Charente-Maritime

Riviera of the Atlantic
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Charente-Maritime, charm of the Atlantic and the South

Gateway to southern France and crossroads of the Atlantic, the Charente-Maritime is a département of a thousand faces, a place of land and sea, where the mild climate is perfect for relaxation. Whether you’re here for a holiday, a short break or just passing through, the Charente-Maritime will delight and surprise you.

Living it up

From North to South and East to West is a ribbon of enchanting islands, full of character, with sandy beaches as far as the eye can see, and shores battered by the waves of the Atlantic… Remarkable monuments bear witness to more than two thousand years of history, and the dynamic towns have established quality of life as a value of reference.

The Charente-Maritime knows how to party all year round… with sailing events, cinema and music festivals such as the Francofolies with more than 150 hours of music and concerts, classical music in the perfect setting of the Abbaye aux Dames in Saintes, and the amazing ‘Sites en Scenes’ festival, with shows staged in the historical monuments of the region, there is sure to be something for everyone.

For nature and history lovers

Lovers of the great outdoors can set off on the discovery of the green Poitevin Marsh, it is a perfect area for sports and sailing enthusiasts and amateur historians can visit Saintes and the Gallo-Roman monuments, Rochefort and the Corderie Royale, the coastline and the impressive stone citadels, or La Rochelle, elegant city of rebellion and ancient bastion of the Reform.

In summer and low season alike, the Charente-Maritime invites holiday makers to come and taste its gentle lifestyle. It’s just a question of choice…
Wild, elegant, mysterious or sporty, the islands are linked to the mainland by gigantic bridges or else only reveal their delights to those who come by boat or foot. Each of the four islands on the Charente coast - Oléron, Ré, Aix and Madame - offers a unique atmosphere. They are a world apart of warmth and calm. And they are the islands the furthest South on the Atlantic coast ...

The photo shows the Ile d'Aix.

For further information, please contact the Ile de Ré Tourism Offices, page 25
Ré, the isle of white
the isle of chic

A new world… From the port of La Pallice, the bridge forms a graceful 3km arc between the Antioche and Breton sounds. Arriving in Ré is like stepping into a world of warmth bathed in an enchanting light. It is one of the jewels of the Atlantic, an isle 25km in length and which, despite the fears of those opposed to the bridge, has successfully preserved its countryside, its true nature and remained faithful to its reputation. Behind the clumps of tamarix and the hollyhocks, the sandy beaches and green-shuttered white buildings, Ré is an ambivalent isle, both chic and authentically traditional with its farmers and hundred or so salt-makers who still work the flats to the North of the island. You don’t feel you are on the same island when sitting at a table at one of the many terraces by the port at Saint-Martin and when at Fier d’Ars surrounded by the wild ducks.

Each village has its charm - ‘It might be the Saint-Tropez of the Atlantic, but people don’t come here to be seen’ the islanders like to say. Of course, it is well known that a certain famous actor holidays in the Portes, such singer in Loix, and such minister in Ars, but the famous come here discretely to enjoy the outstanding levels of sunshine and the comfortable Ré lifestyle.

On the island everybody goes about by bike or else strolls along the coast or through the village streets. Ars, Saint-Martin, La Flotte, Loix... each of the villages on the isle reveal their charms in their own way. To appreciate this, visit Ars in the morning, on market day, with the stalls laid out around the fine circular square with the village church and its surprising black and white spire in the middle. At Saint-Martin you can stroll around the hidden little streets, some of which are very steep, then go to the top of the church belfry or on the ramparts to gaze at the Vendée coastline in the distance.

There is no doubt about it - bathed in light, Ré is the resplendent gateway to the Charente sounds.

Salt and salt-makers on the Île de Ré

Surrounded by the neat squares of the saltpans, far from the summer crowds, Pascal Chauveau takes up his traditional flat wooden rake and scrapes off a fine layer of salt from the bottom of the pan. All around, a labyrinth of channels criss-crosses the flats. It is October, with its changeable weather. The salt-harvest finished in August and now is the time for maintaining the pans and rebuilding the walkways. ‘We have been using practically the same tools and gestures for 500 years’, Pascal explains. All the tools are made of wood to avoid their oxidising due to the salt. Working the salt pans is a matter of encouraging salt water to evaporate in the sun - water is directed from the ocean via a series of canals, vast decanting basins and most importantly, the primary ponds. It evaporates and becomes more and more salty as it moves along. What matters for the salt-maker is ‘being attentive to the elements’, and carefully controlling the through-flow until the salt, which is still dissolved, finally crystallises.

There are today a hundred or so men like Pascal Chauveau to perpetuate this ritual. To find out and understand everything there is to know about ‘white gold’ there is nothing better than a visit to the salt flats ecomuseum.

Bicycles - rule on the Île de Ré

Uniquely in France, there are almost as many kilometres of cycle paths on the Île de Ré as roads (100km). On Ré, bicycles rule and most holiday-makers use their bikes to travel around, to go to the beach or up to the Phare des Baleines, the Whales’ Lighthouse - far from the traffic jams and exhaust fumes - the best way to discover the charm of Ré.
Oléron, the giant of the Atlantic

Oléron is the second largest French island after Corsica and the furthest south on the Atlantic coast. Beside the long fine sandy beaches, often flanked by dunes, a whole refined way of life has built up over the years, following the rhythms of the ocean. Families and watersports enthusiasts will love this wonderful place to relax and have fun.

A 9km beach

On the West coast facing the open sea are fine sandy beaches flanked with dunes stretching as far as the eye can see. Surrounded on all sides by the forest of Saint-Trojan-les-Bains, the Grande Plage is over 9km long. The whole of the West coastline is sandy, wild and turned towards the ocean. The waves sweep in as rollers here and windsurfers and other watersports fans have a whale of a time.

Dunes are all around, only interrupted by the haven of La Cotinière, the largest fishing port in the département, specialising notably in shrimp.

Oyster ponds

To the East the coastline is tamer, and flatter too. This is the part of the island where the oyster ponds are laid out. It is also on this side of the island that you can stroll alongside a pretty canal to Boyardville, and at the end make out Fort Boyard and La Rochelle in the distance. On the East coast you can also visit the imposing citadel of the Château d’Oléron, which played a central role in defending the estuary of the Charente.

Oléron is not just beaches. Whether on foot or by bike all you need to do is to set off and explore the isle to see for yourself. Strolling around, you will come across unspoilt villages, fine forests, little vineyards and of course the enormous patchwork of oyster ponds where the islanders fatten the famous Marennes-Oléron oysters.

Oléron for sports

There is a particularly wide variety of sports on offer on Oléron - diving, kitesurfing, windsurfing, sand yachting, sea kayaking, jet skiing and more besides. Boardsport fans in particular will find renowned surf spots on the beautiful sandy beaches.

