

# History

## PREHISTORIC MAN

Provence was inhabited from an exceptionally early age and has a bounty of prehistoric sights to prove it. In Monaco the Grottes de l'Observatoire (p390) showcase brilliant prehistoric rock scratchings, carved one million years ago and among the world's oldest. Around 400,000 BC, prehistoric man settled in Terra Amata (present-day Nice): the archaeological site's Musée de Paléontologie Humaine de Terra Amata (p268) explores prehistoric man and his movements at this time.

Neanderthal hunters occupied the Mediterranean coast during the Middle Palaeolithic period (about 90,000 to 40,000 BC), living in caves. Provence's leading prehistory museum, the Musée de la Préhistoire des Gorges du Verdon (p240) in Quinson, runs visits to one such cave, the Grotte de la Baume Bonne (p240).

Modern man arrived with creative flair in 30,000 BC. The ornate wall paintings of bison, seals, ibex and other animals inside the decorated Grotte Cosquer in the Calanque de Sormiou (p116), near Marseille, date to 20,000 BC.

The Neolithic period (about 6000 to 4500 years ago) witnessed the earliest domestication of sheep and the cultivation of lands. The first dwellings to be built (around 3500 BC) were *bories*: learn about life inside these one- or two-storey beehive-shaped huts at the Village des Bories (p217) near Gordes.

The star of Provence's prehistoric show is the collection of 30,000 Bronze Age petroglyphs decorating Mont Bégo in the Vallée des Merveilles (p254). Marked walking trails lead to the rock drawings, which date to between 1800 and 1500 BC.

## GREEKS TO ROMANS

Massalia (Marseille) was colonised around 600 BC by Greeks from Phocaea in Asia Minor; from the 4th century BC they established more trading posts along the coast at Antipolis (Antibes), Olbia (Hyères), Athenopolis (St-Tropez), Nikaia (Nice), Monoikos (Monaco) and Glanum (near St-Rémy de Provence). With them, the Greeks brought olives and grapevines.

While Hellenic civilisation was developing on the coast, the Celts penetrated northern Provence. They mingled with ancient Ligurians to create a Celto-Ligurian stronghold around Entremont; its influence extended as far south as Draguignan.

In 125 BC the Romans helped the Greeks defend Massalia against invading Celto-Ligurians from Entremont. Their subsequent victory marked the start of the Gallo-Roman era and the creation of Provincia Gallia Transalpina, the first Roman *provincia* (province), from which the name Provence is derived.

## THE GALLO-ROMANS

Provincia Gallia Transalpina, which quickly became Provincia Narbonensis, embraced all of southern France from the Alps to the Mediterranean Sea and as far west as the Pyrenees. In 122 BC the Romans destroyed the Ligurian capital of Entremont and established the Roman stronghold of Aquae Sextiae Salluviorum (Aix-en-Provence) at its foot.

During this period the Romans built roads to secure the route between Italy and Spain. The Via Aurelia linked Rome to Fréjus, Aix-en-Provence, Arles and Nîmes; the northbound Via Agrippa followed the River Rhône from Arles to Avignon, Orange and Lyons; and the Via Domitia linked the Alps with the Pyrenees by way of Sisteron, the Luberon, Beaucaire and Nîmes. Vestiges of these roads – the Pont Julien (p220) from 3 BC at Bonnieux and an arch in Cavaillon (p223) – remain.

The Roman influence on Provence was tremendous, though it was only after Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul (58–51 BC) and its consequent integration into the Roman Empire that the region flourished. Massalia, which had retained its independence following the creation of Provincia, was incorporated by Caesar in 49 BC. In 14 BC the still-rebellious Ligurians were defeated by Augustus, who celebrated by building a monument at La Turbie (p287) in 6 BC. Arles (Arles) became the chosen regional capital.

Under the emperor Augustus, vast amphitheatres were built at Arles (Arles), Nemausus (Nîmes), Forum Julii (Fréjus) and Vasio Vocontiorum (Vaison-la-Romaine). Triumphal arches were raised at Arausio (Orange), Cabelio (Cavaillon), Carpentorate (Carpentras) and Glanum, and a series of aqueducts was constructed. The 275m-long Pont du Gard (p200), with its impressive multimedia museum, was part of a 50km-long system of canals built around 19 BC by Agrippa, Augustus' deputy, to bring water from Uzès to Nîmes. All these ancient public buildings remain exceptionally well preserved and lure sightseers year-round.

The end of the 3rd century saw the reorganisation of the Roman Empire. Provincia Narbonensis was split into two provinces in AD 284. The land on the right bank of the Rhône (Languedoc-Roussillon today) remained Narbonensis, and the land on the left bank (today's Provence) became Provincia Viennoise. Christianity – brought to the region according to Provençal legend by Mary Magdalene, Mary Jacob and Mary Salome who sailed into Stes-Maries de la Mer (p146) in AD 40 – penetrated the region and was adopted by the Romans.

## MEDIEVAL PROVENCE

After the collapse of the Roman Empire in AD 476, Provence was invaded by various Germanic tribes: the Visigoths (West Goths, from the Danube delta region in Transylvania), the Ostrogoths (East Goths, from the Black Sea region) and the Burgundians of Scandinavian origin. In the 6th century it was ceded to the Germanic Franks.

In the early 9th century the Saracens (an umbrella term adopted locally to describe Muslim invaders such as Turks, Moors and Arabs) emerged as a warrior force to be reckoned with. Attacks along the Maures coast, Niçois hinterland and more northern Alps persuaded villagers to take refuge in the hills. Many of Provence's perched, hilltop villages date from this chaotic period. In AD 974 the Saracen fortress at La Garde Freinet was defeated by William the Liberator (Guillaume Le Libérateur), count of Arles, who consequently extended his feudal control over the entire region, marking a return of peace and unity to Provence, which became a marquisate. In 1032 it joined the Holy Roman Empire.

The marquisate of Provence was later split in two: the north fell to the counts of Toulouse from 1125 and the Catalan counts of Barcelona gained

Enjoy a different twist on the region's classic Roman and medieval sights with *Old Provence* by hugely successful journalist and travel writer Theodore Andrea Cook (1867–1928), penned in 1905, now republished and as fascinating as ever.

Provence Beyond has an excellent section on the general history of Provence, not to mention almost every Provençal village. Read it at [www.beyond.fr](http://www.beyond.fr).

### TIMELINE 90,000–30,000 BC

Neanderthal hunters occupy the Mediterranean coast; around 30,000 BC Cro-Magnons start decorating their caves

### 600 BC

The Greeks colonise Massalia and establish trading posts along the coast, bringing olives and grapevines

### 125–6 BC

Romans create Provincia Gallia Transalpina, from which Provence gets its name; Provence joins Roman Empire

### 5th to 9th centuries AD

Roman Empire collapses and Germanic tribes invade Provence; Franks encourage villagers to move uphill to avert Saracen attacks

control of the southern part, which stretched from the River Rhône to the River Durance and from the Alps to the sea. This became the county of Provence (Comté de Provence). Raymond Bérenger V (1209–45) was the first Catalan count to reside permanently in Aix (the capital since 1186). In 1229 he conquered Nice and in 1232 he founded Barcelonnette. After Bérenger's death the county passed to the House of Anjou, under which it enjoyed great prosperity.

## THE POPES

In 1274 Comtat Venaissin (Carpentras and its Vaucluse hinterland) was ceded to Pope Gregory X in Rome. In 1309 French-born Clement V (r 1305–14) moved the papal headquarters from feud-riven Rome to Avignon. A tour of the Papal palace (p161) illustrates how resplendent a period this was for the city, which hosted nine pontiffs between 1309 and 1376.

The death of Pope Gregory XI led to the Great Schism (1378–1417), during which rival popes resided at Rome and Avignon and spent most of their energies denouncing and excommunicating each other. Even after the schism was settled and a pope established in Rome, Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin remained under papal rule until 1792.

The arts in Provence flourished (see p59). A university was established in Avignon as early as 1303, followed by a university in Aix a century later. In 1327 Italian poet Petrarch (1304–74) encountered his muse, Laura: visit Fontaine de Vaucluse's Musée Pétrarque (p187) for the full story. During the reign of Good King René, king of Naples (1434–80), French became the courtly language.

## FRENCH PROVENCE

In 1481 René's successor, his nephew Charles III, died heirless and Provence was ceded to Louis XI of France. In 1486 the state of Aix ratified Provence's union with France and the centralist policies of the French kings saw the region's autonomy greatly reduced. Aix Parliament, a French administrative body, was created in 1501.

This new addition to the French kingdom did not include Nice, Barcelonnette, Puget-Théniers and their hinterlands that, in 1388, had become incorporated into the lands of the House of Savoy. The County of Nice, with Nice as its capital, did not become part of French Provence until 1860.

A period of instability ensued, as a visit to the synagogue in Carpentras (p183) testifies: Jews living in French Provence fled to ghettos in Carpentras, Pernes-les-Fontaines, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, Cavaillon or Avignon – all were part of the pontifical enclave of Comtat Venaissin, where papal protection remained assured until 1570.

An early victim of the Reformation that swept Europe in the 1530s and the consequent Wars of Religion (1562–98) was the Luberon. In April 1545 the population of 11 Waldensian (Vaudois) villages in the Luberon were massacred (see the boxed text, p227). Numerous clashes followed between the staunchly Catholic Comtat Venaissin and its Huguenot (Protestant) neighbours to the north around Orange.

In 1580 the plague immobilised the region. Treatments first used by the prophetic Nostradamus (1503–66) in St-Rémy de Provence were administered to plague victims. The Edict of Nantes in 1598 (which recognised

Protestant control of certain areas, including Lourmarin in the Luberon) brought an uneasy peace to the region – until its revocation by Louis XIV in 1685. Full-scale persecution of Protestants ensued. Visit Aigues-Mortes's Tour de Constance (p150) and Château d'If (p102) to see where Huguenots were killed or imprisoned.

The close of the century was marked by the French Revolution in 1789: as the National Guard from Marseille marched north to defend the Revolution, a merry tune composed in Strasbourg several months earlier for the war against Prussia – *Chant de Guerre de l'Armée du Rhin* (War Song of the Rhine Army) – sprang from their lips. France's stirring national anthem, *La Marseillaise*, was born.

## LA ROUTE NAPOLÉON

Provence was divided into three *départements* in 1790: Var, Bouches du Rhône and the Basse-Alpes. Two years later papal Avignon and Comtat Venaissin were annexed by France, making way for the creation of Vaucluse.

In 1793 the Armée du Midi marched into Nice and declared it French territory. France also captured Monaco, until now a recognised independent state ruled by the Grimaldi family (see p388). When Toulon was besieged by the English, it was thanks to the efforts of a dashing young Corsican general named Napoleon Bonaparte (Napoleon I) that France recaptured it.

The Reign of Terror that swept through France between September 1793 and July 1794 saw religious freedoms revoked, churches desecrated and cathedrals turned into 'Temples of Reason'. In the secrecy of their homes, people handcrafted thumbnail-sized, biblical figurines, hence the inglorious creation of the *santon* (p100).

In 1814 France lost the territories it had seized in 1793. The County of Nice was ceded to Victor Emmanuel I, king of Sardinia. It remained under Sardinian protectorship until 1860, when an agreement between Napoleon III and the House of Savoy helped drive the Austrians from northern Italy, prompting France to repossess Savoy and the area around Nice. In Monaco the Treaty of Paris restored the rights of the Grimaldi royal family; from 1817 until 1860 the principality also fell under the protection of the Sardinian king.

Meanwhile the Allied restoration of the House of Bourbon on the French throne at the Congress of Vienna (1814–15), following Napoleon I's abdication and exile to Elba, was rudely interrupted by the return of the emperor. Following his escape from Elba in 1815, Napoleon landed at Golfe-Juan on 1 March with a 1200-strong army. He proceeded northwards, passing through Cannes, Grasse, Castellane, Digne-les-Bains and Sisteron en route to his triumphal return to Paris on 20 May. Unfortunately Napoleon's glorious 'Hundred Days' back in power ended with the Battle of Waterloo and his return to exile. He died in 1821.

## THE BELLE ÉPOQUE

The Second Empire (1852–70) brought to the region a revival in all things Provençal, a movement spearheaded by Maillane-born poet Frédéric Mistral; the house-museum in his home town (p194) looks at his life. Rapid economic growth was another hallmark: Nice, which had become part of France in 1860, was among Europe's first cities to have a purely tourist-based economy.

In 1848 French revolutionaries adopted the red, white and blue tricolour of Martigues near Marseille as their own. This became France's national flag.

In 1560 Nîmes native Jean Nicot (1530–1600) was the first to import tobacco into France from Portugal, hence the word 'nicotine'.

Between 1860 and 1911 it was Europe's fastest-growing city. In the Victorian period the city became particularly popular with the English aristocracy, who followed their queen's example of wintering in mild Nice. European royalty followed soon after. The train line reached Toulon in 1856, followed by Nice and Draguignan, and in 1864 work started on a coastal road from Nice to Monaco. Nice Opera House (p277) and the city's neoclassical Palais de Justice (p265) were built in fine Second Empire architectural style.

In neighbouring Monaco the Grimaldi family gave up its claim over its former territories of Menton and Roquebrune (which has been under Monégasque rule until 1848) in 1861 in exchange for France's recognition of its status as an independent principality. Four years later Casino du Monte Carlo – a stunning place, still operational, that should not be missed (see the boxed text, p389) – opened and Monaco leapt from being Europe's poorest state to one of its richest.

The Third Republic ushered in the glittering *belle époque*, with Art Nouveau architecture, a whole field of artistic 'isms' including impressionism, and advances in science and engineering. Wealthy French, English, American and Russian tourists and tuberculosis sufferers (for whom the only cure was sunlight and sea air) discovered the coast. The intensity and clarity of the region's colours and light appealed to many painters; and in 1887 the first guidebook to the French coast was published.

## WWI & THE ROARING '20S

No blood was spilled on southern French soil during WWI. Soldiers were conscripted from the region, however, and the human losses included two out of every 10 Frenchmen between 20 and 45 years of age. With its primarily tourist-based economy, the Côte d'Azur recovered quickly from the postwar financial crisis that lingered in France's more industrial north.

The Côte d'Azur sparkled as an avant-garde centre in the 1920s and 1930s, with artists pushing into the new fields of cubism and surrealism, Le Corbusier rewriting the architectural textbook and foreign writers attracted by the coast's liberal atmosphere: Ernest Hemingway, F Scott Fitzgerald, Aldous Huxley, Katherine Mansfield, DH Lawrence and Thomas Mann were among the scores to seek solace in the sun. Guests at Somerset Maugham's villa on Cap Ferrat included innumerable literary names, from TS Eliot and Arnold Bennett to Noël Coward, Evelyn Waugh and Ian Fleming.

The coast's nightlife gained a reputation for being cutting edge, with everything from jazz clubs to striptease. Rail and road access to the south improved: the railway line between Digne-les-Bains and Nice was completed and in 1922 the luxurious *Train Bleu* made its first run from Calais, via Paris, to the coast. The train only had 1st-class carriages and was quickly dubbed the 'train to paradise'.

The roaring '20s hailed the start of the summer season on the Côte d'Azur. Outdoor swimming pools were built, seashores were cleared of seaweed to uncover sandy beaches, and sunbathing sprang into fashion after a bronzed Coco Chanel appeared on the coast in 1923, draped over the arm of the duke of Westminster. France lifted its ban on gambling, prompting the first casino to open on the coast in the Palais de la Méditerranée (today a hotel; p272) on Nice's promenade des Anglais in 1927. The first Formula One Grand Prix (p396) sped around Monaco in 1929, while the early 1930s saw

Twinkling with glamour, *Côte d'Azur: Inventing the French Riviera* by Mary Blume is a fascinating and colourful study of the glamorous rise and fall of the modern Côte d'Azur.

### 1790–92

Provence is divided into three *départements*; Papal Avignon and Comtat Venaissin are annexed by France and Vaucluse is mapped

### 1860

The County of Nice becomes part of French Provence; European royalty winters in Nice, Europe's fastest-growing city

## THE SKY BLUE COAST

The Côte d'Azur (literally 'Azure Coast') gained its name from a 19th-century guidebook.

*La Côte d'Azur*, published in 1887, was the work of Stéphane Liégeard (1830–1925), a lawyer-cum-aspiring poet from Burgundy who lived in Cannes. The guide covered the coast from Menton to Hyères and was an instant hit.

Its title, a reflection of the coast's clear blue cloudless skies, became the hottest buzz word in town. And it never tired. The Côte d'Azur is known as the French Riviera by most Anglophones.

wide pyjama-style beach trousers and the opening of a nudist colony on Île du Levant. With the advent of paid holidays for all French workers in 1936, even more tourists flocked to the region. Second- and 3rd-class seating was added to the *Train Bleu*, which had begun running daily in 1929.

## WWII

With the onset of war, the Côte d'Azur's glory days turned grey. Depression set in and on 3 September 1939 France and Britain declared war on Germany. But following the armistice treaty agreed with Hitler on 22 June 1940, southern France fell into the 'free' Vichy France zone, although Menton and the Vallée de Roya were occupied by Italians. The Côte d'Azur – particularly Nice – immediately became a safe haven from war-torn occupied France; by 1942 some 43,000 Jews had descended on the coast to seek refuge. Monaco remained neutral for the duration of WWII.

On 11 November 1942 Nazi Germany invaded Vichy France. Provence was at war. At Toulon 73 ships, cruisers, destroyers and submarines – the major part of the French fleet – were scuttled by their crews to prevent the Germans seizing them. Almost immediately, Toulon was overcome by the Germans and Nice was occupied by the Italians. In January 1943 the Marseille quarter of Le Panier was razed, its 40,000 inhabitants being given less than a day's notice to pack up and leave. Those who didn't were sent to Nazi concentration camps. The Resistance movement, particularly strong in Provence, was known in the region as *maquis* after the Provençal scrub in which people hid.

Two months after D-Day, on 15 August 1944, Allied forces landed on the southern coast. They arrived at beaches – all open for bronzing and bathing today – along the Côte d'Azur, including Le Dramont near St-Raphaël, Cavalaire, Pampelonne and the St-Tropez peninsula. St-Tropez and Provence's hinterland were almost immediately liberated, but it was only after five days of heavy fighting that Allied troops freed Marseille on 28 August (three days after the liberation of Paris). Toulon was liberated on 26 August, a week after French troops first attacked the port.

Italian-occupied areas in the Vallée de Roya were only returned to France in 1947.

## MODERN PROVENCE

The first international film festival (see the boxed text, p302) at Cannes in 1946 heralded the return to party madness. The coast's intellectuals reopened their abandoned seaside villas, and Picasso set up studio in Golfe-Juan. The 1950s and 1960s saw a succession of society events: the fairy-tale marriage

A brilliant and true read, Rosemary Sullivan's *Villa Air-Bel: World War II, Escape and a House in Marseille* is the story of a chateau outside Marseille and the 'safe' haven it provided for some of Europe's most prominent artists, writers and cultural elite stranded in France when WWII broke out.

### 1920s

The Côte d'Azur sparkles as Europe's avant-garde centre

### 1939–45

Nazi Germany occupies France and the Vichy regime is established; Provence is liberated two months after D-Day

### THE BIRTH OF THE BIKINI

Almost called *atome* (French for atom) rather than bikini after its pinprick size, the scanty little two-piece bathing suit was the 1946 creation of Cannes fashion designer Jacques Heim and automotive engineer Louis Réard.

Top-and-bottom swimsuits had existed for centuries, but it was the French duo who plumped for the name bikini – after Bikini, an atoll in the Marshall Islands chosen by the USA in 1946 as a testing ground for atomic bombs.

Once wrapped around the curvaceous buttocks of 1950s sex-bomb Brigitte Bardot on St-Tropez's Plage de Pampelonne, there was no looking back. The bikini was born.

of a Grimaldi prince to Hollywood film legend Grace Kelly in 1956; Vadim's filming of *Et Dieu Créa la Femme* (And God Created Woman) with Brigitte Bardot in St-Tropez the same year; the creation of the bikini (see the boxed text, above); the advent of topless sunbathing (and consequent nipple-covering with bottle tops to prevent arrest for indecent exposure); and Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald and Ray Charles appearing at the 1961 Juan-les-Pins jazz festival.

In 1962 the French colony of Algeria negotiated its independence with President Charles de Gaulle. During this time some 750,000 *pieds noirs* (literally 'black feet', as Algerian-born French people are known in France) flooded into France, many settling in large urban centres such as Marseille and Toulon.

Rapid industrialisation marked the 1960s. A string of five hydroelectric plants was constructed on the banks of the River Durance and in 1964 Électricité de France (EDF), the French electricity company, dug a canal from Manosque to the Étang de Berre. The following year construction work began on a 100-sq-km petrochemical zone and an industrial port at Fos-sur-Mer, southern Europe's most important. The first metro line opened in Marseille in 1977 and TGV high-speed trains reached the city in 1981.

From the 1970s mainstream tourism started making inroads into Provence's rural heart. While a concrete marina was being constructed at Villeneuve-Lourbet-Plage (west of Nice), the region's first purpose-built ski resort popped up inland at Isola 2000 (p252). The small flow of foreigners that had trickled into Provence backwaters to buy crumbling old *mas* (Provençal farmhouses) at dirt-cheap prices in the late 1970s had become an uncontrollable torrent by the 1980s. By the turn of the new millennium, the region was welcoming nine million tourists annually.

Corruption cast a shady cloud over France's hot south in the 1980s and early 1990s. Nice's mayor, the corrupt right-wing Jacques Médecin (son of another former mayor, Jean Médecin, who governed Nice for 38 years), was twice found guilty of income-tax evasion during his 24-year mayorship (1966–90). In 1990 King Jacques – as the flamboyant mayor was dubbed – fled to Uruguay, following which he was convicted *in absentia* of the misuse of public funds (including accepting four million francs in bribes and stealing two million francs from the Nice opera). Médecin was extradited in 1994 and imprisoned in Grenoble where he served two years of a 3½-year sentence. Upon being released the ex-mayor, who died in 1998 aged 70, returned to Uruguay to sell handpainted T-shirts.

During 1994 Yann Piat became the only member of France's National Assembly (parliament) since WWII to be assassinated while in office. Following her public denunciation of the Riviera Mafia, the French *député* (member of parliament) was shot in her Hyères constituency. Her assassins, dubbed the 'baby killers' by the press after their conviction in 1998, were local Mafia kingpins barely in their 20s.

### THE FN

In the mid-1990s blatant corruption, coupled with economic recession and growing unemployment, fuelled the rise of the extreme-right Front National (FN). Nowhere else in France did the xenophobic party gain such a stronghold as in Provence, where it stormed to victory in municipal elections in Toulon, Orange and Marignane in 1995, and Vitrolles in 1997.

Yet the FN, led by racist demagogue Jean Marie Le Pen, never made any real headway in the national arena. Party support for the FN rose from 1% in 1981 to 15% – a level it has pretty much stayed at ever since – in the 1995 presidential elections, yet the FN never secured any seats in the National Assembly. And despite gaining 15.5% of votes in regional elections in 1998 and 14.7% in 2004, the FN never succeeded in securing the presidency of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur *région*.

A deadly blow was dealt to the FN in 1998 when second-in-command Bruno Mégret split from Le Pen to create his own breakaway faction. In subsequent European parliamentary elections in 1999, Le Pen and the FN won just 5.7% of the national vote (enough to secure just five of the 87 French parliamentary seats), while Mégret's splinter group, the Mouvement National Républicain (MNR) party, trailed with 3.28% (and no seats). This was in contrast to the Socialists, Rassemblement pour la République (RPR), communists and extreme left who won the backing of 21.95%, 12.7%, 6.8% and 5.2% of the electorate, respectively.

The next blow came in 2000 when Le Pen was suspended from the European Parliament after physically assaulting a Socialist politician three years previously. A year later the extreme right lost the mayorship of Toulon. Extreme-right mayors Jacques Bompard (FN) and Daniel Simonpiéri (MNR) clung onto Orange and Marignane, but in Vitrolles elections were declared invalid, only for the last bastion of MNR power to be smashed to smithereens by left-wing candidate Guy Obino in repeat elections in 2001.

Le Pen's incredible success in the first round of presidential elections in 2002 – he landed 16.86% of votes – shocked the world. More than one million protestors took to the streets across France in the days preceding the second round of voting in which the FN politician was up against incumbent president Jacques Chirac. Fortunately 80% of the electorate turned out to vote (compared with 41.41% in the first round) and Chirac won by a massive majority.

Never to be defeated, Le Pen pulled out his final trump card – his blonde daughter, Marine (dubbed 'the clone' because of the uncanny likeness to her father). Despite accusations of nepotism following her appointment as party vice-chairman at the FN party congress in Nice in 2003, Marine Le Pen stoically pushed forth in her drive to inject youthful zest into an otherwise ageing party (Jean Marie Le Pen is in his 70s), and was rewarded with relative success in the 2004 European elections.

Lose yourself in regional politics at the prefecture, online at [www.paca.pref.gouv.fr](http://www.paca.pref.gouv.fr) (in French).

### 1946

The first international film festival opens at Cannes

### 1956

Prince Rainier of Monaco weds his fairy-tale princess, Hollywood film legend Grace Kelly

### 1962

Algeria negotiates its independence with French president Charles de Gaulle

### 2000

European leaders meet in Nice to thrash out future EU expansion

## ANOTHER MILLENNIUM

Nowhere was the startling newfound optimism sweeping through France at the start of the new millennium more pronounced than in multicultural Marseille, France's third-largest city that stood at the cutting edge of hip-hop, rap and football (p38).

France's sea-blue south sped into the 21st century with the opening of the high-speed TGV Méditerranée railway line (p420) and a booming information technology sector. In Marseille, Euroméditerranée laid the foundations for a massive 15-year rejuvenation project in the port city (see the boxed text, p112); while the arrival by sea of the world's largest floating dike (see the boxed text, p386) in Monaco doubled the capacity of the already thriving port. The €2 million purchase of a vast 19th-century estate near Bargemon (p357) by the Beckhams (footballer David and ex-Spice Girl Victoria) was mere confirmation that the Côte d'Azur had not lost its sex appeal.

Yet two years on, the tide started to turn. Flash floods devastated north-western Provence in September 2002, killing 26. A year later floodwaters rose again, this time in Marseille, Avignon, Arles and other Rhône Valley cities, where several died and thousands lost their homes after the river burst its banks. The floods topped off a year that had seen the Festival d'Avignon (p163) – Europe's premier cultural event with an annual revenue of €15 million – paralysed by striking artists, furious at government proposals to tighten unemployment benefits for arts workers. Strikes peppered much of 2004 and 2005.

Regional elections in March 2004 reflected the national trend, socialist Michel Vauzelle (b 1944) staving off the government-backed centre-right UMP (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire) candidate to secure a second term in office as president of the 123-strong, Marseille-based Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur *conseil régional* (regional council; p409). Among other things, the staunchly left politician – a former justice minister, Bouches du Rhône MP and mayor of Arles – was a very loud voice in the 'Non' campaign to the proposed EU constitution that an overwhelmingly disgruntled French electorate rejected in a referendum in May 2005.

Urban violence across the country – including in Marseille, Cannes, Nice and dozens of other Provençal towns – in response to the death of two teenagers of North African origin in October 2005 who, apparently running from the police, were electrocuted after hiding in an electricity substation in a northeast Paris suburb, capped off these terrible times for a desperate government and France. Just a year before in multicultural Marseille, part of the city's sizable ethnic population had resorted to street protests following the government's national ban of the Islamic headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh

Keep in the loop with current affairs in the region with the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region website at [www.regionpaca.fr](http://www.regionpaca.fr) (in French).

