

INTRODUCING PROVENCE & THE CÔTE D'AZUR

NO PART OF SOUTHERN FRANCE HAS MORE ALLURE THAN THIS WEDGE OF COAST WITH ITS MOUNTAIN RETREATS AND GASTRONOMIC ART DE VIVRE.

So prepare for heart-and-soul seduction. Travelling à la Provençal means sensual sauntering past scented lavender fields and chestnut forests; through fresh apple-green vineyards and silvery olive groves; around markets, Matisse-designed chapels and medieval hilltop villages impossibly perched on rocky crags. Travelled with two wheels or four, on the back of a bicycle or with the roof rolled back in a vintage Citroën 2CV, no region better begs lazy days out, interrupted only by copious alfresco lunches.

Yet Provence and the Côte d'Azur is not all Zen-paced rural chic. Wedged between rough-cut Marseille with its urban art scene, and megalomaniacal Monte Carlo with its skyscraper skyline, this hot spot on the Med also screams action, glamour and just a hint of the ridiculous. Where else do cowboys herd cattle while Roma blaze flamenco beneath flamingo-filled skies? Where else do people flock to watch film stars strut the red carpet into a concrete bunker? Where else can you canyon white water in the morning, crack open sea urchins for lunch, see fabulous art in the afternoon, and bunk down in a tree house, old Celtic hamlet or winemaking château come dusk?

TOP A view from Vaison-la-Romaine to Mont Ventoux
BOTTOM LEFT A hilltop village in the Luberon **BOTTOM RIGHT** A fruit and vegetable market in Nice's old town.

NICK HUNTER/GETTY IMAGES



GETTY IMAGES



RICHARD JANSOHN



GORGES DU VERDON



MONACO



JEAN BERNARD CABRIET

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MONACO

TOP LEFT Gorges du Verdon, Haute-Provence **TOP RIGHT** A view of Monaco from the Grande Corniche
BOTTOM LEFT La Condamine at dusk, Monaco
BOTTOM CENTRE Pont St-Bénézet (Pont d'Avignon) spans the Rhône, with the Palais des Papes and the walled city behind, Avignon **BOTTOM RIGHT** Art on sale portside, St-Tropez



BETHUNE CAMACHILL

AVIGNON

RICHARD JARSON



ST-TROPEZ

GETTING STARTED

PROVENCE
& THE CÔTE D'AZUR

WHAT'S NEW?

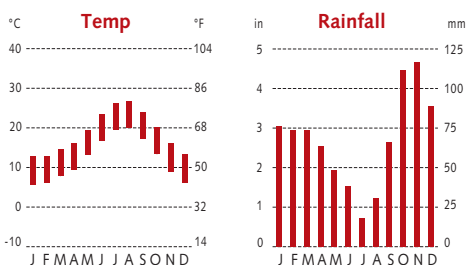
- ★ Innovative tram art in Nice, with 14 exciting works to discover (p203)
- ★ Europe's last-remaining ochre quarry (p154)
- ★ An artisan ice creamery hidden in Pays d'Aigues back country (p165)
- ★ Learning how to cook with flowers – for kids and adults alike (p259)
- ★ Jean Cocteau 'tattoos' on the glittering millionaire cape of Cap Ferrat (p214)



BETHUNE GAMBRIEL

CLIMATE: NICE

Average
Max/Min



PRICE GUIDE

	BUDGET	MIDRANGE	TOP END
SLEEPING	up to €80	€80-175	over €175
MEALS	up to €20	€20-40	over €40

RICHARD JARSON



RICHARD JARSON

TOP A time-worn facade in Vieux Nice **BOTTOM LEFT** Sunbathers enjoy the beach, Nice **BOTTOM RIGHT** Promenade des Anglais, Nice **FAR RIGHT** Medieval Èze with views of Cap Ferrat

ACCOMMODATION

From age-old Provençal *mas* (farmhouses) with sun-bleached shutters, gold-stone walls and vine-shaded pergolas to wine-producing châteaux, accommodation in this essentially rural part of southern France is dreamy. *Chambres d'hôtes* (B&Bs) provide a golden opportunity to experience a taste of local life from the inside (not to mention fabulous homemade breakfasts); many serve *tables d'hôtes* (evening meals) too. But for those who prefer traditional hotel accommodation, boutique hotels and quintessential village *auberges* (inns) abound. For more on accommodation see p376.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

MARSEILLE-PROVENCE AIRPORT (MRS; ☎ 04 42 14 14 14; www.marseille.aeroport.fr) Provence's main airport, 28km northwest of Marseille, has international flights including easyJet and Ryanair to and from the UK.

NICE-CÔTE D'AZUR AIRPORT (NCE; ☎ 08 20 42 33 33; www.nice-aeroport.fr) The airport for the French Riviera, 10 minutes from Nice centre, is an easyJet hub.

TOULON-HYÈRES AIRPORT (TLN; ☎ 08 25 01 83 87; www.toulon-hyeres.aeroport.fr) This airport, 3km south of Hyères and 23km from Toulon, has a few European flights.

THINGS TO TAKE

- ★ Sunglasses, suncream, hat and mosquito repellent for the outdoors
- ★ A pocket knife, refillable water bottle and corkscrew for stylish picnics
- ★ Sturdy shoes to stroll cobblestoned hilltop villages
- ★ A French phrasebook
- ★ An insatiable appetite, a pleasure-seeking palate and a thirst for good wine



BETHUNE COMPIEGNE

WEBLINKS

PROVENCE & BEYOND (www.beyond.fr) Comprehensive tourist guide.

PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR (www.decouverte-paca.fr) Indispensable regional tourist board website.

PROVENCE-HIDEAWAYS (www.provence-hideaway.com) Travel guide covering inland western Provence.