For further information, please contact Ile d’Aix, Oléron, and Port-des-Barques Tourism Offices, pages 25 and 26.
Aix - Paradise never lost

With its forests, little creeks and long beaches set amidst the Charente straits, the Ile d’Aix almost has a Mediterranean air to it. Aix can only be reached by boat and cars are not allowed, making Aix a little paradise of peace and quiet.

From the Pointe de Fouras (Fouras headland), the boat sets off for a relaxing 20-minute crossing. On your left, like a stone circle, Fort Enet rises up above the waters. The boat cruises along and as the strange outline of Fort Boyard appears in the distance, the walls of the Fort de la Rade come into view. You can only get to the Ile d’Aix by boat and once you have landed you have to pass through a fortified gate and then over a drawbridge.

To visit the island you need to respect its environment, its peace and quiet; hire a bike and set off along the paths that wind their way along the rocky, sandy coastline.

Despite its small size (3km at its longest point and 600m at its widest), the crescent-shaped island has a wide variety of landscapes. The village, with its many hollyhocks and the Fort de la Rade, is surrounded by long sandy strands. In places, especially if you head towards the Pointe de Coudepont (Coudepont Head), the atmosphere is suddenly very Mediterranean. The coast becomes hillier and turquoise waters lap little creeks at the foot of oak and strawberry tree forests.

Aix is a veritable jewel with 180 inhabitants and only six cars. It is a paradise on earth to be discovered almost with reverence.

After the debacle at Waterloo, Napoleon and his escort withdrew to the Ile d’Aix. He sent his letter of surrender to the English from here on 1 July 1815. Three months later, he arrived at Saint Helena. He spent his final hours of freedom on the Ile d’Aix, and his house on the island is open to visitors.

Madame - the little known island

Low tide. The Passe aux Bœufs, or Cattle Fairway emerges, an elegant tombolo of sand and pebbles. A few hundred yards further on and the fairway swings away from the Port-des-Barques and arrives at the foot of a little island flanked on either side by the tall silhouettes of the carrelets.

At 65 hectares, Madame is the smallest of the islands on the Charente coast. The smallest, and also no doubt the wildest and the most mysterious, charming visitors with its plays of light and unusual atmosphere.

This island, accessible only at low tide, has become a little paradise for botanists, walkers and of course shellfish gatherers.

On the Les Palles plateau at one end of the island, two hours before and after low tide, shellfish gatherers come out in force to unearth their catch – limited to 5 kilos.

People also come to Madame for the day to walk around what is left of the old salt pans, or else to follow the pretty path along the island’s coast from where there are fine views, between the carrelets of Fouras and the Charente coastline. A few even choose to be stranded here for an hour or two between two tides for a moment away from it all.

* A tombolo is a strand of pebbles or sand linking an island to the mainland.
The majestic estuary

Of the four estuaries branching out along the Charente coast, the most southerly and least known is the Gironde. Yet it is a unique conservation area, retaining all its character and offering a great variety of landscapes. This powerful arm of the sea results from the waters of the Garonne joining those of the Dordogne to create the largest estuary in Western Europe – and a region just waiting to be discovered.... The Pointe de Suzac is shown opposite.

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rom its rocky plateau, Cordouan - the oldest French lighthouse, built in the 16th Century - stands guard majestically over the estuary. To the South is the Médoc, to the North the Charente and all around swirl the silt-laden waters of the Gironde. The Pointe de Suzac, a rocky spur with maritime pines and evergreen oaks, marks the start of the estuary, with lovely sandy bays on either side between the cliff faces.

The road then climbs up over dizzy headlands, winding along above sheer cliffs with surprising troglodytic habitations (Meschers-sur-Gironde). High above the ever-changing waters of the Gironde, the scale of the estuary can be fully appreciated.

There are many little harbours where professional fishermen still catch shad, meagre and eel. Some harbours are in towns, such as at Mortagne and Meschers, and others are in the countryside, sheltering from the currents between the fields. Often the harbours cannot be seen from the river itself.

From Talmont to Mortagne, the cliffs give way to hills covered with pineau and cognac vineyards. Beyond lie the Vitrezay and Saint-Thomas-de-Conac marshes, where many species of migratory bird halt on their journey to far-off climes. The estuary park at Saint-Georges-de-Didonne is the ideal place to learn all about how the estuary formed, through an interactive exhibition.

Talmont – the jewel of the estuary

Clinging to a wind-swept, wave-battered cliff, Talmont-sur-Gironde is the jewel of the Saintonge. Stroll along its narrow streets bedecked with hollyhocks, and enter the charming little white houses to discover artisans working silk, mother-of-pearl or leather.

At the end of the village the church of Sainte-Ragedonde and its little maritime cemetery dominates the estuary. This Romanesque masterpiece was founded in 1094 and used to be a halt on the pilgrim route to Santiago. It was fortified at the end of the Middle Ages but has lost none of its pure Romanesque lines.

Vitrezay Nature Port

The Nature Centre of Saint-Sorlin-de-Conac is a place of activity and to find out about the marshes and their rich ecology. Corn was grown on the marsh for many years, but today it is once again a wetland with a fishing lake. At nightfall you can watch a flight of herons or even owls.

Vitrezay is turned towards the estuary, and along the channel leading to the river is Joëlle Brard, cooking the lamprey and eels the local fishermen bring her. Further on you can go sea-kayaking, or for a trip on a gabare or traditional sailing boat, or else hire a net and go shrimp-fishing.

The Ancient City of Fâ

Here, a few hundred yards from the coast, somewhere between Talmont and Mortagne, Novioregum once stood, a legendary Gallo-Roman port. The sanctuary, baths, residential areas, theatre and numerous warehouses yet to be excavated reveal just how important a site this was. Before disappearing in the 3rd Century BC, it was a major port between Nantes and Bordeaux, where road, sea and river met. Today it offers a unique insight into Antiquity. •
A row of Belle Epoque villas on one side, monumental modern constructions on the other, fine sandy beaches with their famous pointed blue and white bathing huts – Royan, at the opening of the Gironde estuary is a unique town and seaside resort where you can travel through time and discover little architectural gems...

Few imaginative houses line the bay, including a miniature Loire château, English cottages, Gothic and Oriental ornamentation, and a replica of the Japanese Kesiki pagoda of the 1889 Exposition Universelle. Around the Boulevard Garnier and the park, Royan is very 'Belle Epoque', and was a renowned resort where Emile Zola, Sarah Bernhardt, and Sacha Guitry liked to stay and take a dip in the warm sea waters.

**Between the flapping twenties and the post-war period**

Right beside this is a 500m front composed of two blocks of buildings following the curve of the bay. This is where people come in the summer for a drink or a stroll after an afternoon at the beach. On the Western edge of the town stands a majestic 60m spire, symbol of Royan’s modernity.

This is Royan. It is the largest resort on the Charente coast and an unusual place, both modern and marked by the extravagances of the twenties and the Belle Epoque.

