



Tour Information



La Rochelle and the Vendee





Travel

Passports

Please ensure your 10-year British Passport is not out of date and is valid for a full six months beyond the duration of your visit. EU, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino or Switzerland valid national identification cards are also acceptable for travel to France.

Visas

British and EU passport holders are not required to have a visa.

For all other passport holders please check the visa requirements with the appropriate embassy.

French consulate: PO Box 57, 6A Cromwell Place, London SW7 2EW;
Tel (020) 7838 2000/1.
Information Service: Tel (0891) 887 733, Fax: (020) 7838 2046.
Opening hours: 0900-1130 (and 1600-1630 for visa collection only) Mon-Fri (except British and French national holidays).



Tickets

You will be issued with a return train ticket.

Please take care not to lose your tickets and please check that the details on your tickets are accurate. Your ticket is non-transferable and non-refundable. No refund can be given for non-used portions.

Standard Premier on Eurostar tickets is indicated by two asterisks in the class type section in the top right hand corner. A light meal will be served to passengers travelling Standard Premier on Eurostar. Standard class Eurostar tickets do not include any food or drink on board, although there is a buffet car serving drinks and snacks.

TGV tickets do not include any food or drink on board, although a buffet car is available.

Train Seats

On all legs of the journey you have reserved seat and carriage numbers which are shown clearly on your ticket.



Baggage

As with most trains, passengers are responsible for carrying baggage onto and off the train. Baggage can be stored on overhead shelves or at the entrance to the carriages. Trolleys are available at St Pancras and Lille, but bags do need to be carried on to the platform. Porters are sometimes but not always available at St Pancras.

Travel Editions recommends a luggage delivery service called **thebaggageman**, where your suitcase can be picked up from your home before departure and delivered straight to your hotel; therefore removing the worry about carrying your cases onto and off the trains.

For further information:

<http://www.thebaggageman.com>

Labels

Please use the luggage labels provided. It is useful to have your home address located inside your suitcase should the label go astray.

Transfers

On arrival in Niort, transfer by coach to the Hotel le Rabelais (approx. 40 mins.)

Special Requests

If you haven't already, please notify Travel Editions of any special requests as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements.



Accommodation

Hotel le Rabelais

The three-star Hotel le Rabelais is located near the centre of the pretty market town of Fontenay le Comte. Approximately 10 minutes from the historic town centre. The hotel has spacious public areas including a bar, a spa area, a restaurant, relaxing green surroundings and an outside heated swimming pool (May to Sep) in pleasant grounds

For more information visit their website
<https://www.le-rabelais.com/>



Food

With its long coastline, it is no surprise that seafood features strongly in the cooking of the Vendée. High-quality fresh fish is easily available fishmongers, supermarkets, markets and, in some coastal towns, directly from fishermen.

Dover and lemon sole, sardines, bass, brill, gurnard, mackerel and sea bream are well-known species that are landed fresh on the coast of the Vendée along with cod, ling and tuna from further afield. Less well known are species like maigre, a type of fish known as a “drum” due to the curious sounds it makes.. Maigre is fished in the Bay of Biscay and is consumed only locally because it really doesn't travel well. The flesh of maigre rewards delicate cooking – it is delicious simply poached in white wine and served with new season potatoes from Noirmoutier and a hollandaise sauce.

The marais provides a selection of fresh water fish – eels (anguilles), pike (brochet) and frogs' legs (cuisses de grenouilles).

Almost all restaurants offer two types of meals: *a la carte* (extensive choice for each course, generally more expensive) and *le menu* (a set meal at a fixed price).

The bill (*l'addition*) will not be presented until it is asked for, even if clients sit and talk for half an hour after finishing their meal. Usually, a discretionary service charge is added to your bill in restaurants and bars, and no further tipping is required.

Generally speaking, mealtimes in France are strictly observed. Lunch is as a rule served from noon to 1330, dinner usually from 2000-2130, but the larger the city, the later the dining hour.



Drink

The wines of the Vendée – both the wines of the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) Fiefs Vendéens and the local Vins de Pays – are comparatively little known in the world outside of Western France. Many local producers sell direct to the public and are more than happy to have visitors to their vineyards to taste the product before buying.

In the north of the Vendée, a number of producers make wine for the well known AOC Muscadet. A smaller number make wine for the more obscure AOC muscadet-côtes-de-grandlieu.

