

Traveldiary Brigitte & Heinz
French Atlantic:
a summer in our birthday suits



Chapter 24, Part 2 of
In Great Britain as Tourists,
hereafter in Benelux & France as Na-Tourists
April 2013 - October 2013

French Atlantic: a summer in our birthday suits

On April 28th 2013, we headed via Bordeaux to the **Atlantic coast**, where we were going to spend the bulk of the summer. After more than three months of intense travelling through Spain, western France, the Benelux countries and especially through Great Britain, we definitely needed a rest now. Yes, it's true: even though we could organize our lives around travelling instead of working, we need a holiday once a while too! We opted for naturist resorts, as it's natural to us. After collecting so many new experiences, we didn't want to get too many new impressions during this summer and so we had booked only three seven- and a two-weeks stage in three large holiday villages.



Euronat: a chilly kick-off to summer

We spent most of our time at [Euronat](#) near Montalivet, where we stayed in spring and again after mid August. We had chosen this place because of its good facilities and big size. We love nude walks on the beach and on the extensive grounds. If you can go shopping on the way back, it's just perfect – provided you carry at least your wallet along. Well, during May and June 2013, the Weather Gods must have been very grumpy. Most of the time they annoyed us with wet and chilly weather, so keen naturists could be seen in polar jackets until early summer.

Luckily, we had opted not to camp but to rent a rather luxurious mobile home. So we just made the best of the chilly days, worked on our travel diary and wrapped warmly, when venturing out for walks. Despite our wrapping, we were recognized by two Dutch guys we had met in Sweden three years ago, during an unusually hot summer. Robin & Ray are campers by heart and didn't get discouraged to stay in a tent for 7 weeks. We just laughed about how many layers of clothes they peeled off, every time they visited us in our cosy and warm mobile home.

Another visitor, Amy from Swaziland* who came to stay with us for a week, was lucky with the weather, as she picked the few warm June days. Going to the beach and enjoying the sun was most important to her. She enjoyed her time here very much and left just three days before we moved to the next place.

In order to be able to describe how this naturist village feels in different seasons, we postpone a detailed account about Euronat until we have returned here in August. For now, we crossed the vast pine forests along the French Atlantic coast and moved some 300km southwards.

ARNA: a very appealing, family oriented naturist ground

It was June 16th 2013, when we checked-in at [Arnaoutchot](#) (in short Arna), an attractive naturist centre, right on the Atlantic. It's situated near Léon in the Landes district. As it was a hot day, we stripped off without delay, carried our belongings quickly into the mobile-home and went to the beach right away. It was amazingly popular with young families, mainly sun-seekers from France and Spain. We instantly fell in love with the golden sand and the atmosphere at the naturist resort; if we hadn't been naked already, Arna would have charmed our pants off immediately.



It certainly had been a good decision to book here a mobile home for 7 weeks. Though we had chosen the most economical model (up to 10 years old), it was in sound condition. Apart from a living area with kitchen, it had two small bedrooms and en-suite facilities. We were given a quiet location between (Caravan-) sites and other mobile homes. There was a large patio with wooden benches and a table, fixed directly to the forest floor. It was only a few hundred

metres to the heart of the holiday village with reception, a few shops and restaurants, as well as the swimming pools.

The “aqua park” consists of a large complex with two big outdoor pools, a paddling pool and a coldwater jacuzzi. Furthermore, there is an indoor pool, heated to a pleasant 28°C and complemented with a toboggan. Everything is nicely landscaped, wind protected and very inviting, which makes it popular to linger on the sunbeds. If it doesn't feel warm enough outdoors, there are plenty more sunbeds in a large sunroom. We were delighted about the pools staying open till 10 P.M. once a week. After closing time, overstaying bathers were friendly reminded by the staff of a private security company, contracted by Arna to patrol the grounds at night.

Treats and treatments

For those who think they are not beautiful enough, there is the possibility to enhance their appearance by investing in Arna's beauty centre, which offers also sauna, hamam and jacuzzi sessions in their attached wellness section.

Not only wellbeing, but also the guests health is looked after. During July and August, a nurse was available for some four-and-a-half hours each day and somehow we were shocked, how many people queued there. As most of them didn't appear sick at all, we wonder whether they were after a free treatment or the charms of the nurse.

However, for entertainment, there was certainly no need to visit the nurse, as Arna offers countless animations for young and old. Everything is done very professional and high class, you feel there is perfectionism behind everything they do. One of the best examples is the “théâtre de verdure” an outdoor amphitheatre with sound- and lighting equipment, no short of what you find in towns. Sure enough, there is an indoor hall for bad weather days and we would be surprised, if this wasn't as sophisticated. Anyway, we watched a few of the shows held under the open sky.

