

EUROPE

The 50 best holidays in France

Stylish châteaux, fun family holidays and great breaks for foodies and culture lovers — here are this year’s top trips

Carolyn Boyd

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Château du Ludaix is in rolling countryside in one of the least-populated parts of France

FINN LYNGESEN



Share



Best for families



1 Boating in the Camargue

Take the family off the beaten track with a self-drive boating holiday in the south of France. The Guardians' Cruise is a new package from Le Boat and takes in the fortified town of Aigues-Mortes, with its striking fortress walls, and the wildlife of the Camargue, including the famous wild horses and flamingos. Head off on a boat with four en suite cabins and a sun deck.

Details A week's self-catering costs from £234pp (£2,105 for a whole boat) on *Horizon 4*, which sleeps up to nine people, departing on April 8 (0844 4172028, leboat.co.uk). Fly to Montpellier, or take the train to Avignon

2 Château stay, Auvergne

The fairytale Château du Ludaix with turrets and shuttered windows is in rolling countryside in one of the least-populated parts of France. Available for up to 18 or 30 people, the beautifully decorated property has a pool, games room and gym. You can book by the room too, or try the new cookery course launching in May.

Details A three-night self-catering weekend for 18 people is from £2,250, or £3,900 for 30 people. Rooms cost from €120 a night, B&B. The cookery course is €750pp (00 33 4 70 51 62 32, sawdays.co.uk). Fly to Limoges

3 Historical theme park, Vendée

The Puy du Fou theme park will leave you in awe with the scale of its historic re-enactments. To celebrate its 40th birthday, there will be a new show, *Le Grand Carillon*, in which musicians play enormous bells suspended 16m high. There is also a new in-park hotel in the shape of a fortress and two new themed restaurants.

Details Stay on site from €61pp (including tickets to the park, 00 33 8 20 09 10 10, puydufou.com), or try a night in the quirky Terragora Lodges from €80 a night per lodge, sleeping up to five (terradora-lodges.com)

4 Farm stay, Normandy

The Featherdown Farm experience makes more forays into France with its sister brand Un Lit Au Pré (a bed in the meadow) with another of its idyllic sites opening at Ronfil in the Orne department of Normandy in July. Glamp in safari tents with proper beds, a solid wooden floor and a wood-burning stove. Children of all ages will adore spending time helping out on the farm, feeding animals and playing in the meadows.

Details A two-night stay costs from £199, or £471 for a week in a tent sleeping up to six. Cabins and ten-bed tents are also available (00 33 176 43 00 61, unlitaupre.fr)



Take a placid four-footed friend for a ramble along the Rhône valley

SAFRANTOURS

5 Walking with donkeys, Ardèche

What better way to liven up a family walking holiday than to take a donkey? On this new trip from Responsible Travel you will ramble along the Rhône valley and the Ardèche on carefully chosen paths accompanied by a placid four-footed friend. Accommodation is in comfortable B&Bs, with the best local produce in tasty evening

meals.

Details Six nights' half-board at traditional guesthouses with picnic lunches costs from €650pp (based on children sharing a room with parents), with detailed maps, baggage transfers and in-country support (01273 823700, responsibletravel.com). Fly or take the Eurostar to Lyons

6 Teenage kicks, Chamonix

Thrill-seeking teens are in for a treat with Scott Dunn's new Chill and Thrill itineraries in the Alpine resort of Chamonix, which give kids aged 8 to 18 a choice of outdoor activities such as biking, climbing, paragliding, treasure hunts and hiking adventures, all led by mountain leaders and guides. The programme also offers downtime, which can be spent in the town's museums and galleries or the hotel's wonderful spa.

Details The seven-night Alpine Summer Adventure costs from £1,350pp, based on a family of four sharing on a B&B basis at the Hotel Mont Blanc, including flights and transfers (020 8682 5030, scottdunn.com)



Ile de Ré is easy to pedal around and features pretty whitewashed villages and sandy beaches

GETTY IMAGES

7 Ile de Ré escape

The Ile de Ré is a cycling family's dream, with extensive bike tracks criss-crossing the charming island. Largely flat, it's easy to pedal around, visiting pretty whitewashed villages and sandy beaches and spotting wildlife en route. Children will love the donkeys, which can be seen sporting their traditional culottes (or pyjamas) in the summer months in the town of Saint-Martin-de-Ré. Sawdays has several properties on the island, including the charming Galathée holiday house in Saint-Martin-de-Ré that sleeps four.

