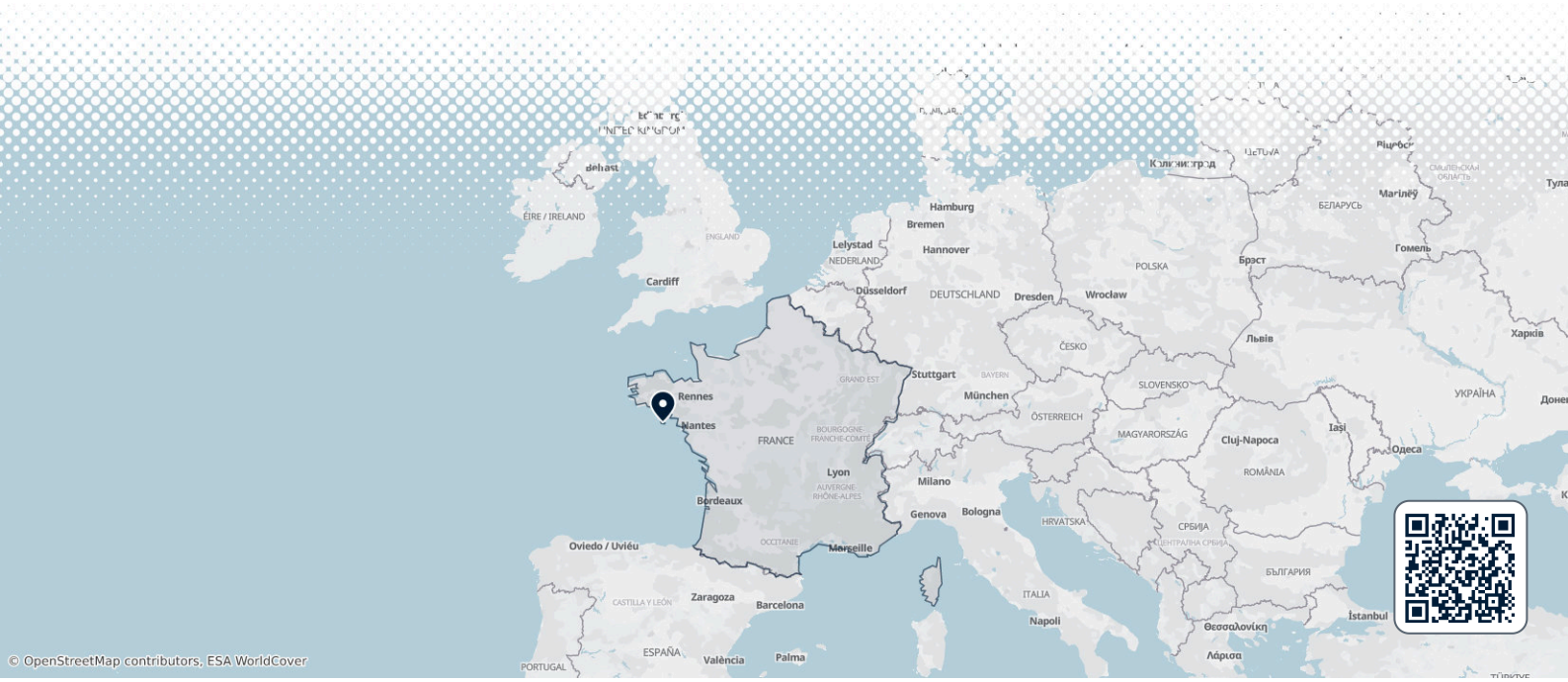


Belle Île

Brittany · France

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Belle-Île is the largest island off the Brittany coast. It is about 17 km long and 9 km wide, and lies in the Atlantic south of the Quiberon peninsula. Four communes share the island: Le Palais, Sauzon, Bangor and Locmaria. About 5,500 people live here all year, and many more come in summer.

The island has two faces. The east coast is gentle, with sandy bays and small harbours. The west coast, called the Côte Sauvage, has cliffs, sea stacks and rough surf. Belle-Île suits a slow stay of three to five nights on foot or by bike. It also works as a long day trip from the mainland. The painter *Claude Monet* worked here in 1886, and the actress *Sarah Bernhardt* later bought a fort on the north tip.

