



EXPLORE  
COGNAC

# \ PRESS KIT 2023

[www.explore-cognac.com](http://www.explore-cognac.com)





## \ INTRODUCTION

Cognac is a lively spirit  
in every sense of the word.

First and foremost, Cognac is an  
alcoholic drink – an internationally  
renowned eau-de-vie that inspires  
joie de vivre near and far.

Cognac is also a phantasmal reminder  
of a long history and rich gastronomic  
and cultural heritage. There's an  
historical town of Cognac, birthplace  
of France's great Renaissance king,  
Francis I, and home to most of its  
major Cognac houses. So too is  
there an exceptional region proudly  
carrying the same name, buffeted  
by the Atlantic, draped in vineyards  
and devoted to exacting traditions  
centuries in the making. Other iconic  
towns such as Angoulême, Jarnac,  
Jonzac, Saintes and La Rochelle  
round out the region's appeal, as do  
its famous maritime communities like  
those on Oléron Island.

Finally, Cognac is a lively state of  
mind – a proud devotion to creative  
authenticity brought to life through  
evocative experiences and a  
commitment to excellence.

Fittingly, there's no one way to live  
Cognac. In fact, there are as many  
ways to live it as there are to visit it, a  
boast captured by the subtle, powerful  
and elegant complexity  
of its namesake elixir.



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## Luxury 5\* hotel

*La Nauve, Hôtel & Jardin*

Opened in Cognac in spring 2023, this 5-star Relais & Châteaux hotel has 12 luxurious, individually designed rooms, a gastronomic restaurant managed by a top Parisian chef, a cocktail bar and a brasserie, all set in a belle époque mansion and a transformed Cognac distillery surrounded by a stunning 4½-hectare/11-acre park and herb/vegetable garden.

[almae-collection.com/lanauve](https://almae-collection.com/lanauve)



## A living Cognac eco-museum

*Domaine des Bessons*

The Musée du Vigneron-Bouilleur de Crus is a Cognac wine museum at the Domaine des Bessons. It appeals to all senses through the history and heritage of the Tesseron family since 1850, the arts and fragrances of Cognac and discovery of the aromas of Pineau des Charentes and Cognac through 10 fragrance-releasing pipes.

[domaine-des-bessons.fr](https://domaine-des-bessons.fr)

## All-terrain electric scooter tour

*Martell by Vitiscoot*

Hop on a Vitiscoot – an all-terrain electric scooter – at Martell to discover its sustainable viticulture... and the beauty of the Charente. When done, stop in their innovative boutique-workshop to fill a numbered and personally engraved (in gold or silver) bottle directly from the 610-liter/160-gallon cask of a special blend.

[martell.com](https://martell.com)

## Cognac biodiversity trail

*Boinaud*

This four-kilometer/2.5-mile walking tour of the Boinaud vines brings to life a guiding ethos: “We respect the land where our vines grow and the healthier our soil, the more fertile it will be.” A mobile app connects to 12 interactive terminals along the itinerary, which finishes in a tasting cellar amongst 41 alembics (stills).

[boinaud.com](https://boinaud.com)

## Immersive, virtual reality experience

*Hennessy*

Launched in May 2023, Mobilis is inspired by the sketches that Richard Hennessy, founder of Hennessy, scribbled on his worktable blotters in 1765. The immersive experience, part of a reimagined tour of Hennessy, is an exploration of craftsmanship and pioneering spirit designed by artists Olivier Kuntzel and Florence Deygas.

[hennessy.com](https://hennessy.com)

## Eco-tour in Grande Champagne

*Rémy Martin*

Among the great number of experiences offered by this famous brand is an eco-tour that allows visitors to explore its estate, vineyards and their biodiversity methods in Juillac-le-Coq (near Cognac). The tour is available depending on the season and weather, by electric bike or electric version of a fun off-road utility vehicle—the Méhari.

[remymartin.com](https://remymartin.com)

## Gourmet stay with breathtaking ocean view

*Hotel, Restaurant & Spa Le Grand Large*

Located on a natural and wild site, the recently-opened 5-star Hotel & Spa Le Grand Large is set in the middle of the dunes on one of the most beautiful beaches of the Island of Oléron.

[en.le-grand-large.fr](https://en.le-grand-large.fr)





## \ SELECTION OF COGNAC HOUSES

Many of today's major houses were established in the 18th and 19th centuries. Here are experiences to enjoy at seven of the most notable.



## Find Cognac and kings at Baron Otard & d'Ussé

### *Cognac*

The Château de Cognac is home of the Baron Otard & d'Ussé Cognac house. In 1795, noting that the thick 10th-century fortress walls would provide exceptional aging conditions for his eaux-de-vie, the eponymous baron purchased the Gothic and Renaissance structure, saving from total destruction the 15th-century birthplace of Francis I, one of France's greatest kings. Now a historic monument, the castle offers several tours that bring to life the histories of both France and Baron Otard & d'Ussé Cognac. Combine a visit to the king's apartments, usually closed to the public, with a discovery of the cellars' unique natural aging conditions. Or learn the art of tasting and serving Cognac using an exclusive blend of castle-aged eaux-de-vie. Try an unusual tasting: in the dark and blindfolded. Afterward, stop at Le Lys, the castle cocktail bar. Booking is recommended for all visits.

[chateauroyaldecognac.com](http://chateauroyaldecognac.com)



## Blend your own Cognac at Camus

### *Cognac*

Founded in 1863, Camus is the largest Cognac house to remain independent and family-owned. Traditions and practices have been passed down through five generations and rely on a proprietary, patented distillation method in small traditional pot stills that produce notable and intensely aromatic cognacs. Multiple bespoke tasting experiences explore the large selection of crus, vintages, and horizontals and verticals of Camus products, each also including a guided tour of the family house and behind-the-scenes introduction to the production of Cognac, from grape to glass. For an especially unforgettable experience, the Master Blender session sees the expert-led creation of a visitor's own XO Cognac that can be brought home in a personalized bottle to share with friends. Tours and workshop are available all year round by appointment.

