

Travel feature – French Leave

You can fly from Edinburgh to a dozen airports all over France, so the whole country is your oyster.

Here I suggest a menu of things to see and do in France this summer.



Grand Reims journey PHOTO Cyrille Beudot
LOVELY BUBBLY

Scotland won't be in contention as Reims hosts the FIFA Women's Football World Cup, but there's still plenty to celebrate in Reims. Put some fizz into your life with a trip to France's Champagne capital.

Another Notre-Dame

Start your day in Reims by visiting the **Catedral Notre-Dame** de Reims. A near contemporary of its Paris namesake, it was founded in 1211. There's a fine view of Reims from its towers and the interior glows with medieval and modern stained glass.

From the 11th century onward, all France's kings were crowned in Reims and until 23 September 2019 a breathtaking new sound and light show at the cathedral, Regalia, recreates the power and glory of a medieval coronation.



Palais Tau PHOTO Cyrille Beudot
From medieval to modern art

There's art for all tastes in Reims. The 17th-century Palais du Tau (www.monuments-nationaux.fr), opposite the Cathedral, is

filled with medieval sculpture, tapestries and religious art. If your taste runs to classical art, you'll find Corot landscapes and David's *Death of Marat* in the Musée des Beaux-Arts. There's work of a very different kind at the Champagne-Ardenne Regional Foundation for Contemporary Art (FRAC), with a collection of modern art from the 1960s to the 21st century (www.frac-champagneardenne.org).

And the bubbly?

The high point of any visit to Reims is a visit to one of the city's venerable Champagne houses. A two-hour tour of the cellars at Maison Ruinart (www.ruinart.com) costs €70 per person ends with a tasting session.

EAT AND DRINK

Reims is a gourmand's delight, with six Michelin-starred restaurants sharing nine stars between. Queening it over them all is Arnaud Lallement's triple-starred **L'Assiette Champenoise** (www.assiettechampenoise.com). The cheapest menu here costs €105, but you could easily spend €400 a head. On a more modest budget, you'll find regional dishes at **Brasserie du Boulingrin** (29-31 Rue de Mars www.boulingrin.fr), next to the vast Halles du Boulingrin covered market. The lunch menu starts at around €10.00 . **L'Edito** (74-80 Place Drouet d'Erlon www.brasserie-ledito-reims.fr) is a lively brasserie where the lunch bill will start at around €30 a head. End the day at **As Before**, Reims's swish jazz and piano bar, which stays open into the small hours (35 rue Buirette, www.salon-degermann.com).

FIND OUT MORE

Reims Tourisme www.reims-tourism.com

Champagne-Ardenne Tourisme www.tourisme-champagne-ardenne.com

Fly to Paris-CDG from Edinburgh with Air France

(www.airfrance.com) or **Easyjet** (www.easyjet.com). Trains direct from CDG to Champagne-Ardenne TGV take as little as 30 minutes or a 20-minute taxi ride into Reims costs around €25.

