



Press Pack 2016

Atlantic Coast & Cognac Country

Poitou-Charentes Tourism

R É G I O N
**AQUITAINE
LIMOUSIN
POITOU-CHARENTES**

For more information, please visit our website

www.visit-poitou-charentes.com

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Region Aquitaine Limousin Poitou-Charentes

A tourism heavyweight of France

As of 1st January 2016 the old regions of Aquitaine, Limousin and Poitou-Charentes have joined together to create a larger, more diverse and attractive area that offers a wealth of historic, cultural and geographic interest and that is now one of the most important employers in the tourism field in the country.

A region where one lives well!

Visitors to the region inevitably experience the warm, sunny climate. Fringed by sandy beaches, the area offers all the best in terms of water sports that are so numerous it is now known as 'Glissicon Valley'. Thanks to the Pyrénées, lovers of winter sports are also well catered for.

Poitou-Charentes continues this year to spotlight the Charente Valley, Futuroscope, Green Venice (the Marais Poitevin), La Rochelle and the Atlantic Coast including the Ile de Ré, Ile d'Oléron, Rochefort and Royan). Aquitaine also highlights the lovely coastline as well as the vineyards, spa centres and the Lascaux Caves. Limousin will continue to promote, in particular, the gastronomy of the Corrèze, the lakes, the ceramics and the village of Collonges-la-Rouge.

All areas have well-established 'villages of character', towns of 'art and history' and some quite remarkable sites throughout the countryside. All areas have a diversity of accommodation of all grades and types but always of excellent quality. All areas promote local initiatives.

An extraordinary diversity

Right across the Region Aquitaine Limousin Poitou-Charentes there is a great variety of landscapes from the ocean to the mountains, lakes to marshes and forests. Among the most extraordinary are the Pyrénées, the Forests of the Landes, the Pilat Dune, the Green Venice, Dordogne Valley and the Vassivière Lake. We can boast all the facets of the French scenic panorama.

The Region Aquitaine Limousin Poitou-Charentes has 720 kilometres of coastline, one sizeable metropolitan area – Bordeaux, and four important urban conglomerations – Poitiers, Bayonne, Pau and Limoges. All help to make the region even more attractive.

An exceptional history and cultural legacy.

The new territory oozes with history! The Saint-Savin Abbey, the ostentatious septennial of Limousin, the administrative area of Saint-Emilion, the areas of Saintes, Mont Gargan or the Cordouan lighthouse all bear witness to this. Many are classified by UNESCO.

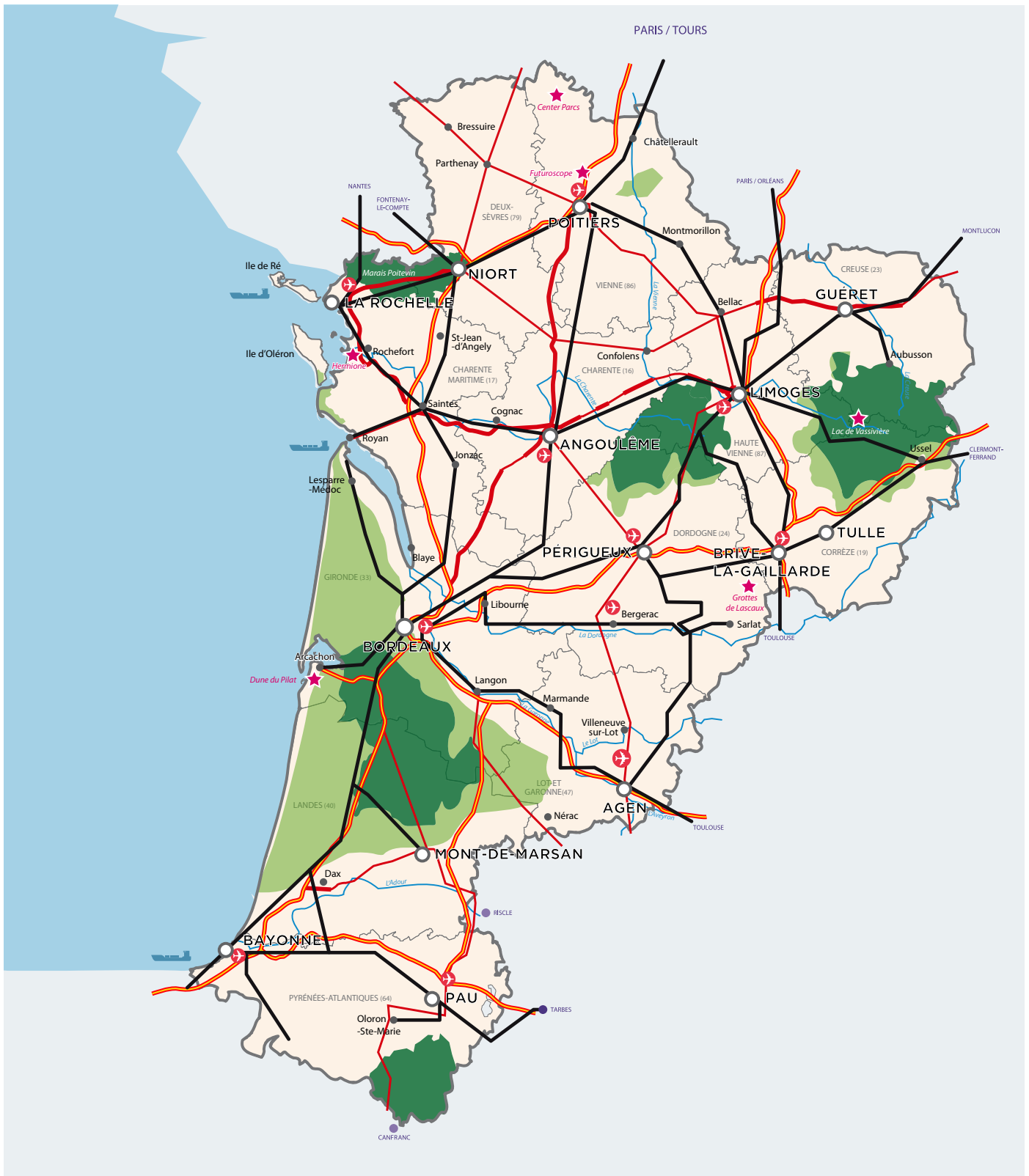
Local arts and crafts are very well represented and among their number we can count the tapestry of Aubasson and the ceramics of Limoges such as porcelain. Much store is put by the wonderful caves of Lascaux IV, the more than 170 nights of 'Les Nuits Romanes' and the town of Oradour-sur-Glane – a memory to the village martyrs.

Many important personalities have left their imprint on the area: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Richard the Lionheart, Henry IV, Francis 1, Jean Monnet and François Mitterand amongst others.

