

The Best of France

France presents visitors with an embarrassment of riches—you may find yourself bewildered by all the choices. We've tried to make the task easier by compiling a list of our favorite experiences and discoveries. In the following pages, you'll find the kind of candid advice we'd give our closest friends.

1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **Hunting for Antiques:** The 18th- and 19th-century French aesthetic was gloriously different from that of England and North America, and many objects bear designs with mythological references to the French experience. France has some 13,000-plus antiques shops throughout the country. Stop where you see the sign ANTIQUAIRE or BROCANTE.
- **Dining Out:** The art of dining is serious business in France. Food is as cerebral as it is sensual. Even casual bistros with affordable menus are likely to offer fresh seasonal ingredients in time-tested recipes that may add up to a memorable meal. For our favorite restaurants in France, see “The Best Upscale Restaurants” and “The Best Affordable Restaurants,” later in this chapter.
- **Biking in the Countryside:** The country that invented La Tour de France offers thousands of options for bike trips. For a modest charge, trains in France will carry your bicycle to any point. **Euro-Bike & Walking Tours** of DeKalb, Illinois (© 800/321-6060; www.eurobike.com) offers some of the best excursions, including walking and cycling tours of areas such as Provence, Burgundy, and the Loire Valley. See chapter 3.
- **Shopping in Parisian Boutiques:** The French guard their image as Europe's most stylish people. The citadels of Right Bank chic lie on rue du Faubourg St-Honoré and its extension, rue St-Honoré. The most glamorous shops are along these streets, stretching between the Palais Royal to the east and the Palais de l'Élysée to the west. Follow in the footsteps of Coco Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, and Karl Lagerfeld on the shopper's tour of a lifetime. See chapter 6.
- **Exploring the Loire Valley:** An excursion to the châteaux dotting the valley's rich fields and forests will familiarize you with the French Renaissance's architectural aesthetics and with the intrigues of the kings and their courts. Nothing conjures up the aristocratic *ancien régime* better than a tour of these landmarks. See chapter 8.
- **Paying Tribute to Fallen Heroes on Normandy's D-Day Beaches:** On June 6, 1944, the largest armada ever assembled departed on rough seas and in dense fog from England. For

about a week, the future of the civilized world hung in a bloody and brutal balance between the Nazi and Allied armies. Today you'll find only the sticky sands and wind-torn, gray-green seas of a rather chilly beach. But even if you haven't seen *Saving Private Ryan* or *The Longest Day*, you can picture the struggles of determined soldiers who paid a terrible price to establish a bulkhead on the Continent. See "The D-Day Beaches" in chapter 9.

- **Climbing to the Heights of Mont-St-Michel:** Straddling the tidal flats between Normandy and Brittany, this Gothic marvel is the most spectacular fortress in northern Europe. Said to be protected by the archangel Michael, most of it stands as it did during the 1200s. See "Mont-St-Michel" in chapter 9.
- **Touring Burgundy during the Grape Gathering:** Medieval lore and legend permeate the harvests in Burgundy, where thousands of workers (armed with vintner's shears and baskets) head over the rolling hills to gather the grapes that have made the region's wines so famous. You can sample the local wines in the area restaurants, which always stock impressive collections. See chapter 13.

- **Schussing down the Alps:** France offers world-class skiing and luxurious resorts. Our favorites are Chamonix, Courchevel, and Megève. Here you'll find cliffs only experts should brave, as well as runs for intermediates and beginners. The après-ski scene roars into the wee hours. See chapter 15.

- **Marveling at the Riviera's Modern-Art Museums:** Since the 1890s, when Signac, Bonnard, and Matisse discovered St-Tropez, artists and their patrons have been drawn to the French Riviera. Experience an unforgettable drive across southern Provence, interspersing museum visits with wonderful meals, sunbathing, and stops at the area's architectural and artistic marvels. Highlights are Aix-en-Provence (Cézanne's studio), Biot (the Léger Museum), Cagnes-sur-Mer (the Museum of Modern Mediterranean Art), Cap d'Antibes (the Grimaldi Château's Picasso Museum), La Napoule (the Henry Clews Museum), and Menton (the Cocteau Museum). In addition, Nice, St-Paul-de-Vence, and St-Tropez all have impressive modern-art collections. See chapters 16 and 17.

