



Poitou-Charentes Tourism

Press Pack 2015

Press Pack

Atlantic Coast & Cognac Country

Poitou-Charentes

For more information, please visit our website

www.visit-poitou-charentes.com

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5 reasons to visit Poitou-Charentes in 2015 :

- 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'

Profile

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
- 826km of road to Santiago de Compostela
- 2950 km cycle tracks
- 2195 km mountain bike tracks
- 220 km navigable roads
- 20 Golf courses



Heritage

Eight churches are classified by the Unesco World Heritage organisation of which six are situated on the road to Santiago de Compostela: the Churches of St Hilaire of Poitiers and Melle, the Church of St Pierre d'Aulnay-de-Saintonge, the Royal Abbey of St Jean d'Angély, the Church of St Eutrope of Saintes and the Hospital of Pilgrims of Pons. Two outstanding sites are registered by Unesco World Heritage: the Abbey of St Savin with her recently restored frescoes and St Martin de Ré which is within the framework of the network Vauban (since 2008).

Cities and Villages

Six cities and seven territories have the label 'country of art and history': Poitiers, Rochefort, Saintes, Royan, Cognac, Pays d'Angoumois, Thouars, Pays de Parthenay, Pays Montmorillonais, Pays Mellois, Pays Confolentais, Pays de l'Île de Ré, Pays Châtelleraudais.

Six villages are among 'The Most Beautiful Villages in France': Angles-sur-l'Anglin, Ars-en-Ré, La Flotte, Aubeterre-sur-Dronne, Mornac-sur-Seudre and Talmont-sur-Gironde.

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Destinations



Atlantic Coast



La Rochelle



Marais poitevin



Cognac Country



Futuroscope

&

Hermione Lafayette frigate



Hermione

Lafayette's Freedom frigate

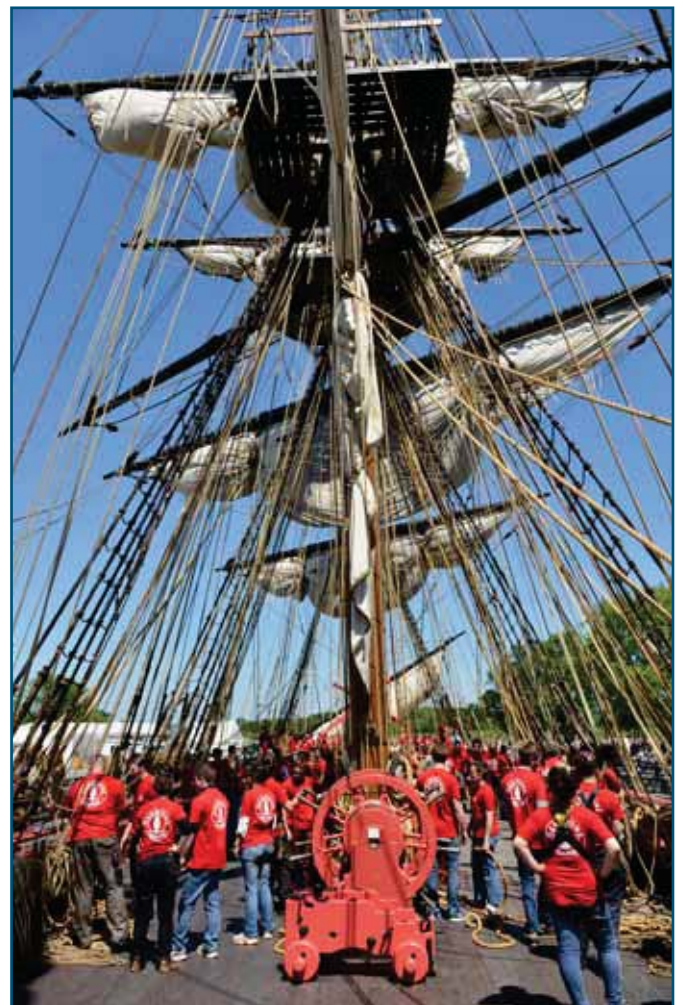
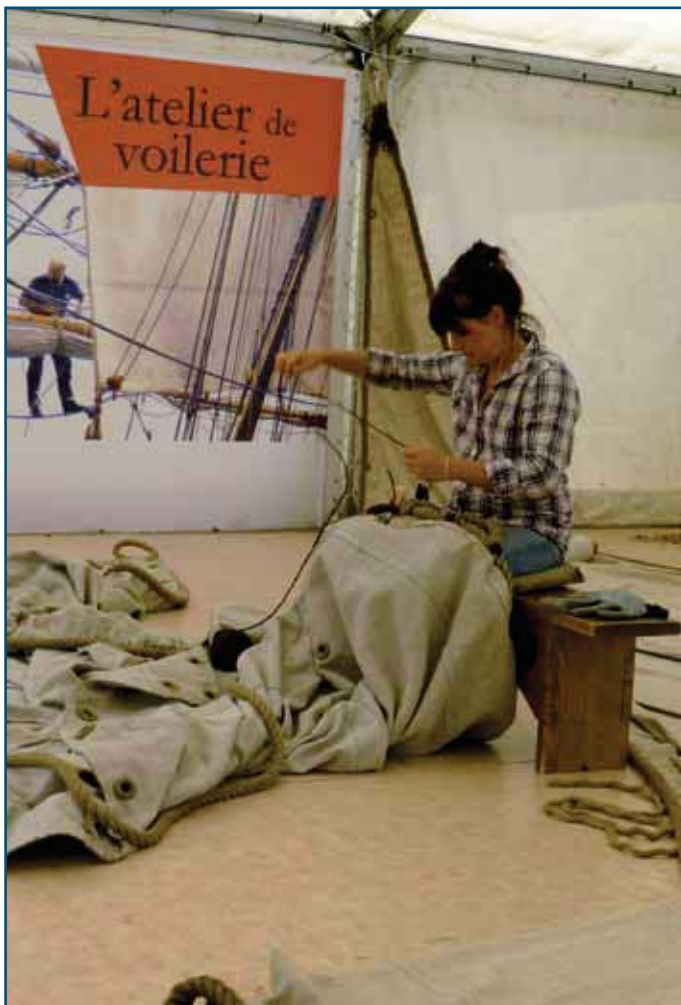
Work began on the reconstruction of Lafayette's frigate 'Hermione' in 1997 in Rochefort - **the ship that took Lafayette across the Atlantic in 1780 to assist General Washington in the American Civil War.** He had convinced the French king to aid Washington with reinforcements and fought alongside the Americans on the 'Hermione' for over eighteen months.