There is an ever-growing interest in artisanal beers and microbreweries in France, and the Vendée is home to an excellent brewery whose output can be found in shops and bars throughout the area. Brasserie Mélusine was established in 2001 in the village of Chambretaud. The brewery produces an extensive and varying range of beers.

In elegant restaurants the wine list will be separate from the main menu, but in less opulent establishments will be printed on the back or along the side of the *carte*. The waiter will usually be glad to advise an appropriate choice. If in doubt, try the house wine; this will usually be less expensive and will always be the owner's pride.

Meals included in the price of your holiday are:

Breakfast – daily

Dinner - daily



Destination

The area today called the Vendée was originally known as the Bas-Poitou and is part of the former province of Poitou. In the southeast corner, the village of Nieul-sur-l'Autise is believed to be the birthplace of Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122–1204). Eleanor's son, Richard I of England (the Lionheart) often had his base in Talmont. The Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) turned much of the Vendée into a battleground. Since the Vendée held a considerable number of influential Protestants, including control by Jeanne d'Albret mother of Henry IV of France, the region was greatly affected by the French Wars of Religion which broke out in 1562 and continued until 1598. In April of that year King Henri IV issued the Edict of Nantes and the Wars came to an end. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 caused many Huguenots to flee from the Vendée

The Vendee is criss-crossed by four rivers: the Sèvre Nantaise, the Vendée - which gave the area its name, the Lay and the Sèvre Niortaise.

Places of interest included in the tour:

La Rochelle

La Rochelle though not in the Vendée, being a few kilometres inside the Charente-Maritime, is one of those places that anyone who is visiting this part of France should see. A beautiful town often referred to as the Jewel in the Bay of Biscay and is also the sailing capital of France. In La Rochelle one can experience maritime France at its very best, watching the world go by and experiencing a maritime heritage that is difficult to beat anywhere in France, either from the innumerable harbour side cafes and bars or by simply just strolling around the ever-active waterfront. Behind the inner harbour is a labyrinth of streets and sidewalks some covered with stone arches, vast squares, pretty courtyards and everywhere one looks there is impressive architecture. The Town hall (hotel de Ville) is one of the most imposing buildings and is a "must see" on anyone's itinerary. The large parks that stretch from just behind the Lantern tower on the harbour entrance all the way back past the centre of town to its outskirts help give the town an air of serenity.

For more information about La Rochelle, please visit:
<http://www.vendee-guide.co.uk/la-rochelle.htm>

Fontenay le Comte

The Renaissance town of Fontenay-le-Comte is often referred to as the prettiest town in the Vendée and is surely one of the prettiest in France being listed in the "Plus Beau detours de France". Sitting astride the River Vendée this former port was a fording town on the old Roman coastal road from Les Sables D'Olonne to Niort. There are three distinct rings in the development of Fontenay-le-Comte, starting with the walled medieval castle, of which only the ruins of some of the ramparts, entrance, gate and a tower remain. Surrounding these ruins is the Renaissance heart of the town dating from the 15th and 16th centuries, which is now a conservation area where development is restricted. Surrounding this is the modern outer commercial sector. This quiet and pleasant country town boasts superb architecture and narrow winding streets which include several wooden framed houses, imposing mansions and townhouses, open squares and impressive fountains. A stroll around the town is a very pleasant experience and see for yourself a thousand years of history.

For more information about Fontenay le Comte, please visit:

<http://www.vendee-guide.co.uk/fontenay-le-comte.htm>

Marais Poitevin

The Marais Poitevin is the largest of the three areas of Marais (marshlands) in the Vendée. The Marais are what is left of the ancient Gulf of Pictons a large basin that was scoured out during the last ice age and which has since slowly been silted up by alluvial deposits left by the local rivers and the Loire. During the Roman period at least 10 rivers drained into the gulf, but today just the Sèvre Niortaise, the Cure and the Lay have Atlantic estuaries. During the early medieval period drainage of the Marais was started by the Benedictine monks, the Dutch were brought in later to continue the drainage work and built the Drogues (dykes) to keep the sea at bay.

For more information about Marais Poitevin, please visit:
<http://www.vendee-guide.co.uk/marais-poitevin.htm>

Saintes

The Roman period is well represented by monuments in Saintes, as are the medieval and later periods, and there is a great deal to enjoy when visiting this lively town. Because of its gallo-

roman, medieval and classical heritage Saintes is officially listed as a 'Ville d'Art et d'Histoire'. Saintes has its origins in Roman times when it was an important regional centre. This can be seen as you arrive in the town centre and see the large Arch of Germanicus (a Roman triumphal arch) on the banks of the river. In the area immediately around the Arch de Germanicus you can also see the Archaeological museum where you can learn more of the town's Roman history. The most interesting part of the museum is the old abattoir that has been converted into an exhibit hall that holds hundreds of ancient parts of statues, columns and other ancient decorative features.

