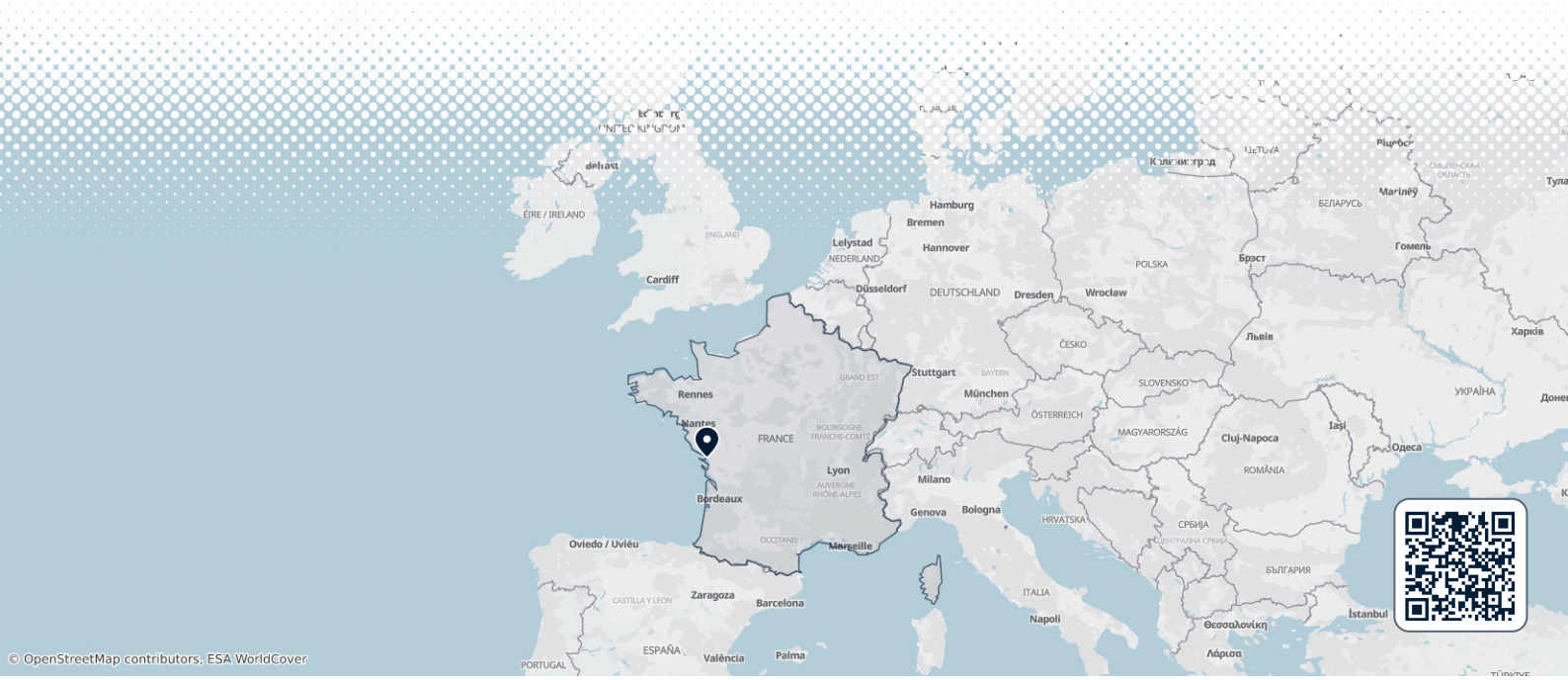


# La Rochelle

New Aquitaine · France

## TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



## Overview

La Rochelle is a port city on France's Atlantic coast. Its old town is built around a medieval harbour that is still full of boats. Three stone towers guard the harbour entrance.

The city was a Protestant stronghold and a rich trading port. Today it is easy to walk, sunny in summer and known for fresh seafood. It suits a stay of two to four nights, and it is a good base for the islands of Ré, Aix and Oléron. Families, couples and cyclists will find a lot to do here.

## When to visit

June to September is the best time. Days are warm and sunny, and the sea is warm enough for swimming. July and August are the busiest months, so book rooms early. Spring and autumn are mild and quieter. Winter is grey, wet and windy, and some island businesses close.

