

The 50 best breaks in France for 2016

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2 Hameau d'Albi villa

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2 Hameau d'Albi villa

Carolyn Boyd

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Best new places to stay

1 Wine château in Languedoc

Opening this month after a €25 million spend, the Château St Pierre de Serjac is set to be the go-to resort of 2016. This sister project to Château les Carrasses, which opened in 2011, is perfect for families. There's a 30m infinity pool, a boules area, kids' club and

tennis courts, as well as a spa, stylish bar and restaurant, and winery. As well as the eight spacious hotel rooms, 36 self-catering properties are dotted about the grounds, which have sensational views of the surrounding countryside.

Details A one-night stay in a double room costs from €220, about £162 (00 33 4 67 93 91 27, serjac.com). Béziers and Montpellier are the nearest airports

2 Luxury villa, the Tarn

Get together with friends to rent the luxury Hameau d'Albi villa in the Tarn and a dream holiday becomes much more affordable. Sleeping 17 people in eight rooms across the main house, guest house and a charming former *pigeonnier* (dovecote), it has a swimming pool and a terrace for evening apéritifs. The villa, parts of which date from the 12th century, is new to Red Savannah's collection for 2016.

Details A week's rental costs from £4,751 for 17 guests (01242 787800, redsavannah.com). Toulouse is the nearest airport

3 Eco-hotel in Brittany

Set to open its doors in April, the four-star Hôtel de la Mer at Brignogan-Plages, on the north coast of Finistère, offers a luxury (but ecological) experience. The original 1930s building has been refurbished using biomaterials, and has renewable energy and eco-friendly water-treatment systems. There are 18 rooms and eight apartments as well as a restaurant, and a spa with an indoor pool and treatments inspired by the coast's rich mineral algae.

Details Doubles cost from €90 (00 33 2 98 43 18 47, leteaser.fr/hoteldelamer). Take the ferry to St Malo

4 Literary hotel, Rouen

Bookworms will love this new four-star boutique hotel, in the heart of Rouen, which pays tribute to one of the city's most famous sons, the author Gustave Flaubert. His love of travel is celebrated in its decor; each floor is a homage to one of his favourite destinations or his most famous novels. Rooms are named in honour of his greatest works.

Details Doubles cost from €98, breakfast €15 (00 33 2 35 71 00 88, hotelgustaveflaubert.com). Take the ferry to Calais

5 Floating château in the Dordogne

Glamping just got more glam with the opening of this floating wooden château in the heart of the Dordogne. It is the newest addition to the Châteaux dans les Arbres complex, which already has four fabulous castles suspended in the trees. The floating cabin for two has a huge double bed, shower, wi-fi and hot tub.

Details Cabins start from £185 a night for two, B&B (0117 2047830, canopyandstars.co.uk/lileflottante). Bergerac is the nearest airport

6 Miramar Crouesty, Brittany

The Miramar Crouesty on the Rhuys peninsula has just undergone a major refurbishment. Shaped like a luxury liner, it has 100 minimalist, whitewashed rooms and 13 marvellous suites, as well as a thalassotherapy centre and a spa offering massages and detox treatments. There's also a heated pool.

Details Doubles cost from €180 and two-day/one-night breaks with spa treatments from €200 (00 33 2 97 53 49 00, miramarcrouesty.com)

7 Apart hotel in Provence

Holidays on the Côte d'Azur often come with a champagne price tag, but for those on a

budget the new Prestige apart'hotels from Lagrange should fit the bill. Near the village of Mougins, which has superb views towards Cannes, the Domaine de Mai has 42 apartments as well as a heated swimming pool and hot tub.

Details Seven nights in a one-bedroom apartment for four costs from £352 (020 7371 6111, lagrange-holidays.co.uk). The nearest airport is Nice

8 Hamlet in Perigord

This entire hamlet — new to Simply Perigord for 2016 and on the borders of the Dordogne and the Lot — is ideal for a noisy family celebration (there are no neighbours). The four houses sleep up to 22 people. The pretty village of St-Julien-de-Lampon is five minutes away, with shops, a weekly market and restaurants, while a local host can organise a chef, babysitting, wine-tasting and bike hire.