For more information about Saintes, please visit:

<https://www.francethisway.com/places/saintes.php>

Cognac & tasting

Cognac is situated in the Charente department of western France between Angouleme and Saintes. The name of Cognac is known the world over because of the brandy produced in the region, but the town itself is also very interesting to explore with an attractive riverside and historical centre to discover. The buildings in Cognac are mostly constructed from the local white stone that is found throughout the Poitou-Charentes region and makes the local architecture so distinctive and attractive. Cognac 'old town', the medieval part of the town, is a region of narrow cobbled streets, hemmed in by attractive houses from the 15th to 18th centuries, and a multitude of brandy maturing warehouses along the riverside.

For more information about Cognac, please visit:

<https://www.francethisway.com/places/cognac.php>

Rochefort and the Corderie Royal

The town developed around its military harbour when Louis XIV, in the 17th century, had an important naval base built here on what was previously a region of swamps and marshes. It was the naval base and the resulting wealth it brought to Rochefort that shaped much of the architecture here. The town was developed around the harbour and the associated naval buildings as a carefully planned 'new town', with a grid of straight streets and a large central square. The straight lines of houses remain much as they were originally laid out, and most of the houses in this part of Rochefort are also the original 17th - 19th century properties. In the centre of this part of Rochefort is the Place Colbert, a large open square with the Town Hall, a stone archway, and several shops and restaurants. A short distance east of here, the large 17th century buildings that include the arsenal and

the corderie are on the banks of the Charente river. Over the centuries several hundred ships were constructed here as the French Empire established its territories and protected its interests at sea. The Corderie Royale is a very long building built in 1670 and was once the centre of the docks in the town and the centre of ropemaking for ships across France, until ropes on ships were finally replaced by chains. At the corderie you can learn about the history of the site and also about the techniques involved in ropemaking.

For more information about Rochefort, please visit:

<https://www.francethisway.com/places/rochefort.php>

Nantes

Nantes will always be known as the capital of Brittany, even though it's now in a different region. The Dukes of Brittany ruled their lands from here until the Duchy was united with France in the 16th century and their former seat of power is still one of Nantes most commanding buildings. The old seat of the Dukes of Brittany is the final château on the Loire before it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The fortified palace is in the eastern part of the old town, although it's hard to miss the hefty walls and towers that encircle the refined Grand Logis where the dukes lived. The castle was built in the 13th century and occupied for 300 years by the Dukes until becoming a French royal residence in the 1500s.

For more information about Nantes, please visit:

<https://www.thecrazytourist.com/15-best-things-nantes-france/>

Reading Suggestions

Graham Robb, *The Discovery of France*.

A general introduction to French culture, landscape and history, it also features an excellent insight into the distinctive character of France's regions.

Angela Bird, *The Vendee*

A friendly and informative guide designed to help visitors make the most of their time in the sunny Vendee - a popular area of France's Atlantic coast.

Tour manager

Your tour manager will be on hand throughout the tour to ensure that everything operated according to plan. If you have any problems or questions please see him or her immediately – it is often possible to resolve complaints or problems very quickly on the spot, and do everything to help you enjoy your holiday.



The Basics

Climate – The weather in the Vendée at this time of year is likely to be pleasant, but there is the chance of the odd shower. Our best advice is to come prepared.

Time – GMT +2 hours (Summer time Apr-Oct); GMT + 1 (Standard time Nov-Mar).

Language – French.

Religion – Roman Catholic.

National holidays – New Year's day (01 Jan); Easter Monday; Labour day (01 May); Victory in Europe day (08 May); Ascension day; Whit Sunday; Whit Monday; National day (14 Jul); Assumption of Mary (15 Aug); All Saints' day (01 Nov); Armistice day (11 Nov); Christmas day (25 Dec).

Currency – Euro. €1 = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents.

Banks – Cashpoints compatible with international banking networks are located in all towns and cities, as well as airports, major train stations and other spots. They usually offer an attractive exchange rate. Those banks that still exchange foreign currencies into local money will always charge a transaction fee, so withdrawing money from an ATM usually represents the most logical means of obtaining euros.