[camus.fr](http://camus.fr)

## Meet true prestige at Courvoisier

### *Jarnac*

Courvoisier is one of the most celebrated major Cognac houses. Since its initial founding in 1796 and grounding in Jarnac in 1828, it has, among other things, been appreciated by Napoleon Bonaparte (with whose silhouette its bottles are marked), supplied Napoleon III's Imperial Court, played a leading role in the dinner that marked the opening of the Eiffel Tower and been honored (twice!) with the 'Prestige de la France,' the highest accolade for quality in France, the only Cognac house to hold such an award. Still today, Courvoisier exclusively uses a customized distilling process with small pot stills to ensure its complexity. The Premium tour steps into its imposing 19th-century castle to explore the soul and legacy of Courvoisier – including the Paradis cellar, the sanctuary of the most precious eaux-de-vie; a museum emphasizing Courvoisier's shared history with Napoleon – and concludes with a tasting. Reserve ahead.

[courvoisier.com](https://www.courvoisier.com)



## Take a multi-sensory journey to « Planet Hennessy »

### *Cognac*

Since 1765, Hennessy, the world's leading Cognac house, has enjoyed international standing from its base on the banks of the Charente. Its visits offer a rich, multi-sensory learning experience, taking in the vineyards, historic cellars and some of the secrets behind its cognacs' time-honored craftsmanship. The most comprehensive tour is the three-hour Grape to Glass 360° prestige experience that includes glimpses of little-known corners of the estate before settling into the VIP salon at the Château de Bagnolet, the Hennessy family's historic home, for a comprehensive look at the art of Cognac production, a taste of five eaux-de-vie representing various stages in the aging process and a finish with three cognacs and selection of hors d'oeuvres. Reservations required. In the New in 2023 section, read about Mobilis, Hennessey's immersive, virtual reality experience, launched in May 2023.

[hennessy.com](https://www.hennessy.com)

## Map your own multimedia journey at Martell

### *Cognac*

Founded in 1715, Martell is the oldest great Cognac houses, famed for its presence aboard the Orient Express and the Concorde, on polar expeditions and at royal weddings, among other things. These days, Martell invites visitors to map their own journeys of discovery. A multimedia format offers immersion into the house's heritage, terroir and savoir-faire. Different spaces travel visitors back in time and across continents to appreciate the range of artisanal skills that produce Martell cognacs. The journey culminates in a tasting with a house expert. Before leaving, visitors can stop at the Martell Foundation, a space devoted to artistic production and contemporary creation. On the top floor of the building is the Indigo by Martell bar, a vast roof terrace with an inventive cocktail menu and spectacular views. Also view the all-terrain electric scooter vineyard tours in the New in 2023 section.

[martell.com](https://www.martell.com)



## Lunch in a chai at Meukow

### *Cognac*

In 1862, two Silesian brothers set up a commercial office in Cognac after several trips to France in search of eaux-de-vie for Silesian royalty. Today, Meukow, still situated in the middle of Cognac and overseen by one of the very few female cellar masters in the Cognac world, is known for its suppleness, power and elegance. Once inside Meukow's imposing gateway, visitors are treated to a complete change of scene: a guided discovery tour of the house's history and savoir-faire, complete with modern visual effects in its distillery, cellars and more. At the end of the tour, visitors taste three cognacs, but can extend their experience into lunch at Chai Meukow, a refurbished cellar transformed into a restaurant. Cognacs can be enjoyed in this convivial setting as an aperitif, digestif or in Cognac-based food pairings with local specialities prepared by an on-site chef.

[visitemeukow.com](http://visitemeukow.com)



## View a sustainable future at Rémy Martin

### *Cognac*

Anchored in excellence since 1724, Rémy Martin is all about being exceptional, from special rights granted to it by King Louis XV to plant new vines (1738) and appointing the first woman cellar master to a major Cognac house (2003) to leading the push for sustainable agriculture and becoming the first wine-growing estate in the Charente region to obtain a «High Environmental Value» certification (2012). Rémy Martin has the biggest range of visitor experiences, which take guests from vineyard to distillery to final product and range across the work sites, the Domaine de Merpins and the firm's historic house. There are walking, electric bike and now electric Méhari (see the New in 2023 section) vineyard eco-tours with a focus on sustainability and biodiversity. For budding mixologists, the Cocktail Creation program measures, shakes, blends and pours Cognac cocktails. Reserve ahead for all experiences.

[visitesremymartin.com](http://visitesremymartin.com)





## \ FAMILY-OWNED HOUSES

In 2022, there were over 4,295 winegrowers, 120 professional distillers and 265 merchants operating within the Cognac geographical area. Here are 16 family-owned Cognac houses that will open the minds and palates of curious visitors.



## *Learn how it happens and tastes*

### **Bertrand**

*Réaux*

In the heart of the Petite Fine Champagne growing region, and under its trademark Windmill of Bel'Air, the last one in Reaux, the Bertrand family has respected the traditional art of cultivating vines since 1731. Guided visits teach the essentials of Cognac and Pineau des Charentes production with accompanying tastings of both.

[cognac-bertrand.com](http://cognac-bertrand.com)

### **Bourgoin**

*Saint-Saturnin*

The cognacs of the Bourgoin family estate are authentically handcrafted by the same people who work the vines, capturing their sincerity and boasting an excellent aromatic range. Visitors are shown around the vineyard and working areas, and then invited to a tasting.

[bourgoincognac.com](http://bourgoincognac.com)

### **Thomas Hine & Co**

*Jarnac*

Founded in 1763, Hine is one of the oldest artisanal Cognac firms in Jarnac and, since 1962, has been the official (and only) supplier of Cognac to the British monarchy. Two-hour visits take in the atmospheric wharf-side buildings redecorated by British designer Russell Sage and conclude with multiple tastings.

[hinecognac.com](http://hinecognac.com)



## *Enjoy a tour, taste and museum*

### **Frapin**

*Segonzac*

The Frapin family has been winegrowers since 1270 and distillers for 20 generations in the Grande Champagne region. A 2½-hour visit of their estate includes the vineyard, distillery, cellars and a museum. Halfway through, there's a cocktail break at Château Fontpinot and, at the end, a tasting of four cognacs.

[cognac-frapin.com](http://cognac-frapin.com)

### **Maine Giraud**

*Champagne-Vigny*

Le Maine Giraud's castle, distillery and 42 hectares/104 acres of vineyards have belonged to the Durand family since 1938, but are traced back to romantic poet Alfred de Vigny. Visitors to the estate's distillery and cellars also pause at its free Alfred de Vigny Museum.