Details Simply Perigord has one week's rental of Figuiers from €7,450 for 22 people (00 33 55 3 54 54 31, simply-perigord.com). Fly to Brive or Bergerac

9 Manor in Brittany

Enjoy playing the lord or lady of the manor at Maison Meneac, a beautifully decorated mansion close to the north Breton coast, which is new to Oliver's Travels this year. Its owner has taken two years to restore the mansion with decor that reflects its 19th-century origins, with William Morris wallpaper, *objets d'art* and portraits.

Details A week for eight in four bedrooms costs from £442 (0800 1337999, oliverstravels.com). Fly to Rennes or take the ferry to St Malo

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10 Hôtel Vertigo, Dijon

The capital city of the Burgundy region gets a much anticipated addition to its hotels in April when Hotel Vertigo opens. It's already a member of the hip Design Hotels group and will come with a pool, hamman and sauna — plus 42 futuristic, minimalist rooms in a 1920s building overlooking Park Darcy, near the main railway station.

Details Doubles are from about £90 (vertigohoteldijon.com/en). Take the train via Paris

11 Corsican cottage

It's not often that a tiny hideaway for two comes with a private pool, which is what makes Casa Joséphine — new to Corsican Places' 2016 collection — so special. The cottage has a modern interior with double bed, kitchen and lounge area, as well as all the mod cons. Set in the countryside in the south of the island, it is surrounded by vines, and is near some of the island's best beaches.

Details Seven nights in May cost from £699pp, including flights from Gatwick to Ajaccio or Bastia, and a week's car hire (0845 3302113, corsica.co.uk)

Best for food and wine

12 Wine city, Bordeaux

Bordeaux's astonishing new wine museum — La Cité du Vin — will open in June and promises to be the ultimate destination for all things vinous. The enormous centre on the

banks of the Gironde estuary will cover ten floors, have a majestic glass tower with a viewing platform, and offer visitors a multisensory experience to learn about wine and culture throughout history. Combine your visit with a stay at Le Saint-James hotel, which has its own bijou vineyard.

Details One night at Le Saint-James with dinner in the Michelin-starred restaurant and a visit to the Cité du Vin costs from €420pp (00 33 55 797 06 00, saintjames-bouliac.com)

13 Brittany food festival

Hop across the channel for a trip that combines the best of Breton cuisine with a fun music festival. As part of Saint-Brieuc's Art Rock festival in May, the Rock'nToques event sees the streets filled with stands on which the area's top chefs prepare taster dishes in front of visitors. Add its street theatre, music, dance and visual arts and you're in for a fun-filled few days.

Details The festival runs from May 13 to 15 (rockntoques.fr). Stay at the three-star Hotel-Restaurant Edgar, with doubles from €110 (0 33 29 660 27 27, saint-brieuc-hotel.co.uk). Rennes is the nearest airport or take the ferry

14 Truffles in Burgundy

Indulge in two of Burgundy's tastiest offerings with a chablis and truffle-hunting weekend next autumn. This new gourmet package is hosted at Le Petit Village, a pair of cosy gîtes in the rolling hills of northern Burgundy. On day one, visitors will be treated to a tour of the region's famous chablis vineyards. This is followed by a trip to the local forest with a truffle expert.

Details Weekends cost from €900 for two (00 33 38 675 19 08, le-petit-village.com). Take the train via Paris to Nuits-sous-Ravières

15 Cooking in the Loire

Brush up on your language skills while picking up some tips for your cooking with a specially designed course at Parfum de France language school in the Loire Valley. Guests in groups of four or less will spend at least 35 hours speaking French while taking part in other activities such as cookery classes, sightseeing and visiting local markets.

