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15 COSY WINTER RETREATS
WHERE TO STAY FOR A WARM WELCOME

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February 2019 | Issue 245

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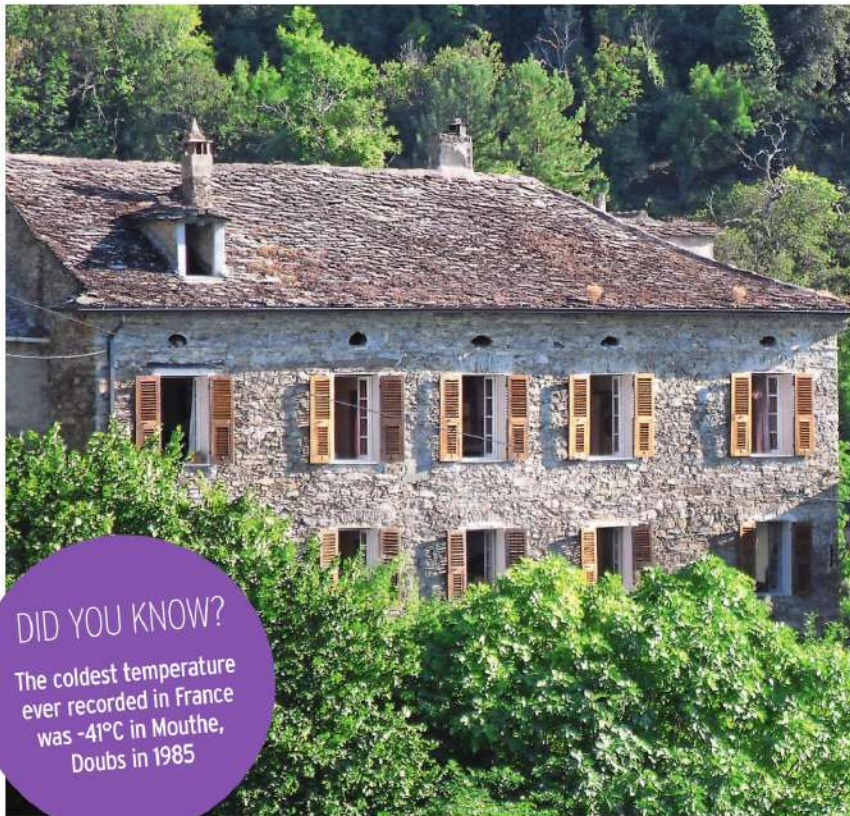
Where to stay... in the winter

Winter is a season that splits opinion; you either love it or you hate it, sometimes both. We've scoured France from north to south and east to west to bring you the best places to escape the gloom in *l'Hexagone* this winter and make the most of winter's charms. Despite being the least popular season for tourism in the country, we all know that France can offer a wealth of options for the winter tourist and there's just something about

being there that lifts the spirit, even if it's just a short hop across the Channel to visit the north of the country. Of course, there is never a bad time to visit Paris for its shops, restaurants and museums. You may want to join the skiers and head for the mountains to enjoy a week on the slopes and stay in a cosy cabin with plenty of good food and warming drinks. Equally, head south to the Riviera, where the milder weather made it one of the first modern resorts, prized for its health-giving

and restorative effects. If it was good enough for Queen Victoria, it must be worth a visit; just try to avoid the mistral.

For those dreaming of summer while shivering in their snow boots, the warmest winter weather is likely to be found in Corsica, where temperatures can creep towards the early teens in January and February. So fetch your woolly hat and gloves, wrap up warm and get out there; there's plenty to be enjoyed all over France *pendant l'hiver*.



DID YOU KNOW?