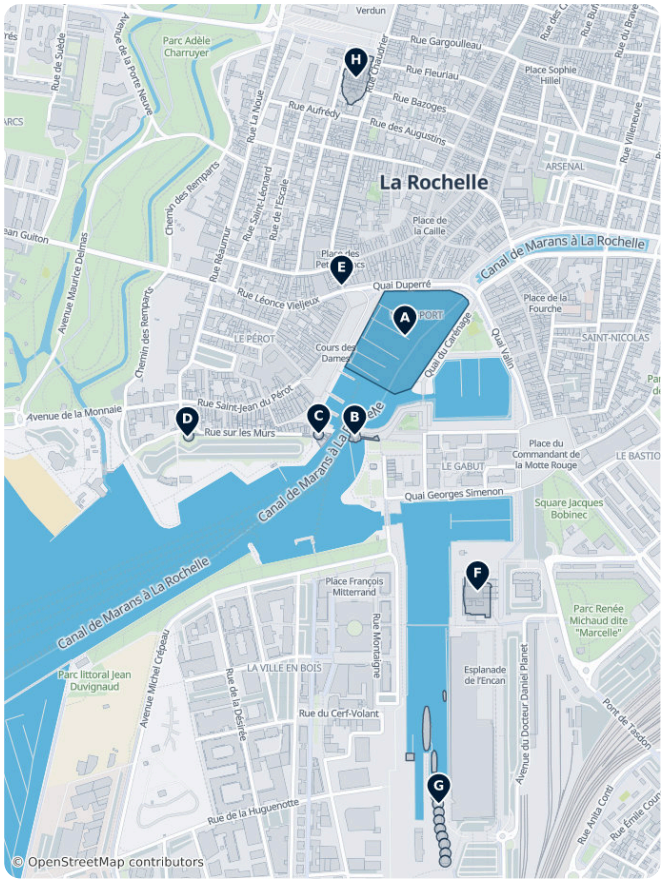
The biggest event of the year is Les Francofolies, a large music festival held in July since 1985. Book accommodation well ahead if you want to attend.

| MONTH | CONDITIONS | DAY °C avg / max | NIGHT °C avg / min | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| January | Poor<br>Poor for cycling | 9° / 14°<br>Feels like 5° | 4° / -2° | 12 rainy days · Dry air |
| February | Fair<br>Fair for cycling | 10° / 15°<br>Feels like 6° | 4° / -2° | Dry air |
| March | Good<br>Good for cycling | 13° / 19°<br>Feels like 9° | 6° / 1° | Dry air |
| April | Good<br>Good for cycling | 16° / 22°<br>Feels like 12° | 9° / 4° | Dry air |
| May | Good<br>Good for sightseeing | 19° / 26° | 12° / 8° | 12 rainy days · Dry air |
| June | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 22° / 29° | 15° / 12° | |
| July | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 24° / 31° | 17° / 13° | |
| August | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 24° / 32° | 17° / 14° | |
| September | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 22° / 29° | 15° / 11° | |
| October | Good<br>Good for cycling | 18° / 24° | 12° / 7° | 12 rainy days · Dry air |
| November | Good<br>Good for cycling | 13° / 18°<br>Feels like 9° | 8° / 2° | 13 rainy days · Dry air |
| December | Poor<br>Poor for cycling | 10° / 14°<br>Feels like 6° | 5° / -1° | 13 rainy days · Dry air |

Best months: June, July, August, September

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

## Top sights




- A Vieux Port is the heart of the city. Cafés and seafood restaurants line the quays, and the harbour is best in the evening.
- B Tour Saint-Nicolas guards the harbour entrance from the south side. It is a 14th-century tower with a viewpoint on top.
- C The Chain Tower stands opposite. A chain was once stretched from this tower across the harbour mouth to close it.
- D Lantern Tower is the third harbour tower. It dates from the 15th century and once served as a lighthouse and a prison.
- E Porte de la Grosse Horloge is a medieval city gate with a clock tower on top. It leads from the harbour into the old town's arcaded streets.
- F Aquarium de La Rochelle is one of the largest aquariums in Europe. It is a good choice for families and for rainy days.
- G Musée Maritime La Rochelle is a floating museum with heritage ships in the harbour. You can go on board some of them.
- H Cathédrale Saint-Louis is an 18th-century cathedral in the old town. It is a short stop on a walk through the centre.

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Turn the places from this guide into a real itinerary, with smart routing, time estimates, and everything you need for a perfect trip.

