

Rebecca Recommends

Hotels and Services with Personality



REBECCA RECOMMENDS DÉCOUVERTES FOR FRANCE

When I was growing up, many of our family holidays consisted of wonderful trips to France. Initially it was with the largest caravan my Dad could successfully tow behind his Volvo as we toured the beautiful villages, towns and cities of Brittany, Normandy, Bordeaux and the Dordogne.

The perfect weather, endless countryside, wonderful markets and delicious local ingredients that we cooked ourselves outdoors all created memories that I still treasure. We would drive to Michelin-starred restaurants for dinner even when we stayed at a campsite! Later our family discovered the pleasures of overnights in châteaux and luxury hotels. We explored further south into Provence, even taking in the glitz and glamour of the Formula One Grand Prix in Monaco.

I still love France and never tire of visiting, as you can see from a recent shot of Charlie and me in the Dordogne. There are so many pleasures to be enjoyed -- unparalleled food and wine, beautiful art and architecture, balmy summer evenings, lovely gardens and the history of kings gone by.

I highly recommend Découvertes as [the French specialist in luxury and cultural travel](#). The Découvertes team is both broad and deep (eight different programs are run by eight team leaders) and capable of creating an exceptional itinerary in city or country.

A foodie can go truffle hunting with a specially trained dog in Provence....learn how hand-crafted butters are made in Brittany using 19th century techniques....or take an outdoors cooking class in the vineyards of Champagne.

There are so many reasons why people should visit France, for the first or fourteenth time, and we hope to inspire you by offering itineraries Découvertes has created for [Lyon](#), [Bordeaux](#), [Provence](#), [the French Riviera](#), [Alsace](#), [Champagne](#), [Brittany](#) and [Normandy](#).

Découvertes can also combine several destinations, as it does for this [Wine Regions in France](#) itinerary that starts in Paris and travels through Champagne, Burgundy, Lyon and Provence. I encourage you to take a look and get a taste for the special people, places and experiences that Découvertes can bring to your clients.

To enhance your clients' experience, connectivity and flexibility while in France, Découvertes has introduced a smartphone which serves as a hotspot with unlimited Wi-Fi access and built-in conveniences like commands to "call my driver," "call my guide," "call my local advisor" or "call my 24/7 concierge", to name just a few.

If you haven't yet worked with Découvertes (or it has been some time since you last inquired for their services) we would be delighted to personally introduce you to your assigned Découvertes travel advisor.

André, Céline, Karine, Sandra, Cynthia and the rest of the Découvertes team look forward to hearing from you and working on your client's next trip to France. Just email us your inquiry or what your clients need assistance with in France, and we will take it from there. I would love to hear from you!

Very best wishes,

Rebecca

vip@r-recommends.com



Lyon: The French Capital of Gastronomy



Known as the "French Capital of Gastronomy," Lyon is one of the wealthiest and most elegant cities in France. It bustles with dozens of food markets, none more magnificent than Les Halles de Lyon Paul Bocuse, named for the ground-breaking native son who helped modernize French cuisine.

Lyon also has more restaurants per square mile than any French city outside Paris. Options for foodies include a guided tour of Les Halles, cooking classes that specialize in Lyonnaise cuisine, a picnic in Beaujolais, and a behind-the-scenes tour of Cité du Chocolat Valrhona, the historic site of the Valrhona chocolate factory.

As everywhere in France, the food is wonderful, but there is always fascinating history to explore. In 1540, the King of France granted Lyon the monopoly to make lavish hand-loomed silk textiles for the aristocracy. The city's wealth helped build Europe's greatest collection of Renaissance architecture, still found in the historic quarter of Vieux Lyon. Covered passageways, linked buildings and courtyards were used as shortcuts by tradesmen carrying valuable fabrics.

