), and there's access at several places, including all the city gates. From their northern stretch, look across to the remains of **Fort National** (admission free; ☎ Jun-Sep). You can also walk to the rocky islet of Île du Grand Bé, where 18th-century writer Chateaubriand is buried. Check tide times with the tourist office, as the island is accessible for around six hours around high tide.

The battle to drive German forces out of St-Malo destroyed around 80% of the old city during August 1944; damage to the **Cathédrale St-Vincent** (place Jean de Châtillon; ☎ 9.30am-6pm except during Mass), was particularly severe.

Other attractions in St-Malo include the **Musée International du Long Cours Cap-Hornier** (Museum of the Cape Horn Route; ☎ 02 99 40 71 58; adult/child €5/2.50; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6pm Apr-Sep, Tue-Sun Oct-Mar), which explores of the lives of the leather-skinned sailors who plied the Cape Horn route, and the excellent **Grand Aquarium** (☎ 02 99 21 19 00; av Général Patton; adult/child €14/10; ☎ at least 10am-6pm Feb-Dec, to 8pm Jul & Aug), 4km south of the city. If you're hardy enough to brave the Atlantic swells, there are also several pleasant **beaches** around St-Malo.

Sleeping

Camping Aleth (☎ 02 99 81 60 91; camping@ville-saint-malo.fr; allée Gaston Buy, St-Servan; camp sites €11.50; ☎ May-Sep) Next to Fort de la Cité, Camping Aleth has panoramic 360-degree views and is close to the beaches. Take bus 1 in July and August or No 3 year-round.

Auberge de Jeunesse Ethic Etapes (☎ 02 99 40 29 80; www.centrevarangot.com; 37 av du Père Umbricht; dm incl breakfast €12.50-16.50; ☎) This efficient place has a self-catering kitchen and sports facilities. Take bus No 5 from the train station or 1 (July and August only) from the bus station.

Hôtel les Chiens du Guet (☎ 02 99 40 87 29; www.leschiensduguet.com, in French; 4 place du Guet; d €37-48,

tr €47-53) This welcoming no-star place is near Porte St-Pierre, which opens directly onto the beach. The 12 simple, sunlit rooms are homy if somewhat snug.

Hôtel France et Chateaubriand (☎ 02 99 56 66 52; www.hotel-fr-chateaubriand.com; place Chateaubriand; s €41-79, d €48-95) Opposite the chateau entrance, this grand place houses 80 rooms that combine a rarefied traditional French atmosphere with a relaxed seaside ambience.

Hôtel San Pedro (☎ 02 99 40 88 57; www.sanpedro-hotel.com; 1 rue Ste-Anne; s €43-49, d €53-65; ☎ Feb-Nov; ☎) Tucked away in the old city, the San Pedro has cool, crisp neutral-toned décor with subtle splashes of colour, friendly service, and superb sea views.

Eating

Pain de Campagne (☎ 02 99 20 11 26, 7 rue Ste-Barbe; meals €5-9; ☎ lunch Thu-Tue, dinner Thu-Sat, Mon & Tue Sep-Jun, noon-2am daily Jul & Aug) The locals' choice for sandwiches and light lunches.

Crêperie Margaux (☎ 02 99 20 26 02; 3 place du Marché aux Légumes; menu €12; ☎ closed Tue & Wed) You can watch the owner of this wonderful little creperie hand-making traditional crepes.

Côté Jardin (☎ 02 99 81 63 11, 36 rue Dauphine, St-Servan; menu €18-24; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue & Thu-Sun) This charming restaurant presents regional and traditional cuisine, and boasts a terrace overlooking the marina and city.

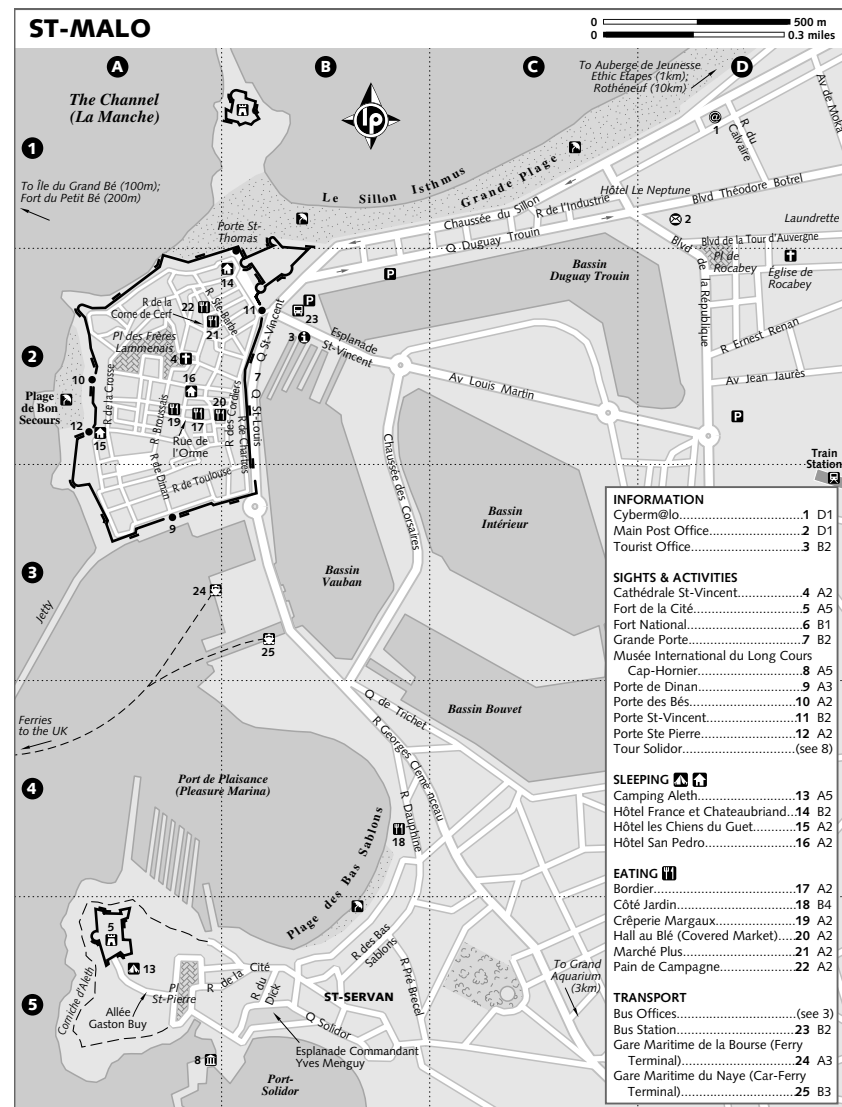
Marché Plus (cnr rue St-Vincent & rue St-Barbe; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, 7am-noon Sun), in the old city, is good for picnic supplies, while **Bordier** (9 rue de l'Orme; ☎ Tue-Sat) is the best cheese and dairy shop in town. Just down the street is the covered market, **Halle au Blé** (☎ 8am-noon Tue & Fri).

Getting There & Away

Brittany Ferries (☎ in France 08 25 82 88 28, in the UK 0870 556 1600; www.brittany-ferries.com) sail between St-Malo and Portsmouth and **Condor Ferries** (☎ in France 08 25 13 51 35, in the UK 0870 243 5140; www.condorferries.co.uk) run to both Poole and Weymouth via Jersey or Guernsey. Ferries leave from the Gare Maritime du Naye.

From April to September, **Compagnie Corsaire** (☎ 08 25 13 80 35) and **Etoile Marine Excursions** (☎ 02 23 18 02 04, www.etoile-marine-excursions.com) run a Bus de Mer (Sea Bus; adult/child return €6/4, 10 minutes, hourly) shuttle service between St-Malo and Dinard.

Courriers Bretons (☎ 02 99 19 70 80) serves Pontorson (€2.50, one hour) and Mont St-Michel (€4.30, 1½ hours, three to four daily).



TIV (☎ 02 99 82 26 26) has buses to Dinard (€1.50, 30 minutes, hourly) and Rennes (€3, one to 1½ hours, three to six daily).

TGV trains services run frequently between St-Malo and Rennes (€11.60, one hour), and there is also a direct service to Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€58, three hours).

AROUND ST-MALO Dinard

pop 10,100

Visiting Dinard 'in season' is like stepping into one of the canvases Picasso painted here in the 1920s. *Belle époque* mansions built into the cliffs preside over the beach, dotted with blue-and-white-striped bathing

tents and summertime bathers. As befits a seaside resort, Dinard's main attractions are its beaches, cafés and waterfront walks. Take a stroll along the **promenade du Clair de Lune** (Moonlight Promenade) running from north of place Général de Gaulle to the Embarcadère, and offering views of St-Malo's old city across the Rance River estuary.

The **tourist office** (☎ 02 99 46 94 12; www.ot-dinard.com, in French; 2 blvd Féart; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-12.15pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) books accommodation for free.

THE LOIRE

For a taste of the lavish lifestyles of the aristocracy in centuries past, look no further than the beautiful Loire region. This is famous chateau country with some of the grandest country manors and fortified castles anywhere in France. It's hardly surprising it has been listed by Unesco as a World Heritage site. A rural and relaxing place to explore on foot or on two wheels, though it can get a bit overrun in high summer.

BLOIS

pop 49,300

Blois (pronounced blwah) has a long history of aristocratic intrigue and bloody royal politics. In the Middle Ages it was the seat of the counts of Blois and in the 16th century it served as France's second capital. It's also home to the renowned Poulain chocolate firm – but though even Willy Wonka let five winners visit his factory, Poulain has a strict no-tours policy.

Orientation & Information

Blois, on the northern bank of the Loire, is a compact town – almost everything is within 10 minutes' walk of the train station. The old city is southeast and east of the chateau, which towers over place Victor Hugo.

The **tourist office** (☎ 02 54 90 41 41; www.loiredeschateaux.com; 23 place du Château; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) supplies free walking brochures.

Sights

The **Château de Blois** (☎ 02 54 90 33 32; adult/student/6-17yr €6.50/5/3; ☎ 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, to 6pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, to 12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Nov-Mar) makes an

excellent introduction to the chateaux of the Loire valley, with elements of Gothic (13th century); Flamboyant Gothic (1498-1503), early Renaissance (1515-24) and classical (1630s) architecture in its four grand wings.

Opposite is the **Maison de la Magie** (House of Magic; ☎ 02 54 55 26 26; 1 place du Château; adult/12-17yr/6-11yr €7.50/6.50/5; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Jul & Aug, to 12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Jun, to noon & 2-6pm Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun Sep-Mar) featuring a magic show, interactive exhibits and clocks invented by the Blois-born magician Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin (1805-71), after whom the great Houdini named himself.

Blois' old city, damaged by German attacks in 1940, retains its steep, twisting medieval streets. **Cathédrale St-Louis** (☎ 9am-6pm) was rebuilt in late-Gothic style following the devastating hurricane of 1678. A few paces east, there's a great view of Blois and the Loire River from the **Jardins de l'Évêché** (Gardens of the Bishop's Palace).

Sleeping

Hôtel Le Savoie (☎ 02 54 74 32 21; www.citotel.com; 6 rue Ducoux; d €48-54) A well-kept, family-run hotel conveniently located a few steps from the train station. The 25 two-star rooms are modern and spotless.

Hôtel Anne de Bretagne (☎ 02 54 78 05 38; http://annedebretagne.free.fr; 31 av Jean Laigret; d €52-58; ☎ closed early Jan-early Feb) A vine-covered, two-star hotel with 28 bright, comfortable rooms overlooking a leafy crescent.

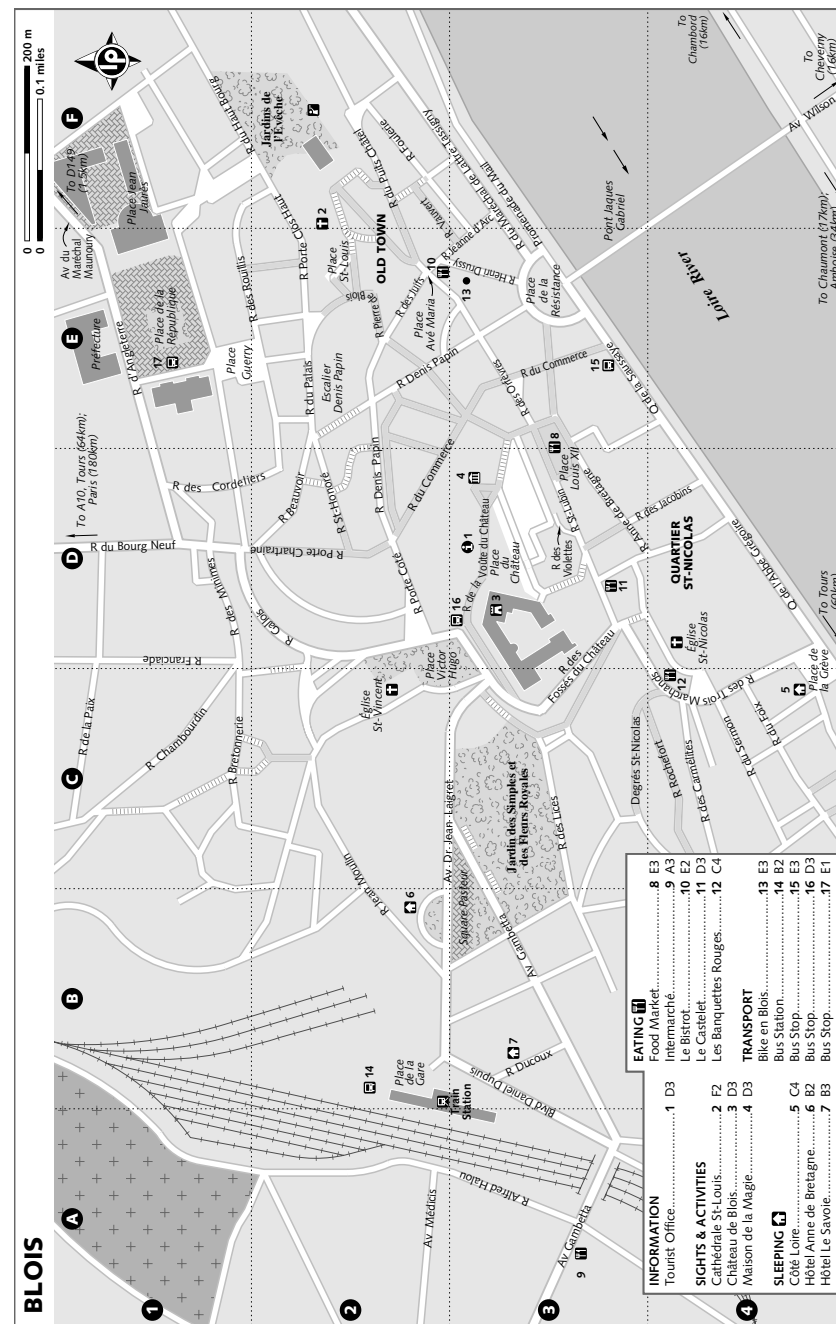
Côté Loire (☎ 02 54 78 07 86; www.coteblois.com; 2 place de la Grève; d €53-72) Full of wood-beamed character, this small, higgledy-piggledy two-star hotel is a good choice if you can get one of the seven charming rooms.

Eating & Drinking

Popular restaurants line rue Foulerie, which is two blocks from the Loire River. The best of the bars are in the old town, particularly in the small alleys and squares off rue Foulerie.

Le Bistrot (☎ 02 54 78 47 74; 12 rue Henry Drussy; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat, also Sun approx Apr-Sep, to 2am daily May-Aug) An informal bar-brasserie-wine bar serving steaks (€11.50 to €13.50), salads (€8.50) and hot open sandwiches (€8.50).

Les Banquettes Rouges (☎ 02 54 78 74 92; 16 rue des Trois Marchands; menu €13.50-37.50; ☎ noon-1.45pm & 7-9.45pm Tue-Sat) Hearty French favourites,



including *jarret d'agneau* (lamb shin) and various fish dishes, all served with a Gallic smile.

Le Castelet (☎ 02 54 74 66 09; 40 rue de Saint Lubin; menu €16-26.50; ☎ closed Wed & Sun; ☒) A convivial restaurant serving traditional French and Touraine cuisine packed with market-fresh ingredients. Specialities include *escargots à l'amboisienne* (snails with butter, ground hazelnut and rosé wine; six/12 €7.80/11.40) and classic *mousse au chocolat noir* (dark-chocolate mousse; €5).

Top spots for self-caterers include the **food market** (rue Anne de Bretagne; ☎ to 1pm Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday) and **Intermarché supermarket** (16 av Gambetta).

Getting There & Away

The *départemental* bus company, **TLC** (☎ 02 54 58 55 44) links Blois with Chambord (40 minutes, two to four daily Monday to Saturday) and Cheverny (€2.40, 30 minutes, two to four daily).

The train station has frequent services to Amboise (€5.60, 19 minutes, 10 to 20 daily), Orléans (€9, 45 minutes, 14 to 28 daily) and Tours (€8.70, 40 minutes, 11 to 22 daily). There are also trains to Paris' Gare d'Austerlitz (€22.10, two hours, seven to 13 daily).

Bikes can be hired at **Bike en Blois** (☎ 02 54 56 07 73; 8 rue Henri Drussy; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 6-7pm Sun Easter-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Christmas).

AROUND BLOIS

Château de Chambord

Chateaux don't get any grander than **Chambord** (☎ 02 54 50 50 20; www.chambord.org; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €8.50/6/free; ☎ 9am-6.30pm May-Sep, to 5.30pm Oct-Apr, to 8.30pm 14 Jul-15 Aug, ticket sales end 45min before closing), constructed from 1519 by François I as a lavish base for hunting game in the nearby Sologne forests, but eventually used for just 42 days during the king's entire 32-year reign (1515-47).

The chateau's most famous feature is the double-helix staircase, attributed by some to Leonardo da Vinci, who lived in Amboise (34km southwest) from 1516 until his death three years later. The Italianate rooftop terrace, surrounded by a maze of cupolas, domes, chimneys and slate roofs, was where the royal court assembled to watch military exercises, tournaments and hunting parties returning at the end of the day.

A 1½-hour **audioguide** (€4) is available, and from June to August, 1½-hour **guided tours** (€4) in English are held once or twice a day. Free *son et lumière* (sound and light) shows, known as **Les Clairs de Lune**, are projected onto the chateau's façade nightly from July to mid-September.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Chambord is 16km east of Blois, 45km southwest of Orléans and 17km northeast of Cheverny. For details on buses see left.

Château de Cheverny

Cheverny (☎ 02 54 79 96 29; www.chateau-cheverny.fr; adult/student/7-14yr €6.50/4.50/3.50; ☎ 9.15am-6.45pm Jul & Aug, to 6.15pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 9.45am-5pm or 5.30pm Oct-Mar), built between 1625 and 1634, is the region's most magnificently furnished chateau, renowned for its opulently appointed rooms and salons – especially the *Chambre du Roi* (King's Bedroom), the Grand Salon, and the 1st-floor dining room, where 34 painted wood panels illustrate the story of *Don Quijote*. Across the lawn behind the chateau is the 18th-century Orangerie, where Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* was hidden during WWII.

Cheverny is 16km southeast of Blois and 17km southwest of Chambord. For information on the bus from Blois see left.

Château de Chaumont

It's a brisk climb up to **Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire** (☎ 02 54 51 26 26; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €6.50/4.50/free; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm 8 May-mid-Sep, 10am-5pm mid-Sep-7 May, no ticket sales 12.30-1.30pm Oct-Mar, ticket sales end 30min before closing), set on a bluff overlooking the Loire. The entrance, across a wooden drawbridge between two wide towers, opens onto an inner courtyard from where there are stunning views. Opposite the main entrance are the luxurious stables, built in 1877. The chateau will be closed for several months in early 2007.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Chaumont-sur-Loire is on the Loire's south bank 17km southwest of Blois and 20km northeast of Amboise.

Onzain, 2km across the Loire from Chaumont, is on the Orléans-Tours train line. Frequent trains go to Blois (€2.90, 10 minutes, 10 to 20 daily) and Tours (€6.90, 35 minutes, 11 to 22 daily).

The Chaumont-sur-Loire **tourist office** (☎ 02 54 20 91 73; 24 rue du Maréchal Lederc; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-7pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, plus Sun & holidays Jun-Aug, to 12.30pm & 1.30-5pm or 5.30pm, closed Sun & holidays Feb-Apr & Oct-late Dec) rents bikes for €5/10 per half-/full day.

TOURS

pop 270,000

Lively Tours has the cosmopolitan, bourgeois air of a miniature Paris, with wide 18th-century avenues, formal public gardens, café-lined boulevards and a thriving university with 25,000 students. The French spoken in Tours is said to be the purest in France.

Orientation & Information

The focal point is place Jean Jaurès, where the city's major thoroughfares – rue Nationale, blvd Heurteloup, av de Grammont and blvd Béranger – meet. The train station is 300m east of place Jean Jaurès. The old city is centred on place Plumereau, 400m west of rue Nationale.

For the local low-down head for the **tourist office** (☎ 02 47 70 37 37; www.ligeris.com; 78-82 rue Bernard Palissy; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Sun & holidays mid-Apr-mid-Oct, 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun & holidays mid-Oct-mid-Apr).

Sights

In an impressive 17th- to 18th-century archbishop's palace, the **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (☎ 02 47 05 68 73; 18 place François Sicard; adult/student/under 13yr €4/2/free; ☎ 9am-12.45pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon) has an excellent collection of paintings, furniture and objets d'art from the 14th to 20th centuries.

Tours' Gothic-style **Cathédrale St-Gatien** (☎ 9am-7pm) dates from the 13th to 16th centuries, although the domed tops of the two 70m-high towers are from the Renaissance. The cathedral's interior is renowned for its 13th- to 15th-century stained-glass windows.

The city's archaeological museum, **Musée de l'Hôtel Guéin** (☎ 02 47 66 22 32; 25 rue du Commerce; adult/child €3.50/3; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.15-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Oct-Mar), is housed in an impressive Renaissance residence built for a wealthy merchant around 1510.

About 1.6km west of place Jean Jaurès, the **Jardin Botanique** (blvd Tonnelles; admission free; ☎ 7.45am-sunset) has a tropical greenhouse,

medicinal herb garden and petting zoo. There are also emus and kangaroos bouncing around. To get there, it's a short walk or take Bus 4 along blvd Béranger.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse du Vieux Tours (☎ 02 47 37 81 58; www.ajtours.org, in French; 5 rue Bretonneau; s, d or tr per person incl breakfast €17; ☎ reception 8am-noon & 5-10pm Oct-Mar, 8am-noon & 6-11pm Apr-Sep; ☎) A well-equipped, 146-room hostel near the old town. There are eight kitchens for cooking and three lounges for hanging out – you can also rent bikes (€10 per day) or for that extra touch of luxury, your very own minifridge (€0.50 a day).

Hôtel Val de Loire (☎ 02 47 05 37 86; hotel.val.de.loire@club-internet.fr; 33 blvd Heurteloup; s/d €33/42, with hand basin €22/31) This two-star hotel, in a bourgeois home built in 1870, has heaps of charm. The ceilings get lower the higher up you go but all the rooms boast real parquet floors and antique furniture.

Hôtel du Cygne (☎ 02 47 66 66 41; http://perso.wanadoo.fr/hotelcygne.tours; 6 rue du Cygne; d €44-74; ☎) A pretty 18-room hotel on a quiet side street, with wooden-shuttered windows, blooming flowerboxes, high ceilings and the odd chandelier.

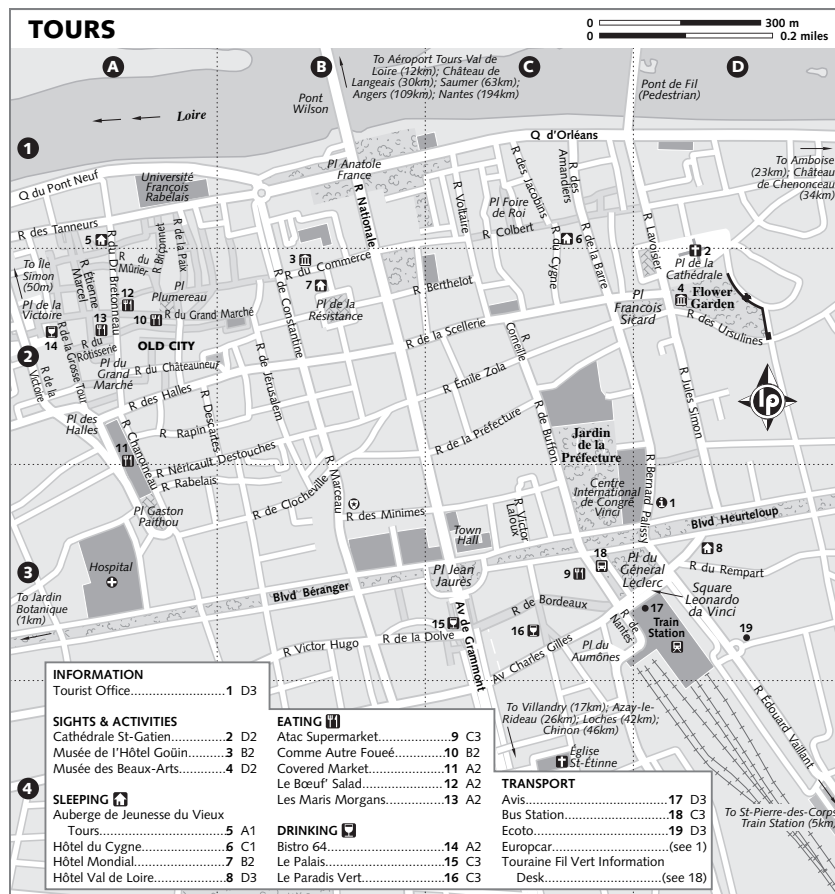
Hôtel Mondial (☎ 02 47 05 62 68; www.hotelmondial.tours.com; 3 place de la Résistance; s/d from €46/50) A postwar two-star option with 19 immaculate, carpeted rooms overlooking a public square. There's a sunny room on the 2nd floor to enjoy the buffet breakfast.

Eating

In the old city, place Plumereau, rue du Grand Marché and rue de la Rôtisserie are loaded with restaurants and cafés. Further east, cheap eats are available along rue Colbert.

Comme Autre Fouée (☎ 02 47 05 94 78; 11 rue de la Monnaie; lunch menu €10, other menu from €16-19.50; ☎ lunch Fri & Sat, dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Tue-Thu mid-May-mid-Sep) Comme Autre Fouée specialises in *fouée* (or *fouaces*), an age-old regional speciality that is created by baking a small, flat disc of dough in a wood-fired oven. Served piping hot, these minipitta breads are then filled with pork *rillettes*, *haricots blancs* (butterbeans) or fresh goat's cheese. When in doubt, *fouée* make a hearty, all-you-can-eat meal.

Le Boeuf Salad (☎ 02 47 66 70 58; 19 rue du Grand Marché; menu €14-22; ☎ sometimes closed Tue & Wed)



An informal French eatery, decked out in white and blue, serving Tours' cheapest steak-and-fries platter (€7, available October to May).

Les Maris Morgans (☎ 02 47 64 95 34; 6 rue de la Rôtisserie; menu €16-29; ☎ dinner Thu-Tue) This innovative eatery specialises in meat and fish dishes that you cook yourself on a *Pierre chaude* (hot rock); and *bisquines*, a creamy seafood smorgasbord served on a cork platter.

The best place for fresh produce is **Les Halles** (covered market; place Gaston Pailhou; ☎ 7am-7pm). General supplies are sold at two **Atac supermarkets** (place du Général Leclerc ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Sat; place Jean Jaurès shopping arcade; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat).

Drinking & Entertainment

The old town is full of bars – a good starting point is place Plumereau, which fills to bursting in the summer, and nearby rue du Grand Marché.

Le Palais (☎ 02 47 61 48 54; 15 place Jean Jaurès; ☎ 7am-2am, closed Sun Nov-Mar) Every Monday night, this trendy bar-brasserie hosts a *café des langues*, where you can chat to linguistically motivated locals in English (and lots of other languages).

Bistro 64 (64 rue du Grand Marché; ☎ 11am-2am Mon-Sat) An intimate bar choked with smoke from cigarettes and the candles on the tiny tables. Jazz usually provides the background score, although there's live music on Thursday nights.

Le Paradis Vert (☎ 02 47 66 00 94; 9 rue Michelet; adult/student billiard table per hr €10/8; ☎ 10am-2am) France's largest pool hall with 36 tables. The Monday night tournament (7.30pm to 1am) is open to all comers.

Getting There & Away

Aéroport Tours-Val de Loire (TUF; ☎ 02 47 49 37 00; www.tours-aeroport.com) is linked to London Stansted by Ryanair. A **shuttle bus** (€5) links Tours' bus station with all Ryanair flights.

Buses operated by **Touraine Fil Vert** (☎ 02 47 47 17 18; www.touraine-filvert.com, in French) serve destinations including Amboise (€2.10, 45 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday). There's an **information desk** (☎ 02 47 05 30 49; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat) at the bus station on place du Général Leclerc.

The regional train station is linked to St-Pierre-des-Corps, Tours' TGV train station, by frequent shuttle trains. Trains run 13 to 20 times a day between Tours and Orléans (€15.90, one to 1½ hours), stopping en route at Blois (€8.70, 35 minutes). SNCF lines go to Angers (€14.70, one hour, eight to 14 daily) and Chenonceau (€5.50, 30 minutes, four to six daily) as well as various other local destinations.

TGVs travel to Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€37.60 or €50.30, 1¼ hours, 13 to 15 daily), Bordeaux (€40.40, 2½ hours) and La Rochelle (€31.30, two to three hours). Slower corail services travel to Gare d'Austerlitz (€28.50, two to 2¾ hours, nine to 14 daily), Poitiers (€16.70 or €13.80, 40 to 60 minutes) and Nantes (€26.70 or €23.80, about two hours).

Car-rental companies include **Avis** (☎ 02 47 20 53 27), inside the train station; **Europcar** (☎ 02 47 64 47 76; 76 bdv Bernard Palissy); and **Ecoto** (☎ 02 47 66 75 00; www.ecoto.fr; 8 rue Marcel Tribut).

AROUND TOURS

Some of the Loire's finest **châteaux** can be visited on a day trip from Tours. The tourist office in Tours has details of *son et lumière* and other spectacles performed at the châteaux during summer.

With its moat, drawbridge, towers and turrets, the 16th-century **Château de Chenonceau** (☎ 08 20 20 90 90; www.chenonceau.com; adult/student & child €8/6.50; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Mar-mid-Sep, to 4.30pm rest of year) is everything a fairy-tale castle should be, although the chateau's antiques-stuffed interior is overshadowed by the

glorious landscaped gardens that surround the castle. There's even a fabulous yew tree *labyrinthe* (maze) in which to get thoroughly lost.

The grand fortifications and turrets of the **Château Azay-le-Rideau** (☎ 02 47 45 42 04; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €7.50/5/free; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, to 6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-12.15pm & 2-5.15pm Oct-Mar) were designed to indicate the rank and prestige of the castle's owners. The chateau's most impressive feature is an extraordinary staircase with ornamented loggias on each floor.

The crenellated **Château de Langeais** (☎ 02 47 96 72 60; adult/10-17yr/under 10yr €7.50/4/free; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, to 6.30pm Feb-Jun & Sep-mid-Nov, 10am-5pm mid-Nov-Jan) is the most authentic of the valley's châteaux, with an atmospheric interior packed with period furnishings, tapestries and original 15th-century floor tiles. There's even a working drawbridge and a ruined 10th-century donjon (keep), thought to be the oldest in France.

Perched above the Vienne River, the mostly ruined medieval **Château de Chinon** (☎ 02 47 93 13 45; adult/student €6/4.50; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Mar), consists of three sections separated by waterless moats: the 12th-century Fort St-Georges, the Château du Milieu (the Middle Castle), and, at the western tip, the 13th-century Fort du Coudray. Superb views are on offer from the 14th-century clock tower, and four of the castle's rooms are dedicated to Joan of Arc, who in 1429 picked out Charles VII from among a crowd of courtiers in the *Salle du Trône* (Throne Room).

Getting There & Away

Many châteaux are accessible by train or SNCF bus from Tours, including Chenonceau, Villandry, Azay-le-Rideau, Langeais, Amboise, Chaumont, Chinon and Saumur, but touring the châteaux by public transport can be slow and expensive.

An organised bus tour is a better option. There are several operators offering English-language tours of the main châteaux; typical prices are €18 to €31 for a half-day trip in a minibus for up to eight people. Stops at each chateau last between 45 minutes and one hour, and you'll usually be entitled to discounted entry fees if you're part of an organised group. Reservations can be made at the Tours tourist office.

Acco-Dispo (☎ 06 82 00 64 51; www.accodispos-tours.com)
Quart de Tours (☎ 06 85 72 16 22; www.quartdetours.com)

Services Touristiques de Touraine (STT; ☎ 02 47 05 46 09; www.stt-millet.fr) Runs full-sized coaches for individuals rather than groups from April to mid-October.

St-Eloi Excursions (☎ 02 47 37 08 04; www.saint-eloi.com)

AMBOISE

pop 11,000

The picturesque town of Amboise, nestling under its fortified chateau on the southern bank of the Loire River, reached its peak during the decades around 1500, when luxury-loving Charles VIII enlarged the chateau and François I held raucous parties there. These days the town makes the most of its association with Leonardo da Vinci, who lived out his last years here under the patronage of François I.

Amboise makes a convenient base for visiting the chateaux of Tours and Blois.

The **tourist office** (☎ 02 47 57 09 28; www.amboise-valde Loire.com; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-8pm Mon-Sat & 10am-6pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat & 10am-1pm sometimes Sun Oct-Mar) stocks maps for walking (*Balades Royales*, €4) and cycling (*5 Circuits Vélos*, €2) and supplies a free English-language brochure for a walking tour of Amboise.

Amboise's **royal chateau** (☎ 02 47 57 00 98; place Michel Debré; adult/15-25yr/7-14yr €8/7/5; ☎ 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9am-6pm or 6.30pm mid-Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-noon & 2-4.45pm Nov-mid-Mar) sits high above town on a rocky outcrop, affording panoramic views of the town and the Loire.

Charles VIII (r 1483-98), who was born and brought up here, enlarged the chateau in 1492 after a visit to Italy that left him deeply impressed by that country's artistic creativity and luxurious lifestyle. Today, just a few of the chateau's 15th- and 16th-century structures survive, including the Flamboyant Gothic Chapelle St-Hubert, said to be the final resting place of Leonardo da Vinci; and the Salle des États (Estates Hall), where a group of Protestant conspirators were tried before being hanged from the balcony in 1560.

Leonardo da Vinci came to Amboise in 1516 at the invitation of François I. Until his death three years later at the age of 67, he lived and worked at **Le Clos Lucé** (☎ 02 47 57 00 73;

www.vinci-closlucé.com; 2 rue du Clos Lucé; adult/student/6-15yr Apr-mid-Nov €12/9.50/7, mid-Nov-Mar €9/7/6; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9am-7pm Apr, Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-6pm Nov, Dec, Feb & Mar, 9am-5pm Jan, ticket sales end 1hr before closing), a brick manor house that now houses scale models of his inventions, including a proto-automobile, armoured tank, parachute and hydraulic turbine.

Sleeping

Camping Municipal de l'Île d'Or (☎ 02 47 57 23 37; Île d'Or; camp sites per adult/site €2.50/3.50; ☎ Apr-early Oct) Has trans-river views of the chateau; the municipal swimming pool is next door.

Centre Charles Péguy-Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 02 47 30 60 90; www.mjcamboise.fr, in French; dm €11, bedding €4; ☎ reception 2-8pm Mon-Fri, usually 5.30-7.30pm Sat & Sun) A smart, efficient 72-bed youth hostel on the Île d'Or, with rooms for one to six people.

Hôtel La Brèche (☎ 02 47 57 00 79; www.labreche-amboise.com; 26 rue Jules Ferry; d with breakfast €66; ☎ Mar-Oct) Near the train station, this 14-room place is comfortable and full of charm. The owner is full of local knowledge.

Le Clos d'Amboise (☎ 02 47 30 10 20; www.leclosamboise.com; 27 rue Rabelais; r €79-170; ☎ closed late Nov-mid-Feb; 🍷) This grand 17th-century ecclesiastical residence boasts a tranquil walled garden and a fantastic selection of lavishly appointed rooms.

Château de Pintray (☎ 02 47 23 22 84; www.chateau-de-pintray.com; d with breakfast €96) Six kilometres west of Amboise in Lussault-sur-Loire, this small 16th-century chateau has five traditionally furnished rooms and a delightful garden. You can taste and buy wines produced on the estate.

Eating

The southern side of place Michel Debré is lined with eateries; more restaurants and food shops line rue Nationale.

L'Épicerie (☎ 02 47 57 08 94; 46 place Michel Debré; lunch menu €11, dinner menu €19.50-37.50; ☎ Wed-Sun, also open Mon & Tue Jul-Sep, closed late Oct-mid-Dec) A quaint little restaurant with traditional French dishes, including *tournedos de canard aux baies poivrées* (duck breast in a sauce of pink peppercorns and red Chinon wine, €16.50).

Le Pavillon des Lys (☎ 02 47 30 01 01; 9 rue d'Orange; menu €22-33; ☎ closed Tue Dec-Feb; 🍷) An elegant French restaurant which makes the perfect end to a hard day of chateau sight-seeing.

Self-caterers can head for the **Marché Plus supermarket** (5 quai du Général de Gaulle; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) or the **open-air food market** (☎ 8am-1pm Fri & Sun).

Getting There & Away

Touraine Fil Vert's line C1 links Amboise's post office with Tours' bus terminal (€2.10, 45 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday).

The **train station** (blvd Gambetta), across the river from the town centre, is served by trains from Paris' Gare d'Austerlitz (€24.20, 2¼ to three hours, 11 daily), Blois (€5.60, 20 minutes, 10 to 20 daily) and Tours (€4.50, 15 minutes, 10 to 20 daily).

Hire mountain bikes at **Cycles Richard** (☎ 02 47 57 01 79; 2 rue de Nazelles; per day €15; ☎ 9am-noon & 2.30-7pm Tue-Sat).

SOUTHWESTERN FRANCE

Though the Côte d'Azur is the most popular beach spot in France, the many seaside resorts along the Atlantic Coast are fast catching up. If you're a surf-nut or a beach bum, then the sandy bays around Biarritz and Bayonne will be right up your alley, while oenophiles can sample the fruits of the vine in the high temple of French wine-making, Bordeaux. Towards the Pyrenees you'll find the Basque Country, which in many ways is closer to the culture of northern Spain than to the rest of France.

NANTES

pop 550,000

Spirited and innovative, the university city of Nantes is France's sixth-largest metropolis. In the 18th century Nantes was France's foremost port, and in the 19th – following the abolition of slavery – it was a cutting-edge industrial centre. The shipyards have been relocated to St-Nazaire, but Nantes is enjoying a renaissance as a cultural hub, with plenty of museums, a lively biscuit factory-turned-cultural centre, and a museum in the city's magnificent medieval castle.

Orientation

On the Loire's northern bank, central Nantes' two main arteries, both served by tram lines, are the partly pedestrianised cours des 50

Otages and a broad east-west boulevard that connects the train station with quai de la Fosse. They intersect near the Gare Centrale bus/tram hub. The old city is to the east, between cours des 50 Otages and the Château des Ducs de Bretagne.

Information

Cyber City (☎ 02 40 89 57 92; 14 rue de Strasbourg; per hr €3; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Sat, 11am-midnight Sun) Internet access.

Main post office (place de Bretagne)

Main tourist office (☎ 02 72 64 04 79; www.nantes-tourisme.com; cours Olivier de Clisson; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 10.30am-6pm Thu, closed Sun)

Tourist office annexe (2 place St-Pierre; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, 10.30am-1pm & 2-6pm Thu, closed Mon)

Sights

The **Château des Ducs de Bretagne** (Castle of the Dukes of Brittany; ☎ 02 51 17 49 00; adult/child each for museum/exhibitions €5/3 or for both €8/5, admission to grounds free; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-May-mid-Sep, 10am-6pm Wed-Mon mid-Sep-mid-May) has reopened after renovation, and houses a multimedia-rich museum covering the city's history.

Showcasing one of the finest collections of French paintings outside Paris, Nantes' **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (Fine Arts Museum; ☎ 02 51 17 45 00; 10 rue Georges Clemenceau; adult/child €3.50/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon, to 8pm Thu) displays works by Chagall, Monet, Picasso and Kandinsky.

Overlooking the river, the **Musée Jules Verne** (☎ 02 40 69 72 52; www.julesverne.nantes.fr, in French; 3 rue de l'Hermitage; adult/student & child €3/1.50; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 2-6pm Sun) is a magical place dedicated to the works of the great author, who was born in Nantes in 1828. Exhibits include first-edition books, manuscripts, and interactive displays.

