

DON'T BE A TOURIST  
MINI GUIDE TO

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# Brittany

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A MESSY NESSY MINI GUIDE



## DON'T BE A TOURIST MINI GUIDE

DESTINATION

# BRITTANY

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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First things first. This is not the Cote d'Azur. Brittany is a place to disconnect and unplug yourself from the fast-paced rhythm of modern life; to dispel the stereotypes of vacationing in France and discover its more rugged, natural and down to earth side.

We won't sugar coat it: the weather is unpredictable. Pack cozy sweaters, a waterproof jacket or barbour, some wellies and a sailor's cap. Indulge in the simple pleasures of a fisherman's weekend off. Eat plenty of fresh seafood and buttery crêpes. Immerse yourself in the proud and unchanged culture of the Bretons. Bounce between centuries wandering their medieval stone villages and bygone Art Deco resorts. Walk the moody coastlines worthy of a Jane Austen novel. Walking is a prime past-time in Brittany; a chance to lose yourself in thought and embrace the elements.

Okay, a superquick history of Brittany: Way back when the Romans were ruling the region known as "**Armorica**", Brits hurtled across the Channel to make it their own and renamed it "Brittany". They switched the language to something close to Welsh (**Breton**) and inaugurated a tendency to burst into Celtic song at any given time. Eventually, the heir to Brittany, Anne de Bretagne, married two French kings, France usurped Brittany and thus the '**Bretons**' became French. Until the 1980s it was actually illegal to play Celtic music here. But alas, Brittany's unique culture didn't die and they're still very proud people, considering themselves somewhat apart from the rest of France. They have their own flag and parliament, the road signs are still written in both Breton and French, and the locals continue to celebrate Celtic traditions.

Brittany is arguably best discovered as a road trip. It's a vast region, to put it in perspective - there's over 17 000 miles of coastline from one end to another. This guide is split into three separate regions, highlighting villages, promenades, restaurants and sites in each. If you've only got a weekend to escape, pick one of the three regions and save the rest to discover on another trip.

[You can find our Brittany map here.](#)

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# Seaside Nostalgia on the Emerald Coast

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Classic Brittany, great for first-timers to get a feel for the **Breton** lifestyle and seaside culture while also visiting some of its most fabled resort towns and coastal sights that attracted well-to-do Parisians out of the city during the rise of leisurely travel in the **Belle Époque** thanks to the development of the railways.

It also proves that Britain and France have more in common than you think – architecture-wise – with all of the Tudor-like houses.





## A BELLE EPOQUE SEJOUR IN DINARD

In the late 19th century American and British aristocrats made **Dinard** popular as a fashionable summer resort, and they built stunning villas on the cliff tops and exclusive hotels such as the '**Le Grand Hotel**' on the seafront during the French «**Belle Époque**». Winston Churchill summured in Dinard and Picasso painted here in the 1920s before the fashionable social set started preferring the Côte d'Azur.



You'll really get a feel for the former glory of the **Belle Époque** summers walking along the **Promenade du Clair de Lune**, admiring the beautiful but ghostly turn-of-the-century holiday mansions.

Visit the **local market** on Sunday morning filled with friendly faces, food and furniture.

Have lunch at the **old art deco theatre turned restaurant** in Saint-Lunaire.

**Crêperie du Roy** is your galette stop in the town.

Enjoy a drink at the 1930s bar **Aquarium Bar**, fit for Jules Verne, with little windows looking onto the ocean.

Explore the Wes Anderson cum Art deco **golf club on the beach**. The restaurant is open to non members and you can venture down to the members' area where the locker rooms haven't changed since the 1930s.





## CANCALE A MOVEABLE OYSTER FEAST

Cancale is the oyster capital of Brittany, and this old port town is famous for their big and meaty chewers.

Anytime of day is appropriate to stop for a mid-morning or mid-afternoon oyster snack at one of the **cafés of the port**. Don't miss the full authentic experience at the **Marché aux huitres** (everyday, morning to night) and when the tide is low you will see the oyster beds along the coastline.

If you want to learn more about oysters, stop by **La Ferme Marine**, a family run oyster farm, which organises guided tours in English during the summer months.

