

The lure of Les Landes

This lesser-known coastal region is where the French go to escape the crowds every year – and **Mergim Ozdamar** knows why



In Capbreton (main) and Hossegor (below), both within the Landes region, Atlantic waves roll onto dune-backed beaches and are a go-to destination for French holidaymakers GETTY

While Provence and the Côte d'Azur tend to steal the spotlight, it is the Landes coast that remains French holidaymakers' best-kept

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summer secret. Here, in the country's south-west, surfers, winemakers and designers trade the chaos of Paris for pine-scented calm and a surfside, slow life.

I didn't stumble upon this spot by chance. My partner's family are from the region, and this forest-fringed triangle of land by the Atlantic has become one of my favourite parts of France. When the city blues hit, a few days of sun, forest air and soft Atlantic breeze feel like an antidote.

One spring, we flew to Bordeaux and boarded a train heading south-west towards Hendaye, pausing at the station just long enough to pick up a chewy, rum-laced canelé (*inset top right*) – the region's signature cake

since the 18th century. No trip to Nouvelle-Aquitaine feels right without one.

Two hours later, I arrived in Dax, a French city that dates to the fourth century and is known for its thermal spas. We crossed the Adour River at dusk to reach the village of Sainte-Marie-de-Gosse. It felt like a place where time was paused.

The next day, driving further south-west, I meandered through forests of maritime pine and caught glimpses of the Pyrénées. This is a land shaped by water and wood: briny air from the ocean, crisp and cool from the mountains, and the hush of trees.

In 2024, Landes had 1.7 million visitors, a figure that might surprise given the region's quiet reputation. Yet that is part of its charm. It is deeply loved by the French but still flies under the radar internationally.

A villa stay can help visitors fall into the local pace. I met Joanna La Forge, a Briton who runs villa rental company, Summer France, with her French husband. "I always dreamt of living in France," she said. "But here, it's not just about the landscape, it's the rhythm of life. People genuinely understand how to live slowly."

Joanna recommends the communes of Moliets or Messanges as a base, with the calm of the Landes, yet within reach of the Basque Country and Spain. In this area, accommodation for two starts from around £600 in August, with Summer France, falling to around £200 in September. Villa guests cycle to Moliets's Saturday market, take surf lessons from Golf Surf School and pick up asparagus in Azur.

Winemaking here also holds surprises. In Messanges, they bury barrels beneath the dunes, a medieval practice revived for a fruity flavour. Just a short cycle from the villas, Bergerie des Vignerons de Messanges produces a sandy-soil rosé made from Cabernet Franc and Merlot.

Auberge du Soleil in Azur, a rustic inn once favoured by former president François Mitterrand, serves traditional Landes cuisine in an unpretentious setting. Just 15 minutes away in Magescq, the Coussau family's Relais de la Poste offers

a refined two-Michelin-starred restaurant and a more casual bistro. Seafood lovers can head to Chez Vincent in Léon.

Most villas include terraces and private pools, tucked within pine groves. Guests come back year after year, often to the same villa.

That quiet rhythm defines the Landes coast. In Capbreton and Hossegor, wild Atlantic waves roll onto dune-backed beaches.

Best visited in September, when the crowds fade, this coast offers

more than scenery. You come for the beaches, but stay for the way of being.



