

What to Do and Where to Go in the South Charente.

The south Charente is known as the 'Tuscany of France'. You can see why, as you discover this beautiful area.

THE VINES

This home is in the middle of a small town surrounded by vines within walking distance of everything important to your daily living requirements. It is an old stone house in keeping with its neighbors on the outside, yet comfy and with all modern conveniences on the inside.

Mere steps away is the beautiful Chateau Merignac with a neighboring distillery opposite rows of vines, on the edge of town.



You can hear the church bell chiming on the $\frac{1}{4}$ and the hour (during daylight hours), which is one of the special things about being in the middle of a French and indeed European village.

Merignac is a rural 'working town'. As such there are many noises associated with daily life here. Enjoy being a part of it.

Food Shopping: Walk 100 meters down Rue du L'Angoumois to buy your daily bread and croissants (don't forget dessert!) at the Boulangerie/Patisserie opposite the town square.



Boulangerie/Patisserie

The Merignac COOP convenience store has good quality essentials, but for larger family-style food shopping why not enjoy a leisurely stroll through the aisles of one of the supermarkets in Jarnac or Cognac. They are a destination in and of themselves. Take the shopping bags provided.

There is a Pharmacy and Medical Center on the main road to Route N141, within walking distance.

A Butchery and Traiteur, Hairdresser and Post Office are located in a new building opposite the large Pharmacy.

Marketing/Supermarkets/Cafes/Restaurants:

Many supermarkets are now open Saturday mornings or all-day Saturday. Some are even open Sunday morning, closing at 12.30pm. You can check opening hours online.

*In the month of August many businesses close for Annual vacation.

Jarnac

Enter 'Jarnac' into your GPS and take the route recommended. For supermarket shopping turn onto Avenue de l'Europe and follow the road to Lidl and Intermarche Supermarkets.

There is a *Bistrot du Marche* at Intermarche serving 'local' lunch, either Formule or A la Carte. Their prices are reasonable and the food is typical Charentais fare.

There is a Dry Cleaner's next to the supermarket here. There is also a car wash and petrol station.

To find the center of town look for signs indicating **Centre Ville** and follow those.

There is plenty of parking in the middle of Jarnac so stop here and take a stroll along the River or through the pretty streets, and find a café for a hot or cold beverage.

L'Alambic or *La Comedie* are both excellent candidates, on the square. The latter is open on Sundays and has staff who speak some English. Food choices in both of these bar/restaurants are excellent and so is the quality.

For a slightly more formal atmosphere, walk across the bridge to *Le Coin Charantaise* restaurant. Their menu and food is excellent. They are open 7 day.

Restaurant du Chateau, 15 Place du Chateau is reasonably expensive. Open 12-Noon until 9pm.

Le Verre y Table, 42 Avenue Carnot, Mainxe. This restaurant is close to the railway line on the main road leading into Jarnac and within easy walking distance of the main square.

Chateaneuf-sur-Charente: Here you will find a large SuperU supermarket on the outskirts of the town, and an excellent *Market Day on Tuesday, Thursdays and Saturdays outside the Mairie* right in the center of town. It is wise to find parking away from the center and walk these ancient streets to the market where you will also find a couple of excellent Cafes. Continue walking down the hill to the Charente River, and the

path to the right of the Bridge will take you to the Parc (*Le Bain des Dames*), alongside the estuary. You can swim safely here, in the river.

It is possible to rent Kayaks across the bridge and along the street to the right.

Across the bridge you will also find the restaurant La Tonnellerie. You can walk to the end of this street past the Ecluse (lock) and the Eclusier house (lock keepers house) on the small island in the river Charente. The weir and park (*Le Bain des Dames*) is opposite.

Cognac Supermarkets: Lidl and Auchan are in the Chateaubernard end of Cognac off N141. An Intermarche is on the opposite end of the city.

New food stores on Rue Victor Hugo include Grand Frais and FRESH, along with Boulangerie Marie Blachere, on both sides of the road.

Auchan supermarket is placed inside a Mall where you will also find Café 20 which is excellent for a typical French Petit Dejeuner. They have a Formule lunch and a la Carte menu as well.