What the contracted artists performed, was always top class, be it a big choir or a small comedy group. Even the weekly “open podium” had been choreographed to perfection. Arna does not only provide training to guests willing to participate, but also a big number of different costumes. This certainly helps to bring moody teenagers back here, if their live dance in a group of ~25 new friends was such a success.

Afterwards, they might want to meet-up in the nightly disco. As it's only open to those 18 and over, they may ask their parents (or rather strangers) to take them along...

For holidayers who prefer to do something by themselves, a fitness trail has been laid through the forest. Some might have enough exercise monitoring their children, so they will appreciate the nature trail with its many educating signs. Many of the pine trees are full of character, especially in one section. They have all sorts of shapes and bendings - as if created by artists - but it's all nature.

Most of Arna's 500 campsites are situated in Pine Forest. That's where we stayed, when we visited the first time some 14 years ago. Then, we were still under the illusion, we could save money by staying in a simple tent. Meanwhile we know: decent camping is certainly more expensive than renting a mobile home or chalet. Luckily, Arna has some 200 rental units: from family friendly, pre-erected tents to a wide range of mobile homes and chalets - some even high among the trees. Furthermore, there are probably around 200 permanent residents, mainly French and Spaniards, owning mobile homes. When we were here the first time, there were only few places to rent and somehow it was still disputed, whether a naturist campground should offer such luxuries. The Dutch guy, who stayed in the mobile home next to ours, admitted that he took part in demonstrations against the set-up of mobile-homes in Arna when he was young. Well, as you get older, views and appreciation of comfort change. Anyhow: because of his partner, he made a leap of faith and now rents precisely such a mobile home.



Miles of golden sand

From most locations and pitches, it's an easy 20 minutes stroll down to the beach. Theoretically, half of it could be covered by car but it's only handicapped, those with 7 children and lots of beach gear, or the dead lazy who drive. It's just an irony when exactly the latter tell you, they never switch their car's air-con on to save petrol, or you see them buying low-fat yoghurt in the shop, probably to compensate the calories they didn't burn.

The beach at Arna is a real dream, as the fine golden sand stretches for miles. To the south, you can only walk nude for about one kilometre and then you encounter a textile beach. However, if you walk northwards, you don't need to wear any clothes at all for at least five kilometres. Walking was indeed enjoyed by many others too, especially those without children. Most families lingered around the supervised part of the beach, where life savers are present from mid June to the end of September. Everybody goes naked, apart from the usual few recalcitrant teenagers. To make sure, they don't mushroom, a "vice squad" is present.



As we were naked, nobody ever hassled us. It's a peaceful paradise indeed! There are no beach hawkers, apart from one poor ice-cream vendor. Though, he almost melted quicker than his goods, under the heat of the sun and the weight of the box he carried.

Watching the change of the tide was fascinating. At high tide, a sandbar remained connected to the shore, like a curved peninsula along the beach, allowing the water to escape on one side only. It was challenging for children and their parents to build huge sand dams to prevent the water from entering or leaving the bay. Sure enough, the tides always won, moving even faster once the barriers collapsed to rejoicing children.

Exciting for some - boring for others

Once good weather arrived, the sea warmed quite suddenly and some regulars told us that the water is warmer here, than in the Mediterranean, thanks to the Gulf Stream. Due to the relatively high waves, it's normally not possible to swim in the Atlantic Ocean, it's only possible to play with the waves. However, there was about a week with such calm water that the life savers could raise the green flag, a real exception! Those days must have been pretty hard for surfers, though for Arna's surf school, it was probably easier to teach their pupils how to stand on the board. Also to us non-surfers, the Atlantic is fun and we find it quite a bit more interesting than the tame Mediterranean. Never the less, with its currents it bears some serious risks that even locals often underestimate. The radio broadcast far too often sad news about bathers who drowned, because they didn't respect the red flag and had thought it was more fun going into the waves away from the beach guards.

Some non-naturists might envy the life savers here, as those guys are being paid for watching nude people all summer long. We wouldn't; it's as dull as ditchwater and the job bears lots of responsibility. Sitting on a highchair, no matter how strong the wind blows, is anything else than fun. How dull it ever is, they have to be alert at all times, as they know the risks. One day, the radio connection to the rescue helicopter was down, leaving the beach guard no option but to raise the red flag and making sure nobody enters the water.

When coming back from the beach, we often used the communal showers, which was always a multi-cultural experience. German and Dutch people were usually already cleaning their dinner dishes, when the French showered after the beach to get ready for their Apéro. By the time the French washed their dishes, the Spaniards had their showers, then went for Tapas, before slowly preparing their dinners...