The ship is 65 metres long, has three masts with over 1,500 square metres of sails and a hull built of oak. It was decided to rebuild the ship to commemorate the maritime heritage of France and more locally, the importance once held by the Arsenal of Rochefort.

In 2014 'Hermione' went undergo sea trials, in September and October. At the start of the year the Hermione- LaFayette Association started recruiting personnel to work on board – about 80 people are needed.

Work is finished and the ship will set sail once again across the Atlantic in April 2015 supported by the French and American Navy. She will stop at symbolic ports of call en route – Rochefort, of course, to the Canaries, Yorktown and Annapolis then finally New York and Boston. This journey originally took 38 days to complete. She will return to France in August 2015.

www.hermione2015.com



Hermione

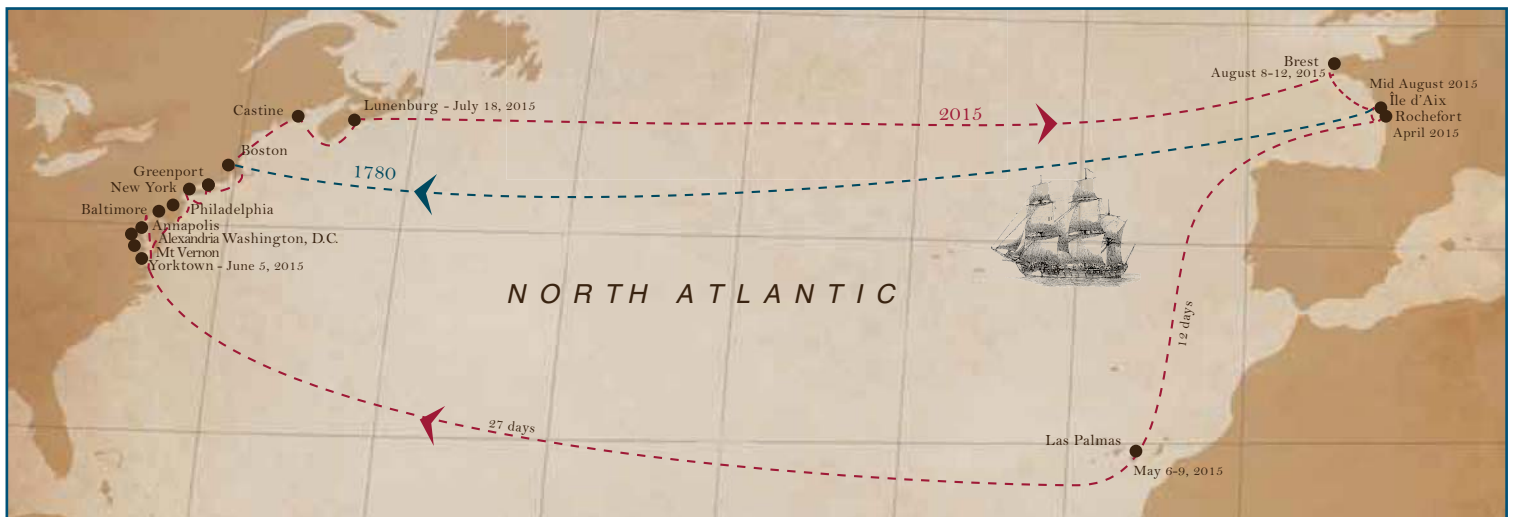
Voyage 2015 to America

In April 2015, after a period of sea trials and training in 2014, **the Hermione will set sail for the USA**. The journey will start from the mouth of the river Charente, in Port des Barques, where Lafayette boarded on March 10th, 1780.

The transatlantic crossing is expected to take 27 days in total, before landfall at Yorktown, Virginia, where the original had engaged in the blockade that led to the British defeat at Yorktown.

The provisional itinerary will take the Hermione to Yorktown, Mount Vernon, Alexandria, Annapolis, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Greenport, Newport, Boston, Castine and Lunenburg.

Don't miss the Hermione in the U.S



Atlantic coast

Rochefort

Walk through Rochefort on the towpath beside the Charente and it's easy to imagine yourself back in the 17th century when this former fishing village was chosen as the site for the royal dockyard of 'Sun King' Louis XIV. Tucked in a meander of the river, some 20 km inland south of La Rochelle, Rochefort offers 21st century visitors a chance to step back into an age of maritime adventure and exploration.