Culturally there are many annual festivals – international, national and regional favourites. Music festivals like the Francfolies in La Rochelle, Garorock in Marmande or the Pearl Nights of Tulle; literary festivals such as the Comic Strip Festival in Angoulême or the International Design and Caricature Festival in Saint-Just-Le-Martel. Region Aquitaine Limousin Poitou-Charentes also has several local languages and dialects that still flourish such as Gascon, Poitevin, Basque and Langedocien.



Region Aquitaine Limousin Poitou-Charentes



Statistics pertaining to Région Aquitaine Limousin Poitou-Charentes

Key Numbers:

5.8 million inhabitants

83,339 square kilometres – the largest region of France

10 airports including 7 international, namely Bergerac, Biarritz, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Limoges, Pau and Poitiers.

3 maritime ports

Tourism:

27 million tourists

85,334 employees in the tourism sector

720 kilometres of coastline

Visitors

14% of all French visitors to metropolitan France in 2013

10% of all international visitors to metropolitan France in 2013

Most visited sites (in millions):

| | |
|---------------------------------|------|
| Futuroscope | 1.6m |
| Old Town of Sarlat | 1.5m |
| Pilat Dune | 1.4m |
| Saint-Emilion (historic centre) | 1m |
| Aquarium of La Rochelle | 0.8m |
| Palmyre Zoo | 0.7m |

Poitou-Charentes **Profile**

5 reasons to visit Poitou-Charentes :

- The only place where you can learn about cognac and make your own
- A region with 4 islands to discover, each with a special atmosphere : Ré, Oléron, Aix and Madame
- La Rochelle, one of the most famous cities by the sea, and Poitiers Romanesque capital, the city with the 100 belltowers
- Rochefort, the town where the Hermione, replica of Lafayette's frigate, has been rebuilt
- The Marais Poitevin also called the 'Green Venice'

1 792 000 inhabitants

4 'Departements'

- Charente (16)
- Charente-Maritime (17)
- Deux-Sèvres (79)
- Vienne (86)

The coast

460 km of coastline

110 km of beaches

Four Islands : Oléron (the second biggest island in France after Corsica), Ré, Aix and Madame

Wellbeing

- Six thalassotherapy centres
- Seven spas

Nature

- Five major walking routes
- 826 km of road to Santiago de Compostela
- 2950 km cycle tracks
- 2195 km mountain bike tracks
- 220 km navigable roads
- 20 golf courses





Destinations



Atlantic Coast



La Rochelle



Marais poitevin



Cognac Country



Futuroscope

La Rochelle

Historic Atlantic Port

Founded in the tenth century, La Rochelle started as a town of fishermen and salt merchants. Always turned towards the sea, this major port built its expansion on the salt and wine trade. Razed by Richelieu, the town still has visible vestiges of medieval walls.

The Old Town, once a prominent Huguenot and Protestant enclave, is characterised by medieval houses with facades sculpted during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, streets with arcades and private mansions of big shipowners.

La Rochelle has four ports: the Old Port with its iconic towers, the commercial port La Pallice, the fishing port 'Chef de Baie' and the Minimes Port which is the premier European pleasure port with 4 800 slips. The Minimes Port welcomes the 'Grand Pavois', a famous European nautical show every September.

Thanks to protective ramparts put in place in the 1970's, the town has safeguarded its historical centre, particularly its medieval and Renaissance architecture. The modern areas of the town are close to the Old Centre, notably the 'Gabut' quarter with its painted wooden buildings and the area near to the Minimes Port.

Nowadays visitors come to the town to stroll down the streets and around the ports. La Rochelle welcomes over three million tourists annually, 25% of which are foreigners, making it the third most visited town in France.



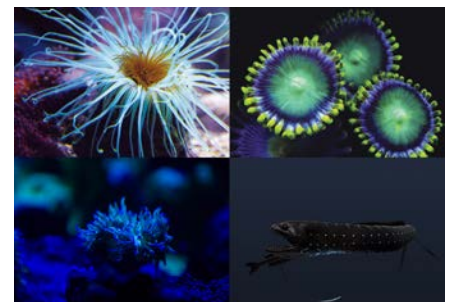
The Aquarium of La Rochelle

For 40 years, the Coutant family - father, son and daughter has used their technical and biological expertise to create aquaria and other natural environments throughout Europe. Opened in 1970 the Aquarium of La Rochelle quickly grew to become the number one privately owned aquarium in Europe. The La Rochelle Aquarium is open 365 days a year and attracts over 800,000 people annually. It is an important research facility as well as an extremely well situated tourist attraction - number two in Poitou-Charentes after Futuroscope.

NEW for 2016 the Aquarium will be opening the Gallery of Lights - over 100 square metres more of five giant tanks that will take the visitor on a magical journey to the great depths of the oceans to reveal the sea creatures that light up their world with the most vibrant colours. On the surface there are manta rays lit magically from below. Further down the cerianthus lloydii and jewelled anemones, corals and sea fans lead to the pineapple fish found in slightly deeper waters before one enters the abyss! Here the wonders of bioluminescence, fluorescence and iridescence will be revealed - how species react to it, how does it happen - all these scientific questions will be answered.

95% of the oceans have yet to be explored as the great depths and hostile waters make it a dangerous and often an impossible voyage of discovery. Yet we know that several ecosystems have developed at 2,000 metres or more. Only 5% of species that live in the ocean depths are known to us - such as the tripod fish, flashlight fish, dumbo octopods and spookfish. Light is absorbed by the water only up to about 150 metres so below that everything appears grey. Over 1,000 metres deep the ocean is pitch black. At the Aquarium of La Rochelle as much as we know will be revealed.

