

La Rochelle, France's most easy-on-the-eye Atlantic port, has been an attractive place to the English for hundreds of years. However, these days, it's not fashionable to come by warship.

If you are passing through, here are some strolls to get you acquainted with the town, but don't forget your sunglasses. Thanks in part to the Gulf Stream, it has similar levels of sunshine to the French Riviera but it's also built out of brilliant white limestone.



Strolls

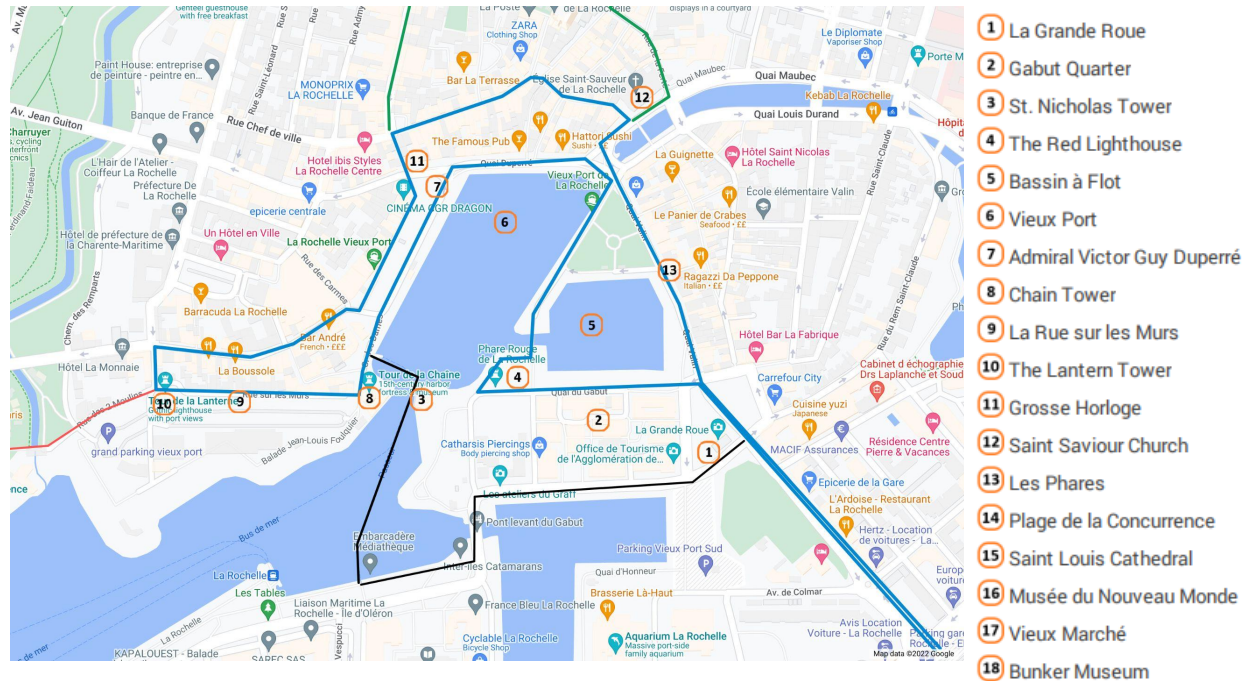
- **[A three tower tour around town \(3.2km blue\)](#)**
- **[Beach stroll \(1.5km red\)](#)**
- **[A longer way back via the New World \(1.2km green\)](#)**

Interactive Map

Here is a [link to a map](#) that can help you find your bearings.

A three tower tour around town (3.2km blue)

This walk will take you around the main sights of the town and you can even get a little boat ride back.



Leave the station and walk straight ahead down Avenue du Général de Gaulle. If you're a fairground fan and want an overview of the town, you could hop into a capsule of [La Grande Roue](#) - La Rochelle's Ferris wheel (1).

If you would rather have your views to be lower, older and stationary, you may prefer the view from the [Tour de Saint-Nicolas](#), one of three towers protecting the old harbour.

To get there, we can go left along the Quai du Gabut which separates the marina (Bassin à Flot) from the seafood joints and shops of the regenerated Gabut quarter (2) - next time I go there, I'll check out the [Moule Shop](#). The far end of the quarter is in its original state and has become something of a hip street art project.