Every building and bend in the river tells an exciting new tale. Visit the museum behind the elegant façade of the Corderie Royale or Royal Rope Factory ; tour the Musée de la Marine inside a building that was once home to naval captains ; and stroll the Jardin des Retours to see exotic plants brought back by naval expeditions. Begonias were named here in Rochefort after Monsieur Begon, who oversaw the transformation of a wooden village into a town of broad streets and stone mansions.



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.



Hôtel Napoléon - Aix

Focus on

A young 'aide de camp' of Napoleon and his beloved American wife Eva moved to Aix when the island was in decline and gave it a new lease of life by opening museums and welcoming tourists. The Hotel Napoleon is situated in the small village and only reopened few years ago, offering 18 elegant rooms, some with ocean views. Sleeping on this tiny island is a unique and tranquil experience, and bikes are available at the hotel to help guests explore the beautiful setting. The Chez Josephine restaurant specialises in healthy and innovative cuisine. On fine evenings, dine on outdoor terrace for a front row view of the sunset.

<http://www.hotel-ile-aix.com>



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. This area features the ponds where the **famous Marennes- Oléron oysters are fattened up!** Colourful oyster-loaded boats proliferate, with their captains carefully orchestrating their arrival and departure!

On the island, the unique countryside can be explored on foot, by bike or on horseback! Military and maritime Oléron possesses the citadel of Oléron and **Fort Boyard** (yes indeed, that's the fort known to French and English TV viewers!).



Our 'Coup de coeur'



Novotel Thalassa Oléron Saint Trojan

Right on the tip of the island of Oléron, the Novotel has a calm, serene atmosphere as befits a thalassotherapy centre. There are beautiful views out to the ocean, even from some of the treatment rooms so you can have a massage facing the sea! In the summer holidays they have a mini-club for the children so you can take the whole family along to enjoy the island, the hotel even has bikes for you to borrow.

<http://bit.ly/1bvy2Qn>

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 can offer it.



La Rochelle

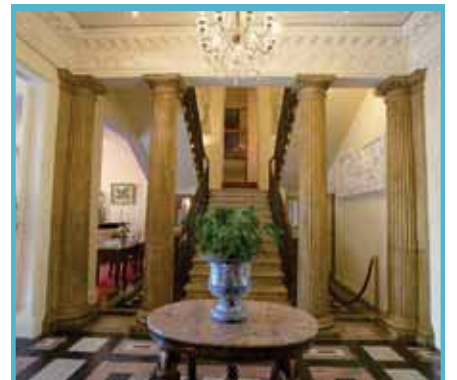
Historic Atlantic Port

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 3,500 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.**



Our '**Coup de coeur**'

Hotel Champlain ***

The Hotel Champlain in La Rochelle is just five minutes from the Old Port and the old town so is ideally placed for the visitor to explore or otherwise simply enjoy the pretty gardens. The rooms are very comfortable and all have flat screen TV's and free Wifi.

www.hotelchamplain.com



La Rochelle Aquarium

Classified best aquarium in France in 2014 by TripAdvisor.

This undersea journey begins with a jellyfish tunnel and travels through the world of Atlantic fish to the depths of the Mediterranean and the shores of the Caribbean, before moving on to a tropical lagoon and the Great Barrier Reef. The aquarium is home to around 10000 creatures from the world's oceans that live here in 3 million liters of seawater. Highlight for many visitors is a close encounter with the sharks. Open 365 days a year, the aquarium stays open until 11pm in July and August.

www.aquarium-larochelle.com



Sunset Cruise over the ocean

On a catamaran, sail from La Rochelle on the Atlantic for a sunset cruise. Unforgettable. The tour finishes in the old harbor, passing between the two towers.

www.kapalouest.com

Ile de Ré

The White Island

Known as the **'White Island'**, the Ile de Ré is the most northerly of the four islands just 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 defenses.



La Flotte food market

The daily market of La Flotte, dating from the Middle Ages, is set up in a paved and halfcovered marketplace. The best place to discover all local products, oysters and other shellfish, fish, salt, wine and seasonal fruit and vegetables, and meet the locals!

The market 'of La Flotte' is the only one on the Ile de Ré that is open every morning all year round.



Our 'Coup de coeur'

Le Clos Saint-Martin

Le Clos Saint-Martin Hôtel & Spa stands in the middle of a park and offers quality service with a smile in a chic and relaxing atmosphere. The hotel reflects the spirit of the island just a few steps from the port and its fortifications. You'll enjoy the calm and peacefulness of this lovely residence, the heated outdoor pools, and... of course the Spa by Clarins.

www.le-clos-saint-martin.com/uk



La Route des métiers d'art

The Arts and Crafts Route on the Ile de Ré is new for 2014. Being both educational and fun it takes visitors to various locations on the island to watch artisans at work creating their various pieces, whilst explaining how they work.

www.holidays-iledere.co.uk



Cognac country

You know everything about wine and champagne, now learn about Cognac

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.

