

Sail away with me

Feel like a spontaneous getaway for a gourmet lunch in France?
Oui, says **food's** Gemma Chilton

'Darling, shall we pop over to France for lunch?' It's the kind of statement we Antipodeans fantasize is entirely commonplace in Old Blighty.

Ok, so perhaps before actually moving here I may have overestimated just how common or practical this kind of Euro-hopping lifestyle might be. But with the distance from Plymouth to Brittany being only a tenth of that to Sydney's nearest neighbour, New Zealand, it is certainly possible. And I do love French food.

Enter Brittany Ferries Gourmet Cruise offer – an all-inclusive overnight getaway to Roscoff, the sleepy seaside village in Brittany in north west France.

Scheduled to depart Plymouth at 8.45pm (or 20:45, as we say on the continent), we boarded Pont-Aven, Brittany Ferries' flagship liner, with ample time to settle in to our ensuite cabin before getting stuck into a four-course gourmet meal at the boat's restaurant, Le Flora.

If putting the words ferry and buffet in one sentence make you cringe, then you've clearly never eaten at Le Flora.

The main course is a la carte, but the starters, desserts and cheeses are irresistibly laid out. Mountains of fresh langoustine were a highlight, while the fillet steak arrived cooked to perfection – and then there was dessert. Who doesn't revert back to their bright-eyed four-year-old selves when stood before a heaving bounty of colourful sweets? Let them eat cake, indeed.

Unfortunately, having misread the brochure (and perhaps overindulged in cheese) the following morning's 08:00 arrival time hadn't quite sunk in, and so we were sleeping cosily to the rock of the waves and rumble of the engine – our clocks reading 7am (British time) – when we awoke to find pretty Roscoff outside our porthole window ... and then a knock at the door informed us we had about three minutes to dress and pack and be in our car ready for departure. While this is where I should be telling you about the lovely continental breakfast included in your Gourmet Cruise package, what I *can* say is, if dinner is anything to go by, then breakfast shouldn't be missed. Just remember to set your watch to French time.

Petit déjeuner was instead enjoyed with the locals –

THE ESSENTIALS The Gourmet Cruise to Roscoff leaves Plymouth on Thursdays and returns on Friday evening.



**AVAILABLE UNTIL JUNE 25
AND AGAIN IN THE AUTUMN**



croissant, coffee and freshly squeezed orange juice in a small cafe. It was a grey and drizzly day in Roscoff, which shares some of its history with Brittany Ferries – the latter was established in 1972 following the provision of the deepwater port in Roscoff. We hit the streets after breakfast to explore the shops, narrow cobbled lanes and the local botanical gardens of Roscoff (which feature, somewhat ironically, rather a lot of Australian flora).

This was all ahead of the true hero of our getaway – a three course lunch booked at L'Ecume des Jours. Translated roughly to "seafoam of the days", the restaurant is named after a 1947 French novel by Boris Vian. The interior is all timber and clean lines – classic nautical meets French colonial, with wide windows overlooking the view, reflected onto a large mirror on the opposite wall. The atmosphere was cosy but sophisticated – as if you'd been invited to a rainy day lunch at your chic French friend's seaside house. Hey, that could happen.

And the food. I'm sure it's no coincidence words like delicious (*délicieux*) and delectable (*délectable*) have their origins across the channel. *Bon appetit*.

An apéritif of the lightest, ziest champagne was served

with an amuse bouche of white asparagus mousse and a taste of tuna tartare with seaweed. We then shared entrées of fresh oysters and crab with seasonal artichoke and piquillo peppers, seaweed and crispy rice, followed by mains of roasted monkfish with sweet potato, white asparagus and lobster juice. Dessert was a mango and basil concoction that matched the flavour brought to the dining room by the French colonial-inspired framed paintings on the sandstone walls.

Happily full (our scraped-clean plates by no means reflecting the French paradox or any classy continental restraint), we ventured on to the right-hand side of the road to explore a little further afield, before boarding our ferry for a 16:30 departure. We had another ensuite cabin, which meant a much-needed *siesta* (wait, that's Spanish ... alright then, food coma) before exploring the entertainment on offer ahead of our 21:30 arrival on UK shores. This included a cinema, cocktail bar, free Wi-Fi or simply a good book and a view of the endless horizon – plus the occasional dash outside for a blast of salty sea air and the sound of waves crashing against the hull.

Now ... who's in the mood for paella?

PRICES START AT
£92 per person



A £20 supplement is charged for lunch at L'Ecume des Jours. The other lunch option is at Les Alizés and offers the same views and quality French food.

CONTACT
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www.brittanyferries.com/gourmet