**Long beaches and pine forests**

Until the mid-19th century it was only a modest fishing harbour on the Gironde estuary. Yet with the railway and fashion for sea bathing it rapidly became a fashionable resort where Parisian and Bordeaux high society came for its long fine sandy beaches and the warmth of its pine-bordered bays.

Royan continued to grow for over a century, until it was razed in January 1945 by Allied bombs. Over the next two decades Royan was nearly totally rebuilt, and nowadays, along the vast beaches, the finest examples of 1950s architecture stand side by side with Belle Epoque villas.

**The most ‘50s’ town in France**

When it was liberated, Royan was a pile of rubble. Confronted with a blank canvas the Government commissioned a Bordeaux architect, Claude Ferret, to draw up a town plan. Royan became a ‘research centre for town planning’ where the principles underlying Le Corbusier’s Athens Charter were applied.

From the early 1950s many architects came and gave free reign to their imagination. Between 1947 and 1970, over 100 chief architects helped to rebuild the town. René Sarger designed the sinuous covered market, and Guillaume Gillet the imposing Church of Notre-Dame.

This church is the main symbol of the new town. Some decry it as a massive, ungracious, concrete monstrosity, other praise it as a Modernist masterpiece. A town both modern and a unique example of 50s and 60s architecture, Royan has been called the ‘French Brasilia’ or ‘the most 50s town in France’.

For further information, please contact the Royan Tourism Office page 26.
Bathing and fine sandy coves

Royan, with its five fine sandy beaches - mostly south-facing, rare on the Atlantic coast - and its 2,600 hours of sunshine per year, is incontestably a major seaside resort and certainly the largest on the Atlantic coast between La Baule and Biarritz. During the summer the number of people increases tenfold. On the Grande Conche – over 2km long – beach tents are to be seen all the way from the seafront to the Vallières rocks. The Chay and Pigeonnier coves are smaller and perfect for children, while the Pontaillac cove, in front of the Sporting Casino has a reputation for being more chic.

At Saint-Palais-sur-Mer and Saint-Georges-de-Didonne nearby, you will also find lovely beaches, often bordered by elegant pine forests. Near the Pointe de Suzac, right at the entrance to the Gironde estuary, you could almost believe you were by the Mediterranean.

Boating and fishing

Its fine sandy beaches could almost make you forget that Royan has two major harbours. The first is a fishing harbour and every day it comes to life with the return of the trawlers and the fish market – that the public can watch from a gallery above the fish stalls. The second is the third largest port on the Atlantic coast, covering three hectares and with over 1,000 mooring rings, a popular halt between Archachon and La Rochelle.

You can also take the ferry from Royan to pass in front of the Cordouan lighthouse and land at the Pointe de Grave on the other side of the Gironde estuary.

The orchid kingdom

Bonsais, Japanese gardens, a labyrinth of giant bamboo, fine orchids – alongside the Pousseau marsh, the Jardins du Monde (Gardens of the World) plunge you into an exotic atmosphere in a large 7.5-hectare floral park.
A wild world of sand, woods and water stretches from the Pointe d’Arvert - just a few hundred yards from the Ile d’Oléron - and from the most surprising bay of the Bonne Anse further South. The Côte Sauvage is one of the most closely preserved spots on the Charente coast. Whilst many summer visitors come and enjoy the dunes and the beaches stretching as far as the eye can see, there is not the slightest trace of urbanisation for 20 or so kilometres.

For lovers of open spaces
The tip of the Arvert peninsula is above all an area for all those who love open spaces and limitless horizons, a place that delights walkers and mountain bikers. And to ensure that there is no property development in this little corner of paradise, the Coastal Protection Agency has acquired the majority of the zone. This range of dunes, the highest of which is 60m above sea level, is bordered by the magnificent La Coubre forest which shelters deer and wild boar. Paths and cycle tracks wind their way through the evergreen oaks and maritime pines towards the coast. Further on, facing the sea, are the fine sandy dunes with their clumps of marram grass.

10,000 hectares of pines
Here, facing the immensities of the Atlantic Ocean, sand, wind and sea wage a merciless conflict. The dunes are continuously assaulted by the waves and the wind. And it was to combat the erosion and stabilise the sand that the first marram was planted in the early 19th century, then nearly 10,000 hectares of pines. But despite this the battle of the elements continues. That is why the Coubre lighthouse on the southern tip of the Côte Sauvage, which was built 2.5km from the coast in 1905, is now on the coast itself. At the mercy of the wind and the tides, the living landscape of the Côte Sauvage is in a process of perpetual evolution.

One of the finest zoos in Europe
The Palmyre zoo, with over 10 million visitors since it was founded by Claude Caillé 40 years ago, is today one of the most reputed in Europe. Ring-tailed lemurs, makis, greater kudus, gorillas, cheetahs, orang-utans, red pandas, rhinos, snow panthers, pygmy marmosets... in all there are 1,600 animals living in a 14-hectare park. The site’s creator has even managed to acclimatise polar bears that you can admire as they swim.

But the management at Palmyre is also involved in protecting certain species, particularly via financing ‘in situ’ conservation programmes. The Siberian tiger, for example, has found a pleasant refuge on the Arvert peninsula.
The pearl of the Seudre

Hundreds of oyster farmers work between Seudre, Charente and the ocean, farming the famous Marennes-Oléron cupped oysters. Tremendously popular with discerning gourmets, and considered by some to be the finest in the world, the secret behind Charente oysters is their lengthy fattening in former salt pans reconverted into oyster ponds...

You can already make out the dance of the oyster boats from the Oléron bridge; as the sea goes out a vast oyster park appears. It is here, in the largest oyster bay in Europe, that 800 fishermen keep alive the tradition of the famous Marennes-Oléron oysters.

Seen from the sky, 3000 hectares of fattening ponds laid out in a grid in the estuary reveal their secrets. These are old salt pans deepened for use as oyster ponds and all around the fisherman have set up multicoloured wooden huts.

‘The pond makes the oyster, as the barrel does the cognac,’ jokes Alain Normandin who has fished oysters for decades. And it is because of a microscopic algae (Haslea ostrearia) that Marennes-Oléron oysters may have a surprising green tint. They are left for several weeks in briny water to strengthen their shell, fatten, and acquire a longer flavour in the mouth - but only after four years in the bay at the heart of an ideal ecosystem irrigated by the fresh waters of the Charente and the Seudre.

After four years of patient labour they can finally be served to the most discerning palates.

Four types may be found on the fisherman’s stall, depending upon the time spent and number of oysters in the ponds, including the special ‘label rouge’ quality label oyster Alain Normandin describes as the “caviar of oysters”. It has been fattened for “at least four months with no more than 5 oysters per square metre in the ponds”.