[mainegiraud.com](http://mainegiraud.com)

### **Tiffon-Braastad**

*Jarnac*

This Cognac house, founded in 1875, occupies a coveted position on the banks of the Charente River in Jarnac. Its spectacular building is home to the distillery and 10 stills, the blending rooms and a remarkable museum. The Norwegian origins of this family are evident during each stage of a tour of the facilities.

[braastad.com](http://braastad.com)



# Blend your own Cognac

## Bache-Gabrielsen

*Cognac*

Run by the same family for four generations, this Cognac house dates back to 1852. Its Cellar Master Challenge asks visitors to recombine a blend created by the Bache-Gabrielsen cellar master, Jean-Philippe Bergier. Along the way, participants discover Cognac's terroirs, aromas and tastes. Everyone leaves with a personal blend.

[bache-gabrielsen.com](http://bache-gabrielsen.com)

## Grosperin

*Saintes*

Launched in 1999, this independent family-run business gathers and ages casks of old Cognac, recording and telling their stories and terroirs on what's bottled. A cellar master tour covers the Cognac production process and culminates in cask tastings of old cognacs from which to make and take home a personal blend.

[cognac-grosperin.com](http://cognac-grosperin.com)

## Domaines Francis Abecassis

*Claix*

The Abecassis's collection of estates covers 370 hectares/915 acres of vines, making it one of the largest independent producers in Cognac. A full visit experience reveals the complete journey taken by a grape, from the vine to glass, and includes a master blender workshop with a take-home bottle of one's own Cognac.

[abecassis-cognac.com](http://abecassis-cognac.com)

## Normandin Mercier

*Dompierre-sur-Mer*

Since 1872, five generations of family tradition have guided the production of Normandin-Mercier cognacs. Located in the Château de La Péraudière on the outskirts of La Rochelle, the cellar masters invite visitors to learn about the Cognac production process but also allow for chocolate pairings or a blend-your-own Cognac workshop.

[normandin-mercier.fr](http://normandin-mercier.fr)





## Mix Cognac with other flavors

### Château Montifaud

*Jarnac Champagne*

Six generations of the Vallet family have owned the Château Montifaud since 1866. Its cognacs are made using traditional methods with grapes grown only on the estate's 140-hectare/346-acre vineyard. One fun and immersive cocktail experience mixes discovery, creativity and tasting Cognac, Pineau des Charentes and gin.

[chateau-montifaud.com](http://chateau-montifaud.com)

### Delamain

*Jarnac*

Founded in 1824 by the grandson of an Irish Cognac man, Delamain sees itself as guardians of time protecting the purity and integrity of exceptional cognacs. Their Patrimoine & Luxe experience teaches about Cognac production and its relationship with food, pairing Delamain cognacs with regional delectables like caviar, foie gras, cheeses and more.

[delamain-cognac.com](http://delamain-cognac.com)

### Domaine Castels-Sablons

*Saint Maigrin*

A Roux family property for four generations, the four hectares/10 acres of Castels-Sablons today produce Cognac, Pineau des Charentes and verjus (a natural nonalcoholic grape juice used in cooking since Roman times). They also have a Flamme des Anges, used in making a traditional Brûlot charentais (see the Gastronomy section).

[castel-sablons.com](http://castel-sablons.com)



## Go a level deeper

### A. de Fussigny

*Cognac*

The cognacs of A. de Fussigny are created using traditional methods. More than that, the company, founded in 1814, places a special emphasis on greening its work through organic production and eco-innovation. It has natural and organic cognacs and offers its entire collection in new biodegradable bottles made from plant residues.

[adefussigny.com](http://adefussigny.com)

### Domaine du Chêne

*Saint-Palais-de-Phiolin*

Established in 1865, currently independent and committed to environmental stewardship, Domaine du Chêne has received several golds from the World Cognac Awards in recent years. Visitors can admire the entire Cognac and Pineau des Charentes production process right on its 90-hectare/222-acre property, also certified for its «High Environmental Value».

[ledomaineduchene.fr](http://ledomaineduchene.fr)

### Frères Moine

*Chassors*

Since 1980, the Moine family has passionately worked its 40 hectares/100 acres of vineyards. Numerous hands-on visitor experiences give meaning to their viticultural lifestyle, from tasting workshops to an award-winning discovery of oak's critical role in Cognac production to a half-day "peasant getaway" of vineyard work during a harvest.

[moinefreres.fr](http://moinefreres.fr)





## \ VINEYARDS & TRADITIONS

The Cognac tradition began in the 15th century, when the Dutch introduced distillation to preserve the quality of Charentes wines during transport. Three centuries later, the stills of Charente were redesigned, marking the arrival of double distillation. Then came the practice of aging the sought-after wine spirits in oak barrels, which helped improve its quality. However, the market for Cognac really developed in the 19th century, when many of the Cognac houses were established. Bottles then replaced oak barrels for shipments.

Officially delimited in 1909, the Cognac region today covers 83,140 hectares/205,443 acres of vineyards planted on the plains and gently rolling hills of central western France. Bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and crossed by the Charente River, Cognac has a famously conducive climate for grape growing: ideal temperature variations, a countryside bathed in a unique, warm sunlight and clay-limestone soils.

The 20th century also saw the formal introduction of Cognac regulations and, in 1936, the creation of the region's "Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée" or AOC (today's protected designation of origin, or PDO), its vineyards divided between six crus (growing areas), all planted primarily with three white grape varieties renowned for their aromatic complexity: Ugni Blanc (more than 98% of the plants), Colombard and Folle Blanche.

Today, Cognac is home to a living heritage that both shapes and is shaped by the land. From winegrowers to cellar masters, and distillers to coopers and boilermakers, Cognac expertise has been passed from one generation to the next, each aiming to preserve it and develop it in the quest for even greater quality.