Details A week in the Galathée holiday home costs from €1,050 for four (01903 879936, sawdays.co.uk). Fly to La Rochelle, or drive from northern ferry ports



A hammam, aromatherapy sauna and infinity pool are on offer at the Château Saint Pierre de Serjac

AMANDA GRAPES

8 Family château, Languedoc

The Château Saint Pierre de Serjac opened in April 2016 and makes for a fantastic family getaway, with a kids' club that offers activities such as bow and arrow-making, flower-pressing, vegetable gardening and bike rides through the vineyards. There's also a boules piste, and children can hunt for treasure in an archaeological dig. For adults, there is a Cinq Mondes spa with indoor pool, hammam and aromatherapy sauna, and clay tennis courts, as well as a sublime infinity pool looking out over the surrounding vineyards.

Details Hotel rooms are from €220 a night B&B, apartments cost from €178 a night, and the kids' club is €150 for five half-day sessions (0345 6866505, serjac.com). Fly to Béziers or Montpellier



9 Luxury villa, Provence

For a truly indulgent holiday, perhaps in a group of three or four families, take a look at the exquisite La Bergerie villa at the Terre Blanche resort in the hills above the Côte d'Azur. You won't need to lift a finger thanks to the private chef, concierge, housekeepers and hostess, while the cinema room, swimming pool and access to the Terre Blanche spa and golf course mean you won't need to stray far. The main house sleeps 12 and this year sees the addition of a new and equally impeccably decorated courtyard cottage, with room for an additional four guests — a perfect retreat for the grandparents if they want to tag along.

Details A seven-night stay at La Bergerie costs from £2,500pp, based on 16 people sharing (020 8878 4433, bergerieterreblanche.com). Fly to Nice



The off-grid Château dans les Chênes is surrounded by hilly forests and has a rainwater shower

10 Digital detox, Hérault

Take the family off-grid at this attractive new cabin, dubbed Château dans les Chênes (castle in the oak trees), overlooking the rugged Haut-Languedoc regional park. Sleeping up to five on two canopied beds and a single sofa bed, the charming abode is a chance to get back to basics. There is a big kitchen and a comfortable seating area, while the shower consists of a large wooden bucket and rainwater heated by the sun or stove, with staggering views while you perform your ablutions. There are games to play in a nearby yurt, walks in the surrounding hilly forests, and the Tour du Pin, a Cathar tower, to visit.

Details From £77 a night for five (0117 204 7830, canopyandstars.co.uk). Fly to Béziers or Montpellier

New places to stay

11 Okko, Paris and Strasbourg

This year, there will be two new additions to the cutting-edge Okko hotel collection, with a new Paris hotel opening in May and another in Strasbourg in September. Both

promise to be as alluring as their counterparts in Lyons, Nantes, Cannes and Grenoble. The hotels will have the lobby, bar, breakfast room and conference room all in one cleverly designed public area. Better still, their room rates are competitive and include aperitifs, drinks, snacks and breakfast.

Details Doubles are from €110 a night, all inclusive (okkohotels.com)

12 Maison Troisgros, the Loire

The Maison Troisgros, in Roanne in southeast France, has been the home of the Troisgros gastronomic dynasty since the 1930s and has held three Michelin stars since 1968. However, in 2017 one of France's most famous restaurants will up sticks for a new home. The new Maison Troisgros will be in the village of Ouches, five miles outside Roanne, and promises to be an exciting new chapter for the family when it opens in March. The new restaurant will be set round the base of an enormous oak tree in 40 acres of parkland with a lake, orchards and vegetable garden. With 15 contemporary hotel rooms on offer, it promises to be this year's most sought-after booking for food lovers.

Details Doubles cost from €300 a night, tasting menus cost from €260pp (00 33 477 71 66 97, troisgros.com). Fly to Lyons



Hélène Darroze

Michelin-starred chef

Whenever I visit Biarritz, I always stop at Bar Jean (barjean-biarritz.fr). It's the heart of the market, the place to eat tapas, or to stop for a glass of wine.

13 Hotel Lutetia, Paris

The art nouveau and art deco icon that is the Hotel Lutetia in Paris will reopen in the autumn after a three-year multimillion-euro restoration. The Left Bank hotel has a rich history; it was occupied by the Germans during the Second World War and played host to such figures as Pablo Picasso, Josephine Baker and James Joyce. The renovated hotel will have 184 rooms and suites, a vast spa complex, a courtyard restaurant for light meals, a jazz bar and cigar bar, as well as the reopening of the elegant Lutetia Brasserie.

