



French food & wine

We visited the Languedoc-Roussillon region to join the French in one of their most cherished activities – eating and drinking

WHY GO?

Food features so strongly in the French psyche that it's virtually impossible not to get carried along on a tide of foodie enthusiasm when you visit France. We chose the popular holiday destination of the Languedoc-Roussillon to explore its rich culinary and wine traditions, and check out local markets, food shops and producers in and around the region's historic villages and towns.

Influenced on its western side by the Atlantic Ocean and embraced by two mountain ranges and the Mediterranean coast, Languedoc-Roussillon has a diverse range of produce and culinary creations.

GETTING THERE

By plane

The following airlines fly from the UK to airports in and around the Languedoc-Roussillon region:

■ **BMIbaby** (www.bmibaby.com)

Manchester to Perpignan (from May to September only), and to Toulouse.

■ **Flybe** (www.flybe.com)

Southampton to Perpignan (from May to September only), Birmingham to Toulouse (from May to September only).

■ **British Airways** (www.britishairways.com)

London Heathrow to Toulouse.

■ **Easyjet** (www.easyjet.com)

London Luton to Montpellier; Gatwick to Montpellier, Toulouse; Bristol to Toulouse.

■ **Jet2.com** (www.jet2.com)

Belfast to Toulouse (from May to September

only), Edinburgh to Toulouse (from May to September only), Leeds Bradford to Toulouse (from May to September only).

■ **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com)

London Stansted to Carcassonne, Montpellier, Perpignan and Rodez; London Luton to Nîmes, Beziers; Bournemouth to Carcassonne; Bristol to Beziers, Montpellier, Perpignan; Birmingham to Perpignan; East Midlands to Carcassonne; Leeds to Montpellier, Carcassonne; Liverpool to Carcassonne, Nîmes; Edinburgh to Carcassonne

By train

■ **Eurostar** (www.eurostar.com)

London St Pancras to Montpellier (6hrs 50 mins), Nîmes (6hrs 25 mins), Perpignan (8hrs 20 mins). Change trains at Lille or in Paris (at the Gare du Nord change to Gare de Lyon).

London St Pancras to Toulous (8hrs 40 mins), Change trains in Paris (at the Gare du Nord change to Gare Montparnasse).

■ **Put your car on the train**

French Motorail (www.raileurope.co.uk) operates services from May and September only from Calais to Toulouse/Narbonne.

GETTING AROUND

Driving or cycling is the most satisfying way of visiting the Languedoc-Roussillon region. French roads are in good repair and, out of the main summer season (July-August), minor roads can be relatively free of traffic.

By train

Intercity trains run between the following cities in France:

Along the coast: Nîmes to: Montpellier, Sète, Béziers, Narbonne, Perpignan.

To the coast: Toulouse, Castelnaudary, Carcassonne, Narbonne.

For ticket details, go to RailEurope's website, www.raileurope.co.uk.

HELPING YOU TRANSLATE

French	English translation
A.O.C. (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée)	Produce (usually associated with wine) that has passed the French rules of production and storage and given an A.O.C. label. Labels will carry 'A.O.C.' along with the region, sub-region or local area of the produce
Bio	French version of organic produce
Cave	Cellar (wine)
Cave de dégustation	Wine cellar with tasting
Caveau	Sells regional/local wine
Charcuterie	Delicatessen/butcher
Dégustation (et) Vente	Tasting and selling (usually wine, unless indicated otherwise)
Fromage de chevre	Goats cheese
Maison des Terroirs	Shop selling local farm produce
Moulin à Huile	Oil mill (usually olive oil)
Pélarдон (now carries A.O.C. label)	Traditional goats cheese from the Languedoc-Roussillon region
Vente de Vin	Sale of wine
Jus de pommes	Apple juice (Cévennes speciality)

CARCASSONNE AND AROUND

Specialist food and wine shops in the city include:

■ **Comptoir des Vins et Terroirs, 3 Rue du Compte Roger** Regional wines with tasting.

■ **Librairie Pennavayre, 1 Place du Château** Books and regional specialities.

■ **Pain d'Or, 18 Rue Porte d'Aude** A stall that specialises in *pan d'épice*, a honey-based bread.

Villemoustaussou (10 km from Carcassonne)

■ **Wine cave tour: O' Vineyards** Joe and Liz O'Connell (Tel 0033 3018 9910, www.ovineyards.com). Guided tour, samples and a bottle of wine, €10.

Castelnaudary (30 km west of Carcassonne)

■ **Marc Charrié** (42 Rue du 11 Novembre). The shop is dedicated to Castelnaudary *cassoulet* (casserole of haricot beans with pork, mutton, duck or goose). Buy their own preparation, or the ingredients to make your own.

