



The Luberon

The picture-perfect area that makes up the Luberon region might take the shape of a rectangle on the map. But navigating its bucolic rolling hills, golden-hued perched villages and hidden valleys is a little like fitting together a jigsaw puzzle.

Part of the *Vaucluse département* (administrative area), the Luberon is named after the main range – culminating with a 1100m-high summit – much of which is protected by the Parc Naturel Régional du Luberon. Split by the Combe de Lourmarin, with the Petit Luberon to the west and Grand Luberon to the east, the Luberon's lush landscapes are crisscrossed by a rambling network of country roads, way-marked walking tracks and signposted cycling routes.

Orchards bowed by blood red cherries, fertile fields of melons and crops, ribboned vineyards, olive groves and aromatic wild herbs buzzing with bees and fluttering butterflies envelop honey-coloured *mas* (Provençal farmhouses) in the lower altitudes. Beneath a canopy of oaks, the upper slopes shelter Bronze Age *bories* (beehive-shaped huts); while nearby, ochre-rich earth creates a powdery sunset-coloured palette. Lavender blazes on the plains around Buoux. Capped by chateaux, the massif's Mediterranean southern side around Pays d'Aigues is bordered by the rushing River Durance.

Cavaillon, to the west, and Apt, in the centre, are the region's two main towns. Both act as engine rooms driving the area's agricultural economy. At the Luberon's eastern edge, industrial Manosque creates natural cosmetics, shipping the scents of Provence to the world.

The Luberon's heady hues, fragrances and flavours subtly transform in tune with the seasons, and exploring even a piece of this picturesque region provides an ever-changing spectacle.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Drift up, up and away in the still morning air on a sunrise balloon flight in **Joucas** (p216)
- Get to the essence of Provence's perfusive purple flowers at the lavender museum at **Coustellet** (p223)
- Admire the opulent interiors of **Château d'Ansouis** (p229)
- Take a free behind-the-scenes winery tour and tasting at the Cave des Vignerons in **Piervert** (p230)
- Cling to the rugged rocks on a climbing expedition in **Buoux** (p226)



ITINERARIES

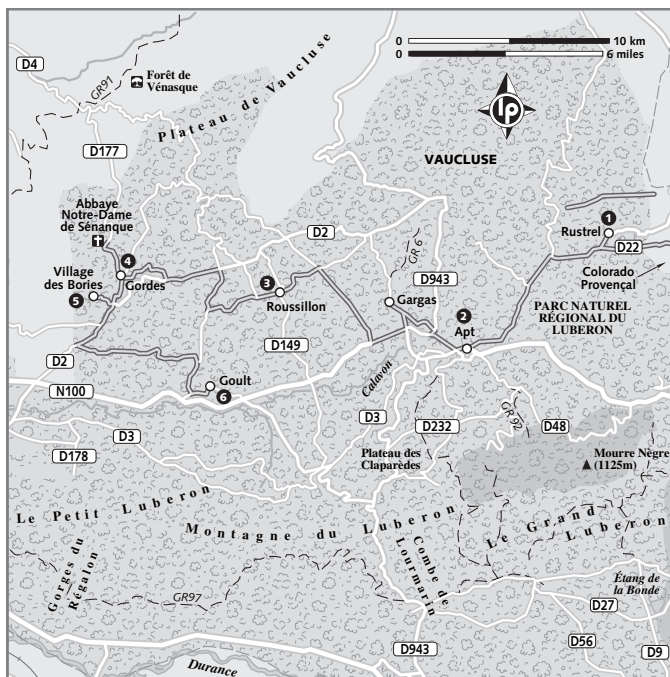
STUNNING STONEMWORK

One Day / North of the N100

Sojourning at the former-foundry-turned-*chambre d'hôte*, **La Forge** (p218) on the edge of **Rustrel** (1; p217) provides the perfect stepping stone for an early-morning walk through the fiery-ochre rock formations of the **Colorado Provençal** (see the boxed text, p220). Then swing your handlebars or steering wheel west to the Luberon's capital, **Apt** (2; p212) to learn about its 18th-century earthenware production at the **Musée de l'Aventure Industrielle du Pays d'Apt** (p212).

After lunching on Serge Peuzin's candied creations at **Auberge du Luberon** (see the boxed text, p216), whiz west to Gargas to visit Europe's only operational **ochre quarry** (see the boxed text, p220). Continue west to rust-coloured **Roussillon** (3; p215) to amble along its **ochre trail** and take an **ochre workshop** (see the boxed text, p220).

Wiggle your way further west to **Gordes** (4; p216) for a glimpse of the village tiered over the valley. North of Gordes, marvel at the masonry skills of 12th-century monks at the **Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque** (p217). Just west of Gordes, more stunning stonework is on view at the **Village des Bories** (5; p217), where the concentration of limestone-silver huts creates spectacular sunlit patterns. For dinner, head southeast to cosy up in the stone dining room of chef Patrick Payet in **Goult** (6; p216), then snuggle up in one of his village-view *chambre d'hôte* rooms (or book in for a weeklong cooking course), before traversing the hilltops back towards Apt, or scooting south.



PETIT PROVENCE

Two to Three Days / Le Petit Luberon

A *petit* road trip between Cavaillon and Lourmarin packages up some of Provence's most toy-townlike hilltop villages with panoramas over the patchwork countryside.

Discover the delights of the small city of **Cavaillon** (1; p223) including its **melon-filled markets** (see the boxed text, p223), moving **Jewish Museum** (p223) and tantalising **gourmet shops** (p225); and dine in style at one of Provence's best restaurants, **Prévôt** (p225). Set off east in the morning for the rocky hilltop ruins of **Oppède-le-Vieux** (2; p222). Continue east to **Ménerbes** (3; p221), calling in to the quirky **corkscrew museum** (p222) before charting a course through the higgledy-piggledy village to learn about **wine and truffles** (p222) and feasting on Laurent Jouin's fare at his vaunted new restaurant, **Véranda** (p222). Then push east to **Lacoste** (4; p221) to gaze out over the former chateau of the **Marquis de Sade** (p221), where you can tour its ruins undergoing restoration, or catch an open-air concert.

Wind your way around the hillsides east to **Bonnieux** (5; p219) to scuttle up 86 steps to its **12th-century church** (p219), and stroll in its protected **cedar forest** (p219). Break your journey at Bonnieux's village-centre *chambre d'hôte*, **Le Clos du Bois** (p220) or live it up at Edouard Loubet's blissful **bastide** (country manor; p221). The following day, sluice through the deep **Combe de Lourmarin** (6; p226) to reach its namesake town, the former home of Albert Camus and Henri Bosco, whose trails can be followed on a **literary walking tour** (p228).



NORTH OF THE N100

Losing yourself in the lush Luberon hills is the ultimate way to absorb the area's charms. The N100, running through the area's capital, Apt, is the main delineation between its northern and southern regions.

APT

pop 11,500 / elev 250m

At the centre of the Luberon's cherry-laden orchards is its capital, Apt. The agricultural town's festive spirit comes alive at its Saturday-morning market, brimming with cherries, grapes, and candied and crystallised fruits; and peaks during its **wine festival**, held on the Ascension (May or June), when up to 30 chateaux show off their wares.

Apt is a handy pit stop for cyclists and walkers: the Luberon en Vélo cycling itinerary (see p81) passes through, as does the GR9 long-distance walking track.

Information

Commercial banks cluster around place de la Bouquerie.

Infotelec (☎ 04 90 04 46 40; www.luberon.org in French; 44 quai de la Liberté; per hr €5; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

Laundrette (4 av Victor Hugo; ☎ 7am-8pm)

Luberon News (www.luberon-news.com) Information and what's-on listings for the entire region.

Post office (105 av Victor Hugo)

Tourist office (☎ 04 90 74 03 18; www.ot-apt.fr in French; 20 av Philippe de Girard; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun May, Jun & Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr)

Sights & Activities

Apt's tourist office has information on strolls around town, some passing the 11th-century **Ancienne Cathédrale Ste-Anne** (rue Ste-Anne; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat), where the relics of St Anne and illuminated 11th- and 12th-century manuscripts rest.

Gain an appreciation of Apt's artisan and agricultural roots at the **Musée de l'Aventure Industrielle du Pays d'Apt** (Industrial History Museum; ☎ 04 90 74 95 30; 14 place du Postel; adult/under 12yr €4/free; ☎ 10am-noon & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 3-7pm Sun). In an old candied-fruit factory, the museum interprets the candied-fruit trade as well as ochre mining and earthenware production from the 18th century.

TO É OR NOT TO É

Luberon may be spelt Lubéron by many leading cartographic publishers, but no – as any local will emphatically explain, regardless of what the rest of the country might heedlessly claim, there's no accent on the 'e'. (In fact, to really sound like a local, it's pronounced as if there's no 'e' at all.)

Thirty tonnes of cherries a day are candied at the **Confiserie Kerry Aptunion** (☎ 04 90 76 31 43; www.kerryaptunion.com; rte Nationale 100, quartier Salignan; ☎ shop 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat), the world's largest crystallised-fruits factory, 2.5km west of town. Free guided factory tours are possible by reservation.