Details Room rates are yet to be set (thesethotels.com)

14 Les Hauts de Choranche, Vercors

High in the breathtaking Vercors mountains in southwest France, a homely new gîte complex called Les Hauts de Choranche has incredible views of the regional park's most spectacular sights: the Cirque de Bournillon cliff-face and the Moulin Marquis waterfall. Each of the four cosy gîtes sleeps up to four people, with a fully equipped kitchen and sitting area. They are all built from natural materials, with wooden floors, stone walls and charming touches such as stained-glass windows. The area is perfect for hikers or bikers and isn't far from the fascinating Choranche caves.

Details Gîtes for four are from €100 a night or from €420 a week (00 33 476 38 90 50, cabanecafe.com). Fly or take the Eurostar to Lyons



Les Rochers: a former Roman villa in the heart of the Luberon

15 Les Rochers, Provence

What better place to cool off than a beautiful villa built into rock? Les Rochers, a former Roman villa, is set in the pretty village of Les Baux de Provence, which enjoys a stunning setting on a rocky plateau in the heart of the Luberon. The villas sleep six in three bedrooms and the interiors are a beautiful blend of original stone walls, oak beams and large fireplaces with contemporary furniture. The village is a short walk away, with good restaurants and museums as well as the impressive Carrières de Lumières light shows on the walls of a former quarry.

Details A week for six costs from £4,585 (01242 787800, [redsavannah.com](https://www.redsavannah.com)). Fly to Marseilles

16 L'Arbre Voyageur, Lille

Opening this month, the L'Arbre Voyageur hotel makes a fun place to stay on a weekend break to Lille — just a quick Eurostar ride away. Themed around trees and the environment, it will have 48 individually decorated rooms, including four suites. Each floor's decor represents a different part of the tree, from the roots on the ground floor to the birds roosting at the top. Meanwhile, solar panels on the roof minimise the hotel's carbon footprint. There are two bar/restaurants on site, but because it's only five minutes' walk to the heart of Lille, there's plenty of choice for eating out, shopping and sightseeing.

Details B&B doubles cost from €134 a night (00 33 320 20 62 62, [hotelarbrevoyageur.com](https://www.hotelarbrevoyageur.com))

James Lohan

Founder of Mr & Mrs Smith

My favourite hotel in France is Jardins Secrets ([jardinssecrets.net](https://www.jardinssecrets.net)) in Nîmes. It's a hidden oasis with a walled garden and 14 individually styled bedrooms. It's like walking into the enchanting house of a decadent older relative — packed with paraphernalia, charm and character.

17 Villages Nature, Paris

Disneyland Paris celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, and visitors will be able to book a stay in a new holiday park called Villages Nature, which is due to open in July. The 640-acre site will offer 916 cottages and apartments in a lakeside or woodland setting or in the village centre. If the nearby Disney park isn't enough, the village will also offer Aqualagon, which will be the biggest water park in Europe, with water heated entirely by natural geothermal energy. There will also be a working farm, an enchanted forest park and themed gardens; with so much on offer, it's hard to see how Mickey Mouse and Co will get a look-in.

Details A four-night stay for four people, self-catering, costs from €471 ([villagesnature.com](https://www.villagesnature.com), French language only at the moment)

Best for food and wine

18 Gourmet cycling, Burgundy

Burgundy is a food lover's heaven, with fantastic local produce along with some of the world's best wines. So make the most of the gastronomic highlights of the Côte d'Or vineyards between Dijon and Beaune with a tailor-made holiday with the Hungry Cyclist, Based in a beautifully decorated lodge. Extras such as bicycle hire, picnics, home-cooked evening meals, daily wine tastings and cellar visits, and gourmet tours of Beaune market can be arranged. Or you can hire the entire lodge for up to eight people on a six-night stay that includes bike rental, a gourmet picnic, three evening meals, daily wine tastings and cellar visits.

Details Stays cost from €125pp a night (minimum three nights), with bike hire from €20 a day (0781 342082, thehungrycyclist.com). Six nights' exclusive hire costs from €2,450pp for two to eight people. Fly to Paris or Lyons and take the train to Beaune



CHRIS JACKSON/GETTY IMAGES FOR ASCOT RACECOURSE

Raymond Blanc

Michelin-starred chef

In Besançon, I like to visit Le Poker d'As, which is where I had my first haute gastronomie experience. It still serves tasty regional dishes.

19 Gastronomic exhibition, Lyons

Lyons' status as the gourmet capital of France will be further cemented when the Cité de Gastronomie opens at the end of the year. The new complex has taken over the former Hotel Dieu hospital, which dates from the 12th century, and will be an exhibition space devoted to the flavours, styles, art and pleasures of cooking. There will also be a five-star Intercontinental hotel, as well as shops and restaurants. This

month the city hosts the Bocuse d'Or cooking competition for promising chefs and the World Pastry Cup.

