



Where to stay to... Learn new skills

From bee-keeping to scuba diving, going on holiday can be an education, so find an activity that suits you

▲ BEE-KEEPING Confolens, Charente

Gain an insight into the world of bees and how to keep them, as well as seeing how honey is produced, during this hands-on holiday. The residential breaks are run by British expats Amanda and Kevin at their art-deco-inspired villa on the banks of the River Vienne. The three-night option includes three hours of activities every morning covering the basics of bee-keeping, setting up an apiary, extracting honey and discovering the insects' favourite plants. Afternoons and evenings are left free for you to explore the area. Five- and six-night breaks are also available. A three-day break costs from €460pp, or €840 per couple, including full-board accommodation, tuition and safety equipment.

Tel: (Fr) 7 83 10 73 68
13bees.co.uk

► FOOD AND WINE Marigny-le-Cahouët, Côte d'Or

Savour some of France's best food and drink on the six-night 'Culinary and Wine Adventures in Hidden Burgundy' trip from Active Gourmet Holidays. You will stay at a 200-year-old country house and enjoy many exciting experiences. These include preparing your own dishes with the help of a leading chef, exploring *Grand Cru* and *Premier Cru* wine estates in the Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune, visiting food markets, and enjoying a meal at a three-Michelin-star restaurant. Prices start from £2,620pp, based on two people sharing, and include accommodation, all meals, wine and culinary experiences.

Tel: (US) 203 732 0771
activegourmetholidays.com



WHERE TO STAY

▼ KNITTING Saint-Hilaire-de-Villefranche, Charente-Maritime

If practising your knitting skills surrounded by verdant countryside sounds a great combination, look no further than Le Vieux Monastère. This holiday retreat organises regular knitting workshops, led by Fiona Morris, who covers techniques ranging from Estonian lace and Baltic braids to shadow knitting and two-colour Brioche stitch. Away from the sessions, you can visit places of interest such as La Rochelle and Saintes, or relax around the on-site pool. The seven-night 'Knit and Relax' holiday costs €900pp, and includes full-board cottage accommodation within the grounds, knitting sessions, excursions and airport transfers.

Tel: (Fr) 5 46 91 59 98

levieuxmonastere.com



▲ PAINTING Quarante, Hérault

Watercolour enthusiasts looking to hone their skills in an idyllic setting will enjoy this six-night trip from Painting Holidays France. British expat artist and teacher Nicola Blakemore welcomes students to a delightful *chambre d'hôte* in the village where she lives, and through a gentle and persuasive teaching style helps learners to channel their inner creativity and produce work of which they can be proud. Holidays are available in spring and autumn, and cost €900pp including full-board accommodation and 24 hours of tuition over four days.

Tel: (Fr) 4 99 57 16 63

painting-holidays-france.com



▲ LANGUAGE Pissotte, Vendée

Brush up on your French on a residential language course from Le Poiron Bonjour. The school, based in a medieval château, caters for all levels and offers an intimate experience with a maximum of six people per course. Students stay in en-suite rooms with balcony or terrace in

buildings next to the château, and can use the swimming pool and whirlpool bath. A five-night stay costs £1,399 for a couple, or £875 for an individual, and includes full-board en-suite accommodation, 20 hours of tuition, all activities and entrance fees for visits.

Tel: 01494 529 152

france4life.co.uk ➞

► GARDENING Bailly-Romainvilliers, Seine-et-Marne

Discover the wonders of nature with a stay at Extraordinary Gardens, one of five recreational sites that make up the Villages Nature Paris. The site comprises four gardens, which represent the ancient Greek elements of earth, water, air and fire, with each flowering in a different season. You can even try your hand at gardening by joining a course. Led by one of the site's 'artisans', the family experience teaches adults and children how to care for their garden. A three-night, self-catered stay in a cottage costs £167pp based on two sharing, and includes the gardening experience. The accommodation features free Wi-Fi, a fully equipped kitchen, a balcony or terrace and a flat-screen TV.

Tel: 0845 351 2878

villagesnatureparis.co.uk



▲ PERFUME MAKING Grasse, Alpes-Maritimes

Learn how to make your own scent on this two-night holiday in France's perfume-making capital. Choose either a 'Rose of May' or 'Organ of Flavours' course with 3.5 hours of perfume- and fragrance-making tuition. You receive a 15ml bottle of the perfume school's latest creation to take home, as well as two 100ml vaporiser bottles; one with your signature perfume, and the other your home fragrance. The formulas are registered so you can order refills. Prices start from €328pp based on two sharing, and include B&B at a four-star hotel and all course materials.