2 The Best Romantic Escapes

- **Deauville** (Normandy): Using the resort of Deauville to propel herself to stardom, Coco Chanel added greatly to its sense of glamour and romance. Try your hand at the casinos, ride horses, stroll along the elegant boardwalk, or simply revel in the resort's sense of style and nostalgia. See "Deauville" in chapter 9.
- **La Baule** (Brittany): Consider an escape with your significant other to La Baule, a coastal resort in southern

Brittany. The salt air; the moody, windswept Atlantic; and the Belle Époque architecture help justify the name of its 8km (5-mile) beach, La Côte d'Amour. See "La Baule" in chapter 10.

- **Talloires** (The French Alps): The bracing climate, the history that goes back to the Middle Ages, and the Gallic flair of the innkeepers make for a memorable stay. The accommodations include a converted medieval

monastery, and the village's cuisine is superb. See "Talloires" in chapter 15.

- **Les Baux** (Provence): During the Middle Ages, troubadours sang ballads to audiences at the fortress of Les Baux. The romantic tradition continues today, with escapists from all over congregating in the rocky, arid landscape. The town has an abundance of romantic hideaways. See "Les Baux" in chapter 16.

- **St-Tropez** (Côte d'Azur): Any blonde feels like Brigitte Bardot in sunny St-Tropez, and the number of scantily clad satyrs and nymphs in town during summer could perk up the most sluggish libido. The real miracle here is that the charm of the place manages to survive its hype and the hordes of visitors. See "St-Tropez" in chapter 17.

3 The Best Driving Tours

- **La Route des Crêtes** (Alsace-Lorraine): The Vosges, one of the oldest mountain ranges in France, once formed a boundary with Germany. Richly forested with hardwood trees and firs, they skirt the western edge of the Rhine and resemble the Black Forest. La Route des Crêtes (the Crest Road), originally chiseled out of the mountains as a supply line, begins west of Colmar, at the Col du Bonhomme. High points are Münster (home of the cheese), Col de la Schlucht (a resort with panoramas as far as the Jura and the Black Forest), and Markstein. At many points along the way, you can stop and strike out on a well-marked hiking trail. See "La Route des Crêtes" in chapter 12.
- **La Côte d'Or** (Burgundy): Stretching only 60km (37 miles) from Santenay to Dijon, this route is for wine lovers. Rows of terraced vines rise in tiers above the D122/N74/D1138 highways (La Route des Grands Crus), passing through the towns of Puligny-Montrachet, Volnay, Beaune, Nuits-St-Georges, Vosne-Romanée, Gevrey-Chambertin, and Marsannay-la-Côte. Travel at your leisure, stopping to sample the noble vintages (look for the signs sprouting from the sides of the highway). See chapter 13.
- **The Gorges of the Ardèche** (The Rhône Valley): The river that carved

these canyons (the Ardèche, a tributary of the Rhône) is the most temperamental French waterway: Its ebbs and flows have created the Grand Canyon of France. Riddled with alluvial deposits, grottoes, caves, and canyons more than 285m (935 ft.) deep, the valley is one of France's most unusual geological spectacles. A panoramic road (D290) runs along one rim of the canyons, providing views over a striking, arid landscape. Plan to park and walk a little on some of the well-marked paths. The drive, which you can do in a day even if you make frequent stops, stretches between Vallon-Pont-d'Arc and Pont St-Esprit. See "The Ardèche" in chapter 14.

- **La Route des Grandes Alpes** (The French Alps): One of the most panoramic drives in western Europe stretches south from the lakefront town of Evian to coastal Nice. You'll see Alpine uplands, larch forests, glaciers, and the foothills of Mont Blanc. Plan on driving 2 to 6 days, stopping in such towns as Morzine, Avoriaz, Chamonix, and Megève. The route covers 740km (460 miles) and crosses many of France's dramatic mountain passes. Some sections are passable only in midsummer. See chapter 15.

