

Day-Tripping

Irresistible diversions out of Paris, Tours, and Dijon—all reachable by train

by Ethan Gelber and David Masello

inspiration for his story *Around the World in Eighty Days*). The **Centre de Documentation Jules Verne** includes original manuscripts.

Lille (137 miles [221 kilometers] from Paris; one hour by train from Paris's Gare du Nord)

France's northernmost city is ready for its close-up, as it assumes its role as Cultural Capital of Europe for 2004. In preparation, the city has created 12 performance/exhibition venues in former factories, invited choreographers to mount spectacles, and commissioned premieres of plays and musical pieces. **Le Vieux Lille** is a central neighborhood of Lille-style 17th- and 18th-century stone and brick buildings (unlike elsewhere in France, many buildings in this Protestant, Flemish-influenced city are redbrick and carved stone), especially the houses along **Place du Général de Gaulle**. Sites to see include the **Vieille**



Bourse (Old Stock Exchange), built in the 1650s; the **Palais des Beaux-Arts**, which houses France's second largest art collection; and the **Opéra**, an ornate 1920s building reopened in December 2003 after a dramatic renovation. Just outside the old town is a **Charles de Gaulle museum** set in the house where he was born. In the northwest corner of the city is **La Citadelle**, a Vauban-built star-shaped fortress from 1670 situated in parkland along the Deule River (all of Lille is essentially on an island—L'Isle—thus the origin of its name). Also in 2004, Lille hosts **Métamorphoses**, a continuing series of visual spectacles—a train station turned into a gallery of mobile sculptures, an upside-down forest suspended over a street, and sound and light shows. Outside town are the **Musée d'Art et d'Industrie** (in nearby **Roubaix**) and the museum-home of writer **Marguerite Yourcenar**.

Caen 149 miles (240 kilometers) from Paris; two hours by train from Paris's Gare St-Lazare



In this 60th anniversary year of the D-Day Landings on the beaches of Normandy (see pages 66-69), the Mémorial de Caen has made day trips from Paris affordable and easy. Once a day, every day of

the year in 2004, €89.50 will buy you round-trip transportation to Caen, transfers to and from the train station to the **Mémorial de Caen**, a bilingual guide who will provide commentary on visits to the Mémorial and to the **D-Day Landings beaches**, and a handbook called *The D-Day Landings*. See www.memorial-caen.fr for more information.

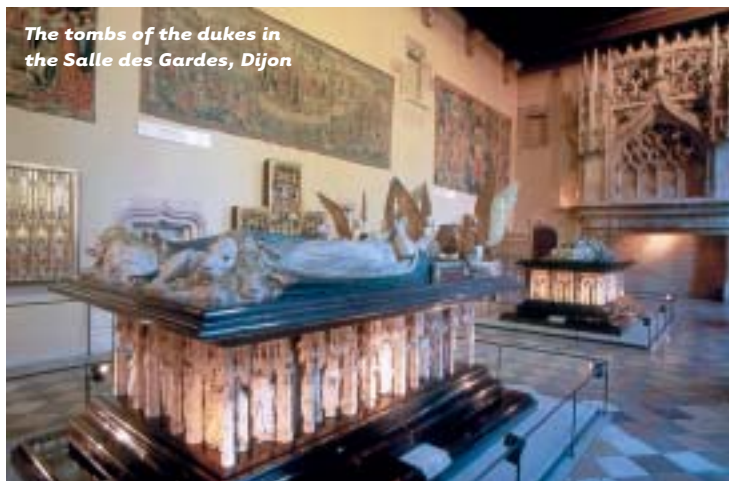


Cathédrale Notre-Dame, Amiens

From Paris to...

Amiens 93 miles (150 kilometers) from Paris; one hour by train from Paris's Gare du Nord

On the ride to Amiens, it wouldn't be inappropriate to whistle the "The Roses of Picardy," the famous World War I-era song. Amiens, capital of **Picardy**, was shelled with 12,000 German bombs in the 1918 Battle of Picardy, set on fire during the 1940 Battle of the Somme, and bombarded during Allied campaigns in 1944. Despite the loss of 60 percent of the city's original fabric, today Amiens is a lively, distinctive place. France's largest Gothic building, the **Cathédrale Notre-Dame**—475 feet (145 meters) long and with the tallest nave in France at 139 feet (42 meters)—dominates the skyline. Completed around 1270, it was a locus for pilgrims who came to see its coveted relic, the alleged head of John the Baptist (still visible on a silver platter in the treasury). The **Musée de Picardie**, a short walk from the cathedral, is an exemplar of the architectural style favored by Napoléon III in the mid 19th century. The eclectic collection includes Egyptian and Greek antiquities, sculptures by Rodin, and paintings from the high Renaissance to the late 20th century. Nearby are the **Hortillonnages**, 741 acres (300 hectares) of tranquil gardens crossed by miles of narrow waterways. Visitors can navigate the channels by rowboat and follow scenic footpaths. For a picnic on the grounds, pick up some of the town's famous culinary treats—*ficelles picardes* (pancakes stuffed with ham and mushrooms, and basted in a white sauce), *pâté de canard en croûte* (duck pâté baked in pastry crust), chocolate wafers, and macaroons. No doubt, author **Jules Verne**, who moved to Amiens in 1871, spent time in the Hortillonnages (he flew over Amiens in a balloon in 1873, perhaps the