When to visit

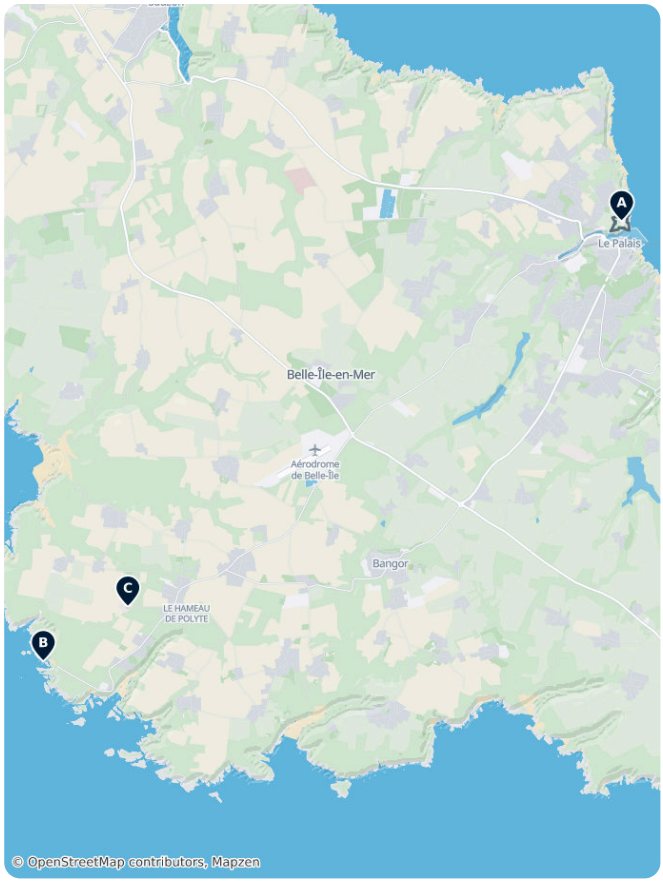
Late spring and early autumn are the best times. The days are mild and the paths are quiet. July and August are the warmest months and the busiest, so book ferries and rooms early. The sea stays cool even in summer. Winter is wet and windy, and many shops, restaurants and hotels close.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for hiking	9° / 13° Feels like 3°	6° / 0°	15 rainy days · Dry air
February	Fair Fair for hiking	9° / 12° Feels like 4°	6° / 1°	12 rainy days · Dry air
March	Fair Fair for hiking	11° / 15° Feels like 6°	7° / 2°	13 rainy days · Dry air
April	Good Good for hiking	13° / 18° Feels like 9°	9° / 5°	Dry air
May	Good Good for cycling	16° / 21° Feels like 12°	11° / 8°	Dry air
June	Great Great for cycling	19° / 24°	14° / 11°	Dry air
July	Great Great for cycling	20° / 26°	16° / 13°	
August	Great Great for cycling	20° / 25°	16° / 13°	
September	Great Great for cycling	19° / 23°	14° / 11°	Dry air
October	Good Good for cycling	16° / 19° Feels like 12°	12° / 8°	14 rainy days · Dry air
November	Fair Fair for cycling	12° / 16° Feels like 7°	9° / 5°	16 rainy days · Dry air
December	Poor Poor for hiking	10° / 14° Feels like 4°	7° / 1°	15 rainy days · Dry air

Best months: June, July, August, September

Climate data: NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5-Land and ERA5 · 1996–2025

Top sights



- A Citadelle Vauban in Le Palais is the island's largest fortress. The Gondi family built the first defences in the late 16th century, and *Fouquet* and then *Vauban* strengthened it in the 17th century. It overlooks the main port. The former museum is closed while the fortress is converted into a hotel, so check the tourist office before you go.
- The B Aiguilles de Port-Coton are sharp rock needles on the Côte Sauvage. *Claude Monet* painted them in 1886. They are the best-known view on the island.
- Port-Goulphar is a narrow, sheltered inlet on the south-west coast. The C Phare de Goulphar stands above it, and a short path leads down to the water.
- Plage de Donnant is a wide sandy beach on the wild coast. Swimming can be dangerous here when the sea is rough, so this beach is better for walking.
- Les Grands Sables is a long, gentle sandy beach near Locmaria. It is one of the safest places on the island for swimming.
- Fort Sarah Bernhardt and the Pointe des Poulains lie at the north-west tip. The actress *Sarah Bernhardt* bought the fort. A small exhibition and a nature centre are nearby, and the point has a lighthouse.
- The Grotte de l'Apothicairerie is a sea cave that cuts through a headland on the wild coast. Go only in calm weather.
- The villages of Sauzon, Le Palais, Bangor and Locmaria each have a different feel. Sauzon has a small harbour with colourful houses.