### THE TREATY OF NICE

No pan-European agreement has been more influential on the future map of Europe than the Treaty of Nice, a landmark treaty thrashed out by the-then-15 EU member states in the seaside city of Nice in late December 2000. Enforced from February 2003, the treaty laid the foundations for EU enlargement starting in 2004, determined the institutions necessary for its smooth running and – not without controversy – established a new system of voting in the Council of Ministers for the 25 EU countries from 1 November 2004.

### LAI D TO REST

It was in the turquoise depths of the Mediterranean between Marseille and Cassis that the book was closed on one of aviation's greatest mysteries: in 2004 a local diver uncovered the wreckage of the plane of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, thus identifying the spot where the legendary author of one of the world's most enchanting tales, *Le Petit Prince* (The Little Prince), plunged to his death in July 1944.

turban, crucifix and other religious symbols in French schools. The law, as Marie-Josée Roig – France's minister for the family and Avignon city's mayor – explained to a UN committee for child rights, might well be intended to place schoolchildren on an equal footing in the republican French classroom, but for many Muslims it merely confirmed that the French state was not prepared to fully integrate Muslims into French society. For a deeper look at contemporary multicultural affairs, see p40.

Meanwhile, in a privileged pocket of coastal paradise, well away from all this modern-day mayhem, the bachelor son of a Hollywood queen was crowned monarch following the death of his aged father (see the boxed text, p388). A new era, albeit one peppered with a couple of out-of-wedlock kids, was born.

2001

The high-speed TGV Méditerranée railway line puts Marseille just 3½ hours away from Paris by train

2004

The National Assembly bans overtly religious symbols, including the Islamic headscarf and Jewish skullcap, in state schools

2005

Prince Albert I of Monaco is crowned monarch of the world's second-smallest country

2006

Zinedine Zidane retires from football after the 2006 World Cup Final

# The Culture

## I AM PROVENÇAL

'No I'm not!', shrieks a modish chunk of 20-somethings. 'It's too folkloric. Things like the tablecloths (fussy flowery motifs, sky blue and sunflower yellow, tomato red), the costumes (traditional long skirts and stiff white hats) – they're cute and amusing, but they're not contemporary,' asserts 28-year-old Aix-en-Provence gal Claire Tourette who, as communications manager at one of Marseille's most cutting-edge radio stations, is in tune with modern vibes. 'They belong to an older generation, my grandparents' generation,' she continues, adding 'I am French. But more than French, I am from the south...the weather, the sea...it's different to the rest of France.'

Indeed, in a part of the country where foreigners have always come and gone (and invariably stayed), regional identity is not clear cut. Less than a smidgen of born-and-bred Provençaux understands or speaks Prouvènço (below), rendering the region's traditional mother tongue useless as a fair expression of regional identity.

Young, old or salt-and-pepper-haired in between, people do share a staunch loyalty to the hamlet, village, town or city in which where they live. 'People in Marseille have a real identity that is attached to the place, they love this town,' says Claire, whose smile betrays her own fondness for the port city and its stereotyped rough-and-tumble inhabitants, famed throughout France for their blatant exaggerations and imaginative fancies such as the tale about the sardine that blocked Marseille port.

Markedly more Latin in outlook and temperament, the Niçois exhibit a common zest for the good life with their Italian neighbours; while St-Tropez's colourful community is a trendy mix of bronzed-year-round glamour queens, reborn hippies and old-time art-lovers. Law-abiding Monégasques (p394) dress up to the nines, don't break the law or gossip, and only cross the road on a zebra crossing.

For many, particularly in rural pastures where family trees go back several generations and occupations remain firmly implanted in the soil, identity is deeply rooted in tradition. Truffle hunter Jean François Tourette explains: 'Truffles are part of my family's traditions. My father, my grandfather and many of my relatives (at least four generations, maybe more) did the same thing before me. But they are also part of the regional patrimony, which makes me proud', adding 'I am and feel Provençal, but I am also French and European'. Monsieur Tourette is clearly at ease with life.

## I SPEAK PROVENÇAL

Should you wish to dip into Provençal culture and bone up on the rich lyrics and poetry of Prouvènço (Provençal), the region's age-old dialect of *langue d'Oc* (Occitan; p431), the Frédéric Mistral house-museum in Maillane (p194) runs writing workshops in Provençal.

In Nice, birthplace of subdialect Niçois, **La Remembrança Nissarda** (☎ 04 93 88 32 03; felixmacri@yahoo.fr; 1 rue des Combattants) runs weekly lessons in the Niçois language and *chants niçois* (traditional Niçois songs and chants), and cultural workshops on Niçois history, carnival traditions and *cuisine nissarde* (local cooking).

Online, pick up useful Provençal phrases and old proverbs such as '*fai pas bon travaia quand la cigalo canto*' (it is not good to work when the cicada chants) at the portal of Provençal culture, **Lou Pourtau de la Culturo Prouvençalo** (<http://prouvenco.presso.free.fr> in French). For an online Provençal–French dictionary see [www.lexilogos.com/provençal\\_langue\\_dictionnaires.htm](http://www.lexilogos.com/provençal_langue_dictionnaires.htm).

'Unless you're born and bred in Provence, you have little hope of adjusting to the mistral's menacing climes'

Three-quarters of the population is wedged into the region's three key urban hubs: Marseille, Toulon and Avignon.

## RIVIERA HIGH LIFE

From the giddy days of the *belle époque* to the start of the summer season during the avant-garde 1920s, the Côte d'Azur has always glittered as Europe's most glamorous holiday spot: the Beckhams own a 15-bedroom mansion in Bargemon ('is it haunted?' splashed the *Daily Mail* in 2006, claiming Posh and Becks hadn't stayed in it once since making the €2.2-million purchase in 2003); their old pal Elton John and film-producer partner David Furnish live next door with 15 dogs (who have a daily swim in the pool) and a constant turnover of showbiz friends at Castel Mont-Alban, a lemon-coloured 600-sq-m villa on Mont Boron near Nice; American film star John Malkovich lives in the Luberon; a €5.3 million wine-producing chateau near St-Raphael is F1 superstar Michael Schumacher's cup of tea; and Tina Turner, Leonardo DiCaprio, Claudia Schiffer and Bono of U2 are long-term seasonal residents.

Hidden behind high stone walls it might be, but voyeurs can peep in on Riviera high-life during a sunlit stroll between dream mansions on Cap Martin and Cap Ferrat, over an apéritif on Pampelonne beach or at St-Tropez's yacht-filled old port where yachtsmen pay €90,000 a week to moor; or in Monaco where heli-pads on pleasure boats are the norm. In Cannes, meanwhile, millionaires congregate once a year at the celebrity city's Millionaire Fair ([www.millionairefair.com](http://www.millionairefair.com)), an overtly brash celebration of wealth where the world's most luxurious limousines, jewels, homes, private jets, wine, fashions and living concepts are showcased. Target audience: 'consumers in the high-end luxury segment, the rich and famous, CEOs, entrepreneurs and internet-workers, bon vivants, the media, VIPs, business and cultural elite,' quotes its website, footnoting that the 'spiritually rich' can also join in (sort of) the fun. Dress code: *tenu de ville* (jacket and tie) – a key phrase to know should you intend moving in luxury-lifestyle circles.

Places to do precisely that include several star-loved legends in hedonist Monaco (p387); Grand Hôtel du Cap Ferrat and Michael Powell's La Voile d'Or in St-Jean-Cap Ferrat (p283); the Martinez, Majestic, Carlton and Hilton hotels (p305) in Cannes; Cap d'Antibes' twinset of Riviera legends (p317); La Colombe d'Or (p321) in St-Paul de Vence; St-Tropez's top five beach legends (p346), Hôtel Byblos (p348) and Spoon Byblos (p349). Celebrity-studded bars and clubs to guzzle outrageous amounts of champagne include those on Pampelonne beach and pretty much any club in St-Tropez (p350) or Cannes' 'magic square' (p308).

Affluent outsiders buying up the region are prompting some traditional village communities to question their own (shifting) identities: 'Les Nouveaux clash with the locals' screeched the headline of a Luberon-village portrait, published in the *International Herald Tribune* in 2006. Property prices spiralling out the reach of local salaries, farmers being deprived of livelihoods and English heard more than French were symptoms of the dramatic influx of foreigners in recent years, the piece rallied. It painted Bonnieux's Socialist mayor as 'a champion of the native-born...[who] chides the village's new co-citizens'. Indeed, within the region, 20% of privately owned homes are *résidences secondaires* (second homes).

Propped against age-old yellow stone, one hand fondling the water of Châteauneuf du Pape's village fountain, a born-and-bred Provence man ponders this 'them and us' notion: 'I don't see myself or the people living here today as French or Provençal, but as being 'from the south'. People in Provence today have vastly different origins, Italian, African and so on, but we are all from the south. More than a culture, it is a certain way of life here that defines us.'

## LIFESTYLE PARADE

Lifestyles are as dazzlingly different as those out-of-vogue tablecloth designs.

Enter Jeanine Squarzoni, market-stall holder at Marseille's garlic market: 'I've been here 20 years; my mother, Thérèse, has been here for 40 years. I

'I've lived in Cannes for years but still have the head of a Marseillais. People from Marseille are more natural than the Cannois. Marseillais are simpler, easier to understand. In Cannes there's a lot of money but little culture; in Marseille it is one's *metier* (trade) that is still important.'

MARSEILLE-BORN DJ MAX FROM CANNES

## 10 FACES TO SPOT

Intrinsic to its rich, multifaceted identity, the region wouldn't be the same without these larger-than-life personalities, dead easy to see in one form or another.

- Jimmy McKissic (pianist, Hôtel Martinez, Cannes) has played in the piano bar (p307) of this celebrity-studded 1920s Art Deco hotel since 1985; he's in his 60s; and he's hot. The black American was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, and still plays at New York's Carnegie Hall when he's not wooing punters in Cannes with his incredible finger-work, voice and radiant, indiscriminate smile. Joe Bloggs or Joe Superstar, he oozes warmth: 'For Jimmy the only thing that counts is giving pleasure and sharing his good humour with the audience,' says the press officer at the hotel.
- Zinedine Zidane (retired footballer, Marseille) is football's most expensive player, Christian Dior's first male model, a Lego minifigure, FIFA's 2006 player of the year and Golden Ball winner and France captain in the last two World Cups: everyone knows this Marseille footballer (b 1972), the youngest of five children, born in La Castellane to Algerian parents. Career-defining moment: head-butting Italian opponent Matarazzi 10 minutes before the close of his career in the 2006 World Cup final against Italy (play the Zidane Head Butt Game online). Spot him in gigantic form (p103) in his home town.
- Dany Lartigue (artist, St-Tropez): 'always surrounded by ladies', octogenarian Dany (b 1921), son of the famous Riviera photographer Jacques Lartigue (1894–1986), until recently cruised around St-Tropez on his bicycle. He can still be spotted, basket in hand, shopping at the Place des Lices market. Painter in his own right, Lartigue spent his heyday (1948–70) in Montmartre but lives where his mother did in St-Tropez (p345) today.
- Jeanine Vernet (fishmonger, Marseille): Marseille wouldn't be Marseille without its early-morning fish market. 'Twenty years I've worked here. My husband and sons fish every day and I come here every morning year-round to sell the fish they catch', explains the fisherman's wife, merrily dressed in blue-and-white striped top and gumboots as eels writhe and fish flap in buckets around her. She brings the fish by van from Soumaty, 10.5km north of the Vieux Port in Marseille's 16e, where the family fishing boat is moored.
- Jenifer Bartoli (*Star Academy* winner, Nice): young wannabe stars have come and gone on France's pioneering reality-TV show *Star Academy*, but fame seems to have stuck to Jenifer,

**'Wild gesticulations, passionate cheek kissing and fervent handshaking are a part of daily life'**

Cut to the heart of business at [www.businessriviera.com](http://www.businessriviera.com)

used to help her on the stall, but now I run it.' And will her children continue the family tradition? 'No, they work in an office. It's hard for young people to make a living from farming these days; traditions are no longer being passed on. When my mother started on the market there were 42 stalls. A decade ago there were 14; now there are five', said Jeanine, who reckons the market will have folded within five years.

Next up, what a character! Frédéric Bon, full-time *guardian* (Camargue cowboy) on the family *manade* (bull farm), traditionally assisted at busy times of the year by 'freelance' or 'amateur' *guardians* who work in exchange for a place to stable their horses, meals etc. But with many a young local lad firmly implanted behind a desk Monday to Friday in Arles these days, casual cowboys are becoming hard to find. Moreover, people are less willing to trade their services and be flexible since the work week was slashed from 39 to 35 hours in 2000, according to the Bon family, who see the shift in work hours as 'spirit changing'. Frédéric's father Jacques was born on the farm in 1926, farmed sheep until 1979 when changes in the-then EEC rendered it less profitable, and still rides every day.

Avoiding the midday heat means a 5.30am start for viticulturer Michel Vivet who grabs a coffee for breakfast and works in the vineyards until noon when the sun drives him in for *une bonne sieste* – a good two-hour snooze.

the dark-haired, good-looking singer from Nice who won the 1st series of *Star Academy* (it's now in its 6th) in 2001 and has released three albums since.

- Thérèse (*socca* queen, Cours Saleya market, Nice): fully made-up with blood red lips, super-long lashes and dripping gold jewellery, 56-year-old Theresa steals the show on cours Saleya. 'The market is my life – I love it, the people, the restaurants, We all know each other', laughs the hard-working daughter of a Spanish mother and Israeli father who's cooked up *socca* (chickpea and olive-oil cake) at the market for 20 years. Six days out of seven start at 6am and end around 2pm with a *pastis* on one of cours Saleya's many café terraces.
- Hans Silvester (globe-trotting photographer, Lioux, 15km north of Apt): you might not snag sight of him, but you'll certainly run into the subjects his world-famous lens zooms in on. Camargue horses, cats, dogs and lavender fields in every season are among the quintessential elements of local life the German-born photographer, at home in the Luberon since 1962, has immortalised in his stunning coffee-table books. You don't need to understand French to appreciate his 250 nostalgic B&W photos of Provence between 1957 and 1964, published in *C'était Hier* (It was Yesterday; 2004).
- Noëlle Perna (comic actress, Nice): better known as 'Mado la Niçoise', a comic music-hall dame of cult standing with indiscreet blue eye-shadow, bright pink lipstick and heavy Niçois accent, this actress is being tipped across France as the next best thing since sliced bread. It started in 1999 when Perna opened the one-man Théâtre des Oiseaux in Vieux Nice, drawing on characters from her parent's adjoining bar as the inspiration for her comic sketches. Buy the DVD.
- Olivier Baussan (entrepreneur, Mane): the man behind two of Provence's best-known brands remains true to his Haute-Provence roots. He grew up on a farm in Ganagobie and the headquarters of L'Occitane en Provence ([www.loccitane.com](http://www.loccitane.com)), his hugely successful luxury bath, body and skincare product company with 470-odd shops worldwide is in Mane. Founded by the then 23-year-old in 1976, L'Occitane uses essential oils from Provence as the natural basis for its creams, shampoos and so on. Not content to sit on his laurels; Baussan created Oliviers & Co ([www.oliviersandco.com](http://www.oliviersandco.com)) in 1993, wooing eager punters with olive oil from Provence and elsewhere. Watch out for whatever the region's most incredible entrepreneur does next.

'Afternoons are spent in the *cave* (cellar) where it's cooler', explains Michel who describes local lifestyle as a mix of 'outside living and siestas' (as we sit around a tree-shaded table behind the sage green shuttered farmhouse, cicadas making an absolute din in the July heat). Michel runs Domaine Valette in Les Arcs with his father, mother and wife. Bar September's grape harvest (p54), the Vevets do everything themselves on the small 15-hectare holding.

Enter Haute-Provence organic sheep farmers, Luisella and Pierre Bellot. May to November they tend 130 to 180 sheep, chickens and vegetable garden on their 11-hectare farm and are ski instructors in winter. 'We dream of just having the farm, but we don't make enough money from it. Many people in the mountains have to do this to make a living', says father-of-three Pierre, who grew up on his parent's farm down the road, bought his own farm when he was 18 and laments the decline of mountain farms like his: 'It's why villagers complain about the mess and the smell when they see sheep walking on the village roads. They've forgotten the farming traditions of the region.' Their lifestyle in a nutshell: 'We live with the rhythm of the animals – when days are shorter, we go inside earlier.' And in summer when the sheep are grazing on higher pastures (2000m) with a shepherd? 'We cut dry grass and grow corn.'

Peep into homes in Provence and at lifestyles led inside them with Lisa Lovett-Smith's lavish image-driven *Provence Interiors* and Johanna Thornycroft's *The Provençal House*.

Hone into Anglophone life on the Riviera with AngloINFO Riviera at <http://riviera.angloinfo.com>.

**TALK OF THE TOWN**

Tune into the underbelly of what people are really thinking NOW, with these locally generated, voice-of-the-moment blogs:

**Blogs Nice Matin** (<http://blogs.nice-matin.com> in French) French-language blogosphere of daily newspaper *Nice Matin*, lots of local politics and current affairs.

**Chez mistral** (<http://chezmistral.vrbx.com>) 'Wine, food and other adventures' by a New Yorker with Italian-Irish roots married to an Avignon lad, living in Avignon; particularly strong restaurant reviews.

**French Word-a-Day** (<http://french-word-a-day.typepad.com>) Well-established blog, from which three books have been published (p20); thrice-weekly entries are inspired by a French word and tell a tale of life in the region as well as teaching fairly advanced colloquial French.

**Life on Marseille** ([www.lifeonmarseille.canalblog.com](http://www.lifeonmarseille.canalblog.com) in French) French-language photoblog from Marseille.

**Marseille Forum** ([www.marseilleforum.com](http://www.marseilleforum.com) in French) Chat to Marseillais online and find out what's happening in the region's most buzzing city.

**Provence Blog** ([www.residencelesmarronniers.com](http://www.residencelesmarronniers.com)) News-driven blog compiled in La Croix Valmer; pulls together articles on the region from the international press.

**Provence Blog by Provence Beyond** ([www.provenceblog.typepad.com](http://www.provenceblog.typepad.com)) Travel stories.

**Provence from Fayence outwards** ([www.go-provence.com](http://www.go-provence.com)) Brilliant, on-the-button, Fayence-generated blog loaded with news, chat, hot links and celebrity scoops.

**Tongue in Cheek** (<http://willows95988.typepad.com>) The latest word on the ground from the markets, written by a *marché aux puces*-addicted, antique-loving American, resident in Marseille since the 1980s.

Shift to the wealthy Luberon where many a foreigner lives the Provençal dream. Enter Englishwoman Sally Faverot de Kerbrech who traded in the London smog for a Luberon vineyard in 2000: 'There is everything you could want here ... quality of life, music, opera, theatre and art all around,' explained Sally, who tends the vines at Domaine Faverot (p225) with husband François, a Frenchman. And with their 'more than abundant' social life, there's a 50% French-/English-speaking split: 'We love going to local markets and to restaurants. There are all sorts of other activities (apart from meeting all sorts of friends and having dinner and musical evenings in all our homes) like walking, cycling, horse riding, tennis, golf. We do a bit of all that. The next thing I'd like to do is to take up painting', says an exuberant Sally, clearly high on life.

Then, of course, there's the razzmatazz of Riviera high life (p35).

**SPORT**

Be it bullfighting – revered as a sport and a celebration of Provençal tradition by those who do it (p148) – or the hottest date on the Formula One calendar (p396) that tears around regular town streets rather than a racetrack – sport here is dramatic and entertaining.

**Football**

'Merci les bleues!' was the slogan emblazoned on Paris' Arc de Triomphe when the national team captained by Marseille's beloved Zizou came home after the dramatic final of the 2006 World Cup: high drama indeed, thanks to Zinedane Zidane's head-butt (p36) 10 minutes before the end of the match – and a brilliant career that saw the Marseille-born midfielder of North African origin captain France to victory in the 1998 World Cup and transfer from Juventus (Italy) to Real Madrid (Spain) for a record-breaking €75.1 million.

Long the stronghold – not to mention heart and soul – of French football, Marseille at club level was national champion for four consecutive years between 1989 and 1992, and in 1991 Olympique de Marseilles (OM) became

'Football isn't just a religion in Marseille, it crosses religions'

The splendid documentary *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006) is not only for football fans; watch it on DVD.

the first French team to win the European Champions League. It reached the UEFA Cup final in 2004 but hasn't qualified since. Club colours are white at home, turquoise away. To witness the side in action, see p103. Arsenal manager Arsène Wenger and star striker Thierry Henry both began their careers with the region's other strong club, AS Monaco (ASM).

**Tied Feet**

Despite its quintessential image of a bunch of old men throwing balls on a dusty patch of gravel beneath trees, Provence's national pastime is a serious sport with its own world championships and a museum to prove it.

*Pétanque* (Provençal *boules*) was invented in La Ciotat, near Marseille, in 1910 when arthritis-crippled Jules Le Noir could no longer take the running strides prior to aiming demanded by the *longue boule* game. The local champion thus stood with his feet firmly on the ground – a style that became known as *pieds tanques* (Provençal for 'tied feet', from which '*pétanque*' emerged).

Big dates on the *pétanque* calendar include France's largest tournament, La Marseillaise, held each year in Parc Borély in Marseille in early July; and the annual celebrity tournament organised in Avignon on the banks of the River Rhône.

**Nautical Jousting**

*Joutes nautiques* is typical only to southern France. Spurred on by bands and a captive audience, participants (usually male and traditionally dressed in white) knock each other into the water from rival boats with 2.60m-long lances. The jousting stands balanced at the tip of a *tintaine*, a wooden gangplank protruding from the wooden boat where the rest of his team members spur him on.

The sport is particularly strong in St-Raphaël, where the annual jousting championships are invariably held. In the Vaucluse, river jousting set L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue ablaze with colour on 14 and 26 July.

**THE RULES OF BOULES**

Should you wish to play the game:

Two to six people, split into two teams, can play. Each player has three solid metal *boules* (balls), weighing 650g to 800g and stamped with the hallmark of a licensed *boule* maker. Initials, a name or a family coat of arms can be crafted on to made-to-measure *boules*. The earliest *boules*, scrapped in 1930, comprised a wooden ball studded with hundreds of hammered-in steel nails.

Each team takes it in turn to aim a *boule* at a tiny wooden ball called a *cochonnet* (jack), the idea being to land the *boule* as close as possible to it. The team with the closest *boule* wins the round; points are allocated by totting up how many *boules* the winner's team has closest to the marker (one point for each *boule*). The first to notch up 13 wins the match.

The team throwing the *cochonnet* (initially decided by a coin toss) has to throw it from a small circle, 30cm to 50cm in diameter, scratched in the gravel. It must be hurled 6m to 10m away. Each player aiming a *boule* must likewise stand in this circle, with both feet planted firmly on the ground. At the end of a round, a new circle is drawn around the *cochonnet*, determining the spot where the next round will start.

Underarm throwing is compulsory. Beyond that, players can dribble the *boule* along the ground (known as *pointer*, literally 'to point') or hurl it high in the air in the hope of it landing smack-bang on top of an opponent's *boule*, sending it flying out of position. This flamboyant tactic, called *tirer* (literally 'to shoot'), can turn an entire game around in seconds.

Throughout matches *boules* are polished with a soft white cloth. Players unable to stoop to pick up their *boules* can lift them up with a magnet attached to a piece of string.

Keep abreast with cultural affairs in the region with [www.culture.gouv.fr/paca](http://www.culture.gouv.fr/paca) (in French).



**ZOOM IN: AIX-BORN TUNISIAN GRAFFITI ARTIST**

Medhi's parents moved from Tunis to Provence in their early 20s, ushering a kind and sincere Medhi into the world in Aix-en-Provence. Since 1999 he has lived in Marseille where he musters a living as a web designer in between tags. Catherine Le Nevez caught up with the charismatic, short, dark-haired 20-something, dressed in the latest street fashion, in Marseille.

**In Marseille do you have a sense of Tunisian community?**

I have Tunisian friends, but not exclusively. I am a graffiti artist and my 'community' comprises people who do the same thing, share the same passion. The graffiti-art community is a big mix – I have friends from Martinique, Korea, Laos, China and many other places.

**Is your Tunisian heritage an integral part of daily life?**

Now it's a mix of French culture and Tunisian culture. I don't want to lose my Tunisian roots. My double culture creates my identity; it's very important for me.

**And graffiti?**

When I was younger I did graffiti art every day; now I have other commitments in life it's about one time per week. There are places where you can tag legally in Marseille. I choose places where a lot of people can see the tags. The walls along the train tracks are best because a lot of people can see my art from the train.

**Do you encounter racism?**

Every day – it's normal. Well, maybe not every day, but frequently. It's OK, because Marseille is cosmopolitan. It happens more often in Aix. Aix is a town with lots of money. Rich people are in the majority, but not only rich people live there (which creates tension).

**What sort of racism do you encounter?**

Things like a grandmother sees you and clutches her handbag tighter or changes it to the other arm, away from you. Or if I go in a shop, the guy in the shop will be watching me all the time. People are more afraid since terrorism. But I don't care (about encountering racism), I've got friends (who aren't racist), I don't feel marginalised. Look at the French side in the 2006 World Cup – it was multicoloured and went far because of that, more than if there had been only one (religious/ethnic) community of French people playing.

**How important is religion to you?**

Religious observations like Ramadan and Aïd El Kebir are very important to my parents; it's a way for the family to be together, something to share with family. I don't have children yet, but I hope to have them, when I can afford them – it's expensive! I want them to know their Tunisian roots, and I will take them to Tunisia. But afterwards, whether they want to be Muslim, or any other religion like Christian, it's no problem; they will be free to choose. My girlfriend is French; she's not religious at all.

**MULTICULTURALISM**

For creative souls in particular, the region's substantial multicultural mix is energising and gives the region its razor-sharp edge: 'Marseille's richness attracts artists like musician David Walters who is from a French/West Indies/English-speaking Caribbean background, and has come to live here to express every aspect of himself', explains Radio Grenouille musical director Stephane Galland, himself the Marseille-born son of a French father and mother from Guadeloupe. 'The rhythm of life is more human here than other parts of France (because of this multicultural mix)', he continues, adding with a laugh: 'My mother has a very, very strong Marseille accent, almost from the day she arrived'.

Immigrants form around 9.5% (430,000) of the regional population, a constant since 1975 when France implemented its first immigration law. The largest foreign communities are European (31.4%), Algerian (19%), Moroccan (19%), Tunisian (13.8%) and Turkish (1.7%). The vast majority of this ethnic community do have French citizenship, which is subject to various administrative requirements rather than being conferred at birth.

In Didier van Cauwelaert's *One Way*, a French boy orphaned in a crash in multicultural Marseille is pulled from the burning car by Roma people and given false ID papers making him Moroccan.

The Algerian community originates from the 1950s and 1960s, when over one million French settlers returned to metropolitan France from Algeria, other parts of Africa and Indochina. At the same time millions of non-French immigrants from these places were welcomed as much-needed manpower. A 1974 law banning all new foreign workers ended large-scale immigration.

Racial tensions are fuelled by the National Front whose leader makes no bones about his party's antiforeigner stance. The French republican code, meanwhile, does little to accommodate a multicultural society. While the government's banning of the Islamic headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, crucifix and other religious symbols in French schools in 2004 was meant to place all schoolchildren on an equal footing, Muslims slammed it as intolerant and yet more proof that the French state is not prepared to properly integrate them into French society.

