



ALTERNATIVE AQUITAINE

The other South of France

FRANCE SURVIVAL GUIDE

Even though a strait of a mere 21 miles away separates us from France, culturally it's a vast gulf – after all, it's because it's so different yet so close that we love going there. For the uninitiated, however, arriving in France can be rather disorientating. To help you through here is Alternative Aquitaine's guide to surviving a week or two there.

This guide is intended for inexperienced travellers in France, as a way of hopefully guiding you through some of the idiosyncracies of French life. For the time-pressed, here it is distilled down to our 3 'Top Tips' (you can read the rest when you arrive):

- **Map:** we very much recommend buying a map of Aquitaine before you go – Michelin #355 covers most of the region. To avoid starting a holiday with threats of divorce, please familiarise yourself with the directions we have provided, especially the last leg, and mark them on the map **before you leave!** This is the most heartfelt piece of advice in this guide!
- **French:** if you are not confident in French please swot up before you go! Aquitaine is a very French part of France, with few English speakers - a little French will go a long way. Holiday French CDs for the car journey down or the week before you go are ideal. A small portable phrase book is also a must – the guide books recommended at the end of the guide all have useful sections.
- **First night:** Please think ahead to your first night. If you are arriving at a 'normal' time, on a Saturday around 5pm, you should have time to buy provisions for that evening and the next morning. (There'll usually be a supermarket open until 7.30 pm nearby.) If you are arriving late on Saturday, or on a Sunday, some (but not all) supermarkets are open on Sunday mornings but only until midday at the latest so please factor this in and take provisions with you if need be.

ACCLIMATISING YOURSELF

Forget *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Before setting foot on 'la Patrie' (as patriotic natives refer to it) the four essential characteristics of France worth memorising are the ones below – these can help to explain and understand better much of the strangeness of what's going on round you:

- **France is a country of unlikely contrasts.** There is a strong sense of tradition, and that certain 'old-fashioned' values and ways of life are worth preserving. At the same time progress is by no means a dirty word. A visit to Bordeaux provides an excellent example of this combination of modern & traditional, a gleaming 21st century tram winding it's way amongst the city centre's beautifully restored 18th century architecture - something locals are very proud of.
- **France is a very proud nation.** For example, long after we ditched our Rovers & Austins, Renaults, Peugeotts and Citroens still clog French roads. One reason for their pride is that the French see themselves as a last beacon of civilization in this globalised, dog-eat-dog world. As not everyone shares this view the French can be a little defensive, and sensitive to criticism.
- **France is essentially a Communist country;** think Soviet-era central-planning, not Anglo-Saxon 'flexibility' (like 'liberalisation', a detested word in France). This means the waitress and CEO are treated as equals, and officialdom are unforgiving. Another consequence is that 'have-a-nice-day' style service is still uncommon in France, and can result in you feeling you've been dealt with rather abruptly – please don't take it personally.

- By their own admission, **the French can be rather passionate and unruly**, characteristics which, unfortunately, have to be tamed by myriad and vehemently enforced regulations in every corner of life, even extending to which side of the street you can park on on certain days of the week. Unfortunately the same rules apply to visitors too, there's no point in arguing about it.

It's a unique mix, very different from the average Anglo-Saxon's outlook on life. Although it may leave us sometimes feeling baffled it's worth remembering that this combination of tradition and modernity, pride, regulation and control go a long way to preserving so many of the aspects of France we love, and often feel we have lost ourselves.

2. TRAVEL

Driving in France

Naturally we do a lot of driving in France and whilst most of it is blissful and carefree, there are times when you're left wondering if there's such a thing as a driving test in this beloved country. It seems as though indicators are an optional extra that most French motorists feel they can do without. We've often considered it safest to be a on a push-bike in France as the French have the utmost respect for cyclists; many's the time we've observed a motorist slowing down behind a bunch of cyclists, indicating and pulling out carefully - before carving up another driver at the next roundabout...c'est la vie!

The following is a Bluffer's Guide for the newcomers first venture on French roads.

First & foremost, *serrez à droite!* (**drive on the right**). There are many such signs on the way of channel ports, but few in Aquitaine itself. If (like me) the nominated driver struggles with telling left from right encourage him or her to write *droite* and *gauche* on the backs of their hands.