Some of the shops in the mall include Clothing (children's and adults) Shoes, Chocolate, Opticians, Nail grooming, News agents/lottery.

Auchan sells bed/bathroom, small appliances/crockery/TV/Audio etc

Moving further down Rue Victor Hugo, stop at VICTOR at the roundabout on your right for an excellent lunch and pastries/bread and further down this road you will find one of our favourites, Fromentiere Boulangerie/Patisserie.

You can eat your pastry at both of these cafés, and order a coffee or tea there also. Fromentiere has a comfortable upstairs lounge with sofas and comfy chairs.

Walking/Picnics

You can walk freely through the vines and anywhere that is not fenced, as long as you respect the land owner's property. Do not sample the grapes please. They belong to the vineyard.

**Please be aware that machinery operates in the vines at all times of the year.

The Tables d'Orientation at Moulidars and Segonzac give you views forever across the Charente Valley and are fabulous places for a wine, cheese and baguette-style picnic.

Le Bain des Dames in Chateauf-neuf-sur-Charente is a safe place to take children for a swim from the River Beach. It also has a playground. Plenty of shady trees are perfect for parents to relax under and watch the goings on there.

Towns of interest in the region:

Information: All larger towns have **Tourist Information Offices**. They are indicated on the signposts in each town. You can find them on your hand-held device also. We recommend you take advantage of their advice.

Nearby towns/places of interest:

We highly recommend a drive along the roads that follows the Charente River. Here you will find interesting small towns with glorious scenery.

Sirueil (on D7). **St Simeux** (on D84), is a great place for a picnic. **Vibrac** (for the swimming hole with clear water) and **St Simon** (on D22) for the Gabares , the flat-bottomed boats used for transporting goods up and down the Charente River in days gone by.

In all of these towns you will find Cognac Distilleries and Wineries.

We suggest that you do your own online search on these towns to find out which wineries have summer hours for Vente Directe, sales at the door.

D22 will lead you towards **Bassac** where a visit to the Abbaye St Etienne de Bassac is an excellent stop, and don't forget to make your way through the garden down to the rather magical location of the riverside.

**TripAdvisor has current information on restaurants in the area. This changes each year, as do the seasonal hours.

In nearby **Saint Meme les Carrieres**, you will find a water-skiing and wakeboarding facility on a lake. Sign posts are everywhere as you travel in that direction.

For more formal swimming and exercise, Cognac has a brand-new Swimming pool and exercise facility at X'eau, 1 Place de l'Azure, 16100, **Chateaubernard**.

Kayaking/boating is popular in Summer and Spring/Fall, and you can find these at Cognac, Jarnac, Chateauneuf-sur-Charente and St Simon. You can also launch a kayak at Saintonge, not far from the Ecluse de Bassac and the boat ramp at Bourg-Charente.

Jarnac also has a Le Boat rental/Marina

If you seek beach activities, **Royan** and **Rochefort** are both a short one hour and 15 minute journey away. There you will find gorgeous wide, white sand beaches and everything you would expect to find at the French Atlantic Seaside.

La Rochelle, the St Tropez of the north is approx. 1 ½ hours by car, and is a must-see destination. If you don't want to drive, you can catch the train (SNCF) from the nearby station in Jarnac, which brings you into the station in the middle of the Old Town (Gare de la Rochelle), La Rochelle. You may have to change trains mid-way (in Cognac) but this adds to the adventure.

This coastal city has wonderful cobbled, mostly pedestrian streets, 17th century buildings, plenty of cafes and restaurants, patisseries, and high-end shopping that includes Galleries Lafayette. Don't leave town without enjoying one of the multitude of flavors at Ernest La Glacier. It is worth walking the Port de Plaisance to the end, and the old harbor, front and center in town. Night life is good in summer and there are any number of excellent restaurants for special meals.

Visit the Aquarium and the ancient fortifications. La Rochelle boasts numerous museums.

Catch a Ferry out to the Islands, either one at a time, or do all of them on a sight-seeing tour.

Jonzac: A Chateau sits front and center in Jonzac and if you walk down the right side of the street (going downhill) you will come to the delightful Salon de The du Chateau, with one of the best selections of Glaces (Ice-creams). The Patisserie is also worth a visit and you can purchase coffee and tea to drink alongside your choice of patisserie. There is inside and outside seating during warmer months.

