

THE PERFECT 10 BEAUNE, FRANCE



IMAGEFOLK

The best of Burgundy

Wine and dine within the walls of a charming French town

MARIAN McGUINNESS

1 CHARM OFFENSIVE: The walled, cobblestoned town of Beaune is two hours southeast of Paris by high-speed train; it nestles on Burgundy's Cote d'Or, between Dijon and Lyon, amid hills shimmering in yellow waves when autumn transforms its landmark terraced vineyards. Snug within its walls and ramparts are architectural delights such as belfries, dragon-shaped finials, cloisters and convents, gargoyle watchtowers, stylised chimney pots and half-timbered houses with peaked attic windows. There's even a tourist train that showcases Beaune's main sites and vineyards. More: beaune-tourism.com; visiotrain.com.

2 WHAT LIES BENEATH: While the monks cultivated wine, the powerful dukes of Burgundy amassed wealth. Cistercian monks began growing grapes in the 11th century, travelling among the four cotes, or slopes, mixing the sandy soil with water and sipping it to taste the differences in terroir. To sample the fruits of their centuries of labour, head to the Marche aux Vins located within and beneath a former Franciscan church. Ten kilometres of wine caves coil beneath Beaune and each tour includes your own clam-shaped cup called a taste-vin. The wines are displayed on spaced-apart barrels, with explanatory notes read by candlelight. Within this labyrinth are the ruins of a 5th-century chapel, excavated in 1971, revealing the remains of 11 plague victims layered inside a stone sarcophagus. Back in the light of the church nave, sommeliers are on hand to answer questions or organise purchases. Also check out the wine museum in the former palace of the Duchy of Burgundy. More: marcheauxvins.com.

3 OLD-STYLE HOSPITALITY: Suffering from spasms, gout or syphilis? No 15th century health cover? Luckily for the destitute, the flamboyantly Flemish Hospices de Beaune was also known as The Palace of the Poor. Built in 1443, after the plague and Hundred Years War had ravaged the town, the last patients were admitted in 1971. Against the white stone and timber fretwork, the geometric roof tiles glisten like the bejewelled skin of a snake. The timber-vaulted Paupers' Hall is lined with crimson-curtained four-poster beds that al-

Main courtyard of Hospices de Beaune top; at work in the FalLOT Mustard Company, top right; cycling the vineyards, above right; market day in town, below



IMAGEFOLK

lowed the infirm to attend mass without leaving their pillows. There's a medieval pharmacy displaying unusual medical instruments, but the greatest treasure is Rogier van der Weyden's terrifying altarpiece *Last Judgement*. Today it is viewed via a giant, suspended magnifier that glides across its mind-tripping details. More: beaune-tourism.com/discover/hospices-de-beaune.

4 MARKET DAYS: Beaune's outdoor market, held Saturdays and Wednesdays, is considered one of the most beautiful of its kind in France. It is a celebration of l'art de vivre among arcades of colourful awnings and decorative displays of fruit, vegetables, cheese, condiments, crafts and clothing that spill into adjoining streets near the gothic Hospices. There are sausages in all their herbal variations along with mustards, candied ginger, nougat and gingerbread, all specialties of the region. If you're after a picnic-ready tarte, you'll find them being kept cool under the vendors' trestles.

5 BIKE OR HIKE: Beaune is on Burgundy's famous Route des Grand Crus. Starting south of Dijon, the wine route runs for 60km, wending through limestone fields, stone hamlets and cascading vineyards. You can take a bike and wine tour, where everything is supplied, or simply rent a bike from Bourgogne Randonnees and fill your pannier with goodies. Biking the well-signed veloroute along the vineyard paths feels a bit like cycling through a wine list. If walking is more conducive, there are enticing paths among Beaune's vineyards, passing stone wine-growers' huts (*cabottes*), shaded expanses of fir trees, and viaducts. More: burgundybiketour.com; bourgogne-randonnees.fr.

6 KEEN AS MUSTARD: Dijon mustard is actually made across the world, the name referring not to the origin but the process and ingredients. A visit to the FalLOT Mustard Company is an interesting tangent as it has been producing Dijon mustard since 1840 and is the only artisanal producer of same in Burgundy. It's located a pleasant five-minute walk from the town's centre and tours are available of the museum and the production facility. There's even a mustard bar where you



ALAMY

can sample Moutarde de Bourgogne, with its magical ingredient of Burgundian wine. More: fallot.com.

7 STROLL AND SUP: The social scene of Beaune revolves around Place Carnot, the picturesque main square. Mothers wheel their prams over the cobbles to rock their babies to sleep while children delight in the fairytale carousel and adults play games of giant noughts and crosses set up on the grass. The square's perimeter offers purveyors of chocolate and cheese, such as Fromagerie Hess, where Alain Hess's family has been making cheese for four generations; try *Delice de Pommard*, a triple cream cheese rolled in FalLOT's mustard seeds. There's also a wine cellar under a glass floor, and an amazing deli of Burgundian artisanal delights. For your chocolate and confiserie fix, go no further than the specialty boutique of Alain Batt. For a Michelin-star gourmet meal, try *Le Jardin des Remparts* or *Loiseau des Vignes*; the latter offers a list of 70 wines by the glass. For more traditional Burgundian cooking, I recommend *Ecrit'Vin* in Place Carnot. More: fromageriehess.com; le-jardin-des-remparts.com; alainbatt.com; bernard-loiseau.com; ecrivin.fr.

8 DIFFERENT STROKES: *Tempera Art Gallery*, in Beaune's centre, owes its name to the popular painting technique of the Middle Ages. The paintings and sculptures, many by local Burgundian masters, invite the viewer to daydream and travel into imagined worlds. The *Dalineum*, in an 18th-century mansion, is the inspiration of a passionate collector of all creations, Salvador Dali. There are more than 100 works on display, covering watercolours, drawings, gouaches and sculptures that capture Dali's surrealism. There's even the famous *Bocca Sofa* designed on the voluptuous lips of Mae West, as well as a great shop to fulfil those Dali fantasies. More: cotedor-tourisme.com; dalineum.com.

9 PEACEFUL PROMENADES: A popular place for time out is at the *Parc de la Bouzaize*. The 5ha English-designed park ambles beside the Bouzaize River and cambers up to the adjoining vineyards. The river runs under the centre of Beaune providing humidity for the wine caves. Perhaps go for a romantic walk along its banks with a backpack of wine and cheese or take a row in a hire boat. For children, there's a carousel to ride, ducks and geese to feed, squabbling moorhens to be entertained by, and a petting zoo to explore.

BEST BEDS



10 BETWEEN THE SHEETS: Nothing is too far from Beaune's social epicentre, with accommodation to suit all desires, including quirky gites and gypsy caravans. As a few fine examples, *Hotel Athanor*, built within a 16th-century convent, blends rusticity and modernity. The grand whitewashed *Najeti Hotel de la Poste*, a former coach house, is Beaune's oldest hotel and offers a classical feel of toile fabrics and antiques while meeting modern expectations. A member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, the family-owned *Le Cep*, pictured, is an enchanting fusion of private mansions, courtyards and a Michelin-starred restaurant. More: poste.najeti.fr; slh.com; hotel-athanor.com; beaune-tourism.com/accommodation. • au.france.fr