# \ KEY FIGURES

**Total  
vineyard area:  
83,140 hectares/  
205,443 acres**

10% of France's total

**Rank in size  
of France's white  
wine vineyards: #1**

98% Ugni Blanc grapes

**97.2% of Cognac  
production drunk  
outside of France**

212.5 million bottles or 7 bottles  
sold per second worldwide, with  
the USA in the lead at 155 million  
bottles\*, followed by China  
(34 million\*) and Singapore  
(19 million\*)

**Livelihoods  
directly  
and indirectly  
associated with  
the Cognac industry:  
60,000**

Source: BNIC

[cognac.fr/en/discover](https://cognac.fr/en/discover)





## \ MIXOLOGY & COCKTAIL BARS

In addition to the exceptional IGP Charentais wines are two AOC alcohols (Cognac and Pineau des Charentes) that we feature in this section. Local bars and their mixologists expertly blend and play with these unique regional drinks to whet one's whistle. Below are a handful of top-notch cocktail bars that do just that.

# *Exceptional regional drinks*



## **Cognac**

Cognac is a subtle blend of eaux-de-vie of different ages and profiles that produce an amber-colored elixir of floral, fruity and oaky aromas. It can be enjoyed on its own, but 80% of Cognac is consumed in cocktails. Cognac was granted AOC status in 1936 and must be produced according to precise practices and specifications - double distilled in copper pot stills and aged for at least two years in special oak barrels - guaranteeing its origin and authenticity. Cognacs are classified as VS («Very Special»), VSOP («Very Superior Old Pale»), Napoléon, XO («Extra Old»), XXO («Extra Extra Old») and Hors d'âge, denoting blends from eaux-de-vie aged for different lengths of time, from the minimum two years to 14 years or older.

[cognac.fr](http://cognac.fr)

## **Pineau des Charentes**

Pineau des Charentes is an aromatic fortified wine (white, red and rosé) made from blending grape must (juice) and Cognac. It is drunk as an apéritif and used in recipes. The grape must and Cognac always come from the same vineyard on the same estate and are made by the same people. After harvested grapes are pressed, Cognac from the previous year is added and the mixture stored in oak barrels for a long time to gain a distinctive taste. The Pineau des Charentes was awarded AOC status in 1945.

[pineau.fr](http://pineau.fr)

## **Charentais wines**

Given the region's mild and sunny climate, the same vines used for the production of Cognac and Pineau are also used for wines. Dry, light whites account for more than 80% of production, with a growing number of fresh and fruity reds and rosés. Charentais wines are usually drunk young, but reveal a fuller complexity after a period of aging. In 2009, Charentais wines were certified as IGP (formerly "vins de table").

[vinscharentais.fr](http://vinscharentais.fr)



# Cocktail Bars



## Bar Luciole

A dedication to Cognac (don't miss the Cognac "library") shows in signature cocktails steeped in Cognac heritage. Book ahead for master classes.

[bar-luciole.com](http://bar-luciole.com)

## Bar Louise

Classic cocktails and original creations dominate in this laid-back bar committed to local spirits and homemade dishes. Private workshops cover cocktail-making and -tasting techniques.

[barlouise.com](http://barlouise.com)

## Indigo by Martell

A vast roof terrace on the top floor of the Martell building offers spectacular views, an inventive cocktail menu and the complete collection of Martell cognacs.

[martell.com](http://martell.com)

## Jazz Bar 1838 & Rooftop

The 5-star Hotel Chais Monnet & Spa is home to two bars: a live-music jazz bar set in a former cooperage and, in summer, a rooftop terrace overlooking Cognac.

[chaismonnethotel.com](http://chaismonnethotel.com)

## Origins

At Origins, mixology is an art and its cocktails are how it is expressed using ingredients from the French terroir. The adjoining restaurant boast market-fresh local foods.

[origins.bar](http://origins.bar)

## Le Mary Lili

The full and changing menu of La Rochelle's first cocktail bar brings mixology experiences to neophytes and amateurs alike.

[lemarylili.fr](http://lemarylili.fr)



## \ GASTRONOMY

Flavors and local gastronomic products – from the land and the sea – are big business in the Charentes region. Not to be missed are three AOP foods (Charentes-Poitou butter, potatoes of Ile de Ré and Chabichou du Poitou cheese). Showcasing these products are the Charentes’ eight restaurants featured below. They are a celebrated fraction of more than one thousand excellent eating establishments found throughout the region. Learn more about them and other notable produce.



# Local culinary specialties



## Salt

Ile de Ré is world famous for its fleur de sel, a delicate, flaky and mild salt that forms as a thin crystalized layer on the surface of shallow seawater pools. It is harvested from saltworks in a traditional, labor-intensive process of raking the purest and whitest layer off the top.

## Cheese

The region has several notable local cheeses: Chabichou du Poitou (AOP; a goat cheese with a wrinkled rind and creamy interior), Mothais sur feuille (a goat cheese wrapped in a leaf), Manslois (smooth texture and creamy flavor), Jonchée (wrapped in natural rush and most often flavored with almond) and Taupinette (a goat cheese with subtle hazelnut and forest floor notes).

## Potatoes

The potatoes of Ile de Ré (AOP) have a soft, slightly sweet flesh and delicate skin that rubs off easily. It is only grown by 35 farmers who work 60 hectares/150 acres from a total of 360/900 in rotation. To preserve their special characteristics, Ile de Ré potatoes are harvested before July 31st.

## Melons

The pale orange flesh of Charentais melons has a sweet flavor with a soft, floral aftertaste. Also known as French cantaloupes, Charentais melons are eaten fresh and usually locally since they don't travel well.

## Oysters

Marennes-Oléron oysters (IGP) are celebrated for their taste. Matured or raised in the claires (shallow salt-water ponds, often former salt pans) of Europe's largest oyster-farming center, they are the only oyster in France with a «Label Rouge» certification (a food quality assurance label).

## Butter

Charentes-Poitou butter is the oldest butter with PDO status. Using milk only from cows raised in the region and fabricated according to traditional methods and precise specifications, it is beloved for its smooth, creamy texture and hazelnut taste. The region is also known for its beurre salé (salted butter).

## Truffles

Many Périgord black truffle patches have been developed in Charente. Open to all, the Jarnac truffle market showcases expert-certified, quality truffles every Tuesday from December to February. The market opens officially to the sound of horns – a unique (and fragrant) experience.

## Chicken

The Barbezieux chicken is the biggest and the strongest of all French chicken breeds and said to be one of the best-tasting meat chickens in the world, particularly ideal for roasting.