The coldest temperature ever recorded in France was -41°C in Mouthe, Doubs in 1985

▲ CHAMBRES D'HÔTES LA MARLOTTE

Hameau de Pastoreccia, Haute-Corse

Take to the Corsican mountains for a winter holiday destination with a difference. This gorgeous, five-bedroom guesthouse is situated in a hillside hamlet to the north of the island, just under an hour from the principal port of Bastia. The English-speaking hosts are renowned for their warm welcome and bountiful

breakfasts. Wrap up for a snowy stroll around the quintessentially Corsican village or enjoy the rustic surroundings of La Marlotte with a board game or book in the communal lounge. Evenings are made for soaking in the jacuzzi or relaxing with a blanket and a glass of wine on the terrace, where you feel on the top of the world.

Doubles from €90, breakfast included
Tel: (Fr) 6 95 51 50 90
booking.com

► BAMBAM CHALET
Saint-Lary-Soulan, Hautes-Pyrénées

This recently renovated and modernised mountain retreat certainly packs a punch. At 1600m the luxurious BamBam chalet is just 100m from the ski lifts of Espiaube and sleeps up to 12 people across six stylish, ensuite bedrooms. The chalet has large, glass windows and doors that open up onto a wrap-around balcony, with fantastic views of the Midi-Pyrénées available while sitting inside or out. The open plan layout allows guests to enjoy a vast living room/dining area, as well as plush sofas near an open fire – perfect to warm yourself up next to after a day on the slopes. The kitchen has



all mod cons and a four-metre-long handmade dining table is perfect for groups to dine together. BamBam offers plenty of comfort and style, with sheepskins, hides, heated floors and wood walls all adding to the luxuriously cosy feel.

A week's stay costs from €1,995
bambamrocks.com

▼ ST-ALBAN HÔTEL AND SPA

La Clusaz, Haute-Savoie

This boutique hotel in the charming Alpine village and winter resort of La Clusaz is new for 2018, combining elegant French service with art-deco design to create the ultimate cocoon in the Aravis Mountains. Each bedroom is different, but all have a view of the snowy mountains or the village. Guests enjoy the benefits of a NUXE spa with its indoor pool, sauna and ice cave. The chic art deco bar serves breakfast, gourmet tapas and cocktails – perfect for some après-ski fun.

Doubles from €135, breakfast €16
Tel: (Fr) 4 58 10 10 18
hotel-st-alban.com



▼ QUAIN'T 'VOSGIAN' CHALET

Le Thillot, Vosges

This quaint chalet deep in the Vosges wouldn't look amiss in the pages of a fairytale. There is a steep miller's ladder leading to the mezzanine, where there is a double bed and two singles. It's had the same owners since 1966 and they still live on-site, happy to dispense advice about what to do in the area. If you can tear yourself away from the cosy fireplace, the snowy slopes of Gérardmer, Bresse-Hohneck and Ventron aren't far away. Nearby excursions include Les Hautes Mynes, the copper mines of the Dukes of Lorraine.

From £34 per night, breakfast not included
airbnb.co.uk/rooms/1833771





DID YOU KNOW?
 France has hosted the Winter Olympics three times, in Chamonix, Grenoble and Albertville respectively.



▲ CHEZ BUGI
 St-Martin-de-Belleville, Savoie

If your idea of an ideal winter break involves enjoying a drink with loved ones on a balcony overlooking spectacular mountain views, this could be the place for you. Chez Bugi is the flagship chalet in a new development in central St Martin de Belleville. This six-bedroom on-piste chalet offers skiing on your doorstep and since it only opened in December, you would be among the first few groups to visit. Inside and out, this is the archetypal ski chalet, with the interior full of cosy

rugs and comfy cushions alongside natural aged wood, ensuring it is somewhere to hunker down and enjoy a night in. Floor-to ceiling-windows allow plenty of natural light into the property, which blends modern architecture with Alpine elegance. The living area has a large corner sofa where guests can enjoy pre-dinner canapés in front of a beautiful log fire. The chalet can accommodate up to 12 guests.