www.aquarium-larochelle.fr



© GDL_AquariumLa Rochelle

Ile de Ré

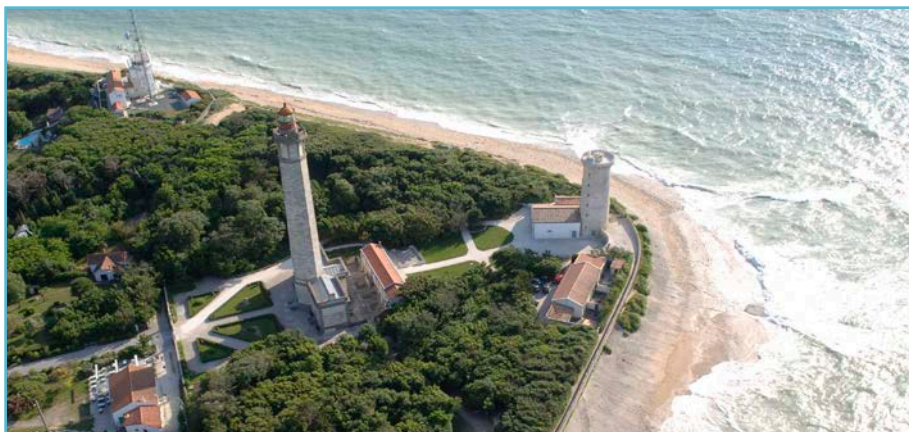
The White Island

Known as the White island, Ile de Ré is the most northerly of the four islands off the coast and accessible directly from La Rochelle by a bridge. It is 30 kilometers long and five kilometers wide, and can be easily explored by bicycle thanks to a plethora (100 kilometers) of cycle tracks leading all over the island. The streets of Ile de Ré are lined with white houses decorated with colourful shutters, a type of house generally found throughout some of the most gorgeous villages in France ('Les Plus Beaux Villages de France'). Ars en Ré has a coloured bell tower that is a landmark in navigational circles; La Flotte has a famous old market and medieval covered market too. The Ile de Ré is connected to the mainland by a three kilometer bridge. The south end of the island is home to relaxing beaches, while the north boasts ports that have always contributed to the economic life of the island.

Bicycle riding

Bicycles are a way of life on Ile de Ré, where more than 100 km of marked cycle tracks wind through vineyards, salt marshes and nature reserves. And with the highest point just 19 metres above sea level, it is small wonder that bikes are the most popular way to explore the whitewashed villages, sandy beaches and coastal defences.

It doesn't matter when you cycle – early in the morning until late at night. For some, cycling is a way of life – for others a simple recreation, a sport or just a way of getting from A to B. In summer on the Ile de Ré the centre of most villages are closed to traffic so this is a great way to explore the island. There are several different cycle routes such as St. Martin to La Couarde – about 20 kilometers through vineyards and marine plantations, that remind one of the agricultural heritage of the Island.



The Burn Out Treatments at the Thalacap Ile de Ré

The newest treatment at the Thalacap Ile de Ré is the anti-burn out treatment. As stress is now seen as a professional illness from which more than 17% of French adults profess to suffer, the doctors at Thalacap have come up with an effective treatment that uses oil of marine magnesium. The oil is rubbed onto the skin and thus relaxes the body where the first signs of fatigue and stress appear. In harmony with the oil, the scientists have come up with a programme of physical activities and relaxation techniques that should help re-boot the physiology to combat the illness. The burn-out cure lasts six nights and encompasses 20 treatments with prices starting at 1209 Euros per person on a half board basis.

www.cote-thalasso.fr



Phare des Baleines

Built in 1854 as the original lighthouse was thought not to be tall enough, it was totally rebuilt. This is a lighthouse of the top order by the architect Leonce Reynaud.

Octagonal in design, it has lenses by Fresnel and is still operational. Originally petrol powered it was passed onto the national grid after the Second World War. A king amongst lighthouses!

www.lepharedesbaleines.fr

Atlantic coast

Rochefort

2016 sees the **350th Anniversary** of the maritime history at Rochefort so there will be plenty going on. It was back in 1666 that Louis XIV had the idea of creating his military naval base in Rochefort on the Atlantic coast. Rochefort was actually inland – a little upstream on the Charente River but protected by the islands of Aix and Madame. The beautiful Ponant Arsenal was built which extended the reach of the town down to the estuary which was protected also by the Fort Boyard come 1866, as constructed by Napoleon.

The Versailles of the Sea, as Rochefort is known, is today home to **Hermione** – a replica of the frigate that took LaFayette across the ocean to join the American War of Independence in 1780. Between 4th June and 19th July, Hermione will be present at the Brest 2016 nautical show but otherwise visits of Hermione conducted by a sailor or a technical tour to learn about the navigation of the frigate, can be undertaken in Rochefort year round.

Whilst Hermione is away, a replica of an eighteenth century Russian Frigate, the Shtandart, will be on view in Rochefort between 4th June and 8th July 2016. This was the naval command of Tsar Peter the Great.

To celebrate the 350 year anniversary of the Arsenal at Rochefort, a new 'Accromâts' experience has been created. This is similar to the aerial accrobranches courses found elsewhere but in a maritime setting.

2016 sees the **50th Anniversary** of the movie, 'Les Demoiselles de Rochefort'. A documentary about the making of the film and what happened after the filming will be shown in the Apollo Cine8 on 1st-3rd July 2016. 'In the footsteps of Jacques Demy' is a fascinating musical and cinematic experience.

2016 is also the **Centenary of the French Fleet Air Arm**. On the 21st and 22nd May 2016 to recognise this landmark, a brand new Super Standard will arrive in town, there will be a special conference and exhibition of the stamps used for the warplane post as well as an opening up of the Naval Air Arm Museum in the Charente, so that almost 4,000 square metres of space will be available to the public. Amongst other things, 33 aircraft will be on display from the Dewoitine 520 to the Super Frelon and Crusader.

Pierre Loti at the Hèbre de St.Clement Museum

As Loti's actual house is closed for refurbishment at present, 2016 sees the opening of a virtual 3D visit of the property from the comfort of the Hèbre de St.Clement Museum. The tour will cross the Red Salon, Blue Salon, Renaissance Room, the staircase, the mosque... accompanied by a guide who is present in the room and can answer questions, zoom in on objects on the screen, rewind, consult the archives and so on so that every visit is personalised... and very special, as Pierre Loti!



Aix 'The Genuine' where Napoleon spent his last days on the French soil

Aix is a small island (120 inhabitants) located between Ré and Oléron. It is 600 metres wide and three kilometres long. There are no cars or buses – only a boat to reach the island! Looking toward Ré and Oléron, you can see Fort Boyard. The island is explored on foot, by bike and by carriage, taking about three hours to circumnavigate on foot.

Aix is reminiscent of Brittany with its rugged landscape and is the only true 'island' in Charente – Maritime. The main town is composed of small white houses embellished with climbing roses. There is a pearl factory, two museums (Napoleonic and African) and a fort (Liédot) which is the epitome of the art of fortification.



Atlantic coast

Oléron 'the Luminous'

With an area of 175 km² this is the second largest island in France, linked to the continent by a viaduct. Military and maritime Oléron possesses the citadel of Oléron and Fort Boyard (well known to French and English TV viewers!). In fact the Ile d'Oléron and the Marennes basin are the perfect areas to get away from it all thanks to having so many aces in the pack - beaches, unspoilt nature, first-rate heritage, world-famous gastronomy, a range of land- (biking, walking...) or water- (sailing, surfing...) based sports without equal. Create your own à la carte stay.



Route des Huîtres

The Oyster Route is situated between the Château d'Oléron and Boyardville, taking in the channels and oyster beds which one visits by tractocar! Many of the old cabins are in use once again, inhabited by artists that have lovingly restored some of these charming old buildings. The coast here is beautiful with varied flora and fauna to admire. There is also a museum to visit that tells the story of oyster cultivation in the area.