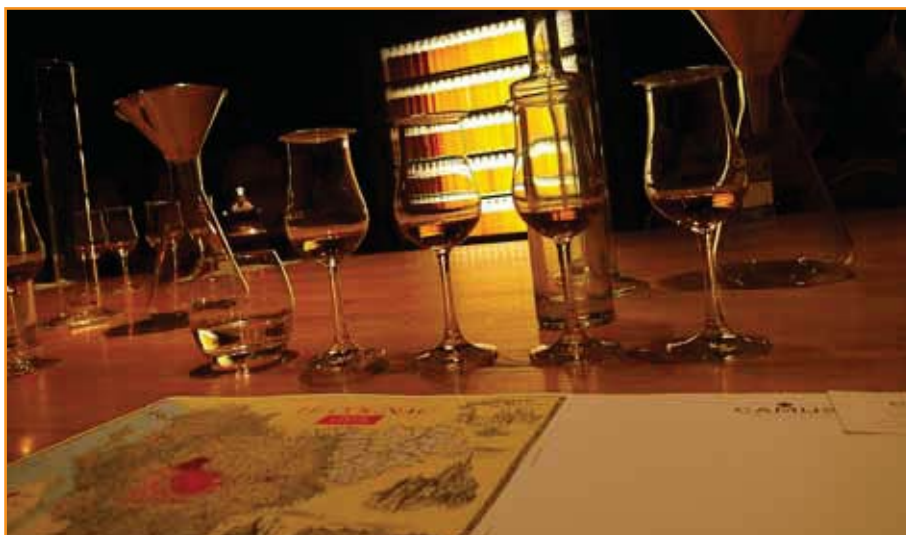
The vineyards of Cognac constitute the 2nd largest area of production in France after Bordeaux and cover an area of 80,000 hectares.

Do you know that you can make your own cognac at the "maison Camus"?

Amongst many of the programmes offered at the Ateliers Camus is the Master Blender Programme. Participants take part in one of the vital stages in the creation of cognac. After an introduction to the art of cognac tasting, one steps into the world of the Cellar Master. Under his guidance, one creates one's own cognac blend by choosing 'eau de vie' from the finest vines of the region. An experience that you can't live anywhere else in the world.

Duration: two hours at €160 per adult including one 50cl bottle of your own XO cognac.

www.camus.fr



Otard Cognac

The Cognac House of Otard is the only house situated in what was a Royal Palace. Once home to François 1st of France, the chateau was purchased by Baron Otard after the French Revolution, as he saw it as the perfect place to age the cognac he started producing in 1795. Otard cognac is aged for a minimum of six and a half years whereas normally cognac, by law, has to age for two and a half years. The strict quality controls, eau de vie from the grapes and humid cellars in the castle all give Otard its distinctive taste.

www.baronotard.com

Chateau Courvoisier

Dating back to Napoleonic times the House of Courvoisier sits on the banks of the River Charente occupying the Paradis Cellars where this distinctive cognac is aged in hand-made barrels. Guests can enjoy tastings and take a look in the museum- there are several options available all year round.

<http://courvoisier.com>



Rémy Martin Chocolat

This special programme incorporates a cognac tasting that forms an alliance with chocolate through various flavours and consistencies. Each of the three cognac tastings is partnered by a specialised chocolate interpretation.

A gourmet pack is included in the entrance price of €100 so you can recreate the experience at home.

www.visitesremymartin.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.



Made in Cognac country: Les Tcha

Felt production in the Charentaise dates back to the eighteenth century when the material was used to make army uniforms by the tailors of Rochefort. Warm and snug, the Charentaise slippers gained a notoriety that lasts to this very day. Six types of slipper are made in different colours, popular with men, women and children alike. Only 100% natural materials are used.

The iconic French slippers, now with a new look, are available in the US.

www.tcha-charentaise.com

www.tcha-usa.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.



September 2015

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 weekend-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



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.



Our 'Coup de coeur'

Stay in Niort – gateway to the Marais Poitevin :

Fenetre sur cour and Un coin en ville

These are two new gites created by the owners of 392bis which opened last year in the Marais Poitevin. Fenetre sur cour is a very modern gite just off the Place de la Brèche in Niort, gateway to the Marais Poitevin that can sleep up to four people. Just as the sister apartment, Un coin en ville, the buildings date from the beginning of the twentieth century and has thick stone walls and beams which contrast with the ultra-modern interior décor.

www.le392bis.com

Focus on

Marais Poitevin: 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 700,000 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 breathtaking 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.parcs-naturels-regionaux.tm.fr



Poitiers

Romanesque capital

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 given shape 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.

Not to miss: the Polychromies

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.



Sleep in an old chapel at the Hôtel Mercure Poitiers Centre ****



Housed in the 1854 Jesuit chapel, designed by renowned French architect Magloire Tournesac, the hotel has over 50 bedrooms with some offering an unobstructed view over the town of Poitiers. The restaurant 'Les Archives' is located in the nave and chancel of the former chapel. The kitchens are run, by two talented young chefs Gil Elad and Ayako Ota.

www.mercure.com



5 things to do

La Palmyre Zoo

Founder and local boy Claude Caillé was introduced to the animal world by his wife; the zoo remains a private family concern to this day. It all started with their travelling zoo that went the length and breadth of the country visiting schools. Claude set up the zoo on the Atlantic coast of Poitou-Charentes in 1966 with just 60 animals. Today there are 1,600 animals and about 700,000 visitors a year whose entrance fees help fund many of the conservation programmes practised at the zoo. Palmyre Zoo is open all year round.

www.zoo-palmyre.fr



Monkey Valley

A wander through the world of monkeys, this is a lovely setting covering fifteen islands where 400 animals from 30 different species are perfectly free to move around. Visitors get successively acquainted with a group of wild chimpanzees, a family gorillas, tiny monkeys such as titis, tamarinds and marmosets – as well as pygmy monkeys (the smallest in the world), intriguing lemurs... The park is the only one in France to have bonobos, a species who has a lot of similarity to human.

