

# Christmas in France



## The Good Life France



**Paris, Markets, Festivals, Lights, Alsace, traditions, Chateaux, gastronomy - Christmas in France**

*The Good Life France guide to Christmas in France ([www.thegoodlifeFrance.com](http://www.thegoodlifeFrance.com))*

*Picture by Perry Taylor*

**Christmas in France** means wonderful festive events, exceptional illuminations and gifts galore! Enjoy the festive season and discover the special magic of this happy time - France is the perfect place for a fabulous celebration.

At this time of year towns, villages and cities across France arrange a brilliant array of festivities, special events, gourmet fairs, shows, shopping, decorate the wonderful chateaux and of course, those fabulous markets to create an unforgettable Christmas visit.

You could watch a parade of turkeys run down the town high street in northern France, see the lights in Paris, visit the biggest Christmas market in Europe, sip Champagne in Champagne .....

Create a French Christmas Day menu with recipes from Michel Roux Jr, Raymond Blanc, Rachel Khoo and other top chefs...

Enjoy our beautiful photographs of France at Christmas... and our Festive French Facts!

From the North to the South of France here is our free guide to Christmas in France...

*With best wishes to you all*

*Janine*

Editor, [www.thegoodlifeinfrance.com](http://www.thegoodlifeinfrance.com)

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*Just a little note from us: please check dates and times before travelling, we've done our very best to check everything for you but sometimes dates are changed beyond our control. We've included websites to make it easy for you...*



## Christmas in Paris

From the end of November Paris takes on a festive look. Shops are busy with people looking for Christmas gifts, fine food stores are full of exceptional products, excited children rush to look at toys displayed in shop windows ... And above all, the loveliest streets and avenues in the city are decked out in magical lights. More than ever, the capital lives up to its name as the 'City of Light'! Be captivated by the Christmas season in Paris.

### The best Christmas lights in Paris

The Paris lights will be switched on by French model and actress Laetitia Casta on 21st November 2013.

**Avenue des Champs Elysées:** Every year, for Christmas and the New Year, the avenue des Champs-Elysées is decorated with lights and stunning decorations. Star bursts, sparkling garlands, rings of light, a shimmering curtain effect bring the 200 trees along the world's most beautiful avenue to life... a festive landscape for a magical Christmas!

**Avenue Montaigne:** Champagne-coloured mistletoe and an enchanting, festive and especially chic theme like the fashion houses along avenue Montaigne:

**Bercy Village:** Multi-coloured stars illuminate the sky of the Cour Saint-Emilion. A visual enchantment for kids and adults. Specially created for Bercy Village, this decor will form a second starry sky against the night sky of Paris, a magical backdrop to all the glitter and decorations of the month of December.



© Paris Tourist Office, Jacques Lebar

**Place Vendôme:** Place Vendôme, rue de la Paix, rue de Castiglione, rue Saint-Honoré and rue des Capucines ... outstanding places where you'll see waterfalls of light, showers of stars, enormous chandeliers... the fabulous Christmas lights embellish the prestigious character of this very chic district.

**Forum des Halles:** The Forum des Halles shopping mall will be decked out in wintry finery with starry Christmas decorations.

**Viaduc des Arts:** The Viaduc des arts is devoted to arts and crafts industries and professions and has an international reputation. Some 50 or so craftspeople in different disciplines work here daily and at Christmas the arches are lit up beautifully.



**In olden days in some regions it was traditional to burn a log in homes from Christmas Eve until New Year's Day. This stems from an ancient tradition in which farmers would use part of the log to ensure good luck for the next year's harvest. The tradition has persisted in the form of a yule log cake called a "or bûche de Noël".**



© Paris Tourist Office, Amélie Dupont

## The best Christmas Markets in Paris

**Champs-Élysées:** One of the world's best known streets – the beautiful Avenue des Champs-Elysees in Paris will be alive with Christmas spirit. On this magnificent, wide avenue crowned by the Arc de Triomphe, you will find a winter wonderland of Christmassy chalets stretching from the Place de la Concorde to the Champs-Elysees roundabout. With more than a hundred wooden chalets, stallholders will be selling arts and crafts and delicious specialities from various regions of France and other Christmas delicacies from all around Europe. This is a great opportunity to pick up some French delicacies to enjoy at home over the holiday period, such as champagne, truffles, chocolate, foie gras, cheeses and meats and so on. At the market you can also enjoy freshly made crêpes and waffles, and warm up with a hot chocolate or mulled wine accompanied by delicious cinnamon biscuits. The City of Light will be suffused with a special seasonal glow thanks to this popular Christmas market. Free shows are held at the market every day, and Santa will be visiting the market in person, delighting kids of all ages while their parents get some Christmas shopping done.

From November 15, 2013 until January 5, 2014

Open every day from 10am until 11pm, extended to midnight on Friday and Saturday.

**Montmartre, Sacré-Cœur:** From December 6, 2013 until January 6, 2014

**Montparnasse station:** From December 12, 2013 until January 2, 2014



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**Trocadéro:** Quite a big market with about 100 stands selling Christmas goods, an ice-skating rink and “snow villages” with a giant igloo and snowman etc. Ideal for families – young children will love it. The European Christmas Village ‘Trocadéro on Ice’ will be held at Trocadéro, opposite the Eiffel Tower, taking on the look and feel of a ski resort right in the middle of Paris!

From December 12, 2013 until January 5, 2014. Village open daily from 11am to 8pm; Place de la Trocadero, across from the Eiffel Tower, Paris, Metro: Trocadero

**Montmartre, place des Abbesses:** gourmet stalls, crafts, jewellery, clothing and items of all kinds; Santa Claus, elves, clowns, face painting for children and rides. From November 29, 2013 until January 1, 2014

**Branly promenade:** In front of Quai-Branly museum, along the Seine (*details of stalls not available at time of publication – check website [www.parisinfo.com](http://www.parisinfo.com)*) From December 17, 2013 until January 5, 2014

**La Défense:** 300 stalls in a village of some 10,000m<sup>2</sup>, this is the largest and most festive Christmas market in the Paris region – set among the high rise buildings of this major business area – it has an authentic and eccentric feel to it. You’ll find traditional arts and crafts lots of gorgeous festive decorations and plenty of tempting things to eat and drink.

Location: Parvis de la Défense (near the Grand Arche).