4 The Best Châteaux & Palaces

- **Château de Chantilly/Musée Condé** (Ile de France): Anne de Montmorency, a constable of France who advised six monarchs, began this palace in 1560. To save costs, he ordered the new building placed atop the foundations of a derelict castle. His descendants enlarged and embellished the premises, added the massive stables, and hired Le Nôtre to design gardens that later inspired Louis XVI to create similar, larger ones at Versailles. See p. 220.
- **Château de Versailles** (Ile de France): Versailles is the most spectacular palace in the world. Its construction was fraught with ironies and tragedies, and its costs were a factor in the bloodbath of the French Revolution. Ringed with world-class gardens and a network of canals whose excavation required an army of laborers, the site also contains the Grand and Petit Trianons as well as miles of ornate corridors lined with the spoils of a vanished era. See p. 195.
- **Palais de Fontainebleau** (Ile de France): Since the days of the earliest Frankish kings, the forest has served as a royal hunting ground. Various dwellings had been erected for medieval kings, but in 1528, François I commissioned the core of the building that subsequent monarchs would enlarge and embellish. Napoleon declared it his favorite château, delivering an emotional farewell to his troops from its exterior staircase after his 1814 abdication. See p. 207.
- **Château d'Azay-le-Rideau** (Loire Valley): Visitors are enthralled by this château's beauty. Poised above the waters of the Indre River, it boasts decorative remnants of medieval fortifications and an atmosphere that prefigures the Renaissance embellishments of later Loire Valley châteaux. See p. 258.
- **Château de Chambord** (Loire Valley): Despite the incorporation (probably by Michelangelo) of feudal trappings in its layout, this château was built for pleasure—a manifestation of the successes of the 21-year-old François I. Begun in 1519 as the Loire Valley's most opulent status symbol, Chambord heralded the end of the feudal age and the dawn of the Renaissance. After military defeats in Italy, a chastened François rarely visited, opting to live in châteaux closer to Paris. See p. 235.
- **Château de Chenonceau** (Loire Valley): Its builders daringly placed this palace, built between 1513 and 1521, on arched stone vaults above the rushing Cher River. Two of France's most influential women, each of whom imposed her will on Renaissance politics and the château's design, fought over Chenonceau. Henri II gave the palace to his mistress, Diane de Poitiers. After the king's death, his widow, Catherine de Médicis, humiliated Diane by forcing her to move to a less prestigious château in nearby Chaumont. See p. 246.

5 The Best Museums

- **Centre Pompidou** (Paris): "The most avant-garde building in the world" is a citadel of 20th-century art, with exhibitions drawn from more than 40,000 works. Everything is here, from Calder's 1928 *Josephine Baker* (one of his earliest versions of the mobile) to a re-creation of Brancusi's Jazz Age studio. See p. 146.

- **Musée d'Orsay** (Paris): The spidery glass-and-iron canopies of an abandoned railway station frame one of Europe's most thrilling museums. Devoted to 19th-century art, it contains paintings by most of the French Impressionists, and sculptures and decorative objects whose design forever changed the way Europe interpreted line, movement, and color. See p. 150.
- **Musée du Louvre** (Paris): The Louvre's exterior is a triumph of grand French architecture, while its interior contains an embarrassment of artistic riches, with more paintings (around 300,000) than can be displayed at one time. The collection retains its dignity despite the thousands who traipse through the corridors every day, looking for the *Mona Lisa* and the *Venus de Milo*. I. M. Pei's controversial Great Pyramid neatly offsets the grandeur of its Cour Carrée. See p. 151.
- **Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux** (Bayeux, Normandy): This museum's star is a 900-year-old tapestry named in honor of medieval Queen Mathilda. Housed in a glass case, the Bayeux tapestry is a long band of linen embroidered with depictions of the war machine that sailed from Normandy to conquer England in 1066. See p. 296.
- **Musée Historique Lorrain** (Nancy, Alsace-Lorraine): Few other French museums reflect a province as well as this one. Its collections include 16th-century engravings, 17th-century masterpieces by local painters, exhibits on Jewish history in eastern France, antique furniture, wrought iron, and domestic accessories. See p. 380.
- **Foundation Maeght** (St-Paul-de-Vence, Côte d'Azur): Established as a showcase for modern art by collectors Aimé and Marguerite Maeght, this avant-garde museum features works by Giacometti, Chagall, Braque, Miró, Matisse, and Barbara Hepworth. The multilevel design by the architect José Luis Sert boasts glass walls with views of the Provence landscape. See p. 556.
- **Musée Fabre** (Montpellier, Languedoc): This museum occupies a villa where Molière once presented some of his plays. Today it boasts one of the worthiest collections of French, Italian, and Spanish paintings in the south of France. See p. 612.
- **Musée Toulouse-Lautrec** (Albi, Languedoc): Henri Toulouse-Lautrec was born in Albi in 1864. Much to his family's horror, he moved to a scandalous area in Paris, where he created depictions of the Belle Epoque scene that are treasures today. Also on view are works by Degas, Bonnard, and Matisse. See p. 631.
- **Musée Ingres** (Montauban, the Dordogne): This museum, in a 17th-century bishops' palace, was created in 1867 when Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (one of the most admired classicists since the Revolution) bequeathed to the city more than 4,000 drawings and paintings. See p. 707.