A large chunk of Marseille's sizable Muslim and Jewish populations lives in depressed city suburbs, unemployment among immigrants being 12% higher than the regional average.

**RELIGION**

Countrywide, 80% of people identify themselves as Catholic, although few attend Mass. Catholicism is the official state religion in neighbouring Monaco, which marks a number of religious feasts with public holidays. Protestants account for less than 2% of today's population.

Many of France's four to five million nominally Muslim residents live in the south of France, comprising the second-largest religious group. Marseille's notable 200,000-strong Muslim community is served by 62 mosques and places of worship – although, somewhat controversially, the port city still lacks a grand mosque it can call its own. In mid-2006 the city council, after years of bickering among local Muslims who couldn't agree on a site, bit the bullet and allocated an 8000-sq-metre plot of land to its Muslims for the project. But building work won't start until the local Muslim community has found the €10 million needed to build the 2500 sq m edifice.

France's Jewish community – Europe's largest – numbers 650,000, some 80,000 of whom live in Marseille. There are several synagogues in the latter, as well as in Avignon, Cavaillon and Carpentras.

Claire Messud's second novel, *The Last Life*, is the dramatic portrayal of one family who fled Algeria in the 1960s and settled in the south of France.

'The essence of Nice for me is its mix of cultures... the city is like a very well-done *ratatouille*, full of flavours and savours.'

MARCO FOLICALDI, LA ZUCCA MAGICA, NICE

# Food & Drink

Thinking, dreaming and living food is the norm in Provence, where most peoples' days are geared around satisfying their passionate appetite for dining well. And not without good cause: Provençal cuisine is reputed the world over. Lazing over lunch with friends, leaving one vowing never to eat that much again (until tomorrow), is an integral part of the Provençal experience.

## NUTS & BOLTS

What is a *ferme auberger*? Are there menus for kids? For the practical nuts and bolts of dining and drinking in Provence, see p405. For table etiquette see p49.

Some culinary traditions are upheld everywhere: oodles of olive oil, garlic and tomatoes invariably find their way into many a dish; anything *à la Provençal* involves garlic-seasoned tomatoes. Yet there are exciting regional differences, rooted in geography and history, which see fishermen return with the catch of the day in seafaring Marseille; herds of bulls grazing and paddy fields in the Camargue; lambs in the Alpilles; black truffles in the Vaucluse; cheese made from cows milk in alpine pastures and an irresistible Italianate accent to Niçois cooking (p273).

Ultimately, the secret of Provençal cuisine lies not in elaborate preparation techniques or state-of-the-art presentation but in the use of fresh ingredients produced locally. There are top-dog chefs and pioneering food designers (p44), yes; but when in Provence it is the humble rhythm and natural cycle of the land and the seasons that really drive what you eat, and when.

## JANUARY: PIG OUT ON TRUFFLES

Break and beat three eggs, season with salt, pepper and 15g of grated truffle. Leave to rest for 30 minutes, then cook slowly in a *bain-mairie* with

## DINING DIARY

So what precisely is the dining order of the day for people in Provence? 'My father would start work at 5.30am, stopping around 9am or 10am for a plate of ham, *saucisson* (sausage), radishes from the garden ... but breakfast for me is a coffee,' says third-generation wine producer Michel Vivet, at home amid 15 hectares of vines in Les Arcs. 'At lunchtime it is too hot; our evening meal is the most important,' he says, looking at his wife who reels off their previous evening's menu: courgette omelette and *saucisson*, bought from neighbouring farms.

While *petit déjeuner* (breakfast) for urban folk generally entails a short, sharp, black *café* (coffee) or milky *café au lait* and a croissant (no jam or butter) grabbed at a *café* on the way to work, *petit déjeuner* in agricultural circles is a more imaginative affair, albeit one that is never cooked, and generally fresh from the farm: 'I get up at 3.45am to take my melons to the wholesale markets, have a coffee and when I get back at 8am, I have breakfast with my wife,' says Bernard Meyssard (p51) who kick-starts his dining day several hours after getting up with a feast of *jambon cru* (uncooked ham) and melon.

While *déjeuner* (lunch) is the traditional main meal of the day (and an inevitable highlight for those visiting Provence), people who work actually dine quite lightly at midday and save the ritual feast of *apéritif* followed by a hot meal with wine for the evening when it is cooler and the day's work is done. 'For lunch I have melon, ham and a tomato salad,' says Bernard, adding, 'A healthy appetite, I always have one,' eyes dancing, when asked which meal – lunch or *dîner* (dinner) – was the more important to him.

The same pattern is echoed in urban climes where restaurants get packed out from noon with regulars lunching on a light(er) *plat du jour* (dish of the day), *formule menu* (fixed main course plus starter or dessert) or lunch *menu* (choice of two-course meal) – saving the heavier, three- or four-course *menu* for the evening when several hours can be devoted to appreciating an *entrée* (starter), *plat* (main course), *fromage* (cheese) and dessert. Many top-end restaurants serve an *amuse-bouche* (complimentary morsel of something very delicious) between the starter and main course; some also serve a sweet equivalent before dessert, plus *petit fours* with coffee.

## THE TRUFFLE MASS

The truffle mass pays homage to St-Antoine, the patron saint of truffle growers, and venerates the 'black diamond': the truffle. All of the festivities, in one way or another, honour truffles. After mass, the truffles – offered primarily by truffle growers – are collected in the same baskets used during truffle hunts and weighed on the square in front of the church by members of the *Confrérie du Diamant Noir et de la Gastronomie* (Black Diamond & Gastronomy Brotherhood; [www.conf-truffe.com](http://www.conf-truffe.com) in French). The brotherhood – dressed in long black capes, black hats and yellow-ribbed medals – then proceeds to the place de la Mairie (town hall square) where the *Grand Chambellan* (Great Chamberlain) auctions the truffles – a particularly powerful moment. The money raised is used by the parish to restore religious monuments in the village. After the truffle auction, an *apéritif* is offered to everyone, followed at 1pm by the *repas des confrères* – a great meal of excellent quality/price ratio (€50 per person) composed entirely of truffles.

Visitors are charmed by the folklore ... these days the festivities are geared more to the tourists than locals; people of the village prefer not to take part to let others experience it.

Mylène Savoye, *Point Tourisme, Richerenches*

a drizzle of olive oil or a knob of butter. Stir regularly, adding a spoon of *crème fraîche* if necessary. Sprinkle with 15g of grated truffle, stir and serve immediately.

Christian Etienne's (p44) recipe for *brouillade de truffes* – a Provençal classic included in many a lavish three- and four-course *menu aux truffes* (truffle menu) served by several restaurants in season – is nothing more than scrambled eggs with truffle shavings. Simplicity laces many truffle dishes, allowing the palate to revel in the flavour (it's subtle) of Provence's most luxurious and elusive culinary product. A fungus that takes root underground at the foot of a tree, usually in symbiosis with the roots of an elm or oak tree, the black truffle (*tuber melanosporum*) is snouted out in modest amounts in the Vaucluse, especially around Carpentras, Vaison-la-Romaine and in the Enclave des Papes, from November to March. January is the height of the season, which climaxes midmonth with Richerenches' sacred *Messe des Truffles* (above). Dubbed *diamants noirs* (black diamonds) and at €500 to €1000 per kg, truffles are as precious as gold dust.

Traditionally snouted out by pigs, these days it's dogs that hunt truffles. 'Dog training is a long activity and requires an enormous amount of patience,' explains fourth-generation *trufficulteur* (truffle farmer) Jean-François Tourrette from Vénasque who hunts black truffles with Youcan, his 10-year-old mongrel, in winter and the cheaper, lesser-known and not nearly-as-precious white truffle – often called *truffe d'été* (summer truffle; *tuber aestivum*) – between May and August. 'It has to be a game for the dog – a test work. You have to make it understand that it gets a reward when it finds a truffle,' says Monsieur Tourrette who rewards Youcan with a lump of *gruyère* cheese or – should the black truffles be abundant that day – a less fatty biscuit. Planting oak trees, picking acorns and guarding his oak plantation against 'spring's water excess, summer dryness, autumn's water excess, winter frost and wild boars' are other daily *trufficulteur* tasks.

Truffles form an integral part of the traditional New Year's Day feast in Provence. Families pig out on the biggest *coq* (chicken, rooster; symbolising the coming year) they can find, either stuffed with sausage meat and truffles or chestnuts or – in wealthier circles – served alongside 12 partridges (one for each month of the year), truffles (symbolising the nights) and eggs (the day).

For more on truffle culture see p178, [www.la-truffe.com](http://www.la-truffe.com) (in French) and [www.truffle-and-truffle.com](http://www.truffle-and-truffle.com). The ultimate truffle dining experience? Chez Bruno (p360).

*The Provence of Alain Ducasse* by Alain Ducasse is not just a book: it is an essential listing of 'insider' markets, food shops and addresses frequented by one of Provence's biggest chefs.

From the 5th century AD until the French revolution, the kings of France were baptised with olive oil from St-Rémy de Provence.

## FEBRUARY: A FISHY AFFAIR

Slice off the bottom of the spiny ball, deep purple in colour and serve like oysters by the dozen or half. Scrape off the foul-looking guts and brown grit to uncover the pale-orange ambrosia – the roe of the sea urchin, exquisitely arranged by nature in six delicate sweet-salty strips. This is what you eat.

Savouring *oursin* (sea urchin) – a delicacy that falls in the same love-it-or-hate sphere as oysters and foie gras – is reason enough to be in Carry-le-Rouet in February when the quaint fishing port west of Marseille celebrates its *oursin* festival (p119). *Oursins* can be fished September to April and are best served with a white Cassis, chilled.

Other catches worth a bite include clamlike *violet*s (sea squirts), another fishy affair whose iodine-infused yellow flesh tastes like the sea; *supions frits* (squid pan-fried with fresh garlic and parsley (sample it at Pizzeria Etienne in Marseille; p109). There are shoals of Mediterranean fish – *merlan* (whiting), *St-Pierre* (John Dory), *galinette* (tub gurnard), *maqueareau* (mackerel), *chapon de mer* (chapon), *congre* (conger eel) and *rascasse* (scorpion fish) – sold straight from the sea at the region's premier fish market.

Assessing whether a fish is fresh hardly takes a genius, says fishmonger Jeanine Vernet with a smile, pointing to the slithering eels and fish flapping noisily in buckets on her market stall at Marseille's Vieux Port. 'You can also tell by the colour; it should be clear,' she continues, citing her favourite way of preparing the day's catch as 'sprinkled with fresh herbs, wrapped in aluminium and baked in the oven'.

Marseillais chef Christian Buffa buys the fish he needs for his highly regarded fish restaurant, Miramar (p108), each morning at the Vieux Port market and a wholesale fish market 10km out of town. For him, essential purchases are scorpion fish, white scorpion fish, *vive* (weever), conger eel, chapon and tub gurnard – the six fish types he would not consider making his famous *bouillabaisse* without. King of regional dishes, *bouillabaisse* is a pungent yellow fish stew, brewed by Marseillais for centuries and requiring a minimum of four types of fresh fish cooked in a rockfish stock with onions, tomatoes, garlic, saffron (hence its colour), parsley, bay leaves, thyme and other herbs. Its name is derived from the French *bouillir* (to boil) and *baïsser* (to lower, as in a flame), reflecting the cooking method required: bring it to the boil, let it bubble ferociously for 15 minutes, then serve it: the *bouillon* (broth) first as a soup, followed by the fish flesh in the company of a local wine. Try it with a white Cassis or dry Bandol rosé.

No two cooks make an identical *bouillabaisse* and the debates about which fish constitute a true *bouillabaisse* are endless. 'St-Pierre or lotte (John Dory or monkfish) are optional,' says Christian Buffa, who also throws in a *cigale de mer* (sand lobster), *langouste* (crayfish) or *langoustine* (small saltwater lobster) sometimes to transform a bog-standard *bouillabaisse* into *bouillabaisse royale*. In Toulon – shock horror – Toulonnais throw potatoes into the pot (taste it at

'It's only a true authentic *bouillabaisse* if it's made in Marseille by a Marseillais.'

CHRISTIAN BUFFA, CHEF,  
MIRAMAR, MARSEILLE

## CHEFS & LEGENDS

The two tend to go hand in hand: the region's dynamic dining scene is charted by a mix of big-name chefs heading historic eating venues and young, rising stars busy making a name for themselves with more cutting-edge dining concepts.

Names well worth the €50-plus that their *menus* command include Alain Ducasse (p393 and p359), Christian Etienne (p166), Bruno Clément (p359 and p360), Alain Lorca (p325), Jacques Chibois (p328), Franck Cerutti (p392), Édouard Loubet (p221), Olivier Teissedre (p173), Bruno Sohn (p274), Christian Buffa (p108) and last but far from least, with a huge round of applause for innovation, Jouni (p274).

## DIY BOUILLABAISSE

Learn how to do it yourself – the authentic way. Marseille tourist office takes bookings for half-day *bouillabaisse* workshops (€110) comprising a chef-accompanied trip to the fish market, a cooking lesson, an apéritif around the kitchen table, lunch (no guessing what) and a copy of the real McCoy Marseille recipe to share with your friends.

L'Oursinado atop a cliff on Cap de Carqueiranne; p377); while *bourride* is a cheaper version of *bouillabaisse* – it contains no saffron, features cheaper white-fleshed fish, and is served with white *aïoli* instead of pink *rouille* (p46).

Seafood dining standouts: Marseille's *bouillabaisse* restaurants (p108); Le Sloop, St-Jean-Cap Ferrat (p282); Bacon, Cap d'Antibes (p317); La Table du Mareyeur, Port Grimaud (p355); Chez Jo (p365) in Cavalière.

## MARCH: OLIVE-OIL SHOP

Drink water first. Pour a drop of oil onto a plastic teaspoon, raise it to your lips and taste it. It can have a varying degree of sweetness or acidity; be peppery or fruity and 'green' or it can be clear or murky (which means the oil has not been filtered). Once opened, consume within six months, don't cook with it and keep out of direct sunlight.

The secret behind many a Provençal dish, olive oil is a key ingredient in every Provençal sauce; essential for *socca*, the Niçois chickpea-flour pancake (p273); and best tasted in March with asparagus, the month's seasonal speciality – steam the slender green tips, sprinkle with *fleur de sel* (salt crystals) and drizzle with olive oil.

March is, in fact, the last chance to shop for *huile d'olive* at the *moulin* (mill) – by far the most interesting place to buy it – before the mill runs out. Most open soon after the winter harvest (p50) until March or April. Sold in glass bottles or plastic containers, olive oil costs around €20 per litre and degustation is an integral part of buying.

Some mills are listed in the regional chapters: in the northern Vaucluse around Nyons (p176), the Vallée des Baux and the Alpilles (p189), *oléiculteurs* (olive growers) adhere to a rigid set of rules to have their bottles stamped with a quality-guaranteed *appellation d'origine contrôlée* (AOC) mark. Generally, 5kg of olives yield 1L of oil. Markets and olive-oil shops sell oil year-round and several restaurants serve olive-oil *menus*.

## APRIL: SPRING CHEESE

Take a round of fresh *chèvre*, drizzle it with local olive oil or honey and bite into what goatherds say is the finest goat cheese of the year. Serve with bread.

'Our cheese is best in spring because of the lush new grass; the milk tastes the best,' says farm-born, 25-year-old Emanuelle Marbezy, technical manager of a small *fromagerie* (cheese dairy) in Banon (p249), Haute-Provence, where the milk from 12 mountain goat farms is brought down to the plain and turned into Provence's best-known cheese, Banon.

Instantly recognisable by the autumnal chestnut leaves it comes wrapped in, Banon cheese has been protected by its own AOC since 2003, the strict rules of which require goats to graze for a minimum of 210 days on the prairies; their milk to stay unpasteurised; and the cheese produced from it to ripen for at least 15 days after being pressed into delicate 7cm-to-8cm-diameter rounds.

Banon aside, *chèvre* comes in heart shapes, pyramids, logs and squares. It can be eaten young and *frais* (fresh) – a mild creamy taste – or matured into a tangy, stronger tasting *demi-sec* (semidry) or *sec* (dry) cheese. It can be plain, raisin-studded or coated in crushed pepper corns, *herbes de Provence* (p48)

Learn more about *oléiculture* (olive culture) at [www.olivierdeprovence.com](http://www.olivierdeprovence.com) and [www.oleiculture.com](http://www.oleiculture.com) (in French).

'Everything uses olive oil. It is the base of Provençal cuisine. For lunch today I prepared a filet mignon with fresh rosemary and olive oil – simple but magnificent.'

NICOLE BERENGUER, OLIVE FARMER, NORTHERN VAR

or black ash. Or you can dip the round in egg and breadcrumbs, fry it and serve it with sweet *miel de Provence* (local honey) or a fruit chutney.

## MAY: LAMBS & BULLS

Sprinkle fresh garlic, rosemary and wild thyme over a *gigot d'agneau* (leg of spring lamb, pour over three tablespoons of olive oil and bake in the oven. Or try *pièdes et paquets* – sheep trotters wrapped in tripe and cooked with wine and tomatoes.

It is in early May during the traditional transhumance that sheep farmers move their flocks – by truck, in many places, since the 1950s – to higher mountain pastures to fatten up on summer's cool, lush grass under the watchful eye of a shepherd. 'My sheep graze on the mountain for 120 days or so. Their return depends on the weather, but it is invariably in October before the first mountain snow,' says Alpilles sheep farmer René Tramier, adding, 'I belong to the 'Lamb of Sisteron' red label which requires me to kill them when they're 70 to 150 days old.' No wonder lamb from Sisteron alongside the Alpilles de la Crau is so tender.

It is a bullish affair in the Camargue where three- or four-year-old bulls who have failed to prove their worth in the arena are slaughtered for their meat instead to make *gardianne de taureau* (bull-meat stew) and *saucisson d'Arles* (air-dried bull sausage). Bull calves reared specifically for their meat are born in early spring, fattened all summer and sent packing to the abattoir in October 'so we don't have to feed them in winter' according to Camargue guardian Frédéric Bon (p152).

## JUNE: RED & GREEN GARLIC

'Crunch a few coffee beans or parsley stems afterwards if your breath smells too aggressively of garlic, or better still, share the aioli with your friends': wise words of legendary 'cuisine of the sun' chef, Roger Vergé, one of Provence's biggest names from the late 1960s until his new-millennium retirement.

Garlic – harvested and piled high in woven garlands at the markets in June – gives Provençal cuisine its kick, letting rip in a clutch of fantastic strong-tasting sauces, traditionally served to complement *crudités* (raw vegetables), soups and fish dishes. *Anchoïade* is a strong, anchovy paste laced with garlic and olive oil (try it at La Taca d'Oli in Nice with *bagna cauda* (raw mixed veg dipped into a pot of warm tangy anchovy paste known as *anchoïade*);

### TOP 10 EATS

The 'best' in terms of Michelin stars, no. An extremely tasty cross-section of long, lazy, lunch choices to remember, yes.

**L'Épuiette** (see p108) Bountiful *bouillabaisse* in a magical setting: Marseille's most picturesque fishing harbour.

**Le Cilanro** (see p144) Dine well in Arles on Jérôme Laurant's contemporary Camargaise cuisine and learn how to cook it (see p52).

**Le Bistrot de l'Eygalières** (see p193) This unassuming village restaurant in Eygalières has twin-Michelin-starred cuisine.

**L'Olivier** (see p173) One to watch; headed by Olivier Teissedre (see p44).

**La Bastide de Capelongue** (see p221) Fine countryside dining, not for the faint-of-wallet but worth every centime.

**Atelier du Goût** (see p393) Simple but stunning palate creations in Nice by Jouni.

**Beau Séjour** (see p294) A must-try village inn for the quintessential Provence lunch experience. In Gorbio.

**Z Plage** (see p307) Lunch with the smart set on the beach in Cannes.

**Restaurant des Arcades** (see p318) Bistro lunch between art, from a bygone era. In Biot.

**Couleurs du Jardin** (p354) Hip, romantic dining above the sand on the St-Tropez peninsula, in Gigaro.

**Ferme de Peïgros** (see p361) Lunch on a farm at the top of mountain pass in Collobrières.

Each cheese is wrapped in five chestnut leaves and hand-tied with a sticker and raffia. Six people just do this job all day; each cheese takes one minute to wrap'.

EMANUELLE MARBEZY,  
FROMAGERIE DE BIANON

## THE OIL MILL

Siblings Anne and Gilles Brun make a formidable team at the family mill, Moulin à Huile du Calanquet, 4.5km southwest of St-Rémy de Provence. Stopped in its tracks following the great frost of 1956, the oil press started turning again in 2001 – to the joy of Anne and Gilles' grandmother, now in her 80s, who can still be found between bottles at the mill. Lonely Planet author Catherine Le Nevez met the family.

### Tell me about a little bit more about the mill and its past.

Our family have farmed this property for five generations. Our grandparents ran the oil mill and olive farm but after 1956 production stopped and they grew cauliflowers and potatoes instead. Before 1956 there were five mills in the area; one traded for 10 years afterwards then stopped too, meaning there was nowhere in the northern Alpilles to mill oil.

Provençal and local traditions are important to us. (The mill's name comes from the Provençal word 'calan', a rock used as shelter from the mistral.) After we reopened the mill, we also replanted olive trees where our grandparents' trees were.

### What sort of oil do you produce and how much?

We cultivate five traditional Alpilles olive varieties which give five types of oil, as well as a blend. Our speciality is separating the different varieties for mono-varietals. Our oils have 0% to 8% acidity which means they go well with sweet dishes as well as fish. Our 5000 trees produce 100,000kg of olives and 20,000 litres of oil a year.

### When is olive oil at its best?

When it's new; the taste and flavour is good.

p273); *brandade de morue* is a don't-mess-with-me mix of crushed salt cod, garlic and olive oil; and *tapenade* is a sharp, black-olive-based dip seasoned with garlic, capers, anchovies and olive oil.

Then there is handsome *pistou*, a green crushed-up mix of garlic, basil, pine kernels and olive oil that the Provençal stir into *soupe au pistou* (a vegetable, three- or four-bean and basil soup) or paste on toast. On the coast, aioli (a potent garlic mayonnaise) is smeared over many a fish dish and is an essential component of aioli *Provençal complet* – a mountain of vegetables (including artichokes), boiled potatoes, a boiled egg and *coquillages* (small shellfish), all of which are dunked into the pot of aioli. Fiery pink *rouille* (a garlic mayonnaise with breadcrumbs and crushed chilli peppers, hence its wild colour) is best friend to *soupe de poisson* (fish soup), served with bite-sized toasts, a pot of *rouille* – and a garlic clove. Rub the garlic over the toast, spread the *rouille* on top, bite it and breathe fire.

## JULY: YELLOW & BLACK TOMATOES

Slice six red tomatoes. Grate two *cébettes* (small white onions) and sprinkle on top. Dress with a vinaigrette of balsamic vinegar, olive oil, salt and pepper; sprinkle with chopped basil or parmesan shavings and *voilà* – *salade de tomates*.

The humble tomato salad remains a firm favourite of Provençal chef Christian Etienne who conjures up a magnificent four-course *menu de tomates* (tomato feast; €60) at his Avignon restaurant in July when the region's most quintessential vegetable is at its noble best. 'Tomatoes remind me of my childhood – there were always tomatoes in our garden,' says the burly Avignon-born chef as he waves enthusiastically at the line-up of potted tomato plants on his restaurant terrace.

Tomatoes in this fertile neck of the woods are not all red. Of the region's 2500 known varieties, some are white, some are burgundy, some black, green, orange, yellow and so on. **René Caramela** (☎ 04 90 47 58 40, ☎ 06 03 48 52 69; Mas du Bout des Vignes, chemin des Poissoniers) grows 30 to 40 different types in her exceptional tomato garden in Mourières, 15km south of St-Rémy de Provence.

'Tapenade combines the favourite flavours of Provence: the tang of the home-cured black olives in brine, the saltiness of the tiny anchovy, the briny flavour of the caper, the vibrant sharpness of garlic, the heady scent of thyme, the unifying quality of a haunting olive oil.'

PATRICIA WELLS

Long and skinny, smooth or crinkled, shape also differs dramatically – as does the vital difference between ‘*une belle tomate et une bonne tomate* (a beautiful tomato and a good tomato)’. ‘My tomatoes are not beautiful but I know they are good,’ explains the tomato-mad chef, taking me through his steely kitchen to the sun-flooded balcony out back where the 40kg of far-from-uniform tomatoes he will use in two days are stacked in crates. ‘Never keep tomatoes in a fridge,’ says Monsieur Etienne with horror, ‘it dulls their taste’. He adds that there is little point smelling a tomato to check quality: it’s the green branch, not the flesh, that exudes that lovely fresh-from-the-garden tomato scent – ‘*Quel bonheur!*’ (What joy!) – familiar to too few these days.

Like every chef in the region, Monsieur Etienne buys his fruit and vegetables at the market and directly from local producers. A stroll through the Provençal market in July is a particularly succulent affair: July is the month for melons (p51), apricots, pomegranates, the first fleshy black figs of the year and the last of the cherries. Francis et Jacqueline Honoré grow 150 different fig varieties at **Les Figuières** (☎ 04 90 95 72 03; www.lesfiguières.com; Mas de Luquet), an organic fig farm in Graveson.

The artichoke, another July vegetable, is eaten young and can be stuffed with a salted pork, onion and herb mix, then baked, to become *petits légumes farcis* (little stuffed vegetables); stuffed courgette flowers make an enchanting variation. Most vegetables that grow under the Provençal sun can be thrown into a *tian* (vegetable-and-rice gratin) or eaten as *crudités*, that is, chopped up and served raw with *anchoïade*, *tapenade* or *brandade de morue* with an apéritif.

Staples like onions, aubergines (eggplant) and courgettes (summer squash or zucchini) are stewed alongside green peppers, garlic and various aromatic herbs to produce that perennial Provençal favourite known the world over, *ratatouille*.

## AUGUST: HERBAL SCRUB

Distinctive to Provençal cuisine is the use of lavender (p244), harvested during the hot dry days of August when the aromatic purple flower is still in bloom. Its flowers flavour herbal tea, tart up desserts and spice grilled meats. Its leaves float in soups.

Provence’s titillating array of aromatic herbs and plants is a legacy of the heavily scented garrigue that grows with vigour in the region. While

### STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE’S MOUTH

*Tomates à la Provençale* (tomatoes cut in two, sprinkled with crushed garlic and oven-baked), potatoes cooked in the oven with loads of garlic and herbs, and *bœuf boulettes ail persil* (garlic and parsley-spiced beef balls) are typical dishes eaten in the family home of garlic-farmer Jeanine Squarzonei, a regular at Marseille’s seasonal garlic market:

‘The market opens on 24 June (midsummer and the feast day of St-John) and runs for a month. People buy garlic to keep for the whole year,’ explains Jeanine who farms near Aix-en-Provence. Garlic is planted in August, plucked from the soil the following June and strewn across the fields to dry for a few days before harvesting.

‘I farm two types of garlic: violet (€2.40 per kg) which keeps 10 months and is particularly good raw in salads as it’s less strong; and Moulinin or *rouge* (red; €2.80 per kg) which keeps 12 months,’ continues Jeanine, stressing that both garlic taste the same after cooking. The strongest-tasting garlic is *vert* (green) garlic, harvested in May when it is not fully ripened. Eat it quickly; it doesn’t keep.