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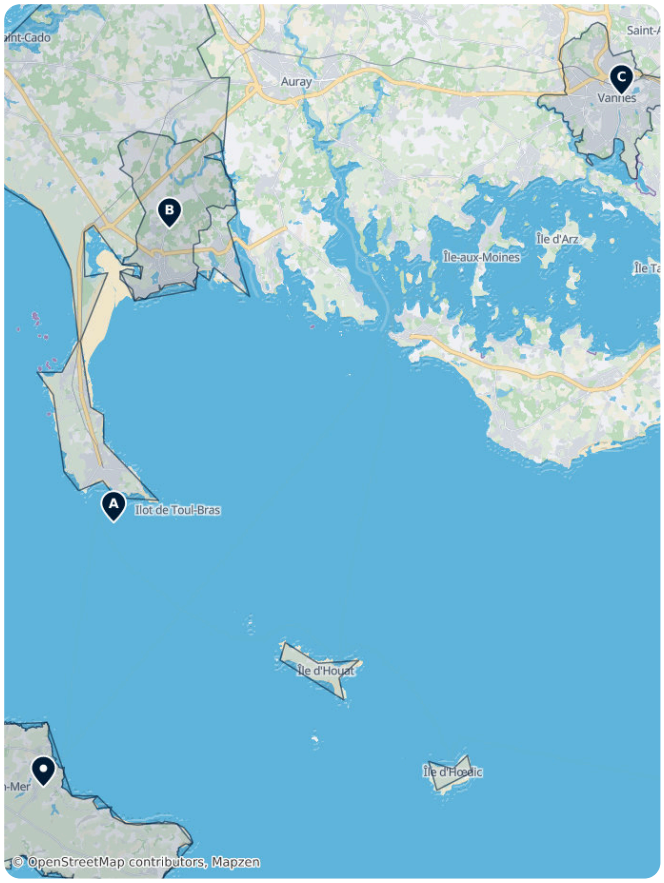
What to experience

- Walk a section of the GR 340 coastal path. The Côte Sauvage section has the sea stacks and the cliffs.
- Hire a bike in Le Palais and ride between the four villages. Plan a stop at a harbour café.
- Surf or paddle at a beach with a school. Les Grands Sables and Donnant are the usual places, but check the sea conditions first.
- Watch the sunset from a headland on the west coast, where the Atlantic is rough.
- Go sea kayaking along the calmer east coast, from Sauzon or Le Palais.

Day trips

Most visitors stay on the island. Day trips go back to the mainland, which is easy by ferry.

- A Quiberon: the ferry port, about 45 min by sea. The long peninsula has beaches and a rocky west coast.
- B Carnac: about 20 min by car from Quiberon. It is famous for its fields of standing stones.
- C Vannes: about 1 hour by car from Quiberon. The old town has half-timbered houses and city walls. Boats from Vannes reach the island in summer.
- Gulf of Morbihan: a sheltered bay with many small islands, north-east of Quiberon. Boat trips leave from Vannes and from Port-Navalo.



Getting there

Belle-Île can be reached only by sea or air. There is no bridge.

- **By air**: The island has a small airfield, but most visitors arrive by ferry. Fly to Nantes, Rennes or Lorient on the mainland, then continue by train or car to the ferry port.
- **By train**: Take a train to Auray. Then continue by bus or taxi to Quiberon. SNCF Connect
- **Ferry from Quiberon**: This is the main route. The crossing to Le Palais takes about 45 minutes. It runs all year, with more departures in summer. It is the only line that carries cars.
- **Other ferries**: Boats run in the warmer months from Vannes, Port-Navalo, Le Croisic and La Turballe. These carry passengers only.
- **Book ahead**: In July and August, book the ferry and any car space well in advance. Belle-Île tourist office

