

Island Delights

5 Night Tour - Bed & Breakfast

Your itinerary

The following pages contain general information about your car or motorcycle tour and the locations where you will stay. The order in which they appear may not be the order your hotels have been confirmed for you - for your individual itinerary please refer to your holiday documentation.





Maps and route planning

To help plan your trip we provide an excellent map of France. It's also useful to go to travel websites such as Google maps, viamichelin.com* or www.theaa.co.uk.

*Motorway tolls, where applicable, are indicated on this site.

Hotel directions With your travel documents is an information sheet for each hotel we have booked for you giving directions together with some further details.

Arrival Unless stated, you will be expected to arrive at each of the hotels pre-booked for you by 6pm each day. This should allow time for a fairly leisurely drive between hotel stops but if you find you will be arriving later than this please ring the hotel so that your room is held for you.

The tour is on a bed and breakfast basis.

Your itinerary takes you through the varied scenery of France's Atlantic coast and some of its beautiful islands, which can mostly be reached by bridge. Here we give a few ideas about the overnight stops and places you may like to see along the way.

Rochefort



Ile d'Oléron

Its strategic position on the river Charente meant that Rochefort grew as a commercial route for transporting wine, a shipbuilding port and (at the order of Louis XIV) an important naval base in the 17th century. It was here that the Corderie Royale, or royal ropeworks was established in an magnificent building which has the distinction of being the longest in France, next door to your hotel. This is now a museum, one of several in Rochefort which makes an interesting visit and the harbour is now a marina. A 40 minute drive away is the **Ile d'Oléron**, reached

by a toll free bridge. This is France's second largest island after Corsica and becomes very busy in the summer months - but to escape the traffic you can hire a bike or take some of the marked footpaths to discover the many different landscapes - long sandy beaches backed by dunes and pine woods, surfing beaches (and some naturist beaches),



Drive to the Ile d'Oléron

little coves and lots of mimosa. The first town you'll come to is **Le Château d'Oléron** with its huge 17th century citadel which has free entry and is floodlit at night, and for arts and crafts there is a little 'village' of vibrantly coloured fishing huts, the Cabanes des Créateurs, where you will find all sorts of interesting things and also buy plates of oysters which the island is famous for. At the northernmost point of Oléron is the **Chassiron lighthouse** - climb the 224 steps for a fantastic view. Also not to be missed is the lively fishing port of **La Cotinière** which has a great atmosphere. On the east side of the island is **Boyardville** with its marina, beach and views out to Fort Boyard. Another island to visit whilst staying in Rochefort is the tiny, vehicle free

Ile d'Aix - take the 20 minute ferry trip there from Fouras (15k). You can take bikes on the ferry or hire them there - or just set off on foot to enjoy the peace and unspoilt scenery. Napoleon spent his last nights on French



soil in a large house here which is now a museum dedicated to him. Inland, it's just 35 minutes from Rochefort to the pleasant town of **Saintes**, which has the impressive remains of a Roman amphitheatre and there are also boat trips along the river Charente.

Ile de Ré



La Rochelle

On the way to the Ile de Ré which is less than an hour's drive, you will come to **La Rochelle**, possibly one of the highlights of the itinerary. A thousand years ago it was a fishing village surrounded by marshland but over the next centuries as its wealth from the trade in wine and salt increased, it became the largest port on France's Atlantic coast. The landmark towers that guard the harbour have been there since the 14th and 15th century and add to the charm of this place as you sit at one of the waterside bars, cafés or restaurants. This university city has a great atmosphere, with stunning architecture, picturesque shopping streets, a marina and delightful old port often lively with street entertainers, artists and market stalls.

