



# UP FOR ADVENTURE

Gill Harris discovers there's more than one way to explore the sights and delights of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté

Main and below: The charming town of Dole is not only a riverside paradise but the birthplace of microbiologist Louis Pasteur, who invented pasteurisation; the Château de Ray-sur-Saône

They say it's like riding a bike. And it turns out it is – in this case, literally. After a 30-year absence from the saddle, there I was powering up a mountain with an ease worthy of the *maillot jaune*, magnificent scenery rushing past... Suddenly I felt like I was nine again – and the world was my oyster.

The site for this reunion twixt foot and pedal was Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, which takes up one tenth of mainland France but is home to fewer than one in 20 of its population; so once you escape the various towns and cities, there are plenty of wide-open spaces to explore, making it an ideal destination for sporty types. With its network of rivers and canals and three regional nature parks, it is criss-crossed with 18,000km of walking routes and endless trails for cyclists to enjoy.

Though, of course, my miraculous return to the world of cycling was aided slightly by good old electricity.

The Plateau des Mille Étangs tourist office in Faucogney-et-la-Mer rents out e-bikes to open up this magnificent land to a wider audience. The plateau stretches between the Ognon and Breuchin valleys, a

delightful mosaic of land and water that was created some 12,000 years ago, as the last glaciers of the Vosges retreated. Hills and forests give way to water meadows and glittering ponds, making for a stunning bike ride. Don't miss the 6th-century Église Saint-Martin and its magnificent views over the valley – a perfect spot to catch your breath and have a go at ringing the church bell!

## PEDAL POWER

I've always been a bit sniffy about e-bikes: it's not really cycling, is it? But I'm a convert now. These bikes allowed me and my companions to cycle up steep slopes through magnificent forest – something we simply wouldn't have managed on a regular bike. And it is actually exactly like cycling. You still have to pedal and you don't even have to use the electricity unless you need it. Think of it as an extra set of bionic gears designed to make sure you never have to get off and push.

If you prefer the more traditional form of cycling, you might enjoy the tranquil scenery (and easy terrain) of L'Échappée Bleue: Moselle – Saône à Vélo, a new path that joins Luxemburg to Lyon, connecting Northern Europe with the Mediterranean Sea. We didn't go that far,

obviously, instead opting for an easy 12km route from Ray-sur-Saône, where you can explore a stunning château, owned by the same family for 900 years, to Savoyeux. Pick up maps and suggested routes from one of the tourist offices, where you can also arrange bike rental. Leisure boating is also abundant and you can hire vessels for day trips or longer holidays.

In the picturesque town of Dole, birthplace of Louis Pasteur, there is another opportunity for messing about on the water, by setting sail on the Doubs river. We relaxed and took in the splendid views aboard Bateau Isola Bella ([www.unebelleaventure.fr](http://www.unebelleaventure.fr)), a refurbished 1963 Venetian taxi boat oozing with charm, our guides explaining points of interest, such as the magnificent Baroque collegiate church, along the way.

Back on dry land, if you feel like swapping your wheels for, err... more wheels, try a Segway tour of Dijon. The tourist office offers guided tours by Segway of some of this handsome city's main sights – or you can easily wander around on foot, following the owl symbols which signify points of interest. Along the way, you'll find shops, museums, galleries and plenty of cafés and bars where you can »







pause to watch the world go by. However, the highlight – and high spot – of a visit to Dijon has to be the Tour Philippe le Bon (tower of Philip the Good); tours of which can be booked at the tourist office. After a 316-step climb, you will be rewarded for your efforts with breathtaking views across the city.

### A SPRING IN YOUR STEP

All this gallivanting will leave you quite thirsty, so while you're in the Haute-Saône, it's worth dropping in to Velleminfroy Sources, where you can visit the bottling factory and browse the fascinating museum, which tells the story of the 1828 discovery of this award-winning natural spring water that claims to prolong life (and is so packed with goodness, you are advised to limit your daily intake). The huge collection of multi-coloured water bottles from years gone by are worth a visit alone!

Thirst quenched, it's time to soothe your weary limbs at the thermal spa in Luxeuil-les-Bains, a charming town about 70 km from Besançon. The baths are classified as a historic monument for their 18th-century exterior and 1930s interior. Centred around a



**Far left (top to bottom):** Cycling is the best way to explore Bourgogne-Franche-Comté's (occasionally hilly) countryside – preferably with a little jolt of electricity when the going gets tough; river cruising is the perfect way to discover the sights of the region; the Saône Valley; (inset) the tannery once owned by Louis Pasteur's father in Dole

**Clockwise from main:** Dole is the birthplace of Louis Pasteur; and the ideal spot to while away an afternoon by the river; head to the Velleminfroy Sources and learn about the 1828 discovery of this award-winning natural spring water that claims to prolong life; Luxeuil Abbey

natural thermal spring at a temperature of 34C, the huge complex includes floatation tanks, hammam, whirlpool, steam rooms and more. As well as being popular with tourists, many people travel to the spa for health reasons, with special tidal tanks set up to help with physical rehabilitation following injury.

### BACK IN TIME...

After a spot of pampering and recharging of the batteries, it's well worth a stroll around the town itself, which is brimming with history, notably the excavation of numerous catacombs in the centre and the abbey, founded in the 6th century by Saint Colomban, which is one of the oldest monasteries in this region of France.

