

# The best MARCO POLO Insider Tips

## Our top 15 Insider Tips



### INSIDER TIP Wafer-thin delicacies

You won't be able to resist the crêpes and *galettes* at La Fraiserie in Nantes served with a range of exotic fillings such as *foie gras* or scallops → p. 41

### INSIDER TIP Home-baked culture

The former LU biscuit factory in Nantes is now a popular venue for cultural events (photo right) → p. 42

### INSIDER TIP Cabanes art

Strict EU hygiene regulations have led to something very positive. 18 former oyster farmers' huts in the fishing port at Château-d'Oléron have now been turned into arts and crafts workshops → p. 48

### INSIDER TIP Salt ice cream

The ice cream parlour La Martinière in Saint-Martin-de-Ré, the main town on the island, has a number of exotic flavours on offer – such as the mildly salty variety made with *fleur de sel* from the island's own salt pans → p. 53

### INSIDER TIP Paradise with breakfast

Staying in the small hotel Blanc Marine on Noirmoutier is like visiting old friends. The hearty breakfast served by your hosts is wonderful in its own right → p. 59

### INSIDER TIP Wine directly from the producer

Dozens of wines made by the lady of the house herself line the shelves in the winebar La Robe in Bordeaux for all to enjoy → p. 73

### INSIDER TIP Just say cheese

Cheese lovers make a beeline for Baud & Millet in Bordeaux where the restaurant serves a phenomenal 200 different types of cheese – which you can also stock up on for home → p. 73

### INSIDER TIP River bed

If you're fond of unconventional places to stay, try 'Le D'Ô'. This one-roomed hotel is a boat moored on the Erdre, a tributary close to the heart of Nantes → p. 43

### INSIDER TIP Stand-up paddling:

#### surfers eat your heart out

Anyone who paddles across Arcachon Bay standing up sees things in a very different light. Give this trend-setting sport a try – it's easier than it looks! Paddle to the oyster beds or the Dune du Pilat → p. 67

### INSIDER TIP Feel like the king of

#### the castle

Château Franc Mayne in Saint-Émilion is beautifully furnished and guests can sample the château's own wines – this is after all Bordelais (photo left) → p. 77

### INSIDER TIP Snail ravioli and coconut ice cream

The Restaurant Le Square in Nantes comes up with innovative interpretations of classical French dishes at affordable prices. Why not sample snail ravioli with cream of cress, lobster with ginger and coriander and a hint of Asia, or passion fruit with coconut ice cream – pure bliss! → p. 42

### INSIDER TIP Fit for a king

Maison Adam in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, founded in 1660, produces delicious almond macaroons that are reputed to have been served at Louis XIV's wedding and are still made to the same recipe → p. 94

### INSIDER TIP Live like Eleanor of

#### Aquitaine

The four hotel rooms in Les Jardins d'Aliénor on Oléron have been individually furnished with loving care → p. 48

### INSIDER TIP Luxury treats

De luxe ice cream and sorbets are made by hand at Jérôme's in Biarritz and served in a post-modernist setting → p. 88

### INSIDER TIP Take a walk around the ponds

Stroll through the middle of the famous oyster beds of Marennes-Oléron at Bourcefranc-le-Chapus which have changed little over the years → p. 104



# BEST OF ...

## GREAT PLACES FOR FREE

Discover new places and save money

FOR FREE

### ● **Booty on the beach**

So you still need something for dinner tonight? The tide can give you a helping hand – for free. At low tide, the sea leaves some of its treats on the sand for people to gather quite legitimately. In the meantime, *pêche-à-pied* has become quite a popular pastime along the Atlantic coast → p. 21

### ● **A view open to all**

It may not be the Eiffel Tower but Gustave worked on this building too. In Arcachon you can climb to the top of the *Observatoire Sainte-Cécile* from where you have a free view over the rooftops of the town and its lovely villas that is green in winter too → p. 66

### ● **Boating on the Loire**

Boat trips don't have to be expensive. Along the lower reaches of the Loire between Le Pellerin and Couëron and between Indret and Basse-Indre you can take the *ferry* across the river – for nothing! → p. 41

### ● **Lovely views of the castle in Nantes**

A wonderful view of the Château des ducs de Bretagne can be had for free if you take the 500m *round walk* along the fortified ramparts. Even if you don't visit the exhibitions inside, you can still get a good idea of the castle's architecture from here → p. 38

### ● **Visit a wine producer**

Red wine from the Médoc peninsula is world famous. Almost all producers have *wine tasting* arrangements when you can sample the different vintages. Wine tasting is not only informative – it is usually free too, such as in Pauillac (photo) → p. 81

### ● **Museums for free**

Admission to some museums is free on certain days. Careful planning certainly pays off, especially for families. Everything you always wanted to know about Basque culture, for example, can be found free of charge on the first Sunday in the month in the excellent *Musée Basque* in Bayonne → p. 90



●●● Dots in guidebook refer to 'Best of ...' tips

# ONLY ON THE ATLANTIC COAST

Unique experiences

### ● **Oysters from the farmer**

They don't come fresher than this! Enjoy oysters in the most traditional way possible in a *cabane*, one of the little oyster farmers' huts that have been converted into restaurants such as *Le Relais des Salines* on Oléron. *Huîtres* instead of chips and ketchup is the catchword in such 'snack bars'! → p. 49

### ● **A stroll around the salt pans**

Coarse sea salt and exquisite *fleur de sel* are must-haves among all the souvenirs to take back after a visit to the west coast of France. The *Musée des Traditions de l'Île* on Noirmoutier shows how the salt is harvested → p. 58