Any other tips for avoiding ‘garlic breath’? ‘Chewing gum,’ she says with a grin, pulling out a packet from her apron pocket.

The Provence Cookbook by Patricia Wells is the recipe-book bible for anyone keen to try their hand at Provençal cooking.

### TABLE MANNERS

The Provençal book of etiquette:

- Cardinal sins – skipping lunch, turning down a *dégustation* (wine-tasting) session or expressing a dislike of regional specialities *pieds et paquets* (sheep tripe) or *testicules de mouton* (sheep testicles).
- Don’t even try to balance your bread on your main-course plate (side plates are only provided in formal, multistarred, gastronomic restaurants); a liberal sprinkling of crumbs on the table is fine.
- Using the same knife and fork for your starter and main course is common in many *fermes auberges* and bistros. Don’t be surprised if the waiter adds up your *addition* (bill) on the paper tablecloth.
- Feel free to order *une carafe d’eau* (a jug of tap water) in any type of restaurant, formal or otherwise, rather than a €5 to €10 bottle of *plate* (still) or *gazeuse* (fizzy) mineral water.
- *Santé* (cheers!) is the toast used for alcoholic drinks; raise a full glass and chink it lightly against those of fellow drinkers before taking a sip. *Bon appetite* (or simply ‘*bon app*’ between families and very good friends) is the thing to say before eating.
- End your meal with a short, sharp *café* (espresso); ordering anything else (a tea, milky coffee) is just not on.

the classic *herbes de Provence* mix of dried basil, thyme, oregano, rosemary (which was a natural ingredient for eternal youth in medieval Provence) and savory seasons dishes throughout Europe, culinary creations in the region rely more on fresh herbs. Fresh basil lends its pea green colour and strong fragrance to *pistou* (pesto) but the herb is used dried to flavour *soupe au pistou*. Sage is another *pistou* ingredient, while aromatic rosemary brings flavour meat dishes. Chervil leaves are used in omelettes and meat dishes, and the tender young shoots of tarragon flavour delicate sauces accompanying seafood.

Particularly rife is the sensual aniseed scent of the bulbous fennel. While its leaves are picked in spring and finely chopped for use in fish dishes and marinades, its potent seeds are plucked in late August to form the basis of several herbal liqueurs, including *pastis* (p50).

## SEPTEMBER: RED RICE

Gourmets rave about the red rice harvested in September in Europe’s most northerly rice-growing region – the Camargue. Nutty in taste and borne out of a cross-pollination of wild red and cultivated short-grain rice, the russet-coloured grains are best shown off in a salad or pilaf. They are also quite delicious simply served with olive oil, salt and herbs or almonds; and marry beautifully with the region’s other big product, bull (p46). Risotto-style white and other brown-rice varieties are also cultivated in this wet westerly corner of Provence where paddies cover 10,000 hectares and conditions can be quite unique.

‘Flamingos try to eat our rice so we have an automatic gun-sound machine to scare them off,’ says Camargue rice farmer Lucille Bon, whose 500-hectare rice plantation – strictly organic – yields just 2000kg to 5000kg of rice per hectare (compared to up to 8000kg per hectare on a traditional nonorganic farm).

‘Because we’re organic, turning the fields is important otherwise the earth becomes too poor,’ she explains, adding that ‘this year we have lentils and alfalfa; but next year we’ll plant red rice again’.

Search by product, establishment or village to track down a tasty of choice of fabulous and authentic *fromageries* (cheese shops), farmhouse kitchens and so on with the annual *Guide Ganté Provence & Côte d’Azur* at [www.guidegantie.com](http://www.guidegantie.com) (in French).

Rice is planted in a pancake-flat field at the end of April and flooded with water from the Rhône, remaining submerged until 15 days before the September harvest when the water is drained off. Harvesting is just like harvesting wheat, after which the field is burned and the rice sent to the cooperative to have its outer husk machine-removed, thus becoming brown rice. White rice is stripped of its second husk too – making red rice a type of brown rice.

Since 2003 Provence's classical dried herbal mix has been protected by a Label Rouge (Red Label), which requires *herbes de Provence* to contain 26% rosemary, 26% savory, 26% oregano, 19% thyme and 3% basil.

## OCTOBER: SWEET CHESTNUTS

Roast chestnuts hot off the coals brighten darker days in October when the first fresh fruits of the *châtaignier* (chestnut tree) fall – *marrons* (the larger fruits packed singularly in the prickly chestnuts burs) and *châtaignes* (the smaller fruits, packed two or more per bur) in culinary terms.

In Collobrières (p360), chestnut capital in the Massif des Maures, the autumnal fruit is made into *marrons glacés*, *crème de marrons* (sickly sweet chestnut spread, much loved on crepes) and *liqueur de châtaignes* (chestnut liqueur). The tree's aromatic flowers flavour *gelée de fleurs de châtaignes* (chestnut flower jelly).

If it's savoury you're after, Grasse-based chef Jacques Chibois at the Bastide St-Antoine (p328) cooks a mean roast partridge with juniper berries and chestnuts.

## NOVEMBER: THE OLIVE HARVEST

In November, the bulk of the region's succulent, sunbaked black olives – born from clusters of white flowers that blossom on the knotty old trees in May and June – are harvested. The harvest continues in some parts until January, olives destined for the oil press (p45) usually being the last to be picked.

A ramekin of olives marinated in olive oil and spices or tangy *tapenade* (an olive-based dip fusing the region's quintessential edibles; p46) are classic

### THE MILK OF PROVENCE

When in Provence, do as the Provençaux do: drink pastis. The aniseed-flavoured alcoholic drink is a classic apéritif in the region, although it can be drunk any time of day.

Amber-coloured in the bottle, it turns milky white when mixed with water. Bars and cafés serve it straight, allowing you to add the water (roughly five parts water to one part pastis). It's best drunk before lunch or as the sun sets – and never on the rocks.

A dash of *sirop de menthe* (mint syrup diluted with water) transforms a regular pastis into a *perroquet* (literally 'parrot'). A *tomate* (tomato) is tarted up with one part grenadine, while the sweet Mauresque is dressed with *orgeat* (a sweet-orange and almond syrup).

Pastis was invented in 1932 in Marseille by industrialist Paul Ricard (1909–97). The earliest aniseed liqueur to hit the market was absinthe, a dangerous and potent liqueur distilled with wormwood oil that, from the early 1800s, was manufactured in France by Henri-Louis Pernod. The drink – which boasted an astonishing 72% alcohol content – was banned in 1915, paving the way for Ricard's 45% alcohol pastis and other harmless (except for the alcohol) aniseed and liquorice liqueurs, such as the modern-day Pernod. Leading pastis brands are Pastis 51 and Ricard, both owned by the Ricard empire (in addition to Pernod, taken over by Ricard in 1974).

Taste these and others at Marseille's Maison du Pastis (see the boxed text, p113). Tasting tips from locals not quite rolling under the table include (a) never order simply 'a pastis' at the bar; ask for it by the brand name such as Ricard, Janot or Casanis etc (b) if you find it too strong, add sugar (c) bars in Marseille serve it in four sizes of glass: in a *momie* or *mominette* (a dinky shot glass), a *bock* (double-height shot glass), a *tube* (tall thin juice glass) and a *ballon* (like a brandy balloon).

### HERB 'N' SPICE WIZARDS

Gem up on herbs, spices, their mixes and uses – from Provence and elsewhere – for a morning or weekend at the inventive *atelier de créations culinaires* (culinary creations workshop) of herb 'n' spice whiz Gérard Vives in Forcalquier (p246). In Mane, 4km south, see every herb growing under the Provençal sun at the Prieuré de Salagon (p246) and ask the local priest to concoct a herbal remedy for you.

apéritif accompaniments. Table olives are the first to be harvested and can be black, round and fleshy (*grossane*); green and pointed (*picholine*) or pear-shaped with yellow tints (*salonenque*). *Olives de Nice* (the Cailletier grape variety) are small, firm and lime, wine, brown or aubergine in colour.

With son Anthony, Nicole and Serge Bérenguier cultivate four different varieties of olives at their 10-hectare olive farm and mill in Callas (p357), a four-generation family business founded in 1928 by grandfather Félix and revived by grandson Serge in the 1970s after the 1956 frost froze most olive trees to death. 'October, just before the harvest when the olives change colour, is a magnificent moment. The olives stay green, but they become paler, promising *une belle recolte* (beautiful harvest),' says Nicole, adding that 'early November when the olives fall is also magical'. Just two extra people are taken on to help harvest: green nets are laid out beneath the trees to catch the falling olives, loosened from the tree with special scissors. Annual yield: around 350 tons.

### THE MELON FARM

Charismatic Bernard Meyssard has plenty of passions in life: 'melons, *la chasse* (hunting), *pétanque*, my wife,' says the 58-year-old melon producer and French *pétanque* champ. Monsieur Meyssard zips around his melon farm in Cheval Blanc, 6km south of Cavaillon, on a quad like a kid, eyes popping out of sockets, frizzy grey locks flying behind him as he revs between greenhouses side-saddle.

A bus driver when he wed Martine in 1969, Bernard traded in the road for agriculture in 1982, quickly establishing himself as one of the largest of the dozen or so small melon-producers farming around Cavaillon. His greenhouses span 20,000 sq m and yield 2kg to 3.5kg per sq metre of Charentais melons a year (Galia is the other variety rife in these parts). The gentle-hued, sweet-fleshed fruit is harvested and sold at the market late June to early September, although July is the best month. About 90% of melon flesh is water.

But life on the melon farm is not a bed of roses: 'It is not as good as it was. The last 10 years have been catastrophic. There are areas now that grow melons like fields of corn while the big buyers fix the prices months before melons are harvested. For us small producers, it is finished,' explains Bernard, bemoaning the industrialisation of the melon trade between sweet mouthfuls of his lovingly grown melon: we are all savouring it around his kitchen table between restrained sips (we are all driving) of Beaugues de Venise. 'Melon is my passion – I won't abandon it. But now I grow lettuces November to March and strawberries in spring to make ends meet,' says the man who holidays twice a year ('two weeks in August with my wife on the coast and a gastronomy week in Le Gers with my friends in September before planting the lettuces'). 'Chin chin, *c'est bon*, huh?' Murrings of contentment rumble around the table as the bottle of Beaugues is drained (we are six).

Should you want to meet Bernard in the middle of a melon field and learn more about his trade, ask at Cavaillon or Cheval Blanc tourist offices about their July and August **melon-farm visits** (adult/child under 12 €/free). Otherwise, stop at his roadside stall in front of his farm, 2km south of Cheval Blanc towards Merindol, and buy a Meyssard melon.

For the ultimate melon-dining experience, try Prévôt (p225).

## DECEMBER: A DOZEN & ONE DESSERTS

December in Provence sees families rush home after Mass on Christmas Eve for Caleno vo Careno, a traditional feast of 13 desserts symbolising Jesus and the 12 apostles. Among the culinary delights are *pompe à huile* (leavened cake baked in olive oil and flavoured with orange blossom), sweet black-and-white nougat (homemade from honey and almonds), nuts and an assortment of dried and fresh fruits.

Not that there's not plenty to keep sweet-tooths appeased year-round. Lavender and thyme flavour milk-based dishes such as *crème brûlée* as well as jams and honey. Anise and orange blossoms give *navettes* (canoe-shaped biscuits from Marseille) and *fougassettes* (sweet bread) their distinctive flavours. A secret 60 different Mont Ventoux herbs are used to make the liqueur that laces *papalines d'Avignon* (pink liqueur-laced chocolate balls). Almonds are turned into *gâteaux secs aux amandes* (snappy almond biscuits) around Nîmes; *calissons* (almond biscuit frosted with icing sugar) in Aix-en-Provence; and black honey nougat everywhere. Countrywide, christening and wedding guests receive *dragées* – porcelain-smooth sugared almonds tinted pink for a girl, blue for a boy and white for a blushing bride.

### TOP 10 COOKING COURSES

Cooking courses are a big business. Many *chambres d'hôtes* also host cooking workshops; see the regional chapters for details.

**At Home with Patricia Wells** ([www.patriciawells.com](http://www.patriciawells.com); c/o Judith Jones, 708 Sandown Place, Raleigh NC 27615, USA) Four- and five-day general Provence, truffle, fish and wine courses with Patricia Wells, the only wholly foreign cook considered to have truly embraced the soul of Provençal cooking. Courses upwards of US\$4000 (excluding accommodation); most take place in Wells' 18th-century farmhouse kitchen near Vaison-la-Romaine.

**Le Cilantro** (☎ 04 90 18 25 05; 29 rue Porte de Laure, Arles) Learn the tricks of the trade in the restaurant kitchen of Arlésian chef Jérôme Laurant; seasonally themed classes with lunch (€45), once a month March to December.

**École de Cuisine du Soleil** (☎ 04 93 75 35 70; [www.mouline-demougins.com](http://www.mouline-demougins.com); av Notre Dame de Vie, Mougins) Thematic 2½-hour sessions (Riviera flavours, snails, Sunday in the country etc), June to August, with well-known Provençal chef Alain Llorca cost €58/265 for one/five sessions.

**L'Estocaficada** (☎ 04 93 80 21 64; [brigitte.autier@wanadoo.fr](mailto:brigitte.autier@wanadoo.fr); 7 rue de l'Hôtel de Ville, Nice) Atmospheric Niçois cooking workshops (September to June) by third-generation female chef Brigitte Autier, in the open kitchen of family restaurant L'Estocaficada, where stockfish, *tourte de blette* and other staunchly Niçois dishes have been boiled up in since 1958. Three-hour workshop with lunch costs €55, with lunch and market and producer visits €70.

**Hostellerie de Crillon le Brave** (☎ 04 90 65 61 61; [www.crillonlebrave.com](http://www.crillonlebrave.com); place de l'Église, Crillon le Brave) Five-day courses in October with French chef Philippe Monti; €2900 per person per week, including hotel accommodation.

**Jean-Jacques Prévôt** (☎ 04 90 71 39 43; [www.restaurant-prevot.com](http://www.restaurant-prevot.com) in French; 353 av de Verdun, Cavaillon) Half-day thematic sessions (€120/110 with/without market visit) focusing on a seasonal product – melons, clams, truffles, asparagus, chocolate – with Provence's melon-mad chef.

**Le Marmiton** (☎ 04 90 85 93 93; [www.la-mirande.fr](http://www.la-mirande.fr) in French; Hôtel de la Mirande, 4 place de la Mirande, F-84000 Avignon) Morning/evening classes for €80/135 and afternoon pastry sessions in the *atelier de cuisine* (cooking studio) of Avignon's loveliest hotel, a 14th-century cardinal's palace; truffle weekend €460. Course calendar online.

**Christophe Leroy** (☎ 04 94 97 87 20; [www.christophe-leroy.com](http://www.christophe-leroy.com); 38 rue Georges Clemenceau, St-Tropez) Three-hour *ateliers* (workshops) cost €100 and include coffee and *viennoiseries* (Viennese pastries). They each cover four recipes with inventive St-Tropez chef Christophe Leroy at La Table du Marché (p348).

**L'Oustau de Baumanière** (☎ 04 90 54 33 07; [www.oustaudebaumaniere.com](http://www.oustaudebaumaniere.com); Les Baux de Provence) Indulge in a three-hour *atelier* followed by lunch (€165) with chef Jean-André Charial or a pâtisserie and confectionery sessions (€110 including meal) with this prestigious hotel's pastry chef.

**Les Petits Farcis** (☎ 06 81 67 41 22; [www.petitsfarcis.com](http://www.petitsfarcis.com); 7 rue du Jésus, Nice) Niçois cooking sessions built around the cours Saleya market by long-time Nice resident Rosa Jackson. A market tour, cooking class and lunch costs €200 or throw in a postlunch gourmet stroll (€290) to make a day of it; three-hour gourmet walks (€100), early-morning market tours with breakfast (€120) and full-day meet-the-producers tours (€290).

### TOP FIVE SPECIALIST FOOD MARKETS

Market days are listed at the start of regional chapters. Photogenic highlights:

- Farmers Market on Tuesdays from April to December in Apt
- Fresh Fish Market on mornings year-round in quai des Belges, Marseille
- Garlic Market daily from late June and July in cours Belsunce, Marseille
- Melon Market on mornings from May to September in Cavaillon
- Truffle Market on Saturdays from November to March in Richerenches

Nice and Apt excel at *fruits confits* (crystallised or glazed fruits); see them made in Apt (p212), Pont du Loup and Nice. *Berlingots* are hard caramels originating in Carpentras, and *tarte Tropézienne* is a cream-filled sandwich cake from St-Tropez. A popular dessert in the Vaucluse is cantaloupe melon from Carpentras doused in Muscat de Beaufort de Venise, a sweet dessert wine made in a village nearby.

## EAT YOUR WORDS

### Useful Phrases

#### I'd like to reserve a table.

*J'aimerais réserver une table.*

zhay-mer-ray ray-zair-vay ewn ta-bler

#### A table for two, please.

*Une table pour deux, s'il vous plaît.*

ewn ta-bler poor der seel voo play

#### Do you have a menu in English?

*Est-ce que vous avez la carte en anglais?*

es-ker voo a-vay la kart on ong-glây

#### Could you recommend something?

*Est-ce que vous pouvez recommander quelque chose?*

es-ker voo poo-vay re-ko-mon-day kel-ker shoz

#### I'd like a local speciality.

*J'aimerais une spécialité régionale.*

zhay-mer-ray ewn spay-sya-lee-tay ray-zhyo-nal

#### I'd like the set menu.

*Je prends le menu.*

zher pron ler mer-new

#### I'd like today's special.

*Je voudrais avoir le plat du jour.*

zher voo-drây a-vwar ler pla doo zhoor

#### I'm a vegetarian.

*Je suis végétarien/végétarienne.* (m/f)

zher swee vay-zhay-ta-ryun/vay-zhay-ta-ryen

#### I don't eat meat/fish/seafood.

*Je ne mange pas de viande/poisson/fruits de mer.*

je ne monzh pa de vee-and/pwa-so/ fwee-de-mair

#### I'd like to order the ...

*Je voudrais commander ...*

zher voo-drây ko-mon-day

#### Is service included in the bill?

*Est-ce que le service est inclu?*

es-ker ler sair-vees ay un-klew

#### The bill, please.

*La note, s'il vous plaît.*

la not seel voo play

## Food Glossary

### STARTERS

<b>anchoïade</b>	on-sho-yad	anchovy puree laced with garlic and olive oil
<b>assiette anglaise</b>	a-syet ong-glây	plate of cold mixed meats and sausages
<b>assiette de crudités</b>	a-syet de krew-dee-tay	plate of raw vegetables with dressings
<b>banon à la feuille</b>	ba-no a la fer-yer	goats cheese dipped in eau de vie and wrapped in a chestnut leaf
<b>bouillon</b>	boo-yon	broth or stock

## REPAS DES VENDANGES

Harvesting the grapes is all very well but for *vendangeur* (grape picker) and *vigneron* (wine grower), it is the *repas des vendanges* marking the end of the harvest's end that is the most memorable feast.

The 'harvest meal' is the culmination of three long weeks spent working hard in the heat of late summer – from around 7.30am to 2am in the case of small-scale wine producer Michel Vivet in Les Arcs who pretty much works around the clock despite the extra eight *coupeurs* and additional *porteur* he takes on to help him pick and carry grapes on his 15-hectare estate.

The day after the harvest, everyone who's helped harvest joins Michel and his family around 11am on the terrace of their green-shuttered farmhouse overlooking vines for an apéritif and lunch which carries on well into the night: 'It is a fabulous affair. We eat *petit gris de Provence* (snails in tomato sauce), a huge aioli and plenty of wine.'

For Michel the *repas des vendanges* evokes the free spirit of his childhood growing up in Les Arcs: 'I looked for mushrooms, I hunted truffles, I took my bike and built tree houses, I walked wherever I wanted to and no one worried about fires. Everyone knew everyone and helped each other. Now, with more and more large industrial *domaines* run by people who don't actually work on the land, this contact between *paysans* (farmers, country folk) is being lost'.

<b>bourride</b>	boo-reed	fish soup; often eaten as a main course
<b>brandade de morue</b>	bron-dad der mo-rew	mix of crushed salted cod, olive oil and garlic
<b>brebis</b>	brer-bee	sheeps milk dairy product
<b>fromage de chèvre</b>	fro-mazh der shev-rer	goats cheese (also called <i>brousse</i> )
<b>pissala</b>	pee-sa-la	Niçois paste mixed from pureed anchovies
<b>pissaladière</b>	pee-sa-la-dyair	anchovy, onion and black olive 'pizza' from Nice
<b>soupe au pistou</b>	soop o pees-too	vegetable soup made with basil and garlic
<b>soupe de poisson</b>	soop der pwa-son	fish soup
<b>tapenade</b>	ta-per-nad	sharp, olive-based dip
<b>tomme arlesienne</b>	tom ar-ler-syen	moulded goats cheese from Arles

## MEAT, CHICKEN & POULTRY

<b>agneau</b>	a-nyo	lamb
<b>bœuf</b>	berf	beef
<b>bœuf haché</b>	berf ha-shay	minced beef
<b>canard</b>	ka-nar	duck
<b>chèvre</b>	shev-rer	goat
<b>chevreau</b>	sher-vro	kid (baby goat)
<b>daube de bœuf à la Provençale</b>	dob der berf a la pro-von-sal	beef stew
<b>entrecôte</b>	on-trer-cot	rib steak
<b>épaule d'agneau</b>	e-pol da-nyo	shoulder of lamb
<b>estouffade de bœuf</b>	es-too-fad der berf	Carmargais beef stew with tomatoes and olives
<b>filet</b>	fee-lay	tenderloin
<b>jambon</b>	zham-bon	ham
<b>lardons</b>	lar-don	pieces of chopped bacon
<b>pieds de porc</b>	pyay der pork	pig trotters
<b>pieds et paquets</b>	pyay ay pa-kay	sheep tripe; literally 'feet and packages'
<b>poulet</b>	poo-lay	chicken
<b>saucisson d'Arles</b>	so-see-son darl	sausage made from pork, beef, wine and spices
<b>taureau de Camargue</b>	to-ro der ka-marg	Camargais beef

Visit the Comité Interprofessionnel des Vins Côtes de Provence and learn more about Côtes de Provence wine at [www.cotes-de-provence.fr](http://www.cotes-de-provence.fr).

## PROVENÇAL WINE

Provençal wines are by no means France's most sought after, but making and tasting them is an art and tradition that bears its own unique and tasty trademark. Each AOC possess a common trait: an exceptionally cold mistral wind and an equally exceptional, hot, ripening sun. Most carry the name of the chateau or *domaine* (wine-growing estate) they are produced on – unlike **Fat Bastard** ([www.fatbastard.com](http://www.fatbastard.com)), a label created by Gigondas oenologist Thierry Boudinaud ('*now zat iz what you call eh phet bast-ard*,' said Thierry allegedly to his English partner Guy Anderson upon tasting the wine, hence the ground-breaking hip name). Using grapes from neighbouring Languedoc, the Gigondas-born wine is the French sensation of the moment since breaking into the US market.

Wine can be bought direct from the *producteur* (wine producer) or *vigneron* (wine grower), most of whom offer degustation, allowing you to sample two or three vintages with no obligation to buy. For cheap plonk (*vin de table*) costing €2 or so per litre; fill up your own container at the local wine cooperative; every wine-producing village has one. Lists of estates, *caves* (wine cellars) and cooperatives are available from tourist offices and *maisons des vins* (wine houses) in Avignon (p163), Les Arcs-sur-Argens (p359) and elsewhere.

## Côtes du Rhône

The most renowned vintage in this respected appellation established in 1937 is Châteauneuf du Pape, a full-bodied wine bequeathed to Provence by the Avignon popes who planted the vineyards 10km south of Orange.

Châteauneuf du Pape reds are strong (minimum alcohol content 12.5%) and well-structured masters in their field. Whites account for 7% of total annual production. Châteauneuf du Pape wine growers, obliged to pick their grapes by hand, say it is the *galets* (large smooth, yellowish stones) covering their vineyards that distinguish them from others. Both whites and reds can be drunk young (two to three years) or old (seven years or more). Irrespective of age, whites should be served at 12°C; reds at 16°C to 18°C.

The Tavel rosé is another popular Rhône Valley *grand cru* (literally 'great growth'). The vineyards around the Dentelles de Montmirail, some 15km east of Orange, produce notable red and rosé Gigondas, and the sweet dessert wine, Muscat de Beaugues de Venise.

## Côtes de Provence

The 18 hectares of vineyards sandwiched between Nice and Aix-en-Provence produce red, rosé and white Côtes de Provence, France's sixth largest appellation, dating from 1977. The *terroir* (land) ranges from sandy coastal soils around St-Tropez to chalky soils covering subalpine slopes around Les Arcs-sur-Argens.

The appellation is the largest in Provence, with an annual production of 100 million bottles; 75% are rosé. Côtes de Provence rosé is drunk young and served at a crisp 8° to 10°C. Reds drunk young should be served at 14° to 16°C, while older red *vins de garde* – a traditional accompaniment to game, sauced meats and cheese – are best drunk at 16° to 18°C.

Côtes de Provence whites, a golden friend to fish, should be chilled to 8°C.

## Others

Six other pocket-sized appellations are dotted along or near the coast: Bandol, Cassis, Coteaux Varois, Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence, Bellet and Palette. Of these, Bandol is the most respected, known for its deep-flavoured reds produced from the dark-berried *mourvèdre* grape, which needs oodles of sun to ripen (hence its rarity). In neighbouring Cassis, crisp whites (75% of its production) are drunk with gusto.

Those who like a dry rosé should try Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence. Palette, east of Aix, is just 20 hectares, dates from 1948 and produces well-structured reds from its old vines. Four of every five Palette bottles come from Château Simone. Wines from the Bellet AOC are rare outside Nice.

Vast areas of the region's interior are carpeted with Côtes du Ventoux (6900 hectares established in 1973) and Côtes du Lubéron (3500 hectares dating from 1988) vineyards.