Marennes and La Tremblade oyster centres

Marennes, capital of the green oyster, is a few kilometres from Oléron and surrounded by a huge chequeboard of marshes and oyster beds. From here you can set off to discover little oyster ports with their famous multicoloured huts alongside the canals.

La Tremblade is on the left bank of the Seudre, opposite Marennes on the right bank. It too has always lived from the sea (salt, fishing, and especially oysters) and today is an oyster centre with a mollusc museum on the port. You can relax on the fine beaches of Ronce-les-Bains nearby, or go walking in the forest of La Coubre.

Charming little fishing ports

Mornac-sur-Seudre, officially recognised as one of the ‘most beautiful villages in France’, is a charming traditional oyster village to visit on foot and admire the ancient streets where many craftsmen have set up shop.

A little way away is another charming port, L’Eguille. Built on a headland on the Seudre it was once an island in the Santons Gulf, and it is a delight to drink in the typical atmosphere here.

La Cité de l’Huître

The recently-opened Cité de l’Huître (Oyster Town) is right in the middle of Europe’s largest oyster basin (6,000 hectares). Built on stilts buried up to 20 metres deep, it is the ideal place to find out about oyster farming and the marsh environment. The site is organised around a series of huts equipped with innovative multi-media tools. Each one has a different oyster-farming theme, such as the life cycle of the oyster through to its sale, the ecosystem of the Marennes-Oléron Basin or the daily life of an oyster-farming family through the ages.

A reconstruction of a life-size oyster farm can be seen in the oyster-pond hut. And of course, nobody can leave the ‘Cité’ without tasting a few oysters.

For further information, please contact the Tourism Offices pages 25 and 26.
The other Atlantic Wall

Strongholds and citadels are to be found dotted all along the Charente coast. The Charente-Maritime was a maritime frontier region and a much coveted prize, and from the Middle Ages on it learnt how to protect itself behind a curtain of fortifications.

On the Ile d’Aix, Ile d’Oléron and Ile de Ré, on either side of the Seudre and the Charente estuaries, amidst the waves or several tens of kilometres inland, the Aunis and Saintonge coasts are crowded with fortifications. A network of citadels and forts built from the Middle Ages on and especially between the 16th and mid-19th century, stands guard over the Antioche straits.

During this 300-year period, the kingdom was riven with strife and torn by wars. Protestants were pitted against Catholics, English against French – danger could pounce from any quarter, and especially from the sea.

Forts and citadels, inland and at sea, protecting the Rochefort arsenal

An arc of defences sprang up on the coast to protect the region, the town of La Rochelle and especially the strategically important Rochefort arsenal, threatened by enemy sea raids. The famous French Field Marshal Vauban ingeniously managed to build and reinforce a ring of fine defences to protect and effectively seal off the Charente estuary: Fort Vauban at Fouras, Fort Louvois at Bourcefranc-le-Chapus, Fort de la Rade on the Ile d’Aix and Fort Lupin on the Charente. In addition to these strongholds are such imposing citadels as the Château-d’Oléron, or those of Saint-Martin-de-Ré and Brouage.

The work of fortifying the zone between Charente and Oléron continued after Vauban. Fort Liédot was added on the Ile d’Aix and Fort de la Pointe was built facing Port-des-Barques. To complete this ring of defences, sentry strongholds were built out at sea, such as Fort Enet between the Ile d’Aix and the continent, or the famous Fort Boyard between Oléron and Aix, which was only completed in 1857.

Thanks to its imposing citadels and forts, the straits were remarkably well protected and the Rochefort arsenal never fell into enemy hands.

And finally, between 1940 and 1945, the Germans built a last line of fortifications on the Charente coast, with a large number of blockhaus constituting the ‘Atlantic wall’. The submarine base at La Pallice still bears witness to this period.

Visiting the forts and citadels

Of the many forts and citadels to be found on the Charente coast not all of them may be visited. While there is no problem at all to stroll along the ramparts of the Fort de la Rade or of the forts at Fouras and Brouage, others, particularly those built out at sea, are inaccessible. Fort Boyard and Fort d’Enet, for example, are not open to visitors but you can sail close by them, creating the ideal opportunity for a little cruise.

The legend of the forts

The Regional Council has come up with an original idea to allow visitors to discover the fortifications along the Charente coastline: a life-size treasure hunt for all the family. Following the adventures of Antoine and kitted out with your own worksheets, set off on the attack of the various sites along the coast to gather clues that help you solve the enigma of the Legend of the Forts.

Fort Boyard, an impressive sentinel

A stone sentinel rising out of the waves, evidence of true technical prowess… this astonishing island-fortress, 68 metres long, 31m wide and 28m high, was built to protect the passage between the Ile d’Aix and Oléron; at the time, the range of the cannons at the Fort des Saumonards and the Fort de la Rade was not long enough. Construction began under Napoleon I and was completed only in 1857 under the reign of his nephew Napoleon III, after monumental labour. By this time, however, artillery had advanced so much that it was already useless. In the end it served only as a prison for the Communards; then, very much later – and as it still does today – it became the stage for a television game show known throughout the world.

Furhter information at www.france-atlantic.com
Brouage, citadel of the marshes

Brouage, protected by two kilometres of fortified walls, rises up from the middle of the marsh, massive and impressive. This fortress, birthplace of Samuel de Champlain, the famous founder of Québec, was once a powerful port; certainly one of the greatest in the kingdom of France. The salt marshes all around the town provided its wealth. A royal stronghold opposite La Rochelle, Brouage entered a period of decline from the 17th century, notably because of the irreparable silting-up of the port and the development of Rochefort.

The setting of Louis XIV’s love story

In its past, Brouage was witness to the impossible love of Louis IV for Marie Mancini, niece of Mazarin. So as not to upset the marriage of the king to Maria-Theresa of Spain, Cardinal Mazarin sent his niece to Brouage for a few months, where she did her best to forget her heartache. The story goes that on his return from Saint-Jean-de-Luz where he had just married the Spanish princess, Louis XIV made an emotional stop at Brouage where he demanded to sleep in the same room that Marie had slept in a few months before.

La Maison Champlain, founder of Québec

Town of history and adventure, a major trading port ... Today, Brouage is above all an awe-inspiring citadel where you can see across marsh from the heights of its ramparts. Inside the walls, you can see the Halle aux Vivres, the two powder magazines and the cooperage, as well as the Maison Champlain.

Saint-Martin-de-Ré, star of the sea

Seen from the sky, Saint-Martin-de-Ré looks like a star of stone advancing through the ocean. The layout of the stronghold is a perfect example of Vauban’s rigour and imagination.

The square citadel with its small harbour is encircled by a thick, semi-circular wall, with six bastions and half-moons.