Getting around

- **By bike**: Cycling is the best way to see the island. Bikes and electric bikes can be hired at Le Palais and in the other villages. The island has many paths, but the west side has hills and wind.
- **On foot**: The coastal path GR 340 circles the island. It takes about a week to walk all of it. Shorter sections are easy day walks.
- **By bus**: Local buses link Le Palais with the other villages and the main beaches. Service is thinner in winter. Check times at the tourist office. Belle-Île tourist office
- **By car or scooter**: You can hire cars and scooters in Le Palais, or bring your own car on the Quiberon ferry.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

Moderate

The villages are compact. The main sights and beaches lie several kilometres apart on coastal paths.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

High

The island has many paths and quiet roads, and bikes are easy to hire. The west side is hilly and windy.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?** Not needed for a short stay. Bikes and local buses cover the main sights. A car helps if you stay in a remote house or travel with young children.
- **Bringing a car**: The Quiberon ferry carries cars. Book early in summer, as space is limited.
- **Roads**: The roads are narrow, and in summer they are busy near the beaches and the port. Park in the village car parks and walk to the harbour.

Food & drink

Food on Belle-Île is Breton and based on the sea. Look for fish, shellfish, crêpes and galettes. Local products include goat cheese, honey from the island's black bees, caramels, biscuits and chocolates.

Most restaurants and shops are in Le Palais and Sauzon. Many close in winter. In summer, book dinner ahead, and buy picnic food in the villages before you walk to the beaches.

What to eat & drink

BREAKFAST

Croissant
Buttery, flaky laminated pastry and a classic French breakfast staple.

LUNCH

Ratatouille
A Provençal stewed vegetable dish of eggplant, zucchini, peppers, and tomatoes.

DINNER

Coq au Vin
Chicken braised slowly in red wine with mushrooms, onions, and lardons.

Beef Bourguignon · Bœuf Bourguignon
Beef stewed in red Burgundy wine with carrots, onions, and mushrooms.

Escargot · Escargots de Bourgogne
Snails cooked in garlic and parsley butter, a classic starter.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Baguette
Long, crusty white bread loaf bought fresh daily from the local boulangerie.

Cheese · Fromage
France produces hundreds of cheese varieties, often served as a course before dessert.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Crepes · Crêpes
Thin pancakes served sweet with sugar or jam, or savory as galettes.

Macarons
Delicate almond meringue sandwich cookies in a range of flavors and colors.

DRINKS

Wine · Vin
France's wine regions, including Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Champagne, are among the world's most renowned.

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Safety & health

Belle-Île is very safe. Petty crime is rare. The main risks come from the sea and the cliffs.

- **Sea and currents**: The wild coast beaches, such as Donnant, have strong waves and currents. Swim only on beaches with lifeguards, and follow the flags.
- **Cliffs**: Stay on the paths and away from cliff edges. In bad weather, avoid the sea caves and the rocks near the water.
- **Medical help**: There is a medical centre at Le Palais. For serious cases, call 112 or 15.
- **Ticks and sun**: In grass and scrub, check for ticks. Use sun cream, as the wind can hide the heat.

History

The island lies on a sea route with a long military history. The Gondi family fortified the island from the late 16th century. In the 17th century *Nicolas Fouquet* bought it and the fortress at Le Palais grew further. *Vauban*, the king's military engineer, later improved the citadel. British forces held the island for about two years in the 1760s.

In the 19th century, the island's sardine canneries grew in importance. They have since closed. Artists came for the light and the rocks. *Claude Monet* painted the Aiguilles de Port-Coton in 1886, and *Sarah Bernhardt* bought a fort at the Pointe des Poulains.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for France at a glance:

CURRENCY
EUR €

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY

Type C / Type E
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
French

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Belle-Île-en-Mer: The Absolute Essentials

Belle-Île-en-Mer features a dense network of 19th-century military architecture, including Vauban's Citadelle and numerous coastal batteries. The landscape is defined by the jagged Aiguilles de Port-Coton and the Pointe des Poulains. Cultural landmarks include Sarah Bernhardt's former estate and prehistoric megaliths like the Jean and Jeanne menhirs. The island's maritime and religious heritage is preserved in historic reservoirs and parish churches across the four main communes of Le Palais, Sauzon, Bangor, and Locmaria.





A Fortin de Kerdonis

A 19th-century fortification complex located at the eastern tip of the island in the commune of Locmaria.

