

# Travel & Outdoors

WISH YOU WERE HERE



## A taste of fine Burgundy

At beautifully renovated Abbaye de la Bussière, Michelin-starred dining and luxury accommodation awaits, finds **Bernadette Fallon**

**E**ight centuries of monks have climbed the stairs of this abbey before me. They've passed under these magnificent vaulted ceilings, past the ornately carved pillars and enjoyed the sunlight through the huge stained-glass windows.

But they didn't walk on carpet on their way to eat in a Michelin-starred dining room. They didn't rock in the huge wooden swing by the lake. Nor would they have crossed the hump-backed bridge to the tiny island with its trees and treehouse.

Back then there were no swings or treehouses and the lake was a sewage facility for the 12th century monastery. Now the lake is a home to ducks and a family of herons, and the abbey-turned-hotel has been sympathetically preserved by an English family to display its wonderful architecture to a whole new generation of worshippers.

Only now we come to admire the beauty of the building, the gourmet

food and the tranquil setting instead of God. But if you have any spiritual awareness at all, you'll quickly find this beautiful place resonating with your soul.

There are 20 rooms in total at the Abbaye de la Bussière explains owner Clive Cummings when he picks us up at Dijon train station, a half hour drive from the abbey, including rooms in the main house as well as the various other buildings around the grounds, some of which have been converted into family suites. Our cosy double is nestled under the eaves with views of the gardens and lake. As befits its luxurious setting, it's kitted out with a Nespresso machine and a welcome bottle of home-made peach liqueur – there's a Jacuzzi bath in the bathroom, fluffy robes and slippers in the wardrobe.

Luxurious it may be, but the

*Trout is from the abbey's pond, meat from the area and vegetables from the garden*



**Restaurant Le 1131, main; the pool and exterior of Abbaye de la Bussière, above**

renovations were not without incident. The main one being the protesters who gathered at the gate when the family arrived to take it over from its former owners, worried that the building was being lost to the nation.

The Abbaye was founded in 1131 by the third abbot of Citeaux, the mother church of the religious order that became famous all over Europe. The monks stayed until 1793 when the building was sold as a national asset. In the 20th century it passed back into the hands of the Church and was run as a spiritual retreat until the Cummings bought it in 2005.

The protesters needn't have worried. Far from taking it out of the

hands of the country, the family has preserved the building for future generations. They've opened it up to the locals who come to eat in the hotel's two dining rooms, provided employment – the majority of the staff are French – and a market for local suppliers. As Clive says, "if we can't get it in a 20-mile radius, we mainly do without it". Eighty per cent of the hotel's produce is sourced in the immediate area, 100 per cent of it comes from Burgundy.

Which means the food is super fresh and while you won't find any seafood on the menu (the coast being outside the 20-mile catchment area), there is organic trout from the abbey's own pond, meat from the local area and vegetables from the garden. The fine dining Michelin-starred restaurant is a grand affair with stone arches and chandeliers and offers both a tasting menu – matched with wines – and an à la carte, with choices including frogs' legs, local freshwater zander and pigeon.

In fairness, the quality of the food is just as good in the hotel bistro, where the next evening we eat duck foie gras and local asparagus, Charolais beef and veal steak. It's also very good value, with prices starting at €29

for two courses. Dinner in Le 1131 Michelin restaurant will set you back a rather heftier €98.

Pre-dinner drinks like Crement – the local sparkling wine, cocktailed up with Crème de Cassis, made to the chef's grandmother's recipe – are served in a choice of elegant sitting rooms. One of these is the Scottish Room, carpeted in the family's Cummings tartan, all very "gentleman's study" and sporting a cabinet full of Scotch.

And if you tire of all the Michelin-dinners and elegant drawing rooms, what else is there to do? Well, there are bikes to borrow for a leisurely cycle along the nearby canal tow-paths, there's the tiny village of La Bussière sur Ouche just outside the gates to explore and there's the Frog.

We zip along country roads in this vintage green Citroen 2CV, along the Route de Grand Crus (Road of the Great Wines), which is home to some of the most prestigious vineyards in the world. Like the Romane Conti, a bottle of which can fetch up to almost half a million pounds. The Abbaye cellar stocks one of its slightly more reasonable offerings, a snip at a mere €6,000.

We stop for lunch in the medieval walled city of Beaune, with its fromageries, patisseries and cafes – La Buissonnière is a good spot for food. The city hosts the most prestigious wine auction in the world every November, when international wine connoisseurs arrive to do bidding and everyone else parties it up in the week-long festival.

You can hire the Frog from the hotel or its owner Julie will take you out for a spin. An Englishwoman who has lived in the area for over 20 years, she's a font of knowledge on the local history and regional wine-making – you can also stop off at any vineyard with a 'degustation' sign to taste and buy.