[St Nicolas Tower](#) (3), along with its neighbour on the other side of the water, gives the harbour a reassuringly solid feel, despite it being on a slight wonk. The origins of the

tower remain a mystery with some saying it was built by the fairy [Mélusine](#) who dropped a load of stones as she flew past. That might help explain why the building is on a lean.

The tower across the water is the Tour de la Chainé (chain tower) and between the two a chain could be hauled up to protect the harbour.

Let's carry on around the harbour to the other tower which we can do by walking past the red lighthouse (4) and along the Quai de Carenage which runs between the harbour and the Bassin à Flot. If we had been walking here in 1863, we might have seen a strange shadowy figure beneath the water with a stream of bubbles coming out of its rear. That would have been the [plongeur](#) - an early submarine experimenting with compressed air to power it.

Continue walking along the quay of the old port (6). At the far corner we pass the Grosse Horloge, which we'll head through on the way back.



St Nicolas tower - Google



Chain tower - Google

The statue in front is of [Admiral Victor Guy Duperré](#) (7). At a time when Britain ruled the waves, he managed to buck the trend and inflict a rare [defeat](#). His talents as a commander were also put to good use by Charles X in the [Invasion of Algiers](#) leading to 130 years of French colonial rule, something he advised against at the time. Perhaps it might have been better all round if he had actually been listened to...

The Tour de la Chaine (8) as the name suggests was used to manage a chain across the harbour to protect it from enemies, but it was also used to store gunpowder. During an uprising in the 1600s, someone put a match to it and it was transformed into an open-top tower and only got a new lid in the 1950's.

Go up the steps by the tower and on to the wall (Rue sur les Murs)(9) that leads to the third tower, the Tour de la Lanterne (10) - so named after the light that guided ships. It has also been put to use as a prison and has graffiti made by forlorn English prisoners in the 18th century and a backgammon board carved into the floor by someone in room 4.



Admiral Duperré & Grosse Horloge - Google



Lantern tower - Google

If you fancy a paddle, you could walk down to the beach (marked in red on the map) otherwise let's head back down Rue des Fagots and then turn right on to the café-lined Rue St Jean du Pérot which takes us back to the harbour-front.

If you have seen enough sights and you want to get a bit nautical, there is a ferry ([Bus de Mer](#)) running from the quay to the other side of the water (marked in black on the map) every few minutes.

On the way back, let's go through the arch of the Grosse Horloge (Big Clock)(11), with its rather small clock face and huge 2.2 ton bell, which (subject to multiple facelifts) has been the grand entrance to the town since the 12th Century.

If you have plenty of time and a spring in your step, you could take a look further into town by following the green route below.

Otherwise, let's turn right onto Rue du Temple. The Knights Templar and the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem put La Rochelle on the map for pilgrims wanting to make for the Holy Land and as a result helped make it the largest port on the Atlantic.

The street is now home to an alternative holy grail - shopping.

Turn right on to Rue Saint-Sauveur which leads to the church of Saint-Sauveur (12) with its mish-mash façade. The remaining bits of ornate gothic arches give a glimpse of what the current more classical facade replaced.



Saint-Sauveur - Google

Cross over the road (and consequently the canal) and back along Quai Valin with its limestone lighthouse (13), past La Grande Roue and to the station marked out by its grand tower.

Beach stroll (1.5km red)