6 The Best Cathedrals

- **Notre-Dame** (Paris): This structure's stone walls symbolize the power of Paris in the Middle Ages. Begun in 1163, Notre-Dame is the cathedral of the nation and a triumph of medieval architecture. It's dazzling in the morning and at sunset, when its image reflects in the Seine. See p. 153.
- **Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres** (Chartres, Ile de France): No less an

artist than Rodin declared this cathedral a French Acropolis. Its site reputedly was holy for the Druids and the ancient Romans. Chartres is one of the world's largest cathedrals, one of the first High Gothic cathedrals, and the first to use flying buttresses. It also has possibly the finest stained-glass windows, more than 2,500 sq. m (27,000 sq. ft.) of glass whose vivid hues and patterns of light are truly mystical. See p. 200.

- **Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Rouen** (Rouen, Normandy): Consecrated in 1063 and rebuilt after a fire in 1200, parts of it are masterpieces of the Flamboyant Gothic style; others are plainer, though equally dignified. This cathedral was immortalized in the 19th century, when Monet painted a series of impressions of the facade. See p. 274.
- **Cathédrale Notre-Dame d'Amiens** (Amiens, the Ardennes): A lavishly decorated example of High Gothic

architecture, this cathedral boasts a soaring nave whose roof is supported by 126 breathtakingly slender pillars. It was begun in 1220 to house the head of St. John the Baptist, brought back from the Crusades; at 141m (463 ft.) long, it is the largest church in France. It escaped destruction during the world wars, despite fierce fighting nearby. See p. 349.

- **Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Reims** (Reims, Champagne): One of France's first Christian bishops, St. Rémi baptized Clovis, king of the Franks, on this site in 496. The church memorializing the event was conceived as a religious sanctuary where the French kings would be anointed; it was large, spectacular, and (in our eyes) rather cold. The coronation of every king between 815 and 1825 was celebrated here. Damaged by World War I bombings, the cathedral was restored by American donations during the 1920s and 1930s. See p. 338.

7 The Best Vineyards & Wineries

- If your primary interest is the wines of Bordeaux, contact the **Maison du Vin**, 1 cours du 30-Juillet, 33075 Bordeaux (☎ 05-56-00-22-88; www.vins-bordeaux.fr), which offers 3-day courses that cost 305€ to 490€ (\$397–\$637) per person. The price includes lunch each day and an impressive selection of wines, most from the region around Bordeaux.
- **Couly-Dutheil** (12 rue Diderot, Chinon; ☎ 02-47-97-20-20; www.coulydutheil-chinon.com): Many of its medieval cellars are carved into the rock undulating through the area's forests. Most production here involves Chinon wines (mostly reds), though its Bourgueil and St-Nicolas de Bourgueil wines are growing in popularity in North America. See "Chinon" in chapter 8.
- **Taittinger** (9 place St-Nicaise, Reims; ☎ 03-26-85-84-35; www.taittinger.com): Taittinger is a grand *marque* of French champagne, one of the few still controlled by members of the family that founded it, in 1930. It's one of the most visitor-friendly houses. See p. 341.
- **Domaines Schlumberger** (100 rue Théodore-Deck, Guebwiller, near Colmar; ☎ 03-89-74-27-00; www.domaines-schlumberger.com): Established in 1810, these cellars blend early-19th-century brickwork and modern stainless steel; a visit will enhance your understanding of the subtle differences among wines produced by the seven varieties of grape cultivated in Alsace. See "Colmar" in chapter 12.

