



Le Moulin de Saint Martin

B&Bs

in Ile de France

by Marianne Lohse

Longing to get away from the city for a brief excursion *à la campagne*? No need to travel far to find forest walks, country produce and cozy fireside evenings. Just outside Paris, Gîtes de France in four *départements* of the Ile-de-France region offers a multitude of delightful B&Bs. And if you travel by train or RER suburban train, your hosts will pick you up at the nearest station.

LE MOULIN DE SAINT-MARTIN

A peaceful stream, opalescent light, silvery mist rising to the treetops, canals and medieval lanes—there's no end to the charms of the Vallée du Grand Morin, whose singular beauty has always attracted artists, from Camille Corot to Edward Steichen. At the entrance to Crécly-la-Chapelle, a small town built on several small arms of the Grand Morin River—sometimes called the Venice of the Brice—in the *département* of Seine-et-Marne just 26 miles east of Paris, the Moulin de Saint-Martin is particularly popular with English and American visitors.

Visitors who prefer not to drive can take the RER to Marne-la-Vallée, then the 59 bus to Crécly-la-Chapelle, where owner Bernard Gourbaud will meet them. Gourbaud's grandfather bought the property, which includes a 16th-century mill set on an island, in 1933. There are just two rooms: Les Anges on the first floor and Les Nymphes on the second. The decor is quietly elegant, with toile de Jouy fabrics, 18th-century furniture and beautiful tapestries. Gourbaud and his wife Agnès offer a *table d'hôtes* in the evening (delicious chicken with *moutarde de Meaux*) and in good weather breakfast—

which includes *confitures* of pumpkin, pineapple or kiwi—is served on a terrace filled with exuberant vegetation.

A stay here is recommended not only for contemplative souls, but also for hikers: the GR1, one of the *Grandes Randonnées* trails, passes right in front of the mill located on the property. The area is also a paradise for hunting and fishing, especially for pike. There are also boat rides and painting classes available, along with visits to the Créçois countryside or Disneyland Paris. 7 route de Saint Martin, Voulangis, Crécly-la-Chapelle, 01.64.63.69.90. Doubles from €70. www.gites-de-france.com.

LE CLOS DES FONTAINES

At Nainville-les-Roches, in the Essonne *département*, the estate that once belonged to tennis champion and pop singer Yannick Noah is now a B&B well worth a detour. It's



The Myrtille room of La Ferrière de Saint Martin

VILLA 1865

The French poet Charles Péguy (1873–1914) stayed in this villa, in Saint Witz in the Val d'Oise, just before his death. Carefully restored, the house retains its 19th-century facade and its lovely proportions, while the interior has been decorated with an eye to comfort and modern minimalism by owner Bruno Guatieri, using old marble, delicate patinas, lacquered metalwork and silk curtains that beautifully filter the light. On the first floor, the Charles Péguy room plays on contrasts, with wide black and white stripes; the two rooms on the second floor, L'Antique and L'Alcôve, are done in soft shades of gray. Bathrooms have been fitted with designer basins and footed bathtubs. Most of the furnishings are Italian, reflecting Guatieri's origins and his admiration for his grandmother Brigida, "a formidable cook, born in Molise, the truffle country near Abruzzo." Guatieri, who cooks dinner for his guests every evening and happily offers cooking classes, seems to have inherited her culinary talent—judging by his seafood ravioli, his Sorrentina lasagne and his panna cotta—as well as an Italian sense of generosity and conviviality.

Saint Witz is easily accessible from Paris, just 19 miles away on the A1 autoroute. You can also take the RER to Fosses or Roissy. But you'll feel like you've traveled much farther, deep into *la campagne*, when you visit the nearby forest of Montmorency and the towns of Senlis and especially Chantilly, with its wonderful château housing the rich Musée Condé, and the Grandes Ecuries, the handsome stables with live equestrian performances.

3 rue Charles Péguy, Saint Witz,
01.34.68.30.98. Doubles from €85.
www.villa1865.com



Le Clos des Fontaines

LE CLOS SAINT NICOLAS

Set in a park of 100-year-old trees, this house in the pretty village of Neauphle-le-Château, in the Yvelines department, has a proud look, with its Napoleon III facade and its conservatory, an ideal spot for breakfast. The Clos Saint Nicolas offers three upstairs rooms, full of charm, accessible by a separate staircase. Marie-France Drouelle has used color to liven up the rooms—red, yellow and green—and the furniture is a harmonious mixture of old and new (including TV and wireless computer access). All three rooms open onto a

set in more than an acre of gardens with an immense copper beech tree, a rare weeping cedar and, of course, a tennis court, but also a pool, sauna, *boules* court and—how can you resist?—a trampoline at your disposal. Geneviève Soton, a former credit manager for a large company, decided to change her life when she discovered this country home adjacent to an exquisite village church and returned to the pleasures of nature. Eighteenth-century farm buildings house five guest rooms named for spices, each with

its own entrance and pleasantly decorated. Just 30 miles from Paris, guests can enjoy wine-tastings or watercolor painting, bike along a Seine towpath, or visit Milly-la-Forêt, the royal city of Etampes and the Musée Volant de l'Amicale Jean-Baptiste Salis in Cerny-la-Ferté-Alais, whose collection of vintage planes is one of the most astonishing in Europe.

3 place de l'Eglise, Nainville-les-Roches,
01.64.98.40.56. Doubles from €90.
www.closdesfontaines.com



comfortable little salon decorated with early 19th-century portraits, where Parisians guests mingle with American, Dutch or Russian visitors. Since the village is only 22 miles from Paris, "many of our visitors come on the train from the Gare Montparnasse, especially to visit Versailles," says Drouelle, "but we also show them Montfort L'Amaury, Dampierre and Port Royal."

33 rue Saint Nicolas, Neauphle-le-Château, 01.34.89.76.10. Doubles from €90.

www.clos-saint-nicolas.com ■

IMAGE UPGRADE

Gîtes de France, created in 1955 and well-known in France for its network of rural vacation rentals, campsites and inexpensive *chambres d'hôtes* in private homes, is modernizing its image: a new logo—as a symbol of welcome, a figure in silhouette opening shutters—along with a new advertising campaign and a firm desire to attract more foreign tourists, who accounted for 20 percent of clients in 2009.

In an attempt to dust off its somewhat antiquated and blue-collar image, the network's new *chambres d'hôtes "de charme"* must meet strict standards to earn their *épis*, ears of corn, the rating symbol for Gîtes—the highest rating is five *épis*. In total, Gîtes de France, which brings in some €450 million a year, now offers some 58,000 accommodations of various types, and each year the group adds many more. Comfort and a warm welcome are their trademarks. www.gites-de-france.com



Le Clos Saint Nicolas

The Antique room at Villa 1865