Details A week's stay, with all activities and visits, 12 restaurant meals, and accommodation costs from €1,800pp (00 33 24 151 78 74, parfumdefrance-fr.com). The nearest airport is at Tours

16 Luxury Bordeaux

Wine aficionados will enjoy this break at two of the Bordeaux region's finest wine châteaux. Starting in the Médoc and Graves vineyards of the "Left Bank" of the Gironde, at the Château Cordeillan-Bages, visitors can enjoy tasting Grand Cru classé wines. After two nights they will head to Saint-Émilion to enjoy wines from a "Right Bank" stay at the luxury Hostellerie de Plaisance.

Details Four nights' B&B for two with two meals at Michelin-starred restaurants (one in each location) and visits to wine châteaux and tastings costs from €1,258 (00 33 55 659 24 24, cordeillanbages.com)

17 Burgundy wine break

Last year the vineyards of Burgundy gained Unesco World Heritage status, so what better excuse for a short break in Beaune, Burgundy's wine capital? Admire the 15th-century Hotel Dieu, with its beautiful coloured roof tiles, take a wine-tasting class with Sensation Vin (sensation-vin.com), shop in its stylish boutiques and stay in one of the new

apartments at the Maison du Colombier, a stylish “gastro-bar”.

Details Apartments cost from €155 for two, €245 for four (00 33 38 026 16 26, maisonducolombier.com). The nearest airport is at Lyons

18 Michelin stars in southwest France

Next year Michel Guérard celebrates 40 years as a three Michelin-starred chef, so our advice is to go this year and get in early. At his beautiful hotel, Les Prés d’Eugénie, in southwest France, guests can enjoy his famous slimming cuisine alongside a programme of spa treatments. Or take one of the courses at the cookery school.

Details Slimming menus from €60, rooms from €250 a night (00 33 55 805 06 07, michelguerard.com). The nearest airports are at Bordeaux and Biarritz

19 Spa and food in the Auvergne

The stunning village of Saint-Bonnet-le-Froid in deepest Auvergne offers superb cuisine and the chance to relax, with the recent addition of a top-class spa. The village, high in the Ardèche mountains, is home to the three-Michelin-starred restaurant run by the chefs at Régis and Jacques Marcon. The new spa — Les Sources du Haut Plateau — has pools, whirlpools and a sauna.

Details One night for two at Le Clos des Cimes costs from £150, with access to the spa and dinner for two at La Coulemelle gourmet bistro (00 33 47 165 65 66, regismarcon.fr). The nearest airports are at Lyons or Grenoble

Best for families

20 Nantes city break

The jaw-dropping Les Machines de l’île in the vibrant city of Nantes celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. Ride on the 12m robotic elephant or climb aboard the fantastic three-storey carousel, which is inspired by the city’s most famous son, Jules Verne . Elsewhere, the turreted Château des ducs de Bretagne has exhibits that celebrate the city’s eclectic history — shipbuilding, slavery and biscuits — while a green line painted on the pavements leads you to a series of outdoor art installations.

Details See levoyageanantes.fr or lesmachines-nantes.fr. Stay at Nantes Camping, a tram-ride from the centre, with two-bedroom mobile homes from €61 per night (00 33 2 40 74 47 94, nantes-camping.fr). Fly to Nantes

21 Post-natal Limousin

For those very new to family life, try the post-natal retreats at Manoir la Croix de la Jugie, in Limousin. Led by Caroline Bragg, a post-natal physical training expert, the retreat includes a programme of toning, pilates and cardio, while massages, home-cooked meals and babysitting services are also on offer.

Details Seven nights’ full board costs from £1,500 per family (two adults, baby and toddler) in March, June and September (07739 413835, lajugie.co.uk). The nearest airport is Brive Vallée de la Dordogne

22 Glamp in Normandy

Enjoy some off-grid family time at the enchanting Ferme du Moncel in the heart of Normandy, where you stay in a rustic tent with a wood-burning stove, proper beds and a solid dining table. With no electricity, there’s no choice but to get stuck in, feeding the animals and grooming the ponies.