From November 27, 2013 until December 28, 2013



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## **Gourmet Christmas at Palais Brongniart**

First Paris fair of Christmas gastronomy at la Bourse de Paris

In the very grand settings of this fabulous Greco style building which was home to the French stock market business for over a century and a half, the inaugural Paris fair of Gastronomy. *(Details not available at time of publication please check website for more information)*

Friday December 20 to Sunday December 22, 2013, 10am to 8pm [www.palaisbrongniart.com](http://www.palaisbrongniart.com)

Entrance fee €10 including a souvenir tasting glass

**Christmas Market and Santa's Village Saint-Germain-des-Prés:** This is a small Christmas market but in the lovely setting of the lively Latin Quarter it's well worth a visit. Around 30 stalls, beautifully decorated around the church of Saint Germain des Prés. When this little market was left off of a list of top Paris markets by a well-known newspaper in the UK – a lot of people complained as it's one of the nicest Christmas markets in Paris. We're not making that mistake as we like it too with its Christmas tree, warm welcome and the very pretty roads around like rue de Buci, rue de la Harpe, Place St André des Arts, Place Saint-Michel.

December 7 to December 30 2013; Location: Place Saint-Germain-des-Prés

There are several smaller markets. For opening times and details on all Paris Christmas markets see the [www.parisinfo.com](http://www.parisinfo.com) website



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## Best Christmas Window Displays in Paris

You can be sure every shop in Paris will be putting on a show - all competing to create a fabulous display to impress. Wander along the Champs-Élysée and the Boulevard Hausmann – in fact anywhere in the City - and take in the fabulous sights and enjoy the magical feel of Paris at Christmas. Stop off at a little café for a hot chocolate or a glass of wine, push the boat out with a celebration at one of Paris' swish restaurants, or try one of the little traditional brasseries full of atmosphere.



© Paris Tourist Office, Amélie Dupont

You can count on all the shops in Paris to pull out the stops on making their shop window wow shoppers at Christmas. The big brand shops like Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, Hermès always put on a classy show with tasteful baubles hanging elegantly amongst the chic and expensive haut couture and fabulous accessories.

The big three department stores will have passers-by holding up their phones and iPads to take photos.

**Galleries Lafayette:** As is the tradition, under the cupola stands a majestic 21-metre-high Christmas tree.

In 2012, the store celebrated its centenary and the tree was adored with 120 Swarovski ornaments, and over 5,000 Swarovski stars – it was the largest Swarovski object ever produced in Europe.

In 2013 the tree is less bling and more playful and fairy-tale with bright colours, giant bows, teddies and little Hansel and Gretel type houses around the base. The window display theme is "Once upon a time ... Christmas Eve on the stroke of midnight". Twelve windows unveil animated fairy scenes telling the story of Lilly doll and teddy bear Martin receiving a mysterious invitation ... From window to window, the two intrepid friends travel a path of discovery where some surprising encounters await...



© Paris Tourist Office, Amélie Dupont

**Bon Marche Rive Gauche:** Every year, the artistic director of this grand store is given free rein to create and unveil a world of magical Christmas scenes. This year the windows aim to create a dreamlike walk in a forest where time stands to better savour each precious moment ... colourful, jewel coloured lights and white and gold trees, cuckoos and metronomes and rocking chairs...

**Printemps Department Store** in Paris is the largest beauty department in the world, 45,000 square metres of shopping dedicated to fashion & luxury brands, a Parisian historical monument with a panoramic terrace with a 360° view of Paris. This year the windows have been decorated in collaboration with Italian fashion house Prada and titled “Noël, Joyeuse Obsession by Prada”. They are so posh that the store flew in actress Gwyneth Paltrow to unveil their super chic window display!



**Festive French Fact:** French children put their shoes in front of the fireplace, in the hopes that Père Noël (aka Papa Noël or Saint-Nicolas) will fill them with gifts. Candy, fruit, nuts, and small toys will also be hung on the tree overnight. In some regions Saint-Nicolas has a partner, le Père Fouettard - the whipping father - whose job it is to decide whether children have been good or bad. He apparently gives spankings to bad children instead of gifts.



© Paris Tourist Office, Amélie Dupont

## Best Things to do in Paris

### Get your skates on

**Ice Skating** is de rigueur in the city and there are some fabulous locations for you to pull your boots on and glide off

**Paris Town Hall:** from Friday, 20 December 2013 to Sunday, March 2, 2014. There are qualified advisers on hand and you can rent skates – you must have ID to do that, wearing gloves is mandatory for this activity.

**Charléty-on-Snow** – a ski resort right in the centre of Paris!

For young people aged 3- 16 there's a winter sports centre set up with real snow... Firs, tobogganing, zip lines, a play area. Many activities are free and there are qualified instructors.

**Jours de fêtes:** At the Grand Palais, a funfair in the nave of the Grand Palais from Saturday December 21 to Sunday, January 5, 2014

A 30m Ferris wheel gives you a unique opportunity to admire the renovated canopy of this much loved Paris monument and enjoy a unique view of all Paris. Details [www.grandpalais.fr](http://www.grandpalais.fr)

There are more than 50 rides, stalls selling candy floss, doughnuts and toffee apples to recreate a special funfair atmosphere. See the page on the website of the Grand Palais



© Paris Tourist Office, Marc Bertrand

**Complimentary rides** for children on carousels across Paris from Saturday December 21 to Sunday, January 5, 2014

The great thing about Christmas in Paris is to just wander the streets, soaking up the ambience and stopping off for hot chocolate in a lovely café, a glass of champagne up the Eiffel Tower or a cup of mulled wine from a street vendor...

Useful websites for what's on in Paris over Christmas: [www.paris.fr](http://www.paris.fr), [www.parisinfo.com](http://www.parisinfo.com)



**French Festive Fact:** In 1962, a law was passed decreeing that all letters written to Santa must be responded to with a postcard. When a school class writes a letter, every student gets an individual response.



© Paris Tourist Office, Jacques Lebar

## Christmas Markets near Calais and Day Trips

The scent of roasting chestnuts, mulled wine and spicy gingerbread fills the air. Lights twinkle, gourmet food products offer a tantalising hint of gastronomic delights, chairs on pavements outside cafés where people sit sipping wine or chocolat chaud and enjoying the festive feeling. This is Christmas shopping at its best – and if you’ve got to do it, you might just as well do it in style and have a break at the same time.

Put the magic into Christmas at a French Christmas market – oozing atmosphere, historic settings, pedestrianised streets that make it safe for the whole family to wander at leisure – here’s the pick of Christmas markets that you can easily reach from the UK by Train or Road.

**Paris:** Eurostar from the centre of London to the centre of Paris makes this a very do-able day trip.

Just Imagine, a little over 2 hours after leaving London St Pancras you’ll arrive at Gare du Nord, hop on the metro to the Champs Elysée and enjoy the sparkling lights, the fabulous window displays and the Paris Christmas markets (see pages 3-12) and still be home before midnight!