We've come by train from the UK to France and on the way back spend a night in Paris (just an hour and 40 minutes from Dijon) to break the journey. Scorning tourist haunts after our time hanging out with the Burgundy locals, we stay in the Marais district. It's the place

that fashionable Parisiennes like to keep for themselves, with winding medieval cobblestone streets, cosy bars and cafes, hip boutiques and galleries, old-fashioned bakeries and wine shops. The area has more pre-revolutionary buildings and streets left intact than any other part of Paris, this is what the city looked like before Napoleon showed up.

We have lunch in the chic Mariage Freres, the oldest teahouse in Paris where tea pervades the entire menu, both food and drink. Decked out in marble with its Colonial styling, if Raffles did a French tea shop this is what it would look like. We dine in the conservatory and eat delicate Croque Monsieur and French beef, served with matching teas and desserts – from a gloriously sumptuous selection in a big glass case – for €35. Later, we sit outside a local bar, drink rosé wine in the fading afternoon sun and feel French.

We're staying in a former bakery, Hotel du Petit Moulin, the 19th century boulangerie where Victor Hugo once bought his baguettes. The writer lived in the area and the Musée Victor Hugo is just a few streets away. Today the hotel is a stylish mix of eye-catching décor – the 18 rooms were designed by Christian Lacroix – and cosy intimacy, with tiny foyer decked out in eclectic colour and quirky style.

We pull into St Pancras station on the Eurostar, walking under the massive bronze embracing couple as we leave the platform. The Meeting Place is the work of British sculptor Paul Day, there's a smaller version in the halls of the Abbaye and his huge Charolais cows grace the lawns. He lives just down the road from the former monastery, a little British enclave in this scenic part of Burgundy, well worth the trip across the English Channel to discover it. ■

**Rooms at Abbaye de la Bussière** from €225, +33 3 8049 0229, [www.abbayedelabussiere.fr](http://www.abbayedelabussiere.fr); **rooms at Hotel du Petit Moulin** from €215, +33 1 4274 1010, [www.hotelpetitmoulinparis.com](http://www.hotelpetitmoulinparis.com); **book travel on www.eurostar.com** direct from Glasgow, Edinburgh and London to Paris and Dijon.



One of the bedrooms at Abbaye de la Bussière, above; a stone carving, inset

SHORT HAUL



Photographs: Neil Geraghty

# Raise a glass to Poznan

The historic city in western Poland is a gem just waiting to be discovered, writes Neil Geraghty

It's midday in Poznan's Old Market Square and hundreds of children on school trips are gathered in front of the Town Hall awaiting a charming ritual that dates back to 1551. In this year, so legend has it, a cook was asked by the mayor to prepare a banquet of roast venison which unfortunately fell off the spit and burnt to a cinder. In a desperate bid to rescue the banquet the cook stole two goats from a nearby meadow which slipped from his fingers and ran up the clock tower of the town hall. In a farcical scene the goats began fighting in front of cheering crowds and the mayor was so entertained he forgave the cook. To commemorate the event the mayor ordered two clockwork tin goats to be installed in the tower which to this day come out and head butt each other 12 times at noon. The bells of the clock begin to chime and a hushed silence descends upon the square as a lone bugler appears on the parapet and plays a melodic salute. Two doors above the clock then open and the tin goats roll out and lower their heads to commence battle. Each time they lock horns a chorus of cheers emanates from the excited school kids and a good percentage of the adults present too.

Poznan is one of those rare cities

full of history and charm that has somehow remained off the radar of the European city break circuit. The city is the cradle of Polish history where on an island in the River Warta the first Polish King Mieszko I was baptised in 966. The cathedral on the island is the oldest in Poland and the present structure is an imposing mixture of austere red Gothic brickwork and ornate green copper Baroque spires. The city that grew up around the cathedral quickly outgrew the island and in medieval times the city centre moved over to the west bank of the river. Cathedral Island today is a peaceful backwater of ecclesiastical buildings set amidst tranquil gardens. Just across the river from the cathedral a state of the art new heritage centre, the Porta Posnania, takes visitors on an interactive multimedia journey through Poznan's turbulent history from the early Slavic migrations of the 5th century to the traumas of Nazi occupation and Communist oppression of the 20th century.

A terrace on the roof of Porta Posnania gives visitors unparalleled views of the cathedral and Old Town beyond. The Renaissance Old Town was heavily bombed during the Second World War but in the past 75 years has been painstakingly

restored with imaginative urban improvement projects continuing to the present day. The Old Town is paved with pink granite cobblestones from the Baltic that cast a warm cheerful glow over the streets. The houses, many with pretty Dutch-style gables, are painted in vibrant colours and are home to bars and restaurants which in the summer have delightful al fresco seating in atmospheric courtyards and pavement terraces. The Old Market Square is an especially lovely spot to dine and in the evening I head over to Brovaria, a hotel, restaurant and micro brewery for a dinner of hearty traditional Polish food. Although it's summer

**The Market Square in Poznan, main; the city's cathedral, above**

the delicious St Martin's croissant. Traditionally eaten on 11 November, St Martin's Day, the croissant is a weighty horse shoe-shaped pastry stuffed with a paste made from poppy seeds, raisins, almonds, sugar and butter. At the museum two entertaining pastry chefs invite the audience to take part in each stage of the recipe process, the highlight of which involves cutting the rolled pastry into triangles with a giant military sabre.