Details A week in June costs from €655 per tent for up to five (00 33 1 76 43 00 61, unlitaupre.fr). Take the ferry to Caen

23 Beachside Biarritz

Perched above the white sands of the coast near Biarritz, the Sable Blanc villa sleeps 12 in spectacular surroundings. The new addition to CV Villas' collection has great views. Teenagers will love the media room on the mezzanine level and the surf schools near by, while everyone will enjoy the heated infinity pool.

Details Seven nights for 12 costs from £6,335 (020 7563 7900, cvillas.com)

24 Camargue by boat

For a gentle sojourn through the Camargue, the wildlife haven in Languedoc-Roussillon, families with older children can set sail on their own cruiser from Nicols' new base in Aigues-Mortes. Pootle the waterway that leads to the Canal du Midi where you will spot the famous wild horses and bulls.

Details Seven nights' costs from €2,255 based on a three-cabin boat sleeping six (02392 401320, boat-renting-nicols.co.uk). The nearest airport is Montpellier

25 Loire château

Switch off from the world with a stay at the family-run Château des Briottières, north of Angers, where the family suite in Le Fruitier guesthouse has just been redecorated. With stunning parkland, a pretty swimming pool, trampoline, and free bikes to use, along with home-cooked evening meals, the château has plenty to keep you busy.

Details B&B doubles are from €169 (00 33 2 41 42 00 02, briottieres.com). The nearest airports are Nantes and Tours

26 Riviera camping

Perched on a hillside terrace above glorious Port Grimaud, surrounded by trees, the Domaine des Naïades campsite is a new addition to Eurocamp's holiday parcs. The waterpark includes waterslides, an Olympic-sized pool and children's pool, and there are kids' clubs and an open-air cinema.

Details A seven-night break at Domaine des Naïades, starting July 23, costs from £1,169 for a two-bedroom Espirit holiday home that sleeps up to seven people (01606 787125, eurocamp.co.uk). Fly to Nice Côte d'Azur

27 Villa in Provence

La Bergerie is a stunning villa in the hills above the Côte d'Azur which comes with a chef, a cinema room, 18m swimming pool and manicured gardens. An added wow factor comes in the six spacious suites, which have been decorated to an exquisite standard, while the separate guest house opening in May is the perfect place for the extended family.

Details Catered stays cost from £1,625pp, based on 12 people sharing six rooms in the main villa and four in two rooms in the guesthouse (020 8878 4433, bergerieterreblanche.com). Fly to Nice

28 Treehouses in Mayenne

The family-run Chouette Cabane in Mayenne, north of the Loire, has three cosy treehouses that enjoy spectacular views across sunflower fields. All are beautifully decorated using natural materials. Dinner and breakfast are delivered in a picnic basket, which you winch up to the treehouse terrace with a pulley. Children can feed the goats and chickens and groom the donkeys.

Details A night for two in a treehouse for four costs from €105 with breakfast (00 33 9 52 73 14 58, chouettecabane.fr). The nearest airport is at Rennes

Best for activities

29 Le Grand Départ at Mont-St-Michel

This year's Tour de France will set off from Mont-St-Michel, which has been restored as an island after its causeway was dismantled. If you want to join in with the pedalling action, sign up to Discover Adventure's special trip that will, after a 100-mile ride along the spectacular Normandy coast, arrive at Mont-St-Michel to see the Tour depart.