Details For details on the Cité de Gastronomie see grand-hotel-dieu.com; for other events see lyon-france.com. The magical Cour des Loges hotel has doubles from €220 a night B&B, and a Michelin-star restaurant (00 33 472 77 44 44, courdesloges.com). Fly to Lyons or take the Eurostar direct from London

20 Foodie escape, Auvergne

Make a beeline for central France to discover why a British chef's small restaurant has recently been named best village bistro by the stylish restaurant guide *Le Fooding*. Chris Wright opened L'Épicerie de Dienne in June, having left Paris to live in the unspoilt Cantal in the Auvergne area of central France. The restaurant will reopen in the spring and Wright has plans to open a B&B this year. In the meantime, Alta Terra B&B is less than ten minutes away from the restaurant and makes a great base for exploring the surrounding mountains and extinct volcanoes. It has four cosy rooms, as well as a new luxury cabin.

Details L'Épicerie de Dienne has dishes from €16 (00 33 471 20 59 84, lepiceriededienne.com). Doubles at Alta Terra are from €70, B&B; the cabin costs from €120 a night, B&B (00 33 471 20 83 03, altaterra-cantal.com). Fly to Brive, Clermont-Ferrand or Rodez



A visit to Sanary-sur-Mer is part of Hostellerie Bérard's Art de Vivre en Provence package

JASON LANGLEY/ GETTY IMAGES

21 Cookery course, Provence

Discover the flavours of Provence with a week-long cookery course at the enchanting Bastide des Saveurs, in the Var department, with the charming Michelin-starred chef René Bérard. The Hostellerie Bérard offers a five-night, four-day Art de Vivre en Provence package that includes accommodation in the beautiful hotel, four days of learning to cook Provençal cuisine, and visits to the colourful fishing harbour Sanary-sur-Mer, Bandol wine producers and local olive and honey farms.

Details Five nights' B&B, one dinner in the gastronomic restaurant, four days of cookery classes, four lunches (including drinks), all recipes, and four local visits costs €1,494pp (00 33 4 94 90 11 43, hotel-berard.com)

Alastair Sawday

Founder of Sawday's

My top tip on where to stay in France is Galerie Huit Arles (www.galeriehuit.com), a splendid house in the heart of Arles old town. The rooms are grand and sumptuous, in an old-fashioned way.

22 Breton weekend

Tucked away in the northwest corner of Brittany, the harbour town of Roscoff makes a perfect bolt hole for food lovers. With plentiful seafood, local cider and the flavoursome pink onions that were made famous by the beret-clad “Onion Johnny” sellers, it’s the perfect place to indulge before stocking up on supplies to bring home. The Michelin-starred restaurant at the Brittany hotel offers the perfect view of the fishing harbour and the Île de Batz, while the hotel has 11 modern suites offering equally stunning views from their private gardens or terraces.

Details Doubles cost from €140 a night; sea-view suites from €290 (00 33 2 98 61 13 29, hotel-brittany.com). Take the ferry to Roscoff, or fly to Brest



Dune du Pyla — Europe’s biggest sand dune — in Arcachon Bay

GETTY IMAGES

23 Eat oysters, Arcachon Bay

A favourite weekend spot of Parisians, the seaside town of Arcachon is the place to scoff oysters and sip wine — and getting there will be easier from mid-2017, with train times from Paris to Bordeaux cut to just over two hours. Take a boat trip over the Bassin d’Arcachon, a tidal lagoon bordered by oyster farming villages on the Cap Ferret peninsula. You can also explore the fantastic beaches, the Dune du Pyla (Europe’s biggest sand dune) and the shops and boutiques in Arcachon.

Details Stay at Alternative Aquitaine’s Maison Aiguillon, a beautifully furnished beach cottage for three, from £658 a week, self-catering (01395 576655, alternative-aquitaine.co.uk). Take the train via Paris to Bordeaux with Voyages SNCF (voyages-sncf.com)



Abbaye de la Bussière, the former Cistercian abbey, home to the chef Guillaume Royer

STUDIO ADP

24 Best of Burgundy cuisine

Give your taste buds a treat at the Abbaye de la Bussière hotel and restaurant, where the Michelin-starred chef Guillaume Royer has been awarded the Grand de Demain (Chef of the Future) award by the *Gault & Millau* restaurant guide. The award comes a year after Royer was awarded the Meilleur Ouvrier de France accolade, which recognises the best craftsmen and women of all trades. The hotel is set in a former Cistercian abbey, with stunning architecture and stained glass windows, along with idyllic gardens, making it perfect for relaxation.