When he built this citadel in 1681, Vauban wanted it to be large enough to hold the population of the island and withstand a long siege, explaining its impressive size.
The largest and finest arsenal in the world’ is what Louis XIV said he wished to build when Colbert and his military engineers presented him with a simple fishing village lying in the coils of the Charente 20km upstream from the ocean. At this period the British Navy was repeatedly gaining the upper hand over the French - unacceptable for the King. The kingdom was to arm itself with frigates and boats, to protect the Gulf of Gascony. Following Colbert’s advice, Louis XIV decided to build a large arsenal on the banks of the Charente, where Rochefort now stands. The site is perfect, surrounded by coastal marshes and accessible only at high tide.

Over 550 ships in 250 years
A huge building programme was launched in 1666 and within a few years Rochefort became a major royal city. Its arsenal produced many ships – over 550 in 250 years. Ships left its quays for the West Indies, Africa and Canada. This golden age is of course best symbolised by the Corderie Royale, the Royal Ropemaking Manufacture, where the thickest and longest ropes in the kingdom were once made. It is a masterpiece of pre-Revolution industrial architecture, 7m long and built alongside the river on an oak structure.

Rochefort also owes its orthogonal chequerboard layout to this period, with wide paved streets planted with palm trees. At its heart is the famous Place Colbert where the film Les Demoiselles de Rochefort was shot.

Point of departure for botanical voyages and collectors of curiosities
For over 200 years Rochefort was a strategic Atlantic port, the point of departure for numerous botanical expeditions, and a major manufacturing town.

One of its most famous sons, the 19th-century traveller and writer Pierre Loti, brought back a heteroclite collection of objects from his voyages around the world which he used to decorate the rooms of his house – the Renaissance room, the Gothic room, the Turkish lounge and Arab bedchamber.

In the 1900s Rochefort had a greater population than La Rochelle. And then in 1927 the closure of the Arsenal plunged it into a deep sleep. Worse was to come when, during the Occupation, a fire at the Corderie Royale struck a heavy blow to the town. When the Liberation came, the Arsenal was in ruins and the town in decline.

But it was as if history had come full circle when the reconstruction of the Corderie Royale – which started in the 1970s and ended over twenty years later - breathed new life into the town. Henceforth Rochefort came back to life and nowadays one can admire once again its architectural splendours.

> A magnificent example of 17th century military architecture, the Corderie Royale has been entirely renovated.

Further information at www.france-atlantic.com
1780: On the quays of Rochefort, the young La Fayette (2 years old) boards the Hermione to go to the aid of American insurgents fighting for their independence.

1997: More than two hundred years later, the reconstruction of the Hermione begins in Rochefort.

It all began with a simple observation: although Rochefort had been an important arsenal for two centuries, by the 1990s there was not a single ship left. In 1992, the Hermione La Fayette Association was created, with the objective of reconstructing this famous frigate.

For the project organisers, this fast and maniable ship - 44 metres long and weighing 2,000 tonnes - which took part in the war of Independence, symbolises “a great adventure of solidarity between peoples”. The 4 July 1997, American Independence Day, the first piece was laid. The great originality of the project is that the shipyard is open to the public, who can see work progress from month to month. Carpenters, blacksmiths, coopers... on average 25 people work full time on the construction of the ship. The construction will take at least another three years, and when it will be fit to sail the Hermione will set out - more than two hundred years after La Fayette – for a return voyage to the United States; after which she will remain in the port of Rochefort where she will be open to visitors.

Along the Charente

From its estuary – between the Ile Madame and the Ile d’Aix – up to Saint-Sever-de-Saintonge and as far as Cognac, the Charente flows peacefully through the Saintonge countryside; on foot, by bike, car or even on horseback, but especially by boat, discover astonishing villages clinging to the cliffs, suspension bridges and small Romanesque churches...

The outsize silhouette of the transporter bridge stands out against the horizon; the sea is already far beyond. Further upstream, the Charente River flows calmly in front of the gigantic facade of the Corderie Royale.

It is here, towards Rochefort, that the river’s historical and economic importance in the region can be fully appreciated. The Charente was used as a communication axis as far back as Gallo-Roman times, but it was especially from the Middle Ages that it became the main trade route between the inlying areas and the Atlantic coast. A whole host of gabares, loaded with brandy from the vineyards, salt, or the famous Crazannes stone sailed along the river.

That time is long gone; commercial activity is concentrated around Rochefort, but it is pleasure boats that dominate the river.

170km of waterway

The Charente is completely navigable from Rochefort to Angoulême, nearly 170km. And on the way to Saintes, you will discover astonishing landscapes and architectural treasures.

At Tonnay-Charente, a little after Rochefort, the river passes under a majestic suspension bridge with 51 ogival arches, built in 1842. Continuing East between Saint-Savinien and Saintes, the maritime influence becomes more apparent and Cognac vineyards occupy the surrounding area.

Saint-Savinien, a small, peaceful village overlooking the tranquil river from the heights of the cliff, is not to be missed. Most of the houses and gardens have a view of the Charente, and at the top of the village is a very English-looking 13th-14th century church.

Around Saint-Savinien are a number of quarries, famous for the production of Crazannes stone. Next comes Taillebourg, well-known for the famous battle between the Capetians and the Plantagenets, and then you enter Saintes, at the foot of the Gallo-Roman arch.

For further information, please contact the Tourism Office page 36.
Saintes, on the banks of the Charente and once capital of Aquitaine, was founded over 2,000 years ago. Its palm trees and white facades give it a relaxed, sophisticated Southern charm. A panorama from the terrace of the Hôpital gives out over the town with its red-tiled roofs; directly beneath is the imposing Cathedral belltower and across the river the Arc de Triomphe and the Abbaye-aux-Dames.

Saintes is the historic capital of the Saintonge and oldest town in the region. On the Roman road linking Lyons and the Atlantic, it rapidly became a political capital of Aquitaine, larger even than Bordeaux. For several centuries the town prospered, as shown by the remarkable Gallo-Roman remains.

**Arenas, Abbeys and Neanderthals**

The influence of the past is ever-present. To the West lies the arena, holding 15,000 people, to the North the Saint-Saloine Baths, and on the right bank the Arc Germanicus and archaeological museum.

Romanesque masterpieces came to complement the Gallo-Roman edifices. The first convent in Saintonge, the Abbaye-aux-Dames, was built in 107. Fifty years later came a church to honour Saint-Eutrope, who evangelised the region, and later the Gothic Cathédrale Saint-Pierre and in the 19th century the neoclassical theatre and Palais de Justice.

There are also traces of prehistory and in 2005 the Paleosite opened where Pierrette the Neanderthal was found. Its interactive exhibition runs from the Big Bang to Prehistoric times, revealing how monkeys first stood upright, and how early humanoids made tools and mastered fire.

**Southern charm**

Saintes is not just about archaeological treasures. The elegant white facades, red-tiled roofs, cypresses, palm and fig trees all contribute to a Southern charm. Saintes lives to the peaceful rhythm of the Charente, and it is a delight to stroll along the quays, or to walk around the town’s architectural circuit.