With 100,000 students, Poznan has a lively nightlife characterised by small bars where live music and craft beers take centre stage. A local speciality is Grodziski, a smoked wheat beer that dates back to the 14th century. I find a small bar that stocks it and take the drink outside. It's a warm evening and the golden beer sparkles in the mellow sunshine flooding down the street. I take a sip and the taste is light, refreshing with zesty mineral notes that dance over the tongue. Known as Polish champagne it's the ideal tippie to while away a perfect summer evening in this charming city. ■

*Local speciality Grodziski is a wheat beer that dates back to the 14th century*

I opt for a delicious Christmas dish of slow cooked roast duck that falls off the bone onto a bed of delicately spiced braised red cabbage. To mop up the savoury juices the duck comes with pyzy Poznan, traditional steamed dumplings that are similar in taste and texture to Chinese steamed buns.

I've no room for a pudding but the following day I visit the Rugarlowe Museum for a masterclass in Poznan's most famous sweet treat,

**Ryanair** ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) flies from Edinburgh to Poznan twice a week from £27 one way inc taxes. For more information on travel to Poland visit [www.poland.travel](http://www.poland.travel)

48 HOURS IN

## Southern Brittany

**Friday, midday**  
Check into Grande Metairie Carnac (cabins from £95, [www.canvasholidays.co.uk](http://www.canvasholidays.co.uk)). The top of the range cabins come with plenty of space and an outdoor hot tub.



**1pm**  
Dine overlooking the pool complex. A glass of crisp local Muscadet and a hearty moules mariniere will slip you into laidback Brittany time.

**2:30pm**  
Handily Grande Metairie is next to the famous Carnac stones, one of the world's most important prehistoric sites. Myriad menhirs (standing stones) stretch off in rows into the distance. La Maison des Megalithes runs guided tours in English, which get you beyond the perimeter fence.

**4pm**  
Spend time at La Maison des Megalithes. Learn about the theories behind the stone alignments, watch their film and visit a shop stocked with books yielding more theories.

**7pm**  
Head into Carnac for a relaxed dinner near the beach at Lulu's. Breton seafood is the star, which you can follow up with a crepe – in Brittany crepes are always sweet, galettes are the buckwheat savoury variety.

**Saturday, 10am**  
Head down to the Yacht Club Carnac to discover the spectacular coastline in a kayak. If you're unsure they can organise a guide.

**1:30pm**  
Head to Saint-Goustan, arguably the prettiest village in Brittany. Newcomer Billig is just off the main drag. Their set menu is brilliant value

– a savoury galette, crepe and a local cider for €12.

**2:30pm**  
Wander around this riverside village checking out its wee sailing boats and chocolate box pretty lanes.

**4pm**  
Enjoy an ice cream at L'Igloo, who offer a massive range of flavours. Take a pew overlooking Saint-Goustan's landmark bridge.

**7:30pm**  
Southern Brittany is renowned for its seafood. Maison Quintin offer a heaving platter of lobster, prawns and oysters for just €35. They've been cultivating oysters for three generations so you're in good hands.

**Sunday, 9am**  
Time for one last dip in Grand Metairie's trio of swimming pools, or for a cerebral denouement pop back to revisit those otherworldly Carnac stones. ■

Robin McKelvie

**Ryanair** ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) fly direct to Nantes from Edinburgh with return flights from £37.87. **Lonely Planet's France guide** has handy information as does [www.brittanytourism.com](http://www.brittanytourism.com)

BARGAIN BREAKS

### City on the Loire

Prices start from £252pp for a three night holiday to Nantes, France, with Travel Republic. This includes room-only accommodation at the four star Radisson Blu Nantes and return flights from Edinburgh on 27 September. **Call 020 8974 7200 or see [www.travelrepublic.co.uk](http://www.travelrepublic.co.uk)**

### Channel Island treat

EasyJet Holidays is offering seven nights at the three star Merton Hotel in St Saviour, Jersey on a B&B basis

from £370pp including flights from Edinburgh on 19 October. **Call 020 3499 5232 or see [www.easyjet.com/holidays](http://www.easyjet.com/holidays)**

### Tailored for you

The four star Mercure Leeds Centre Hotel has a new sartorial break in partnership with Hemingway Tailors. Available until the end of the year, it starts from £250 for two people, including an overnight stay with breakfast and a made-to-measure shirt for one of the guests. **Call 011320 42150 or see [www.accorhotels.com](http://www.accorhotels.com)**