Duck farms (20 km southwest of Castelnaudary). Four duck farms with shops, produce *confit*, *pâté* and *foie gras* from their free-range ducks. The farms are in the following villages (phone before a visit):

■ **Belpech** Ferme de Bellemayre (Tel 00334 6860 2885)

■ **Mézerville** Ferme de Bérangou (Tel 00334 6860 3311)

■ **Ste-Camelle** Ferme le Bénès (Tel 00334 6860 3552)

■ **Salles-sur-l'Hers** Ferme de Malvezy le Haut (Tel 00334 6860 3488, earlvidal@wanadoo.fr). We called into this prize-winning farm, run by Marrielle and Thierry Vidal, and can recommend the excellent gamey flavoured produce.

Limoux

■ **Abbaye de St-Hilaire** (<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/abbayedesainthilaire/>)

A glass of Blanquette is included with the ticket. Open November to March 10am-12noon, 2-5pm, April to June, September and October 10am-12noon, 2-6pm, July and August 10am-7pm Admission €4

■ **La Cube, Domaine de la Bordette, Pomas** (Tel 00334 6869 4504). The best Blanquette cave we visited.

THE CEVENNES MOUNTAINS

The mountain range is northeast of Carcassonne and home to various appetising produce.

Le Vigan

Specialist food shops in this lively town include:

■ **L'Arbre à Vins** (16 Rue des Barris) Good selection of local wines along with *cartègne*, a sweet aperitif.

■ **Fromagerie Papillon** (16 Place du Marche, next to the tourist office). Local cheeses.

Ganges

Shops selling specialist produce in this workaday town include:

■ **Alimentation Michelle Accaries** (23 Rue Biron). Sells *crèmes de châtaigne*, local cheese, cold meats and a small range of local wines.

■ **Boutique Paysanne** (Ave du Mont Aigoual). Stocks local farm produce.

Pélaridon (goats cheese) from the farm

■ **Celin Mourgues** (La Grove, 1563 Route de St Bresson, Tel 00334 6781 2610)

■ **Brigitte and Denis Sauveplane** (Hameau de Campis, Tel 00334 6781 1922). The track to the farm is rough.

■ **Farms around Le Prat** (Vallerauge road). Sells Reinette apple juice in October and *oignon doux* (sweet onions) in July/August.

Sumène (6 km from Ganges)

■ **Boulangerie Barra** (Rue des Tilleuls). Sells *pan a la farine de châtaigne* (bread made with chestnut flour). This is baked on Wednesdays.

Montoulieu (10 km from Ganges)

■ **Le Mas Domergue farm** (just north of Montoulieu on the D108, Tel 00334 6773 7088). Sells Pélaridon.

NIMES

Shops which sell speciality produce are clustered around Rue des Marchands and include:

■ **Maison Villaret** (13 Rue des Marchands). A celebrated bakery that stocks Nîmes specialities.

■ **L'Oustaù Nadal** (4 Rue des Marchands). Sells local olive oil, honey, vinegar, *cartègne*.

■ **L'huilerie** (10-12 Rue des Marchands). Olive oil, dried fruits, herbs and *legumes*.

■ **La Cave d'Anais** (28 Rue de la Madelaine). Stocks local wines (Costieres de Nîmes).

ROQUEFORT (MIDI PYRENEES)

Cheese producers with tours of the cheese ripening caves include:

■ **Fromageries Papillon**

<http://www.roquefort-papillon.com/en/index.php>

Open daily guided tours, October to March 9.30-11.30am and 1.30-4.30pm; April to June/September 9.30-11.30am and 1.30-5.30pm; July to August 9.30am-6.30pm

Admission free

■ **Société**

www.roquefort-societe.com/anglais/index.html

Open daily guided tours, March 30 to July and August 24 to November 12 9.30am-12noon and 1-5pm; July 13 to August 2 9.30am-6pm; August 3 to August 23 9.30am-6.30pm; November 2 to March 29 10am-12noon and 1.30-4.30pm

Admission guided tour €3

■ **S.A. Gabriel Coulet**

www.gabriel-coulet.fr/roquefort_gabriel_coulet.fr/historique_fr.php

Open daily January to June and September to December 9.30am-12.30pm and 1.30-5.30pm; July to August 9am-7.30pm

Admission free

THE MEDITERRANEAN COAST

Between Nîmes and Aigues-Morte (on the RN113 Caveau La Maison des Terroirs, 429 RN 113 Codognan) has a superb selection of regional wines and aperitifs (with tasting).

Aigues-Morte

Speciality dishes include: *gardienne de Toro* (bull stewed in red wine with rice), *bouride d'aurade* (monkfish stew), *rouille du pêcheur* (fisherman's stew) and *tellinès* (small Mediterranean clams).

Sète

The speciality dish in this historic canal town is *rouille de seiche à la sètoise* (cuttlefish stew). For the boat josting timetable, see the Sète tourist office website, www.en.ot-sete.fr.