Inside the Flamboyant Gothic **Cathédrale St-Pierre et St-Paul** (place St-Pierre), the tomb of François II (r 1458-88), duke of Brittany, and his second wife, Marguerite de Foix, is a masterpiece of Renaissance art.

The 19th-century **Jardin des Plantes** is one of the most exquisite botanical gardens in France and makes a beautiful spot for a stroll or an afternoon picnic.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse La Manu (☎ 02 40 29 29 20; nanteslamanu@fuaj.org; 2 place de la Manu; dm ind breakfast €15; ☎ early Jan-late Dec; 🍷) About 600m east

of the train station's northern entrance in a converted factory, this well-equipped hostel is a 15-minute walk from the centre. Take tram 1 to the Manufacture stop.

Hôtel St-Daniel (☎ 02 40 47 41 25; www.hotel-saintdaniel.com; 4 rue du Bouffay; s €32-40, d €45, tr & q €50; ☒) Peacefully situated overlooking the St-Croix church courtyard in the heart of the old town, this clean, cheery place has a variety of well-priced rooms.

Hôtel Renova (☎ 02 40 47 57 03; 11 rue Beauregard; www.hotel-renova.com; s €34-43, d €38-48, tr & q €55; ☒) There are six steep mosaic-tiled flights of stairs at this narrow hotel of 24 rooms which has an absolutely superstar location in a pedestrianised street in the old city.

Hôtel Pommeraye (☎ 02 40 48 78 79; www.hotel-pommeraye.com; 2 rue Boileau; s €45-64, d €53-84; ☒) Sleek and chic, the colourful rooms at this boutique place on the corner of Nantes' smartest shopping street are sized like clothes (M, L, XL, XXL), with prices to match.

Hôtel des Colonies (☎ 02 40 48 79 76; www.hotel-descolonies.fr; 5 rue du Chapeau Rouge; s €56-64, d €63-71; ☒) Local art exhibitions are displayed in the lobby of this cherry-red place, and upstairs you'll find snazzy rooms decked out with boldly coloured walls and boxy resin light fittings.

Hôtel La Pérouse (☎ 02 40 89 75 00; www.hotel-la-perouse.fr; 3 allée Duquesne; s €81-95, d €91-133; ☒) Styled to reflect the city's shipbuilding traditions, this stunning pad is Nantes' hottest choice for design-conscious travellers, with 46 rooms kitted out with zigzag chairs, canvas curtains, and glass sinks.

Eating

Nantes' most cosmopolitan dining is in the medieval Bouffay quarter. Breton creperies are plentiful throughout town. West of cours des 50 Otages, rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau and rue Santeuil are lined with eateries.

Ma Saison Préfère (☎ 02 40 47 13 12; 10 rue de Chateaux; dishes €6-7; ☒) 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) Though not exclusively vegetarian, this little lemon-and-lime-coloured hole in the wall is a great place for homemade vegetable tarts and lasagnes.

Rève Marins (☎ 02 40 47 00 96; 2 rue du Roi Albert; mains €7.50-12; ☒) lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This much-lauded place combines classic crepes and buckwheat *galettes* with very un-classic fillings like chicken curry, or kangaroo and Muscadet grapes.

Brasserie La Cigale (☎ 02 51 84 94 94; 4 place Graslin; mains €7.50-14, brunch €20; ☒) 7.30am-12.30am) No visit to Nantes is complete without a coffee, cake or all-out feast at this Art Nouveau showpiece, with several salons decorated by 1890s gilded tile work and frescoed ceilings.

Le Bistrot de l'Écrivain (☎ 02 51 84 15 15; 15 rue Jean Jacques Rousseau; menu €17; ☒) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) With checked-clothed tables and wine bottles lining the walls, Le Bistrot de l'Écrivain serves authentic Nantaise cuisine like *sandre au beurre blanc* (pike in white sauce).

Sardines are sold at street stalls throughout town between March and November.

Stock up on supplies at the huge market-place, **Marché de Talensac** (rue Talensac; ☒) 7.30am-1pm Tue-Sun), **Monoprix supermarket** (2 rue du Calvaire; ☒) 9am-9pm Mon-Sat), or the basement at **Galerios Lafayette** (rue de la Marnie; ☒) 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat).

Drinking

La Maison (☎ 02 40 37 04 12; 4 rue Lebrun; ☒) 3pm-2am) You have to see to believe this trip of a place, decorated room by room like a home furnished in *bad* 1970s taste.

Café Cult (☎ 02 40 47 18 49; www.lecult.com; place du Change; ☒) 2pm-2am Mon & Sat, noon-2am Tue-Fri) Squeezed in a smoky half-timbered house bohemian Café Cult draws students.

Le Bar du Coin (☎ 02 40 47 55 05; 21 rue de la Juiverie; ☒) 11am-2am Apr-Oct, closed Sun Nov-Mar) This neighbourhood bar in the heart of the medieval Bouffay quarter is where most Nantais nights out get started.

Entertainment

Listings of cultural events appear in *Nantes Poche* and *Pil'* (both €0.50). *Le Mois Nantais*, available at the tourist office and *tabacs*, has day-by-day details of cultural events. Good what's-on websites include www.leboost.com, in French. The six-screen **Cinéma Katorza** (☎ 02 51 84 90 60; 3 rue Corneille) screens *v.o.* (*version originale*; foreign movies subtitled in French) films.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aéroport Nantes-Atlantique International (NTE; ☎ 02 40 84 80 00; www.nantes.aeroport.fr) is 12km southeast of town. The public bus TAN-Air links the airport with the Gare Centrale bus/tram hub and the train station's southern entrance (€6, 20 minutes) from about 5.30am until 9pm.

BUS

The southbound **bus station** (☎ 08 25 08 71 56) is used by CTA buses serving areas of the Loire-Atlantique *département* south of the Loire River. The northbound **bus office** (☎ 08 25 08 71 56; 1 allée Duquesne, on cours des 50 Otages), run by Cariane Atlantique, handles buses to destinations north of the Loire.

Eurolines (☎ 02 51 72 02 03; allée de la Maison Rouge; ☒) 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat) has an office in town.

CAR

Budget, Europcar and Hertz are located outside the train station's southern entrance.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 36 35; 27 blvd de Stalingrad) is well connected. Destinations include Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€49.10 to €61.40, 2½ hours, 15 to 20 daily), Bordeaux (€37, four hours, three or four daily) and La Rochelle (€21, 1¾ hours, three or four daily).

Tickets and information are also available at the **SNCF ticket office** (La Bourse, 12 place de la Bourse; ☒) 10am-7pm Mon, 9am-7pm Tue-Sat).

Getting Around

The **TAN network** (☎ 08 01 44 44 44; www.tan.fr, in French) includes three modern tram lines that intersect at the Gare Centrale (Commerce), the main bus/tram transfer point. Buses run from 7.15am to 9pm. Night services continue until 12.30am.

Bus/tram tickets (€1.20) can be purchased from bus (but not tram) drivers and at tram-stop ticket machines. They're valid for one hour after being time-stamped. A 24-hour Ticket Journalier costs €3.30.

POITIERS

pop 120,000

The cobblestoned city of Poitiers is packed with history. Founded by the Pictones, a Gaulish tribe, and expanded by the Romans, Poitiers was the capital of Poitou, governed by the Counts of Poitiers in the Middle Ages. Poitiers has one of the oldest universities in France, first established in 1432 and a lynchnpin of this city today.

Orientation & Information

The train station is 600m downhill (west) from the old city, which begins just north of Poitiers' main square, place du Maréchal

Leclerc, and stretches northeast to Église Notre Dame la Grande. Rue Carnot heads south from place du Maréchal Leclerc.

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 49 41 21 24; www.ot-poitiers.fr; 45 place Charles de Gaulle; ☒) 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm & 7-11pm Sun 21 Jun-Aug, to 10pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm & 7-10pm Sun 1-17 Sep, to 6pm Mon-Sat 18 Sep-20 Jun) is near **Église Notre Dame**. Check your email at **Virtual 86** (☎ 05 49 53 63 42; 13 rue Magenta; per 15min/1hr €0.50/2; ☒) 10am-2am daily).

Sights

Strolling Poitiers' streets is the best way to get a feel for the city's past. Along the footpaths, red, yellow, and blue lines correspond with three **self-guided walking tours** detailed on a free map handed out by the tourist office.

The earliest parts of the **Église Notre Dame la Grande** (place Charles de Gaulle; ☒) 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 2-7pm Sun) date from the 11th century, while the chapels were added in the 15th and 16th centuries. A few 12th- or 13th-century frescoes can be seen on the U-shaped dome above the choir.

The 13th century stained-glass window of the Crucifixion at the **Cathédrale St-Pierre** (rue de la Cathédrale; ☒) 8am-6pm) is among the oldest in France.

The **Musée Ste-Croix** (☎ 05 49 41 07 53; www.musees-poitiers.org; 3 rue Jean Jaurès; adult/child €3.50/free; ☒) 1.15-6pm Mon, 10am-noon & 1.15-6pm Tue-Fri, to noon & 2-6pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 2-5pm Mon-Sun Oct-May) has exhibits on the history of Poitou from prehistoric times to the 19th century.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Central (☎ 05 49 01 79 79; www.centralhotel86.com; 35 place du Maréchal Leclerc; d €34-51) Facing directly onto place du Maréchal, this two-star place is a terrific bargain, with snug, sunlit rooms and a handy lift.

Hôtel de l'Europe (☎ 05 49 88 12 00; www.hotel-europe-poitiers.com; 39 rue Carnot; d €49.50-79; ☒) This elegant hotel, with its sweeping staircase, oversized rooms and refined furnishings, dates from 1710. The annex has modern rooms for the same price.

Le Grand Hôtel (☎ 05 49 60 90 60; www.grandhotel-poitiers.fr; 28 rue Carnot; s €65.50-68, d €80.50-83; ☒) Poitiers' premier hotel certainly lives up to its name. Faux Art Deco furnishings and fittings fill the public areas with character, and rooms are spacious and well-equipped.

Aux 40 Gourmands (☎ 05 49 37 01 37; 40 rue Carnot; mains €10.50-12.50; ☒) lunch & dinner Tue-Sat)

This relaxed place serves sumptuous *moules et frites* (mussels and fries); try them with crème fraîche and Pineau des Charentes, a sweet white wine with a Cognac base.

La Serrurerie (☎ 05 49 41 05 14; 28 rue des Grandes Écoles; mains €11-16, weekend brunch €14.50; ☎ 8am-2am) Decked out with mosaics, steel balustrades and retro toys, this vibrant bistro-bar is Poitiers' communal lounge/dining room. Specialities include pastas and a *crème brûlée* you'll be dreaming about for days.

The covered **Marché Notre Dame** (☎ 7am-1pm Tue-Sat) is next to Église Notre Dame la Grande; an open-air market is held outside from 7am to 1pm on Saturdays. The **Monoprix supermarket** (☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) is across from 29 rue du Marché Notre Dame (behind the Palais de Justice).

Getting There & Away

The **train station** (☎ 08 36 35 35 35; Blvd du Grand Cerf) has links to Bordeaux (€30.30, 1½ hours), La Rochelle (€19.30, 80 minutes), Nantes (€24.40, 3½ hours) and other cities. TGV tickets from Paris' Gare Montparnasse (1½ hours, 12 daily) cost from €46.40.

AROUND POITIERS

Piercing the countryside with gleaming domes, pods and towers, **Futuroscope** (☎ 05 49 49 30 80; www.futuroscope.com; Jaunay-Clan; adult 1 day/2 days €31/59, under 16 €24/44; ☎ 10am-approx 10pm, closed Jan-early Feb) is a futuristic theme park with 22 whizz-bang attractions. Schedules change annually, as do many of the attractions – present highlights include **Digitalworld**, an action-packed 3D trip; **Zoo Safari**, starring a giant robotic giraffe; and **Cosmos**, a trip through the solar system and beyond. Allow at least five hours to see the major attractions.

Futuroscope is 10km north of Poitiers in Jaunay-Clan. TGV trains link the park's TGV station with Paris (from €46.40, 1½ hours) and Bordeaux (€31.20, 1¾ hours).

Local **STP buses** (☎ 05 49 44 66 88) Nos 9, 16 and 17 (€1.20, 30 minutes) link Futuroscope (Parc de Loisirs stop) with Poitiers' train station; there are hourly buses from 6.15am until 7.30pm or 9pm.

LA ROCHELLE

pop 120,000

Known as *La Ville Blanche* (White City), La Rochelle's luminous limestone façades are topped by 14th- and 15th-century towers

glowing white in the bright coastal sunlight.

One of France's foremost seaports from the 14th to 17th centuries, La Rochelle is now a pleasure port and sailing centre, and boasts one of the largest marinas in the country. The city's arcaded walkways, half-timbered houses and ghoulish gargoyles are reminders of La Rochelle's seafaring past.

Orientation & Information

La Rochelle is centred on the Vieux Port (Old Port). The old city unfolds to its north. To the southeast, the train station is linked to the Vieux Port by the av du Général de Gaulle, with the tourist office tucked in the Le Gabut quarter halfway between.

The **post office** (6 rue de l'Hôtel de Ville) has exchange services and a Cyberposte. The **tourist office** (☎ 05 46 41 14 68; larochelle-tourisme.com; Le Gabut; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5.30pm Sun Jul & Aug; 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Jun & Sep; 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-May) sells the *Pass Rochelais*, offering discounts on public transport, sights and activities. The internet café, **Akromicro** (☎ 05 46 34 07 94; rue de l'AIMable Nanette; per hr €2; ☎ 10am-midnight), is behind the tourist office.

Sights & Activities

An enormous defensive chain used to be stretched between the two 14th-century stone towers at the harbour entrance. **Tour de la Chaîne** and **Tour St-Nicolas** both have fine views across the harbour.

West of Tour de la Chaîne, the medieval wall leads to the steeple-topped, 15th-century **Tour de la Lanterne** – look closely and you might spot some graffiti carved by English privateers held here during the 18th century.

The three **towers** (☎ 05 46 34 11 81; admission per tower adult/18-25yr/child €5/3.50/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, to 12.30pm & 2-6.30pm 15 May-Jun & 1-15 Sep, to 12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) can be visited individually or on a combined ticket (€10/6.50).

La Rochelle's state-of-the-art **Aquarium** (☎ 05 46 34 00 00; adult/student & child €12.50/10, with audioguide €16/13; ☎ 9am-11pm Jul & Aug, to 8pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-8pm Oct-Mar) is home to fish, sea flora and some mean-looking bull sharks.

The flat **Île de Ré**, 9km west of La Rochelle, boasts 70km of coastline, including lots of fine-sand beaches (one or two of which are favourite spots for local naturists). Its west-

ern half curves around the Fier d'Ars, a bay lined with *marais salants* (salt evaporation pools), saltwater marshes and a bird reserve, **Lilleau des Niges**. Year-round, **Rébus** (☎ 05 46 09 20 15) runs buses from La Rochelle (the train station car park, Tour de la Grosse Horloge and place de Verdun) to all the major towns on the island.

Sleeping

Camping du Soleil (☎ 05 46 44 42 53; av Marillac; camp sites per adult/tent €8.50/8.50; ☎ late Jun-late Sep) This is the closest camping ground to the city. Take bus 10 to get there.

Centre International de Séjour-Auberge de Jeanne (☎ 05 46 44 43 11; www.fuaj-aj-larochelle.fr.st; av des Minimes; dm incl breakfast €14-16, tw incl breakfast €34; ☎ closed Christmas period) This popular hostel is 2km southwest of the train station in Les Minimes.

Hôtel Terminus Vieux Port (☎ 05 46 50 69 69; www.tourisme-francais.com/hotel/terminus; 7 rue de la Fabrique; d €46-68; ☎) Bedecked with navy-blue awnings, this welcoming hotel has 32 freshly renovated rooms, each named after one of the islands offshore from La Rochelle.

Hôtel La Marine (☎ 05 46 50 51 63; www.hotel-marine.com, in French; 30 quai Duperré; d €55-95; ☎) For captivating views of La Rochelle's iconic towers, try for rooms 1, 6, 9 or 13 of this exquisite boutique hotel in the northwest corner of the Vieux Port. Each of the 13 rooms is individually fitted out with cool décor and smart designer furniture.

Hôtel François 1er (☎ 05 46 41 28 46; www.hotel-francois1er.fr; 15 rue Bazoges; d €60-106; ☎) A number of 15th and 16th century French kings stayed in this building set back behind a cobbled courtyard. The 40 rooms are atmospheric if a bit heavy handed with the heritage décor. King-size rooms cost proportionately more.

Eating

Teatro Bettini (☎ 05 46 41 07 03; 3 rue Thiers; mains from €9.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Part Italian diner, part Rochelais restaurant, this decades-old eatery is an old favourite for hearty lasagne and seafood.

Café de la Paix (☎ 05 46 41 39 79; 54 rue Chaudrier; mains €11-20; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Sat) A *belle époque* brasserie-bar serving traditional cuisine including beef, fish and foie gras, as well as bountiful breakfasts and afternoon teas.

André (☎ 05 46 41 28 24; www.bar-andre.com; 8 place de la Chaîne; mains €15-30; ☎ noon-4pm & 7pm-midnight)

This renowned seafood place first opened in the 1950s as a small seafood café, and has now grown into a maze of interconnecting dining rooms, each with its own individual maritime ambience.

Le Comptoir des Voyages (☎ 05 46 50 62 60; www.coutanceau.com; 22 rue St-Jean du Perot; menu €26) This chic restaurant done out with rattan chairs, palms and red walls takes you on a stylish world tour of international flavours using the best regional produce.

The lively, 19th-century **covered market** (place du Marché; ☎ 7am-1pm) seethes with stalls selling fresh fish, meat, fruit and vegetables.

In the old city there's a **Monoprix supermarket** (30-36 rue du Palais; ☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat), and freshly-baked breads and pastries are available at **Boulangerie Fillon** (18 quai Louis Durand; ☎ 6am-9pm Mon & Thu-Sat, 6am-8pm Tue, 6am-1pm Sun).

Getting There & Away

La Rochelle airport (LRH; ☎ 05 46 42 30 26; www.la-rochelle.aeroport.fr, in French), north of city centre off the N237, has flights to destinations throughout France as well as London Stansted (with Ryanair) and Southampton and Birmingham (with Flybe). Bus 7 runs from the airport to the town centre (€1.20).

From the bus station at place de Verdun, **Océcars** (☎ 05 46 00 95 15) runs services to regional destinations, including the Île de Ré.

Eurolines ticketing is handled by **Citram Littoral** (☎ 05 46 50 53 57; 30 cours des Dames; ☎ closed Mon morning, Sat afternoon & Sun).

The **train station** (☎ 08 36 35 35 35) is linked by TGV to Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€57.60, three hours, five or six direct daily). Other destinations served by regular trains include Nantes (€22.30, two hours), Poitiers (€19.30, 1½ hours), and Bordeaux (€23.80, two hours).

Getting Around

The innovative public transport system, **RTCR** (☎ 05 46 34 02 22), has a main bus hub and **information office** (place de Verdun; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6.30pm Sat). Most lines run until sometime between 7.15pm and 8pm. Tickets cost €1.20.

The city's distinctive yellow bikes can be rented at **Les Vélos Autoplus** (☎ 05 46 34 02 22; ☎ 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-7pm May, Jun & Sep, 9.15am-12.15pm & 1.50-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr). The first two hours are free; after that bikes cost €1 per hour.

BORDEAUX

pop 735,000

The city long known as *La Belle Au Bois Dormant* (Sleeping Beauty) is well and truly awake after years of slumber. The millennium was a major turning point for Bordeaux, when former mayor, controversial ex-Prime Minister Alain Juppé roused this graceful city, pedestrianising its boulevards, restoring its neoclassical architecture, and implementing a hi-tech public transport system. These days, bolstered by its high-spirited student population, *La Belle* Bordeaux never seems to sleep at all.

Orientation

The city centre lies between the flower-filled place Gambetta and the Garonne River. From place Gambetta, place de Tourny is 500m northeast, from where the tourist office is 400m to the east. Bordeaux' train station, Gare St-Jean, is about 3km southeast of the city centre.

Information

Bordeaux Monumental (☎ 05 56 48 04 24; 28 rue des Argentiers; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun) Specialist tourist office dedicated to the city's history.
Cyberstation (☎ 05 56 01 15 15; 23 cours Pasteur; per hr €3; ☎ 9.30am-2am Mon-Sat, 2pm-2am Sun) Internet café.
Main post office (37 rue du Château d'Eau) Currency exchange and Cyberpost.

Tourist office (☎ 05 56 00 66 00; www.bordeaux-tourisme.com; 12 cours du 30 Juillet; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, to 6.30pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-6.30pm Sun May, Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.45am-4.30pm Sun Nov-Apr) Runs city and regional tours, and sells the *Plan Guide du Patrimoine* (€1) with four walking itineraries around the city.

Train station tourist office (☎ 9am-noon & 1-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 1-3pm Sun May-Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr).

Sights

Looming above the city is **Cathédrale St-André** (☎ 05 56 81 26 25; admission free; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat, 9am-6pm Sun, 2-6pm Mon). A Unesco World Heritage Site, the cathedral's oldest section dates from 1096, but it mostly dates from the 13th and 14th centuries. It's particularly renowned for its elaborate masonry carvings, best seen in the north portal. Behind the choir, the 50m-high belfry, 15th-century **Tour Pey-Berland**, has a panoramic view at the top of 232 narrow steps.

Bordeaux' museums have free entry for permanent collections; temporary exhibits cost €5 for adults and €2.50 for children.

Occidental art buffs can trace its evolution from the Renaissance to the mid-20th century at Bordeaux' exceptional **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (Museum of Fine Arts; ☎ 05 56 10 20 56; 20 cours d'Albret; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Mon). More recent works are on display at the **Musée d'Art Contemporain** (Museum of Contemporary Art; ☎ 05 56 00 81 50; Entrepôt 7, rue Ferrère; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue, Thu-Sun, to 8pm Wed), in a former colonial warehouse.

Gallo-Roman statues and prehistoric relics dating back 25,000 years are highlights of the impressive **Musée d'Aquitaine** (☎ 05 56 01 51 00; 20 cours Pasteur; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun).

Exquisite faïence pottery, porcelain, gold, iron, glasswork and furniture are displayed at the **Musée des Arts Décoratifs** (Museum of Decorative Arts; ☎ 05 56 00 72 50; 39 rue Bouffard; ☎ museum 2-6pm Wed-Mon, temporary exhibits from 11am Mon-Fri).

The landscaped **Jardin Public** (cours de Verdun), established in 1755 and laid out in the English style a century later, includes the meticulously catalogued **Jardin Botanique** (☎ 05 56 52 18 77; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm), founded in 1629 and at its present site since 1855; and the nearby **Musée d'Histoire Naturelle** (Natural History Museum; ☎ 05 56 48 29 86; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun).

Pretty **place Gambetta**, a central open area ringed by shady benches, wasn't always so peaceful – during the Reign of Terror that followed the Revolution, a guillotine placed here severed the heads of 300 alleged counter-revolutionaries.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 05 56 33 00 70; www.centres-animation.asso.fr; 22 cours Barbey; dm incl bedding & breakfast €20; ☎ ☎) Bordeaux' only hostel is housed in a lino-and-glass building with a self-catering kitchen and four-bed dorms, each with their own bathroom.

Hôtel Boulan (☎ 05 56 52 23 62; fax 05 56 44 91 65; 28 rue Boulan; s €20-28, d €25-32) Situated on a secluded little side street, but still handy for a slew of Bordeaux' sights.

Hôtel Touring (☎ 05 56 81 56 73; le-touring@wanadoo.fr; 16 rue Huguerie; s €25-42, d €30-50, tr €57) This budget hotel run by a friendly family has impeccable rooms furnished with 1940s and '50s furniture including school-style desks and club chairs. The cheapest rooms have showers but share toilet facilities.



WINE TOURS

Bordeaux is famous as one of France's premier wine-growing areas. The region is divided into 57 *appellations* (production areas), and there are more than 5000 chateaux (also known as *domaines*, *crus* or *clos*) around Bordeaux producing the region's trademark reds, rosés, sweet and dry whites and sparkling wines.

If you're looking to get to grips with the bewildering world of Burgundy wines, your first stop should be the tourist office's informal wine and cheese courses (€22), held 4.30pm Thursday at the restaurant Baud et Millet (below). Numbers are limited, so reserve ahead.

Next is a visit to one of the region's chateaux. The tourist office organises tours between May and October, starting at €50 and rising to €75 for prestigious *domaines* such as the **Médoc** or **St-Emilion**. Tours include wine tastings and lunch. The smaller chateaux often accept walk-in visitors, but at many places, especially the better-known ones, you have to make advance reservations by phone. Many chateaux are closed during the *vendange* (grape harvest) in October.

For do-it-yourself wine trailing, the **Maison du Vin de Bordeaux** (☎ 05 56 00 22 88; 3 cours du 30 Juillet; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) supplies a free, colour-coded map of production areas and chateaux, and can point you in the direction of local *maisons du vin* (tourist offices that deal mainly with vineyard visits).

Armed with your newfound knowledge, it's time to stock up at Bordeaux' wine shops, including **Bordeaux Magnum** (☎ 05 56 48 00 06; 3 rue Gobineau; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) and **l'Intendant** (☎ 05 56 48 01 29; 2 Allée de Tourny; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat). Don't worry if you're running low on funds – you can pick up exceptional wines at Bordeaux' supermarkets for just a few euros, the same wines that command a small fortune at some of the world's flashiest restaurants.

Hôtel de la Presse (☎ 05 56 48 53 88; www.hoteldela Presse.com; 6-8 rue Porte-Dijeaux; d €49-109; ☎) Just off the pedestrianised rue Ste Catherine, this three-star hotel has elegant touches such as silk and dried flowers, and guest baskets of fruit and nuts in the rooms.

Hôtel de la Tour Intendance (☎ 05 56 44 56 56; www.hotel-tour-intendance.com; 14-16 rue de la Vieille Tour; d €58-129; ☎) Wake up to sandstone walls, stone-laid floors and wood-beamed ceilings at this stylised boutique hotel tucked into a quiet corner of the city.

Hôtel des 4 Soeurs (☎ 05 57 81 19 20; 4soeurs.free.fr; 6 cours du 30 Juillet; s €65, d €75-90; ☎ ☎ ☎) A romantic relic from the reign of Louis-Philippe, Hôtel des 4 Soeurs' 34 sophisticated rooms recall the private home it once was, with stencilled wood-panelling, damask drapes, and chrome bathroom fittings.

Eating

Cassolette Café (☎ 05 56 92 94 96; www.cassolettecafé.com, in French; 20 place de la Victoire; lunch menu €10; ☎ noon-midnight) Fun, friendly, and fantastic value, this lively place at the southwestern edge of place de la Victoire serves up *cassolettes* (casserroles) created from your own personal check-list of ingredients.

L'Entrecôte (☎ 05 56 81 76 10; 4 cours du XXX Juillet; menu €14-29; ☎ lunch & dinner) Opened in 1966,

this popular, unpretentious place doesn't take reservations but Bordeaux locals queue for hours for its succulent thin-sliced meat heated underneath by tea-light candles and unlimited homemade *frites* (fries).

Brasserie Les Noailles (☎ 05 56 81 94 45; 12 allées de Tourny, mains €12-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) This classic velour-filled French brasserie is an elegant affair, with delicious fare including Les Noailles' signature king prawn salad.

Baud et Millet (☎ 05 56 79 05 77; 19 rue Huguerie; menu €15-30; ☎ 9.30am-midnight Mon-Sat) More than 250 different cheeses are offered at this vegetarian-friendly place, including a gut-busting all-you-can-eat *raclette* (cheese buffet).

Moshi Moshi (☎ 05 56 79 22 91; 8 place Fernand Lafargue; mains from €15; ☎ 8pm-2am Tue-Sat) Japan meets France head-on at this super-chic minimalist place. The open kitchen lets you watch its chefs roll out sushi with unusual twists like foie gras and *magret de canard*.

Absolut Lounge (☎ 05 56 48 80 00; 14 rue de la Devis; mains around €33; ☎ 6pm-2am Mon-Sat) Chill to electro-jazz amid turquoise décor and red lamps.

Drinking

Bodega Bodega (☎ 05 56 01 24 24; 4 rue des Piliers de Tulle; ☎ noon-3.15pm & 7pm-2am Mon-Sat, 7pm-2am Sun)

The biggest and best Spanish bar in town has two levels of tapas, tunes and trendy types.

Café Brun (☎ 05 56 52 20 49; 45 rue St-Rémi; ☎ 10am-2am) This bar-bistro with a warm atmosphere and cool jazz is great for an evening apéritif.

Entertainment

Bordeaux buzzes by night. Details of events appear in the free publications *Bordeaux Plus* and *Clubs & Concerts* (www.clubsetconcerts.com, in French), available at the tourist office.

Getting There & Away

Bordeauxairport(BOR; ☎ 05 56 34 50 50; www.bordeaux.aeroport.fr) is in Mérignac, 10km west of the city centre, with domestic and international services. The train station and place Gambetta are connected to the airport by **Jet'Bus** (☎ 05 56 34 50 50; single/return €6.50/11), which runs till around 9.30pm. A taxi from the airport costs about €20.

Citram Aquitaine runs most buses to destinations in the Gironde and has an **information kiosk** (☎ 05 56 43 68 43; ☎ 1-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Sat) at esplanade des Quinconces.

Eurolines (☎ 05 56 92 50 42; 32 rue Charles Domercq; ☎ 7am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat) faces the train station.

Bordeaux is one of France's major rail hubs. The station, **Gare St-Jean**, is 3km from the city centre. Destinations include Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€63.70, three hours, at least 16 daily), Bayonne (€25.70, 1¼ hours), Nantes (€39.60, four hours), Poitiers (€30.30, 1¼ hours), La Rochelle (€23.80, two hours) and Toulouse (€31.60, 2¼ hours).

ARCACHON

pop 11,800

A long-time oyster harvesting area on the tranquil, triangular Bassin d'Arcachon (Arcachon Bay), this seaside town lured bourgeois Bordelaise at the end of the 19th century. Its four little quarters are romantically named for each of the seasons, and are filled with grand villas evoking the town's golden past. Arcachon seethes with sun-seekers in summer, but you'll find practically deserted beaches a short bike ride away.

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 57 52 97 97; www.arcachon.com; place Président Roosevelt; ☎ 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, to 6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 10am-noon & 1-5pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat Oct-Mar) is a few hundred metres from the train station.

In the **Ville d'Été** (Summer Quarter), Arcachon's sandy beach, **Plage d'Arcachon**, is flanked by two piers. Lively **Jetée Thiers** is at the western end. A **pedestrian promenade** runs from the Plage d'Arcachon to **Plage Péreire**, **Plage des Abatilles** and the **Dune du Pilat**.

Cycle paths link Arcachon with the Dune du Pilat and Biscarosse, and around the Bassin d'Arcachon to Cap Ferret.

Sleeping & Eating

La Forêt (☎ 05 56 22 73 28; www.campinglaforet.fr; route de Biscarosse; camp sites €12.50-26.50; ☎ Apr-mid-Oct; ☎) A well-run, three-star camping ground, 'the forest' has shady pine trees and spotless amenities.

Hôtel La Paix (☎ 05 56 83 05 65; fax 05 56 83 05 65; 8 av de Lamartine; s/d €33.50/36.50, with shared bathroom €26/29, half-board d €54-62; ☎ May-Sep) Many of the simple rooms at this hotel, 200m from the beach, have scrubbed timber floors and open onto a sunny courtyard. Upstairs are three self-contained apartments (€152.50 to €487) available from Easter to November.

Hôtel le Dauphin (☎ 05 56 83 02 89; www.dauphin-arcachon.com; 7 av Gounod; tw €52-79, d €57-88, tr €64-95, q €71-107; ☎ ☎ ☎) You can't miss this late-19th-century gingerbread place thanks to its patterned red-and-cream brickwork and twin semicircular staircases. Several eras have left their legacy, with a '50s marble foyer, '70s glass- and cork-panelled walls, plus '80s pine furniture.

St-Christaud (☎ 05 56 83 38 53; 8 allée de la Chapelle; menu from €12.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Jun-Aug, by reservation Sep-May; ☎) Opening on a sun-baked courtyard overlooking the beachfront, this authentic family-run place serves just one hearty *plat* a day, but it's always top-notch.

La Calypso (☎ 05 56 83 65 08; 84 blvd de la Plage; menu €20; ☎ closed Wed & Thu Sep-Jun) With beamed ceilings, red tablecloths and a cosy open fire in the chillier months, this is the best place to try delicious bouillabaisse Arcachonnaise.

Getting There & Around

Frequent trains between Bordeaux and Arcachon (€9, 50 minutes) coordinate with TGVs from Paris' Gare Montparnasse.

Bikes can be hired at **Locabeach** (☎ 05 56 83 39 64; www.locabeach.com; 326 blvd de la Plage; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm) and **Dingo Vélos** (☎ 05 56 83 44 09; www.dingovelos.com; rue Grenier; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to midnight Jul & Aug).

BAYONNE

pop 42,000

Bayonne (Baiona' in Basque) is bordered by its twin rivers, the Adour and the Nive, which provide a picturesque backdrop for the town's narrow streets, shuttered buildings and waterside restaurants. The cultural and economic capital of the French Basque country, Bayonne is famous for its marzipan and prime smoked ham; it's also rumoured to be the place where the *baïonnette* (bayonet) was developed in the early 17th century.

Orientation

The Adour and Nive Rivers split Bayonne into three: St-Esprit, the area north of the Adour; Grand Bayonne, the oldest part of the city, on the western bank of the Nive; and the very Basque Petit Bayonne quarter to its east.

Information

Post office (21 blvd Alsace-Lorraine)

Taxiphone (1 place Ste-Ursule; per hr €2; ☎ 11am-10pm) Internet café that also does cheap international phone calls.

Tourist office (☎ 05 59 46 01 46; www.bayonne-tourisme.com; place des Basques; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat Sep-Jun) Supplies the useful listings brochure *Fêtes* and lots of brochures on local activities.

Sights

The twin towers of Bayonne's Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) soar above the city. Construction began in the 13th century, when Bayonne was ruled by the Anglo-Normans, and was completed after France assumed control in 1451. It has three Renaissance-era stained-glass windows.

The **Musée Basque et de l'Histoire de Bayonne** (☎ 05 59 46 61 90; 37 quai des Corsaires; www.musee-basque.com, in French; adult/student/under 18yr €5.50/3 free; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr) is an excellent introduction to the Basque people and their culture. **Musée Bonnat** (☎ 05 59 59 08 52; 5 rue Jacques Lafitte; adult/student/child €5.50/3/free; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Wed-Mon May-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Nov-Apr) contains canvases by El Greco, Goya, Ingres and Degas, and a roomful of works by Rubens. A **combined ticket** (adult/student €9/4.50) admits you to both museums.

The town's premier fiesta is the five-day **Fêtes de Bayonne** in early August – like

Pamplona's 'running with the bulls', only with cows. There's also a **chocolate festival** in May.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 05 59 58 70 00; www.hibiarritz.org; 19 route des Vignes, Anglet; B&B €16.50; ☎ Apr-Oct) In the town of Anglet, complete with a Scottish pub, this hostel is lively and popular. Reservations are essential in summer. The hostel also has a small camping area (per person with breakfast €10.50).

Hôtel Paris-Madrid (☎ 05 59 55 13 98; sorbois@wanadoo.fr; place de la Gare; d/tr €32/47, r with shower €27, s/d with shared bathroom €18/24; ☎) You can tumble off the train straight into this highly recommended hotel, where the owners speak English and the rooms surround a peaceful patio.

Adour Hôtel (☎ 05 59 55 11 31; www.adourhotel.net; 13 place Ste-Ursule; d/tr from €55/70) Near the station, this friendly family establishment has bright, airy rooms, comprehensively renovated in 2005. Each one is decorated with a Basque theme – bullfighting, rugby, chocolate, cuisine and more.

Hôtel Loustau (☎ 05 59 55 08 08; www.hotel-loustau.com; 1 place de la République; s/d/tr/q from €77/84/89/94; ☎ ☎) This tall, attractive 18th-century building on the St-Esprit side of the town has comfortable rooms. On the southern side of the building, the full-length windows open out onto views of the Adour River.

Eating & Drinking

Numerous reasonably priced restaurants surround the covered market and quai Amiral Jauréguiberry.

Bistrot Ste-Cluque (☎ 05 59 55 82 43; 9 rue Hugues; mains €9.50-15) There's only one *menu* here – a large blackboard that's propped up before you. Noisy, smoky and bustling with busy waiters, it makes a wonderful and unpretentious spot for a meal.

Le Chistera (☎ 05 59 59 25 93; 42 rue Port Neuf; mains €10-14, menu €15; ☎ Thu-Sun, lunch Tue & lunch Wed) This authentically Basque restaurant features in many a French gastronomic guide. The *chistera* is the basket that pelota players strap to their wrists, and the restaurant is decorated with motifs from the sport.

Bar-Restaurant du Marché (☎ 05 59 59 22 66; 39 rue des Basques; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) You can fill yourself to bursting point with homely Basque cooking at this unpretentious place, and all for under €15.

La Grange (☎ 05 59 46 17 84; 26 quai Galuperie; mains €14-22; ☎ Mon-Sat) With a shady outside terrace, this popular place overlooks the Nive River. Basque music plays sotto voce in the cosy interior, hung with hanks of dried peppers and garlic. Traditional flavours and seafood are the order of the day.

The **covered market** (quai Commandant Roquebert) occupies an imposing riverside building. There are a number of tempting food shops and delicatessens along rue Port Neuf and rue d'Espagne.

Most pubs and bars are in the Petit Bayonne area, especially along rue Pannecau, rue des Cordeliers and quai Galuperie. Two lively night-time spots are **Café-Bar Le Patio** (38 rue Pannecau) and **Massai Café** (14 rue des Cordeliers).

Getting There & Away

The **Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport** (BIQ; ☎ 05 59 43 83 83; www.biarritz.aeroport.fr) is 5km southwest of Bayonne and 3km southeast of Biarritz. Ryanair flies daily to London Stansted and three times weekly to Dublin. Air France has daily flights to Paris (Orly and Roissy Charles de Gaulle) and Lyon.

The hourly bus 6 links Bayonne and Biarritz with the airport. A taxi from the town centre costs around €15.

From place des Basques, **ATCRB buses** (☎ 05 59 26 06 99) runs nine services daily to St-Jean de Luz (€3, 40 minutes) with connections for Hendaye (€3, one hour). Transportes Pesa buses leave twice a day for Bilbao in Spain, calling by Irún and San Sebastián.

Eurolines is represented by **Voyages Domejean** (☎ 05 59 59 19 33; 3 place Charles de Gaulle). Buses stop in the square, opposite the office.

TGVs run between Bayonne and Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€75.60, five hours, eight daily). There are frequent services to Biarritz (€2.20, 10 minutes) and the French-Spanish border towns of Hendaye (€6.20, 40 minutes) and Irún (€6.50, 45 minutes).

There are also trains to Bordeaux (€24.90, 2½ hours, at least 10 daily) and Toulouse (€35.50, 3¼ hours, five daily).

BIARRITZ

pop 30,000

The stylish coastal town of Biarritz, 8km west of Bayonne, took off as a popular seaside resort in the mid-19th century when Napoleon III and his Spanish-born wife, Eugénie, visited regularly. Nowadays, every-

one from Parisian weekenders to beach bums in camper vans flock to this lovely seaside town, renowned for its beaches and some of Europe's best surfing.

Orientation

Place Clemenceau, the heart of town, is south of the main beach (Grande Plage). Pointe St-Martin, topped with a lighthouse, rounds off Plage Miramar, the northern continuation of the Grande Plage. The train station and airport are about 3km southeast of the centre.

Information

Form@tic (☎ 05 59 22 12 79; 15 av de la Marne; per hr €4; ☎ 10am-8pm Jul-Sep, 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun, closed Sat afternoon Nov-May) Internet access.

Main post office (rue de la Poste)

Tourist office (☎ 05 59 22 37 00; www.biarritz.fr; square d'Ixelles; ☎ 8am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Sep-Jun) Publishes a free monthly what's-on guide.

Tourist office annexe At the train station; open July and August.

Sights & Activities

Biarritz' **Musée de la Mer** (Sea Museum; ☎ 05 59 22 33 34; www.museedelamer.com; Esplanade du Rocher de la Vierge; adult/child €7.50/5; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm daily Apr-Oct, closed Mon Nov-Mar) has 24 tanks seething with underwater life from the Bay of Biscay (Golfe de Gascogne). Tickets are €1 cheaper at the tourist office.

Biarritz' fashionable beaches are end-to-end bodies on hot summer days. In the high season, the **Grande Plage** and also **Plage Miramar** to its north are lined with striped bathing tents. North of Pointe St-Martin, the superb surfing beaches of **Anglet** stretch northwards for more than 4km. Take eastbound bus 9 from place Clemenceau.

