

Five Things You Didn't Know About Cognac

Famous for its namesake spirit, the city of Cognac is pleasantly sprawled across both sides of the Charente River. Unsurprisingly, one of the city's main attractions is the [Museum of the Arts of Cognac](#), where you can learn about the full manufacturing process. However, there's more to this charming city than brandy.

1. A King's birthplace

An important patron of the arts who brought Leonardo da Vinci, as well as other Italian artists, to France, King Francis I (cruelly named "*François du Grand Nez*", or "Francis of the Big Nose"!) was a native of Cognac. These days, visitors to the city can enjoy numerous tours at the King's birthplace, the [Chateau Royale de Cognac](#). It's now the house of Baron Otard cognac, so all tours end with a tasting – in case you needed another reason to go!

2. An "English-Style" garden

Though it largely replaced the more formal, symmetrical *jardin à la française* as the most common style of European park in the 18th century, very few *jardins à l'anglaise* (which draw their inspiration from an idyllic view of nature) are open to the public in France. The [Jardin Publique de Cognac](#) covers seven hectares, and is the result of the purchase by the state of two mansions, the *Otard La Grange* (now the *Hotel de Ville* or City Hall) and Dupuy D'Angeac (now the city's [Musée d'Art et d'Histoire](#)). With its maze of twisting rivers, tranquil lake, and delightful follies, it's easy to while away a summer's day exploring, wandering or relaxing in this pleasant park.

3. Home of the glass-blowing machine

Given Cognac's most famous export, it's unsurprising that the major development in the glassmaking industry of the 19th Century happened in this city. Traditionally, cognac had been transported in oak barrels, but when clients began asking for glass bottles, naturally several glassworks opened in the area. Claude Boucher, the son of a poor farming family who had worked in the glassworks since his infancy, made his name in 1878 by patenting his *chef-d'oeuvre*, a machine which mechanised the glassblowing industry and allowed the production of 50,000 bottles per day.

4. Blues-fan's paradise

Since 1994, every year in early July, thousands of music-lovers descend on Cognac for its [annual Blues festival](#). With over 40 artists, 50 concerts, and 6 stages, the festival mostly takes place in the picturesque *Jardin Publique de Cognac*. However, musicians also take to the streets of the city itself, creating a real festival atmosphere.

5. Not just about brandy!

While Cognac's most famous spirit needs no introduction, another drink owes much to this Charente city. In 1997, *Maitre de Chai* (Cellar Master) and Cognac native, Francois Thibault was approached by an American businessman, to create a new brand of vodka. Using his expertise in cognac-making, Thibault created Grey Goose. Voted the "best-tasting in the world", Grey Goose vodka is produced using wheat from Picardy, northern France, and distilled in the same area before being transported to Cognac for blending and bottling. The water used is from a spring right below the factory, calcium-rich because of the natural limestone, so every sip of Grey Goose is a real taste of the Charente!

There's plenty to do and see in Cognac, and this list is just a small selection. For history-enthusiasts, music-fans and vodkas-drinkers alike, there's much more to Cognac than cognac.