[Découvertes' four-day, three-night itinerary for Lyon.](#)

The Legendary Wines of Bordeaux



Great cellars of the world are filled with the magnificent wines of Bordeaux, including Château Margaux, Château Pétrus and Château Lafite-Rothschild. Découvertes can arrange access to the most prestigious domains, as well as tastings, cooking classes, and surprises like a trip to a saffron farm. Our must-sees in the countryside include the Médoc and Graves wine regions, the medieval village of Saint Émilion (home to Chateau Pétrus) and the citadel of Blaye.

The city of Bordeaux is a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of its remarkable architecture, which includes the 18th century Place de la Bourse, so beautifully mirrored in reflecting pools. A young Marius Petipa first staged his ballets in the magnificent 18th century Grand Theatre of Bordeaux, still the setting for great operas, concerts and ballets.

To further wine knowledge, the brand new Cité du Vin is a stunning modern masterpiece devoted to helping people learn the culture of wine through exhibits, workshops and tastings. Travelers can also enjoy simple outdoor pleasures like bike rides along the Garonne River, boat rides and a stroll through gardens.

We also recommend a visit to The Bay of Arcachon with such natural wonders as the Great Dune of Pilat (the highest in Europe), Malprat Island and Cap Ferret peninsula. It's the perfect setting for pairing oysters with a crisp, cool glass of white Bordeaux, usually a blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon grapes.

[Découvertes' four-day, three-night itinerary for Bordeaux.](#)

The Pleasures of Provence



Arguably the most irresistible region in France, sun-soaked Provence offers so many ways to explore fine food. At the truffle fields of Pélissanne, clients can learn the different types of French truffles through a guided tasting, then go on a hunt with dogs that have been specially trained to find France's elusive "black gold".

In St Rémy en Provence, a chef leads a tour of its famous market, introduces local producers, and gathers all the ingredients you need for a cooking class that ends with a typical Provençal lunch. Découvertes can also arrange a visit to Moulin du Calanquet, which re-launched olive oil production in the village after a gap of over 40 years. It has an olive plantation of over 10,000 trees in the traditional regional varieties: Aglandau, Salonenque, Grossane, Verdale and Picholine.

Chocolaterie de Puyricard was the first food producer to be named a Living Heritage Company (EPV) by the French state for its excellence in traditional skills. Founded in 1967, Chocolaterie de Puyricard makes the finest chocolates using 100 original recipes. You can tour the workshop, see the production techniques, then taste its specialities, which includes calissons, macarons, marshmallows and ice cream!

[Découvertes' five-day, four-night itinerary for Provence.](#)

Glamour in the French Riviera



The French Riviera is synonymous with glamour and beauty. The Cannes Film Festival, Monte Carlo Beach and St. Tropez are just a few reasons why Côte d'Azur is a popular destination for celebs, royals and jetsetters. Découvertes can show clients a different way to visit the French Riviera, with private visits to artistic villages, perfume gardens, perfume workshops and a candied flower workshop.

In Nice, Découvertes can arrange a hands-on class at a Provençal bakery, with regional classics like olive and sundried tomato-studded fougasses, brioches scented with orange flower water, fruit tarts, and pain d'épices made with honey and spices.

[Découvertes' five-day, four-night itinerary for the French Riviera.](#)

The Regional Flavors of Alsace



Combining both French and German traditions, Alsace is renowned for its beautiful landscapes, unique architecture and regional food traditions. Travelers can enjoy the views from the Mont Sainte-Odile, an important spiritual place for locals, or from the Haut-Koenigsbourg castle, a medieval mountain fortress. La Petite France (the historic quarter of Strasbourg), the villages of Riquewihr and Kaysersberg, and the city of Colmar will transport you back in time.

Foie gras is considered the most refined dish in Alsatian gastronomy and Découvertes has connections with a famous foie gras maker in Ribeauvillé who offers lectures and tastings. The local Alsatian Rieslings and spicy Gewurtraminers are paired well with *Baeckeoff*, a traditional dish of mutton, beef, pork, potatoes and onions marinated overnight in white wine and juniper berries, then slow-cooked in a sealed casserole.