A week's stay costs from €895 per person
 Tel: (UK) 01626 895052
whitemountain-chalets.com

▼ L'ARBRE À CHAPEAUX
 Grand'Combe-Châteleu, Doubs

This 17th-century farmhouse beside the Doubs river is particularly worth a visit in winter, when it becomes an ideal base for snowshoeing or walking in the Jura. The guesthouse's three bedrooms and one suite have been designed by local craftsmen and artists, each one unique and colourful, yet welcoming, in décor. L'Arbre boasts a hip in-house café, open from Wednesday to Sunday, offering warming winter drinks to refresh weary travellers, such as a hot lemon and honey or hot chocolate.

Doubles from €120, breakfast included
 Tel: (Fr) 3 81 68 19 11
larbre-a-chapeaux.com



◀ **LE BOWMANN**

Paris

Inside and out, this hotel is a picture of Parisian elegance and a wonderful spot to banish the winter blues. An understated but clearly upmarket exterior welcomes guests into Le Bowmann, found at the heart of a golden triangle between the Église de la Madeleine, major department stores and the Arc de Triomphe. Speaking of gold, there is plenty to be found once you step inside, with the immaculate white walls and ceilings complemented by golden artwork and designs. There is a mix of the old and the new here, with ornate facades and beams sitting comfortably alongside all the trappings and technology of a modern hotel. Bedrooms have elegant furniture, soft rugs and beautiful lighting and some also have terraces allowing you to enjoy breakfast overlooking *les toits de Paris*.

Doubles from €385, breakfast from €33
Tel: (Fr) 1 40 08 00 10
hotelbowmannparis.com

▼ **VILLA PAULA**

Tourcoing, Nord

Ideally located in the Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing triangle is this art-deco guesthouse. The stylish 1930s building has two rooms and two suites where comfort is the order of the day. Included are Nespresso coffee machines, flat-screen televisions and L'Occitane products in the bathrooms. After a day

of city sightseeing, return to this suburban oasis to relax in the garden jacuzzi or enjoy a treatment in the massage room. Only 2km away is the striking Musée de la Piscine de Roubaix, which reopened in 2018 after a two-year restoration.

Doubles from €140, breakfast included
Tel: (Fr) 6 12 95 97 97
villapaula.fr



▲ **BRITTANY BOLTHOLE**

Saint-Nicolas des Eaux, Morbihan

You may not immediately associate Brittany with a brilliant winter break, but there are some real bargains to be had

here and some charming villages to explore that look even more picturesque in the winter. This 200-year-old beamed cottage, just 200 yards from the River Blavet, enjoys access to bicycles, kayaks and a shared swimming pool for some winter exertion, plus there is a year-round golf course nearby. The property sleeps four guests, who are treated to a generous welcome hamper on arrival. From £420 per week, breakfast not included

holidayfrancedirect.co.uk/holiday-rentals/BM004861

▼ **HÔTEL BALEA**

Guéthary, Pyrénées-Atlantiques

A trip to the seaside might not immediately spring to mind when you think of a winter break. But Guéthary, a quaint fishing port between Biarritz and Saint-Jean-de-Luz, is a popular destination for surfers at this time of year when the waves are at their best. The Hôtel Balea, a schoolhouse in its former life, is now a 26-bedroom hotel and an ideal base for the chillier months. Opt for one of the ocean view rooms where you can watch the swells of the Atlantic. If you fancy taking to the sea yourself, you can rent a surfboard that is delivered directly to the hotel.

Doubles from €69, breakfast €9.90
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 26 08 39
hotel-balea-guethary.com

► **LES DRYADES**

Pouigny-Notre-Dame, Indre

This golf resort and spa is the perfect place to go if you are looking for some peace and relaxation in the heart of France. The sprawling estate is around three hours from Paris and 45 minutes from Châteauroux. It is a popular spot for those who enjoy playing a round of golf with friends or family. The in-house spa which is a wonderful place to escape the cold or wet weather outside. If you do want to venture out, this is a great area for lovers of green landscapes, castles and museums. You can even bring your dog



along, although charges may apply. Head chef Franck Gatefin is the main man in the kitchens, producing ever-changing menus in the Harmonie restaurant and Les Dryades bar.