And if you're feeling especially inspired by the cuisine of Brittany, you can book yourself **a cooking lesson** with Oliver Roellinger's former sous-chef.







*John Singer Sargent - Cancale (1878)*

Brittany attracted many 19th century painters and artists for inspiration and Cancale was depicted in paintings by John Singer Sargent and Eugène Feyen.

There's a coastal path that will guide you towards the **Pointe du Grouin**, a scenic nature reserve with splendid views of **Mont Saint-Michel** and **Saint-Malo**. Neighboring Normandy, you can also take a day trip to the iconic Mont Saint-Michel (we have a little guide to it [here](#)). If you're feeling ambitious, you can also get a boat to the English islands of Jersey or Guernsey where you can visit **Victor Hugo's kaleidoscopic home**.



## MEANDERING THE MIDDLE AGES IN DINAN

Take a little drive inland to the historic village of Dinan, where you'll no doubt recognise the connection between Britain and France.

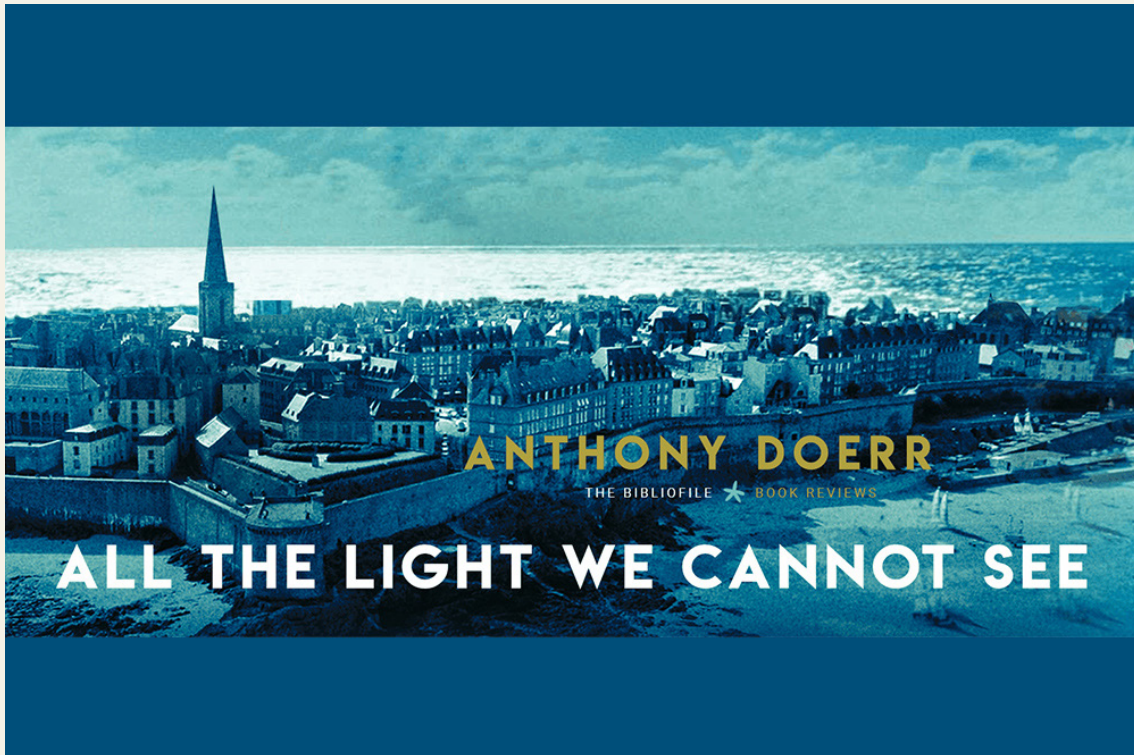
Hop in a time machine several centuries back to explore the medieval streets lined with half-timber Tudoresque houses and browse the arts & crafts galleries on [Rue du Petit Fort](#).

Stop for a crêpe in the beautiful port area near the [Viaduc de Dinan](#) with pretty old stone houses lining the quay, many of which have been converted into family-run restaurants.

Pass the fairytale facades as you walk down [Rue du Jerzual](#), which takes you to the Rance river, perfect for a romantic stroll when the lights are glowing at night.