Other than the beach, Arna and its surroundings offer various other possibilities for activities. They are all listed in a comprehensive 40 pages colour brochure “activités et loisirs”. It bears a wealth of information about Arna itself, and even more about sight-seeing possibilities. We have never ever been handed out such a complex and well made activity-guide in any other naturist-resort! It proposes also many sights that can be reached via the extensive bicycle-path network just outside Arna. Those who don't bring their own bicycles, can rent some from a shop near the reception.

Less impressed we were with the internet-access. The good thing was, it was available from all rental units. Due to limited capacity (probably one line for up to 3'000 keen surfers), they only sold rather expensive coupons that lasted for a maximum of five hours. That way, everybody who needed to go on-line, could do so. For most of those on a two-weeks holiday, this is probably good enough, as they have high speed access at home. Poor people like us, who are constantly roving around and had the privilege to stay here for 7 weeks, had to resort with this connection only. If you have to organize your banking, onward-travel or anything like that, it's not such a happy solution. Sure enough, exactly here we had several urgent matters coming up, including an unexpected flight to Switzerland, after Heinz' mother died. At 86 she was rather relieved from her afflictions of old age. Anyhow, after five days we were back at Arna and glad we had still some weeks ahead of us to digest the happenings.

Great shopping and a market among nudes



After it had been unseasonably wet and cold until the end of June 2013, the weather changed for the better on the beginning of July. Finally, wherever we went in France, it remained sunny and hot until the beginning of September. Now it was just more tempting to go to the beach than to drive out shopping. Luckily, you can buy anything you might want for a decent meal, at Arna's “épicerie”. The little supermarket is well stocked and includes a meat- and cheese-counter. At Arna, nude shopping is the rule and enjoyed by some 90% of shoppers. We love fish and were delighted about the big market-van of a fish-monger who came in twice a week for the entire morning.

Not even those who like to visit markets, need to leave the resort. In season, every Monday afternoon, a real market is being set up and stays until 10 PM. It's no smaller than the markets in nearby villages like Léon. We counted some 30 stalls. That's how it goes in the countryside: first the locals moan about the nudes, but as soon as they realize, they can squeeze money out of their pockets, the naked pigs mutate to damned fine customers. As up to 3'000 holidayers inhabit Arna in peak season, there is more business potential for a market than in surrounding villages.

Also on most other days, two to five market stalls came onto the ground and stayed for a few hours, so the potential customer didn't need to rush. Much better than the “horny” bakers visiting other resorts. Apropos baker: one from the area has a branch at Arna and his Baguettes got awarded with a medal as “best of Landes”. It's a well known secret that a French Baguette loses its great taste two hours after it comes out of the oven. The jury must certainly have awarded their points within this time span. It's just a pity, the two hours usually have passed by the time this baker's bread hits the shelves at Arna. Luckily, the supermarket next door provides a large variety of crusty bread, dark brown or white. They're all great in taste and really fresh, as they bake up every few hours. These are just the way we like it and taste far superior to normal crisp-up bread. If you don't want to cook by yourself, there are three restaurants on the site. A very good Pizzeria, a Spanish style fish restaurant and a French restaurant that serves traditional fare at fair prices.

It was interesting to see, how the season built up, during our stage at Arna. The mobile homes were very well occupied all the time, the pre-erected tents and the chalets filled on the beginning of July, and the campground around famous Bastille Day, but then: with a bang! As most French and Spaniards see August as their main holiday month, everything was in full swing, when we left on the 3rd of August.

From the naturist places we visited, we liked the atmosphere at Arna best. It feels very natural and has a very international, and rather young clientele. It's certainly a place to go back to and we're looking forward to do so.

Domaine Laborde: a side trip to the interior

We enjoyed our time at the Atlantic, but what we missed were charming, naturally grown villages and a good choice of restaurants. So, as of August 3rd 2013, we had booked a small cottage at [Domaine Laborde](#), a naturist camping on the border between the districts Garonne. We had discovered owned place with some 40 homes and ~150 pitches two ha of farm- and woodland, scenic ponds, a swimming toboggans, as well as an and hamam. The Dutch not only their compatriots, nationals. They do quite well stay on a Dutch owned doesn't feel like "a Dutch August, more than half of French families; that's what



of Dordogne and Lot-et- this well equipped, family rental chalets and mobile years ago. Spread over 20 guests find two small but pool, two thrilling indoor pool with sauna owners try hard to attract but also French and other and it's the first time we naturist-ground, which Embassy". Now in the guests were in fact we call success!