**Through Roman Saintonge**

In Romanesque times, the Saintonge was a place of artistic development that touched even the most modest villages and there are a multitude of sanctuaries, often authentic masterpieces of Romanesque Art to discover. In Aulnay-de-Saintonge, Saint-Pierre-de-la-Tour is possibly the most beautiful Romanesque church in France. Built between 1130 and 1160, the ornamentation is of exceptional quality, with sculptures of the old men of the Apocalypse, a host of mermaids, dragons and a series of skeletal characters. There are many Romanesque churches all around Saintes. The best way to discover them is to set out from Saintes, passing through Trizay, Chermignac, Rétaud, Thézac, Marignac, Montilis and arriving in Pons.

**In the footsteps of St. James**

The Tours Route (Latin: Via Turonensis) is one of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage routes. It crosses the Charente-Maritime from Aulnay-de-Saintonge to Mirambeau, passing through Saintes, Pons, Saint-Genis-de-Saintonge and Saint-Jean-d’Angely, which plays host to a European Culture Centre in the Abbaye Royale designed for young people from all over Europe. The Conseil Général (the Regional General Council) has breathed new life into this route by providing nearly 125 kilometres of signposting. By following the path, the ‘pilgrim’ discovers the Roman art of the Saintonge countryside.
Region of land and sea, the Charente-Maritime offers a wide range of local produce. Cognac, pineau, potatoes from the Île de Ré, Surgères butter, bouchot mussels and Marennes-Oléron oysters... the region holds wonderful gastronomic treats in store...

Vines are omnipresent - on the Île d’Oléron or Île de Ré, along the coast or on hillsides inland. Part of the famous Cognac vineyard is in Charente-Maritime.

**Birth of Cognac**

Vines appeared in the Saintonge in Roman times. Then and during the Middle Ages a light wine was produced which was particularly appreciated in Northern Europe – but it was not yet called cognac. In reality, cognac came about in the 17th century when Dutch and English merchants found it profitable to import Saintonge wines as brandy. The volume and thus transport cost were reduced and on arrival consumers added water.

**A process unchanged since the 17th century**

Since then, cognac manufacture has not changed. Distillation is in two stages, with a Charentes alambic called à repasse. First, a distillate or brouillis is obtained. This is put in a copper pot still for a second distillation or bonne chauffe. After elimination of the less pure brandies the cœur or heart is obtained, a limpid liquid that gives cognac. The distillation cycle lasts around 24 hours and requires constant surveillance. Cognac then ages for long months in oak barrels, acquiring all its finesse as the incomparable aromas develop.

**Pineau des Charentes**

Pineau des Charentes is obtained by prematurely interrupting the fermentation process of grape juice by adding an old cognac. It is then stored in oak barrels for at least two to three years.

**A cuisine of Land and Sea**

**Eels**: found particularly in the Poitevin marsh and savoured grilled or marinated in red wine and cognac.

**Crépinette**: a flat sausage, perfect with oysters.

**Charentaise galette**: made with white flour, salted butter, sugar, eggs, angelica confit, vanilla flavouring and lemon zest.

**Cagouilles**: à la saintongeaise or with parsley butter, snails are an emblem of local gastronomy.

**Surgères butter**: its finesse and aroma make it one of the best French butters. Perfect with oysters and a white wine from the Pays Charentais.

**Bouchot mussels**: cultivated on wooden poles, notably in the Baie de l’Aiguillon.

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**Facts & figures**

80,000 hectares of vine are planted in the defined region of Cognac. This makes it the 2nd largest French vineyard, after that of Bordeaux.
To the north of the département, between the Baie de l’Aiguillon and the outskirts of Niort, stretches the Poitevin Marsh, the second largest wetland area in France. In this unique region you can navigate the canals of the Venise Verte, go fishing or observe the incredible diversity of fauna and wildlife.

**Eclade**

Mussel Recipe...

Eclade is a simple dish, ideal for a meal on the beach. Wash and then place 4 mussels in a cross in the middle of a board, then after these four place the following mussels with the point in the air so that they cannot open. Over the arrangement of mussels, place a thick layer of pine needles, and then set them alight. When all the pine needles have burnt, brush away the cinders. All that remains to do is enjoy the mussels, nice and hot, with bread and butter.

**Wet marsh and dry marsh**

The marsh is divided into two distinct areas: the wet marsh and the dry marsh. These two types of marsh present diametrically opposite landscapes. The first, subjected to flooding by the Sèvre Niortaise, is a green paradise with a multitude of tree-lined canals. It is here, in what is known as the Venise Verte, that barques are used to travel the canals and where you can walk or cycle along a towpath. The wet marsh serves as a flood extension zone for the drained marsh, made up of vast meadows given over to animal rearing or crop farming.

Nevertheless, both the wet and dry marshes have a point in common: both serve as a refuge for migrating birds and both are places of superior ecological interest that must be preserved at all costs.

**Pôles-Nature**

15 sites of excellence

In May 2007, Taugon will be host to a Pôle Nature (Nature Centre) about the marsh, its workings, natural richness and the human influence on the area – the 15th Pôle Nature created by the Conseil Général. Here in the middle of a preserved environment, you can discover exceptional flora and fauna. In the Marais aux Oiseaux (Bird Marsh), the Lilleau-des-Niges nature reserve the Yves Marsh reserve, there are an infinite number of migratory birds. Other Pôle Nature sites are about human activities (Maison de la Forêt - Forest Centre - and Ecomusée du Marais Salant - Salt Marsh Ecomuseum,) or even domestic animals like the remarkable Poitou donkey farm in Dampierre-sur-Boutonne.

Further information at [www.france-atlantic.com](http://www.france-atlantic.com)
Protestant capital refractory to royal authority, city of liberty and tolerance, La Rochelle acquired a reputation as an elegant and powerful city over the centuries, but always a little rebellious. Today, the city of La Rochelle is also a modern metropolis, resolutely turned towards the future. Around the ports or in the shadows of the majestic towers, people cultivate a certain easy way of life... 

Yachtsmen, entering La Rochelle between the two towers of Saint-Nicolas and La Chaîne, appreciate better than anyone the peaceful charm of this Atlantic city; past the high ramparts is an astonishing town, youthful and joyful, that seems to party behind the white facades. The café terraces are spread out over the quays of the port. A certain art of living has been cultivated here over the centuries - a certain spirit of liberty, marvellously expressed in the famous slogan: “La Rochelle, belle et rebelle” (La Rochelle, a beauty and a rebel!). 

Democracy came to La Rochelle in 1199 with the election of its first mayor, Guillaume de Montmirail. Later, La Rochelle converted to Protestantism while the whole of France was Catholic.