Monkey Valley is a pioneer in regards the protection of species.

www.la-vallee-des-singes.fr

Défi Planet

The Défi Planet' offers a variety of accommodation from gipsy caravan to chateaux in the tree, mushroom houses, snail house... it is quite some place to be explored and there is so much to do.

The main attraction is a theme park based on sustainable development. The park allows the visitor to discover nature and how they can help to protect the environment we live in.

www.defiplanet.com



New 2015 - Center Parcs

Welcome to the 5th Center Parcs village in France, Le domaine du bois aux daims holiday park, which will open in Les Trois Moutiers in June 2015. Surrounded by incredible flora and fauna, the all-wooden cottages are completely integrated into the countryside. There is an Aqua Mundo a tropical swimming paradise, with aquatic fun to be had by everyone! Le domaine du bois aux daims holiday park is a true paradise for children. Everything is provided so that they will never get bored and they will experience unforgettable holidays! From toddlers to teenagers, there's something for all ages.

www.centerparcs.fr

with your kids

Futuroscope

With almost 44 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

Aérobar

The Aerobar lifts twelve lucky guests 115 foot in the air with drink (and snack) in hand to have twelve minutes of spectacular views over the Park. This is an entirely unusual foodtainment experience and can be enjoyed with family and friends. Feet dangling from an airship – you will not have drunk a glass of champagne like this before!



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FUTUROSCOPE. CDI_2013-007 -- DLV 2018

New – The Arena Fun Xperiences

Get in on the pumping action in this totally whacky sports training centre! This futuristic arena has been designed so you can max out on the thrills and fun in a range of wild new, entertaining sports games that include free-fall slides, sprinting, flying-ball, laser training, and mind-ball. Get your body moving and get grooving, people! You're the stars of this show!

New – The Kube Mysteries

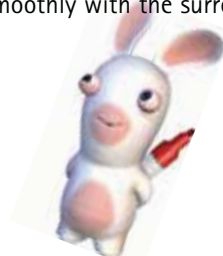
Archaeologists have discovered a mysterious cube. As it is unveiled to the public, it sits serenely on display when, suddenly...

Get ready to be taken into a fantastical world with this new live theatre performance that blends acrobatics, dance and digital arts built around an innovative stage set. Devised by Mu-Events



Lady Ô – Evening show

The Lady Ô Evening Show sends guests spinning into a world of dreams and make-believe to end their day. A glorious extravaganza which combines art and technology to bring a ground-breaking spectacular bursting up from one of the largest water stages in Europe. A magical night-time experience you will never forget...



The Time Machine 'European Star award 2014' by the Kirmes & Park Revue

Is an incredible journey back in time with the Raving Rabbids. Futuroscope has cranked up this attraction with a unique blend of art and technology to bring visitors an all-out intensive, immersive experience. The moving platform and polarised glasses take the audience through four historical scenes, each bursting with thrill after thrill against backdrops that merge with 3D computer-generated images and are boosted by 4D effects, immersing them in a key moment from history.



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 chateau 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.

Aubeterre-sur-Dronne

In the south of the region at the gateway to the Périgord, this charming village follows a natural amphitheatre above the Dronne and is classified amongst the Most Beautiful Villages in France and

Petites Cités de Caractère. Wander its narrow streets between old stone buildings decorated with galleries and wooden balconies, and sheltered by curved clay tiles in shades of russet and brown. Leave time to explore Aubeterre's stunning ecclesiastical buildings.

The church of Saint Jean is the largest troglodyte church in Europe, hollowed out of the rock in the 12th century near the site of a primitive cult – a truly spiritual location whatever your beliefs.

Petites Cités de Caractère®



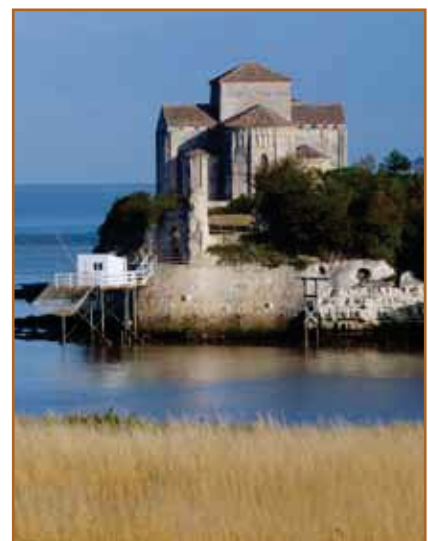
- > Aubeterre-sur-Dronne
- > Villebois-Lavalette
- > Airvault
- > Arçais
- > Oiron
- > La Mothe-Saint-Héray
- > Saint-Loup-sur-Thouet
- > Saint-Savinien
- > Celles-sur-Belle
- > Melle



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.



