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Family-friendly fun in South West France

James Marsh and his family discover sun, surf, sand and a whole lot more on a holiday to the Aquitaine coast of South West France...b2ap3_thumbnail_Beach.jpg Finding the right family holiday destination can be a real headache. Will there be sun? Is there a beach? What about activities for the kids? Is there enough pampering for the adults so that we feel we've had a holiday, too? Can we afford it? And on it goes. Well, we may just have found a solution. The Aquitaine coast of South West France is something the French have kept a bit to themselves over the years. There are wonderful, long sandy beaches with the crashing waves of the Atlantic rolling in. Go just 1km inland and green forests sit besides cool, refreshing lakes. And there are lots of activities to keep children happy. And the luxury at an affordable price? Well, that comes via [Madame Vacances](#). The British company has been around for 25 years and much of their business is in the Alps during the ski season. But a jewel in their crown is Moliets-et-Maâ. Moliets-et-Maâ (though everyone calls in Moliets) is a small village on France's Atlantic coast, about an hour's drive from Biarritz. Madame Vacances' holiday accommodation there is built loosely around a golf course that is nestled in a pine forest, right on the coast. My family, including Oscar (12) and Sophia (8), stayed in a prestige villa in the Villas La Clairière aux Chevreuils. It was a detached chalet-style bungalow with its own grounds and pool, backing onto woods where deer roam. It felt quiet in a very good way. Image: James Marsh Inside the villa, besides the spacious bedrooms and bathrooms, there's a big breakout area with comfy sofas, cable TV, free Wi-Fi and board games to while away the evenings. During August, prices start around £3,579 for a family of four for seven nights but there are much cheaper apartments in the same area from £599 for seven nights. Image: James Marsh Choose the top ten and you'll be welcomed with a hamper packed with goodies, fresh flowers, soft towels, lovely toiletries, and so on. And, when you check in, your children will be welcomed with ice creams as a treat at the end of a tiring, sticky journey. It starts your holiday on the right note. Image: James Marsh Although the golf course is at the centre of the resort, it isn't an intrusive presence. If you don't like golf, don't worry because you won't really notice it. But if you do like golf, you'll be impressed to know Golf de Moliets is regarded as one of the top 25 courses in Europe. There's an 18-hole, a 9-hole and a driving range – 18 holes costs from €58 a round. Image: Office de Tourisme Moliets et Maâ Associated with the golf club is the Moliets Tennis Academy, with outdoor grass and clay courts, and indoor clay and hard courts. So take your pick and work your game! Courts start at €12.50 an hour. One of the best ways to get around Moliets is by bike. There are lots of cycle paths and bikes can be hired from Loca-Velo from around €40 for a week. They didn't provide the fancy dress outfit Oscar is wearing, in case you're wondering... Image: James Marsh The beach is one of the main draws of the area. It's a 5-10 minute cycle ride from the villas and is about 4km long – the largest on France's Atlantic coast. The area nearest the car park can be busy, but take a short walk either way and it soon thins out. Image: James Marsh Before you hit the beach, you pass a stretch of shops and restaurants including friendly pizzeria Le Transat, La Cave aux Moules that serves mussels in a myriad of different ways and seafood specialists Hotel Grille l'Océan. Surfing is huge here and we took a lesson with Ecole de Surf du Golf. The instructors know the area so well they'll find the best spot for your level. We all got up briefly (and fell off again!) but it was great fun. Prices start at €35 for a two-group lesson, including instructor, wetsuit, board and insurance. Image: James Marsh Of course, sometimes the ocean is flat. That could be a good time to hit the skate park in nearby Vieux-Boucau-les-Bains. We took a lesson with Julien Polisset. This email address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it. who is cool, funny and bilingual in the language of skate. It cost €25 per child for 90mins, but both Sophia and Oscar had a real sense of achievement by the end. Image: James Marsh Another activity away from the beach is the tree top Adrenaline Parc. Here you climb, swing and jump through the trees, up to 20m in the air. Thanks to a metal harness and clip, you can't fall. At €15 for three hours, it's great value. The routes through the trees are colour-coded from green to black in difficulty, and there is something here for all ages. I loved seeing my boy cycle through the air as if in ET. And he seemed to love my ungainly 20ft jump – OK, flop – onto a huge air bag. For something a little calmer, we tried stand-up paddle boarding on the freshwater Lac D'Azur, a 15 minute-drive from Moliets. We hired the boards from SUP



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Land and, once across the lake, were led up a small stream that flowed underneath a canopy of trees, dotted every few metres with wild flowers. A wonderfully gentle way to mess around on the water.Of course, one of the joys of France is the food – and near to Lac D'Azur is Auberge du Soleil. This small restaurant was a favourite of France's President François Mitterrand, back in the day when animals lived in the yard before turning up on the menu. Things have changed since then and it now offers delicate, light versions of classic French dishes (but served in a way that doesn't put children off!).
Image: James Marsh
We had a great time in Moliets with Madame Vacances, and the children just loved it. So, we've booked to go back again in two months. This could become a habit...
When we went to Moliets-et-Maâ in Aquitaine, Madame Vacances decided to see who had more fun – me or the kids? Here's a film of some challenges they set us. Guess who came out best?!
The nearest airports are Bordeaux (90mins drive) or Biarritz (60mins drive), with flights from Gatwick, Stansted, Heathrow, Luton, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast, Liverpool, Bristol and Southampton. Car hire is recommended to make the most of the area.
To find out more about the family holidays offered by Madame Vacances and to make a booking, go to madamevacances.com
James Marsh is managing director of specialist children's communication agency B3 Creative

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