RIVIERA CÔTE D'AZUR (www.guidेरiviera.com) Riviera tourist board site.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

PROVENCE
& THE CÔTE D'AZUR



NOSS/INCEI/DAVID

FEBRUARY

CARNAVAL DE NICE

NICE

Both the decorated floats and the crowds are gigantic at this flamboyant Mardi Gras street parade, celebrated since 1293. Don't miss the legendary flower battles. (www.nicecarnaval.com)

FÊTE DU CITRON

MENTON

Monumental sculptures and floats crafted from a zillion and one lemons make this two-week event the French Riviera's most exotic fest. (www.feteducitron.com)

MAY

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

CANNES

The world's premier film event sees cinematic luminaries star on La Croisette. (p245; www.festival-cannes.org)

FÊTE DES GARDIANS

ARLES

The traditional Camargue cowboy and his bullish and equestrian skills are the focus of this vibrant festival on 1 May. (p90)

PÈLERINAGE DES GITANS

STES-MARIES DE LA MER

Roma from Europe pour into this remote seaside outpost to honour their patron saint for three days starting 24 May (and again in October). (p95)

MONACO GRAND PRIX

MONACO

It's fitting that the most glamorous race of the Formula One season should tear around one of the world's most glam countries. (p227; www.acm.mc)

JUNE

FÊTE DE LA TRANSHUMANANCE

ST-RÉMY DE PROVENCE

Sheep fill the streets of this small Alpilles town as shepherds walk their flocks up to lush summer pastures; their return in September is equally festive.

FÉRIA DE PENTECÔTE

NÎMES

The city's bull-fighting season opens at Pentecost with five days of *novilladas* and *corridas* inside the town's monumental Roman amphitheatre and sangria-fuelled flamenco outside.

TOP Costumed celebration at the Fête du Citron, Menton **BOTTOM RIGHT** A colourful float at the Carnaval de Nice street parade

JULY/AUGUST

FESTIVAL D'AIX-EN-PROVENCE

AIX-EN-PROVENCE

Stunning music, theatre and song form the program of this prestigious July festival born in 1948. (www.festival-aix.com)

FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON & FESTIVAL OFF

AVIGNON

Theatre in every guise takes to the stage at this renowned theatre festival; fringe Off parallels the official fest. (www.festival-avignon.com)

CHORALIES

VAISON-LA-ROMAINE

There is no finer stage for Europe's largest choral festival than Vaison's Roman Théâtre Antique; the next is in 2010. (www.choralies.fr)

FESTIVAL DE LACOSTE

LACOSTE

Spooky castle ruins are the backdrop for this two-week arts festival of dance, music, theatre and opera. (www.festival-delacoste.com)

MUSIQUES DANS LES VIGNES

VAUCLUSE

This month-long musicfest features classical music and jazz performed between vines tended by some of the region's loveliest wine-producing châteaux. (www.musiquesdanslesvignes.com)

DECEMBER

CHRISTMAS

Villages celebrate with midnight Mass, Provençal chants and a ceremony in which shepherds offer a newborn lamb. In Séguret the Nativity scene has a living baby – an age-old tradition. (p120)



CULTURE

PROVENCE & THE CÔTE D'AZUR

BOOKS

PROVENCE: A CULTURAL HISTORY (Martin Garrett)
Evocative portrait of culture through the ages, inspired by Provence's varied landscapes.

FRENCH RIVIERA: LIVING WELL WAS THE BEST REVENGE (Xavier Girard)
A brilliant look at the fervent artistic creativity of 1920s and '30s Côte d'Azur.

ONE WAY (Didier van Cauweleart)
A French orphan in Marseille is rescued by Roma and given false ID papers making him Moroccan.

PROVENÇAL ESCAPES (Caroline Clifton-Mogg)
Image-driven snoop around 22 beautiful homes in Provence.

PROVENCE (Lawrence Durrell)
British novelist who has dedicated the last 30 years of his career to penning Provençal life.



BETHUNE GAMBACIARE

ARTIST PORTFOLIO

With its designer chapels, cutting-edge architecture and avant-garde art, the region is a living art museum. It has masterpieces to savour and an artist portfolio bursting with 20th-century greats. Local lad Paul Cézanne and Dutchman Van Gogh were among the first to paint Provence's extraordinary intensity of light, not that anyone appreciated their efforts at the time. Pointillist Paul Signac famously sailed into St-Tropez in 1890 and made the fishing port home two years later. In Nice, meanwhile, Matisse revelled in a warmth and depth of light absolutely unknown elsewhere in Europe, paving the way for Renoir, Picasso et al. It was these artists, bohemian and impoverished, who paid their way with art, hence the world-unique collections strung on the walls of a couple of Riviera restaurants. See p331 for more on 20th-century art and p36 for visual highlights.



DAN HERRICK

TOP Performers at the Palais des Papes, Avignon **BOTTOM** Garden, Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild
RIGHT Market stall, Aix-en-Provence **FAR RIGHT** An art deco star on La Croisette, Cannes

TOP CELEBRITY HAUNTS

MONACO GRAND PRIX Formula One meets high society (p227).

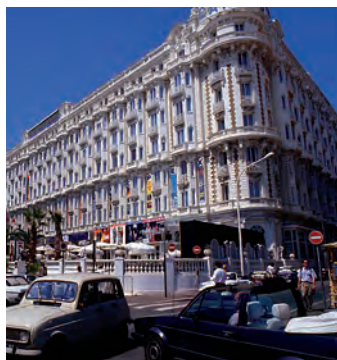
LA CROISSETTE Trail world stars of cinema along Cannes' fabled seaside prom; lunch on the sand at the art deco Martinez (p243).

LA COLOMBE D'OR Dine with the rich and famous amid priceless art or beneath fig trees in St-Paul de Vence (p258).

LE CLUB 55 Guzzle Champagne, spot celebrities and swoon when the bill comes at St-Tropez's mythical beach restaurant (p283).