### ● **Sand and more sand**

Beaches as far as the eye can see are one of the Atlantic coast's most memorable features. Sand *en masse* can be found near Arcachon at the *Dune du Pilat*. Towering more than 100m (330ft) over the surrounding area, Europe's highest wandering dune has created a unique landscape along the shore (photo) → p. 68

### ● **Lighthouses**

Heavy seas on the Atlantic have made life difficult for many a ship's captain since time immemorial. As a consequence, the area has more than its fair share of lighthouses. Climb to the top of the *Phare du Cordouan* at the mouth of the Gironde – the only manned lighthouse left in France → p. 83

### ● **White horses**

In the south, huge waves roll in from the Atlantic. Hossegor in particular is a *paradise for surfers*. Book a course at the surfing school and try your luck – or lie back in your deckchair and watch others struggling to keep their balance → p. 92

### ● **Desserts and cheese platters**

Every town has its own delicious desserts and every region its own traditional cheese specialities, ranging from creamy goat's cheese to spicy blue cheese that turn a picnic into a feast. Sample them yourself – e.g. the almond *macarons basques* in and around Saint-Jean-de-Luz or take a look at the variety of cheese in the *Fromagerie Beillevaire* in Nantes → p. 25, 42



ONLY IN

# THE PERFECT ROUTE

Experience the different facets of the French Atlantic Coast from north to south with detours to the islands

## FROM NANTES TO NOIRMOUTIER

In **1 Nantes** → p. 38 you can find out everything about the region where world history was written in the Middle Ages in the Château des Ducs de Bretagne. Treat yourself to a romantic trip on the River Erdre and then take the road via **2 Saint-Nazaire** → p. 36, where the Loire meets the Atlantic, down the coast to **3 Île de Noirmoutier** → p. 58. *En route*, it is worth stopping at the pretty fishing town **4 Pomiac** → p. 43 (photo left). A relaxing time awaits you on Noirmoutier: cycling and sunbathing as well as delicious seafood.

## THE PICTURESQUE ISLAND OF OLÉRON

Then it's off down the coast, pausing a while in the pretty resort **5 Saint-Gilles-Croix-de-Vie** → p. 61. It is worth spending at least one day in the beautiful and lively port **6 La Rochelle** → p. 53 (photo right), exploring the bustling Old Town, the market and visiting the aquarium, before going on to **7 Oléron** → p. 47.

Beaches, little harbours and masses of unspoilt countryside are a guarantee for a peaceful holiday.

## WATER AND WINE: MÉDOC

Back on the mainland, cross from Royan to the Médoc peninsula and head for **8 Pauillac** → p. 80, home to one of the most famous châteaux in the world. Book a wine tasting session through a tourist information office at one château at least. Apart from top wines, the peninsula also has a number of watersports facilities and interesting excursions to offer such as to the **9 Phare de Cordouan** → p. 83, so that several days can easily be spent here.

## ENDLESS BEACHES

Once you have found your favourite Bordeaux red, the next stretch of your journey focuses entirely on the ocean. Leaving Bordeaux behind you for the time being, you will reach the traditional seaside resort **10 Arcachon** → p. 65. The **11 Dune du Pilat** → p. 68, a unique natural phenomenon, rises up just beyond the town. Follow the Côte d'Argent

southwards, passing through the quiet beachside resorts **12 Biscarrosse** → p. 68 and **13 Mimizan** → p. 77. A lovely place to complete this stretch of the route is **14 Capbreton** → p. 91.

## HUGE WAVES ON THE BASQUE COAST

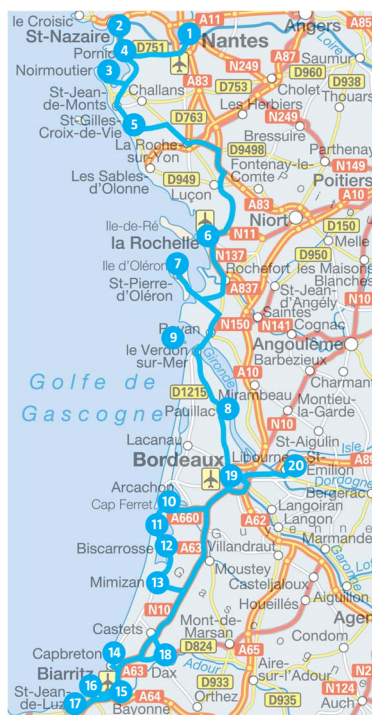
After the endlessly wide beaches of the 'Silver Coast', the French Basque Country is twisty and rugged but with wonderful bays and beaches in between. Stop off for a bit of culture in **15 Bayonne** → p. 90 that is famous for its half-timbered buildings and delicious chocolate, before visiting glamorous **16 Biarritz** → p. 84 down the road. Apart from the wonderful beaches and enormous breakers, you will find a beautiful Old Town and excellent shopping. And don't miss the idyllic seaside resort and fishing village **17 Saint-Jean-de-Luz** → p. 92, just a few miles further south.

## A DETOUR INLAND

The return journey takes you inland through the extensive pine forests of *les Landes*. The first port of call is **18 Dax** → p. 91 that can be reached on the A 63 motorway. In France's oldest spa you can find out why this area has been called Aquitaine since Roman times. In mid August, the arena is packed for bullfights.

## BORDEAUX AND SAINT-ÉMILION

**19 Bordeaux** → p. 71 has exciting museums, elegant shops and the gastronomic delights of a flamboyant city. A detour to **20 Saint-Émilion** → p. 77 is certainly worthwhile. This little old town is in a wonderful setting and is not just appealing to wine-lovers.



Approx. 1150km (715mi), incl. detours.  
Recommended time: at least 2, preferably 3 weeks. Detailed map of the route on the back cover, in the road atlas and the pull-out map