A bit of America

in Poitou-Charentes

New York began as Angoulême

How many New Yorkers realise that their city was originally named after Angoulême in Poitou-Charentes? The first European to discover New York was Giovanni da Verrazano who sailed into the harbour on 17 January 1524 on board La Dauphine. The captain's expedition was sponsored by Francis 1 of France, born in Cognac and known as Francis of Angoulême until he became king in 1515. So Verrazano dutifully named the harbour Angoulême in honour of the monarch. The name appears on many 16th century maps but the town was renamed New Amsterdam in 1625 when it became a Dutch colony, and finally New York when taken by the English in 1664.



Samuel de Champlain

Born in Brouage near Rochefort around 1567, Samuel de Champlain served in the French Navy as Maréchal des Logis under King Henri IV. **Between 1599 and 1601, he explored the West Indies, but his name is forever associated with Canada.** From 1604 to 1607, de Champlain helped found the first French colony on the shores of Port Royal in Nova Scotia, the hub of the French territory christened Acadia. De Champlain himself continued down the St Lawrence, founding Quebec in 1608, discovering the region of the Great Lakes, and leading several expeditions against the Iriquois. He went on to become Governor of New France, and died in Quebec on Christmas Day 1635.



New Rochelle

When a group of French Protestants or Huguenots fled religious persecution in 1688, they crossed the Atlantic and bought 6,000 acres of fertile farmland along the shores of Long Island Sound, settling in an area very similar to the one they had left behind. **They called the community New Rochelle to reflect their home port of La Rochelle** - last Huguenot stronghold in France - and they made their living from farming and fishing, transporting their produce along navigable waterways to the centre of New York. Today, New Rochelle is the seventh largest city in New York State and maintains strong links with the French port where the story began.

Nicolas Martiau the ancestor of George Washington

On 11 October 2007, the U.S. Ambassador to France, Craig R. Stapleton, inaugurated a statue of George Washington in the garden of Ernest Cognacq Museum in Saint Martin de Re (Ile de Re). A tribute to the most famous 'Rétais' - Ile de Ré native - in the U.S.: Nicolas Martiau, his direct ancestor. Naturalized British in 1619, he started to work for the Count of Huntington and sailed to America. He contributed to the foundation of the town of Yorktown which earned him the nickname of 'Father of Yorktown'. But his fame in the U.S. comes from its descendants: by his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, he is the earliest emigrant ancestor of George Washington.



Short Break Idea

Cognac and the islands

Day 1 : Cognac

- Visit of the Camus cognac house and participation in their Master Blender programme where you will learn to blend your own cognac www.camus.fr
- Lunch at L'atelier des Quais along the river Charente www.ateleirdesquais.fr
- Visit of the MACO Cognac Museum www.musees-cognac.fr
- Dinner and overnight at the Château de l'Yeuse www.yeuse.fr



Day 2 : Ile d'Aix

- Ferry boat from Fouras to Ile d'Aix
- Tour of the island by bicycle or horse carriage
- Visit of Napoleon Museum and Nacre Museum www.musees-nationaux-napoleoniens.org
- Dinner and night at the Hotel Napoleon*** www.hotel-ile-aix.com



Day 3 : La Rochelle or Ile de Ré

- Visit of La Rochelle with a guide including the port area and old town
- Lunch near the market at 'La cuisine de Jules' a very contemporary restaurant whose refined menu with the seasons www.lacuisinedejules.com
- Shopping : boutiques 'Matlama', the stalls along the port, 'Taste vin'...
The shopping areas centers around Rue du Temple, Rue Saint Yon, Rue des Merciers and rue du Palais (loads of shop and arcades). 'Glace chez Ernest' (it is a must!)
www.matlama.fr - www.ernest-le-glacier.com
- Dinner at restaurant Les Flots – one of Gregory Coutanceau's treasures in the Old Port area where seafood is a speciality www.lesflots.com
- Overnight at the Best Western Champlain*** – wich is just five minutes from the centre
www.hotelchamplain.com



Other option :

- Visit of the port of Saint Martin de Ré, the old remparts and of course the boutiques including the 'savonnerie au lait d'ânesse' which specialises in soap made with asses milk.
- Lunch at Le Grenier à sel at Ars-en-Ré www.grenierasel.fr
- Visit of the village of Ars en Ré
- Cycle ride from Ars, threw the salt marshes to the famous lighthouse 'des baleines' classified as an historical monument in 1904
- Dinner at the restaurant L'Avant port wich is an establishment almost in the sea and where the fish dive directly from the sea to the plate www.lavantport.com
- Night at La villa Clarisse**** www.villa-clarisse.com



Short Break Idea

Wellbeing and culture

Day 1 : La Roche Posay

- Spa treatment at La Roche Posay Spa
La Roche Posay's Spa Source offers you a luxurious and authentic area of over 2,200 m², dedicated to beauty and well-being and fed by skin-regenerating thermal waters. Carrée des Sources : an area for relaxation with a sensory pool, fragrant hammam, meditation sauna, jacuzzi hydropool and gymnasium with private and group lessons. La Roche Posay can help you lose weight, relax, or pamper your skin with its wide range of treatments, split between four different areas.

www.spasourcelarocheposay.fr

- Lunch at the Lounge Grignotage et papotage
- Relaxation at the swimming pool, hammam or sauna
- Dinner and night at Les loges du Parc & spa**** – Renovated in 2014



Day 2 : Saint Savin and Poitiers

- Visit of the Abbaye of Saint-Savin, Unesco World Heritage. Saint-Savin has been described as 'the Sistine Chapel of the Romanesque period' and the moment you walk in through the main doors, it is easy to see why

www.abbaye-saint-savin.fr

- Lunch at Les Orangeries at Lussac-Les-Châteaux. International sustainable restaurant of the year 2014 www.lesorangeries.fr

- Visit of Poitiers : Poitiers is a supreme example of Romanesque art in France but the present day structure of Poitiers was given shape in the eighteen and nineteen centuries. 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 classified by UNESCO.