**3M+ downloads · 4.6 stars · 15 years of trip planning**

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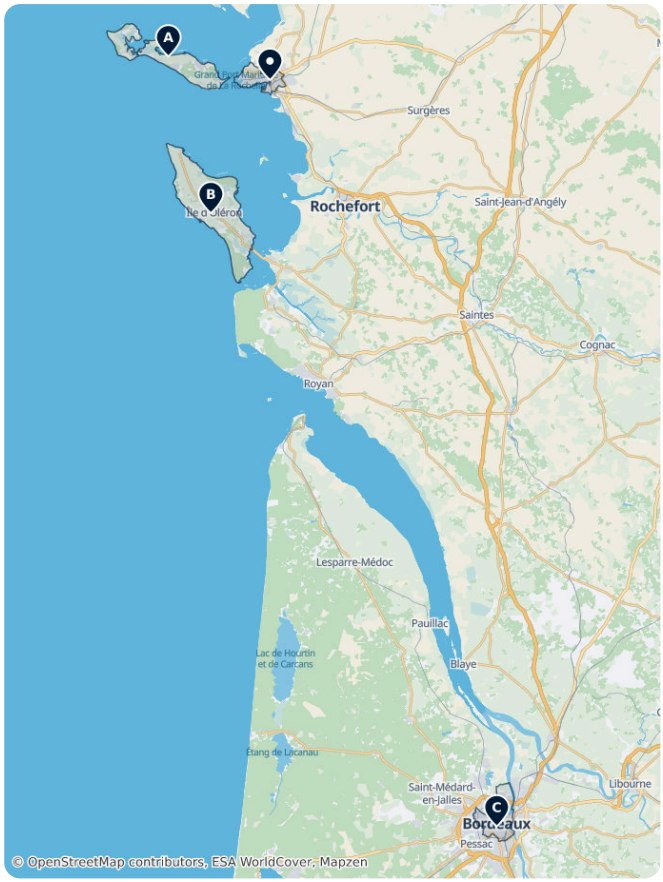
Scan to download the app

## What to experience

- Ride the electric Bus de mer from the Vieux Port to Les Minimes. It is a cheap way to see the harbour from the water and reach the beach and marina.
- Take a boat trip from the harbour towards Fort Boyard and Île d'Aix in summer. You pass the three towers on the way out.
- Join the crowds at Les Francofolies in July. The streets and squares fill with concerts.
- Cycle along the seafront to the Les Minimes marina and beach. Swim there in summer.

## Day trips

Most day trips here are by sea or over the bridge to the islands. They are listed from closest to farthest.




- A Île de Ré: about 30 minutes by car over a 2.9 km toll bridge. The flat island has cycle paths, beaches, salt marshes and the fortified harbour town of Saint-Martin-de-Ré. Bikes travel on the summer bus line 51.
- Île d'Aix and Fort Boyard: reached by boat from the Vieux Port. Île d'Aix has no cars, and Fort Boyard is the sea fort known from a TV game show. Boats are seasonal, so check timetables.
- Rochefort: about 30 minutes by train. It is a naval town with a former royal rope factory and a replica of the frigate *Hermione*.
- B Île d'Oléron: about 1 hour by car. It is a larger island with beaches, oyster villages and pine forests.
- Marais Poitevin: about 1 hour by car. This "Green Venice" is a network of shaded canals. You explore it by flat-bottomed boat or bike.
- Saintes: about 1 hour by train. It has Roman ruins, including an arch and an amphitheatre.
- C Bordeaux: about 2 hours by train. It is a long day trip, but suits wine and city lovers.

## Where to explore

Other destinations near La Rochelle:

- For islands: Île de Ré is the closest, and Île d'Oléron is farther south.
- Heading south: Bordeaux is the big city of the region, and Arcachon is on the coast beyond it.

## Getting there

- **By air**: La Rochelle–Île de Ré Airport has a limited number of direct flights from some European cities. Most travelers fly into Nantes Atlantique (137 km north) or Bordeaux–Mérignac (191 km southeast) and continue by train or car.
- **By train**: Direct TGV trains run from Paris Montparnasse in roughly 2.5 to 3 hours. Regional trains link La Rochelle with Bordeaux, Nantes and Poitiers. The station is about a 10-minute walk from the harbour. Book at SNCF Connect.
- **By road**: The city is on the Atlantic coast road network. See the driving section for parking.