Sleeping & Eating

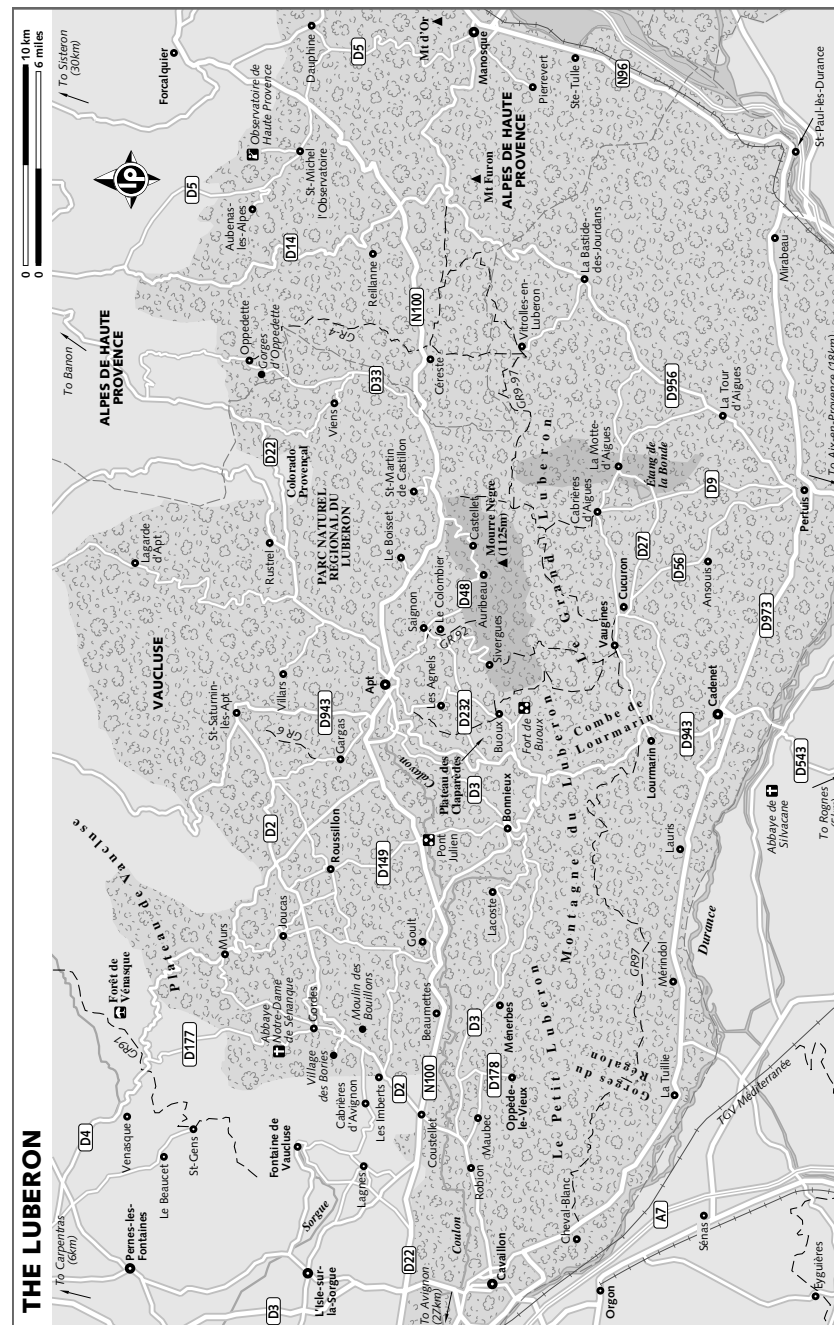
Many eating and sleeping options throughout this chapter are easily accessible by car from Apt.

Le Couvent (☎ 04 90 04 55 36; www.loucouvent.com in French; 36 rue Louis Rousset; d incl breakfast €75-120; ☎) Hidden behind a high stone wall and flowering gardens in the centre of town, this stunning *maison d'hôte* occupies a 17th-century convent and offers exceptional value for what you get; namely one of just five sumptuous rooms with high-speed internet, and breakfast in a vaulted stone dining room. Between April and October there's a two-night minimum at weekends.

Hôtel L'Aptois (☎ 04 90 74 02 02; www.aptois.fr.st; 289 cours Lauze de Perret; d €32-56) Above an inexpensive café, this surprisingly stylish cyclist-friendly hotel rents guests bikes that can be dropped off at points along the Luberon – Vélo bike routes, and does repairs. The cheapest rooms have toilets only, but they're all done out with chic fuchsia, purple and red taffeta and funky touches like designer lamps and streamline vases of silk flowers.

Thym, te Voilà (☎ 04 90 74 28 25; 59 rue St-Martin; mains €10; ☎ 11.30am-6pm Tue-Sat) Head to this sweet little spot in the town centre any time but especially on Saturday when a fresh-as-it-gets market soup bubbles aromatically in the open kitchen. During the rest of the week, the homemade savoury tarts and sugary flans are a treat.

L'Intramuros (☎ 04 90 06 18 87; 120 rue de la République; menus €14-27; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) In the centre of town within a 19th-century grocery shop filled with nostalgic bric-a-brac



LITERARY LUBERON

There's more on the list than the classic *A Year in Provence* (Peter Mayle), regaling the Mayles' move to the Luberon and renovation of a *mas* in Ménerbes (p221).

- *Confessions of a French Baker* (Peter Mayle and Gerard Auzet) The secret behind successful breadmaking, revealed by Cavaillon-based baker Auzet (p224) and his English novelist mate.
- *Hotel Pastis* (Peter Mayle) Set in Bonnieux, this departure from autobiography sees Mayle delve into fiction with equal passion for Provençal life. A *Good Year*, Mayle's novel-turned-film about a British financier who inherits a Luberon vineyard is likewise a fictional romp through this neck of the woods.
- *Village in the Vaucluse* (Lawrence Wylie) Published in the mid-1970s, Wylie wrote this amusing account of life in red-rock Roussillon in the 1950s, decades before all and sundry jumped on the travelogue bandwagon.
- *The Luberon Garden* (Alex Dingwall-Main) An English garden designer uproots his family from London to landscape a secret garden in Ménerbes.
- *The Man Who Planted Trees* (Jean Giono) A jewel-like short story from this much-loved Manosque writer, many of whose works are available in English.

like old coffee grinders, this simple little family-run place is beloved by locals for its 'instinctive Provençal' cooking.

SELF-CATERING

Markets aside (see the boxed text, p217), try **L'o à la Bouche** (98 rue St-Pierre) or **Via Domitia** (19 quai Léon Sagy), two *épiceries fines* (upmarket grocery shops). Directly across from the tourist office is Apt's best boulangerie (bakery).

Drinking & Entertainment

Place de la Bouquerie abounds with cafés like the gregarious **Grand Café Grégoire** (☎ 04 90 04 93 69; place de la Bouquerie; menus from €13.50; ☞ restaurant lunch Thu-Tue, dinner Thu-Mon, bar 6am-1am daily), which opens out the back to a terraced garden filled with umbrellas, and with a billiards table inside. Rue St-Pierre is another hot spot.

Brasserie St-John's (☎ 04 90 74 58 59; place St-Pierre; ☞ closed Sun) Also lively is the pavement terrace at Brasserie St-John's, which has energetic young owners, a fun, friendly vibe and good music (sometimes live).

Pâtisserie Rousset (☎ 04 90 74 14 34; 196 rue des Marchands; dishes €5-9.50; ☞ Tue-Sun) Although the word on the streets of Apt is that this *salon de thé* (tearoom) isn't the 'it' spot it once was, it's worth dropping by for the perennially popular cherry-and-lavender ice cream.

Cinema César (☎ 08 92 68 69 20; www.cinemacesar.fr.tc in French; rue Scudery) screens (often nondubbed) art-house flicks and documentaries as well mainstream releases.

Shopping

For souvenirs with style, pop into the following shops:

Abotis Création (☎ 04 90 04 56 86; www.abotis.com; 494 av Viton) Unusual handcrafted furniture stained with natural pigments.

Atelier Buisson Kessler (☎ 04 90 04 89 61; 20 place du Septier) Small *poterie* (pottery) workshop specialising in contemporary, big 'n' bold bowls, plates and tiles.

Cave du Septier (☎ 04 90 04 77 38; www.vcommevin.com in French; place du Septier) For many, the region's best-stocked wine cellars; rare and highly sought-after vintages.

Confiserie Marcel Richaud (48 quai de la Liberté) Candied figs, cherries and other fruits.

Faïences Atelier du Viel Apt (☎ 04 90 04 03 96; 61 place Carnot) Earthenware featuring the gold- and mud-coloured marbled finish that was all the rage in 18th-century Apt.

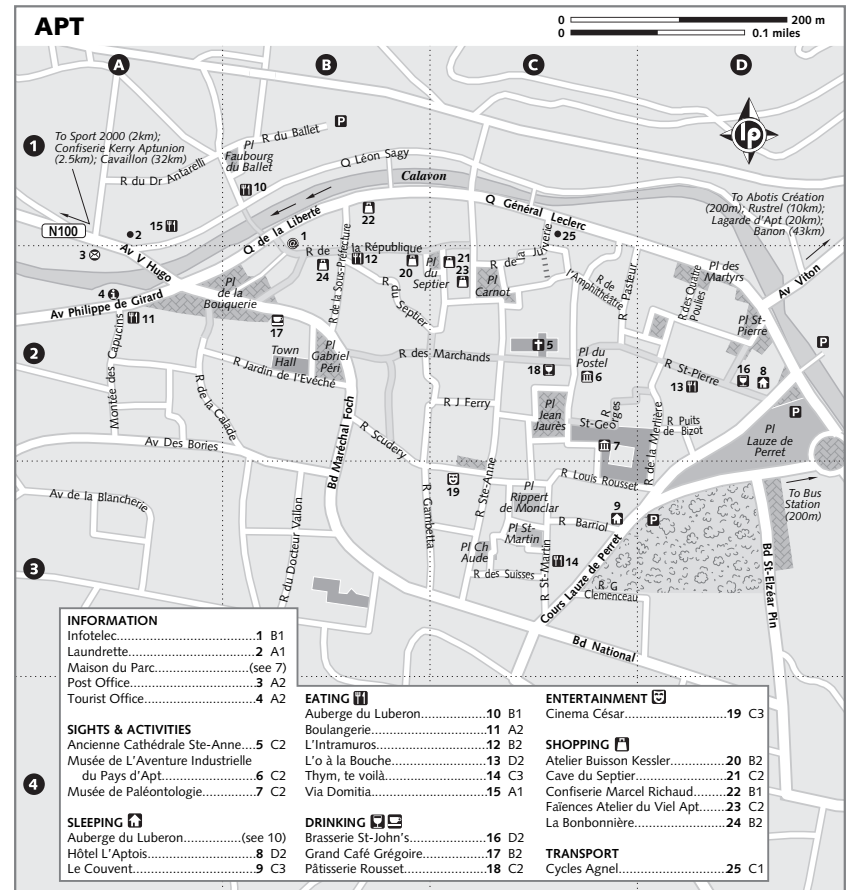
La Bonbonnière (57 rue de la Sous-Préfecture) Another place for candied figs, cherries and other fruits.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 04 90 74 20 21; 250 av de la Libération) east of the centre there are buses to/from Avignon (€7.90, 1¼ hours, three or four daily), to Aix-en-Provence (€9.40, 1½ hours, two daily), Digne-les-Bains (€7.30, two hours, one or two daily), Cavaillon (via Coustellet; €4.80, 40 minutes, two or three daily) and Marseille (€10.90, 2½ hours, two daily).