Continue down this main road and under the ancient archway. Turn sharp right and you will find another glorious selection of Patisserie and Boulangerie at this popular store. There are only two small tables inside, so make your selection and walk back up to the chateau for a picnic with a view.

There is a brand-new Swimming complex and Spa (Les Antilles de Jonzac, Water Park) in this town which features a Thermal Spa.

Le Base de Loisiers de Jonzac, near the Parc des Antilles, provides for water sports, kayak and Pedal boat rentals etc. Suitable for all ages.

Pons: Known for its many National Monuments dating from the 12th Century. Situated in the southern Charente Maritime, the Lords of Pons (silent s) built an imposing Chateau and Donjon (Keep) here overlooking the Seugne River below.

Worth visiting is also the Grand Escalier, built in the 17th century to better access the town from the river/valley floor. Ascend the Keep of Pons, the square tower, and enjoy the view below.

From the Centre Ville there are some excellent Cafes to choose from to enjoy the view. Try the Café du Donjon at 5 Place de la Republique.

The huge public parking lot is in the middle of town near the Tower and the Chateau and Gardens.

Pons is a Protected UNESCO Site due to its 12th century churches, 17th century artwork and its status as being on the Route for the St Jaques de Compostela, to Spain.

Visit Le Chateau des Enigmes de Pons. This property is great for all ages.

Charente Maritime:

The Department boasts the second longest hours of annual sunshine after the Cote d'Azur and frost is virtually unheard of.

Tee shirts and shorts are the norm in October. The climate has changed gradually all over France and here is no exception. The Belle Saison now stretches from April to October with frequent sparkingly, fine, warm days outside of the Summer heat.

Rochelais (locals of La Rochelle) keep up the Christmas rendez-vous, turning out in droved to bask on sunny terraces outside cafes and bars along the Vieux Port.

The low-cost flights to La Rochelle may well induce more British visitors to enjoy what Germans and Scandinavians and of course the French have known for ages; The west coast is less crowded, the beaches are glorious, the beaches offer a gamut from the calmest, wave-less family bathing spots to the fiercest surf, for the sporting.

The locals, particularly on the islands, are laid-back and genuine and haven't succumbed to the greed and corruption associated with the better known, over-priced resorts in the south of France.

Of course, you might chance an out of season visit and be unlucky with the weather. The rainy day is an opportunity to do some sightseeing and maybe learn something of the history which gave this area its fascinating heritage. Museums these days are attractive and often interactive and hi-tech, aimed at interesting both French and international school-aged children and visiting grown-ups.

Salt:

To appreciate the very distinct atmosphere and architectural styles of the Charente Maritime inland cities and the islands of Re, Orleron and Aix, one needs at least an inkling of the maritime history of this key point on France's west coast.

Les Anglaise (the English) have had more than a hand in the story.

Besides substantial prehistoric remains and the architectural legacy of the Romans, the inland part of the Department abounds in magnificent ecclesiastic and secular architecture.

The wealth accrued through the salt trade was often spent, in the fervent religious Middle Ages, on endowing Churches, Hostels and Abbaye. All over Saintes and the Saintonge are signs of the facilities for welcoming exhausted pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela along the Via Turonensis.

Saintes and Romanesque Saintonge:

To spread Roman ideas throughout the empire, the Emperor T Augustus wanted an east-west road to link Lon to Saintes, then inhabited by a Celtic tribe called Santons.

Much of the rocky spur where the city is founded has disappeared into the hillside, now too built-up to allow further archeological digs.

Away from the main town, the 1st and 2nd C Amphitheatre was not built on high ground but in the valley, easily accessible from the old Roman road. At one end of the Gallo-Roman Amphitheatre is the Porte des Vivants where notables arrived in procession and the gladiators and lions entered the arena. Opposite is the much lower Porte des Morts through which victims were carried out feet first.

Saintes has always had a special significance in Christianity.