**FISH & SEAFOOD**

<b>aioli Provençale complet</b>	a-ee-o-lee pro-von-sal kom-play	shellfish, vegetables, boiled egg and aioli
<b>anchois</b>	on-shwa	anchovy
<b>coquillage</b>	ko-kee-lazh	shellfish
<b>coquille St-Jacques</b>	ko-keel san zhak	scallop
<b>crevette grise</b>	kre-vet grees	shrimp
<b>crevette rose</b>	kre-vet ros	prawn
<b>fruits de mer</b>	frwee der mair	seafood
<b>gambas</b>	gom-ba	king prawns
<b>homard</b>	o-mar	lobster
<b>langouste</b>	lang-goost	crayfish
<b>langoustine</b>	lang-goos-teen	small saltwater 'lobster'
<b>oursin</b>	oor-san	sea urchin
<b>paella</b>	pa-ay-a	rice dish with saffron, vegetables and shellfish
<b>palourde</b>	pa-loord	clam
<b>rouget</b>	roo-zhay	red mullet
<b>estocaficada</b> (in Niçois)	es-to-ka-fee-ka-da	stockfish, dried salt fish soaked in water for four to five days, stewed for two hours with onion, tomato and white wine, then laced with anchovies and black olives

**VEGETABLES, HERBS & SPICES**

<b>aïl</b>	ai	garlic
<b>artichaut</b>	ar-tee-sho	artichoke
<b>asperge</b>	a-spairzh	asparagus
<b>basilic</b>	ba-see-leek	basil
<b>blette de Nice</b>	blet der nees	white beet
<b>cépe</b>	sep	cepe (boletus mushroom)
<b>estragon</b>	es-tra-zhon	tarragon
<b>fleur de courgette</b>	fler der coor-zhet	courgette (zucchini) flower
<b>légumes farcis</b>	lay-goom far-see	stuffed vegetables
<b>mesclun</b>	mes-kloo	Niçois mix of lettuce

**TOP 10 APÉRITIFS & DIGESTIVES**

Lounging over a pre- or postdinner drink is one of the region's great sensual delights; most are loaded with herbs, plants and spices of Provence

- Pastis (p50) – quintessential Provençal drink
- Côtes de Provence rosé (p55) – crisp and chill
- Beauges de Venise (p177) – sweet muscat wine, popular apéritif
- Liqueur de châtaignes – chestnut liqueur; mixed with white wine in the Massif des Maures to make a sweet apéritif
- Rinquinquin de pêche – peach liqueur mixed with chilled white wine, distilled at the Distilleries et Domaines de Provence in Forcalquier (p246)
- Amandine – almond liqueur from Haute-Provence
- La Farigoule – thyme liqueur from Haute-Provence
- Reverend Father Gaucher's Elixir – sweet, yellow chartreuse blended from 30 aromatic herbs in Tarascon
- Marc – fiery spirit distilled from grape skins and pulp left over from wine-making; digestive
- Eau de vie – generic name for brandies distilled from the region's fruits; digestive

**TOP FIVE FOOD FESTIVALS**

Food itself is a reason to celebrate: practically every harvest (grapes, olives, cherries, chestnuts, melons, lemons and so on) is honoured with its own festival. Our favourites:

- Messe de la Truffe (Truffle Mass) in Richerenches in January (see p43)
- Fête des Citrons (Lemon Festival) in Menton in February (see p292)
- Fête du Melon (Melon Festival) in Cavaillon in July (see p223)
- Fête des Premices du Riz (Rice Harvest Festival) in Arles in mid-September (see p142)
- Fête de la Châtaigne (Chestnut Festival) in Collobrières in October (see p361)

<b>ratatouille</b>	ra-ta-too-yer	casserole of aubergines, tomatoes, peppers and garlic
<b>riz de Camargue</b>	ree der ka-marg	Camargais rice
<b>romarin</b>	ro-ma-ran	rosemary
<b>salade Niçoise</b>	sa-lad nee-swa	green salad featuring tuna, egg and anchovy
<b>thym</b>	teem	thyme
<b>tian</b>	tyan	vegetable-and-rice gratin served in a dish called a <i>tian</i>
<b>tourta de bléa truffe</b>	toor-ta de blay-a trewf	Niçois white beetroot and pine-kernel pie black truffle
<b>SAUCES</b>		
<b>aioli</b>	ay-o-lee	garlicky sauce to accompany <i>bouillabaisse</i>
<b>huile d'olive</b>	weel do-leev	olive oil
<b>pistou</b>	pees-too	pesto (pounded mix of basil, hard cheese, olive oil and garlic)
<b>Provençale</b>	pro-von-sal	tomato, garlic, herb and olive-oil dressing or sauce
<b>rouille</b>	roo-yer	aioli-based sauce spiced with chilli pepper; served with <i>bourride</i>
<b>vinaigrette</b>	vun-ay-gret	salad dressing made with oil, vinegar, mustard and garlic

**BREAD & SWEETS**

<b>chichi freggi</b>	shee-shee-fre-gee	sugar-coated doughnuts from around Marseille
<b>fougasse</b>	foo-gas	elongated Niçois bread stuffed with olives, chopped bacon or anchovies
<b>fougassette</b>	foo-gas-set	brioche perfumed with orange flower
<b>gâteaux secs aux amandes</b>	ga-to sek o a-mond	crisp almond biscuits
<b>michettes</b>	mee-shet	Niçois bread stuffed with cheese, olives, anchovies and onions
<b>navettes</b>	na-vet	canoe-shaped, orange-blossom-flavoured biscuits from Marseille
<b>pain aux noix</b>	pan o nwa	walnut bread
<b>pain aux raisins</b>	pan o ray-son	sultana bread
<b>pan-bagnat</b>	pan-ba-nya	Niçois bread soaked in olive oil and filled with anchovy, olives and green peppers
<b>panisses</b>	pa-nees	chickpea flour patties from in and around Marseille
<b>socca</b>	so-ka	Niçois chickpea flour and olive-oil pancake

# The Arts

Artists and their Museums on the Riviera by Barbara Freed is an essential art-driven read for anyone touring the region for its art.

‘Artistic dynamo’ sums up the region pretty well. ‘It’s important to have a place for everybody. If you don’t like it, you can always shut your eyes,’ believes Nathalie Duchayne (see the boxed text, p349), who receives requests daily from artists all over the world keen to have their work shown in her gallery – a mixed-medium cocktail of wall and floor art (painting, drawing, sculpture, designer furniture, ceramics etc) – in St-Tropez, the old fishing village on the Mediterranean where it all started.

But those dreamy bohemian days of impoverished artists sharing studio and sleeping space, using their artistic creations as a form of currency to drink and dine very well – St-Paul de Vence’s La Colombe d’Or (see the boxed text, p321) and Biot’s Restaurant des Arcades (p318) have fabulous collections as a result – are over. The artistic pace today is fast and furious, fuelled by a frenetic creative energy that finds expression in an orgy of diverse and often ground-breaking artistic mediums, as one look at the portfolio of **Documents d’Artistes** ([www.documentsdartistes.org](http://www.documentsdartistes.org)), a Marseille-based association that catalogues and diffuses the work of contemporary regional artists on an international circuit, proves: be it tracing a line along the surface of the planet, creating sound installations, inflatable or mechanical art, it is happening here.

The high profile attributed to undiscovered younger artists echoes the region’s natural leaning towards the avant-garde: Avignon has its theatre-driven Festival Off (p163) and La Manutention (p167); Marseille has La Friche la Belle de Mai (see the boxed text, p112 and opposite) and La Cité des Arts de la Rue (see the boxed text, below); while legendary art centres on the Côte d’Azur – Nice, Vence, St-Paul de Vence, Vallauris and Mougins – are rich in one-person *ateliers* (workshops). In 2005 urban art scored a major coup with the opening of Europe’s first further-education establishment dedicated solely to street art, FAI AR. Venue: cutting-edge Marseille.

## ART TALK

Nowhere is the contemporary-art dialogue sparkier than in Marseille where a potent cocktail of street-art projects, artists’ residencies and public forums keeps the debate raging.

On the 5th floor of La Tour at La Friche, **Astérides** ([www.asterides.org](http://www.asterides.org)) – an association committed to launching young unknown artists – invites a contemporary artist to present his/her work to an audience of local artists and art-lovers. On top of these twice-monthly vibrant Garage Hermétique sessions, Astérides provides short-term studio space for young artists and hosts two or three contemporary art exhibitions a year at Galerie de la Friche. Installation artist Gilles Barbier (b 1965) is one of the well-known local artists behind the Astérides group; see his work at Nîmes’ Carrée d’Art (p195).

In a rejuvenated soap and oil factory complex, ‘theatrical laboratory’ **La Cité des Arts de la Rue** (☎ 04 91 03 20 75; 225 rue des Aygaldes, Marseille) generates further art talk: emerging artists temporarily reside in studios on the industrial site alongside arts and culture ‘diffuser’ **Karwan** (hugely informative website in French at [www.karwan.info](http://www.karwan.info)); musical street-theatre ‘like public transport’ **Generik Vapeur** ([www.generikvapeur.com](http://www.generikvapeur.com)); mechanical workshop **Ateliers Sud Side** ([www.sudside.org](http://www.sudside.org) in French) where urban installations, stage sets and furniture are created; **Lézarap’art** (<http://perso.orange.fr/lezarapart> in French) which, among other things, runs a brilliant mechanical-art workshop in its multimedia garage; and national centre for the creation of street art **Lieux Publics** ([www.lieuxpublics.com](http://www.lieuxpublics.com)).

At the other end of the coast, in Nice, it is **Villa Arson** ([www.villa-arson.org](http://www.villa-arson.org) in French; p268) that fires up dialogue and encourages artistic activity with artists’ residencies, exhibitions, workshops etc.

## ZOOM IN: LA FRICHE LA BELLE DE MAI

From 1868 until 1990 tobacco was manufactured at La Belle de Mai, a vast factory complex in a run-down urban quarter northwest of Marseille’s central train station. Since 1992 the industrial dinosaur has been the hub of creative life in Provence, providing cheap or free work space for experimental artists. Author Catherine Le Nevez spoke to Séverine Capiello, international relations manager at La Friche, about its ground-breaking concept.

### How did it all start?

It started 15 years ago with a one-year contract, when the government suggested using the abandoned factory to make a cultural space to extend the downtown area of Marseille into the poor neighbourhoods. Fifteen years later it’s still here, with no contract. The space is smaller now; some areas are used by other companies, such as the studios where Plus Belle La Vie (a soap opera broadcast nationally on FR3) is filmed.

### How many people are involved?

There are 60 to 70 independent artistic organisations, with 300 people working on the site, ranging from short residencies to long-term artists, some here from the beginning.

### What are its basic tenets?

It’s multidisciplinary, with music venues (hip-hop, electronic and reggae), dance and theatre venues, galleries for contemporary visual artists, as well as film studios and radio stations. It’s independent, not lucrative, and politicised; focusing on emerging artists. It’s definitely not mainstream. Artists pay cheap or no rent.

### How accessible is it to artists and the general public?

Artists arrive but often don’t leave, so space is very limited. Artists work outside in summer; the public can come in and walk around. There’s a restaurant here and a shop to buy music, discover new artists. Our season runs September to the end of June. There’s something to see four or five days a week – music, dance, theatre... Most of it is free for the public, but some nights there are big shows people pay to enter. It’s random, there’s no specific programming; the rule here is that there is no rule.

## PAINTINGS & VISUAL ARTS

Contemporary art in the region rides on the back of an extraordinary artistic legacy. ‘People who come to St-Trop already have a fantasy of St-Tropez in their head. With my painting, I let people live out that fantasy,’ says Cica, a street artist in Vieux Port, St-Tropez.

## Papal Pleasures to Rococo Silliness

In the 14th century Siennese, French and Spanish artists working at the papal court in Avignon created an influential style of mural painting, examples of which can be seen in the city’s Palais des Papes – or rather on postcards featuring the paintings that once adorned the palace’s now very bare interior.

While the rest of France found itself preoccupied with the Hundred Years’ War, art flourished in Nice county, where the School of Nice emerged, led by Louis Bréa. Much exalted as the ‘Fra Angelico Provençal’, Louis Bréa created the burgundy colour known as *rouge bréa*. View his works at Nice’s Église Notre Dame (p268) and Menton’s Musée des Beaux-Arts (p291). In the Vallée de la Roya, meanwhile, a pair of artists from northern Italy set to work on what has since been dubbed the ‘Sistine Chapel of the southern Alps’, Notre Dame des Fontaines (p255).

Blind-man’s bluff, stolen kisses and other courtly frivolities were the focus of Enlightenment artists. One of the most influential was Avignon-born Joseph Vernet (1714–89), who left a series depicting French ports. Rococo influences brushed the landscapes of Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806), whose playful and often licentious scenes immortalised his native Grasse.

Marseille’s ground-breaking Art-cade, Galerie des Grands Bains Douches de la Plaine, online at [www.art-cade.org](http://www.art-cade.org), provides gallery space for rapidly rising contemporary artists.

Find out about FAI AR (Formation Avancée et Itinerante des Arts de la Rue), Marseille’s pioneering performing street-arts school at [www.faiar.org/anglais](http://www.faiar.org/anglais).

The elevated style of Nice-born Carle van Loo (1705–65) represented rococo's more serious 'grand style'; good examples hang in Nice's Musée des Beaux-Arts (p267) and Avignon's Musée Calvet (p162).

### 19th Century

The strong empathy with nature expressed in watercolour by François Marius Granet (1775–1849), a born-and-bred Aix-en-Provence artist, was a trademark of early-19th-century Provençal painters.

Landscapes painting further evolved under Gustave Courbet (1819–77), a frequent visitor to southern France where he taught Provençal realist Paul Guigou (1834–71). A native of Villars in the Vaucluse, Guigou painted the Durance plains overdrenched in bright sunlight.

Provence's intensity of light drew the impressionists, among them Alfred Sisley and Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919). Renoir lived in Cagnes-sur-Mer from 1903 until his death. Many of his works are displayed in the Musée Renoir (p319), his former home and studio.

Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), celebrated for his still-life and landscape works, spent his entire life in Aix-en-Provence and painted numerous canvases in and around the fountain city; the tourist-office trail traces what he painted where.

Southern France was also immortalised by Paul Gauguin (1848–1904). In Arles Gauguin worked with Vincent van Gogh (1854–90), who spent most of his painting life in Paris and Arles. A brilliant and innovative artist, van Gogh produced haunting self-portraits and landscapes, in which colour assumes an expressive and emotive quality. Unfortunately, van Gogh's talent was largely unrecognised during his lifetime (see the boxed text, p143) and just one of his paintings remains in the region (in Avignon's Musée Angladon; p162).

Pointillism was developed by Georges Seurat (1859–91), who applied paint in small dots or with uniform brush strokes of unmixed colour. His most

Xavier Girard's photography, *French Riviera: Living Well Was the Best Revenge*, captures the incredible artistic creativity of the Riviera during the 1920s and 1930s. Equally captivating on the same subject is Pari Stave's *Making Paradise: Art, Modernity and the Myth of the French Riviera*.

### PAINTING & DRAWING COURSES

Our pick of the plethora of painting courses run within the region:

- The painting atelier of Jean-Claude Lorber in an 18th-century *mas* (farmhouse), **L'Atelier Doré** (☎ 04 90 06 29 60; www.mas-des-amandiers.com in French; 48 chemin des Puits Neufs, Cavailon), offers workshops for adults/children covering all media (oil, watercolour, acrylic, pastel etc). The cost is €20.50/17 per two-hour session (20 hours €195/140). *Chambre d'hôte* accommodation is available at Mas des Amandiers (p224).
- Resident painting courses are run from June to September with semiabstract/modern painter Camille Monnier in a forest overlooking lavender fields at **Technique & Creation** (☎ 04 90 75 48 81; www.lestavannes.com; Les Tavannes, St-Saturnin-les-Apt). One week costs €580 per person including 5½ hours of painting a day, meals and accommodation.
- **L'Art et la Manière** (☎ 04 42 01 80 04; www.peindreacassis.com in French; Les Hauts Cépages, Euvezin, Cassis) offers one-day painting oil or acrylic workshops (€90) along the route des Crêtes and other fabulous coastal spots around Cassis; four-day workshops (€350 plus €50 for materials excluding brushes) with two days' studio work; three-day portrait/live model workshops cost €260/270 (excluding materials).
- English–French one-week painting/drawing courses at **Maison des Arts** (☎ 04 93 32 32 50; www.maisondesarts.com; 10 rue Maréchal Foch, La Colle sur Loup) cover several media (acrylic, charcoal, watercolour, oil). The cost is €1450/1630 for a single/shared twin room including five days' tuition, seven nights' full board and materials. Venue: an 18th-century *maison de village* in the heart of a medieval Var village.

devout pupil was Paul Signac (1863–1935), who settled in St-Tropez from 1892. Part of the Musée de l'Annonciade (p343) in St-Tropez is devoted to pointillist works and includes *Étude pour le Chenal de Gravelines* (Study for the Channel at Gravelines), painted by Seurat in 1890, as well as numerous works by Signac.

### 20th Century

On the Côte d'Azur, leading fauvist exponent Henri Matisse (1869–1954) spent his most creative years lapping up the sunlight and vivacity of the coast in and around Nice. While in St-Tropez with Signac, Matisse began sketches that produced *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* (Luxury, Calm and Tranquillity). Pointillism's signature uniform brush strokes were still evident, but were also intermingled with splashes of violent colour. His subsequent painting, *La Gitane* (1906) – displayed in St-Tropez's Musée de l'Annonciade – is the embodiment of fauvism.

Cubism was launched in 1907 by Spanish prodigy Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), for whom Provence had a tremendous importance. As demonstrated in his pioneering *Les Femmes d'Alger*, cubism deconstructed the subject into a system of intersecting planes and presented various aspects of it simultaneously. The collage, incorporating bits of cloth, wood, string, newspaper and anything lying around, was a cubist speciality.

After WWI the School of Paris was formed by a group of expressionists, mostly foreign, such as Belarusian Marc Chagall (1887–1985) who lived in France from 1922 and spent his last few years in St-Paul de Vence; his grave can be visited at the town's cemetery (p320). The largest collection of Chagall's works is at Nice's Musée National Message Biblique Marc Chagall (p267).

With the onset of WWII many artists left, and although some later returned the region never regained its old magnetism. Picasso moved permanently to the Côte d'Azur, settling first in Golfe-Juan, then Vallauris and finally Mougins, where he died. In 1946 he set up his studio in An tibes' Château Grimaldi (now the Musée Picasso; p313) and later painted a chapel, which is now the Musée National Picasso at Château Musée De Vallauris (p311).

The 1960s ushered in new realists Arman, Yves Klein and César and art generated from recycled trash, dirty crockery, crushed cars and scrap metal. Marseille-born César Baldaccini (1921–98), after whom the French cinema awards, the Césars, are named (he created the little statue handed to actors at the awards) was greatly inspired by Michelangelo. He started out using wrought iron and scrap metals, but later graduated to pliable plastics. From 1960 he crushed motor cars.

In 1960 Nice-born Klein (1928–62) produced *Anthropométrie de l'Époque Bleue*, a series of blue imprints made by two naked women (covered from head to toe in blue paint) rolling around on a white canvas – in front of an orchestra of violins and an audience in evening dress. Nice-born Arman (b 1928) became known for his trash-can portraits, made by framing the litter found in the subject's rubbish bin. Another influential realist from the School of Nice was Martial Rayasse, born in Golfe-Juan in 1936, and renowned for pioneering the use of neon in art. Most notable is his 1964 portrait of *Nissa Bella* (Beautiful Nice) – a flashing blue heart on a human face.

Another influential artist was Hungarian-born Victor Vasarely (1908–97). In Gordes from 1948, the avant-gardist turned his attention to geometrical forms, juxtaposed in contrasting colours to create shifting perspectives. Forty-two works by Vasarely are displayed in the Fondation Vasarely – designed and funded by the artist himself – in Aix-en-Provence.

In his candid, kiss-and-tell memoir, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, acclaimed Picasso biographer John Richardson recounts the 12 years he spent living the high life with cubist art collector Douglas Cooper and their wide circle of famous artist friends in 1950s Provence.

Roussillon served as a refuge to playwright Samuel Beckett during WWII; he stayed until April 1945 and wrote *Watt* there.

The 1970s supports-surfaces movement focused on deconstructing the traditional concept of a painting and transforming one of its structural components – such as the frame or canvas – into a work of art instead. The Groupe 70, specific to Nice, expressed an intellectual agitation, typical to Vivien Isnard's 1987 *Sans Titre* (Without Title) and Louis Chacallis' *Tension* (1978). In the 1990s bold paintings of naked angels brought world fame to Arles-born Louis Feraud (1921–99), an artist and couturier who dressed Brigitte Bardot and Ingrid Bergman in the 1950s.

## ARCHITECTURE

Nothing competes with Mouans-Sartoux's lime green building designed by Swiss-based architects Annette Gigon and Mike Guyer to complement its 16th-century chateau museum (see the boxed text, p326) or Sacha Sosno's square head in Nice (p266) in which the city's public library offices are housed. Other striking examples of contemporary architecture include French architect Rudi Ricciotti's Pavillon Noir in Aix-en-Provence (see the boxed text, p129); the Grimaldi Forum (2000; p389) in Monaco, two-thirds of which sits beneath sea level; and MAMAC (1990; p266) and Fondation Maeght (1964; p320) in Nice. Nîmes' steel-and-glass Carrée d'Art (1993; p195) and the Musée de la Préhistoire des Gorges du Verdon in Quinson (p240) are the work of British architect Sir Norman Foster, who is to design a new building for Monaco Yacht Club.

Italian architect Vittorio Gregotti's theatre in Aix-en-Provence and the future hotel extension of Riviera legend Grand Hôtel du Cap Ferrat (see the boxed text, p284) by Nice-based hot-shot architect Luc Svetchine ([www.lucsvetchine.com](http://www.lucsvetchine.com)) will be guaranteed stunners.

It was in Nice that modern-dance icon Isadora Duncan (1878–1927), Paris resident from 1900, died. Her neck was broken in a freak motoring accident on the Riviera when the customary scarf that trailed behind her got caught in the car wheels.

## VISUAL ARTS COURSES

From ceramics, mosaics and sculpture to photography, pottery and installation art, art-mad Provence sports courses to suit every creative taste.

- Summer installation-art workshops in the grounds of Mouans-Sartoux's cutting-edge Centre of Concrete Art with **Espace de l'Art Concret** (see the boxed text, p326).
- Learn the art of opicolour mosaics and ceramic decoration in the ceramic workshop of a Greek-inspired villa, looking out to sea in Beaulieu-sur-Mer, with **Atelier de Céramique – Villa Grecque Kérylos** (p284).
- Study pottery, sculpture and the art of decoration – as Picasso did – in Vallauris at **École Municipale des Beaux-Arts** (☎ 04 93 63 07 61; blvd des Deux Vallons, Vallauris). Courses – a joint venture between Vallauris tourist office and School of Fine Arts – cost €140/185/250 for 12/20/30 hours of tuition over four/five/five days.
- Tailor-made photography, sculpture, landscape design courses and workshops hosted by the coast's wackiest art venue are available at **Chateau La Napoule** (p328).
- **Les Ateliers de l'Image** (p190) offers English and French half-day to one-week residential photography courses (digital and film) at this design-driven photography hotel with on-site dark rooms, studios and artsy grounds to inspire in St-Rémy de Provence.
- Paper dying, wall-mural painting and wood-craft workshops are offered by **Usine Mathieu Okhra** (see the boxed text, p220) and cost €110/99/88/77 for the first/second/third/fourth day. You'll use traditional techniques and natural dyes and pigments, extracted from the ochre earth in Roussillon.
- **Atelier de Sculpture Martine Wehrel** (☎ 04 92 00 13 84; [martinewehrel@hotmail.com](mailto:martinewehrel@hotmail.com); 900 chemin des Espinets, St-Paul de Vence) offers twice-weekly sculpture classes with live model and skilled sculptor Martine Wehrel, best known for her voluptuous nudes in bronze.

## SLEEP EAT DESIGN

Top 10 addresses for discerning design-lovers:

- 3.14 Hôtel, Cannes (p305)
- Bar & bœuf, Monaco (see the boxed text, p393)
- Chambre de Séjour avec Vue, Saignon (p227)
- Columbus Monaco, Monaco (p391)
- Domaine des Andéols, St-Saturnin-lès-Apt (see the boxed text, p219)
- Hôtel Burrhus, Vaison la Romaine (p175)
- Hôtel Hi, Nice (p272)
- Hôtel Les Ateliers de l'Image, St-Rémy de Provence (p190)
- La Maison du Frêne, St-Paul de Vence (see the boxed text, p323)
- Palm Beach Marseille, Marseille (p107)

Urban 20th-century architecture is the focus of Patrimoine XXème, a national government-funded project protecting 33 edifices in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region: a 1920s Marseille silo, a dazzling white 1930s summerhouse in Antibes, Toulon port and a hydroelectric power plant. Read all about it [www.culture.gouv.fr/paca/dossiers/xxeme](http://www.culture.gouv.fr/paca/dossiers/xxeme).

## Prehistoric to Villages Perchés

See remnants of stone megaliths at Marseille's Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne (in the Centre de la Vieille Charité; p97), Monaco's Musée d'Anthropologie Préhistorique (p390) and Quinson's Musée de la Préhistoire des Gorges du Verdon (p240). Numerous petroglyphs are evident in the Vallée des Merveilles (p254) and examples of the region's earliest habitats – beehive-shaped huts built from dry limestone called *bories* – can be seen near Gordes (p216).

To view the Romans' colossal architectural legacy look no further than Pont du Gard, amphitheatres in Nîmes and Arles, the theatres at Orange and Fréjus, Nîmes' Maison Carrée and the triumphal arches at Orange and Carpentras.

Bar the octagonal 5th-century baptistry that can be visited in Fréjus, few churches constructed between the 5th and 10th centuries remain.

## Romanesque to Renaissance

A religious revival in the 11th century ushered in Romanesque architecture, so-called because of the Gallo-Roman architectural elements it adopted. Round arches, heavy walls with few windows and a lack of ornamentation were characteristics of this style, Provence's most famous examples being the 12th-century abbeys in Sénanque (p217), Le Thoronet (p359) and Silvacane (p226). You can visit all three.

Fortresslike sacred buildings also marked this era, as the majestic Chartreuse de la Verne (p361), the older monastery on Île St-Honorat (p310) and the church at Stes-Maries de la Mer (p147) demonstrate. The exceptional dimensions of Digne-les-Bains cathedral (p242) are typical of the late Provençal-Romanesque style.

Provence's most important examples of Gothic architecture are Avignon's Palais des Papes (p161), the Chartreuse du Val de Bénédiction (p168) in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon and Carpentras' Cathédrale St-Siffrein (p183). Look for ribbed vaults carved with great precision, pointed arches, slender

Ted Jones' *The French Riviera: A Literary Guide for Travellers* is the essential companion for – the literary traveller.

verticals, chapels along the nave and chancel, refined decoration and large stained-glass windows.

The French Renaissance scarcely touched the region – unlike mighty citadel architect Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban (1633–1707), who thundered in with Antibes' star-shaped Fort Carré, hilltop Entrevaux and constructions at Toulon.

### Classical to Modern

Classical architecture fused with painting and sculpture from the end of the 16th to late 18th centuries to create stunning baroque structures with interiors of great subtlety, refinement and elegance: Chapelle de la Miséricorde in Nice, Menton's Italianate Basilique St-Michel Archange and Marseille's Centre de la Vieille Charité are classics.

Neoclassicism came into its own under Napoleon III, the Palais de Justice and Palais Masséna in Nice demonstrating the renewed interest in classical forms that it exhibited. The true showcase of this era, though, is 1878 Monte Carlo Casino (p388), designed by French architect Charles Garnier (1825–98). In 1887 Garnier, together with Gustave Eiffel (1832–1923) of tower fame, who lived in Beaulieu-sur-Mer, came up with the Observatoire de Nice. Elegant Aix-en-Provence's fountains and *hôtels particuliers* (private residences) date from this period; as do the intricate wrought-iron campaniles.

The *belle époque* heralded an eclecticism of decorative stucco friezes, trompe l'œil paintings, glittering wall mosaics, brightly coloured Moorish minarets and Turkish towers. Anything went.

Hyères' 1920s concrete-and-glass Villa Noailles is a stark expression of the cubist movement that gained momentum in the interwar period. Examples of surrealist interiors designed by Jean Cocteau, who lived in Menton at this time, include Menton's Salles des Mariages, Chapelle St-Pierre in Villefranche-sur-Mer and Cap d'Ail's amphitheatre.