## Getting around

- **On foot**: The old town and the harbour are compact and mostly pedestrian. Walking is the best way to see the main sights.
- **Public transit**: The Yélo network runs buses and boats. Pay by bank card on board, in the app or with a Yélo card. A free electric shuttle serves the centre from Tuesday to Saturday. See Yélo for lines and fares.
- **By boat**: A small boat called Le Passeur crosses the harbour in about 3 minutes. The electric Bus de mer sails from the Vieux Port to the Les Minimes marina in about 20 minutes. Both use Yélo tickets.
- **By bike**: Cycling is easy on flat streets and seafront paths. Yélo has a self-service bike system.

### Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

**High**

The old town and harbour are compact and largely pedestrian, so walking is the best way to see the sights.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

**High**

Streets and seafront paths are flat, and a self-service bike system and bike lanes make cycling easy.

## Driving

- **Is a car worth it?**: Not for the city. The centre is compact and partly pedestrian. A car helps for the Marais Poitevin and for Oléron, but the islands of Ré and Aix are easy without one.
- **Parking**: Use car parks at the edge of the old town and walk in. Streets by the harbour are crowded in summer.
- **Île de Ré bridge**: A toll applies on the bridge. Queues are common on summer weekends.

# Food & drink

The local food is seafood. Look for mussels, especially *mouclade*, a mussel dish in a creamy sauce. Oysters come from the nearby Marennes-Oléron area. *Pineau des Charentes*, a sweet local aperitif, is also worth a try. Cognac country begins just inland.

For a good meal, look at the market and the harbour area. The Marché Central is a covered market in the old town where you can buy fresh fish, cheese and local products. The quays of the Vieux Port have many seafood restaurants. Walk a street or two back from the water for quieter and cheaper tables.

## 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

La Rochelle is a safe city for visitors. Petty theft can happen in summer crowds, so watch your bag near the harbour and markets. Lock your bike, because bike theft is common in French cities.

Take care when you swim. Tides and currents can be strong on the open coast, so choose beaches with lifeguards in summer. Sun is strong from June to August, so use sun protection.

## History

La Rochelle became a free port in 1137 and grew rich on sea trade. The three towers at the harbour entrance, Tour Saint-Nicolas, The Chain Tower and Lantern Tower, date from this medieval period.

In 1568 the Protestant Huguenots made the city a Reformed republic. In 1627 and 1628 Cardinal Richelieu blockaded La Rochelle for 14 months. The city surrendered and lost its privileges. This siege is part of the background of *The Three Musketeers*.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, trade with the Americas made the city rich again. This trade included the slave trade, which the Musée du Nouveau Monde explains. In the Second World War the Germans built a submarine base at La Pallice. La Rochelle was one of the last French cities to be liberated, in May 1945.

## 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**

# La Rochelle Must-Sees

La Rochelle's maritime identity is defined by the three medieval towers guarding its Vieux Port: Saint Nicolas, the Chain, and the Lantern. The city's architectural landscape includes a 16th-century Renaissance Hôtel de Ville and the 18th-century Saint-Louis Cathedral. Cultural landmarks range from one of Europe's largest private aquariums to the Natural History Museum, housed in a former governor's residence. The historic center is characterized by limestone facades and arcaded streets reflecting centuries of seafaring trade.






## A Saint Nicolas Tower

Saint Nicolas Tower along with the Lantern tower and the Chain tower, is one of the three medieval towers guarding the port in La Rochelle,...

Saint-Martin-de-Ré - La Rochelle, France
(46.15579, -1.15337)



## B Lantern Tower

The Lantern Tower is one of the three medieval historic towers in La Rochelle, Poitou-Charentes, France, which guarded the port at Aunis.

44 Rue sur les Murs, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.15576, -1.15715)



## C Vieux Port

The historic marina is flanked by medieval towers and lined with 17th and 18th-century buildings. It serves as the central hub for the city's maritime activities and waterfront events.

17000, France (46.15734, -1.15224)




## D Aquarium La Rochelle

Aquarium de La Rochelle is a family-owned public aquarium in La Rochelle, France.