Getting Around

Equip yourself with pedal power at **Sport 2000** (☎ 04 90 04 30 00; 669 av Victor Hugo; ☞ 10am-12.30pm &



2.30-7pm Mon-Sat), a vast sports shop with a bike-rental outlet 1km west of the tourist office. Rental starts at €12/115 a day/week, including helmet and puncture-repair kit.

Similar rates are charged at **Cycles Agnel** (☎ 04 90 74 17 16; 86 quai Général Lederc; ☞ 8.30am-noon & 2.15-7pm Tue-Fri, 8.30am-12.15pm & 2.15-5.30pm Sat).

AROUND APT

On the N100's northern side, there are two worthwhile circuits from Apt. One takes you northwest to Roussillon, Gordes and the Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque returning via the pretty villages of **Joucas** (population 321), St-Saturnin-lès-Apt and hilltop **Villars** (population 700). Alternatively, heading northeast, Provence's 'Colorado' (see the boxed text,

p220) makes for a colourful trip. If time is of the essence, both loops can be covered (at a cracking pace) in the same day – see the itinerary, p210.

Sights & Activities

Some of Provence's most quintessential sights – impossibly pretty villages, ochre-rich earth, beehive-shaped *bories*, lavender fields and a stunning Cistercian abbey – are all just a few kilometres apart in this picturesque patch around Apt.

ROUSSILLON

Some two millennia ago, the Romans used the ochreous earth around the village of Roussillon (population 1190; elevation 360m), set in

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Auberge du Luberon (☎ 04 90 74 12 50; www.auberge-luberon-peuzin.com; 8 place Faubourg du Ballet, Apt; d €58-118, menus €29-62; 🍴 restaurant lunch & dinner; 📞 📺) This cosy inn just a few footsteps across the river from the historic town centre of Apt has 14 guest rooms in warm Provençal colours like (aptly enough) cherry red; some have added comforts such as minibars. Hotel parking costs €7 (or you'll usually find a free spot on the adjacent quay).

Among Luberon locals, the inn is best known as the home of Apt's finest restaurant, which is the magnum opus of chef Serge Peuzin. Hot news from the kitchen: when we last visited, Serge was busy building what he describes as a '*cuisine professionnelle pour des amateurs*' ('professional kitchen for amateurs') where he'll share the secrets of his sweet sauces, jams, glazed fruits and *tapenades* (pastes) using candied fruits during cooking courses. Check the website or with Apt's tourist office (☎ 04 90 74 03 18; www.ot-apt.fr in French) for schedules.

the valley between the Plateau de Vaucluse and the Luberon range, for producing pottery glazes. These days the whole village – even gravestones in the cemetery – is built of the reddish stone.

From the town, take a 45-minute walk along the **Sentier des Ocres** (see the boxed text, p220) or a workshop at the **Conservatoire des Ocres et Pigments Appliqués** (see the boxed text, p220).

Roussillon – which is 9km east of Gordes and 7km northeast of the little village of Goult (population 1310) – is inaccessible by public transport. Motorists must park in car parks (€2) outside the village, a 300m walk away (and yes, you will still see tourists brazenly blockading the minuscule village streets, to the consternation of locals and amid the tooting horns of other tourists attempting to do the same – the car park is much easier on everyone's nerves). The **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 05 60 25; www.roussillon-provence.com in French; place de la Poste; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat) has in-

formation on walks in and around the village.

GORDES

Forming an amphitheatre over the Rivers Sorgue and Calavon, the tiered village of **Gordes** (population 2127; elevation 372m), 20km west of Apt, sits high on the white, southern rock face of the Vaucluse plateau. Gordes has top billing on many tourists' must-see lists (particularly those of high-profile Parisians). High season sees a cavalcade of tour coaches and cars ushered by attendants into parking bays. Early evenings, the village is theatrically lit by the setting sun, turning the stone buildings a shimmering gold.

Apart from celebrity-spotting, the village's star attraction is its 11th-century chateau housing the **Musée Pol Mara** (☎ 04 90 72 02 75; place du Château; adult/10-17yr €4/3; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-6pm), dedicated to Flemish painter Pol Mara, who lived in Gordes. The **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 72 02 75; www.gordes-village.com; place du Château; 🕒 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Jun-Sep, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Oct-May) is in the guards hall of the chateau.

Just outside Gordes, 6km northeast in Joucas, you can take off for a blissful balloon flight over the Luberon with **Hot-Air Ballooning Provence** (☎ 04 90 05 74 39; www.avignon-et-provence.com/ballooning; 1½hr flights from €230, sunrise flights €305).

Heading 3.5km south along rte de St-Pantaléon (D148) you hit the **Moulin des Bouillons** (☎ 04 90 72 22 11; rte de St-Pantaléon; adult/10-17yr €4.50/3; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-5pm or 6pm Feb-30 Oct), an oil mill with a Gallo-Roman 10m-long press weighing seven tonnes, said to be the oldest in the world.

Buses operated by Cavaillon-based **Les Express de la Durance** (☎ 04 90 71 03 00) link Gordes

with Cavaillon up to three times daily between Monday and Saturday. Motorists must park in the car park (€3) opposite the bright blue piece of monumental art by Hungarian sculptor Victor de Vasarely (an honorary citizen of Gordes) at the bottom of the village.

VILLAGE DES BORIES

You'll spot beehive-shaped *bories* while you're buzzing around Provence (1610 have been counted to date), but the **Village des Bories** (☎ 04 90 72 03 48; adult/child €5.50/3; 🕒 9am-8pm Jun-Sep, 9am-5.30pm Oct-May) has hoards of them.

Reminiscent of Ireland's *clochàn*, these one- or two-storey dry-walled huts constructed from slivers of limestone were first built in the area in the Bronze Age. Up until the 18th century, they were lived in, renovated and even built from scratch. Their original purpose isn't known (shelter would seem most likely), but over time they've also been used as workshops, wine cellars and storage sheds. This 'village' contains about 20 *bories*, best visited early in the morning or just before sunset for the interplay of light and shadows.

The village is 4km southwest of Gordes in the direction of Cavaillon. Getting here is easiest with your own wheels, but buses from Gordes to Cavaillon can drop you 1.5km from the village.

ABBAYE NOTRE-DAME DE SÉNANQUE

Framed by fields of lavender in July, this picture-postcard Cistercian **abbey** (☎ 04 90 72 05 72; www.senanque.fr in French; guided tour in French adult/6-18yr €6/2.50; 🕒 by reservation), 4km northwest of Gordes off the D177, was founded in 1148 and is inhabited by a few young monks today. Mass is celebrated at noon on weekdays and 9am Sunday.

ST-SATURNIN-LÈS-APT

Rooftop views of St-Saturnin-lès-Apt (population 2393), 9km north of Apt, and the surrounding Vaucluse hilltops can be enjoyed from the **17th-century windmill**, 1km north of the village off the D943 to Sault. Follow signs for Le Château Les Moulins.

In the village, discover how olives are turned into oil at the **Moulin à Huile Julien** (☎ 04 90 75 45 80; 1 rue Albert Trouchet). Its boutique can be visited year-round but the mill can only be visited during the December olive harvest.

MARKET DAY

The Luberon's fresh, fabulous food markets take place from around 8am to 1pm unless otherwise noted.

Monday Cadenet, Cavaillon and Lauris
Tuesday Apt, Cucuron, Gordes, Lacoste, La Tour d'Aigues, St-Saturnin-lès-Apt
Wednesday Coustellet (from 5.30pm June to September), Mérindol, Pertuis
Thursday Ansouis, Céreste, La Tour d'Aigues (mid-May to September)
Friday Bonnieux, Cavaillon, Lourmarin, Pertuis, Roussillon
Saturday Apt, Cadenet (farmers market May to October), Lauris (2pm to 5pm winter, 5pm to 8pm summer), Manosque, Oppède-le-Vieux, Pertuis, Vaugines
Sunday Coustellet (April to December), Vaugines

OBSERVATOIRE SIRENE

In Lagarde d'Apt, 20km northeast of Apt, the **Sirene Observatory** (☎ 04 90 75 04 17; www.obs-sirene.com in French; day/night visit €8/40; 🕒 by reservation year-round) lets you learn about astronomy amid the lavender fields by day, but the best time to visit is during an all-night star-gazing session sustained by coffee and goats cheese.

Lagarde d'Apt is also home to a lavender trail (see the boxed text, p226).

RUSTREL & AROUND

The russet red village of **Rustrel** (population 621), 10km northeast of Apt, is the threshold to the otherworldly ochre formations of the **Colorado Provençal** (see the boxed text, p220). For aerial views, take off with paragliding school **Rustr'aille Colorado** (☎ 04 40 04 96 53; www.parapente.biz in French; Le Stade), signposted on the D112. Baptism flights cost €70 to €100.

