

1 Family Highlights of Brittany



France has represented different things to me at various crucial stages of my life: as a teenager spending long indolent summers in the country home of a French family; as a carefree student drunk on Gallic culture in Paris; as a thirty-something enjoying my first holiday with my husband-to-be; and as a house hunter while pregnant with my first baby five years ago. But I've come to experience this wonderful country the most deeply as a mum, living in and exploring France with my two young sons, and learning to appreciate to the full its manifold charms: stunning landscapes, a laidback attitude to life, and – last but by no means least – superb food and drink!

I'm not alone – 75 million foreign visitors to France each year make it the world's most popular holiday destination. A great many of these are British families, attracted by a number of factors – notably, France's proximity to Britain, especially with the blossoming of low-cost air travel, and its lower living costs, which make eating out and staying in interesting accommodation much more affordable than in the UK.

Brittany, easily accessible from Britain and boasting kilometres of stunning coastline, has long been a favourite with visitors from across the Channel. Unspoilt beaches, untouristy inland sites bursting with authentic Breton culture, and child-friendly crêperies are just a few of its draws. This is also a region awash in myths and legends: countless

Breton festival



sites are said to be linked with Merlin, Viviane, Sir Lancelot and other Arthurian figures, or with *korrigans* – shapeshifting Breton fairies with red flashing eyes, who like to substitute human children with changelings. The tales of mermaids and cities lost beneath the waves, recounted throughout this guide, are bound to enchant children of all ages.

Coming back down to earth, I'd like to stress that visiting France with children is not without its frustrations – for me, spoilt by having lived in central London with its round-the-clock facilities, the hardest aspect of French life has been the rigid and rather limited restaurant opening times and the tendency of shops, banks and businesses to shut down for three hours in the middle of the day. However, once you've got your head around this and adjusted your routines accordingly, you'll find Brittany one of Europe's most delightful regions to visit with children. Just bear in mind that the weather can turn nasty on you whatever the season, and make sure you save some of those wonderful museums and aquariums for rainy days!

BRITTANY FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS

Best Family Events The 'festival of children in Brittany', **Bugale Breizh**, brings together most of the region's children's traditional dance groups – around 1,000 youngsters in all – in the Côtes d'Armor town of Guingamp, renowned for Breton dancing. Over a single day in early July, participants as young as five dress in historical costume, while young visitors can take part in dance and workshops including puppet-making, cooking, traditional games and Breton wrestling. See p. 110.

Later that month or in early August, Lorient in the Morbihan hosts the **Festival Interceltique**, a week-long gathering of Celts from all over Western Europe. In addition to Celtic traditional, classical, folk, jazz and rock

music and dancing, there are Breton games and sports galore, including demonstrations of and free tuition in *boules*, skittles, tug-of-war and more, plus workshops on woodland games. Some evenings are 'Nuits Magiques', with pipe bands, dancers, choirs and firework displays. See p. 200.

Best Cities **St-Malo** in the Ille-et-Vilaine is a combination of ancient walled pirates' city and gorgeous seaside resort. It also offers some of the best shopping in Brittany or Normandy, and has a fantastic aquarium. See p. 63.

Finistère's naval port of **Brest** may not be the prettiest city but it has a cracking sealife centre – one of the world's best – and a stunning natural bay, the Rade de Brest, which you can sail through in the company of cargo and military ships. Its former Nazi submarine pens are just one



Harbour, St-Malo

fascinating sight among its museums and other attractions. See p. 148.

Best Natural Attractions The Côtes d'Armor's **Côte du Granit Rose**, with its pinky-brown rocks eroded into odd shapes resembling skulls, tortoises and piles of crêpes, is one of France's most famous stretches of coast. A signposted circuit takes you past gorgeous turquoise bays, and some of the houses appear to be squashed between boulders. See p. 115.

The valley of **Huelgoat** in Finistère is strewn with as many legends as it is strangely shaped rocks. The best known, the Roche Tremblante or 'trembling rock', weighs about 100 tonnes but is balanced so precariously a child can make it move. Some people claim to make out wild boars' heads in the rocks of the Mare aux Sangliers and see fairies bathing in the Mare aux Fées. See p. 156.