If you fancy hitting the surf, boards and lessons are available at the Auberges de Jeunesse in Biarritz and Anglet, the **Rip Curl Surf Shop** (☎ 05 59 24 38 40; 2 av de la Reine Victoria) or the **Quiksilver Surf School** (☎ 05 59 22 03 12; www.biarritz-boardriders.com, in French).

Sleeping

Biarritz Camping (☎ 05 59 23 00 12; www.biarritz-camping.fr; 28 rue d'Harcet; camp sites €15-21.50; ☎ mid-May-mid-Oct; ☎) This camping ground, 2km southwest of the centre, has spacious, shady pitches. Take westbound bus 9 to the Biarritz Camping stop.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 05 59 41 76 00; www.hibiarritz.org; 8 rue Chiquito de Cambó; B&B €17.50; ☹ year-round) This popular hostel, with rooms for two to four, offers outdoor activities such as surfing, sailing and guided walks. From the train station, follow the railway westwards for 800m.

Hôtel Palym (☎ 05 59 24 16 56; www.le-palmarium.com; 7 rue du Port Vieux; d €50-55, d/tr with shared bathroom €42/52; ☹ mid-Jan–mid-Nov) This welcoming 20-room family-run place occupies a brightly painted town house on a street packed with hotels. Bedrooms are colourful though the bathrooms are a squeeze.

Hôtel St-Julien (☎ 05 59 24 20 39; www.saint-julien-biarritz.com, in French; 20 av Carnot; r €60-80, d €66-99; ☹) The new owners have renovated this late-19th-century villa, with its attractive shuttered façade and original parquet flooring. The 3rd-floor rooms have views of both mountain and sea.

Maison Garnier (☎ 05 59 01 60 70; www.hotel-biarritz.com, in French; 29 rue Gambetta; r €95-130) The seven rooms of this elegant mansion are delightfully decorated and furnished. The attic rooms (especially No 5) have a special charm.

Hôtel Plaza (☎ 05 59 24 74 00; www.groupe-segeric.com; 20 av Édouard VII; s/d from €105/125; ☹ ☹ ☹) The Plaza is an Art Deco delight overlooking Grande Plage. Refurbished to great effect, the original 1930s glass-fronted lift and plenty of decorative detail throughout give the feel of a glamorous hotel in its heyday.

Eating

Le Corsaire (☎ 05 59 24 63 72; Port des Pêcheurs; mains €11-15; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) It's all about seafood here at the water's edge, with dishes including *dorade à l'espagnole* (Spanish sea bream) and grilled cod with chorizo.

Tikia (☎ 05 59 24 46 09; 1 place Ste Eugénie; menu €13-20; ☹ lunch & dinner) 'Tikia' is the Basque word for small. The restaurant's indeed modestly sized, though the same can't be said of the *brochettes* – giant skewers of duck, steak or seafood.

Le Clos Basque (☎ 05 59 24 24 96; 12 rue Louis-Barthou; menu €24, mains €12; ☹ Tue-Sat) With its tiles and exposed stonework this tiny place could have strayed in from Spain. The cuisine, however, is emphatically Basque, traditional with a contemporary twist or two.

Le Vivier des Halles (☎ 05 59 24 58 57; 8 rue du Centre; menu €25; ☹ daily Jul-Sep, Tue-Sun Oct-Jun)

The fish could almost flap their way up the road from the nearby covered market to this place, where the seafood is reasonably priced and the fish soup a special delight.

Downhill from Biarritz' covered market, **La Table de Don Quichotte** (12 av Victor Hugo) sells Spanish hams, sausages, pickles and wines. The **Épicerie Fine du Port Vieux** (41bis rue Mazagran) is another excellent delicatessen.

Drinking & Entertainment

There are several good bars along rue du Port Vieux and the streets radiating from it.

Le Surfing (☎ 05 59 24 78 72; 9 blvd Prince des Galles) Surf-themed bar which makes the perfect place to discuss waves and wipe-outs.

Ventilo Caffè (rue du Port Vieux; ☹ Wed-Sun Sep-May, daily Jun-Aug) This café attracts a young crowd and gets packed to the gills on summer nights.

Two discos near the town centre are **Le Caveau** (☎ 05 59 24 16 17; 4 rue Gambetta; ☹ 11pm-5am) and **Biarritz Latino** (☎ 05 59 22 77 59; ☹ 11pm-5am Tue-Sat).

Getting There & Away

Stopping on av Jean Petit, nine daily **ATCRB buses** (☎ 05 59 26 06 99) follow the coast southwestwards to St-Jean de Luz (€3, 30 minutes) and Hendaye (€3, one hour). For other destinations, it's better to go from Bayonne.

Biarritz-La Négresse train station is 3km from the town centre. Destinations and fares are similar to Bayonne (see p271). Bus 2 and 9 connect the two stations. **SNCF** (13 av du Maréchal Foch; ☹ Mon-Fri) has a town-centre office.

For flights to **Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport**, see p271. To get to the airport from Biarritz, take STAB bus 6 or, on Sunday, line C to/from Biarritz' Hôtel de Ville.

LOURDES

pop 15,000 / elevation 400m

Lourdes was a sleepy market town until 1858, when Bernadette Soubirous, a 14-year-old peasant girl, saw the Virgin Mary in a series of 18 visions that came to her in a grotto. Nowadays Lourdes is one of the world's most important Catholic pilgrimage sites, descended upon annually by some five million visitors – and although the town has more than its fair share of tacky souvenirs, it's still an intriguing place to visit.

Orientation

Lourdes' two main streets are rue de la Grotte and blvd de la Grotte, both leading to the Sanctuaires Notre Dame de Lourdes. The principal north–south thoroughfare, av Général Baron Maransin, connects the train station with place Peyramale.

Information

Micro Point Com (8 place du Champ Commun; per hr €4; ☹ 2-7pm Mon, 9.30am-noon & 2-7pm Tue-Sat) Internet access.

Post office (1 rue de Langelle)

Tourist office (☎ 05 62 42 77 40; www.lourdes-info-tourisme.com; place Peyramale; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar)

Sights

The development of the **Sanctuaries of Our Lady of Lourdes** began within a decade of the miraculous events of 1858. The most revered site is the **Grotte de Massabielle** (Massabielle Cave), lit by flickering candles left by the thousands of pilgrims who visit the cave every year. The 19 holy baths are said to cure all kinds of diseases and ailments – the most recent confirmed case was that of an Italian, Anna Santaniello, who was apparently cured of chronic rheumatism in 2005.

The main 19th-century section of the sanctuaries includes the neo-Byzantine **Basilique du Rosaire** (Basilica of the Rosary), the **crypt** and above it the spire-topped, neo-Gothic **Basilique Supérieure** (Upper Basilica).

From Palm Sunday to mid-October, there are **torchlight processions** nightly at 9pm from the Massabielle Grotto, while at 5pm there's the **Procession Eucharistique**, where pilgrims bearing banners process along the Esplanade des Processions.

All four places of worship open from 6am to 10pm in summer and 7am to 7pm in winter.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping de la Poste (☎ 05 62 94 40 35; 26 rue de Langelle; camp sites per person/pitch €2.80/4; ☹ Easter-mid-Oct) Right in the heart of town, it's tiny, friendly – and often full. It also rents eight excellent-value rooms with bathroom (d/tr/q €26/35/44).

Hôtel Cazaux (☎ 05 62 94 22 65; hotelcazaux@yahoo.fr; 2 chemin des Rochers; s/d €30/35; ☹ Easter-mid-Oct)

This small 20-room hotel is a converted private house. It's friendly, a true bargain and really cosy.

Grand Hôtel de la Grotte (☎ 05 62 94 58 87; www.hotel-grotte.com; 66 rue de la Grotte; s/d/tr from €64/72/88 ☹ Apr-Oct; ☹ ☹) This charming *fin de siècle* place has a gorgeous garden, bar and a couple of prestige restaurants, and makes an excellent choice for those who like comfort and old-world courtesies.

Hôtel Gallia et Londres (☎ 05 62 94 35 44; www.hotelgallialondres.com; 26 av Bernadette Soubirous; s €73-78, d €86-96; ☹ Apr-Oct; ☹ ☹ ☹) The spacious bedrooms are each individually and attractively decorated à la Louis XVI – get ready to gasp at the chandeliers and wooden panelling of the dining room.

Lourdes' covered market occupies most of place du Champ Commun.

Le Cardinal (☎ 05 62 42 05 87; 11 place Peyramale; salads €5-5.50; ☹ Mon-Sat) Le Cardinal is an unpretentious bar-brasserie where you can tuck into steak, pork or chicken, garnished with chips and salad for only €6.

L'Ardiden (☎ 05 62 94 30 55; 48 av Peyramale; lunch menu €11, dinner menu €12.50-16, mains €8-14; ☹ Wed-Sun) A pleasantly sited neighbourhood restaurant, especially strong on pizza and pasta.

Restaurant le Magret (☎ 05 62 94 20 55; 10 rue des Quatre Frères Soulas; menus €26 & €33, mains €17-23; ☹ Tue-Sun Feb-Dec) This rustic restaurant offers an innovative menu with a pronounced regional flavour.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (place Capdevielle) has services northwards to Pau (€7.40, 1¼ hours, four to six daily).

Lourdes is well connected by train to cities all over France, including Bayonne (€18.90, 1¼ hours, up to four daily) and Toulouse (€22.20, 1¼ hours, six daily). There are four daily TGVs to Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€91.80, six hours).

THE DORDOGNE

The Dordogne – better known to the French as Périgord – is one of the most popular areas of France, and it's easy to see what attracts visitors here in their thousands every year. Littered with ancient chateaux, sparkling rivers and quintessentially French countryside villages, the Dordogne region is

for many people the picture of rural France. It's also renowned as one of the world's most important prehistoric sites – the Vézère Valley is littered with some of the most spectacular cave art ever found.

SARLAT-LA-CANÉDA

pop 10,000

Nestled at the bottom of a sheltered valley, Sarlat-la-Canéda is one of the most attractive medieval towns in France. It's certainly one of the best-restored – a maze of cobbled alleyways, unexpected cul-de-sacs and snaking lanes, hemmed in by the town's distinctive honey-bricked buildings and elegant mansions. Unsurprisingly, it's also hugely popular, and the summer crowds can take the shine off things. Sarlat makes an excellent base for exploring the prehistoric sites of the Vézère Valley.

Orientation & Information

The heart-shaped Cité Médiévale (Medieval Town) is bisected by the rue de la République (La Traverse), which joins up with the main roads north and south from town. The train station is 2km from the Cité Médiévale, which is centred around place de la Liberté, rue de la Liberté and place du Peyrou.

Sarlat's **tourist office** (☎ 05 53 31 45 45; www.ot-sarlat-perigord.fr; rue Tourny; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is in a building attached to the cathedral and books accommodation for a small fee.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Les Récollets (☎ 05 53 31 36 00; www.hotel-recollets-sarlat.com; 4 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau; d €43-63) Lost in the narrow alleys of the Medieval Town, this great-value hotel has bags of period appeal (think quirky layouts and exposed brickwork) and colourful bedrooms.

Hôtel St-Albert (☎ 05 53 51 55 55; www.sarlathotel.com; place Pasteur; r €45-58; 📍) This cosy little hotel lies slightly outside the busy streets of the old town, and offers 25 snug rooms decked out in sunny tones and a calm, convivial atmosphere.

La Maison des Peyrat (☎ 05 53 59 00 32; www.maisondespeyrat.com; Le Lac de la Plane; r €47-95) This beautifully renovated 17th-century house, formerly a nuns' hospital and aristocratic hunting lodge, is set on a hill 1.5km from the town centre. The 11 rooms have lots of country-tinged charisma; the best have

views over the gardens and the countryside beyond.

Getting There & Away

Bus services from Sarlat are practically nonexistent – about the only destination is Périgueux (€7.10, 1½ hours) via Montignac. There's no bus station – departures are from the train station, place Pasteur or place de la Petite Rigaudie.

The **train station** (☎ 05 53 59 00 21) is 1.3km south of the old city on av de la Gare. Destinations include Périgueux (via Le Buisson; €12.60, 1¾ hours, two daily), Les Eyzies (change at Le Buisson; €7.90, 50 minutes to 2½ hours, two daily) and Bordeaux (€21.20, 2½ hours, five to seven direct daily).

LES EYZIES DE TAYAC

pop 850

Two museums in the one-street tourist village of Les Eyzies de Tayac provide an excellent introduction to the valley's prehistoric legacy. The excellent **Musée National de Préhistoire** (National Museum of Prehistory; ☎ 05 53 06 45 45; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €5/3.50/free, adult Sun €3; ☹ 9.30am-6.30pm Jul & Aug, to 6pm Wed-Mon Jun & Sep, to noon & 2-5.30pm Wed-Mon Oct-May) contains the most comprehensive collection of prehistoric finds in France, including stone-age tools and a famous bas-relief carving of a bison licking its flank.

About 250m north of Musée National de Préhistoire along the cliff face is the **Abri Pataud** (☎ 05 53 06 92 46; www.semitour.com; adult/6-12yr €5.50/3.50; ☹ 10am-7pm Jul-Sep, to 12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) a Cro-Magnon *abri* (shelter) inhabited over a period of 15,000 years starting some 37,000 years ago.

MONTIGNAC

pop 3101

The previously peaceful town of Montignac, 25km northeast of Les Eyzies, achieved sudden fame after the discovery of the nearby Grotte de Lascaux (Lascaux Caves; see opposite).

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 53 51 82 60; www.bienvenue-montignac.com, in French; place Bertrand de Born; ☹ 9am-7pm Jul-Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct; 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is next to the 14th-century Église St-Georges le Prieuré.

You won't find better value in Montignac than sweet little **Hôtel de la Grotte** (☎ 05 53 51

ANCIENT HISTORY

The Vézère Valley is renowned for its fantastic prehistoric **caves**, many of which contain the finest examples of cave art ever found.

Of the Vézère Valley's 175 known sites, the most famous ones include the **Grotte de Font de Gaume** (☎ 05 53 06 86 00; www.leseyzies.com/grottes-ornees; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €6.50/4.50/free; ☹ 9.30am-5.30pm May-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Sep-May, closed Sat), 1km northeast of Les Eyzies, where you can see around two-dozen prehistoric paintings of mammoths, bison, horses, fish, reindeer and bears, created some 14,000 years ago.

Eight kilometres east of Les Eyzies is the **Abri du Cap Blanc** (☎ 05 53 59 21 74; adult/7-15yr €6/3.50; ☹ 9.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Nov), which is unusual in that it only contains carved sculptures, rather than the combinations of engravings and cave paintings you'll see elsewhere.

The spectacular, 1200m-long **Grotte de Pech Merle** (☎ 05 65 31 27 05; www.pechmerle.com; adult/5-18yr mid-Jun–mid-Sep €7.50/4.50, mid-Sep–mid-Jun €6/4; ☹ 9.30-noon & 1.30-5pm Apr-Nov), 30km northeast of Cahors, has dozens of stunning cave paintings created some 16,000 to 20,000 years ago, as well as the haunting sight of a human footprint, clearly imprinted into the muddy clay floor.

Most famous of all are the **Lascaux Caves** (☎ 05 53 51 95 03; www.semitour.com; adult/6-12yr €8/5, joint ticket with Le Thot adult/child €10/7; ☹ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 2-5.30pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sat Feb-Mar & Nov-Dec, closed Jan), 2km southeast of Montignac. The cave's walls are covered with an astonishing menagerie of animals and figures, including oxen, deer, horses, reindeer and mammoth, as well as an amazing 5.5m bull, the largest cave drawing ever found. The original cave was closed to the public in 1963 to prevent damage to the paintings, but the most famous sections have been meticulously re-created in a second cave nearby – a massive undertaking that required some 20 artists and took 11 years.

Most of the caves are closed in winter, and get very busy in summer. Visitor numbers are also strictly limited, so you'll need to reserve well ahead during busy periods.

80 48; hoteldelagrotte@wanadoo.fr; place Tourny; d €49-57), which, with its red-and-white striped awnings and chichi furnishings, seems to have dropped out of a time hole to the 1930s.

Splendid **La Roseraie** (☎ 05 53 50 53 92; www.laroseraie-hotel.com; 11 place des Armes; s €81-96, d €92-152, s with half-board €105-130, d with half-board €150-194; 📍 📍), housed in one of the town's grandest mansions overlooking place des Armes, is the top choice in town, with plenty of plumped-up cushions, floral wallpaper and polished furniture. Half-board is compulsory on weekends, and in July and August.

QUERCY

Southeast of the Dordogne *département* lies the warm, unmistakably southern region of Quercy, many of whose residents still speak Occitan (Provençal). The dry limestone plateau in the northeast is covered with oak trees and riddled with canyons carved by the serpentine Lot River. The main city of Cahors is surrounded by some of the region's finest vineyards.

CAHORS

pop 21,432

There's something unmistakably Mediterranean about the laid-back town of Cahors, former capital of the Quercy region – a reminder that the sunbaked regions of Toulouse and Languedoc lie just to the south.

The main commercial thoroughfare is the north-south blvd Léon Gambetta. It divides Vieux Cahors (Old Cahors) to the east, from the new quarters to the west. Place François Mitterrand is home to the **tourist office** (☎ 05 65 53 20 65; cahors@wanadoo.fr; place François Mitterrand; ☹ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Sep-Jun).

Sights

Encircled by a hairpin loop in the Lot River and ringed by hills, the city has been inhabited since Roman times, but its most celebrated landmark is the three-towered medieval **Pont du Valentré**, which spans the river on the west side of the city.

The old **medieval quarter** is east of blvd Léon Gambetta, which cuts through the centre of the modern city. In the Middle Ages Cahors

was a prosperous commercial and financial centre, and reminders of the city's wealth are clearly visible along the narrow streets and alleyways of the old city, densely packed with elegant houses and merchant's mansions.

Sleeping & Eating

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 05 65 35 64 71; fjt46@wanadoo.fr; 20 rue Frédéric Suisse; dm €9.50; ☎ 24hr; 🏠) The town's 40-bed youth hostel. The hostel's staff is helpful and efficient and there's a cheap canteen. There are a few private rooms and four- to 10-bed rooms; reservations are advisable.

Hôtel de la Paix (☎ 05 65 35 03 40; www.hoteldela-paix-cahors.com; 30 place St-Maurice; s €48, d €54-70, ste €75) Inside a tall, pale-pink building on place St-Maurice, the rooms at this small hotel are a little hit-and-miss, but most are roomy and freshly decorated.

Marché Couvert (place des Halles; ☎ 7.30am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat, 9am-noon Sun & most holidays) A covered market also known as Les Halles.

Le Lamparo (☎ 05 65 35 25 93; 76, rue Georges Clémenceau; menu €11.50-26) This popular bistro caters for all moods, from pizza, pasta and gourmet salads through to regional fish and meat dishes.

Getting There & Away

Cahors' **train station** (place Jouinot Gambetta, aka place de la Gare) is on the main SNCF line linking Paris' Gare d'Austerlitz (€60.90, five hours, four to eight daily). To get to Sarlat-la-Canéda, take a train to Souillac and an SNCF bus from there (€13, three hours, twice daily).

BURGUNDY & THE RHÔNE

Burgundy is the spiritual heartland of two of France's *raisons d'être* – food and wine. The vineyards along the Côte d'Or and the Côte des Nuits are littered with some of the most prestigious names in French wine-making. It's also renowned for rich, meaty cooking – this is the place to try quintessentially Burgundian dishes such as *bœuf bourguignon* and *escargots* (snails). But it's not just a place to fill your stomach – the historic city of Dijon is famous for its glorious Renaissance architecture and excellent

museums, and the city of Beaune is home to the country's finest medieval hospital.

DIJON

pop 230,000

Dijon, mustard capital of the universe, is one of France's most appealing provincial cities. Filled with some of France's most elegant medieval and Renaissance buildings, the lively centre is wonderful for strolling, especially if you like to leaven your cultural enrichment with good food and shopping, and the city's 25,000 students help keep the nightlife scene snappy.

Orientation

Dijon's main thoroughfare, known for much of its length as rue de la Liberté, stretches from the train station eastwards past the tourist office and the Palais des Ducs to Église St-Michel. The main shopping precinct is around rue de la Liberté and perpendicular rue du Bourg. The focal point of the old town is place François Rude.

Information

Laundrettes 41 rue Auguste Comte (☎ 6am-9pm); 28 rue Berbissey (☎ 6am-8.30pm); 8 place de la Banque (☎ 7am-8.30pm)

Main post office (place Grangier) Cyberposte and currency exchange.

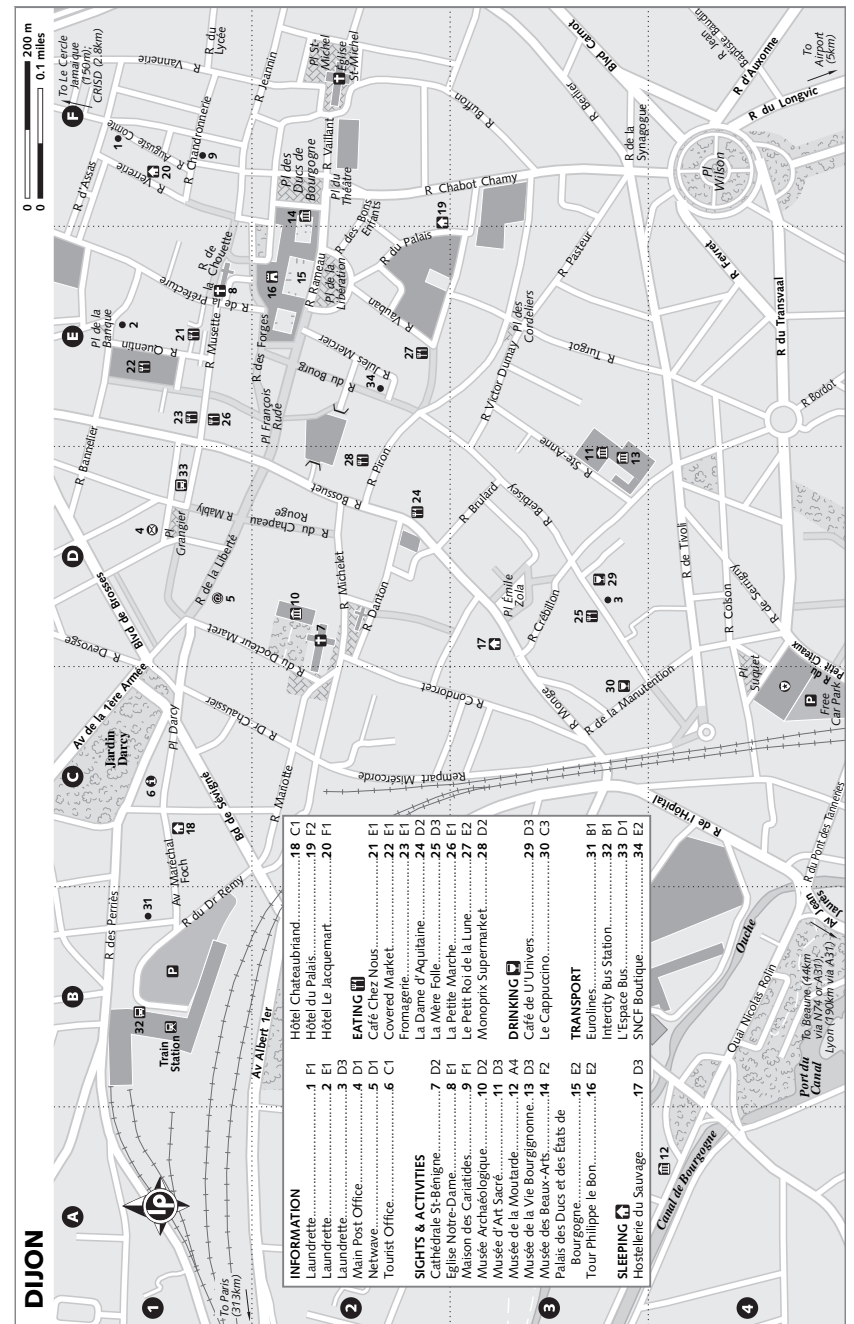
Netwave (10 rue de la Liberté; per hr €4; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 10pm Jun-Aug) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 08 92 70 05 58; www.dijon-tourism.com; place Darcy; ☎ 9am-7pm May–mid-Oct, 10am-6pm mid-Oct–Apr) The *Owl's Trail* (€2) details a walking tour whose route is marked on the footpath with bronze triangles.

Sights & Activities

MEDIAeval & RENAISSANCE ARCHITECTURE Once home to the region's rulers, the elaborate **Palais des Ducs et des États de Bourgogne** complex lies at the heart of old Dijon. The eastern wing houses the Musée des Beaux-Arts. The 15th-century **Tour Philippe le Bon** (Tower of Philip the Good; ☎ 03 80 74 52 71; adult/student/under 12yr €2.50/1.50/free; ☎ guided visits every 45-60min 9am-noon & 1.45-5.30pm Easter-late Nov, 9am-11am & 1.30-3.30pm Wed, Sat & Sun late Nov-Easter) affords fantastic views over the city.

Many of Dijon's finest **hôtels particuliers** are north of the Palais des Ducs on and around rues Vannerie, Vannerie and des Forges. The 17th-century **Maison des Cariatides** (28 rue Chaudronnerie), is particularly impressive.



CHURCHES

A little way north of the Palais des Ducs, the decorative **Église Notre-Dame** was built between 1220 and 1240. The façade's three tiers are decorated with leering gargoyles and an elaborate clock, the **Horloge à Jacquemart**. Outside, rue de la Chouette is named after the small stone *chouette* (owl) carved into the north wall of the church, said to grant happiness and wisdom to those who stroke it.

Situated above the tomb of St Benignus (believed to have brought Christianity to Burgundy in the 2nd century), Dijon's Burgundian Gothic-style **Cathédrale St-Bénigne** (☎ 9am-7pm) was built around 1300 as an abbey church.

MUSEUMS

All of Dijon's municipal museums are free except during special exhibitions.

Housed in the eastern wing of the Palais des Ducs, the **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (☎ 03 80 74 52 70; audioguide €3.90; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Wed-Mon May-Oct, 10am-5pm Wed-Mon Nov-Apr) is one of the most outstanding museums in France. Highlights include the wood-panelled **Salle des Gardes** (Guards' Room), which contains the medieval sepulchres of two Valois dukes. There's also an excellent modern-art section (closed from 11.30am to 1.45pm), and a collection of sculptures by the Dijon-born artist François Rude (1784-1855).

The **Musée Archéologique** (☎ 03 80 30 88 54; 5 rue du Docteur Maret; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Mon mid-May-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.35-6pm Wed-Sun Oct-mid-May) displays some surprising Celtic, Roman and Merovingian artefacts, including a 1st-century bronze of the goddess Sequana standing on a boat.

The **Musée de la Vie Bourguignonne** (☎ 03 80 44 12 69; 17 rue Ste Anne; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon) explores village and town life in Burgundy in centuries gone by. Nearby, the **Musée d'Art Sacré** (☎ 03 80 44 12 69; 15 rue Ste Anne; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon) displays ritual objects from the 12th to 19th centuries inside the convent's copper-domed chapel (1709).

You couldn't leave Dijon without paying homage to the city's most famous export. Visits to the **Musée de la Moutarde** (Musée Amora; 48 quai Nicolas Rolin; adult/under 12yr incl tour €3/free; ☎ bilingual tours 3pm Mon-Sat May-Oct, Wed & Sat Nov, Dec & Feb-Apr) can be arranged at the tourist office.

Sleeping

Centre de Rencontres Internationales et de Séjour de Dijon (CRISD; ☎ 03 80 72 95 20; www.auberge-cri-dijon.com; 1 blvd Champollion; dm with breakfast €17, s/d €32.50/43) This institutional hostel, 2.5km northeast of the centre, was completely renovated in 2006. Most beds are in modern, airy rooms of four or six. By bus, take Line 4 to the Epirey CRI stop.

Hôtel Chateaubriand (☎ 03 80 41 42 18; www.hotelchateaubriand.fr, in French; 3 av Maréchal Foch; d €38, with hand basin €34) A 23-room, no-star place near the train station that has the air of a well-worn dive but, thanks to the Victorian breakfast room, has far more character than the sterile chain hotels down the block.

Hôtel du Palais (☎ 03 80 67 16 26; hoteldupalais-dijon@wanadoo.fr; 23 rue du Palais; d €40-68) A great two-star place in a 17th-century *hôtel particulier*. Bedrooms are spacious and the public spaces exude old-fashioned charm – rooms on the 3rd floor have great views.

Hostellerie du Sauvage (☎ 03 80 41 31 21; hoteldusauvage@free.fr; 64 rue Monge; d €44-54) In a 15th-century *relais de poste* (relay post house) set around a cobbled courtyard, this great-value hotel is just off lively rue Monge. The 22 rooms are spare and practical.

Hôtel Le Jacquemart (☎ 03 80 60 09 60; www.hotel-lejacquemart.fr; 32 rue Verrerie; d €47-60) In the heart of old Dijon, this two-star hotel has 31 tidy, comfortable rooms; the pricier ones are quite spacious and some come with marble fireplaces.

Eating

La Mère Folle (☎ 03 80 50 19 76; 102 rue Berbisey; lunch menu €9.50, other menus €14.50-23; ☎ closed lunch Sat, Tue & Wed) Crammed with character, from the baroque wall mirrors to the pineapple-shaped table lamps, this camp French restaurant bills itself as a *resto extravagant* and serves unusual variations on traditional dishes.

La Petite Marche (☎ 03 80 30 15 10; 27-29 rue Musette; menu €10.50-14; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) An organic restaurant with seven types of salad and lots of vegetarian options (as well as meat and fish). Upstairs from the organic food shop.

Le Petit Roi de la Lune (☎ 03 80 49 89 93; 28 rue Amiral Roussin; mains €15; ☎ closed Sun) 'The Little King of the Moon' serves French cuisine with a highly individual spin, such as *Camembert frit avec gelée de mûre* (Camembert in bread crumbs, fried, baked and served with blackberry jelly).

La Dame d'Aquitaine (☎ 03 80 30 45 65; 23 place Bossuet; lunch menu €15-21.50, dinner menu €32.50-39; ☎ closed Sun & lunch Mon) Excellent Burgundian and southwestern French cuisine served under the vaulted bays of a 13th-century cellar.

Self-caterers should check out the **covered market** (Halles du Marché; rue Quentin; ☎ 6am-1pm Tue-Sat), the **Monoprix supermarket** (11-13 rue Piron; ☎ 9am-8.45pm Mon-Sat) and the excellent **fromagerie** (28 rue Musette; ☎ closed Mon morning & Sun).

Drinking & Entertainment

For the latest on Dijon's cultural scene, pick up *Spectacles*, available free from the tourist office. Dijon's club scene is centred on place de la République, and there are lots of bars along rue Berbisey.

Café Chez Nous (☎ 03 80 50 12 98; impasse Quentin; ☎ 10am-2am, closed Mon morning & Sun) A quintessentially French *bar du coin* (neighbourhood bar), down a tiny alleyway from the covered market. The *plat du jour* chalked up daily on the blackboard costs €6.50 to €9.

Le Cercle Jamaïque (☎ 03 80 73 52 19; 14 place de la République; admission free; ☎ 2pm-5am Tue-Sat) Decked out in lovably tacky baroque decor, this nightclub has live music (Cuban, flamenco, jazz, rock and roll) nightly from 11pm to 3.30am. Rum-based cocktails are the speciality. The downstairs disco (open 11pm to 5am Thursday to Saturday) plays everything but techno.

Le Cappuccino (☎ 03 80 41 06 35; 132 rue Berbisey; ☎ 5pm-2am Mon-Sat) Despite the name, beer rather than coffee is the mainstay at this popular bar – there are more than 100 brews to choose from, including Mandubienne, the only beer brewed in Dijon.

Café de l'Univers (☎ 03 80 30 98 29; 47 rue Berbisey; ☎ 5pm-2am) One of many convivial *café-bars* along rue Berbisey, with live music at weekends and a small downstairs dance floor (open roughly 8pm to 2am Thursday to Sunday).

Getting There & Away

Five kilometres southeast of the city centre, **Dijon-Bourgogne airport** (DIJ; ☎ 03 80 67 67 67) has regular flights to many French cities, as well as to Amsterdam.

The bus station is in the train station complex, where there's a **Transco information counter** (☎ 03 80 42 11 00; ☎ 6am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-2pm & 3-6pm Sat, 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Sun).

Transco bus 60 (12 to 17 daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) links Dijon with the northern Côte de Nuits wine villages (30 minutes). Other Transco buses travel to various destinations around Burgundy.

International bus travel is handled by **Euro-lines** (☎ 03 80 68 20 44; 53 rue Guillaume Tell; ☎ Mon-Fri & Sat morning).

Train services include Lyon (€23.80, two hours, 14 to 17 daily), Nice (€72.40, six hours, two daily), Paris' Gare de Lyon (€49 by TGV; 1½ hours, 15 daily weekdays, eight to 10 weekends) and Strasbourg (€40, four hours, three or four nondirect daily). In the city centre tickets can be purchased at the **SNCF boutique** (55 rue du Bourg; ☎ 12.30-7pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat).

Getting Around

Details on Dijon's bus network, operated by Divia, are available from **L'Espace Bus** (☎ 08 00 10 20 04; www.divia.fr, in French; place Grangier; ☎ 7.30am-6.45pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6.30pm Sat). Single tickets, sold by drivers, cost €0.90 and are valid for an hour; a *Forfait Journée* ticket costs €3 (available from the tourist office or L'Espace Bus).

The tourist office rents bikes year-round for €12/17 per half-/full day, €50 for three days. Helmets are free.

CÔTE D'OR VINEYARDS

Burgundy's most renowned vintages come from the vine-covered Côte d'Or (Golden Hillside), a range of hills made of limestone, flint and clay that runs south from Dijon for about 60km. The northern section, the **Côte de Nuits**, stretches from Marsannay-la-Côte 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.

Tours

Bourgogne Randonnées (☎ 03 80 22 06 03; www.bike-in-france.com; 7 av du 8 Septembre, Beaulieu; day tour incl lunch & tastings €65; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-7pm Sun Apr-Oct) Arranges tailor-made bike tours around the Côte d'Or. Bikes can be rented for €15/69/170 per day/week/month.

Wine & Voyages (☎ 03 80 61 15 15; www.wineandvoyages.com; 2/3hr tours €50/60; ☎ Mar-mid-Dec) Runs minibus tour of the Côte de Nuits vineyards. Reservations can be made by phone or internet, or last-minute at the Dijon tourist office.

BEAUNE

pop 22,000

Beaune (pronounced similarly to bone), 44km south of Dijon, is the unofficial capital of the Côte d'Or. This thriving town's *raison d'être* is wine – making it, tasting it, selling it, but, most of all, drinking it. Consequently Beaune is one of the best places in France for wine-tasting. The jewel of Beaune's old city is the magnificent Hôtel-Dieu, France's most splendid medieval charity hospital.

Orientation

The old city, enclosed by ramparts and a stream, is encircled by a one-way boulevard with seven names. The tourist office and the commercial centre are about 1km west of the train station.

Information

Laundrette (19 rue du Faubourg St-Jean; ☎ 6am-9pm)

Post office (7 blvd St Jacques)

Tourist office (☎ 03 80 26 21 30; www.beaune-burgundy.com) 1 rue de l'Hôtel-Dieu (☎ 9am or 10am-1pm & 2-7pm Jun-3rd weekend Nov, to 6pm late Mar-May, to 5pm 4th week in Nov-late Mar); 6 blvd Perpreuil (☎ same hr but mid-day closure is noon-1pm)

Sights & Activities

Founded in 1443 and used as a hospital until 1971, the celebrated Gothic **Hôtel-Dieu des Hospices de Beaune** (☎ 03 80 24 45 00; rue de l'Hôtel-Dieu; adult/student/under 18yr €6/5/3; ☎ ticket counter 9am-6.30pm Easter-mid-Nov, to 11.30am & 2pm-5.30pm mid-Nov-Easter, interior closed 1hr later) is topped by ornate turrets and pitched rooftops covered in multicoloured tiles. Highlights include the barrel-vaulted **Grande Salle**, an 18th-century pharmacy, the huge **kitchens**, and the disturbing **Polyptych of the Last Judgement**, an apocalyptic altar-piece by the Flemish painter Roger van der Weyden.

Underneath Beaune's streets and buildings, millions of dusty bottles of wine are being aged to perfection in cool, dark, cobweb-lined cellars. You can sample and compare fine Burgundy wines at several places around town.

Using a *tastevin* (a flat silver cup) you can sample a whopping 16 wines at **Marché aux Vins** (☎ 03 80 25 08 20; www.marcheauxvins.com, in French; 2 rue Nicolas Rolin; admission €10; ☎ visits begin 9.30-11.30am & 2-5.30pm, no midday closure mid-Jun-Aug), the former Église des Cordeliers.

During the 45-minute tour of the cobweb-covered cellar at **Reine Pédaouque** (☎ 03 80 22 23 11; www.reine-pedaouque.com, in French; rue de Lorraine; admission €7.50; ☎ tours 10.30am, 11.30am, 2.30pm, 3.30pm & 4.30pm, also at 5.30pm Mar-Nov, closed Mon Dec-Feb), visitors sample at least one white, two reds and Belen, an apéritif.

Patriarche Père et Fils (☎ 03 80 24 53 78; www.patriarche.com; 5 rue du Collège; audioguide tour €10; ☎ 9.30-11.30am & 2-5.30pm) are the largest cellars in Beaune, and are like Paris' Catacombs, except that the corridors are lined with dusty wine bottles instead of human bones. You get to sample and compare 13 of them.

Sleeping

Camping ground (☎ 03 80 22 03 91; 10 rue Auguste Dubois; camp sites per adult/tent €3.50/4.50; ☎ mid-Mar-Oct) A four-star camping ground 700m north of the centre.

Hôtel Rousseau (☎ 03 80 22 13 59; 11 place Madeleine; d €52, s/d/tr/q with hand basin from €25/32/48/56, hall shower €3) An endearingly shabby, 12-room hotel run since 1959 by a woman *d'un certain âge*. Some of the old-fashioned rooms have showers or toilets. The best budget bet.

Hôtel de la Cloche (☎ 03 80 24 66 33; www.hotel-cloche-beaune.com, in French; 40-42 place Madeleine; d €55-70) The 32 rooms at this veteran three-star establishment mix old-fashioned character with contemporary comfort.

Abbaye de Maizières (☎ 03 80 24 74 64; www.abbayedemaizieres.com, in French; 19 rue Maizières; d €77-107) A quirky three-star hotel inside a 12th-century chapel with 13 rooms that make use of the old brickwork and wooden beams.

Hôtel des Remparts (☎ 03 80 24 94 94; www.hotel-remparts-beaune.com; 48 rue Thiers; d €91-105; ☎ ☎) Set around two delightful courtyards, this 17th-century townhouse has 22 rooms with red tile floors, antique furniture and luxurious bathrooms.

Eating

Most cafés and restaurants are around place Carnot, place Félix Ziem and place Madeleine.

Caves Madeleine (☎ 03 80 22 93 30; 8 rue du Faubourg Madeleine; menu €12-22; ☎ closed Thu, Sun & lunch Fri) A convivial Burgundian restaurant with long wooden tables and regional classics such as *boeuf bourguignon*, *cassoleto d'escargots* and *jambon persillé* (jellied moulded ham).

Le Bistrot Bourguignon (☎ 03 80 22 23 24; 8 rue Monge; menu €13-27; ☎ closed Sun & Mon) A bistro-

style restaurant and wine bar that serves good-value cuisine billed as *régionale et originale* and 15 Burgundian wines by the glass (€3 to €8).

Ma Cuisine (☎ 03 80 22 30 22; passage Ste Hélène; menu €19; ☎ 12.15-1.30pm & 7.30-9pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri) An intimate place whose traditional French and Burgundian dishes include *pigeon de Bresse entier rôti au jus* (whole Bresse pigeon roasted in its juices, €25).

The covered market at place de la Halle hosts a **food market** (☎ to 12.30pm Sat) and a smaller **marché gourmand** (gourmet market; ☎ Wed morning). The nearest *fromagerie* is **Alain Hess Fromager** (7 place Carnot; ☎ Tue-Sat). **Casino supermarket** (28 rue du Faubourg Madeleine; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) is through an archway on rue Faubourg Madeleine.

Getting There & Away

Bus 44, run by **Transco** (☎ 03 80 42 11 00), links Beaune with Dijon (€5.95, one hour, seven weekdays, four Saturday, two Sunday and holidays), stopping at Côte d'Or wine villages such as Vougeot, Nuits-St-Georges and Aloxe-Corton. Buses serve villages south of Beaune, including Pommard, Volnay, Meursault and La Rochepot (three daily weekdays, one or two daily weekends).

Beaune has frequent trains to Dijon (€6.20, 20 minutes, 16 to 22 daily) via the Côte d'Or village of Nuits-St-Georges (€2.90, 10 minutes). Other destinations include Paris' Gare de Lyon (€42.70, two TGVs daily), and Lyon (€20.50, two hours, 11 to 17 daily).

