

Culinary Terms

La cuisine Bourgeoise. Straightforward home cooking using good produce and invariably done well. The repertoire often seems to revolve around 20 to 30 dishes – wherever you are in France: *terrines, escalope, jambon, côte de veau, côte d'agneau, entrecôte, gigot, poulet* and so on.

La cuisine Régionale. Self-explanatory. Alas, authentic regional cooking continues to wither away at an alarming rate. (*Cuisine du terroir*: cooking of the local area, including both produce and ancient recipes.)

La haute cuisine (classical cooking). A repertoire of hundreds of rich sauces and garnishes combined with carved-in-stone recipes, techniques and preparation, developed over the last 200 years, make this style of cooking France's greatest contribution to the culinary arts. Many chefs bring a lighter, less rich, more modern touch to classical cuisine – described in this guide as neo-classical cooking.

La cuisine moderne. Dishes prepared to preserve natural flavours and with the simplest of sauces. Simplicity, and the quality and purity of produce, are essential keys. Improvisation, too, plays a vital part.

Regional Cuisine

In the notes which follow I examine first the French regions with Atlantic seaboard, starting in the north and finishing at the Spanish frontier; then the regions bordering Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and the Mediterranean; and, finally, the regions of inland France.

North Fish takes pride of place, freshly landed at the ports of Boulogne, Calais, and smaller ones like Le Crotoy. *Sole, turbot, maquereaux, barbue, lotte de mer, flétan, harengs, merlan, moules, crêvettes*; all appear on menus. So do soups and stews, many with root vegetables: *waterzooï* – fish or chicken stew; *hochepot* – meat and vegetable *pot-au-feu*; *carbonnade* – beef stew with beer. Leeks are super; enjoy *flamiche aux poireaux* (*quiche*-like pastry). Seek out the *hortillonages* (water-gardens) of Amiens and their fine vegetables. Try *gaufres* (yeast waffles) and *ficelles* (variously stuffed pancakes). Beer, too, is good.

Normandy Land of cream, apples and the pig. Vallée d'Auge gives its name to many dishes, including chicken, veal and fish; the term means cream, apples or cider, or apple brandy (Calvados) have been added. Cider is first class. Pork products are everywhere: *andouilles* – smoked tripe sausages, eaten cold; *andouillettes* – small grilled tripe sausages. Fish are superb: *sole à la Normande, à la Dieppoise, à la Fécampoise, à la Havraise* (the last three are ports); *plats de fruits de mer*; shrimps; oysters; *bulots* (whelks); mussels. Enjoy tripe; *ficelles* – pancakes; cow's milk cheeses; rich cream; butters, both salty and sweet; salad produce and potatoes from Caux; exquisite apple tarts; *canard à la Rouennaise*; and fish stews.

Brittany Fish and shellfish are commonplace: lobsters, *huîtres, langoustes*, crabs, of varying sorts, *moules*, prawns, shrimps, *coquilles St-Jacques*; to name just a few. Enjoy *cotriade* – a Breton fish stew with potatoes and onions; *galettes* – buckwheat flour pancakes with savoury fillings; *crêpes de froment* – wheat flour pancakes with sweet fillings; *far Breton* – a batter mixture with raisins; *gâteau Breton* – a mouthwatering concoction; *agneau de pré-salé* – from the salt marshes near Mont-St-Michel (fine omelettes are also made there); and *poulet blanc Breton*. Brittany is one of France's market-gardens: enjoy artichokes, cauliflowers, cabbages, onions and strawberries.

Charentes/Vendée western half of Poitou-Charentes. La Rochelle is a famed fishing port; consequently fish predominates. Oysters are glorious (see *Huîtres* in Glossary). The port of La Cotinière, on the island of Oléron, is renowned for its shrimps. Challans, in the Vendée, is reputed for its quality ducks. Charentes is second to none for butter, goat's milk cheeses, Charentais melons, Cognac, cabbages, mussels, *mojette* (white beans) and salt-marsh lamb from the Marais Poitevin.

