

Three of the best

Francesca Syz's pick of French holiday rentals for autumn breaks

I've a soft spot for Ile de Ré. The first time I visited the island off France's Atlantic coast, years ago, my godmother had bought a house in one of its loveliest villages, Ars-en-Ré, and I was helping her get it ready to rent. We grouted bathrooms by day and devoured oysters and steak au poivre by night, at simple but wonderful local restaurants.

This year I stayed at Galathée, a stylish two-bedroom house in the island's capital, Saint-Martin-de-Ré. Getting there couldn't be easier, especially in autumn, when the weather tends to remain glorious but the summer crowds have gone. Connected to France's west coast by a bridge, the peaceful, beach-fringed Ile de Ré is a low-cost airline hop from London to La Rochelle, with Saint-Martin just 20 minutes further by taxi over the bridge. A 17th-century town house on a residential street a couple of blocks back from the town's lively, yacht-filled harbour, Galathée was bought and restored by its English owners in 2013. On arrival, we were greeted by housekeeper Valerie, a delightful local glass-blower, who is just a phone call away.

One of Galathée's loveliest features is its leafy courtyard, part of which is covered and has a dining table and a sinfully comfortable daybed. Beyond that is a light, airy, well-equipped kitchen, a shower room and a



Galathée
Saint-Martin-de-Ré, Ile de Ré
From £900 per week
(iledereholidayhouses.com;
france-atlantic.com)

The magically peaceful, beach-fringed Ile de Ré is only a low-cost airline hop to La Rochelle, then a 20-minute taxi ride

spacious living-dining room with a comfy leather sofa and a pellet-burning stove. There's a good mix of stylish vintage furniture and pretty, local antiques, all set against whitewashed walls and floors. Upstairs, you'll find a pretty twin and a double room and, on a tiny attic landing, a desk with views over the town's partly ruined church.

In the summer, there's a daily food market, a nightly street market, an ice-cream parlour and restaurants serving delectable

seafood. Out of season, much of this closes, but by no means all of it – locally loved waterfront restaurant Le Bistrot du Marin, for example, is open for 50 weeks of the year. Saint-Martin is ringed by pointy ramparts and, like the rest of the island, criss-crossed with cycle paths. All year round you can hire bikes and scale the walls or just keep going, through the salt flats, vineyards, marshes and the picturesque villages scattered across this island treasure.

The Gascony Farmhouse Gascony

Tucked away in a lesser-known pocket of south-west France, the four-bedroom, boho-chic Gascony Farmhouse is ideal for a family or group of friends. Set within 15 acres of private gardens with a lovely outdoor pool, it's a great base for autumn walks, and there are several good markets in the area. The house has three dining areas, including a barn with a long oak table and a firepit, and you can arrange for the services of a local chef. From £1,070 per week (07778-132478; i-escape.com).



Gardener's Cottage, Château St Pierre de Serjac Languedoc

Situated within the grounds of the Château St Pierre de Serjac wine estate, this is one of 36 cosy self-catering properties forged from outbuildings. Activities this autumn include truffle hunting, and the estate is also home to an intimate eight-room hotel, a restaurant and a bar. Plus there's the huge heated infinity pool, Cinq Mondes spa, clay tennis court and kids' club. The estate is offering four nights for the price of three this autumn, when it will cost £900-£1,200, depending on the week (0345-686 6505; serjac.com).