**French Festive Fact: Mistletoe is hung above the door during the Christmas season to bring good fortune throughout the year.**



©LilleTourisme Laurent Ghesquière

## Lille

Eurostar from London to Lille is only 80 minutes. Arriving in the centre of Lille it's an easy 10 minute walk to the centre of Old Lille with its cobbled streets and wonderful architecture... and 4000 shops! There's a fabulous Christmas market at Place Rihour with stalls selling local arts and crafts plus regional food specialities such as Maroilles cheese, macarons, biscuits, and sweets like babelutttes (soft caramels). Next door at the Grand Place take a ride on the 164ft high Ferris Wheel and take a bird's eye view over the square with its artificial snow village and the city with its beautiful Renaissance architecture and twinkling lights.

If you're driving from Calais it usually takes around 90 minutes to get to Lille (*it could take a little longer in the Christmas holidays*).

November 20 – December 30; Ferris wheel opens November 20 – January 14, 2014

Further information: [www.lilletourism.com](http://www.lilletourism.com)

**If you're looking to buy wine, beer and food and want to take your car with you there is plenty of choice within an hour or so of Calais.**

**Eurotunnel trains from Folkestone to Calais take just 35 minutes.**

**[P&O Ferries](#) take 90 minutes from Dover to Calais and have lots of onboard offers and entertainment to keep the kids quiet. They have special offers for day trips and short trips in the festive season – check their website for details.**



## **Le Touquet**

Le Touquet is a smart, chic and delightful seaside town on the Opal Coast about 45 minutes from Calais. Famous for its lights, shops and its art deco covered market place, Le Touquet makes for a lovely Christmas market visit.

This year the Le Touquet lights will be illuminated on Friday 29 November and the Christmas market will take place on 14th and 15th December.

Hotels, restaurants and shops will be putting on a grand display of festive spirit as many of them offer special discounts and deals to tempt you (Details on the Le Touquet Tourist office website).

As you enter the town of Le Touquet you'll be welcomed by the sight of the Christmas village and the lovely band stand covered in thousands of twinkly lights, the roads lined with Christmas trees and more lights and the whole place oozes with a celebratory festive spirit.

Take a horse drawn carriage ride through the town, get your ice skates on for the rink, go to a concert, visit Santa Claus or just wander and admire the fabulous window displays.

Christmas market in the covered art deco market area 14 and 15 December, Lights from 29 November to early January 2014

See the Le Touquet Tourist Office website for more information [www.letouquet.com](http://www.letouquet.com)



## **Boulogne-sur-Mer**

The weekend Christmas market takes place in the picturesque walled old town of Boulogne-sur-Mer (25 minutes' drive from Calais). Enter the old town through the immense stone gates cut into the high walls and discover a real winter wonderland. This is one of my favourite Christmas markets – authentic, friendly, buzzing and very festive.

From the elves running around making the kids laugh, to the knights of old careering around on their wooden horses – horsing about, this is a very theatrical Christmas market with lots of surprises. The pedestrianised beautiful rue de Lille, lined with ancient and beautiful stores is lit up with thousands of twinkly lights – a spectacular sight. At the top of the road is the stunning, ancient Basilica of Notre Dame whose dome dominates the sky line and where you'll find a traditional French crèche (nativity scene) in a very beautiful setting.

The main square is filled with stalls, the scents of ginger bread, hot chestnuts and mulled wine hang on the cold air and there are sellers of cheese, sausages, locally smoked herring and other gourmet delights as well as arts and crafts and gifts galore.

A band strolls the streets playing lively and festive music, in the little park there's a petting zoo; there are illuminations as the Belfry is lit up to welcome Father Christmas (who will be there on his sleigh) and there's a really special, quite magical atmosphere here that will entrance children of all ages – even the grown up ones!

When: Weekend of 14th-15th December [www.tourisme-boulognesurmer.com](http://www.tourisme-boulognesurmer.com)



## Arras

The Arras Christmas village has become over the years one of the most important Christmas markets north of Paris. The exceptional houses of the Grand Place are a unique setting in Europe, providing a prestigious market place with around 100 exhibitors. Wander the red carpet, enjoy the smell of firewood, the sound of music, the workshops with appetizing aromas and sparkling lights... if it's cold, stop off at a heated kiosk and enjoy a glass of mulled wine or chocolat chaud - there's oodles of atmosphere at this very festive Christmas market in a truly stunning and historic setting.

There's a 600 m<sup>2</sup> skating rink open every day, a carousel and at the weekends music and songs are played and this year for the first time there will be a grand Ferris wheel giving spectacular views over the town like never before.

To get there takes about 75 minutes from Calais.

November 29 to December 29 2013

See Arras Tourist office Website for opening times and more details [www.explorearas.com](http://www.explorearas.com)



**Festive French Fact: In France, Christmas is called Noël. This comes from the French phrase "les bonnes nouvelles," which means "the good news".**



©Ville de Dunkerque

## Amiens

Amiens in Picardy will be hosting the largest Christmas market in the north of France From 22 November to 29 December 2013.

The city of Amiens (about 75 minutes' drive from Calais) will be turned into a festive world of dreams as it is immersed in the imaginary world of Jules Verne who wrote many of his books here. 130 chalets brimming with gift ideas – arts and crafts, decorations and delicious delicacies – in an atmosphere fragrant with the typical sweet smells and flavours of Christmas. An ice rink, magic shows and a flight simulator of Jules Verne's amazing imaginary and visionary world.

There is a Big Wheel with heated cabins and glorious views and not to be missed is the spectacular Amiens Cathedral in Colour. Built from 1220 to 1288 it is one of the largest Gothic cathedrals in Europe. At nightfall the UNESCO world heritage classified Notre-Dame Cathedral is lit up in a magical display of medieval colour – a fabulous sight and pure Christmas...

Details and information, plus a map for car parking on the Amiens Tourist Office website: <http://www.visit-amiens.com>

## Dunkirk

The town of Dunkirk was the 2013 Regional Capital of Culture and they really pulled out all the stops with a calendar of fabulous events to celebrate. Christmas is no exception as this year the programme is packed with festivities and a fabulous Christmas parade.

Dunkirk is this year planning to put on a sensational Christmas parade and is the only French city to put on such an incredible theatrical Christmas event and huge parade which will take place on Sunday December 15 from 17.30 to 19.00 in the city centre.

A giant theatre will be created, 200 actors will take part, animated puppets, musicians, dancers and a grand parade through the town the like of which has not been seen in this part of France before. This promises to be a magical and unforgettable Christmas parade.

There's a winter fair (December 14 to December 30), Santa's locomotive (26m long), snowmen, a magical forest, entertainment and a Christmas Market (7 to 31 December) and more.