In the Morbihan, the inland sea of the **Golfe du Morbihan** has a magical landscape of tiny

Côte du Granit Rose



Speaking in Tongues: The Breton Language

About 300,000 inhabitants of Brittany (and some people in the Loire Atlantique, which used to be part of Brittany) still speak Breton, which is descended from a branch of Celtic languages brought to the region by Roman-British settlers. Cornish and Welsh are the modern-day languages to which it's most closely related, and it's comprised of four dialects, though there are no set areas in which these are spoken – the language as a whole varies slightly between one village and its neighbours. It's never been an official language of France, despite efforts by supporters for state recognition, and this is one factor in its decline (1.3 million people spoke it in 1930, and around half of the population of southern Brittany spoke no other language, not even French). On the other hand, there have been some positive developments – in the 1970s Diwan schools (unfunded by the state) were set up to teach children Breton, and in 2004 the *Astérix* books (p.114) were translated into Breton and Gallo (another language of Brittany, based on Latin) – an important symbolic step given that *Astérix* is said to be based in Brittany. And as you venture deeper into Brittany, from about the Côtes d'Armor onwards, you'll begin to see street signs and place names in Breton as well as French.

It's by no means an easy language to pronounce, and you don't need to speak any to get by in Brittany, but you may have fun looking out for, recognising and trying out some of the following phrases on your travels:

Breizh – Brittany
brezhoneg – the Breton language
demat/devezh mat/salud dit – hello
kenavo – goodbye
ken emberr – see you soon
trugarez – thank you
mar plij – please
deuet mat oc'h – you're welcome
degemer mat – welcome
kreiz-kêr – town centre
da bep tu – all directions
porzh-houarn – train station
skol – school
ti/ty – house
ti-polis – police station
ti an douristred – tourist office
ti-kêr – town hall
krampouezh – crêpes
chistr – cider

islands that you can see by boat or from a plane or hot-air balloon. See p. 205.

Best Animal Park The **Domaine de Ménez-Meur** in Finistère is a conservation park with farm, forest and country circuits where you can see wolves, boar and deer, and endangered Breton breeds. Observation hides and viewing points are ubiquitous, and there are pony-and-trap rides and nature-related activities. See p. 159.

The Morbihan's **Ferme du Monde** is a remarkable farm with more than 400 domestic animals from around the world (including yaks, buffaloes and camels), created entirely by disabled workers. The eclectic programme of events includes calf races, balloon sculpting and traditional bread-making, and there's a children's farm, a *petit train*, pony rides, an animated scale model of a Breton village, puppet shows, and a play area. See p. 208.

Best Aquarium The **Grand Aquarium** in St-Malo in the Ille-et-Vilaine has an amazing **Nautibus** mini-submarine ride and a Bassin Ludique for young children, with a touchpool and funky interactive installations. See p. 72.

In Finistère, Brest's space-station-like **Océanopolis** is one of the world's very best sealife centres, with a penguin colony, a multiscreen helicopter trip over Antarctica, a glass lift down past

the shark tank and much, much more. See p. 160.

Best Beach Resorts

Untouristy **St-Lunaire** in the Ille-et-Vilaine is a tranquil family resort with four lovely beaches, children's clubs and watersports, open-air family film screenings and lots of activities. See p. 66.

On its own peninsula in Finistère, **Carantec** is an intimate, relaxed, quite chic resort with masses of children's activities in summer, including beach clubs, free concerts, dance shows, circus acts, drawing and painting lessons, and a nature trail. You can tour the bay with its bird reserve and sea fort by canoe or cruiser, and there are six beaches, including the Plage de Kéleñn with its sailing centre, play area, striped bathing huts and cafés. See p. 152.

Best Islands Wild and wind-lashed **Ouessant** 20km off the Finistère coast is home to the world's most powerful lighthouse, a lighthouse museum and unique dwarf black sheep. Explore it on foot, by bike, on horseback or by pony and trap. See p. 153.

Brittany's largest island, **Belle-Ile** off the Quiberon peninsula in the Morbihan, is a chic favourite among Parisians for its mild climate and idyllic beaches. Join local youngsters bodyboarding at Port Donnant, or climb a lighthouse, take a bus or taxi tour, hire a pony-and-trap or go horse-riding. See p. 202.

