

Tips from the top



a beef and red wine jus, at Biquet Plage, a restaurant which pops up on Plage Mouret each summer (biquetplage.com; two courses £18). It seemed odd to serve seafood with side dishes you'd usually eat with steak, but God it was good.

Don't think that booking two weeks before is playing it safe – try two to three months.

You'll need to be *that* organised in summer for La Colombe d'Or (la-columbe-dor.com; doubles from £248, room only; mains about £35) on the French Riviera. It's a rustic restaurant with rooms where artists once paid with their art – you'll see the odd Picasso and Matisse – and the food is exquisite. Try the chicken fricassee with morels.

How to eat in France

By Rick Stein

When Cornwall's much-loved TV chef gets a holiday, he's off digging into France's finest food

For the best seafood, pause in Dieppe, Normandy. Most people get the ferry there, then just drive straight through. But not only is Dieppe really interesting historically, it also has a fantastic fish market. I ate a beautiful turbot cooked in salt at a restaurant called Le Turbot by the docks (leturbot.com; mains about £18), and lovely poached ray in olive oil and *sauce vierge* at Comptoir à Huîtres (12 Cours de Dakar; mains about £23).

The place to bed down is just outside the main tourist resorts. Every summer, I stay in a little village called L'Escalet in Ramatuelle. I sit on the beach and watch the yachts whizzing to Saint-Tropez and feel slightly superior. In Provence, I love the little town of Cassis

– it's like a Greek fishing port, with pastel-coloured houses tumbling down towards the sea. Eat at La Presqu'île (restaurant-la-presquile.fr; three courses £35) for great fish and views.

Eat when the French do. Restaurants in France have strict opening times. Lunch tends to be between 12pm and 2pm sharp. Don't be the guy who arrives at two minutes past two and gets cross.

But break some of the rules. Wine, for example: I love a white Burgundy with fish, but it's fine to load a light Provence rosé with ice cubes on a hot day, to make it a long lunchtime drink. And I ate an incredible meal in Leucate in southern France: octopus with garlic mash and

Chef's special: from top, the port promenade in Cassis, Provence; chicken fricassee with morels; the art-filled La Colombe d'Or

French patisserie is the best in the world. One of my favourites is a simple latticed prune tart from the Auvergne. A slice of that and a glass of Armagnac brandy is absolute heaven.

Don't just stick to the classics. There's some great modern French cooking. In the Dordogne, seek out a little cafe in the village of Trémolat called Les Tartines Etc. It serves fantastic duck burgers in a brioche bun with Comté cheese (vieux-logis.com; mains about £8).

Cornish seafood is just as good as French. Except for the whelks. French whelks are smaller and less daunting to eat than the ones you get in the UK. They're delicious with the mustard mayonnaise that is served all over Brittany and Normandy.

The new cookbook Rick Stein's Secret France is out now (BBC Books). ■

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