Giving way (*cedez le passage*): the rules are now the same as in the UK and most of the world: drivers give way to the left, vehicles already on a roundabout have priority, vehicles give way when joining a major road from a minor road. There are however two exceptions! One is official: in Paris (only in Paris) vehicles joining a roundabout have priority over ones already on it. One is unofficial – older drivers in the rural south, especially ones at the wheel of agricultural machinery, abide by the old rules and do not give way to the left, please watch out!

French roads are divided into: **autoroutes** (motorways), indicated by an **A** then a number; **routes nationales** (main trunk roads, often dual carriageways, like our A roads), indicated by an **N** and a number; **(routes) départementales** (secondary routes, like our smaller A and B roads), indicated by a **D** and a number. There are also country roads with no number.

Péages: most autoroutes charge tolls (*péages*); you'll find péage stations occasionally in the middle of the motorway or when you exit. Péage channels and queues are divided into ones which accept coins, credit cards (most cards accepted), and '*télépéage*' - a system for regular motorway users, avoid!

Safety: all cars on French roads must be equipped with: **reflective triangle & yellow security vest**. Drivers should carry the registration certificate, valid driving licence and insurance documents. Drink-driving limits, seat-belt laws, child seat regulations are all similar to the UK. The Driving Abroad website (www.drivingabroad.co.uk) contains a useful guide to French road signs.

The decree requiring vehicles to carry **two alcohol breath tests** applies as of 1 July 2012. (According to the decree, the obligation is to have one breath test in the vehicle but if the driver tests himself, drivers will need to have a second breath test – unused - in order to comply with the law.) The fine of € 11 if the driver does not have such breath test in the vehicle is only applicable as from 1 November 2012.

Traffic information reports can be found at www.bison-fute.com (= “crafty bison”; suggestions to us on a postcard please as to why a bison should be crafty and know about traffic-jams, we’ve no idea!)

Speeding: Traffic police have the power to impose **on-the-spot speeding fines**, and are not afraid to do so – we talk from experience, rushing to catch a plane... Please respect speed limits, and remember they are in kmh!

Services: autoroutes and some dual carriageways have regular *aires*, **service areas**. There are two types – *aires de repos*, essentially just a toilet (beware: usually they are the old-fashioned, third-world kind) & picnic tables, and *aires de service*, offering the full works: proper WCs, petrol station, restaurant/cafeteria, and often a hotel. In Aquitaine the Bordeaux-Cestas (nr Bordeaux) and Labenne (nr Biarritz) service areas are recommended!

Stop-overs: if you are driving down from a channel port and looking for **stop-overs**, in our experience **Alasdair Sawday’s** website is a reliable source of good quality, characterful B&Bs – this can be lovely way to break the journey. If you don’t want to go far off your route, road-side **Campanile** hotels offer decent, clean accommodation, usually with a restaurant offering a good quality buffet dinner & breakfast.

Day trips: if you're driving to the beach, try and get there early in the morning or leave at lunchtime. In August the coast roads and car parks jam up quickly. The RN10 between Biarritz and St Jean de Luz is notorious for jams in the summer.

Filling up: almost all petrol stations accept major non-French credit and debit cards. Some local garages will still want to fill you up (rather than let you do it yourself) – *faites le plein s’il vous plait* is how to ask for a fill-up. If you are on a long drive please note that unmanned 24 hour petrol stations do not normally take non-French credit/debit cards. Also, most petrol stations do not open in the evenings or Sundays so fill up whilst you can!

To help you be prepared for your time on French roads, the **AA** and **RAC** plus **European Driving Regulations** provide some useful information and advice. The AA also provides route plans and driving times. Don't forget you'll need to extend your **car insurance** and **breakdown cover** for your trip.

The **Google Maps** (<http://maps.google.fr>) and **Michelin** (<http://www.viamichelin.com/viamichelin/gbr/dyn/controller/Cartes>) websites are good for maps, routes and driving directions & times. Sat Nav is obviously a bonus, but beware: France is three times the size of the UK and the French map often won’t fit on a UK sat nav machine – be prepared to buy more memory before you go.

There's also a useful guidebook - 'Your Glove Box Guide to Trouble Free Motoring' - on the subject of driving in France which you can buy from AllRich Publications.

