I’ve found the best holidays in France for the year ahead

Whether you want to ski like a king in Courchevel or lock in a cultural city break, there are many wonderful ways to explore France — with new reasons to visit in 2026

Kaysersberg village among the Vosges mountains in Alsace

GETTY IMAGES

Matt Hampton | Tuesday February 03 2026, 9.07am, The Sunday Times

Charles de Gaulle once lamented the difficulty of governing a country with 246 varieties of cheese. What he failed to mention is that pretty much all of it tastes good. It can feel the same when it comes to choosing a holiday to our nearest and dearest neighbour. What at first can seem a bewildering variety can be boiled down to hot France, cold France, new France and old France. And active France and relaxing France. And wine France and food France and… all right, there is a little bit more to it than it first seems. But, just as with all those cheeses, it is hard to make a bad decision on where to go.

Pay attention, though, to what’s new. Even if we Brits make up a fair share of travellers to the most visited country on earth — and we should know our way around by now — this year there are some significant anniversaries, including centenary celebrations for Monet and a 50th for the effervescent crémant d’Alsace. The cultural buzz continues with several new museums, and if you have an eye for luxury there are notable hotel openings.

So read on, even if you know your Mont d'Or from your roquefort.

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1. Art and beer in Lille

La Grand Place in Lille

GETTY IMAGES

Most of us have passed through on the way to Paris, but those who alight at Lille Europe remark what a pretty and manageable city it is. Manageable in the sense that it won't break your spirit trying to tick off every recognisable sight, nor will it break the bank as the capital can. In February the modern art gallery LaM will reopen with a Wassily Kandinsky retrospective as its first big exhibition (£9; musee-lam.fr). Enjoy a drink afterwards at one of Lille's microbreweries — the city is renowned for its beer — or book an organised tour (£35; echappee-biere.com). Visit in the first week of September for the Braderie de Lille, Europe's largest flea market, where the bargains are greater than at the Marchés aux Puces in Paris. The new art deco-style Hotel Oceania Les Augustins has a spa and a great location in the centre of town.
Details Room-only doubles from £100 (oceaniahotels.com). Take the train to Lille

Book now

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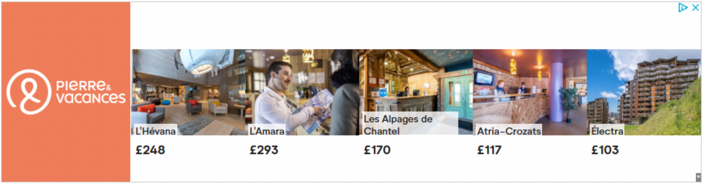

2. Theme park fun near Paris

Parc Astérix is about 20 miles north of Paris

SYLVAIN_CAMBON

You can search a long time for the “real France” only to find the perfect example somewhere entirely artificial. Parc Astérix, about 20 miles north of Paris, stands testament to the French obsession with the comic-book Gaul and his pals. The rides are terrific but the real fun is in watching the locals in their (un)natural habitat, interacting with the characters. The park has been lovingly created, especially its flagship hotel, Les Quais de Lutèce. Next year it will be joined by another four-star hotel, L’Odyssée, but the big news for the 2026 season, which starts on April 4, is a revamp of the park’s Egyptian zone and some of its rides. **Details** Les Quais de Lutèce has two nights’ B&B for four from £860, including park tickets (parcasterix.fr). Fly to Charles de Gaulle then take the £10 park shuttle

Book now

3. Return of a Côte d’Azur classic

Winston Churchill once stayed at Le Beauvallon

COMO HOTELS

A grande dame on the Côte d’Azur, Le Beauvallon counts among its former guests dozens of luminaries, from Audrey Hepburn to Winston Churchill. Built as a hotel in 1914 but converted to a private estate in 2015, it switches back to its roots in April as part of the luxury Como group, which manages the Halkin in

London. With ten acres of grounds, it will of course have all the standard luxury touches, with the added benefit of yacht moorage in front of the property. If you haven't brought your own boat you can use theirs: two motor launches are available to whisk guests to dinner or more secluded beaches.
Details B&B doubles from £700. Fly to Nice