56360, France (47.30856, -3.05748)



B Fortin de Port-Fouquet

A crenellated guardhouse built in 1860, situated at the end of the Port-Fouquet ria.

Port Fouquet, 56360, France (47.36018, -3.17342)



C Fort Sarah Bernhardt

A 19th-century military fort converted into a residence by the famous French actress Sarah Bernhardt; now part of a museum.

56360, France (47.38581, -3.24934)

culture.fr/Ressources/Labels/Maisons-des-illustres/Fort-d...



D Réduit de La Biche

A 19th-century military redoubt situated on the Pointe de la Biche in Locmaria.

(Unnamed Road), 56360, France (47.31553, -3.08959)



E Fort du Gros Rocher

Coastal fortification structure used for island defense.

(Unnamed Road), 56360, France (47.32820, -3.12546)

F Fort de Taillefer

Historic military fortification situated on the northern coast.

(47.36402, -3.15803)



G Corps de garde de Fort Larron

Military guardhouse and defensive structure near the coast.

56360, France (47.33130, -3.14299)

H Fort Ramonet

Coastal defense battery located near the harbor of Le Palais.

(47.34256, -3.14640)

I Réduit de la Pointe-d'Arzic

Defensive redoubt located on the southern coast near Locmaria.

(47.28748, -3.07551)

J Fortin de Port-Andro

Small coastal fort protecting the beach and inlet of Port-Andro.

(47.30633, -3.06454)

K Ancienne station radar de Port-Coton

Remnants of a former radar station site near the Port-Coton cliffs.

(47.30278, -3.23063)



L Retranchement de Bordardoué

Historic defensive earthworks and coastal fortifications.

(47.32813, -3.13808)

M Corps de garde de la Pointe du Cardinal

Historic guardhouse overlooking the entrance to the port of Sauzon.

(47.37819, -3.21871)



N Fort du Bugull

Coastal fortification structure located in the commune of Locmaria.

56360, France (47.32368, -3.11406)



O Ensemble fortifié de la Ferrière

Ruins of a 19th-century defensive complex including a city wall.

56360, France (47.31475, -3.09811)

P Plage de Donnant

Large sandy beach on the wild coast, known for its high cliffs and strong Atlantic surf.

56360, France (47.32460, -3.23609)



Q Citadelle Vauban du Palais

Massive fortress overlooking Le Palais, redesigned by Vauban in the 17th century; it now houses a historical museum.

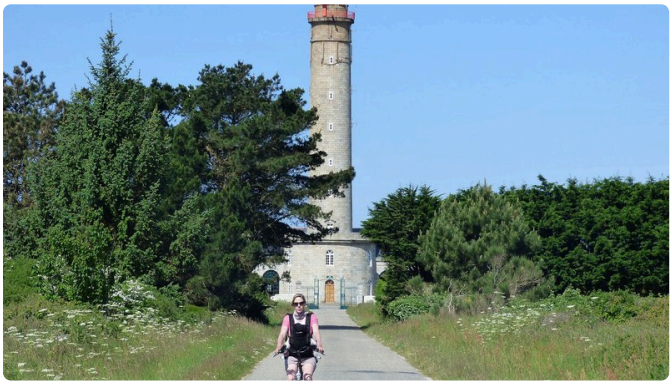
Quai Jean-Louis Trochu, Le Palais 56360, France (47.34931, -3.15451)



R Fortin de Port Maria

17th-century fortification complex built to defend the ria of Port Maria.

Chemin de Port Maria, 56360, France (47.29414, -3.07738)



S Goulphar lighthouse

19th-century granite lighthouse standing 52 meters tall, offering views of the wild coast.

56360, France (47.31085, -3.22712)

Mo–Su 11:00–13:00, 14:00–18:00

belle-ile.com/aimer/une-ile-une-histoire/le-grand-phare



T Aiguilles Rocheuses de Port-Coton

Sharp offshore rock needles famously painted by Claude Monet.

56360, France (47.30540, -3.23955)

U Menhir Jean

Prehistoric standing stone located in the interior of the island.

(47.34390, -3.22496)

V Menhir Jeanne

Neolithic standing stone that forms a pair with the nearby Menhir Jean.

(47.34221, -3.22133)



W La Belle Fontaine (aiguade Vauban)

A 17th-century vaulted reservoir built by Vauban to supply fresh water to the fleet.