- Shop and buy macaroons – The Rannou-Métivier boutique has been making macaroons for over 90 years with a certain passion and creativity

www.rannou-metivier.com

- Dinner at Les Archives www.lesarchives.fr

- Night at the hotel Mercure Poitiers Centre

www.mercure.com/fr/hotel-8539-hotel-mercure-poitiers-centre/index.shtml



Lifestyle Accommodation

Le Logis de Puygaty

In the heart of the South Charente stands the Logis de Puygaty, a stately and authentic fortified manor dating to the 15th C. Once the home to and advisor to Francois I, France's Renaissance king, today the Logis and its outbuildings have been sensitively restored using native materials and the decoration has been interpreted in a rustic contemporary manner. The subject of five television programs in France, and featured in over 50 international magazines on travel and decoration, the Logis accommodates overnight guests in four guest bedrooms surrounding the central courtyard. The Logis de Puygaty is an ideal starting point from where to discover this fantastic and little-known area of France, rich in its tradition of Cognac-distillation, paper manufacturing, and Gallo-Roman history.

www.logisdepuygaty.com



Les jardins du lac ***

This is an ecologically friendly three star hotel where the restaurant is one of the Bonnes Petites Tables de Michelin and the views over the Lake du Bois Fleuri in Trizay are simply lovely. All rooms have a balcony and lake view, all produce is organically grown. Really relax by climbing into the jacuzzi or by taking in the panorama of green fields and woods.

www.jardins-du-lac.com

La Chamoiserie ***

Located in the heart of the historical centre of Niort the hotel is just steps away from the river and the station. There are 16 comfortable bedrooms and a lovely shaded garden. Each room has a Roman shower, flat screen satellite TV and ironing facility. There is a fitness room in the hotel too. Wifi is standard throughout. 'La Petite Cantine' restaurant offers regional wines and cheeses, salads and light refreshments.

www.hotelparticulierniort.com



Lifestyle Accommodation

Hôtel Le Ligaro *** Luxury Hotel

The Where to stay whilst visiting Cognac – try the Hotel Le Ligaro in Jarnac which opened its doors in September 2012. The ten rooms are very spacious and decorated in traditional colours of Cognac – orange, cinnamon, vanilla and chocolate. There is a boutique selling local produce and a gastronomic restaurant just 500 metres from the hotel run by the same family. The lovely garden area has been completely redesigned.

www.hotel-ligaro.com



Le Domaine de Saint-Palais

Live the experience in a charming hotel between sea and forest. Situated close to the Golf of Royan and 650 meters of fine sand beaches, this is the perfect place to relax.

Recently renovated the 15 rooms and the Suite offer all the comfort (private bathroom, TV LCD screen, free Wifi...). Originally a castle destroyed during the Hundred Years' War it's now an elegant hotel only 10 km from Royan.

www.domainedesaintpalais.eu



Hôtel de Toiras *****

Villa Clarisse ***** *Relais & Châteaux*

The Hotel Toiras is a 17th-century former ship owner's residence with a ideal location on Saint-Martin-de-Ré harbour. A perfect mix of elegance and luxury.

Villa Clarisse, the sister property, opened in 2012, was included in the 'It List Best News Hotels 2012' of Travel + Leisure: 'There's nothing we like more than uncovering a hidden gem. This new address Villa Clarisse is a petite hideaway on the picturesque French island of Île de Ré'.

www.villa-clarisse.fr/en
www.hotel-de-toiras.com



Gastronomy

Learn to be a chef

Flavours of France

In the picturesque, seaside town of La Rochelle you will be able to learn to cook dishes using local, seasonal ingredients such as the Pineau sauce made with the region's local aperitif on the Flavours of France French cooking course. Laurent has a way to make the most complicated of dishes look simple. During your French cooking course you will stay in Le Champlain a beautiful hotel located in the heart of La Rochelle. A short walk from the harbour your accommodation is the perfect base to explore this historic, lively town and is walking distance from the cooking course venue.

www.flavoursofrance.com



La Ribaudière

Thierry Verrat opened his restaurant in 1989; his expert cooking earned him a Michelin star. He now runs cookery classes too (in English as well as French). Students shop at the market with him in the early morning and then cook a three course lunch which is enjoyed with fine wines and an explanation from the sommelier.

www.laribaudiere.com

Restaurant du Chateau

In Jarnac, close to Cognac, you find the fine dining establishment of chef Ludovic Merle who combines quality produce with creativity! He plied his trade in New York then worked for Georges Blanc for four years before opening Restaurant du Chateau.

www.restaurant-du-chateau.com



Gastronomy

What to taste in Poitou-Charentes ?

Goat's Cheese

Goat farms and dairies may seem an unusual tourist attraction but when you have as many different cheeses as Poitou-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 Macaroons

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

www.museedumacaron.com

www.ramou-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.



Festivals & Events

International Comic strip art festival

in Angoulême 29 January - 1th February 2015

Each year in Angoulême, in Charente, the International Comic Strip Festival invades the town during the last weekend in January.