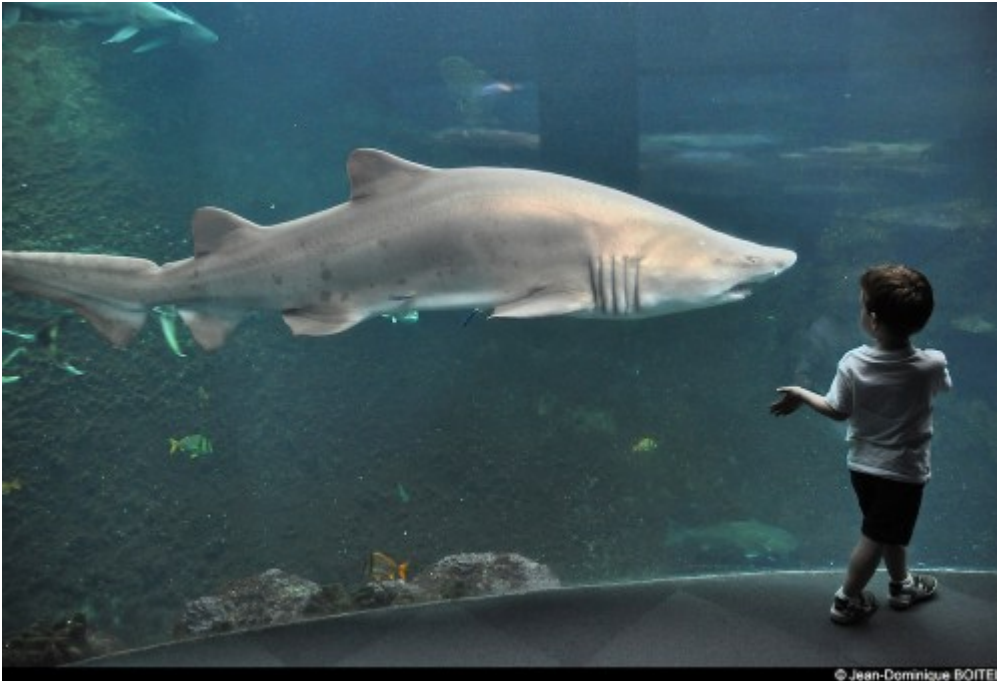


PHOTO Jean-Dominique Boitel

FISHY BUSINESS

Take a break in Boulogne to explore **Nausicaa**, Europe's largest aquarium, where you can plunge beneath the surface without getting your feet wet thanks to a new 18-metre underwater tunnel that passes through a huge tank – home to thousands of sea creatures great and small. Go behind the scenes with an English-speaking guide to find out how keepers take care of everything from sharks to sea anemones.

FIND OUT MORE

www.nausicaa.com

Fly to **Paris-CDG** from Edinburgh with **Air France** (www.airfrance.com) or **Easyjet**

(www.easyjet.com). Boulogne is around 2 hrs 30 mins by train (www.oui.sncf).



Chavin Observatory PHOTO Matthieu Pinaud

DON'T LOOK DOWN

The big deal at the 2877-metre Pic Du Midi is the Chavin observatory with its 400mm telescope and a breathtaking view of a starry sky free of light pollution and unobscured by clouds. In the daytime, there are panoramic views of the Pyrénées from a new 12-metre walkway glass-floored pontoon. Don't look down unless you have a good head for heights.

FIND OUT MORE

www.picdumidi.com

Fly to Toulouse from Edinburgh with Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) then train to Lourdes www.OUI.sncf. There's a twice-daily shuttle bus from Lourdes to the Pic.

MAGIC MONUMENTS

France's national heritage organisation, the **Centre des Monuments Nationaux**, hosts a choice of fascinating events and exhibitions at iconic buildings all over France over the next six months.

Summer spectacular

The **Chateau d'Azay-le-Rideau**, loveliest of the Loire chateaus, celebrates 500 years of the French Renaissance this summer with an evening sound and light show that turns the Italianate facade and gardens into a stunning spectacle that makes you wonder why Catherine de Medici spent so long in Leith.

(29 June-1 Sept)

*Fly to **Nantes** from Edinburgh with Ryanair. Azay-le-Rideau is around 200km from Nantes and the drive (along the picturesque Loire) takes about 2hrs 30 mins.*

Light and colour

British artist Liz West unveils installations inspired by the colours and light of ancient **Beaulieu-en-Rouergue Abbey**, where an outstanding collection of contemporary art graces the grounds and interior, rescued in the 1950s by collectors Genevieve Bonnefoi and Pierre Brache. (Until 30 September)

Fly from Edinburgh to **Toulouse** with Ryanair, then drive (under two hours).

Let them eat cake!

Marie-Antoinette famously condemned herself when she suggest that the Paris mob might get by on *brioche*s when the bread ran out. Well, you know how the French are about their bread. This autumn, visit the **Conciergerie** in Paris, where she spent her final days before the guillotine fell, to discover the woman behind the playgirl legend (16 Oct-27 Jan 2020).

*Fly to **Paris-CDG** from Edinburgh with **Air France** (www.airfrance.com) or **Easyjet***

*(www.easyjet.com) or to **Paris-Orly** with **Transavia** (www.transavia.com)*

FIND OUT MORE

Centre des Monuments Nationaux www.monuments-nationaux.fr

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