



Provence

Includes »

Marseille.....	760
Aix-en-Provence.....	773
Arles.....	780
The Camargue.....	786
Avignon.....	791
Orange.....	800
Mont Ventoux.....	805
Gorges du Verdon.....	818
Parc National du Mercantour.....	820

Best Places to Eat

- » Restaurant Pierre Reboul (p777)
- » Auberge La Fenière (p816)
- » Café Véranda (p815)
- » L'Atelier (p784)
- » Sanglier Paresseux (p816)

Best Places to Stay

- » Hôtel La Mirande (p793)
- » Le Couvent (p808)
- » Relais d'Elle (p817)
- » Hôtel Vertigo (p765)
- » Le Mas de Peint (p787)

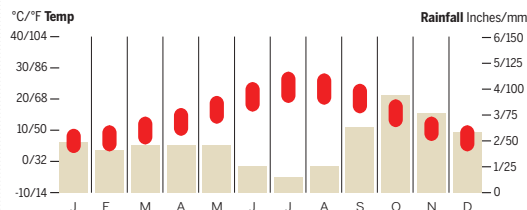
Why Go?

Provence conjures images of lavender fields, gorgeous stone villages, wonderful food and superb wine – most people's idea of a perfect holiday. It certainly delivers on all those fronts, but what many visitors don't expect is Provence's incredible diversity. The Vaucluse and Luberon regions epitomise the Provençal cliché. But, near the mouth of the Rhône, craggy limestone yields to salt marshes, where pink flamingos replace purple lavender. In the south, the light, which captivated Van Gogh and Cézanne, begins to change, a prelude to the Camargue's bleached landscapes. Amid Haute-Provence's soaring peaks and raw wilderness, half-mile-high granite walls lord over a serpentine river at the Gorges du Verdon. The region's other surprises are its cities, sultry Marseille and wonderful Arles.

One thing remains constant everywhere: the food – clean, bright flavours, as simple as sweet tomatoes drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with *fleur de sel* (sea salt) from the Camargue.

When to Go

Marseille



Easter Kick off the bullfighting season with Féria d'Arles.

Jul & Aug Wade through blooming lavender and see performing artists at Festival d'Avignon.

Sep & Oct Wait for cool temperatures and the grape harvest to bike the Luberon's back roads.

The Finer Things in Provence

There are so many ways to treat yourself in Provence. Your budget may not stretch to them all, but a few of our favourites include: spending the night and dining at La Bastide de Moustiers (p820); taking a wine-tasting course (p799) in Châteauneuf-du-Pape (and shipping a case of wine home!); learning to cook in the sumptuous kitchen of Hôtel La Mirande (p793); and enjoying a night of opera in Orange's grandiose Théâtre Antique (p800).

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

It's not too difficult to get off the beaten path in Provence. In the great outdoors, hike along Marseille's rocky coastline at Les Calanques (p775) or picnic in the peaceful Jardins de l'Abbaye (p798) in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, a world away from Avignon's crowds, but only a tiny hop across the river. Explore the peninsulas and islands of the Parc Naturel Régional de Camargue (p786) or the sublime wilderness of Parc National du Mercantour (p820).

For a few days of peace and quiet, check in at Le Mas Perréal (p813) or La Bouquière (p815) in the Luberon or Relais d'Elle (p817) in Pays de Forcalquier, where good food, select company and big views will ensure you wind down. And when you feel like getting out, track down artists workshops in Oppède-le-Vieux (p814) and Saignon (p815), or go for a scenic drive across the lavender fields of Plateau de Valensole (p817).

Finally, drop in to Prieuré de Ganagobie (p818), where the monks stick by two main tenets, one of which is 'listen': share their serenity.

Provence's Best Markets

Whatever the day of the week, there is a market somewhere in Provence. Mooching around the stalls, tasting local specialities and buying picnic treats and souvenirs is a quintessential part of Provençal life. Here is our list of favourites and their flagship wares:

- » Forcalquier (Monday; p816) Lavender products, honey, Banon cheese
- » Vaison-la-Romaine (Tuesday; p801) Delicious fruit and veg, charcuterie (pâtés, *saucissons* and more)
- » St-Rémy de Provence (Wednesday; p789) Olives, olive oil and a sprinkling of celebrities
- » Carpentras (Friday; p806) *Berlingots* (colourful sweets), truffles in winter
- » Arles (Saturday; p780) Camargue salt, *saucisson d'Arles* (bull-meat sausage)
- » Aix-en-Provence (Sunday; p773) Flower market and a very chic crowd

EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Marseille, Aix-en-Provence and Arles are European Capital of Culture (p769) in 2013. Hundreds of concerts, exhibitions and events are scheduled – make sure you check out what's on.

Fast Facts

- » **Population** 2.66 million
- » **Area** 15,579 sq km
- » **Hotel overnights/yr** 7.75 million
- » **Signature drink** Pastis (aniseed liqueur)

Planning Ahead

If you're around for the region's biggest festivals, booking tickets and accommodation in advance is essential.

- » Féria d'Arles (p783)
- » Chorégies d'Orange (p800)
- » Festival d'Avignon (p793)
- » Festival de Lacoste (p814)

Resources

- » En Provence (www.enprovence.fr)
- » Tourisme PACA (www.tourismepaca.fr)
- » Alpes de Haute-Provence (www.alpes-haute-provence.com)
- » Bouches du Rhône (www.visitprovence.com)
- » Vaucluse (www.provenceguide.com)

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