The Tourist Office of Dunkirk has lots of accommodation and restaurant deals for Christmas that are well worth checking out. [www.dunkirk-tourism.com](http://www.dunkirk-tourism.com)



## Licques

Licques is about 40 minutes' drive from Calais. The Fete de Dindes or Turkey Festival involves hundreds of turkeys parading through the streets of the town in an extraordinary celebration to honour the Christmas bird. Accompanied by local dignitaries and brotherhoods decked out in all their splendour – it's a colourful and memorable day out. It's also the place to go for a gourmet Christmas market, held in a huge marquee full of local producers and those from other regions where you'll be able to taste and buy great wines, champagne, cheese, meats, cakes, biscuits, sweets – pretty much all the French produce you'll need to make it a proper gastronomic Christmas!

The gourmet market is held on 14 and 15 December, the turkey parade is on 15 December starting at about 11.00 a.m. – grab a glass of warm local liqueur called “licquoise” from the enormous cauldron in the high street and celebrate in style at this authentic and distinctly fun and delicious Christmas event. [www.licques-vollailes.fr](http://www.licques-vollailes.fr)



© Rheims Tourism Carmen Moya

## Champagne Christmas

Champagne!

That famous bubbly wine is perfect to toast your friends and loved ones at Christmas and Champagne the region is the perfect place to enjoy a traditional Christmas celebration.

Did you know that Champagne is home to the wonderful World Nativity Scene Route (Le Chemin des Crèches du Monde)?

The 'World Nativity Scene Route' is an astonishing collection of crib scenes of all shapes, sizes, materials and origin, from hand-knitted scenes to historic hand-carved figures, all with their own unique charm. The cribs are on show throughout December in and around the churches of 46 towns and villages between the coronation city of Reims, Epernay capital of Champagne, Châlons-en-Champagne and the historic town of Fismes.

The towns and villages taking part in this quite amazing display also have a programme of fabulous Christmas illuminations, festivities and events, such as Christmas markets, exhibitions and concerts.

Here are some of our favourite Champagne Christmas highlights. The full programme, including the dates and times of the animations, which vary from village to village, can be found online at [www.noels-de-champagne.com](http://www.noels-de-champagne.com)

### Reims: Christmas Market ('Le village de Noël')

The Christmas market at Reims is the biggest in the region and amongst the largest in France with 135 chalets offering a range of gourmet products, arts and crafts and creative gift

suggestions. What makes this special is that it's held in the tree-lined pedestrian streets around Place d'Erlon and the city centre and it is beautifully illuminated and decorated.

The Rheims big wheel gives spectacular views over the coronation city and will be set up in the boulevards opposite the railway station

Christmas Market: 22 November to 29 December, 2013; Big Wheel: 30 November to 7 January; Children's Kingdom and Ice Rink: 22 November to 5 January; International Craft Market ('Village d'artisanat international') 29 November to 8 December

More details: [www.reims-tourism.com](http://www.reims-tourism.com)



**French Festive Fact: Reims was the site of the first French Christmas celebration when, in 496, Clovis and his 3,000 warriors were baptized. Bishop Rémi had purposely chosen the day of the Nativity for this ceremony.**



## **Epernay Christmas Champagne Market**

Now in its 14th year, Epernay's fabulous annual Christmas festival explodes in a riot of lights, colours and flavour. Most of the festivities centre around the famous and elegant villas in the 'Avenue de Champagne', housing the world's most prestigious champagne producers. During the three day festival, Epernay is 'dressed in lights' with special champagne tastings offered by the grand champagne houses, free tasting sessions from top chefs, son et lumière shows, fireworks, music and pop up Champagne bars, ending with a fabulous parade of vintage cars.

**When:** 12-14 December, 2013

See [www.habitsdelumiere.epernay.fr](http://www.habitsdelumiere.epernay.fr) for details & times.



*Big Wheel Reims, © Reims Tourisme, Carmen Moya*

## **Chalons-en-Champagne: White Christmas**

In addition to the display of 'cribs from the east' in the Saint-Alpin church from 29th November to 31st December, a programme of gastronomy, art, decorations, street entertainment, concerts, shows and children's activities is being organised around the town.

From 29 November 2013 – see website for details [www.chalons-tourisme.com](http://www.chalons-tourisme.com)

## **Charleville-Mezieres: Traditional Christmas Market**

The historic setting of the Place Ducale in this beautiful town is transformed into a traditional Christmas market with chalet stalls offering gourmet treats, regional produce, festive fare, and arts & crafts. Festive animations will take place every day with special activities on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, including the arrival of Father Christmas in his sleigh on 7 December.

From 4 to 24 December, 2013 More details: [www.charleville-mezieres.fr](http://www.charleville-mezieres.fr)



**Festive French Fact: The celebration of Christmas in France varies by region. Most provinces celebrate Christmas on the 25th of December, which is a public holiday. However, in eastern and northern France, the Christmas season begins on 6 December with la fête de Saint Nicolas.**



© Strasbourg Tourist Office, Aurelie Cottier

## Christmas Markets in Alsace

You might wonder why Alsace gets a chapter all to itself in our Christmas in France book – well there is a very valid reason: The French Christmas markets were started in Strasbourg in the 16th Century, it was where Christmas trees were first taken into people’s homes, and also where the Christmas bauble was invented!

Yes – those wonderful French Christmas markets we all love so much started right there in Alsace almost 500 years ago. The first one took place in Strasbourg in 1570 – it’s still going strong and the "Christkindelsmärik," as it is known, is the oldest Christmas market in France. Strasbourg is known as the “Capital of Christmas”.

Not surprisingly other villages and towns in Alsace followed the example set by trendy Strasbourg and now there are more than 100 Christmas markets in Alsace.



**French Festive Fact: In the old days, peasants’ wooden shoes, called sabots, were placed before the fire to be filled with gifts at Christmas time, today shoes of any kind are set before the fireplace or around the tree. However, the sabots are not forgotten - chocolate wooden shoes are made by pastry shops and filled with candies.**

## Strasbourg – Capital of Christmas



In the Middle Ages, the "St. Klausenmarkt" (St Nicholas Market) was held in early December around the Cathedral in Strasbourg, during which presents were handed out to the children. In the 16th Century Strasbourg became Protestant and a preacher denounced the St Nicholas Market as "papist". Swayed by his influence, the city abolished the market in 1570. That same year the market was replaced with the "Christkindelsmärik" (Market of the Christ Child), held a few days before Christmas at the foot of the Cathedral. In 1870, the market was moved to Place Broglie where it is still held to this day.

The oldest and one of the largest Christmas markets in France, it spreads throughout the city, but its historical heart is still Place Broglie and Place de la Cathédrale, the lovely medieval square in front of Strasbourg's graceful Romanesque cathedral. With more than 300 stalls, this is the place to buy great arts and crafts - glass paintings, marquetry, music boxes, embroidered tablecloths and earthenware pottery. The food stalls will certainly tempt you with spiced bread, kugelhopf cake, berawecka cake, traditional bredle cakes, mulled wine and, of course, foie gras.