Trains & Planes

If travelling by air, three airports are located close to the Aquitaine coast where most of our rentals are: **Bordeaux**, **Biarritz** and, in a few cases, la Rochelle. Inland, properties east of Bordeaux are also well-served by **Bergerac** airport; properties inland from **Biarritz** are also served by **Pau** and, a bit further away, **Toulouse** airports. **Bilbao**, just over the border into Spain, is also convenient for the southern half of Aquitaine.

An increasing number of clients take lower-emission travel options. They are usually lower-stress too and include:

- **Bay of Biscay ferries** (Portsmouth-Bilbao and Plymouth-Santander). Please visit www.brittany-ferries.co.uk and www.poferries.com for schedules & prices.
- **TGV** (high-speed train) services to Bordeaux, Dax and Bayonne, with connections to the coast at Arcachon, Biarritz, Hossegor/Capbreton, Moliets and St Jean de Luz. Please visit www.sncf.com for more information.
- **Motorail services.** The nearest motorail stops are **Brive** (northern half of Aquitaine) and Toulouse (southern half) – it’s a 2-3 hour drive to most of our properties from each location. Please visit www.motorail.co.uk for more information.

Local Ferry Services

Two local ferry services may also help your journey.

Travelling from channel ferry ports to the **northern resorts of Aquitaine** (e.g. Soulac, Montalivet, Lacanau, Cap Ferret), take the Royan-Point de Grave ferry crossing and miss out the Bordeaux ring road. You'll save a couple of hours' driving. Ferries run every 30-45 minutes in summer, the crossing takes 30 minutes. The fare is approx. 35 EUR for a car and four passengers. More details and downloadable timetable from the Royan Tourist Office: www.ot-royan.fr/PartenairesGB/Horaires_Bac_Royan/Le_Verdon.html

If travelling without a car and you want to reach **Cap Ferret** village, a foot-ferry service operates from **Arcachon** across to the peninsula at hourly intervals 8am – 8pm during July & August. The Arcachon jetty (Jetée Thiers) is about a 15 minute walk from Arcachon train station.

3. PHONES, INTERNET, TV, RADIO, ETC

Much of the information below involves use of electrical & electronic appliances, so a note on plug adaptors is worth while – if you're taking any of this kit, **please remember adaptors!** French sockets take round two and three-pin plugs; one of the configurations in a standard European multi-adaptor from Boots will work.

Phoning in France

Most UK mobiles automatically pick up French networks, though you may need to call your network provider (eg O2, Orange, Vodafone, etc) before leaving to be certain you can make calls abroad.

If using a UK mobile, you don't need to dial the UK country code when calling home. If you are calling a French number, you need to include the country-code (0033) and drop the first '0' of the rest of the number (usually starting '05' or '06'). To call the UK from a French phone dial 0044 then drop the first zero of the area code.

Mobile coverage is good in Aquitaine, except in the heavily-forested mid-Aquitaine areas, eg the Landes National Park and mid-Médoc.

Some rentals include phones from which you can dial local numbers for free. Local numbers in Aquitaine begin 05 and should be dialled in full (10 digits).

Public phones are still widespread in France, but almost all require a phone card to operate them. Visitor phone cards, know as a *télécartes séjour* are available from *tabacs* (local newsagents-cum-cafés), and come in different pre-paid amounts starting from 10 EUR. Instructions on how to use them come in many languages, including English.

Internet Access

Internet Access: internet usage is not quite as ingrained into national life in France as it is in the UK or USA, but this is changing. Where we have indicated that a property has Internet access, if you wish to make use of it please let the owner know in advance so they remember to provide access details. Unless we have specified that a PC is available you will need to bring your own computer, and necessary cables and adaptors.

In bigger towns some cafés, hotels and airports have wireless Internet 'hot-spots' accessible by the public. You may have to tolerate watching an advert before you can connect. Internet cafés (cybercafés) are also available in most sizeable resorts.

High-speed wireless access via mobile phone (3G) is available in most towns, and 4G in larger towns. You'll need a laptop, compatible 3G modem and a valid 3G network account to be able access it. Please contact your network service provider for more information about this.

Please be aware that in peak summer wifi and 3G and 4G services are in high-demand, browsing speeds may not be what you are used to at home.

TV, Radio, Papers

Being on holiday is one of the few times you have to read the newspaper front-to-back (or if you're male, back-to-front) so it's understandable to want to buy English-language papers. *Tabacs* (newsagents) in most resorts sell many international newspapers, including those from the UK, Ireland & USA, 1 or 2 days old.

