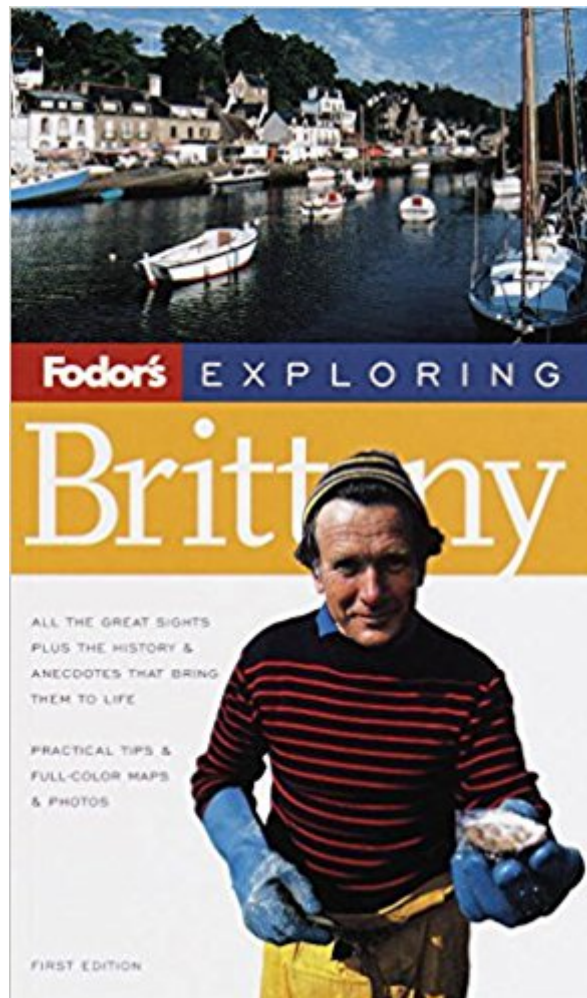


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Exploring Brittany, 1st Edition (Fodor's Exploring Brittany)



Synopsis

Fodor's Exploring Guides are the most up-to-date, full-color guidebooks available. Covering destinations around the world, these guides are loaded with photos, essays on culture and history, descriptions of sights, and practical information. Full-color photos make this a great guide to buy if you're still planning your itinerary (let the photos help you choose!) and it's a perfect companion to a general guidebook, like a Fodor's Gold Guide. All the great sights plus the history and anecdotes that bring them to life • Extraordinary coverage of history and culture • Itineraries, walks and excursions, on and off the beaten path • Architecture and art Practical tips and full-color maps and photos • Getting there and getting around • When to go and what to pack • Quick tips on where to sleep in every price range • Savvy restaurant picks for all budgets Praise for Fodor's Exploring Guides "Most travel guides are either beautiful or practical. This one is both." -- New York Daily News "Beautiful...and the depth of text is impressive." -- San Diego Union Tribune "Authoritatively written and superbly presented...worthy reading before, during, or after a trip." -- Philadelphia Inquirer "Concise, comprehensive, and colorful." -- Washington Post "Absolutely gorgeous. Fun, colorful, and sophisticated." -- Chicago Tribune

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Food Cockles and mussels Breton seafood is predictably superb; Brittany is one of France's foremost fishing regions, and the range available in markets and restaurants is staggering. Visit a criée (fish auction), or commercial fish farm for some idea of this marine cornucopia. They are daunting sights, those platefuls of seaweed and crushed ice, piled so precariously with curious sea creatures that extracting any one of them threatens a deluge. Whatever else you find on your plate there are almost certain to be mussels and oysters, which are prime local products. Winkles, crayfish, clams, crabs, and scallops may also put in an appearance. If you prefer your fish hot, try a traditional Breton cotriade, or fish stew. Most Breton of all, though, is lobster, often prepared in a special sauce of tomato, shallots, and cognac (homard à l'armoricaine). **Pancakes** You will find crêperies everywhere in Brittany, and crêpes are an inexpensive, quick way of satisfying hunger pangs. The variety of fillings offered is legion, and imaginative to the point of eccentricity. Two names are used for pancakes: crêpe and galette. Generally, crêpes are made with a batter of wheat flour and usually have sweet fillings, whereas the more traditional galettes are made with the heavier buckwheat flour and are most often savory. **Legends** Like all Celtic regions, Brittany is a land of storytellers, full of legends and folklore. Intense piety and religious fervor often go hand in hand with a belief in fairies, elves, demons, and witches that stretches back to pagan times. **The Arthurian myth** When Celtic settlers arrived in the 6th century from Wales and Cornwall they brought with them shadowy tales of the saintly protector-king who fought the invading tribes of Saxons. The legends of Arthur became established in the mysterious forests of Brittany, where they still live on today. The forest of Paimpont is identified as the Brocéliande of the ancient stories, where the Knights of the Round Table began their Quest for the Holy Grail, and where the great wizard Merlin was ensnared