Aix-en-Provence's Fondation Vasarely, designed by Victor Vasarely (1908–97), was an architectural coup when unveiled in 1976. Its 14 giant monumental hexagons reflected what he had already achieved in art: the creation of optical illusion and changing perspective through the juxtaposition

Born in L'Estaque near Marseille to an Armenian mother and German dockerman father, fiercely successful experimental film-maker Robert Guédiguian (b 1953) is your typical Marseillais. Working with the same actors – including his beautiful actress wife and muse Ariane Ascaride (who won Best Actress award at the 2003 Césars) – is his trademark, as is his commitment to a realist portrayal of Marseille and its inhabitants on screen. Of his many films, *Marius et Jeannette* (1997) and *Marie-Jo et ses deux amours* (2002; Marie-Jo and her Two Loves) are the best known.

### ZOOM IN: LE CINÉMA DU CÔTÉ DES AUTEURS

Making flicks needs money and the industry in Provence could do with more, as Matthieu Colotte, manager of Le Cinéma du Côté des Auteurs, the film centre committed to helping first-time and/or low-budget filmmakers in La Friche La Belle de Mai, explains to Lonely Planet author Catherine Le Nevez.

#### What film activities take place at La Friche?

We cover every dimension of cinema – teaching, technical skills, acting and screenwriting. We also have programmes working in prisons, and art fairs and screenings. Residencies are long term as well as short term (one day to three weeks).

#### Do you have public screenings?

Yes, we try to have one screening a month (€5) covering a different theme. But we receive our funding from the government, meaning we don't know if we'll have enough money to continue the screenings. So far they have been a success – 80% to 90% full.

#### How do you see your organisation's role in cinema today?

The next revolution of cinema could be here (because of the creativity and technical ability of the centre's film-makers), but to make a revolution you need money now and Marseille is not 'la Provence' but 'la Province' – film is done in Paris. Our president, film-maker Robert Guédiguian, has put his back office here for artistic and social fights, but the money (the business end) is in Paris.

### TRAILING LE CORBUSIER

Le Corbusier rewrote the architectural stylebook in southern France: track him down in Marseille (where he built the ground-breaking Unité d'Habitation), Cap Martin (where he had a studio) and Roquebrune (where he's buried).

It was the latter part of his life that saw Swiss-born Charles Édouard Jeanneret (1887–1965), alias Le Corbusier, turn to Provence. Of all his architectural achievements, it was the concrete apartment block he designed in Marseille that was the most revolutionary. Built between 1947 and 1952 as a low-cost housing project, the **Unité d'Habitation** saw 337 apartments arranged inside an elongated block on stilts. Considered a coup by architects worldwide, the façade, communal corridors and rooftop terrace of the block has been protected as an historical monument since 1986. Apartments on the 7th and 8th floors function as a hotel (p105); the rest are private flats.

Le Corbusier frequently visited the coast from the 1930s, often staying with his architect friends, Irish Eileen Gray and Romanian-born Jean Badovici, in their 1920s seaside villa, **E-1027** ([www.e1027.com](http://www.e1027.com)), on Cap Martin. In 1938 Le Corbusier painted a trio of wall frescoes in E-1027, one of which featured three entangled women and offended Gray (a proclaimed lesbian) so much that she broke off her friendship with Le Corbusier and moved to Menton.

After WWII, Le Corbusier befriended Thomas Rebutato who ran L'Étoile de Mer, a neighbouring shack restaurant. He bought a plot of land from Rebutato and in 1951 created Le Cabanon, a cabin containing everything needed for holiday living in 13 sq metres, which he gave to his wife, Monégasque model Yvonne Gallis, as a birthday present. It remained their summer home until 1965 when Le Corbusier had a heart attack while swimming in the sea.

Future plans for Le Cabanon will see the site developed as a museum and architectural research centre, incorporating everything needed for holiday living in 13 sq metres, which he gave to his wife, Monégasque model Yvonne Gallis, as a birthday present. It remained their summer home until 1965 when Le Corbusier had a heart attack while swimming in the sea.

Le Corbusier is buried with his wife in section J of Roquebrune cemetery. His grave (he designed it before his death) is adorned by a cactus and the epitaph, painted in Le Corbusier's cursive hand on a small yellow, red and blue ceramic tile: *ici repose Charles Édouard Jeanneret (1887–1965)*.

tion of geometrical shapes and colours. This 'father of Op Art' went on to design the town hall in La Seyne-sur-Mer, near Toulon, and the stained-glass windows inside Port Grimaud's church.

Roquebrune's Vista Palace (see the boxed text, p289) is the other gawp-worthy piece of 1970s architecture.

### CINEMA

Posing on the steps where many a silver-screen star has stood during the glitzy glam Festival International du Film (see the boxed text, p302) or viewing cinema personified on Cannes' bus-station wall (p301) are film-buff musts. To sense the grit of regional film-making, tour the film studios at Marseille's La Friche La Belle de Mai (see the boxed text, opposite).

One film studio at La Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseille, touts a 17m-high ceiling, making it among the highest sets in Europe.

### History

With its spectacular light and subtle shadows, southern France was inspirational to cinema: the world's first motion picture by the Lumière brothers premiered in Château Lumière in La Ciotat in September 1895. The series of two-minute reels, entitled *L'Arrivée d'un Train en Gare de La Ciotat* (The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station), made the audience leap out of their seats as the steam train rocketed forward. In March 1899 the brothers opened Eden Théâtre (p118) in La Ciotat.

French film flourished in the 1920s, Nice being catapulted to stardom by Hollywood director Rex Ingram, who bought the city's Victorine film studios in 1925 and transformed them overnight into the hub of European film-making.

A big name was Aubagne-born writer Marcel Pagnol, whose career kicked off in 1931 with *Marius*, the first part of his *Fanny* trilogy portraying prewar Marseille. Pagnol filmed *La Femme du Boulanger* (The Baker's Wife; 1938) in Castellet. These films launched the career of France's earliest silver-screen heroes, Toulon-born comic actor Raimu, alias Jules Auguste César Muraire (1883–1946), and 'horse face' Fernandel (1903–71), an honorary citizen of Carry-le-Rouet where he summered most years. Throughout his career Pagnol stuck to depicting what he knew best: Provence and its ordinary people.

Portraits of ordinary people dominated film until the 1950s when surrealist Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) eschewed realism in two masterpieces of cinematic fantasy: *La Belle et la Bête* (Beauty and the Beast; 1945) and *Orphée* (Orpheus; 1950). Both starred beautiful blonde-haired Vallauris-born actor Jean Marais (1914–98), who met Cocteau in 1937 and remained his lover until Cocteau's death in 1963. Find out more about the film-maker at Menton's Musée Jean Cocteau (p290).

*Nouvelle Vague* (New Wave) directors made films without big budgets, extravagant sets or big-name stars. Roger Vadim turned St-Tropez overnight into the hot spot to be with *Et Dieu Créa la Femme* (And God Created Woman; 1956) starring Brigitte Bardot. Several French classics filmed in the region followed, among them François Truffaut's *Les Mistons* (1958), filmed exclusively in Nîmes; Jacques Démy's *La Baie des Anges* (The Bay of Angels; 1962); Henri Decoin's *Masque de Fer* (Iron Mask; 1962), parts of which were filmed in Sospel; and Rohmer's *La Collectionneuse* (The Collectors; 1966), again shot in St-Tropez. In 1972 Truffaut filmed part of *La Nuit Américaine* (The American Night; 1972) in the Victorine studios, the Niçois hinterland and the Vésubie Valley.

Generous state subsidies to film-makers focused on costume dramas and heritage movies in the 1980s, prompting a renewed interest in Pagnol's great Provençal classics. Parts of Claude Berri's *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources* were shot in the Massif de la Ste-Baume and in 1990 Yves Robert directed film versions of Pagnol's *La Gloire de Mon Père* (My Father's Glory) and *Le Château de Ma Mère* (My Mother's Castle). Big-name stars, slick production values and a strong sense of nostalgia were dominant motifs of the 1998 Hollywood box office hit *The Man in the Iron Mask* set on Île Ste-Marguerite near Cannes in the late 17th century.

## LITERATURE

### Courtly Love to Sadism

Lyric poems of courtly love, written solely in Occitan *langue d'oc* by troubadours, dominated medieval Provençal literature.

Provençal life featured in the works of Italian poet Petrarch (1304–74), exiled to Avignon in 1327 where he met Laura, to whom he dedicated his life's works. Petrarch lived in Fontaine de Vaucluse from 1337 to 1353, where he composed his song book *Canzoniere* and wrote poems and letters about local shepherds, fishermen he met on the banks of the Sorgue and his pioneering ascent up Mont Ventoux. The village's Musée Pétrarque (p187) tells his life story.

Bellaud de la Bellaudière (1533–88), a Grasse native, wrote *Oeuvres et Rimes* in Occitan. The literary landmark is a book of 160 sonnets drawing on influences by Petrarch and French epic writer Rabelais.

Cocteau's best-known novel, *Les Enfants Terribles* (1955), portrays the intellectual rebellion of the postwar era.

British novelist and travel writer Lawrence Durrell (1912–90) settled in Somières, near Nîmes, and dedicated the last 33 years of his literary career to writing about Provençal life.

## TOP 10 FILMS STARRING PROVENCE

- *To Catch a Thief* (1956) Classic Hitchcock suspense starring Cary Grant and Grace Kelly.
- *Et Dieu Créa la Femme* (And God Created Woman; 1956) Roger Vadim's tale of the amorality of modern youth set in St-Tropez made a star out of Bardot and St-Tropez.
- *Le Gendarme de St-Tropez* (1964) Fast-paced, farcical and utterly French film in which an ambitious but incompetent police officer is transferred to St-Tropez and makes it his mission to crack down on the local nudists. Meanwhile, daughter Nicole fibs her way into high society by pretending her dad's a high-rolling yacht owner.
- *Herbie goes to Monte Carlo* (1977) Disney lovable starring Herbie the Volkswagen Beetle and his race to Monte Carlo to take part in the Monte Carlo Rally (p395).
- *Taxi 3* (2003) Comedy guaranteed to raise a giggle; filmed and set in Marseille.
- *Swimming Pool* (2002) A dispirited middle-aged English novelist seeks repose and inspiration in the Luberon at the summerhouse of her publisher, only for the latter's high-spirited, sexy and very French daughter to show up. Directed by François Ozon.
- *The Statement* (2004) Norman Jewison film set in Vichy France and starring Michael Caine; shot on location in Marseille and in the village of Ste-Anne d'Evenos, northwest of Toulon.
- *Brice de Nice* (2005) Hilarious take of cult surfing movie *Point Break* in which surfing dude and poseur Brice, aka charismatic French comic actor Jean Dujardin, waits for *sa vague* (his wave) to come in waveless Nice (great shots of the town).
- *A Good Year* (2006) Ridley Scott's adaptation of the Peter Mayle novel, filmed at Château La Canorgue in Bonnieux (p219); London financier May Skinner inherits his uncle's wine-producing chateau in the Luberon and, all too predictably, falls in love with the place after hard-heartedly vowing to sell it for the cash.
- *French Bean* (Bean II; 2007) The lovable Mini Cooper–mad, teddy bear–loving buffoon, Mr Bean, holidays on the Côte d'Azur and somehow gets his video diary entered into the Cannes film festival. The second, and allegedly last, Bean movie.

In 1555 the philosopher and visionary writer from St-Rémy de Provence, Nostradamus (1503–66), published (in Latin) his prophetic *Centuries* in Salon de Provence, where he lived until his death (from gout, as he had predicted). Find out why the papal authorities banned his work as blasphemous at Salon de Provence's Maison de Nostradamus (p121).

The 17th-century *grand siècle* yielded Nicolas Saboly's the *Noëls Provençaux*, poems encapsulating a nativity scene, the pious tone typical of the strait-laced fervour dominating baroque Provençal literature.

## Mistral to Mayle

The 19th century witnessed a revival in Provençal literature, thanks to Frédéric Mistral (1830–1914), the only minority-language writer so far to be awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature (1904). A native of Maillane, Mistral's passion for Provence and its culture, history and language was awakened by his Avignon tutor Joseph Roumanille (1818–91), who published *Li Margarideto* in 1847. In 1851 Mistral began his most momentous work, *Mirèio*. Three years later Le Félibrige was founded by seven young Provençal poets who pledged to revive Provençal and codify the language's orthography.

Between 1878 and 1886 Mistral's most influential work on Provençal culture was published, the monumental *Trésor du Félibrige*. The 1890s saw Le Félibrige popularise his work with the opening of the Museon Arlaten (p141) and the publication of the *L'Aioli* journal.

Imagist poet Ezra Pound took traditional Provençal songs and troubadour ballads and adapted them to suit modern tastes in his two poetry collections, *Provença* (1910) and *Cantos* (1919).

Another outstanding Provençal writer was Nîmes-born Alphonse Daudet (1840–97) who wrote *Lettres de Mon Moulin* (Letters from My Windmill; 1869) from a windmill, a replica of which can be visited (p193) in Fontvieille.

Parisian novelist Émile Zola (1840–1902) lived in Aix-en-Provence from the age of three to 18. Zola aimed to convert novel writing from an art to a science by the application of experimentation – a theory that, though naive, produced powerful works. Aix-en-Provence is evoked in *La Conquête de Plassans* (1874), and his friendship with Cézanne is the focus of *L'Oeuvre* (The Masterpiece; 1886).

Early-20th-century Provençal literature is dominated by writers depicting their homeland. Jean Giono (1895–1970) from Manosque blended myth with reality in novels that remain a celebration of the Provençal Alps and their people.

Surrealism was expressed by Jean Cocteau (1889–1963), French poet and film-maker who ran away from home to the Côte d'Azur at the age of 15, returned in 1924 and is buried in Menton. Colette (1873–1954), who thoroughly enjoyed tweaking the nose of conventional readers with titillating novels that detailed the amorous exploits of such heroines as the schoolgirl Claudine, lived in St-Tropez from 1927 until 1938. *La Naissance du Jour* evokes an unspoilt St-Tropez.

The post-WWII years saw the existentialist literary movement develop around Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) and Albert Camus (1913–60). The latter moved to Lourmarin (where he is buried) in 1957; he started his unfinished autobiographical novel *Le Premier Homme* (The First Man) there. The manuscript was found in the car wreckage when the Algerian-born writer – son of an illiterate mother – died in a car accident three years later.

Writers who settled in the region in the latter part of their careers include Lawrence Durrell, Dirk Bogarde, James Baldwin, Anthony Burgess and Peter Mayle. Provence-inspired novels written by foreign writers are listed at the start of regional chapters.

## MUSIC

Contemporary music is pretty much a one-stop shop, immigrant life in Marseille *banlieue* (suburbs) proving the inspiration behind a diverse and influential scene enjoyed by an audience far further flung than the beat-hot port city.

The hip-hop lyrics of the 1991 smash-hit first album, *de la Planète Mars* ('from Planet Mars', Mars being short for Marseille) by rapping legend IAM – France's best-known rap group from Marseille – nudged rap into the mainstream. A decade on, the city's music scene has transcended its rap roots. 'It has exploded, in all styles. Marseille is a rich place for music; it's not pigeonholed into rap and hip-hop any more', says Stéphane Galland, music director of alternative Marseillais radio station, **Radio Grenouille** (Radio Frog; www.grenouille888.org in French), on air 24/7 since 1981 and famed across France for broadcasting tomorrow's music. Ten to 15 demo CDs land on Stéphane's

Mistral's epic poem *Mirèio* (1859) tells the story of a beauty who flees to Stes-Maries de la Mer when her parents forbid her to marry her true love, only to die of a broken heart on the beach.

Daudet is best remembered for his comic novels evoking small-town Tarascon through the eyes of antihero Tartarin; his *Tartarin de Tarascon* trilogy was published between 1872 and 1890.

Government funded and wholly independent, with no on-air advertising, Radio Grenouille has a full-time staff of 12 assisted by 70 volunteers and a daily audience of around 60,000. Tune in on 88.8FM.

## DANCE ROOTS

The *farandole* is a Provençal dance, performed at the close of village festivals in and around Arles since the Middle Ages. Men and women take their partner by the hand or remain linked with a cord or handkerchief as they briskly jig, accompanied by a tambourine and *galoubet* (shrill flute with three holes).

## STÉPHANE GALLAND: TOP 10 PLAYLIST

Asked who his favourite Marseille artists were by Lonely Planet's Catherine Le Nevez, Stéphane Galland revealed his top 10 bands. And his hot tips on tomorrow's sounds to listen for: Anais, a solo female artist singing in the melodic Chanson Française style; new pop-rock outfit, Heidi; and Rosa, a band playing 'jazz-rock-contemporary music with energy and groove', which recorded its first album in 2006.

- **Alif Tree** (<http://alif.tree.free.fr> in French) Down-tempo, electronic music; very moody, cinematic sound.
- **Cheb Mami** ([www.chebmami.net](http://www.chebmami.net)) and **Cheb Khaled** (<http://khaled-lesite.artistes.universalmusic.fr> in French) Rai solo artists internationally well known.
- **David Walters** ([www.davidwalters.fr](http://www.davidwalters.fr)) Very fresh, Marseille-based artist from France and the West Indies. Sound: world-electro incorporating lots of instruments like drums and guitar. Presents weekly mix on-air for Radio Grenouille.
- **Dupain** 'Trad-innovation' style. First album exclusively in Occitan, subsequent albums a mix of French and Occitan featuring work songs and lyrics from political poets; one of the best bands to see live.
- **IAM** ([www.iam.tm.fr](http://www.iam.tm.fr) in French) Symbolic Marseillais hip-hop outfit, active for more than 15 years.
- **Jack de Marseille** (<http://w4-web160.nordnet.fr>) One of Europe's top DJs. Initiated electronic music scene in Marseille 15 years ago and formed the record label Wicked Music. Returned to Marseille in 2004 after performing club raves and festivals worldwide.
- **Kabbalah** Modern yet traditional five-person Jewish band, formed in 2003 and blending jazz, contemporary Mediterranean folk and klezmer (traditional Eastern European music).
- **Massilia Sound System** ([www.massilia-soundsystem.com](http://www.massilia-soundsystem.com) in French) Legendary reggae band incorporating a Marseille accent with Provençal and typical Marseillais slang that 'Parisians often can't understand. Another legend from the same generation and genre is Jo Corbeau'.
- **Raphael Imbert** Saxophonist and composer playing classic jazz and sacred music; listen out for him solo and as part of the Newtopia Quintet.
- **Troublemaker** Electro-funk trio comprising Lionel Corsini aka DJ Oil (himself the son of a famous DJ), Arnaud Taillefer and Fred Berthet; present in weekly mix on-air on Radio Grenouille.

desk every day, not to mention a clutch of CDs from record labels, all angling for air space. Postlucky break, many artists return to the Grenouille studios to jam live on the station that launched them.

Massilia Sound System is another Marseille-born band: 'They initiated reggae in France,' explains Stéphane, 'using a south-of-France sound as a vehicle for their own identity.' The Rub a Dub trio is involved in dozens of side projects too: Moussu-T performs blues, calypso, south of France and acoustic music and heads up **Moussu-T e lei jouvants** (<http://moussut.ohaime.com> in French), a trio that draws on the musical melting pot of 1930s Marseille – a mix of traditional Provençal, local operettas and imported black music – for inspiration. Its latest album, *Forever Polida* (2006), promises to be as huge as its previous, *Mademoiselle Marseille* (2005).

In world music, 20-something Iranian percussionist Bijan Chemirani stuns with rhythmic playing of the *zarb* (Persian goblet drum), and his debut solo album *Eos* (2002) is hot. Cheb Khaled, Cheb Aïssa and Cheb Mami – all from the same multicultural portside city – have contributed hugely to the development of Algerian rai. 'You can't do rai without passing through Marseille', says Stéphane (whose music knowledge is encyclopedic). 'Marseille is a mecca, but the scene is underground, very community based, in small, low-budget venues, not very visible. You'll always hear guys playing it in cars

For a handle on performing arts in the region, surf ARACDE, the Agence Régionale des Arts du Spectacle (Regional Agency for Performing Arts) at <http://aracde-paca.com>.

on the streets, though,' he adds. And on jazz: 'Marseille has a lot of very good jazz – traditional, modern, electro jazz... the whole spectrum.'

Traditional Provençal chants form the root of the powerful percussion-accompanied polyphony sung by Lo Còr de la Plana, a six-voice male choir born in 2001 in La Plaine, Marseille. Its album *Chants à Danser*, which was planned for release in 2007, is one to buy.

## DANCE

The Centre Chorégraphique National (CNN; see the boxed text, p129) in Aix-en-Provence, one of 21 national choreographic centres in France, drives contemporary dance. At its front end is **Ballet Preljocaj** ([www.preljocaj.org](http://www.preljocaj.org)) and French-Albanian-born choreographer, Angelin Preljocaj (b 1957), known for pushing dance to its limits. Ballet Preljocaj and the CNN are deemed the likely benefactors of additional funding created by the decision of Aix city mayor, Maryse Joissans-Masini, in late 2005 to scrap Aix-en-Provence's annual dance festival, Danse à Aix, after 29 years. As a longtime platform for the discovery of new talent and innovation, the festival's loss was a major blow to contemporary dance; Avignon's annual dance festival, **Les Hivernales** ([www.hivernales-avignon.com](http://www.hivernales-avignon.com)) hosted each February by Hivernales (the other big choreography centre in the region) provides little consolation.

As part of its local awareness dance programme, Ballet Preljocaj occasionally performs on public squares and hosts open rehearsals, dance workshops and evening *apéritif-danse* events. See [www.preljocaj.org](http://www.preljocaj.org) for details.

### ELIZABETH LEWIS: TOP 10 PLAYLIST

Vastly different kettle of fish, yes, but on the Riviera, it is Nice that is music queen. Touting a great range of live-music venues, including a rash of Brit-style bars where bands play most nights, it is the hot spot to party. Nicola Williams caught up with former Kiss FM DJ and Riviera Radio presenter, Elizabeth Lewis, at Monaco's Star 'n Bars to find out which gigs she looks out for in her adopted hometown, Nice.

'**Scott Allen**, a black guy from America who sings soul, funk and jazz; and **Ronnie Rae Junior** ([www.raefamilyjazz.com](http://www.raefamilyjazz.com)), a Scottish jazz-keyboard player from a big Scottish musical dynasty. Ronnie Rae Senior is a very well-known bass player in Scotland, one of the top bass players in Britain in fact. Then there's **Donal Corcoran**, an Irish singer and songwriter, very talented, a lovely charismatic man, who writes the most amazing songs that already sound like hits (see [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)).

**The Boogie Men** are good; that's my mate Brice. They do swing, jazz and play at Wayne's new place, La Cave (see the boxed text, p324), in Tourettes-sur-Loup. Wayne plays drums with them, although they work with other drummers too. If you prefer heavy rock, Aerosmith/Rolling Stones-style, you need to see **The Running Birds**. They're Italian, but sing in English. They're heavier, they've got the hair.

'The **Philip Jones Orchestra**: Phil's an American who taught me how to busk; he's a very accomplished musician who plays double bass and guitar. He tends to do more private parties these days, on yachts etc, although you still occasionally hear him on cours Saleya. For true jazz, **Jean-Marc Jafet**, a bass player, is extremely good and for a more eclectic, folk, Bob Dylanish-REM-Rolling Stones mix, there's **Joe Danger** (<http://joe.danger.free.fr>). He plays in bars, is Austrian but sounds like he's from east London.

'Another excellent local band is **Medi and the Medicine Men** ([www.mediantthemedicineshow.com](http://www.mediantthemedicineshow.com)). Medi is the (multi-instrumentalist) figurehead and has a record deal; Dave Stewart from the Eurythmics took him under his wing and produced his album (*Medi and the Medicine Show*; 2006). He works mainly in Paris but comes to Nice from time to time. He's the local star – a beautiful-looking man (LP: his website says he looks like Jesus), only about 27.

'**Anthony Caligagan** ([www.caligagan.com](http://www.caligagan.com)), an Afro-Swede with Bob Marley dreadlocks, is very enjoyable. He sings reggae.

'And then there's **Fat Cat**, a cross between Barry White and Marvin Gaye; he's even recorded a Barry White tribute album.'

### WATCH OUT

... for these young, vibrant, dead-exciting contemporary dance companies:

**Al Masira** (<http://almasira.free.fr> in French) French-Arabic fusion of contemporary and oriental dance from Marseille, with choreography by dancer Virginie Recolin.

**Compagnie Lézards Bleus** Apt-based company known for its architectural choreography, vertical dance performances being staged on building façades.

**Kubilai Khan Investigations** ([www.kubilai-khan-investigations.com](http://www.kubilai-khan-investigations.com)) Marseillais mixed-media urban dance company; heavy accent on hip-hop, photography and video-art.

**Onstap** ([www.onstap.com](http://www.onstap.com)) *Percussions corporelles* (body percussion; step) is the beat of this Avignon company who clap out their dance rhythm with their feet, on thighs etc.

**Pascal Montrouge** ([www.pascalmontrouge.fr](http://www.pascalmontrouge.fr)) Company split between Hyères (catch a performance at Villa Noailles) and Réunion Island, headed by Pascal Montrouge.

Provence's innovative spirit in contemporary dance echoes the role France played in the development of 19th-century classical ballet – until the centre for innovation shifted to Russia in 1847, taking France's leading talent, Marius Petipa (1818–1910), a native of Marseille, with it. The **Ballet National de Marseille** ([www.ballet-de-marseille.com](http://www.ballet-de-marseille.com)) continues in a classical vein today.



# Environment

## THE LAND

Provence is France's most biofriendly region: 5.5% of its agricultural land is farmed organically compared to 1.9% nationally.

Provence and the Côte d'Azur – an elongated oval in southeast France – is bordered by the southern Alps (to the northeast), which form a natural frontier with Italy, and by the River Rhône to the west. The Grand Rhône (east) and Petit Rhône (west) form the delta of the Rhône, a triangular alluvial plain called the Camargue.

The Mediterranean Sea washes the region's southern boundary – a 250-odd-km coastline (Côte d'Azur in French, French Riviera in English) stretching from Marseille to Menton. Offshore lie several islands: the Îles du Frioul (Marseille), the Îles des Embiez (Toulon) and the Îles de Lérins (Cannes). The most southern, the Îles d'Hyères (Hyères), are inhabited. A chain of calcareous rocks, Les Calanques, forms the coastline around Marseille, and France's highest cliff (406m) crowns Cap Canaille in nearby Cassis.

Three mountain ranges cut off the coast from the vast interior: the red volcanic Massif de l'Estérel, the limestone Massif des Maures and the foothills of the Alps north of Nice. Hills dominate the interior, peaking with stone-capped Mont Ventoux (1912m). Lower-lying ranges include (west to east) the Alpilles, Montagne Ste-Victoire, Massif Ste-Baume, the Vaucluse hills and the Luberon. Further east is the Gorges du Verdon, Europe's largest and most spectacular canyon.

## WILDLIFE Animals

The Camargue shelters 400 land and water birds including the kingfisher, bee-eater, stork, shelduck, white egret, purple heron and more than 160 migratory species. It is also home to native horse and bull populations, and 10% of the world's greater flamingos (see the boxed text, p137).

Port-Cros is a key autumn stopover for migratory birds, the puffin, ash-grey shearwater and yelkouan shearwater among the many species in its diverse seabird population.

Nowhere do more mammals romp than in the Parc National du Mercantour (p248), home to 8000 chamois (mountain antelopes) with their dark-striped heads, 1100 *bouquetin* (Alpine ibex) and the mouflon, which hangs out on stony sunlit scree slopes in the mountains. At higher altitudes the alpine chough – a type of crow with black plumage, red feet and a yellow beak (that appears white from a distance) – can be seen. Other treats include

### THE MUD-EATING MISTRAL

Folklore claims it can drive people crazy. Its namesake, Provençal poet Frédéric Mistral, cursed it. And peasants in their dried-out fields dubbed the damaging wind *mange fange* (*manjo fango* in Provençal), meaning 'mud eater'.