LYON

pop 415,000

Commercial, industrial and banking powerhouse for the past 500 years, grand old Lyon (Lyons in English) is the focal point of a prosperous urban area of almost two million people, France's second-largest conurbation. Outstanding art museums, a dynamic cultural life, a busy clubbing and drinking scene, not to mention a thriving university and fantastic shopping, lend the city a distinctly sophisticated air.

Information

Commercial banks are a dime a dozen on rue Victor Hugo (2e), rue du Bât d'Argent (1er) and rue de la République (1er).

AOC Exchange (20 rue Gasparin, 2e; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat; ☎ Bellecour) Currency exchange off place Bellecour.

Espace Internet (☎ 04 78 39 72 41; cnr rue Romarin & rue Terraille, 1er; per hr €2; ☎ 10am-8.30pm Mon-Sat; ☎ Hôtel de Ville) Internet access.

Lav'+ (rue Terme, 1er; ☎ 6am-9pm; ☎ Hôtel de Ville) Laundrette.

Laverie de la Fresque (1 rue de la Martinière, 1er; ☎ 6am-10pm; ☎ Hôtel de Ville) Laundrette.

Main post office (10 place Antonin Poncet, 2e; ☎ Bellecour)

Raconte-Moi La Terre (☎ 04 78 92 60 22; www.raconte-moi.com; 38 rue Thomassin, 2e; per hr €4; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat; ☎ Cordeliers) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 04 72 77 69 69; www.lyon-france.com; place Bellecour, 2e; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat; ☎ Bellecour) The Lyon City Card (one/two/three days per adult €18/28/38, per four- to 18-year-old €9/14/19) covers admission to every museum in Lyon, a guided tour, a river excursion (between April and October) and unlimited travel on public transport.

Sights

VIEUX LYON

Old Lyon, with its cobblestone streets and **medieval and Renaissance houses** below Fourvière hill, is divided into three quarters: St-Paul at the northern end, St-Jean in the middle and St-Georges in the south.

Lovely old buildings languish on **rue du Bœuf**, **rue St-Jean** and **rue des Trois Maries**. The partly Romanesque **Cathédrale St-Jean** (place St-Jean, 5e; ☎ Vieux Lyon), seat of Lyon's 133rd bishop, was built from the late 11th to the early 16th centuries. The **astronomical clock** in the north transept arm chimes at noon, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm.

FOURVIÈRE

More than two millennia ago, the Romans built the city of Lugdunum on the slopes of Fourvière. Today, Lyon's 'hill of prayer' – topped by a basilica and the **Tour Métallique** – affords spectacular views of the city and its two rivers. Footpaths wind uphill but the funicular departing from place Édouard Commette is the least taxing way up; use a metro ticket or buy a return ticket (€2.20).

Crowning the hill is the **Basilique Notre Dame de Fourvière** (www.lyon-fourviere.com, in French), a typically over-the-top example of 19th-century ecclesiastical architecture. You can climb to the top on your own, or there are **guided tours** (☎ 04 78 25 86 19; adult/under 16yr €5/3; ☎ 2.30pm & 4pm Mon-Sun Jun-Sep, 2.30pm & 4pm Wed & Sun Oct, Apr & May, 2.30pm & 3.30pm Wed & Sun Nov) which end up at the **Tour de l'Observatoire**

(Observatory Tower; adult/under 16yr €2/1; ☎ 10.30am–noon & 2–6.30pm Wed–Sun Mar–Sep).

Roman artefacts and several sumptuous mosaics are displayed in the **Musée de la Civilisation Gallo-Romaine** (Museum of Gallo-Roman Civilisation; ☎ 04 72 38 81 90; www.musees-gallo-romains.com, in French; 17 rue Cléberg, 5e; adult/18–25yr/under 18yr €4/2.50/free, Thu free; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun; Fourvière funicular station). Next door, the **Théâtre Romain**, built around 15 BC and enlarged in AD 120, once seated an audience of 10,000.

PRESQU'ÎLE

The centrepiece of beautiful **place des Terreaux** (M Hôtel de Ville) is the 19th-century fountain sculpted by Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, creator of New York's Statue of Liberty.

Next door, the **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (☎ 04 72 10 17 40; 20 place des Terreaux, 1er; adult/under 18yr €6/free; ☎ 10am–6pm Wed–Thu & Sat–Mon, 10.30am–6pm Fri; M Hôtel de Ville) showcases one of France's finest collection of sculpture and painting outside Paris.

Lyonnais silks, French and Asian textiles, and carpets are showcased at the **Musée des Tissus** (Textile Museum; ☎ 04 78 38 42 00; www.musee-des-tissus.com, in French; 34 rue de la Charité, 2e; adult/under 18yr €5/free; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Tue–Sun; M Amère). Next door, the **Musée des Arts Décoratifs** (Decorative Arts Museum; free with Textile Museum ticket; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Tue–Sun) displays 18th-century furniture, tapestries, ceramics and silver.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Lyon's graceful 117-hectare **Parc de la Tête d'Or** (☎ 04 72 69 47 60; blvd des Belges, 6e; ☎ 6am–11pm mid-Apr–mid-Oct, to 9pm mid-Oct–mid-Apr; M Masséna), landscaped in the 1860s, is graced by a lake, botanic garden with greenhouses, an alpine garden, rose garden and zoo.

At the northern edge of the park is the brick-and-glass **Cité Internationale**, which houses the **Musée d'Art Contemporain** (☎ 04 72 69 17 17; www.moca-lyon.org; 81 quai Charles de Gaulle, 6e; adult/under 18yr variable depending on exhibition/free; ☎ noon–7pm Wed–Sun).

The WWII headquarters of Gestapo commander Klaus Barbie house the evocative **Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation** (CHR; ☎ 04 78 72 23 11; 14 av Berthelot, 7e; adult/under 18yr €4/free; ☎ 9am–5.30pm Wed–Sun; M Perrache or Jean Macé), which explores the exploits of the French resistance during WWII.

Film buffs should head for the **Musée Lumière** (☎ 04 78 78 18 95; www.institut-lumiere.org;

25 rue du Premier Film, 8e; adult/under 18yr €6/5; ☎ 11am–6.30pm Tue–Sun; M Monplaisir-Lumière), housed inside the Art Nouveau home (1899–1902) of Antoine Lumière who, with his sons Auguste and Louis, shot the world's first motion picture, *La Sortie des Usines Lumières* (Exit of the Lumières Factories) in 1895.

Today classic films are screened in the **Hangar du Premier Film** – the film set for *La Sortie des Usines Lumières* – that somehow escaped demolition when the rest of the Lumière factories were bulldozed in the 1970s.

Festivals & Events

Les Nuits de Fourvière (www.nuitsdefourviere.fr, in French) brings a multitude of fabulous open-air concerts to Fourvière's Théâtre Romain mid-June to early August.

For several days around 8 December, Lyon is lit up by the **Fête des Lumières** (Festival of Lights), marking the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse du Vieux Lyon (☎ 04 78 15 05 50; lyon@fujaj.org; 41–45 montée du Chemin Neuf, 5e; dm €13; ☎ reception 7am–1pm & 9pm or 10pm–1am; M Vieux Lyon) Rates include breakfast at this superbly located hostel above Vieux Lyon. Its 180 beds are split between rooms for two to seven people.

Hôtel de la Poste (☎ 04 78 28 62 67; 1 rue Victor Fort, 4e; s/d/tr/q €39/44/58/70, with shared bathroom €37/35/45/66; ☎ reception 7am–9pm Mon–Fri, 8am–9pm Sat & Sun; M Croix Rousse) Price – not prettiness – pulls in the punters at this bright but basic hotel overlooking the lovely central square in Croix Rousse.

Hôtel Iris (☎ 04 78 39 93 80; hoteliris@freesurf.fr; 36 rue de l'Arbre Sec, 1er; s/d €45/47, with shared bathroom €37/39; M Hôtel de Ville) The location of this two-star number inside a four-centuries-old convent couldn't be better, so get in quick to snag one of its simple courtyard rooms.

Hôtel St-Vincent (☎ 04 78 37 75 79; www.hotel-saintvincent.com, in French; 9 rue Pareille, 1er; s/d/tr €45/55/65; M Hôtel de Ville) High beamed ceilings, giant windows, old stone walls and original wooden floors make this three-level, 32-room hotel a fine place for lapping up authentic Lyonnais atmosphere.

Hôtel St-Antoine (☎ 04 78 92 91 91; www.hotel-saintantoine.fr; 1 rue du Port du Temple, 2e; s/d €63/69; ☎ ☎; M Cordeliers) A stylish mix of old and new greets guests at this thoroughly modern



hotel, inside an 18th-century townhouse a pebble's throw from the Saône.

Collège Hotel (☎ 04 72 10 05 05; www.college-hotel.com; 5 place St-Paul, 5e; undergraduate/graduate/postgraduate d €105/125/140; 📶 📺 📺; 🕒 (M) Vieux Lyon) The stark minimalism of this cutting-edge hotel comes as something of a shock, but most have flat-screen TVs and private balconies. Breakfast is served in the *salle de classe petit déjeuner* (breakfast classroom), bedecked like a classroom of yesteryear.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Gaston Restaurant Agricole (☎ 04 72 41 87 86; 41 rue Mercière, 2e; 2-/3-course menu €11.50/14.50; 📶 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; 🕒 (M) Cordeliers) Pack a giant-sized appetite before venturing into this feisty agricultural restaurant, complete with rusty old tractor, farm tools and veggie-filled wheelbarrows.

Commanderie des Antonins (☎ 04 78 37 19 21; www.commanderie-antonins.fr; 30 quai St-Antoine, 2e; mains €7-13.50, menu €20; 📶 lunch & dinner; 🕒 Bellecour) This meat-lover's paradise cooks meat the old-fashioned way – slowly over a low heat in a wood-burning oven – and serves it with a flourish in a medieval banquet hall.

Le Petit Léon (☎ 04 72 10 11 11; www.leondelyon.com; 3 rue Pléney, 1er; plat du jour €11.50, menu €18.50; 📶 lunch Tue-Sat; 🕒 (M) Hôtel de Ville) Tables are highly sought after at this soulful old-world bistro, the affordable arm of Michelin-starred big brother Léon de Lyon around the corner.

Oxalis (☎ 04 72 07 95 94; www.lessardinesfilantes.fr, in French; 23 rue de l'Arbre Sec, 1er; lunch menu €15, dinner menus €28-35; 📶 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri; 🕒 (M) Hôtel de Ville) Lyon-born chef Sonia Ezgulian fuses Mediterranean with Asian and African at her truly globe-spanning restaurant – she also runs cooking courses.

Brasserie Georges (☎ 04 72 56 54 54; www.brasserie-georges.com; 30 cours de Verdun, 2e; mains €15-20, menus €21.50 & €24.50; 📶 8am-11.15pm Sun-Thu, 8am-12.15am Fri & Sat; 🕒 Perrache) In fashion since 1836, the original Art Deco interior is breathtaking – as is the sheer size of the place. Food is a mix of onion soup, mussels, sauerkraut, seafood platters and Lyon specialities.

Café des Fédérations (☎ 04 78 28 26 00; www.lesfedeslyon.com, in French; 8 rue Major Martin, 1er; lunch/dinner menu €19.50/23; 📶 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri; 🕒 (M) Hôtel de Ville) In Lyon a *bouchon* is a small, local bistro that cooks up traditional city cuisine, and this is one of the city's old

favourites, especially for its *caviar de la Croix Rousse* (lentils in a creamy sauce).

For quick eats at lunch time, try the following:

Le Pain Quotidien (☎ 04 78 38 29 84; 13-15 rue des Quatre Chapeaux, 2e; tartines €6-8, salads €12; 📶 7am-10.30pm Mon-Sat, 7am-7pm Sun; 🕒 (M) Hôtel de Ville) Great for *tartines* (thick toast with topping) and rustic lunches.

Jim-Deli (☎ 04 78 38 31 67; 14 rue des Quatre Chapeaux, 2e; pasta €7-13; 🕒 (M) Hôtel de Ville) Authentic Italian *panini* (bread rolls), *carpaccio* (raw beef with olive oil, lemon juice and spices), pasta and salads.

SELF-CATERING

Central Lyon has two **outdoor food markets** (📶 Tue-Sun morning; Presqu'île quai St-Antoine, 2e; 🕒 Bellecour or Cordeliers; Croix Rousse blvd de la Croix Rousse, 4e; 🕒 (M) Croix Rousse).

Les Halles de Lyon (102 cours Lafayette, 3e; 📶 7am-noon & 3-7pm Tue-Sat, to noon Sun; 🕒 Part-Dieu) and **La Halle de la Martinière** (24 rue de la Martinière, 1er; 📶 8am-7.30pm Tue-Sun; 🕒 (M) Hôtel de Ville) are the main indoor food markets.

Drinking

The bounty of café-terraces on place des Terreaux (1er, metro station Hôtel de Ville) buzz with drinkers day and night.

Ké Pêcherie (☎ 04 78 28 26 25; quai de la Pêcherie, 1er; 📶 7am-1.30am; 🕒 (M) Hôtel de Ville) Seemingly open all hours, this ever-changing bar spans the drinking spectrum: daytime café drifts into lounge bar come late afternoon, followed by heaving venue after dark.

Le Bar (☎ 04 78 31 51 08; 10bis rue de la Bourse, 1er; 📶 11am-3am; 🕒 (M) Hôtel de Ville) A striking minimalist interior and imaginative cocktails are on offer at this cocktail bar, one of Lyon's most chic.

modernartcafé (☎ 04 72 87 06 82; www.modernartcafé.net; 65 blvd de la Croix Rousse, 4e; 📶 11.30am-2am Mon-Fri, 3.30pm-2am Sat, 11am-2am Sun, shorter hr winter & rain; 🕒 (M) Croix Rousse) Retro furnishings, contemporary art, and multimedia events make this art bar one cool place to lounge. There's even a pocket-sized beach.

Bauhaus Bar (☎ 04 72 00 87 22; 17 rue Sergent Blandant, 1er; 🕒 (M) Hôtel de Ville) Tiny and trendy, this chic bar attracts a cool crowd with its authentic Bauhaus furnishings.

Entertainment

The tourist office knows most about Lyon's dynamic entertainment scene. Local listings guides include weekly *Lyon Poche*

(www.lyonpoche.com, in French; €1 at news-agents) and the free weekly *Le Petit Bulletin* (www.petit-bulletin.fr, in French) available on street corners and at the tourist office.

Getting There & Away

Flights to/from dozens of European cities land at **Aéroport Lyon-St-Exupéry** (LYS; ☎ 08 26 80 08 26; www.lyon.aeroport.fr), 25km east of the city. **Satobus** (☎ 04 72 68 72 17; www.satobus.com) links the airport with the city centre (single/return €8.40/14.90, every 20 minutes from 5am to midnight).

In the Perrache complex, **Eurolines** (☎ 04 72 56 95 30), **Intercars** (☎ 04 78 37 20 80) and **Linebus** (☎ 04 72 41 72 27) have offices on the bus-station level of the Centre d'Échange (follow the 'Lignes Internationales' signs).

Lyon has two main-line train stations: **Gare de la Part-Dieu** (🕒 Part-Dieu), which handles long-haul trains; and **Gare de Perrache** (🕒 Perrache), a stop for both long-distance and regional trains. Tickets are sold in town at the **SNCF Boutique** (2 place Bellecour, 2e; 📶 9am-6.45pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6.30pm Sat; 🕒 Bellecour).

Destinations by TGV include Paris' Gare de Lyon (€58.70 to €76.30, two hours, every 30 to 60 minutes), Lille-Europe (€77.20, 3¼ hours, nine daily), Nantes (€72.20, 4¼ hours, five daily), Beaune (€20.50, 2¼ hours, up to nine daily), Dijon (€23.40, 2¼ hours, at least 12 daily) and Strasbourg (€45.60, 5¼ hours, five daily).

Getting Around

Lyon's buses, trams, metro and funiculars are run by **TCL** (☎ 08 20 42 70 00; www.tcl.fr, in French; Vieux Lyon place Commette, 5e; 📶 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Sat; 🕒 Vieux Lyon; Presqu'île 5 rue de la République, 1er; 📶 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Sat; 🕒 Bellecour). Tickets cost €1.50/12.20 for one/10 and are available from bus and tram drivers and from machines at metro entrances. Two-hour/day tickets cost €2.10/4.30. Public transport runs from around 5am to midnight.

THE FRENCH ALPS

The spiritual home of winter sports, the French Alps form one of the most stunning mountain ranges in Europe. The snowy peaks and ice-capped spires of this region are famous for their downhill thrills and

fresh powder, but there are also some fascinating towns to explore, including Annecy, which sits in a spectacular spot surrounded by sawtooth mountains and a sparkling lake, and elegant Grenoble, the undisputed capital of the Alps.

CHAMONIX

pop 10,000 / elevation 1037m

Grungy and gritty, Chamonix is where the serious Alpine action kicks in. This is France's legendary mountaineering centre, where world-class skiers, boarders and climbers push themselves to extremes on Europe's most challenging pistes and rock faces. It's also renowned for its lively après-ski scene, and for having the world's highest (and most terrifying) cable car.

Information

There are several seasonal currency-exchange places between the tourist and post offices. **Banque de Savoie** (☎ 04 50 53 30 25; 1 place Balmat; 📶 9am-1pm & 3-7pm May, Jun & early Sep-Nov, 8am-8pm Jul-early Sep & Dec-Apr) Exchange bureau with competitive rates.

Laverie Automatique (174 av de l'Aiguille du Midi; 7/16k wash €5.50/10; 📶 9am-8pm) Laundrette. **Le Bureau** (☎ 04 50 90 68 37; 7/13 quai du Vieux Moulins; per 10min/1hr €14/50; 📶 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-9pm Sat & Sun) Internet access.

Maison de la Montagne (190 place de l'Église) Your first port of call for finding out everything about the Mont Blanc area.

Office de Haute Montagne (OHH; ☎ 04 50 53 22 08; www.ohm-chamonix.com) Information on trails, hiking conditions and *refuges* (mountain huts).

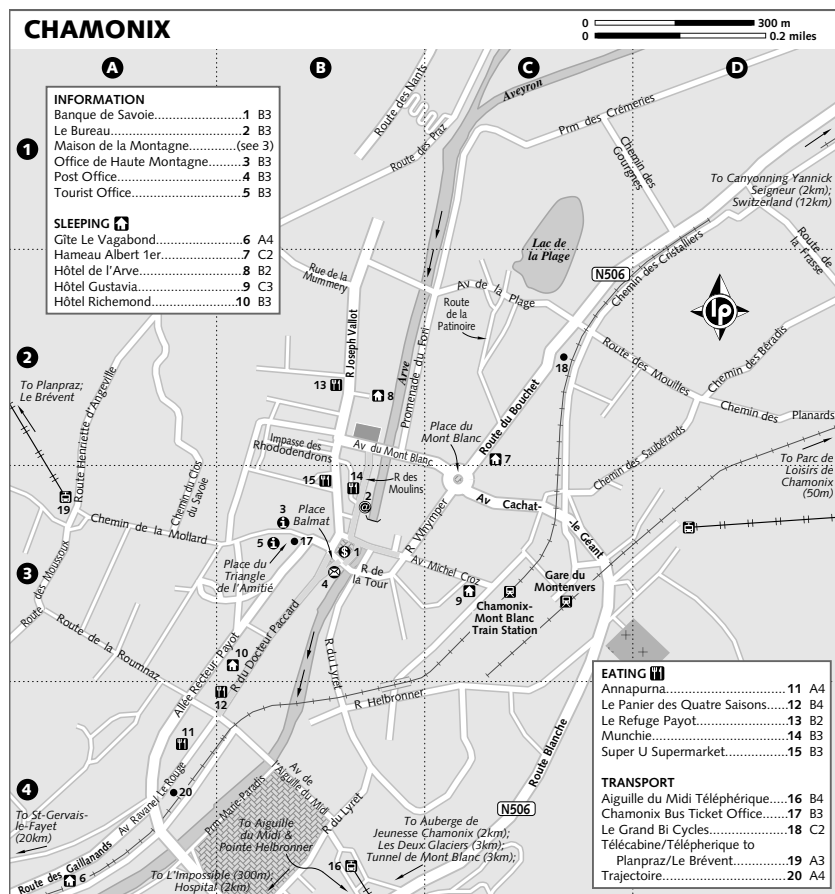
Post office (89 place Balmat)

Tourist office (☎ 04 50 53 00 24; www.chamonix.com; 85 place du Triangle de l'Amitié; 📶 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-7pm mid-Dec-Mar & mid-Jun & Sep, 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-mid-Jun, 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-7pm early Jul, 8.30am-7.30pm mid-Jul-mid-Aug, 8.30am-7pm mid-end Aug) Accommodation and activity information; also sells ski passes.

Sights

AIGUILLE DU MIDI

A jagged pinnacle of rock rising above glaciers, snowfields and rocky crags, 8km from the domed summit of Mont Blanc, the **Aiguille du Midi** (3777m) is one of Chamonix' most famous landmarks. If you can handle the height, the panoramic views from the summit are unforgettable.



The **Téléphérique du Aiguille du Midi** (Aiguille du Midi cable car; ☎ 04 50 53 30 80, advance reservations 24hr ☎ 08 92 68 00 67; 100 place de l'Aiguille du Midi; adult/12-15yr/4-11yr return €36/31/25.50, adult/12-15yr/4-11yr return to midstation Plan de l'Aiguille €16/14/11.50; ☎ 7am-5.40pm Jun-Nov, 8.30am-4pm mid-Dec-Jan, 8.10am-4pm Feb & Mar, 8.10am-4.30pm Apr, 8.30am-5pm May) links Chamonix with the Aiguille du Midi. Be prepared for long queues.

From the Aiguille du Midi, a second cable car, the **Télécabine Panoramic Mont Blanc**, travels to Pointe Helbronner (3466m) on the French-Italian border.

LE BRÉVENT

The highest peak on the western side of the valley, **Le Brévent** (2525m) has fabulous views

of the Mont Blanc massif and a fabulous summit restaurant.

Reach it via the **Télécabine du Brévent** (☎ 04 50 53 13 18; 29 rte Henriette d'Angeville; Chamonix-Brévent adult/12-15yr/4-11yr return €17/15/14, Chamonix-Planpraz adult/12-15yr/4-11yr return €12/10.50/8.50; ☎ 8am-5.45pm Jun-Sep, 8.45am-4.45pm mid-Dec-Apr), from the end of rue de la Mollard to midstation **Planpraz** (2000m), from where another cable car travels to the top.

MER DE GLACE

The **Mer de Glace** (Sea of Ice), the second-largest glacier in the Alps, is 14km long, 1800m wide and up to 400m deep. The glacier moves 45m a year at the edges, and up to 90m a year in the centre, and has become

a popular tourist attraction thanks to the rack-and-pinion railway line built between 1897 and 1908.

Since 1946, the **Grotte de la Mer de Glace** (☎ late May-late Sep) – an ice cave – has been carved every spring. Work commences in February and takes up to three months. The interior temperature is between -2°C and -5°C. Take a look down the slope for last year's cave to see how far the glacier has moved.

A mountain train links **Gare du Montenvers** (☎ 04 50 53 12 54; 35 place de la Mer de Glace; adult/12-15yr/4-11yr return €16/14/11.50; ☎ 10am-4.30pm mid-Dec-Apr, 8.30am-5.30pm May-Jun & Sep, 8am-6.30pm Jul & Aug) in Chamonix with Montenvers (1913m), from where a cable car transports tourists in summer down to the glacier and cave. A combined ticket for the train, cable car and cave costs €22.50/19.50/16 per adult/12- to 15-year-old/four- to 11-year-old.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Les Deux Glaciers (☎ 04 50 53 15 84; glaciers@club Internet.fr; 80 rte de Tissières; camp sites per 2 adults, tent & car €13; ☎ mid-Dec-mid-Nov) Chamonix has some 13 camping grounds in summer, but this is the only one which opens year-round. Ride the train to Les Bossons or the Chamonix bus to the Tremplin-le-Mont stop.

Auberge de Jeunesse Chamonix (☎ 04 50 53 14 52; chamonix@fuaj.org; 127 montée Jacques Balmat; dm mid-Apr-Oct/Dec-mid-Apr €17/22; ☎ reception 8am-noon, 5-7.30pm & 8.30-10pm; ☎ Dec-Oct) This hostel is 2km

south of Chamonix in Les Pélerins. There's no kitchen but there's a decent snack bar. Package stays are available in summer and winter. Take the Chamonix-Les Houches bus line and get off in Les Pélerins d'en Haut.

Gîte Le Vagabond (☎ 04 50 53 15 43; www.gitevaga bond.com; 365 av Ravanel-le-Rouge; dm €14.50, with breakfast €19.50, with half-board €31.50, d with breakfast €62; ☎ reception 8-10am & 4.30-10pm; ☎ ☎) This legendary hangout is where cool dudes free-ride by day and eat, drink and party by night. Beds are in four- or six-person dorms, and doubles have their own bathroom.

MIDRANGE

During July, August and the ski season, most hotels are heavily booked, so reserve ahead.

Hôtel Gustavia (☎ 04 50 53 00 31; www.hotel-gustavia.com; 272 av Michel Croz; s/d/tr/q from €46/74/102/180) 'Une belle adresse' since 1890, this charming manor-house hotel with bottle-green wooden shutters and wrought-iron balconies oozes soul, and has a great après-ski bar.

Hôtel Richemond (☎ 04 50 53 08 85; www.richemond.fr; 228 rue du Docteur Paccard; s €56-64, d €87-102, tr €108-130, q €123-145) The same family has run this ginger-shuttered hotel with wrought-iron balconies facing Mont Blanc since 1914. Most of the two-star rooms tout flower-power wallpaper, lurid carpets and other kitsch 1960s furnishings which just about qualify for a 'retro' tag.

Hôtel de l'Arve (☎ 04 50 53 02 31; www.hotelarve-chamonix.com; 60 impasse des Anémones; d €58-83;

ALPINE ADVENTURES

Chamonix is obviously known for its fantastic skiing and snowboarding, but there's much more to this part of the Alps than simply hurtling downhill strapped to a couple of matchsticks.

From late spring until October, 310km of **walking trails** open up in the mountains around Chamonix. For walking information, contact **Chamonix Guide** (☎ 04 50 55 66 47, 06 03 60 21 03; www.chamonixguide.com; 840 rte des Chavants) or the **Compagnie des Guides** (☎ 04 50 53 00 88; www.chamonix-guides.com; 190 place de l'Église), who also run **rock-climbing** and **cycling** expeditions.

Canyoning and **white-water rafting** trips are organised by **Cham' Aventure** (☎ 04 50 53 55 70; www.cham-aventures.com; 190 place de l'Église) and **Canyoning Yannick Seigneur** (☎ 06 77 88 24 50; www.canyoning-chamonix.com; 44 chemin de l'Ordon).

Paragliding above the valley is popular; starter flights from Planpraz cost €90, or €220 from the Aiguille du Midi. Paragliding schools include **Summits** (☎ 04 50 53 50 14, 06 84 01 26 00; www.summits.fr; 27 allée du Savoy) and **Les Ailes du Mont Blanc** (☎ 04 50 53 92 76, 06 20 46 55 57; www.lesaiiledumontblanc.com; 24 av de la Plagne).

Down in the valley, there's a **summer luge track** at the **Parc de Loisirs de Chamonix** (☎ 04 50 53 08 97; www.planards.com; 1/6 descents €5/25; 1.30-6pm Sat & Sun May & Oct, 1.30-6pm Jun & Sep, 10am-7.30pm Jul & Aug).

☞ mid-Dec–mid-Oct) The Arve is one of the last great family-run hotels left in Chamonix, handed down through four generations since 1890. The best rooms look down the valley to Mont Blanc.

Hameau Albert 1er (☎ 04 50 53 05 64; www.hameaualbert.fr; 38 rte du Bouchet; d €115–150; ☞ ☞) This exquisite hotel is a hamlet of traditional Savoyard farms and wooden chalets bizarrely placed in the centre of town. Interiors are rustic and the futuristic swimming pool is a dream.

Eating

A food market fills place du Mont-Blanc on Saturday morning.

Le Panier des Quatre Saisons (☎ 04 50 53 98 77; 24 Galerie Blanc Neige; mains €15; ☞) dinner Thu, lunch & dinner Fri–Tue Dec–May & mid-Jun–Oct) A firm favourite, the Basket of Four Seasons cooks up a veritable feast of season-driven, quintessentially French dishes.

Annapurna (☎ 04 50 55 81 39; planetguddoy@aol.com; 62 av Ravelan-Le Rouge; mains €15) Authentic Indian dishes – biryani, tandoori etc – as well as more unusual dishes like curried lobster tail (€38).

Munchie (☎ 04 50 53 45 41; 87 rue des Moulins; mains €17–25; ☞) dinner Mon–Sun) Think fusion at this trendy hang-out with great pan-Asian food. Mains include blackened salmon *sashimi* (slices of raw fish), sushi, and a couple of imaginative vegetarian dishes.

L'Impossible (☎ 04 50 53 20 36; 9 chemin du Cry; lunch/dinner menus €20/24.50 & €29.50) An 18th-century barn, located near the Aiguille du Midi cable car, has been transformed into this rustic eatery with wood, wicker and warm lighting, and a deliciously upmarket French *menu*.

Self-caterers can choose from **Le Refuge Payot** (☎ 04 50 53 18 71; www.refugepayot.com; 166 rue Joseph Vallot) for deli supplies and the **Super U** (117 rue Joseph Vallot) supermarket for everything else.

Getting There & Away

From **Chamonix bus station** (☎ 04 50 53 07 02; www.altibus.com; ☞) 6.45am–10.30am & 1.25–4.45pm Mon–Fri, 6.45am–11am Sat & Sun), at the train station, there are buses to Geneva airport and bus station (www.sat-montblanc.com; single/return €34/55, 1½ to 2¼ hours, three daily) and Courmayeur (single/return €10/18, three daily).

Chamonix-Mont Blanc **train station** (☎ 04 50 53 12 98; place de la Gare) is on the line between St-Gervais-le-Fayet, 23km west of Chamonix, and Martigny, 42km north of Chamonix in Switzerland. There are nine to 12 daily trains and a return Chamonix-St-Gervais fare is €9 (40 minutes).

From St-Gervais-le-Fayet, there are trains to most major French cities.

Getting Around

Local buses are run by **Chamonix Bus** (☎ 04 50 53 05 55; chamonixbus@transdev.fr; 591 promenade Marie-Paradis; ☞) 7am–7pm Sep–Apr, 8am–noon & 2–7pm Jun–Aug).

Le Grand Bi Cycles (☎ 04 50 53 14 16; 240 av du Bouchet; ☞) 9am–7pm Jul & Aug, 9am–7pm Tue–Sat Jun) and **Trajectoire** (☎ 04 50 53 18 95; 91 av Ravelan le Rouge) rent bikes for €10 to €15 a day.

ANNECY

pop 50,000 / elevation 448m

Chic Annecy, capital of the Haute-Savoie, is perfect for a good old mosey. Nestled around the northwestern end of Lake Annecy against a pretty backdrop of Alpine peaks, the town is crisscrossed with ancient canals, geranium-covered bridges, medieval houses and arched alleyways perfect for meandering. This is *the* hot spot to kick back and relax after the high-altitude and attitude-fuelled Alpine resorts – except in summer when bumper-to-bumper traffic makes it a tad taxing.

Orientation

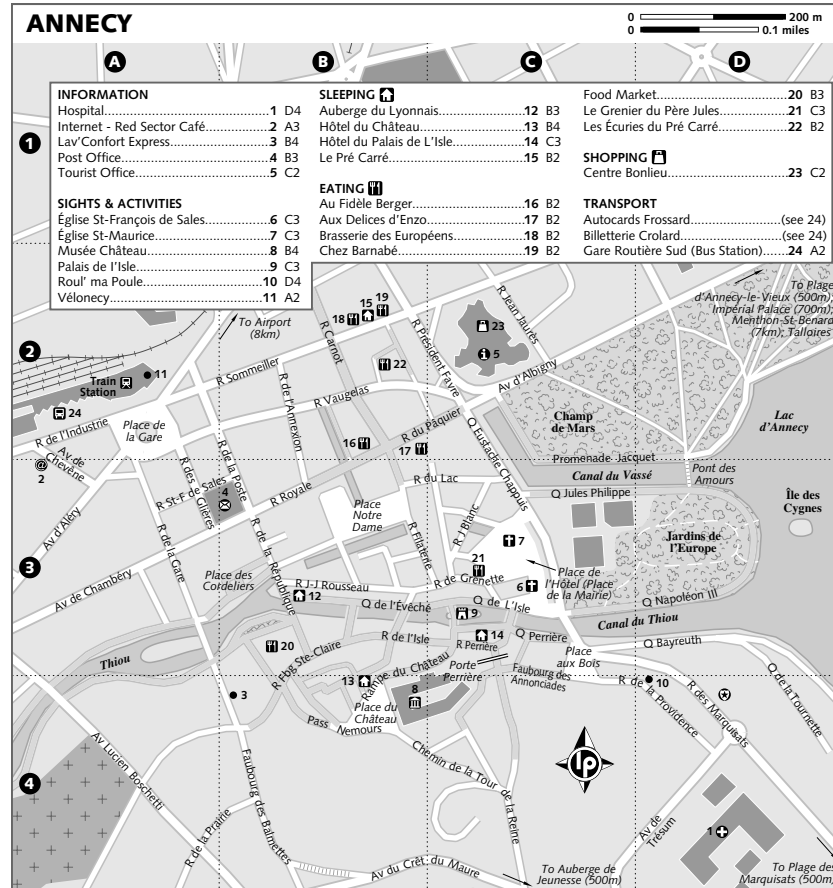
The train and bus stations are 500m north-west of Vieil Annecy, also called the Vieille Ville (Old Town), which is huddled around the Thiou River (split into Canal du Thiou to the south and Canal du Vassé to the north). The town centre is between the post office and the purpose-built Centre Bonlieu, near the shores of Lac d'Annecy.

Information

Internet – Red Sector Café (☎ 04 50 45 39 75; 3bis av de Chevène; per 15min/1hr €1/4; ☞) 10am–7pm Fri–Wed) **Lav'Confort Express** (6 rue de la Gare; ☞) 7am–9pm) Laundrette.

Post office (4bis rue des Glières) Has a Cyberposte.

Tourist office (☎ 04 50 45 00 33; www.lac-annecy.com; 1 rue Jean Jaurès, Centre Bonlieu; ☞) 9am–12.30pm & 1.45–6pm Mon–Sat mid-Sep–mid-May, 9am–6.30pm Mon–Sat mid-May–mid-Sep, Sun Mar–Oct)



Sights & Activities

Wandering around the Vieille Ville and lakefront are the essence of Annecy. Just east, behind the town hall, are the **Jardins de l'Europe**, linked to the park of **Champ de Mars** by the poetic arch of **Pont des Amours** (Lovers' Bridge).

The old town retains much of its 17th-century appearance, with a warren of narrow streets, canals and colonnaded passageways. On the central island, the **Palais de l'Isle** (☎ 04 50 33 87 31; 3 passagede l'Île; adult/student/under 12yr €3.50/1.50/free, free 1st Sun of month Oct–May; ☞) 10.30am–6pm Jun–Sep, 10am–noon & 2–5pm Wed–Mon Oct–May) was a prison, but now hosts local-history displays.

In the 13th- to 16th-century castle above town, the **Musée Château** (☎ 04 50 33 87 30; adult/

student/under 12yr €5/2/free; ☞) 10.30am–6pm Jun–Sep, 10am–noon & 2–5pm Wed–Mon Oct–May) explores traditional Savoyard art and Alpine natural history. A combined ticket covering palace and castle costs €6.

Parks and grassy areas line the lakefront. **Plage d'Annecy-le-Vieux** (admission free; ☞) Jul & Aug) is 1km east of Champ de Mars. Somewhat closer to town, the privately run **Plage Impérial** (admission €3; ☞) Jul & Aug) slumbers in the shade of the elegant pre-WWI **Impérial Palace**. You'll find **Plage des Marquisats** (admission free; ☞) Jul & Aug) 1km south along rue des Marquisats.

Biking and blading are big in Annecy. A two-way cycling track – equally popular with roller-bladers – starts in Annecy-le-Vieux

and follows the entire *rive ouest* (western shore) of the lake for 20km.

Bikes can be hired from **Vélonicy** (☎ 04 50 51 38 90; place de la Gare; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 9am-noon & 1-6pm Thu-Sat Oct-Mar) at the train station for €6/10 per half-/full day.

Roul' ma Poule (☎ 04 50 27 86 83; www.roulmapoule.com; 4 rue des Marquisats; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-7.30pm Mar-Jun & Sep, 9am-7.30pm Jul & Aug) rents rollerblades (€8/12 per half-/full day), bikes (€7/11) and tandems (€16/25).

Sleeping

There are several camping grounds and a handful of *chambres d'hôtes* around the lake; the tourist office has details.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 04 50 45 33 19; anney@fuaj.org; 4 rte du Semnoz; dm €12; ☎ reception 8am-12.30pm & 1.30-10pm mid-Jan-Nov) Annecy's smart wood-clad hostel with picture windows and modern furnishings sits south of town in Forêt du Semnoz. Take bus No 6 to the 'Hôtel de Police' stop and walk 1km.

Hôtel du Château (☎ 04 50 45 27 66; www.annecy-hotel.com; 16 rampe du Château; s/d/tr/q €49/59/71/81) Just below the chateau, this hilltop hotel is hard to beat for its serene view over Annecy's lantern-lit lanes. Rooms are small, beige and have seen better days.

Auberge du Lyonnais (☎ 04 50 51 26 10; 9 rue de la République; s/d €55/70, with shared bathroom €40/50) This traditional nine-room hotel-restaurant is ideal for a quintessential taste of old Annecy (*menu* €28.50). Idyllically set astride the canal, the inn is old, quaint and as good for eating as sleeping.

Hôtel du Palais de l'Isle (☎ 04 50 45 86 87; www.hoteldupalaisdelisle.com; 13 rue Perrière; s/d from €62/76; ☎) Guests slumber in the heart of Vieille Ville action at this old 18th-century house where the crisp contemporary décor is an oasis of peace after the tourist mayhem outside.

Le Pré Carré (☎ 04 50 52 14 14; www.hotel-annecy.net; 27 rue Sommeiller; s/d €125/135; ☎) The contemporary interior of this modern four-star hotel makes a refreshing change from the older norm. Service is impeccable and the sauna is a dream.

Eating

In the Vieille Ville, the quays along both sides of Canal du Thiou are lined with cafés and restaurants. There are lots of cheap places along rue du Pâquier.

Chez Barnabé (☎ 04 50 45 90 62; 29 rue Sommeiller; mains €3.50; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat) Cartoons on the walls set the tone of this trendy and innovative quick-eat joint. Salads, hot dishes, fresh juices and homemade cookies are prepared on the premises.

Au Fidèle Berger (☎ 04 50 45 00 32; 2 rue Royale; ☎ 9.15am-7pm Tue-Fri, 9am-7.30pm Sat) This traditional tearoom and cake shop with a fantastic old-world feel is the spot for a sweet breakfast (€7.50), cakes and chocolates.

Aux Delices d'Enzo (☎ 04 50 45 35 36; 17 rue du Pâquier; mains €10; ☎ lunch & dinner) What you see is what you get at this typically French restaurant-bar where the menu is handwritten and the Italian pasta homemade.

Le Grenier du Père Jules (☎ 04 50 45 41 18; www.restaurant-chez-le-pere-jules.com; 11 rue Grenette; menu €11.50-21; ☎ lunch & dinner) Checked table cloths, mountain-dried sausages and a menu heaving with cheese-heavy Savoyard dishes are the order of the day at Father Jules' attic restaurant.

Les Écuries du Pré Carré (☎ 04 50 45 59 14; cour du Pré Carré, 10 rue Vaugelas; menus €14 & €19; ☎ lunch & dinner) The cuisine is almost as imaginative as the décor at the Stables – a mix of wood, '70s retro and glasses that don't match. Upstairs, the upmarket La Suite is evening only.

Brasserie des Européens (☎ 04 50 51 30 70; 23 rue Sommeiller; mains €15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) This popular brasserie with an authentic 1920s ambience is known for the mountains of mussels (€15.50 to €18.50) and seafood platters.

In the Vieille Ville, there is a **food market** (rue Faubourg Ste-Claire; ☎ 8am-noon Sun, Tue & Fri).

Getting There & Away

From Annecy's small **airport** (NCY; ☎ 04 50 27 30 06; 8 route Côte Merle) north of the city in Meythet, Air France operates daily flights to/from Paris' Orly Ouest (€220, 1½ hours).