- **Domaine Maurice Protheau** (Château d'Étroyes, Mercurey; © 03-85-45-10-84; www.domaine-protheau-mercurey.fr): The 50 hectares (124 acres) of grapevines straddle at least two *appellations contrôlées* (a regulation system that ensures a wine has been produced where the bottles says), so you'll have a chance to contrast reds (both pinot noirs and burgundies), whites, and rosés produced under the auspices of both Rully and Mercurey. Headquarters is in a château built in the late 1700s and early 1800s. See "Autun" in chapter 13.
- **The Winegrowing Region around Bordeaux:** This area is among the most glamorous in France, with a strong English influence, thanks to centuries of trade with London- and Bristol-based dealers. One prestigious grower, **Société Duboscq**, Château Haut-Marbuzet, St-Estephe (© 05-56-59-30-54), welcomes visitors who phone in advance of their arrival Monday to Saturday. Free visits to the cellars are followed by a complimentary *dégustation des vins* of whichever of the company's products a visitor requests. See p. 689.

8 The Best Luxury Hotels

- **Hôtel Ritz** (Paris; © 800/223-6800 in the U.S. and Canada, or 01-43-16-30-30; www.ritzparis.com): This hotel occupies a palace overlooking the octagonal borders of one of the most perfect plazas in France: place Vendôme. The decor is pure opulence. Marcel Proust wrote parts of *Remembrance of Things Past* here, and Georges-Auguste Escoffier perfected many of his recipes in its kitchens. See p. 102.
- **Hôtel Meurice** (Paris; © 01-44-58-10-10; www.meuricehotel.com) faces the Jardin des Tuileries close to the Place de la Concorde. Over the course of its career, it has catered to everybody from royalty to Salvador Dalí. Massively restored and still celebrated for its glass roofed Winter Garden, it's a pocket of posh. See p. 102.
- **Château d'Artigny** (Montbazou, Loire Valley; © 02-47-34-30-30; www.artigny.com): The perfume king François Coty once lived and entertained lavishly at this mansion outside Tours—and you can do the same today in one of the poshest hotels in the Loire Valley. Experience the grandeur once enjoyed by Elizabeth Taylor and other celebs, taking in the weekend soirées and musical evenings. See p. 253.
- **Oustau de Baumanière** (Les Baux, Provence; © 04-90-54-33-07; www.oustaudebaumaniere.com): This Relais & Châteaux property is in the valley at the foot of Les Baux de Provence. Both the cuisine and the accommodations, some of which are in buildings dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, are superb. See p. 490.
- **Grand Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat** (St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Côte d'Azur; © 04-93-76-50-52; www.grand-hotel-cap-ferrat.com): The Grand Hôtel occupies 5.6 prime hectares (14 acres) on one of the world's most exclusive peninsulas. In a Belle Époque palace, it has hosted royals, aristocrats, and wealthy wannabes since the turn of the 20th century. See p. 579.
- **Hôtel du Cap-Éden Roc** (Cap d'Antibes, Côte d'Azur; © 04-93-61-39-01; www.edenroc-hotel.fr): Built during the grand Second Empire and set on 8.9 hectares (22 acres) of splendidly landscaped gardens, this hotel is legendary, evoking the F. Scott Fitzgerald classic *Tender Is the Night*. Swimmers revel in a pool

blasted from the dark rock of the glamorous coastline. See p. 550.

- **Hôtel Negresco** (Nice, Côte d'Azur; ☎ 04-93-16-64-00; www.hotel-negresco-nice.com): Built in 1913 as a layered wedding cake in the château style, the Negresco was a lavish escape for the Edwardian era's most respected and most notorious figures, including Lillie Langtry, the longtime mistress of Britain's Edward VII. After her fall from grace, she sat in the lobby, swathed in veils, refusing to utter a word. Following renovations, the

hotel is better now than during its Jazz Age heyday. See p. 569.