The legendary mistral, a cold, dry northwesterly wind, whips across Provence for several days at a time. Its furious gusts, reaching over 100km/h, destroy crops, rip off roofs, dry the land and drive tempers round the bend. It chills the bones for 100 days a year and is at its fiercest in winter and spring.

The mistral's intense and relentless rage is caused by high atmospheric pressure over central France, between the Alps and the Pyrenees, which is then blown southwards through the funnel of the narrow Rhône Valley to an area of low pressure over the Mediterranean Sea. On the upside, skies are blue and clear of clouds when the mistral is in town.

### TOP 10: NATURE WATCH

Precious opportunities to peer close-up at Mediterranean wildlife:

- Camargue 4WD safari tours (p138) – see bulls, horses, flamingos and other typical Camargue fauna roam wild, from the back of a jeep.
- Cetacean-spotting boat trips (Villefranche-sur-Mer, p281) – watch dolphins leap from the Med; bring binoculars and plenty of luck.
- Half-day forest walks – discover chestnuts, learn how cork is harvested (see the boxed text, p78) or trace transhumant trails with **Conservatoire du Patrimoine et du Traditions du Freinet** (☎ 04 94 43 08 57; www.conservatoiredufreinet.org; Chapelle St-Jean, place de la Mairie, La Garde Freinet).
- Var nature walks – tourist offices in the Var (see p356) take bookings for *balades nature accompagnées* (adult/under 10yr €5 to €9/free). Themes include salt-pan bird-watching; man, plants and health; orchids; the forest and its mushrooms; 'fire' plants; cicadas and insects; mimosas and exotic plants. See www.webvds.com/sorties in French for info.
- Kayaking and canoeing river expeditions – paddle through peaceful waters and observe river wildlife at play along the Petit Rhône (p137), the Sorgue (p187), the River Gard (p200) and the Ubaye (p250).
- Wildlife photography – Frédéric Larrey and Thomas Roger of **Regard du Vivant** (☎ 06 10 57 17 11; www.regard-du-vivant.fr; 26 blvd Henri Fabre, Marseille) run nature-photography workshops (€200/day), bird-watching treks (p136) and nine-hour dolphin-observation expeditions (€70 for adults and €55 for children 7 to 12 years old).
- Underwater nature trails (Domaine du Rayol, p364; Île de Port-Cros, p369; La Londe, see the boxed text, p373; Parc Régional Marin de la Côte Bleue, p119) – view underwater marine flora through a snorkeller's mask.
- Tortoise sanctuary – view the rare Hermann tortoise at Village des Tortues (see the boxed text, p362).
- Vulture culture (see the boxed text, p236) – spot the griffon vulture during half-day vulture treks, departing from Castellane and Rougon in the Gorges du Verdon.
- Wolf-watching – learn how man is learning to live with the wolf and watch wolves roam wild at **Wolf Watch at Alpha** (☎ 04 93 02 33 69; www.alpha-loup.com; Le Boréon, St-Martin de Vésubie) in the Mercantour.

the ermine, the green lizard, the viper, the rare Alexanor butterfly and 19 of Europe's 29 bat species.

### ENDANGERED SPECIES

The Hermann tortoise (see the boxed text, p362), a yellow-and-black creature once indigenous to Mediterranean Europe, is now found only in the Massif des Maures (and Corsica). Forest fires threaten it.

The Bonelli eagle swoops above Les Calanques (p115) and 40 pairs of golden eagles nest in the Mercantour alongside the buzzard and short-toed eagle. The griffon vulture and the bearded vulture, with its unsavoury bone-breaking habits and awe-inspiring wing span of 3m, only remain in the wild thanks to reintroduction programmes instigated in protected areas such as the Gorges du Verdon and the Parc National du Mercantour.

The Parc National de Port-Cros (p369) safeguards the monk seal, a 3m-long mammal in danger of extinction due to its natural food supply (of plaice, mackerel and flounder) being gobbled up by intensive fishing and pollution.

To sheep farmers' horror, wolves roam the Parc National du Mercantour.

**SIZE DOESN'T MATTERS FOR GARDENERS** *Louisa Jones*

The Riviera's legendary *belle époque* gardens are essential viewing for garden-lovers visiting southern France.

But as long-standing gardening authority and best-selling author Louisa Jones told Nicola Williams, it is the smaller, lesser-known gardens in western Provence where the real horticultural excitement is.

**What is the difference between gardens in Provence and on the Riviera?**

The agricultural roots are the same but what is going on now is quite different. Most Northern Mediterranean gardens were working farms and everything was built and planted for practical reasons, to provide shade, produce food... When I started writing about this in the 1970s, people told me there were no gardens in Provence because they meant summer floral gardens, ornamental gardens, mixed borders...

Gardens in western Provence are also very mineral. Bare rock and stone construction lend themselves to what people think of today as a new kind of land art – involving the landscape in the garden. There is also a lot of unbuilt space and many different kinds of landscapes in a very small area, giving garden designers the opportunity to do very original and interesting gardens involving the landscape. You can't really do that on the Riviera. It's very rare.

**Why not?**

Because there's hardly any landscape left! The gardens are completely enclosed, for security reasons and because there is such ugly stuff built everywhere.

**When you say 'western Provence', where exactly do you mean?**

The two fashionable areas are the Luberon and the Alpilles, but they're now filling up and people who really want to be away from others are going further out. [Jones herself lives well away from the madding crowds in a village in northwestern Provence.]

The Var is beginning to develop as a garden area too – not St-Tropez which is very fashionable as it always is: I mean back-country Var.

**What are the current trends in contemporary garden design?**

One very important aspect of gardens in Provence is how foreground connects to distant landscape. A traditional garden will have a foreground, then the view, but nothing in between. But here, there are people who've planted a gradually modulated progression – a whole sequence of framing and partial framing – in the middle ground.

What's going on here is much more art gardening: architecture, sculpture, land art, an interest in living space and form whether it's the structure of trees or of landscape with terracing.

**Which gardens best reflect these trends?**

One of the best is the Garden of the Alchemist (alchemy gardens and botanic gardens of magic plants designed by Arnaud Maurières and Eric Ossart, two of France's most original young designers; p193).

**Plants**

Take a springtime stroll along any of the 600km of walking trails in the Parc National du Mercantour and you'll see dozens of different species of plants. Particularly enchanting are the 63 types of orchids, 30 endemic plants and 200 rare species: wild blueberry bushes, rhododendrons, fuchsias and geraniums are abundant.

Rare or threatened species visible during coastal walks in the Parc National du Port-Cros include the *ail petit moly*, a type of garlic that sprouts in early autumn, flowers in January and lingers until spring – look for six white petals. The Powis Castle artemisia, typical to stony, sun-baked soils, is identified by its lacy, silver grey leaves and small yellow flowers. Jupiter's beard, a cloverlike plant resistant to sea spray, thrives on the coastline where it breaks out in a riot of small white flowers in spring.

Forest covers 40% of the region; the most heavily forested areas (predominantly oak and pine) are northeastern Provence and the Var. Cork oak (see the boxed text, p78) and chestnut trees dominate the Massif des Maures;

Visit an organic farm in Provence and chat with the local farmer about organic farming; a list of *fermes bio* welcoming visitors is online at [www.bio-provence.org](http://www.bio-provence.org) (in French).

Another is **Aux Fleurs de l'Eau** (☎ 04 90 95 85 02; Quartier Cassoulen, rte de St-Rémy) in Graveson. It was made by a professional builder who used to help farmers lay out fields. Agriculture declining as it is, he used his rock-lifting machinery to create a huge rockery garden in his back yard and it has turned into a really interesting garden. It is a water garden essentially, a grass-roots project done with great care and a very good eye. The planting was done by **Braun Nurseries** (☎ 04 90 92 89 56; pepbraun@aol.com; 1016 rte de St-Rémy, Eyragues) so it's sophisticated, interesting planting.

There's also a brand-new garden, a **Roman garden** (Jardin Romain; ☎ 04 90 22 00 22; [www.jardin-romain.fr](http://www.jardin-romain.fr); adult/under 7yr €3/free; 📍 10am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Easter-Sep, noon-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-Easter), in Caumont-sur-Durance, 15km southeast of Avignon, which is very interesting (gardens evoking Roman gods, labyrinth, Roman games); it is designed around Roman archaeological digs found quite recently.

**And the famous Riviera gardens?**

They are all very different, all very historic but there's little contemporary creation. They're living monuments in a sense. There is a definite English influence, which is one reason why they are very plant-orientated.

One of my favourites is Jardins de la Serre de la Madone (see the boxed text, p293). Lawrence Johnston was a genius and he did something on the Riviera he didn't do at all in his English garden, which was take really great advantage of the site, the setting... And that was done in the 1920s and 1930s.

Clos du Peyronnet (see the boxed text, p293) is one of the best gardens on the Riviera. It is very much a live garden. The owner is heavily involved and keeps an avid interest in the garden. It is not just a monument; it is an ongoing project.

**What are the big names in Provençal garden design?**

There are two: landscape architect **Michel Semini** (☎ 04 90 72 38 50; rue St-Frusquin, Goult) whose work can be seen at the **Château de Brantes** (☎ 04 90 39 11 73; [www.jardinez.com/jardindebrantes](http://www.jardinez.com/jardindebrantes); Sorgues; adult/under 14yr €5/free; 📍 by appointment 10am-noon & 2-6pm Easter-early Nov) in Sorgues, 12km north of Avignon; and **Dominique Lafourcade** (☎ 04 90 92 10 14; [www.architecture-lafourcade.com](http://www.architecture-lafourcade.com); 10 blvd Victor Hugo, St-Rémy de Provence), a family enterprise; she does the gardens and her husband and stepson restore old homes. Both designers are very deeply rooted in the almost-Roman tradition, but at the same time they're very playful, inventive and imaginative.

*Canadian garden critic Louisa Jones (www.gardeninprovence.com/louisajones) has lived in Provence since 1975. She has written 21 books on gardens (in English and French), including The French Country Garden (2000), Gardens of the French Riviera (2001), Provence Harvest (2005) and most recently New Gardens of Provence (2006), in which she examines current gardening trends. Her six-day 'Garden Week in Provence', the third week in April (€3800 incl seven nights' accommodation at Avignon's Hôtel de la Mirande; p165), takes a small group of garden lovers around gardens in Provence no one else can take them to. A new updated itinerary is available each year in November; email her at [ljones@wanadoo.fr](mailto:ljones@wanadoo.fr).*

maritime, Aleppo and umbrella pines provide shade along the coast; and plane trees stud village squares.

Maquis is a vegetation whose low, dense shrubs provide many of the spices used in Provençal cooking. Garrigue is typified by aromatic Mediterranean plants such as juniper, broom and fern growing on predominantly chalky soil.

**NATIONAL & REGIONAL PARKS**

Two national parks protect 2.6% of the region and another 16% of the region is protected to a lesser degree by three *parcs naturels régionaux*. Nature reserves offer protection of sorts, as do the three Unesco-backed *réserves de biosphère* (biosphere reserves) – the Camargue, Luberon and Mont Ventoux.

Parks and reserves strive to maintain local ecosystems: in the Parc Régional Marin de la Côte Bleue, artificial reefs were submerged in the sea in the 1980s to encourage sea life to grow and prevent illegal fishing.

Precious pockets of coast fall within the realm of the **Conservatoire du Littoral** (Coastal Protection Agency; ☎ 05 46 84 72 50; www.conservatoire-du-littoral.fr; Corderie Royale, BP 13 7, F-17306 Rochefort Cedex), an association that acquires threatened natural areas by the sea to restore, rejuvenate and protect.

Among the Conservatoire's rich pageant of *espaces naturels protégés* (protected natural areas) are the Archipel de Riou, which is a cluster of uninhabited limestone islands offshore from Marseille, sheltering 30% of France's cory's shearwater population; the *calanques*-laced Presqu'île de Port-Miou; the Côte Bleue (p119); a twinset of wildlife-rich capes (Cap Lardier and Cap Taillat; p352) on the St-Tropez peninsula and the former salt marshes on La Capte in Hyères (p372). There's also the red-rock Massif de l'Estérel (p328); Corniche des Maures (p364), which is neighboured

#### NATIONAL & REGIONAL PARKS

Park	Features	Activities	Best Time to Visit	Page Ref
Parc National du Mercantour (1979; 685 sq km)	majestic 3000m-plus peaks, uninhabited valleys; mouflon, chamois, ibex, wolves, eagles & vultures	skiing (alpine), white-water sports, mountain biking, walking & donkey trekking	spring, summer & winter	p248
Parc National de Port-Cros (1963; 7 sq km plus 13 sq km of water)	island marine park; puffins, shearwaters & migratory birds	snorkelling, bird-watching, swimming, gentle strolling & sunbathing	summer (water activities) & autumn (bird-watching)	p369
Parc Naturel Régional du Verdon (1997; 1769.6 sq km)	Europe's most spectacular canyon, 5 green-water lakes & prealpine massifs; griffon vultures	white-water sports, swimming, horse riding, walking & cycling	summer	p234
Parc Naturel Régional du Luberon (1977; 1650 sq km)	hilltop villages & limestone gorges; eagles, Egyptian vultures & European greater horned owls	walking, cycling, rock climbing & paragliding	spring, late summer & autumn	p218
Parc Naturel Régional de Camargue (1970; 863 sq km)	paddy fields, salt pans & marshes; horses, bulls, boars, flamingos, egrets & herons	horse riding, cycling, bird-watching, botany & walking	spring & autumn	p136
Parc Régional Marin de la Côte Bleue (1983; 2.95 sq km)	marine reserve protecting Cap Couronne & surrounding waters; marine flora & fauna	guided snorkelling expeditions & boat tours	spring & summer	p119
Réserve Géologique de Haute-Provence (1900 sq km)	geological reserve; 185-million-year-old fossilised ichthyosaur skeleton & fossils from 300-million-year-old tropical forests	geology & walking	year-round	p241
Réserve de Biosphère du Mont Ventoux (1990; 810 sq km)	1912m-high mountain; 60 rare flora species, Lebanese cedars, mouflon & chamois	cycling, walking, skiing & snowboarding	spring & summer (cycling & walking) & winter (skiing)	p180

#### RENDEZ-VOUS AUX JARDINS

For four days in early June dozens of exceptional private gardens, otherwise inaccessible, welcome visitors, among them **La Chèvre d'Or** (www.lachevredor.com), lovingly created with the help of English botanist Basil Leng in Biot in 1950. Find a complete garden list at [www.rendezvousauxjardins.culture.fr](http://www.rendezvousauxjardins.culture.fr).

Year-round, Nice-based **Société Centrale d'Agriculture et d'Horticulture de Nice et des Alpes-Maritimes** (☎ 04 93 86 58 44; <http://perso.orange.fr/scanice/index.htm>; 113 promenade des Anglais; visits €4-10) organises visits to some superb, lesser-known gardens, including Dirk Bogarde's former garden-olive grove in Châteauneuf du Grasse and a private garden designed by another of the region's top garden designers, Cabris-based **Jean Mus** (www.jeanmus.com).

**La Pomme d'Ambre** (☎ 04 94 53 25 47; www.gardeninprovence.com; impasse ancienne rte d'Italie, La Tour de Mare, Fréjus; d incl breakfast €90; ☎ mid-Sep-mid-Jul; ☒) is a *chambre d'hôte* with gardening and botany library, a luxuriant Riviera garden and half-day gardening workshops (€95 per person).

by Domaine du Rayol (p364); and several soggy chunks of the Camargue (p133).

#### ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Forest fires are the hottest issue: 3000 fires destroy 150 sq km of forest a year, eight out of 10 being caused by careless day-trippers or arsonists seeking to get licences to build on the damaged lands. A concerted fire-prevention effort by local authorities in the 1990s paid off in the early years of the new millennium (the number of forest fires fell by 45%), but it was back to square one in 2003 when a freakishly hot summer sparked off the worst fires for 15 years: 2500 hectares sizzled. Only 8.5% of forests in Provence are protected; 70% are privately owned.

Provence has a pivotal role to play in the world quest to develop fusion power: Cadarache, 40km northeast of Aix-en-Provence, is the chosen hot spot for a thermonuclear experimental reactor. Assuming it succeeds, the ambitious US\$5 billion engineering project between the EU, the USA, China and Japan will revolutionise the production of world power. Unlike conventional nuclear power plants, fusion reactors produce energy through the fusion of light atom nuclei and produce dramatically less radioactive waste. The cleaner, new-generation reactor in Cadarache will start churning out energy in 2014.

#### RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Training rather than flying to Provence scores instant Brownie points in the campaign to limit global warming; see p418 for more on climate change

#### BLUE FLAG BEACHES

No green label says more about a beach than the **Blue Flag** (www.blueflag.org), a recommendation of quality awarded to clean, safe and well-maintained beaches, ports and marinas Europe-wide. Clean bathing water, sanitary facilities and litter bins are among criteria needed to fly a Blue Flag.

Beaches clean enough to do so for the 2006 season (beaches are reassessed seasonally) included those in Antibes, Cap d'Ail, Cavalière, Ste-Maxime, Six Four les Plages, La Londe les Maures, Hyères, Plage de Gigaro in La Croix Valmer and Le Lavandou. Of the 92 beaches in Bouches du Rhône, just seven – in Port de Bouc, Fos-sur-Mer and Martigues – scored a Blue Flag.

Beaches in Marseille, Nice and St-Tropez haven't been flagged for years.

Marine life between Toulon and Menton is being choked by *Caulerpa taxifolia*, a pea green seaweed that starves native flora of sunlight; originating in the Pacific it's been found in the Med since 1984.

and travel. Within the region, shopping at markets, roadside stalls and farms rather than supermarkets is environmentally responsible.

Otherwise, don't litter; minimise waste; don't use detergents or toothpaste, even if they are biodegradable, in or near watercourses; stick to designated walking paths; and obey the 'no dogs, tents and motorised vehicles' rule in national parks.

### THE CORK HARVESTER *Nicola Williams*

Call me old-fashioned but there's a definite appeal to watching a man wield an axe. Or maybe it had more to do with the earthy good looks and gentle humour of forest technician Fabien Tamboloni, whose unreserved passion for, and extraordinary ease in, the forest had us all spell-bound.

'I grew up in the forest, in the Jura, not far from Switzerland. The forest is my home,' he explained, adding: 'for me this is not a tree, it's a plane tree' pointing to the *platane* we were standing under on a village square in La Garde Freinet. Born-and-bred forest stock, at home in Collobrières today, Fabien leads guided hikes in the chestnut- and cork-rich forests around La Garde Freinet for the Conservatoire du Patrimoine (p362). When he's not captivating cork-curious minds with his axe-chopping, cork-harvesting prowess, he is a tree surgeon and researcher at an experimental plantation for France's Centre de Formation Professionnelle Forestière ([www.cfpf.prg](http://www.cfpf.prg) in French). Introductions done, the long-haired 30-something naturalist with well-used walking boots and a hole in his trousers (don't ask where) lopped his Catalan axe, straight blade protected by pea green felt, over his shoulder and off we strode up the street, around the corner and 'gosh, here already', into the forest.

Cork-oak (*chêne-liège*) trees have grown in the western Mediterranean basin for 60 million years, but it was not until the 17th century when a Benedictine monk called Dom Pérignon started bottling sparkling wine in glass that a cork industry emerged. Cutting out cylindrical wedges from the tree's honeycomb-textured bark – cork – and stuffing them in the bottles was quickly found to be the best means of conserving wine.

'Cork is impermeable, lightweight, soft and a great thermal insulator. More importantly, it protects the tree against sun and fire; it doesn't burn,' says Fabien, quick to explain that a cork-oak tree – once stripped of its bark – is unprotected from fire for two years. In tracts of forest affected by fire, trunks are charred black but the tree lives.

Harvesting cork is a delicate business. It is only allowed mid-June to mid-August when the tree is physiologically active. The bark must be at least 3cm thick, making the tree a minimum of 40 to 60 years old. One wrong move and *la mère* (the mother), the amber-coloured layer beneath the cork, is damaged and the tree's internal balance turned upside-down. 'Cork should only be harvested in the morning – the afternoon is too hot,' Fabien tells us, at this point on his knees, as he deftly pushes his spat-on-and-sharpened axe into the vertical crack of around 1m that he has cut from the foot of the tree up. The cork creaks and groans as, inch by inch, he prises it loose from the tree. He has already cut the bevelled '*couronne*' (crown) at the top of the section he is harvesting.

With a macho yank and a flick of the ponytail, the cork comes away in two half-pipe sheets. The suddenly-skinny trunk is a gentle ginger in colour, wet, warm and wrinkly. Within a couple of months it will turn brick red; within 12 months, brown; and within 13 years, be ready for the next harvest. But it is the fresh, heady mineral scent it exudes that is the most extraordinary.

Today's cork industry has annual revenue of approximately €1.5 billion: 'No one has ever been able to live only on cork in the Massif des Maures' says Fabien, who spent three years working at France's Institut Méditerranéen du Liège (Mediterranean Institute of Cork; [www.institutduliege.com](http://www.institutduliege.com) in French) where cork-oak cultivation is studied, researched and developed. France produces just 1.6% of the world's cork, all of which comes from the Mediterranean, primarily Portugal and Spain. A bumper harvest in 2006 yielded 110,000 tons of raw cork in Portugal, 30,000 tons in Spain and between 3500 and 5500 tons in France – of which the Var produced some 50%.

### ENERGY WATCH

Learn about renewable energy and see for yourself what this sun-rich region is doing, with a free tour of a solar-energy plant in St-Raphaël, Draguignan, La Garde Freinet, Hyères and other towns and villages in the Var. Contact the **Espace Info Energie** (☎ Eastern Var 04 94 51 41 36, Massif des Maures 04 94 55 70 49, Toulon 04 94 92 35 76) for information and reservations.

If you want to take environmentally responsible travel a step further, you can immerse yourself in the environment with a *chantier vert* (green workshop) or other volunteering opportunity. Fancy restoring a village, clearing a forest or mothering a tortoise? See p415 for a detailed listing.

# Outdoor Activities

Despite its compact size, Provence has a vast array of landscapes, from alpine mountains to cavernous gorges, wetlands and a world-famous coastline scattered with offshore islands. There are outdoor activities for all energy levels.

## ASTRONOMY

Provence's infamous mistral might bite, but on the bright side the wind blows away cloud cover, resulting in sunny days and, for stargazers, clear, star-filled night skies. Large tracts of protected areas, especially across the Luberon and Haute-Provence, give off little artificial light, allowing stars to shine at their brightest.

Observatories welcoming stargazers include the Observatoire de Haute-Provence (p248), a national research centre in St-Michel l'Observatoire, west of Manosque, and the nearby Centre d'Astronomie (p248). Amid the Luberon's lavender fields in Lagarde d'Apt you can stay up all night to watch the stars at the Observatoire Sirene (p217). On the star-studded Côte d'Azur, see stars at the Observatoire de Nice (p286) in La Trinité and nearby at Astrorama (p286), east of Nice.

Young astronomers will be enthralled by the Parc d'Astronomie, du Soleil et du Cosmos (p163) near Avignon.

## BALLOONING

Drifting across Provence's patchwork fields in a hot-air balloon is an uplifting and romantic way to take in the captivating countryside. Balloon flights last one to 1½ hours (allow three to four hours in all for getting to/from the launch pad, inflating the balloon etc) and cost from €230 per person (€305 for a sunrise flight). Flights run year-round but are subject to weather forecasts. Operators include **Hot-Air Ballooning Provence** (☎ 04 90 05 74 39; www.avignon-et-provence.com/ballooning; Jocas), just outside Gordes (p216), with flights in the Avignon and Luberon area; and **Les Montgolfières du Sud** (☎ 04 66 37 28 02; www.sudmontgolfiere.com in French; 64 rue Sigalon, Uzès), west of Nîmes, floating over the Pont du Gard.

## BEACH VOLLEYBALL

*Baywatch* types can set, spike and dig at nets set up along Marseille's beaches; see p102.

## BIRD-WATCHING

Ornithologists flock to see clouds of pink flamingos in the protected Camargue delta (p137) and the Presqu'île de Giens (p372) near Hyères, and majestic birds of prey in the Parc National du Mercantour (p248). The national **Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux** (LPO; League for the Protection of Birds; www.lpo.fr in French) has a regional branch, **LPO PACA** (☎ 04 94 12 79 52; paca@lpo.fr; Villa La Paix, rond-point Beauregard, F-83400 Hyères), which organises guided bird-watching expeditions, can tell you where to spot what and can put you in touch with LPO-affiliated bird-watching groups in the region.

## BUNGEE JUMPING

The daring and downright fearless can leap off Europe's highest bridge (182m) in the Gorges du Verdon (p235) or from a (slightly) less daunting 80m-high equivalent in the red-rock Gorges de Dalius (p252), near Guilaumes in the Vallée de la Tinée. Prices for *saut en élastique* (bungee jumping) range from €60 to €98 for an initial jump (cheaper for subsequent jumps).

## CANOEING

Glide on a peaceful paddling expedition beneath the Pont du Gard (see p200), along the bird-filled Camargue waterways (p137) or along the River Sorgue from Fontaine de Vaucluse to L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue (p187 and p188).

## CANYONING

Provence has Europe's biggest canyon, the gaping Gorges du Verdon (p236) in its backyard, so a guided canyoning expedition, involving a combination of scrambling, swimming and hiking through the gorges' depths (wetsuits provided) is a high point of any trip to the region. Convivial English-speaking operators include **Guides Aventure** (☎ 06 85 94 46 61; www.guidesaventure.com).

## CYCLING

Pedalling is practically synonymous with Provence. With near-endless sunshine and few killing hills to climb, not to mention storybook scenery and enchanting villages en route, the region is ideal two-wheeled territory for professionals and amateurs, adults and kids alike. On the Côte d'Azur the noisy motorway is never far away, making cycling a less tranquil affair: coastal cyclists often base themselves in Nice, from where they take a train along the coast each morning with their bicycles to avoid the stress of cycling out of the city. Some GR trails (see p88) are open to mountain bikes, and those keen to tackle the region's roughest mountain terrain should hightail it to Haute-Provence.

Road and mountain bikes can be easily hired for around €15 a day including helmet, puncture-repair kit and suggested itineraries. Many rental outlets, especially on the coast and in the Luberon, have tandems (€20 to €30 per day), children's bikes (around €12 per day), toddler seats (around €5 per day) and two-seater trailers (*remorques* or *carrioles*; up to €15 per day) to tow little kids and babies along. Some deliver to your door for free. Rental outlets are listed under Getting Around in the respective regional chapters.

Both on- and off-road cycling itineraries of various lengths and difficulties, compiled by local experts, can be picked up at most tourist offices. The **Conseil Général du Var** (www.cg83.fr in French) publishes an excellent cycling *topoguide* for the St-Tropez to Toulon area containing 22 detailed itineraries. For Nice, its coast and hinterland, *Rando VTT: Guide RandOxygène*, published by the **Conseil Général des Alpes-Maritimes** (www.cg06.fr in French), maps out 30 cycling routes ranging from a gentle 7km (1½ hours) to a sporty 22km (four hours). And for the Avignon area, there are the 13 routes suggested by the Vaucluse **département** (www.vaucluse.fr in French) in its *VTT: Loisirs de Plein Air* booklet. These free guides (in French only) can all be ordered online.