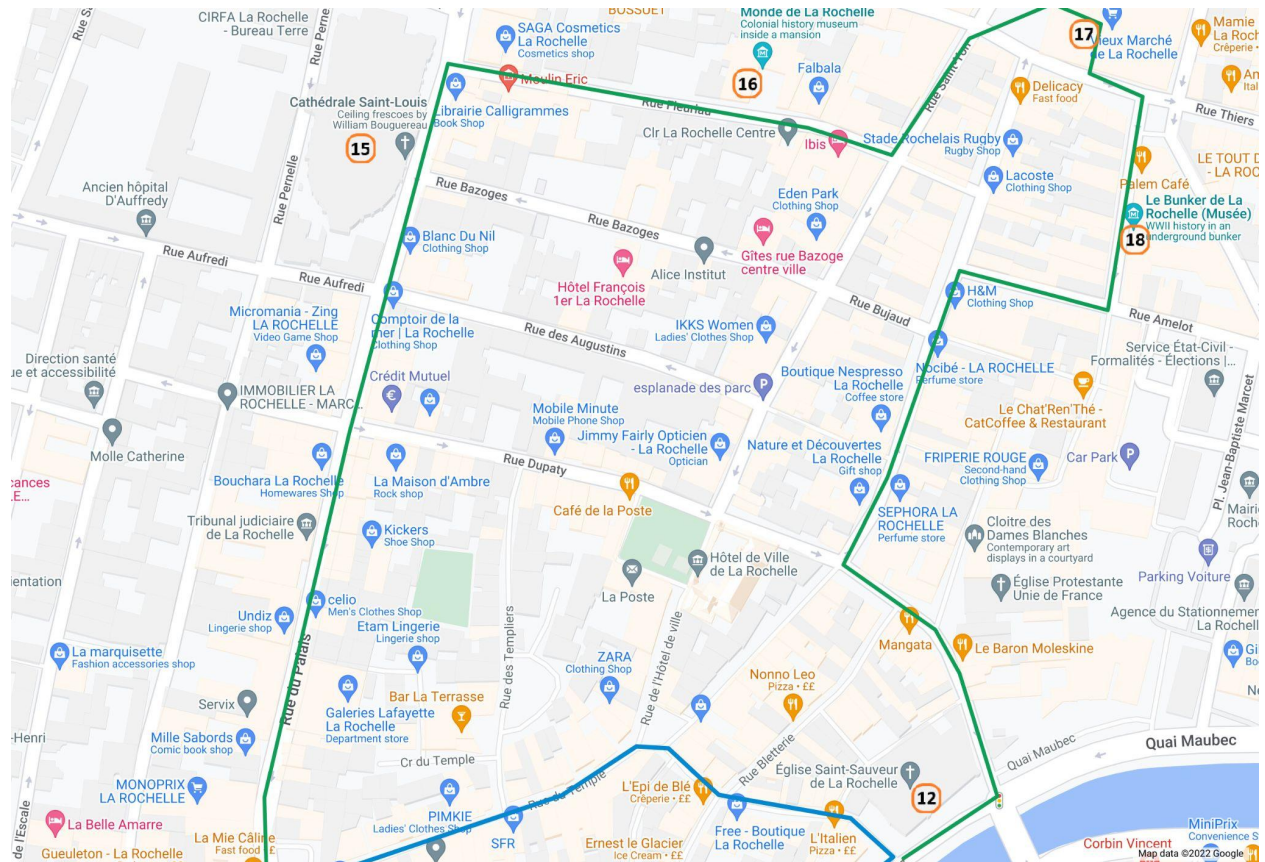
While there are some wonderful beaches *near* La Rochelle, if you are tight for time but want to get your feet wet, why not take this little stroll?



From the Tour de la Lanterne, follow the Rue des 2 Moulins which will take you round the edge of the park and down to the beachfront where there is a snackbar (14). When you have finished your sandcastle, head back the way you came.

A longer way back via the New World (1.2km green)

On this walk you can get to see a little more of the town behind the front.



Passing through the Grosse Horloge, continue straight on down Rue du Palais until you get to the Saint-Louis Cathedral (15) which is worth a nosey for its ornate ceiling frescos.

La Rochelle's prosperity came from its role as a principal port for exploring, colonising and trading with the New World and we can find out more about that by continuing along Rue Fleuriau which houses the [New World Museum](#) (Musée du Nouveau Monde) (16).



New World Museum - Google



Les Halles - Google

At the end of the street, turn left (Rue Saint-Yon) which leads to Les Halles (17) - the covered market with stalls and a couple of cafes to keep any tummy satisfied.

Returning back to the station via Rue des Dames may not be the most scenic route, but it contains the [Bunker Museum](#) (18) where you can learn more about La Rochelle's time under Nazi occupation.

Turning right on to Rue Amelot takes us on to the arcaded street of Rue des Merciers. Turn left and wander down until it runs out of steam where it meets Rue de la Ferté. Turn left and follow it around. On the left is the Protestant church and attached museum. On the right at the end is the Church of Saint-Sauveur (12).

Cross over the road and back along Quai Valin with its limestone lighthouse (13), past La Grande Roue (1) and to the station marked out by its grand tower.