Narbonne

The sophisticated little medieval town with a range of smart shops makes a good stop-off when touring the coast:

■ **La Ferme Narbonneise** (27-23 Rue Droite).

Sells local Pélaridon, Brebis sheep cheese, olive oils and wines from neighbouring Minervois and Corbières.

■ **Le Palais du Vin** (38 Rue de Pancien Courier, just off Espace de Liberté on the Perpignan road). Has a selection of 1000 labelled regional wines.

■ **The RN9 between Narbonne and Perpignan**

Two olive oil mills and two caves can be found around Fitou and Rivesaltes.

Olive oil mills

■ **Oliaude, Mija du Cres** (RN 9 11510 run by Rose Quer, www.oliaude.com, 2 km from Fitou towards Perpignan).

■ **Oliveraie de Combusta** (18 km from Fitou towards Perpignan).

Cave de dégustation (wine cellars)

■ **Domaine de la Grange** (7 km from Fitou towards Narbonne), Sells Muscat de Rivesaltes.

■ **Domain du Capital** (39 RN9 11510, just outside village towards Perpignan). Sells Fitou wines.

Collioure

Tucked away in this attractive seaside resort are two anchovy factories with shops:

■ **La Maison Roque** (www.anchois-roque.com)

■ **Anchois Desclaux** (www.anchoisdesclaux.com)

PYRENEES ORIENTALES OF ROUSSILLON

Elne

Has a specialist wine shop:

■ **Caveau Vincoeur** (Boulevard Voltaire). Over 200 Roussillon wines are stocked, including Muscat de Rivesaltes and Rancio, a sweet or dry, aperitif, made from oxidised wine.

Laroque-des-Albères

An almond producer with a shop:

■ **La Maison de L'Amand** (Avenue des Mas Catalans). Everything almond: *crèmes*, oils, soaps etc, can be purchased.

Thuir

A medieval fortified city.

■ **Caves Byrrh** (6 Boulevard Violet, www.byrrh.com). Produces, among others, Byrrh, an aperitif made from sweet red wine and quinine-water mix. Tastings follow guided tours of the cellar.

Open guided tours April, May, June, September, October 9am-11.45am and 2.30pm-5.45pm; July- August 10am-11.45am and 2pm-6.45pm; November-end of March 10.45am-3.30pm

Olive oil producer

■ **Moulins St Pierre** (5 km from Thuir, towards Millas on the D612, www.moulin-saint-pierre.com). Sells Bio olive oil.

GOOD PLACES TO STAY

Prices are for the cheapest double room, including breakfast and taxes, in October 2009.

CARCASSONNE

■ Hôtel du Pont Vieux

☎ 00334 6825 2499

www.lacitedecarcassonne.fr

In a leftover morsel of old France, the 18th-century inn is on the old road that winds between the Cité and the Ville Basse (lower town). The small walled garden is a well-tended delight dotted with olive trees and a feature loggia covered in flowering vines. Rooms are old-fashioned and homely and the breakfast room is snug. The roof terrace offers superb views across the rooftops of the ancient fortified walls.

Price €81 (£71)

Rooms 22

Facilities 10 parking spaces

Disabled access none

■ Mercure Hotel

☎ 00334 6811 9282

www.mercure.com

A short stroll from the Cité and with views of its fortified walls, this modern chain hotel has a decent sized pool in its spacious landscaped garden. The smart restaurant has an informal atmosphere. Large picture windows face the garden and outside the wide dining terrace is a popular dining choice. Modern furnished bedrooms are coordinated in neutral colours. Beds are large with textured headboards. The best rooms face the garden and have ground floor sliding patio doors, or, on the floor above, French balconies.

Price €112 (£99)

Rooms 80

Facilities swimming pool, car park

Disabled facilities three wheelchair-accessible rooms, ground-floor rooms, lift

CASTELNAUDARY

■ Hôtel du Canal

☎ 00334 6894 0505

www.hotelducanal.com

The canal du Midi runs alongside the rear of the

low-slung modern block. Sited within a long garden of tree-sprinkled lawns, the budget-priced B&B is comfortable enough, but it leans towards the provincial and lacklustre. The white breakfast room, in a glass-sided extension, has an outlook to the canal and is filled with small tables. Bedrooms are simply furnished.

Price €80 (£70)

Rooms 35

Disabled access ground-floor rooms

■ Hôtel Restaurant du Centre et du Lauragais

☎ 00334 6823 2595

www.hotel-centre-lauragais.com

At the base of the village, close to Pont Neuve that crosses the Canal du Midi, the 19th century building has a modern interior. The restaurant is

FOOD MARKETS

■ Carcassonne

Tues, Thurs, Sat general markets (Place Carnot in the Ville Basse or lower town).