Best Boat Trips The *bâteau-promenades* on the lovely Rance estuary between St-Malo and Dinard in the Ille-et-Vilaine takes you past islands, coves, watermills, *malouinières* (merchants' country dwellings), fishing villages and marine wildlife, including – if you're lucky – seals. Lunch and dinner trips include a 'Pirate's Menu' for children. See p. 81.

Trips in the *Capitaine Némó*, a catamaran with submarine viewing 'salons', allow you to get up close and personal with marine life around the Iles Glénan off the coast of Finistère, with guided commentary in French by a marine expert. See p. 170.

Best Forest The *Fôret de Brocéliande* (or Paimpont) in the Ille-et-Vilaine is a wonderland of Arthurian myths and atmospheric ancient monuments, as well as a scenic area for walking, riding and mountain biking. See p. 67.

Best Outdoors Activities The forest of Villecartier in the Ille-et-Vilaine is home to the *Parc des Grands Chênes* with its acrobatic routes through the trees. Bring a picnic for lunch by the lake with its *Port Miniature*, where you can ride replica ferries, tugs, steamboats and fishing boats amidst scale models of Breton landmarks. You can also orienteer, walk and ride ponies. See p. 87.

The Ille-et-Vilaine also has a *Vélo Rail* – a system of quirky two-person bikes, joined side-by-side, that you ride along old train tracks through the heart of nature. See p. 88.

The Côtes d'Armor has a summer *Cap Armor* programme of free or cheap activities for locals and tourists across the *département*, including riding, mountain biking, sea canoeing, diving, volleyball, tennis, horse-and-carriage riding and Breton dancing. See p. 128.

Océanopolis, Brest





Parc des Grands Chênes

Best Museum The expanded **Musée de Bretagne** in Rennes in the Ille-et-Vilaine is a must-see for visitors to Brittany, tracing the region's history and identity through objects (including old toys), costumes, videos and more. It shares a building with the **Espace des Sciences**, a science museum with a planetarium and the Laboratoire de Merlin – a discovery zone with 30 hands-on installations. See p. 78.

On a coast bristling with majestic lighthouses, the **Musée des Phares et Balises** on Ouessant off Finistère is the world's only museum on the history of lighthouses and maritime signals. As well as navigation aids, there are models demonstrating the dangerous process of building lighthouses, plus objects from shipwrecks and displays on the harsh lives of lighthouse-keepers. See p. 168.

Fort la Latte



Best Castles The partially-ruined 13th century **Château de la Hunaudaye** in the Côtes d'Armor has child-friendly guides, a booklet with discovery trails, and free daily archaeology and weaving workshops in summer so parents can explore the medieval remains while the children get creative. Summer also sees spectacular *son-et-lumière* shows, and in September there's a Children's Day with games and workshops. See p. 123.

Also in Côtes d'Armor is one of the most dramatic sights on the entire Breton coast: the fortified medieval **Fort la Latte** rising from jagged cliffs against a backdrop of blue sea. Famous as a location for the final scenes of the 1958 film *The Vikings*, it has two drawbridges and the dungeon, plus an 18th century oven used to 'cook' cannonballs (to set enemy ships on fire). See p. 123.

Best Themepark The **Village Gaulois** in the Côtes d'Armor is a collection of Celtic-themed games in a setting out of an *Astérix* book, run by an association that channels profits into schools in Africa. See p. 128.

Best Art Site For just one day a year, in June, the hamlet of Nizon in Finistère hosts **Hangar't**, a quirky 'Fête des Cabanes' with installation pieces by modern artists placed in little huts that have been created from leaves, branches and other natural materials by local children. See p. 168.

Best Markets Best known for its mysterious megaliths, Carnac in the Morbihan has a stylish beach resort that – in addition to lots of children's activities – hosts **Nocturnes** evening markets in July and August, with stalls full of local produce and crafts. See p. 203.

