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Issue 1

Ryanair
Angouleme-Cognac airport
Flights to and from Stansted
begin March 31st

NEWS FROM **LA VIEILLE DISTILLERIE**

The aim of our regular newsletters is to share with you our pleasure at living in France, to help you to understand why the Poitou Charente enchants not only visitors to France but has attracted many of us from Britain to make it our permanent home. We shall also provide you with news of events and sightseeing attractions throughout the year and we shall endeavour to give you an insight into the Charente way of living, the culture and history of this historic region.

Walking with our dog, Millie, this morning we begin to see the signs of Spring, birdsong and nesting. The other day some friends saw a large flock of cranes flying in amazing formation over Angouleme - not something you would see in Britain because it is not on their flight path. After dark you can sometimes hear them calling to each other.

Next month in Le Tatre the apple blossom in the orchards by the lake will appear. Towards the end of April the apparently dead vines start to show their leaf for what might, or might not be, a great vintage.

We are now preparing to welcome you and others from all over Europe to our home. This diversity gives us great pleasure and we are learning from all the delightful people we meet. Last autumn a charming couple from Eindhoven stayed. They told us that each year in Eindhoven the schools close so that the children can join in a remembrance parade of World War II Operation Market Garden, a British parachute landing. On Armistice Day On November 11 we shared Remembrance Day with a 92 year old Brit on Parade.



The calendar of local events which is attached will give you some idea of things to do and see and places to visit in the Poitou-Charentes. We can help you to choose where to go and what to see during your stay in the region.

The Poitou-Charentes has such a variety of activities that whatever your interest you will never be short of something to do. At Easter we will see the start of the colourful and picturesque markets in nearly every town and village. There will be folklore presentations and art exhibitions as well as festivals which are a feature of the cultural activity of the Poitou-Charentes.

As Francophiles you may have wondered why most French towns have a street or Boulevard named Gambetta. He was Minister of the Interior during the siege of Paris in 1871(during the Franco-Prussian War) and escaped by balloon (a Montgolfier) to rally the French Army. Gambetta later became Prime Minister.



The hot air balloon invented by the Montgolfier Brothers.

The first manned flight was on 21st November 1783

The Poitou-Charentes is a land full of history, traditions and legends. Man has lived in this region since the prehistoric era. There are many historical sites, medieval sites and attractions as well. Being only 40 minutes from a marvelous Atlantic coastline, we have a climate that is second only after the Cote d'Azur with almost as many sunshine hours. There are beautiful beaches with pine clad dunes, reclaimed marshes, a paradise for seabirds, beautiful countryside with vineyards and sunflower fields, dotted with chateaux and red-roofs of villages. Many of whom were ancient Gaullist settlements.



One town, not to be missed, is Angouleme, historic Romanesque cathedral capital of the Charente. You can spend a fascinating day wandering its quaint cobbled streets and charming squares in, stopping off for a glass of wine at one of its many pavement cafes listening to the outdoor bands that play from June to September.



Angouleme Cathedral



View from Ramparts

Things to see in Angouleme:

- Cathedral
- Town Hall, once the Palace of Marguerite de Ravanna, with 13th and 15th century towers
- Museum with medieval stonework, 16th-20th century paintings, weapons, ceramics, African and Pacific art
- Museum with Gallo-Roman mosaics and roman antiquities
- Museum and memorial to the Resistance Movement
- Old houses dating from the 16th & 18th century

Angouleme is a city of festivals, the most famous of all being the Circuit des Remparts Race. Every year in the third week of September classic or vintage cars from all over Europe arrive in Angouleme for the famous exciting Circuit des Remparts race where they race around the medieval walls. The town is completely taken over by this event and spectators and competitors mix freely in the bars and restaurants. This year is the 70th anniversary of the event.



In April and May the street theatre festival and the Musique Métisses Jazz and Cross-over Music events begin..

During October and November there is the Piano en Valois festival, an annual series of classical and contemporary piano concerts.

Each year in the last week of January the International Comics festival is held. This festival is the main Comics festival in Europe when comic enthusiasts, cartoonists, publishers and writers from all over the world gather in the city for one of the liveliest festivals of the year. Angouleme is known as cartoon city and you will see amazing cartoons painted on the walls of over 150 buildings.

