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The stylish French peninsula that the locals don't want you to know about

Cap Ferret's charm lies in its calm waters, forested lanes and the enduring essence of simple seaside pleasures



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Shaded by pines, holidaymakers enjoy the Atlantic panorama at Lège-Cap-Ferret Credit: Andia / Alamy Stock Photo



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Every parent will be familiar with this scenario: you've dared to venture to a restaurant for lunch, your wine glass has just been filled, your meal has been served – and at this very moment, your inquisitive toddler decides it's time for a wander.

This happened during a recent visit to [Hôtel de la Plage](#) in the village of L'Herbe in Cap Ferret. Knowing all attempts at diplomacy would fail – with the sole exception of “ice cream?” – I took his hand, and off we went.

With the determination of an army general, George led me into the village's maze-like grid of wooden houses. We walked along sandy alleys, tiptoeing around a somnolent golden retriever, Lasso, who is so famous in L'Herbe he has a street named after him. Then, glimmering in the metre-wide gap between the houses, lay the bright blue waters of Bassin d'Arcachon and a wide golden beach.



Toddler in tow, Greg wandered the streets of L'Herbe to discover La Chapelle de la Villa Algérienne

The first thing you ought to know about Cap Ferret is that it is not [Cap Ferrat](#). Cap Ferret is a peninsula on France's Atlantic coast, about an hour west of [Bordeaux](#). It is pronounced "Ferrey," with a roll on the R. The glitzier Cap Ferrat – nicknamed the "Peninsula of Billionaires" – is on the [French Riviera](#), east of Nice.

For the best part of half a century, Cap Ferret was where French families went to untie their loafers and eat oysters for a month or so in high summer. But in the last 15 years it has risen in popularity, in no small part due to the 2010 film *Little White Lies*, starring Marion Cotillard, which was set on the peninsula.

Henri Coufoulan, 77, who has been visiting Cap Ferret for seven decades and has lived here full-time for 20 years, says: "There's a certain cinematic image of the peninsula that doesn't match reality. The media often reinforces this glossy portrayal, but while the area has undeniably changed, its true essence endures."



Wide, golden beaches define the charm of Cap Ferret Credit: OceanProd/iStockphoto

What does the glossy portrayal look like? Well, you could quite easily spend a morning perusing the boutiques of Cap Ferret town, buying a “jute-fibre” hat for €495, and then showcasing it on the terrace of the Frédélian restaurant. Many of the villas on the peninsula sell themselves on – someone, quick, pass me a bucket – “barefoot luxury.”

As for the true essence? This could be distilled as the smell of pine while pedalling through a forest along well-kept cycle lanes. It is the Tabasco shockwave of an oyster, accompanied by a bottle of super-pale rosé, a big bowl of crevettes, and some bread (with nothing else on the menu).



The true taste of Cap Ferret: fresh oysters, super-pale rosé and the briny Atlantic air Credit: Stephen Hughes / Alamy Stock Photo

It is the creak of a boardwalk looping over dunes to the crashing, rolling Atlantic, surfboard under your arm. It is a bar with several large screens, as locals cheer on their beloved Union Bordeaux Bègles (UBB) rugby team.

Above all, the essence of Cap Ferret is the Bassin itself. On our most recent visit, we stayed in a self-catered house in Claouey, with a wide terrace overlooking the bay. In one moment, the glassy water stretched for miles at knee height. Blink, and it had emptied, as if a plughole had been pulled, leaving fishing boats marooned and lugworm mounds offering fascination for little minds. All of Cap Ferret's ten villages offer such spots and such quiet beaches.

Somewhere this delightful comes with its challenges. Since falling into the international spotlight, Cap Ferret has become one of the most expensive places to buy a home in France, despite coastal erosion, storms, and forest fires being sources of growing concern.



Cap Ferret's boutiques and terraces show off the peninsula's glossy side, where barefoot luxury meets seaside charm

In peak summer, the single road that tracks the peninsula's spine is invariably clogged with traffic, so much so that taxi drivers tend to leave triple the time to get to the airport. One local calls summer the “chicouf” season: chic meaning “great” as the tourist hordes arrive, and ouf (pew) as they leave.

“In the winter, it all becomes magical again,” reflects local Marion Girault-Rime, a former journalist who runs a boutique agency called Quatre Histoires. “The light falling on the Bassin d’Arcachon. Wild hogs and deer and foxes taking back the forest.”

Still absent from the lunch table, with George’s T-shirt drenched to tummy height and my sense of time hazy, I decided it was time to return. Shall we go and finish our pasta? No. Shall we go see the nice sleeping doggy? No. Ice cream? He knew I wouldn’t dare suggest such a thing as a little white lie.

How to do it

Cap Ferret has a range of excellent self-catering options and a suite of high-end hotels: the [Hôtel des Dunes](#), the [Hôtel de la Plage](#) and [La Maison du](#)

[Bassin](#) come recommended by Telegraph experts. A car is an essential, if you want to explore the peninsula: Greg Dickinson hired one courtesy of [booking.com](#), which lists a convenient range of options from Bordeaux Airport. The shoulder season of May and September are wonderful months to visit.

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