Brits missing the cultured tones of BBC newsreaders can just about tune into Radio 4 long-wave, as long as you are facing London! Cricket-lovers need not miss out on TMS commentary...

If we have indicated a property has a TV with English channels, this will usually consist of 1 or 2 of: CNN, BBC World, Eurosport, etc. Please don't expect anything like the same choice as you would have at home. If a TV is available without English channels, many clients now take a portable DVD player and standard audio and video connectors (which you'll need to take with you).

Feeling confident in French and want to immerse yourself in some local news? The regional paper *Journal du Sud Ouest* will tell you everything local oyster-farmers/vine-owners/sweetcorn-growers are complaining about, and has an excellent weather forecast.

To really go native, dip into *le Monde* – a proper, serious paper which makes you realize just how tabloid-y our broadsheets have become. News weeklies, especially *le Nouvel Observateur* and *l'Express* (the more accessible of the two) are also recommended.

4. SHOPPING

One of the many pleasures of visiting France is to shop, whether it's amongst the amazing range & quality of things in an Auchan hypermarket, the curiosities of a Sunday *brocante* (flea-market), or, of course, the vivid smells, colours and sounds of the local *marché*: if you've time all are worth a try! Here are a few tips on shopping in France:

Markets: most towns & resorts have at least a weekly market in summer, selling food, clothes, shoes, gifts, etc. They are usually open mornings, 8.30-ish to 1pm-ish. Please check locally for days & times: property owners, residences reception staff or local tourist offices will have the information.

Supermarkets are very convenient, especially for shopping at the start of your stay to buy the basics. Most are open 9am to 7.30 pm Monday-Saturday, but beware of 3 hour + closing at lunchtime (approx. midday to 3 or 3.30). Because Saturday is changeover day in July & August queues on Saturday afternoon can be long. Many are open Sunday morning too so if you can manage until then (get there early!) you'll save a lot of time standing in line. **NB** To avoid icy glares from cashiers and much muttering from everyone behind you in the queue, please don't forget to weigh your fruit and veg!

Boulangeries (bakeries): are open mornings and late afternoons/early evenings. If you really want to go native you'll buy fresh baguettes, croissants etc in the morning for breakfast, then fresh bread again in the afternoon for that evening's dinner. French bread is delicious fresh, but goes stale very quickly!

Entering & leaving: French shop-keepers, stall-holders, etc, appreciate politeness – even if you're just browsing, it's customary to say *bonjour* and *au revoir*.

Banks are typically open 9am – midday, 3.30 pm – 6pm. French cashpoints are found at banks and large post offices (indicated by a yellow *La Poste* sign); they accept most UK bank cards, and give you the choice of using English language settings. **Credit cards** are widely accepted in Aquitaine, except by most market stallholders, and, curiously, in Cap Ferret where many of the shops & restaurants shun this modern convenience.

Most other shops are open Monday to Saturday with a mid-week closing day that varies according to local custom, the weather, etc. They are generally open mornings until about midday, then in the afternoon from between 3 and 4 until between 6 and 7.30 pm.

Signs you'll often see in French shops windows are: *SOLDES* (this means a sale is on), and *ENTREE LIBRE*. This latter one is strange one to English eyes, it means you are welcome to go in and browse without an obligation to buy something!

5. FOOD & DRINK

Aquitaine Specialities

Aquitaine is France's gastronomic heartland, and much of the country's finest ingredients are sourced here. Here is a selection of produce you are likely to come across, in restaurants, food shops or at the market:

Fruits de mer (seafood): with a shoreline of almost 200 kms it's little wonder that **seafood** is the speciality of the region. In particular, *huîtres* (oysters) are the crustacean of choice, especially in Arcachon & Cap Ferret and there are many oyster huts ('cabanes') and villages throughout the Arcachon Bay where you can try them direct from the producer. *Crustacés* are any shellfish; *moules* (mussels), *crevettes* (prawns), *coquilles St Jacques* (scallops) *les palourdes* (clams), *bulots* (sea-snails) and *bigorneaux* (winkles) are also common menu-items. Larger shellfish include: *homard* (lobster), *langouste* (spiny lobster) and *langoustine* (saltwater crayfish).