The eastbound D22 and D33 link Rustrel with **Viens** (population 500), a starting point for forays into the limestone canyon **Gorges d'Oppédette**. From Viens the 3km-long **Circuit des Bories** takes afternoon strollers past several *bories*; yellow markers flag the footpath. In Roman times the Via Domitia passed through **Céreste** (population 1045; elevation 380m), 8km south. Just outside Céreste on the D31, visit the family-run lavender farm **Le Frigoulet** (☎ 04 92 79 05 87; humannfrigoulet@aol.com; 🕒 by reservation).

From Céreste the N100 travels east to Haute-Provence. Lavender fields link these

DOWN THE TRACK

Trains ceased operating to Apt in the 1960s, but the disused railway tracks are now, slowly, being turned into an extensive **cycleyway** that will allow cyclists to steer completely clear of traffic. At press time 6km of the route was open west from Apt's former train station, but 2008 should see the completion of a 70km stretch from Cavaillon to Forcalquier. Further down the track, the cycleyway will extend into Italy. Ask at Apt's **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 74 03 18; www.ot-apt.fr in French; 20 av Philippe de Girard) for the latest.

two regions along the scenic northbound D14. Céreste's **tourist office** (☎ 04 92 79 09 84; www.cereste.fr in French; place de la République; ☹ 10am-noon & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun) has information for the area.

Sleeping & Eating

Tourist offices, including in Apt, have information about seasonal camp sites.

La Forge (☎ 04 90 04 92 22; www.laforge.com.fr; Notre-Dame des Anges, Rustrel; d incl breakfast €86-199, picnics & tray meals by reservation €15; ☎ ☒ ☒) Deep within the Colorado Provençal, bordered by forest, this 1840-built former iron and steel foundry has been transformed by artist Dominique Berger-Ceccaldi and her husband Claude into an incredible *maison d'hôte*. Dominique's stylised paintings grace the four rooms and breakfast is served beneath a vine-trailed trellis by the pool. A heartfelt note in the bathrooms alerts guests to indelible stains from ochreous earth (ie don't wipe your shoes on the towels).

La Mas de la Beaume (☎ 04 92 72 02 96; www.labeaume.com; Gordes; d incl breakfast €105-165; ☎ ☒) Behind a stone wall at the top of the road leading to Gordes, this potpourri-scented five-room *maison d'hôte* is the pride and joy of hosts Wendy and Miguel. Beneath a wood-beamed ceiling, the 'blue room' has views of Gordes' chateau and bell tower from the bed. Homegrown produce from the garden arrives on your plate at breakfast and at the twice-

weekly table d'hôte (literally 'host's table'; in set courses with little or no choice).

Le Mas Perréal (☎ 04 90 75 46 31; www.masperreal.com; Lieu-dit la Fortune, St-Saturnin-lès-Apt; d incl breakfast €110-125; ☎ ☒ ☒) If you're keen to *améliorer votre Français* (improve your French), Perréal's charming hostess, Elisabeth, a longtime French teacher, offers lessons of all levels to guests (€25 per hour for one or two people) in the shade of the property's vineyards and cherry orchards. When the winter chill sets in, breakfast is served in the cosy farmhouse kitchen. Find the *mas* 1.5km southwest of St-Saturnin-lès-Apt.

Patrick Payet's Chambres de Village (☎ 04 90 72 22 35; www.famous-provence.com; place de l'Ancienne Mairie, Goult; d incl breakfast €81; menu €26; ☹ dinner Tue-Sun) Picture yourself staying in a charming 18th-century 'room in the village' of Goult with chateau views, creating culinary masterpieces alongside a Provençal chef. Patrick Payet provides intimate and entertaining weeklong programs from €2600 per person including accommodation, meals and visits to surrounding villages. The cosy stone restaurant and guest rooms are open to non-program participants, but you'll need to book ahead.

La Bastide Saint Joseph (☎ 04 90 04 97 80; www.bastide-saint-joseph.com; rte de Banon (D22), Rustrel; d incl breakfast €120-160; ☎ ☒) Phenomenal views of the Colorado Provençal's flame red ochre cliffs unfold from three of the four guest

rooms at this contemporary *chambre d'hôte* 1km east of Rustrel. In addition to a bountiful breakfast, rates include afternoon drinks and poolside canapés.

Les Grands Camps (☎ 04 90 74 67 33; Le Chêne, Gargas; menu incl wine & coffee €24; ☹ lunch Sun, dinner Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat Jul & Aug, lunch Sun, dinner Fri & Sat Sep-Jun) This unpretentious *ferme auberge*, not far from Gargas' ochre quarry (see the boxed text, p220), cooks up meat, meat and more farm-fresh meat (and sometimes poultry).

Le Mas Tourteron (☎ 04 90 72 00 16; chemin de St-Blaise, Les Imberts; menu €57; ☹ lunch Sun, dinner Wed-Sun Mar-Oct) Dining at the lilac-clothed tables in the stone dining room or amid the flourishing gardens of Chef Elisabeth Bourgeois-Baique and her sommelier husband Philippe's welcoming *mas* is like eating at the home of friends. Elisabeth's seasonally changing *menus* of beautifully presented dishes garnished with sprigs of herbs and lavender and her legendary desserts marry with wines hand picked by Philippe from over 200 vintages in their cellar. The *mas* sits 3.5km south of Gordes village.

SOUTH OF THE N100

To the south of the N100 artery, the deep Combe de Lourmarin carves a north-south divide through the Luberon massif. Bonnieux sits on the western 'little Luberon' side, while Buoux, less than 10km east, is in the Grand Luberon (p226).

LE PETIT LUBERON

The rocky landscape of Le Petit Luberon is sprinkled with cake-decoration-like *villages perchés* overlooking thick cedar forests and Côtes du Luberon vineyards. Bonnieux's tourist office (right) has regional information including lists of estates where you can taste and buy wines and the other local nectar, honey (see the boxed text, p224). At the region's western edge, Cavaillon's tourist office (p223) also has comprehensive information.

Bonnieux & Around

pop 1436 / elev 425m
Bonnieux burst onto cinema screens in late 2006 as the village where Russell Crowe's character Max Skinner, a British finance broker, finds *joie de vivre* in the vineyards of Provence. Based on the 2004 novel *A Good Year* by Peter Mayle and directed by Ridley

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Domaine des Andéols (☎ 04 90 75 50 63; www.domainedesandeols.com; St-Saturnin-lès-Apt; d €210-290, ste €280-950; menus €39-58; ☹ Apr-Oct; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒) Flanked by two fantastical, outsized flowerpots on the D2, 2km west of St-Sat, the driveway of this ode to design leads through expansive countryside to nine individual houses, each decked out down to the last cutting-edge detail. This author's choice: the *maison rouge* (red house), with a colossal cherry red chaise longue by Ron Arad, Philippe Starck mirrors, studded laminate wardrobes, and a rectangular-cut polished-concrete bathtub with its own waterfall (yes, with its own waterfall). In addition to indoor and outdoor wet-edge pools, two houses have private pools. Should you not feel like cooking in your superbly equipped kitchen (or you're not stopping here to sleep), head to chef Albert Boronat's pebblecrete-and-cacti restaurant (closed lunch Wednesday and Thursday), under the stewardship of Alain Ducasse, for *garrigue*- (aromatic plant) fragranced Luberon lamb. On summer nights, candlelit tables cluster beneath the stars.

Scott, its filming was a good year for Crowe and his wife, whose second child, so locals proudly proclaim, was conceived in Bonnieux (apparently the mayor has offered baby Crowe honorary citizenship).

Navigating Bonnieux, 11km southwest of Apt and 26km east of Cavaillon, is a little jigsaw puzzle in itself. The village straddles several levels, making it easy to miss the **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 75 91 90; www.tourisme-en-luberon.com in French; 7 place Carnot; ☹ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat) hiding high above a stone wall – the adjacent restaurant Le Fournil (p221) acts as a handy landmark. From place de la Liberté, 86 steps lead to the 12th-century **Église Vieille du Haut**, while the history of bread-making is raised at the **Musée de la Boulangerie** (☎ 04 90 75 88 34; 12 rue de la République; adult/12-18yr €3/1.50; ☹ 10am-noon & 2.30-6pm or 6.30pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct), a former bakery.

South of Bonnieux is **Forêt des Cèdres** (1861), a protected cedar forest through which runs a **sentier botanique** (botanical trail). Heading north, taste and buy local wine in the village cooperative, **Caves des Vignerons de Bonnieux**

PARC NATUREL RÉGIONAL DU LUBERON

Egyptian vultures, eagle owls, wild boars, Bonelli's eagles and Etruscan honeysuckle are among the species that call the 1650-sq-km **Luberon Regional Park** home. Created in 1977 and recognised as a Biosphere Reserve by Unesco in 1997, the park encompasses 67 villages with a combined population of 155,000, dense forests and unexpected gorges. The GR6, GR9, GR92 and GR97 walking trails all cross it, as does a 230km-long **cycling route** (see p81). For ambler, there is a **sentier botanique** (botanical trail) through the park's oldest cedar forest (Bonnieux; opposite); a trail around **ochre cliffs** (Roussillon; see the boxed text, p220); and a **bories discovery path** (Viens; p217).

Information, maps and guides are available at the **Maison du Parc** (☎ 04 90 04 42 00; www.parcduluberon.fr in French; 60 place Jean Jaurès, Apt; ☹ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-7pm Mon-Sat Jul-Sep, 8.30am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar). Between March and August, you can join a thematic nature workshop-walk (French only; adult/under 18 years €5/free). The Maison du Parc's on-site **Musée de Paléontologie** (Palaeontology Museum; adult/child €1.50/free; ☹ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-7pm Mon-Sat Jul-Sep, 8.30am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) provides a historical framework, with prehistoric flora and fauna displays.

Guides sold at the Maison du Parc include topoguide *Le Naturel Régional Parc du Luberon à pied* (PN07; in French; €11.90), detailing 24 walks including the GR trails; and the topoguide *Walks in Provence* (PN04; €11.95), which outlines 24 shorter walks (3km to 20km).