Otherwise, the **Ligue Provence Alpes de Cyclo-tourisme** (☎ 04 90 29 64 80; perso.wanadoo.fr/cyclo-provence-alpes in French; Hôtel de Ville, Espace Acampado, BP 27, F-84220 Piolenc) publishes a clutch of excellent French-only guides, some free; while Didier-Richard publishes *Les Guides VTT* series of cyclists' *topoguides*, sold in bookshops. Outside France, Lonely Planet's *Cycling France* details six cycling itineraries in the region.

Following are seven free and easy (and not-so-easy) cycling itineraries.

### Le Luberon en Vélo

**Nearest towns** Apt & Cavaillon **Difficulty** easy to hard **Information** ☎ Maison du Parc 04 90 04 42 00, Vélo Loisir en Luberon 04 92 79 05 82; www.parcduluberon.fr in French, www.veloloisirluberon.com

Cyclists can cross the Parc Naturel Régional du Luberon by following a circular 230km-long itinerary. Roads – steep in places – have little traffic and

'Those keen to tackle the region's roughest mountain terrain should hightail it to Haute-Provence'

Inspiring ideas for outdoor activities throughout the entire region are listed on the regional tourist board's website [www.crt-paca.fr](http://www.crt-paca.fr).

saunter up, down and around photogenic hilltop villages, vineyards, olive groves, lavender fields and fruit farms. Cyclists taking the northern route pedal 111km from Forcalquier to Cavaillon via Apt, Bonnieux, Lacoste and Ménerbes; the southern route links the two towns by way of Lourmarin, Vaugines, Cucuron and Manosque.

Those who enjoy a stiff climb should tackle the northern route east to west (signposted with white markers). Freewheelers should opt for the easier west-bound route, which is marked by orange signs. For day-trippers in Cavaillon, the 40km round trip to Ménerbes makes for an exhilarating bike ride.

Information boards posted along both routes provide details on accommodation, eating and sightseeing.

At press time, the first section of a car-free cycleway utilising disused railway tracks had opened for cyclists from Apt. By 2008 it is expected to span Cavaillon to Forcalquier; and ultimately it will extend east to Italy; see p216 for details.

### Les Ogres en Vélo

**Nearest town** Apt **Difficulty** easy **Information** ☎ Maison du Parc 04 90 04 42 00, Vélo Loisir en Luberon 04 92 79 05 82; www.parcduluberon.fr in French, www.veloloisirluberon.com

This colourful itinerary forms a 50km circular route around the land of Luberon ochre (see p220), linking rocky-red Roussillon with Villars (to the north), Rustrel (to the east), Apt (to the south) and Gargas (to the west). The route can be followed in either direction; green signs mark the westbound way from Apt and ochre markers flag its eastbound counterpart.

### Le Pays de Forcalquier et Montagne de Lure en Vélo

**Nearest town** Forcalquier **Difficulty** easy to hard **Information** ☎ 04 92 75 10 02; www.velopaysforcalquier.com in French

The rough-cut plains of rough 'n' ready Haute-Provence star on the agenda of this mountainous-in-parts, 78km-long route that can be followed in either direction from Forcalquier; ochre signs mark the eastbound route, blue the west, and brown the 6km *boucle* (loop) that can be picked up in Lurs. Villages passed en route include Aubenas les Alpes, St-Michel de l'Observatoire and Mane.

### Île de Porquerolles

**Only town** Porquerolles **Difficulty** easy **Information** ☎ 04 94 58 33 76; www.porquerolles.com

The only means of transport on the national park-protected island of Porquerolles – bar one's feet – is bicycle. Sights are few and distances between beaches are small, making it a hassle-free cycling choice for families happy to spend the day sauntering about by pedal power. In all, 70km of unpaved biking trails zigzag across the island and there are seven rental companies; some provide picnic hampers (€14 per person) for cyclists.

### Toulon–St-Raphaël

**Nearest towns** Toulon, Hyères & Cavalaire-sur-Mer **Difficulty** ultraeasy **Information** ☎ 04 94 18 53 00, 04 94 01 84 50, 04 94 01 92 10; www.cg83.fr in French

Between 1905 and 1949 a steam train (poetically named *le macaron* after a local almond cake containing pine kernels extracted from the same pine cones that fuelled the locomotive) huffed and puffed between Toulon and St-Raphaël. Today the same 101km-long coastal stretch is covered by a smooth-as-silk two-lane cycling path (*piste cyclable*) instead. The track winds

from Toulon to Hyères via Cap de Carqueiranne (a great lunch spot; see p377) past Cavalaire-sur-Mer and St-Tropez to St-Raphaël.

### Mont Ventoux

**Nearest towns** Malaucène & Sault **Difficulty** brutal **Information** ☎ 04 90 65 22 59, 04 90 64 01 21; www.lemontventoux.net in French

Many cyclists who make it to the summit of the mighty Mont Ventoux do it as something of a tribute to British world-champion cyclist Tommy Simpson (1937–67), who suffered a fatal heart attack on the mountain during the 1967 Tour de France. A moving roadside memorial to Simpson 1km east of the summit reads 'There is no mountain too high'. The road ascent from Chalet Reynard on the westbound D974 to the summit is six painful kilometres, but a good many cycling enthusiasts only pedal part of the road, often just to see how hard it is!

Tourist offices have information on guided bike rides on the mountain, including night descents by road and daytime mountain-bike descents.

### Brevet des 7 Cols Ubayens

**Nearest towns** Barcelonnette **Difficulty** ultrahard **Information** ☎ 04 92 81 03 68; www.ubaye.com

The seven cols – Allos (2250m), Restefond la Bonette (2802m), Larche (1991m), Vars (2109m), Cayolle (2326m), Pontis (1301m) and St-Jean (1333m) – linking the remote Vallée de l'Ubaye in Haute-Provence with civilisation form the region's most challenging bike rides. The series of loop rides from Barcelonnette involves 207km of power-peddalling and can only be done May to September when the passes aren't blocked by snow. Cyclists who do all seven get a medal (to prove it, participants have to punch a special card in punch-machines installed on each mountain pass). Local tourist offices sell a map of the route (€6.10).

### DIVING & SNORKELLING

The coastline and its offshore islands – Porquerolles and Embiez particularly – offer enticing diving opportunities. Experienced divers enjoy the waters around Hyères and the Presqu'île du Giens, where the sea beds are littered with shipwrecks. Military WWII wrecks can be explored from St-Raphaël.

Spectacular dive sites in and around Marseille include the Rade de Marseille (a bay with a far-from-flat bottom) and its offshore islands. Diving is also spectacular around Les Calanques, where Henri Cosquer discovered prehistoric paintings in an underwater cave; the school in Cassis he formerly headed up (see p117) organises a variety of dives including night and wreck dives.

The diving season generally runs mid-March to mid-November. Irrespective of whether you're a first-timer about to embark on a *baptême de plongée* (baptism dive) or a highly experienced diver, you will need to show a medical certificate. You should automatically be covered by the diving school's own insurance, but always check. Prices for a half-day baptism/explorative dive start from €48/37 including full equipment hire, and a 10-dive course starts from €396/247.50 with/without equipment hire and without an instructor, or €450/297 with an instructor.

In summer underwater nature trails encourage the aquatically curious to discover marine life at Domaine du Rayol (p364) on the Corniche des Maures, on Île de Port-Cros (p369) and on Plage d'Argentière near La Londe (p373).

'The seven cols form the region's most challenging bike rides'

Park authorities on Cap Couronne near Marseille organise one-hour guided snorkelling sessions in the Parc Régional Marin de la Côte Bleue (p119).

Diving shops and clubs are listed in the relevant regional chapters.

### DONKEY RAMBLING

To ramble amid steep gorges and mountain slopes unencumbered by the weight of a pack on your back, engage a gentle-natured donkey to accompany you on your journey. Farms renting donkeys include Les Ânes des Abeilles (p188), near the Gorges de Nesque, and a couple of other options in Thoard in Haute-Provence (see p243).

### FISHING

Provence's crystal-clear rivers and lakes offer excellent fishing. Local restrictions dictate which fish can be caught and which must be thrown back. Cafés and *tabacs* situated close to fishing spots sell licences for a few euros (depending on the area and the catch), and can often provide tips about local sweet spots. Tourist offices throughout Provence stock detailed information.

For private trout fishing in the Avignon area, including rod rental and bait, contact **Maurice Paris** (☎ 04 75 28 07 66; 📅 Jul & Aug, Sat & Sun Apr-Jun & Sep). Prices vary according to the weight of the fish caught.

### FLYING & GLIDING

Fabulous views of Mont Ventoux can be seen from above with **Air Ventoux** (☎ 04 90 66 35 81; monsite.wanadoo.fr/airventoux in French). Half-hour flights (adult/child under 12 €72/36; minimum two passengers) take off from airstrips in Montfavet (near Avignon) and Pernes les Fonatines (near Carpentras).

Alternatively, you can take to the skies above Salon-de-Provence (famed as the home of France's military flying school, the École de l'Air et École Militaire de l'Air) in a glider. Baptism flights with **Centre de Vol à Voile de la Crau** (☎ 04 90 42 15 38) lasting 20 minutes cost €60.

### GOLF

A total of 15 golf courses across Provence participate in the **Golf Pass Provence** (www.golfpass-provence.com) network, offering savings on green fees. A pass for three/five green fees in high season (April to October) costs €150/250, and can be purchased online. Individual rounds must be booked 48 hours in advance.

Marseille's tourist office organises golf lessons from 10am to 11.30am on Sunday at the Marseille Borély Golf School costing €10 including equipment, where beginners and intermediate players aged over eight years are given technical advice by qualified instructors. See p96.

One of the most memorable places to tee off is **Golf de Digne La Lavande** (☎ 04 92 30 58 00; www.golfdigne.com; 57 rte du Chaffaute; 18 holes low/high season from €34/48), amid the lavender fields in Haute-Provence. The course also has an on-site restaurant and hotel; see p243.

### GRASS-SKIING

Come the melting snow of spring, off go the sleek snow skis and on go the grass skis, which – for those not familiar with this fringe sport, invented in Germany in the 1960s to help Alpine skiers train year-round – resemble short clunky skis with a caterpillar tread like a bulldozer.

Popular spots in France for *le ski sur herbe* (grass-skiing) are the Mont Serein ski station (p181) on Mont Ventoux's slopes, and La Foux d'Allos and Sauze in Haute-Provence. Ski and boot hire costs around €15 a day and a one-day drag-lift pass is likewise around €15. The season – July and August in the main – is supershort and face-first wipeouts can be frequent (and fierce). As with

other types of skiing, grass-skiing has its own world championship, world cup and European cup. For more information, see <http://grass-ski.alpes-provence.net>.

### HORSE RIDING

With its famous cowboys, creamy white horses and expansive sandy beaches to gallop along, the Camargue (see p137) is a wonderful – if windswept – spot to ride. Aspiring cowboys and gals can learn the ropes on week-long *stages de monte gardiane* (Camargue cowboy courses); see p148.

Elsewhere in Provence, tourist offices have lists of stables and riding centres where you can saddle up, and the national **Fédération Française des Relais d'Étape de Tourisme Équestre** (☎ 03 86 20 08 04; www.chevalfrance.org in French; Mairie, F-58800 Corbigny) arranges riding itineraries and accommodation.

### ICE DIVING

James Bond wannabes who find themselves high and dry in Provence in winter can plunge into the chilly but extraordinarily crystal-clear depths of an iced-over lake. See p251 for the full ice-diving brief.

### JEEP TOURS

A range of 4WD tours setting out from Arles or Stes-Maries de la Mer take you well off the beaten bitumen in the wild Camargue wetlands; see p138 for info.

### NATURISM

The Côte d'Azur has long embraced a let-it-all-hang-out attitude. Nudist spots – known as *aires naturistes*, not to be confused with *aires naturelles*, which are primitive farm camp sites – range from small rural camp sites to large chalet villages with cinemas, tennis courts and shops. Most open April to October; visitors need an International Nudist Federation (INF) *passport naturiste*, available at nudist centres.

If you're not a fan of tan lines, the coastline between Le Lavandou and the St-Tropez peninsula is well endowed with nudist beaches. Héliopolis on Île du Levant – one of a trio of islands off the coast between Le Lavandou and Hyères – is the region's oldest and largest nudist colony, dating from the 1930s and easily visited on a day trip by boat. See p370 for details.

The **Fédération Française de Naturisme** (☎ 08 92 69 32 82; www.ffn-naturisme.com in French; 5 rue Regnault, F-93500 Pantin) can tell you precisely where in Provence you can roam in the buff.

### PARACHUTING

To *saut en parachute* (skydive) above the dramatic Provençal countryside, Marseille-based Latitude Challenge (p235) organises solo/tandem jumps starting from €221/236.

### PARAGLIDING

St-André-les-Alpes (p241), 20km north of Castellane in Haute-Provence, is the French capital of *parapente* (paragliding). If the thermals are good – as in St-André – you can stay up for hours circling the area and enjoying breathtaking aerial views. Paragliding schools in St-André and St-Dalmas-Valdeblère (p254) typically charge €445/475 in low/high season for a five-day initiation course and €60/85 for a 10-/20-minute tandem flight (with instructor) for those who'd rather not brave it alone.

In the Luberon paragliders can soar with the birds over Provence's russet red Colorado in Rustrel (p217).

A swag of information on horse riding, schools, tours and other equestrian activities in the Provence-Côte d'Azur region is linked to [www.terre-equestre.com](http://www.terre-equestre.com) (in French).

'Take to the skies above Salon-de-Provence'

## QUADING

Razzing around by quad bike is an exhilarating way of exploring the great outdoors. Mont Ventoux and the Alpilles in the Avignon area are hot quad spots, as is the Camargue; see the Activities sections of the regional chapters and check with local tourist offices for details.

## ROCK CLIMBING & VIA FERRATA

The Gorges du Verdon, the *calanques* around Marseille, the lacy Dentelles de Montmirail in the Vaucluse, Buoux in the Luberon and the Vallée des Merveilles in the Parc National du Mercantour are but a handful of the region's *sites d'escalade* (climbing sites). Most tourist offices stock lists of spots to climb, guides and climbing schools, as well as information on branches of Club Alpin Français (CAF; located in most major towns). Local Luberon climbing club Améthyste (p226) runs a packed programme of climbs in the Buoux area.

Crisscrossing the dizzying peaks of Haute-Provence are four heart-lurching *via ferrata* (a type of rock climbing using pre-attached cables bolted into the mountainside) courses; see p253 for details and locations.

## INLINE SKATING & SKATEBOARDING

Inline skating is still one of the chicest ways to cruise around town. Blades (and usually boards) can be hired in any of the larger cities as well as most resorts on the Côte d'Azur for around €10 to €20 per day. Top inline skating spots on the Riviera include Nice's promenade des Anglais and La Croisette in Cannes. Marseille's La Canebière (once the tramway construction's completed), the coastal corniches and the legendary bowl at Marseille Skatepark (p103) are also prime skating terrain. Year-round, Marseille's tourist office organises lessons for beginner bladers over the age of 11 years from 10am to noon Sunday at Parc Borély (€12 plus €2 for blade hire), where you'll learn how to stop, glide and turn. Bookings must be made in advance through the tourist office (p96).

Hundreds of inline skaters meet each week for a police-escorted evening blade around town in Avignon (p163). Marseille's mass blade had been cancelled by the authorities at press time, but strong local support may yet see it reinstated. Nice also hosts an en masse blade (p269).

Skating and boarding are forbidden in Monaco.

## SAILING & SEA SPORTS

Sailing is big business on the French Riviera: Antibes, Cannes, Mandelieu-La Napoule and St-Raphaël as well as Marseille are large water-sports centres where those without their own boat can hire a set of sails. Tourist offices have a list of sailing centres (*stations violes*) that rent gear and run courses. Count on paying around €40/70 to rent a catamaran for 1½/three hours and €40 for a one-hour sailing lesson.

Marseille's tourist office organises three-hour sailing courses from 2pm to 5pm on Saturday for €36 for start-up sailors aged over six years; book with the tourist office (p96).

Other sea sports readily available on the beach include windsurfing (around €30 per hour to rent a board), water-skiing and wake-boarding (€25 for around 15 minutes), jet-skiing (around €50 for 30 minutes) and rides from the back of a boat in a parachute (€45/60 for one/two people for a 10-minute ride), hair-raising rubber ring (€20 per person for a 10-minute ride) or fly fish (€30 per person for a 10-minute ride).

Surfing the waves with a kite is rapidly taking off along the coast. March to November, surfers can ride the best winds of the day on a board propelled by a kite with **AirX Kite** (☎ 06 60 41 87 34; www.airxkite.com; St-Laurent du Var Centre Nautique, 416

*Via Ferrata: A Complete Guide to France* by Philippe Poulet is a bible for anyone intending to tackle the elevated *via ferrata* climbing trails across the mountains of Haute-Provence.

av Eugène Donadeï; Mandelieu-La Napoule Centre Nautique, av Général de Gaulle), a kite-surf school that surfs from its bases at St-Laurent du Var and Mandelieu-La Napoule. Four-hour private lessons cost €180 and a 20/32-hour group-lesson pass is available for €590/840, both including equipment hire.

Among the emerging kite-surfing and windsurfing hot spots are the beaches at L'Almanarre in Hyères, home to **Funboard Center** (☎ 04 94 57 95 33; www.funboardcenter.com; route l'Almanarre) which runs lessons year-round costing upwards of €23 per hour for windsurfing and €70 for a maiden kite-surf; several other places are open in summer. The Camargue is another up-and-coming kite-surfing spot, both for kite-boarding the wind-whipped seas and speeding along the flat sands on a kite-powered buggy; see p138 for details.

The Atlantic it ain't, but Marseille's beaches often get enough of a swell to satisfy regular board-riders, at least briefly, with short, zippy rides in to shore. For surfing info, see p103.

From Marseille you can also paddle out in a sea kayak; see p103 for information about all-day and moonlight paddles.

To get a marine weather forecast before setting sail, call ☎ 3250 or visit www.meteo.fr/marine in French.

## SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

The few ski resorts in Haute-Provence are refreshingly low-key, with little of the glitz and glamour attached to the Alps' better-known centres such as Chamonix. Provence's pistes are best suited to beginner and intermediate skiers and are marginally cheaper than their northern neighbours.

Resorts include the larger Pra Loup (straddled between 1500m and 1600m) and La Foux d'Allos (1800m), which share 230km of downhill pistes and 110km of cross-country trails. Smaller sister resorts of Le Sauze (1400m) and Super-Sauze (1700m) in the Vallée de l'Ubaye tend to attract domestic tourists. The concrete-block Isola 2000 (2450m) is the largest of the resorts, and the least attractive.

### TOP FIVE ACTIVITY TOURS FROM ABROAD

Signing up for an activity tour before you leave home allows you to hit the ground running. Most cycling- and walking-tour operators lighten the load by transporting baggage by minibus between hotels. Tours take in hilltop villages and other sights en route.

**Andante on Foot** (☎ 01722-713813; www.andanteonfoot.co.uk; The Old Barn, Old Rd, Alderbury, Salisbury SP5 3AR, UK) You only need book your own transport to/from Nice and let Andante on Foot do the rest, ie organise 11km to 17km (four to seven hours) a day of scenic walking from the hilltop villages of the Roya Valley to *belle époque* Menton, seven nights' B&B accommodation (including two evening meals and three picnics) and luggage transfer, costing UK£540.

**ATG Oxford** (☎ 01865-315678; www.atg-oxford.co.uk; 69-71 Banbury Rd, Oxford OX2 6PJ, UK) Escorted and independent walking holidays, including a guided eight-day Luberon trip (UK£1795 excluding flights) with five days of walking through the colour-rich countryside.

**Europeds** (☎ 800-321 9552, 831-646 4920; www.europeds.com; 761 Lighthouse Ave, Monterey CA 93940, USA) This friendly California-based Europe specialist runs seven-day 'Provence Loops' circuits incorporating five full days of cycling costing US\$2400.

**Susi Madron's Cycling for Softies** (☎ 01612-488282; www.cycling-for-softies.co.uk; 2 & 4 Birch Polygon, Rusholme Manchester M14 5HX, UK) Gourmet restaurants, charming hotels and itineraries catering to all cycling abilities have made this 'soft' approach to cycling Provence perennially popular. Three- to 14-day self-guided tours cost from UK£428 to UK£1579.

**Top Yacht** (☎ 01243-520950; www.top-yacht.com; Southgate, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 8DN, UK) Yachts complete with experienced crews can sail you around the Mediterranean from US\$8000 per week (excluding dinner, drinks, marina fees and port taxes) for one or two people. Skipped and unskipped yachts are also available for charter.



These resorts – all in the Parc National du Mercantour (p248) – open for the ski season from December to March/April/May (depending on the snow conditions), and for a short period in July and August for summer walkers. Buying a package is the cheapest way to ski and/or snowboard. For information on lift passes, equipment hire and the like, see the relevant sections in the Parc National du Mercantour section.

North of Dignes-les-Bains, near the western edge of the Parc National du Mercantour in the Vallée de la Blanche, the locally patronised resort of St-Jean Montclar (p244) is well set up for families.

Mont Ventoux offers limited downhill and cross-country skiing; Chalet Reynard in Bédoin and Mont Serein are the two ski stations. See p181 for details.

## SPELUNKING

The harsh moonscape of the Plateau d'Albion (p182) is riddled with natural potholes and caverns, inviting nonclaustrophobic adventurers to explore underground. The **Association Spéléologique du Plateau d'Albion** (☎ 04 90 76 08 33; www.aspanet.net in French; 2 rue de l'Église, St-Christol d'Albion) runs spelunking trips from €60 per day.

## WALKING

The region is crisscrossed by a maze of *sentiers balisés* (marked walking paths) and *sentiers de grande randonnée* (long-distance paths with alphanumeric names beginning 'GR'). Some of the latter are many hundreds of kilometres long, including the GR5, which travels from the Netherlands through Belgium, Luxembourg and the spectacular Alpine scenery of eastern France before ending up in Nice. The GR4 (which crosses the Dentelles de Montmirail before climbing up the northern face of Mont Ventoux and winding east to the Gorges du Verdon), GR6 and their various diversions also traverse the region. Provence's most spectacular trail, the GR9, takes walkers to most of the area's ranges, including Mont du Vaucluse and Montagne du Luberon.

No permits are needed but there are restrictions on where you can camp, especially in the Parc National du Mercantour, Les Calanques and the Gorges du Verdon. Between 1 July and 15 September paths in heavily

## BLISS OUT

Lavender and algae baths, shiatsu and Ayurvedic massages, Mediterranean mudpacks and lots of other pampering pleasures soothe and rejuvenate weary feet and souls at a handful of spas.

A supersoak in a bubbling thermal bath laced with essential lavender oil at Établissement Thermal (p242) in Digne-les-Bains costs €45.

Thermes Sextius (p127), a Roman spa in Aix-en-Provence, hits the spot with Zen massages, Camargue-salt skin scrubs and dozens of other blissful treatments, starting from €37.

Aromatherapy, *oshibori* (Japanese hot towels) and shiatsu prove a potent cocktail at the Shiseido Spa at Le Mas Candille (p325) in Mougins, near Cannes. Surrounded by Japanese gardens and all things Zen, the spa practises the Qi method; test it out with a 45-minute body polish (€90), 30-minute quick tension release (€65), an ultimate pampering day (€445) or the men-only energising antistress day (€420).

At Monaco's Thermes Marins de Monte-Carlo (p390), the region's (and quite possibly the world's) most exclusive and luxurious spa, the truly decadent can splurge on a Monte Carlo diamond massage (€398 for 90 minutes) – a body scrub with diamond powder, followed by a massage with rose-scented lotion and topped off with a 'gold and light of Monte Carlo' cream for the ultimate sparkle – or a star massage (€110 for one hour) to relax each of the body's five 'star-shape' points (head, arms and legs).

Snow-bunnies can get the scoop on skiing or surfing the region's slopes on www.skifrance.com.

Before setting off on a trek, pop Lonely Planet's *Walking in France* or the English-language *Walks in Provence: Lubéron Regional Nature Park*, a *topoguide* by the Fédération Française de Randonnée Pédestre in your backpack.

## WALKING WITH A FARMER

No-one knows the lay of the land better than those who tirelessly farm it. For a wonderful introduction to a Provençal farm, sign up for an *itinéraire paysan* (farmer's itinerary): a two- to three-hour walk with a local farmer across their property. These thematic walks take you through fruit orchards and Alpine pastures, past beehives, along canals, around goat farms and in search of black diamonds (truffles); ending with a small sample of the farm's produce.

*Itinéraires paysans* take place on farms and agricultural land in Haute-Provence (including the area around Manosque in the Luberon), and in the Var to the east from June to September. They cost €7/3 for an adult/six to 16 year old and must be booked directly with the farmer at least 24 hours in advance. Walks are cancelled if there are fewer than eight participants. A calendar covering the season's walks is online at www.itinéraires-paysans.com. Alternatively, contact the **Centre Permanent d'Initiatives pour l'Environnement Alpes de Provence** (☎ 04 92 87 58 81; www.cpie04.com in French; Château de Drouille, F-04100 Manosque).

forested areas – such as the section of the GR98 that follows Les Calanques between Cap Croisette (immediately south of Marseille) and Cassis – are closed completely due to the high risk of forest fire. The GR51 crossing the Massif des Maures, paths in the Montagne de Ste-Victoire east of Aix-en-Provence and numerous trails in Haute-Provence are likewise closed in summer due to fire risk.

Many walking guides – predominantly in French – cover the region. The *Guides RandOxygène* walking guides published by the Conseil Général des Alpes-Maritimes (Alpes-Maritimes General Council) are outstanding. The guides detail 60 walks of varying lengths – for seaside amblers to serious walkers – in the Alpes-Maritimes *département: Rando Haut-Pays* covers the Parc National du Mercantour, *Rando Moyen-Pays* tackles the hilltop villages north of Nice and *Rando Pays Côtier* features invigorating coastal walks. Tourist offices have information, as does the jam-packed website www.randoxygene.org (in French).

Almost every tourist office takes bookings for short two- to three-hour guided nature walks in their areas during summer; many are organised by the local branch of the Office National des Forêts (ONF, National Forests Office) or by a local mountain guide. Several companies, both within and outside the region, organise longer treks; see p87.

## WHITE-WATER SPORTS

Between April and September Haute-Provence (p231) promises thrills and spills galore with a torrent of opportunities for white-water rafting, canoeing, kayaking, hot-dogging (bombing in an inflatable canoe), canyoning (scaling waterfalls and rivers with ropes), hydrospeed (bombing on a body-board), 'floating' (like rafting minus the raft, with a buoyancy bag strapped to your back) and water-rambling (navigating rivers with or without a mountain bike).

The Rivers Verdon, Vésubie, Roya and Ubaye are easily the region's most dramatic waterways; leading centres where you can sign up for guided half- and full-day expeditions are Castellane (for the Gorges du Verdon), St-Martin-Vésubie (for the Vésubie descent), Breil-sur-Roya (for the Vallée de la Roya) and Barcelonnette (for the Vallée de l'Ubaye). Expect to pay around €50/75 for a half-/full-day group expedition with guide. Full details are listed in the Haute-Provence chapter.

The Manosque-based branch (☎ 04 92 70 54 54; centre.giono@wanadoo.fr; Centre Giono 3, blvd 'Elémir Bourges F-04100) of Handi Cap Évasion (☎ 04 78 22 71 02; www.hce.asso.fr in French) organises nature walks for travellers with disabilities (including those in wheelchairs).

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