Best Shops An unexpectedly great place for gifts and toys is **La Droguerie de Marine** in St-Malo in the Ille-et-Vilaine, an ancient marine hardware store that resembles an exotic ship. Alongside classic products for sailors there's a treasure trove of tin Pop Pop boats, games, ship's models, compasses, tin whistles, homewares and books. There's even a grocery section with local delicacies, from fish ravioli to salted-butter caramels. See p. 89.

In Concarneau in Finistère, the **Biscuitier Chocolatier Glacier Lanicol** has huge decorative chocolate animals to admire as you help yourself to some of the riotously colourful giant and mini meringues, tempting slabs of chocolate, mouth watering *kouignettes* (moist little cakes in praline, chocolate and almond, lime and other flavours), and *torchette* biscuits containing Breton seaweed. See p. 174.

BEST ACCOMMODATION

Best Family-Friendly Option
The **Résidence Reine Marine** in St-Malo in the Ille-et-Vilaine

has pristine modern apartments with sea views, direct beach access and use of an indoor pool, sauna, bar, games room, breakfast service, babysitting and laundrette. You pay a fraction what you would at the *résidence's* big sister, the Grand Hôtel des Thermes, but can use its famous seawater therapy centre and children's and beach clubs. See p. 97.

Best Grand Hotels The **Grand Hôtel des Bains** at Locquirec on the northern Finistère coast is an elegant 18th century seafront hotel with a fashionable New England feel and awesome bay views from its family rooms and beautiful decked terraces. As well as direct access to a sandy beach, it has an indoor saltwater pool, a Jacuzzi and spa, and there's a

nearby sailing and diving school for all the family. The restaurant serves healthy food based on local seafood and organic produce. See p. 176.

In the Morbihan, close to Lorient, the **Château de Locguénolé** has 2km of private shoreline, a large outdoor pool beside its 'winter garden', which houses saunas, a Turkish bath and massage rooms, a tennis court, bike hire, a private pontoon for those arriving by boat and even its own helicopter offering trips to the Golfe du Morbihan, Belle-Ile and more. You stay in the castle itself or in its 18th century stone cottages 4km (2.5 miles) away towards the beaches but sharing its amenities, which include a Michelin-starred restaurant. See p. 224.

Château de Locguénolé





Le Lodge Kerisper

Best Seaside Hotels The **Castel Régis** at Brignogan-Plages in Finistère is a moderately priced option with a little sandy beach of its own, as well as lush gardens with children's play equipment and a panoramic waterside lounge with books and children's games – a great place to watch the sunset over a glass of wine. There's also a tennis court, canoes for hire, a sauna and an outdoor pool in high summer; rooms include family suites and a four-person 'gîte'. See p. 179.

At the northern end of Finistère's Baie d'Audierne, in the town of Audierne itself, the **Hôtel-Restaurant Le Goyen** is a genteel blue-shuttered harbour-front hotel with elegant rooms, most with a balcony facing the sea. There are spacious suites, some with panoramic views from their living rooms, a conservatory restaurant with a port view and a sophisticated

children's menu, plus room service and babysitting. See p. 184.

Most Stylish Hotels In the unlikely setting of the ferry port of Roscoff in Finistère, the **Hôtel du Centre** has a fresh modern look in its 16 rooms, some of which can interconnect to form 'family apartments' – think traffic-light red and grey decor and walls embellished with quotes about the sea by Breton poets. Its former sardine bar has been transformed into a tapas restaurant from which you can watch *boules* matches as you eat breakfast, sandwiches and salads, or local seafood. See p. 178.

Le Lodge Kerisper in the yachting town of La Trinité-sur-Mer in the Morbihan has trendy 'beach hut' decor but doesn't overlook childrens' or parents' needs – there's an outdoor pool that's heated year round and equipped with games and waterwings, beach games and



Le Ty Nadan

waterproofs to borrow, bikes (and child seats) for hire, children's books and films to watch on your in-room DVD player, babysitting, a stunning bar and a massage and beauty treatment space. Staff organise outings, including sailing trips to nearby islands, and make up picnics, or you can just doze under the fruit trees while the children run around. See p. 226.