Details Departing June 30, the two-night trip costs from £1,000pp, B&B, with ferry crossing from Portsmouth to Cherbourg, most meals, motorcycle outriders, an escort car and rolling road closures (01722 718444, discoveradventure.com)

30 Snow yoga, the Alps

If your ski holiday typically starts and ends with aches, pains and stiff limbs, a trip to the Tarentaise Valley in the Alps with Soulshine Retreats could be the answer. Its Snow Yoga programme starts each day with a 60-minute dynamic Vinyasa yoga class to warm up the muscles ready for the slopes. At the end of the day, wind down with a session of slow Yin yoga in front of the log fire, with the option of guided meditation.

Details The seven-night retreat costs from £1,080pp, half board, with yoga and meditation, a massage and transfers (0808 1890279, soulshineretreats.com). The nearest airports are Chambéry-Savoie and Grenoble

31 Sail the Côte d'Azur

Soak up the sun on the Côte d'Azur aboard a 50ft yacht with one of Essential Sailing's new holidays on the French Riviera. The trips are designed for those who don't have any sailing experience. Those who fancy a turn at the helm can take part in a short introduction to sailing before boarding the "floating boutique hotel".

Details Seven-day cruises start from £1,442pp on a yacht for six, including breakfast and lunch daily and dinner on four nights (0845 6530126, essentialsailing.com). Nice is the nearest airport

32 Snowshoe Chamonix

Spend three days in the spectacular Chamonix valley with an introduction to snowshoeing with KE Adventure Travel. The three-day trip includes a gentle walk in the Bois du Bouchet and the Valley of the Bears, or exploring the gorge and frozen waterfalls of the Bérard Valley.

Details Four nights' half board, including all hire equipment and full tuition, costs from £595pp (01768 773966, keadventure.com). Flights cost extra; Geneva is the nearest airport

33 Hike and bike, Alsace

Take it easy with a gentle cycling and walking holiday through the villages and vineyards of Alsace with Inntravel's Alsace Discovery holiday, new for 2016. The trip will have you meandering through a string of flower-bedecked villages, such as the postcard-perfect Riquewihr, and past the striking Kaysersberg Castle, with stops at a butterfly house and stork sanctuary.

Details Seven nights' B&B, with two dinners, cycle hire, luggage transfers, route notes and maps, costs from £698pp (01653 617000, inntravel.co.uk). The nearest airports are at Strasbourg or Basel-Mulhouse

34 Yoga near Toulouse

Relax and recharge among the rolling fields and wildflower meadows of southwest France with a yoga retreat at the medieval Château Puységur, the newest venue for

In:spa's luxury retreats. As well as taking daily yoga sessions, guests can learn how to prepare nutritious meals or enjoy hikes in the countryside. There are ten individually styled bedrooms in the château.

Details A seven-night retreat costs from £1,995pp on an all-inclusive basis, including yoga, hikes, fitness classes, two massages, one personal training session, one nutrition consultation and one cookery demonstration (020 3235 0120, inspa-retreats.com).

Toulouse is the nearest airport

35 Hike the Pays Basque

Enjoy a week of walking, good food and wine with The Walking Party, which celebrates its ten-year anniversary this year. Its popular Taste of Basque Pyrenees trip takes you through rolling hills and pretty villages by day and on a gastronomic adventure each evening.

Details Departures are in April, September and October. Eight days costs from €2,890pp, including all meals and wine, guided walks and accommodation in hotels, private châteaux and auberges (00 33 68 767 11 51, thewalkingparty.co.uk). Fly to Biarritz

Best for culture and history

36 Art in Pont-Aven

Art lovers should make a beeline for the pretty village of Pont-Aven in southern Brittany where the Museum of Fine Arts will reopen this spring after a two-year renovation. It features works by artists such as Émile Bernard and Paul Gauguin, who founded the 19th-century Pont-Aven art movement. Then follow the "*Escapade artistique*", a walk that brings together some of the scenes captured on canvas by Gauguin, et al.

