

Visit La Rochelle in 1 or 2 days: our must-do activities



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By Floriane

Today we're taking you on a trip to La Rochelle, a city we've had the opportunity to visit on several occasions, and we love its seaside atmosphere. Nestled on France's Atlantic coast, La Rochelle is a destination that perfectly combines history, culture and nature. Known for its famous Old Port, guarded by its imposing towers, this port city is full of treasures to discover.

In this article, we share with you **what to see and do** in La Rochelle, our **14 must-sees**, our 1 or 2-day **itinerary** for a weekend, and our **secrets** for visiting La Rochelle! We live on the Ile d'Oléron, and La Rochelle is our favorite city getaway.

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1. The Old Port and its Three Towers

The Vieux-Port is the place to be during your stay in La Rochelle. Stroll along the lovely quays and admire the **3 medieval towers**, listed as historic monuments and witnesses to the town's maritime history.

- **Tour de la Chaîne (Chain Tower)** : as its name suggests, this tower was used, in conjunction with the Tour Saint-Nicolas, to tighten a massive chain to close the harbor entrance at night or in the event of a threat. This chain prevented unauthorized vessels from entering or leaving.
- **Tour Saint-Nicolas**: located at the entrance to the old port, as mentioned above, this is a military building used to protect the port.
- **Lantern Tower**: unique in its kind, with a lantern-shaped roof that once served as a lighthouse.

*Nous vous conseillons de visiter les tours à l'aide d'un billet jumelé (tarif 9,50€) pour avoir une superbe vue sur Le port et la ville de la Rochelle. Dans chaque tour, un petit espace musée présente son histoire. Si vous êtes pressés, la **tour de la Chaîne** se visite plus rapidement que les autres. [Information sur le site officiel.](#)*

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2. The colorful Gabut district

The **Gabut district**, south of the harbor, is one of our favorites in La Rochelle. It's a vibrant, colorful area, known for its houses painted in bright tones reminiscent of the Nordic countries, and it's almost as if we were in [Stockholm](#), a city we adore.

Formerly an industrial zone, this area has been transformed into a trendy, artistic spot, much sought-after by locals. It's the perfect place to take photos of La Rochelle's beautiful street art frescoes.

As a little anecdote, we used to love having a drink at the guinguette "la Belle du Gabut", which was located in the heart of the district, but unfortunately closed after a few years of activity. In 2024, foodtrucks will once again take over the site, much to our delight!

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3. The Town Hall

Located in the heart of the historic center, La Rochelle **Town** Hall is our favorite building in La Rochelle. Recently restored after a fire, it is an architectural gem. Its Renaissance facade is a must-see for lovers of history and architecture. You can enter the courtyard free of charge to admire the building's façade and many architectural details.

4. The historic center:

The historic center is famous for its charming **shopping arcades**. It's also a fascinating labyrinth of cobbled streets and ancient buildings, reflecting the city's rich history.

In this area we recommend that you stop at the following buildings / points:

- Renaissance-style **Town Hall** (see point 3)
- The majestic **Saint-Louis Cathedral**, with its many half-timbered houses.
- The **covered market** brings a lively, authentic atmosphere to the district.

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5. Port des Minimes

The Port des Minimes is the **largest marina on the French Atlantic coast**. It's a dynamic, modern place, teeming with boats, sailboats and yachts.

A promenade links the port to the city center, while you admire the view of the boats on the docks and in the water. It's time to choose your boat for your exploration of the islands around La Rochelle.

[De nombreuses croisières pour explorer les îles partent de ce port](#)

6. The legendary Fort Boyard

Fort Boyard is located on the west coast of France, in the Atlantic Ocean. It is located between Ile d'**Oléron** and **Ile d'Aix**, in the **Pertuis d'Antioche**, a strait separating Ile d'Oléron from the mainland.

Fort Boyard is not visible from La Rochelle, only from the east coast of the island of Oléron and from Fourras, south of La Rochelle.

You can't visit the inside of the fort, unless you've been selected to take part in the Fort Boyard TV game show, in which case you're welcome to send us a little

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dedication from **Père Fouras!**

Your only option is to **take a cruise** around Fort Boyard and admire the region's magnificent coastal scenery. During your tour, your guide will share anecdotes about the fort's history, from its construction to its role in popular culture. Even if we feel we know it by heart, we learn new anecdotes with every cruise.

From La Rochelle, expect to pay **around €40 for a 4-hour cruise aboard a catamaran**. The cruise departs from the south of the port of La Rochelle, opposite the La Rochelle media library on Place François Mitterrand. We recommend this more intimate cruise than the Inter-island boats.