Tel: 0208 144 5990

golearnto.com



▲ GOLF Moliets, Landes

Improve your swing and perfect your putting with a stay at Les Palmiers du Golf on the Atlantic coast of south-west France. The self-catered apartments are close to one of the country's best courses, which combines technical and strategic challenges, making it ideal for more experienced golfers. The apartments are spacious and feature a well-equipped kitchen and living room with Wi-Fi and flat-screen TV. A seven-night stay, starting from 21 October, in a one-bedroom apartment sleeping four-six costs £299. A sofa bed and a cabin room with bunk beds provides the other accommodation. A 27-hole golf course pass for the whole stay costs from £220.

Tel: 0203 475 4756

summerfrance.co.uk

▼ SCUBA DIVING Saint-Jean-d'Angély, Charente-Maritime

Combine a self-catering *gîte* holiday with a number of family activities at La Grange du Moulin. The most exhilarating has to be scuba diving, which is run by English-speaking local company Scuba School and takes place at the on-site swimming pool. Sessions last from 15 minutes to one hour.

Anyone aged ten or over has the chance to complete a PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) qualification, while younger children can enjoy fun dives. Each of the six *gîtes* has a fully equipped kitchen and a bathroom. A seven-night stay costs from €350. A 60-minute scuba-diving session costs €30.

Tel: 01935 577 016

grangedumoulin.com





▲ STARGAZING Confolens, Charente

Ever wondered about the names of the constellations in the night sky? Stargazing novices can learn the answers on this 'Introduction to Astronomy course' at the Astrofarm B&B in the heart of Charente. Resident astronomer Andrew Davies begins lessons in his observatory at 6pm and will show guests how to identify constellations, explore galaxies and appreciate the movement of the Earth and planets in the solar system. Weather permitting, the course ends with a late-night observation session. Prices start from €60pp, and include the beginner's course and B&B in an en-suite double room.

Tel: (Fr) 5 45 71 25 53
astrofarmfrance.com



▲ PHOTOGRAPHY Les Ages, Brantôme

Budding photographers keen to improve their skills and capture the glories of the French countryside will have plenty of scope on this seven-night break. Guests stay at the 17th-Century Dordogne home of professional photographer Paul Edmunds, who promises a maximum of four guests per workshop. The week includes six organised trips into the countryside, 24-hour access to an Apple Mac computer complete with Photoshop software, and unlimited advice on all aspects of digital photography. This French Photographic Holidays break costs from €1,150pp including full-board, en-suite accommodation, tuition and photography outings.

Tel: (Fr) 5 53 54 74 85
frenchphotographicholidays.com



NEXT
MONTH

WHERE TO
STAY FOR
A FESTIVE
BREAK

▲ DANCE Fréjus, Var

If learning the Latin moves of the sensual salsa dance sounds appealing, then a stay at the Château Lou Casteou on the Côte d'Azur is a must. The luxurious property organises a four-day retreat called 'Let's Salsa!' with classes led by professionals, and water-based aerobics to boost guests' fitness levels. Other

highlights include coastal treks, a visit to a Provençal vineyard and gourmet meals. The retreat costs £998pp, based on two sharing. The price includes accommodation, all meals with wine, a champagne reception and cocktail party, daily dance and fitness classes, excursions and transfers to and from Nice airport.

Tel: (Fr) 4 94 19 33 90
loucasteou.com

WHERE TO STAY

▼ CLASSIC COOKERY Trèbes, Aude

Anyone taking a break at the *gîte* known as the Cottage by the Canal du Midi can enhance their stay with a cookery class run by the host, Heather Hayes. The qualified chef leads a 'Classic French Cooking Day' from 10am-3.30pm, when up to seven participants prepare dishes such as soufflés, duck, quail and fish as well as sauces and desserts. Everyone gathers on the canal-side terrace for a traditional three-course lunch with local wines. The 'Classic French Cooking Day', which is also available to non-residents, costs €110pp. The *gîte*, which accommodates two people, costs from €75 per night (min stay three nights).

Tel: (Fr) 6 51 63 29 04
canaldumidigite.com
canaldumidicooking.com



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