Details Stay at the three-star hotel La Chaumière Roz Aven with doubles from €78, breakfast €14 (00 33 2 98 06 13 06, hotelpontaven.com). More information at museepontaven.fr, pontaven.com. The nearest airport is at Rennes or take the ferry to St Malo

37 Somme centenary

To mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, book the Poets and the Somme tour from Martin Randall and explore the lives of those who captured the raw emotions of the First World War in poetry. Led by military historian Andrew Spooner, the tour will include an actor reading the poems in key locations, such as at the poet's grave. If you would rather travel independently, time your visit for the special services held at key sites, such as Thiepval Memorial to the Missing on July 1, exactly 100 years since the battle started. It is a ticket-only event.

Details The tour is from September 2-5 and costs from £1,390pp, including coach travel and three nights' full board (020 8742 3355, martinrandall.com). Or see www.visit-somme.com

38 Arty Normandy

The popular impressionist festival that runs across Normandy, an area that inspired many artists such as Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, returns this year. It takes place every three years and the theme for 2016 is portraits. Some 450 projects, including sound and light shows, and music, dance and theatre events, will be held in locations that include Le Havre, Étretat and Honfleur.

Details The festival runs from April 16 to September 26 (normandie-impressionniste.eu). Stay at the charming maison d'hôtes in La Petite Folie Honfleur

with B&B €150 (00 33 6 74 39 46 46, lapetitefolie-honfleur.com). Take the ferry to Caen or Le Havre

39 Jazz in the Dordogne

Stroll the streets of Souillac to the sound of jazz as the town comes alive for the Sim Copans festival from July 16-23 (souillacenjazz.fr). With performances in front of its domed church and in its squares, streets, cafés and bars, the festival is this year celebrating its 40th anniversary. For something a little more underground, try one of the special performances in the caves at Lacave.

Details A room at Château de la Treyne in Lacave, costs from €300 (00 33 5 65 27 60 60, www.chateaudelatreyne.com). The nearest airport is Brive

Best for special interest

40 Euro 2016

The highlight of the sporting calendar for all football fans, Euro 2016, takes place in ten cities across France. With England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland all qualifying, it's a great way to combine a city break with sport. England play Russia on June 11 in Marseilles, a city with a rich footballing culture and a cosmopolitan vibe.

Details Tickets are available from uefa.com. Stay at Mama Shelter with doubles from €69 (00 33 4 84 35 20 00, mamashelter.com/Marseille). Fly or take the Eurostar direct to Marseilles

41 The Tour in Morzine

Cycling fans should make a beeline for Morzine this summer as both L'Étape du Tour and the Tour de France will pass through the alpine town. For L'Étape du Tour, the amateur event that precedes the Tour de France on July 10, cyclists start in Megève and reach Morzine after 146km. Meanwhile, Le Tour arrives on July 23 before it transfers to Paris for the final stage.

Details See morzine-avoriaz.com for more information. Stay at La Ferme du Lac Vert, with doubles from £65pp per night (01483 890044, skizeen.com). Fly to Geneva

42 Cave art in the Dordogne

Be one of the first to see the new replica cave Lascaux IV, which opens its doors this summer. Among France's top prehistoric sites, the cave was found in 1940 by four young boys and their dog. Lascaux II opened as a replica of the original, with Lascaux III as a touring exhibition. The new experience allows visitors to get a feel for life in prehistoric times with visits to the replica cave.

Details Lascaux IV opens in June (00 33 5 53 02 20 20, projet-lascaux.com). Stay at the Auberge de Castel-Merle, 20 minutes away with doubles from €77 (01172 047810, sawdays.co.uk). The nearest airport is Bergerac

43 Norman invasion anniversary

It is the 950th anniversary of the Norman invasion of England and the Battle of Hastings this year, so why not trace the story back to William the Conqueror's original stomping ground in Normandy? Between April and December medieval festivals, including street markets, theatre workshops and sound and light shows, will mark the occasion. Start your tour with a visit to the ultimate testimonial of William's victory, the Bayeux tapestry.