DANA MARTELLO



VERONICA GABRIELLI

DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ Provence markets – Aix-en-Provence (p75), Carpentras (p125) and St-Tropez (p275) are particularly vibrant
- ★ Cours Mirabeau café life – Be chic between *hôtels particuliers* (private mansions) in bourgeois Aix-en-Provence (p69)
- ★ Theatre alfresco – Catch starlit performances at the Festival d'Avignon (p107), Les Chorégies d'Orange (p115), Domaine du Rayol (p298) or Villa Ephrussi (p213)
- ★ Riviera high life – Strut amid millionaire mansions and chanting cicadas on Cap d'Antibes (p251) and Cap Ferrat (p212)
- ★ Place des Lices *pétanque* – Play *boules* beneath plane trees on this St-Tropezian square (p275)
- ★ La Friche la Belle de Mai – Cutting-edge culture next to train tracks in Marseille (p55)

BLOGS

FRENCH LANDSCAPES

(<http://french-landscapes.blogspot.com>)
Photo blog with stunning images of the St-Tropez area.

FRENCH WORD-A-DAY

(<http://french-word-a-day.typepad.com>)
French words inspire a tale of life in Provence.

PROVENCE & BEYOND

(www.provenceblog.typepad.com)
Cultural, historical and practical on-the-ground nuggets Provence-wide.

FROM FAYENCE OUTWARDS

(www.go-provence.com)
Fayence-generated blog loaded with current news, chat, celebrity scoops and links.

CULTURE

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CURIOSITIES

ABBAYE DE ST-ROMAN

France's only troglodytic monastery, carved into a limestone outcrop (p137).

CHAPELLE DE LA GAROUBE

A shrine of local worship in Cap d'Antibes; pilgrims walk from the beach to the lighthouse (p252).

PROVENÇAL SANTONS

'Little Saints': Thumbelina-sized terracotta figures made in Marseille (p54).

CABANON LE CORBUSIER

A visit to this iconic beach hut is an architect-buff must (p215).

WORLD SOUNDS

A diverse playlist of local artists from Radio Grenouille's Stéphane Galland.

DAVID WALTERS (www.davidwalters.fr) Acoustic folk-electronic beats mix by world-electro, Marseille-based artist.

KABBALAH (www.kabbalah-music.net) Five-person Jewish band blending jazz, contemporary Mediterranean folk and klezmer (traditional eastern European music).

MASSILIA SOUND SYSTEM (www.massilia-sound-system.com) Legendary reggae group combining a Marseille accent with Provençal and Marseillais slang.

RAPHAËL IMBERT Saxophonist and composer of classic jazz and sacred music; plays solo and with the Newtopia Quintet.

PROVENCE: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Gloriously intact Roman amphitheatres, triumphal arches and other public buildings evoke that very period in its rich history that gave Provence – a Roman *provincia* – its name. Throw the region's festive spirit into the ancient arena and Roman Provence becomes rather fun: take the Pont du Gard, an aqueduct whose three tiers can be paddled beneath; the archaeological site of Glanum, aka a walk from the 3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD; or the resplendent Les Arènes and Maison Carré in Nîmes, where bullfights, concerts and films enthral spellbound audiences (see p315 for more on Roman Provence).

TOP Canoeing beneath the Pont du Gard, a Roman aqueduct west of Avignon **RIGHT** Les Arènes, a spectacular Roman amphitheatre in Nîmes

THE MUD-EATING MISTRAL

Folklore says it drives people crazy. Its namesake, Provençal poet Frédéric Mistral, cursed it. And peasants in their dried-out fields dubbed it ‘mud eater’.

Inspiration for a thousand and one Provençal stories, the legendary mistral is a cold, dry northwesterly wind that whips across Provence for several days at a time. Its gusts destroy crops, rip off roofs and drive tempers round the bend. It chills the bones for 100 days a year and is fiercest in winter and spring. Its intensity is caused by high atmospheric pressure over central France, blown southwards through the Rhône Valley.

On the upside, skies are cornflower blue and clear when the mistral is in town. And the vines love it.

DOS & DON'TS

- ★ Cover your shoulders when visiting places of worship

- ★ Dress smart in Monaco, where the casino, many bars, restaurants and theatre venues demand men don a jacket and tie

- ★ Two *bises* (kisses), a fleeting peck each side, is the usual way to greet irrespective of gender

- ★ Smoking in public places, including inside restaurants, is illegal

- ★ Shop like a local: buy fresh produce from farms, roadside stalls and the weekly morning market; market days are listed in regional chapters



FOOD & DRINK

PROVENCE
& THE CÔTE D'AZUR

COOKING COURSES

JEAN-JACQUES PRÉVOT (www.restaurantprevot.com) Seasonal workshops (including melon, mushroom, truffle, game and asparagus) with Cavaillon's melon chef (p148).

L'ATELIER (www.rabel.com) Two-hour cooking sessions under the watchful eye of highly contemporary two-star chef Jean-Luc Rabanel (p91).

LES PETITS FARCIS (www.petitsfarcis.com) Niçois cooking sessions with market and producer visits, run by Nice resident Rosa Jackson (p197).

ATELIER DE LA CUISINE DES FLEURS (www.la-cuisine-des-fleurs.com) Crystallise violets and make rose preserve with these cooking classes (p259).

LA RECETTE MAGIQUE Cook in Nice with Michelin-starred chefs (p204).

LE LIBERTY Fish-fuelled cooking on the beach in St-Tropez (p278).



DIANA MAYER/ISTOCK

A SEASONAL CUISINE

Thinking, dreaming, living food is the norm in Provence, where days are geared around satisfying a passionate appetite for dining well.

Some culinary traditions are upheld everywhere: oodles of olive oil, garlic and tomatoes find their way into dozens of dishes. Yet there are regional differences, which see fishermen return with the catch of the day in seafaring Marseille; grazing bulls and paddy fields in the Camargue; lambs in the Alpilles; truffles in the Vaucluse; cheese made from cows' milk in alpine pastures; and an Italianate accent to Niçois cooking.

Ultimately, the secret of Provençal cuisine lies not in elaborate preparation techniques or sophisticated presentation, but in the use of fresh local ingredients. In Provence it is the humble rhythm and natural cycle of the land that drives what you eat and when. See p364 for more.