Over 250 exhibitors and 1,600 authors covering 36 nationalities will meet for the greatest pleasure of the 220,000 festival goers. In 2014, the 41st edition was chaired by illustrator Willem. The Jury awarded the First Prize to Bill Watterson for Calvin and Hobbes. www.bdangouleme.com



Francofolies in La Rochelle

10th - 14th July 2015

All styles of French language music converge at one of France's leading festivals held each summer. Les Francofolies welcomes all genres from soul to folk as well as hip hop, electro, blues and rock. With more than 250 concerts in eight different venues programmed across five days and nights, there is plenty to keep the most enthusiastic festival-goers entertained. www.francofolies.com

Cognac Blues Passions 29th June - 5th July 2015

World class music festival on the banks of the Charente

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. Whilst the heart of the festival remains the blues and blues-derived 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



Fête du Cognac 23th - 25th July 2015

A celebration of the Charente area, the Fete du Cognac is a gastronomic event promoting cognac ... and music.

Over 22,000 plates of regional specialties were served last year and 55,000 glasses of cognac, pineau and various cocktails including the emblematic 'Summit'. So feast during the day - there are five bars and 350 volunteers ready to serve you - and then enjoy some top line musicians performing in the evening. Stars such as The Stranglers are artists that have recently made an appearance.

www.lafeteducognac.fr

Festivals & Events

Highland Games World Championship

13th - 14th June 2015

The traditional Scottish Highland Games have existed ever since the 11th century; they provide an occasion for a reunion of members of clans often scattered throughout the world. Historically, when the games were over, the clan's chieftain had selected its swiftest, strongest and most proficient warriors.

It is therefore slightly surprising that the tradition of Highland Games now has a firm foothold in the historic Deux-Sèvres town of Bressuire which has been twinned with Fraserburgh in Aberdeenshire for the past two decades. This twinning has resulted in a passion for all things Scottish with the thousand-year-old château welcoming the first Highland Games complete with athletics, dancing and music to mark the fifth anniversary in 1996. The second competition was held in 2001 and the Games are now a much-anticipated, annual event. **In 2015, the best twelve throwers of the world will compete in BRESSUIRE. Dan Mc KIM and Matt VINCENT will represent the USA.**

www.highlandgames-france.eu



A Violin on the Sand in Royan

18th - 25th July 2015

Classical and lyrical music festival with a symphonic orchestra comprising some 80 musicians from Paris Opera and other major orchestras. A Violin on the Sand is an invitation for kids and grownups alike to sit on the beach, facing the ocean with their heart amongst the stars, and to enjoy some of the most beautiful and unexpected classical music ever heard in such a location. www.violonsurlesable.com

International Film Festival

in La Rochelle 26th June - 6th July 2015

The 41st festival is held in La Rochelle. In 2012 82,429 spectators watched 389 performances of 142 long films and 61 shorts. www.festival-larochelle.org



Coup-de-chauffe@benoitdidier

Coup de Chauffe in Cognac September 2015

The 19th arts festival takes place annually in Cognac with thirty or so regional, national and European companies taking part to show more than 60 free shows – art in the streets. www.avantscene.com

How to get to Poitou-Charentes ?

Access

all Areas

Easy access from Paris, between the Loire chateaux and Bordeaux

By car:

From Paris
A10 motorway to Bordeaux, then directions to 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 (1.30), Angoulême (2.15), Niort (2.15) and La Rochelle (2.50).
From Paris Charles de Gaulle: TGV services to Bordeaux with stops in Poitiers (2.20) and Angoulême (3.10).
From Bordeaux to Angoulême (55 mn) and Poitiers (1.35).

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

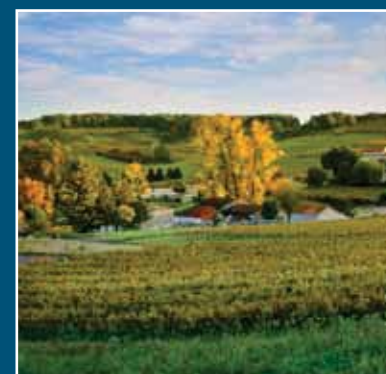
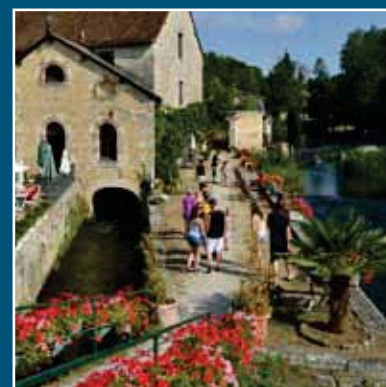
Direct flights to Europe:

Poitiers Airport:

- Londres Stansted / Shannon with Ryanair

La Rochelle Airport:

- Lyon with Hop !, with connecting flights to Amsterdam, Francfort, Munich, Milan, Barcelone, Madrid ;
- Londres Stansted with Ryanair ; Londres Gatwick with Easyjet ;
- Bristol with Easyjet
- Birmingham and Southampton with Flybe ;
- Cork and Dublin with Ryanair
- East Midlands with Ryanair
- Manchester with Flybe
- Bruxelles, Charleroy with Ryanair
- Porto with Ryanair





Map

Where is Poitou-Charentes ?



Key to symbols

	Boat trips
	Tourist train
	Golf
	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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