Get dressed up and celebrate medieval times for the [Fête des Remparts](#) which is held two days in late July every even-numbered year.

Visit the enchanting little towns of [Léhon](#) and [Combourg](#) nearby.



## THE HAUNTING BEAUTY OF SAINT-MALO

Saint-Malo is the setting of the best-selling novel **All the Light we Cannot See**. The ominous walled city became a stronghold of the Nazis in World War II and feels somewhat eerily frozen in time, its streets steeped in mystery, legend and adventure.





*Librairie Le Septentrion*

Ideal for a day of shopping, browsing the unchanged boutique facades, especially around Rue Broussais. Pop into **La Maison Générale** and **Esprit de Famille** (for interior deco), **Le Boudoir De Monsieur** (a "Concept Store Masculin"), **Épices Roellinger** (for spices to make your own mystical potions), **Le Septentrion** (for old French books and antique prints).

**Au Troc Malouin** is a huge depot space filled with antiques and quirky bric à brac, where you can find anything from guitars, grand old commodes and mirrors to old model cars and suitcases.

**Cargo Culte** is a family-run café serving homemade lunches until the late afternoon, while also doubling as a mid-century brocante for hearty, home-made food.

**Grain Noir** is a perfect, cosy crêperie. **La Marie Cécile** is another good option for crêpes, but if you want to push the boat out, book yourself a Michelin star dinner at **Le Chalut**.

See how artisanal butter is made at **La Maison du Beurre Bordier**, where traditional methods and bygone tools are still used. Pick up some butter to take home with you. Try some of their flavoured varieties made with ingredients like seaweed and vanilla.





A 20 minute drive East along the coast, see the **sculpted rocks**, carved by a single man - **the Rochers Sculptés de Rothéneuf**.

A 15 minute drive south of Saint-Malo, you'll find the **Quelmer Boat Graveyard** where abandoned vessels from a lost industry have been transformed into artistic canvases in this unusual cemetery.

Back in town, when the sun is beaming strong (and if you're brave enough) take a dip in the outdoor seawater pool which also has a diving platform at the **Plage de Bon-Secours**. Walk into the ocean down **Le Môle des Noires**.

For a much needed coffee stop to warm yourself up, **La Java café**, filled to the brim with oddities; from old dolls and accordions hanging above the bar, to antique metal signs and hand drawn pictures plastered on the ceilings.



*Cap Fréhel, f\_bzh*

## SALTY-AIR STROLLING IN CAP FRÉHEL

For a taste of the wilder side of the Emerald Coast, hop over to the Cap Fréhel. Get some comfy shoes on for a wondrous walk along the panoramic paths filled with a big variety of flora and fauna.

Great for bird-watching enthusiasts!

La Fosse is a peaceful, secluded naturist friendly beach.

## Small Hotels & Lodging of Note in the Region

A choice of atmospheric accommodation for discovering  
the Emerald Coast...

**A TIMBERED 15TH CENTURY HOUSE**

in the centre of Dinan.

**LA DEMEURE AUX HORTENSIAS**

A colourful bourgeois B&B in Dinard

**HÔTEL ROYAL EMERAUDE DINARD**

**HÔTEL VILLA REINE HORTENSE**

**LA GOUGEONNAIS**

A picturesque B&B in a 19th century mansion

**MANOIR DU CLOS CLIN**

Another beautiful stately B&B

**VILLAGE DE YOURTES**

Glamp in a yurt

**AU JARDIN D'ÉLOÏSE**

A picturesque farmhouse with a tranquil garden

**LE NESSAY**

A majestic castle right on the coast.





*Le Nessay*

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# Island Hopping on the West Coast

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Discover the islands of Brittany, each with their own microclimates, surrounded by storybook lighthouses and cycle through the undisturbed natural scenery. Days are spent strolling by the sea and fishing for coquillages in the sand at low tide, finding hidden beaches, lighthouses and ancient ruins by bike or stopping in at small locally-run museums.

Keep an eye out for the charming **ouessant** sheep which are one of the smallest breeds in the world.





## BOHEMIAN BELLE ILE

Belle-Île, whose name translates to “beautiful island” is the largest island in Brittany. You can spend several days exploring its diverse landscapes or take a day trip on the ferry from the town of Carnac (with the car). It's super laid back and not overly crowded.