JEAN-BERNARD GONNET/ISTOCK

TOP Garlic is a staple in Provençal cooking **BOTTOM** Jars of aromatic herbs **RIGHT** Fresh seafood at a market in Nice **FAR RIGHT** Decorated squash

TOP FOODIE FESTIVALS

Food itself is a reason to celebrate.

MESSE DE LA TRUFFE Richerenches' solemn truffle Mass in January (p121)

FÊTE DU CITRON Menton's February Lemon Festival is fabulous (p233)

FÊTE DU MELON July melon madness in Cavaillon (p150)

FÉRIA DU RIZ Arles celebrates rice harvest mid-September (p90)

FÊTE DE LA CHÂTAIGNE Go nuts at Collobrières' October chestnut festival (p295)



DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ **Bouillabaisse** – Sample this pungent yellow fish stew at least once in Marseille, preferably waterside (p59)
- ★ **A socca aperitif** – Feast on Niçois nibbles over drinks alfresco in Nice's old town (p207)
- ★ **Wine tasting** – Enjoy a range of respected reds in Bandol, where the surrounding sea-facing terraced hills are the heart-throb (p312)
- ★ **Truffle hunting** – Try your hand at snouting out these 'black diamonds' yourself near Carpentras (p102)
- ★ **Mountain-cheese road trip** – Motor from farm to farm around Banon sampling goat's-milk cheese wrapped in chestnut leaves (p174)
- ★ **Thirteen desserts** – Bite into one of each at Christmas to avoid bad luck for the coming year (p373)

MARKET MUSTS

- ★ **FARMERS MARKET** On Tuesdays from April to December in Apt
- ★ **FRESH FISH MARKET** Takes place every morning year-round on quai des Belges, Marseille
- ★ **GARLIC MARKET** Daily late June and July on cours Bel-sunce, Marseille
- ★ **MELON MARKET** In Cavaillon every morning from May to September
- ★ **TRUFFLE MARKET** On Saturdays, November to March, in Richerenches

FOOD & DRINK

PROVENCE
& THE CÔTE D'AZUR



DAVID STRAIN

BOOKS

THE PROVENCE COOKBOOK (Patricia Wells) The cookbook bible from this French-food expert and Provence resident.

A CHEF IN PROVENCE (Édouard Loubet) Learn to cook wildflowers with this esteemed creative chef.

THE OLIVE FARM (Carol Drinkwater) An olive-farm memoir and love story, the first in a trilogy.

ROSÉ EN MARCHÉ (James Ivey) A travel memoir flavoured with rosé wine and Provençal markets.

APERITIFS

Lounging over an *apéro* is one of Provence's great delights.

CÔTE DE PROVENCE ROSÉ Crisp, chilled and classic (p359).

PASTIS Aniseed-flavour drink; amber-coloured in the bottle, but milky-white when mixed with water (p55).

BEAUMES DE VENISE A sweet muscat wine to round off dessert (p359).

LIQUEUR DE CHÂTAIGNES Sweet chestnut liqueur from the Massif des Maures; mix with white wine (p296).

RINQUINQUIN DE PÊCHE, AMANDINE & LA FARIGOULE Peach, almond and thyme liqueurs from Haute-Provence (p169).

THE TRUFFLE MASS

As sacred as the cuisine into which it goes, the Messe de la Truffe honours St-Antoine, the patron saint of truffle growers. An unadulterated veneration of Provençal cuisine's most luxurious product, the Mass is celebrated on the third Sunday in January in Richerenches (p121). The faithful – local truffle growers in the main – offer knobly pig-ugly 'black diamonds', weighed and auctioned after Mass by black-caped, black-hatted members of the local Confrérie du Diamant Noir et de la Gastronomie (Black Diamond and Gastronomy Brotherhood). Then it is aperitif time followed by a truffle lunch (see p364 for more on truffles).

TOP One of many wine cellars in a region made for wine tasting **RIGHT** The fish market at Vieux Port, Marseille

À TABLE

Cardinal sins in the Provençal book of etiquette include skipping lunch, declining a *dégustation* (wine tasting) session or disliking a delicacy such as *testicules de mouton* (sheep testicles). In restaurants, forget balancing your bread on your main-course plate (side plates are only provided in multistarred temples); crumbs on the table is fine – as is using the same knife and fork for your starter and main in many a down-to-earth bistro and *ferme auberge* (farmhouse restaurant). Irrespective of price, order *une carafe d'eau* (a jug of tap water) rather than pricy bottled water. *Santé* is the toast for alcoholic drinks and *bon appétit* is what you say before tucking in. End your meal with a short, sharp espresso; ordering anything else, tea and cappuccino included, is just not done.

STAPLES

Bite into the fresh flavours of the Provençal culinary dream.

- ★ Olives, marinated or spiced in oil and garlic as *tapenade*
- ★ Vegetables, particularly tomatoes and courgettes
- ★ Fruit, melons, peaches and Apt cherries
- ★ Aromatic herbs and fiery garlic, impossible to avoid
- ★ Fish and other seafood on the coast



OUTDOORS

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NATURE PARKS

PARC NATIONAL DU MERCANTOUR (www.mercantour.eu) Walking, biking, skiing and white-water sports beneath 3000m-high peaks (p183).

ÎLE DE PORT-CROS (www.portcrosparcnational.fr) Snorkelling, swimming and ambling on a bird-busy island (p304).

PARC NATUREL RÉGIONAL DU VERDON (www.parcduverdon.fr) White-water sports, walking, cycling and trekking around five green lakes and Europe's most spectacular canyon (p177).

PARC NATUREL RÉGIONAL DU LUBERON (www.parcduluberon.fr) Walking and cycling hilltop villages and limestone gorges; spot eagles and vultures (p159).

PARC NATUREL RÉGIONAL DE CAMARGUE (www.parc-camargue.fr) Horse riding, birdwatching and cycling between salt pans and paddy fields (p84).



