



Magnifique villa en front de mer à louer sur l'île de Ré - Luxurious Beachfront villa for Rent on Ile de Ré, France

January 2013 newsletter

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WHY RENT?

Settle into the daily pattern of Rétais life. Stay in your own villa. Enjoy meals at home, tasting local cheeses, saucissons, fruit and Rétais wines. Relax on your own terrace with a view of the sea. Meet your neighbours and shopkeepers and make new friends. Become less of a tourist and more of a welcome visitor.

What a wonderful treat! You do want to polish your French when you visit, but the locals are very friendly and patient with non-French speakers.

Enjoy the villa as much as my former visitors: one of my Australian friends once called the villa "a godsend".

My American girlfriend's husband said it was the villa God would have built had he had the money!

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN RENTING IN FRANCE?

Meeting the locals.

Speaking French.

Bottled gas for stoves.

Slower washing machines.

Careful use of electricity.

WHAT NOT TO EXPECT WHEN RENTING IN FRANCE?

Air conditioning.

Washcloths.

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THE COST OF THE EURO

Okay, it's true. The euro costs more this year. But there is good news for those who love travelling to France: **renting** is a wonderful way to keep down your expenses. Eating out in restaurants can take a huge bite out of your travel budget.

Renting allows you to **shop in local markets**, get good value on fresh produce and **eat the occasional meal at home**. Think of all the delicacies that you love to eat in France: robust cheeses, complex wines, hearty breads, home-made pasta, foie gras, marinated Provençal olives, elegant chocolates, pastries, and so on. Ordering these items in a fine restaurant can be expensive. Buying them in the local market and having them at home is a bargain. Shopping is a huge part of the fun. The weekly open-air markets held in most major villages are an event in themselves.

Pre-made foods are another special treat for those who want to eat local specialties at home without the work. At the **open-air market**, the poultry vendor will have revolving spits with chickens roasting bathed in local herbs. The sausage vendors will have a huge pan with paella cooking. You request the quantity you want, and they seal it in a plastic container, and you take it home. A wonderful midday meal! Throughout the season all villages have a traiteur, a store offering a large selection of pre-made food with such things as roast rabbit, sliced roast pork, homemade pasta, poached fish as well as elegant desserts in individual portions, and more. These are typically restaurant quality and are a wonderful way of getting a meal of local specialties you can enjoy in your own rental. Much less expensive than going to a restaurant.

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MASTERING THE FRENCH OPEN-AIR MARKET

In season, there is an open-air market every day in every one of the 10 villages of the Island. I recommend you visit a different one every day the first week: start with the closest one, the one in La Noue, then go to my favourite one, the one in La Flotte: the stalls are arranged around the medieval little square: you have never seen the like of it ! (La Flotte is my favourite village because of its fishing port, lighthouse, horseshoe-shaped beach, and daily open-air market)

The one with the most numerous take-away foods is in Saint-Martin “sous la halle”, off the harbour: it sells all sorts of fish, fresh oysters, salt from the salt marshes (but please, wait till you visit the marshes to buy your salt on the spot, it is so much more pleasant! And be sure you ask for “fleur de sel” (flower of salt). The biggest markets are in le Bois-Plage and La Couarde and they sell all sorts of different things, including clothes!

Markets are half-day only. 8:30 am to 1:30 pm. So, get there as early as possible, at least by mid morning. As all the locals are shopping too, parking is always a challenge. Arriving in the early part of the morning always helps.

Take a straw basket for your purchases. Merchants will give you small paper bags, but they get cumbersome to hold. The villa has such baskets in the back office for you to use. Or buy one at the market to take away.

Bring cash. Merchants only take cash for food purchases. Usually there are ATM machines around for you to get more if you need it, but it will save you time and footsteps if you come prepared. (There is an ATM in front of the “Poissonnerie” (fishmonger’s) in La Noue).

Explore. Many towns have very large markets. There are streets with stands just for fish and meat, others for cheese, olives, spices; still others for kitchen supplies, or flowers, or clothing. Take your time and explore.

Socialize with the vendors. Although the vendors are busy—this is after all their way of making a living--they often love to talk about their products. Most are local farmers and will offer tastes of cheese or honey or saucisson. If you stay for a few weeks, return to the same vendors: they will love to see you again and will offer you parsley or some little treat to show they are happy.