Poissons (fish): the range and quality of fish in Aquitaine is outstanding. Here are the main ones you will come across and which aren't always in the pocket dictionaries or phrase books: *le bar* or *le loup de mer* = seabass, *l'églefin* = haddock; *la dorade*, *la dorée* or *le Saint Pierre* = John Dory, *le flétan* = halibut, *la lotte de mer* = monkfish, *la morue* = cod, *le merlan* = whiting, *le rouget* = mullet, *le thon* = tuna The easiest way to identify them is in a *poissonnerie*!

Salade Landaise: a wonderful mixture of fresh cold salad and warm salty meat - various, hard-to-identify (best not ask), fried cuts of fowl. The Landes is renowned in France for its poultry, especially, *canards* (duck) and *oies* (geese), and parts of some or all of these are to be found in the landaise salad. Makes a perfect lunch with a glass of rose.

Confits and patés. This isn't the place to explain the differences between the two, just to say that the Landes duck and geese populations are raised in a laudable purpose, maintaining the local tradition of making fine accompaniments to toast and a glass of chilled white wine.

Cèpes and girolles. There are a lot of words for 'mushroom' in French, a testament to the depth of its culinary heritage. Look out for these delicately-flavoured fungi in September/October, either in the forest itself, or on the local restaurant's 'specials' menu.

The further south in Aquitaine you go, the more the Basque & Spanish influence is evident in tastes, in offerings such as **jambon de Bayonne** (air-dried ham) and **pimientos** (spicy peppers). This fusion of Spanish and French cuisine is made in heaven! Also try: **fish soups** (*ttoro*), **stews** (*marmitako*) and Basque tapas - *pinchos* or *pintxos*.

Of course, every region in France has its **speciality cakes** and **pastries**. You'll find **canelés** in every boulangerie and patisserie and it's quite likely you'll eat several on your holiday here! Interesting fact: *canelés* are made from egg-yolks left after the whites have been used for purifying barrel-aged wine before it is bottled.

For something to accompany your meal, then obviously you are spoilt for choice. The wines of the Bordeaux region cover crisp dry whites and easy-drinking reds as well as the prestige appellations of **Margaux, St Emilion, Graves, Sauternes and so on**. (See www.alternative-aquitaine.co.uk/regions/pays_vins/bordeaux-wines.htm for a Quick Guide to Bordeaux wines.) Away from Bordeaux you will come across less well-known wines such as **Vins de Tursan, Floc de Gascogne** and **Armagnac** (all from from the area just to the south of the Landes National Park) and **Jurançon**, a gorgeous sweet aperitif white wine from near Pau.

If you are in a restaurant and ever unsure what to drink, ask for a recommendation (within a budget), it's bound to be good!

Dégustation: Eating/Drinking Direct from the Producer

You'll see signs saying *dégustation* a lot: it means the producer of oysters, foie gras, wine or whatever other delight it might be is offering the chance for you to try. This is as fresh and real as it gets! There is an implicit understanding that you'll buy something, even if it's not in huge quantity. It's a fun, highly memorable experience and even if you're French is very average sign-language and pidgin French can go a long way – give it a go!

Eating out

The enjoyment of food in convivial surroundings is central to the way of life in France, so it would be rude not to try it!

We will have provided some restaurant suggestions in the local guide attached to your Arrival Instructions. (If it's not to hand don't hesitate to ask us again.) We advise booking in advance in high summer, especially for prestigious destinations such as *Chez Hortense* in Cap Ferret or *Chez Albert* in Biarritz.

Service is included on almost all bills in French restaurants, but it is still customary to leave a small tip.

You will probably find that at the end of a lovely meal, the hitherto attentive service you had been enjoying suddenly vanishes - all waiting staff go AWOL when you want to pay & leave. If no-one's coming just go up to the patron and pay at the counter, it's OK to.

Children are very welcome in most French restaurants and most offer a children's menu or, even if not, will if you ask grill you a hamburger (*steack haché* – ask for it well done, *bien cuit*), chicken breast (*blanc de poulet*), or cook you an omelette. From birth French children are used to eating out with grown-ups until quite late, and behave beautifully. The French think most other nations (especially Brits) bring up children badly so if you're eating out *en famille* it is our chance to prove them completely wrong!