Lonely Planet's *Walking in France* also suggests Luberon routes.

NATURE'S PAINT PALETTE

Although ochre has been used in the Luberon since Roman times, it wasn't until 1785 that large deposits of the hydrated oxidised iron-and-clay sands were mined industrially. In 1929 – the peak of the ochre industry – some 40,000 tonnes of ochre were mined around Apt, 90% of which was exported to other parts of Europe and America.

Traditionally used as a pigment to colour pots and buildings, ochre comes in some 25 shades ranging from delicate yellow to vivid orange and fire red. Discover these vibrant hues first-hand along short walking trails in Rustrel's **Colorado Provençal** (☎ 04 32 52 09 75; ☹ 9am–dusk), a savage landscape of red-ochre sand with rock formations like the fiery upright **Cheminée de Fée** (Fairy Chimney). The extraordinary formations were part of a quarry where ochre was mined from the 1880s until 1956. Today the area is in the process of being listed as a heritage site.

Colour-coded trails for two of the most dramatic trails – the 'blue' **Sentier de Cheminée de Fée** (1km) and the 'red' **Sentier du Sahara** (1.5km) – can be picked up in the Parking des Mille Couleurs car park, signposted south of Rustrel village off the D22 to Banon. Parking costs €3.50 (free November to March), including a trail map.

An equally dramatic discovery is at **Colorado Aventures** (☎ 06 78 26 68 91; www.colorado-aventures.com in French; adult/child €18/14; ☹ closed Jan), a Tarzan-style obstacle course rigged between red rocks in a forest. The site, signposted off the D22, is a rocky 15-minute walk from the car park. Kids need to be 150cm tall. Rustrel is the closest town. Call for annual schedules.

Westwards, in Gargas (population 3000; elevation 280m), 4km northwest of Apt, Europe's last remaining **ochre quarry**, run by **Sociétés Ogres en France** (www.ogres-de-france.com), can be visited by guided tour on Friday mornings; with exhibitions (€3) on Monday, Tuesday and Friday from 9am to noon and 4pm to 6pm. The quarry produces around 1000 tonnes of ochre a year, 45% of which is exported. Tours must be booked through the **Gargas mairie** (town hall; ☎ 04 90 74 12 70; info@ville-gargas.fr; adult/under 16yr €6/free) and include a visit to the village's **ochre exhibition** (place des Jardins; adult/under 16yr €1.50/1; ☹ 9am–noon & 4–6pm Mon, Tue & Thu, reduced hr in winter).

In rust-coloured Roussillon you can take a 45-minute walk along the **Sentier des Ogres** (Ochre Trail; admission €2; ☹ 9.30am–5.30pm Mar–11 Nov). Within fairy-tale groves of chestnuts, maritime pines and scrub the trail leads you through nature's powdery sunset-coloured paint palette of ochre formations created by erosion and winds over centuries. Don't wear white!

Workshops (some in English), exploring the colouring properties of ochre, and factory tours are held at the **Conservatoire des Ogres et Pigments Appliqués** (Applied Pigment & Ochre Conservatory; ☎ 04 90 05 66 69; www.okhra.com in French; rte d'Apt; guided tours adult/student €5/3; ☹ office 9am–7pm daily Jul & Aug, to 6pm Tue–Sun Sep–Jun), on the D104 east towards Apt. Guided tours depart every half-hour between 10am to noon and 2pm to 6pm in July and August; call for tour times the rest of the year.

If that's not enough, there's the **Ogres en Vélo cycling trail** (see p82).

(☎ 04 90 75 80 03; www.cave-bonnieux.com; La Gare de Bonnieux; ☹ 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–6.30pm Mon–Sat), and stop by the three-arched Roman bridge, **Pont Julien** (27 BC–AD 14), 6km north on the D149.

SLEEPING & EATING

Seasonal camp sites are pitched around the village.

Le Clos du Buis (☎ 04 90 75 88 48; www.leclosdubuis.fr; rue Victor Hugo; d incl breakfast €84–112, cottages per week from €300; ☹ 9am–dusk) Smack-dab in the village, this stone townhouse *chambre d'hôte* spills out to a vast garden. The dining room serves up panoramic views along with tables d'hôtes (by reservation), and there's a self-catering

kitchen for guests. One of its six rooms is wheelchair accessible, and parking and wi-fi are free. Hosts Lydia and Pierre also rent out three cottages in the Luberon countryside.

La Bouquière (☎ 04 90 75 87 17; www.labouquiere.com; d incl breakfast €90–120; ☹ 9am–dusk) Down a meandering country lane through the cherry trees, at this remote *chambre d'hôte* all four airy rooms open onto gardens filled with chirping birds and the fluttering wings of bees and butterflies, and at night a glittering sea of stars. From Bonnieux village, follow the D3 in the direction of Apt for 2km, then turn left (there's a small sign) onto the chemin de Gardioles for 1km, then turn right (there's a

very small sign) and traverse the bumpy track to the house.

Auberge de l'Aiguebrun (☎ 04 90 04 47 00; www.aubergedelaiguebrun.com; d cabanon €134, d €140–240; lunch/dinner menu €35/55; ☹ 9am–dusk) Sleep in a *cabanon* (wooden chalet) by the river or in the main house, dine at stone tables on a cobbled terrace with rustic views, and stroll through gardens graced with peacocks, a greenhouse and dovecote. The inn is hidden in the dramatic heart of the Combe de Lourmarin, 6km southeast of Bonnieux off the D943.

La Bastide de Capelongue (☎ 04 90 75 89 78; www.capelongue.com; d from €160, menus €121–160, mains from €42; ☹ closed mid-Nov–mid-Mar; ☹ 9am–dusk) Those *menu* prices make you look twice until you realise that this magnificently restored *bastide* high above Bonnieux is the brand-new bastion of wunderkind chef Édouard Loubet who moved here with his two Michelin stars from Lourmarin, though he still has a hand over there too (see p228). Impeccably decorated by Édouard's mother, his grandmother is the inspiration for many of his renowned recipes; pick up his cookbooks at reception.

Le Fourmil (☎ 04 90 75 83 62; 5 place Carnot; lunch/dinner menu €20/37; ☹ lunch & dinner Wed, Thu, Fri & Sun, dinner Tue & Sat) The Bakehouse is a cut above the average village restaurant – literally. Its glass-and-steel interior is sliced into a rock face, with a fountain in front. Service can be temperamental, but creations like courgette cake with tiny prawns, thyme-dressed shoulder of lamb or *soupe de cerise au vin rouge* (cherry and red-wine soup) are consistently first-rate.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Buses to/from Apt and Marseille stop in Bonnieux. **Mountain Bike Luberon** (☎ 04 90 75 89 96, 06 83 25 48 07; rue Marceau; ☹ 8.30am–noon & 1.30–6.30pm Mon–Fri) rents bikes for €14/25/74 per day/weekend/week. It also has children's seats (€3 per day) and trailers (€5 per day) for hire, and delivers bikes within a 15km radius (free).

Lacoste

pop 417 / elev 320m

Its name may be unrelated to the crocodile-emblem clothing label, but Lacoste, 6.5km west of Bonnieux, does have couturier connections. Earlier this decade, designer Pierre Cardin purchased the 9th-century **Château de Lacoste**, where the notorious Marquis de Sade (1740–1814) retreated when his writings became too scandalous for Paris.

The erotic novels penned by the Marquis (who gave rise to the term 'sadism'), including *120 Journées de Sodome* (120 Days of Sodom; 1785), were only freely published after WWII. De Sade spent chunks of his childhood in Provence where his family had owned Château de Lacoste since 1627. In 1771 he moved here with his wife and three children, engaging in a salacious lifestyle before he was tried on charges of sodomy and attempted poisoning; he spent 27 years in prison. The chateau was looted by revolutionaries in 1789, and subsequently seized and sold.

The 45-room palace, once maintained by 20 servants, remained an eerie ruin until Cardin transformed it into a 1000-seat theatre and opera stage hosting July's month-long **Festival de Lacoste**. In the village, **Espace La Costa** (☎ 04 90 75 93 12) sells festival tickets (€40 to €140) and has information on guided tours of the chateau site (including the incredible old Roman quarry beneath the chateau).

Upping the town's tiny population are students of the US-based art school Savannah College of Art & Design.

A couple of inexpensive cafés are tucked away in the little village centre. For a slice of rural life, at **Ferme de l'Avellan** (☎ 04 90 75 85 10; chemin de St-Jean; d incl breakfast from €54, menu €18; ☹ Easter–Nov), a working farm filled with vines and cherry orchards, Danielle Ravoir serves *bio* (organic) meals with an abundance of herbs, as well as her homemade wine. Find it 1km from Lacoste village, at the end of an unpaved track signposted off the road to Ménerbes. Advance bookings are essential.

Ménerbes

pop 1007 / elev 230m

Ménerbes, 6km west of Lacoste, captured the attention of millions of armchair travellers when it was memorably rendered by Peter Mayle. The British author's light-hearted, lavishly detailed books *A Year in Provence* and *Toujours Provence* recount renovating a *mas* just outside the village in the late 1980s. Their spectacular success spawned a still-booming genre of expat travel tales – and a spectacular number of tourists traipsing by. Mayle subsequently sold up and moved abroad, though the Luberon's charm has recently lured him back to Lourmarin. His former home, 2km southeast of Ménerbes on the D3 to Bonnieux, is the second house on the right after the football pitch.

Scaling the steep streets to the boat-shaped village moored on the hilltop rewards with uninterrupted views. The maze of streets conceals the 12th-century village **church** and the **Maison de la Truffe et du Vin** (House of Truffle & Wine; ☎ 04 90 72 52 10; www.vin-truffe-luberon.com; place de l'Horloge; ☞ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Thu-Sat Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 3-7pm Thu-Sat Nov-Mar), housed in the former hospice (called Hôtel d'Astier de Montfaucou) on the cobble square. In July and August it organises a series of two-hour wine-tasting sessions (€40 including lunch) and a couple of truffle workshops (€65); and sells wines at cellar-door prices.