Book now

4. The artists' Riviera

Explore the coastal towns that inspired Marc Chagall
ALAMY

For a more cerebral take on the Côte d'Azur, try a tour that links London with the Riviera. The Royal Academy on Piccadilly will host a retrospective of French modernism from October 2026 until January 2027. Get to the source material on a group tour of the coastal towns and villages that inspired Miró, Chagall, Matisse, Picasso and their contemporaries. Martin Randall's Modern Art on the Côte d'Azur trip is led by two fine-art experts and will be based at the four-star Hotel La Pérouse in Nice, overlooking the Promenade des Anglais.
Details Seven nights' B&B from £3,160pp, including flights, transfers, some extra meals and entrance fees (martinrandall.com)

5. Monet in Normandy

Monet's house and garden in Giverny
ALAMY

Impressionism takes its name from Claude Monet's 1872 landmark work *Impression, Sunrise*. Born in Paris in 1840, Monet reached the ripe old age of 86 — making this year the centenary of his passing. To mark the occasion a number of events will be held throughout 2026 in Normandy and Paris, notably the Normandy Impressionist Festival, which will focus on the artist's garden at Giverny, where he settled for the latter half of his life (normandie-tourisme.fr). The simple, cosy Musardière hotel is nearby.
Details B&B doubles from £171 (lamusardiere.fr)

Book now

6. Cycle up Everest (in the Alps)

Isère
mvea
Alpe d'HuZes 2024

The Epic 21 challenge is to complete eight ascents of Alpe d'Huez

PEAK RETREATS

Madcap antics are par for the course on the Tour de France. Who could forget Chris Froome running up Mont Ventoux in 2016 having been knocked off his bike? You won't be required to perform such feats on the new Epic 21 event from the tour operator Peak Retreats. It's much harder. Taking place on June 6-11 on Alpe d'Huez, one of the most visited climbs of Le Tour, the challenge is to complete up to eight ascents of the mountain — equivalent in altitude to scaling Mount Everest (8,848m). In reality, one ride up the 21 famed hairpins is enough for most weekend warriors, but the event is open to allcomers and Strava records are likely to be broken. Accommodation is in shared apartments at the swish Le Cristal de l'Alpe, so you can book with friends or make new ones.
Details Five nights' half-board from £734pp, including transfers and event entry (epic21.co.uk). Fly to Lyon

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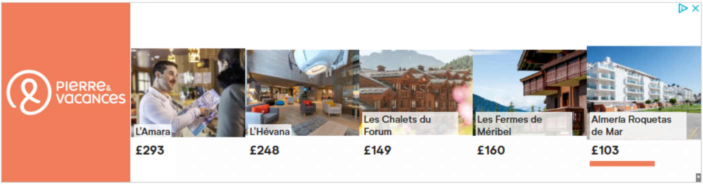

Pierre& vacances
L'Amara £293
L'Hévana £248
Les Chalets du Forum £149
Les Fermes de Méribel £160
Almería Roquetas de Mar £103

7. Family cruising in Burgundy and Provence

TAIN L'HERMITAGE

Cruise through Burgundy and Provence on the Rhône
PAM MCLEAN

A river cruise is like a greatest hits package, and it is fair to say France has had some chart-toppers over the years. So why not showcase them to a younger generation? Uniworld reserves certain summer dates for family-friendly trips. Its Burgundy and Provence cruise on the Rhône and Saône has activities for children, including a Van Gogh-themed painting class (break out the yellow), wildlife watching by kayak, cooking classes and a tour of a chocolate workshop. Parents or grandparents may enjoy a vineyard hike and wine tasting, or a bike tour for the whole family.
Details Seven nights' all-inclusive from £2,699pp, including flights and activities, on the Burgundy and Provence itinerary, departing on June 14 (uniworld.com)

Book now

8. A walking wine tour in Alsace

If a sparkling wine tour seems a little indulgent, balance things out by adding a walking element. It's 50 years this year since crémant d'Alsace gained an official AOC rating, although the local vintners had been enjoying their prized fizz for many years before that. UK-based Macs Adventure has a seven-night tour along France's oldest official wine route, passing through the vineyards around Kaysersberg, Turckheim and Eguisheim, with their half-timbered houses and distinctive German flavour. Walking distances average about seven miles a day.
Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,159pp, including train transfers in France and guided walks (macsadventure.com)