HUGH WATTS

WONDERFUL WALKS

Be it a stiff mountain hike or gentle amble through lavender fields with a donkey, walking in Provence is a sensory delight. Landscapes are astonishingly varied and the diversity creates an endless panorama of contrasting hues (see p342). Coastal paths lace the coastline: walking through *garrigue* (scented scrub) in the rocky Les Calanques near Marseille; or along Nice's Grande Corniche, offering gobsmacking coastal views, is dramatic. Inland, trails wind through red in the Massif de l'Estérel; through chestnut and cork oak forest in the Massif des Maures; across Alpine foothills into the Mercantour national park; and around the foot of stone-capped Mont Ventoux (1912m). Olive groves, cherry orchards and Cézanne canvases pave the way in lower walking pastures like the Alpilles, Montagne Ste-Victoire and Vaucluse hills. For more see p357.



ANDREW BAIN

TOP The peaks of Parc National du Mercantour **BOTTOM** Cycling near Mont Ventoux **RIGHT** Ochre-coloured cliffs, Rustrel **FAR RIGHT** Gorges worth exploring, Parc Naturel Régional du Verdon

TOP COASTAL PATHS

PRESQU'ÎLE DE ST-TROPEZ St-Tropez to gloriously sandy beach after beach (p283)

CAP LARDIER Windy seaside scrub-walking around a cape (p288)

CÔTE BLEUE Dramatic walking with Marseille city views (p65)

SENTIER DU LITTORAL RIVIERA Menton to Cap d'Ail without seeing a car; dip in the sea to cool down (p216)

CAP FERRAT Cicadas sing amid millionaire mansions along this glittering 6km cape walk (p214)



DAN HERBICK



GLENN BEAUMANS

DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ Ochre trails – Walk through wind-sculpted, fire-red scapes in Roussillon Gargas and Rustrel (p154)
- ★ Massif de l'Estérel – Climbing red-spined Mont Roux (435m) is among our top five scenic walks in the Cannes area (p262)
- ★ Cycling through vines – An essential Provence experience; pedal and sup around Château-neuf du Pape (p113), Bandol (p312), La Londe (p308) or Île de Porquerolles (p303)
- ★ Be a gorge explorer – Revel in Provence's grand canyon by white-water raft, kayak, canoe, on foot or by car (p178)
- ★ Paddling – Drift beneath Pont du Gard (p144) or by moonlight around Les Calanques (p46)
- ★ Mountain vistas – Take in Haute-Provence's heart-stirring views (p176)

ACTIVITIES

- The outdoors is great indeed in Provence, where there is an action station to suit every mood, moment and energy level.
- ★ White-water sports – In the Gorges du Verdon (p178)
 - ★ Canoeing and sea kayaking – In the Camargue and Marseille (p353)
 - ★ Cycling – Seaside, through vines or across mountain passes (p353)
 - ★ Walking and rambling – Alone, or with a donkey in the Gorges de la Nesque or Vallée de la Durance (p355)

OUTDOORS

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BEACH STARS

PLAGE MALA, CAP D'AIL

Idyllic pebble-covered cove with a trendy air (p216).

PLAGE DU POURROUSET,

AGAY Small but perfect, with fine sand and even finer views (p270).

PLAGE DE NOTRE DAME

Beautiful beach with pure white sand on Île de Porquerolles (p303).

CALANQUE D'EN-VAU

Pleasant pebbly beach lapped by emerald water slipped in a rocky cove (p63).

EXCITING GARDENS

Horticultural design is not only about the Riviera's belle époque creations (p215).

AUX FLEURS DE L'EAU (<http://auxfleursdeleau.fr>)

Water garden near St-Rémy de Provence.

CHÂTEAU DE BRANTES (www.jardinez.com/jardindebrantes)

Nineteenth-century-styled garden around an 18th-century château, 12km north of Avignon.

DOMAINE DU RAYOL (www.domainedurayol.org)

Mediterranean gardens by the sea.

JARDIN ROMAIN (www.jardin-romain.fr)

Roman garden, 15km southeast of Avignon in Caumont-sur-Durance.

PRIEURÉ DE SALAGON (www.musee-de-salagon.com)

Medieval herb garden awash with mints, mugworts and lavenders.

RENDEZ-VOUS AUX JARDINS

For three days in June dozens of private gardens open – among them the mosaic garden of La Chèvre d'Or (www.lachevredor.com), created with the help of English botanist Basil Leng in 1950. Find a complete list at www.rendezvousauxjardins.culture.fr.

Nice-based Société Centrale d'Agriculture et d'Horticulture de Nice et des Alpes-Maritimes (www.scah-nice.fr) organises visits to superb, lesser-known gardens, including Dirk Bogarde's former garden—olive grove in Châteauneuf du Grasse, and a garden designed by Jean Mus (www.jeanmus.com). In Fréjus half-day gardening workshops bloom at La Pomme d'Ambre (www.gardeninprovence.com).

TOP Fields of lavender colour the Luberon and Haute-Provence **RIGHT** Beautiful beaches abound on the Côte d'Azur – this one in Nice

BEACHES

Cats on leads, dogs in handbags and prima donnas dusting sand from their toes with shaving brushes are madcap sights to savour on the glorious beach-riddled Côte d'Azur, where anything goes. But it pays to know your *plage*. Beaches in and east of Nice are piled with porcelain-smooth pebbles (bum-numbing? *never*); beaches west of Nice are sumptuously sandy, soft and gold. Around Marseille – a *bouillabaisse* mix of both.

Larger beaches have a *poste de secours* (safety post) staffed by lifeguards during the summer season. In water-sport areas, an area of the sea is always sectioned off for swimmers. Note the colour of the flag flying before diving in: green means safe to swim; yellow means risky; red means forbidden; and purple means the water is polluted.