The best Côtes du Luberon wines are nothing but ornaments without a corkscrew – something that's not lost on Ménerbes' mayor, Yves Rousset-Rouard, who created a shrine to the gadgets, the **Musée du Tire-Bouchon** (Corkscrew Museum; ☎ 04 90 72 41 58; www.musee-tirebouchon.com; adult/under 15yr €4/free; ☞ 10am-noon & 2-7pm Apr-Oct, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar). Situated in the Domaine de la Citadelle, a wine-producing estate on the D3 to Cavaillon, you can sample Côtes du Luberon and marvel over 1000 different corkscrews. Prior to becoming mayor, Rousset-Rouard, who resides in Ménerbes' crow's-nest chateau, was a French MP and film producer whose works include the soft-porn *Emmanuelle* (1974).

Some 30,000-odd gastropods live on the family-run **Parcaux Escargots** (☎ 04 90 72 22 26, 06 61 14 48 84; www.leparcauxescargots.com in French; Les Grès; 1hr guided visit adult/5-16yr €4/3; ☞ 9am-7pm May-Oct), signposted off the D24, which specialises in snail cuisine.

SLEEPING & EATING

La Magnanerie (☎ 04 90 72 42 88; www.magnanerie.com; rte de Bonnieux, Lieu-dit le Roucas; d incl breakfast €85-95; ☞ mid-Mar-mid-Nov & mid-Dec-early Jan; ☞ ☞ ☞) At this welcoming *maison d'hôte*, guests can barbecue meals in the summer kitchen; there's a fridge to stash drinks; and of its six stylish rooms, the peach room with mezzanine up top and terrace below is ideal for families. A poolside *pétanque* pitch lets you enjoy a lazy late-afternoon game, and you can borrow a bike for a countryside spin. Credit cards aren't accepted. Find La Magnanerie 200m down a single-track unpaved lane, signposted off the D103.

La Bastide de Marie (☎ 04 90 72 30 20; www.labastidedemarie.com; rte de Bonnieux, quartier de la Verrerie;

with half-board d from €435, ste €620; ☞ late Apr-early Nov; ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) Splashed across *Tatler*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Town & Country* et al, this blue-shuttered 18th-century *bastide* amid vineyards stuns. Soft golds, creams, coffees and slates accentuate the designer interiors, and the tiered, turquoise swimming pool trickled by fountains is paradise found. Prices include everything (breakfast, afternoon tea, dusk-time apéritif, dinner with wine) except lunch. From Ménerbes, follow the eastbound D103 for 4km.

Café du Progrès (☎ 04 90 72 22 09; place Albert Roure; menus €13-16; ☞ lunch, bar 6am-midnight) The village's tobacconist-newsagent-bar run by good-humoured local Patrick hasn't changed since the days before Peter Mayle put Ménerbes on the map, and not much since it opened a century ago. This atmospheric and utterly authentic spot is great for a lunchstop in the dining room out back taking in a spectacular sweep of the countryside, or downstairs on the outdoor terrace.

Véranda (☎ 04 90 72 33 33; 104 av Marcellin Poncet; breakfast & lunch dishes €7.50-13, dinner menu €35; ☞ 10am-9.30pm Fri-Tue) Well-travelled chef Laurent Jouin is doing impressive things in the kitchen of his brand-new establishment high up in the village. Kitchen dressers displaying Provençal fabrics, olive oils and jams still line the walls of this former boutique, where you can now dine on delicious à la carte breakfasts and lunches, tea and cakes between mealtimes, and magnificent evening meals built from seasonal fresh fruit and vegetables.

Oppède-le-Vieux

pop 20 / elev 300m

Tipped as 'the next Les Baux' (so get here before the crowds descend), this medieval hilltop village 6km southwest of Ménerbes was abandoned in 1910 by villagers who moved down the valley to the cultivated plains to earn their living. A handful of artists lives here today. From the car parks (€2) a precarious path leads to the hillside **ruins**. The 16th- to 18th-century **church**, under constant restoration, hosts concerts during August and celebrates mass in honour of Oppède's patron saint (St Laurent) on 10 August.

Signs also direct you from the car parks to the **Sentier Vignerons d'Oppède**, a 1½-hour wine-growers' trail through olive groves, cherry orchards and vineyards. Panels interpret grape varieties, how to train a vine 'lyre' style etc.

Oppède-les-Poulivets (or just Oppède), the new village (population 1246), is 1km north of Oppède-le-Vieux.

Coustellet

The main reason to visit Coustellet, on the noisy N100, is its **Musée de la Lavande** (Lavender Museum; ☎ 04 90 76 91 23; www.museedelalavande.com; adult/under 15yr €5/free; ☞ 10am-noon & 2-6pm or 7pm Feb-Dec). Visits include an audioguide, and a short video (in English), that explains how the purple flowers are harvested and distilled (see the boxed text, p244), and you can see stills used to extract the sweet scent and buy lavender-scented products at its boutique.

On Sunday mornings, Luberon locals gather for the **market** (nr N100 & D2; ☞ Apr-Dec), where only farmers from a 10km radius are allowed to sell their produce.

Cabrières d'Avignon & Around

pop 1431 / elev 167m

Cabrières d'Avignon, 5km north of Coustellet, was one of the most unfortunate Waldensian villages (see the boxed text, p227). Its privately owned 12th-century chateau (closed to visitors) has since been restored and the old *moulin à huile* (oil mill) is now a wine-tasting school.

Pine and cedar forests, crisscrossed with paths and picnic tables, shroud the northern village fringe. Herbs and flowers are used to flavour honey made at the village *miellerie* (honey house; see the boxed text, p224) and the dishes cooked up at **Le Vieux Bistrot** (☎ 04 90 76 82 08; Grande Rue; d €64-110; lunch menu €16, dinner menus €35-42; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun; ☞ ☞ ☞), formerly Le Bistrot à Michel. Upstairs are six cosy *chambre d'hôte* rooms; two with private terraces with village views, of which one is endearingly called *chez nous* (our place).

In yellow-brick **Lagnes** (population 1509; elevation 110m), 5km west, enjoy a quintessential Provençal sleeping and eating experience at **Le Mas des Grès** (☎ 04 90 20 32 85; www.masdesgres.com; rte d'Apt; d with half-board €80-269; ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞), a farmhouse with 14 rooms in warm hues of rust, ochre and gold. On Thursday nights, nonguests can also take a seat at Nina and Thierry's table d'hôte (€50). Thierry runs a range of cooking courses between April and October (prices vary depending on duration and theme), including fun classes for kids (€50 for two-day courses with lunch).

CAVAILLON

pop 25,058

In France and beyond, Cavaillon is tantamount to its sweet cantaloupe melons, often referred to simply as 'Cavaillons', regardless of where they're grown. As a result, Cavaillon is in the process of establishing its own AOC to protect the melons' prized reputation and ensure quality control.

Masses of melons fill Cavaillon's early-morning Monday market from May to September and abound during the four-day **Fête du Melon** in July. The **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 71 32 01; www.cavaillon-luberon.com in French; place François Tourel; 3hr tour adult/under 12yr €6/free; ☞ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar-mid-Oct plus 10am-noon Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat mid-Oct-mid-Mar), which has comprehensive information on all of the western Luberon, arranges melon-tasting tours.

But there's more to this appealing and often-bypassed little city 28km southeast of Avignon than merely melons, with a rich history and outstanding gourmet shops in its quaint old town. In March 2007, Cavaillon should have featured on cinema screens as the backdrop for Rowan Atkinson's *Mr Bean II*.

Sights

An **arch** (place François Tourel) built by the Romans in the 1st century BC frames the square in front of the tourist office, at the western end of cours Bournissac, Cavaillon's main shopping street. Three blocks north the 12th-century **Cathédrale Notre Dame et St-Véran** (☞ 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Apr-Sep, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) boasts a fine Roman cloister.

Cavaillon's beautiful **synagogue** (1772-74) houses the **Musée Juif Comtadin** (Jewish Museum; ☎ 04 90 76 00 34; rue Hébraïque; adult/under 12yr €3/free;

MELON-SHOPPING SECRETS

At the street-side markets, Cavaillon locals shared their top tips for choosing from the mountains of melons:

- Look for a sticky dark orange resinlike residue on the stalk, indicating the melon's ripeness when it was cut.
- Test the melon's weight – too light means it's filled with water, not sugar.
- Follow your nose: the sweeter a melon smells, the more *magnifique* it will taste.

valley it carves. Some 243 species of birds typical of the river banks can be seen from the **Observatoire Ornithologique**, a bird centre run by the Parc Naturel Régional du Luberon (see the boxed text, p218) near the Mérindol-Mallemort dam (signposted 1.5km from the roundabout at the entrance to Mérindol on the D973). Spot herons and great cormorants along the 3km-long **bird sanctuary trail** (1½ hours) marked with yellow blazes.

Mérindol (population 1800; elevation 200m), crossed by the GR6 about 15km east of Cavailon, was another Waldensian martyr village (see the boxed text, opposite).

Lauris (population 1800; elevation 200m), 10km further east, is a regal hilltop village crowned with an 18th-century **chateau** surrounded by terraced gardens. Tinctorial plants, many rare, grow in the **Jardin Conservatoire de Plantes Tinctoriales** (☎ 04 90 08 40 48; cou leur.garance@online.fr; adult/under 10yr €7/free; ☞ 2-5pm Wed-Mon late May & Oct, 3.30-7pm Jun-Sep, by appointment Nov-Mar). Workshops explore dyes traditionally made from these plants. Lauris' **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 08 39 30; ot-lauris@axit.fr; 12 place de l'Église; ☞ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat) has details on July's **Hot Jazz festival** held around the chateau.