Details The hotel's winter offer has a 30 per cent discount on room rates, so a superior room with a seven-course dinner and breakfast costs from €419 for two (00 33 3 80 49 02 29, abbayedelabussiere.fr). Fly to Paris/Lyons, then take the train to Dijon or Beaune

Enjoy a three-Michelin-starred dinner at Michel Guérard's heavenly spa resort, Les Prés d'Eugénie



25 Michelin-starred Landes

One of the founding fathers of haute cuisine, Michel Guérard, celebrates 40 years of holding three Michelin stars this year and has a special two-night package at his heavenly spa resort, Les Prés d'Eugénie, in southwest France. It includes a bottle of the Guérards' own wine, one celebration three-Michelin-starred dinner, one dinner in the historic inn La Ferme aux Grives, and Guérard's *Best Of* recipe book.

Details The two-night packages cost from €1,395 for two. Otherwise, overnight stays are from €250 (00 33 5 58 05 06 07, michelguerard.com). Fly to Biarritz or Bordeaux



The four-star Hotel de la Villeon is part of Grape Escapes' Rhône vineyards tour

JOSY NICOLAS

26 Chocolate and wine, the Rhône

The delicious combination of wine and chocolate is the theme of a new trip from the wine-tour company Grape Escapes. Its four-day Hidden Gem package to the Rhône vineyards includes visits and tastings at some of France's best wineries in the town of Tain-l'Hermitage. The trip includes an excursion to the Valrhôna chocolate museum, and a chance to explore the vineyards by bike and admire the views across the Rhône river and valley from Hermitage Hill.

Details The three-night Hidden Gem package costs from £619pp, with three nights in the four-star Hotel de la Villeon, bicycle hire for one day, tours and tastings at three

wineries and a chocolate tasting at Valrhôna (01920 468666, grapeescapes.net). Fly or take the Eurostar to Lyons



Head to Château de Haute-Serre for tastings of its delicious wines

27 Wine châteaux, Cahors

The Cahors region is the birthplace of the malbec grape, and those wishing to acquaint themselves with the robust red wine can learn much from staying at the fairytale castle of Château de Mercuès; its winery celebrates its 30th birthday this year. Owned by the malbec wine specialist Georges Vigouroux, the hotel has a new package that includes a visit to its winery and the nearby Château de Haute-Serre for a series of tastings of its delicious wines. The Château de Mercuès is set on a cliff overlooking the River Lot and makes an excellent base for exploring the beautiful Lot Valley.

Details A night's B&B costs €459 for two, including a three-course dinner at the fine-dining restaurant, visits to the winery and lunch and a tasting at the Château de Haute-Serre (00 33 5 65 20 00 01, chateaudemercues.com)

Best for activities

28 Cycle in the Luberon

Fans of the Tour de France will know just how hard the Mont Ventoux stage is and, for those who feel like taking it on, a new package at La Coquillade should provide the perfect base. The owner of the eco-friendly luxury hotel in the heart of the Luberon is the boss of the BMC cycling brand, and a new Cycling in Provence package offers two days on the world-class bikes along with good food and access to its excellent spa to restore aching limbs. If Mont Ventoux sounds too challenging, riding through the lavender, vineyards and perched villages will make for a more relaxing alternative.

Details Two nights' B&B costs from €850pp, including one dinner in the Bistrot restaurant, access to the spa, a guided half-day bike tour and bike rental for two days (00 33 4 90 74 71 71, coquillade.fr). Fly to Marseilles



Take in the coastal paths and pretty villages of northern Corsica on a week-long walk

29 Walking in Corsica

Explore the spectacular scenery in the northern part of Corsica with a new Contrasts of Corsica package from Inntravel. The week-long walk takes you from Sisco, on the Cap Corse peninsula, to the city of Calvi through pretty villages, coastal paths, beautiful hills and valleys. Accommodation is in comfortable, contemporary hotels and the trip

includes visits to some excellent wineries.

Details Seven nights' B&B, three dinners, route maps and notes, and luggage transfers between hotels costs from £1,395pp (01653 617000, inntravel.co.uk). Fly to Bastia or Calvi



DAVID BEBBER FOR THE TIMES

Alain Ducasse

Michelin-starred chef

In Paris, Mon Vieil Ami (en.mon-vieil-ami.com) is an incredible place on the Île Saint Louis, and serves generous portions of delicious food made by a chef friend of mine, Antoine Westermann.

