



# Saint-Malo

Follow in the wake of English ships of old and visit one of Brittany's most infamous historic ports, now a boater's haven



**S**aint-Malo has something of a Jekyll and Hyde-style character but it is these two natural extremes that make it all the more appealing.

When in the role of Dr Jekyll, the port presents a somewhat sinister landscape of dark, rocky islands whose sharp fangs threaten to rip out the bottom of any unwary boaters' craft. The softer Mr Hyde side of Saint-Malo, on the other hand, offers a serene and placid lake-like inlet, bordered by two wonderfully safe marinas and a beautiful walled city crammed full of history. This variation in character is due to a tide of staggering proportions, which at springs can vary by as much as 13 metres.

This colossal variance – the largest found in Europe – can be daunting, and even downright off-putting to some. But get it right, and Saint-Malo and its environs can open up to become a magical destination for motorboats,



## the authors

**Frances and Michael Howorth** Frances is an award-winning photographer and Michael is a qualified captain, certificated to command luxury yachts up to 3000 tonnes. They have vast experience in offshore boating and their voyages have taken them to Africa, America, India the Med, the Caribbean, and plenty of islands in between.



The eerie Rochers Sculptés



## INSIDERS' GUIDE SAINT-MALO

St Malo's Intra-Muros (old town) from the breakwater at low water

whether they arrive on their own bottoms or are trailed across the Channel on a ferry.

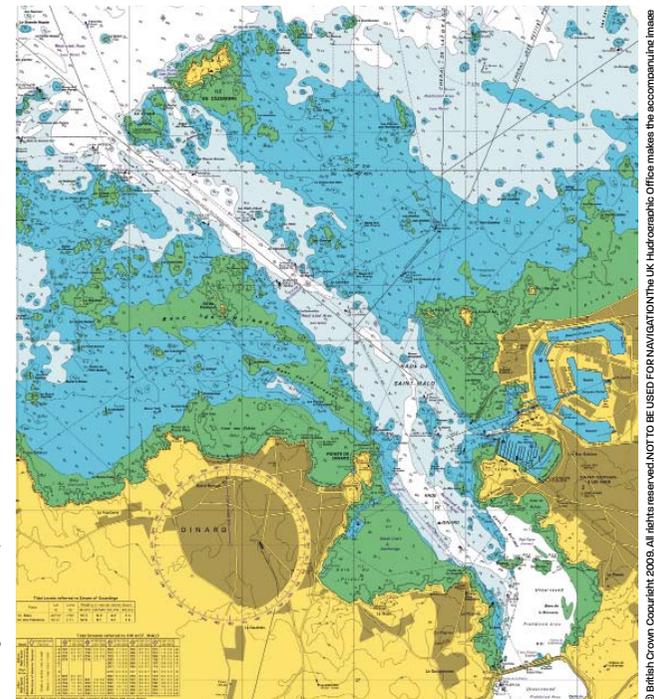
Although now one of Brittany's most popular ports, Saint-Malo hasn't always been comfortable with its Gallic, or its Breton ties. From 1490 to 1493, Saint-Malo declared itself to be an independent republic, taking the motto "not French, not Breton, but Malouins." Saint-Malo also gained notoriety over centuries as the home of the Corsairs, French privateers and even pirates who forced English ships passing up the Channel to pay a ransom.

Today, though, there are many reasons to visit Saint-Malo and, due to its milder winter, it's a port for all seasons. And it's multifunctional too – you can visit for a weekend, use it as a base for a longer cruise, keep your boat here for the whole of summer, or simply use it as an entry port for the French waterways. It's also on the itinerary for this year's MBM Cruising Club (June 16 and 17).

## The approach

A good tip when visiting somewhere new for the first time is to arrive just after low water. This way you get to see the nasty bits, and if for some reason you do gently take the bottom, it won't be too long before you float again.

With Saint-Malo it really does pay to do your homework first. When entering, head for the sea buoy then go towards Le Grand Jardin, which is the tall, red-topped lighthouse to port. >>>



Saint-Malo has the largest tidal range of anywhere in Europe so you should do your homework

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## Favourite haven Vauban

Vauban is accessed through a large, deep lock so you must ensure your boat is well prepared on entrance, with lots of fenders and long lines.