WILDLIFE WATCH

- ★ Cycling or horse riding in the Camargue also means birdwatching (p79)

- ★ Spot the griffon vulture on a Gorges du Verdon trek (p178)

- ★ Watch grey wolves roam in the Mercantour (p188)

- ★ Track cicadas and other insects, mushrooms, fire-resilient forest plants and orchids with a thematic nature walk in the Massif des Maures (p297)

- ★ Observe river wildlife afloat a canoe on the Sorgue (p127 and p129)

- ★ Watch underwater marine flora through a snorkeller's mask along trails in le Rayol and Île de Port-Cros (p304)



FAMILY TRAVEL

PROVENCE
& THE CÔTE D'AZUR



JEAN-BENOÎT CALLETT

TOP SIGHTS

MUSÉE OCÉANO-GRAPHIQUE Watch the changing of the guard before visiting Monaco's renowned aquarium (p223).

ASTORAMA Intriguing space observations and rocket launches on the Grande Corniche (p218).

PALAIS DES PAPES & CHÂTEAU D'IF Nothing like a palace (p104) or a castle on an island (p51) to fire young imaginations.

MARINELAND Leaping killer whales enthral at this Disney-style theme park (p251).

DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ Walking with a farmer – Educational thematic tours across the land and around local farms, often with a chance to taste produce (p357)
- ★ Snorkelling – Underwater trails on Port-Cros (p304) and Domaine du Rayol (p298), and guided trips in St-Raphaël (p268)
- ★ Guided nature walks – Nature trails abound but those with a cork harvester in the Massif des Maures are particularly fascinating (p297)
- ★ Horse riding – Spend a few hours or a whole day on a trek through the flamingo-studded wetlands of the Camargue (p92)
- ★ Roman Provence – Pont du Gard, in particular, with its interactive museum and tiers to skip across is heaps of fun (p143)

TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN

That stretch of coastline alone makes this a family-friendly region: sandy beaches and buckets and spades are part and parcel of coastal travels, with a plethora of boats ploughing the Med between major cities and towns. Marseille and Avignon can be hard work with toddlers; plump for Nice with its relaxed air and outdoor entertainment. Most restaurants welcome pint-sized gourmets with a fixed *menu enfant* (children's menu) but highchairs are rare; pack a screw-on canvas seat. Less formal *fermes auberges* and *chambres d'hôtes* (B&Bs) serving evening meals are attractive options for those with children.

TOP *Gardians* (horsemen) gather in the wetlands of the Camargue

THE AUTHORS



NICOLA WILLIAMS

**Coordinating Author, Marseille Area,
The Camargue, St-Tropez to Toulon**

For Nicola, a writer living and working in France for over a decade, it's an easy getaway to France's south, where she has spent many years eating her way around the region and revelling in its art heritage and landscapes. Nicola wrote the 1st edition of *Provence & the Côte d'Azur* and has worked on every edition since, in between several other Lonely Planet titles. She blogs at triplong.wordpress.com and tweets @Triplong.



ALEXIS AVERBUCK

The Luberon, Haute-Provence, History

Alexis Averbuck first visited Provence when she was four and now makes any excuse she can to visit from her home in Hydra, Greece. A California native and a travel writer for two decades, Alexis has lived in Antarctica for a year, crossed the Pacific by sailboat and written books on her journeys through Asia and the Americas. She is also a painter and each trip inspires new work, both written and visual – see her paintings at www.alexisaverbuck.com.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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EMILIE FILOU

Cannes Area; Nice, Monaco & Menton

Emilie was born in Paris but spent many happy holidays roaming the south of France. She left France at 18 to go travelling, taking a grand total of three gap years (to balance her three-year geography degree from Oxford). Her travels have taken her to Africa, Nepal, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand, but the Côte d'Azur remains one of her favourite places on earth. She now works as a business and travel journalist in London.



FRAN PARNELL

Avignon Area, Transport

Fran's love of France arose while studying Medieval French at Cambridge University. She contributed to an earlier incarnation of *Provence & the Côte d'Azur*, and was particularly delighted on this research trip to visit the 15th-century Château de Tarascon, straight from the pages of a medieval romance, to drift round the Roman city of Glanum with its haunting 'Ubi sunt?' atmosphere, and to spend a sun-speckled afternoon canoeing on the River Sorgue.

ITINERARIES

ROMAN PROVENCE

ONE WEEK // NÎMES TO VAISON-LA-ROMAINE // 200KM

Gloriously intact amphitheatres, triumphal arches, baths and other public buildings transport travellers to the monumental period in history that gave Provence – a Roman

provincia – its name. Start with Roman giant **Nîmes** (p138) and its resplendent **amphitheatre** (p140), fun-fuelled **férias** (p141) and **Square House** (p140).

Next, the world's highest aqueduct **Pont du Gard** (p143) is particularly awe-inspiring when skipped atop or paddled beneath. Drive south to **Arles** (p84) to see its twinset of Roman theatres and north to **Glanum** (p133), a Gallo-Roman city on the outskirts of St-Rémy de Provence. Further north be star-struck at Orange's **Roman amphitheatre** (p115) during the magical Les Chorégies d'Orange, or at the theatre at Puymin, **Vaison-la-Romaine** (p117).



ONLY THE BEST

TWO WEEKS // NICE TO AVIGNON // 550KM

Start with belle of the Riviera ball **Nice** (p196) then explore **Monaco** (p219): revel in stupendous views from the **Grande Corniche** (p217).

Head west, stopping in Picasso's **Anti-bes** (p250) or fragrant **Grasse** (p260), en route to **Aix-en-Provence** (p69) with its markets and café life: to get here, coast via **St-Tropez** (p275) and its **peninsula** (p287) or dive inland past the **Gorges du Verdon** (p177), prime white-water sports terrain.

Week two, enter the Luberon near **Abbaye de Silvacane** (p164). Explore **Gordes** (p152) and other hilltop villages by bicycle. See red in **Roussillon** (p153), lavender in **Lagarde d'Apt** (p155), then whizz up/down **Mont Ventoux** (p122) en route to **Carpentras market** (p124). Finish in papal **Avignon** (p104).