Every year, a thirty-metre tall Christmas tree is brought to Place Kléber and decorated with colourful ornaments and shimmering lights. It is the highest decorated Christmas tree in Europe. The atmosphere that prevails in Strasbourg as Christmas approaches is unique. The city is adorned in its most beautiful finery, the houses are richly decorated... At nightfall, the magic comes alive. The windows light up and the streets and squares, all connected by a network of light, give off their different scents amid sparkling decors. The "Carré d'Or" is especially spectacular, such as the rue des Hallebardes, with its magnificent crystal chandeliers. Throughout December, Strasbourg is the most illuminated city in Europe.

When: From 24 November to mid-January. The illuminations begin on the evening of 23 November.

Further information: [www.otstrasbourg.com](http://www.otstrasbourg.com); [www.noel.strasbourg](http://www.noel.strasbourg)



**Festive French Fact: Sélestat in Alsace is said to be the birth place of the Christmas tree (Sapin de Noel) and it specialises in a Christmas tree market. It is said that the idea of the tree came from Alsace, then part of Germany, in the 14th century and was apparently introduced by Princess Hélène de Mecklembourg, on her marriage to the Duke of Orléans, heir to the French throne. The first recorded mention of a Christmas tree can be found in a document dating from 1521 which is on display in the Bibliothèque Humaniste in Sélestat.**

**The original decorations for a Christmas tree were fruit and nuts – mainly apples and walnuts. Legend has it that in 1858 the harvest failed and the glassmakers of Meisenthal made glass versions of the traditional fruit and nut decorations. The glass decorations were a great success and so the manufacturers carried on with their production and soon the decorations spread across the world .**



© Strasbourg Tourist Office, Bernard Naegelaen

### **Mulhouse Christmas market**

Set in the heart of this historic centre, Mulhouse Christmas Market features half-timbered chalets offering high quality products, exceptional fabric (reflecting the city's heritage as a textile centre) and fine foods. There are regional delicacies from the Alsace and the scent of cinnamon and mulled wine combined with the magical illuminations make this a shopping pleasure.

This market features a unique tradition as the town hall is transformed into a giant advent calendar, and every night in the lead up to Christmas a window is opened and lit up!

Christmas Market: from 23 November to 29 December, 2013 Place de la Réunion

See the Mulhouse Tourist website for more details [www.tourisme-mulhouse.com](http://www.tourisme-mulhouse.com)

### **Colmar Christmas market**

A lovely market in the picturesque old town which is beautifully decorated for the season. A tradition of the town is to attach candles to branches of holly and fir trees to ward off evil for the 4 weeks before Christmas making for some spectacular illuminations.

There are five Christmas markets in Colmar:

Petite Venise for children – kids can post their letters to Santa in the giant letter box, there's a special Christmas merry-go-round and treasures specifically aimed at children.



© Colmar Office de Tourisme

The Covered Market of the Koïfhus - set in a 14th and 15th century building, once the centre of trade in Colmar, there's a great choice of art and antiques from master glaziers, cabinet makers, wood sculptors, hatters, jewellers, second-hand booksellers and antique items.

Christmas Market Place de l'Ancienne Douane – next door to the Koifhus is this lovely square where you'll find around 50 little stalls harmoniously placed around the Schwendi Fountain erected by Auguste Bartholdi (sculptor of the Statue of Liberty).

Christmas Market Place Jeanne d'Arc - Alsatian food products galore – try and buy to your heart's content!

Christmas Market Place des Dominicains - 65 stalls enhanced by the beautiful lights around the 4th century stained-glass windows of the Dominican Church

When 22 November to 31 December, 2013

[www.ot-colmar.fr](http://www.ot-colmar.fr)



**Festive French Fact: Father Christmas as we know him was inspired by the historical figure of Saint Nicolas, the first recorded person to distribute gifts to German and French children. In some traditional tales he has a partner - Père Fouettard (Bogeyman), who, dressed in black, punishes children who have been bad during the past year. With the evolution of Saint Nicolas into what we call Father Christmas today, le Père Fouettard has disappeared. The celebration of Saint Nicolas takes place in Lorraine and Alsace on 6 December. Tradition goes that children place carrots out for his donkey and leave their shoes out for gifts, as he was known for secret gift-giving like placing coins in shoes. If children are well behaved, they also receive oranges as they were once a highly coveted fruit.**



© Chateau de Chenonceau, Guillaume Souvant

## Christmas Chateaux in France

Christmas... chateaux – sounds like the perfect combination doesn't it?!

Visiting one of the great chateaux in France is special at any time but at Christmas it provides a positively enchanting experience!

In the days of Louis XIV, the Sun King, Christmas would have revolved around the saying of Mass in the Versailles Chapel. The Duc de Saint-Simon, a courtier of the King wrote in his

memoirs that at Christmas the atmosphere was charmed, even for Versailles, music that surpassed the opera, magnificent decoration, and extraordinary lighting. The 357 mirrors in the Hall of Mirrors would have been lit with thousands of candles, Dom Perignon champagne (the King's favourite) would be served with a meal of more than 20 dishes lasting hours and illuminated by almost 100 candles on the table.

These days, lots of Chateaux put up special decorations and illuminations – here are just a few of our favourites:



### **Vaux Le Vicomte, Ile de France**

The Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte is a baroque French château located in Maincy, near Melun, 55 km southeast of Paris in the Seine-et-Marne department of France

Wander down a tree-lined avenue festooned with lights... Inside this beautiful chateau you'll find fairy tale decorations and beautiful garlands adorning the lights, chimneys and tables – 12000 decorations to be precise! In the centre of the Great Hall an 8 metre high tree bedecked with around 5000 (yes we did say 5000 – it's not a typo) decorations can't fail to cause a "wow" from everyone who sees it.

At dusk, the famous gardens, designed by French gardener André le Nôtre, are illuminated, and there's even a theatrical production of Pinocchio.

30 November to 31st December – see website for confirmation and details of the full Christmas programme Vaux le Vicomte website: <http://www.vaux-le-vicomte.com/>

### **Chenonceau, Loire Valley**

The Château de Chenonceau, in the Indre-et-Loire département of the Loire Valley in France, is often known as the "ladies Chateau". It was given to Diane de Poitiers by her lover, Henry II and had many famous lady owners over the centuries who shaped its fortunes.

Perhaps it is that feminine touch that gives it such a beautiful look at Christmas when every room in the Castle is filled with sumptuous displays of flowers and garlands. The kitchen, bedrooms, hallways have beautiful Christmas trees, flower arrangements and thousands of gorgeous decorations.