Best B&Bs *Au Char à Bancs*

near St-Brieuc in the Côtes d'Armor has five shabby-chic rooms for up to four people, filled with quirky objects (old birdcages, radios and crockery), an utterly charming inn famous for its ham and sausage hotpot and rhubarb crêpes, a wooden fort and other original play equipment for children, Shetland ponies to pet (and ride in summer) and a river with pedalo hire in the warmer months. See p. 134.

At Rosnoën in Finistère, you can stay on a working honey farm with its own free museum, the **Ferme Apicole de Térénez**. The doubles and four-person rooms are fairly spartan, as you'd expect for the price, but all kinds of baby equipment is available, and there's also a playground, mountain bike hire and Ouessant sheep, hens, geese and other animals to pet in the wooded garden. Beaches are a 10-minute drive away. The farm shop sells gingerbread, nougat, biscuits and more. See p. 183.

Best Gîtes The chic *gîtes marins* at **Les Maisons de Bricourt**, part of superchef Olivier Roellinger's empire at Cancale in the Ille-et-Vilaine, are in a league of their own – seaside cottages with New England decor, they boast log fires, cute sleeping nooks for children, deluxe bathrooms, and superb kitchens with ovens designed by Roellinger

and lots of complimentary goodies. A few steps away lies a vegetable and herb garden where you can pick ingredients for dinner on your private terrace. See p. 90.

More affordably, **La Villeneuve**, a complex of eight gîtes on the gorgeous Bélon estuary in Finistère, has an outdoor pool, a play area, a *boules* pitch and table tennis, woods to build dens in and lawns to run around on, plus practicalities such as cots, highchairs, child-safety gates, babysitting and a communal laundry. See p. 188.

Best Campsites **Le Ty Nadan** at Locunolé in Finistère has an outstanding range of activities, including canoeing on the river or sea, horse and pony rides, watercycling, treetop acrobatic courses, tennis and pedaloing. As well as four-star campsite standards such as a pool complex with waterslides and a paddling pool, it has babysitting and great children's clubs offering zoo trips, insect hunts, puppet shows, crêpe-making, films and more. Guests with tents can hire fridges, cots and highchairs, or there are mobile homes, a couple of apartments, and wooden chalets by the river. See p. 187.

Also in Finistère but a totally different kettle of fish, the **Aire Naturelle de Keraluic** at Plomeur is a small 'green' campsite based around a renovated Breton farm in the heart of the countryside and surrounded by forests yet only 6km (3.75 miles) from the coast. Facilities are kept

to a minimum, but there's an unobtrusive play area, table tennis, a *boules* terrain, a games room with chess, cards and so on, and a cosy stone-walled library with books for all ages. B&B accommodation and studios are also available. See p. 186.

BEST EATING OPTIONS

Best Children-Friendly Restaurants On the busy Plage du Kélen in Finistère, **Le Petit Relais** is a brasserie/pub/bar/*glacier* with a fine terrace, long opening hours, free Internet access, games, books and colouring sheets for children, and bottle-heating and baby-changing facilities. Come for late breakfasts/brunches, snacks (sandwiches, pastries and ice creams), and an unusually wide-ranging menu that includes tarts, *croques*, pasta dishes, salads, *chili con salsa*, Italian platters, Russian caviar and *moules Bretons* (mussels with cider). See p. 190.

Also in Finistère, at Landerneau with its famous bridge, the **Restaurant de la Mairie** goes all out to ensure relaxed family mealtimes, with a baby-changing room, toys and a pretty patio with a resident tortoise. Children get a good-value menu of tried-and-tested favourites, while parents can enjoy the speciality *timbale Neptune* – prawns, scallops and mushrooms in Cognac and



Seafood Restaurants, Cancale

cream – or other hearty local fare such as duck or veal kidneys. See p. 191.

Best Seafood Au Biniou in the family resort of Le Val-André in the Côtes d'Armor is a stylish fish restaurant popular with locals for its shellfish platters, mussels from a nearby bay and fresh local fish cooked simply or in more surprising ways – perhaps with coriander and chive noodles and Vietnamese fish sauce butter. The under-10s menu features excellent fish and top-notch desserts. See p. 138.