Stay overnight on the island at [this wonderful bookshop](#) and café that has rooms for rent or in [this charming cottage via Airbnb](#) in a hamlet in the south of the island.



*Sarah Bernhardt's dining room © Jean-Jacques Boujot*

**Visit Sarah Bernhardt's seaside fortress.** The eccentric, inimitable actress was truly one of the first global superstars, and it was her flair for blurring the lines between performance and reality that made her an international sensation. She also pretty much helped launch the **Art Nouveau** movement. The love story between Sarah and "**the Emerald Coast**" of France started in 1894, when she paid a visit to Brittany, and fell in love with an old, austere fortress perched on the cliff, which happened to be for sale. During the First World War, the house was a welcome refuge for intellectuals and politicians to exchange ideas. Since 2007, her home has operated as a **museum dedicated to her memory** and boasts an extensive array of her personal affairs, which are preserved exactly as she left them.

Mosey down the unspoilt **wild coast**. If you're looking for a beach on the island to relax and swim, the Caribbean-like **Plage des Grands Sables** is one of the best. The water can be pretty rough and rocky on other parts of the island. Look out for the star shaped **Citadelle Vauban**, which doubles as a park and hotel where you can pop in for a stroll, a drink, or an entire weekend getaway.





*Creperie Chez Renee*

Spend an evening at **L'Etoile du Port**, an endearing restaurant and bar with quirky furniture and live music and spoil yourself with sweet crêpes at **Les Embruns** on the port or in the cosy garden at the **Creperie Chez Renee**.

Cycle up to the cliff tops at **Grotte de l'Apothicaire** for panoramic views of the wild coast, but make sure to watch your step.

There's a tranquil little "**Garden of Eden**"; home to a variety of flora with the most splendid smells being carried around the garden by the coastal breeze.



## STAY IN A LIGHTHOUSE ON YOUR OWN PRIVATE ISLAND (for the price of a bed & breakfast)

Borrow [a Private Lighthouse](#) Island for the Price of a Bed & Breakfast. A stone's throw from a medieval sea fortress in the heart of **Morlaix Bay** in Brittany, France, on a little rocky island with a 19th century lighthouse and a white and powder-blue cottage, your Robinson Crusoe moment is waiting. The keys to the lighthouse keeper's old cottage –and absolute sovereignty over your own island for the weekend– can be picked up on the mainland at the local tourist office, which has been renting out the Ile Louët since 2004 when someone on the town council came up with the idea to renovate the neglected property and open it up as a holiday home. The lighthouse has been guiding boats through these waters since 1857 and until the 1960s when it became automated, lighthouse-keepers and their families lived permanently on this picturesque island which is just 350 meters out from the coast of **Carantec** in the north of Brittany.





## CARIBBEAN HUES ON THE CROZON PENINSULA

If someone showed you photos of the **Crozon Peninsula**, you would think it was in the South of France, with its sparkling turquoise waters, colourful shrubs and wild rocky paths.

Walk by the colourful houses and the lined up boats in the port town of **Camaret**. See the old boats in the "**marine cemetery**".

Take in the views on the cliff top walks. Be prepared for some tricky lengths around the **Cap de la Chèvre** - it's definitely worth it! Bring a picnic and snacks to nibble on among the wild scenery while looking onto the endless blue waters.

Save some time to walk around the idyllic little town of **Le Faou**.

If you're up for a slight detour, head to the **Vallée des Saints**, home to a curious group of saint statues, each depicted in a different style.



### A DAY TRIP TO THE ILE DE BATZ

For an ideal island day trip, hop on the ferry at **Roscoff** (which is worth visiting on its own) and in a mere 15 minutes, you'll arrive on the **Ile de Batz**, home to an agricultural village at sea.

You can follow the coastal path which will take you around the island in just a couple of hours. Rent a bike and find your favourite spot on one of the island's twenty beaches, undisturbed by the noise of zooming cars. It's worth packing a little picnic too. The north of the island is very sparsely populated.

