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Bordeaux holidays

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Bordeaux's free holiday cabins: basic but still beautiful

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Pyramid scheme ... Le Prisme, one of the Refuges Périurbains in Bordeaux's Parc de l'Ermitage

Dotted around Bordeaux, Les Refuges Périurbains are architect-designed shelters that cost nothing to stay in - though don't expect hot tubs or minibars

A giant Mr Whippy ice-cream is floating on the edge of a lake. A slender water tower rears out of a clearing in the woods. These strange structures are Neptunea and Le Haut-Perché, new additions to Bordeaux's collection of architect-designed shelters.



Le Haut-Perché, one of the latest shelters to be added to the collection

Les Refuges Périurbains were dreamed up by a young architect, Yvan Detraz, in the late 1990s. The first shelter, the Cloud, opened in Parc de l'Ermitage in 2010. It was joined by a further five structures over the next couple of years, including a family of owls on the banks of the Garonne and a falling star in a country estate. Today there are 10 shelters around the outskirts of Bordeaux, with one more planned for 2018.



Les Guetteurs (the Watchers), the owl-design shelters by the river Garonne

The designs may be fantastical but the facilities are basic: no water, electricity or heating. Guests must bring their own bedding and supplies, and use dry toilets or nearby public loos. The upside is they are free to stay in. Booking opens for one day a month (the next booking slot is on 8 September for stays in October), and the cabins are snapped up in minutes. Each sleeps six, and guests can stay for one night only, from 2pm to noon.



Living space inside the Nuage Zebra cabin

The shelters are close to the [Boucle Vert](#), a 160km walking loop around the city and hikers can apply to stay for consecutive nights in different cabins along the route. And, if owls and ice-creams don't appeal, other designs include a hammock, a prism and a fallen tree. It is a cut above the average walking and camping holiday - but well within the strictest of budgets.

Shelters open 1 March to 30 November, [lesrefuges.bordeaux-metropole.fr](#)