Quai Louis Prunier, 17000 La Rochelle (46.15335, -1.15061)

| | |
|---|---|
| Jan-Mar Mo–Su | 10:00–20:00 |
| Apr 01-Jul 08 Mo–Su | 09:00–20:00 |
| Jul 09-Aug 31 Mo–Su | 09:00–23:00 |
| Sep 01-Sep 30 Mo–Su | 09:00–20:00 |
| Oct 01-Oct 21 Mo–Su | 10:00–20:00 |
| Oct 22-Nov 06 Mo–Su | 09:00–20:00 |
| Nov 07-Dec 31 Mo–Su | 10:00–20:00 |

aquarium-larochelle.com, +33 5 46 34 00 00



## E La Rochelle Cathedral

La Rochelle Cathedral is a Catholic church located in the city of La Rochelle, France. The cathedral has been a national monument since 1906.

20Bis Rue Chaudrier, La Rochelle 17000, France (46.16137, -1.15335)

+33766714555



## F Hôtel de ville de La Rochelle

Occupying its site since 1298, this Renaissance-style city hall is enclosed by a Gothic fortified wall featuring battlements and a belfry.

6Bis Rue des Gentilshommes, La Rochelle 17000, France (46.15950, -1.15130)



## G Saint Nicolas Tower

Saint Nicolas Tower along with the Lantern tower and the Chain tower, is one of the three medieval towers guarding the port in La Rochelle,...

5 Rue de l'Armide, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.15577, -1.15329)

## H Chapelle Fromentin

A 17th-century former chapel that now functions as a theater and performance space for the Mille Plateaux National Choreographic Center.

18 Rue du Collège, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16346, -1.15015)



## I Hôtel de la Bibliothèque et du Musée

Housed in the former episcopal palace, this 18th-century building contains the Museum of Fine Arts, featuring European paintings from the 15th to the 20th centuries.

30 Rue Gargoulleau, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16211, -1.15167)



## J Muséum d'Histoire naturelle de La Rochelle

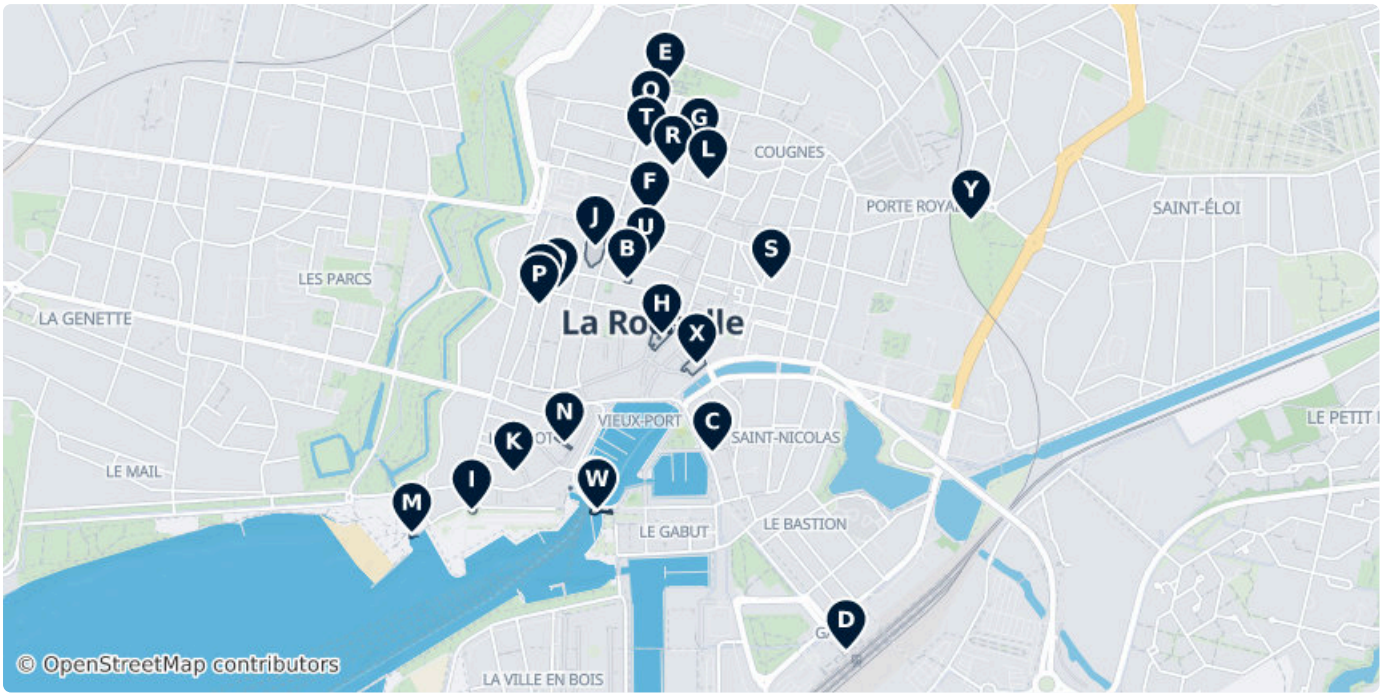
The Muséum d'histoire naturelle de La Rochelle is a natural history museum located in the city of La Rochelle, France.