The first bishop, Saint Eutrope preached in the area before being stoned and then beaten to death. His relics, in the crypt of the church dedicated to him, were venerated by pilgrims on the road to Santiago de Compostela. The pure lines of the Romanesque arches contrast with the ornamentation on the capitals where Gothic plant and geometrical motifs flourish.

The power wielded by Saintes Catholic bishopric, under the See of Bordeaux, served to counter the Protestant stronghold of La Rochelle in the 16th Century.

In the 17th Century, Henry the 4th modernized the defenses of the feudal chateau but these were to be partially demolished twenty years later on the orders of Louis 13th, who thought they might be too tempting a stronghold for the Protestants or English to Seize.

Fine private hotels built by wealthy Cognac merchants make up the towns chic quarter. Off to the left is the Musee de l'Ecevinage with collections of Sevre porcelain. Next to the Porte Germanicus is the Musee d'Archeologie, an ex-abbatoir which houses a small part of the Saintes enormous collection of Roman finds.

The river today is the haunt of pleasure craft, anglers and holiday makers who come ashore from their houseboats here for a spot of relaxation, sightseeing and history, in Saintes.

Not too far away is the Benedictine Abbey of Fontdouce, founded in the 12thC in a peaceful valley protected by woods on one side. The abbey's name comes from the stream that crosses the land; Fontaine Douce.

The Abbey was used by pilgrims on the route from Aulnay, who wanted a tranquil stop on the way to Santiago de Compostela. Fontdouce was a far cry from the pomp and circumstance found in Saintes.

This beautiful place is well worth the detour – even Eleanor of Aquitaine and Louis 9th stayed here. Little of the original church remains but the site gives a fascinating insight into monastic life as the monks living quarters are still intact, including the plumbing!

Some of the vaulted gothic rooms are in good condition and in the Summer you can enjoy classical and jazz concerts here.

The city of Saintes, originally called Mediolanum, was developed in the 1st centuries before and after Jesus Christ, reaching approx. 15,000 inhabitants. Many public monuments were erected, such as the Arch of Germanicus in the years 18/19 A.D. The baths and the aqueduct were also constructed during this time.

The Amphitheater can accommodate 15,000 spectators, the totality of the local population at the time it was built. It was built of ellipsoidal shape. It measures 126m by 102m.

Imagine the Chariots entering the portal at the bottom of the theatre, and the crowds cheering from the tiered seats still very much in evidence today.

Nowadays this site is calm and welcomes visitors all year for free or guided tours. In addition, during the summer season, festivals and concerts revive the arena.

There is a boutique shop with a Salon de The. Audio guides are available for a small charge.

Saint-Jean-d'Angely

A quiet inland town, the old quarters in the historic center are largely pedestrian, cobbled alleys, timber-framed facades, tiny squares and fountains and striking features like the clock tower archway and the royal Abbey.

Between rows of poplars and water meadows, the Boutonne River winds lazily around the town, its towpaths used for strolls and its waters for canoeing. Why not check out the canoe club?

The Boutonne has other aficionados among anglers who catch pike, sander and carp. Families flock to the Boutonne's leisure center where the lake has attractions for families. The Atlantys's Aqua Center offers water fun and fitness for all ages.

There are good restaurants and pubs worth trying out. In summer, some cafes organize concerts and the banks of the Boutonne and the little squares resound to the rhythms of Jazz, Latino or Country n' Western.

Saint-Jean-d'Angely was already capital for Basse Saintonge by the 9th C, with the founding of an Abbey to house a major relic – Saint John's Skull.

Since then the fortunes of the little town have been inextricably linked to those of the Abbey. The Abbey itself has been rebuilt several times but there remain traces of each stage of its development that are fascinating to follow, from the Gothic chevet, now part of the bell tower to the 18thC library and staircases.

Saint-Jean has quite a few antique dealers and there are a number of local bric-a-brac and antique fairs between April and October. Twice a week the town center is taken over by a lively market, the atmosphere and the shoppers lingering on café terraces into the afternoon.

From Saint-Jean-d'Angely you can explore the peaceful, un-spoilt countryside of the Vals de Saintonge.

Vals de Saintonge

Local white stone and water courses mark the countryside of the Vals de Saintonge. Pilgrims crossed this peaceful rural area for centuries and you can explore the wealth of historic monuments and beautiful scenery.