Bars

A beer at the beach bar after a hard day's sunbathing, or a couple before dinner – what could be better? We're no experts on the myriad range of French *apéros* (aperitifs), except to say that to really go native a *pastis* (aniseed liqueur) at 6 pm with a drop of water is the way to go! There'll usually be wine by the glass, cocktails (esp. *kirs* and *kirs royales* – white wine – sparkling for the *royale* – with *cassis*, a blackcurrant liqueur), *gin-tonic* (no translation necessary) and, for children, a good range of cordials, plus the usual *coca* (coke) and the unfortunately-branded *Pschitt* (a French make of lemonade). Beers usually come in *demis* (half-pints) unless you ask for something larger - a *formidable* is roughly a pint, though beware: it's often perceived as a hooligan's measure, if you order one *le patron* (landlord) will be watching you carefully...

Almost all beers are strong-ish lagers (*bières blondes*), plus a few darker, usually sweeter Belgian beers (*bières brunes*). You'll often come across English, Irish or Aussie bars in the bigger resorts – serving pints here is normal.

6. THE FRENCH OUTDOORS

Aquitaine is a vast, natural playground with enough to keep even the most active family busy. Here are a few important pointers to making the most of the Aquitaine outdoors:

Les Plages: Beaches

The Aquitaine coast is a fantastic coastline, but as on any beach in the world, the sea should be treated with respect – Aquitaine’s Atlantic rollers and currents can be powerful. Major beaches are supervised and operate a flag system for bathing (green = OK, orange = OK with caution, red = no bathing) – we recommend using these beaches if you are uncertain about judging conditions for yourself. Aquitaine’s lake beaches are an excellent alternative on days when it’s windy or there’s a large swell. If you are a novice surfer always ask for local advice about where and when to surf to avoid currents – it is often dependent on tide times. Life guards, surf shops and surf schools can advise.

NB *Piscines municipales* (public swimming pools): please note that if you are planning to swim in a public pool, ‘proper’ (Speedo-type) swimwear is required – you won’t be allowed in wearing bikinis and baggy board shorts. You may also be required to wear a swimming hat. Modest, fashion-conscious or easily-embarrassed types are recommended to avoid!

Piste Cyclables: Cycle Paths

There is an extensive network of cycle trails throughout Aquitaine, especially in resorts such as Lacanau, Moliets & Cap Ferret, where cycling is a delightful way to get around. The many cycle-hire shops will hire you wheels (adults’ and children’s) for 8-10 EUR per day. A deposit is usually required, often in cash, or a passport or driving licence may be sufficient.

Pistes Randonnées: Walking Trails

There are also many lake and coast path walks which offer gentle walks and beautiful views; local tourist offices offer walking trail maps for each area.

For more ambitious walkers, the major French walking routes are numbered Grandes Randonnées routes, notably the Pyrenean GR 10 and GR 8.

7. MEDICAL INFORMATION, INSURANCE, EMERGENCIES

Obviously we very much hope you won’t need to consult this section, but in case you do here are a few pointers:

- If you are an EU resident you can apply for a **European Health Insurance Card** (obtainable in the UK from post offices or online), which will allow you to claim for state health service treatment in France in hospitals and local medical centres and doctors’ surgeries.
- We strongly recommend you also take out a suitable **travel insurance policy** for the duration of your stay for extra peace of mind. Please contact us if you’d like help identifying suitable insurers.
- If you are involved in a road accident or the victim of a crime you must inform the local police (*gendarmes*). The emergency number is 17 (calls are free).
- For a medical emergencies you should dial SAMU (the French ambulance service) on 15; for the fire service (*sapeurs pompiers*) dial 18. The main city hospitals in Aquitaine are in: Bordeaux, Bayonne and Pau.
- For medication you’ll see *Pharmacies* throughout France – the French are Europe’s leading pill-poppers! Pharmacists are very helpful, and most pharmacies will have at least one English-speaking member of staff.

8. RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING, MAPS

In our travels we have come across many good travel guides, including in particular the ones below. All have a useful language section including glossary of everyday phrases and useful vocabulary.

- Eyewitness Travel Guides: Dordogne, Bordeaux & The South-west Coast
- Insight Guides: Southwest France
- Cadogan Guides: Bilbao & The Basque Lands; Gascony & The Pyrenees
- The Green Guide: Atlantic Coast

The Rough Guides covering French regions are more designed for a back-packing budget audience, but include very good phrase book and history sections.

Michelin map number 355 covers most of the region as far south as Biarritz. If you are going to St Jean de Luz, St Jean Pied de Port or the Pyrenees, you will need map 342.