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10

TOP BEAUTY
SPOTS IN
FRANCE

MATT PRESTON
The world's best
butter chicken

10

OF LES PLUS BEAUX SPOTS IN FRANCE

From chic city streets to bucolic villages and ritzy beaches, Kerry Parnell finds beauty at every turn

Whether you're window-shopping Chanel in Paris, yacht-gazing in Saint-Tropez or sipping luxe bubbles in Champagne, the French know how to do things in style. So it's little wonder the nation is home to some of the chicest spots in the world, starting with its fashionable capital city. In fact, you're spoilt for choice, with gorgeous villages and towns, beaches and countryside. Here are 10 of the most beautiful places to visit in France.

Paris

The terrace of the Signature Eiffel Suite at the Hôtel Plaza Athénée.



Perfect Paris

It's renowned as one of the most beautiful cities in the world for good reason. Not many capitals can rival the grand boulevards of Paris, lined with Haussmann architecture and pavement cafés. Whether you visit landmarks like Notre-Dame and the Louvre, or wander the streets window-shopping the boutiques and pâtisseries, Paris is especially pleasing on the eye. While the Champs-Élysées is dubbed “the world’s most beautiful avenue”, picturesque Rue de l’Abreuvoir in Montmartre and Rue Crémieux in the 12th arrondissement are Instagram-favorites. Paris is full of beautiful hotels, but one of its loveliest is the historic Plaza Athénée on high-end Avenue Montaigne, with its famous red-canopied courtyard, fabulous views of the Eiffel Tower and Dior spa. It’s one of a handful of hotels awarded the prestigious “Palace” rating by the French government. dorchestercollection.com; parisjetaime.com

Continued next page



Nice

8 The Châteaux of the Loire
 Even the word “château” sounds prettier than the English “castle”, or “manor house”, and France is packed with spectacular châteaux you can visit and even stay in. There are châteaux all over the country, but the Loire Valley has the densest collection, boasting around 300 and earning its name Valley of the Kings. Must-sees include Château de Chambord, Château de Chenonceau, Royal Château of Amboise, Château de Villandry and Château du Clos Lucé, where Leonardo da Vinci died.
loirevalley-france.co.uk

9 Marvellous monuments
 France is home to 53 Unesco World Heritage Sites, which range from famous buildings including the gilded Palace of Versailles, Bourges and Chartres Cathedrals, Pont du Gard Roman aqueduct near Nimes and the magical pilgrimage site of Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy, as well as pretty Canal du Midi

2 Ritzy Riviera
 From Cannes with its famous film festival to historic Nice, spectacular village Eze to the glamour of uber-rich Saint Tropez, the French Riviera – or Côte d’Azur – has been luring the jet set in summer ever since Coco Chanel first got a suntan there in the 1920s. Now it’s packed with luxury hotels, villas and beach clubs. If you want the full experience, check in to The Maybourne Riviera on the cliffside at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. This bucket-list destination has 65 rooms, four restaurants, private beach and the group’s second Surrenne longevity spa, after London’s The Emory.
maybournriviera.com

3 Terrific towns
 As well as its villages, France has handsome towns and cities to discover. Pretty Honfleur, on the Normandy coast, with its medieval architecture and colourful waterfront houses, is a delight, as are Dinan and Saint-Malo in Brittany. Medieval fortified Carcassonne in Languedoc is much-photographed and cobbled Colmar Old Town, in the Grand Est region, with its multi-coloured half-timbered houses, looks like something out of a fairy tale. Other lovely spots include Provence’s L’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, famous for its antique shops, plus Grasse, near Cannes, renowned for its perfume.
france.fr/en

4 Les Plus Beaux Villages
 So plentiful are beautiful French villages, they even have their own organisation. Les Plus Beaux Villages de France is a group of 180 bucolic settlements spread across the country –

from Rochefort-en-Terre in Brittany to Saint-Veran high in the Alps to “Village of the Sun” Coaraze near Monaco – awarded the accolade for their architecture and heritage. The Dordogne boasts a cluster of 10 villages including Beynac-et-Cazenac, Domme, and La Roque-Gageac, and a great way to see them is on a self-guided Walking in the Dordogne tour from UTracks.
utracks.com;
les-plus-beaux-villages-de-france.org

5 Serene Somme
 While you might not think the battlefields of northern France would feature in a most-beautiful list, the region has long inspired artists. From beautiful towns on the coast such as Saint-Valery-sur-Somme to the grand city of Amiens, the region is full of rolling countryside peppered with farms and villages. Even the war cemeteries with their manicured gardens are places of tranquil beauty, such as the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, where you can climb the central tower and gaze out at the countryside. Mat McLachlan Battlefield Tours’ four-day Western Front Explorer lets you appreciate both the countryside and the history.
battlefields.com.au

6 Pristine beaches
 Australia might be famous for its beaches but French beaches are a whole other experience. France has 5500 km of coastline, which extends from the North Sea and English Channel to the Atlantic coast, then around the southern side of the country to the hot, calm Mediterranean Sea. From the boardwalk of Deauville on the north coast to the spectacular sweeping Plage de Tahiti in Brittany, the elegant seaside resort Biarritz on the Atlantic coast, or



From top: Castle Hill overlooking the Mediterranean Sea and Nice on the Côte d’Azur; Coquillade Provence hotel; summer is lavender season in the fields in Provence.

celebrity-packed Pampelonne Beach near Saint-Tropez, be prepared to encounter lines of sunloungers and parasols, plus lots of beautiful people in summer whites and luxe cossies.
france.fr/en

7 Lavender fields of Provence
 Every summer, the landscape turns purple in Provence when its famous lavender fields burst into bloom from June. If you’ve never visited a lavender farm, it really is a feast for the senses. Visit Sault, in the heart of the lavender region, where you can walk the Chemin des Lavandes (Lavender Path), take a guided tour, or drive the Routes de la Lavande. Stay in luxury boutique hotel Coquillade Provence, surrounded by lavender fields and vineyards, and once an 11th-century hamlet, with three restaurants, three swimming pools and a spa, featuring local herbal and vinotherapy treatments. It’s unlikely you’ll want to leave.
routes-lavande.com; coquillade.fr

and Nice, in the south of France. For a historic stay, check in to Airelles Château de Versailles, Le Grand Contrôle, built by Louis XIV’s favourite architect within the grounds of Versailles.
airelles.com

10 Wonderful wine regions
 Not only does it produce spectacular vino, but France’s wine regions are pretty special, too – Champagne and Burgundy have been designated Unesco World Heritage Sites, as has the Loire Valley, Bordeaux’s historic harbour city The Port of the Moon, and the nearby medieval village of Saint-Émilion. A wonderful way to see Bordeaux is on a river cruise and Scenic’s 11-day Beautiful Bordeaux voyage sails down the gentle waterways of three of France’s most beautiful rivers – the Gironde, Dordogne and Garonne, combining wine-tasting trips with spectacular sightseeing.
scenic.com.au



ESCAPE HOT LISTS

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