# Gourmet restaurants

## Christopher Coutanceau



*La Rochelle*

**Chef: Christopher Coutanceau**

Traditional and innovative cuisine is served in a refined atmosphere in this regional gastronomic powerhouse (a 'Relais & Châteaux' and 'Grandes Tables du Monde').

[coutanceaularochelle.com](http://coutanceaularochelle.com)

## Restaurant La Ribaudière



*Bourg-Charente*

**Chefs: Thierry and Julien Verrat**

For 30-plus years, La Ribaudière's has passionately championed the natural food products of the region.

[laribaudiere.com](http://laribaudiere.com)

## Le Gaya par Pierre Gagnaire

*Châtelailon-Plage*

**Chef: Loris Cornacchia**

Located in the 4-star MGallery Hotel, Le Gaya promises a memorable, ocean-front dining experience anchored in local, seasonal fare from both land and sea.

[la-grande-terrasse.com](http://la-grande-terrasse.com)

## Poulpette

*Cognac*

**Chef: Antoine Vernouillet**

Both food and service star here, where market-based cooking informs the short but sophisticated menu. The fine ingredients translate easily into culinary success.

[poulpette.squarespace.com](http://poulpette.squarespace.com)

## Les Foudres



*Cognac*

**Chef: Paolo Boscaro**

Situated in a stunning "chai" (storehouse), this gastronomic restaurant of Hotel Chais Monnet promises local, creative and quality cuisine.

[chaismonnethotel.com](http://chaismonnethotel.com)

## Les Sources de Fontbelle



*Angoulême*

**Chef: Guillaume Veysièrre**

The innovative cuisine of this bright and modern restaurant overlooking a forest places a special emphasis on seasonal and local product.

[sourcesdefontbelle.com](http://sourcesdefontbelle.com)

## Le Verre y Table

*Jarnac*

**Chef: Jean Charles Boisumault**

The freshness and richness of the food are matched by the lively bistro ambiance. An affordable lunch menu is especially good value for money.

[leverreytable.fr](http://leverreytable.fr)

## L'écume

*Oléron*

**Chef: Romaric Villeneuve**

Fresh local produce is the refined material for this modern, imaginative cuisine, deftly overseen by a young chef quickly making a name for himself. Don't miss the desserts.

[restaurant-lecume-oleron.fr](http://restaurant-lecume-oleron.fr)





## \ HOTELS

The Charentes region boasts large numbers of quality accommodation in all forms and styles, from campgrounds and holiday rentals to luxury hotels and resorts. Of the 334 hotels in the region, here is a selection of 14 exemplary establishments.

## Hotel Chais Monnet & Spa ★★★★★

*Cognac*

**21 suites, 71 rooms and 12 apartments • From €200**

On its 2-hectare/5-acre property at the heart of an ancestral winery, this Leading Hotels of the World property promises elegant rooms, a gastronomic restaurant (see Les Foudres in the Restaurants section), the brasserie La Distillerie, Café Angélique, a pool and a contemporary spa. The elegance of the site is ideal for business trips or breaks, and the hotel makes a refined base for visits to the region's cognac houses.

[chaismonnethotel.com](http://chaismonnethotel.com)



## Hôtel Restaurant & Spa Le Grand Large ★★★★★

*Ile d'Oléron*

**31 suites and rooms • From €182**

Ensnconced in the forested dunes of one of Ile d'Oléron's most beautiful beaches, Le Grand Large has a breathtaking ocean view. Built in modern «Le Corbusier» style to blend into its natural surroundings, the recently-renovated hotel promises excellent services, including a gastronomic restaurant (chef David Boyer was awarded "Meilleur Ouvrier de France" [Best Craftsman of France] in 2023), spa, swimming pool and meeting room.

[le-grand-large.fr](http://le-grand-large.fr)



## Domaine des Etangs ★★★★★

*Massignac*

**17 rooms, including suites and luxury farmhouses • From €400**

The largest five-star resort in mainland France, Domaine des Etangs extends over 1,000 hectares/2,500 acres of protected forests, grassland and ponds. It includes a fully renovated 13th-century château, landscaped gardens, six farmhouse cottages, a longère (long, narrow dwelling), vegetable garden, Gallo-Roman baths, two swimming pools, a floating tennis court and a Michelin-starred restaurant.

[domainedesetangs.com](http://domainedesetangs.com)

## La Villa Grand Voile

*La Rochelle*

**14 suites and rooms • From €170**

The Villa Grand Voile - Christopher Coutanceau is a Relais & Châteaux by the Michelin-starred chef-fisherman, nestled in a former shipowner's residence dating back to 1715. The historic building, now with a terrace and outdoor heated pool, is a few minutes' walk from the vibrant port, the Michelin 2-star restaurant Christopher Coutanceau (see the Restaurants section) and the bistro La Yole de Chris.

[villagrandvoile.com](http://villagrandvoile.com)



## Hotel François Premier ★★★★★

*Cognac*

**4 suites, 26 rooms • From €120**

This former private mansion in the heart of Cognac has been fully renovated to balance the elegance of the 19th century with the audacity of contemporary design inspired by the local colors of Cognac. Guests make the most of a spa, fitness room, cocktail bar and garden overlooking the roofs of town. The restaurant, La Belle Epoque, has an incredible patio.

[hotelfrancoispremier.fr](http://hotelfrancoispremier.fr)



## Le Saint Gelais ★★★★★

*Angoulême*

**5 suites, 11 rooms • From €130**

The Saint Gelais is a high-end boutique hotel located in the old priory of St-Gelais square, right at the doors of Angoulême town center. The arresting interior design combines modernity and comfort with a natural theme and colors, while the bistronomic restaurant, L'Algorithme, has a beautiful tree-lined terrace with a swimming pool. There is also a 40-person seminar room for working groups.

[hotel-saint-gelais-angouleme.com](http://hotel-saint-gelais-angouleme.com)

## MGallery Hotel Collection La Grande Terrasse Hôtels & Spas ★★★★★

*Châtelaillon-Plage*

**72 rooms • From €185**

Imagine the sandy beach of a small town with belle époque architecture just a short distance from La Rochelle. That's where the MGallery Hotel & Spa offers its guests a true break from routine. It's part of the Grande Terrasse's 3-hectare/7½-acre park, also home to Le Gaya par Pierre Gagnaire (see the Restaurants section), a spa, thalassotherapy center, panoramic terrace, indoor pool and plenty more.

