



Provence

POP 2.67 MILLION

Includes ➔

Marseille	755
Aix-en-Provence	773
Arles	778
St-Rémy-de-Provence	789
Avignon	792
Orange	800
Carpentras	805
Apt	808
Le Petit Luberon	812
Le Grand Luberon	814
Gorges du Verdon	816

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ L'Atelier Jean-Luc Rabanel (p784)
- ➔ Le Mazet du Vaccarès (p787)
- ➔ La Table de Ventabren (p782)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Mama Shelter (p764)
- ➔ Le Cloître (p783)
- ➔ Hôtel Edmond Rostand (p764)
- ➔ Sous les Figuiers (p790)

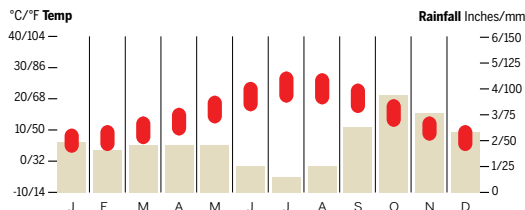
Why Go?

Provence evokes picture-postcard images of lavender fields, medieval hilltop villages, bustling markets and superb food and wine. Less expected is Provence's incredible diversity. The Vaucluse and Luberon epitomise the Provençal cliché. But near the mouth of the Rhône in the Camargue, craggy limestone yields to bleached salt marshes specked pink with flamingos, and the light, which so captivated Van Gogh and Cézanne, begins to change. Then there's the serpentine Gorges du Verdon, its pea-green water lorded over by half-mile-high limestone walls and craggy mountain peaks beyond. The region's other belle surprises are its cities: sultry Marseille and Roman Arles.

Constant across the region is 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 (no blood) with Féria d'Arles.

Jul & Aug Wade through purple lavender in bloom and watch artists perform at Festival d'Avignon.

Sep & Oct Wait for cooling temperatures to bike the back roads of the Luberon.

MARSEILLE

POP 858,902

For many years, the busy port city of Marseille has suffered from a serious image problem. Dismissed for its down-at-heel reputation, urban decay and often alarming crime statistics, it's long been the black sheep of the Provençal coastline. But while it's gritty, and not always pretty – Cannes or St-Tropez, it's not – Marseille is a dynamic, edgy, bustling city that's rich with more than 1500 years of history. And since its stint as the European Capital of Culture in 2013 and the addition of a brace of swanky new museums, the city has sparkled with a new sense of optimism and self-belief. At long last, everyone seems to be waking up to the fact that France's second-biggest city might have been unfairly maligned all along.

The heart of the city is the vibrant Vieux Port (old port), mast-to-mast with yachts and pleasure boats. Just uphill is the ancient Le Panier neighbourhood, the oldest section of the city. Also worth an explore is the République quarter, with its stylish boutiques and Haussmannian buildings, and the Joliette area, centred on Marseille's famous striped Cathédrale de la Major.

History

Around 600 BC, Greek mariners founded Massilia, a trading post, at what is now Marseille's Vieux Port. In the 1st century BC, the city lost out by backing Pompey the Great rather than Julius Caesar: Caesar's forces captured Massilia in 49 BC and directed Roman trade elsewhere.

Marseille became part of France in the 1480s, but its citizens embraced the Revolution, sending 500 volunteers to defend Paris in 1792. Heading north, they sang a rousing march, ever after dubbed 'La Marseillaise' – now the national anthem. Trade with North Africa escalated after France occupied Algeria in 1830 and the Suez Canal opened in 1869. After the World Wars, a steady flow of migration from North Africa began and with it the rapid expansion of Marseille's periphery.

Sights

Greater Marseille is divided into 16 *arrondissements* (districts), which are indicated in addresses (eg 1er for the first *arrondissement* and so on). The city's main thoroughfare, La Canebière (from the Provençal word *canebe*, meaning 'hemp', after the



city's traditional rope industry), in the 1st *arrondissement*, stretches eastwards from the Vieux Port towards the train station, a 10-minute walk or two metro stops from the water. North is Le Panier, Marseille's oldest quarter; south is the bohemian *concourse* of cours Julien; and southwest is the start of the coastal road.

The **Marseille City Pass** (www.resa-marseille.com; 24/48/72hr €24/31/39) covers admission to city museums, public transport, a guided city tour, a Château d'If boat trip and more, plus other discounts. It's not necessary for children under 12, as many attractions are greatly reduced or free. Buy it online or at the tourist office.

Central Marseille

★ Vieux Port

HISTORIC SITE

(Map p766;  Vieux Port) Ships have docked for more than 26 centuries at the city's birthplace, the colourful old port. The main commercial docks were transferred to the Joliette area north of here in the 1840s, but the old port remains a thriving harbour for fishing boats, pleasure yachts and tourists. Guarding either side of the harbour are **Fort St-Nicolas** (Map p766; ☀ 8am-7.45pm May-Aug, shorter hours rest of year) and **Fort St-Jean** (Map p766;  Vieux Port), founded in the 13th century by the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem (and now home to the city's flagship MuCEM museum).

The port's southern quay is dotted with bars, brasseries and cafes, and there are more to be found around place Thiars and cours Honoré d'Estienne d'Orves, where the action continues until late. For supremely lazy sightseers, there's also a **cross-port ferry** (Map p766; ☀ 10am-1.15pm & 2-7pm).

Perched at the edge of the peninsula, the **Jardin du Pharo** (Map p762) is a perfect picnic and sunset spot.

★ Le Panier

HISTORIC SITE

(Map p766;  Vieux Port) From the Vieux Port, hike north up to this fantastic history-woven quarter, which is fabulous for a wander with its artsy ambience, cool hidden squares and

FAST FACTS

Area 15,579 sq km

Local Industry Fruit farming, fishing, viticulture, tourism

Signature drink Pastis (aniseed liqueur)