Doubles from €60, breakfast included
Tel (Fr) 2 54 06 60 60
les-dryades.fr



PHOTOGRAPHS: GUILLAUME GRASSET; VILLA PAULA; HOLIDAY FRANCE DIRECT; ADIT

▼ LE C BOUTIQUE HÔTEL Narbonne, Aude

If you stay at the newly-opened C Hôtel then you will be enjoying a four-star hotel at the price of a three-star. That's because owners Cécile and Chris decided they would prefer it to be the latter so they could keep the prices affordable. Located in the heart of the town, the hotel sits near the picturesque Canal de la Robine, the cathedral and the famous indoor food market Les Halles de Narbonne, where you can pick up all manner of tasty treats. The boutique hotel is elegant and warm, with the owners putting an emphasis on making guests feel at home with an attentive, personalised service. There are ten rooms to choose from, all have a modern and refined style and have great views of Narbonne. There is also a terrace on the third floor which is accessible to all. Doubles from €99, breakfast from €12 Tel: (Fr) 9 67 17 56 54 hotel-le-c.com



DID YOU KNOW?
Last winter Corsica had its biggest snowfall since 1986, with a whopping 15cm of snow coating its beautiful beaches.

▲ VICHY CÉLÉSTINS SPA HOTEL Vichy, Allier

Winter is the ideal time to revitalise at a spa; why not head to the biggest in Europe in Vichy? In the heart of the resort town, the Vichy Célestins Spa Hotel is conveniently connected to the 7,500m², medical thermal spa by a covered walkway. The hotel offers a huge range of health and wellbeing packages; whether you're training for an ironman triathlon,

expecting a baby or want a digital detox, there's a care option for everyone. The rooms are designed with minimalist elegance in mind, and you'll notice the famous octagonal Vichy Pastille design replicated in the décor. Beautiful Vichy in winter is ever-lively, plus the shops are even open here on Sundays and public holidays, so there's never a dull day. Doubles from €167, breakfast from €17 Tel: (Fr) 4 70 30 82 82 vichy-spa-hotel.fr



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◀ LE CHÂTEAU DE BEAULIEU Busnes, Pas-de-Calais

Head chef Marc Meurin achieved his first Michelin star in 1992 and six years later he added to that with a second. Born just down the road in Lens, he knows the area well, and likes to use local ingredients and pay tribute to Pas-de-Calais fishermen by using as much seafood as possible. Joining Marc in the kitchen is a wonderfully talented and passionate young team who love to hone their craft with the finest ingredients meaning the meals here are of the highest quality. The main restaurant is Le Meurin with the slightly cheaper, but still top quality, Le Jardin d'Alice also on site. Its rural location means it is the perfect hideaway in which to cosy up and indulge. Marc also likes to pass on his skills to others by offering cookery classes and there is a shop where guests can buy the delicious macarons, chocolates and sweets served in the restaurant. Doubles from €170, breakfast included Tel: (Fr) 3 21 68 88 88 lechateaubeaulieu.fr

▼ MANOIR DU LYS Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Orne

Need to recharge the batteries with a country break? Le Manoir de Lys is just the spot. It is an old hunting lodge in the heart of the Andaines forest, where you can enjoy activities like cycling, walking

and foraging. It is located just a short distance from the town centre of Bagnoles de l'Orne which has a spa and golf course. The hotel is a family affair with Franck and Stéphanie and their spouses Laure and Yvon, bringing the large country house to life with the same passion as their parents. Franck is a Michelin starred chef of 20 years and he bases his menu on the seasons, local produce and regional specialities. Guests will enjoy top quality comfort in the bedrooms and leisure facilities including a pool and tennis court. Doubles from €130, breakfast from €18 Tel: (Fr) 2 33 37 80 69 manoir-du-lys.com



PHOTOGRAPHS: MANOIR DU LYS: JEAN-MARC CORNU; MLE PHOTOGRAPHIE