La Corniche at Brignogan-Plages on the northern Finistère coast looks like a sailors' dive but serves incredible seafood against panoramic bay views. The changing menus, written up on large chalkboards, might feature exquisite skate wing and delicious 'fisherman's stew', while the children's creamy monkfish comes with some of

the best *frites* they'll ever taste. See p. 190.

Best Crêperies The super-friendly **Crêperie des Grèves** at Langueux in the Côtes d'Armor uses local farm produce, much of it organic, in its faultless galettes and crêpes, whether egg, ham or cheese, sugar and butter or chocolate versions for children, or more grown-up recipes such as smoked sausage, scallops with *julienne* vegetables or plump cod. Books for children are piled by the hearth, or they can wander out to the seaside play area as you enjoy a *bolée* of cider and keep an eye out from the window. See p. 141.

Also in the Côtes d'Armor, in the resort of St Cast-le-Guildo, the **Crêperie Chez Marie** has eccentric ornaments, including goblins, witches, frogs and pigs, walls covered with outsized flower frescoes, and a front terrace safely set on a pedestrianised

street. Its all-day service makes it a good option for early dinners – especially given its wide-ranging menu, which includes galettes and crêpes but also the likes of steak and chips, fish or cheese tartlets, feta and olive salads, omelettes, and the town's mussels. See p. 139.

Best Vegetarian Food Not exclusively vegetarian, **Le Café Bleu** within St-Malo's walled city in the Ille-et-Vilaine offers great veggie salads and other non-meat options among its tasty galettes, savoury and dessert crêpes, and hearty sandwiches. Sometimes customers get a free *dégustation* (taster) of veggie pâté and bread, and most ingredients are organic and/or Fair Trade. If you're self-catering, you can stock up on organic mueslis, tuna terrines, Fair Trade coffee and so on while you're here. If you can't tear yourself away from the beach a minute's walk away, all dishes can be provided as takeaway. See p. 105.

Best Ethnic Restaurant Amid a sea of crêperies and seafood joints, the **Via Costa**, a camp Brazilian-themed 'fashion lounge' by the beach at Etables-sur-Mer in the Côtes d'Armor, stands out. In a decor of fairy lights and exotic flowers, you can enjoy everything from tandoori chicken brochettes and Thai salad to the speciality 'Brazilian' pizza with mozzarella, chocolate and banana. Save room for outlandish desserts

such as crêpe 'tagliatelle' with red fruits, *sirop de menthe* and basil. You can also get tapas in the bar. See p. 140.

Best Outdoor Eating Le Surf at St-Lunaire in the Ille-et-Vilaine masquerades as a humble snack bar but somehow produces an amazing variety of wonderful dishes from its tiny kitchen, at bargain prices. You can enjoy anything from nutella and banana paninis to Indonesian king prawn salad with seaweed butter on its covered terrace or at one of its tables lined up along the sea wall, looking down over the untouristy Plage de Longchamp with its rock pools. See p. 106.

A great picnic spot is the **Fôret de Villecartier**, also in the Ille-et-Vilaine. You can work up an appetite on the treetop adventure course, or orienteering, walking or riding ponies, and after your picnic you can relax in a pedalo or a replica ferry or steamboat on the lake. See p. 87.

Best Views At the **Château d'Eau** at Ploudalmézeau in Finistère, a 50m (165 ft) high former watertower with 360-degree views of the ocean and countryside, food is almost an irrelevance. But the galettes and crêpes, some of which are named in honour of keepers of local lighthouses, are good, and there's all-day service. See p. 192.

Also in Finistère, the more elaborate **Restaurant Patrick**

Jeffroy at Carantec has a panoramic dining room looking out over the yacht-filled Baie de Morlaix. The food is expensive and gorgeously presented – the daily-changing children's menu might include such delights as hermit crab and avocado salad, local pollack with new potatoes, and chocolate cake with strawberry sorbet. See p. 189.

Best Breakfasts In the picturesque oyster-farming port of Cancale in the Ille-et-Vilaine, the laidback little **Café du Port** has a decked harbour terrace where those tired of Continental pastries can get cooked breakfasts and freshly squeezed juices at fair prices. On a sweltering day, don't miss the iced chocolate drinks. See p. 102.