Cognac: The covered market is open every day of the week. If you have a hankering for English cakes and biscuits, be sure to visit the market during the week. You can't miss the English cake stall. The bi-lingual English owner isn't there on Sundays! You can sit down for a wonderful fresh seafood lunch inside the market building. Prices vary according to the season, of course.

Find parking (some is paid) and take time to wander the old town and make your way downhill to the Charente River. You can walk alongside the river on the newly refurbished boardwalk all the way down to the Port de Plaisance on the old town side, or opposite, past the Distillerie Hennessy, and into the countryside.

Restaurants and cafes abound. Take your pick!

Enjoy the river-side restaurants but be prepared to pay a little more. Conversely, visit a Boulangerie for a Sandwich, and enjoy eating your dejeuner sitting on the banks of the river in a shady spot.

Tours of the Hennessy and other distilleries are well publicized.

There are plenty of Wine, Cognac and Pineau Cognac stores to make your purchases of the local offerings.

*Cognac is famous for its early July Blues Festival featuring bands such as Toto, and for many years, Santana.

Cognac is also home to Grey Goose Vodka! Just thought you might like to know that 😊 The Chateau de Cognac Royale, a 10th century Chateau is home to Baron Otard Cognac. Tours are available here. It has an interesting history with no less than 9 French and English kings having passed through its gates.

If you are up for a longer drive and a full day out, venture to the following fabulous destinations.

DORDOGNE:

Brantome: No visit to this area is complete without a day-trip to the lovely Dordogne town (known as the Venice of Perigord) of Brantome. The beautiful 8th Century Benedictine Abbaye founded by Charlemagne, the Dronne River, the markets (Crazy crowds on a Saturday), quaint, skinny streets, parks and the amazing markets make for some crazy times to find parking. Go early!

As you enter this town, you notice the houses built into the limestone cliffs. There is a fabulous Troglodyte Cave with a scene of the Last Judgement carved into it. The Original Abbaye was destroyed by the Vikings, and the Abbaye that now stands in its place was started in the 10th Century. Its restoration was completed in 1850, so the buildings you see today, span 800 years. The Bell Tower could be the oldest in France, having been dated back to the 11th century.

Brantome is a good example of Medieval and Renaissance Architecture. While in the area visit the *Grotte de Villars*, one of the most impressive cave systems in the Perigord Region and the only one to have both prehistoric paintings and Rock Formations.

You could combine your visit to Brantome with a side trip to...

On the way to **Villebois-Lavalette**, take time to visit the **Chateau de la Mercerie**. This stunning building was built in the 19th century by two brothers. Its history is noteworthy. Visits to the Chateau take place from April through November. In French every afternoon, In English on Tuesday mornings only. Phone 07-89-63-03-57, Mr Georges Mesnard, for more information. There is a charge of 10 euros per individual. Group rates also apply.

Villebois-Lavalette: For a special experience on the Charente/Dordogne border, travel in the summer months through wide open fields of Sunflowers, wheat and maize to this Medieval town where the open-air market is held on a Saturday under the ancient Halles roof. Climb the hill to the Eglise (church) overlooking the stunning countryside. Driving west from here, you will encounter the lovely small Dordogne town of **Verteillac** where you can enjoy a beer or wine and a meal, sitting outside or in, next to the church in the central square **at Le Calice**, an English Pub.

Brocante! If you want to experience a true Brocante sale, Verteillac is THE place to find it. More than 100 stalls on Sunday morning on the 1st Sunday of every month. Find parking where you can. It will be crazy busy, but it is worth it. Arrive early!

There are several cafes/restaurants to sit outside and enjoy all the activity. There is an excellent Boucherie and Patisserie just around the corner. Parking is an issue, per usual. Be patient!

Riberac, approx. an hour south, on the Charente/Dordogne border has an excellent **FRIDAY MARKET**. There are plenty of coffee shops/bars and an excellent patisserie on the market square for your food and drink, or purchase from one of the many vendors selling typical local food.

GIRONDE:

Allow a complete day to visit this jewel of a place. *Saint Emilion* on a fine day is sublime.

