

Atlantic Coast

POP 6,128,712

Includes ➔

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Magasin Général (p628)
- ➔ Pickles (p609)
- ➔ Potato Head (p629)
- ➔ La Co(o)rniche (p637)
- ➔ Café Lavinal (p633)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Château Cordeillan-Bages (p633)
- ➔ Hôtel Le Sénéchal (p618)
- ➔ L'Hôtel Particulier (p625)
- ➔ Le B d'Arcachon (p636)
- ➔ Quai des Pontis (p620)

Why Go?

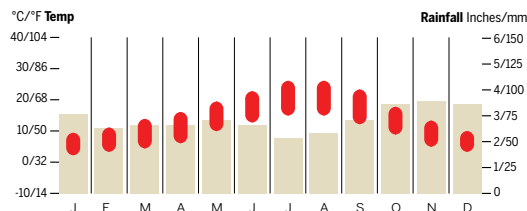
With quiet country roads winding through vine-striped hills and wild stretches of coastal sand interspersed with misty islands, the Atlantic coast is where France gets back to nature. Much more laid-back than the Med (but with almost as much sunshine), this is the place to slow the pace right down.

But the Atlantic coast can do cities and culture as well. There's bourgeois Bordeaux with its wonderful old centre, extraordinary wine culture and dynamic dining scene; studenty Nantes with its wealth of fascinating museums; and seafaring La Rochelle with its breathtaking aquarium, beautiful old port and bucolic offshore islands.

A love of the finer things in life unites people in this region, a part of France where *art de vivre* means appreciating exceptional wine, famous worldwide, and feasting on an ocean of oysters and other fresh, salt-of-the-earth seafood.

When to Go

Bordeaux



May & Jun Ducklings are splashing around the Marais Poitevin and it's a prime time to visit La Rochelle.

Jun–Sep The beaches are bathed in sunshine but there are no high-season crowds.

Sep & Oct Grape-harvesting around Bordeaux, and oyster and cèpe mushroom season all over.



Atlantic Coast Highlights

1 Bordeaux (p622)

Gorging on exceedingly fine architecture, art, food and wine in the Unesco-listed city that can do no wrong.

2 Dune du Pilat (p637)

Romping atop Europe's highest sand dune, followed by lunch with sensational sea-and-sand view at La Co(o)rniche.

3 La Rochelle (p613)

Scaling ancient defensive towers, sailing to Fort Boyard and encountering sharks in this port city's incredible aquarium.

4 Île de Ré (p617)

Cycling smooth bike paths past oyster farms and ancient salt pans.

5 Nantes (p606)

Riding on the back of a giant heron in

flight or a lumbering 60-tonne mechanical elephant.

6 St-Émilion (p633)

Learning about and tasting some of the world's most famous wines.

7 Marais Poitevin (p613)

Gliding through the emerald-green waterways of western France's 'Green Venice'.