30 Hike or bike on a Breton island

Lose yourself on the Île de Houat, off the south coast of Brittany, where the lack of cars means you're on two feet or two wheels for the duration of your holiday. A new glamping site, La Boite à Poissons, has five comfortable bell tents, decorated with futons, rugs and cushions. By day you can walk or cycle between the pretty coves and beaches, and explore the charming fishing villages.

Details Tents sleep two or four people and cost from €59 a night, breakfast €8.50pp (00 33 6 65 45 60 89, laboiteapoissons.fr). Take the ferry to St Malo or Caen, or fly to Rennes or Brest



31 Walk the Camino de Santiago

While the most famous stretch of the ancient pilgrimage path to Santiago de Compostela is through Spain, there are many other routes that start and run through France. Camino Ways specialises in assisting walkers as they take on the pilgrimage routes. It has a seven-night trip that takes in some of the prettiest villages along the Lot Valley, as well as the medieval town of Cahors.

Details A seven-night Le Puy Camino trip from Conques to Cahors costs from £662pp, half-board, with luggage transfers (020 3468 1516, caminoways.com). Fly to Rodez, Brive or Toulouse

32 Biking by boat, Loire

Combine a boating and cycling holiday on this new eight-day cruise along the Loire. The round trip from Nantes goes to the coast at Saint-Nazaire, on to the city of Angers, the many châteaux of the Loire Valley, and Saumur. Guests can enjoy guided cycle rides before relaxing on board the *Loire Princesse*. The ship is the only river cruise ship that can navigate the shallow waters of the Loire, so this trip is one of a kind.

Details The eight-night cruise and bike trip costs from £1,949pp and includes all meals and drinks, bike hire and shore excursions, but not flights to Nantes. (020 8328 1281, croisieurope.co.uk)



The Maritime Alps are a wildlife-spotter's paradise

33 Walking in the southern Alps

This new group walking holiday from KE Adventure explores a little-known corner of the Maritime Alps known as the Switzerland of Nice. The area is a wildlife-spotter's paradise, where sightings of chamois and marmots are common and ibex, mouflon, hare, wild boar, golden eagles and even wolves can be spotted. The trip follows well-defined, waymarked footpaths and takes in the Vallée des Merveilles, where Europe's most numerous open-air Bronze Age rock carvings are found.

Details Seven nights' full board, staying in a hotel, mountain refuges and a gîte, costs from £995pp (01768 773 966, keadventure.com). Fly to Nice

Best for culture and history

34 Caves in the Dordogne

The long-awaited opening of the prehistoric cave replica Lascaux IV came last month after more than two years of work to re-create some of the world's most important cave paintings, and create an exciting interactive exhibition. Tickets are in demand, so to help you to get through the door, the Vieux Logis hotel in Tremolat has launched a

heritage package that offers a guided tour of the cave replica and two nights in the hotel, with a meal in the Michelin-starred restaurant and another in the bistro.

Details The two-night package costs from €495pp half-board, with a guided tour of the Lascaux IV cave (00 33 5 53 22 80 06, vieux-logis.com). More information about the caves at projet-lascaux.com. Fly to Bergerac

35 Arras anniversary

A new visitor centre is due to open in northern France in April to coincide with the centenary of the start of the First World War Battle of Arras, during which Canadian troops captured the Vimy Ridge. The new centre in Vimy will provide a memorial for the contribution and sacrifices made by Canada during the Great War, and the opening will be accompanied by a remembrance ceremony on April 9. Arras makes a great base for visiting this and other First World War sites, such as the Wellington Quarry – a museum tracing the history of a series of tunnels dug by New Zealand troops that proved crucial to the 1917 spring offensive.

Details Go to tourism-lenslievin.co.uk for more information. Stay at La Corne d'Or, a B&B in Arras with doubles from €125 (00 33 3 21 58 85 94, lamaisondhotes.com). Drive via Dover-Calais

36 Châteaux of the western Loire

Discover the unspoilt western Loire with a new driving circuit between two of the area's best château hotels. Starting at the enchanting Château des Briottières, north of Angers, the trail takes you through the Sarthe to discover the abbey of Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, a leading centre for Gregorian chants with a 1,000-year history. Then it's a stop for lunch in Le Mans and a wander around the city's medieval old town. The route ends at Château de Saint Paterne, an equally delightful hotel with charming hosts and excellent food.