Gironde Estuary Royan

Many of the elegant properties were lost in the bombing raids of 1945, but in the 1950s, Royan was dramatically rebuilt to showcase the very latest in town planning and urban construction. More than half a century later, it's a beguiling mix of flamboyant 19th century buildings and post-war minimalist design and is the largest resort on the Atlantic coast between La Baule and Biarritz. The one thing that hasn't changed is the emphasis on providing high quality facilities for every kind of holidaymaker. Whether you want to have fun on the sands with the children, get active over a round of golf, try your luck at the casino or spend a day out on the water, Royan offers it all.



Cognac country

The capital of cognac production has great historical significance. The Château des Valois, for example, birthplace of King François I, delights history and cognac enthusiasts. It is now the property of Maison Otard. The 'liquor of gods', as Victor Hugo called it, cognac owes its character to the warm, humid climate in this part of Western France. Otard, Camus, Hennessy, Martell, Rémy Martin and Courvoisier can be found here and all offer guided tours of their cellars and vineyards.

The vineyards of Cognac constitute the 2nd largest area of production in France after Bordeaux and cover an area of 80,000 hectares.



New for 2016 at Hennessy

In April 2016 Hennessy will open a new series of tours that are unique in Cognac. The contemporary design complements the new vision of the 'World According to Hennessy'. This includes a history of the company, the art of tasting, worldwide expansion of the brand, the unique Hennessy boutique and the various cognacs made by this exceptionally well-known company.

All tours begin with a boat trip on the river Charente, to get a feel for the town and understand its history before returning to the Hennessy warehouses.

- The Signature tour includes the complete circuit of the Maison Hennessy as above followed by a tasting of the VS and VSOP varieties.
- The X.O.Symbole tour adds a particular emphasis on the 1870 creation of XO, its different aromas and ways of tasting.
- The Exception tour offers the basic circuit followed by a visit to the Paradise warehouse where the eau-de-vie that is used in certain varieties is aged. The tasting at the termination of the tour includes XO and Paradise cognacs accompanied by savouries created by David Fransoret himself, Chef of the Château de Bagnole and owner of Maison Hennessy.

www.hennessy.com



© Julia Hasse



Martell_Craftsmanship©Martinelli

New for 2016 at Martell

In 2015 Martell celebrated its 300th anniversary with various new experiences for the public including a celebration of the art and the history of the brand. This theme is supplemented in 2016 with an exceptional opportunity to delve into the company archives as well as have a tasting of the exclusive tercentenary cognac. Otherwise visitors can try the Martell Discovery tour of the historic warehouses followed by a tasting of Martell VSOP. Lastly, for the real gourmand, try the Martell Prestige tour where a Cordon Bleu tasting is included.

Other celebratory surprises will be added throughout the course of the year.

www.martell.com

Cognac country

Angoulême - Capital of the comic strip

Located on the banks of the Charente River, Angoulême has long been associated with paper. Becoming the capital of paper in the Middle Ages, nowadays it is renowned as the **capital of the image and more particularly, of the comic strip**, with its annual festival and new museum.

In Angoulême city centre, it is also fun to follow the cartoon trail throughout the town, as **there are works of comic strip art on every street corner with over twenty painted walls to admire!**

Famous cartoonists such as Yslaire, Zep and Moebius are featured. They place the comic strip and the image in the heart of the city.



Tour of the painted walls

Angoulême is the cartoon capital of France and this is why at the entrances to the town, as well as in the centre itself, the famous painted walls are such an attraction. There are twenty-three of these walls throughout Angoulême - all created by members of the 'Cité de la Création' association of muralists. This is the only place in France where such a group has maintained their own vision over so many years. The tour of these painted walls takes in all 23 of them and provides a stark contrast to the traditional tour of the cultural and historical sites of the town, also easily accessible to the visitor.

September 2016

Classic car street-racing in Angoulême

A highlight in any car enthusiast's diary is the annual 'Circuit des Remparts' held the third weekend in September.

First staged back in 1939, the week end-long events sees classic cars hurtling around the ancient, twisting roads of this pretty hill-top town. The track hasn't changed since that first race and it is one of the very few motor races to take place within the walls of a town, making it quite unique. The course itself is very demanding, twisting around the town ramparts and containing two rightangle bends and three hairpins.

www.circuit-des-remparts.com

Explore Saintes centuries of history

Built in the 1st century AD on the banks of the Charente river, the town of Saintes - then Mediolanum Santonum - was **the Gallo-Roman capital of Aquitaine**, strategically placed between Lyon and the Atlantic. Two thousand years later, it retains some outstanding Roman remains, as well as buildings from the Middle Ages and prestigious Renaissance town houses built of gleaming white limestone. A great place for all the family.



Marais poitevin

The Green Venice

The Marais Poitevin . . . a paradise for nature lovers

Also known as 'Green Venice', the Marais Poitevin is **the second largest temperate zone in France and the fifth in Europe**. Nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the town of Niort in Deux- Sèvres, these famous marshlands are blessed with a particularly agreeable climate. In 2014, the Marais Poitevin recovered its label of Parc Naturel Régional (regional natural park).

The best way to discover this magical land is to explore the villages and marshland ports. There is evidence all around of the 'industrial' past of the area: washers, sluices, fountains, water passages, dovecotes... The countryside is in symbiosis with its environment... **The Marais Poitevin is vast – over 90,000 hectares of green dissected by thousands of canals**. Explore on foot, by fishing boat or canoe, by bicycle, in a carriage or on horseback.



Niort

Niort is the centrepiece of a large conglomeration of around 100,000 people and is renowned as one of the prime towns in France to serve the banking and insurance sectors as well as a training centre for managers in all sorts of industries, building on the university that also specialises in management training.

Niort is also the gateway to the Green Venice of France – the Marais Poitevin. One may start here on foot or by bike to follow the old towpaths of the Sèvre River to explore the heart of this beautiful area. Since the pedestrian only area has been extended it is even easier to stroll around and experience the rich history, culture and nature of what is a unique part of France. Emblematic of Niort is the Keep of Eleanor of Aquitaine, the Baltard style covered market and the old Boinot factory – witness to a time when Niort was the centre of the French chammy leather industry.

There are events taking place in Niort all year round – particularly music, street art and visual arts.

The Keep has just opened a new permanent exhibition to the history of the area from the medieval period to the Ancien Régime that takes over most of the available space.

Focus on

Classified since November 2009 as one of the Great Sites of France, the Marais Poitevin (and more particularly the Marais Mouillé) was only the seventh site in France to be given the honour. There are 18,533 hectares over 24 communes that make up this Green Venice, which welcomes 850 000 visitors annually.