[la-grande-terrasse.com](http://la-grande-terrasse.com)



## Hôtel La Monnaie ★★★★★

*La Rochelle*

**2 suites, 34 rooms • From €120**

This avant-garde hotel mixes the comfort of modern tech conveniences (video projector, wifi, screen, sound system) with the authenticity of a 17th-century residence at the entrance to the Old Port. La Monnaie has art-filled rooms, a lovely courtyard and two meeting rooms, all set in a privileged and luxurious environment right at the heart of the historic center.

[hotelmonnaie.com](http://hotelmonnaie.com)

## Hôtel La Fabrique ★★★

*La Rochelle*

58 rooms • From €100

Even expertly renovated to a high level of contemporary industrial chic, Hôtel La Fabrique retains the luster of its prestigious past. Located right at the entrance of the old port and historic city of La Rochelle, five minutes on foot from the train station, it promises individually styled rooms, the Etabli lounge and cocktail bar and two fully equipped meeting rooms.

[hotellafabrique.com](http://hotellafabrique.com)

## Hostellerie Le Coq d'Or ★★★

*Jonzac*

5 rooms • From €134

The Hostellerie du Coq d'Or occupies an old residence opposite the Château de Jonzac, right in the center of town. Its five rooms are creatively decorated to balance old and new, while the busy restaurant emphasizes regional fare at its brasserie lunches and traditional dinners served on the terrace or in the cozy dining room. There's also a bar with an air of the early 1900s.

[lecoqdor.eu](http://lecoqdor.eu)

## Hôtel du Palais ★★★

*Angoulême*

3 suites, 40 rooms • From €64

Housed in an elegant 18th-century convent building, the Hôtel du Palais faces the Angoulême Palais de Justice (law courts) from which it derives its name. The hotel's palette of bright colors can't be missed at reception and then carries through to the unique rooms, notable for their elegant simplicity and comfortable style. As many customers say: This is a "building that has a soul."

[hotel-angouleme.fr](http://hotel-angouleme.fr)

## Hôtel Saint Nicolas ★★★

*La Rochelle*

86 rooms • From €94

In an old, renovated building at the center of La Rochelle, Hôtel Saint-Nicolas delivers gracious elegance and a touch of the good life. Comfortably appointed rooms, local food products (showcased at the big breakfast buffet) and drinks, a convivial and airy glass-roofed bar, bright co-working space, four meeting rooms and bicycles for hire round out the sense of well-being on offer.

[hotel-saint-nicolas.com](http://hotel-saint-nicolas.com)

## Hôtel SPA Les Cleunes Oléron ★★★

*Saint-Trojan-les-Bains*

41 rooms • From €119

Facing the water from the island of Oléron, Les Cleunes Oléron hotel and spa project the easy calm into which the guests relax. Between the new balneotherapy area (heated spa bath, aerotherapy, sauna, steam bath and treatments), open outdoor swimming pool (heated in high season), bar and relaxing terraces, there's no better way to do nothing at all.

[hotel-les-cleunes.fr](http://hotel-les-cleunes.fr)

## Hôtel Quai des Pontis ★★★

*Cognac*

28 rooms • From €79

Hôtel Quai des Pontis still retains traces of its industrial past as a factory building. Set in the center of Cognac, on the banks of the Charente River, it now offers unique lodging in cozy wooden caravans, cabins on stilts, lodge rooms and even contemporary suites, along with an outdoor pool and welcoming bar. For a change, why not arrange to arrive at the hotel by boat?

[quaidespontis.com](http://quaidespontis.com)







## \ NATURAL, SENSORY & SLOW TOURISM

The Charentes region is a premier destination in France, especially for French travelers drawn in by its sensory pleasures and outdoor nature activities. It also helps that it is the first destination of France for wellness.



## Cycling

One of the most popular activities in Cognac is cycling – a family activity for which Charentes is ideally suited with 6,750 km/4,250 miles of bicycle paths, including five European and national cycling tracks.

### La Flow Vélo®

For independent travelers, this national trail crosses the Charentes from Ile d'Aix to the Dordogne's Thiviers. Since 2023 the path has been extended 37 miles to Le Lardin Saint Lazare near Lascaux, and will soon reach Sarlat. The trail is now 350 km/close to 218 miles of gentle riding that visits Rochefort, Saintes, the archeological site of Angeac-Charente, Cognac, Angoulême to a very scenic section of the Dordogne.

[La Flow Vélo](#)

### Ouest Charente Outdoor®

For a bit more handholding, Ouest Charente Outdoor rents e-bikes (and canoes) equipped with an itinerary-ready GPS. Cyclists ride the route on their own but are seen off at the start, met by a winegrower and distiller along the way and welcomed at the end of the day.

[ouestcharente-outdoor.com](#)



## River cruising

The source of the Charente River is in the Haute-Vienne. Its waters then wind through 35 villages, extensive vineyards and several famous towns (Angoulême, Cognac, Saintes and Rochefort) before flowing into the ocean at Rochefort.

### Riverboat Rental

For travelers ready to manage on their own, riverboats accommodating, 2-12 people can be rented with no license for weeklong (or longer) discovery at a quiet pace.

[Les Canalous \(Cognac\)](#)

[canalous-lot.com](#)

[Le Boat \(Jarnac\)](#)

[leboat.fr](#)

[Intercroisières \(Sireuil\)](#)

[intercroisieres.com](#)

### La Demoiselle

The silent 100% solar and electric powered boat La Demoiselle awaits passengers on the quay outside Hennessy house in Cognac for an unforgettable 90-minute sightseeing river cruise, taking in the lovely views from the Charente.

[More information \(French only\)](#)

### Béthanie Péniche

For a bit more pampering, starting on Jarnac, visitors spend three hours on the Charente River, taking in the quayside Cognac houses and gorgeous countryside, all while sipping cocktails and wine, and sampling delicious local produce.

[bethanie-peniche.fr](#)

## Hot-air ballooning Charente Montgolfières

Seen from the sky, the Charentes landscapes are unforgettable – the historical towns, the coastline from the Gironde estuary to the Marais Poitevin, the Charente River valley and the vineyards of Cognac.

