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Your guide to South-West France by [URSULA Kim](#)

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If you are looking for somewhere that offers

- warmth & hospitality,
- wonderful gastronomy & wine,
- unspoilt countryside & interesting places to visit,
- somewhere that's easy to get to by road, plane or train.

Then this could be the ideal area to take a break away from it all for a few days or more.

This corner of South-West France encompasses four departments, the Charente, Charente Maritime, Gironde & Dordogne, all of which once formed part of the ancient historic region of Aquitaine ruled by Henri II of England and the fabled Eleanor during the middle ages.

You'll find there's something for everyone throughout the seasons.

Landscape & Climate

This region has a really varied landscape, from rolling hills & pine forests to great plains of corn, sunflowers & vines. You will find water everywhere, ranging from the dramatic Atlantic coast north of Royan with its endless stretches of golden sand and the fertile shores of the Medoc wine growing estuary of the Gironde to great rivers like La Charente, La Dordogne & La Garonne that wend their way through through the sleepy countryside, picturesque towns & villages inland.

There are also numerous smaller rivers, lagoons & lakes, many with man-made beaches. Inland the climate is generally temperate although the coastline is affected by the influence of the Atlantic, so the land is greener & not as arid as the Medeterranean.

Spring arrives early and the hot summer sunshine generally lingers well into autumn. Overall this region enjoys the second highest level of sunshine hours in France.

Gastronomy & Wines

Traditional weekly street markets throughout the region provide the ideal opportunity to sample a wide range of delicious specialities from different departments as well as local fresh produce, cheese, charcuterie, fresh fish and seafood. Indeed some of the best seafood in France comes from the Atlantic coast, particularly oysters and mussels.

Other gastronomic treats includes specialities such as foie gras, confit de canard (duck), bayonne ham, truffles and wild mushrooms. Many regional dishes are based on excellent lamb, magret de canard (duck breast), veal, saucisson, mussels and oysters.

When it comes to wine, you are spoilt for choice, everything from the finest chateau vintages from Pomerol, Saint Emillion & Bordeaux to excellent wines from Blaye, Bourg & Bergerac, as well as many easy drinking great value vin de pays.

The two Charentais dpartments in this area are real cognac country. As well as visiting famous cognac houses like Remy Martin and Hennessy around the medieval towns of Cognac & Jarnac, you can also enjoy a tasting of this fine brandy, named as Liquor of the Gods by Victor Hugo, at many local producers. Another Charentais speciality is an aperatif, called Pineau des Charentes (red or white, but always served chilled), made from a fine blending of cognac and grape juice.

Other specialities include the great Armagnac brandies & another delicious aperatif, a brandy based wine called Floc, that are found in the Dordogne & Gironde departments Overall, you'll find excellent food & wine throughout the region, whether it's fine dining at a chateau or restaurant, traditional country food at a farm auberge or simply fresh produce from the market, warm bread from the boulangerie or fresh meat from the village butcher. Many of our members also offer gourmet dining on-site, so you can indulge yourself without worrying about having to drive.

The region also hosts many events and festivals throughout the year, like the September vintage car rally and the November gastonomade market in Angoulême, Francfolies and the boat show at La Rochelle, jousting events on the River Charente/Dronne & many brocantes or seasonal markets/fetes in local towns.

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