The 'Réseau des Grands Sites de France' was founded in 2000 and now groups together 35 sites throughout the country. The Marais Poitevin is one of two in the region, the other being Brouage. The mutual objective is to preserve and restore the fragile yet breath-

taking countryside. In the case of the Marais Poitevin, this means the rehabilitation of the grass land, planting ash trees and fixing the canals, as well as measuring the tide of tourism in and out of the area and promoting lasting development in the area of ecotourism. This involves providing tourist accommodation and ecological leisure activities such as canoeing and cycling.

www.parc-marais-poitevin.fr

www.grandsitedefrance.com

www.parc-naturels-regionaux.tm.fr



Poitiers

new town - new look

Poitiers . . . a Romanesque town and, for a long time, the 'Saviour of France'

Poitiers is known as the 'Town of Hundred Bells' due to the 24 parishes and 30 monasteries within its boundaries. It is a supreme example of Romanesque art in France. Two famous battles have taken place in Poitiers – one against the Visigoths in 507 and the other against the Arabs in 732. The town is also associated with Clovis and Charles Martel.

The present day structure of Poitiers was shaped in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the addition of the Grands Boulevards, Blossac Park and the Haussmann-style roads, particularly between the Town Hall and the Police Headquarters.

Poitiers has 80 buildings classified as Historical Monuments, the most famous of which is the Baptistery of Saint Jean, which dates back to the beginning of Christianity in Europe; Notre-Dame-La-Grande church and the Saint-Hilaire church, which are both stops on the pilgrimage route of St.Jacques de Compostelle and classified by UNESCO. Now a university town and administrative centre, Poitiers is obviously dynamic, full of energy and a delightful place to visit, as it combines a heady mixture of vitality and tranquility.

A new twist on an old town

There is a relatively new tour of Poitiers as seen from the eyes of the 19th century town-planners and architects, explaining the emblematic places and buildings, from that era onwards which have helped shape the town as we know it today.

The tour includes the Prefecture of Durand and Guérinot built between 1864 and 1868 and inspired by both the famed Baron Haussmann and possibly (due to the construction of the Place Aristide Briand) inspired by the Louis XIII style of bricks and stone. The detailed decoration of the interior reflects the power of the State in the 19th century.

More up to date is the Media Centre designed by Laurent Baudouin in the 20th century. This contemporary building of wood, cement and glass reflects its environment and manages to include intimate interior spaces despite the monumental proportions of its exterior.

Right up to date is the Théâtre Auditorium de Poitiers. This was designed by João Luis Carrilho de Gracia with opaque glass exteriors reflecting the surrounding architecture – a town planner's dream scenario. Also from the 21st century is the Léon Blum Viaduct designed by Jean-François Blassel that brings together the districts on either side of the Boivre Valley – thanks to the local bus service that uses this important public facility. Hubert Junneau is another 21st century architect who has designed the Îlot des Cordeliers uniting the religious and commercial. Since 2001, this religious site (Convent of the Cordeliers) has been a metal and glass shopping centre in the tradition of the Grands Magasins of the nineteenth century.

The Puygarreau Gardens are brand new, sitting behind the town hall and containing artworks by three contemporary artists, Elisabeth Ballet, Didier Marcel and Pierre Joseph, designed to interest and relax the visitor.

Place du Maréchal Leclerc (place de l'Hôtel de Ville) designed by Yves Lion is the focal point of the redesign of the centre of Poitiers. It has been here since 1058 and was previously known by several names such as Marché-Vieil Square, and Place Royal.

Not to miss: the Polychromies



© S.Charbeau-cr ation skertzo

Following the restoration of the façade of Notre-Dame La Grande in Poitiers in 1995, the design company Skerzto created a coloured light show to be beamed onto the façade of the church every evening during the summer months, for the viewing delights of the public. These 'Lumiere' shows take place between the 21st June and end of September plus at the end of the year. The light show adds another perspective to this Romanesque monument and reflects how the church would actually have looked in the Middle Ages, emblazoned with colour.



Village Life

There are many attractive small communities nestled in amongst the sunflowers and vineyards of Poitou-Charentes, but six of them are particularly special. They have been classified amongst Les Plus Beaux Villages de France, an elite band of around 155 utterly delectable villages that have to comply with a list of stringent criteria, that include having fewer than 2,000 inhabitants and at least two historic monuments.

Ile de Ré is home to two of them – Ars-en-Ré with its whitewashed houses and black church spire, and La-Flotte-en-Ré with its pretty harbour and historic covered market. Mornac-sur-Seudre on the Atlantic coast has a harbour, a covered market and a Romanesque church, whilst at Talmont on the Gironde estuary, the Romanesque church stands on a dramatic cliff above the shore.

Head inland to visit Aubeterre-sur-Dronne with its galleried houses, imposing château and 12th century church cut into a cliff. And don't miss Angles-sur-l'Anglin which boasts a ruined fortress, ancient watermill and streets of idyllic cottages.

Confolens

Built at the confluence of the Vienne and Goire rivers, Confolens has always held an important strategic position. Confolens still has some well preserved oak beamed houses dating from the Middle Ages, the most famous of which belonged to the Duke of Epernon. Every August the town vibrates to the rhythms of the International Folklore Festival which promotes dance and music from all over the world.



Coulon

At the very heart of the Marais Poitevin and capital of Green Venice, the port of Coulon was always of considerable importance to the economy of the area, as it still is today. This is one of the best places to take a boat to explore, one of the most beautiful sights in France as noted by UNESCO.



Petites Cités de Caractère®



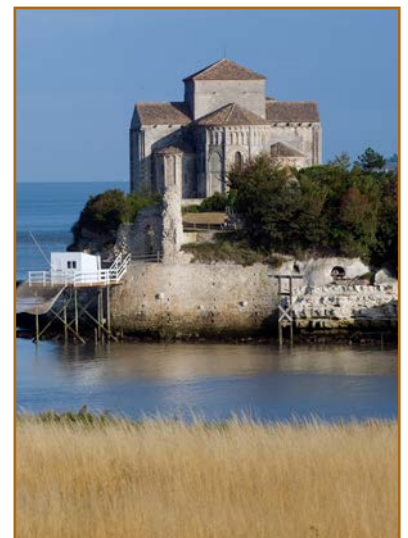
- > Aubeterre-sur-Dronne
- > Villebois-Lavalette
- > Airvault
- > Arçais
- > Oiron
- > La Mothe-Saint-Héray
- > Saint-Loup-sur-Thouet
- > Saint-Savinien
- > Celles-sur-Belle
- > Melle
- > Confolens
- > Talmont-sur-Gironde
- > Coulon



Talmont-sur-Gironde

Classified amongst the Most Beautiful Villages in France, Talmont stands on the left bank of the Gironde estuary to the south of Royan, surrounded by ramparts. Built in 1284 on the orders of Edward 1 of England, the then ruler of Aquitaine. Talmont has kept its original layout, typical of a medieval bastide town.