From the **bus station** (Gare Routière Sud; rue de l'Industrie), adjoining the train station, the **Billetterie Crolard** (☎ 04 50 45 08 12; www.voyages-crolard.com; ☎ 7.15am-12.30pm & 1.45-7.30pm Mon-Sat, Sun in peak seasons) sells bus tickets to lakeside destinations including Menthon (€2.10, 20 minutes) and Talloires (€2.90, 30 minutes). It also runs up to five daily buses to/from Lyon-St-Exupéry airport (single/return €30/45).

Next door, **Autocars Frossard** (☎ 04 50 45 73 90; ☎ 7.45-11am & 2-7.15pm Mon-Fri, 7.45am-1pm Sat) sells tickets for Geneva (€10.30, 1¼ hours,

up to 12 daily) and a bus four times weekly to/from Nice (€66.50, 9¼ hours) via Grenoble (€16.60, two hours).

From the **train station** (place de la Gare), there are frequent trains to Chambéry (€8.20, 50 minutes), Lyon (€20.50, 2¼ hours) and Paris' Gare de Lyon (€109, 3¼ hours).

GRENOBLE

pop 156,000

Elegant Grenoble is the Alps' economic soul. Spectacularly sited in a broad valley surrounded by snow-capped mountains, it sits in the centre of the Dauphiné region. Shops thrive, boulevards are broad and architecturally fine, and a gregarious student population adds a big-city buzz to the air.

Orientation

The old city is centred around place Grenette and place Notre Dame, both 1km east of the train and bus stations. The main university campus is a couple of kilometres east of the old centre on the southern side of the Isère River.

Information

Arobise (☎ 04 76 19 08 49; 22 rue de la Poste; per 15/30/60min €1/1.50/2.50; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, 1-9pm Sun) Internet access.

Au 43 Viallet (43 rue Viallet; ☎ 7am-8pm) Laundrette.

Laverie Berriat (88 cours Berriat; ☎ 7am-8pm) Laundrette.

Neptune Internet (☎ 04 76 63 94 18; 2 rue de la Paix; per hr €2.50; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 1-8pm Sun) Internet access.

Post office (rue de la République) Next to the tourist office.

Tourist office (☎ 04 76 42 41 41; www.grenoble-isere.info; 14 rue de la République; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun, longer hr Jun-Aug) Inside the Maison du Tourisme. Sells maps and guides, arranges city tours.

Sights

Looming above the old city on the northern side of the Isère River, the grand 16th-century **Fort de la Bastille** is Grenoble's best known landmark. The views are spectacular, with vast mountains on every side and the grey waters of the Isère River below.

To get to the fort, hop into one of the pods of the **Téléphérique Grenoble Bastille** (☎ 04 76 44 33 65; quai Stéphane Jay; adult/student/under 5yr €4/3.50/free, adult/student return €6/5). Unsurprisingly, it gets crowded in summer – leave early to avoid the worst queues.

The sleek glass-and-steel exterior of Grenoble's boldest museum stands at the southern end of place Notre Dame. Also called Musée des Beaux-Arts, **Musée de Grenoble** (☎ 04 76 63 44 44; www.museedegrenoble.fr; 5 place de Lavallette; adult/student €5/2, free 1st Sun of month; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Wed-Mon) is renowned for its modern collection, including works by Chagall, Matisse, Modigliani, Monet, Picasso, Pissarro, Gauguin among others.

The **Musée Dauphinois** (☎ 04 76 85 19 01; www.musee-dauphinois.fr; in French; 30 rue Maurice Gignoux; admission free; ☎ 10am-7pm Wed-Mon Jun-Sep, to 6pm Oct-May) documents the cultures, crafts and traditions of Alpine life, including a fantastic exhibition devoted to the region's skiing history.

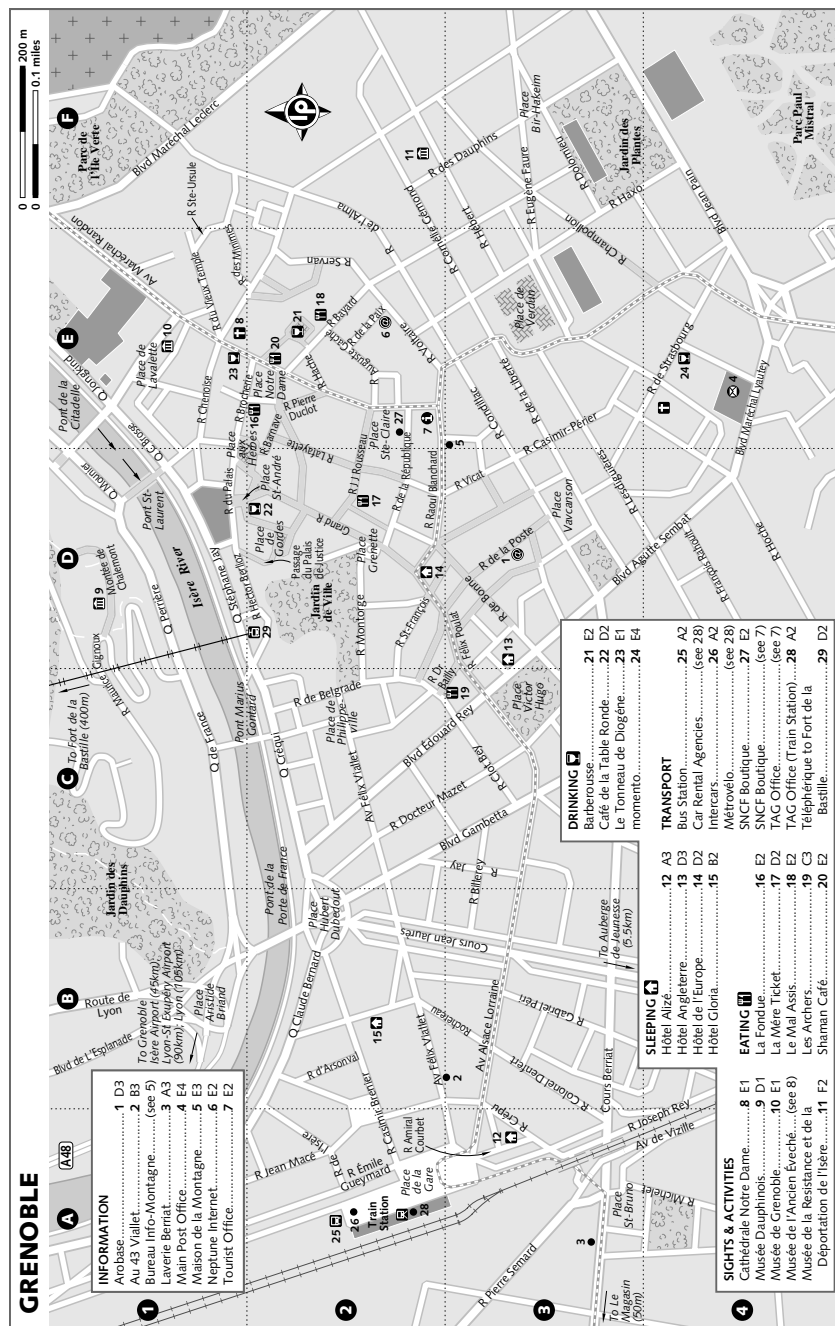
This moving **Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation de l'Isère** (Resistance & Deportation Museum; ☎ 04 76 42 38 53; www.resistance-en-isere.com; in French; 14 rue Hébert; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 1.30-6pm Tue, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun, 10am-7pm Mon & Wed-Sun, 1.30-7pm Tue Jul & Aug) examines the deportation of Jews and other 'undesirables' from Grenoble to Nazi camps during WWII, and explores the role of the Vercors region in the French Resistance.

Considered one of Europe's leading centres of contemporary art, **Le Magasin** (☎ 04 76 21 95 84; www.magasin-cnac.org; 155 cours Berriat; adult/student/under 10yr €3.50/2/free; ☎ 2-7pm Tue-Sun) is housed in a vast warehouse built by employees of Gustave Eiffel. There are two exhibition areas – a permanent 1000-sq-metre space with a huge glass roof called 'The Rue' and a flexible space of about 900 sq metres known as 'The Galleries'. Charles Saatchi would be green with envy.

On place Notre-Dame the imposing **Cathédrale Notre Dame** and adjoining 14th-century Bishops' Palace – home to Grenoble's bishops until 1908 – form the **Musée de l'Ancien Évêché** (☎ 04 76 03 15 25; www.ancien-veche-isere.com; in French; 2 rue Très Cloîtres; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Sat & Mon, 10am-7pm Sun).

Activities

For information on activities, the main outdoor organisations are in the **Maison de la Montagne** (☎ 08 25 82 55 88; 3 rue Raoul Blanchard; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat), including the **Bureau Info-Montagne** (☎ 04 76 42 45 90; www.grande-traversee-alpes.com; in French) which has information on hiking routes, *gîtes* (country accommodations) and *refuges*.



Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 04 76 09 33 52; grenoble@fuj.org; 10 av du Grésivaudan; B&B €12; ☎ reception 7.30am-11pm) Five kilometres south of the train station in the Echirolles district. From Cours Jean Jaurès, take bus 1 to the Quinzaine stop (look for the Casino supermarket).

Hôtel Alizé (☎ 04 76 43 12 91; www.hotelalize.com; 1 rue Amiral Courbet; s with hand basin €28, d with hand basin/shower & toilet €30/35/39, tr €47) The major drawcard of this simple one-star pad opposite the train station is its cheapness; book in advance to snag one of its 35 rooms.

Hôtel Gloria (☎ 04 76 46 12 93; hotelgloria@wanadoo.fr; 12 rue Aristide Berges; s/d €46/50) Gloria is a simple number, tucked down an appealing side street in the train station area. The hotel's heyday is long-gone, but it's still an atmospherically old-fashioned place to stay.

Hôtel de l'Europe (☎ 04 76 46 16 94; www.hotel-europe.fr; 22 place Grenette; s/d from €52/56, s with hand basin/shower €29/39) This late-17th-century Grenoble building on place Grenette is among the city's oldest hotels. The 45 comfortable rooms are fantastic value – the front ones have balconies with mountain views.

Hôtel Angleterre (☎ 04 76 87 37 21; www.hotel-angleterre-grenoble.com; 5 place Victor Hugo; d €98-170; ☎) Hotel England – the pick of several three-star hotels in the area – has a lovely outlook over tree-shaded place Victor Hugo. Rooms are luxurious, if a little small.

Eating

Les Archers (☎ 04 76 46 27 76; 2 rue Docteur Bailly; mains €10-15; ☎ 11am-2am Tue-Sat, to 1am Sun & Mon) This busy brasserie has a great outside terrace, cosy red leather banquette seating inside and a shellfish repertoire that's hard to beat.

Shaman Café (☎ 04 38 37 23 56; 1 place Notre Dame; menu from €11; ☎ 8am-midnight) Submerge yourself in oriental opulence at this cavernous restaurant-cum-bar with low lighting and a cuisine that flits between India, Japan, Morocco and Italy.

La Fondue (☎ 04 76 15 20 72; 5 rue Brocherie; fondue per person €12.50-22.50; ☎ dinner Mon, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Leave your waistline worries at the door at Grenoble's fondue hot spot, which offers more than 15 flavours of fondue as well as traditional *tartiflette* and *raclette*.

Le Mal Assis (☎ 04 76 54 75 93; 9 rue Bayard; mains €15; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) 'The Badly Seated' is a cosy upmarket restaurant favoured by a cultured crowd. Cuisine is very much old-school

bourgeois; think traditional mains and *gratin dauphinois* (potatoes in nutmeg-spiced cream).

La Mère Ticket (☎ 04 76 44 45 40; 13 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau; menus €18.50 & €24; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Traditional cooking is on offer at this endearingly old-fashioned French restaurant, with its checked table cloths, lace curtains and handwritten menu.

Drinking

Le Tonneau de Diogène (☎ 04 76 42 38 40; 6 place Notre Dame; menu from €8; ☎ 11.30am-midnight) Grenoble's best known philo-café is a cramped atmospheric place, decked out with polished wood, leather booths, tightly packed tables and an academic crowd.

Café de la Table Ronde (☎ 04 76 44 51 41; www.café-table ronde.com, in French; 7 place St-André; lunch/dinner menu €10/22; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Sat) This historic café from 1739 was a favoured haunt of Stendhal and Rousseau, and its old-world atmosphere has hardly changed since the 19th century. In summer its tables and chairs spill onto place St-André, the city's liveliest drinking square.

momento (☎ 04 76 26 21 59; 2 rue Beccaria; ☎) to 1am Sun-Wed, to 2am Thu-Sat) Steel and neon mingle with a well-dressed set at this lounge bar, where tapas whets appetites and DJs spin vinyl from 10.30pm.

Barberousse (☎ 04 76 57 14 53; www.barberousse.com, in French; 8 rue Hache; ☎ 6pm-2am Tue-Sat) There are 70-odd types of aromatic rum (cherry, apple and papaya etc) at this superbly hip shooter bar hidden down an alley.

Getting There & Away

AIR

A clutch of budget airlines, including Ryanair and easyJet, flies to/from **Grenoble-Isère airport** (GNR; ☎ 04 76 65 48 48; www.grenoble-airport.com), 45km northwest of Grenoble, from London, Bristol, Stockholm, Warsaw and Rome.

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 04 76 87 90 31; rue Émile Gueymard) is next to the train station. Bus companies including **VFD** (☎ 08 20 83 38 33; www.vfd.fr, in French) and **Transisère** (☎ 04 76 87 90 31; www.transisere.fr, in French) serve many Alpine destinations, including the Vercors ski stations.

Intercars (☎ 04 76 46 19 77; www.intercars.fr, in French; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Sat) handles international destinations.

TRAIN

From the **train station** (rue Émile Gueynard), next to the Gare Europole tram stop, trains run to/from Paris' Gare de Lyon (from €86, three hours), Chambéry (€9.50, one hour, 10 to 13 daily) and Lyon (€17.30, 1¼ hours, five daily). Train tickets are sold at the station and in town at the **SNCF boutique** (15 rue de la République; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Shuttle buses run by **Trans-Isère** (☎ 04 76 87 90 31) to/from Grenoble-Isère airport use the bus station (single/return €4/8, 45 minutes, four to eight daily).

BICYCLE

Métrovélo (☎ 08 20 22 38 38; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-7pm Sat & Sun), underneath the train station, rents out bikes for €1.20/3/5 per hour/half-day/full day.

BUS & TRAM

Grenoble's three pollution-free tram lines – called A, B and C – run through the heart of town. A bus and tram ticket costs €1.30 from drivers or the ticket machines at tram/bus stops. Time-stamp tickets in the blue machines at stops before boarding. *Carnets* of 10/20 tickets (€10.50/19.50) can be bought at the **TAG office** (☎ 04 76 20 66 66; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat) inside the tourist office or next to the train station. Trams run from 5am to midnight; buses stop between 6pm and 9pm.

CAR

All the major car-rental agencies are in the Europole complex underneath the train station.

THE JURA

The dark wooded hills and granite plateaus of the Jura Mountains stretch for 360km along the French–Swiss border from the Rhine to the Rhône. Part of the historic Franche-Comté region, the Jura is one of the least explored regions in France, which makes it a fine place to escape the Alpine crowds. If you're looking for a taste of traditional mountain life, the Jura makes a far better destination than the ruthlessly

modernised and tourist-orientated resorts elsewhere in the Alps.

The Jura – from a Gaulish word meaning 'forest' – is an important agricultural area, best known for its unique wines and cheeses. It is also France's premier cross-country skiing area and popular for its superb hiking and nature trails.

BESANÇON

pop 125,000

Old town, young heart: that's Besançon, capital of the Franche-Comté region. One of France's most liveable cities, Besançon boasts one of the country's largest foreign student populations and an innovative spirit that finds full expression in an old town humming with hip bars and bistros. Since the 18th century, Besançon has been a noted clock-making centre, and Victor Hugo and the film-pioneering Lumière brothers were all born on place Victor Hugo in the old town.

Orientation

The old city is enclosed by the curve of the Doubs River (Boucle du Doubs). The tourist office and train station sit just outside this loop. The Battant quarter straddles the northwest bank of the river around rue Battant. Grande Rue, the pedestrianised main street, slices through the old city from the river to the gates of the citadel.

Information

Blanc-Matic (14 rue de la Madeleine; ☎ 7am-8pm) Laundrette.

ID PC (28 rue de la République; per hr €3; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 2-7pm Tue-Sat) Computer shop with internet terminal.

Post office (23 rue Proudhon; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 03 81 80 92 55; www.besancon-tourisme.com; 2 place de la 1ère Armée Française; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-12.30pm Sun Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-12.30pm Sun Nov-Mar) Sells city maps and guides.

Sights

Built by Vauban for Louis XIV between 1688 and 1711, Besançon's **citadel** (☎ 03 81 87 83 33; www.citadelle.com; rue des Fusillés de la Résistance; adult/4-14yr €8/4.50; ☎ 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9am-6pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) is a steep 15-minute walk from **Porte Noire** (Black Gate; rue de la Convention), a triumphal arch left over from

the city's Roman days. Inside the citadel are three museums: the **Musée Comtois** zooms in on local traditions, the **Musée d'Histoire Naturelle** covers natural history, and the **Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation** examines the rise of Nazism and the French Resistance movement. There's also an animal park with an insect house, aquarium and small zoo.

Thought to be France's oldest museum, the **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (☎ 03 81 87 80 49; 1 place de la Révolution; adult/student €3/free; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon) has an impressive art collection and displays on Franche-Comté's long history of clock-making.

Housed in the 18th-century **Cathédrale St-Jean** (rue de la Convention; adult/under 18yr €2.50/free; ☎ 7 guided tours daily Wed-Mon Apr-Sep, Thu-Mon Oct-Mar), the city's incredible **Horloge Astronomique** (astronomical clock) has 30,000 moving parts and tells the time in 16 places, the tides in eight different ports, and the time of sunrise and sunset. It really has to be seen to be believed.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse Les Oiseaux (☎ 03 81 40 32 00; 48 rue des Cras; dm incl breakfast €20) The city's hostel is two kilometres east of the train station. Rates include breakfast and bedding; subsequent nights cost €2 less. Take bus 7 from the tourist office in the direction of Orchamps and get off at Les Oiseaux.

Hôtel du Nord (☎ 03 81 81 34 56; www.hotel-du-nord-besancon.com; 8 rue Moncey; s/d/tr from €35/38/48) This excellent-value hotel, strung with wrought-iron balconies and flower boxes, sits on a smart street in the old quarter. The pricier rooms have huge bathrooms.

Hôtel de Paris (☎ 03 81 81 36 56; www.hotel-deparis.com; 33 rue des Granges; d €50-64; ☎) The Paris prides itself on being the city's oldest hotel where a clutch of celebrities stayed, including Colette and George Sand in 1932. Skip breakfast in the hotel and head for the grand Brasserie du Commerce next door instead.

Hôtel Castan (☎ 03 81 65 02 00; www.hotelcastan.fr; 6 square Archéologique Castan; d €110-170; ☎) Monumental fireplaces, canopy beds, stags' heads and ornate grandfather clocks add a touch of period authenticity to Besançon's loveliest boutique hotel.

Eating

Au Gourmand (☎ 03 81 81 40 56; 5 rue Mégevand; menu from €9; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, lunch Sat) Going strong for 22 years, this legendary bistro

is loved by everyone – students, couples and old ladies alike. The house speciality is *les parmentières* (mashed potato bespeckled with various fillings).

Au Petit Polonais (☎ 03 81 81 23 67; 81 rue Granges; menu €11-14.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) One of Besançon's oldest restaurants, founded in 1870 by Polish émigrés, this place still pulls in the punters with its delicious cooked meats, fondues and sausages.

Apéro et dîatoire – apéritif and a light casual dinner – is what trendy **Mi:AM** (☎ 03 81 82 09 56; 8 rue Morand; mains €15; ☎ 11.30am-midnight Tue-Sun) is best at. Snag a seat on the busy buzzing street terrace if you can. The same set run **La Femme du Boulanger** (☎ 03 81 82 86 93; 6 rue Morand; salads €10; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat), a paradise for cake and tart lovers, next door.

Self-caterers can food shop at the **indoor market** (cnr rue Paris & rue Claude Goudimel) or **outdoor market** (place de la Révolution).

Drinking

Nightlife is concentrated in the old Battant quarter and around the river; Besançon's most happening street is rue Claude Pouillet (along with parallel quai Vauban).

La Crêmerie (☎ 03 81 83 55 00; 9 rue Claude Pouillet; ☎ 5pm-1am Tue-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) Hotshot venue on the city's buzziest street. Bars are constantly coming and going along this ramshackle strip, but the Dairy has long been strong.

Carpé Diem (☎ 03 81 83 11 18; 2 place Jean Gigoux) Drink, smoke and hang out with a student set at this small, rough-and-ready café-bar through which a decidedly bohemian air blows.

Les Passagers du Zinc (☎ 03 81 81 54 70; 5 rue de Vignier; ☎ 5pm-1am Tue-Fri, 5pm-2am Sat & Sun) A grungy bar and club that hosts tapas nights and live bands. Step through the bonnet of an old Citroën DS to reach the cellar.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (9 rue Proudhon), there are daily services to Orans and Pontarlier.

From **Besançon Gare Viotte**, 800m uphill from the city centre, there are trains to/from Paris' Gare de Lyon (€86, 2¼ hours, three daily), Dijon (€14.40, 50 minutes, 20 daily), Lyon (€24.10, 2¼ hours, seven daily) and local destinations. Buy tickets at the train station or from the **Boutique SNCF** (44 Grand Rue; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat) in town.

Getting Around

Borrow a bicycle to cruise around town – free with a valid bus ticket – from local bus company office, **Boutique Ginko** (☎ 08 25 00 22 44; www.ginkobus.com; 4 place du Huit Septembre; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Sat). Bus tickets cost €1.05/3.20/8.90 for a single ticket/day ticket/carnet of 10.

AROUND BESANÇON

Saline Royale

Envisaged by its designer, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, as the ‘ideal city’, the 18th-century **Saline Royale** (Royal Salt Works; ☎ 03 81 54 45 45; www.salineroyale.com; adult/16–25yr/6–15yr €7/4.50/3; ☎ 9am–7pm Jul–Aug, 9am–noon & 2–6pm Apr–Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am–noon & 2–5pm Nov–Mar) in **Arc-et-Senans** (pop 1400), 30km southwest of Besançon, is a showpiece of early Industrial Age town planning. Although his urban dream was never realised, Ledoux’ semicircular saltworks is now listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Regular trains link Besançon (€5.60, 35 minutes, up to 10 daily) and Arc-et-Senans.

Route Pasteur & Route du Vin

Nearly every town in the Jura seems has a street, square or garden (sometimes all three) named after Louis Pasteur, the great 19th-century chemist, born and raised in the Jura, who invented pasteurisation and developed the first rabies vaccine.

Pasteur grew up in **Arbois**, a rural community 35km east of Dole. His laboratory and workshops in Arbois are on display at **La Maison de Louis Pasteur** (☎ 03 84 66 11 72; 83 rue de Courcelles; adult/7–15yr €5.50/3; guided tours ☎ 9.45am, 10.45am, 11.45am & hourly 2–6pm Jun–Sep, hourly 2.15–5.15pm Apr, May & 1–15 Oct). The house is still decorated with its original 19th-century fixtures and fittings.

No visit to Arbois, Jura’s wine capital, would be complete without a glass of *vin jaune*. The history of this nutty ‘yellow wine’, matured for six years in oak casks, is told in the **Musée de la Vigne et du Vin** (☎ 03 84 66 26 14; museevignevin@wanadoo.fr; adult/child €3.50/2.50; ☎ 10am–noon & 2–6pm Wed–Mon Mar–Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am–12.30pm & 2–6pm Jul & Aug, 2–6pm Wed–Mon Nov–Feb).

The Arbois **tourist office** (☎ 03 84 66 55 50; www.arbois.com; rue de l’Hôtel de Ville; ☎ 9.30am–noon & 2–6pm Sep–Apr, 9am–12.30pm & 2–6.30pm May–Sep) has cycling information and a list of *caves* where you can try the local vintage.

Trains link Arbois and Besançon (€7.70, 45 minutes, eight to 10 daily).

PARC NATUREL RÉGIONAL DU HAUT-JURA

Experience the Jura at its rawest in the Parc Naturel Régional du Haut-Jura, an area of 757 sq km filled with glacial lakes, mountains and low-lying valleys.

Highlights include **Les Rousses** (pop 2850, elevation 1100m) the park’s main sports hub, both in winter (for skiing) and summer (for walking and mountain biking) and the incredible views from the **Telesiege Val Mijoux** (chairlift; return €6; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–6pm Jul & Aug), which travels from the ski resort of Mijoux all the way to Mont Rond (elevation 1533m). Even more stunning is the view from the **Col de la Faucille**, 20km south of Les Rousses.

The **Château de Voltaire** (☎ 04 50 40 53 21; allée du Château; ☎ Tue–Sat mid–May–mid–Sep) where the great writer lived from 1759 until his return to Paris and death in 1778, is also worth visiting. Guided tours take in the chateau, chapel and surrounding 7-hectare park.

Public transport in the park is almost non-existent, so you’ll need your own wheels.

PROVENCE

It’s impossible not to be swept up by the sights – and smells – of picture-perfect Provence. Whether wandering through the region’s lavender-filled fields or drinking in the spicy aromas of Marseille’s markets, you’ll discover Provence is an assault on the senses. With tiny hamlets, hilltop villages and brightly coloured fields, it made the ideal canvas for artists such as Cézanne and van Gogh, who both lived and worked here and made Provence the subject of some of their most famous paintings.

MARSEILLE

pop 807,071

The gritty, grimy and gloriously real city of Marseille is France’s oldest and largest after Paris. It’s far less genteel than its Provençal counterparts, but its rough-and-tumble edginess and litter-swirled streets have an irresistible pull. Pulsing to a sultry Mediterranean tempo, Marseille also beats the drum of neighbouring northern Africa. Its fusion of cultures is best experienced at its thronging street markets, where spice stands and Moroccan craft-shops sit side by side with stalls selling fish straight off the boats.

Orientation

The city’s main thoroughfare, *blvd La Canebière*, stretches eastwards from the Vieux Port (Old Port). The train station is north of *La Canebière* at the northern end of *blvd d’Athènes*. A few blocks south of *La Canebière* is the *cours Julien*, a large pedestrianised square. The ferry terminal is west of *place de la Joliette*, a few minutes’ walk north of the Nouvelle Cathédrale. Addresses below include *arrondissements* (1er being the most central).

Information

There are banks and exchange bureaus on *La Canebière* near the Vieux Port.

Canebière Change (39 *La Canebière*, 1er) Currency-exchange service.

Info Cafe (☎ 04 91 33 74 98; 1 *quai du Rive Neuve*, 1er; per 30min/1hr €2/3.50; ☎ 9am–10pm Mon–Sat, 2.30–7.30pm Sun) Internet access.

Laverie des Allées (15 *allées Léon Gambetta*, 1er; ☎ 8am–8pm) Laundrette.

Laverie Self-Service (5 *rue Justice Breteuil*, 1er) Laundrette.

Main post office (1 *place de l’Hôtel des Postes*, 1er) Offers currency exchange.

Tourist office (☎ 04 91 13 89 00; www.marseille-tourisme.com; 4 *La Canebière*, 1er; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun, mid–Jun–mid–Sep) Sells the Marseille City Pass (for one/two days €18/25), which includes access to the city’s museums, unlimited travel on public transport, a guided city tour and a boat trip to either *Île d’If* or *Îles du Frioul*.

Tourist office annexe (☎ 04 91 50 59 18; Gare St-Charles train station; ☎ 10am–1pm & 2–6pm Mon–Sat)

Dangers & Annoyances

Forget everything you may have heard about Marseille – it’s no more dangerous than many other French cities. In fact, its ingrained integration of cultures meant Marseille got off lightly during the riots that swept the country in 2005. But as with any big city, keep your wits about you, and don’t leave anything of value in a parked car, even in the boot. At night, take extra care in the Belsunce area, southwest of the train station.

Sights

MUSEUMS

The courtyard of the **Centre de la Vieille Charité** (Old Charity Cultural Centre; ☎ 04 91 14 58 80; 2 *rue de la Charité*, 2e; admission €3; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun Oct–May, 11am–6pm May–Sep) incorporates the **Musée**

d’Archéologie (☎ 04 91 14 58 80; admission €2) and **Musée des Arts Africains, Océaniques & Amérindiens** (Museum of African, Oceanic & American Indian Art; ☎ 04 91 14 58 38; admission €2), which has a diverse collection of primitive art, including masks from the Americas, Africa and the Pacific. A combined ticket to all the museums costs €4.

The **Musée d’Histoire de Marseille** (☎ 04 91 90 42 22; ground fl, Centre Bourse shopping centre, 1er; adult/child/under 12yr €2/1/free; ☎ noon–7pm Mon–Sat) offers an overview of the city’s history, including the remains of a 3rd-century vessel discovered in the Vieux Port in 1974.

BASILIQUE NOTRE DAME DE LA GARDE

Be blown away by the celestial views and knock-out 19th-century architecture at the hilltop **Basilique Notre Dame de la Garde** (☎ 04 91 13 40 80; admission free; ☎ basilica & crypt 7am–8pm May–Sep, 7am–10pm mid–Jun–mid–Aug, 7am–7pm Oct–Apr), the resplendent Romano-Byzantine basilica 1km south of the Vieux Port that dominates Marseille’s skyline. The domed basilica was built between 1853 and 1864 and is ornamented with coloured marble, murals and mosaics restored in 2006.

CHÂTEAU D’IF

Immortalised in Alexandre Dumas’ 1840s novel *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (The Count of Monte Cristo), the 16th-century fortress-turned-prison **Château d’If** (☎ 04 91 59 02 30; adult/student €5/3.50; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Mon–Sat Sep–Mar, 9.30am–6.30pm Jun–Aug) sits on a 30-sq-km island 3.5km west of the Vieux Port. Political prisoners of all persuasions were incarcerated here, including the revolutionary hero Mirabeau, and the Communards of 1871.

GACM (☎ 04 91 55 50 09, www.answeb.net/gacm; 1 *quai des Belges*, 1er) runs boats to the *Château d’If* at 9am, 10.30am, noon, 2pm, and 3.30pm (€9 return, 20 minutes).

Sleeping

Generally, the better hotels cluster around the old port (where budget options are pretty much nonexistent) and as you head east out of the centre along the *corniche*.

Auberge de Jeunesse de Bonneveine (☎ 04 91 17 63 30; fax 04 91 73 97 23; *impasse du Docteur Bonflis*, 8e; dm €15–16, d €34–36, both ind bedding & breakfast; ☎ Feb–Dec; ☎ ☐) A fair hike from the centre, this HI makes up for it with its proximity to the beach, and outdoor terrace and bar. Take bus 44 from the *Rond Point du Prado*

metro stop and get off at the place Bon-nefons stop.

Le Richelieu (☎ 04 91 31 01 92; www.lerichelieu-marseille.com; 52 corniche Président John F Kennedy, 7e; d €34-53) With a breezy, beach-house vibe and marine-themed rooms, this artists' haven is built onto the rocks next to the plage des Catalans.

Hôtel St-Louis (☎ 04 91 54 02 74; www.hotel-st-louis.com; 2 rue des Récollettes, 1er; d €45-47, tw €52, tr €63) This charmingly simple pied-à-terre is in the heart of Marseille's chic shopping district. Most rooms have towering ceilings, terracotta-tiled floors and charming balconies even Juliet would admire.

Hôtel Lutetia (☎ 04 91 50 81 78; www.hotelmarseille.com; 38 allées Léon Gambetta, 1er; s/d/tr from €55/60/69) Awaken to the cacophony of church bells ringing on Sunday mornings from Les Réformés, the distinctive twin-steeped church just up the street from the sweet, petite Hôtel Lutetia.

Hôtel Péron (☎ 04 91 31 01 41; www.hotel-peron.com; 119 corniche John F Kennedy, 7e; d €69.50-72.50, tw €78-97; ☎) The faded exterior of this authentic 1920s period piece conceals bedrooms with original Art Deco bathrooms and parquet floors. Many rooms are angled to accentuate the sea views, and all have balconies.

Hôtel du Palais (04 91 37 78 86; www.hotelmarseille.com; 26 rue Breteuil, 6e; d €80-100; ☎ ☎ ☎) For a stylish sleep, head south from the Vieux Port to this chic little place of 22 intimate rooms done out in designer shades, with chrome minibars, free wi-fi, a sleek red lobby, and cachet to spare.

Eating

African, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisines, along with Provençal specialities, are the mainstays of Marseille's restaurants. Marseille is also the place to try authentic bouillabaisse (fish stew) – check out the restaurants around the old port.

Chez Madie Les Galinettes (☎ 04 91 90 40 87; 138 quai du Port, 2e; mains €10-28; ☎) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, closed Sat lunch Jun-Aug) Decked out with pop art and mural panels, this portside place is top for bouillabaisse (€35). Order a day ahead if you're stopping by for lunch.

Le Souk (☎ 04 91 91 29 29; 98 quai du Port, 2e; menu €20-30; ☎) lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat Sep-Jun, lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Sun Jul & Aug) Try the authentic *tajine* amid Moroccan mosaic walls, iron furniture, and tiny candles.

Au Bord de l'Eau (☎ 04 91 72 68 04; 15 rue des Arapèdes, port de la Madrague Montredon, 8e; menu €25-30; ☎) daily Jul-Aug) This little harbourside restaurant is literally 'at the water's edge' of the Calanques, but the fantastic seafood is worth the trip. Catch bus No 83, then bus 19.

Lemongrass (☎ 04 91 33 97 65; 8 rue Fort-Notre-Dame, 1e; menu €30; ☎) closed Sun) Spice up your day (or night) at this refreshing fusion place. Lemongrass serves lush *menus* of Asian/French fare such as curried lobster and coconut rice pudding.

Chez Fonfon (☎ 04 91 52 14 38; 140 rue du Vallon des Auffes, 7e; mains around €40; ☎) closed Mon lunch & Sun) Another place famed for its bouillabaisse, with a lush list of local rosés and crisp Cassis white wines.

Stock up at **Marché des Capucins** (place des Capucins, 1er; ☎) Mon-Sat), one block north of La Canebière, or the **fruit and vegetable market** (cours Pierre Puget, 6e; ☎) Mon-Sat). The **fish market** (quai des Belges; ☎) 8am-1pm) is a daily fixture at the Vieux Port docks.

Drinking & Entertainment

Cultural events are covered in Wednesday's *L'Hebdo* (in French; €1) available around town. The website www.marseillebynight.com, in French, also has listings.

Options for a coffee or something stronger abound on and around the Vieux Port. Students and artists congregate at the alternative cafés and bars of cours Julien and its surrounding streets.

Le Bar de la Marine (☎ 04 91 54 95 42; 15 quai de Rive Neuve, 1er; ☎) 7am-1am) This Marseille institution draws drinkers from every walk of life.

Au Petit Nice (☎ 04 91 48 43 04; 28 place Jean Jaurès; ☎) 6am-2am) This cosy Brit boozier-type place is a local favourite.

Pelle Mêle (☎ 04 91 54 85 26; 8 place aux Huiles, 1er; ☎) 7pm-1am Mon-Sat) Jive to jazz at this lively bistro near the port. Bands start from 10pm.

L'Intermediaire (☎ 04 91 47 01 25; 39 cours Julien; ☎) 7pm-2am Mon-Sat) Groovers gather at this artsy place for new bands (from 10.30pm most nights).

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **Marseille-Provence airport** (MRS; ☎ 04 42 14 14 14), also known as the Marseille-Marignane airport, is 28km northwest of the city in Marignane. It's a Ryanair minihub and has flights across Europe.



BOAT

Marseille's **passenger ferry terminal** (gare maritime; ☎ 04 91 56 38 63; fax 04 91 56 38 70) is 250m south of place de la Joliette (2e).

The **Société Nationale Maritime Corse Méditerranée** (SNCM; ☎ 08 36 67 95 00; www.sncm.fr; 61 blvd des Dames, 2e; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon & 2-5.30pm Sat) links Marseille with Corsica, Sardinia and Tunisia.

BUS

The **bus station** (gare des autocars; ☎ 04 91 08 16 40; 3 place Victor Hugo, 3e) is 150m to the right as you exit the train station. Tickets are sold at ticket counters or on the bus.

Buses travel to Aix-en-Provence (€4.40, 35 minutes via the autoroute or one hour via the N8, every five to 10 minutes), Avignon (€17.20, two hours, one daily), Cannes (€23.50, two hours, four daily) and Nice (€25, 2¾ hours).

Eurolines (☎ 0892 289 9091, www.eurolines.com) and **Intercars** (☎ 04 91 50 08 66; fax 04 91 08 72 34) have adjacent offices in the bus station, and run buses to countries including Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Italy and the UK. There's a joint **office** (☎ 04 91 50 57 55; 3 allées Léon Gambetta, 1er) for these two firms near the Vieux Port.

TRAIN

Marseille's passenger train station, served by both metro lines, is Gare St-Charles. There's a **ticket office** (☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat; ticket purchases 4am-1am) and a **left-luggage office** (rates from €3.50; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) next to platform A. In town, tickets can be bought at the **SNCF Boutique** (9 rue Montgrand, 6e; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat).

From Marseille there are trains to pretty much anywhere in France including Paris' Gare de Lyon (€75.20, three hours, 17 daily), Nice (€26.40, 2½ hours, 21 daily), Avignon (€16.40, 30 minutes, 27 daily) and Lyon (€43.10, 3¾ hours, 16 daily).

Getting Around**TO/FROM THE AIRPORT**

Navette shuttle buses (☎ Marseille 04 91 50 59 34, airport 04 42 14 31 27) link Marseille-Provence airport with Marseille's train station (€8.50, one hour).

BUS & METRO

Marseille has two metro lines (Métro 1 and Métro 2) and an extensive bus network.

The metro and most buses run from 5am until 9pm. From 9.25pm to 12.30am, metro and tram routes are covered every 15 minutes by buses M1 and M2.

Bus/metro tickets (€1.60) can be used on metros and buses for one hour after they've been time-stamped. A pass for one/three days costs €4/9.50.

AIX-EN-PROVENCE

pop 137,067

A pocket of Parisian chic in Provence, it's hard to believe Aix-en-Provence is just 25km from chaotic Marseille. Aix (pronounced like the letter X) is all class: its plane-tree-shaded boulevards and public squares are littered with 17th- and 18th-century mansions and mossy fountains. The city has been a centre of culture since the Middle Ages (two of the town's most famous sons are painter Paul Cézanne and novelist Emile Zola) but for all its polish, it's still a laid-back Provençal town at heart.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 04 42 16 11 61; www.aixenprovence tourism.com; 2 place du Général de Gaulle; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sun)

Virtualis (☎ 04 42 26 02 30; 40 rue Cordeliers; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun) State-of-the-art internet café.

Sights

Art, culture, and architecture abound in Aix, and it's a perfect city to explore on foot. The graceful **cours Mirabeau** is the literal and spiritual heart of Aix, dotted by fashionable cafés, stone lions and elegant Renaissance *hôtels particuliers* along its southern side.

The **Musée Granet** (☎ 04 42 52 88 32; place St-Jean de Malte; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Mon) has reopened after a three-year renovation. Housed in a 17th-century priory, its collections include 16th- to 20th-century Italian, Flemish and French paintings and eight stunning Cézannes.

Cézanne fans can follow the **Circuit de Cézanne** (Cézanne Trail), marked on the footpath by bronze plaques with the letter C, which visits many of the painter's favourite hang-outs. On a hilltop 1.5km north of the tourist office, Cézanne's last **studio** (Atelier Paul Cézanne; ☎ 04 42 21 06 53; www.atelier-cezanne.com; 9 av Paul Cézanne; adult/student €5.50/2; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Oct-Mar, to 6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug) is preserved almost as he left it.

Sleeping

Camping Arc-en-Ciel (☎ 04 42 26 14 28; route de Nice; camp sites €17.50; ☎ Apr-Sep) This four-star campground is bordered by wooded hills and a busy motorway. Take bus 3 to Les Trois Sautets – it's 2km southeast of town.

Auberge de Jeunesse du Jas de Bouffan (☎ 04 42 20 15 99; fax 04 42 59 36 12; 3 av Marcel Pagnol; dm incl breakfast & sheets €16; ☎ 7am-1pm & 5pm-midnight, closed 20 Dec-9 Feb) Flash and cyclist-friendly, with a bar and tennis courts, this HI hostel is 2km west of the centre. Take bus 4 from La Rotonde to the Vasarely stop.

Hôtel Le Manoir (☎ 04 42 26 27 20; www.hotelmanoir.com; 8 rue d'Entrecasteux; d €57-85, tr €78-85; ☎ closed Jan; (P)) In a 14th-century cloister with its own leafy garden, Le Manoir has 40 antique-furnished rooms in a secluded but super-central wedge of the old town.

