

How to celebrate spring in Charentes with Explore Cognac



As the first leaves return to the vines, Charentes slips into one of its most appealing seasons. Spring remains something of an insider's secret. Between April and June, this quietly compelling French destination near Bordeaux offers something increasingly rare: space, authenticity and the freedom to savour it at your own pace. The roads are quieter and the experiences – from tastings to tours – feel more personal. With seasonal

direct flights from the UK to La Rochelle, just a 2h30 train ride from Paris, and straightforward rail connections between Angoulême, Saintes and Cognac itself, exploring the region is sustainable and effortless.

Serene natural beauty and the great outdoors



Spring in Charentes is defined by lush landscapes. Rolling vineyards stretch across one of France's largest AOC areas, offering ideal conditions for **cycling and walking**, while the tranquil rivers and waterways allow for laid-back **river cruising**. The 'Apéro Boat' Cruise with [Charentes in Flow](#) (**new for 2026**) combines a peaceful cruise along the River Charente with a Cognac tasting, paired with local delicacies.

For keen cyclists, **five European and national routes weave through the countryside**, including the vineyards of Hennessy and Rémy Martin, with several Cognac houses offering tours and tastings. Routes such as [La Flow Vélo](#) - a 400km trail of gentle riding from Île d'Aix to Dordogne, passing through Rochefort, Saintes, the archaeological site of Angeac-Charente, Cognac and Angoulême - offer an unhurried way to discover the region's rich heritage and scenic beauty.

Towns of culture, heritage and history



At the heart of the region lies the town of [Cognac](#) itself, birthplace of French king Francis I. Nearby Jarnac and Segonzac sit at the heart of the vineyards, surrounded by estates that define the region's production such as Maison Courvoisier, one of the 'big four' producers. Those with a thirst to understand the distilling and ageing process of Cognac can visit the cellars, as well as those of the local winegrowers.

Nearby [Angoulême](#) is known as the capital of French comic strips and is a UNESCO Creative City, while to the west, [Saintes](#) offers a striking layer of Gallo-Roman history spanning two millennia with an impressive array of period monuments. The [Vals de Saintonge](#) is an area of blissful landscapes dotted with idyllic villages and takes pride in offering engaging activities from geocaching trails and escape games to river outings, parks and interactive heritage visits, perfect for families looking to explore the region.

On the coast, the port city of [La Rochelle](#) combines history with a dynamic and young energy, with a selection of great restaurants and bars such as Le Mary Lili, while nearby [Royan](#) retains the feel of a classic Belle-Époque seaside resort. Perched above the Gironde estuary, [Talmont-sur-Gironde](#) stands apart as one of France's *Plus Beaux Villages*, combining dramatic ocean views with an historic cliff-top citadel and exceptional vineyards, including [Les Hauts de Talmont](#) which now offers visitors a sensory exploration of their picturesque estate.

Cognac, land of spirits



A visit to Cognac is incomplete without indulging in a voyage of discovery of its eponymous spirit. Produced using a distillation process unchanged since the 17th century, this cosmopolitan eau-de-vie is a cornerstone of the region's culture and heritage, so much so that **4 June is the official World Cognac Day.**

The new experiences for 2026 are exciting and wide-ranging. [Martell Héritage](#) invites visitors to blend their own Cognac, while [Cognac Voyer Vaudon](#) offers aroma nosing kits to help identify the ages of different examples, with gift cards to be won. At [Cognac Paul Giraud](#), 'A story of water' takes visitors from the vineyard to a private cellar where a spring of fresh water flows all year round, highlighting the important role this element plays in the process of Cognac making. [Maison Brillet](#) blends floristry with a unique pear Cognac: after a personalised tasting, participants design their own glass dome of dried flowers.

As a drink, Cognac is equally enjoyed as an apéritif, lengthened with tonic, used in a classic cocktail or one reimagined by regional bartenders, or served neat over ice alongside local dishes such as seafood. Across the region, producers and chefs are also pairing it with both sweet and savoury dishes. At the [Normandin-Mercier](#) estate you'll find it **paired with chocolate**, while at the [Domaine de Pladuc](#), visitors **make their own samosas before savouring them with a glass.**



A place of terroir and delicacies



Food and drink are inseparable from their surroundings in Cognac. The emphasis on local delicacies is reflected at **high-end establishments** such as [Notes at La Nauve Hotel & Jardin](#), newly Michelin-starred for 2026, and [Christopher Coutanceau](#) in La Rochelle, with two stars - as well as at **simple bistros** like [Le Restaurant du Château](#) in Jarnac. Jump on board the [Bethanie](#) for a **gourmet cruise** along the tranquil River Charente from

Jarnac to Bourq-Charente. The **eight-cover Cellar Dinner** at [Delamain](#) is an exclusive gastronomic experience, featuring exquisite dishes each paired with a Delamain Cognac.

As a region, **Cognac today represents 13.23% of the entire French vineyard** (*source: BNIC*). It is here that the grapes used in Charentais wines are grown, as well as those used for **Pineau des Charentes**, an aromatic fortified wine with its own AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée). In Jonzac, the [Maison de la Vigne et des Saveurs](#) provides an eye-opening experience with expert testimonials from the winegrowers and distillers and a tour of a cooperage workshop to learn about the entire wine- and spirit-making process.

From **Barbezieux chicken** to **Chabichou du Poitou goats' cheese** and pale, sweet **Charentais melons** to **prized vinegars**, Cognac is rich in regional specialities rooted in both land and sea traditions. On the coast, the **Marennes-Oléron oyster** is the only oyster in France to hold a 'Label Rouge' certification and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status. Many are farmed in the marshlands of [l'île](#)

[d'Oléron](#), the **second-largest island in metropolitan France** and an ideal destination for cycling. Here, local chefs such as Romaric Villeneuve at [L'écume](#) showcase the region's bounty.

Where to stay: A selection of exemplary accommodation for all budgets

Five-star: [La Nauve Hotel & Jardin, Cognac](#)

Opened in 2023 and composed of three elegantly renovated, 19th-century buildings, La Nauve offers just 11 rooms, surrounded by lush gardens with a pool. Guests can enjoy a bar, brasserie and **Notes, a gastronomic restaurant with a new Michelin star for 2026**. The property is part of Relais & Châteaux and invites its guests to experience the true lifestyle "à la française".

Four-star: [Le Champlain, La Rochelle](#)

In a beautiful 17th-century convent, this charming hotel of 39 rooms is close to the city's major attractions. Newly renovated, the hotel offers moments of relaxation through a **new wellness space with dedicated treatment rooms**, a bar with terrace and flower garden, and a gourmet restaurant. Three generations of the Brisson family have managed the property since its opening in 1948.

Three-star: [L'Albatros, Île d'Oléron](#)

Located on the southern tip of Île d'Oléron, Hôtel-Restaurant L'Albatros is an idyllic property equipped with 18 rooms and 3 family suites, set against the backdrop of the Atlantic. The hotel invites guests to relax and unwind on one of its several terraces, perfect for enjoying the gourmet delights of both the restaurant and the **oyster bar with a view of the stunning coastline**.

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FURTHER READING

[Visit Explore Cognac's website](#)

[Explore Cognac 2026 press kit](#)

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