

# The charms of Britt

**Melissa Hekkers**  
discovers the natural  
beauties of a very  
special part of France

**W**e left the environs of Brussels early morning. Bearing in mind we had a 750 kilometre drive, we were equipped with two little TV screens on the back seats for the kids, and a picnic basket filled with goodies at my feet.

Crossing the Pont de Normandie, a cable-stayed road bridge that spans the Seine River and links Normandy to northern France, the 23 metre wide bridge and its spectacular concrete 214 metre high pylons surround you as you descend towards the other side; a breath of fresh air knowing we had reached the first landmark that would take us to our final destination.

The sight of Mont-Saint-Michel, standing tall on its island was another such sign that merely portrayed what awaited us once we arrived in the heart of Brittany, in the Côtes-d'Armor region.

Years ago my uncle had purchased a little farm in the village of Sainte Anne, a name also attributed to the Duchess of Brittany, the last independent Breton ruler January 25, 1477 - January 9, 1514). Cushioned into the Bulat-Pestivien Commune, Sainte Anne's most prominent feature is its Saint Blaise Chapel, where the kids would spend late afternoons kicking ball in its green filled courtyard with a striking stoned carved cross in its centre.

Although staying put in Sainte



Anne, near a forest and inhabited by local farmers, our cultivated yet basic needs could only be fulfilled in Bulat - a hamlet, adorned with a square dressed with oak trees.

Here a charming couple, both 'strangers' to the village, have set up a little house and transformed it into a multifaceted public space.

Named Ch'ty coz's, it is home to a little épicerie, a bar and a brochan- te situated in the attic of a restored stoned-walled and internally wooden-

dressed house, with coloured shutters that are typical of the region.

It is also here that you will get acquainted with the locals. After all, they too are in need of some form of human contact from time to time. Friday evenings saw us savour the Ch'ty coz's weekly aperitif, served with fresh shellfish, usually mussels cooked in wine and fresh cream.

But the three kilometre trek to the Ch'ty coz's with my sibling every morning, in search for baguettes and

petit pain for breakfast also gave us a taste of the locals.

It's here that I very quickly found out that Brittany stands apart from the rest of France. I think that if it was in their hands, they would consider themselves a different nationality. This is obvious from the local Breton dialect which has resurfaced and is being taught in what they call bi-lingual schools, but also in the daily chit chats with local farmers who would inform us that the bad weather would soon

## Tides, mussels and fishing boats

Opting to go and explore the coast initially felt somewhat unnecessary, but once on the shores, the persistent wildlife now touching the Atlantic Ocean is a sight not to be missed.

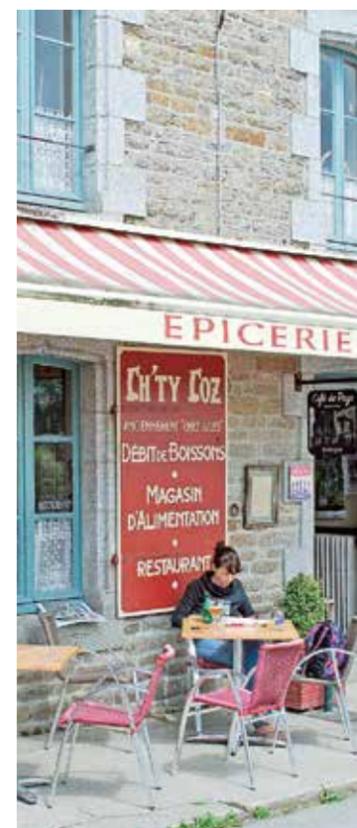
Between the low and high tides, we made our way to the beaches of the 'Granites Roses'; pale pink, melting like looking rocks that adorn the shores of the northern western coast. Waiting for the tide to come up, sometimes to what is estimated to be a 14 metre height; we would walk the sea bed collecting mussels and oysters which were on a non-stop self-service alert.

Making sure we bought lemons when we once again returned to another coast, this time close to a town called Pluha. Here there is a nature

trail that took us all the way along the coast, at the tip of the cliffs that look down on the shore.

It's also here that during a low tide, I played slalom games with my daughter, in between the fishing boats that had lain to sleep on their sides, resting on the wet sand until the tide came back up again, to lift them and allow them to rock with the sea once again. A most beautiful sight.