Hôtel Cardinal (☎ 04 42 38 32 30; fax 04 42 26 39 05; 24 rue Cardinale; s/d €58/68, self-catering ste €80) Beneath stratospheric ceilings, the romantic rooms are beautifully furnished with antiques, tasselled curtains and bathrooms.

Eating & Drinking

Aix excels for Provençal cuisine, and is also renowned for its colourful markets.

Charlotte (☎ 04 42 26 77 56; 32 rue des Bernardines; 2-/3-course menu €13/16; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Townspeople congregate like a big extended family at this bustling place, turning out delicious, simple home cooking from the open kitchen.

Le Zinc d'Hugo (☎ 04 42 27 69 69; 22 rue Lieutaud; mains €14-18; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This rustic French bistro boasts stone walls, wooden tables and a daily changing blackboard *menu*.

Les Deux Garçons (☎ 04 42 26 00 51; 53 cours Mirabeau) Aix' best café has been in business since 1792 and is still resplendent. Cézanne and Zola used to hang out here. Take a seat in its gilded salon or outdoor terrace and wait for your white-aproned waiter to arrive.

Trestle tables set up each morning for the produce market on place Richelme, displaying olives, goat's cheese, honey and lots of other Provençal products. Another **food market** (place des Prêcheurs) takes place on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday morning.

Aix' sweetest treat is calisson, a small, diamond-shaped delicacy made with ground almonds and fruit syrup. Traditional *calissonniers* include **Roy René** (☎ 04 42 26 67 86; www.calisson.com; 10 rue Clémenceau).

Getting There & Away

Aix' **bus station** (☎ information office 08 91 02 40 25; av de l'Europe) is a 10-minute walk southwest from La Rotonde. Buses run to Marseille (€4.40, 35 minutes, every 10 minutes Monday to Saturday, every 20 minutes on Sunday), Arles (€10, 1¾ hours, five daily), and Avignon (€13.90, one hour, six daily).

The tiny **train station** (☎ 5am-9.15pm Mon-Fri, 6am-9.15pm Sat & Sun, information office 9am-7pm) is at the southern end of av Victor Hugo. There are frequent services to Marseille (€6.20, 35 minutes, at least 18 daily), from where there are connections to just about everywhere.

Aix' bus station is linked to the TGV station (€3.90) and Aéroport Marseille-Provence (€7.90) by the half-hourly **Navette** (☎ 04 42 93 59 13).

AVIGNON

pop 88,312

Looped by 4.3km of stone ramparts, this graceful city is the belle of Provence's ball. Its turn as the papal seat of power has bestowed Avignon with a treasury of magnificent art and architecture, none grander than the massive Palais des Papes. Famous for its annual performing arts festival, Avignon is also renowned for its fabled bridge, the Pont St-Bénézet, aka the Pont d'Avignon.

Orientation

The café-clad central square place de l'Horloge is 300m south of place du Palais, which abuts the Palais des Papes. The city gate nearest the train station is Porte de la République, while the city gate next to Pont Édouard Daladier, which leads to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, is Porte de l'Oulle.

Information

Lavmatic (27 rue du Portail Magnanen; ☎ 7am-7.30pm) Laundrette.

Post office (cours Président Kennedy) Currency exchange and Cyberpost.

Tourist office (☎ 04 32 74 32 74; www.avignon-tourisme.com; 41 cours Jean Jaurès; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Jun & Aug-Oct, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun Nov-Mar, 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jul) Ask about the Avignon Passion museum pass, which entitles you to special discounts.

Webzone (☎ 04 32 76 29 47; 3 rue St Jean le Vieux; per 30/60min €2/3.50; ☎ 10am-10pm)

AVIGNON

To Tour Philippe-le-Bel (1.2km); Villeneuve-lès-Avignon (8km); Pont St-Vincent (2.1km)

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Sights

The **Pont St-Bénézet** (St Bénézet's Bridge; ☎ 04 90 27 51 16; full price/pass €4/3.30; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Jun, Oct & Nov, 9am-8pm Jul-Sep, 9.30am-5.45pm Nov-Mar, to 9pm theatre festival Jul) is a fabled 900m wooden bridge – the subject of a famous French nursery rhyme – and was completed in 1185, and repaired several times before all but four of its 22 spans were washed away in the mid-1600s. The best views of the bridge are from the Rocher des Doms or Pont Édouard Daladier, or across the river on the Île de la Barthelasse's promenade des Berges.

The **Palais des Papes** (Palace of the Popes; ☎ 04 90 27 50 00; place du Palais; full price/pass €9.50/7.50; ☎ 9am or 9.30am-6.30pm or 7pm Oct-Jun, 9am-8pm Jul-Sep, to 9pm theatre festival Jul) was built during the 14th century as a fortified palace for the papal court. It's the largest Gothic palace in the world, but its undecorated rooms are all but empty, except during occasional art exhibitions.

The **Musée du Petit Palais** (☎ 04 90 86 44 58; place du Palais; full price/pass €6/3; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Jun-Sep, 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Wed-Mon Oct-May) houses an outstanding collection of Italian religious paintings including works by Botticelli, Carpaccio and Giovanni di Paolo.

Museum buffs on a budget will appreciate the **Musée Lapidaire** (☎ 04 90 86 33 84; 27 rue de la République; full price/pass €2/1; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon), with a random but interesting collection of Egyptian, Roman, Etruscan and Early Christian pieces.

Avignon's encircling ramparts were built between 1359 and 1370, and restored during the 19th century, minus their original moats. The best views of the walled city are from the **Tour Philippe-le-Bel** (☎ 04 32 70 08 57; full price/pass €2/1; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm, closed Mon mid-Sep-mid-Jun), across the Rhône in the 13th-century town of Villeneuve-lès-Avignon.

Festivals & Events

More than 600 *spectacles* (performances) take to the stage and streets during the **Festival d'Avignon** (Bureau du Festival; ☎ 04 90 27 66 50; www.festival-avignon.com; Espace St-Louis, 20 rue du Portail Boquier), founded in 1946 and held annually from early July to early August. The fringe event, **Festival Off** (Avignon Public Off; ☎ 01 48 05 01 19; www.avignon-off.org), has an eclectic – and cheaper – programme of experimental performances.

Sleeping

You'll need to book months ahead for a room during the festival. Many places close for a few weeks midwinter.

Bagatelle (☎ 04 90 86 30 39; camping .bagatelle@wanadoo.fr; île de la Barthelasse; camp sites €9-15.50; ☎ reception 8am-9pm) A shady camping ground just north of Pont Édouard Daladier, 850m from the walled city.

Auberge Bagatelle (☎ 04 90 85 78 45; auberge .bagatelle@wanadoo.fr; île de la Barthelasse; dm €15, s €29-33, d €35-37) Adjoining the camping ground, this hostel has 180 beds in a mix of two- to eight-bed rooms, plus snazzier private digs in its adjoining hotel.

Hôtel Mignon (☎ 04 90 82 17 30; www.hotel-mignon.com; 12 rue Joseph Vermet; s €36, d €40-55; ☎ ☎) Cute and comfy, this 16-room place within the walled city is a favourite for its pastel rooms, helpful staff, and a decent breakfast of croissants and rolls (€5).

Hôtel Boquier (☎ 04 90 82 34 43; www.hotel-boquier.com; 6 rue du Portail Boquier; d €45-62) Handy for the train and bus stations, this 18th-century manor has rooms inspired by distant destinations such as southern Africa and India. A little wrought-iron gate opens to the wood-beamed café (for guests only; €7).

Hôtel de l'Horloge (☎ 04 90 16 42 00; www.hotels-ochre-azur.com; place de l'Horloge; s €72-122, d €82-132; ☎ ☎) On Avignon's main square, refined rooms are tastefully decorated in natural fabrics and fibres, with muslin curtains overlaid by stone-coloured checked linen drapes and lustrous chocolate-brown carpet.

Le Limas (☎ 04 90 14 67 19; www.le-limas-avignon.com; 51 rue du Limas; d €86-135, tr €139-165, all ind breakfast; ☎ ☎) Behind its discreet entrance 50m from the papal palace, this chic B&B in an 18th-century mansion is like something out of *Vogue Living*, with four white-on-white rooms with hardwood floors.

Eating

Place de l'Horloge is a riot of restaurants and cafés from Easter until mid-November.

Numéro 75 (☎ 04 90 27 16 00; 75 rue Guillaume Puy; mains from €10; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, daily during the festival) This place in a lovely old house (where Pernod was first concocted in 1870) is now one of Avignon's 'in' spots for Mediterranean cuisine, best savoured on the €15 'chef's suggestion' menu.

Restaurant Brunel (☎ 04 90 27 16 00; 46 rue de la Balance; mains €10-18; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat)

A local favourite for authentic Provençal food, especially at lunch, when the outside terrace is always packed.

La Fourchette (☎ 04 90 85 20 93; 17 rue Racine; menu from €28; ☹ Mon-Fri) An enduring classical French restaurant west of place de l'Horloge, La Fourchette has a fixed-price *menu* dotted with house specialities such as sardines and a sinful ice-cream meringue with praline.

More than 40 outlets fill Les Halles' **food market** (place Pie; ☹ 7am-1pm Tue-Sun). St-Tropez' famous cream-and-cake concoction, *tarte Tropézienne*, is best tasted at **La Tropézienne** (☎ 04 90 86 24 72; 22 rue St-Agricol; ☹ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat).

Getting There & Away

BUS

The **bus station** (halte routière; ☎ 04 90 82 07 35; blvd St-Roch; ☹ information window 10.15am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri) is in the basement of the building down the ramp to the right as you exit the train station.

Local services include Aix-en-Provence (€13.90, one hour), Arles (€7.10, 1½ hours), Marseille (€20, 35 minutes), Nice (€37) and Nîmes (€7.60, 1¼ hours). Most lines operate on Sunday at reduced frequency.

Long-haul bus companies **Linebus** (☎ 04 90 85 30 48) and **Eurolines** (☎ 04 90 85 27 60; www.eurolines.fr) have offices at the far end of the bus platforms.

TRAIN

The **main train station** (☹ information counters 9am-6.15pm Mon-Sat) is located across blvd St-Roch from Porte de la République. The TGV station is a few kilometres from town. A shuttle bus (€2, half-hourly from 5.30am to 10.50pm) links the TGV station to the bus stop outside the main post office.

There are trains to Arles (€5.70, 20 minutes, 14 to 18 daily); Marseille (€15.50, 40 minutes); Nice (€38.80, three hours); Nîmes (€7.40, 30 minutes, 15 daily); and, by TGV, Paris' Gare de Lyon (€67, 2½ hours) and Lyon (€29.60, one hour).

AROUND AVIGNON

Arles

pop 51,614

If the winding streets, stone squares, and colourful houses of Arles seem familiar, it's hardly surprising – the town featured in some of the most celebrated canvases by

Vincent van Gogh, who lived and worked here for much of his life in a yellow house on place Lamartine. Unfortunately the yellow house was destroyed during WWII, but you can still follow in Vincent's footsteps on the **Van Gogh Trail**, marked out by foot-path plaques and an accompanying brochure handed out by the **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 18 41 20; www.tourisme.ville-arles.fr; esplanade Charles de Gaulle; ☹ 9am-6.45pm Apr-Sep, to 4.45pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-Mar).

Contemporary artists, including the likes of David Hockney, Francis Bacon and Fernando Botero pay homage to van Gogh's distinctive painting style at the appropriately named **Fondation Vincent van Gogh** (☎ 04 90 49 94 04; 24bis Rond Point des Arènes; adult/student €7/5; ☹ 10am-7pm Jul-Sep, 10am-6pm Apr-Jun, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar).

Two millennia ago, Arles was the region's major port and a major Roman settlement. The town's 12,000-seat theatre and a 20,000-seat amphitheatre, known as the **Arènes** and the **Théâtre Antique**, are still standing – today they are still used for cultural events and bullfights.

The **bus station** (☎ information office 08 10 00 08 16; 24 blvd Georges Clemenceau; ☹ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Sat) is served by companies including **Telleschi** (☎ 04 42 28 40 22), which runs services to Aix-en-Provence (€9.80, 1¼ hours).

Arles' **train station** (☹ information office 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat) is just across from the bus station. Major rail destinations include Nice (€6.90, 30 minutes), Marseille (€12.20, 45 minutes) and Avignon (€6, 20 minutes).

CÔTE D'AZUR

The Côte d'Azur, otherwise known as the French Riviera, has been synonymous with chic elegance and lofty living for well over a century, however, its heyday was during the 1950s and '60s, when practically everyone who was anyone seemed to have upped sticks and bought a duplex apartment along its pebble-strewn shores. It's still a playground for the rich and beautiful, especially at stylish resorts such as Nice, Cannes, St-Tropez, and of course the epitome of extravagance, Monte Carlo – but less well-heeled visitors will find plenty to entertain them too.

NICE

pop 345,892

Naughty Nice is certainly one of the highlights of the French Riviera. Sun-seekers sip cocktails while reclining on the parasoled lounges lining its pebbled shores, children splash in azure seas and roller-bladers cruise the promenade des Anglais – but Nice is more than just a beacon for fun in the sun. You'll find some major art museums, the remains of a ruined Roman city and a glorious old town to discover, as well as some of the best restaurants, bars and markets on the Mediterranean. The city is a great base from which to explore the rest of the Côte d'Azur, with some great-value hotels and handy travel links to the rest of the Riviera.

Orientation

Avenue Jean Médecin runs south from near the Gare Nice Ville (the main train station) to place Masséna. You will find the modern city centre north and west of place Masséna. The bus station is located three blocks east. The promenade des Anglais follows the gently arced beachfront right from the city centre to the airport, which is 6km west. Vieux Nice (Old Nice) is delineated by blvd Jean Jaurès, quai des États-Unis and, towards the east, the hill known as Le Château.

Information

Barclays Bank (2 rue Alphonse Karr) There's a change counter here.

Cyberpoint (☎ 04 93 92 70 63; 10 av Félix Faure; per hr €4; ☹ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 3-9pm Sun) Organised internet cafe with English keyboards.

Le Change (☎ 04 93 88 56 80; 17 av Thiers; ☹ 7.30am-8pm) Currency exchange; opposite the Gare Nice Ville.

Main post office (23 av Thiers)

Main tourist office (☎ 0892 70 74 07; 5 promenade des Anglais; ☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) Right by the beach.

Nice Ferber tourist office annexe (☎ 04 93 83 32 64; promenade des Anglais; ☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) Towards town from the airport.

Post office (2 rue Louis Gassin) In Vieux Nice.

Taxi Lav rue Pertinax (22 rue Pertinax; ☹ 7am-9pm) Vieux Nice (13 rue du Pont Vieux; ☹ 7am-9pm) Laundrette.

Train station tourist office (☎ 08 92 35 35 35; av Thiers; ☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun Jun-Sep, 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun Oct-May)

Sights

VIEUX NICE

Go off-map in the old town's tangle of tiny 18th-century pedestrian passages and alleyways, where you'll find several historic churches including the baroque **Cathédrale Ste-Réparate** (place Rossetti) and the mid-18th-century **Chapelle de la Miséricorde**, next to place Pierre Gautier.

At the eastern end of quai des États-Unis, steep steps and a **cliffside lift** (€0.70; ☹ 10am-5.30pm Oct-Mar, 9am-7pm Apr, May & Sep, 9am-8pm Jun-Aug) climb to the **Parc du Château**, a beautiful hilltop park with great views over the old city and the beachfront. The chateau itself was razed by Louis XIV in 1706 and never rebuilt.

MUSEUMS

The excellent **Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain** (Marmac; ☎ 04 93 62 61 62; www.mamac-nice.org; av St-Jean Baptiste; adult/student €4/2.50; ☹ 10am-6pm) is worth a visit for its stunning architecture alone, but it also houses some fantastic avant-garde art from the 1960s to the present, including iconic pop art from Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol's 1965 *Campbell's Soup Can*.

The largest public collection of works by the Russian-born artist Marc Chagall is housed at the **Musée National Message Biblique Marc Chagall** (Marc Chagall Biblical Message Museum; ☎ 04 93 53 87 20; permanent collection adult/student €5.50/4, temporary exhibitions additional €1.50; ☹ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon Jul-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Jun), freshly renovated in 2006.

Heading northeast from the Chagall museum (about 2.5km from the city centre) brings you to the **Musée Matisse** (☎ 04 93 81 08 08; www.musee-matisse-nice.org; 164 av des Arènes de Cimiez; adult/student €4/2.50; ☹ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon), which contains a fantastic collection of exhibits and paintings spanning Matisse's entire career, including his famous paper cut-outs *Blue Nude IV* and mixed-media *Woman with Amphora*.

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL OF ST-NICOLAS

Crowned by six onion domes, the multi-coloured **Cathédrale Orthodoxe Russe St-Nicolas** (Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St-Nicolas; ☎ 04 93 96 88 02; av Nicolas II; ☹ 9am-noon & 2.30-6pm, closed Sun morning), was built between 1902 and 1912 in early-17th-century style, and is the largest

outside Russia. It's an easy 15-minute walk from Gare Nice Ville; shorts, miniskirts and sleeveless shirts are forbidden.

BEACHES

Free sections of beach alternate with 15 sun-lounge-lined **plages concédées** (private beaches; ☞ late Apr/early May-15 Sep), for which you have to pay by renting a chair (around €11 a day) or mattress (around €9).

On the beach, operators hire catamarans, paddleboats, sailboards and jet skis; you can also parasand, water-ski, or paraglide. There are outdoor showers on every beach, and indoor showers and toilets opposite 50 promenade des Anglais.

Tours

Trans Côte d'Azur (☎ 04 92 00 42 30; www.trans-cote-azur.com; quai Lunel) runs cruises in summer to the Îles de Lérins (adult/child €25/17), St-Tropez (adult/child €45/27) and Monaco (adult/child €20/15).

Festivals & Events

Flower-covered floats and impressive fireworks light up the city during the **Carnaval de Nice** (Nice Carnival; www.nicecarnaval.com) in mid-February. In mid-July, Nice swings to the week-long **Nice Jazz Festival** (www.nicejazzfest.com).

Sleeping

Nice has lots and lots of hotels, ranging from bargain-bucket to superchic. Sea-views and a beachfront location obviously come at a considerable surcharge – you'll find better value in the city centre, around the main train station, and along rue d'Angleterre, rue d'Alsace-Lorraine and av Durante.

BUDGET

Villa Saint-Exupéry (☎ 04 93 84 42 83; www.vsaaint.com; 22 av Gravier; dm €18-22, s €30, d €52 incl breakfast; ☞ ☞ ☞) In a lovely former monastery, this palatial independent hostel is fit for St-Exupéry's little prince, and worth the 3km trip from the city centre. Treats include a slate-and-steel kitchen, a barbecue terrace, a 24-hour common room/bar, and terrazzo-tiled, mostly en-suite dorms and rooms, some with magical views across Nice to the Mediterranean. Take bus 1, direction Saint Sylvestre, along av Jean Médecin to the Gravier stop and follow the steps up to the hostel.

Auberge de Jeunesse – Les Camèllias (☎ 04 93 62 15 54; www.fuaj.org; 3 rue Spitalieri; dm incl breakfast €20, bedding €3; ☞ ☞) Flash backpacking. The four- to eight-bed dorms (136 beds all-up) have space-age metallic bunks and in-room showers, and there's a self-catering kitchen. A funky citrus-coloured bar stays open to 11pm, and there's no curfew.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hôtel Wilson (☎ 04 93 85 47 79; www.hotel-wilson-nice.com; 39 rue de l'Hôtel des Postes; s/d/tr €45/50/60.50, with shared bathroom €27/33.50/43.50) Owner and multilingual *bon vivant* Jean-Marie Martinez lives in this rambling old apartment building and shares his dining table, books and classical music with his guests. Some rooms have small balconies.

Villa la Tour (☎ 04 93 80 08 15; www.villa-la-tour.com; 4 rue de la Tour; s €45-127, d €48-135, ☞) This intimate *chambre d'hôte*-style hotel in Nice's old town has organza curtains framing rustic rooms with fragrant Fragonard Perfumery soaps and quirky details such as bedside lamps designed like chic little paper shopping bags. There's also a petite rooftop patio.

Hôtel de la Buffa (☎ 04 93 88 77 35; www.hotel-buffa.com; 56 rue de la Buffa; d €48-73; ☞ ☞) Up a spiral staircase in a character-filled building, old-fashioned corridors with ornate cornices and baskets of dried and silk flowers open to 13 bright, airy, sun-washed rooms with lofty ceilings and angular bathrooms.

Hôtel Acanthe (☎ 04 93 62 22 44; www.hotel-acanthe-nice.cote.azur.fr; 2 rue Chauvain; d €57-61) Facing the fountains of Albert I gardens, this place is perfectly positioned for the beach and old town. Behind its peach-coloured curved façade, the pick are the four 'round' rooms, which have semicircular balconies.

Hôtel Lépante (☎ 04 93 62 20 55; www.hotel-lepante.com; 6 rue de Lépante; s €59-99, d €59-109; ☞) Renovated in a palette of Mediterranean colours, this homy, unpretentious hotel is housed in a landmark 1915 *belle époque* building. Two rooms have balconies just big enough for a tiny table and chairs.

Hôtel Armenonville (☎ 04 93 96 86 00; www.hotel-armenonville.com; 20 av des Fleurs; d €74-96, with shower or bath only €49-61; ☞) Graced by grand Grecian-style columns, this dove-white 1905 pavilion is secluded in gardens filled with citrus trees. A marble staircase leads to rooms in romantic hues such as rose and olive.

Villa Victoria (☎ 04 93 88 39 60; www.villa-victoria.com; 33 blvd Victor Hugo; s €75-155, d €90-170; ☞ ☞) How many inner-city hotels can boast their own botanic garden (complete with a fairy-lit gazebo overlooked by a marble breakfast room flanked by five sets of French doors)? This is one of the few.

Hôtel Hi (☎ 04 97 07 26 26; www.hi-hotel.net; s from €165, d €185-395; ☞ ☞) Imagine you're invited to stay with ultra-connected, urbanite friends in their techno-funky, futuristic pad designed in part by Philippe Starck; with a panoramic rooftop splash pool, and in-room surround-sound stereos programmed by DJ Laurent Garnier. The party vibe here means (for a price!), you are.

Eating

Niçoise nibbles include *socca* (a thin layer of chickpea flour and olive oil batter fried on a large griddle, served with pepper), niçoise salad, ratatouille and *farcis* (stuffed vegetables). Generally, you'll find the most authentic restaurants in the back streets of Vieux Nice.

Chez René Socca (☎ 04 93 92 05 73; 2 rue Miralhéti; dishes from €2; ☞ 9am-9pm, to 10.30pm Jul & Aug, closed Mon & Nov) The cheapest fare in town and it's good. Split into two sides (order food on one and drinks on the other), this is a great, casual place for tapas-style bites such as spiced fish cakes, washed down with local wine.

Fenocchio (☎ 04 93 80 72 52; 2 place Rossetti; ice creams from around €2.50; ☞ 9am-midnight Feb-Oct) The best ice cream in Nice, made on the premises in scores of unique flavours such as lavender and thyme.

Lou Pihla Leva (place Centrale; dishes from €3; ☞ 11am-10pm) Seated at wooden tables under an awning, this down-to-earth place is great for vegetarians, especially for *soupe au pistou* (soup of vegetables, noodles, beans, basil and garlic).

Nissa Socca (☎ 04 93 80 18 35; 5 rue Ste-Réparate; dishes from €6, menu €13; ☞ closed Sun & lunch Mon) Locals love this inexpensive *socca* joint in Nice's ambient old town, and it's a prime location for taste-testing authentic Niçoise cuisine.

La Table Alziari (☎ 04 93 80 34 03, 4 rue François Zanin, mains €8-14; ☞ noon-2pm & 7.30-10pm Tue-Sat) In the heart of old Nice, this tiny, traditional Provençal place has no *carte*, just a blackboard with a daily selection of seasonal dishes.

Zucca Magica (☎ 04 93 56 25 27; 4bis quai Papacino; lunch/dinner menu €18/22; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) The Italian-vegetarian 'magic pumpkin' is always packed full of regulars. Book ahead, and bring your appetite: lunch comprises four set dishes plus dessert (five for dinner), and depends on what turns up at the daily market.

Chanteder (☎ 04 93 16 64 00; 37 promenade des Anglais; most mains €30-70; ☞ closed Mon, Tue & Jan) Up there in the fame stakes, along with the historic hotel in which it's housed, is the Nègresco's crimson-coloured, Michelin-starred restaurant.

Pack the ultimate picnic hamper from cours Saleya's fruit and vegetable market, and pick up fresh-caught fish from the **fish market** (place St-François; ☞ 6am-1pm Tue-Sun).

Drinking & Entertainment

Vieux Nice's little streets are jammed with bars and cafés in which to sip a perfect *pastis* (a 90-proof anise-flavoured alcoholic drink).

Cave de la Tour (☎ 04 93 80 03 31; 3 rue de la Tour; ☞ 7am-7pm Tue-Sat, 7am-noon Sun) An utterly un-touristy old-town treasure that combines a wonderful wine shop and a café-bar. It also serves food for around €7.50 for a main meal.

La Banane (☎ 06 03 18 61 40; 6 rue de la Poissonnerie; dishes €3.50-9; ☞ 9am-9pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 9am-midnight Fri-Sun) This hidden little bolt-hole is a chic spot to grab a drink or a *croque banane*.

Le Bar des Oiseaux (☎ 04 93 80 27 33; 5 rue St-Vincent; ☞ noon-midnight Tue-Sat Jun-Aug, 6pm-12.30am Tue-Sat Sep-May) Artistic types flock to this bohemian bar (and adjoining theatre) for live jazz, blues and cabaret. There's a cover charge of about €5 when entertainment's on the bill.

Chez Wayne's (☎ 04 93 13 46 99; 15 rue de la Préfecture) A magnet for carousing locals and visitors alike, this raucous watering hole has live bands every night.

Les Trois Diables (☎ 04 93 92 93 37; 2 cours Saleya; ☞ 5pm-3.15am) The 'three devils' tempts a mainly local crowd with trip-hop, house and electro.

L'Odace (☎ 04 93 82 37 66; 29 rue Alphonse Karr; ☞ until late Thu-Sat Jul & Aug, Fri & Sat Sep-Jun) The vast industrial-style party temple formerly known as Le Grand Escorial is now even hipper after its relaunch.

NICE

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0 300 m
0 0.2 miles

0 200 m
0 0.1 miles

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

FRANCE

Getting There & Away

AIR

Nice's international airport, **Aéroport International Nice-Côte d'Azur** (NCE; ☎ 08 20 42 33 33; www.nice.aeroport.fr), is 6km west of the city centre and served by numerous carriers, including the cut-price **bmiBaby** (www.bmibaby.com), **DBA** (www.flydba.com) and **easyJet** (www.easyjet.com). Its two terminals are connected by a free shuttle bus (running at least every 10 minutes between 6am and 11pm).

BOAT

The fastest and least expensive ferries from mainland France to Corsica depart from Nice (see p310). The **SNCM office** (☎ 04 93 13 66 66; ferry terminal, quai du Commerce) and **Corsica Ferries** (☎ 08 25 09 50 95; www.corsicaferies.com; quai Lunel) sell tickets and provide timetables.

BUS

Buses stop at the **intercity bus station** (☎ 04 93 85 61 81; 5 blvd Jean Jaurès).

There are services until about 7.30pm daily to Antibes (1¼ hours), Cannes (1½ hours), Menton (1¼ hours) and Monaco (45 minutes). Single tickets cost €1.30.

For long-haul travel, **Intercars** (☎ 04 93 80 08 70), at the bus station, serves various European destinations; it also sells Eurolines tickets for buses to London, Brussels and Amsterdam.

TRAIN

Nice's main train station, **Gare Nice Ville** (av Thiers) is 1.2km north of the beach.

There are frequent services (up to 40 trains a day in each direction) to coastal towns including Antibes (€3.60, 25 minutes), Cannes (€5.50, 40 minutes), Menton (€4.10, 35 minutes) and Monaco (€3.10, 20 minutes).

Direct TGV trains link Nice with Paris' Gare de Lyon (€103.20, 5½ hours), with additional connecting services.

Getting Around

Ligne d'Azur (☎ 08 10 06 10 07; www.lignedazur.com; €4) runs two shuttle services to/from the airport – Route 99 to Gare Nice Ville, and Route 98 to the Gare Routière. Both stop at the two airport terminals, and run till around 9pm. A taxi to the centre of Nice costs €25 to €30.

Local buses are also handled by **Ligne d'Azur** (www.lignedazur.com). Fares cost €1.30/4/20 for a

single fare/day pass/17 rides. All tickets can be purchased on the bus. After you time-stamp your ticket, it's valid for one hour.

For car rental, try **Budget** (☎ 04 97 03 35 03; Gustave V 1bis av Gustave V; Aubert 38 av Aubert) and **JML** (☎ 04 93 16 07 00; fax 04 93 16 07 48; 34 av Aubert).

Holiday Bikes (☎ 04 93 16 01 62; 34 av Aubert; ☹ closed noon-2pm & Sun) rents out 50cc scooters (€26 a day), bicycles (€14 a day), and cars (€58 a day).

CANNES

pop 68,214

These days Cannes is synonymous with its International Film Festival, when the town bristles with film stars flashing shiny white teeth and studio execs permanently glued to their mobile phones. Though the festival lasts less than two weeks in May, the city basks in its aura for the rest of the year. Cannes' palatial hotels and chic boutiques along the blvd de la Croisette are very much geared up for well-heeled travellers, so unless you're arriving in your own personal chopper, you'll be better off staying elsewhere.

The **tourist office** (☎ 04 92 99 84 22; www.cannes.com; ☹ 9am-8pm daily Jul & Aug, to 7pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) is on the ground floor of the Palais des Festivals. There's an **annexe** (☎ 04 93 99 17 77; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) next to the train station.

Sights & Activities

The central, sandy **beaches** along blvd de la Croisette are sectioned off for hotel guests. A small strip of sand near the Palais des Festivals is free, but you'll find the best public beaches, **Plages du Midi** and **Plages de la Bocca**, stretching westwards from the Vieux Port along blvd Jean Hibert and blvd du Midi.

The **Musée de la Castre** (☎ 04 93 38 55 26; adult/concession €3/2; ☹ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Apr, May & Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Wed-Mon Oct-Mar) is memorable for its excellent ethnographic exhibits and stunning location in a medieval castle at the top of Cannes' old town.

The tranquil **Îles de Lérins** are just 20km offshore from Cannes, and make the perfect place to escape the crowds. The closest is the 3.25km-long **Île Ste-Marguerite**, where the enigmatic Man in the Iron Mask was incarcerated during the late 17th century. Smaller still, **Île St-Honorat** has been a monastery since the 5th century. Its Cistercian monk owners

welcome visitors to their community and seven small chapels.

Boats, operated by several companies, leave from quai des Îles on the western side of the harbour. **Compagnie Maritime Canoise** (CMC; ☎ 04 93 38 66 33) runs ferries to Île Ste-Marguerite (€11 return), while **Compagnie Estérel Chantédair** (☎ 04 93 39 11 82) operates boats to Île St-Honorat (€12 return), with skeleton schedules in winter. **Trans Côte d'Azur** (☎ 04 92 98 71 30; www.trans-cote-azur.com; quai St-Pierre) charges €10 for trips to/from Ste-Marguerite.

Sleeping

Hotel prices in Cannes fluctuate wildly according to the season, and soar during the film festival, when you'll need to book months in advance.

Parc Bellevue (☎ 04 93 47 28 97; www.parcbellevue.com; 67 av Maurice Chevalier, Cannes-La Bocca; camp sites per 2 adults, tent & car €24; ☹ Apr-Sep; ♿) Five-and-a-half kilometres west of the city, this is the closest camping ground to Cannes. The No 9 bus from the bus station on place Bernard Cornut Gentille stops 400m away.

Le Chalit (☎ 04 93 99 22 11; www.le-chalit.com; 27 av du Maréchal Galliéni; dm from €20, bedding €3) Just 300m northwest of the station, this independent hostel has a self-catering kitchen, wi-fi, and no curfew.

Le Chantédair (☎ /fax 04 93 39 68 88; 12 rue Forville; d from €50, with shower from €37; ☹ closed mid-Oct-early Jan) Right in the heart of the Le Suquet old town and just moments from the Forville Provençal market, this sweet, simple 15-room place has an enchanting courtyard garden, and is handy for the harbourside restaurants.

Hôtel Molière (☎ 04 93 38 16 16; www.hotel-moliere.com; 5 rue Molière; d from €80; ♿) This elaborately colonnaded pretty-in-pink period piece has restrained, subtle rooms. Most have balconies looking over the manicured gardens lined with conifers. Rates include a classic continental breakfast.

Hôtel Atlantis (☎ 04 93 39 18 72; www.cannes-hotel-atlantis.com; 4 rue de 24 Août; d from €80; ♿) This cheerful place offers outstanding bang for your buck. Top-notch amenities include a lift, guest spa and sauna, plus cheaper use of two different private beaches (€9).

Hôtel 3.14 (☎ 04 92 99 72 00; www.3-14hotel.com; 5 rue François Einesy; d from €120; ♿) Otherwise known as *trois-quatorze* (three-fourteen) or more often, Pi, this is the hottest design

choice in Cannes. Each individually perfumed floor is themed after an aspect of a continent such as North America's '70s psychedelia. Lounge around on the private beach or by the rooftop swimming pool.

Eating

La Tarterie (☎ 04 93 39 67 43; 33 rue Bivouac Napoléon; most dishes €3-9; ☹ 8.30am-4.30pm) Fashionistas and backpackers jostle for stellar salads and specialties such as *clafoutis* – a fruit tart baked in sweet batter.

Mantel (☎ 04 93 39 13 10; 22 rue St-Antoine; lunch menu €23, dinner menu €32-70; ☹ closed lunch & dinner Wed & Thu lunch) With a charming owner who may well also be your waiter, this cosy little gem of a restaurant dishes up gastronomic bliss. Don't miss Mantel's signature crepe suzette for dessert.

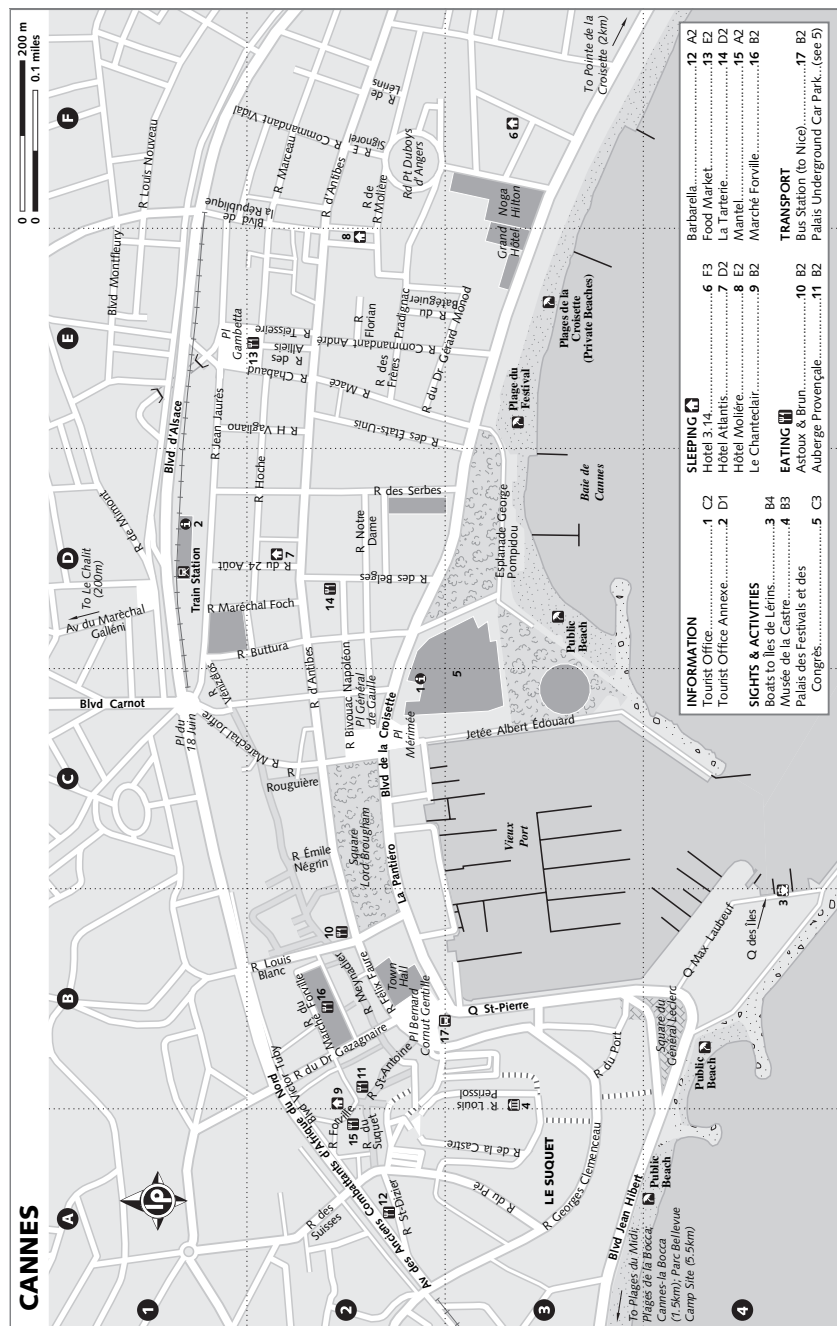
Barbarella (☎ 04 92 99 17 33; 16 rue St-Dizier; mains €23-38; ☹ 7-11.30pm Tue-Sun) At the top of the old town in a trompe l'œil-painted building with groovy, upbeat interiors, this camp place (named after the sci-fi '60s flick) does fusion food such as roasted duck fillet glazed in coffee sauce.

Auberge Provençale (☎ 04 92 99 27 17; 10 rue St-Antoine; mains €24-38; ☹ lunch & dinner) Established in 1860, Cannes' oldest restaurant is a time-honoured tradition for classic Provençal lunches accompanied by very fine bottles of wine.

Astoux & Brun (☎ 04 93 39 21 87; 21 rue Félix Faure; menu from €28; ☹ 10am-1am) If you're a seafood connoisseur, this world-renowned place needs no introduction. Oysters, scallops and mussels just don't come any fresher.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hôtel Negresco (☎ 04 93 16 64 00; www.hotel-negresco-nice.com; 37 promenade des Anglais; r €250-525; ♿) Built in 1912 and now a protected historical site, the pink-domed Negresco houses priceless art and architecture (including one of only three Hyacinthe Rigaud Louis XIV portraits – the others are in the Louvre and Versailles; and the Gustave Eiffel-designed stained-glass Salon Royale, bears a 1-tonne Bacarat crystal chandelier). Two hundred and fifty staff are on hand-and-foot to attend to your every whim, and there's even a private beach. High living.



The daily **food market** (place Gambetta; ☹ closed Mon Dec-Feb) is one of Cannes' main markets. **Marché Forville** (rue du Marché Forville) comes to life every morning except Monday (when a flea market takes its place).

Getting There & Away

Regular buses service Nice (€1.30, 1½ hours), Nice airport (€12.90, 40 minutes, hourly from 8am to 7pm) and other local destinations.

Trains run to Nice (€5.50, 30 minutes) and Marseille (€23.60, two hours), as well as St-Raphaël (€5.70, 30 minutes), from where you can get buses to St-Tropez and Toulon.

ST-TROPEZ

pop 5542

At the turn of the century St-Tropez was still a quaint fishing port favoured by a few artists, intellectuals and writers. But since the 1950s, when Brigitte Bardot shimmied along its streets in *Et Dieu Créa la Femme* (*And God Created Woman*), St-Tropez has been transformed into the high temple of Riviera chic, crammed with the kind of upmarket boutiques and designer restaurants that would put most Parisian boulevards to shame. St-Tropez is at its worst in high summer, when the streets are jammed with nose-to-trail traffic and red-faced sightseers, but visit off-season and you'll be able to glimpse a much quieter, prettier side to sexy St-Tropez.

Orientation

The beaches where A-listers lounge start about 4km southeast of the town. The village itself is at the tip of a petite peninsula on the southern side of the Bay of St-Tropez, across from the Massif des Maures. The old town sits snugly between quai Jean Jaurès (the main quay of the luxury yacht-packed Vieux Port), place des Lices (an elongated square a few blocks back from the port) and a lofty 16th-century citadel overlooking the town from the northeast edge.

Information

Kreatik Café (☎ 04 94 97 40 61; 19 av Gal Lerclerc; ☹ 10am-9pm, closed Mon Dec-Feb) State-of-the-art internet access.

Laverie du Port (quai de l'Épî; ☹ 7am-10pm) Close to the car park near the port.

Post office (place Celli) One block from the port.

