

The village of Banon is on the route de la lavande, which is at its best in late June.
BELOW The market at Place Richelme; Les Lodges Sainte Victoire has beautiful grounds.



VIVE LE LONG WEEKEND

We asked leading lights from the world of French design, interiors and food to share their favourite Gallic destinations. From family-owned hotels to secluded beaches, each offers a glorious insight into la vie en rose



MARTIN GLEIZE, Roche Bobois AIX-EN-PROVENCE

WHY My family and I have spent many summers in Aix in the south of France. Known for its architecture, climate and quality of light, it's wonderful to stroll around, and is surrounded by beautiful villages and landscapes. We enjoy browsing in the shops, stopping at cafés and generally taking life at a slower pace.

STAY We have family with a house in Aix, where we stay every year, but there are plenty of appealing options. Les Lodges Sainte Victoire hotel has a real buzz about it. Reasonably priced, an ideal combination of contemporary and Provençal style, and with a pool and pretty garden, it's an idyllic retreat five miles from Aix. From €225 per night for a double room. 2250 Route de Cézanne, 13100, Le Tholonet, 0033 4 42 24 80 40, leslodgessainte victoire.com.

EAT One of our favourite restaurants in town is L'Épicerie d'Aix. There's no

better place to sit and watch the world go by than in the shade of its plane trees in a small cobbled square. The waiters cool your wine in the stone fountain and serve authentic dishes including the best risotto, made with delicious ingredients from the market. 5 Rue Epinaux, 13090, Aix-en-Provence, 0033 4 42 23 24 86.

DO We like to start our mornings with a stroll into town and a trip to the market at Place Richelme, where local producers sell freshly picked, sun-ripened fruit and vegetables, traditional breads, cheeses and charcuterie. These are then simply unwrapped à table for a delicious lunch on the terrace.

VISIT Make sure you hire a car so that you can explore the local area. Not too far from Aix, you will find Banon and Maussane-les-Alpilles – a typical village nestled among olive and almond groves and one my family's favourites. For history, the newly renovated Fort Saint-Jean, linking the charming Panier district of Marseille with the new cultural centre on the port via walkways and footbridges, is well worth a visit.



PIERRE FREY, Pierre Frey CAP FERRET AND BASSIN D'ARCACHON

WHY Just an hour from Bordeaux, this unspoiled, rugged headland separates the Atlantic Ocean from the Bassin d'Arcachon. I've been visiting this area for as long as I can remember, as my great-grandmother had a cabin on the water's edge. The bay is calm, but twenty minutes' walk across the headland, you'll find the waves of the Atlantic, perfect for surfing. Famed for its lighthouse, the bay itself is dotted with small, picturesque villages.

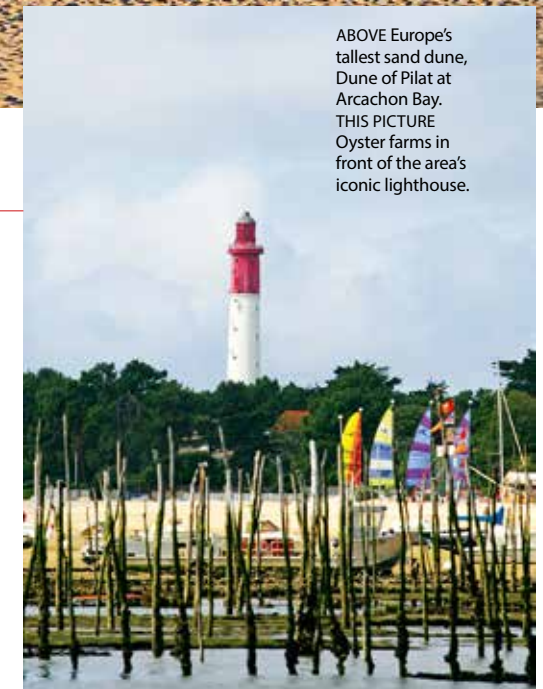
STAY I can thoroughly recommend La Maison du Bassin. I'll often pop into this elegant hotel for drinks before supper. Wisteria-clad in the spring, it has a lovely terrace, bar and restaurant and the comfortable rooms combine crisp linen with furniture from local flea markets. From €140 per night for a double room. 5 Rue des Pionniers, Cap Ferret, 33950, Lège-Cap-Ferret, 0033 5 56 60 60 63, lamaisondubassin.com.

EAT Head to Chez Hortense, a well-known institution overlooking the Dune of Pilat,

famed for its sole, oysters and mussels cooked in a secret signature sauce. This is unpretentious cooking at its best. Sit at one of the convivial trestle tables, but do book in advance as the quality of the fish here, coupled with a laid-back atmosphere, makes it popular with locals and visitors alike. Avenue du Sémaphore, 33950, Lège-Cap-Ferret, 0033 5 56 60 62 56, chez-hortense.fr.

DO Whether you want to catch a wave on the Atlantic or simply go fishing or scuba diving in the bay, this area is fantastic for sports enthusiasts. You can hire a boat to explore hidden coves or venture out on foot – there are plenty of impressive sand dunes to see and, being part of a nature reserve, the headland also features large pine forests. It's also a great place to rest and recharge.