9. Ski like a king in Courchevel

Courchevel is loved by royals and tech tycoons alike
GETTY IMAGES

Courchevel in the Three Valleys courts royalty as well as tech tycoons and hedge fund managers with its ever more luxurious digs. William and Kate have skied here on several occasions, staying in very private chalets. They may well like the seven-bedroom Lord of Snow, which opened this season with prices of up to £220,000 a week. If that makes the new Rosewood Hotel seem modest by comparison, it isn't, and for maximum bragging rights a short stay here is hard to beat. Located on Le Jardin Alpin piste with just 51 rooms, naturally it is ski-in, ski-out. Along with the standard luxury features is a cigar room, curiously styled as the interior of a pine cone.
Details Room-only doubles from £2,010 (rosewoodhotels.com). Fly to Geneva or take the train to Moûtiers

10. Sip cognac at the source

Hôtel Chais Monnet & Spa was once a cognac trading house
LEADING HOTELS OF THE WORLD

Beloved of hip-hop moguls, cognac — or "yak", as it's known in the hood — is the lifeblood of the eponymous region in the southwest of France. The area tends to get second billing to nearby Bordeaux, though it is a favourite of holidaying Parisians who enjoy a tipple at any of its 270 distilleries. The rapper Jay-Z is one of the local producers — his D'ussé VSOP is known for its full-bodied, slightly spiced aroma — no doubt he would be comfortable at the Hôtel Chais Monnet &

Spa. Once a cognac trading house, it is now a five-star retreat part-owned by the Soho Farmhouse investor Javad Marandi. While the pool and spa may be hard to leave, the property has two vintage 2CVs that guests can use to tour the region. Be sure to agree on a designated driver first.
Details B&B doubles from £255 (chaismonnethotel.com). Fly to Bordeaux

Book now

11. Happy camping in Brittany

Domaine des Ormes has plenty of activities for families including zip lines

IMAGERA

Remember those family camping breaks that made us fall in love with France in the first place? The good news is France *en plein air* is still there — and the campsites are far better equipped. Eurocamp's Domaine des Ormes, about 20 miles from the St Malo ferry port, has an indoor waterpark with slides and a wave pool. There are outdoor pools too, and activities from horse riding and archery to a treetop adventure with zip lines. There's even an 18-hole golf course on site. If you can tear the kids away, the beach is 20 minutes' drive away at Cherrueix, and the pretty city of Rennes is 45 minutes away.
Details Seven nights' self-catering for four in a hut from £263. Take the ferry to St Malo

Book now

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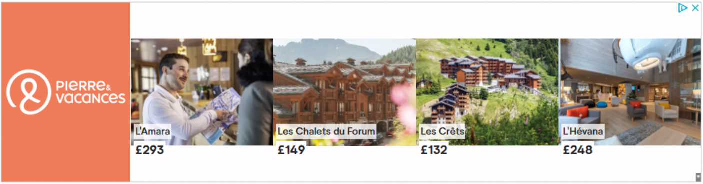

12. Paris for the Six Nations

Maro Itoje and the England squad will face France in the Six Nations in France

DAVID ROGERS/GETTY IMAGES

All eyes will be on Les Bleus as the Six Nations rugby union championship kicks off on February 5 at the Stade de France in Paris, where the 2025 champions square off against Ireland. Matches are held across the UK, Ireland, France and Italy, and of the home nations only England will face France on French soil — in the final match of the championship on March 14. It's fair to say the atmosphere will be something to remember. Accommodation is at the Ibis Paris Eiffel Tower, which is comfortable but not fancy, though there are options to upgrade.
Details Three nights' B&B from £825pp, including match tickets (englandrugbytravel.com). Fly to Paris

13. Sweet stay near Chambéry

Château de Candie has the feel of a boutique hotel

Château de Candie is an unexpected find ten minutes' drive from Chambéry, so it's a smart add-on to a ski trip or a summer mountain getaway. With 25 rooms it's just the right size to feel convivial, and the decor ranges from the simple and cosy to the rather lavish Duchess Tower. It has the feel of a boutique hotel in a lovely old building. A summer visit brings the added pleasure of its outdoor pool, and wine tasting in the adjacent vineyard.
Details B&B doubles from £184 (chateaudecandie.com). Fly to Chambéry

Book now

14. Sustainable Corsica