As there are many beautiful villages in the surroundings, we took the opportunity and drove out several times, passing green rolling hills, full of shiny sunflower fields. Along the way, we found several spots worthy of a stop, like the viewpoint in Montsegur or the converted mill on the River Lot near Trentels. We stopped so often, it was 6 P.M., by the time we reached Penne d'Agenais, the village we initially wanted to visit.

Sure enough, one of the reasons to visit the Dordogne region, is always good food. We sampled quite a few gastronomic menus and enjoyed a Vietnamese Restaurant and an extra-ordinary Ferme Auberge (Farm-Restaurant) in between. On these gourmet-trips, we re-visited a few nice towns we knew from last time, like Monpazier, Villeréal or Villeneuve-sur-Lot. Our sunny two weeks at Laborde made for a nice change from the Atlantic coast, to where we returned now.

Euronat: a popular naturist village on the Atlantic

When we arrived back at [Euronat](#) on August 17th, 2013, it was peak season and therefore quite different to our previous stay in spring. We instantly knew that check-in wouldn't be fast, when we were greeted by hostesses distributing free refreshments to all new arrivals, before we joined the queues at reception. It looked like on an airport with several booths. We were a bit unlucky, as we joined a queue behind a family, who arrived without reservation. For some reason, this always seems to take ages, whereas check-in for those with a reservation and pictures in hand for their "dog-mark" (guest-pass), is always quite efficient.

Anyway, we got the same luxurious mobile home we had occupied already in spring. Upon arrival, we met again the neighbours who are permanents and they exclaimed: "Dieu merci; you are back. The families that were here in the



meantime, all made sooo much noise". Despite the mobile home being clean, it showed quite a few scars it had gotten during the last 9 weeks. However, we couldn't complain about any noise, as all our present neighbours were rather quiet.

Most of the chalets and mobile homes were now occupied, either by their owners or then by holidayers renting. Of course, also the vast campground was now full and all over there was a lively, but not crowded atmosphere. This is thanks to Euronat's smart and generous layout. In contrast to most other naturist resorts, all accommodation at Euronat is privately owned. This results in varying standards, as every dwelling is equipped and decorated according to its owner. Hundreds of mobile homes, apartments, chalets and big houses can be rented through

reception. Some are a bit older, some a bit newer, but standards are in general higher than in places, where the company who runs the business, owns the rentals. At Euronat, probably most accommodation has satellite TV and many come with

additional trimmings, like air-con, baking oven, dishwasher or washing machine. So, if you reserve in time, you have a good chance to get what is important to you. Its best to write or phone, instead of making a reservation with the internet-booking tool. We were lucky, we managed to grab a nice 38m² mobile home with baking oven and dishwasher.

Though Euronat hosts up to 15'000 naturists during peak summer, it feels never really crowded. That's mainly thanks to its big size, allowing a smart layout with plenty of open space, strategically positioned between pitches and plots. The estate in the pine forest measures 335ha and is divided into separate areas for camping with tents, caravanning, mobile homes and chalets. If you're in a tent, it is much more pleasant if you are not cornered by rows of caravans! The extensive built up housing area, is divided into "villages" named after continents. The roads in each continent, are named after adjoining countries and islands. Many roads lead, like clover leaves, into a dead end and only a few connect to the next "continent". The plots are all located along those clover leaves, leaving much more open space than if the parcels and pitches would be in a raster shaped road layout. It's very pleasant to walk or cycle around Euronat and within a short time, you can move around the world, from Iceland all the way down to Africa.

Once you're there, it feels as if Apartheid was still in place. But here, the estates are almost exclusively owned by Germans. In Africa, it's particularly popular to let privately and this is always clearly marked with a sign in German only: "zu vermieten von privat" - after all, this is an occupied territory and not France. Maybe they are after milking their compatriots only. According to our experience, not only at Euronat, but in other holiday resorts as well, you often get the better deal, if you rent from the reception, rather than directly from owners.

A beach in the change of tides

As said, Euronat is a huge place and depending on where you're located, it's a few hundred metres, or up to three kilometres, down to the beach. From our mobile home it was a pleasant 2,2km stroll till you approach the central- or the south beach. The first things you see on each of them, are hundreds of bicycle racks, a toilet and shower block and a small snack stall. Then you stand atop of the dune and see down to the vast beach, dotted with sinking bunkers from WWII that had been washed out of the dunes. The first time we went there, was on the beginning of May. It was high tide and the waves reached the dune. We wondered, where the thousands of sun seekers that are expected for the summer, should sunbathe. Euronat has long found a solution to that: every year, they heap up large sand terraces and hope they will last for the summer. These sand terraces are also needed to suppress the ground water that leaks out from the dunes. If you walk along the beach, you find many sections where the water flow, out of the dune, is so strong and so enriched with minerals, the outflows become very colourful little creeks. In one part, black and copper coloured mineral layers cover a several metres high sand-wall, it looks now like a trickling waterfall. In some places, it formed blackish, rainbow coloured grottos, with stalactites and stalagmites.