28 Rue Albert 1er, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16485, -1.15120)

museum.larochelle.fr, +33 5 46 41 18 25

# La Rochelle Heritage Trail

Explore La Rochelle's maritime and civic history through its diverse architectural landmarks. This trail covers the iconic 14th-century defensive towers of the Old Port, the Renaissance-style Hôtel de Ville—the oldest in France—and the 18th-century Saint-Louis Cathedral. Discover a network of 'hôtels particuliers' (private mansions), historic gateways like the Porte Royale, and religious sites ranging from the Gothic Clocher Saint-Jean to the Louis XIII-style Église Saint-Sauveur, all illustrating the city's evolution from a medieval fortress to a prosperous merchant port.

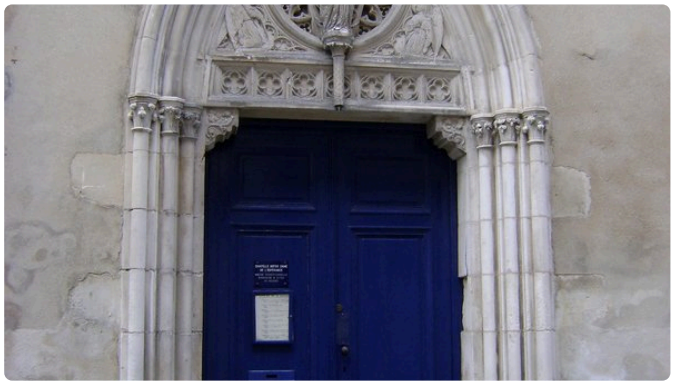





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Saint-Martin-de-Ré - La Rochelle, France
(46.15579, -1.15337)



## B Chapelle Notre-Dame de l'Espérance

A 19th-century chapel located between Rue des Augustins and Rue Bazoges, known for housing numerous ex-votos offered by sailors.

9 Rue des Augustins, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16067, -1.15237)

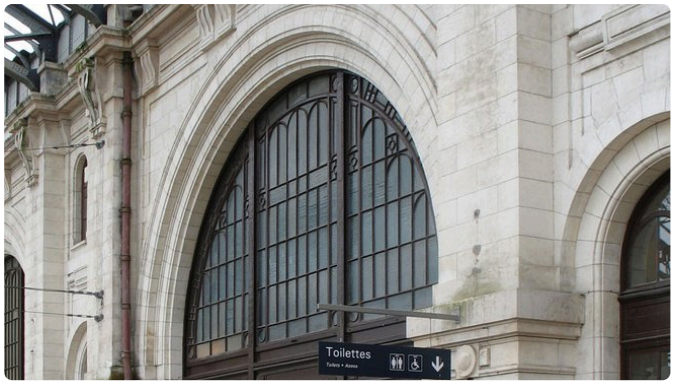
+33251429588



## C Phares d'alignement

Built in 1852, this 24-meter-high alignment lighthouse at the end of Quai Valin guides ships through the harbor channels into the Old Port.

Rue d'Ablois, 17000 La Rochelle, France
(46.15699, -1.14974)




## D La Rochelle station

Gare de La Rochelle is the main railway station serving La Rochelle. The station building, which includes a 45-metre-tall clock tower, was...

Place Pierre Sémard, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.15277, -1.14563)



## E Muséum d'Histoire naturelle de La Rochelle

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museum.larochelle.fr, +33 5 46 41 18 25



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The oldest city hall in France still in use, featuring a Renaissance-style facade and a fortified wall with a belfry dating to 1298.