December 7th to January, 5th

Website: [www.chenonceau.com](http://www.chenonceau.com)



©Chateau d'Amboise, L de Serre

## **Amboise Chateau Royale**

The royal Château at Amboise is in the Indre-et-Loire département of the Loire Valley in France. It was a favoured royal residence and is famous for being the chateau where King Charles VIII died in 1498 after hitting his head on a door lintel.

At Christmas this once favoured royal house is decorated in style and takes a look at Christmas traditions from the Renaissance to the 19th Century.

See the website for details: <http://www.chateau-amboise.com/en/events>

## **Christmas in the Loire Valley Chateaux**

The Loire Valley is a wonderful place to be at Christmas – many châteaux will be dressing up in their Christmas finery, and the entire city of Blois will making merry with its Winter Festival.



During the weekends of December and the Christmas holidays, four châteaux in the region of Orléans will be celebrating the magic of an old-fashioned French Christmas. The Château de Meung-sur-Loire will showcase the Père Noël as well as a splendid candy factory and larger-than-life fairy tale characters. Visit the Châteaux de la Ferté-Saint-Aubin by candlelight and enjoy a cup of steaming chocolat chaud in the château's gorgeous kitchens. The Château de Saint Brisson-sur-Loire, whose façade is lit up at nightfall, will feature a contest of Christmas tree ornaments. Château de la Bussière will put on an enchanting nativity scene in the historic stables. December 7, 2013 to January 5, 2014

### **Blois Celebrates Christmas in a Big Way!**

The royal city of Blois will be celebrating the holidays with the annual Winter Festival. Shows and street theatre performances, concerts, choirs, sleigh rides, ice-skating – and more. There is a lively St. Nicolas rummage sale and a fabulous Marché de Noël in Place Louis XII, with its cheerfully decked stalls and tempting aromas of gingerbread and mulled wine.

The streets and storefronts are beautifully decorated from the cobblestoned downtown area up to the Château Royal de Blois, perched majestically above the town and overlooking the Loire. Wander to your heart's content, taking in the Christmas sights, sounds and magic.

Don't miss a visit to the château, the home of 7 kings and 10 queens of France, and an impressive example of medieval, Renaissance and 17th century architecture.

There's also a Maison des Vins de Tours in the centre of town where you can taste (and buy) Loire Valley wines selected each year by a group of specialists. You can also set out on your own with a map of the region's vineyards in hand and buy them directly from the producers.

Although the region's white wines are already well-known in the UK the red wines are plentiful too and there's even a sparkling wine from the area. As you serve the wine at Christmas dinner, you can always surprise your guests by telling them that only a few weeks before the bottles were carefully preserved in a Loire Valley troglodyte cellar!

<http://www.loirevalleytourism.com/>



**Festive French Fact: Charlemagne received the crown from the hands of Pope Leo III on Christmas Day in 800. In 1100, Godefroy de Bouillon's successor, his brother Baudouin, was crowned in the basilica of Saint Mary of Bethlehem. Later, King Jean-le-Bon founded the Order of the Star in honour of the manger; it remained in existence until 1352. In 1389, French crowds shouted 'Noël! Noël!' in welcoming Queen Isabeau of Bavaria to the capital.**



## Christmas Festivals in France

Hundreds of wonderful festivals take place in France for Christmas – from quirky and authentic events like the Licques Turkey Parade to the huge Festival of Lights in Lyon attended by huge crowds.

Where ever you are in France at Christmas – check with the local tourist office to find out what’s on but here are a few of our favourite festivals at Christmas in France:

### **Festival of Lights in Lyon**

Since 1852 people in Lyons have placed tiny candles in their windows and on their balconies in December to herald in the Christmas season. Thousands of little candles lights up the streets of this beautiful town making it look enchanting but it doesn’t end there – over the years the event has grown in popularity and has become an exceptional spectacle with famous designers creating magnificent sound and light shows. All over the city, buildings, rivers and parks become part of the show and for four days Lyons sparkles attracting millions of visitors to explore its beautiful lit up splendour.

6-9 December; website for details: [www.en.lyon-france.com](http://www.en.lyon-france.com)

### **Licques Turkey Festival – Fete de la Dinde**

One of the most unusual, authentic and fun festivals of Christmas takes place in Licques, about 40 minutes’ drive from Calais. The Fete de la Dinde involves hundreds of turkeys parading through the streets of the town in an extraordinary celebration to honour this ungainly Christmas bird. Accompanied by local dignitaries and brotherhoods decked out in all their splendour – it’s a colourful and memorable day out.

It’s also the place to go for a gourmet Christmas market, held in a huge marquee full of local producers and those from other regions where you’ll be able to taste and buy great wines, champagne, cheese, meats, cakes, biscuits, sweets – pretty much all the French produce you’ll need to make it a proper gastronomic Christmas!

The gourmet market is held on 14th and 15th December, 2013 - the Turkey Parade is on 15th December 2013 at 11.00 a.m. Information and details from: [www.licques-volailles.fr](http://www.licques-volailles.fr)



### **Bresse Poultry contest in Louhans**

The south of Burgundy is home to Bresse poultry, known worldwide for their quality and unique taste. Bresse chicken is the only poultry to be awarded A.O.C (Controlled designation of origin) status. During the last week of the run-up to Christmas, the Glorieuses de Bresse festival pays tribute to livestock breeders in the region and their unique know-how, with their capons, fattened chickens, turkeys and Bresse chickens, the only poultry in the world to benefit from an official protected designation of origin. No fewer than 1,000 birds including Bresse capons and fattened chickens are on show.

The 148th year programme includes a poultry market, competitions, exhibitions, events and tasting sessions.

14 December 2013

[www.glorieusesdebresse.com](http://www.glorieusesdebresse.com)



**French Festive Fact: Many French homes at Christmastime display a Nativity scene or creche, peopled with little clay figures called santons or "little saints." In addition to the usual Holy Family, shepherds, and Magi, the craftsmen also produce figures in the form of local dignitaries and well known characters. The practice is thought to go back as far as the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and in many families Santons are passed from generation to generation and become family heirlooms**



©Matthew Feroze, *Cheese and I* (Michael O'Mara Books)

## Traditional French Christmas Menu

Christmas in France is all about food... and enjoying a meal with your friends and family. In the land of French Cuisine, where gastronomy has been recognised with a UNESCO world heritage rating, Christmas is a time to indulge and enjoy the best of fabulous French food. The focus at this time is firmly on the table.

Christmas Eve is often when a big family meal will take place known as le réveillon (or 'wake-up' meal) it will likely go on for several hours and into the next morning. In many places this Christmas Eve dinner is more important than that which takes place on Christmas Day.

New Year's Eve is also the time for a dinner called le réveillon and it is very common for families to get together and repeat the indulgences of Christmas Eve to usher in the New Year.