It's also from the coast that we bought lobsters as big as my forearm and crabs as big as a football home, alive. Cracking and meticulously picking at these shelf fishes' insides, the children looked at us in awe and curiously came close to the sea that very morning, in a miniature version.



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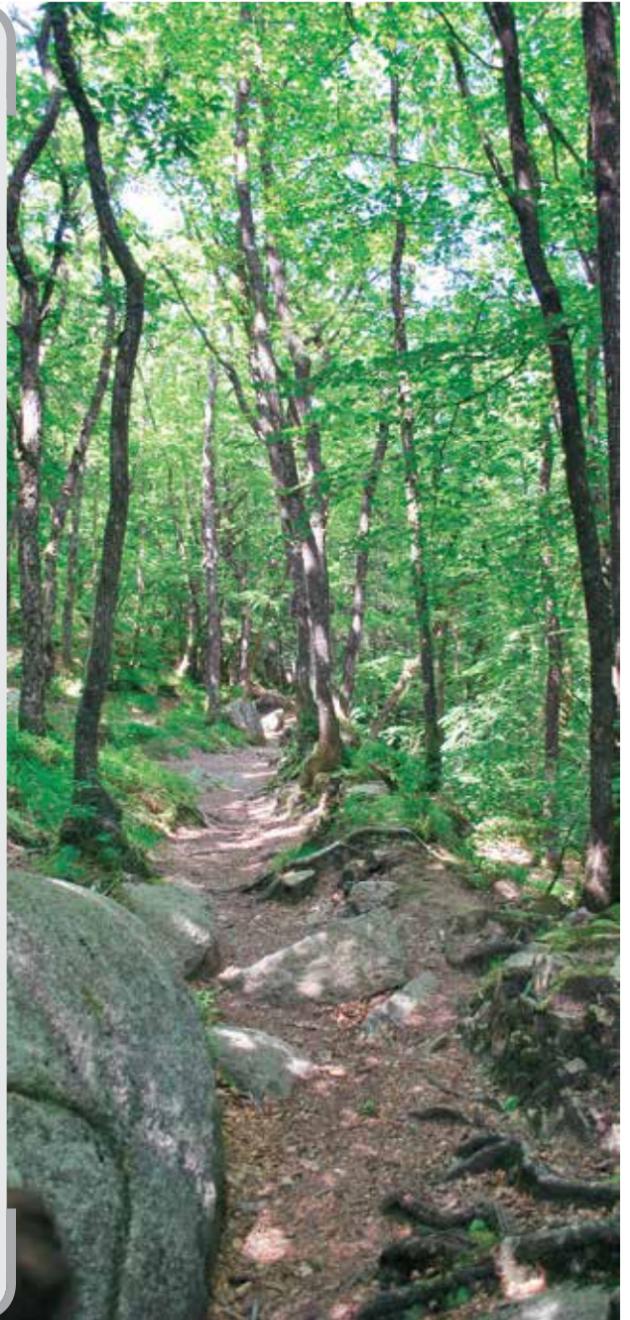


## Away from the beaten path

As days went by we got more and more acquainted with the wild and truly breathtaking nature that Brittany offers. For we came across eucalyptus trees and citrus trees coloured with bougainvilleas on the coast, but once in the forest we were picking berries and stroking moss on its trees and rocks.

We didn't make it to big cities, such as Saint Malo, or Rennes. We didn't make it to museums and tourist attractions. By accident we did stop at the Château de Tonquédec, a mediaeval château-fort built in the 15th century that stands in a pleasant green forested countryside south of Lannion. This was enough to show us how this region had once been fortified by its people, tucked away in Brittany's wildlife.

We didn't feel the need to be tourists, who perhaps cover as much as they can until the next time. Without internet, spasmodic communication means and with Brittany's bustling fauna and flora, there's a peace of mind to be found there, mostly because, when confronted with such sights you feel so very small that there's nothing really that more miraculous than what you're literally standing among.



...side and move along 'to France'!  
The commune's 500 or so inhabitants are warm and very much tied to local religious traditions and the land they vigilantly cultivate. Women are at the helm of tractors, and kids are transported in tractor's spades to assist in the daily chores. It's when they show us walking through adjacent forests that with a smile they told us that it was a pleasure to come across 'other people' who enjoy the local biodiversity and nature.