- **Hôtel du Palais** (Biarritz, Basque Country; ☎ 800/223-6800 in the U.S. and Canada, or 05-59-41-64-00; www.hotel-du-palais.com): Delectably beautiful, this place was built in 1845 as a pink-walled summer palace for Napoleon III and his empress, Eugénie. The Belle Epoque fantasy has entertained such guests as Edward VII of England, Alfonso XIII of Spain, and the duke of Windsor. See p. 659.

9 The Best Affordable Hotels

- **Hôtel de Lutèce** (Paris; ☎ 01-43-26-23-52; www.paris-hotel-lutece.com): It slumbers on Paris's "other island," the Ile St-Louis, which usually escapes the crush of visitors on the more popular Ile de la Cité, just across the bridge. You're still in the city, but here you can imagine yourself in a country inn. See p. 105.
- **Les Maisons de Léa** (Honfleur, Normandy; ☎ 02-31-14-49-49; www.les-maisonsdelea.com): It overlooks a Norman 18th-century port favored by the French novelist Flaubert. The amenities aren't grand, but the charming setting includes an appealing restaurant, and—more surprising—the price tag is reasonable. See p. 284.
- **Hôtel d'Avaugour** (Dinan, Brittany; ☎ 02-96-39-07-49; www.avaugour-hotel.com): Its exterior looks as antique as the fortifications ringing the medieval harbor, but a major restoration transformed the interior into a cozy getaway on the Norman coast. Add aesthetic appeal, old-time flavor of Dinan's winding alleys, and views of the Channel, and you've got the ingredients for an affordable escape. See p. 316.
- **Ostellerie du Vieux-Pérouges** (Pérouges, Rhône Valley; ☎ 04-74-

61-00-88; www.ostellerie.com): This hotel, described as a museum of the 13th century, is one of the most significant in central France. Composed of a group of 13th-century buildings with low ceilings and thick walls, it evokes the France of another day and doesn't overcharge. See p. 423.

- **Hôtel Clair Logis** (St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Côte d'Azur; ☎ 04-93-76-51-81; www.hotel-clair-logis.fr): The real estate surrounding this converted 19th-century villa is among the most expensive in Europe, but this hotel manages to keep its prices beneath levels that really hurt. When you check into your room (named after a flower in the garden surrounding the place), you'll be in good company: Even General de Gaulle, who knew the value of a centime, stayed here. See p. 580.
- **La Réserve** (Albi, Languedoc; ☎ 05-63-60-80-80; www.relaischateaux.fr/reservealbi): Scrublands, vineyards, groves of olives, and cypresses surround this dignified farmhouse. It's less expensive than many luxurious hideaways along the nearby Côte d'Azur, and its location is just outside the center of one of our favorite fortified sites in Europe, the town of Albi. See p. 632.