Visit the [Georges Delaselle Garden](#), in between the fields home to sprouting fruits and vegetables, which is home to exotic plants and its own microclimate. Named after a Parisian insurer who created the garden at the turn of the 19th century.

Les [Herbes Folles](#) is a nice hotel if you choose to spend the night on the island with a much admired restaurant. For a sit-down meal, [La Crêperie du Phare](#) is another option.





## OFF-GRID ON THE ILE D'OUessant

Standing at **Pointe de Pern**, France's most westerly point, will make you feel as though you are at the edge of the world.

The ferry from **Le Conquet** to **Ile d'Ouessant** takes about 50 minutes. Stay for the sunset and the seals.

With just 846 habitants, the island is a haven of peace, and its landscape often reminiscent of Ireland's most beautiful spots.

One of the six lighthouses on the island is **Créac'h**, and one of the most powerful in the world, whose mighty beam can be seen by sailors 60 km away. There's a little museum to visit at its base for the curious.

Visit the best beaches on the island near to the main village, **Lampaul**. See the forgotten stories of sailors lost at sea at the cemetery too.



### CASTAWAY VILLAGE LIFE ON ILE DE SEIN

The first inhabitants of this isolated little island, well known for its dangerous waters. Surrounded by rocky waters, the Ile de Sein is entirely flat – convenient seeing as the only way to get around the 1 mile long island is by foot. The village is peppered with brightly coloured houses and the island's only museum, **Écomusée**, traces Sein's history and daily life through the ages.

According to Breton legend, Île de Sein was once home to a group of virgin druid priestesses who could control the winds. The island women used to wear a black headdress, and in the past, they had a reputation for enticing sailors onto the rocks by witchcraft. To reach the island, you can take a boat from Audierne, and if you're lucky you'll pass some friendly dolphins instead of witches.

Meet the locals over a pint of cider at [Chez Bruno](#). Indulge in fresh seafood at [Case De Tom](#), and finish off with homemade ice cream while looking onto the sea.

[Climb to the top of the lighthouse](#) and take in the views of the whole island.





© *philippeigel*

## THE MYSTERIOUS ISLET OF THE ETEL RIVER

In Saint-Cado, you'll find a view of this unusual little house perched on a few rocks, known as l'îlot rocheux de Nichtarguer. Also known as the oyster house as it was once the home of an oyster park keeper and his family. Currently it's uninhabited, but unfortunately, not available to rent.

Stroll along the charming path on the water that was said to have been made by Satan to connect the two islands in exchange for the first soul to cross it (which turned out to be a little cat). See the colourful boats, the cute little houses, and step into the small, homely chapel.

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# Brittany's Medieval Trail

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Fill your days road tripping through the Breton heartlands, stopping in charming little towns lost in time, filled with middle aged half-timbered houses, canals, gardens, and cosy cobbled alleys and narrow streets. Catch the local markets and festivals filled with costumes and cheer.





*Les Jardins de Kerdalo*

## THE STORYBOOK CHARM OF TREGUIER

This spiritual town up on a hill with views of the river, dates back to the 6th century. Fun fact – it's home to the patron saint of lawyers, Saint Yves.

Absorb the history in a café in front of the gothic cathedral and sample local delicacies at the market, which takes place in the main square every Wednesday.

History buffs can also enjoy a house museum visit the birthplace of **Ernest Renan**; a chance to see inside one of the old timber houses and imagine the life of a 19th century bourgeois historian and philosopher.

There are some fabulous French gardens to visit near Treguier - **Le Jardin du Pellinec**, **Les Jardins de Kerdalo** and **Jardin du Kestellic**.

A short ten minutes away from Treguier, is La Roche-Derrien, an 11th century town where the tiny alleys are lined with old shops revealed by their former window openings.

Visit a **Bretonne whisky distillery**, and make sure to book in advance if you can.



*Rüdiger Wölk*

A 25 minute drive away is the **Abbaye de Beauport in Paimpol**. The 13th century religious site was destroyed during the Revolution, and has since become home to an affable ecosystem.