Lock-keepers sometimes lower looped lines for you to attach to your own, but this only occurs when they aren't too busy. Apart from these, and two ladders on each side, there is nothing else to attach to. There are 225 berths and there is no maximum length. Water, electricity and use of the amenities block are included in the

docking charges. **Facilities** Launderette, engine repair shop and chandler's **Contact** Harbourmaster, Erwan Le Calvez, on Tel: 0033 (0)2 99 56 51 91, mobile: 0033 (0)6 74 40 37 45, VHF Ch9 for marina, VHF Ch12 for lock or email: portplaisancevauban@saint-malo.cci

Be aware of Bunel, a nasty rock just awash at low water and marked by a westerly cardinal, which you should leave well to port. The disadvantage of arriving just after LW is that entrance to the marinas may be closed, but fortunately they all have waiting buoys.

### Where to stay

Saint-Malo can get busy in the height of summer and, as neither of the town's two marinas take reservations, it pays to have a back-up plan. Choose which

“Don't get caught out by Saint-Malo's huge tidal range, which can be up to 13m”

marina is best for you and aim for that one, but remain flexible. The smaller marina, **Port de Plaisance Vauban**, is only accessible through a lock that opens five times on each high tide. However, lying just a stone's throw from the Intra-Muros (the old town) it's well worth the restrictions. From here you can stroll through one of the gates in the city's walls and find yourself

immediately surrounded by shops, restaurants, bars and amusements. It is also conveniently close to the tourist office but it can get noisy during a busy summer season. The **Port de Plaisance des Sablons** is far larger, with berths for 1200 boats, 50 of which are set aside for visitors. This marina prefers to accept boats under the Intra-Muros (the old town) it's well with – the only restriction is that for a few hours each month the sill prohibits entry, but even then it is only at low



Marc Boughnères working in his **Marine d'Autrefois** ship model shop



A visit to the Brittany figurine souvenir shop, **Carre d'Art**, is a must



Marie Bozzetti painting her plaster of Paris models



Christine Defretin from **Vent de Voyage** makes bags from old sails

water springs. This purpose-built and fully facilitated marina is a half an hour walk from the old town but boasts its own beach and slipway as well as a good selection of shops, bars and restaurants closer at hand. This is also the centre for boat repairs with a huge array of marine services available. Marina staff in RIBs meet and greet you outside the marina and will direct you to a berth or place you on a holding buoy if there isn't sufficient water for you to pass across the sill.

### Old town

Saint-Malo's **Intra-Muros** is living proof that modern city planning doesn't have to involve concrete and tower blocks. Bombed to almost oblivion by US aircraft who wrongly targeted a part of Saint-Malo they did intend to hit, the city all but completely burned to the ground in 1944. When offered the choice of how they wanted restoration to proceed the inhabitants asked that their city be reinstated as it was, rather than be rebuilt to a modern plan. As a result, the walls were re-erected where they had breached and the fallen granite was used to erect taller and even more beautiful town houses, apartments and roads. And where new material was required this was sourced from re-opened quarries that had provided the original stones.

### Shopping

Restaurants, cafés, crêperies and bars abound and there are more than enough shops to keep everyone happy. Trendy, upmarket clothes shops jostle for position among souvenir shops – some just tacky, others slightly trashy, but they are fun to wander through just the same. Among the real gems is **Carre d'Art** run by Maria Bozzetti, an artist that creates beautifully hand-crafted plaster of Paris figurines and sculptures of Breton folk in their traditional garb.

Another artist tucked away in the cobbled side streets is Christine Defretin who runs **Vent de Voyage**, a shop with a twist on traditional sail makers' art. Here, Christine turns old sails into modern and useful items, from bags and briefcases, to log carriers and placemats.

## factfile

### VHF

- Saint-Malo Port Ch12
- All marinas on Ch9
- Rance Barrage Lock Ch13
- Ferries and other commercial craft standby on Ch16 and work on Ch12 inside the port boundaries

### Charts

- The Approaches to Saint-Malo, Admiralty chart number 2700
- Imray chart number C33B
- Useful French charts include, Approaches to Saint-Malo chart 7130, and Entrance to the Rance chart 4233, both from SHOM (Service Hydrographique et Océanique de la Marine)

### Pilots and guides

- North Brittany Pilot, by John Lawson (Imray) is a very useful guide
- The Reeds Nautical Almanac

### Slipways

There are a number of slipways around Saint-Malo



The ancient village of Cancale, founded in the 6th century and an old haven for pirates

Equally fascinating is **Marine d'Autrefois**, the store run by Marc Boughnères who has been making model boats since he was just eight years old. Fifty or so years later he is still making them, every one a stunning work of art. He accepts commissions and frequently makes scale models of boats for customers. Conveniently his shop is just a few doors away from the laundrette, so if you're waiting for your washing be sure to stop by.