VISIT Tour the villages that stud the headland, such as L'Herbe, Le Canon and Le Petit Piquey, and discover vintage treasures from



ABOVE Europe's tallest sand dune, Dune of Pilat at Arcachon Bay.
THIS PICTURE Oyster farms in front of the area's iconic lighthouse.

the antiques dealers found there. Or, do as the locals do and, after a day on the beach, head to pâtisserie Frédélian, renowned for its ice cream and gaufres (waffles). 33 Rue des Grèbes Cap Ferret, 33970, Lège-Cap-Ferret, 0033 5 56 60 60 59, fredelian-capferret.com. e

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ABOVE Hotel L'Hermitage in La Baule is steeped in history. THIS PICTURE Earth and sky meet at low tide on a Brittany beach.



THIS PICTURE Saint-Malo's marina at sunset. BELOW Oysters are famously good here.



ERIC VALERO, Nobilis SAINT-MALO

WHY I always head back to Saint-Malo in northern Brittany because it's where I come from. It's an incredibly picturesque spot, which is very green with a lovely beach and plenty to see within the walled city.

STAY I stay with my family, but often pop into Le Grand Hôtel des Thermes. It has Belle Epoque style and is right on the sea front, with incredible views and a great spa. From €105 per night for a double room. 100 Boulevard Hébert, 35400, Saint-Malo, 0033 2 99 40 75 00, le-grand-hotel-des-thermes.fr.

EAT I always spend an evening at Cancale harbour on the Bay of Mont Saint-Michel, a few miles from Saint-Malo. It's renowned for its oysters. Head there for seafood and a glass of white wine and eat out on the quayside with a view of the sea. st-malo.info/cancale.html.

DO Saint-Malo's beaches offer varied walks and, at the foot of the town's ramparts, Plage de Bon Secours, which was opened in the 1930s, is a popular option with its saltwater pool. Above all, come here for fresh air, great seafood and unspoiled beauty.

VISIT I love to go to Dinan, a medieval walled town that is located on a hillside 15 kilometres from Saint-Malo and overlooks the River Rance. There's a long and beautiful towpath and the town is known for its immaculately preserved timber buildings. In Saint-Malo, the Fort National, built in 1689 to defend the town from the Anglo-Dutch fleet, is accessible by foot at low tide. fortnational.com.



THIS PICTURE The private beach of Le Maquis hotel. BELOW Calvi's colourful buildings and citadel (left).

PRUNE ALLAIN DES BEAUVAIS, Yves Delorme LA BAULE-ESCOUBLAC

WHY I often return to La Baule to see my friends and family. It's easy to get to – just one hour from Nantes airport on the north-west coast of France. I've spent many childhood holidays here, building my first sandcastles, learning to swim and sailing catamarans, so it's especially rewarding to introduce it to my four-year-old son. The nine-kilometre bay is perfect for riding or long coastal walks.

STAY I've been visiting Hotel Hermitage Barrière on the Plage Benoît with my cousins since I was young. This large hotel is a local landmark and it's ideally located with steps leading from the terrace to the beach. One of the area's original resorts, it has an old-world charm. From €157 per night for a double room. 5 Esplanade Lucien Barrière, 44504, La Baule, 0033 9 70 80 94 44, lucienbarriere.com.

EAT If you have a car, make a beeline for Michelin-starred L'Atlantide in nearby Nantes. Headed up by chef Jean-Yves

Guého, its menu focuses on seasonal produce and the restaurant offers views across the Loire. 16 Quai Ernest Renaud, 44105, Nantes, 0033 2 40 73 23 23, restaurant-atlantide.net. For a sweet treat, head to Manuel in La Baule itself and try its famous niniches, a kind of lollipop made in a variety of flavours. 2 Avenue du Général de Gaulle, 44500, La Baule Escoublac, 0033 2 40 60 20 66.

DO We go to the local market and buy fruits, vegetables, baguettes and seafood. Long lunches are spent with friends, their children and my family. We like to stroll back to the beach in the evening to admire the sunset or enjoy a late swim.

VISIT The Côte Sauvage offers magnificent coastal walks. We try to make a pit stop at nearby village Batz-sur-Mer to take in the views, and we can never resist a salted butter caramel crêpe at Crêperie du Derwin, Allée du Dervin, 44740, Batz-sur-Mer, 0033 2 40 23 90 06.

MICHEL ROSET, Ligne Roset CORSICA

WHY This is one of the most beautiful islands in the world. It is still untouched by concrete, surrounded by the Mediterranean and studded with mountains. The white sandy beaches are unspoiled and you can swim for six months of the year. Corsicans are wonderfully welcoming people, too, and the island is just an hour's flight from Paris and half an hour from Marseille and Nice.

STAY Along with my brother Pierre, I inherited a property in Ajaccio on the island's west coast, but there are also some wonderful hotels. In Porticcio, Le Maquis is fantastic. It has its own beach, offering just the right sense of seclusion. Have a drink on the terrace overlooking the Sanguinary Islands. From €180 per night for a double room. BP 94, 20166, Porticcio, 0033 4 95 25 05 55, lemaquis.com.