Stopping off place for pilgrims on the trail to Santiago de Compostela, Talmont is dominated by Sainte Radegonde, one of the most dramatic Romanesque churches in the region. Wander lanes of whitewashed houses – ablaze with hollyhocks in the summer months – to spot ancient wells and historic sundials, and follow the rampart walk to the small harbour.





Family Activities



Center Parcs

In June 2015, Pierre et Vacances – Center Parcs opened their fifth site in France at the Domaine du Bois aux Daims, just one hour north of Poitiers. The site covers what was an old hunting area dating from the 13th century – an area of 260 hectares.

This is the first Center Parcs designed to specifically preserve the eco-diversity of the area whilst allowing the visitor to experience nature at first hand. The utmost sensitivity has been shown to not only care for the plethora of animals and plants but to increase numbers of some of the most ecologically delicate, reintroducing some species that may have recently been lost. There are areas where nature takes precedence and guided tours to show the visitor the importance of respecting nature. Crayfish, deer, butterflies, newts, squirrels, wild flowers – there is so much to conserve and protect. For the younger children there is a petting farm and a pony club too.

Center Parcs are aiming to tick all the 'green' boxes and consequently this ecological awareness carries over into the beautiful design of the bungalows and the materials used to build them. They are comfortable, stylish and contemporary. You will even find a few sited high in the treetops!

The park flows around an enormous central village where the shops and restaurants are located in amongst waterfalls and tropical plants. A highlight is The Aqua Mundo where a vast 6,000 square metres of pools allows visitors to swim between them. There are 36 different activities on offer with everything from beach volleyball to archery, cycling to tennis, minigolf to electric boats... as well as a play area for the teeny tots and massage rooms for the adults!



Eden Treehouses

The Center Parcs Domaine du Bois aux Daims has a selection of treehouses that are quite something! The two-bedroom accommodation, for two adults and two children, has fantastic views over the whole area and is fully equipped with everything the modern day Swiss Family Robinson could ever need, from a coffee machine to a dishwasher, washing machine to the toaster, bathroom with whirlpool bath and flat screen TV in the living room. The materials used are all natural and eco-friendly.

www.centerparcs.com

Futuroscope

What's New at Futuroscope in 2016 ?

With almost 45.5 million visitors since it opened, Futuroscope is one of the best-loved leisure parks in France and the only one of its kind in Europe.

Futuroscope is the ideal place in which to relax, with 60 hectares of tranquil green countryside and 25 original experiences you won't find anywhere else: films in giant format, thrill-filled attractions, 3D rides with 4D effects, games, live shows, open-air activities and more....

The spectacular theatres inside Futuroscope are gigantic sculptures and their futuristic lines blend in smoothly with the surrounding landscape.

www.futuroscope.com

NEW films for 2016 are the Explorarium

A submarine adventure around the seas of the Bahamas and Fiji where we meet the organisms' that are at the very start of the food chain and Invisible World, a production from National Geographic Entertainment about the imperceptible world that because it is too small, too fast or too slow, we cannot see.

NEW for 2016

What are the technological breakthroughs that will change our way of life in the near future? The Future Exhibition is a series of ten different adventures – such as meeting Socibot, the humanoid robot, changing the décor of your bedroom in one sweep, piloting an avatar, cooking in the Bar'Lab of the future... and much more.



© CDI_2015-008DLV2020

NEW in 2016 will be the 4D adventure for all the family – the Ice Age

Join Sid and his friends shaking as they approach a tyrannosaurus rex, for example, there are plenty of giggles on this immersive ride.

NEW for 2016 is the evening show – Smythy of the Stars

A big bang creation from the same team as the Cirque du Soleil. The story is of a young girl who meets a virtual giant whose feet are on the earth and whose head is in the stars. The aquatic stage is one of the largest in Europe and the special effects and pyrotechnics are beyond belief.



© 45 Degrès-Cirque du Soleil-Futuroscope



Cycling

La Vélo Francette®

In June 2015, a new cycle route La Vélo Francette® (V43) was launched. This is a new north to south itinerary of 600 km from Ouistreham in Normandy to La Rochelle in Poitou-Charentes. The 630 kms route complements the existing, well-structured routes of Vélodyssée (EV1), le Tour de Manche (EV4), La Loire à Vélo and la Véloscénie which are all based on an east-west axis. La Vélo Francette® interconnects with these four courses as well as linking three regions - Normandy, Pays de la Loire, Poitou-Charentes, seven 'départements' - Calvados, Orne, Mayenne, Maine-et-Loire, Deux-Sèvres, Charente-Maritime and the Vendée and crossing three Regional Natural Parks - Normandie-Maine, Loire-Anjou-Touraine et Marais Poitevin.

It is a recognised fact that the tourism potential is particularly significant for Deux Sèvres as the area already benefits from the Loire à Vélo and the lovely route of Vallée du Thouet (120 kms) is blessed with an enviable Romanesque heritage and above all has 300 kms of cycle paths throughout the Grand Site de France of the Marais Poitevin. There are also 45 km of route in Charente-Maritime which also benefits from this 'slow tourism', where visitors appreciate the culture, gastronomy and the natural world they are cycling through. This is the real France, not the chichi version !

Thanks to the thrice daily ferry connections from Portsmouth to Ouistreham, there's potentially a million British tourists waiting to try the itinerary!

www.lavelofrancette.com



La Vélodyssée – the cycle route along the Atlantic Coast

From Roscoff to Hendaye, La Vélodyssée is 1250 km long with just 150 km in Charente-Maritime to Royan from La Rochelle, Rochefort, Marennes, etc. It is part of the Euroveloroute and the longest marked route in France.

www.lavelodysee.com



Accommodation



Lifestyle Accommodation

Mondo Bisaro

Mondo Bisaro is right in the centre in Angoulême. The lover of contemporary design, Céline Rochet-Bisaro, has opened something new. The accommodation comprises two apartments, 'Bis' and 'Ter', as well as a 'Ramones' suite and a 'Sonic' bedroom! The latter two are decorated in the Seventies style with vinyl, graphic motifs and a rock and roll feel. The apartments are in the nineteenth century house and have an American 'loft' decoration.

www.mondobisaro.fr



Eden Ouest

This eighteenth century townhouse that once belonged to a local arms manufacturer is near to the Old Port and markets of La Rochelle. Each of the five bedrooms, including four suites, is very large and each one has a terrace, patio or balcony. The hotel was completely restored last year. Each room has a well-being area in marble, with a larch wood bath and a private hammam. There is a pleasant garden where breakfast may be taken. The B & B is a cradle of artistic invention, thanks to the owner Lise Humeau, who is a great patron of modern art and a painter herself.