Of course no French meal would be complete without a cheese course... maybe Camembert from Normandy, blue cheese from the Auvergne, goats' cheese from Poitou, a piece of Comté from Franche-Comté and a very strong Maroilles from Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Decorate the board with some grapes – just to make it healthy! If you want to know how a champion makes a cheeseboard zing – take a look at this award winning cheese platter by Champion des Fromagers de France 2013, Englishman Matthew Feroze!



### Here's a typical French Christmas Day menu:

**Breakfast:** Start the day with a great breakfast or brunch meal of oeufs en cocotte, delicious and easy to make and will keep you going until the main meal. See Paola Westbeek's recipe below.

*Start with an Aperitif: Champagne, Kir Royal or cocktail of your choice. Serve with Amuse-gueles/amuse bouches – you can go as fancy as you like or just a bowl of peanuts or crisps/chips.*

**Entrée/hors d'oeuvre/starter:** For something very French, you could go with some garlicky escargots, oysters roasted in white wine, foie gras or Michel Roux Jr's wonderful Chestnut and Apple Soup (recipe below)

**Plat Principal** – in France this is open to the individual's choice and taste and varies from region to region – turkey, goose, chicken, lamb or charpon are usual and stuffing using chestnuts is much favoured. You'll also find fish, ham, duck, and shellfish like crab or lobster or game meats like venison. For Le Reveillon this wonderful ham hock terrine with soused vegetables recipe that Raymond Blanc shared with us is just perfect.

**Dessert:** A Bûche de Noël (Christmas log), fabulous concoctions of cakes and puddings, macarons and of course Kugelhopf – make your own Christmas Kugelhopf with this fabulous recipe from Rachel Khoo.



**Festive French Fact:** At midnight many people attend Christmas mass. Churches and cathedrals, large and small, are magnificently lit and echo the joyful melodies of carols, bells and carillons. Many churches have a crèche or manger. When the family returns home after midnight mass, there is a late supper known as le réveillon.



## Oeufs en Cocotte

Oeufs en Cocotte are great as a hearty breakfast or brunch dish. While most people are fussing about what they'll serve for dinner on Christmas Day, I tend to focus more on what I'll serve for brunch. Oh how I love Christmas brunch! The possibilities are endless: beautiful breads, freshly-pressed juices, colourful winter fruit salads, quiches, and eggs in a million and one different ways. Wonderful!

Here is one of my favourite Christmas breakfast in France recipes. These little baked eggs are so versatile and can be thrown together faster than an elf can make toys for a whole neighbourhood of children!

I like to serve them with buttery pan-fried ciabatta slices, a citrus salad sprinkled with pomegranate seeds and a scattering of mint leaves, and of course -- a nice bottle of Champagne.

### Serves 2

Butter  
2 tbsps lardons  
4 slices ciabatta  
1 spring onion, finely chopped  
freshly-grated Gruyère  
4 eggs  
2 tbsp single cream  
freshly-grated pepper  
pinch of dried tarragon

Preheat the oven to 180C. Butter two small ramekins and place them on a baking dish. In the meantime, fry your lardons in a dry frying pan. Remove them with a slotted spoon and divide over the ramekins.

Now add a generous knob of butter to your pan (don't wipe it clean, you want all those salty, bacony juices!) and fry the ciabatta slices for 3-4 minutes a side.

To make the eggs: divide the spring onions over the ramekins, top with the Gruyère, 2 eggs each and 1 tbsp of cream each. Season with some pepper and the tarragon. You probably won't need any salt.

Pour some boiling water into the baking dish so that it comes halfway up the sides of the ramekins and pop the eggs into the oven for 13-15 minutes.

Serve with the fried bread - perfect for dipping into the runny yolks!

Bon appétit...

***Paola Westbeek** is the Good Life France's resident Queen of French Cuisine, she is a food, wine and travel writer with a good dose of joie de vivre ([inmylife-paola.blogspot.com](http://inmylife-paola.blogspot.com))*



## Ham hock terrine with soused vegetables

**Raymond Blanc** is one of Britain's most respected and popular TV chefs and the UK's favourite French man.

Here he share's a fabulous ham hock terrine with soused vegetables recipe – perfect for a traditional French Christmas lunch, supper or buffet! Make it a few days in advance and serve with bread, crackers, salad, whatever – it's guaranteed to impress...

**Serves:** 4-6

Preparation time: 12hrs

Cooking time: 30mins

For the terrine:

1 large ham hock, about 1.5kg  
1 pig's trotter cut in half lengthways (optional)  
2 litres cold water  
1 bouquet garni (2 bay leaves, 5g parsley, 2g thyme, tied together)  
8 black peppercorns  
1 large carrot, quartered lengthways  
2 celery sticks, halved  
1 medium white onion, peeled and cut into 6 wedges  
2 sheets leaf gelatine  
40ml white wine vinegar  
35g flat-leaf parsley

For the soured vegetables:

400ml water  
80ml white wine vinegar  
90g clear honey  
1 thyme sprig  
1 bay leaf  
6 pinches of sea salt  
2 pinches of freshly ground  
White pepper  
160g baby onions, peeled, root left on  
100g carrot, peeled and cut into 3cm long sticks  
70g cauliflower, cut into small florets  
1 tarragon sprig  
  
60g small gherkins, rinsed  
10g dill sprigs, chopped

Method

1. Put the ham hock and pig's trotter into a large stockpot or saucepan, cover with the cold water and bring to the boil, skimming to remove the impurities. Let bubble gently for one minute.
2. Turn down the heat to a gentle simmer, add the bouquet garni and peppercorns and put the lid on, leaving a slight gap. Cook for three to four hours, adding all the vegetables forty-five minutes before the end of the cooking time. The cooking time will depend on the size of the hock; the meat should be tender enough to pull the small bone out easily.
3. Once cooked, lift out the meat onto a board and leave until cool enough to handle. Strain the liquor through a sieve set over a large pan, reserving the vegetables. Soak the gelatine leaves in a shallow dish of cold water to soften for five minutes or so. Bring the strained liquor

to a simmer and take off the heat. Drain the gelatine and stir into the hot liquor with the wine vinegar. Reserve 400ml for the terrine (any excess can be used as a broth with noodles).

4. Peel off the rind and fat from the ham hocks. Cut off and discard the fat from the rind; cut the rind into one centimetre pieces. Flake the meat from the hock into a bowl, reserving three large pieces. Add the rind to the flaked meat. No additional seasoning should be needed as the hock's cure provides enough. Set aside a quarter of the meat and rind mixture; mix the drained vegetables into the rest. Blanch the parsley in boiling water for fifteen seconds, drain, pat dry and chop roughly, then mix into the meat and vegetable mixture.

5. Line the terrine with two layers of cling film for extra support, leaving a ten centimetre overhang all around (to wrap the terrine once formed). Pack the meat and vegetable mixture into the terrine, placing the three reserved pieces of ham hock in the centre, then top with the reserved meat and rind mix.

