



## On Y' Bike France — *We bike France !*

### Fantastic Drinks In France - *Apart from the wines !*

#### Pastis

Pastis is an aniseed based liquor/aperitif made in in the South of France and similar to, but not as sweet, as the Greek Ouzo or Turkish Raki. It is surprisingly refreshing on a hot, sunny day.

Enormous quantities are downed from morning to dusk in many village bars and bar-tabacs in the South.....and, if the locals drink it, it must be OK!

Common brands of the drink available in most stores are ; Pernod, Ricard, Pastis 51 and Un Marseillais. Each area of Provence has their unique style of Pastis with some high end brands being ; Henri Bardouin and Petit Bleu (blue coloured pastis). WARNING : Don't EVER get the red coloured Pastis.

Commonly, pastis is mixed one to five with water, whereupon it turns milky in colour....or cloudy with the coloured versions of Pastis. If you order a pastis in a bar usually you will get a glass with the shot of pastis and a jug of water to add to your preference.

Wikipedia says that more than 2 litres per person in France is drunk per year. It is brilliant to try a few pastis at a bar after a days ride or walking though a town. The locals will love you for it..... and you will enjoy. Just don't hop back on your bike!

#### Cognac / Armagnac - Brandy

Cognac is a brandy made in a particular area of France under the strict guidelines of the Appellation Controlee. It comes in four grades based on the number of years maturing; A.C. (2 years) V.S. (Very Special 3 years), V.S.O.P. (Very Special Old Pale 5 years), XO (Extra Old 6 years) / Napoleon, Vintage and Hors d'age (beyond age)....these grades are in direct proportion to the price.

Armagnac is France's oldest brandy and is made in the Armagnac region of Gascony in Southern France. The distillation process is slightly different than for Cognac however, both drinks are exceptional and good ones can be quite expensive. It is less smooth but, possibly, more interesting in taste than Cognac.

Cognac and Armagnac differ from whiskey in that they taste slightly sweeter and have more overtones of flowers, fruit and citrus. With age they become more mellow and oaky.

#### Cointreau & Grand Marnier

Both are orange flavoured cognac liquors made from cognac and essence of bitter orange. Cointreau is a clear coloured liquid with a decidedly fresh orange flavour. Grand Marnier is more of a honey colour with a softer flavour. I can't decide which is my favourite but at the moment, I love a Cointreau with ice on the flight over to France....or two! Both are 40% alcohol by volume so they're strong.

#### Pineau

Pineau is a fortified wine made in the Charente...the Cognac region It is made from grape juice mixed with Cognac and then aged. At about 17% alcohol by volume, it comes in White, Rose and Red versions and is usually served slightly chilled.

It is THE drink to have before dinner or at a bar in the afternoon but, seek help if you are trying to buy one at a Wine shop especially if they offer a large range - accept that you know nothing, you're there to learn and put yourself in their hands.



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### Benedictine

A famous herbal liquor that has given me too many headaches. It is reputed to have medicinal properties and to be good for digestion after dinner. Although there are people who love it, I say, steer clear. I suspect the sneaky monks who devised the recipe felt cranky about their vows of silence or abstinence on that day...

### Absinth

This is a highly alcoholic anise flavoured spirit which is a dark green colour. It was very popular in the late 19th Century with artists (eg Van Gogh) and writers when it was made with wormwood and was thought to be highly addictive. It was banned in 1915 although it seems not to be now... it can be called "spirit with Wormwood base. I would stick to Pastis - I just don't trust green liquids!

### Chartreuse

Another GREEN herbal liquor that was made by monks. It has a strong, herby flavour....must be good for you. Try mixing it with Red Pastis...just to see what colour results!

### Get

Pronounced "Jzet" (or "zhet") this is another GREEN mint flavoured herbal liquor . It was the drink of choice when we stopped in at a little at on a hot, mistral head-wind day. Our horrified expressions motivated the evil waitress to let me sample one gratis....unfortunately, I didn't suddenly feel better. Perhaps it's an antidote to Chartreuse.

### Calvados

A brandy from Normandy made by distilling apple cider. It is quite strong - but, worth a try. Just get a small one first rather than a whole bottle. If you find it too strong - then try the cider from Normandy.