### Food and drink

France is well known for its love of good food and wine and in one short street

(Rue de L'Orme) you'll find shops bursting with calories. Start at the top where a delicatessen (**Traiteur**) sells ready cooked meals and goodies that just require heating up back on board, or visit the butcher's next door, and sample something from proprietor **Thierry Le Roux's** meat counter. Across the road is a baker for that wonderful bread the French are famous for and next door to him is **Four Seasons**, a specialist greengrocer. And if that's not enough, head across the road to **La Maison du Beurre**. This shop, owned by Jean Yves Bordier, dates back to 1927 and is part museum, part

## TRIVIA

Saint-Malo is famous for its oysters from the nearby village of Cancale



The magnificent oyster beds as the tide falls – Cancale is said to be home to the best oysters in France





The view of the beautiful anchorage at Port Solidor at low tide, taken from Tour Solidor, which houses a nautical museum

shop and sells freshly churned butters, artisanal cheeses, fresh eggs and milk. Watching Philippe Rouxel use wooden paddles to form butter into small blocks is like watching visual poetry. When the ship's cook needs a night off there is an abundance of choice from simple crêperies to gourmet restaurants. If you crave a crêpe, head to **Le Corps de Garde** – it is the only eatery up on the ramparts and offers a stunning vista across the beach and out to sea. Owner Valerie Cabot and her chef, David Pinard, offer a selection of

both savoury and sweet fillings served inside divine buckwheat pancakes. For a more substantial meal the **L'Entre Deux Verres**, a small cosy bistro-style establishment, comes well recommended. Signature dishes include accra of cod served with a curried dipping sauce, cod casserole served with cockles and mussels, and a Moroccan tajine of lamb.

Also worth searching out is the tiny emporium of **Amorino**, owned by Serge Lucas, which serves tea, coffee, Italian ice creams and hot chocolate in

28 different flavours. But if you fancy something a little stronger then there are plenty of drinking establishments within the city's walls – if you're spoiled for choice, **La Belle Epoque** has a nice ambience.

#### Cruising and anchoring

There are lots of cruising options in Saint-Malo, for instance you can visit the nearby Fort National, built in 1689 by the great military architect, Vauban. Motor east, instead of west, and you will find the **Emerald Coast** is full of



Stop off for an ice cream or hot chocolate at Amorino

## Getting there

**Boat**  
Distance from Weymouth via Guernsey and Jersey is 139 miles and from the Solent is 150 miles

**Ferries**  
High-speed ferry services are available with Condor Ferries from Weymouth and Poole with a crossing time of four hours. These wave-piercing craft can carry cars and boats up to 49ft on trailers (longer by arrangement) as long as weight per axle doesn't exceed 15 tonnes. Visit [www.condorferries.com](http://www.condorferries.com)  
Brittany Ferries serves Saint-Malo from Portsmouth, and crossings take nine hours. For more visit [www.brittany-ferries.co.uk](http://www.brittany-ferries.co.uk)

**Airport**  
Dinard Saint-Malo Airport is about 14km from Saint-Malo. There is no bus or rail connection from the airport but a taxi takes 20 minutes and costs about €20.  
Dinard Saint-Malo Airport is served by Ryanair (from Stansted, East Midlands, Bristol and Birmingham) and Aurigny Air (from Manchester, Bristol, Stansted, Gatwick, Alderney and Jersey, all via Guernsey).



Moules et Frites is an unmissable local dish



Crêperie Le Corps de Garde makes delicious...



...savoury crêpes



Watch as butter is made here

nooks and crannies that are worth exploring. For starters **Les Rochers Sculptés de Rothéneuf** is an intriguing collection of stone gargoyles that overlooks the sea. Further round to the east is the ancient town of **Cancale**, once a famous haven for pirates but today it is considered the seafood capital of Brittany

Boats that can take the mud at low tide are useful if you are cruising east, although many of the bays and towns along the coast road have slipways.

At the mouth of the Rance, the anchorage off **Dinard** is appealing in settled weather, even if it is some way from the shore. Equally, the large sandy beach on the south side of **Île de Cézembre** is very attractive but it can get crowded with local craft eager to visit this island that was, until recently, off bounds because wartime bombs and mines hadn't been cleared away.

Another pretty anchorage can be found in the bay on the eastern side of the **Rance Estuary**, north of the Sablon Towers. Here, as in all local anchorages, you must be aware of the state of the tide.

At another anchorage at **Port Solidor**, a turreted tower houses a museum dedicated to sailors that have sailed around Cape Horn.