Saint Emilion: Since 1289 the land around this beautiful town, have been growing vines. One of the most attractive 'wine' towns in France, and a UNESCO protected town and vineyards. We highly recommend a visit to this glorious place. It will be super busy in June, July and August. Don't miss the opportunity to enjoy a meal in a restaurant overlooking the fabulous view. There is plenty to enjoy here. Don't forget to sample the wine!

Bordeaux:

The *Cite de Vin* is a futuristic building especially built to showcase the famous wines and vines of the Bordeaux region. If wine is your reason for coming to this region, then a visit to this museum is a must!

Learn about the differences in the region and why the wines are so sought after.

There is an excellent restaurant on site.

Cultural events happen year-round in this lovely city on the Garonne River. Summer is of course, the time for outdoor concerts and other events.

If shopping is your preferred activity, try walking the length of Rue St Catherine. It is the longest pedestrian shopping street in Europe. It is well worth it.

All activities can be found by googling, of course.

If it is Museums that you seek, you can spend a day wandering the many: Musee des Beaux –Arts, Musee des Arts Decoratif, Musee des Chartrons, The Jardin Publique, Musee d'Histoire Naturelle, Centre d'Art Plastique Contemporaine (CAPC).

Tour of the Medoc:

The Medoc vineyards produce some of the finest wines in the world. The area enjoys a mild and humid climate ideal for growing vines. Soils are the perfect mix of gravel, sand and clay. For Winery visits, check out Chateau Mouton Rothschild, Chateau Pichon-Longueville, Chateau Beychevelle, Chateau Cos d'Estournel, Chateau Lafite Rothschild, Chateau Latour and Chateau Margaux, all names the serious wine drinker will be familiar with. Make your own tour for a day. *Make sure you have a Designated Driver with you for the return journey.*

Arcachon Basin:

Known for its Oyster Cabines, fishing huts on stilts out over the tidal waters, and of course the famous Dune du Pyla. It is the highest sand dune in Europe.

Head towards Bordeaux and follow the signs to Arcachon. Don't forget to stop at the small seaside towns and find Cabines where fresh oysters are literally delivered to the restaurant door. Parfait!

The Chateau Deganne is now Arcachon's Casino. Other places of interest include the Parc Ornithologique, Ile aux Oiseaux, Domaine de Certes. A visit to the Arcachon Basin makes for a fun-filled day trip.

CHARENTE:

Angouleme: Is the Capital of the Charente Department. A Bastide (fortified) town, Angouleme is set on a meander in the Charente River. It is the Comic Capital of France and a newly minted UNESCO City of Flax and Paper industries were prevalent in the 16th century. Visit the Paper Museum to learn about this important part of the town's history. The Bande Dessine is opposite, on the banks of the Charente River, and a must see if you or your children enjoy comics. The book shop and museum are worth a visit. *Remember...most of the books are in French!

The Angouleme International Comics Festival is a highlight of the year as is the Francophone Film Festival. Visit in the middle of September (13/14/15) for the **Circuit des Ramparts** car race and spectacle.

The Ramparts, repeatedly rebuilt over the centuries, are 260ft high above the plain. You can walk this ancient plateau and enjoy the 360 degree views and ancient towers. The old Centre Ville offers not just views and of course the covered market, but excellent shopping, cafes and restaurants and some fabulous churches.

Take a good look around the Hotel de Ville. This building has been designed to showcase the ancient round towers from days long gone by.

Supermarket shopping near Angouleme can be found at **La Couronne (Auchan)** where there is a Mall anchored by the supermarket.

On the east of the city at **Soyaux**, you will find *Grand Frais, Bio-Marche, Carrefour* (inside the mall), *Leroy Merlin Hardware*, and assorted other light industrial.

Angouleme also has a TGV station with direct access to Bordeaux and Paris(2hrs).

At **St Yrieix sur Charente**, a suburb of Angouleme just off Highway N10, during the summer months there a **Plage (River Beach)** at 20 Rue du Plan d'Eau. This is a highly popular destination during our hottest months.

Jarnac:

The birthplace of former President of the Republic, Francois Mitterand.

