

A LIVING HERITAGE: 5 SITES TO SEE ONCE IN A LIFETIME



In Médoc Atlantique, heritage is expressed as much in stone as in the landscape. The Cordouan lighthouse, the basilica in Soulac-sur-Mer, the Gironde estuary, wine-growing and oyster-farming villages: these iconic places trace the history and natural wealth of this coastline. The European Heritage Days, on 20 and 21 September, offer a unique opportunity to (re)discover them.

The Cordouan Lighthouse: the king of lighthouses and the lighthouse of kings

Nicknamed the '**Versailles of the seas**', the Cordouan lighthouse is located at the mouth of the Gironde estuary. For more than four centuries, it has guided sailors and **remains today the only lighthouse in France still manned year-round**. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2021, it can be explored by boat, followed by a climb up its 301 steps. From the vaulted ground floor to the Fresnel lantern, each room tells a part of its history, combining architecture and maritime heritage.

During European Heritage Days, visitors will be offered a dual-voice tour alongside the lighthouse keepers and Séverine Laborie, curator of historical monuments at the DRAC Nouvelle-Aquitaine. Access to the monument will be free of charge on an exceptional basis, but the boat trip will still be subject to a fee (€40 return from Le Verdon-sur-Mer).



The basilica of Notre-Dame-de-la-Fin-des-Terres: the basilica cleared of sand

Buried for nearly two centuries beneath the dunes, the Basilica of Notre-Dame-de-la-Fin-des-Terres was rediscovered in the 19th century. It was listed as a historic monument in 1891 and has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1998 as part of the Routes of Santiago de Compostela.

Built in the 11th century in the Saintonge Romanesque style, then raised in the 14th century, it still bears traces of its burial under sand, visible in the unusual height of its openings. A visit reveals both its remarkable architecture and a unique chapter in the history of Soulac-sur-Mer.



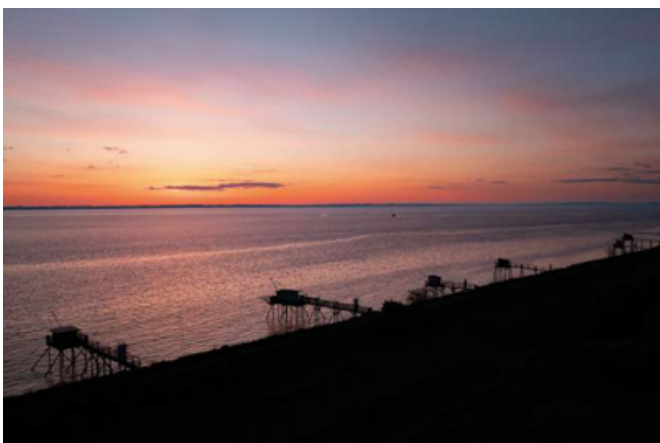
The bunkers of the Atlantic Wall: relics among the dunes

From Soulac-sur-Mer to Le Verdon-sur-Mer, the remains of the Atlantic Wall still emerge from the dune cordon and forest. The coastal battery at Les Arros, near Soulac-sur-Mer, is one of the most complete positions, with casemates, shelters and firing posts still visible. Protected by a 19th-century sea wall, some structures remain virtually intact, having escaped the ravages of erosion. To discover their history and architecture without harming the environment, it is recommended that you join a guided tour.



The Gironde estuary: a landscape between fresh water and the Atlantic Ocean

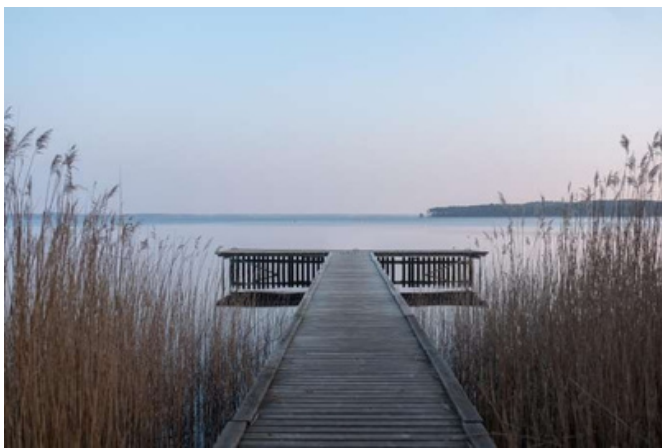
With a length of 75 km and a width of up to 12 km, the **Gironde estuary is the largest in Europe**, covering more than 635 km². Its banks alternate between beaches and wetlands where herons, ospreys and other species find refuge. Fishing boats and pleasure craft glide gently across the water, while the carrelets on stilts, visible in particular at the Richard lighthouse in Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac (free admission on 21 September for Heritage Days), remind us of the importance of traditional fishing. Further north, in Saint-Vivien-de-Médoc, oyster farming flourishes in basins where the fresh water of the estuary mixes with the salt water of the ocean, a unique environment that gives the oysters their characteristic taste and texture. Finally, at Pointe de Grave, the estuary opens onto the ocean, revealing the silhouette of the Cordouan lighthouse in the distance, an iconic sentinel.



Nature reserves and large lakes: nature waiting to be discovered

Médoc Atlantique has **two Nature Reserves and two large lakes**, all places where nature can be discovered at a leisurely pace on foot or on family walks. The **Étang de Cousseau Nature Reserve**, between Lacanau and Carcans, offers 900 hectares of meadows, moors and lakes where herons, European pond turtles and even water buffalo roam. Further north, **the Dunes and Marshes of Hourtin Nature Reserve** covers 2,150 hectares, combining dunes, marshes and forests, and providing a refuge for remarkable biodiversity.

Lake of Hourtin-Carcans, covering nearly 6,000 hectares, is the largest natural freshwater lake entirely located in France. In Carcans-Maubuisson, the Sentier du Lac is an ideal family walk in the heart of the forest with breathtaking views of the water. The more intimate **Lake of Lacanau**, covering almost 2,000 hectares, charms visitors with its shady coves and small, secluded beaches nestled in the coves to the west. Pointe du Tedey, Longarisse and Grande Escoure are among the spots that can be reached by bike or on foot, offering beautiful views of the lake and a peaceful atmosphere, away from the hustle and bustle.



About Médoc Atlantique

Médoc Atlantique is a community of 13 communes located in the Gironde department, in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region (Lacanau, Soulac-sur-Mer, Carcans-Maubuisson, Hourtin, Naujac-sur-Mer, Grayan-et-l'Hôpital, Vensac, Le Verdon-sur-Mer, Saint-Vivien-de-Médoc, Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac, Queyrac, Valeyrac and Talais). This area, rich in natural and cultural diversity, stretches along the Atlantic coast, offering a variety of landscapes, from immense beaches to pine forests. The local economy is strongly influenced by tourism, agriculture and maritime activities, with a particular emphasis on aquaculture and oyster farming. Médoc Atlantique Community of Communes is actively involved in sustainable development, regional planning and environmental protection projects. It also supports local initiatives and helps businesses to grow. Finally, Médoc Atlantique promotes its natural and cultural heritage to encourage responsible and attractive tourism.

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