Details Two nights with gourmet dinners, including wine, and breakfast, costs from €430pp (00 33 2 41 42 00 02, briottieres.com). Take the ferry to Caen, St Malo or Cherbourg. A night at Château de Saint Paterne starts at €145, room only (00 33 2 33 27 54 71, chateau-saintpaterne.com)

37 Le Havre anniversary

The port city of Le Havre, which was founded in 1517 by King François I, celebrates its 500th anniversary this year. To mark the event, the Summer in Le Havre programme includes carnivals, concerts, exhibitions, sound-and-light shows and firework displays. The city's impressive Unesco-listed postwar architecture is worth exploring too,

including the Apartement Témoin, a fascinating 1950s show flat, and the jaw-dropping concrete and glass tower of St Joseph's Church. Brittany Ferries has a two-night break, including a four-star hotel, and ferry crossings.

Details Two nights' B&B at the Novotel Le Havre Bassin Vauban for two people taking their car, including ferry crossings, costs from £169pp (0330 1594500, brittanyferries.com)



MARCO SECCHI/GETTY IMAGES

Sebastian Faulks

Novelist

My favourite place to eat in Paris is the Juveniles wine bar/bistro (juvenileswinebar.com) in the 1st arrondissement. There's fine cooking, it's friendly, the wine is great, the atmosphere is informal and it's good value.

38 Roman sites, Avignon

See some of France's Roman and medieval sites with a walking holiday that takes in the ancient city of Avignon — with its 800-year-old ramparts and famous bridge — as well as Arles's Roman amphitheatre. The trip includes a five-mile walk to the Pont du Gard, the impressive Roman aqueduct. Accommodation is at Le Magnan Hotel in Avignon, so there is no need to move on every night, as with many walking holidays. Walks are about six miles a day

Details Seven nights' half-board costs from £990pp, with dinner in local restaurants, Eurostar from St Pancras via Paris or Lille, and all transport (01707 246666, chaptersholidays.co.uk)

39 Perfume museum, Paris

Le Grand Musée du Parfum, which opened last month, tells the history of perfume and the skill that goes into making the world's best fragrances. Visitors will learn what it is to be "a nose", an expert who creates scents, and are invited to smell the ingredients that go into making different fragrances.

Details Le Grand Musée du Parfum is at 73 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré (musee-du-parfum.fr). Stay at Relais 12 Bis, a stylish B&B with doubles from €220 (00 33 6 80 92 65 68, sawdays.co.uk)

40 Lutyens in northern France

The early 20th-century British architect Edwin Lutyens designed a number of First World War memorials and three country houses in northern France with the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll. This new group trip (maximum 25) from Ace Cultural Tours visits some of the most interesting examples from before and after the Great War and is co-led by Candia Lutyens, the architect's granddaughter, who is an expert on his architecture and designs. Primarily set in France, the tour also visits Belgium on the final day.

Details Edwin Lutyens in France & Belgium is from September 11-15 and costs £1,495pp, including transport, B&B, two lunches and three dinners (01223 841055, aceculturaltours.co.uk)

41 Art in Nantes

The new-look Musée d'Arts set to open in early summer gives an extra reason to visit Nantes this year. After four years of renovation, the museum will display 10,000 exhibits, including works by Courbet and Picasso and drawings, sculptures, prints and contemporary installations that range from 200 sq m to just 1 sq cm. Elsewhere, the city is gearing up to offer new art installations in the streets and public areas to add to the permanent public art works that have transformed Nantes in recent years.

Details See nantes.fr for more details on the opening. Stay at Hotel Sozo, set in a former chapel, with doubles from €127 (00 33 2 51 82 40 00, sozohotel.fr)

The beautiful Maison de Cannes can sleep up to 12 film fans during the Cannes festival



42 Cannes film festival

Cannes celebrates its 70th anniversary in May. You don't need to be an A-lister to get in on the action, however, with free screenings at the Cinéma de la Plage on the Macé beach. You can apply for accreditation to see the other screenings. Hotel rooms fill quickly, so try a villa instead. Oliver's Travels has the beautiful Maison de Cannes, which sleeps up to 12.

Details Seven nights at the six-bedroom Maison de Cannes villa, with pool, hot tub, sauna and gym, costs from €2,436 and is €5,517 during the festival (0800 1337999, oliverstravels.com). Or the four-star Hotel Le Mondial has 49 rooms with doubles from €150 (00 33 4 93 68 70 00, hotellemondial.com). Fly to Nice



The fairytale Azay-le-Rideaux château in the Loire Valley
CALLE MONTES/GETTY IMAGES

43 Loire Valley cycle tour

Soak up the culture and history of the châteaux of the Loire Valley with a self-guided cycling holiday that starts in the medieval town of Chinon. Move on to Château d'Ussé,

riverside Saumur and the fairytale châteaux of Azay-le-Rideaux and Villandry. It can be done on a three, five or seven-night basis, with gentle routes covering 10-25 miles a day. **Details** Three nights' B&B, with gourmet dinners, costs from £585pp (020 7471 7760, cycling-for-softies.co.uk). Fly to Angers or Tours

Best of the rest

44 Loire rose festival

Chédigny in the Loire Valley holds an annual rose festival at the end of May, a celebration that includes gardening workshops, live music and exhibitions. Book into the new chambre d'hôte rooms or an apartment at the Château du Breuil.