November sees the Gastronomades festival of fine foods and specialties from the Charente and different French regions.

Angouleme has been described as the "undiscovered gem of the Charente" - which so many tourists bypass perhaps being put off by the industrial commercial sprawl that greets the visitor. But if the visitor were to pass this urban sprawl they would discover a beautiful city built on a rocky promontory with its original ramparts that protected the town from invaders. Built of cream limestone the old town is perched high on a rock overlooking the Charente river encircled by boulevards.



Some Places to Visit

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- Near Saintes Paleosite at Saint Cesaire is the most modern prehistory centre in the world. Discovery of the bones of a young Neanderthal women in 1979 whose tribe lived in this area 35,000 years ago. The centre takes the visitor on a journey in time tracing evolution through a high-tech series of presentations.
- Chateau de Dampierre - a 12th century chateau with award winning gardens in exceptional surroundings at Dampierre-sur-Boutonne.
- Chateau La Rochefoucauld - said to be one of the finest examples of Renaissance architecture in France. The Rochefoucauld family, descendants, of Francois 1, has lived at the chateau since it was built in the 14th century.



Both chateaux are open to the public
for guided tours

- Talmont village is on a promontory in the Gironde estuary. Its 11th century church built in the Roman style overlooking the estuary has spectacular views of the estuary. It is one of the finest examples of religious architecture to be found in western France.





- Aubeterre-sur-Dronne - the village, perched on a steep hill above the river Dronne, is recognized as being one of the prettiest villages in France. With its narrow streets and ancient buildings it is one place not to be missed.
The tall houses have been built on terraces all the way up to the 14th century chateau. (There is an excellent modestly priced restaurant in the chateau) In summer cascades of flowers hand over the balconies of the houses. One of the most impressive sights is the 11th century monolithic church of Saint-Jean, part of which dates back to the 5th century. It is the tallest hewn-out church in the world, measuring some 20m at its highest point, and was a place to store the relics from the crusades. The monolithic church was a stop for pilgrims en route to Santiago de Compostelo.

We cannot end this newsletter without reference to Cognac; after all we do live in the heart of the Cognac countryside.

We have put together two **Holiday Options** - summer and winter

Summer

From May to October

Come and discover the vineyards of the Grande Champagne region, known as the French Tuscany.

What is included:

For 1 couple based on 2 nights stay to include bed and breakfast and 2 four course dinners with aperitif, wine and Cognac

- Drive through the vineyards of the Grande Champagne
- Visit the vineyard of a cognac producer who will explain the process of cognac production from grape picking to distillation
- Visit a traditional barrel factory (optional) or
- Visit the Museum Les Arts du Cognac
- Lunch at a traditional restaurant in the Grande Champagne
- Dinner/bed and breakfast

Tariff for 2 nights stay- 229 €

Additional nights can be added at our normal bed and breakfast price of 50 € per couple with dinner, if required at 25 € per person



Winter

From November to end of March

Only during the months of November to the end of March each year the distilleries work day and night and open their doors to the public. These months are known as the **Bonne Chauffes** for which there is no literal translation. During these months the Charentaise adapt their lives to the rhythm of the Stills. You can meet the distillers, watch the best Cognacs being distilled and learn about the art of distillation with people who maintain the traditions and pass them on from generation to generation.

What is included:

For 1 couple based on 2 nights stay to include bed and breakfast and 2 four course dinners with aperitif, wine and Cognac

- Visit to a distillery to watch and learn about the distillation of the best Cognac crus and enjoy guided tastings
- Visit to a cooperage (barrel factory) - optional visit
- Visit to the Museum Les Arts du Cognac
- Choice of trips to Aubeterre-sur-Dronne, Villebois-Lavalette, Angouleme, Christmas or Night Markets
- Lunch at a traditional restaurant in the Grande Champagne

Tariff for 2 nights stay- 229 €

Additional nights can be added at our normal bed and breakfast price of 50 € per couple with dinner, if required at 25 € per person