[charente-montgolfieres.fr](#)





# *Satisfying the senses*

Cognac is an adventure of the senses. A visit to the region should indulge them all – from the sight of stacked aging barrels and field-carpeted vineyards to the sound of bubbling stills and commerce on the river, from the fragrance and flavor of local truffles and just-uncorked VSOP Cognac to the sturdy roughness of old castle walls.

## **Maison de la Vigne et des Saveurs**

In Archiac, this vine museum teaches about the world of Cognac: the history of its vineyards, vintages and grape varieties; the Cognac production cycle and who is involved (in the vineyards and cooperages); and the process of creating Pineau and Cognac.

[maisondelavigneetdessaveurs.com](http://maisondelavigneetdessaveurs.com)



## **Logis des Tourelles**

At the heart of Cognac town's historic center, in a lounge or garden of this stunning 19th-century mansion, now a guesthouse, Cognac is served.

Guests taste from among the quality bottles presented in the cognathèque, with local food pairings as a gustatory enhancement.

[logis-des-tourelles.fr](http://logis-des-tourelles.fr)



## **Cognac Jewellery School**

Located in the beautiful Château de Puyguiller of Segonzac, the Cognac Jewellery School offers numerous hands-on half-day experiences, many based around the creation of jewelry inspired by the vines of Ugni Blanc, a common Cognac grape variety.

[cognacjewelleryschool.com](http://cognacjewelleryschool.com)





## \ FESTIVALS & CULTURAL EVENTS

The festivals of the Charentes region bring bright life to the destination all year round. Three of its most significant events are the Festival International de la Bande Dessinée, Europe's largest comics festival (200,000 visitors); Les Francfolies, France's third largest music festival (150,000 visitors); and the Grand Pavois, the leading international boat show (80,000 visitors).



**15 - 17 September**  
2023

## **Circuit des Remparts**

*Angoulême*

An international race has been staged here since 1939 and attracts drivers of the world's finest classic cars (Aston Martin, MG, Bugatti, Porsche, Lotus etc.) racing around the town's ramparts.

[circuitdesremparts.com](http://circuitdesremparts.com)

**20 - 25 September**  
2023

## **Le Grand Pavois**

*La Rochelle*

A 6-day international in-water boat show where visitors can examine 300 boats afloat and 450 on land, find out about the latest technology, discover equipment and gear for a myriad of water sports and activities.

[grand-pavois.com](http://grand-pavois.com)

**7 - 8 October**  
2023

## **Fort Boyard Challenge**

*Fouras-les-Bains*

This is the most important multi-watersport event in France, combining windsurfing/windfoil, stand-up paddling and Polynesian canoeing VA'A.

[fortboyardchallenge.fr](http://fortboyardchallenge.fr)

**21 - 27 November**  
2023

## **Les Gastronomades**

*Angoulême*

Winegrowers, gardeners, breeders, oyster farmers, butchers, bakers and chefs come together to share their wisdom, trade and products.

[gastronomades.fr](http://gastronomades.fr)

**November - March**  
Every year

## **Distillation in action**

After grapes are harvested, pressed and their juice fermented, the resulting white wine is double distilled in copper pot stills as part of the precise practice that produces Cognac. In winter, cognac houses focus on this day and night and welcome the public to see the art of distillation in action.

[explore-cognac.com](http://explore-cognac.com)

**25 - 28 January**  
2024

## **Festival International de la Bande Dessinée**

*Angoulême*

With 2,000 authors and two dozen countries represented, this annual international comics festival attracts more than 200,000 visitors in search of new comics from all over the world.

[bdangouleme.com](http://bdangouleme.com)

**February**  
2024

## Mimosa Festival

*Saint-Trojan-les-Bains*

Why light up the streets with music and celebrations right in the middle of winter? Because that's when the mimosas bloom!

[lafetedumimosa.com](http://lafetedumimosa.com)

**May**  
2024

## Festival International de Musique de Chambre en Charente

Since 2008, this festival has been dedicated to the rich repertoire of chamber music with concerts throughout Charente.

[chalaismusique.com](http://chalaismusique.com)

**4 June**  
Every year

## NATIONAL COGNAC DAY

**July**  
Every year

## Cognac Blues Passions

*Cognac*

For 30 years, lovers of R&B have flocked to this amazing Afro-American music festival in a convivial setting.

[bluespassions.com](http://bluespassions.com)

**July**  
Every year

## Les Francofolies

*La Rochelle*

This celebration of French music is one of the most famous annual music festivals in Europe and the third largest in France.

[francofolies.fr](http://francofolies.fr)

**July**  
Every year

## La Fête du Cognac

*Cognac*

Concerts by renowned artists are complemented by celebrations of local delicacies such as Cognac, Charentais melon and snails at the town's riverside marina.

[lafeteducognac.fr](http://lafeteducognac.fr)

**August**  
2024

## Coupe d'Europe de Montgolfières

This world-class competition and show of hot-air balloons takes over the lands and vineyards of the Charentes.

[mainfonds.com](http://mainfonds.com)





## \ ITINERARIES

Explore a trio of sample itineraries that take in Charentes highlights, including some of its six UNESCO-listed World Heritage Sites, six “Most Beautiful Villages of France” (Plus Beaux Villages de France) and seven «Small Towns of Character» (Petites Cités de Caractère).

# Cognac brand lovers

## DAY 1

- Morning* Grab an early train from Paris or Bordeaux to Cognac and stroll through town, location of the great Cognac houses. Hit the cobbled streets lined with half-timbered houses and 19th-century mansions or visit the royal Château de Cognac, birthplace of King Francis I and site of the Baron Otard & d'Ussé Cognac house.
- Lunch* Les Foudres in your hotel, the Chais Monnet & Spa (see the Restaurants section)
- Afternoon* Do an informative tour and tasting at the world-renowned Hennessy Cognac house.
- Late Afternoon* Time and energy permitting, visit the Martell Foundation and discover the links between art, the environment and the community, not least some sustainable solutions to climate challenges.
- Dinner* Watch the colors of the evening sky from Indigo by Martell, the highest rooftop bar in Cognac. Appreciate the 360-degree views over cocktails, tapas and local products.
- Evening* Take an after-dark interactive tour of the Martell Cognac house. Discover its secrets, history and knowhow.
- Night* Hotel Chais Monnet & Spa (5 stars; see the Hotels section)



## DAY 2

- Morning* Learn about the iconic Louis XIII Cognac on a tour of the historic Rémy Martin Cognac house and its old cellars.
- Lunch* Restaurant La Maison
- Afternoon* Afternoon: Return to Paris, Bordeaux or head off to your next destination.