[See availability for this cruise](#)

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7. Parc Charruyer: the green lung

A must-see in La Rochelle, the huge 40-hectare **Parc Charruyer** is the perfect place for a nature break in the heart of the city. For the little ones, an area has been set aside with animals (ducks, swans, etc.). There's also a lovely children's play area.

A pleasant stroll links the town center to Plage de la Concurrence (approx. 1.5 km). It's an excellent spot for a picnic or digestive stroll.

8. Taste local gastronomy at the central market

For a taste of local flavors, there's no better place than the **Central Market** in the heart of the historic center. A lively market, just the way we like it, full of energy and beautiful products from local producers. In high season, it's open every day.

Oysters, opened in front of you, are ideal. Then buy fresh produce for your picnic or aperitif on the beach or in Parc Charruyer.

9. Take a cruise to explore the offshore islands

This is a must-do activity during your stay in La Rochelle. Around La Rochelle, several islands are just a few kilometers away:

- **Île de Ré** : the nearest is famous for its picturesque villages, sandy beaches and salt marshes. It's ideal for bike rides and tastings of local produce.
- **L'Île d'Oléron**: we know it well, because we live there. It's a bigger island, with vast beaches, pine forests and oyster beds. It's perfect for nature lovers and water sports enthusiasts.
- **Île d'Aix** : smaller and wilder, an invitation to tranquillity, accessible only by boat.

2-hour sunset cruise

A **great idea for an activity** is to embark on a catamaran from the **port of La Rochelle** and sail between the islands of Ré, Aix and Oléron to admire the sunset.

In short, a moment that will make you **forget everything** without **breaking the**

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bank (from 29€).

[See prices and availability for this cruise](#)

10. The Maritime Museum all about naval history

The **Musée Maritime de La Rochelle** is a fascinating place dedicated to the region's naval history and maritime culture. Located on the banks of the Old Port, the museum offers a unique experience, with 3 historic ships docked for visitors to explore, including a submarine.

Inside, interactive and educational exhibits present the history of navigation, shipbuilding and deep-sea fishing. It's an ideal museum to visit with children, our daughter loved it.

11. Enjoy the sandy beaches

Lounging on one of La Rochelle's beaches is a must-do activity during your stay.

3 fine sandy beaches are located in the immediate vicinity of the town center: the large **Plage des Minimes**, the **Plage de la Concurrence**, right in the town center, and the wilder Plage du **Chef de Baie**. The only drawback is that they are very busy in summer.

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Around La Rochelle, you'll be spoilt for choice when it comes to choosing your beach. We've listed the most **beautiful, wild and picturesque beaches** around La Rochelle in an article, which you can consult [here](#).

12. La Rochelle Aquarium: the ideal family activity

Located to the south of the old port, it is home to over 12,000 marine animals, representing 600 species, in 75 tanks. We're not usually big fans of aquariums and zoos, but here the spaces are so large, we had a great time **watching the marine animals** go about their business.

We observed a wide variety of marine life, from fragile jellyfish to imposing sharks and colorful tropical fish. The aquarium also boasts a shark tunnel and an impressive gallery of lights.

It's an ideal **family** activity for young and old alike, and even more so when it's **raining** in La Rochelle. High-season tip: visit in the early morning to avoid the crowds.

13. Festivals and cultural events

La Rochelle is alive with **festivals and events** all year round. The best-known are undoubtedly the International Film Festival (held at the end of June) and the Les Francopholies music festival (Les Franco for the locals), which each year welcomes the greatest French artists (held in mid-July).

14. Rent a boat

Renting a **private boat** is the ideal way to explore the **La Rochelle area** at your own pace, and to get within reasonable distance of **Fort Boyard**.

Don't panic if you're new to sailing: you can rent a boat **with or without a license** and with or without a skipper. You're bound to find a formula to suit your needs.

Pour louer votre bateau, nous vous recommandons de passer par la

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plateforme [Samboat](#). C'est bien simple, ils ont l'offre la plus complète de location de bateau et leur site est très simple d'utilisation.

You enter your location, then your dates, then you can filter by boat type (motorboats, houseboats, small boats...), with or without a license, with or without a skipper: in short, you're spoiled for choice.