Another specialty is the soft cheese Munster, named for the village where it originates. Découvertes can arrange a local factory tour where travelers learn the different stages in making and maturing the strong-tasting cheese.

The Oster family has been making classic gingerbread since 1933. Flour, honey, spices and butter are the essential ingredients, but Mireille Oster's updates to the classic recipe include citrus, ginger, dates, even goji berries.

[Découvertes' four-day, three-night itinerary for Alsace.](#)

The World's Only True Champagne



For Champagne lovers, Reims is the place from which to explore the magic of the world's original – and indisputably greatest – sparkling wine. Découvertes recommends a stay at Domaine Les Crayères, whose restaurant Le Parc serves classical French cuisine with a wine list of more than 600 Champagne labels.

An excursion to the vineyards of Epernay with a private guide is a must. Découvertes can arrange an outdoors cooking class in the vineyards of the Montagne de Reims. Au Piano des Chefs' team of bi-lingual master oenologists and expert chefs (including the Michelin-starred Phillipe Mille) are warm and welcoming as they reveal the secrets of Champagne and the foods that pair best with it.

Founded in 1756, Maison Fossier in Reims is the oldest biscuit factory in France and a Living Heritage Company. It makes traditional Reims biscuits (a tradition dating to 1690), as well as gingerbread, sweets and marzipan-based confectionery.

[Découvertes' four-day, three-night itinerary for Champagne.](#)

Calvados, Cider and Camembert in Normandy



Normandy means Le Mont St. Michel and D-Day Landing Beaches to Americans, but the French think of it as the prosperous agricultural area that brings them Camembert, apple cider and Calvados,

the famous apple brandy. Découvertes can open this world up with a private cheese and cider tour through the archetypal Norman countryside, with its small villages and traditional half-timbered cottages.

Claude Monet, a famous Impressionist artist who adored food and drink, made his home in Giverny. The house and gardens where he created his famous water lilies paintings are open to the public. Then at the Giverny Museum of Impressionism, one learns how Degas, Matisse and Courbet flocked to Normandy to capture the beauty and changing light of its alabaster cliffs, twisting coastline and seaside towns.

Honfleur's picturesque port and slate-covered houses were a favorite subject, as were the sandy beaches of Deauville. Today the Deauville American Film Festival is a hot destination in early September.

[Découvertes' four-day, three-night itinerary for Normandy.](#)

Seafood and Seaweed Butter in Brittany



Brittany offers the traveler a fascinating cultural history plus enchanting old towns such as Saint Malo, Dinan and Vannes. The Celtic Breton language is still spoken, and on high days and holidays the women still wear their traditional long dresses adorned with lace. Brittany is home to many megalithic monuments, the largest alignments being near Carnac. Here, too, you will find long beaches swept daily by Atlantic tides.

Brittany yields some of the finest seafood anywhere in the world, and it's even better with hand-crafted Bordier Butter. Découvertes recommends a visit to see the traditional 19th century techniques that produce a much higher quality product.

Pasteurized cream from organic, sustainable farms is allowed to mature for two days to thicken and develop aromatic complexity. After being churned, the butters are left to rest for 24 hours before being kneaded in the Bordier workshop. Kneading is a 19th century technique that homogenizes and reworks butters from different production sites. Jean-Yves Bordier also creates flavored butters, including famous seaweed butter, to accompany the day's catch.

[Découvertes' six-day, five-night itinerary for Brittany.](#)

Finally...Always Stay Positive!



As we contemplate the riches France has to offer, I am inspired by the example of Lindsey and Carlo Garcia, a young couple from Austin, Texas. Fully aware of a State Department caution, they flew to Paris in March with their eight-month-old son to experience one of the world's great cities.

This photo of mum Lindsey and baby Thomas at the Eiffel Tower is a powerful image of joy and optimism. We can always decide to fully engage with life, even in an unpredictable world!

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