Details The Festival des Roses is on May 27-28 (chedigny.fr). Doubles cost from £95 a night, breakfast £5pp, or seven nights in the apartment for six costs £800 (00 33 2 47 92 55 88, loire-chateau.fr). Fly to Tours



Cast off on the Dordogne at the Château de la Treyne

45 Fishing in the Dordogne

The Château de la Treyne is offering a new fly-fishing package for 2017. The château-

hotel is perched above the Dordogne river, making it the perfect location in which to cast off. Nearby attractions include the pilgrimage site of Rocamadour and the Padirac chasm.

Details The package, which includes a half-day private fly-fishing lesson and two nights' half-board with dinner in the Michelin-star restaurant, costs €582pp (00 33 5 65 27 60 60, chateaudelatreyne.com). Fly to Brive or Bergerac

46 Cognac car tour

Vintage or classic car enthusiasts will love this group tour that explores the pretty countryside near Cognac. The six-night trip (May 31 to June 6) includes a garden party, the chance to drive on closed roads as part of a rally, and accommodation in a luxurious B&B in a former distillery.

Details Four nights' B&B, entry to the rally, dinner on three evenings, lunch on two days, and return overnight ferry with Brittany Ferries costs from £995pp (01483 281 282, classicgt.co.uk)

Nicola Williams

Co-author of Lonely Planet France

My favourite beach in the whole country is Huchet Beach in the Landes, in southwest France. Few stretches of sand are as golden, empty or endless as this one, which is by the colonial-styled verandas of Les Maisons Marines d'Huchet (michelguerard.com), two 19th-century hunting lodges turned chic beach houses. Find it amid sand dunes and pine forest, just south of surfing beach Plage de la Lette Blanche in Vielle-Saint-Girons.

47 River festival, Bordeaux

The Fête le Fleuve is a must for anyone with a passion for boats. It includes water sports, trips on the River Garonne, boat exhibitions, concerts and fireworks. It also hosts the start of La Solitaire Urgo Le Figaro race, the unofficial world championship of solo offshore sailing.

Details Bordeaux Fête de Fleuve takes place from May 25-June 4 (bordeaux-tourism.co.uk). Stay at Le Saint James, with spectacular views over the city and doubles from €195 (00 33 5 57 97 06 00, saintjames-bouliac.com)

48 Music in Gascony

Every summer, a quarter of a million visitors flock to the charming village of Marciac in the Gers to enjoy music from some of the best names in jazz. Last year Diana Krall,

Jamie Cullum and Dianne Reeves took to the stage.

Details Visit jazzinmarciac.co.uk for updates. The Gascony Secret has a selection of self-catering gîtes and villas, including a five-bedroom villa at Menon that sleeps up to 12 and costs £2,140 during July and August (01924 439521, gascony-secret.com). Fly to Toulouse

49 Fashion tours, Paris

Give your wardrobe a makeover with a new offering from the Hôtel du Petit Moulin that will teach you how to shop like a Parisian. The 17th-century hotel, in the Marais, has 17 rooms and suites designed by Christian Lacroix. Visit in the autumn and you can also take in the new Yves Saint Laurent museum.

Details A night's B&B with a three-hour personal fashion tour costs from €443 for two (00 33 1 42 74 10 10, hotelpetitmoulinparis.com)



A stop-off at Claude Monet's garden at Giverny can be arranged as part of Château la Chenevière's tour
FARRELL GREHAN/GETTY IMAGES

50 Gardens of Paris and Normandy

Château la Chenevière, close to Bayeux, has teamed up with a Paris hotel to offer a

guided tour of the best gardens in both areas. From the Relais Christine on Paris's Left Bank, the trip covers the Latin Quarter and the Marais. Then head to Normandy to see Château de Brécy and Les Jardins de Castillon, with two nights at Chenevière. A stop-off at Claude Monet's garden at Giverny can be arranged.

Details Two nights' B&B, plus two nights' B&B in Normandy, with guided tours, costs from €1,900 for two (00 33 2 31 51 25 25, lachenievriere.com)



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