The natural beauty of Euronat's beach has certainly lots of charms but people flock down here by the thousands, because they can strip-off in the first place. Euronat stretches for about 1.6 km along the beach, but you can walk in the nude for almost 5km in either direction, before you get to textile beaches. And much further still, if you don't mind to curtain your beauty, until you've passed the sexy covered bathing beauties and beach boys.

We really liked it that Euronat assigned only one section of the beach for dogs, whereas dogs are banned from the vast part, including the two supervised beaches. Live-savers are present from mid June to mid September and most people gather near them. Mid August, there are very many families with children, but towards mid September, they decreased more and more and the average age of beachgoers increased. At low tide, even with thousands of sun seekers, there was plenty of space, as the water retreated sometimes so much, the beach became up to 300 metres wide. At high tide however, even those who like to sunbathe in the middle of nowhere, had to retreat to the dry sand terraces and join the crowd. From there, it is fascinating to watch the crushing waves and quite relaxing, because there are no beach hawks, except one ice-cream vendor.



As much as we liked the beach, if we really wanted to swim, we had to go to the pool. There is a big indoor pool, two outdoor pools, a paddling pool and two small toboggans. It's all supervised and very well organized, but we didn't feel very attracted to it. Apart from July and August, it's only open on 6 days a week, and only, for some three hours in the morning and three in the afternoon. The indoor pool feels functional and cool, perfect if you train for a swimming competition, but not much fun for children, as it's mostly very deep. However, the outdoor toboggans are open from Mai till October.

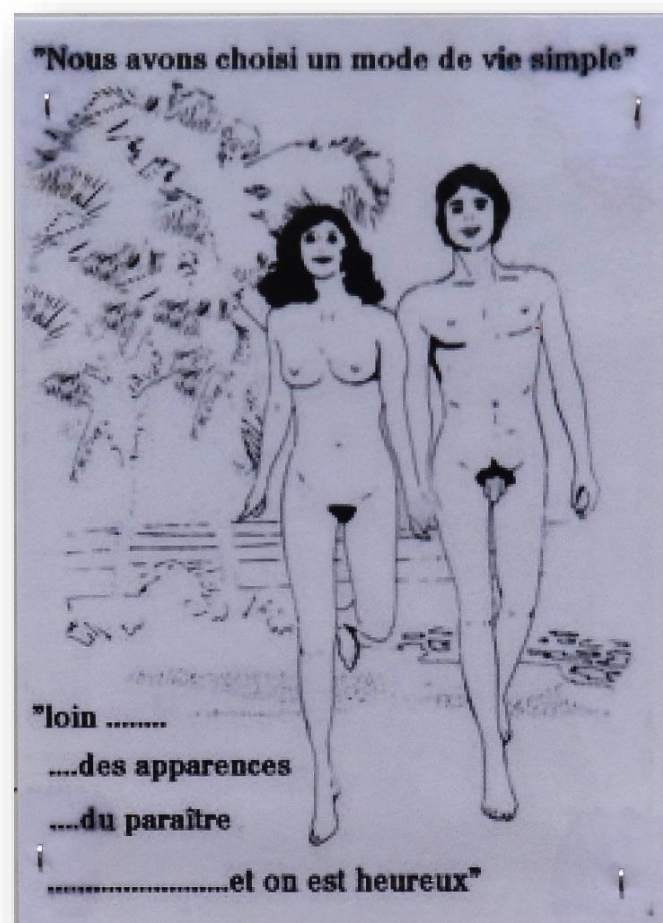
Loosing and gaining weight

Apart from normal holiday activities, Euronat has a wealth of organized animations and workshops on offer during season and most are for free i.e. included in the price... On the other hand, outdoor pursuits like mini-golf or tennis, are organized as in "other towns" of 15'000 inhabitants: you go to the privately run sports-centre and there it's pay and play. Unusual for true naturists: most tennis players wore atrocious white dress, instead of their beautiful birthday suit.

Euronat's biggest profit-centre is certainly the Thalasso. There, you can treat yourself to a few hours in the sauna, hammam or saltwater pool. But that's not how they earn their money. They prefer you to buy one of their 6-day health and slimming, or anti-stress and relaxation packages. However, we suspect that those treatments produce more stress than they take off you. At least, many of those patients who pay to be looked after for a whole week, are so stressed, they don't even take time for the healthiest part of their treatment: a relaxing walk or bike-ride to get to the Thalasso Centre, so they have to resort to their cars!