Here you can visit his Birthplace, former home and the Museum dedicated to him. Friday morning, on Rue du Banvin in the relatively modern building you will find the *Covered Markets*. Every day 7.30am until 1pm. Friday is Fish and weekend stock-up day, so this is the liveliest market day.

Outdoor Market days are Tuesdays and Sundays (mornings).

Jarnac Centre Ville is the home of Courvoisier Cognac. Hine Cognac also has a Distillerie here.

Tours of the Distilleries are available most of the year. It is worthwhile to stroll the streets in the old town. In places you can see the ancient remnants of the Ramparts.

At the very bottom of the Charente you will find...

Aubeterre-sur-Dronne: Satisfied from your morning at the Verteillac Brocante, and perhaps Fish and Chips at Le Calice, Aubeterre-sur-Dronne is about 20kms from Verteillac, on the way home.

Driving through stunning scenery on slim roads, one has to be mindful. Be sure to arrive in Aubeterre early enough to allow for a visit to the underground Monolithic Church. It is open all year from 9.30am to 7pm until 31st August. From Sept. 1st, 9.30am to 12.30pm and 2 to 6pm. Allow at least half an hour before closing.

At the bottom of the hill on which the town sits, you will find a Canoeing Center on the River Dronne. There is a beach if you wish to take a dip in the middle of summer. Driving up and down the hill is advisable, unless you want the exercise. You can drive to the top and park outside the Tourist Center and walk down hill to the Centre Ville where there are chocolate shops and enough cafes and restaurants to take your pick. Take time to wander the streets up and down, and some of the churches too. The views out over the Dronne Valley are stunning.

Les Etapes du Cognac

www.cognacetapes.com

These 4 signposted tourist trails with the logo of 'Les Etapes du Cognac', will introduce you to the charms of the Cognac trade and its people. There are over 200 approved halts (vintners, overnight stops, Restaurants, monuments) to guide you and welcome you to the vineyards of Charente & Charente-Maritime.

1. Les Etapes du Cognac (La Vigne)
2. Les Etapes du Cognac (le Fleuve)
3. Les Etapes du Cognac (La Pierre)
4. Les Etapes du Cognac (Traditions)

Whether your interests are epicurean, cultural or idly curious, Les Etapes du Cognac reveal the many aspects of cognac.

Each Halt guarantees a quality reception, approved under the network's special charters. You can follow the trails at your own speed, according to the season and its activities.

The **Green** 'Cognac and Vine' trail takes you in search of the roots of the Charentais vineyards, discovering the professionals involved in the transformation of grapes into eau-de-vie from the vines to the distillery.

The **Indigo** 'Cognac and River' trail hugs the course of the Charente River, evoking the days when flat-bottomed barges or Gabares delivered the precious cargo to the sea for export. This trail links the river ports and the wine-producing towns.

The **Golden** 'Cognac and Stone' trail punctuated by Gallo-Roman ruins, churches and Chateaux, retraces the area's history. Across the chalklands, it winds through the villages of the Grand Vineyards.

The **Ruby** 'Cognac and Traditions' trail rolls over the hillside vineyards, revealing the generosity of the Saintongeais people, their village fetes, fairs and other local festivities.



COGNAC - Why here?

The freak coincidence of a sunny ocean climate and the restraints of 13th century commerce led wine merchants to distill their goods to make what Victor Hugo called the 'Liquor of the Gods'.

Cognac is a blend of eaux-de-vie of different ages and origins. Legally, a three-star cognac must be two to three years old, a VSOP at least four, a Napoleon eight, and an XO ten.

Only three white grape varieties are permitted: Ugni blanc (95%), folle blanc and colombard (5%), making a light wine which is acid for drinking but great for distilling.

Harvesting takes place in late September through early October and the grapes are crushed straight from the vines before the juice is set to ferment for three weeks – a delicate operation.

Golf:

This area is well served with superb Golf Courses which make this an ideal year-round Golfing destination.

Golf du Cognac lies between the towns of Jarnac and Cognac on the banks of the Charente River. It is an 18-hole parkland course designed by Jean Garaialde. It also has an excellent Restaurant.

4kms south of Angouleme, half an hour's drive away, is Golf Club de l'Hirondelle. It is 35 hectares of woodland course in St Martin's Wood.