6. Pour in enough of the warm cooking liquor to come to the level of the mixture, then press down lightly so a thin layer of liquor covers the meat and vegetables. Gently fold the overhanging cling film over to cover the top and place in the fridge overnight to set.

7. Put the water, wine vinegar, honey, thyme, bay leaf and seasoning into a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Add the onions and carrot and simmer gently for twenty minutes, then add the cauliflower and tarragon and simmer for a further ten minutes.

8. Take off the heat, add the gherkins and pour into a bowl set over ice to cool quickly. Once cooled, add the chopped dill and store in airtight jars until needed.

9. When set, carefully remove the terrine from the mould and wrap tightly in an extra two layers of cling film. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

10. Remove the cling film from the terrine, place on a board and cut into slices. Put the soured vegetables in a pot and serve on the side, along with a basket of freshly toasted pain de campagne or warm French bread.

Read our interview with Raymond Blanc in which he tells how it all began.

*CREDIT: Raymond Blanc (Website: [raymondblanc.com](http://raymondblanc.com))*



**Festive French Fact: Another important celebratory date at Christmas time is la fête des Roi held on 6th January – the 12th Day of Christmas and also the Day of Epiphany. The Galette des Rois cake is eaten on this day, a delicious concoction in which is hidden a lucky charm known as the fève– whoever finds it is crowned king or Queen for a day.**



## Chestnut and Apple soup

**Michel Roux Jr** shares this fabulous Velouté de chataignes – chestnut and apple soup which is just perfect for Christmas Day...

Michel says: “I’m often asked to explain what makes a recipe a classic. The simple answer is that it is a dish that has stood the test of time. A classic can be anything from a pan of sautéed potatoes, redolent with garlic and herbs, to the most extravagant fish or meat dishes or beautiful pastries.

“A great winter warmer, this soup is a speciality of the Cévennes region of France where chestnut trees grow in abundance. They also make a version in Corsica where they have a thriving chestnut industry. The soup is best made with dried chestnuts, which are sold peeled and ready to reconstitute in water before being cooked.”

Serves 4

180g dried chestnuts

1 sprig of thyme

2 bay leaves

1 white onion, peeled and chopped

800ml vegetable stock (see below)  
1 red apple  
1 green apple  
1 tbsp unsalted butter  
½ tbsp caster sugar  
olive oil (optional)  
salt  
black pepper

#### Method

Soak the chestnuts in water for 3-4 hours until reconstituted, then drain them and rinse. Put the chestnuts in a large saucepan with the thyme, bay leaves, onion and vegetable stock. Roughly chop half the red and half the green apple and add them to the pan. Bring the soup to the boil, then simmer gently for about 40 minutes or until the chestnuts are tender and cooked. Take out some cooked chestnuts to use as a garnish, remove the thyme and bay leaves, then blitz the soup in a blender or food processor until smooth. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Using a melon baller, scoop out little balls of apple from the remaining halves. Melt the butter in a small pan, add the apple balls and sprinkle them with the sugar. Toss briefly until lightly glazed.

To serve, put a few cooked chestnuts and apple balls in each bowl, pour in some soup, then drizzle with a little olive oil, if you like.

For the Vegetable stock - Bouillon de legumes

Makes 2 litres

1 carrot  
2 shallots  
1 small onion  
2 celery sticks  
1 leek (green top part only)  
2.5 litres water  
1 bay leaf  
1 bunch of thyme  
a handful of parsley stalks

Peel or trim and roughly chop all the vegetables and put them in a large saucepan with the cold water. Add the herbs and bring the water to the boil. Simmer for about 35 minutes, then strain the stock before using. It can be kept in the fridge for up to 5 days.

*Recipe from THE FRENCH KITCHEN by Michel Roux Jr, published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, hardback £25; image (© Cristian Barnett)*



## Kugelhopf – cake that’s perfect for Christmas

Kugelhopf is a traditional cake which is considered to come from Alsace in the north east of France though its origins go back much further than that. Every bakery window in Alsace seems to be filled with this delicious little round cake with a hole in the centre.

Whilst it is not the easiest dish to make, Rachel Khoo has simplified the recipe to come up with a traditional, authentic Kugelhopf recipe, the perfect explanation for how to make kugelhopf at home (taken from her new book *My Little French Kitchen*. Rachel says this is an “anytime snack cake” but it is especially popular at Christmas.

Rachel’s top tip for this recipe is “if you use dry prunes, cut them into small 1cm chunks and leave to soak in the cognac while the dough rises”

Makes one 20cm kugelhopf

Preparation time: 45 minutes

Resting time: minimum 6 hours, but best overnight

Baking time: 30 minutes

300g strong white bread flour  
40g caster sugar  
1 teaspoon table salt  
5g (2 teaspoons) instant dried yeast  
125g milk  
1 egg, beaten  
70g soft butter, cut into small cubes  
70g soft, ready-to-eat stoned prunes  
50ml cognac, rum or brandy optional – if using very dry prunes\*  
8-10 blanched almonds for decoration (optional)  
1 egg, plus 2 tablespoons milk, for the eggwash  
1 tablespoon soft butter, for greasing the mould

1 x 20cm kugelhpf mould, or 1 x 900g loaf tin, greased and lined with baking paper

#### Method

Mix together all the dry ingredients in the bowl of a mixer fitted with a dough hook and make a well in the middle. Add the milk and egg to the centre. Switch on to a medium speed for 6-8 minutes.

The dough will become soft, smooth and elastic. Add the softened butter bit by bit and continue to mix for another 5 minutes until thoroughly incorporated. Scrape the bowl down periodically with a spatula to insure all the butter is mixed in.

Once the dough is formed (it should be slightly sticky), decant into a large clean bowl. Cover with clingfilm and leave in the fridge until it has doubled in size (ideally overnight).

Butter the kugelhpf mould. If using a loaf tin, line it with baking paper. Place one almond into each groove at the bottom of the mould. If using a loaf tin, just scatter loosely.

Once the dough has doubled in size, remove from the fridge.

Drain the prunes of any excess liquid (\*if they were soaked in cognac) and knead into the dough, but keep the kneading to a minimum.

Shape the dough into a ball and poke a hole in the middle. Tuck it neatly in the mould making sure the middle of the mould pokes through the dough. Brush with eggwash.

If using a loaf tin, form the dough into a sausage the length of the tin. Pop into the tin and brush with eggwash.

Cover with a damp clean tea towel or cling film and leave to rise somewhere warm until doubled in size.

Preheat the oven to 200°C. Brush the kugelhpf with egg wash and place in the oven.

Bake for 30 minutes or until a skewer comes out clean when inserted into the middle.