## A 3-DAY ITINERARY THROUGH ANGOULÊME, JARNAC, COGNAC AND SAINTES

### DAY 1 In Angoulême & Jarnac

- Morning* Morning: Arrive in Angoulême via direct high-speed train from Paris (approximately 2¼ hours) or Bordeaux (35 minutes). Take a guided tour of town that places the Romanesque majesty of the cathedral alongside the contemporary flair of street art and murals. Explore the collections in the three city museums devoted to the 'ninth art' (comics), the paper industry and both the prehistory of Charente and the arts and treasures of Africa and Oceania.
- Lunch* Le Saint-André restaurant
- Afternoon* Take the train to Jarnac (about 30 minutes), birthplace of former French president François Mitterrand. Check in at the hotel and then stroll a few minutes to the Courvoisier Cognac house for a trip deep into their cellar, Chai Renard, and discovery of their history and craftsmanship.
- Dinner* Le Verre y Table  
(see the Restaurants section)
- Night* Ligaro Hotel (3 stars)



## French lifestyle by train

### DAY 2 In Cognac

- Morning* Train from Jarnac to Cognac (about 10 minutes). Step into the royal Château de Cognac, birthplace of King Francis I, for a visit of the Baron Otard & d'Ussé Cognac house with lots of information about the history and secrets of Cognac production. The tour finishes with an unusual tasting: in the dark and blindfolded. Then wander the cobbled streets with a guide to discover the old town.
- Lunch* Poulpette (see the Restaurants section)
- Afternoon* Check in at the hotel before hitting the vineyards in a vintage car with Irène (of XO madame), a wine lover and local who will also arrange an exclusive meeting with a winemaker.
- Dinner* La Belle Epoque, the restaurant in your hotel
- Night* Hotel Héritage (3 stars)

### DAY 3 In Saintes

- Morning* Hop a train from Cognac to Saintes (about 20 minutes). Head straight for the Charente River and relax into a quiet float aboard a solar/electric boat. Alternatively, tour the historic sites of this ancient city, including its Gallo-Roman amphitheater, Saint-Eutrope Basilica (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and the Cathedral Saint-Pierre, a jewel of Roman art.
- Lunch* Le Dallaison
- Afternoon* Take a tour of Groperrin, a small family estate and the only Cognac house in Saintes. There are about 10 old cognacs in barrels from which one can taste and make one's own blend.
- Late Afternoon* Return to Paris, Bordeaux or head off to your next destination.

## A 4-DAY ITINERARY THROUGH THE COGNAC VINEYARDS FROM INLAND TO THE ATLANTIC COAST

### DAY 1 In Aubeterre-sur-Dronne, Champagne-Vigny & Jonzac

*Morning* Begin your trip in Aubeterre-sur-Dronne, one of the “Most Beautiful Villages of France,” with a visit of its underground church, the largest subterranean religious building in Europe, carved out of the rock in the 12th century.

*Lunch* La Taverne (Aubeterre)

*Afternoon* Journey 35 minutes by car outside of Aubeterre to the Maine Giraud Cognac house in Champagne- Vigny, whose unique story began with a romantic idea: to marry a love of Cognac with architectural and literary heritage, as Maine Giraud is headquartered in a home once owned by poet and winemaker Alfred de Vigny.

*Dinner* Le Comptoir du Marché (Jonzac)

*Night* Hostellerie Le Coq d’Or, 40 minutes from Champagne-Vigny (3 stars; see the Hotels section)

### DAY 2 In Archiac, Jarnac-Champagne, Pons & Saintes

*Morning* Head to Archiac (10 minutes) for a visit to the Maison de la Vigne et des Saveurs (vine museum; see the Natural, Sensory & Slow Tourism section) to learn about the world of Cognac. The history of its vineyards, vintages and grape varietals; the Cognac production cycle and who is involved (the professions of the vineyard and the cooperage); and the process of creating Pineau and Cognac.

*Lunch* Le Relais de Jarnac (Jarnac-Champagne)

*Afternoon* Travel 10 minutes to Jarnac-Champagne and its Château Montifaud Cognac house. Tour behind the scenes to discover its secrets and treasures, and for an exclusive glimpse at the cellar master’s job.

*Late Afternoon* Continue your journey for 13 minutes to Pons for a stop at the Pilgrimage Hospital, one of five UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the area and the only surviving structure of its kind along the medieval Camino de Santiago. Carry on to Saintes.

*Dinner* L’Iode (Saintes)

*Night* Les Chambres de l’Abbaye (quirky accommodation in an authentic abbey, built in 1047) in Saintes, 20 minutes from Pons



## Heritage discoveries in the Charentes

### DAY 3 On Oléron Island

*Morning* Drive to Oléron Island, the largest French island on the Atlantic coast, 65 minutes away. Take a break at the century-old oyster-farming village of Fort-Royer to view the local product.

*Lunch* Any of the oyster bars in or around Fort-Royer

*Afternoon* Discover the Maxime Pinard vineyard, founded in 1889 by the current owner’s great-grandfather.

*Dinner* L’écume (see the Restaurants section)

*Night* Novotel Thalassa (4 stars), 25 minutes from Fort-Royer

### DAY 4 In La Rochelle

*Morning* Depart for La Rochelle, either by boat from Boyardville (50 minutes) or by car from the hotel (1¼ hours).

*Lunch* Discover the unique 2-star Michelin, ocean-view restaurant of Christopher Coutanceau (see the Restaurants section).

*Afternoon* Explore La Rochelle on a guided tour by foot or by bike. Climb one of its towers – famous vestiges of the medieval maritime fortifications – and admire the magnificent views of Fort Boyard, the old marina and the islands. Board a guided cruise boat for a breath of sea air.

*Dinner* Les Quatre Sergents, an authentic winter garden just a stone’s throw from the port

*Night* Boat shuttle back to Boyardville in Oléron or stay the night in La Rochelle.



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