Protestant Stronghold against Richelieu

The famous siege of La Rochelle, opposing Jean Guiton, valiant mayor and Louis XIII, best illustrates this spirit of independence. At this time, La Rochelle was a major protestant stronghold that had already marked its distance from the King of France. In 1627, when the English occupied the Ile de Ré, the people of La Rochelle even fought with the Anglo-Saxon enemy. Enraged, Richelieu and Louis XIII came in person to organise the siege of the city. The siege lasted 416 days and when Jean Guiton surrendered, conquered by famine, only a quarter of the population had survived.

For further information, please contact La Rochelle and Châtelaillon-Plage Tourism Offices page 26
A prosperous trade port

More than rebellious, La Rochelle was above all a prosperous city, notably from the Middle Ages to the 18th century. The gateways and the towers, the private residence of the shipowners, the public buildings such as the Town Hall... all these monuments that can be visited today with delectation, bear witness to its glorious past.

The ocean and the port enriched the city over the centuries. Towards the year 1000, when La Rochelle was no more than a little village of farmers and salt makers, ‘white gold’ (salt) was exported, to the land of La Hanse. In the 13th century, at the time of the famous merchant Alexandre Aufredi, salt was still exported and wine also; wheat, wool and sheets were imported. Towards 1630, the port became an embarkation point for Canada. Skins, pepper and sugar were imported from the West Indies, and it was part of the tragic slave trade. From 1760, Nantes and Bordeaux definitively overtook La Rochelle; but after more than a century of being relatively dormant, the town woke up once more to the construction of the port of La Pallice, today ranked as the sixth national port.

Pioneering quality of life

A town with a prestigious past, La Rochelle is today turned resolutely towards the future, without relinquishing its perpetual quest for quality of living. A multitude of little cafés in the streets of the old town, renowned gastronomic restaurants, a national dance company, the internationally reputed Francofolies festival - La Rochelle asserts itself as a modern metropolis of over 100,000 inhabitants.

In La Rochelle, people know how to make you feel welcome. Besides which, the town is today a pioneer in the domain of the environment: its famous parks are dotted across the city centre over several kilometres and set the tone, offering a multitude of oases of enchanting greenery. Since the 1970s, under the impulse of the Mayor Michel Crépeau, the people of La Rochelle have sought to ‘perceive the city differently’. And so this is where the first pedestrian sectors of France appeared, then the first electric cars or the famous little yellow bikes, the perfect way to discover this charming town. A town that has preserved its richness through the centuries without renouncing its rebellious spirit.

Sea bathing in Châtelaillon-Plage

La Rochelle offers its inhabitants and visitors some remarkable beaches within the city center. However, the longest one (3Km) extends a few kilometres south of the city, in Châtelaillon-Plage, a reputed bathing location, the « Belle Époque » feel of which has been preserved.

Further information at www.france-atlantic.com
The three vigils of La Rochelle

From the sea, the boat approaches the ramparts and all you can see are the three towers overlooking the city of La Rochelle. To enter the old port, you have to pass between the two majestic towers of Saint-Nicolas and La Chaîne – and you feel that you are travelling back in time. Only then does the city reveal itself to the traveller. The first, the highest and most massive looks like a veritable fortress, with its keep facing the sea. The second, smaller tower housed the chain system used to close the port at night. Further west, the tower of La Lanterne served as a signal for boats, and even at certain periods as a prison.

The pretty 19th-century covered market abounds in oysters, mussels, fish galore, pineau, farci charentais... This is where locals come for their fresh produce every day. Come to buy, or just out of curiosity and to walk through the surrounding streets with their fine half-timbered houses. Come fill your bag, or simply out of curiosity, visit the market place, walk through the surrounding streets with their fine half-timbered houses, the arches under which a number of boutiques invite you to follow your heart.

The Hôtel de Ville is both surprising and majestic. The Gothic enclosure has decorative corner towers, crenellations and machicoulations.

The 13th-century Porte de l’Horloge, or Clock Gate, was built to separate the town from the port. It originally had two openings, one for pedestrians and one for carts.

The Gabut

Between the Aquarium and the Tour Saint-Nicolas there is a surprisingly Scandinavian atmosphere. With its multi-coloured wooden houses and suspended footbridges the Gabut is atypical of the region. Inspired by the old ‘Wooden town’, a series of huts that once stood at the present-day access to Les Minimes, it is a transition between the historic town and the modern areas to the South.

For further information, please contact La Rochelle’s Tourism Office, page 26
In the middle of the sunny Charentes straits, La Rochelle has built itself a solid reputation as a sailing town. Les Minimes, a business area and home to the University, is today one of the most important European marinas...
Golf enthusiasts and beginners will find no fewer than nine golf courses in the Charente-Maritime, from 6 to 18 holes; besides the sporting aspect, they offer wonderful escapes to truly exceptional sites. Between the umbrella pines, by the sea, on the islands or on the banks of the Charente, the different courses offer remarkable environments and viewpoints, for a particularly memorable session of your favourite sport.

Golf de La Prée La Rochelle
(18 holes)
MARSILLY

Golf de Royan - Côte de Beauté
(18 holes)
SAINT-PALAI-SUR-MER

Golf de Saintes
Louis Rouyer Guillet
(18 holes)
FONTCOUVERTE

Golf d’Oléron (9 holes)
SAINT-PIERRE-D’OLÉRON

Golf de Trousse Chemise
(9 holes)
LES PORTES-EN-RÉ

Golf du Pays Rochefortais
(9 holes)
SAINT-LAURENT-DE-LA-PRÊE

Golf Club de Montendre
(9 holes)
MONTENDRE

Golf du Château
de La Vallade
(6 holes)
SAINT-PORCHAIRE

Golf de La Jarne
(6 holes)
LA JARNE

For further information, please contact the Tourism Offices, pages 25 and 26
**Useful information**

**Climate**
The idyllic location of Charente-Maritime in the middle of the Atlantic Arc and its mild climate make it a very pleasant place to live. The climate is oceanic, with high rainfall in autumn and winter, and winters are mild – around 10°C – rarely below 0°C, and it has the best sunshine record of the Atlantic coast. In summer, the heat (around 26°C) is tempered by a gentle breeze along the seafront.

**Advice**
Best period to visit Charente-Maritime: spring (mild temperatures, beautiful light, later sunset). Another choice period: September and October, when it is generally sunny. See the weather forecast for Charente-Maritime at www.france-atlantic.com.

**Exchange**
Banks are generally open 9 am – 5 pm, Tuesday – Saturday. It is also possible to change money at the post office.