COAST CUISINE

ONE WEEK // STES-MARIES DE LA MER TO MONACO // 300KM

Toast your trip with oysters in **Stes-Maries de la Mer** (p94) and clams and fish in **Méjanes** (p93). But don't think exclusively seafood: red rice and bull meat are **Arles** staples (p90). Cruising east, sample sea urchins in

Carry-le-Rouet (p66), *bouillabaisse* in **Marseille** (p59) – with potatoes on **Cap de Carqueiranne** (p310) – and try *tarte tropézienne* in **St-Tropez** (p284). Devote two days to **Nice** (p204) and its Italianate specialities: *socca* (chickpea-flour pancake) at the cours Saleya market; tripe and stockfish at La Merenda, *petits farcis* (stuffed vegetables) at La Petite Maison, *bagna cauda* (raw mixed vegetables dipped in anchovy paste) at La Taca d'Oli, beefy *daube* (stew) or sheep testicles at L'Escalinada. Finally munch *barbajuan* (chard- or spinach-stuffed pasty) in **Monaco** (p227).



GARDENS OF EDEN

10 DAYS // MENTON TO EYGALIÈRES // 450KM

Stroll the horticultural collection in **Menton** (p232) and understand why Provence is paradise. Equally irresistible is the designer collection in **Monaco** (p224) and the hilltop *jardins* with gobsmacking views in **Èze** (p216) and **Ste-Agnès** (p235).



Scoot southwest along the coast to go wild over ancient-Greek-inspired gardens planted in 1902 in **Beaulieu-sur-Mer** (p216), Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild in **St-Jean-Cap Ferrat** (p213) and eclectic seaside château gardens in **Mandelieu-La Napoule** (p270). Further west **Domaine du Rayol** (p298) is the epitome of paradise in the seaside hamlet of Le Rayol.

Drive two hours inland to learn about plants and dyes in **Lauris** (p163) and Provençal herbs near Lourmarin at **Ferme de Gerbaud** (p344). Then west to a garden with an unusual twist in **Eygalières** (p138).

SEVEN PERFECT LUNCHES

ONE WEEK // AVIGNON TO AGAY // 280KM

It is not taste buds alone that drive this tour: allow all afternoon for each address, where exquisite outdoor space, dreamy views and copious amounts of seasonal cuisine ensure

a deliciously lazed affair. Start in Papal Avignon with the palace and lunch at **Restaurant Brunel** (p110). Day two browse antique shops and feast on farm produce at riverside **Le Vivier** (p128) in L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue. **Les Remparts** (p131) in Venasque, for Provençal cuisine best savoured with freshly squeezed cherry juice, is day three's address. Day four mooch gold-stone hilltop villages in the Luberon: **Véranda** (p161) in Ménerbes, gourmet **Bonnieux** (p159) and **Ferme Auberge Le Castelas** (p163) near Buoux make three perfect days. Wind up with a tummy-rumbling 'gold coast' drive to **Villa Matuzia** (p270) in Agay.



NATURALLY WONDERFUL

TWO WEEKS // NICE TO GORGES DU VERDON // 650KM

Riding the mountain railway from **Nice** to **Puget-Théniers** (p183) is the scenic way to arrive in the **Parc National du Mercantour** (p183). Otherwise, drive to Puget and along the **Gorges de Dalius** (p186) to **Guillaumes** (p186), east to ski resort **Valberg** (p186) for a *raclette* lunch, and back south along the Bordeaux-red **Gorges du Cians** (p187). In the park's heart see Europe's highest alpine lake, **Lac d'Allos** (p185) and then head north to Europe's highest mountain pass, **Col de Restefond la Bonette** (p186). Break in Mexican **Barcelonnette** (p184) on your westward journey to the white waters of the **Vallée de l'Ubaye** (p184) and south to the spectacular fossil deposits around **Barles** (p182). End with a two-day game of gorge explorer (p177) in Europe's largest canyon, **Gorges du Verdon** (p177).



HILLTOP HAPPY

TWO WEEKS // NICE TO GORGES // 575KM

Dip into Provence's vertigo-inducing *villages perchés* (hilltop villages). **Èze** (p216) and **Roquebrune** (p217) are great excuses to drive the corniches from **Nice** (p211). A footpath links Europe's highest seaside village, **Ste-Agnès** (p235), with **Gorbio** (p235), where you can lunch at **Beau Séjour** (p235).



Wiggle around **Arrière-Pays Niçois** (p209), then west to gallery-filled **St-Paul de Vence** (p257). Check out sky-high villages **Grimaud** (p290), **Gassin** and **Ramatuelle** (p287) around St-Tropez. Lose the crowds afterwards in **Haut-Var** (p293).

Second week explore **Ansouis** and **Cucuron** (p165); boutique-shop in **Lourmarin** (p164); and dine in the Petit Luberon villages **Bonnieux** (p158) and **Lacoste** (p159). Finish with **Ménerbes** (p160) and a great view of **Gordes** (p152).

THE BEST OF PROVENCE & THE CÔTE D'AZUR

This seductive part of southern France was made for gorging: be it hilltop villages glinting gold and amber in the blistering sun, the best of 20th-century art, vineyards and almond blossoms, blazing-blue lavender fields or to-die-for black truffles, the orgy of hues, scents and tastes to devour is, quite simply, electrifying.

CHARLOTTE HINDLE



ABOVE Colourful wares in a shopfront in Les Baux de Provence



THE MOST FABULOUS 20TH-CENTURY ART

1 CÉZANNE // AIX-EN-PROVENCE

In chic Aix (p71) drink where Cézanne drank, visit his *atelier* (workshop) and country manor where he painted, and stride red-ochre quarries he immortalised many times on canvas. Out of town, marvel at mountains that inspired this post-Impressionist painter (p75).

2 MATISSE // NICE

Matisse was a Nice man: he slept at Hôtel de Beau Rivage in Nice, later lived in Queen Victoria's wintering palace in the French Riviera town, painted works strung in the Musée Matisse (p201), and designed a masterpiece of a chapel in Vence (p256). He is buried in Nice.