After crossing the 3k long bridge to the **Ile de Ré** (toll around 17€ return) you will notice that the island is completely flat and this is definitely a

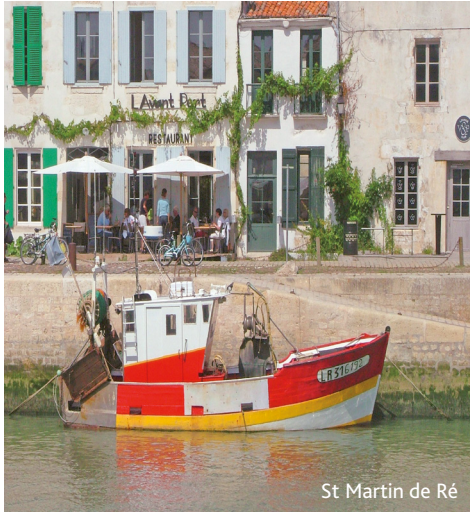


St Martin de Ré



Salt production

place where cycling is one of the best ways to get around, with over 100k of dedicated cycle paths. The island is charming, with whitewashed cottages and colourful shutters, little villages and fishing ports and of course lovely beaches. Watersports are well catered for, from beginners to professionals and thalassotherapy seawater treatments are also very much a feature, with the focus here on wellbeing. A characteristic of the landscape is the marshland, mainly in the north of the island, which is used for the production of



St Martin de Ré

high quality sea salt, for oyster beds (oysters are carefully nurtured for 3 years before they are ready to be sold) and as a conservation area for various fauna and flora. The south western coast of the island has wonderful sandy beaches and there are vineyards, pine woods and even a special variety of new potato is grown here.

The island's beautiful town of **St Martin de Ré** has a star shaped 17th century citadel built by Vauban, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. From the top of the bell tower there is a fantastic view over the town and island. The harbourside bars and restaurants come alive in the evening and this is where the centre of activity is!

St Jean de Monts



St Jean de Monts

The main attraction in **St Jean de Monts** is its huge, gently shelving beach with clear water and golden sand which goes on for miles. It has become a very popular family resort and there are masses of sports and activities here to keep holidaymakers of all ages entertained.

A 20 minute drive north takes you to Fromentine, where there is a bridge (free of charge) to the **Ile de Noirmoutier**. This picturesque place is known as the 'island of mimosa' because of its microclimate and can also be reached by a causeway road, 'Le Gois', but it's best to check the tides if you choose to take this route! The island has a varied landscape of beaches, pine forest, sand dunes and pretty little villages. It's mainly very flat so (like the other islands on this tour) the best way of getting around and enjoying the scenery is by bicycle - there are over 80k of cycle tracks and 60k of footpaths to follow and everything is within cycling distance. There's also a little tourist train that can take you around. As with the other islands, this one has a relaxed atmosphere, where you can feel as if you're going back in time to a less hectic age.

There is a huge choice of beaches on Noirmoutier - sandy or rocky, ones with shells, secluded coves, some with kids clubs and all kinds of watersports and some with dunes and beach huts. There are lovely walks



La Plage des Dames, Noirmoutier

along the Marais du Mellembourg saltmarshes where there's a wealth of bird life. The capital of the island is Noirmoutier en l'île, a wonderful place to wander through the narrow streets and take in the pretty whitewashed houses, the church and medieval castle then stroll along the quayside in the historic port.

Local specialities are sea salt (harvested from the marshes here since the 5th century), fresh seafood, particularly oysters, and *bonnottes* - a delicious variety of new potato grown in the kelp enriched sandy soil, which is held in great esteem throughout France.



The tourist office has an excellent website www.ile-noirmoutier.com

Nantes (an hour from St Jean de Monts), on the river Loire, is France's 6th largest city with a richness of art and culture and a huge choice of things to see and do. Served by an efficient tram system it's easy to get around and well worth calling in at the tourist office for a 'green line' map which gives a route to follow taking in the sights and places of interest in the city. With its mix of old and modern architecture it's a very attractive place with historic riverside buildings and cobbled streets in the old quarter which is good to explore on foot. It's also the capital of crisp dry white Muscadet wines produced locally which are a great accompaniment to seafood.



Nantes