**Islands**

**Île de Ré**
- **Loix** - 17111 Place la Mairie
  - 05 46 29 07 91 - Fax. 05 46 29 28 40
  - office.tourisme.loix@tiscali.fr - www.loix.fr
- **Rivedoux-Plage** - 17940 Place de la République
  - 05 46 09 80 62
  - office-de-tourisme-rivedoux@wanadoo.fr
  - www.rivedoux-plage.fr
- **Saint-Clément-des-Baleines** - 17590 200, rue du Centre
  - 05 46 29 24 19 - Fax. 05 46 29 08 14
  - office tourisme saintclementsdesbaleines@wanadoo.fr
  - www.stclementsdesbaleines.com
- **Sainte-Marie-de-Ré** - 17740 Place d’Antioche
  - 05 46 30 22 92 - Fax. 05 46 30 01 68
  - tourisme-sainte-marie-de-re@wanadoo.fr
  - www.sainte-marie-de-re.com
- **Saint-Martin-de-Ré** - 17410 2, quai Nicolas Baudin - Ilot du Port - BP 41
  - 05 46 09 20 06 - Fax. 05 46 09 06 18
  - ot.st.martin@wanadoo.fr
  - www.saint-martin-de-re.fr

**Île d’Oléron**
- **Maison du Tourisme île d’Oléron** - Bassin de Marennes
  - Route du Viaduc
  - 17560 BOURSEFRANC-LE-CHAPUS
  - 05 46 85 65 23 - Fax. 05 46 85 68 96
  - accueil@marennes-oleron.com
  - www.ile-oleron-marennes.com
- **Dolus-d’Oléron** - 17550 Parvis Saint-André
  - 05 46 75 32 84 - Fax. 05 46 75 63 60
  - office-de-tourisme-dolus-oleon@wanadoo.fr
- **La Brède-les-Bains** - 17840 20, rue des Ardillères - BP 21
  - 05 46 47 96 73
  - otbredere@club-internet.fr
- **Le Château-d’Oléron** - 17480 Place de la République, BP 24
  - 05 46 47 60 51 - Fax. 05 46 47 73 65
  - chateauoleron@ot-chateau-oleron.fr
  - www.ot-chateau-oleron.fr
- **Le Grand-Village-Plage** - 17370 3, boulevard de la Plage
  - 05 46 47 58 00 - Fax. 05 46 47 42 17
  - gtvillageplage@wanadoo.fr
- **Saint-Denis-d’Oléron** - 17650 2, boulevard d’Antioche
  - 05 46 47 95 53 - Fax. 05 46 75 91 36
  - office-tourisme-saint-denis-oleon@wanadoo.fr
  - www.sd-oleron.com
- **Saint-Georges-d’Oléron** - 17190 26, rue des Dames
  - 05 46 76 63 75 - Fax. 05 46 76 86 49
  - ot-st-georges-oleon@club-internet.fr
  - www.saint-georges-oleon.com
- **Saint-Pierre-d’Oléron** - 17310 Place Gambetta - BP 46
  - 05 46 47 11 39 - Fax. 05 46 47 10 41
  - office-tourisme-saint-pierre-oleon@wanadoo.fr
  - www.saint-pierre-oleon-tourism.com
- **Saint-Trojan-les-Bains** - 17370 Carrefour du Port
  - 05 46 76 60 86 - Fax. 05 46 76 17 64
  - ot-s-trojan-les-bains@wanadoo.fr
  - www.ot-s-trojan-les-bains.fr

**Île d’Aix**
- **Île d’Aix** - 17123 6, rue Gourgaud
  - 05 46 83 01 82 - Fax. 05 46 83 31 32
  - tourisme@iledaix.fr - www.iledaix.fr

**Coast**

**From the Bay of Aiguillon, to the Seudre Estuary**
- **Maison du Tourisme île d’Oléron – Bassin de Marennes**
  - Route du Viaduc
  - 17560 BOURSEFRANC-LE-CHAPUS
  - 05 46 85 65 23 - Fax. 05 46 85 68 96
  - accueil@marennes-oleron.com
  - www.ile-oleron-marennes.com
- **Angoulins-sur-Mer** - 17690 3, rue de Verdun
  - 05 46 56 92 09
  - si.angoulins@wanadoo.fr - www.angoulins.com
- **Boursefranc-le-Chapus** - 17560 Route Henri barbusse
  - 05 46 85 07 00 - Fax. 05 46 85 23 22
  - ot.boursefranc@wanadoo.fr
- **Brouage** (commune Hiers) - 17320 2, rue de Québec
  - 05 46 85 19 16 - Fax. 05 46 76 36 35
  - tourismebrouage@wanadoo.fr
  - www.officedetourismebrouage.com

**How to find accommodation in Charente-Maritime?**
Book a classified or labelled accommodation (hotels, campsites, gîtes or holiday house rentals, guestrooms…) at www.france-atlantic.com.

**Telephone**
- Telephoning France from abroad: 0033 followed by the telephone number without the first 0. Telephoning abroad from France: 00 followed by the country code, then the telephone number without the first 0

**School holidays**
- Five times a year, French schoolchildren and teachers are on holiday:
  - 1 week at the beginning of November, 2 weeks at Christmas, 2 weeks in February, 2 weeks in spring and all summer throughout July and August. Sites and roads are busier at these times.

**Holidays**
- 1st January / Easter Monday / 1st and 5th May / Ascension Thursday / 14 July / 15 August / 1st and 11 November / 25 December

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The tourism offices are ranked from 1 to 4 stars for your service, depending on their opening schedule, services offered to customers.

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*Note: the exchange rate is fixed but the price of commission may vary.*
The tourism offices are ranked from 1 to 4 stars for your service, depending on their opening schedule, services offered to customers.
Getting to **Charente-Maritime**

All sorts of travel solutions in Charente-Maritime (bus, boat, taxi, bike…) at [www.france-atlantic.com](http://www.france-atlantic.com)

**By road**

- **A10 Paris**: 430 km
- **A10 Bordeaux**: 70 km
- **A83 / N137 Nantes**: 120 km

**Southern France road information centre**
Tel. 33 (0)5 46 96 33 33

**Airlines**

- **La Rochelle - Ile de Ré Airport**
  Tel. 33 (0) 5 46 42 30 26
  [www.larochelle.aeroport.fr](http://www.larochelle.aeroport.fr)

**Flight routes to La Rochelle**
Connections from:
- Lyon
- Londres
- Southampton
- Dublin
- Birmingham

**By train**

- **TGV Atlantique**
  Paris Montparnasse - La Rochelle (3h00)

**Direct trains daily**
- Paris
- Marseille
- Bordeaux
- Nice
- Poitiers
- Nantes

[www.sncf.fr](http://www.sncf.fr)

**How to drive around Charente-Maritime?**

Average journey times between the main towns:
- **LA ROCHELLE - ROCHEFORT**: 30 mins. (35km)
- **ROCHEFORT - ROYAN**: 40 mins. (41km)
- **ROCHEFORT - SAINTES**: 30 mins. (46km)
- **SAINTES - JONZAC**: 40 mins. (42km)

**Maison de la France - French Tourist Board**

London
Tel 09068 244 123 (60 p/min at all time)
[info.uk@franceguide.com](mailto:info.uk@franceguide.com)

Dublin
Tel 15 60 235 235
[info.ie@franceguide.com](mailto:info.ie@franceguide.com)