At least most holidayers use bicycles to move around Euronat's vast ground. Some bring their own, others rent one here. Of course, it makes you much faster than if you leg it. Heinz took every morning half an hour, to walk to the bakery and back, as the loop was more than two kilometres return. However, it was worth every millimetre. Euronat has the best bakery we had ever seen all over France - and we know many! The selection of breads they sell, is just amazing! There are more than 40 different types of loaves on offer, some brown, some white, all crusty fresh (...if toast munchers know what we mean...). It took us a solid three weeks, until we had tried them all. The bakery remains open 365 days a year, as many people live permanently on the ground. For the busiest time, the bakers have worked out a smart system, so that

nobody has to queue for too long. Up to five vendors are giving out breads and with it, you go to one of three cash registers. Euronat's bakery manages to keep its high standard even if it's very busy, and they certainly do much better business than any out in the greater region. The bakers take into consideration that the majority of holidayers come from Germany and they like dark brown bread.



At the bakery, you feel certainly the upside of German influence, whereas at the two supermarkets in Euronat's shopping centre, you feel rather the downside, as they are quite badly stocked. If it comes to grocery shopping, many Germans unfortunately stick to the habit "Geiz ist geil" (greed turns you up). As the closest supermarket outside, is a German super-discounter, there is not much business left to the shops inside Euronat and this is reflected in their selection. Luckily, Euronat's 25 stores and restaurants do include also a deli, a butcher and a fish monger. So, between June and mid September, it's easier to deal with the limited selection of the supermarkets. We loved to get fresh fish regularly and a good piece of meat, once a while. Many campers took advantage of the carbon grill, the butcher fired every day for his customers. There are many more shops and Restaurants. Noteworthy businesses include a Crêperie and the Petit Café that serves Japanese dishes like Sushi, among more popular dishes. To make sure, people don't run out of money, a cash dispenser is located amidst the shops.

Sights around Euronat



More shops and restaurants (not necessarily better ones), can be found in the nearby village of Montalivet, which is so dead during most of the year, every cemetery appears lively, compared to it. During summer holidays however, it's so bustling, you can't tumble over. The surroundings don't offer many sights and there are hardly any bigger (naturally grown) villages to be found - only resort villages. Tourist managers of Montalivet know, how much tourists love visiting markets and that they usually loosen the purse strings, while on holiday. So they filled the void and organized a big market to fill their streets and to cash up. We couldn't believe our eyes, how big this market is, and still less believe our ears, when we were told that it is

held every single day, from July to mid September! But if you're looking for something useful, you probably drop before you find it. It's almost only about tourist crap!

Sights of the Médoc include mostly castles. It's either a "chateau d'eau", a water tower, or an estate that enhances itself with the name "castle". Those wine-makers, are not interesting to teetotallers like us, because they only intend to sell legalized drugs - a pity for the sweet grapes.

As the Atlantic coast has so few permanent residents, it's hard for good restaurants to establish themselves. The only star we found in the gastronomic sky, is "chez Gilles & Marika" at the Hotel de France in Vendays-Montalivet.

We invited Valery & Alan, friends who live nearby at CHM Monta, for dinner at our mobile home in Euronat. Another time, they treated us to a day out to Blaye, at the other shore of the Gironde River. We parked the car at Lamarque and took the ferry, from where we enjoyed outstanding views to a number of little fishermen's huts on stilts, called "carrelets". The appealing town of Blaye has an ancient citadel, which was the designation of our journey.



Bookings

At Euronat, we also met up with Heidi & Michael a few times. They are a German couple we know for quite some time and they happened to arrive at Euronat the same day we did. After they saw our mobile home, which we rented through reception, they felt quite a bit cheated with the chalet they rented straight from the owner. Ours was a fair bit cheaper and looked much brighter and more appealing. Furthermore, we had loads of empty cupboards, whereas the few they had, were mostly filled with the Landlady's personal belongings. We were not that much surprised about it, because we have looked quite a few times at private rentals in naturist resorts and always found them less competitive than if you book through receptions. One thing is, that you often have to pay hefty additional fees to the resort, if you rent privately and most landlords don't seem to study the price-list and discounts properly.

We are very used to booking everything by ourselves and if we sometimes see a brochure of a travel agent, we always chuckle about how dependent they judge their clientele. Here, we found a catalogue from, a naturist travel agency (Oböna from Germany) and we couldn't believe they are no better than any other. Customers interested in visiting an American Resort, are warned that English is the only language spoken over there. Those interested in visiting some of the European resorts, are advised to bring their own sun beds, plus a caddy to carry them down to the beach, wherever sunbeds cannot be hired. To minimize the risk that their valuable clients have to talk to foreigners (non-compatriots) when checking in, at big places like Euronat, Oböna operates an own reception with German staff. To us, individual-travelling globetrotters, it was mightily amusing to flip through their brochure.