10 The Best Historic Places to Stay

- **Trianon Palace & Spa** (Versailles, Ile de France; ☎ 800/228-3000 in the U.S. and Canada, or 01-30-84-50-00; www.westin.com): Louis XIV nearly bankrupted France during the construction of his nearby palace, but this hotel overlooking its gardens might have been even more influential. In 1919, the Versailles Peace Treaty was ratified by delegates who stayed in the same rooms that house guests today. You'll be pampered at this plush, elegant hotel, which boasts its own spa. See p. 198.
- **Château de Locguénolé** (Hennebont, Brittany; ☎ 02-97-76-76-76; www.chateau-de-locguenole.com): No professional decorator could accumulate the array of furnishings and artifacts that grace this Breton manor house, which has been occupied by the same family for 500 years. Some visitors think it's the most charming hotel in southern Brittany; you may agree. See p. 321.
- **Manoir du Stang** (La Forêt-Fouesnant, Brittany; ☎ 02-98-56-97-37; www.manoirdustang.com): Even the ivy that twines across the facade of this 16th-century Breton manor house looks as though it was planted by someone very important, very long ago. Formal gardens segue into forested parkland; modern amenities are juxtaposed with enviable antiques—the place is a gem that happens to be a glamorous hotel. See p. 319.
- **Château de Rochegude** (Rochegude, Provence; ☎ 04-75-97-21-10; www.chateauderochegude.com): During the thousand years of this château's existence, its owners have included popes, dauphins, and less prominent aristocrats who showered it with taste and money. Today each room is outfitted in a style inspired by a specific emperor or king. The setting is 10 hectares (25 acres) of parkland adjacent to the Rhône, outside Orange. See p. 468.
- **Château de Roussan** (St-Rémy-de-Provence, Provence; ☎ 04-90-92-11-63; www.chateau-de-roussan.com): One of this château's outbuildings was the home of the psychic Nostradamus, and its main building, sheltered by a stone neoclassical facade erected in 1701, is among the most beautiful in Provence. The château evokes another time, with none of the artificiality of the nearby Côte d'Azur. See p. 478.
- **Château des Alpilles** (St-Rémy-de-Provence, Provence; ☎ 04-90-92-03-33; www.chateaulpilles.com): The Pichot family built this château in 1827, and it has housed many famous personages, including Chateaubriand. The luxurious hotel, modestly referred to as “a house for paying friends,” is a showcase of luxury, refinement, and taste. See p. 479.
- **Château de la Vallée Bleue** (La Châtre, Massif Central; ☎ 02-54-31-01-91; www.chateauvalleebleue.com): If your room is named for Liszt, Chopin, Flaubert, or Delacroix, it's probably because they slept in the same spot. The château was built by a doctor committed to the well-being of his nearby patient George Sand, the author and feminist trendsetter whose masquerades as a man still provoke curiosity in this part of France. See p. 714.

11 The Best Upscale Restaurants

- **Restaurant Plaza Athénée (Alain Ducasse; Paris; ☎ 01-53-67-65-00):** A coveted three-star rating from Michelin hardly seemed to challenge this brash chef. Ducasse is the darling of foodies and the spiritual heir of the legendary Escoffier. No one can outdo his pasta bathed in cream, sweetbreads, truffles, and (get this) the combs and kidneys of a proud, strutting cock. See p. 127.
- **Le Grand Véfour (Paris; ☎ 01-42-96-56-27):** Amid the arcades of the Palais Royal, this has been a dining spot since the reign of Louis XV, attracting such notables as Colette, Victor Hugo, and the forever-loyal Jean Cocteau. Jean Taittinger, of the champagne family, runs it today, and his kitchen brings originality to French classics—everything from pigeon in the style of Rainier of Monaco to French-roasted sole and sea scallops in velvety pumpkin sauce. See p. 119.
- **Taillevent (Paris; ☎ 01-44-95-15-01):** Dining here is the social and gastronomic high point of a Paris visit. Its premises (an antique house near the Arc de Triomphe) are suitably grand, and its cuisine as appropriately stylish as the Jackie Onassis look-alikes who dine here. See p. 128.
- **Les Crayères (Reims, Champagne; ☎ 03-26-82-80-80; www.lescrayeres.com):** This restaurant's setting is a lavish but dignified château with soaring ceilings and French Empire decor. Built in 1904 as the home of the Pommery family (of champagne fortune) and surrounded by a 5.6-hectare (14-acre) park, it's maintained by a staff that appreciates the nuances of service rituals. You can retire directly to your room after consuming a bottle or two of the region's bubbly. See p. 342.
- **A la Côte St-Jacques (Joigny, Burgundy; ☎ 03-86-62-09-70; www.cotesaintjacques.com):** On the edge of Burgundy, beside the river Yonne, this is the quintessential *restaurant avec chambres*. Indulge your taste for well-prepared food and wine, and then totter off to one of the carefully furnished guest rooms in the historic compound. One of our favorite dishes is cassolette of morels and frogs' legs, sublime when accompanied by a half bottle of red burgundy. See p. 388.
- **L'Espérance (Vézelay, Burgundy; ☎ 03-86-33-39-10; www.marc-meneau-espérance.com):** In a farmhouse at the base of a hill (La Colline de Vézelay) that has been a holy site for thousands of years, L'Espérance is run by one of Europe's most famous chefs, Marc Meneau, and his wife, Françoise. The place combines country comforts with great sophistication. See p. 391.
- **Paul Bocuse (Collonges-au-Mont-d'Or, near Lyon, Rhône Valley; ☎ 04-72-42-90-90):** Bocuse was the *enfant terrible* of French gastronomy through most of his youth. Today he's the world's most famous chef, catering to Europe's hardest-to-please customers. The cuisine is ostensibly Lyonnais, but Bocuse has never been limited by provincialism, and his mind wanders the world for inspiration. His signature dishes range from pigeon in puff pastry with foie gras to his notable black truffle soup. See p. 416.
- **Hôtel-Restaurant Troisgros (Roanne, Rhône Valley; ☎ 04-77-71-66-97; www.troisgros.com):** The setting is the dining room of a once-nondescript hotel near a train station. The cuisine is a celebration of the agrarian bounty of France. Mingling regional specialties, the menu attracts diners from as far away as Paris. See p. 422.