<http://edenouest.com/>

Lodges in the Parc de la Belle

The Parc de la Belle near to Magné covers ten hectares of land and comprises different landscapes such as French – style garden, vegetable garden, farm, rose garden, Japanese garden and so on. The latest addition to the variety of accommodation on offer, are some lovely tree houses all at different heights among the branches. They are accessible by stairs, ladders or monkey bridges. There are also five new lodges on wooden stilts over the water housing up to six people each and with a warm, cosy feel to them.

www.cabanesdelabelle.com



Lifestyle Accommodation

Domaine des étangs

Situated just 50 kilometres from Angoulême in the heart of the Charentaise countryside, the Domaine retains a friendly, family based atmosphere whilst offering guests a real slice of luxury involving well-being, fine dining and nature. The Domaine has had a complete makeover recently employing the services of local craftsmen as well as two internationally recognised professional designers – Camille Muller (parks and gardens) and Isabelle Stanislas, interior designer. Surrounded by 1000 hectares of woods and seven lakes, the Domaine now boasts 29 rooms including seven suites. There is a spa in the old windmill, an open-air swimming pool and tennis court. There are also thermal baths in the old wine caves, a library, games room and fine contemporary art collection.

www.domainedesetangs.com



Domaine forestier Les Chervelières



Comprises of two' gîtes de charme^{*****} and two fishermen's gîtes^{***} in an unusual setting just 20 minutes from the Marais Poitevin and 45 minutes from Futuroscope. They are decorated in a very original way using metal, wood, glass and stone. One gîte sits on the lakeside and is an old farmhouse that has been turned into a three bedroom accommodation for up to seven people. Another gîte for up to four people is in the old dovecote with its small courtyard which has a medieval feel due to its herb garden and proximity to the farm animals – donkeys, lamas and horses. There is a superb view over the lake from the picture window. The two fishing gîtes – Carp and Sander, are built on stilts out over the water, again with lovely views. There is a private swimming-pool and a boat for the four properties to share. 2016 will see the opening of a cabin in the woods for nature-watching and which will also have sleeping facilities for up to four people.

<http://leschervelieres.com>

Le Logis de Péré ****, a 'Relais du Silence'

This beautiful old manor house sits in acres of stunning grounds close to Rochefort at Saint-Coutant le Grand. The accommodation is attractive, mixing the very old and very new. There is a chapel in which wedding ceremonies can be held, a large reception area for up to 200 people and in the basement a games room is open to the public, as are the sauna, swimming-pool and spa in the old orangery.

www.le-logis-du-pere.com





Gastronomy



Atlantic Coast



La Rochelle



Marais poitevin



Cognac Country



Futuroscope

Gastronomy ideas

Goat's Cheese

Goat farms and dairies may seem an unusual tourist attraction but when you have as many different cheeses as Poutou-Charentes, they are a real attraction for your gourmet visitors! The Route du Chabichou et des Fromages de Chèvre winds for some 200 km across the northern half of the region, linking producers who actively welcome visitors.

Goats' cheeses come in all shapes, sizes and colours, but the most famous of all is the Chabichou, thought to have been introduced by the Saracens who stayed in the area after their defeat in Poitiers in 732. They produced cheese 'de cheblis' (Arabic for 'goat'), which later changed to Chabichou. Watch out for the brown tourist signs.



Salt

The salt marshes along the north-west coast of the Ile de Ré are renowned for their fleur de sel or 'white gold'. Although less important to the island economy today than in centuries past, the industry has been successfully revived in recent decades, helping to preserve the traditional Rétais way of life.

Discover the whole story at the Ecomusée du Marais Salant ; explore the salt marsh trails on foot or by bike and taste the unique flavour of fleur de sel sprinkled on the island's delicious AOC new potatoes. For edible souvenirs, take home a tub of coarse salt crystals or a bag of scrumptious salt-flavoured caramels.



Cognac and Pineau des Charentes

The vineyards within the official "Cognac" area lie in Charente and Charente-Maritime. The Pineau des Charentes is made from a subtle blend of Charente grape juice and cognac. It is served as an aperitif or an accompaniment to foie gras and desserts.



Montmorillon Macarons

Awarded the distinction of being one of the top chocolate makers of France in 2010, Rannou-Metivier has six shops and ...the Macaroon Museum ! Macarons were brought to the area in the seventeenth century and five generations later the Rannou-Metivier family is still making the best macarons in town ! Montmorillon is the centre of French macaroon production without which you cannot leave town!

www.museedumacaron.com

www.ranou-metivier.com/macarons

Oysters

The oyster parks of the Marennes-Oléron basin produce some 60,000 tons of shellfish every year, almost half the total French production. Brightly painted wooden cabins line the rectangular ponds that span both the Ile d'Oléron and the mainland around the Seudre estuary.

Two of the four varieties of Marennes-Oléron oysters have been awarded the Red Label quality mark for their unique flavour, achieved through a process of double-refinement. This involves fattening up the tiny larva produced in open water in shallow basins on shore. Find out more by touring an oyster farm and visiting the Cité de l'Huître at Marennes.



Gastronomy

Les Orangeries and chef David Royer

Les Orangeries was the very first European Ecolabel hotel and restaurant in France. The owner, Olivia has introduced ecologically responsible practices throughout without compromising the comfort and hospitality of this 'hotel de charme'. There are several experiences on offer to hotel guests. Why not visit the kitchen garden with the chef or one of his team in the morning? There is no charge for this. There is the artistic course too painting the colourful produce found there – beetroots, cauliflower, carrots etc. There is a water colour group and another using the actual juices of the plants and fruits. There is an electric car available to clients to visit the area in an ecologically responsible fashion – Futuroscope, Monkey Valley, the Montmorillon countryside and so on. Another idea is to take a gastronomic picnic to eat under the stars.

David Royer, the young chef in Les Orangeries, won the 'Young Talent of the Year 2016' award from Gault-Millau in October last year beating 25 other candidates. This will give him two 'hats' in the guide for 2016. The restaurant has itself three 'hats' in the guide as well as having won International Sustainable Restaurant of the Year in 2014 and 2015 from the SRO (Sustainable Restaurant Organisation). This accolade was due to the inventive seasonal menus thanks to the biological produce from the kitchen garden and bought from local producers. It was the first restaurant in France to attain these giddy heights.