Wickerwork is the mainstay industry of **Cadenet** (population 3937), 7km upstream (east). Learn about the cultivation of *osier* (wicker) on the river banks and its artisan applications in the **Musée de la Vannerie** (☎ 04 90 68 24 44; av Philippe de Giraud; adult/under 12yr €3/free; ☞ 10am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Wed-Sat, 2.30-6.30pm Sun Apr-Oct).

Abbaye de Silvacane

South of the Durance, 7km southwest of Cadenet, **Silvacane Abbey** (☎ 04 42 50 41 69; adult/child €6.50/4.50; ☞ 10am-6pm Jun-Sep, to 1pm & 2-5pm Wed-

Mon Oct-May) is, along with the Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque (p217) and Abbaye de Thoronet (p359), one of a trio of medieval Provençal abbeys built by Cistercian monks in an austere Romanesque style. Constructed between 1175 and 1230, today it hosts classical concerts and three colonies of bats (several hundred in total) in its cloister.

LE GRAND LUBERON

Marking the great divide between Le Petit and Le Grand Luberon, the deep **Combe de Lourmarin** cuts a near-perpendicular swathe through the massif from Bonnieux to Lourmarin. To its east, Le Grand Luberon takes in dramatic gorges and grand fortresses.

Buoux

pop 117

Dominated by the hilltop **ruins of Fort de Buoux**, the tiny village of Buoux (the X is pronounced) sits across the divide from Bonnieux, and less than 8km south of Apt. As a traditional Protestant stronghold, Buoux was destroyed in 1545 (see the boxed text, opposite) and again in 1660. The fort and old village ruins, perilous in places due to loose rocks, can be explored on foot. Painted white arrows mark an optional return route via a spectacular spiralling staircase cut in the rock.

Local climbing club **Améthyste** (☎ 04 90 74 05 92; amethyste1901.free.fr in French) organises rock climbing and walks.

A thrilling 2.5km descent from Buoux village beneath cliffs in the Vallée de l'Aiguebrun is the rambling **gîte d'étape** (hikers accommodation), **Auberge des Seguins** (☎ 04 90 74 16 37; dm with half-board €35, d with shower/shower & toilet with half-board per person €47/52, menus from €26.50; ☞ Mar-mid-

A LAVENDER DETOUR

From Buoux an invigorating cycling or driving route takes you north on the D113 to a set of crossroads straddled by lavender fields. From here you can bear west along the D232 to Bonnieux; east along the D48 to Auribeau (4.3km) and Castellet (7km); or northeast to Saignon and Le Boisset (from where you can link up with the N100; for Auribeau, Saignon and Le Boisset see the boxed text, p228). Otherwise you can continue on a northbound lavender trail to Apt.

After passing more lavender fields, the D113 climbs to **Les Agnells**, where lavender, cypress leaves and rosemary are distilled at the 1895-established **Distillerie Agnel** (☎ 04 90 74 22 72; rte de Buoux; free tours daily Jul & Aug, Tue-Sun May, Jun & Sep).

Lavender-lovers should not miss the Musée de la Lavande (p223), 22km west of Apt, and its 800,000-sq-metre lavender farm, **Château du Bois** (☎ 04 90 76 91 23; www.lechateaudubois.com), 25km north of Apt in **Lagarde d'Apt**, where a 2km-long lavender trail blazes from late June until mid-July when the sweet-smelling flower is harvested.

MARTYR VILLAGES

Eleven Luberon villages were brutally massacred on 9 and 10 April 1545 under the terms of the Arrêt de Mérindol, a bill passed by the Aix parliament condemning anyone of Waldensian faith to death. In Cabrières d'Avignon alone more than 700 men were killed in cold blood, and the women of the village were locked in a barn of straw and burnt alive.

The Waldenses (Vaudois) were a minority Protestant group who sought refuge in the Luberon hills (and other remote parts of France and Italy) following the excommunication of their leader Pierre Valdès from the Catholic Church in 1184. The wealthy merchant from Lyon, who rid himself of material possessions in 1176, incurred the wrath of Pope Lucius III for his fervent preaching of a religion based on the gospels and poverty – itself an enigma in the splendidly rich Catholic Church in medieval times.

In 1532 the Waldenses joined the Reformation, ultimately leading to their demise. What remains of the original castrum in Mérindol guards a memorial to the estimated 3000 murdered and 600 sent to the galleys in the two-day massacre. By 1560 there were few Waldenses left in France. In the 1680s large communities reappeared in mountain valleys in Piedmont, northern Italy, where they were granted the right to free worship in 1848. The Waldensian church, a Calvinist form of Protestantism, remains particularly strong there today.

Tours (€3) covering Waldensian history depart from **Mérindol's tourist office** (☎ 04 90 72 88 50; rue du Four; ☞ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar-Sep, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Oct-mid-Mar) at 9.30am on Thursday, and include a visit to the town's olive-oil mill. **Cavillon's tourist office** (☎ 04 90 71 32 01; www.cavillon-luberon.com in French; place François Tourel; ☞ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar-mid-Oct plus 10am-noon Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat mid-Oct-mid-Mar) also has information.

La Muse (☎ 04 90 72 91 64; 3 rue du Four; ☞ 2.30-5.30pm Sat, 9.30am-noon Wed), in Mérindol, is a Waldensian library and research centre; call in advance to check that someone is there.

Nov; ☎ ☒ ☑), where you can dine on *magret de canard* (duck breast) with fresh cherries or peaches on the shaded veranda or loll in the pool gazing out at giant tiger-striped rocks.

Amid flowery gardens, the **Auberge de la Loube** (☎ 04 90 74 19 58; lunch menu €21, dinner menu from €27.50; ☞ closed Mon, Thu & Jan) remains true to its roots serving wicker trays overflowing with *hors d'oeuvres Provençaux* like *tapenade* (olive dip), *anchoïade* (anchovy sauce), quail eggs, melon slices, cherry tomatoes and fresh figs. Leave room for the succulent roast lamb, and allow plenty of time to savour the experience, especially during legendary Sunday lunches. Payment is in cash only (there are no ATMs in Buoux), and reservations are essential.

Plateau de Claparèdes

Purple lavender carpets the area between Buoux (west), Sivergues (south), picture-postcard **Saignon** (north) with its curious vegetable garden (see the boxed text, p228) and **Auribeau** (east). Beyond cycling, walking and scenic motoring, the star attraction of this pretty pocket is its accommodation.

Secluded in a remote valley, the renovated mill **Le Moulin** (☎ 04 90 75 10 63; www.moulindefondons

.com in French; Auribeau; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast from €42/58/77/92, half-board in gîte d'étape €35, table d'hôte adult/child €12/18.50; ☎ ☒ ☑) is a veritable playground, with swings, swimming, horse riding and walks galore. The mill is signposted off the D48, 2.5km west of Auribeau. The final 500m is a partly unpaved, single-track lane.

In the 11th and 12th centuries it was three presbyteries; now **Auberge de Presbytere** (☎ 04 90 74 11 50; www.auberge-presbytere.com; place de la Fontaine, Saignon; d €68-135, menus €26-35; ☞ mid-Feb-mid-Nov, restaurant lunch & dinner Thu-Tue; ☎ ☒ ☑) is a village inn with beautiful wood-beamed rooms and an enticing terrace restaurant overlooking the village fountain and wash house.

Husband and wife artists Kamila Regent and Pierre Jaccaud are the creative force behind **Chambre de Séjour avec Vue** (☎ 04 90 04 85 01; www.chambreavecvue.com in French; Saignon; d incl breakfast €80, studio incl breakfast €100; table d'hôte €25) – a 16th-century village house turned *chambre d'hôte*/art studio and stunningly decorated with resident artists' works. Cross a little wooden bridge to the garden where bronze sculptures, terracotta urns and contemporary designer chairs lounge beneath trees. Leaves adorn crisp linen pillows and some rooms have kitchens.

Although the isolated **Ferme Auberge Le Castelas** (Chez Gianni; ☎ 04 70 74 60 89; le_castelas@yahoo.fr; Sivergues; menus incl wine €25-30; 🍴 lunch & dinner by reservation only Mar-Dec) is well off any track, beaten or not, celebs such as Catherine Deneuve drop in via helicopter to pass around platters at long shared timber tables. Fresh-from-the-farm feasts include bite-sized toast topped with *tomme* (a mild cows-milk cheese). To get here (sans helicopter), follow the only road through the village of Sivergues (ignore the *fin de la route* – end of the road – sign at the village entrance). Continue for 1.5km along the potholed gravel track until you see the black piglets in the field.

Lourmarin

pop 1127 / elev 230m

At the base of the Combe de Lourmarin and, unlike many of the Luberon's precarious hilltop townships, easily accessed, the alluring village of Lourmarin lies alongside its Renaissance **chateau** (☎ 04 90 68 15 23; www.chateau-de-lourmarin.com; adult/student/10-18yr €5.50/3/2.50; 🕒 10am-noon & 2.30-6pm Jul & Aug, Feb-Jun & shorter hr Sep-Dec) – the first of its kind built in Provence.

Today home to author Peter Mayle, charming streets, cafés and a lively Friday morning **market**, Lourmarin was the final home of Nobel Prize-winning writer Albert Camus (1913–60) and his wife, who are buried in the village cemetery. Also buried in the cemetery is the writer Henri Bosco (1888–1976), another Lourmarin local.

The **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 68 10 77; www.lourmarin.com; av Philippe de Girard; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 10am-1.30pm & 3-6pm Fri) leads guided walks (€4) dedicated to Camus (Tuesday at 10am) and Bosco (Wednesday at 10am) as well as one exploring the village (Friday at 10am).

The use of fragrant plants such as lavender and rosemary at the **Ferme de Gerbaud** (☎ 04 90 68 11 83; adult/child €5/free; 🕒 1½hr guided visits 5pm Tue, Thu & Sat Apr-Oct, 3pm Sat Nov-Mar, boutique 2-7pm) are explained during farm tours in English and French. The farm's owner, Paula, also cooks herb-infused evening meals on Thursdays – call ahead for prices and reservations.