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20Bis Rue Chaudrier, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16137, -1.15335)

+33766714555

## K Clocher Saint-Jean

A 15th-century flamboyant Gothic bell tower, the only surviving remnant of the original Saint-Jean church destroyed during the 17th-century siege.

17000 La Rochelle (46.15657, -1.15586)

## L A&M Art et Ménage

A heritage site in the city center currently operating as a boutique shop.

(46.16279, -1.14989)

aetm.fr

## M Fortin dit des deux Moulins

A small 17th-century redoubt and fort built to protect the entrance to the port and the city's coastal windmills.

Chemin des Remparts, 17000 La Rochelle, France
(46.15527, -1.15899)

## N Maison Communautaire Israélite

A Jewish community center and place of worship located in the historic center.

32 Cours des Dames, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.15720, -1.15430)

## O Hôtel de l'Intendance

An 18th-century neoclassical mansion that formerly served as the residence for the King's representatives in the Aunis province.

16 Rue Eugène Fromentin, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16048, -1.15449)

## P Hôtel de la Villemarais

A 17th-century private mansion showcasing traditional Charentais stone architecture and a historic inner courtyard.

5 Rue René Gautier, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16013, -1.15508)

## Q La pannetière

A historic building in the old town noted for its preserved architectural facade, currently housing a bakery.

18 Rue Albert 1er, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16405, -1.15164)

| | |
|---|---|
| Mo–Fr | 07:15–20:00 |
| Sa | 07:30–15:00 |

## R Octant Design

A heritage building in the historic district now used as a design and furniture showroom.

(46.16308, -1.15096)

## S Hôtel Lambertz

An 18th-century private mansion located near the cathedral, representative of the city's Enlightenment-era urban planning.

23 Rue Amelot, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16067, -1.14793)

## T Salles municipales des associasions

A historic municipal building dedicated to local community associations.

36 Rue du Collège, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16348, -1.15178)

## U Hôtel de Marsan

A 17th-century private residence in the historic center featuring classical architectural details.

14 Rue Bazoges, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16113, -1.15179)




## V Maison de Nicolas Venette

The 17th-century home of physician Nicolas Venette, featuring a facade decorated with busts of famous ancient doctors and philosophers.

1 Rue de l'Abreuvoir, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16036, -1.15496)



## W Saint Nicolas Tower

Saint Nicolas Tower along with the Lantern tower and the Chain tower, is one of the three medieval towers guarding the port in La Rochelle,...

5 Rue de l'Armide, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.15577, -1.15329)



## X Église Saint-Sauveur

A Louis XIII-style church rebuilt in the late 17th century, featuring a 15th-century Gothic bell tower and maritime-themed decor.

11 Rue des Moureilles, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.15886, -1.15023)

Mo–Su 10:00–18:00

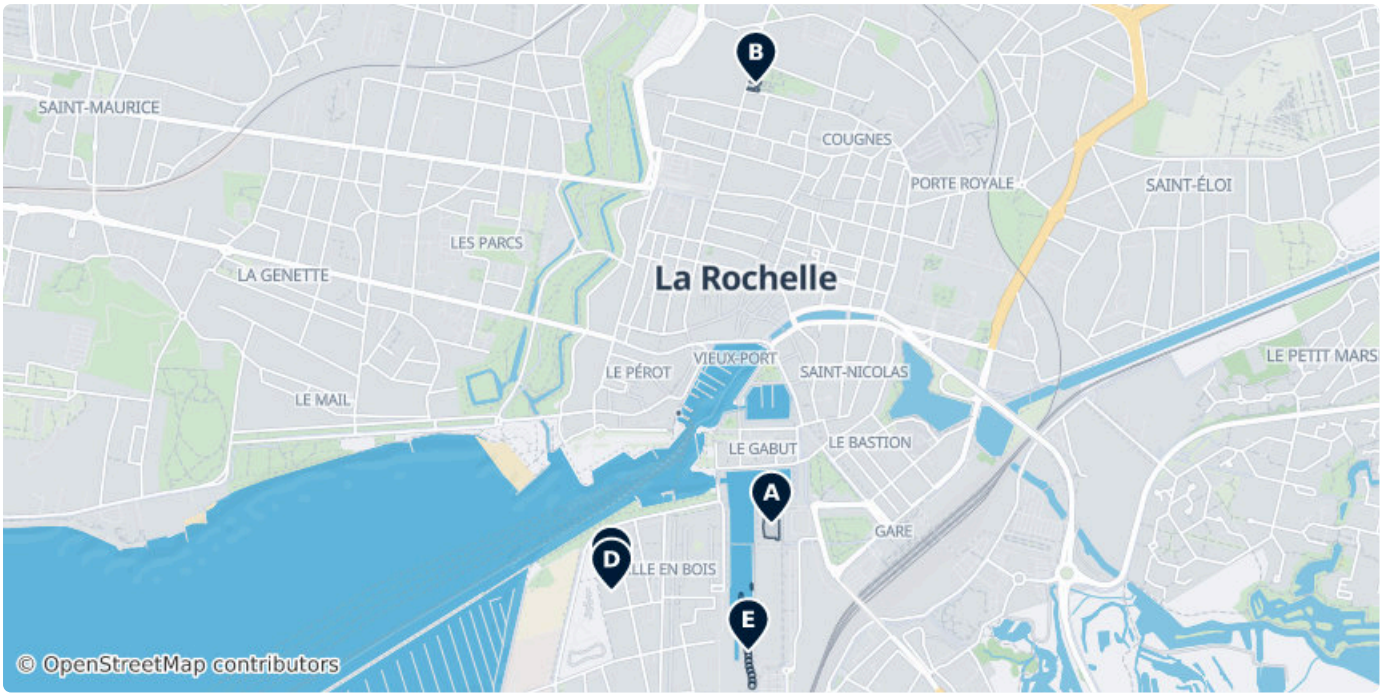
## Y Porte Royale (intérieure)