56360, France (47.33106, -3.14228)



X Pointe des poulains

Rocky peninsula at the island's northwest tip, home to a lighthouse and the Sarah Bernhardt estate.

Rue des Poulains, 56360, France (47.38448, -3.24596)



Y Ensemble fortifié de La Ferrière

18th and 19th-century coastal battery and defensive wall located along the beach.

(Unnamed Road), 56360, France (47.31675, -3.10515)



Z Saint-Gérand Church

Catholic church in Le Palais dedicated to a 5th-century hermit.

3 Rue de Verdun, Le Palais 56360, France (47.34697, -3.15617)



AA Église Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption

Historic parish church located in the commune of Locmaria.

7 Rue Saint-Michel, Locmaria 56360, France (47.29391, -3.08173)



AB Église Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Paul

Parish church serving the commune of Bangor.

19 Rue Arletty, Bangor 56360, France (47.31476, -3.18853)



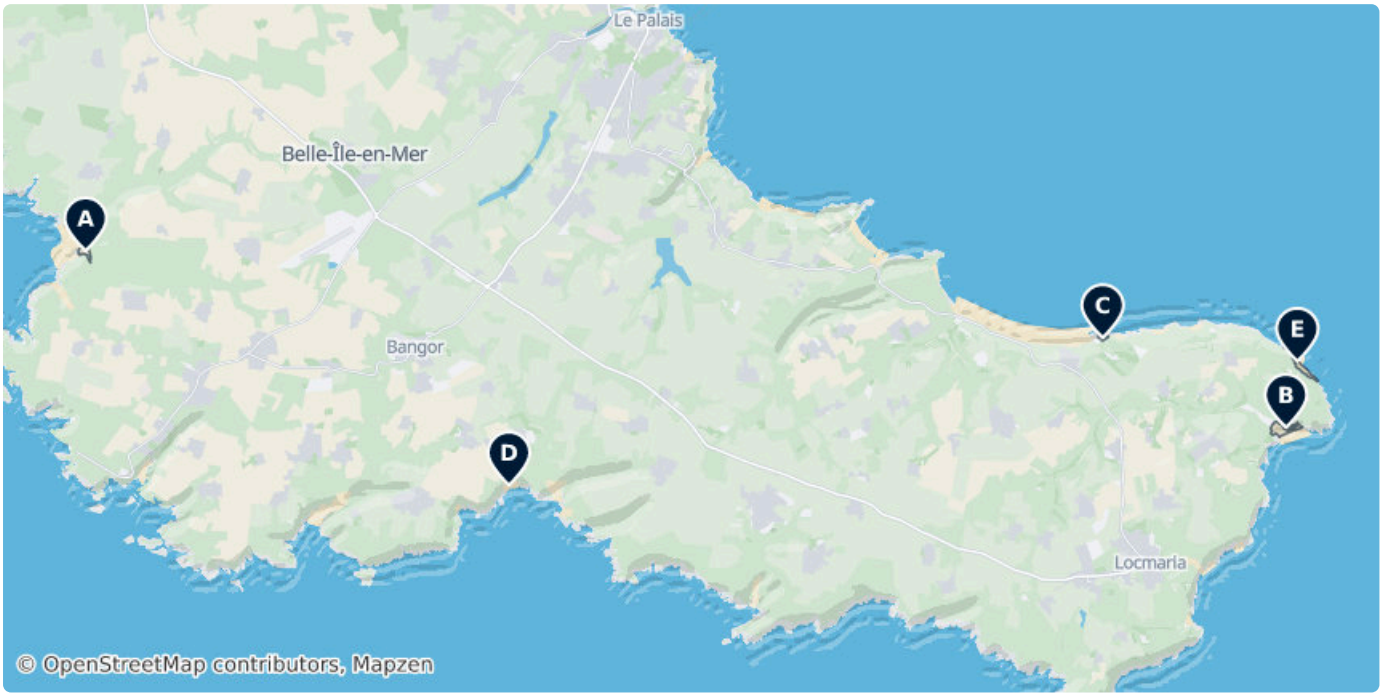
AC Menhir Pierre Sainte-Anne

Neolithic standing stone located in the commune of Bangor.