Credit cards – American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted across the country. If you're eating at a restaurant, check prior to the meal that your card will be an acceptable form of payment. Even in cities, it's advisable to carry a supply of cash with you at all times.

Electricity – 220 volt, two-pin continental plug.

Drinking water – Tap water is safe to drink. (Although you'll find a huge amount of bottled water for sale too)

Shops and museums – Smaller towns have quaint boutiques and beautiful markets. Department stores are open 0900-1830 Monday to Saturday. Most shops are closed between 1200-1430. Some food shops (particularly bakers) are open Sunday mornings, in which case they will probably close Monday. Many shops close all day or half-day Monday.

Please note that most museums close on Mondays.

Clothes & Shoes – You may like to bring a warm sweater for cool evenings. Light rain wear for the occasional storm and good grip/flat walking shoes are recommended.

Camera – bring plenty of memory cards/film and any spare camera batteries as these are not always available. Please check with your guide before photographing people.

Bath plugs – The hotel has plugs for basins, but it is useful to carry a 'universal' one with you.

Telephones/mobiles – You should be able to use your mobile phone in France, depending on your operator and contract.

Tipping –To keep our tours affordable, we do not increase the tour price by adding in tips. However, in the tourism industry, there is a certain level of expectation that when receiving a good service, one does award with a tip. Tour Managers, Representatives, Guides and Drivers appreciate a tip at the end of their involvement with the tour, but this is entirely at your discretion. We believe in allowing you to tip according to your level of satisfaction with their services, but for your guidance about £2-3 per person per day for the tour manager is the norm. We would like to reiterate that tipping is an entirely optional payment and this information is given purely to answer any questions you may have about it.



Health

Doctor/Dentist/Chemist

Please talk to your tour manager if you are feeling unwell and they will organise for you to see a doctor.

Keep receipts for insurance claims.



Hospital

Your tour manager/hotel reception will arrange hospital transport.

Keep receipts for insurance claims.

General Health Advice

We suggest you take a good supply of your own individual medicines with you and always keep some in your hand luggage in case you get delayed or your luggage goes astray. General-purpose supplies for bites, stings, or scratches, and your usual medication for headaches, or stomach upsets are always recommended. Oral re-hydration sachets are excellent for topping up salt and glucose levels.

Visit the NHS Fit For Travel website for more generally information specific to the country you are visiting – www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

Sun Protection

Always ensure you take sufficient sun protection and moisturiser. A sun hat and sunglasses are also advisable.

Inoculations

You should check with your own doctor and take their advice as to which inoculations are required for the country you are visiting, as only they know your medical history and recommendations are liable to change at short notice.



Insurance

To be covered under your Travel Insurance Policy, if you become ill, it is essential that you contact a local doctor and also telephone the emergency number of your insurance company. You will **NOT** be covered for any claim unless this procedure is carried out. Your insurance company will then decide on the best course of medical attention.

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

The EHIC replaced the old E111 in 2006. Valid in all EEA countries, the card lets you get state healthcare at a reduced cost or sometimes for free. It will cover you for treatment that is needed to allow you to continue your stay until your planned return. It also covers the treatment of pre-existing medical conditions.

Please note that the EHIC **is not** an alternative to travel insurance. It will not cover any private medical healthcare or costs such as being flown back to the UK, or lost or stolen property. Therefore, it is important to have both an EHIC and a valid private travel insurance policy. It is also important to note that each country's healthcare system is slightly different, so the EHIC might not cover everything that would be generally free on the NHS.

We strongly recommend that you take out an appropriate travel insurance policy when you travel abroad.

For more information about the EHIC please visit:

<https://www.ehic.org.uk>



Emergencies

Should an emergency arise, please call our offices on:

00 44 20 7251 0045

Outside office hours (Mon-Fri 0900-1700), telephone our emergency staff on:

00 44 7841 023807

PLEASE USE THESE NUMBERS ONLY IN THE EVENT OF A GENUINE EMERGENCY.

If you find that you are in need of consular assistance during your holiday:

British Consulate Paris

16 rue d'Anjou

75008 Paris

France

Tel: +33 (0)1 44 51 31 00

France.enquiries@fco.gov.uk

Mon to Fri: 0930 to 1230. Outside these hours a consular Emergency Service is in operation and can be contacted on +33 (0)1 44 51 31 00

Travel Editions
3 Young's Buildings, London EC1V 9DB
Tel: 0207 251 0045
Email: tours@traveleditions.co.uk www.traveleditions.co.uk

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