The inner section of the 18th-century royal gateway, which served as the main ceremonial entrance to the city from Paris.

3 Avenue de la Porte Royale, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.16193, -1.14179)

# La Rochelle Museums & Galleries

Explore the diverse cultural landscape of La Rochelle through its specialized museums. The Aquarium La Rochelle houses 12,000 marine animals, while the Natural History Museum showcases extensive ethnographic and zoological collections in a former governor's palace. Maritime heritage is preserved at the Musée Maritime, which features a fleet of historic ships including the frigate France 1. For specialized collections, the Musée des Automates displays over 300 mechanical figures, and the Musée des Modèles Réduits presents detailed miniature models of trains, ships, and classic automobiles.






## A Aquarium La Rochelle

Aquarium de La Rochelle is a family-owned public aquarium in La Rochelle, France.

Quai Louis Prunier, 17000 La Rochelle (46.15335, -1.15061)

| | |
|---|---|
| Jan-Mar Mo–Su | 10:00–20:00 |
| Apr 01-Jul 08 Mo–Su | 09:00–20:00 |
| Jul 09-Aug 31 Mo–Su | 09:00–23:00 |
| Sep 01-Sep 30 Mo–Su | 09:00–20:00 |
| Oct 01-Oct 21 Mo–Su | 10:00–20:00 |
| Oct 22-Nov 06 Mo–Su | 09:00–20:00 |
| Nov 07-Dec 31 Mo–Su | 10:00–20:00 |

aquarium-larochelle.com, +33 5 46 34 00 00



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28 Rue Albert 1er, La Rochelle 17000, France (46.16485, -1.15120)

museum.larochelle.fr, +33 5 46 41 18 25




## C Musée des Modèles Réduits

Showcases detailed 1/12th scale models of vintage cars, ships, and trains. It features a large model railway and a sound-and-light show animating historical scenes and mechanical reconstructions.

(46.15192, -1.15665)

Mo–Su 10:00–12:00, 14:00–18:00

museeslarochelle.com, +33 5 46 41 68 08




## D Musée des Automates

A collection of over 300 automated figures, including historical mechanical toys, advertising displays, and contemporary animated scenes. It is located in the Gabut district near the Old Port.

Rue du Loup Marin, 17000 La Rochelle, France
(46.15160, -1.15664)

Mo–Su 10:00–12:00, 14:00–18:00

museeslarochelle.com, +33 5 46 41 68 08




## E Musée Maritime La Rochelle

A floating museum located in the Bassin des Chalutiers featuring the meteorological frigate France 1. The collection includes several heritage ships and exhibitions detailing the city's maritime and industrial history.

Quai Louis Prunier, La Rochelle 17000, France
(46.15003, -1.15148)

museemaritime.larochelle.fr, +33 5 46 28 03 00

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