by Viviane, Lady of the Lake.Â Â Land of saintsBrittany's many saints appear sculpted in countless churches and wayside shrines, in local legends, and in hundreds of place-names. Some are undoubtedly apocryphal, and a large proportion have never been formally recognized by the Church. St. Yves Yves Helori (1253-1303) was born at Minihi-TrÃ©guier. He was a champion of the poor, and is often depicted standing between a well-dressed client and a man in rags, an image which relates to the most famous story about him: a rich man sued a beggar for loitering by his kitchen door and "stealing" his cooking smells. St. Yves heard the evidence, declared the rich man had won his case, and awarded him appropriate damages -- the sound of a coin rattling in a can!

Celtic Music and dance Music is now Brittany's most vigorous and versatile transmitter of Celtic culture, transcending the language barrier. You can see typical Breton instruments such as the bombarde (oboe), the biniou (bagpipes), and the vielle (hurdy-gurdy) in many museums, but try to hear them being played. All through the summer, concerts and festivals offer an opportunity to hear or even take part in Breton musical events. Sports and gamesThe CelticÂ Â temperament adores competitive activities, and trials of strength and team games have an enthusiastic following. For visitors, too, Brittany offers endless opportunities to enjoy active outdoor pursuits.

Breton gamesThe local form of wrestling (known as ar gouren in Breton) can be seen at a number of summer festivals, such as the FÃªte de Locmaria at Belle-Isle-en-Terre. Breton wrestling is a bit like oriental judo: the wrestlers wear a voluminous garb of long shorts and loose shirts, and exchange three smacking ritual kisses before commencing battle. Other trials of strength are similar to those that can be seen at the Scottish Highland Games or in Spain's Basque country -- tug-of-war, lifting a heavy stone, caber-tossing, and discus-throwing.

WatersportsAll types naturally proliferate in the region's coastal areas, though Brittany's inland waterways and lakes also provide many opportunities to canoe, cruise, sail, and fish. Windsurfing (planche Ã voile) is especially popular along the south coast, although experts head for the Plage de la Torche on the Penmarc'h peninsula. GolfBrittany now has more than 30 golf courses, many on the coast in lovely scenery. Dinard is the oldest and most fashionable center, but golf is a more sociable, family-oriented game in France than in many other countries, and course etiquette is generally unstuffy, although greens fees can be quite high.

Horseback ridingBrittany has many centres Ã©questres and horseback vacations (by yourself or in a group with a guide) are easily arranged. Some of these treks include overnight accommodations. Riding through the countryside can add a whole new dimension to a trip.

FestiveThe Celtic love of dressing up and making merry shows through in Brittany's festivals, which provide a continual backdrop of pageantry to any summer visit. Originally the festivals were religious events, but now they reflect many aspects of local culture.

Pardons The pardon is one of the most distinctive aspects

of Breton life, and virtually every parish holds one at some time during the year (some places have several). The word pardon implies forgiveness of sins, which was the purpose of the original medieval ritual. The inspiration for local pardons is still a fervent communal expression of spiritual contrition, followed up in a lighter vein by feasting and fun. Locals in bright costumes parade embroidered banners and statues of their patron saint through the streets, while stall-holders sell all kinds of crafts, souvenirs, crÃ¢pes, and cider. Afterwards, there may be dancing and traditional music, or a sports competition featuring typical "trials of strength" -- perhaps Breton wrestling or a tug-of-war.

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