Southwest One of the great larders of France; can be divided into several distinct areas. From the countryside that lies in a semicircle to the north-west, west, south and south-east of Bordeaux comes: lamb from Pauillac; oysters (*gravettes*) from Arcachon; eels (*pibales*); beef (*entrecôte Bordelaise* is the bestknown); onions and shallots; *cèpes*; *alose* (shad); and *lamproie* – lamprey (eel-like fish). The Garonne Valley is one vast orchard: try prunes from Agen; peaches; pears and dessert grapes.

South of the Garonne is **Gascony**: famed for *foie gras* (duck and goose); *confit* (preserved meat from both birds); jams and fruits; and Armagnac. Try a *floc* (Armagnac and grape juice).

To the south and west of Gascony are **Béarn** and the **Landes**. From the latter came *palombes* and *ortolans*, ducks and chickens. Among traditional Béarn specialities are *garbue* – the most famous of vegetable soups; *poule au pot* – the chicken dish given its name by Henri IV; *tourin, ouliat* and *cousinette* (*cousinat*). See the Southwest for further details.

West of Béarn is **Basque** country: tuna, anchovies, sardines and salmon (from Béarn also) are great; Bayonne ham, *piments* (peppers), *piperade*, *toro* (fish stew) and *gâteau Basque*.

Champagne-Ardenne & Ile de France Many of the specialities listed earlier in the North appear in the former, renowned for its potatoes and turkeys. In the Ardenne you'll enjoy smoked hams, sold in nets; *sanglier*; *marcassin*; and red and white cabbages. West of Verdun, at Ste-Menehould, try *pieds de cochon* (pig's trotters); *petits gris* (snails); and the many differing sweets and sugared almonds (Verdun is famous for them). Troyes is renowned for pork and *andouillettes*.

Regional specialities and produce are all but non-existent in the Ile de France. Look out for cherries from Poissy, beans from Arpajon and tomatoes from Montlhéry. Enjoy *pâtés* and *terrines* and tempting *pâtisseries* and *galettes*.

Alsace There is a strong German influence in much of the cooking; pork, game, goose and beer are common. *Foie gras* (fattened goose liver) is superb. So, too, is a range of tarts; *flammekuchen* – flamed open tart; and some with fruit (*linzertorte* – raspberry or bilberry open tart); jams, fruit liqueurs and *eaux-de-vie* (see Alsace wines). Stomach-filling *choucroute* and local sausages are on most menus; as are *kougelhopf*, *beckenoffe* and *lewerknepfle* (see Alsace specialities). Enjoy *tourte Alsacienne* – pork pie. Use *winstubs* (wine bars).

Lorraine on the north-west borders is known for its *madeleines* (tiny sponge cakes), *macarons*, mouthwatering *quiche Lorraine*, fruit tarts, omelettes and *potée*.

Jura This is dairy country; witness the numerous excellent cheeses encountered in the region. Try *Jésus de Morteau* – a fat pork sausage smoked over pine and juniper; *brési* – wafer-thin slices of dried beef; and many local hams. *Morilles* and other fungi are common; so are freshly-caught trout and other freshwater fish.

Regional Specialities

POITOU-CHARENTES

Bouilliture (Bouillette) a freshwater eel stew with shallots and prunes in Sauvignon white wine

Boulaigou thick sweet or savoury pancake

Bréjaude cabbage, leek and bacon soup

Cagouilles (also called **Lumas**) snails from the Charentes

Casseron en matelote squid in red wine sauce with garlic and shallots

Cèpes fine, delicate, flap mushrooms; please do try them

Chaudrée a ragout of fish cooked in white wine, shallots and butter

Chevrettes local name for *crevettes* (shrimps)

Clafoutis pancake batter, poured over fruit (usually black cherries), and then baked; another treat you must not miss

Embeurrée de chou white-heart cabbage, cooked in salted water, crushed and served with butter

Farcidure a dumpling – either poached or sautéed

Farci Poitevin a *pâté* of cabbage, spinach and sorrel, encased by cabbage leaves and cooked in a *bouillon*

Migourée a sort of *chaudrée*

Mique a stew of dumplings

Mogette (Mojette) small pulse beans in butter and cream

Mouclade mussels cooked in wine, egg yolks and cream; can be served with some Pineau des Charentes