Given its tiny population Lourmarin has a trove of gastronomic gems, unearthed by a stroll around town. Reservations for all restaurants in town are recommended.

Although chef extraordinaire Édouard Loubet is now based in Bonnieux (see p221) he still keeps the wheels turning at **Le Moulin de Lourmarin** (☎ 04 90 68 06 69; www.moulinde Lourmarin.com; d from €120, ste from €350; menus from €26; 🍷 🍴 🍷 🍷 🍷), a restored 17th-century oil mill now housing his Comptoir d'Édouard, a restaurant-*traiteur* (caterers)-*épicerie*-pâtisserie specialising in foie gras fragranced with plants from the mill's botanical garden, along with dreamy rooms.

In the heart of the village, its oldest bar, the convivial **Café de l'Ormeau** (☎ 04 90 68 02 11; place de l'Ormeau; dishes €4-10; 🕒 6.30am-11.30pm) has a pavement terrace perfect for sipping pastis in the sun.

A CURIOUS DETOUR

A curious little detour starting east of Apt gets you off the busy N100 and onto quiet country lanes.

At the bottom of St-Martin de Castillon, turn left and follow the road up to Castellet. Continue for 2km, driving around a sharp hairpin bend and further uphill to bring you to quaint stone **Auribeau** (elevation 586m). In the village, park on rte Jean Moulin, from where a 5.4km walking trail up Mourre Nègre can be picked up. Nip to the top of the street for a panorama of lavender fields then stroll along rue du Château to the splashing fountain on place de la Fontaine.

Continue out of the village along the same D48, passing a small **private lavender distillery** – where you can buy *miel* (honey) and *extrait traditionnel de lavandin* (lavender extract) on your left (you'll need to knock on the door, as it's not open for tours) – and that field of burnt tree stumps. From here the road snakes uphill for 700m, with a succession of swift glimpses of stone-capped Mont Ventoux as you round several sweeping bends. At the third bend you'll find a picturesque **picnic area**.

Four kilometres further, gasp at the cragtop village of **Saignon** with Mont Ventoux as the backdrop. Drive downhill around the huge hairpin to the village and turn right at the post office, following the signs for **Le Potager d'un Curieux** (☎ 04 90 74 44 68; chemin de la Molière; admission free; 🕒 sunrise-sunset Mon & Wed-Fri), 2.6km away. The 'vegetable garden of an inquiring mind' is the creation of Jean-Luc Danneyrolles and his passion for rare and ancient fruits and vegetables.

Vaugines & Cucuron

From Lourmarin the D56 shadows the GR97 walking trail 5km east to **Vaugines** (population 469), where Claude Berri's Pagnol films *Manon des Sources* and *Jean de Florette* (1986) were partly shot with the village's horse-chestnut tree and moss-covered fountain as a backdrop.

Cucuron (population 1792; elevation 350m), 2km further east, is the starting point for walks up **Mourre Nègre** (1125m). Its **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 77 28 37; www.cucuron-luberon.com in French; rue Léonce Briegues; 🕒 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri May-Oct, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr) sells walking/cycling maps and guides.

Pays d'Aigues

Shhhh... the rustic charm of Pays d'Aigues (Aigues Country) remains, for the most part, yet to be 'discovered' by *résidence secondaire* (second-home) owners. For now at least, its peaceful villages and unfolding countryside epitomise timeless Provençal life.

A pretty lake with a beach, **Étang de la Bonde**, 3km south of Cabrières d'Aigues on the D9, is free for the public.

Labelled one of France's 'most beautiful villages' (and it is), **Ansouis** (population 1100), 6km north of Cabrières d'Aigues, shelters the **Musée Extraordinaire** (☎ 04 90 09 82 64; adult/under 16yr €3.50/1.50; 🕒 2-6pm or 7pm), set up by Provençal painter and diver Georges Mazoyer, whose passion for the sea is reflected in the museum's fossilised exhibits and art. Nearby, you can watch *santonner* Daniel Galli hand-craft *santons* (traditional Provençal figurines) in his **santon workshop** (☎ 04 90 09 87 54; rue du Buis). Right in the village, the palatial **Château d'Ansouis** (☎ 04 90 09 82 70; www.chateau-ansouis.com; adult/6-18yr €6/3; 🕒 2.30-6pm Sun Nov-Easter, 2.30-6pm Wed-Mon Easter-Jun & Oct, 2.30-6pm Jul-Sep) is still inhabited but can be visited by guided tour. Classical-music concerts fill its hedged courtyards in August. For a soothing tea, pop across from the chateau through the art gallery and down a flight of steps to **Les Moissines** (☎ 04 90 09 85 90; Grand Rue; 🕒 daily Apr-Sep). And for a delightful dinner, reserve a table at **La Closerie** (☎ 04 90 09 90 54; blvd des Platanes; menus from €21; 🕒 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat). Ansouis' tiny **tourist office** (☎ 04 90 09 86 98; place du Château; 🕒 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Sat & Sun) stocks local information.

At **Château Val Joanis** (☎ 04 90 79 20 77; www.valjoanis.com; rte de Cavaillon; admission free; 🕒 shop 10am-7pm Apr-Oct, 2-6pm Tue-Sat Mar & Nov), 8km southeast in

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Le Mas des Câpriens (☎ 04 90 77 69 68; www.luberon-masdescapriens.com; Chemin de Raoux, Cabrières d'Aigues; d incl breakfast €95-110; 🍷 🍴 🍷) If the Provence of your dreams is a rambling farm amid orchards, vineyards and vegetable gardens with uninterrupted views of the mountains, you'll never want to wake up once you find this idyllic *chambre d'hôte* just outside Cabrières d'Aigues. Within the *mas* (farmhouse) itself are three romantic rooms, including one with a claw-foot tub, but the sweetest dreams are up a narrow dirt track in an exquisitely restored 'gypsy caravan' lit by lanterns, with a hot outdoor shower. Breakfast is fresh from hosts Christine and Bernard's garden, and there's a guest kitchen built into the rocks next to the elevated pool. Find it signposted 500m northwest of the village.

Pertuis, you can take a guided tour of its winery and traditional 19th-century terraced garden with a wine and olive-oil tasting on Thursday at 4pm between April and October.

La Tour d'Aigues (population 4010; elevation 270m), 5km northeast, is dominated by the 12th- to 15th-century **Château de Tour d'Aigues** (☎ 04 90 07 50 33; www.chateau-latourdaigues.com in French; adult/8-18yr €4.50/2; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Jul-mid-Aug, 2.30-6pm Sun & Mon, 10am-1pm Tue, 10am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Wed-Sat Apr-Jun & mid-Aug-Oct, 2-5pm Sun & Mon, 10am-noon Tue, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Wed-Sat Nov-Mar). It incorporates a **Musée des Faïences** full of 18th-century earthenware. In the chateau, **Provence Luberon** (☎ 04 90 07 30 00; www.provence-luberon.net) provides information on Pays d'Aigues.

MANOSQUE & AROUND

pop 20,309 / elev 387m

Manosque's industrial belt wraps around its cobblestone old town. Provençal writer Jean Giono (1895–1970) was born here, and has an arts centre dedicated to him. To the north, **Mont d'Or** looks out over the town's red-tiled roofs to the hills. **Mont Furon** (600m), 10km west, also has lavish Luberon views.

The town's biggest employer is the natural cosmetics company **L'Occitane en Provence** (☎ 04 92 70 19 50; www.loccitane.com; Zone Industrielle St-Maurice; 🕒 boutique 10am-7pm Mon-Sat), on the southeastern outskirts, which utilises Provençal flowers and herbs in its internationally exported products,

and runs free one-hour guided visits of its distilling areas, manufacturing facilities, laboratories, and packaging department (if you've ever picked up its perfumes and soaps you'll have felt the Braille text on its labels). Tours must be booked at Manosque's **tourist office** (☎ 04 92 72 16 00; www.manosque-tourisme.com in French; place du Docteur Joubert; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-12.15pm & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun 15-30 Jun & 1-15 Sep, 9am-12.15pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat 15 Sep-15 Jun), which has regional cycling routes mapped on a board out front.

On Manosque's southwestern fringe, 2km from the centre, the grand manorhouse-turned-*chambre d'hôte* **La Bastide de L'Adrech** (☎ 04 92 71 14 18; www.bastide-adrech.com; av des Serrets; d incl breakfast €68, table d'hôte incl wine & coffee €26; 📍) languished empty for over a century until its recent resurrection by Géraldine and Robert Le Bozec. Amid heritage-listed trees, its five guest rooms are stocked with L'Occitane products and the sweeping living room hosts tables d'hôtes beside the crackling fireplace. L'Oustau de Baumanière-trained chef Robert also runs cooking classes (from €30 for three

hours) and gourmet weekends themed around local specialities like truffles.

The **bus station** (☎ 04 92 87 55 99; blvd Charles de Gaulle) is 500m from Manosque's centre. Exit the station, turn left on blvd Charles de Gaulle, then right to av Jean Giono. Frequent buses run by the **Société des Cars Alpes Littoral** (☎ 04 92 51 06 05; 🕒 office closed Wed, Sat & Sun) serve Marseille. From the **train station** (place Frédéric Mistral), 2km south of the centre, there are six daily trains to/from Marseille (€14.80, 1½ hours) and Sisteron (€8, one hour).

Six kilometres southwest of Manosque, the village of **Pierrevert** (population 3500; elevation 420m) is the centre of the Coteaux de Pierrevert AOC. More than 75% of its wine production takes place at the village's co-op, the Cave des Vignerons (☎ 04 92 72 19 06; 1 av Auguste Bastide; 🕒 cellar 9am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat mid-Jul-mid-Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jul), where you can have a free tasting and stock up at producers' prices. Call one day ahead for a free behind-the-scenes winery tour.

Twenty-odd kilometres southwest of Manosque adjoining St-Paul-lès-Durance is the nuclear research centre, **Cadarache** – see p77.