Details For more information visit bit.ly/WilliamTheConqueror. Stay at Hôtel Poppa,

Bayeux which has B&B doubles from €95 (00 33 2 31 22 41 90, hotel-poppa.com). Take the ferry to Cherbourg, Caen or St Malo

44 Tall ship in Rochefort

The tall ship *Hermione* has returned to French shores after a tour of the east coast of the US and will take up residence in Rochefort, in Charente-Maritime, where it took 20 years to build. Climb aboard the replica of Lafayette's 1780 original to learn about its part in the American War of Independence. The ship will also take part in Brest's annual maritime festival in Brittany from July 13-19.

Details More information on hermione2015.com or brest2016.fr. Stay at the new four-star hotel in Rochefort's former royal ropeworks, La Corderie Royale, where rooms cost from €91 (00 33 5 46 99 35 35, corderieroyale.com). The nearest airport is La Rochelle

45 Morgan and Millau road trip

Norman Foster's sensational Millau Viaduct is the highlight of any road trip in southern France, so do it in style, roof down, at the wheel of a Morgan. Cross Channel Sports Cars has launched

a Morgan and Millau package. Starting at the Château de l'Hoste, not far from Agen, you drive east towards the Cévennes, over the world's tallest bridge.

Details Four nights' B&B and three days' Morgan hire costs from €1,875 for two (00 33 5 63 94 58 31, ccsportscars.co.uk). The nearest airports are at Toulouse or Bergerac

46 Nice Carnival for solos

Those without a travel pal need not miss out on the Côte d'Azur's most exciting diary date. The Nice Carnival takes over the streets of the city for two weeks each February; this year's theme is King of the Media. Solos Holidays has a three-night package staying at the Novotel Nice Centre, which includes a guided tour of the old town, entrance to the parade of lights and flower parade, both with reserved seating.

Details Three nights' B&B costs from £599pp, including BA flights, transfers and one dinner (0844 3718860, solosholidays.co.uk)

47 Normandy antiques

Make the most of the excellent exchange rate and snap up some antique bargains in the little-known Perche area of Normandy. It has an excellent reputation for *brocante* (bric-a-brac) and is a favourite weekend haunt for Parisians. Potter around the antiques shops of Mortagne, Bellême and La Perrière, and look out for the *vides greniers* (empty attic) – open-air flea markets between Easter and October.

Details More information on www.normandy-travel.co.uk. Perche is an hour's drive from Caen ferry port. Stay at La Château de Saint Paterne, near Alençon, with rooms from €145 (00 33 2 33 27 54 71, chateau-saintpaterne.com)

48 Wine and Romans in Provence

The wine tour company Arblaster and Clarke has teamed up with archaeology holiday company Andante Travels to offer visitors the chance to explore Provence's Roman sites alongside its 2,600-year-old wine heritage. Starting in the papal city of Avignon, the tour also visits the Roman amphitheatres of Orange and Arles and the jaw-dropping Pont du Gard Roman aqueduct.

Details The tour runs from June 5-11 and costs from £2,635pp, including eight nights' full board, all visits and guided tours (01730 263111, winetours.co.uk). Take the Eurostar direct to Avignon or fly to Marseilles

49 Grand tour by train

Why do one city break when you can do five in one go? With Planet Rail's 12-day grand tour you travel first class to the culturally rich cities of Lille, Lyons, Marseilles, Bordeaux and Paris, staying in four and five-star hotels. Each part of the journey includes visits to the city's most interesting galleries and museums.

Details Rail travel and 11 nights' B&B costs from £1,175pp (01347 811810, planetrail.co.uk)

50 Birds and bubbles

The Champagne region is a haven for many birds and in mid-March great numbers of common cranes arrive at the Lac du Der on their migration north. This trip with Naturetrek combines two birdwatching locations with a visit to the Champagne Drappier vineyard and a stay in the medieval city of Troyes.

Details Seven nights' full board costs from £1,395 with train travel from London (01962 733051, naturetrek.co.uk)

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