The tombs of the dukes in the Salle des Gardes, Dijon

From Dijon

Dijon is 194 miles (312 kilometers) from Paris, 1 hour 40 minutes by TGV (from the Gare de Lyon). The administrative capital of Burgundy since the House of Valois's Great Dukes of Burgundy built their palace there in the 14th century, the city is a brilliant base for day trips to the surrounding vineyards. In town, although the dukes' original palace, the **Chartreuse de Champmol**, was destroyed in 1793, its most famous treasure—the necropolis of the dukes—is displayed in the 15th-century **Salle des Gardes**, now attached to the replacement palace, the **Palais des Ducs et des Etats de Bourgogne**. Dijon's **Musée des Beaux-Arts** is also housed here. Nearby, the **Eglise Notre-Dame** is an entertaining display of Gothic gargoyle overkill. In Dijon's pedestrian-only old town, **Place François-Rude**, **Rue des Forges**, and **Rue Verrerie** contain 15th- to 16th-century half-timbered buildings and shops selling the area's most famous products: mustard, wine, and *crème de cassis* (black-currant liqueur).

For a better view and taste of the region's specialties, make a day trip (by train, car, or bike) to destinations south into wine country or as far as **Lyon** (see page 44), or east into Franche-Comté.

The **Côte d'Or** (Golden Hillside) and **Beaujolais** wine areas stretch for more than 110 miles (175 kilometers) south of Dijon and are home to Burgundy villages and Pinot Noir and Chardonnay (in the Côte d'Or) and Gamay (in Beaujolais) vineyards. Reading a map of the Côte d'Or's *Route des Grands Crus* (Route of Great Wines) or Beaujolais's backroads is as if you were perusing a gourmet restaurant's wine list. *Dégustations* (winetastings) and purchasing are possible directly from many winemakers.

Beaune, 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Dijon, is the region's wine center. The first home of the Ducs de Bourgogne (until their move to Dijon), it retains much of its 15th- and 16th-century splendor, including **ramparts**, stone and half-timbered **mansions** (one of which now houses the **Musée du Vin de Bourgogne**), and the alluring **Hospices de Beaune**, complete with the Burgundian-Flemish **Hôtel-Dieu's** colorful roof tiles. The Hospices is the beneficiary of **Les Trois Glorieuses** wine auction (on the third Sunday in November), part of a three-day yearly celebration of Burgundy wines.

Besançon, capital of the Franche-Comté region, is a compact city 52 miles (83 kilometers) east of Dijon. Wrapped into an extended loop of the Doubs River, the old town's setting is magnificent and best appreciated from the city's Vauban-designed **Citadelle**.

From Tours

The city of **Tours** sits on the banks of the Loire River at the heart of the **Touraine**, an area called the garden of France that produces some of the country's most popular wines—Vouvray, Chinon, Bourgueil, and others. Only 148 miles (238 kilometers) or 70 minutes (by TGV from Paris's Gare de Montparnasse) southwest of Paris, Tours's social center is the **Place Plumereau**, the former hat market, surrounded by lovely 15th-century half-timbered and stone structures and alive with café life. Explore the pedestrian streets radiating from the square, especially the **Rue du Grand-Marché**, **Rue du Commerce**, and **Rue Briçonnet**. To the south are the **Tour Charlemagne** and **Tour de l'Horloge**, all that remains of the once-vast 11th- to 13th-century **Ancienne Basilique St-Martin**. East of the city-bisecting Rue Nationale, grouped near the **Place de la Cathédrale**, are the Gothic **Cathédrale St-Gatien** and its cloisters (called **La Psalette**), and the **Musée des Beaux-Arts** in the old archbishop's palace.

Tours, a university city with a student population of 30,000, is an excellent central point from which to enjoy the attractions of the surrounding area. Train or drive over the longer distances and rent a bicycle for the shorter ones. Head southwest to the coastal cities of **Nantes** and **La Rochelle** (see page 70), west or east to the cities along the Loire, or south into Poitou-Charentes and Limousin.

The historic cities west and east of Tours along the Loire River are marvels. These are the royal castle cities of Châteaux Country, each with an exquisite palace. To the west are **Angers**, **Saumur**, and **Chinon**, all surrounded by vineyards. Near Saumur is the tomb of Richard the Lionhearted at the **Abbaye de Fontevraud**. To the east are **Amboise** (whose **Clos Lucé** was Leonardo da Vinci's final quarters, now a museum in his memory), **Blois**, **Chambord**, **Chenonceau**. Further upriver are **Orléans**, famously liberated by Joan of Arc; Gien, with its *faïenceries*, or pottery factories; and **Bourges**, a city of art and Gallo-Roman history.

South of Tours, in Poitou-Charentes, are **Poitiers**, one of France's oldest cities, which also has one of its most modern attractions—the **Futuroscope** theme park—and **Angoulême**, France's national comic-book center. The city of **Limoges**, capital of the Limousin region is renowned for its enamel and porcelain, great examples of which are on display in the **Musée National Adrien-Dubouché**. Also in town is the 13th-century Gothic **Cathédrale St-Etienne**. ♣



A costumed equestrian at the Château de Chambord in the Loire Valley east of Blois