D25, 56360, France (47.31263, -3.15942)

Best Beaches

Belle-Île-en-Mer features a diverse coastline ranging from the rugged Côte Sauvage to sheltered eastern coves. Plage de Donnant is the island's primary surfing spot, characterized by large Atlantic swells and high dunes. Conversely, the eastern side offers calmer waters at Port Andro and Plage des Galères, which are protected from prevailing winds. Several locations, including areas near Herlin and the Galères coast, are established spots for naturism. These sandy shores are accessible via the GR 340 coastal path.



A Plage de Donnant

Located on the western Côte Sauvage, this beach features high sand dunes and powerful Atlantic swells. It is the island's primary destination for surfing and bodyboarding.

56360, France (47.32460, -3.23609)



B Plage de Port Andro

A large sandy beach on the eastern coast, sheltered from prevailing winds. It is known for its calm waters and historical significance as the site of a 1761 British landing attempt.

56360, France (47.30731, -3.06271)

C Plage de la Biche

Small sandy cove located on the eastern coast of the island, accessible via the coastal hiking path.

56360, France (47.31609, -3.08919)

D Plage Naturiste

Designated nudist beach located on the southern coast near the Herlin area.

(47.30167, -3.17496)

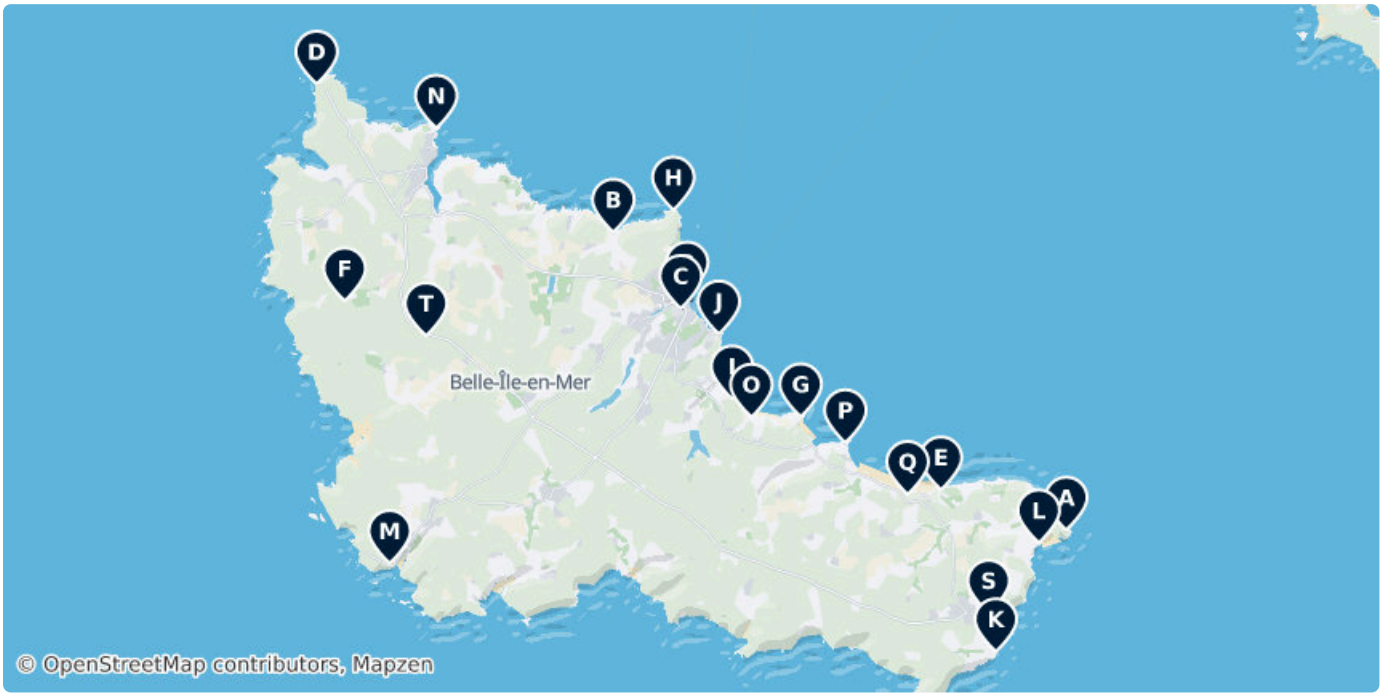
E Plage des Galères

Sandy beach on the eastern coast, offering sheltered swimming conditions away from the Atlantic swells of the western side.