David Royer specialises in a vegetarian menu using 100% biologically grown produce from the kitchen garden that he has developed since he arrived at Les Orangeries. David also gives cookery classes outlining how to economise in the kitchen – from using energy to using produce.

www.lesorangeries.fr/restaurant



© Felix_Vigne_Castalie-DR_5

'De l'île aux papilles' ('Tastebud Island') – a restaurant of zero waste and 'locavore'

Sébastien and Sarah always wanted to open their own restaurant based on sustainable growth, bio cuisine, using locally grown or bio-produced ingredients, and utilising their savoir faire, him, as a chef and her in event organiser. In February 2016 their dream is realised.

'L'île aux papilles' is an innovative restaurant inasmuch as these ambitious owners aim to attain their environmental objective within three years. This is to have zero waste – so all products used will be recyclable, re-usable or bio-degradable. For example serviettes will be made of material, they will feature doggy bags, turn used cooking oil into fuel, use slate menus and so on.

Sébastien and Sarah have also launched their own 'crowdfunding' operation whereby part of the décor of the restaurant can be sponsored. Financial donations will be used to pay for the lights, lamps, cushions, serviettes, tablecloths etc. These will be made by local craftsmen. In return sponsors will be treated to a drink or meal depending on their contribution.

<https://financeparticipative.lanef.com/projets/detail/de-lile-aux-papilles>



© Emmanuel Ligner



Events



Festivals & Events

Maraisthon in Coulon 19th June 2016

The eco-friendly Marathon is centred around Coulon in the Marais Poitevin, which is classified as a 'Grand Site de France'. Visitors may choose to watch the marathon, take part in a ten kilometre run, an eleven or sixteen kilometre guided walk or simply browse through the accompanying exhibition and bio-produce market. Pre-registration is required.

The Maraisthon is a first for sport in France – a sporting event that is entirely based around sustainable development and ecology. It's also the first sporting event in the world to have a charter of ten ethical points. NEW for 2016 are the duo-marathon – two loops of 18 and 24 kilometres, a 16 kilometre walk and the Maraisthon Village with entertainment and exhibitions for the public.

Most marathons usually take place in urban settings whilst this novel event is run mostly on the flat (pew!) over its 42 km course. What sets this event apart from the rest is the ecological nature of the organisation, as touched on above. All communication and signage is eco-responsible, runners are asked to use recyclable or biodegradable materials and there is a serious cleaning up campaign post-race to limit the effects of the event on the fragile environment. Prizes are 'natural', so no medals are presented. Instead, nougat medals, angelica cuttings and boat trips are the prizes. All partners and suppliers are chosen for their ecological credentials and there are plenty of events taking place around the Maraisthon – from jogging mornings with bio-breakfast, to nature guided tours and an exhibition about the relationship between CO2 and water, not to mention a bio market.



www.maraisthon.fr



Nuits Romanes in Poitou-Charentes

25th June - 3rd September

This cultural spectacle will be celebrating twelve years of existence this year. It encompasses over 170 evenings of entertainment by more than 750 performers in 300 different shows and welcomed more than 194,000 visitors last season. The productions take place all over the Poitou-Charentes region and incorporate all types of entertainment from street musicians to theatre and dance. There is something for adults and children alike. This amazing series of events takes place between 25th June and 3rd September 2016.

<https://nuitsromanes.poitou-charentes.fr>

Cognac Blues Passion 5th - 9th July 2016

Cognac's most famous export is undoubtedly its namesake but the town's fame is now rising in the music world too thanks to its annual festival, Cognac Blues Passions. Stars are lining up to appear at the 2016 event and include Marianne Faithful, Faada Freddie and the Balkan Brothers. Whilst the heart of the festival remains the blues music, the recent festivals have broadened their repertoire to include other music from across the world.

Choose from simply enjoying the festival atmosphere at one of the many pavement bars and restaurants or buy a ticket to one of the daily events held in the beautiful botanic gardens.

www.bluespassions.com



Festivals & Events



© Francofolies/JF.AUGER

Francofolies in La Rochelle

13th - 17th July 2016

For the 32nd year of the Francofolies, the "Francos" (as they are otherwise known) will welcome Mika, Aaron, Broken Back, Big Flo, Caravan Palace, Guts, Louane and many more fabulous musicians and entertainers.

www.francofolies.com

Un Violon sur le sable in Royan

23rd - 26th - 29th July 2016

This annual classical music festival held in Royan starts this year at 10pm on the 23rd. Whether you are an avid fan or just passing through you cannot be less than impressed by the wonderful spectacle of this open air concert hall on the beach, under the summer stars. The festival welcomes more than 50,000 people for each concert.

www.violonsurlesable.com



© Un violon sur le sable / Production 114



© Grand'Angles

Les vacances de Monsieur Haydn

Mr Haydn's Holiday -

16th - 18th September 2016

Young classical musicians from all corners are the stars of this series of concerts now in its twelfth year. This time there will be recitals of not only Haydn but Schubert, Mozart, Beethoven, Strauss and Wagner amongst others.

www.lesvacancesdemonsieurhaydn.com

Access

All Areas

Easy access from Paris, between the Loire chateaux and Bordeaux

By car:

From Paris

A10 motorway to Bordeaux, then take the road towards Poitiers (3.30) and La Rochelle.

A10 motorway and Nationale10 road link Poitiers to Angoulême and Bordeaux.

A837 and Nationale 137 road link to La Rochelle, Rochefort, Saintes and Cognac.

By train

From Paris – Montparnasse: TGV services to Poitiers (1.40), Angoulême (2.30), Niort (2.30) and La Rochelle (3.15).

From Paris Charles de Gaulle: TGV services to Bordeaux (4.20) with stops in Poitiers (2.25) and Angoulême (3.15).

From Bordeaux to Angoulême (1) and Poitiers (1.50).

By air

Direct flights within France:

- Poitiers-Lyon with HOP!, with connecting flights from Lyon to Metz-Nancy, Mulhouse, Strasbourg, Marseille, Nice, Montpellier, Toulouse et Pau
- Poitiers - Ajaccio
- La Rochelle - Paris
- La Rochelle - Ajaccio

Direct flights to Europe:

Poitiers Airport:

- London Stansted with Ryanair
- Edimbourg Ryanair

La Rochelle Airport:

- Lyon with Hop!, with connecting flights to Amsterdam, Francfort, Munich, Milan, Barcelona, Madrid ;
- London Stansted with Ryanair, London Gatwick with easyJet
- Bristol with easyJet
- Birmingham and Southampton with Flybe
- Cork and Dublin with Ryanair
- East Midlands with Ryanair
- Manchester with Flybe
- Brussels with Ryanair
- Porto with Ryanair





Map



Key to symbols

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| | Boat trips |
| | Golf |
| | Tourist train |
| | High Speed train |
| | Regional train station |
| | Airport |
| | Roads to Santiago de Compostela |
| | Cycle track |
| | Motorway |
| | Dual carriageway, main road |
| | Main road |
| | Railway line |

10 km

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