Once through the lock in the barrage the **River Rance** provides a huge number of anchorages – if the wind picks up there is a marina six miles up river at **Plouer** and one at **Lyvet**, close by Chatelier Lock. Plus boats that draw less than 5ft can use the marina at the pretty port of **Dinan**.

There is a great anchorage at **Saint Joun des Guérets**. Here you can tie the dingy up at the jetty and walk up

the hill to the **Auberge de la Porte**, ([www.fermedelaporte.com](http://www.fermedelaporte.com)), a working farm and restaurant with bedrooms.

The **Rance Barrage Lock** generally opens on the hour when the water level is at least 4m above chart datum. Information regarding the depth of water above the barrage is only available in French from the marinas in town. Water depth is usually maintained about 4m above chart datum between 7am and 8pm local

time, and at 8.5m for at least a four-hour period but if you want to use the lock you should call ahead. The lock won't open if the water isn't at the predicted height and tidal streams near the entrance can be strong. The white waiting buoys are free to use...

Saint-Malo is rich in facilities and the coast of Brittany offers so much more than just a transit port. This is an area that is crying out to be explored, so what are you waiting for?



The Fort National, built by the great military architect, Vauban, dates back to 1689

## Reader's view

Mike and Cathy Turner regularly cruised to Saint-Malo from St Peter Port, Guernsey, from 1999 to 2005

From Saint-Malo we used to cruise up the River Rance to Dinan, an old village with some very good restaurants. In our experience, Dinan offered economical mooring, all the required facilities, and it was a great place to meet up with other boaters. Coming back we usually stopped off at the Midway Marina, then on to Dinan before heading back to Saint-Malo. The trip usually took about a week and we wouldn't hesitate recommending it to other boaters. If you don't want to cruise all the way to Saint-Malo from the UK, you can easily get the ferry and visit the Rance that way.

Next month we explore the UK's best anchorages. If you would like to share your favourite anchorage with us or join the MBM Skippers' Club, email [sally\\_coffey@ipcmedia.com](mailto:sally_coffey@ipcmedia.com)



## Directory

### Food and drink shops

- Butcher: Boucherie Charcuterie 11 Rue de L'Orme Tel: 0033 (0)2 99 40 84 40
- Greengrocer: Four Seasons 10 Rue de L'Orme Tel: 0033 (0)2 94 84 23 ??
- Grocer: La Maison du Beurre: 9 Rue de L'Orme Tel: 0033 (0)2 23 18 09 07
- Traiteur: Plats Cuisines 13 Rue de L'Orme Tel: 0033 (0)2 99 40 84 40

### Bars and restaurants

- Amorino: 6 Rue Saint Vincent Tel: 0033 (0)2 99 20 85 13
- L'Entre Deux Verres: 7 Rue des Grands Degres Tel: 0033 (0) 2 99 40 18 91
- La Belle Epoque: 11 Rue de Dinan Tel: 0033 (0)2 99 40 82 23
- Le Corps de Garde: 3 Montee Notre Dame Tel: 0033 (0)2 99 40 91 48

### Shops

- Souvenirs, arts and crafts: Breagne Biscuits, Rue de Corne de Cerf Tel: 0033 (0)2 96 72 05 06; Carre d'Art, 6 Rue de Corne de Cerf Tel: 0033 (0)6 84 79 43 51; Vent de Voyage, 3 Rue Saint Thomas Tel: 0033 (0)2 99 20 17 91; Marine D'Autrefois, 5 Hall au Ble Tel: 0033 (0)2 23 18 08 99
- Brittany Tourism, Tel: 0033 (0)2 99 36 15 15 [www.brittanytourism.com](http://www.brittanytourism.com)



Anse des Bas Sablons and Port de Plaisance des Sablons from the beach

## Favourite haven

### Les Bas-Sablons

Marina Les Bas-Sablons is close to the commercial ferry terminal. As you approach look out for the illuminated board at the entrance which displays the depth over the sill. This marina is so innovative that they have not only equipped it with free pump-out

stations for grey, black and oily water, but the pontoons themselves are equipped with their own toilets to save a long walk up to the ablution block.

**Berthing** The marina offers a meet and greet service to visiting motorboats to help you find your berth, which is generally on a pontoon. At least 50 berths are reserved for visiting boats. Facilities include a good range of repair

shops, a bar, a restaurant, launderette, chandler's as well as hauling out with capable boatyard services. Fuel and pump-out facilities are available but only chip and pin credit cards will be accepted

**Contact** Harbourmaster, York Lucas, on Tel: 0033 (0)2 99 81 71 34, VHF Ch9 or email: [port.plaisance@ville-saint-malo.fr](mailto:port.plaisance@ville-saint-malo.fr)