As well as having plenty of things to do for more active types, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté is, of course, packed with culture so you can exercise your brain alongside your legs.

Be sure to pay a visit to the Paul Devoille Distillery in the charming and tranquil town of Fougerolles, the cherry capital of the Haute-Saône (boasting around 10,000 trees). Renowned for its kirsch and *griottines* (cherries in kirsch), you can tour the attics where ageing takes place and see the stills and the bottling »





“A FEW MONTHS BEFORE THE REVOLUTION, THE LOCALS DREW UP A CHARTER OF GRIEVANCES IN WHICH THEY EXPRESSED THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH BLACK SLAVES ”

in which they expressed their solidarity with black slaves. In a letter to the King of France, they wrote: “The inhabitants and community of Champagny cannot think of the ills being suffered by Negroes in the colonies, (...) without feeling a stabbing pain in their hearts.”

Their astonishing story is told at this museum, which charts the cruelty of slavery and its eventual abolition and provides a stark reminder that human rights abuses continue to this day.

Of course, all this exercise and culture will leave you tired and hungry – and fortunately, you are in one of the greatest gastronomic regions in the world. So rest your limbs and indulge yourself with a well-deserved *repas* and glass of wine. **FT**



**Clockwise from top:** Make sure to sample Paul Devoille Distillery's pear brandy, created with a full pear inside the bottle; for a feast worthy of a king look no further than Grain de Sel in Dole; Paul Devoille Distillery's cunning absinthe device

process – all free of charge. In the distillery shop, enjoy a tasting while you marvel at the wide range of brandies, presented in bottles that can only be described as works of art.

Be sure to check out the pear brandy, created with a full pear inside the bottle, and ask for a demonstration of the pretty absinthe set: a cunning device designed to serve your absinthe perfectly.

Around the corner is the Secret Garden of the Green Fairy, chock-full of herbs used in the distillery. It's the perfect spot to relax and enjoy a picnic.

## STANDING TOGETHER

One of the more curious and unexpected sites in this region of France is the Maison de la Négritude et des Droits de l'Homme. In a land of art, architecture, fine food and wine, the last thing you expect to come across is a slice of history related to slavery.

Yet, in the small village of Champagny on March 19, 1789, just a few months before the French Revolution took place, the locals drew up a charter of grievances



## BOURGOGNE-FRANCHE-COMTÉ ESSENTIALS

### WHERE TO STAY AND EAT

#### Hôtel Oceania Le Jura

This smart, stylish hotel in the centre of Dijon is an ideal base from which to explore the town's sites.

14 avenue Maréchal Foch  
21000 Dijon

+33 (0)3 80 41 61 12

[www.oceaniahotels.com](http://www.oceaniahotels.com)

#### Château d'Epenoux

A taste of 18th-century splendour, each room is glitteringly sumptuous and when you see breakfast laid out beneath a magnificent chandelier, it will take your breath away.

5 rue Ruffier d'Epenoux

70000 Pusy-Epenoux

+33 (0)3 84 75 19 60

[www.chateau-epenoux.com](http://www.chateau-epenoux.com)

#### Les Gourmandises Bio

On the banks of the Saône River, Christine Spohn is waiting to welcome you to her eco-paradise. Using ingredients from her organic garden, such as dandelion and goosefoot, she will prepare your meals and you can even take part in a cookery workshop.

3 rue des Varennes

70130 Recologne-lès-Ray

+33 (0)6 33 52 75 28

[www.les-gourmandises-bio.fr](http://www.les-gourmandises-bio.fr)

#### Hôtel Restaurant Spa Beau Site

Comfortable and practical, this modern hotel serves great food. Be sure to leave room for the magnificent cheeseboard!

18 rue Georges Moulimard

70300 Luxeuil-Les-Bains

+33 (0)3 84 40 14 67

[www.beau-site-luxeuil.com](http://www.beau-site-luxeuil.com)

#### L'Essentiel

Dijon is rammed with great places to dine, and at L'Essentiel, Chef Richard Bernigaud won't disappoint with his inventive dishes. I'm still trying to recreate his poached eggs with popcorn, a revelation to the tastebuds!

12 rue Audra

21000 Dijon

+33 (0)3 80 30 14 52

[www.lessentiel-dijon.com](http://www.lessentiel-dijon.com)

#### Restaurant Grain de Sel

Fine, modern cuisine in charming surroundings (if it's warm enough, choose a table in the pretty courtyard).

67 rue Pasteur

39100 Dole

+33 (0)3 84 71 97 36

[www.restaurant-graindesel.fr](http://www.restaurant-graindesel.fr)

#### Auberge Des Mille Etangs

This idyllic spot offers hearty fare and a warm welcome – you won't want to leave.

Goutte Géant

70440 Servance

+33 (0)3 84 20 48 55

[www.aubergedesmilleetangs.fr](http://www.aubergedesmilleetangs.fr)

### GETTING THERE

The Eurostar from London St Pancras will take you to Paris Gare du Nord, then head to Gare de Lyon for the train to Dijon. We flew back from Basel in Switzerland, but Dole and Dijon both have airports too.