NEWSWAVE TIRE

3 **PICASSO** // ANTIBES & VALLAURIS

Antibes (p248), where Picasso had a studio in a 14th-century château, and Vallauris (p250), where the artist painted war and peace inside a chapel, are key stops. Complete the tour with his final resting place, Montagne Ste-Victoire (p75).

4 **RENOIR** // CAGNES-SUR-MER

He was 66 and arthritis-crippled when he arrived on the Riviera, but Renoir still painted, as a stroll around his studio and home proves (p254). As alluring as the house-museum are the olive and citrus groves in which it sits; bring easel and paint to create your own masterpiece.

5 **VAN GOGH** // ARLES & ST-RÉMY DE PROVENCE

Arles (p89) is a one-stop shop for fans of one of the 20th-century's most eccentric artists, whose actual work is displayed anywhere *but* the town where he painted 200-odd canvases and remodelled his ear. St-Rémy de Provence (p132) is the other place in Provence he painted excessively.

STELLA HELLMANER



5

TOP The Musée Picasso, Antibes **BOTTOM LEFT** The Musée Matisse, Nice **BOTTOM RIGHT** Arles bridge, as seen by Van Gogh



THE MOST STUNNING HILLTOP VILLAGES

1 ÈZE // MOYENNE CORNICHE

Clinging to an impossible peak on the middle coastal road east of Nice, this medieval village (p216) is the Riviera crown jewel. For ultimate wow effect, hike to the château ruins, flop on a sun-lounger in the cactus garden and gorge on phenomenal views of Cap Ferrat and the Med.

2 SEILLANS // HAUT-VAR

Cobbled lanes coil to the crown of this gloriously quiet and quaint village in little-explored back-country Var. Lunch around an old stone fountain and admire the panoramic view at the 17th-century *bastide* (country house) of Scipion, knight of the Flotte d'Agout (p295).



3 LES BAUX DE PROVENCE //
LES ALPILLES

A stroll around this fortified village (p135), starring dramatic château ruins atop a limestone *baou* (rocky spur) and a clutch of gourmet addresses, is part of the Provence experience. Combine it with a trip around nearby olive groves (p137).

4 STE-AGNÈS & GORBIO //
AROUND MENTON

A one-hour walking trail links these two *villages perchés* (hilltop villages). From Ste-Agnès, Europe's highest seaside village, climb down to pretty Gorbio for a stroll around the old stone houses, followed by lunch in a village inn (p234).

5 BONNIEUX, MÉNERBES &
GORGES // THE LUBERON

This classic trio just doesn't lose its edge: Bonnieux (p158) boasts a bread-making museum and cedar forest; Ménerbes (p160) a truffle house and corkscrew museum. For a view of Gordes (p152) tumbling down the hillside, approach it from the south.



GLEN VON BERNHOF



BETHUNE CAMICHAEL

3



THE MOST DRAMATIC DRIVES

1 GRANDE CORNICHE //

NICE TO ROQUEBRUNE

One of three parallel coastal cliff-hangers, this legendary road where Grace Kelly cruised is a celebrity in its own right. Crown the sensory feast with a picnic (p219) or lunch in Roquebrune (p218). Return via the Moyenne Corniche (p216).

2 ROUTE DES CRÊTES & CORNICHE

SUBLIME // GORGES DU VERDON

The emerald-green water swirling along Europe's biggest canyon, the Gorges du Verdon, is dizzying – keep your eyes on the road and pack nerves of steel for this sheer-drop drive (p177). Circling vultures add a touch of cinema.



3 COL DU CANADEL //**MASSIF DES MAURES**

This mountain pass plunges from forest to a beautiful wedge of St-Tropez-area coast: it's 12km of low-gear driving on a single-lane road with too few places to pull over and too many blind hairpins, but stunning views (p298). Consider lunch on Bormes-les-Mimosas' Route des Crêtes (p299).

4 ROUTE DES CRÊTES //**CASSIS TO LA CIOTAT**

East of Marseille a mind-blowing panorama of coast and vines unfurls along cliff tops between Cassis and La Ciotat. Pack a seafood hamper in the port of Cassis and indulge in a gourmet lunch along this often windswept 'Road of Crests' (p64).

5 COL DE RESTEFOND-LA**BONNETTE // VALLÉE DE LA TINÉE**

Europe's highest mountain pass, in the Mercantour national park (p183), was once a mule path. It can only be motored in summer: snow blankets the dazzling rock formations in winter.



DOUGLAS TOMLINSON



5

BILLY WASSMAN

TOP Views of the *calanques*, Cassis area **BOTTOM LEFT** The Gorges du Verdon provide the views along the Route des Crêtes **BOTTOM RIGHT** A valley en route to La Bonnette



4

TOP Lavender field at Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque **RIGHT** Lavender blossoms attract more than just the cameras



2

THE BEST LAVENDER

1 CHÂTEAU DU BOIS // LAGARDE D'APT

Frolic along footpaths through fields of lavender at this idyllic lavender farm, one of the few producing pure lavender, in the Luberon. Late June to mid-July, when the flower is harvested, is the sweetest-smelling time to laze away an afternoon here (p155).

2 PLATEAU DE VALENSOLE // HAUTE-PROVENCE

Driving or cycling across this vast chequered plateau (p168) is magnificent: one of the region's greatest concentrations of lavender farms, it swoops in soft contours from corn-yellow wheat fields to squares of pale purple. Plateau de Claparèdes is the other lavender-strewn plateau (p162).

3 PRIEURÉ DE SALAGON // MANE

Shop at Forcalquier market for a gourmet picnic then cycle or drive to Mane for a romantic ramble around the lavender-laden gardens framing a beautiful medieval priory in Provence's rural heart; its lavender museum tells a tale or two about the early-summer lilac bloom (p174).

4 ABBAYE NOTRE-DAME DE SÉNANQUE // NEAR GORDES

Get camera ready: this 12th-century Cistercian abbey is framed with a classic Provence picture-postcard surround of lavender fields. July is the month when it is at its blooming best and smells the most heavenly. Lunch afterwards at a divinely delicious Luberon address (p153).

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