Tourist office (☎ 04 94 97 45 21; www.ot-saint-tropez.com; quai Jean Jaurès; ☹ 9.30am-8.30pm Jul & Aug,

9.30am-12.30pm & 2-7pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Nov-Mar)

Sights & Activities

The **Musée de l'Annonciade** (☎ 04 94 97 04 01; place Grammont, Vieux Port; adult/student €4.50/2.50; ☹ 10am-noon & 3-7pm Wed-Mon Jun-Sep, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Oct-May, closed Nov) houses an impressive collection of works by Matisse, Bonnard, Dufy and especially Signac, who lived and worked in St-Tropez.

The best views of St-Tropez' bay are from the 17th-century **Citadelle de St-Tropez** (☎ 04 94 97 59 43; adult/concession €4/2.50; ☹ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5.30pm Oct-Mar) above the town.

The town's best beach is **Plage de Tahiti**, which morphs into the 5km-long **Plage de Pampelonne**. For a spot of full-body sunbathing, there are lots of *naturiste* (nudist) beaches around St-Tropez, including **La Moutte**, 4.5km east of town, and **Plage de l'Escalet** on the southern side of Cap Camarat. There's a bus to nearby Ramatuelle from St-Tropez, but you'll have to walk the 4km southeast to the beach.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel La Méditerranée (☎ 04 94 97 00 44; www.hotel-mediterranee.org; 21 blvd Louis Blanc; d €90-170; ☹) The kind of unpretentious, old-fashioned place you hoped still existed in St-Trop. La Méditerranée has 16 charming rooms and a courtyard restaurant beneath the trees (mains €16 to €20).

Hôtel Sube (☎ 04 94 97 30 04; www.hotel-sube.com; 15 quai Suffren; d €90-250; ☹ closed early Jan-early Feb; ☹) This nautically styled hotel is perched above the old port. Portside rooms cost more, but they are worth it for the view of the fabulous floating palaces pulled up out the front.

La Maison Blanche (☎ 04 94 97 52 66; www.hotel-lamaisonblanche.com; place des Lices; d €221-374; ☹ closed Feb; ☹) Behind a hedged courtyard, the nine white-on-white rooms are a statement in chic minimalism. There's an outdoor champagne bar in summer; breakfast is served in a marquee.

Sénéquier (☎ 04 94 97 00 90; cnr quai Jean Jaurès & place aux Herbes; dishes €5-12.50; ☹ 8am-2am Apr-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Mar) This quintessential St-Trop quai-side café is the place to splurge on stellar coffee, elaborate ice creams, and homemade nougat (€8 for 200gm).

Le Petit Charron (☎ 04 94 97 73 78; 5 rue Charrons; mains €18-22; 🍷 dinner Tue-Sat) Off place des Lices in a charming little lane, this traditional restaurant is certainly small, with a tiny dining room and itty-bitty terrace, but it's worth trying to sample its classical Provençal menus.

The place des Lices market is held on Tuesday and Saturday mornings. There's also a centuries-old **fish market** (🐟 to noon Tue-Sat) on place aux Herbes. There are four supermarkets in the village including **Prisunic** (9 av du Général Leclerc; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat).

Getting There & Away

St-Tropez **bus station** (av Général de Gaulle) is on the southwestern edge of town on the main road. There's an **information office** (☎ 04 94 54 62 36; 🕒 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) at the station. **Sodetrav** (☎ in Hyères 04 94 12 55 12) has eight buses daily from St-Raphaël-Valescure train station to St-Tropez bus station.

Trans Côte d'Azur (p306 and p311) runs boat trips from Nice and Cannes between Easter and September.

MENTON

pop 29,266

East of Monaco, the pastel-shaded, seaside town of Menton is within walking distance of the Italian border. Bordered by gardens and lemon groves it has a pretty beach and charming old town, and attracts fewer tourists than the rest of the Côte d'Azur. Menton's has the highest temperatures on the coast – it's not unusual for it to be snowing in Ventimiglia when the sun's shining here.

The **tourist office** (☎ 04 92 41 76 76; www.menton.fr; 8 av Boyer; 🕒 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Sat Sep-May) is inside the Palais de l'Europe.

The early-17th-century **Église St-Michel** (Church of St Michael; 🕒 10am-noon & 3-5.15pm, closed Sat morning), the grandest and possibly prettiest baroque church in this part of France, is perched in the centre of the Vieille Ville.

Since the 1930s, local citrus growers have congregated in Menton for the annual **Fête des Citrons** (Lemon Festival), which zings into action in February.

Sleeping

Camping Saint Michel (☎ 04 93 35 81 23; route des Ciappes de Castellar; camp sites per 2 adults, tent & car around €15; 🕒 1 Apr-15 Oct) Five hundred metres from the hostel.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 04 93 35 93 14; www.fuaj.org; Plateau St-Michel; dm €16, bedding €3; 🍷 reception 7am-10am & 5-10pm, closed Nov-Jan; (P) Menton's HI hostel is a 1.5km hike uphill from the train station; or take the (infrequent) bus 6 to the stop at Camping Saint Michel.

Hôtel Richelieu (☎ 04 93 35 74 71; www.hotelrichelieumonton.com; 26 rue Partouneau; s €39-48, d €49-89) Some of lofty-ceilinged rooms here have air-conditioning, and all have modernised bathrooms and floating floors. There's nearby public parking.

Hôtel des Arcades (☎ 04 93 35 70 62; fax 04 93 35 35 97; 41 av Félix Faure; s €40-61, d with hand basin €51-74) Fifty metres from the sea, this colonnaded ochre hotel with pale-blue shutters has basic but character-filled rooms with TVs and phones.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 04 93 28 43 27, information office 04 93 35 93 60) has links to Monaco (€2.20 return, 30 minutes) and Nice (€5.20 return, 1¼ hours). There are also buses to the Nice-Côte d'Azur airport (€16.40, 1½ hours) run by **Bus RCA** (☎ 04 93 85 64 44).

There are frequent trains to Monaco (€1.70, 10 minutes) and Nice (€5, 45 minutes).

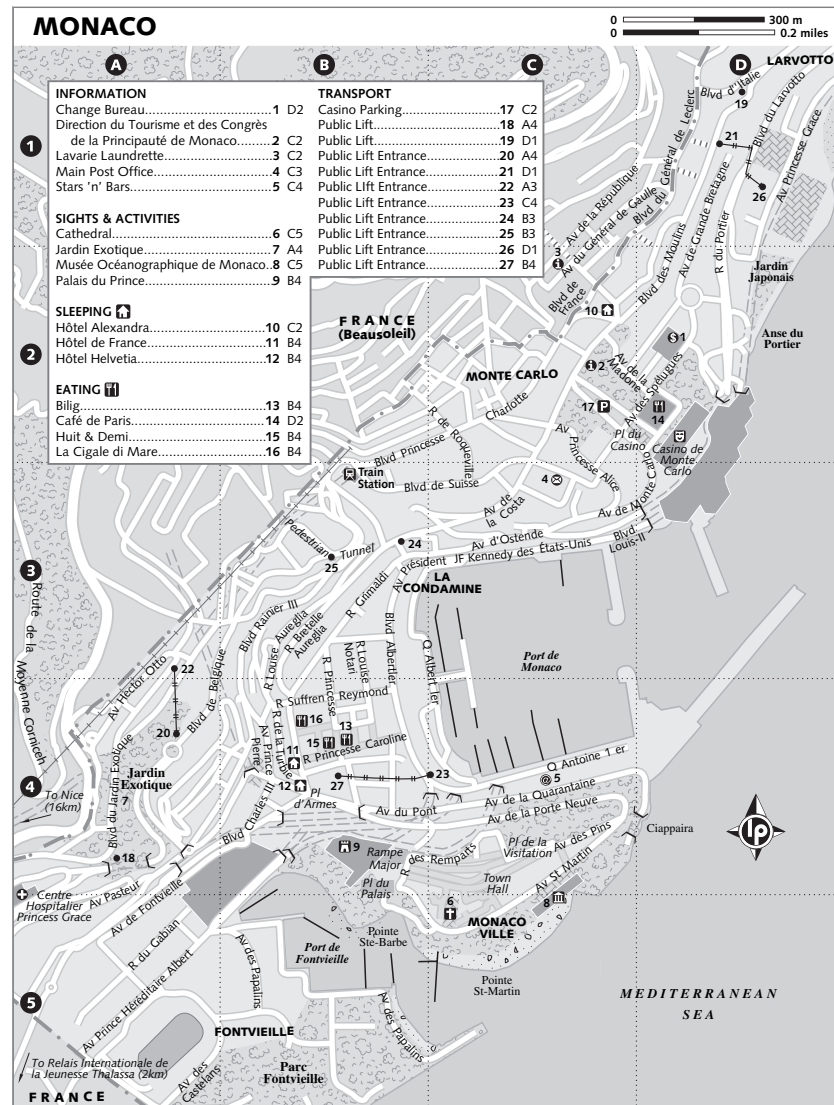
MONACO

pop 30,000

Squeezed into 1.95 sq km, making it the world's second-smallest country after the Vatican, this pint-sized principality is a sovereign state, with its own red-and-white flag, national holiday (19 November) and Monégasque dialect. Ruled by the Grimaldi family since 1297, Monaco's manicured streets are presided over by palaces, fountained parks and one of the world's highest concentrations of plain-clothes policemen and CCTV cameras.

Monaco is best-known for its casino, Formula 1 Grand Prix and high-rolling lifestyle. It's also notorious as a tax-free haven. Many of Europe's richest businessmen, celebrities and sportsmen have a part-time home here in order to dodge paying their dues to the taxman.

Recently Monaco mourned the loss of its beloved monarch, Prince Rainier (1923–2005), who was married to the Hollywood actress Grace Kelly (1929–82) in 1956, and ruled from 1949 until his death on 6 April



2005. Their son, Albert (b 1958) was enthroned on 19 November 2005.

ORIENTATION

Monaco is made up of six areas: Monaco Ville, with its narrow, fairy-tale streets leading to the Palais du Prince (Prince's Palace) on the southern side of the port; the capital,

Monte Carlo, north of the port; La Condamine, the flat area southwest of the port; Fontvieille, the industrial area southwest of Monaco Ville; Moneghetti, the hillside suburb west of La Condamine; and Larvotto, the beach area north of Monte Carlo, from where the French town of Beausoleil is just three streets uphill.

INFORMATION

Calls between Monaco and France are international calls. To call Monaco from France or elsewhere, dial ☎ 00 377; to phone France from Monaco, dial ☎ 00 33.

Monaco-imprinted euro coins are rarely spotted in circulation, and are quickly pocketed by collectors. There are (of course!) numerous banks near the casino.

Change Bureau (Jardins du Casino; ☎ 9am-7.30pm)

Direction du Tourisme et des Congrès de la Principauté de Monaco (☎ 92 16 61 16; www.monaco-tourisme.com; 2a blvd des Moulins; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun) From mid-June to late-September tourist information kiosks open around the harbour and the train station.

Laverie Laundrette (1 Escalier de la Riviera, Beausoleil; ☎ 7am-7pm) Near the border of Monaco and France.

Main post office (1 av Henri Dunant) In Monte Carlo, inside the Palais de la Scala. Monégasque stamps must be used to post mail in Monaco; rates are the same as France.

Stars 'n' Bars (☎ 93 50 95 95; www.starsnbars.com; 6 quai Antoine, 1er; per 15min €2; ☎ 11am-midnight) There's an internet corner and wi-fi inside this rockin' restaurant-bar.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The changing of the guard, enacted with comical solemnity every day at 11.55am sharp, takes place outside the **Palais du Prince** (☎ 93 25 18 31), at the southern end of rue des Remparts in Monaco Ville. You can also visit the **state apartments** (adult/child €4/2; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct, closed Nov-May) with a 10-language audioguide.

The 1910-built **Musée Océanographique de Monaco** (☎ 93 15 36 00; av St-Martin, Monaco Ville; adult/student €11/6; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, to 6.30pm Apr-Jun & Sep) houses one of the world's best aquariums, with coral, sharks and plenty of tropical fish. It's a hilly walk along the cliff from Monte Carlo; alternatively take bus 1 or 2.

Prince Rainier and Princess Grace are buried inside the 1875 Romanesque-Byzantine **Cathédrale de Monaco** (4 rue Colonel). Monaco's boys' choir, Les Petits Chanteurs de Monaco, sings Sunday Mass at 10am between September and June.

Flowering year-round, more than a thousand species of cacti and exotic plants tumble down the slopes of the **Jardin Exotique** (☎ 93 15 29 80; 62 blvd du Jardin Exotique; adult/student €7/3.50; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-May-mid-Sep, to 6pm mid-Sep-mid-May).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

As well as the much-hyped **Formula 1 Grand Prix**, which hits Monaco's streets in late May, there's also the **International Circus Festival of Monaco** (www.montecarlofestivals.com) held late January.

SLEEPING

Relais Internationale de la Jeunesse Thalassa (☎ 04 93 78 18 58; blvd de la Mer; dm €14; ☎ closed Nov-Mar) This is the closest hostel to Monaco, in a beautiful spot right by the sea on Cap d'Ail.

Hôtel de France (☎ 93 30 24 64; fax 92 16 13 34; 6 rue de la Turbie; s/d/tr €70/80/93) Your best bet for bargain accommodation in Monaco is this well-located place near the old city and the casino. Appealing rooms have cable TV, telephones and hairdryers.

Hôtel Helvetia (☎ 93 30 21 71; www.monte-carlo.mc/helvetia; 1bis rue Grimaldi; s €73-83, with shared bathroom €56-70, d €78-91, with shared bathroom €68-78) Overlooking the alfresco cafés of rue Princesse Caroline, the Helvetia's simple rooms have an old-fashioned charm.

Hôtel Alexandra (☎ 93 50 63 13; fax 92 16 06 48; 35 blvd Princesse Charlotte; s €95-115, d €120-150, tr €160-180; ☎) This turn-of-the-century hotel is the closest thing to a midrange place in Monaco. It's in a great Monte Carlo location near the train station, and its 56 rooms are spacious, comfy and modern.

EATING

Decent-priced restaurants congregate in La Condamine along place d'Armes and rue Caroline; you'll find sandwich bars along quai Albert, 1er.

Bilig (☎ 97 98 20 45; 11bis rue Princesse Caroline; mains €5-10.50; ☎ to 6pm Oct-Apr, to 10pm May-Sep, closed Sun) This small creperie has a cute wooden outdoor deck and cosy interior and serves superior savoury and sweet crepes.

La Cigale di Mare (☎ 97 77 14 64; 4 rue Baron de Ste-Suzanne; mains €9-20; ☎ noon-3pm & 7.30-11pm Mon-Fri) As unpretentious as it gets, this pink-tableclothed, family-run place specialises in scrumptious seafood/pasta combinations such as fusilli with baby octopus, or gnocchi with red mullet.

Huit & Demi (☎ 93 50 97 02; cnr rue Langlé & rue Princesse Caroline; mains €12-27; ☎ noon-3pm & 7-11pm, closed Sat lunch & Sun) Dine on tasty Italian dishes surrounded by crimson curtains and black-and-white posters of movie stars. The pavement terrace is prime when the weather's warm.

Café de Paris (☎ 92 16 20 20; place du Casino; mains €17-53; ☎ 7am-2am) Adjacent to the opulent Monte Carlo Casino, this is a fabulous spot for classy French fare, and for limo-spotting from the sprawling 300-seat terrace.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses to France leave from various stops around the city; the tourist office has schedules and maps.

A train trip along the coast offers mesmerising views of the Med. There are frequent trains to Nice (€3.10, 25 minutes) and Menton (€1.70, 10 minutes).

LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

Languedoc-Roussillon is really three separate regions rolled into one. Bas Languedoc (Lower Languedoc) is known for bullfighting, rugby and robust red wines and is home to all the major sights, including the Roman amphitheatre at Nîmes and the turret-topped town of Carcassonne. Inland is the mountainous region of Haut Languedoc (Upper Languedoc), while Roussillon sits beside the rugged Pyrenees and shares more than just a border with nearby Catalonia.

CARCASSONNE

pop 46,250

From afar, Carcassonne looks like some fairy-tale medieval city. Bathed in late-afternoon sunshine and highlighted by dark clouds, the old walled city (La Cité) is truly breathtaking. But with an estimated 3.5-million annual visitors, it can be a tourist hell in high summer – but even then you'll have to be fairly stone-hearted not to be moved.

Information

Main tourist office (☎ 04 68 10 24 30; www.carcassonne-tourisme.com; 28 rue de Verdun; ☎ 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun Sep-Jun)

Tourist office annexe (Porte Narbonnaise; ☎ year-round) In La Cité.

Sights

La Cité, enclosed by two rampart walls dotted with 52 stone towers, is one of Europe's largest city fortifications. But only the lower sections of the walls are original; the rest, including the anachronistic witches'-hat

roofs, were stuck on by Viollet-le-Duc in the 19th century. It's lit up in spectacular fashion after dark.

Entry to the 12th-century **Château Comtal** (adult/student/under 18 €6.50/4.50/free; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Mar) includes a 30-minute guided tour of both castle and ramparts.

Sleeping

Camping de la Cité (☎ 04 68 25 11 77; www.campeole.fr; camp sites €16-21.50, for walkers €9-11; ☎ mid-Mar-mid-Oct) A walking and cycling trail leads from the site to both La Cité and the Ville Basse. From mid-June to mid-September, bus 8 connects the camping ground with La Cité and the train station.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 04 68 25 23 16; carcassonne@fuaj.org; rue Vicomte Trencavel; B&B €16; ☎ Feb-mid-Dec) Carcassonne's cheery HI-affiliated hostel, in the heart of La Cité, has rooms sleeping four to six. It has a kitchen, snack bar, great outside terrace and an internet station, and rents bikes (per day €8).

Hôtel Astoria (☎ 04 68 25 31 38; www.astoria-carcassonne.com, in French; 18 rue Tourtel; d/tr/q €45/52/66; ☎ Mar-Jan; ☎) Rooms are fresh and pleasant, each with tiles or parquet, both at this midrange hotel and its agreeable annexe. Bathrooms are a bit pokey but it's very good value.

Hôtel du Pont Vieux (☎ 04 68 25 24 99; www.hoteldupontvieux.com, in French; 32 rue Trivaille; d €77-82; ☎ ☎ ☎) Bedrooms, most with a bathtub, have attractively rough-hewn walls. On the 3rd floor, rooms 18 and 19 have unsurpassed views of La Cité and there's a small terrace, accessible to all guests.

Eating

Restaurant des Musées (☎ 06 17 05 24 90; 17 rue du Grand Puits; menu €8.50-18) This simple, unpretentious place has three rear terraces with views of the ramparts. It bakes its own organic bread and offers excellent-value meals, including a couple of vegetarian menus (€9.50). No booze, but you can bring your own wine.

Au Bon Pasteur (☎ 04 68 25 49 63; 29 rue Armagnac; menu €15-28; ☎ closed Sun & Mon Jul & Aug, Sun & Wed Sep-Jun) At this intimate family restaurant, the simple wooden tables and chairs belie the sophistication of the cooking. Year-round, its *menu classique* (€15) and *formules de midi* (lunch specials; €10 to €11.50) both represent excellent value.

Restaurant Gil (☎ 04 68 47 85 23; 32 route Minervoise; menu €18-28, mains €9-18; ☎ Tue-Sat) Head downstairs, below street level, for quality, Catalan-influenced cuisine. A particular strength is its fresh seafood and grilled fish (€10 to €15).

There's a **covered market** (rue du Verdun; ☎ Mon-Sat) and an **open-air market** (place Carnot; ☎ Tue, Thu & Sat). **L'Art Gourmand** (13 rue St-Louis) sells scrummy chocolate and 33 types of ice cream.

Getting There & Away

Ryanair flies daily from London Stansted and Brussels Charleroi to Carcassonne's **airport** (CCF; ☎ 04 68 71 96 46), 5km from town. There are also flights to Dublin, Liverpool and UK East Midlands at least three times weekly.

Carcassonne is on the main train line to Toulouse (€12.70, 50 minutes, frequent).

NÎMES

pop 134,000

Plough your way through the traffic-clogged outskirts of Nîmes to reach its true heart, still beating where the Romans established their town over two millennia ago. Here, you will find some of France's best-preserved classical buildings, together with some stunning modern constructions. The city also boasts one of France's best-preserved Roman amphitheatres, but is perhaps most well-known for its contribution to world fashion – this is the original home of *serge de Nîmes*, nowadays more often called denim.

For information, drop in to the **tourist office** (☎ 04 66 58 38 00; www.ot-nimes.fr; 6 rue Auguste; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun Jul & Aug; 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm or 6pm Sun Sep-Jun).

Sights

A **combination ticket** (adult/child €9/7) admits you to Les Arènes, La Maison Carrée and Tour Magne.

LES ARÈNES

This superb Roman **amphitheatre** (adult/under 16yr/under 11yr €8/6/free with audioguide; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, to 5.30pm Mar-May, Oct & Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Feb), built around AD 100 to seat 24,000 spectators, is wonderfully preserved, even retaining its upper storey, unlike its counterpart in Arles.

MAISON CARRÉE

This well-preserved rectangular Roman temple, today called the **Maison Carrée** (Square House; adult/11-16yr/under 11yr €4.50/3.50/free; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, to 5.30pm Mar-May, Oct & Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) was built around AD 5 to honour Emperor Augustus' two adopted sons. It has survived the centuries as a medieval meeting hall, private residence, stable, church and, after the Revolution, archive.

The striking glass and steel building across the square, designed by the British architect Sir Norman Foster, is the **Carré d'Art** (Square of Art), housing the municipal library and **Musée d'Art Contemporain** (Contemporary Art Museum; place de la Maison Carrée; adult/11-16yr/under 11yr €5/3.50/free).

TOUR MAGNE

Nîmes' other Roman monuments enrich the elegant Jardins de la Fontaine (Fountain Gardens). A 15-minute uphill walk brings you to the crumbling 30m-high **Tour Magne** (adult/11-16yr/under 11yr €3/2.50/free; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, to 5.30pm Mar-May, Oct & Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Feb), the largest of a chain of towers that once punctuated the city's Roman ramparts. From here, there's a magnificent view of Nîmes and the surrounding countryside.

Festivals & Events

Nîmes becomes more Spanish than French during its *férias* (festivals). The five-day **Féria de Pentecôte** (Whitsuntide Festival) in June, and the three-day **Féria des Vendanges**, are both marked by daily *corridas* (bullfights). The **Bureau de Locations des Arènes** (☎ 04 66 02 80 90; 2 rue de la Violette) sells tickets.

Sleeping

Camping Domaine de la Bastide (☎ 04 66 62 05 82; www.camping-nimes.com; camp sites €13; ☎ year-round) is 4km south of town on the D13. Take bus D and get off at La Bastide, the terminus.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 04 66 68 03 20; www.hinimes.com; 257 chemin de l'Auberge de Jeunesse, la Cigale; dm €12, d/q €27.50/47) This hostel has everything from dorms to cute houses for two to six in its extensive grounds, 3.5km northwest of the train station. There's also bike hire (per day €14) and camping (per person €6). Take bus I, and get off at the Stade stop.

Hôtel Amphithéâtre (☎ 04 66 67 28 51; hotel-amphitheatre@wanadoo.fr; 4 rue des Arènes; s €34-39, d €44-61; ☎ Feb-Dec; ☎ ♿) The Amphithéâtre,

once a pair of 18th-century mansions, has 15 rooms decorated in warm, woody colours. Each is named after a writer or painter – the nicest are Montesquieu or Arrabal (€61), both large and with a balcony overlooking pedestrian place du Marché.

Hôtel Central (☎ 04 66 67 27 75; www.hotel-central.org; 2 place du Château; d/tr/q €45/55/65, r with shared bathroom €35; ♿) With its creaky floorboards and bunches of wild flowers painted on each bedroom door, this friendly hotel is full of character. Room 20, up on the top (5th) floor, has great rooftop views.

Royal Hôtel (☎ 04 66 58 28 27; rhotel@wanadoo.fr; 3 blvd Alphonse Daudet; s €45-65, d €60-85) New owners have preserved the raffishly bohemian atmosphere of this hotel, popular with visiting artistes. Some of the imaginatively furnished rooms overlook pedestrian place d'Assas, which can be noisy on summer nights.

Eating

Nîmes' gastronomy owes as much to Provence as it does to Languedoc. Spicy southern delights, such as *aïoli* and *rouille* (a spicy mayonnaise of olive oil, garlic and chilli peppers), are as abundant as cassoulet.

There are colourful Thursday markets in the old city in July and August. The covered food market is in rue Général Perrier.

La Truye qui Filhe (☎ 04 66 21 76 33; 9 rue Fresque; menu €9.50; ☎ noon-2pm Mon-Sat, closed Aug) Within the vaults of a restored 14th-century inn is the best bargain in Nîmes, blending a self-service format with a regional *menu*.

Côte Bleue (☎ 04 66 67 36 12; rue du Grand Couvent; menu €17, mains €9-13; ☎ Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Fri & Sat Oct-May) Decked out in blues and yellows, the Blue Coast is as attractive inside as out, and serves excellent, generous portions of Provençal cooking.

Getting There & Away

Nîmes' **airport** (FNI; ☎ 04 66 70 49 49), 10km south-east of the city, is served by Ryanair, which flies to/from London (Stansted and Luton), Liverpool and Nottingham East Midlands.

The **bus station** (☎ 04 66 29 52 00; rue Ste-Félicité) connects with the train station. Regional destinations include Pont du Gard (€6.20, 30 minutes, up to six daily).

There's an **SNCF sales office** (11 rue de l'Aspic). At least eight TGVs daily run to/from Paris' Gare de Lyon (€72.70 to €88.80, three hours). There are frequent services to Arles (€6.90,

30 minutes), Avignon (€7.70, 30 minutes) and Marseille (€17.20, 1¼ hours).

AROUND NÎMES

Pont du Gard

The Pont du Gard, a Unesco World Heritage Site, is an exceptionally well-preserved, three-tiered Roman aqueduct that was once part of a 50km-long system of canals built about 19 BC by the Romans to bring water from near Uzès to Nîmes. The scale is huge: the 35 arches of the 275m-long upper tier, running 50m above the Gard River, contain a watercourse designed to carry 20,000 cubic metres of water per day and the largest construction blocks weigh over five tonnes.

From car parks (€5) either side of the Gard River, you can walk along the road bridge, built in 1743 and running parallel to the aqueduct's lower tier. The best view of the Pont du Gard is from upstream, beside the river, where you can swim on hot days.

CORSICA

Corsica is separated from the rest of France by more than just the blue waters of the Mediterranean. This wild, proud and defiantly individual island has only been French for under 250 years, and would have remained an independent nation if the revolutionary Pascale Paoli had had his way. As it was, Corsica became part of France in 1769, but retains much of its island identity, with a distinctive language, culture and way of life. It's dotted with beautiful beaches, quaint fishing ports and mountain villages, as well as one of the country's most challenging walking routes (including the leg-shredding GR20) so it's packed to bursting in high summer.

Dangers & Annoyances

When Corsica makes headlines, it's often because nationalist militants have turned nasty (previous acts include bombings, bank robberies and the murder of the prefect). The violence isn't targeted at visitors and they need not worry about their safety.

BASTIA

pop 37,800

With its colourful jumble of tenement buildings and atmospheric old port, Bastia is like a miniature version of mainland Marseille: a

thriving, lively city that's not overprettified for tourists. Basking beneath the Mediterranean sun, the city's narrow streets are crowned by a crumbling 15th-century citadel.

Information

Cyber Space (☎ 04 95 30 70 83; 3 blvd Paoli; per 15min/1hr €13.80; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun)

Post office (av Maréchal Sébastiani; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 04 95 54 20 40; www.bastia-tourisme.com; place St-Nicolas; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat)

Sights & Activities

Bastia can be covered in a half-day stroll starting with **place St-Nicolas**, a vast seafront esplanade laid out in the 19th century. The square is lined with trees and cafés, and at the southern end, a bizarre statue of **Napoleon Bonaparte** depicted as a muscle-bound Roman emperor stands guard.

Between place St-Nicolas and the old port lies **Terra Vecchia**, a historic neighbourhood of old houses and tumbledown tenement blocks.

The **old port** is an atmospheric jumble of boats, restaurants and crumbling buildings, dominated by the twin towers of the **Église St-Jean-Baptiste**, which loom over the north side of the harbour.

Bastia's most historic quarter juts out above the old port. The **citadel** (Terra Nova), built by the Genoese between the 15th and 17th centuries to protect Bastia's harbour, can be reached by climbing the stairs through **Jardin Romieu**, the hillside park on the southern side of the harbour.

Sleeping

Camping San Damiano (☎ 04 95 33 68 02; www.campingsandamiano.com; camp sites per tent & vehicle €5-7, per person €5-7; ☎ Apr-Oct) Served by the airport bus, this is a pine-forested camping ground 5km south of Bastia; furnished bungalows are available.

Hôtel Posta Vecchia (☎ 04 95 32 32 38; www.hotel-postavechia.com; quai des Martyrs de la Libération; d €40-47, tr €70-95, q €80-105; ☎) The best option within walking distance of the old port, with bright décor and floating timber floors. An extra €10 buys sea views.

Hôtel Central (☎ 04 95 31 71 12; www.centralhotel.fr; 3 rue Miot; s €55-60, d €65-90, apt €85-105; ☎)

Charming (and central), the terracotta-tiled corridors of this old hotel lead to airy rooms with timber floors, checked curtains and pretty prints of sailing boats. The pick of the rooms have balconies overlooking a courtyard garden.

Hôtel Les Voyageurs (☎ 04 95 34 90 80; www.hotel-lesvoyageurs.com; 9 av Maréchal Sébastiani; s €63, d €73-83, tr €83-93; ☎) Bastia's best hotel, chicly decorated with Matisse prints, lemon walls, wrought-iron furniture and all-white bathrooms.

Eating

Cafés and restaurants line place St-Nicolas, the old port, quai des Martyrs and place de l'Hôtel de Ville.

A Casarella (☎ 04 95 32 02 32; rue du Dragon; mains €9-28; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Artistically decorated with contemporary paintings and navy tablecloths, this restaurant combines classical Corsican produce with imaginative cuisine.

Petite Marie (☎ 04 95 32 47 83; 2 rue des Zéphyr; mains €13-20; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Squeezed into a cross-vaulted room just back from the port, this little restaurant serves *plats du jour* of the freshest seafood imaginable, as well as exceptional paella.

Osteria U Tianu (☎ 04 95 31 36 67; 4 rue Rigo; menu €19; ☎ 7pm-2am Mon-Sat, closed Aug) For a memorable taste of Corsica – culturally as well as culinary – climb the narrow wooden stairs to this quarter-of-a-decade-old restaurant, lined with posters of Che Guevara, old banknotes and hunting rifles.

Pick up fresh supplies at the lively morning **food market** (place de l'Hôtel de Ville; ☎ Tue-Sun). The large **Spar supermarket** (rue César Campinchi) is the most convenient place for staples.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aéroport Bastia-Poretta (BIA; ☎ 04 95 54 54 54; www.bastia.aeroport.fr) is 24km south of the city. Buses (€8, seven to nine daily, fewer on Sunday) depart from outside the Préfecture building. The tourist office has schedules, and timetables are posted at the bus stop. A taxi to the airport costs around €30.

BOAT

The southern ferry terminal is at the eastern end of av François Pietri. The vehicle entrance is 600m north.

There's an **SNCM office** (☎ 04 95 54 66 81; www.sncm.com; ☎ 8-11.45am & 2-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) in the southern terminal. Tickets are sold two hours before departure in the Corsica Marittima section of the terminal building.

Moby Lines (☎ 04 95 34 84 94; www.mobylines.it; 4 rue du Commandant Luce de Casabianca) has a bureau in the ferry terminal, open two hours before each sailing.

The **Corsica Ferries office** (☎ 04 95 32 95 95; www.corsicaferries.com; 15bis rue Chanoine Leschi; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is across the road from the ferry terminal.

BUS

Bastia's buses leave from several locations around town. The tourist office can provide timetables and show you where to catch your bus.

Eurocorse (☎ 04 95 31 73 76) travels to Ajaccio (€20, three hours) via Corte (€11, two hours) twice daily except on Sundays.

Les Beaux Voyages (☎ 04 95 65 11 35) travels to Île Rousse and Calvi (€15, two hours) daily except Sunday. Buses leave from outside the train station.

Les Rapides Bleus (☎ 04 95 31 03 79; 1 av Maréchal Sébastiani) runs buses to Porto Vecchio (€20 plus €1 per item of baggage), with connections to Bonifacio and Sartène.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 04 95 32 80 61; av Maréchal Sébastiani; ☎ 6am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-8.30pm Sun) is beside the large roundabout on Square Mal Leclerc. Main destinations include Ajaccio (€20.70, four hours, four daily) via Corte, and Calvi (€15.70, three hours, three or four daily) via Île Rousse.

CALVI

pop 4800

There's a sliver of Mediterranean chic at Calvi, curving around a crescent-shaped bay, beneath the snowy peaks of Monte Cinto (2706m). Watching over the town, the citadel remains as a relic of the town's past as a strategic military outpost, with a huddle of 13th-century hilltop houses cosseted by 15th-century bastions.

In 1794, a British expeditionary fleet assisting Pasquale Paoli's Corsican nationalist forces besieged and bombarded the Genoese stronghold. In the course of the battle, Captain Horatio Nelson was wounded

by rock splinters and lost the use of his right eye.

Orientation & Information

The citadel – also known as the Haute Ville (Upper City) – sits on a rocky promontory northeast of the Basse Ville (Lower City). Boulevard Wilson, the major thoroughfare through town, is uphill from the marina.

The **main tourist office** (☎ 04 95 65 16 67; www.balagne-corsica.com; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30 & 2.30-6.30 Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Apr, May & Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) is opposite the marina.

Sights & Activities

Calvi's 15th-century **citadel** dominates the harbour skyline. The **Palais des Gouverneurs** (Governors' Palace; place d'Armes), once the seat of power for the Genoese administration, now serves as a base for the French Foreign Legion.

Uphill from Caserne Sampiero is the 13th-century **Église St-Jean Baptiste**, rebuilt in 1570.

Calvi's 4km of beach begins at the marina and stretches east around the Golfe de Calvi. Other good beaches are west of town, including **Algajola**.

Sleeping

Most of Calvi's hotels are closed in winter.

Camping Les Castors (☎ 04 95 65 13 30; www.castors.fr; route de Pietra Maggiore; camp sites per adult €8-9.50, tent €3-4, car €2.50-3.50; ☎ May-Sep; ☎) An 800m stroll southeast of town, this three-star camping ground rents studios and mobile homes from €290 per week.

Hôtel Le Belvedere (☎ 04 95 65 01 25; www.resa-hotels-calvi.com; place Christophe Colomb; d €45-115, tr €70-130; ☎) Both the standard and deluxe rooms at this pleasant two-star place have views over the sparkling blue Golfe de Calvi.

Hôtel Le Rocher (☎ 04 95 65 20 04; www.hotel-le-rocher.com; in French; blvd Wilson; d €70-170, mezzanine r €105-200; ☎ Apr-Sep; ☎) Elegant and well-equipped, this three-star hotel also has mezzanine family rooms sleeping up to four people, where crimson fabrics contrast with soothing neutral furnishings.

Eating

A Cantina (☎ 06 25 78 10 42; quai Landry; tapas dishes €3-7, plates €10; ☎ 7pm-2am Apr-Nov, plus lunch May-Sep) On a portside terrace this cantina serves 'Corsican tapas' and more than 150 Corsican wines.

U Minellu (☎ 04 95 65 05 52; Traverse à l'Église; menu from €14; ☞ daily Mar–Nov, Mon–Sat Dec–Feb) This is a delightful family restaurant that serves up Corsican dishes such as *brocciu* (cheese made from goat's or sheep's milk) cannelloni, Corsican pork, and chestnut and apple cake.

Île de Beauté (☎ 04 95 65 00 46; quai Landry; menu €20–50, mains €12–35; ☞ mid–Mar–Dec) Straight out of St-Tropez, with bright red chairs covering its waterfront terrace, this eminently stylish café specialises in fish and Corsican cuisine.

The **marché couvert** (covered market; ☞ 8am–noon Mon–Sat) is near Église Ste-Marie Majeure. **Annie Traiteur** (rue Clemenceau; ☞ Apr–Oct) sells Corsican products, or for general supplies there's the **Casino Supermarket** (av Christophe Colomb), and, next door, a **Super-U supermarket** (av Christophe Colomb).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Southeast of town (7km) is **Aéroport Calvi-Ste-Catherine** (CLY; ☎ 04 95 65 88 88; www.calvi.aeroport.fr), with flights to Nice, Marseille, Lyon and other French cities. **Taxis** (☎ 04 95 65 03 10) from the airport cost around €20.

BOAT

From Calvi there are express **NGV ferries** to Nice (2½ hours, five per week). SNCM tickets are handled by **Tramar** (☎ 04 95 65 01 38; quai Landry; ☞ 9am–noon & 2–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat). Tickets for Corsica Ferries are handled by **Les Beaux Voyages** (☎ 04 95 65 15 02; place de la Porteuse d'Eau).

BUSES

Buses to Bastia (€15, 2¼ hours) are run by **Les Beaux Voyages** (☎ 04 95 65 15 02; place de la Porteuse d'Eau).

TRAIN

Calvi's **train station** (☎ 04 95 65 00 61; ☞ until 7.30pm) is off av de la République. There are two departures daily to Ajaccio (€24.10), Bastia (€15.70) and the stations between.

From April to October, the single-car trains of CFC's **Tramway de la Balagne** make 19 stops along the coast between Calvi and Île Rousse (45 minutes). The line is divided into three sectors – you need one ticket for each sector. *Carnets* of six tickets (€8) are sold at stations.

LES CALANQUES

One of Corsica's most stunning natural sights is about 85km south of Calvi: Les Calanques de Piana (E Calanche in Corsican), a spectacular landscape of red granite cliffs and spiky outcrops, carved into bizarre shapes by the forces of wind, water and weather. Less rocky areas support pine and chestnut forests, whose green foliage contrasts dramatically with the technicoloured granite.

AJACCIO

pop 60,000

If you didn't already know that Napoleon Bonaparte was born in Ajaccio (pronounced Ajaxio) you will within a few minutes' of arriving here. With a glittering harbourfront, designer boutiques and fashionable restaurants, Corsica's cosmopolitan capital honours its famous son with street names, statues, and several stellar museums.

Orientation

Ajaccio's main street is *cours Napoléon*, stretching from *place de Gaulle* north to the train station and beyond. The old city is south of *place Foch*. The port is on the east side of town, from where a tree-lined promenade leads west along *plage St-François*.

Information

Absolut Game (☎ 04 95 21 56 60; av de Paris; per hr €3; ☞ 9am–2am) Internet café.

Lavomatique (rue Maréchal Ornano; ☞ 8am–10pm) Laundrette.

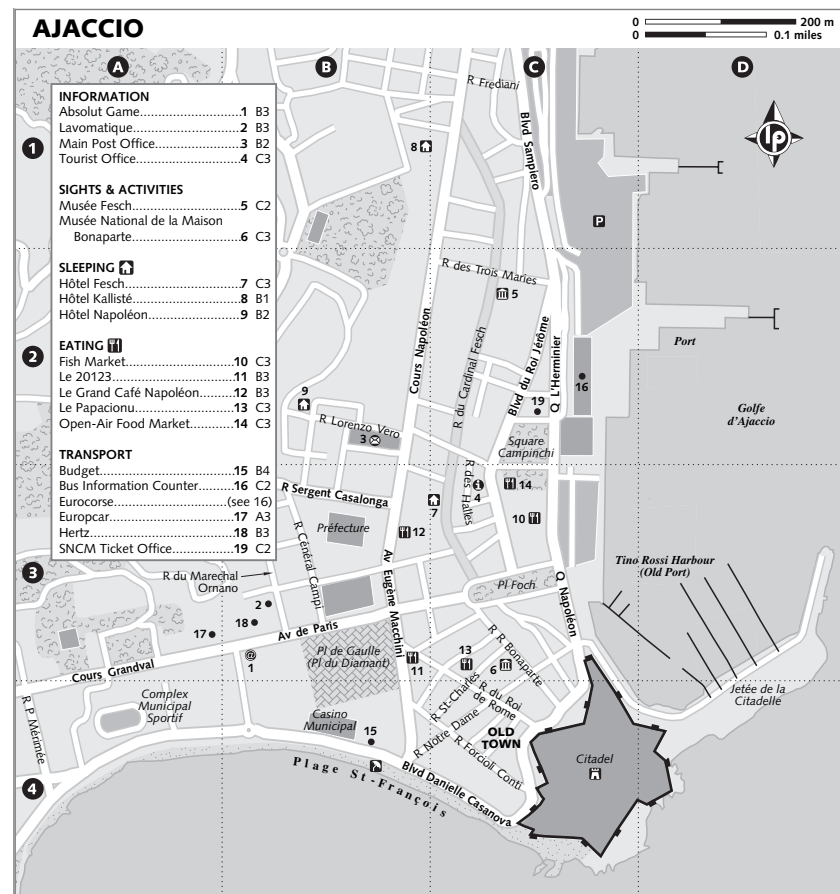
Main post office (13 *cours Napoléon*)

Tourist office (☎ 04 95 51 53 03; www.ajaccio-tourisme.com; 3 *blvd du Roi Jérôme*; ☞ 8am–7pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1pm Sun) Free internet.