- **Auberge du Père-Bise** (Talloires, French Alps; ☎ 04-50-60-72-01; www.perebise.com): A mysterious alchemy transformed a simple lakeside chalet into an illustrious restaurant. Beside Lac d'Annecy in eastern France, it's outfitted like a provincial home of local gentry, yet it serves elegant food favored by generations of patrons, including the Rothschilds. See p. 440.
- **Le Moulin de Mougins** (Mougins, Côte d'Azur; ☎ 04-93-75-78-24; www.moulin-mougins.com): Occupying a 16th-century olive mill in a Provence forest, this long-celebrated destination is a showcase for the cuisine of Alain Llorca, one of the most talented and written-about chefs on the French Riviera. He concocts what he calls the "cuisine of the sun." See p. 539.

12 The Best Affordable Restaurants

- **Crémérie-Restaurant Polidor** (Paris; ☎ 01-43-26-95-34): For many Parisians, the cuisine here evokes diners their grandmothers might have cooked in the days after World War II. The unpretentious setting, with lace curtains filtering the sunlight, drew even such iconoclasts as André Gide. See p. 139.
- **Les Vapeurs** (Trouville, Normandy; ☎ 02-31-88-15-24): An anomaly among the Norman coast's high-priced brasseries, this restaurant overlooking the port is no-frills, from its Art Deco decor to its fresh, well-priced seafood. Patrons enjoy the festive ambience. See p. 291.
- **L'Auberge de Pelican** (Dinan, Brittany; ☎ 02-96-39-47-05): Many visitors drive up from Paris for the day, followed by a dinner here in this old-fashioned Breton establishment, where even the bread is homemade. Dishes with an emphasis on fresh fish are based on time-honored recipes. See p. 316.
- **Brasserie de l'Ancienne Douane** (Strasbourg, Alsace-Lorraine; ☎ 03-88-15-78-78; www.anciennedouane.fr): In a city known for its Alsatian cuisine, this restaurant is a front-runner in the moderate category. In a medieval building, you can feast on the sauerkraut and foie gras of the region, as well as on a succulent specialty, chicken in Riesling wine. See p. 363.
- **Au Chalet de Brou** (Bourg-en-Bresse, Rhône Valley; ☎ 04-74-22-26-28): In a town famous for its poultry, this restaurant sits across from the village church. It offers the local birds at amazingly low prices, and food critics travel here from all over France for the hearty roast chicken. See p. 425.
- **Le Bistro Latin** (Aix-en-Provence, Provence; ☎ 04-42-38-22-88): In Paul Cézanne's hometown, seek out its best and most affordable little bistro, serving classic Provençal cuisine in each of its two intimate dining rooms. Its fixed-price menus are the best deal in town. See p. 496.
- **Chez Servais** (Libourne, Bordeaux wine district; ☎ 05-57-51-83-97): As you're touring the wine district outside Bordeaux, one of your finest and best-value meals is likely to be in this little market town at the junction of the Dordogne and Isle rivers. The cuisine is a savory blend of classical and modern. See p. 688.