

## Burgundy

### Overview

Sit snugly, peacefully and very well fed and watered (this is a gastronome and wine lover's paradise) between the Champagne plains and the Rhône Valley, the region of Burgundy is the great French outdoors writ large. For anyone seeking a walking, hiking or biking break, the Côte d'Or's vineyards and Morvan Regional Park provide the perfect backdrop. And then there are the canals, with Nivernais a favourite among the fast-growing cruising fraternity. Or perhaps a bird's eye view would suit better – take in the sights from the heady heights of a hot-air balloon. Burgundy is also packed with historic towns and beautiful hilltop villages, as well as some of France's most striking religious buildings.

### Main cities and towns

Dijon, the majestic regional capital and world mustard epicentre, is a former dukedom stronghold and centre for science and arts excellence. Today, the medieval and Renaissance buildings and atmosphere of yesteryear still wow the crowds, but the city also enjoys a young, modern aspect thanks to its student population, shopping opportunities and great nightlife. Beaune in the Côte d'Or is famed for its cobbled streets and 15<sup>th</sup>-century hospital, the Hôtel-Dieu, while Auxerre (cathedral, quayside setting) and Sens in the North have oodles of day-trip appeal. Nevers is a small city famed for its nougat sweets and porcelain and Autun is a great base for exploring the Morvan Park.

### Places to visit

There's plenty to see for culture vultures, much of it with an intriguing historical angle to complement the aesthetic appeal. For a spot of pre-Roman history, check out the Treasure of Vix in Châtillon-sur-Seine. This collection of jewellery and artefacts from a 6<sup>th</sup>-century Celtic princess's tomb is splendid. As for the arts, unmissable is the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dijon – head for the panelled Salle des Gardes, home to the tombs of two Valois dukes, to see why this is one of France's most compelling museums. Just east of Montbard is the gorgeously peaceful Fontenay Abbey, a monastery founded 1118, while other notable abbeys include Cluny, Pontigny and Tournus, whose St-Philibert abbey-church is a Romanesque triumph. The small town of Semur-en-Auxois is stunningly beautiful, as is the hilltop cracker Vézelay – visit both with camera primed.

### Things to do and see

Get on yer bike! Burgundy has thousands of kilometres of trails to cycle along, including parts of the Côte d'Or, Mâconnais and the Morvan Regional Park. You can even make your way alongside the Canal de Bourgogne from Dijon to Tonnerre. The regional tourist authority provides excellent brochures to help you plan your departure points and route. Talking of canals, the Nivernais is one of France's most loved waterways. To enjoy the stunning French scenery unfold as you meander gently along in a well equipped cruiser is one of life's boxes that must be ticked. For an equally relaxing time, why not head to one of the region's spas (Saint-Honoré-les-Bains in the Nièvre or Bourbon-Lancy in the Saône-et-Loire) for some pampering or take your rod riverside for a spot of fishing.

### Food and drink

Rich, rich, rich – that’s the message from much of Burgundy’s menu. Think full-bodied red wine sauces and the tenderest of slow-cooked beef, probably of the Charolais cattle variety – this is, after all, the home of coq au vin and boeuf bourguignon (keep an eye out for the suffix à la bourguignonne, which means cooked in wine with mushrooms, onion and bacon lardons). Snails (escargots), usually served in garlic and parsley butter, are another local speciality, as is Bresse chicken and cheeses like Epoisses, called the “King of Cheeses” by Brillat-Savarin. And no visit to Dijon is complete without buying a jar or two of mustard – head for Maille on rue de la Liberté. As for wine, the options are many and of high quality, from the refreshing acidity of Chablis to the Pinot Noir reds of Côte de Nuits.

### Family attractions

With its huge play areas featuring climbing frames, trampolines, go-karts and bouncy castles, the Youmbao centre at Appoigny is a great place for kids to let off some steam. Another forest theme park is Accro’Bath, where youngsters can slide and climb their way along trails for a memorable treetop adventure. Or for something a little different, saddle up at the Traclin Equestrian farm (English spoken) or the Basse Coeur de Saint-Martin. All abilities of horsemanship are catered for and you can get to know the local farmyard residents too.