The 3rd course is Centre d'Entrainement Golf les Pleites Chaumes.

All of the local main towns have reasonable Golf Courses.

Water Sports:

The Charente River is close by where water sports can be enjoyed in **Cognac, Jarnac** and also **Chateauf-neuf-sur-Charente** at the Base de Loisiers/Nautique. The pretty town of **Mansle**, approx. 40 mins away is also on the Charente River and has a Base Nautique where canoes can be rented. Alongside this is a Camping ground where there is a small restaurant and bar.

Le Boat rentals have a base at Jarnac on the river.

If you just want to enjoy a picnic in a quiet verdant setting, try the small riverside town of **Bourg Charente**, just 5kms from Jarnac. Opposite the town, the iconic roof of Chateau Bourg rises above the trees. There is a popular swimming hole with rope swing across the bridge, and on a quiet stretch of the Charente River. Chateau Bourg is owned by the makers of Grand Marnier. The production facility is right there in Bourg-Charente.

Cognac Canoe Club, Cognac

Canoe Kayak Aubeterre, Aubeterre sur Dronne

Base Nautique, Mansle

Randonnee Fluviale, Jarnac (www.randonneefluviale.fr)

Club Canoe, Jarnac (9 euros for 2 hrs)

BIKE HIRE: www.bikehiredirect.com for Free delivery and collection. Helmets included with rental.

Biking Routes: www.bikehiredirect.com/cycling-in-charente.php

Other activities:

Mysterra, a Labyrinthe in Mentendre

KartExtreme. Kart racing/circuit at St Genis de Saintonge

Aunis Karting. Karting at Le Thou. kartouest@wanadoo.fr

Jumporena. Trampoline Park, at Bordeaux Begles

Chatellaillon Aquatic Center. Chatellaillon Plage, near La Rochelle.

Banking:

Jarnac:

BNP Paribas, 13 Pl du Chat

Groupama –Centre-Atlantique, 29 Rue de Conde

Credit Mutuel, 18 Rue Gabriel

Caisse d'Epargne, 8 Pl du Baloir

Banque Postale, 5 bis, Pl Jean Jaures

Credit Agricole, 7, Rue des Moines

Chateaubernard:

Groupama, Rue de l'Anisserie

Banque Populaire, 2 Rue des Vauzelles

St Meme Les Carrieres:

Banque Postale, Le Bourg, 16720

Segonzac:

Caisse d'Epargne, 5 Rue illardet

Credit Agricole, 6 Pierre Frapin

What to eat in Aquitaine:

Lamb, Duck, Geese, Capon and Beef. Foie Gras, Goat cheese.

Truffles (Jarnac is the Truffle capital of the Charente).

Crayfish, Hake and Sardines, Scallops, Arcachon Oysters, Ile d'Orleron Oysters, Ile de Re Oysters, Mussels

Bayonne Ham, Confit de Canard, Magret de Canard aux Cepes,

Gateaux aux Noix, Gateau Basque, Prunes, Walnuts and Almonds, Creamy Goat cheese Cabecou, Ewes's milk cheese Tomme de Brebis, Canneles de Bordeaux, Tourtiere aux pruneaux, Tournon.

In the Charente, Pork is king and Charentais Melons are the sweetest.

Marmande tomatoes are advertised by the name Marmande, only. Everyone knows how good they are.

What to drink in Aquitaine:

Grey Goose Vodka, Pineau des Charentes, Cognac (of course), Bordeaux Red wine, Haute Medoc reds, Sauternes, Plum and walnut liqueurs, Armignac

Market Days:

Jonzac: Tues/Fri/Sat

Chatelaillon-Plage: Tues/Fri, Every day Les Halles

Aulnay: Wed/Sun

Rochefort: Tues/Thurs/Sat

La Rochelle: Every Day

Royan: Every Day except Monday

Saintes: Every Day except Monday

St Jean d'Angely: Wed/Sat

Jarnac: Covered Markets Tues – Sunday. Fish market Tues – Fri.

Jarnac -Open Air Mkt Saturday morning, Centre Ville.

Angouleme: Every day under cover in Les Halles