When we make our bookings and travel arrangements, we use meanwhile mostly the internet. So we took advantage of Euronat's vast Wi-Fi network that covers the entire campground and the area with mobile homes. Around the chalets, there are different private networks. Even if it wasn't cheap, it was comfortable to connect the computer from our dwelling. Luckily, Euronat offers flat fees with unlimited access for those staying a bit longer. Sometimes it got quite slow, though mostly it was reasonable, unless there were many other people around.

Those coming on weekends only, were usually the owners. Most of them didn't come here to relax in the first place, they rather came to work on smaller or bigger projects and to clean. You could tell right away, if a mobile home is being rented out regularly, or not. Those of owners, who come all the time, are clean and have tidy gardens, whereas others, of which owners only appear once a year for a holiday, but otherwise let, often have very mossy façades. Never the less, from the inside they look nice and clean too.

Change of season

It's amazing, how quick a big place like Euronat can fill up and empty again. You don't realize this so much if you walk between chalets and mobile homes. They rent out well, and many people live here year around, or at least all summer long. So, accommodations are always well occupied. Around the campground however, it is obvious how the season changes. The section for tents fills up for the shortest time, which is only about two months. Caravans, on the other hand, come and go with low off-season prices and with school holidays. Number plates on the cars reveal that also on this patch, most holidayers come from Germany, though the place is also popular among French, English and Belgians. The yellow number plates of Dutch cars seem to appear mostly in the absolute peak- and absolute off-season, but not very much in between.

Nature reflects the change of season more than people. When we arrived here the first time, yellow gorse bloomed everywhere, throughout May. It still rained a lot but finally the summer heat took over. As of the second week of

September, the rains set in quite often again. The now vacated pitches on the forest floor burst in purple, with a wonderful display of heather, and once a while you see even some roe deer. Exactly on the calendric beginning of autumn, summer came back with temperatures raising again close to 30°C.

Whether it's hot or cold, sunny or humid, a long walk along the beach is always rewarding and we walked between 10-30km daily, mostly in the buff. To the common man it might be hard to believe that Euronat manages to attract up to 15'000 nude sun seekers at once.



However, the demand is much bigger. Only seven kilometres down the beach, you find CHM Centre Héliomarin Montalivet, another naturist centre, hosting a further 15'000 nudies. Additionally, many bathers flock from small textile campgrounds in the hinterland, to bathe in the sea.

As we had stayed at CHM before, we were curious, how it looks there now. So we walked there twice along the beach. We carried a sarong, as we expected to pass many textile bathers, not only around the village of Montalivet. The opposite was the case! Most of the seven kilometres was one wonderful, almost uninterrupted, free beach. We only needed to wrap twice for a few hundred meters, before reaching CHM-Monta.

Euronat and CHM-Monta both have their peculiarities and choosing between two good options is hard. It's also a matter of personal preferences that come into play, but we can't mix the two. As CHM-Monta was the cradle of naturism, it attracts many modest, full hearted naturists, who were happy with simple comfort. Only recently, CHM caught up to become a modern competitive naturist resort. Euronat, on the other hand, developed from the begin, as a modern holiday village. Thereby attracting more German guests than French, whereas CHM was somehow the opposite. Meanwhile, they both became more even, though we still see differences.

After sneaking in to the area with the shops, we had a look around CHM's two supermarkets and bought a soft drink. After seeing the abundant and attractive choice of groceries, we weren't surprised that we had to queue for a while, something that never happened in Euronat's supermarkets.

We rewarded ourselves for the caloric-intense activity with a delicious piece of cake from the bakery. There, we found the selection of breads (still) to be a far cry away, from what you get at Euronat. Obviously, different nationals create different demands. If it comes to food, the Germans demand proper bread and the French proper everything. We still remember the French Lady, who asked us on a supermarket

freezer, whether we had seen her desired "Glace caramel au beurre salé de Guérande" (Caramel ice-cream with a pinch of salted butter, but not any salt; salt from the famous Guérande saline).

We took to the beach again, as we had one and a half hours to get back. Just when we reached Euronat, the sun disappeared red and romantic into the sea.



France: cross-country direction Switzerland

After an unusually long and sunny summer, we left Euronat on October 5th 2013. Slowly moving eastwards to Switzerland, we allowed plenty of time to make sure we don't have to turn our backs on the sights along the way. Behind Bordeaux, we followed the Dordogne River for the best part of the afternoon, heading thereafter to [Brive-la-Gaillarde](#). After taking a hotel room, we explored the pretty old-town that boasts - even by French standards - an unusually good choice of restaurants with sophisticated menus. Just a pity to us that those places are not only famous but also very popular. So, on that Saturday night, we had to ask in five different places, until we finally got a table.