Oysters for an explanation of *les claires, belons, gravettes, marennnes* and other terms see the *Glossary of Menu Terms* (under *Huitres*)

Soupe aux fèves des Marais soup of crushed broad beans with bread, sorrel, chervil and butter

Soupe de moules à la Rochelaise soup of various fish, mussels, saffron, garlic, tomatoes, onions and red wine

Sourdons cockles from the Charentes

Tartisseaux fritters

Tourtou thick buckwheat flour pancake

SAVOIE

Farcement (Farçon Savoyard) potatoes baked with cream, eggs, bacon, dried pears and prunes; a hearty stomach filler

Féra a freshwater lake fish

Fondue hot melted cheese and white wine

Gratin Dauphinois a classic potato dish with cream, cheese and garlic

Gratin Savoyard another classic potato dish with cheese and butter

Lavaret a freshwater lake fish, like salmon

Longeole a country sausage

Lotte a burbot, not unlike an eel

Omble chevalier a char, it looks like a large salmon trout

Tartiflette potato, bacon, onions and Reblochon cheese

SOUTHWEST

Besugo daurade – sea-bream

Chorizos spicy sausages

Confit de canard (d'oie) preserved duck meat (goose)

Cousinette (Cousinat) vegetable soup

Echassier a wading bird of the Landes

Garbure (Garbue) vegetable soup with cabbage and ham bone

Gâteau Basque a shallow, custard pastry – often with fruit fillings

Grattons (Graisserons) a *mélange* of small pieces of rendered down duck, goose and pork fat; served as an appetiser – very filling

Hachua beef stew

Jambon de Bayonne raw ham, cured in salt. Served as paper-thin slices

Lamproie eel-like fish; with leeks, onions and red Bordeaux wine sauce

Lou-kenkas small, spicy sausages

Loubine (Louvine) grey mullet (like a sea-bass)

Ortolan a small bird (wheatear) from the Landes

Ouillat (Ouliat) Pyrénées soup; onions, tomatoes, goose fat, garlic

Palombes (Salmis de) wild doves and wood pigeons from the Landes and Béarn, sautéed in red wine, ham and mushrooms

Pastiza see *Gâteau Basque*

Ramereaux ring doves

Salda a thick cabbage and bean soup

Tourin (Tourain) see *Ouillat*. (*Touron*: see Languedoc-Roussillon)

Tourtère Landaise a sweet of Agen prunes, apples and Armagnac

Ttoro (Ttorro) a Basque fish stew

Regional Cheeses (Vache cow; Chèvre goat; Brebis ewe)

ALSACE

Cow's milk

Carré-de-l'Est soft, edible white rind, made in a small square; milder than Camembert. Bland taste. Available all year

Géardmer same cheese as *Gérômé*, alternative name

Gérômé soft, gold-coloured cheese, a little more solid than Munster, often covered with fennel or caraway. Made as a thick disk. Spicy taste and at its best in summer and autumn. Good with full-bodied red wines

Munster soft, gold-coloured, stronger taste than *Gérômé*, made as a small disk. Munster *laitier* (made by commercial dairies) available all year; *fermier* (made by farms) at its best in summer and autumn. Try them with Traminer wines. Munster *au cumin* (with caraway seeds)

BERRY-BOURBONNAIS

Cow's milk

Chambérat fruity-tasting; made as a flat, pressed disk

Goat's milk

Chevrotin du Bourbonnais a truncated cone and creamy tasting. Best in summer and autumn. Also know as **Conne**

Crézancy-Sancerre small ball, similar taste to Chavignol (see Loire cheeses). **Santranges** is a related, similar cheese

Graçay nutty, soft cheese; made as a dark, blue-coloured cone

BRITTANY

Cow's milk

Campénéac a pressed, uncooked cheese. Strong smell and made in thick disks. Good all the year

Meilleraye de Bretagne at its best in summer. Light smell, ochre-yellow rind, made in large squares

Nantais dit Curé (Fromage du Curé) (Nantais) strong smell, supple, small square of cheese. Good all the year