*Le domaine de coat rogan*

## Where to Stay

CHAMBRE D'HÔTES TY-GUEN

KERLILOU

LE DOMAINE DE COAT ROGAN

CHÂTEAU DE KERGOUANTON CHAMBRES D'HÔTES



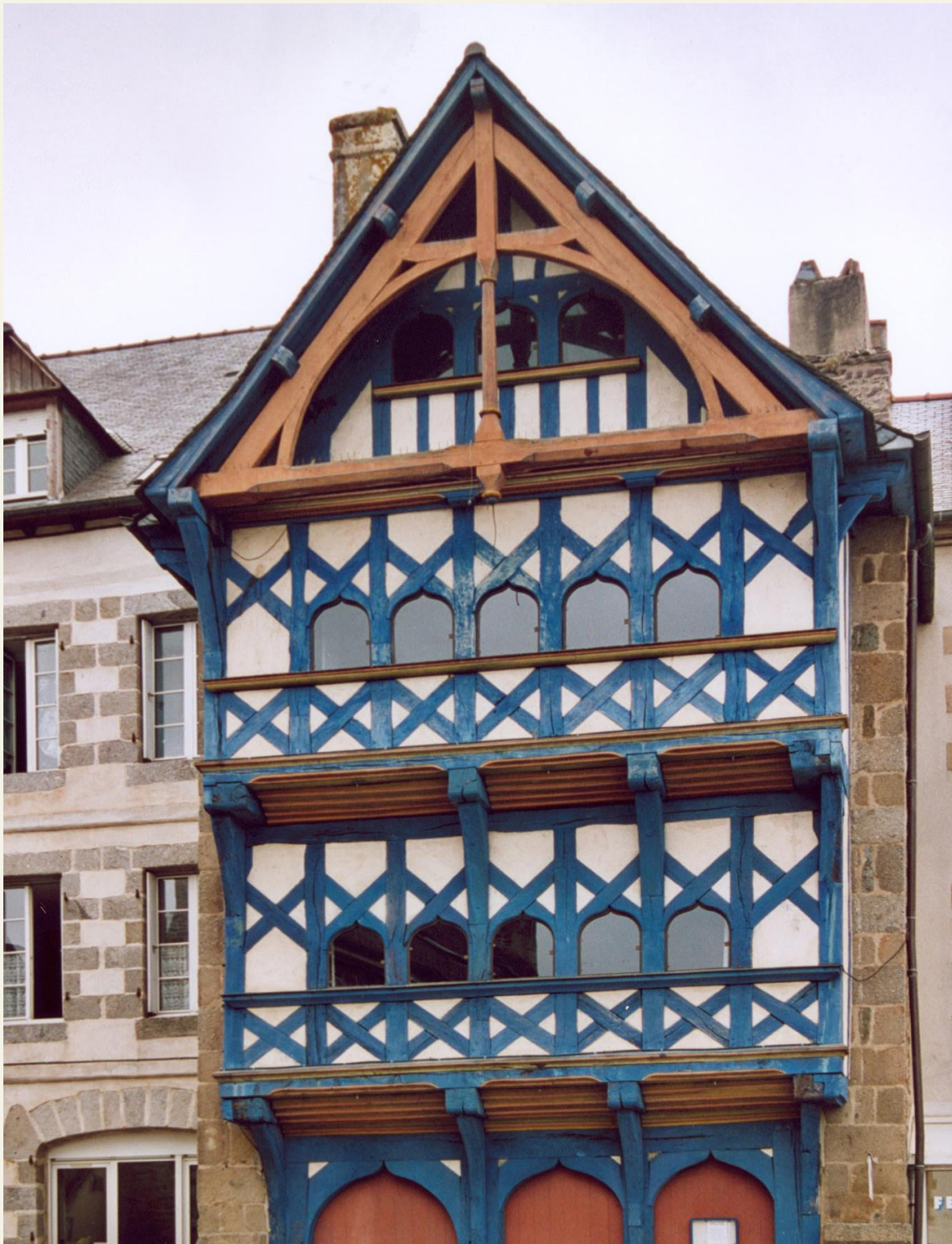
## LITTLE VENICE IN PONTRIEUX

Pontrieux has been called “**the little Venice of Trégor**” because of its slithering canals and dainty boats bobbing on the water, overlooked by former wash houses whose facades are adorned with colourful flowers. On 15th August, there is the annual **Fête de Lavoirs** where locals wear traditional dress and celebrate old forms of washing. The weekly market takes place on Monday mornings.