[All you need to know about yacht charter](#)

Itinerary: Visit La Rochelle in 1 day

Visiting La Rochelle in a day requires efficient organization to make the most of what the city has to offer. Here's our itinerary idea:

Morning

- **Le Vieux Port:** start your day at the Vieux Port, the heart of La Rochelle. Take time to admire the famous towers that guard the entrance to the port, including the Tour Saint-Nicolas and the Tour de la Chaîne. Then explore the colorful Gabut district.
- **A museum:** go on to the **Aquarium de La Rochelle**, or the **Musée Maritime**, located right next door.
- **Central Market or Local Restaurants:** take advantage of the Central Market for a quick lunch featuring local produce, or choose one of the many restaurants around the Old Port for a gourmet break. *(see our selection below)*

Afternoon

- **Stroll through the historic center:** after lunch, explore the **historic center of La Rochelle**. Take a stroll through the cobbled streets and shopping arcades, and admire the town hall.
- Then stroll to the beach through the **Charruyer** park

Evening

- **Relaxation at the Port des Minimes:** end your day at the Port des Minimes. It's the perfect place for a late afternoon stroll, with a breathtaking view of the boats and the sea.

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Itinerary: what to do in La Rochelle in 2 days

For your second day in La Rochelle, we recommend you visit one of the two museums you didn't have time to visit on your first day. Then set off to explore the **lle de Ré** by car or public transport, or take a **cruise** to explore the islands and/or the mythical Fort Boyard.

Our tips for your visit

Where to sleep?

Looking for a place to stay during your stay? To make it easier for you to find what you're looking for, we've put together an article detailing **the most interesting areas** to [stay in La Rochelle](#), as well as some **unusual addresses**.

Don't forget to book your stay in advance, especially in high season, as La Rochelle is a popular destination for holidaymakers, and we understand why!

Our top 3 accommodations

1. **Notre coup de coeur** : l'[Hôtel Saint Nicolas](#) nous avons séjourné dans ce

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magnifique hôtel lors de notre séjour à La Rochelle. Il est idéalement situé dans le quartier Saint-Nicolas, le port et le centre-ville sont accessibles à pied. La décoration est soignée, et cosy idéal. Nous nous sentions comme à la maison. Bref, foncez-y !

2. **Logement insolite** : [La Rochelle sur L'eau](#) : la Rochelle est une ville au bord de la mer, profitez en pour dormir sur un bateau dans le port de la Rochelle.
3. **Bon rapport qualité / prix €** : [Le Manoir Hôtel](#) est un bel hôtel trois-étoiles situé à proximité du centre-ville. Cet ancien hôtel particulier a été entièrement rénové pour offrir des chambres intimistes et pleines de charme. C'est un excellent rapport qualité prix.

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[Top rated accommodation in La Rochelle](#)

Where to eat?

- **Koya**: a Japanese restaurant offering original, tasty dishes just a stone's throw from the old port, in a magnificent setting. We enjoyed ourselves.
- **Le Comptoir Saoufé**: the ideal place to enjoy seafood right in the historic center.
- **Le Jardin du Marché**: a restaurant that showcases local produce, often from the nearby market, an excellent address in La Rochelle.
- **Les Frangins**: La Rochelle's must-try burgeur.
- **Christopher Coutanceau**: the star of La Rochelle. Located opposite the competition beach. If you have a special event to celebrate, this is the place for special occasions:

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Our good addresses on our map

As you know, we love to write down all **our good addresses and our itinerary** on a map to facilitate our readers' stay. Obviously, we **share this map below with you**:

How to get to La Rochelle

- **From Paris:** La Rochelle is easily accessible by TGV from Paris (about 3 hours). It's an ideal destination for a seaside weekend.
- **From Bordeaux:** A car or train journey will take you to La Rochelle in around 2 hours.
- **Depuis l'île de Ré et l'île d'Oléron :** le réseau de bus est bien développé pour l'île d'Oléron vous pouvez consulter les lignes et horaires sur le site internet de la [cdc-oléron](#) En haute saison, vous pouvez prendre un **ferry** pour relier Boyardville en environ 50 minutes (sur la cote est de l'île d'Oléron) ou l'île de Ré. Les bateaux circulent entre avril et début novembre, avec 1 départ quotidien en haute saison. Les **vélos sont autorisés** sur ces liaisons maritimes. C'est l'idéal pour ensuite explorer ces 2 îles en utilisant les nombreuses pistes cyclables. Retrouvez toutes les informations nécessaires sur les horaires et prix des bateaux sur le [site de la compagnie](#). (*environ 18,50€ par personne*)

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La Rochelle is a city rich in history and culture. As you can see, we really like this elegant, tree-lined city, still untouched by mass tourism, and we can't wait to go back. We'll be updating this article regularly as we're a regular visitor to La Rochelle. We hope this guide will help you plan your visit and make the most of this jewel on France's Atlantic coast.

If you have any other suggestions, please feel free to leave a comment below. We'll be adding them to our list of things to visit in La Rochelle.

Feel free to leave us a **note** below to let us know if you are planning this trip, **ask** any questions or **share** on social networks([our Instagram](#)) we will answer you with great pleasure!

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0 avis (0/5)

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