

An introduction to our area:



The Mill of Jonzac (Le Moulin de Jonzac) at Cluzelet one of the rare French mills to still produce flour.

The Gironde is the largest estuary in Europe and at 'Le Pole -Nature de VITREZAY', near **Saint Bonnet-sur-Gironde** on the D146, you can discover all manner of fishes and bird life (did you know for example that a sturgeon is about 3 metres long and can be as big as 4.5 metres?) There are hides for bird watching, kayaks for hire, fishing, boat rides up the estuary, even a restaurant.

A bit further North is the 'PALEOSITE' an interactive centre into pre-history, which offers a fabulous journey in time. This is just outside **Saintes** on the N141.

Still on the estuary are the 'GROTTES DE REGULUS' at **Meschers**, for all those interested in cave dwellings! These caves have been lived in for centuries. However as well as the sheer white cliffs to be found at Meschers, there are not one but 5 superb beaches.

Saintes is a Roman town with the designation from the Ministry of Culture as a 'Town of Art and History'. There is a Roman Ampitheatre, bell tower and an Abbey, all open to the public. Right in the middle of town there is a huge Triumphant Archway which dominates the river. Each year there is a Roman festival with everyone clad in Roman garb and enactments of fights, dances, with eating and drinking and market stalls etc. etc. The river today is the haunt of pleasure craft with motor boats, river cruises and even punts for hire.

The seaside resorts start at **St Georges de Didonne**, which beautiful stretch of beach continues into **Royan**, a true resort with every beach activity available, boat trips out to the islands, Fort Boyard, and the famous lighthouse (Phare de Cordouan) certainly worth a visit but wear shorts for this trip, there is a bit of wading to be done at high tide!!

The beaches continue right up the coast as far as **Ronce les Bains** at the tip of the peninsular with miles and miles of beautiful beaches, coastal paths (my favourite is at **St Palais-sur-Mer**) and forest. At both Royan and St Palais you are spoiled for choice when eating out. Restaurants abound.

At the most Northern tip of the promenade at the 'Grande Plage' at **St Palais-sur-Mer**, sitting right over the beach with the most stunning sunsets is 'le Petit Poucet', excellent food, great staff and a terrace on which to while away the day or night.

The zoo at **La Palmyre** is just a bit up the coast, 1600 animals in 14 hectares of forest. A real treat! Don't miss the performing seal lions and the parrots, they are brilliant and you can see how much they enjoy it! But be warned, in high season, everyone has the same idea, and the zoo can be packed and there are traffic jams in this area of both zoo and beaches, a tip, don't try to come home at 6 or 7 ish, stay and eat and let the crowds escape.

The islands too are worth a visit, **Ile de Re**, **Ile d'Oléron**, **Ile d'Aix**, with their lovely little fishing ports and again beautiful beaches.

No one can come to the Charente Maritime without visiting **La Rochelle** with its old port, massive sea defences, refined facades, colonnades and arcades, not forgetting wonderful shops hidden away behind the arcades. If you like seafood you are in heaven here with the whole port lined with charming restaurants. Our favourite is 'Les Flots' right by the harbour entrance and the chain tower, it has to be said it is expensive, but a terrific experience.

So many wonderful places to visit, I haven't mentioned the half, but I am obliged to tell you about **Cognac**. All those Cognac Houses just waiting to be visited. At Hennessy you take a little boat ride across the river, Remy Martin takes you around on a little train while Martell, the oldest Cognac House is, we think the most interesting tour. Otard has a beautiful chateau by the river and of course there are dozens of smaller Houses to visit.

While we are talking about booze, take a day to visit **St Emilion**, this is about an hour away, to the south, and is a lovely little town surrounded by vineyards and wine chateaux, St Emilion wine being renowned to say the least.

Please note that whilst we hope all of the information provided in the following pages will prove to be a useful guide, the prices, opening times etc are subject to change and cannot be guaranteed by Gites with Class.

Enjoy your stay!