Notice how other shoppers select their purchases. Often vendors prefer to handle the produce for you, but will give you the exact piece you want. Do not worry about asking for a specific weight in grams. You can ask for “trois pêches blanches” (3 white peaches) or “huit tranches de saucisson” (8 slices of salami).

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TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

For many of my American guests this is their first trip to France or with their children. They often have two major concerns about travelling with children.

The first is: **Will owners be bothered by active American youngsters?**

The French love children and are very welcoming to families.

The majority of rental houses do welcome children. Homes that do not are typically those with some element that is potentially dangerous such as a hillside drop. Otherwise, Europeans themselves vacation with their children and so are happy to welcome youngsters.

Europeans use babysitters less often than Americans do and thus you often see entire families having dinner out in restaurants together. Except in the most formal restaurants, it is a common sight to see large families with their children enjoying a leisurely meal on a gravel patio.

The second question guests have is: **Is there enough to do in the area to keep youngsters entertained?**

Vacationing in season in the French countryside is a fun event for children.

The Europeans are on vacation themselves, and the little villages in the countryside have scheduled lots of special events. Travelling circuses come by, parades take place, merry-go-rounds are set up in town squares. Checking at the local tourist office will let you learn about all the special events that are taking place.

The simple act of exploring a foreign culture can be a huge adventure with children along. Figuring out all the different ways to flush the toilet is great fun. Discovering all the different ice cream pops that are sold is a treat! Learning to ask for a particular flavour in French is another adventure. If you slow down and enjoy the daily rituals of life in the village, you and your children will have lots of fun.

The weekly outdoor market is a real treat for adults and children alike. Select a market at one of the larger villages for the most fun. Colourful stands display all sorts of items from honey to soaps to exotic seafood to children's toys. With so many things to look at, all ages of children have a good time. The markets on Ile de Ré are typically half day so get there early and plan to select a restaurant for lunch in the town, too.

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MY ILE DE RE

The Ile de Re is a special French resort and one of my favourite places. Located in the Charente-Maritime, off the mid-Atlantic coast, it is famous among the French, but so far little known to foreigners. Years ago when our twin sons were born and my husband and I were looking for a plot of land to have a vacation villa built, there was scarcely a foreign tourist to be met there.

And how difficult it was to get the owner to part with one of the last plots of land directly on the beach! Finally, because she had to pay her “wealth tax”, the lady divided the land into two and sold half of it to a Swedish couple that have become some of our best friends.

This pretty island is just 30 km long by 5 km wide and has 10 villages on it. Blessed by a special micro-climate, the Ile de Ré has clear sunny warm weather for most of May through October. What is special, is what the island doesn't have. It has no billboards, no highways, no chain restaurants and no tall hotels. You definitely feel like you have arrived in a simpler more authentic French environment.

There is lots to do on the island. The villages are very charming with white washed walls and narrow lanes dotted with pink hollyhocks. Most of the villages have outdoor food markets which are a special treat. There is an excellent selection of local restaurants and stores. The sea, of course, is a main attraction. The north side of the island has picturesque harbours with lighthouses to match. The east side has pine forests leading to broad sandy beaches.

The island is covered with miles of excellent paved bicycle paths that wind from village to village through fields fragrant with local herbs, vegetables and ripening grapes. You often see entire families biking together with grandma and grandpa in their blue striped t-shirts, little kids on bikes with training wheels and tiny terriers perched in the baskets of mom or dad's bicycle.

The villages are lively in season with people strolling along the harbour, watching the fishing fleet come in, and enjoying the many outdoor cafes and excellent restaurants. Seafood is the specialty here with platters heaped high with mounds of crevettes grises (tiny fried shrimp) or huîtres (oysters). Fresh fish is often prepared with local wild herbs. Perhaps one of the most special things is visiting the marshes where salt is still raked by hand into picturesque cones to dry in the hot sun. The island is famous for its delicate fleur de sel (fine white sea salt) as well as the gros sel (coarse grey salt) still moist from the sea and often mixed with herbs. Each year, I bring home a bag of each.

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OUR PROPERTIES

In Paris
[The Apartment](#)

[The studio](#)

At Le Cannet, Cannes
[The Villa](#)

On Ile de Ré,
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