EAT The island's ports provide wonderful fish. We'll often head to Chez Francis, a pailotte (beach restaurant) famed for its seafood,



Plage de Cala d'Orzo, 20138 Coti-Chiavari, 0033 4 95 27 10 39, chez-francis.com, or to Le Bilboquet, known for its simple but delicious food – both frequented by locals. 2 Rue des Glacis, 20000, Ajaccio, 0033 4 95 51 35 40.

DO I try to switch off and do as little as possible when I'm here. Our routine involves going to the market in Ajaccio and buying fish direct from the fishermen. We'll often take a picnic to a quiet beach, and we might walk in

the mountains or wander the streets of lovely old villages such as Calvi and Corte.

VISIT Head to the citadel at Ajaccio, where Napoleon was born. Or visit Galerie Marie Ricco in Calvi to view contemporary artwork. 3 Boulevard Wilson, 20260, 0033 6 83 24 94 58, galeriemariericco.com. Chez Tao, a piano bar in Calvi's citadel, is a wonderful place to spend the evening. Rue St Francois, La Citadelle, 20260, 0033 4 95 65 00 73, cheztao.com.

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Le Vieux Logis in Trémolat is lovely in summer and winter; one of Île de Ré's many beaches; the island's village of Saint-Martin.

ISABELLE BERESFORD PEYMAN, Philippe Hurel ÎLE DE RÉ

WHY Just a few kilometres from La Rochelle airport, this charming island off the west coast of France has long been a favourite of mine. The light, wildlife, salt marshes, unpolluted beaches and quality of life are a big draw – the island combines the warmth of the south with the vitality of the Atlantic coast.

STAY I am lucky enough to be able to stay with my sister and brother-in-law who have a house in Ars, but the nearby Le Sénéchal is a beautiful, family-run place that is full of character. From €80 per night for a double room. 6 Rue Gambetta, 17590, Ars-en-Ré, 0033 5 46 20 40 42, hotel-le-senechal.com.

EAT The island is full of fish restaurants. For informal dining, La Cabane de la Patache is situated on the beach. 15 Route de la Patache, 17880, Les Portes-en-Ré, 0033 5 46 31 38 22. La Cabane du Fier is the best place to enjoy the catch of the day while watching sunset. Le Martray, 17590, Ars-en-Ré, 0033 5 46 29 64 84, lacabanedufer.com. Also try the pancakes at La Route du Sel. 9 Place de l'Église, 17111, Loix, 0033 5 46 29 06 83, laroutedusel.fr.

DO The area is very flat, making cycling a pleasure at any time of year. Hire a tandem, tricycle or beach bike or explore the coastline on horseback. You can't come to Île de Ré without spending some time on its beaches and salt marshes. The uncrowded Plage du Gros Jonc is one of my favourites.

VISIT There is a patchwork of pretty villages including La Flotte, Loix and the tiny harbour village of Saint-Martin. Le Phare des Baleines is one of the tallest lighthouses in France and has spectacular views. lepharedesbaleines.fr. I

HÉLÈNE DARROZE, The Connaught TRÉMOLAT

WHY Trémolat is a beautiful medieval village, situated along the Dordogne River, and within easy reach of airports at Bordeaux, Bergerac and Périgeux. It has a tiny river running through it and a handful of colombages (post-and-beam buildings) built of local sandstone. The area's culinary treasures, including walnuts, foie gras and black truffles, all arrive at the markets in autumn, which is my favourite time to visit.

STAY I always stay at Le Vieux Logis. Once a Carthusian monastery, then a tobacco farm, it's been reinvented by the Giraudel family as a luxury hotel. Large gardens and a pool make it an ideal summer destination, while roaring fires keep it cosy in winter. The owners are so welcoming; I consider them my extended family. From €200 per night for a double room. 24510, Trémolat, 0033 5 53 22 80 06, vieux-logis.com.

EAT I like to indulge at Le Vieux Logis's Michelin-starred restaurant, where chef Vincent Arnould cooks authentic Périgord

cuisine. I enjoy the foie gras accompanied by a Bergerac wine. In warm weather, tables are set up outside; in cooler weather, you eat in the old tobacco-drying barn. The hotel also owns Le Bistrot d'en Face, just outside its front gates, run by Pierre-Jean Duribeaux. It's perfect for everyday meals.

DO My days consist of visiting nearby villages, foraging at the markets and taking long walks in the countryside through the vineyards. From cycling and fishing to wine tasting, there is no shortage of things to do in the area.

VISIT The village itself has two 12th-century churches, which are well worth a look. Just 45 minutes away, Les jardins suspendus de Marqueyssac offer splendid views over the Dordogne. Route de Vezac, 24220, Vezac, 0033 5 53 31 36 36, marqueyssac.com. Also nearby, the caves at Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil have prehistoric cave paintings that are open to the public. leseyziesdetayac.info.

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