56360, France (47.31379, -3.06109)

Regional Heritage Sites

Belle-Île-en-Mer features a dense concentration of defensive architecture and ancient monuments. This collection includes 19th-century crenelated guardhouses like Port-Fouquet, Vauban-influenced citadels in Le Palais, and coastal batteries designed to protect the island's rias. Beyond military history, the list highlights megalithic remains such as the Tumuli de la Lande du semis and the Menhir Jeanne, alongside the 19th-century fort famously converted into a retreat by actress Sarah Bernhardt. These sites illustrate the island's strategic maritime importance and its prehistoric roots.





A Fortin de Kerdonis

A 19th-century fortification complex located at the Pointe de Kerdonis in Locmaria, designed to protect the island's eastern coastline.

56360, France (47.30856, -3.05748)



B Fortin de Port-Fouquet

A crenelated guardhouse built in 1860, tucked away at the end of the Port-Fouquet ria to defend the local anchorage.

Port Fouquet, 56360, France (47.36018, -3.17342)



C Saint-Gérand Church

A Catholic church in Le Palais dedicated to Saint Gérand, a 5th-century hermit; it serves as a central religious site for the commune.

3 Rue de Verdun, Le Palais 56360, France (47.34697, -3.15617)



D Fort Sarah Bernhardt

A 19th-century military fort later used as a summer residence by the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt, now operating as a museum.

56360, France (47.38581, -3.24934)

culture.fr/Ressources/Labels/Maisons-des-illustres/Fort-d...



E Réduit de La Biche

A 19th-century defensive complex situated at the Pointe de la Biche in the commune of Locmaria.

(Unnamed Road), 56360, France (47.31553, -3.08959)

F Tumuli de la Lande du semis

Prehistoric burial mounds located on the Lande du Semis, representing the island's early archaeological heritage.

(47.34825, -3.24215)



G Fort du Gros Rocher

A coastal fortification structure part of the island's extensive 19th-century maritime defense network.

(Unnamed Road), 56360, France (47.32820, -3.12546)

H Fort de Taillefer

A military fort situated near the Pointe de Taillefer, overlooking the northern approaches to the island.

(47.36402, -3.15803)



I Corps de garde de Fort Larron

A historic guardhouse and defensive structure positioned to monitor the coastline near Fort Larron.

56360, France (47.33130, -3.14299)

J Fort Ramonet

A military fortification overlooking the port of Le Palais, integral to the town's historical defense system.

(47.34256, -3.14640)

K Réduit de la Pointe-d'Arzic

A 19th-century defensive work located at the southern tip of the island near the Pointe-d'Arzic.

(47.28748, -3.07551)

L Fortin de Port-Andro

A small coastal fort and guardhouse designed to protect the entrance to the Port-Andro beach.

(47.30633, -3.06454)

M Ancienne station radar de Port-Coton

The remains of a former radar installation located near the famous coastal rock formations of Port-Coton.

(47.30278, -3.23063)

N Corps de garde de la Pointe du Cardinal

A 19th-century guardhouse situated on the northern tip of the island, guarding the entrance to Sauzon.

(47.37819, -3.21871)



O Retranchement de Bordardoué

Historical defensive earthworks and entrenchment lines located near the beach of Bordardoué.

(47.32813, -3.13808)



P Fort du Bugull

A coastal fortification situated between Le Palais and Locmaria, part of the 19th-century defense belt.

56360, France (47.32368, -3.11406)



Q Ensemble fortifié de la Ferrière

The ruins of a fortified complex and defensive wall located near the coastline of Locmaria.

56360, France (47.31475, -3.09811)



R Citadelle Vauban du Palais

A massive Vauban-designed citadel dominating the harbor of Le Palais, featuring historic fortifications and a museum.

Quai Jean-Louis Trochu, Le Palais 56360, France (47.34931, -3.15451)



Fortin de Port Maria

A 17th-century fortification complex built to defend the ria of Port Maria in the commune of Locmaria.

Chemin de Port Maria, 56360, France (47.29414, -3.07738)

Menhir Jeanne

An ancient megalithic standing stone representing the prehistoric human occupation of Belle-Île.

(47.34221, -3.22133)

DATA SOURCES

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