Look for the 16th century [Maison de la Tour Eiffel](#) which was used to look out onto the port.

The [Cité des télécoms](#) nearby is an exciting if not unexpected science museum inside a giant dome, where you can see old fashioned phones, satellites and optical illusions.







*Donatienne Gillaudeau | Tourisme Bretagne*

## PERFECTLY PICTURESQUE MONCONTOUR

The walled town standing on the top of a hill has officially been named one of the “most beautiful villages of France.” To get a taste of local life, the weekly market takes place on Tuesday afternoons and a Medieval festival takes place every August.

Le Jardin d'hildegarde is a medieval garden maintained using ancient methods. Those who find the hiding elf are entitled to a prize... Open every Sunday from 2pm to 6pm.

Prepare to enter the dreamlike world of Carolyne Morel, whose intricate creations and collections fill the intimate Théâtre du Costume museum.





## A THOUSAND YEAR OF HISTORY IN JOSSELIN

The **11th century château fit for Cinderella** overlooking the town takes centre stage in Josselin. Hire a boat to take you along the canal and have yourself a picnic on the **Île de Beaufort**. **Nico Nautic** rents out electric boats during the summer (06 50 62 48 79). The Saturday morning market takes place in the historical centre and hosts up to 100 local vendors.

On route to Josselin, stop by the **Chapelle Saint-Gildas**, an enchanting chapel carved into a giant rock on the bank of the idyllic Blavet river



*Fab5669*

**The doll museum** has thousands of objects in the collection, housed in former stables. Conceived way back in the 19th century by the owner's great grandmother, the diverse collection includes antique Japanese and Peruvian examples.

During the months of July and August, there is the **summer festival** where open air music concerts take place every Wednesday outside of the town hall.

Take your pick of the town's cosy creperies, such as **La Marine** with a terrace overlooking the river, or the no-frills local joint, **Les ateliers Gourmands**.

Take a little respite at the **Lac au Duc** bordered by hydrangeas, which was created by monks, and has its own "vouivre" monster. Today, you can go fishing there and enjoy various water sports.

**Malestroit**, otherwise known as the "pearl of the river Oust" is another town worth adding to your route, 30 minutes drive south of Josselin. During the summer there are **live music performances** on the canal every Friday.



## THE BEST OF MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE ARCHITECTURE IN ROCHEFORT EN TERRE

Designated a "**Petite Cité de Caractère**", the village's medieval chateau became the home of American painter Alfred Klots in the 1900s. His son inherited the chateau and continued to paint there until his death, when the building was donated to the French government. In the grounds of the building, get your fix of steampunk at the [Naia Museum of Imaginary Arts](#) housing a collection of fantasy and kinetic art and sculpture. There's also an intriguing 'escape game' at the museum which is great for kids.

Find a selection of artisanal sweet treats in the little shop and a much needed cup of hot chocolate in the tearoom at [L'Art Gourmand](#), set in an old medieval building.

Sample the spiced breads and local delicacies at the artisanal epicery, [Famille Humeau - Pain d'Épicier](#).

Visit the [salt marsh in Guérande](#) where tonnes of sea salt are produced and has been produced for centuries. Many people don't know the wonders of seeing the hot colours reflecting on salt planes while the sun sets and the curious wildlife that linger in the marshes. Much of the information is in French, so it's worth asking if one of the staff can give you a few explanations in English.

Drive 30 minutes south down to [La Roche-Bernard](#) and make sure to walk along the Marina.



*Terres de France Resort & hotel nature*

## Places of Note to Stay on your Trail through the Medieval Heartlands

Spend the night in a [treehouse](#) close to Pontrieux.

Get cosy in a [gypsy caravan](#) in the forest.

Stay on your own [personal floating island](#).

If you always dreamed of spending a night in a futuro house, you will probably enjoy staying in [Le Caballon](#).

A secluded, [futuristic hotel room](#) surrounded by nature, with the option to sleep under the stars.

[La Grée des Landes](#) is a zen, eco-hotel with an organic spa.

[Château du Pin](#) is a luxurious B&B fit for Victor Hugo.