Sights

You can't walk far in Ajaccio without stumbling across the Ajaccio-born boy who became Emperor of France. In fact, Napoleon spent little of his adult life in Corsica. After crowning himself Emperor of France in 1804, he never returned.

The saga begins at the **Musée National de la Maison Bonaparte** (☎ 04 95 21 43 89; rue St-Charles; adult/concession €5/3.50; ☞ 9am–11.30am & 2–5.30pm Tue–Sun, 2–5.50pm Mon Apr–Sep, 10–11.30am & 2–4.15pm Tue–Sun, 2–4.15pm Mon Oct–Mar), the grand building in the old city where Napoleon was born and spent the first nine years of his childhood.



Established by Napoleon's uncle, the exceptional **Musée Fesch** (☎ 04 95 21 48 17; 50–52 rue du Cardinal Fesch; adult/student €5.50/4; ☞ 2–6pm Mon, 9.30am–6pm Tue–Thu, 2–2.30pm Fri, 10.30am–6pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 9.30am–noon & 2–6pm Tue–Sun Apr–Jun & Sep, 9.30am–noon & 2–6pm Tue–Fri & Sun Oct–Mar) has the finest collection of 14th-to-19th-century Italian art outside the Louvre (mostly looted during Napoleon's foreign campaigns), including works by Titian, Botticelli, Raphael, Poussin and Bellini.

Sleeping

Hôtel Kallisté (☎ 04 95 51 34 45; www.hotel-kalliste-ajaccio.com, in French; 51 *cours Napoléon*; s €45–56, d €52–69, tw €58–76, tr €69–89; ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) With clean lines and 50 contemporary rooms, this stylish city

hotel – complete with a glass lift, terracotta-tiled floors and exposed brickwork – is a fantastic deal.

Hôtel Fesch (☎ 04 95 51 62 62; www.hotel-fesch.com; 7 rue du Cardinal Fesch; s €56–79, d €61–89; ☞ ☞ ☞) Presiding over one of Ajaccio's oldest pedestrianised streets, numerous shops and restaurants are at your doorstep at this grand, old-fashioned 77-room hotel.

Hôtel Napoléon (☎ 04 95 51 54 00; www.hotel-napoleon-ajaccio.com; 4 rue Lorenzo Vero; s €65–89, d €75–105; ☞ ☞ ☞) Just off *cours Napoléon*, rooms at this smart hotel aren't large, but they're tastefully decorated in cool neutral tones, and come with crisp white-tiled bathrooms and free wi-fi.

Eating

Le Papacionu (☎ 04 95 21 27 86; 16 rue St-Charles; mains €7.50-18, pizza €9-12; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat, closed Nov-Feb) Ajaccio's best pizza is served on bright pink, purple and cobalt-blue plates at this fabulous, funky little hole in the wall eatery.

Le 20123 (☎ 04 95 21 50 05; 2 rue du Roi de Rome; menu €26; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) This Corsican bistro started life in the village of Pila Canale (postcode 20123). When the owner upped sticks, he decided to re-create his old restaurant – village square, water-pump, washing lines and all.

Le Grand Café Napoléon (☎ 04 95 21 42 54; 10 cours Napoléon; menu €28-45, mains €23-30; ☎ Mon-Sat) This place is home to Ajaccio's grandest dining room, replete with soaring cream arches, black-and-white terrazzo floors and red tablecloths, and a much-loved streetside café.

Ajaccio's **open-air food market** (square Campinchi; ☎ to noon, closed Mon) fills the area with Corsican atmosphere every morning. The daily fish market is in the building behind the food market.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aéroport d'Ajaccio-Campo dell'Oro (AJA; ☎ 04 95 23 56 56) is 8km east of the city centre. Transports Corse d'Ajaccio (TCA) bus 8 links the airport with Ajaccio's train and bus stations (€4.50).

BOAT

Boats depart from the combined bus and ferry **Terminal Maritime et Routier** (quai l'Herminier). The **SNCM ticket office** (☎ 04 95 29 66 99; 3 quai l'Herminier; ☎ 8am-8pm Tue-Fri, to 6pm Mon, to 1pm Sat) is across the street. Inside the terminal, the SNCM bureau sells tickets a few hours before departure for evening ferries.

BUS

Bus companies operate from Terminal Maritime et Routier on quai l'Herminier. Most have ticket kiosks on the right as you enter the station.

Eurocorse (☎ 04 95 21 06 30) travels to Bastia (€18, three hours, two daily), Bonifacio (€19.50, four hours, two or three daily) and Calvi (€19.85, change at Ponte Leccia). Services run daily except Sundays.

CAR

The main car-rental companies also have airport bureaus.

Budget (☎ 04 95 21 17 18; 1 blvd Lantivy)

Europcar (☎ 04 95 21 05 49; 16 cours Grandval)

Hertz (☎ 04 95 21 70 94; 8 cours Grandval)

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 04 95 23 11 03; place de la Gare) operates services to Bastia (€20.70, four hours, three to four daily), Corte (€11, two hours, three to four daily) and Calvi (€24.10, five hours, two daily; change at Ponte Leccia).

BONIFACIO

pop 2700

The most vivid view of Bonifacio is from aboard a boat in the sapphire-blue Bouches de Bonifacio (Strait of Bonifacio). This stunning 12km strait channels between Corsica's southernmost tip and the Italian island of Sardinia. From the water, the tall, sun-bleached buildings of Bonifacio's citadel appear to morph seamlessly into the serrated white limestone cliffs rising up from the sea. Within the clifftop citadel is a charming maze of alleyways with a distinct medieval feel.

The **tourist office** (☎ 04 95 73 11 88; www.bonifacio.fr; 2 rue Fred Scamaroni; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, to 7pm May, Jun & Sep, to noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) is in the Haute Ville.

Sights

The steps linking rue St-Érasme with Porte de Gènes are known as Montée Rastello then become Montée St-Roch further up. At the top of Montée St-Roch you will find the **Porte de Gènes**. Just inside the gateway, you can stroll through the **Bastion Memorial** (admission €2.50; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Apr-Sep), which features permanent exhibits on Bonifacio's history.

Along the ramparts, fabulous panoramic views unfold from **place du Marché** and **place Manichella**.

Crisscrossed by meandering alleyways lined with tall stone houses, the old city has a distinctly medieval feel. **Rue des Deux Empereurs** is so named because Charles V and Napoleon once slept in the houses at Nos 4 and 7. **Église Ste-Marie Majeure**, a 14th-century Romanesque church, is known for its loggia (roofed porch).

From the citadel, the **Escalier du Roi d'Aragon** (Staircase of the King of Aragon; admission €2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-May & Sep-Oct, daily Jul & Aug) leads down the cliff.

Sleeping

Camping L'Araguina (☎ 04 95 73 02 96; av Sylvère Bohn; camp sites from €13.50; ☎ Mar-Oct) Near the Hôtel des Étrangers, shaded by olive trees and only a short walk into town.

Hôtel des Étrangers (☎ 04 95 73 01 09; hoteldesetrangers.ifrance.com; av Sylvère Bohn; d €37-74; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎) Bonifacio's best deal is just 300m outside town, a rambling hotel with 30 light, airy, old-fashioned soundproofed rooms with cable TVs.

Hotel du Roy d'Aragon (☎ 04 95 73 03 99; www.royaragon.com; 13 quai Jérôme Comparetti; d €49-145, ste €127-197; ☎) The pick of places to stay on the crowded quay. This sophisticated three-star place has minimalist rooms furnished in blond wood; higher-priced rooms come with port views and balconies.

Eating

L'Archivolto (☎ 04 95 73 17 58; rue de l'Archivolto; plats du jour €7-14; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat mid-Mar-Oct) Specialities such as chicken in Pietra beer and a fresh herb tart with *brocciu* are long-standing favourites at this wonderfully quirky restaurant-cum-antique shop in the citadel.

Cantina Doria (☎ 04 95 73 50 49; 27 rue Doria; menu €12-15; ☎ Apr-Oct) Sit with locals on wooden benches, surrounded by copper pots, photos and rusty signs, for classic *soupe Corse* and *gâteau à la châtaigne* (chestnut cake).

U Castille (☎ 04 95 73 04 99; rue Simon Varsi; mains €13-23, pizzas €7.50-11.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat Nov-Feb, daily Mar-Oct) Four separate dining premises run by the same family, but the Corsican menu, wood-fired pizzas and excellent wine list is interchangeable among all.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Bonifacio's airport, **Aéroport de Figari** (FSC; ☎ 04 95 71 10 10), is 21km north of town. An airport bus runs from the town centre in July and August (€7 to €8).

BOAT

In summer, ferries to Santa Teresa in Sardinia are operated by **Saremar** (☎ 04 95 73 00 96; www.saremar.it, in Italian) and **Moby Lines** (☎ 04 95 73 00 29; www.mobylines.it) from Bonifacio's ferry

port (50 minutes, two to seven daily). Fares start from €8 one-way, plus taxes (around €6.20 one-way).

BUS

Eurocorse (☎ Porto Vecchio 04 95 70 13 83) runs two buses to Ajaccio (€19.50, four hours) via Sartène from Monday to Saturday. For Bastia, change at Porto Vecchio (€6.50, 45 minutes, two to four buses daily).

FRANCE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is listed in this chapter in order of price. Generally you'll be able to find a budget room for under €40 (€50 in Paris). Most are equipped with a hand basin but have communal baths and showers.

Hotels listed under 'midrange' are usually €40 to €100 for a double (up to €150 in Paris) and have en-suite bathroom facilities. Top-end accommodation will cost more than €100 (€150 in the capital). Prices for midrange and top-end accommodation include private bathroom unless stated. Prices given are for the high season.

During periods of heavy domestic or foreign tourism, popular destinations are packed out – particularly in July and August, when the French tend to take their summer holidays. Tourist offices will often reserve rooms (generally for a fee).

Camping & Caravan Parks

Camping is immensely popular in France, and many of the thousands of camping grounds are near rivers, lakes or oceans. Most close from October or November to March or April. Hostels sometimes let travellers pitch tents in their grounds. Gîtes de France coordinates farm camping and publishes an annual guide *Camping à la Ferme*.

Camping in nondesignated spots, or *camping sauvage*, is usually illegal.

Gîtes Ruraux & B&Bs

A *gîte rural* is a self-contained holiday cottage (or part of a house) in a village or on a farm. A *chambre d'hôte*, basically a B&B (bed and breakfast), is a room in a private house, rented by the night. The website www.bbfrance.com is useful for B&Bs and vacation rentals.

Ask about Gîtes de France brochures and guides at local tourist offices, or contact the **Fédération Nationale des Gîtes de France** (☎ 01 49 70 75 75; www.gites-de-france.fr).

Hostels & Foyers

A dormitory bed in an *auberge de jeunesse* (hostel) costs €25 in Paris, and anything from €10 to €35 in the provinces. Breakfast/dinner is often available for €3/10; bedding (ie, sheets) costs extra.

Guests need to purchase an annual Hostelling International card (€10.70/15.25 for people under/over 26) or a nightly Welcome Stamp (€1.50) to stay at hostels run by French hostelling associations **Ligue Française pour les Auberges de la Jeunesse** (LFA; ☎ 01 44 16 78 78; www.auberges-de-jeunesse.com; 7 rue Vergniaud, 13e, Paris; **M** Glacière) and **Fédération Unie des Auberges de Jeunesse** (FUJ; ☎ 01 48 04 70 30; www.fuaj.org; 9 rue de Brantome, 3e, Paris; **M** Rambuteau).

Hotels

French hotels vary greatly in quality. In practically every major city you'll be able to find everything from low-budget no-starers to full-blown pleasure palaces catering to your every whim, but what you get for your money can be quite variable.

In general there are a few rules shared by most hotels. A double room has one double bed – if you prefer twin beds you'll need to ask for *deux lits séparés*. Remember that French hotels almost never include breakfast in their advertised nightly rates; you can cut costs by steering clear of the hotel breakfast and picking up some croissants from a local *boulangerie* (bakery) instead. Hotels usually ask for a credit card number to confirm a reservation. Look out for great weekend deals to 33 cities and towns at www.bon-week-end-envilles.com.

ACTIVITIES

From the peaks, rivers and canyons of the Alps to the mountains and volcanic peaks of the Massif Central – not to mention 3000km of coastline stretching from the Med to the Dover Straits – France lends itself to exhilarating outdoor adventures by the mountain load.

Adventure Sports

France is a top spot for adventurous activities. In big cities and picturesque places, especially the Côte d'Azur and the Alps, local

companies offer high adrenaline pursuits such as canyoning, paragliding, white-water rafting and bungy jumping.

Cycling

The French take cycling very seriously – the country practically grinds to a halt during the annual Tour de France. Mountain bikes are called *vélo tout-terrain* (VTT) in France. A *piste cyclable* is a cycling path.

Top cycling spots include Annecy in the Alps, the Dordogne and the Loire Valley.

Hiking

The countryside is crisscrossed by a staggering 120,000km of *sentiers balisés* (marked walking paths), which pass through every imaginable terrain in every region of the country. No permit is needed to hike.

The *sentiers de grande randonnée* (GRs) are long-distance footpaths that cover huge areas of France – some are several hundred kilometres long.

The **Fédération Française de la Randonnée Pédestre** (FFRP; French Ramblers' Association) has an **information centre** (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 44 89 93 93; www.ffrp.asso.fr, in French; 14 rue Riquet 19e, Paris; **M** Pernety) in Paris, as does the **Club Alpin Français** (CAF; Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 53 72 87 00; www.ffcam.fr, in French; 24 av de Laumière, 19e, Paris; **M** Laumière).

Lonely Planet's *Walking in France* is packed with essential practical information.

Skiing

France has more than 400 resorts in the Alps, the Jura, the Pyrenees, the Vosges, the Massif Central and the mountains of Corsica. The season lasts from mid-December to late March or April. January and February tend to have the best conditions, but the slopes get very crowded during the February-March school holidays.

The Alps have some of Europe's finest ski facilities. Much cheaper and less glitzy, smaller low-altitude stations are in the Pyrenees and the Massif Central.

Ski de fond (cross-country skiing) is possible at high-altitude resorts but is usually much better in the valleys. Undoubtedly some of the best trails are in the Jura range.

Rearranged package deals are by far the cheapest way to ski. Paris-based **Ski France** (☎ 01 47 42 23 32; www.skifrance.fr; 61 blvd Haussmann 8e, Paris; **M** Opéra) has information and an

annual brochure covering more than 50 ski resorts.

Water Sports

France has fine beaches along all its three coasts. The sandy beaches stretching along the Atlantic Coast (eg near La Rochelle) are less crowded than their pebbly counterparts on the Côte d'Azur. Corsica has some magnificent spots. Brittany and the north coast are also popular, albeit cooler, beach destinations.

The best surfing in France is on the Atlantic coast around Biarritz (p271) where waves reach heights of 4m. White-water rafting, canoeing and kayaking are practised on many French rivers, especially in the Dordogne and the Alps. Contact the **Fédération Française de Canoë-Kayak** (FFCK; ☎ 01 45 11 08 50; www.ffck.org, in French).

BUSINESS HOURS

French business hours are usually 9am or 9.30am to 7pm or 8pm, often with a midday break from noon or 1pm to 2pm or 3pm (except in Paris). Most businesses close on Sunday; exceptions include grocery stores, *boulangeries*, cake shops and florists.

Restaurant hours vary, but they are generally open for lunch between noon and 2pm and for dinner from 7.30pm. Cafés open from early morning until around midnight. Bars usually open early evening and close at 1am or 2am.

Banks usually open from 8am or 9am to 11.30am or 1pm and then 1.30pm or 2pm to 4.30pm or 5pm, Monday to Friday or Tuesday to Saturday. Post offices generally open from 8.30am or 9am to 5pm or 6pm on weekdays (often with a midday break) and on Saturday mornings from 8am to noon.

Supermarkets open Monday to Saturday from about 9am or 9.30am to 7pm or 8pm; some open on Sunday morning.

TOP TIP

In France, computer keyboards are laid out differently, which can make typing quite difficult. To change the keyboard language, hold down Alt and the Maj (majiscule) button – and hey presto, you can type away to your heart's content.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES French Embassies & Consulates

France's diplomatic and consular representatives abroad are listed on the website www.france.diplomatie.fr.

Australia (Canberra) (☎ 02-6216 0100; www.ambafrance-au.org; 6 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600); Sydney Consulate (☎ 02-9261 5779; www.consulfrance-sydney.org; Level 26, St Martin's Tower, 31 Market St, Sydney, NSW 2000)

Canada (Ottawa) (☎ 613-789 1795; www.ambafrance-ca.org; 42 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ont K1M 2C9); Toronto Consulate (☎ 416-925 8041; www.consulfrance-toronto.org; 2 Bloor Est, Suite 2200, Toronto M4W 1A8)

Germany (Berlin) (☎ 030-590 039 000; www.botschaft-frankreich.de; Pariser Platz 5, Berlin 10117); Munich Consulate (☎ 089-419 4110; www.consulfrance-munich.de; Heimeranstrasse 31, Level 3, Munich 80339)

Italy (☎ 06-686 0111; www.ambafrance-it.org; Piazza Farnese 67, 00186 Rome)

Netherlands (Amsterdam Consulate) (☎ 020-530 6969; www.consulfrance-amsterdam.org; Vijzelgracht 2, 1017 HR Amsterdam); The Hague (☎ 070-312 5800; www.ambafrance-nl.org; Smidsplein 1, 2514 BT Den Haag)

New Zealand (☎ 04-384 2555; www.ambafrance-nz.org; Level 13, Rural Bank Bldg, 34-42 Manners St, PO Box 11-343, Wellington)

Spain (Barcelona Consulate) (☎ 93-270 3000; www.consulfrance-barcelona.org; Ronda Universitat 22, 08007 Barcelona); Madrid (☎ 91-423 8900; www.ambafrance-es.org; Calle de Salustiano Olozaga 9, 28001 Madrid)

UK (London Consulate) (☎ 020-7073 1200; www.consulfrance-londres.org; 21 Cromwell Rd, London SW7 2EN); London Embassy (☎ 020-7073 1000; www.ambafrance-uk.org; 58 Knightsbridge, London SW1X 7JT); London Visa Section (☎ 020-7073 1250; 6A Cromwell Place, London SW7 2EW)

USA (New York Consulate) (☎ 212-606 3600; www.consulfrance-newyork.org; 934 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10021); Washington (☎ 202-944 6000; www.ambafrance-us.org; 4101 Reservoir Rd NW, Washington, DC 20007)

Embassies & Consulates in France

All foreign embassies can be found in Paris. Many countries – including the United States, Canada and a number of European countries – will also have consulates in other major cities.

Australia (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 40 59 33 00; www.austgov.fr; 4 rue Jean Rey, 15e; **M** Bir Hakeim)

Canada (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 44 43 29 00; www.amb-canada.fr; 35 av Montaigne, 8e; **M** Franklin D Roosevelt)

Germany (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 53 83 45 00; www.amb-allemanie.fr; 13-15 av Franklin D Roosevelt, 8e; **M** Franklin D Roosevelt)

Italy (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 49 54 03 00; www.amb-italie.fr; 51 rue de Varenne, 7e; **M** Rue du Bac)

Netherlands (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 40 62 33 00; www.amb-pays-bas.fr; 7 rue Eblé, 7e; **M** St-François Xavier)

New Zealand (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 45 01 43 43; www.nzembassy.com; 7ter rue Léonard de Vinci, 16e; **M** Victor Hugo)

Spain (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 44 43 18 00; www.amb-espagne.fr; 22 av Marceau, 8e; **M** Alma Marceau)

UK (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 44 51 31 00; www.amb-grande-bretagne.fr; 35 rue du Faubourg St-Honoré, 8e; **M** Concorde)

USA (Map pp208-9; ☎ 01 43 12 22 22; www.amb-usa.fr; 2 av Gabriel, 8e; **M** Concorde)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Most French cities, towns and villages have at least one major arts festival each year.

May/June

May Day Workers' day is celebrated countrywide on 1 May with trade union parades, and diverse protests. People give each other *muguet* (lilies of the valley) for good luck. No-one works (except waiters and *muguet* sellers).

Cannes Film Festival (www.festival-cannes.com)

The stars walk the red carpet at Cannes in mid-May, the epitome of see-and-be-seen cinema events in Europe.

Fête de la Musique (www.fetedela.musique.culture.fr) Bands, orchestras, crooners, buskers and spectators take to the streets for this national celebration of music on 21 June.

July

National Day On 14 July fireworks, parades and all-round hoo-ha to commemorate the storming of the Bastille in 1789, symbol of the French Revolution.

Gay Pride (www.gaypride.fr) Effervescent street parades, performances and parties through Paris and other major cities.

August/September

Festival Interceltique de Lorient (www.festival-interceltique.com, in French) Huge Celtic festival attracting people from all over Brittany and the UK.

December

Christmas Markets Alsace is the place to be for a traditional-style festive season, with world-famous Christmas markets, decorations and celebrations.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

France is one of Europe's most liberal countries when it comes to homosexuality, in part because of a long tradition of public tolerance towards people who choose not to live by conventional social codes. Paris has been a thriving gay and lesbian cen-

tre since the late 1970s. Montpellier, Lyon, Toulouse, Bordeaux and many other towns also have significant active communities. Attitudes tend to become more conservative in the countryside and villages.

Online, www.gayscape.com has hundreds of links, while www.france.qrd.org is a 'queer resources directory' for gay and lesbian travellers.

HOLIDAYS

The following *jours fériés* (public holidays) are observed in France.

New Year's Day (Jour de l'An) 1 January – parties in larger cities; fireworks are subdued by international standards.

Easter Sunday & Monday (Pâques & lundi de Pâques) Late March/April.

May Day (Fête du Travail) 1 May – traditional parades.

Victoire 1945 8 May – the Allied victory in Europe that ended WWII.

Ascension Thursday (Ascension) May – celebrated on the 40th day after Easter.

Pentecost/Whit Sunday & Whit Monday (Pentecôte & lundi de Pentecôte) May/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'once Novembre) 11 November – celebrates the WWI armistice.

Christmas (Noël) 25 December.

LEGAL MATTERS

French police have wide powers of stop-and-search and can demand proof of identity at any time. Foreigners must be able to prove their legal status in France (eg passport, visa, residency permit). If the police stop you, be polite, remain calm and don't argue. Don't leave baggage unattended at airports or train stations: suspicious objects will be summarily blown up.

MONEY

The official currency of France is the euro. *Bureaux de change* are available in most major cities, and most large post offices offer currency exchange and cash travellers cheques. Commercial banks charge a stiff fee for changing money – generally it's cheaper to use the *distributeurs automatiques de billets* (DAB, otherwise known as ATMs). Most ATMs are linked to the Cir-

rus, Plus and Maestro networks – check with your bank back home for overseas fees.

Visa and MasterCard (Access or Euro-card) are widely accepted at most shops, restaurants and hotels, although you'll need to know your *code* (PIN number).

For lost cards, call:

Amex (☎ 01 47 77 72 00)

Diners Club (☎ 08 10 31 41 59)

MasterCard, Eurocard & Access (Eurocard France;

☎ 08 00 90 13 87, 01 45 67 84 84)

Visa (Carte Bleue; ☎ 08 00 90 20 33)

POST

France's 17,000 post offices are marked with a yellow or brown sign reading 'La Poste'. Since La Poste also has banking, finance and bill-paying functions, queues can be very long, but there are automatic machines for postage.

Postal Rates

Domestic letters of up to 20g cost €0.53. For international post, there are three different zones: a letter/package under 20g/2kg costs €0.55/12.50 to Zone A (EU, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway); €0.75/14 to Zone B (the rest of Europe and Africa); and €0.90/20.50 to Zone C (North and South America, Asia and the Middle East, Australasia).

Receiving Mail

Picking up poste-restante mail costs €0.50; you must show your passport or national ID card. Mail will be kept 15 days. Poste-restante mail not addressed to a particular branch goes to the city's main post office.

TELEPHONE International Dialling

To call someone outside France, dial the international access code (☎ 00), the country code, the area code (without the initial zero if there is one) and the local number.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance (SAMU) ☎ 15
- EU-wide emergency hotline ☎ 112
- Fire ☎ 18
- Police ☎ 17
- Rape crisis hotline ☎ 08 00 05 95 95

To make a reverse-charges (collect) call (*en PCV*) or a person-to-person call (*avec préavis*), dial ☎ 3123 or ☎ 08 00 99 00 11 (for the USA and Canada) and ☎ 08 00 99 00 61 for Australia.

Phonecards offer much better international rates than Country Direct services (which allow you to be billed by the long-distance carrier you use at home).

Mobile Phones

France uses GSM 900/1800, compatible with the rest of Europe and Australia but not with the North American or Japanese systems. The three major networks are **SFR** (☎ 08 00 10 60 00; www.sfr.com), **Bouygues** (☎ 08 10 63 01 00; www.bouygtel.com) and **Orange** (☎ 08 00 83 08 00; www.orange.fr). If you have a compatible phone, you can buy a 'prepaid' kit that includes a SIM-card and a set number of calls. When these run out you purchase a recharge card at most *tabacs*.

Mobile phone numbers in France always begin 06.

National Dialling Areas

France has five telephone dialling areas; the full 10-digit number is used no matter where you are. There are five regional area codes.

- ☎ 01 Paris region
- ☎ 02 the northwest
- ☎ 03 the northeast
- ☎ 04 the southeast (including Corsica)
- ☎ 05 the southwest

For international directory inquiries, dial ☎ 3212. The cost is about €2.50. Emergency numbers and 08 00 numbers are free.

Public Phones & Telephone Cards

Public phones in France are card-operated. *Télécartes* (phonecards) cost €8 or €15 at post offices, *tabacs* and anywhere you see a sticker saying '*télécarte en vente ici*'.

Cartes à code (with a free access number and a scratch-off code) offer better rates than *cartes à puce* (cards with a magnetic chip). They can be used from private as well as public phones, and often have good international rates.

VISAS

EU nationals and citizens of Switzerland, Iceland and Norway need a passport or

national identity card to enter France. Citizens of Australia, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Japan and Israel don't need visas for stays up to three months; nor do citizens of EU candidate countries (except Turkey).

TRANSPORT IN FRANCE

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

AIRLINES

Most of the world's major carriers fly to Paris and other French cities.

Air Canada (code AC; ☎ 08 25 88 08 81; www.aircanada.ca; hub Toronto)

Air France (code AF; ☎ 08 20 82 08 20; www.airfrance.com; hub Paris)

Alitalia (code AZ; ☎ 08 20 31 53 15; www.alitalia.com; hub Rome)

American Airlines (code AA; ☎ 08 10 87 28 72; www.americanairlines.com; hub Dallas)

BMI BritishMidland (code BD; ☎ short haul 0870 6070 555, long haul 0870 6070 555; www.flybmi.com; hub London)

British Airways (code BA; ☎ 08 25 82 54 00; www.britishairways.com; hub London)

KLM (code KL; ☎ 08 90 71 07 10; www.klm.com; hub Amsterdam)

Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 08 20 02 00 30; www.lufthansa.com; hub Frankfurt)

Qantas (code QF; ☎ 08 20 82 05 00; www.qantas.com; hub Sydney)

There are numerous budget airline serving France.

bmiBaby (www.bmibaby.com) Budget subsidiary of BMI.

easyJet (www.easyjet.com) Main UK budget carrier.

Flybe (www.flybe.com) Regional UK budget carrier.

Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) Mainly UK destinations.

Transavia (www.transavia.com) Budget subsidiary of KLM.

AIRPORTS

France's main international airports are **Roissy Charles de Gaulle** (CDG; ☎ 01 48 62 12 12) and **Orly** (ORY; ☎ 01 49 75 15 15); see p330. France's other main airports include the following: **Bordeaux** (BOD; ☎ 05 56 34 50 50; www.bordeaux.aeroport.fr)

Lille (LIL; ☎ 03 20 49 68 68; www.lille.aeroport.fr, in French)

Lyon (LYS; ☎ 08 26 80 08 26; www.lyon.aeroport.fr)

Marseille (MRS; ☎ 04 42 14 14 14; www.mrsairport.com)

Nantes (NTE; ☎ 02 40 84 80 00; www.nantes.aeroport.fr)

Nice (NCE; ☎ 08 20 42 33 33; www.nice.aeroport.fr)

Strasbourg (SXB; ☎ 03 88 64 67 67; www.strasbourg.aeroport.fr)

Toulouse (TLS; ☎ 08 25 38 00 00; www.toulouse.aeroport.fr)

Land

If you're travelling around Europe, look for discount bus and train passes, which can be combined with discount air fares.

BUS

Buses are slower and less comfortable than trains, but are cheaper, especially if you qualify for discount rates (people under 26, over 60, teachers and students).

Eurolines (☎ 08 92 69 52 52, 01 43 54 11 99; www.eurolines.com) groups together 32 European coach operators and links points across Europe, Morocco and Russia. Eurolines' website has information on fares, routes and bookings. Return tickets cost about 20% less than two singles.

French coach company **Intercars** (☎ 08 92 89 80 80; www.intercars.fr, in French) links France with other European cities, notably Eastern Europe and Russia. The office in **Paris** (☎ 01 49 03 40 63; 139bis rue de Vaugirard, 15e; M Falguière) links with European destinations such as Prague (€56, 16 hours) and Warsaw (€90, 28 hours). From **Lyon** (☎ 04 78 37 20 80; Perrache bus station) you can reach Naples, Porto, Minsk or Zagreb. From **Nice** (☎ 04 93 80 08 70; Nice bus station) you can reach San Sebastian, Casablanca and Venice.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

At some border points you may be asked for passport or identity card (your driving licence will not be sufficient). Police searches are not uncommon for vehicles entering France, particularly from Spain and Belgium. See p310 for details about driving in France.

Channel Tunnel

The Channel Tunnel, inaugurated in 1994, is the first dry-land link between England and France since the Ice Age.

High-speed **Eurotunnel trains** (☎ in the UK 0870 535 3535, in France 03 21 00 61 00; www.eurotunnel.com) whisk cars, motorcycles and coaches from Folkestone through the Channel Tunnel to Coquelles, 5km southwest of Calais. Shuttles run 24 hours a day, with up to five an hour during peak periods.

Prices start from UK£49 one-way for a car including all passengers, unlimited lug-

gage and taxes; discounts for advance bookings are often available on the website.

TRAIN

Rail services link France with every country in Europe. You can book tickets and get information from **Rail Europe** (www.raileurope.com) up to two months ahead. In France, ticketing is handled by the **SNCF** (☎ 08 92 35 35 35; www.sncf.com).

Eurostar

The **Eurostar** (☎ in France 08 92 35 35 39, in the UK 08705 186 186; in France www.voyages-sncf.com, in the UK www.eurostar.com) travels between London and Paris in just 2½ hours. There are direct daily services between London and Ashford (Kent) and Paris, Brussels, Lille, Disneyland Paris and Calais-Fréthun. Extra seasonal routes operate during ski season.

A standard 2nd-class one-way ticket from London to Paris costs UK£149, or €223.50 in the opposite direction. Discounts are available if you book 14 or seven days ahead, and if you're under 25 or a student.

Sea

Regular ferries travel to France from Italy, the UK, Channel Islands and Ireland.

FROM IRELAND

Eurail pass holders pay 50% of the adult pedestrian fare for crossings between Ireland and France on Irish Ferries (make sure you book ahead).

Irish Ferries (☎ in Republic of Ireland 0818 300 400, in Northern Ireland 0035 381 830 0400, in France 01 44 88 54 504; www.irishferries.ie) has overnight services from Rosslare to Cherbourg (18½ hours) or Roscoff (16 hours) every other day (three weekly from mid-September to October). A foot passenger/car and driver costs from €56/99. There's no fee if you book online.

Brittany Ferries (☎ in the UK 0870 366 5333, in France 08 25 82 88 28; www.brittany-ferries.com) operates car ferries on Saturdays (April to October) from Cork to Roscoff (13 hours) and on Friday in the other direction.

FROM ITALY

From April to mid-October, the **Société Nationale Maritime Corse Méditerranée** (SNCM; ☎ in France 08 25 88 80 88; www.sncm.fr) has five or six car ferries per week from Marseille or Toulon to Porto Torres on Sardinia. The crossing takes

about 11 hours; one-way fares are around €118 without a cabin.

Several ferry companies ply the waters between Corsica and Italy.

FROM UK

Fares vary hugely according to the season and day of travel – a Friday night ferry can cost much more than a Sunday morning one, and July and August are always more expensive. Special return fares, often requiring advance booking, are sometimes cheaper than a standard one-way fare. Check out **Ferry Savers** (☎ 0870 990 8492; www.ferrysavers.com), which guarantees the lowest prices on Channel crossings.

Brittany

From mid-March to mid-November, **Brittany Ferries** (☎ in the UK 0870 366 5333, in France 08 25 82 88 28; www.brittany-ferries.com) links Plymouth to Roscoff (six hours, one to three daily). The one-way fare for foot passengers ranges from UK£23 to UK£73. There's also a daily crossing to St-Malo (8¾ hours); pedestrians pay from UK£48 one-way.

From April to September, **Condor Ferries** (☎ in the UK 0845 345 2000, in France 02 99 20 03 00; www.condorferries.com) has at least one daily ferry linking Weymouth with St-Malo (UK£41, seven to 10 hours).

Normandy

Transmanche Ferries (☎ 0800 917 1201; www.transmancheferries.com) operate the Newhaven–Dieppe route. The crossing (up to three daily) takes four hours. A one-way foot-passenger fare starts at UK£12; the one-way fare for a car and two adults starts from UK£33.

There's a 4¼-hour crossing (two or three per day) from Poole to Cherbourg with **Brittany Ferries** (☎ in the UK 0870 366 5333, in France 08 25 82 88 28; www.brittany-ferries.com). Foot passengers pay from UK£48 one-way.

Brittany Ferries and Condor Ferries also operate two or three car ferries a day (five hours by day, eight hours overnight) between Portsmouth and Cherbourg, and two faster catamarans a day from April to September. Foot passengers pay from UK£38 one-way.

Brittany Ferries also has car-ferry services from Portsmouth to Caen (Ouistreham, six hours, three per day). Tickets cost the same as for Poole–Cherbourg.

Northern France

The Dover–Calais crossing (70 minutes to 1½ hours, 15 daily) is handled by **SeaFrance** (☎ in the UK 0870 571 1711, in France 08 04 04 40 45; www.seafrance.com). Foot passenger fares start at UK£6 to UK£12 return. Fares for a car and up to nine passengers cost from UK£24 to UK£45 one-way. **P&O Ferries** (☎ in the UK 0870 598 0555, in France 08 25 01 30 13; www.poferries.com) also operates a Dover–Calais service (one to 1½ hours, 29 daily) from UK£18 one-way for foot passengers and €55 one-way including a small car.

Ferries run by **Norfolk Line** (☎ 03 28 59 01 01; www.norfolkline.com) link Loon Plage, about 25km west of Dunkirk (Dunkerque), with Dover from UK£19 one-way for a vehicle and up to nine passengers, while **Speed Ferries** (☎ in the UK 0130 420 3000, in France 03 21 10 50 00; www.speedferries.com) offers an ultrafast catamaran service between Boulogne and Dover from UK£19 one-way for a vehicle and up to five passengers (50 minutes, five daily).

GETTING AROUND

Air

Air France (☎ 08 20 82 08 20; www.airfrance.com) controls the lion's share of France's long-protected domestic airline industry, although the British budget carrier easyJet has flights linking Paris with Marseille, Nice and Toulouse.

Cheaper deals are available on weekdays and for bookings made at least three weeks in advance. Significant discounts are available to children, young people, families and seniors. Last-minute offers are posted on the Air France website every Wednesday.

Bus

For travel between regions, a train is your best bet since inter-regional bus services are limited. Buses are used quite extensively for short-distance travel within *départements*, especially in rural areas with relatively few train lines (eg Brittany and Normandy) – but services are often slow and few and far between.

Car & Motorcycle

Having your own wheels gives you exceptional freedom and allows you to visit more remote parts of France. Unfortunately it can be expensive and, in cities, parking and traffic are frequently a major headache. Motor-

cyclists will find France great for touring, with winding roads of good quality and lots of stunning scenery. Just make sure your wet-weather gear is in good nick.

DRIVING LICENCE & DOCUMENTS

All drivers must carry a national ID card or passport; a 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); and proof of third party (liability) insurance.

FUEL & TOLLS

Essence (petrol or gasoline), also known as *carburant* (fuel) costs from around €1.30 per litre for 95 unleaded. Petrol stations on the autoroutes are often more expensive than those in towns. You'll have to factor in the cost of tolls on many of France's autoroutes, based on the distance travelled.

HIRE

To hire a car you'll usually need to be over 21 and in possession of a valid driving licence and a credit card. Major rental companies include the following:

ADA (☎ 08 25 16 91 69; www.ada.fr, in French)

Avis (☎ 08 20 05 05 05; www.avis.com)

Budget (☎ 08 25 00 35 64; www.budget.com)

Easycar (☎ 090 63 33 33 33; www.easycar.com)

Europcar (☎ 08 25 35 83 58; www.europcar.com)

Hertz (☎ 08 25 34 23 43; www.hertz.com)

OTU Voyages (☎ 01 40 29 12 12; www.otu.fr, in French) For students.

Cheap deals can be found online, or through **Auto Europe** (☎ 1-888 223 5555; www.autoeurope.com) in the US, or **Holiday Autos** (☎ 0870 530 0400; www.holidayautos.co.uk) in the UK.

Automatic transmissions are *very* rare in France – you'll need to order one well in advance.

INSURANCE

Unlimited third party liability insurance is mandatory in France. Third party liability insurance is provided by car-rental companies, but collision-damage waivers (CDW) vary between companies. When comparing rates check the *franchise* (excess), which is usually €350 for a small car. Your credit card may cover CDW if you use it to pay for the car rental.

ROAD RULES

Cars drive on the right in France. All passengers must wear seat belts, and children who weigh less than 18kg must travel in backward-facing child seats. The speed limits on French roads are as follows:

- 50km/h in built-up areas
- 90km/h (80km/h if it's raining) on N and D highways
- 110km/h (100km/h if it's raining) on dual carriageways
- 130km/h (110km/h if it's raining) on autoroutes

Under the *priorité à droite* (priority to the right) rule, any car entering an intersection (including a T-junction) from a road on your right has the right-of-way, unless the intersection is marked '*vous n'avez pas la priorité*' (you do not have right of way) or '*cédez le passage*' (give way).

It is illegal to drive with a blood-alcohol concentration over 0.05% – the equivalent of two glasses of wine for a 75kg adult. Mobile phones may only be used when accompanied by a hands-free kit or speakerphone.

Riders of any type of two-wheeled vehicle with a motor (except motor-assisted bicycles) must wear a helmet.

Train

France's superb rail network is operated by the state-owned SNCF (www.sncf.com). Many towns and villages not on the SNCF train network are served by supplementary buses.

The flagship trains on French railways are the superfast TGVs, which operate on the following routes:

TGV Atlantique Sud-Ouest & TGV Atlantique Ouest These link Paris' Gare Montparnasse with western and southwestern France, including Brittany (Rennes, Quimper,

Brest), Nantes, Tours, Poitiers, La Rochelle, Bordeaux, Biarritz and Toulouse.

TGV Est Under construction. This line will connect Paris with Strasbourg and Germany. The first sections are due to open in mid-2007.

TGV Nord, Thalys & Eurostar These link Paris' Gare du Nord with Arras, Lille, Calais, Brussels, Amsterdam, Cologne and, via the Channel Tunnel, Ashford and London Waterloo.

TGV Sud-Est & TGV Midi-Méditerranée These link Paris' Gare de Lyon with the southeast, including Dijon, Lyon, Geneva, the Alps, Avignon, Marseille, Nice and Montpellier.

A non-TGV train is referred to as a *corail* or TER (*train express régional*).

Special deals are available at www.sncf.com. Last-minute deals are published online every Tuesday. Reduced fares are available with the **Carte 12-25** (€49) for travellers aged 12 to 25; the **Carte Enfant Plus** (€65) for one to four adults travelling with a child aged four to 11; and a **Carte Sénior** (€50) for those over 60. A **Carte Escapades** (€99) for 26- to 59-year-olds guarantees savings of 25% on a return journey of at least 200km including a Saturday night away.

The France Railpass allows unlimited travel on SNCF trains for four days over a one-month period. In 2nd class it costs US\$229; each additional day costs US\$30. The France Youthpass allows four days of travel in a month. In 2nd class it costs US\$169, plus US\$23 for each extra day. These passes can be purchased from travel agents or travel websites such as www.rail europe.com.

Before boarding the train you must time-stamp your ticket in a *composteur*, one of those orange posts at the start of the platform. If you forget, find a conductor so they can punch it for you to avoid being fined.

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