We devoted the next day to visit picturesque villages and towns. First we got to **Turenne**, only 15km from Brive-la-Gaillarde. It's glued to a hillside with the ruins of a big fortification atop.

In the next valley, we visited [Collonges-la-Rouge](#), a pretty village famous for its red sandstone buildings. We admired the diverse architecture of the historic reddish buildings, of which many have turrets.



Of totally different appeal is the fortified renaissance village of **Salers**. Though it only has 360 permanent residents, the small town appeared extremely lively. For every inhabitant, they get more than 1000 visitors annually, bringing the number up to 400'000 tourists every year. As it rained upon arrival, we accomplished the tourist industries' expectation and headed straight to a restaurant, where we had a few excellent Crêpes.

Well fed, we toured the alleyways lined by tall houses constructed from black volcanic stone. It has been quarried from the surrounding Auvergne Mountains in the southern Massif Central. Here you find Europe's largest volcanic region, though the fire-spitting stopped long ago.

To a big part, the Massif Central consists of rolling green hills and there you often find the endemic Salers mountain cows, a red-brown breed with the unkind fate to end up as the sought-after Salers beef. With their distinctive long horns, they can be identified on up to 7000 years old rock paintings.

For the night, we headed to **Aurillac** where we found a good bed and a Vietnamese meal for a change. The town has a rather modern newer part, but also narrow alleys with old-town houses.

Extinct Volcanoes all over

The next day, we took advantage of the brilliant weather and ventured further into the Massif Central. We started with the "route des crêtes, D35" which leads over hilltops above the Jordanne Valley, offering great views all the way. To the south and west, we mainly saw green pastoral hills with Salers-cattle, to the north and east, we distinguished numerous volcano cones. Altogether, the area around Clermont-Ferrand boasts 40 "Puy" how the volcano cones are called in French. We headed to "Col du Pas de Peyrol" on 1588m, just below [Puy Mary](#), one of the extinct volcanoes. After admiring the great vistas and enjoying the multi-media show in the interesting visitors-centre, we had lunch. The very popular restaurant on the mountain pass served local specialities. Our side-dish e.g. was "Truffade", a delicious blend of mashed potatoes and Auvergne cheese.



After zigzagging through spectacular landscapes, we reached Mont-Dore, a rather touristy spa town on the Dordogne. The source of the Dordogne River is actually on Puy de Sancy, within the community borders of Mont-Dore, some 200km away from what is known as the political Dordogne District. While we continued over Col Robert, fog came in. As evening approached anyway, we looked for a quarter in **Besse-et-Saint-Anastaise**, a small village packed with old grey houses, full of character.

On the next morning, we paid a short visit to Saint-Floret, another village listed as one of the prettiest of France. It rained and so we continued without many detours, though on small roads leading through countryside and forests. The city of **Roanne** was to be our next overnight stop. While strolling through its large pedestrian area, we found more appealing eateries than we could take. The one we chose turned out to be excellent and the two kilometres back to our hotel, made a perfect digestion walk.



Touristy highlights on the next day, included the town of **Charlieu** with its many picturesque half timbered houses, and the rocky gorge of the Ain River.

That night, we ended up in **Saint-Claude**, an unexpectedly large place in the French Jura mountains. Here we were quite near the Swiss border, so we spoiled ourselves once more with “a last” (...) French gourmet meal.

On the next morning, we were convinced it’s only a stone’s throw to Switzerland. However, in the mountains, roads don’t lead as straight as the crows flies and are not always down in the valleys. After a lengthy summer, it was exactly today when winter had its first rendez-vous. So we had to fight for more than two hours through ever denser snow until we finally reached lower altitudes. Though we got quite hungry, we wisely called off our initial idea of having a “last” lunch in France. Instead, we waited until we reached Orbe in the French part of Switzerland. Meanwhile, it was almost two o’clock but with some good Luck, we found parking just in front of a Thai place. The restaurant was soon closing but as Asians don’t know a word for “no”, and maybe also because we remember the Thai words for “hello”, and for some of our favourite dishes, Heinz could talk the Ladies into preparing us an excellent noodle meal in the wok.

How long we’ll stay in Switzerland, where we’re going to venture afterwards and whether we sample more Thai Food, will be revealed in the next part of our travelogue...

Brigitte & Heinz



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** real name know to Brigitte & Heinz, any resemblance to a living person is purely coincidental*