

theguardian



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# Nouveau riches: what's new in France

Hip party pads, design gîtes in Brittany and an art deco pool-turned-gallery – here's our pick of the latest French trends

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**Rachel Dixon** and **Gemma Bowes**  
The Guardian, Saturday 26 March 2011



The LAM modern art museum near Lille Photograph: Max Lerouge

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## Gay-friendly boltholes

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A collection of high-quality accommodation in [France](#) that particularly welcomes gay and lesbian travellers has been launched by Further Afield (07932 755515, [furtherafield.com](http://furtherafield.com)). Par exemple, [La Petite Maison](#) is a romantic river village cottage that sleeps two, with an eclectic collection of furniture, in the Loire, near Treves. It's run by Sue and Micaela who are obsessed with wine, and can arrange local tastings and trips. It costs from €330 for a weekend.

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## The ultimate party pad

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If budget isn't a problem, the place to stay this year is the Château de la Goujeonnerie (07879 640858, [lestroisgarcons.com/chateau](http://lestroisgarcons.com/chateau), sleeps 54, from £19,500 per week or £9,000 for a long weekend), run by the people behind London's hip cocktail bar Loungelover and Les Trois Garçons restaurant. Located in the Vendée, it is the definition of fairytale, with "floating" towers on the corners of the chateau and flamboyant interiors featuring unicorn taxidermy and chandeliers. Seven doubles and three singles are available in the chateau, plus a further 15 doubles and two singles in outbuildings. It's a vast party pad, with drawing rooms, a library, steam room, gym and bar, plus a heated outdoor pool in the grounds, reached by strolling through a forest. The property is let as a whole, catered or not.

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## Art in Lille

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Just outside Lille, the LAM ([musee-lam.fr](http://musee-lam.fr)) modern art museum has reopened after a major extension by Manuelle Gautrand, in a park of sculptures in Villeneuve d'Ascq. It features more than 4,500 works. While in town, you should also take a trip out to Roubaix, where an art deco swimming pool (with the water still in it) has been turned into a gallery, Roubaix La Piscine (+33 3 2069 2360, [roubaix-lapiscine.com](http://roubaix-lapiscine.com)), with sculptures arranged where once dive-bombers scuttled, and a lovely garden overlooked by a terrace cafe.

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## Independent cycle touring

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Imagine pedalling through fields of sunflowers with the wind in your hair and a baguette in your basket. Now check out Freewheeling France ([freewheelingfrance.com](http://freewheelingfrance.com)), a new English-language website that tells you everything you need to know about arranging a cycling holiday. There's help for independent tourers as well as package travellers. If you've got a question they haven't already answered, fellow cyclists will help you out on the message boards.

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## Accessible Alsace

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Alsace ([tourism-alsace.com](http://tourism-alsace.com)) looks set to be a popular destination this year after BMI ([flybmi.com](http://flybmi.com)) and Swiss ([swiss.com](http://swiss.com)) announced new flights from Heathrow and Manchester to Basel-Mulhouse in the south of the region. The route will start operating on 27 March, with both airlines' prices starting around £89 return (£93 from Manchester). Easyjet ([easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)) began flying to the same airport from Edinburgh in

December, while the train takes around six and a half hours from London, with returns from £190 (Eurostar to Paris then TGV to Basel, [raileurope.co.uk](http://raileurope.co.uk)). Alsace may well become the next big place for foodies, with the most Michelin-starred restaurants in France outside of Paris.

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## Ski by rail map

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For the first time, the position of 400 ski resorts across the Alpine countries, including France, has been marked on a map that shows the Alpine rail routes. More than 120 resorts are directly accessible by train, making it easy to arrange an independent trip to these as well as smaller, lesser known resorts. Order from Roger Lascelles (01255 870595, [rogerlascellesmaps.co.uk](http://rogerlascellesmaps.co.uk)). A folded map is £8.95, a wall map £11.

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## Great gîte

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Travel writer Bev Fearis has launched Gîtes Guebernez (+33 2 9739 4325, [gitesatguebernez.com](http://gitesatguebernez.com)), two charming new gîtes in central Brittany with her partner Warren (an interiors photographer – so it's guaranteed to look good, plus his landscape photography decorates the interiors and is available to buy). La Grande sleeps 6-9 people, and Le Pressoir sleeps 2-4. For kids, there's a large lawn for games, a pool table, table tennis, boules, a rope swing, treasure hunts, board games and a dressing-up box, plus a library. You can enjoy a three-course meal for €11 including wine at the local restaurant, Chez Marie-Thé (+33 2 9739 4382) in the village of Ploerdut.

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## Bargain breaks

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It pays to book – and go – early if you fancy a self-catering break in France. Pierre & Vacances (0870 026 7145, [pierreetvacances.co.uk](http://pierreetvacances.co.uk)) has 25% off early summer short breaks, with prices starting at €25pp a night. You need to book before 22 April for a trip before mid-July. Holidays include a spa break in Normandy (from €585) and a weekend in La Rochelle (from €340), plus lots of family-friendly properties.

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## Cultural pursuits

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The former house of the poet and artist Jean Cocteau, in Milly-La-Forêt near Paris (+33 1 6498 1150, [jeancocteau.net](http://jeancocteau.net)), has been turned into a museum, with 500 paintings, drawings and other art works decorating his rooms, along with leopard print wallpaper and erotic knick-knacks. You can also visit his grave in the same village at the St Blaise chapel, inside which is one of his frescoes.

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## Adventures in the Alps

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Increase your fitness while being motivated by your sports hero. The likes of Olympians Sally Gunnell, Liz Yelling and Sharron Davies lead a choice of sports retreats in La Clusaz, in the Aravis valley, with Adventures in the Alps (0845 519 3101, [adventuresinthealps.com](http://adventuresinthealps.com)). A range of sports stars host various weeks, from triathlon to weight loss. The week-long "run training clinic" with Liz Yelling costs £999, including food and transfers.

### Rachel Dixon and Gemma Bowes

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**Readers' tips**

Lille: [Aux Moules](#)

Restaurant selling huge quantities of mussels. Might look like a tourist trap but continues to attract locals in large numbers.

Moules frites cooked...

Posted by juanfandango 30 Apr 2010

Lille: [Bella Italia](#)

Super italian restaurant in the very heart of Lille. Hidden away behind the main shopping street and doesn't look much from outside. Inside though is

Posted by juanfandango 25 Apr 2010

Lille: [Veggie / vegan restaurants](#)

Fantastic Lebanese veggie / vegan menu at Flandres de Liban (website even has English menu) in Wazemmes.

More centrally, Aux Indes, do a great...

Posted by novakb 22 Jun 2009

Lille: [OUI Fooding](#)

The OUI has trendy décor, but they forgot the essential thing: the quality of the food.

The wine list was large but most of the wines were not

Posted by sophiedupont35 5 Jan 2009

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