■ Castelnaudary

Mon general market (Place de la République).

■ Collioure

Wednesday, Sunday general markets, July/August only (Place du Maréchal Leclerc).

■ Eine

Monday, Wednesday, Friday general markets (Place de la République).

■ Ganges

Friday regional produce (town centre).

■ Le Vigan

Saturday local farmers market, Tuesday morning (in July-August only) local farmers organic market (Place du Marché and the covered halles).

■ Limoux

Friday general market (town centre).

■ Narbonne

Daily general market in covered halles (Boulevard Docteur Ferroul).

■ Nîmes

Daily food market in covered halles (Rue Général Perrier), Tuesday regional produce (Place Alphonse Daudet), Wednesday general market (Place Debussy), Thursday local produce (Rue François Rabelais), Friday farmers market (Boulevard Jean Jaurès South), Saturday general market (Place du Griffon St Césaire).

■ Sète

Daily food market in covered halles (Rue Gambetta), Monday local produce (Place Marius Bonneton, île de Thau), Thursday local and organic produce (Plan de la corniche and Rue de Provence).

■ Thuir

Saturday general market (Place de la République).

coloured in chic moody black and white with a feature contemporary chandelier (all produce is fresh and locally sourced and the house speciality is cassoulet). Neat bedrooms are in done out greens and greys, first floor rooms were refurbished in 2008.

Price €64 (£56)

Rooms 16

Disabled access none

GANGES

■ Hôtel de la Poste

☎ 00334 6773 8588

www.hoteldelaposteganges.com

Step outside the front door of this traditional B&B and you are in the middle of the main square action, especially on market day. The lounge and breakfast room are modestly furnished and neat. Carpeted bedrooms are pleasantly furnished and themed in light bright colours. Four rooms have small balconies.

Price €49 (£43)

Rooms 22

Disabled access none

LE VIGAN

■ Le Mas de la Prairie Hotel

☎ 00334 6781 8080

www.masdelaprairie.com

Off the main road out of town to Millau/Roquefort and half a mile from the town centre, the understated modern building is at the end of a large garden fronted by the hotel's car park. The small semi-covered pool is adjacent to a children's playground within a wide lawn bordered by a lofty hedge and mature trees. The snug provincial restaurant leads to a garden terrace that is the favoured dining area in the summer. Carpeted bedrooms (some have seen better days) are simply furnished.

Price €57 (£50)

Rooms 26

Facilities pool, locked car park

Disabled access none

LIMOUX

■ Grand Hôtel Moderne et Pigeon

☎ 00334 6831 0025

www.grandhotelmodernepigeon.fr

On a quiet street opposite the closed market and 100 yards from the main square this delightful 19th century grand hotel has an old-world feel refreshed by modern flourishes.

The centre piece is a wide sweeping staircase, with a vast stain glass window on a gable end wall that leads up to the stately bedrooms. Here the refined theme continues with ornate mirrors, marble fireplaces and canopied beds. The yellow-walled courtyard,

used for al-fresco dining, is dotted with small trees.

Price €132 (£116)

Rooms 14

Disabled facilities not suitable for wheelchairs



■ St-Hilaire Hotel (near Limoux)

☎ 00334 6820 3575

www.clos-saint-hilaire.com

This 200-year-old bourgeois house is a gorgeous atmospheric hotel. Reflecting its past grandeur, the house boasts 14 fireplaces, one in each room. In contrast to the building's historic ambiance, the restaurant is light and modern.

Price €68 (£60)

Rooms 10

Disabled facilities one wheelchair adapted room

NARBONNE

■ Le Regent Hotel

☎ 00334 6832 0241

www.leregentnarbonne.com

On a quiet street 300 metres from the town centre, the bedrooms in this one time bordello have a quaint kitsch look – in the best possible taste. Two rooms have small side balconies.

Price €50 (£44)

Rooms 14

Facilities rooftop sun terrace

Disabled access none

NIMES

■ Royal Hotel

☎ 00334 6658 2827

www.royalhotel-nimes.com

On a smart arty square with an attention-grabbing water feature, the apricot stucco 18th-century town house is within walking distance of the main sights and specialist food shops. The low-key breakfast room, lounge and bar are small and modern and a large terrace for al-fresco eating and drinking spills out on to the square. The pleasing bedrooms are spacious and themed in cool white. Boulevard-facing rooms can suffer some traffic noise.

Price €78 (£69)

Rooms 22

Disabled access none



SETE

■ Grand Hôtel

☎ 00333 2006 3157

www.legrandhotel.com

This gorgeous hotel on the Canal Royal is from a smart bygone world. From the elegant reception to a spacious atrium lounge, where you can relax in one of the many comfy cane armchairs or sofas. Next door, the handsome dining room of moulded plaster pilasters and corncicing is kitted out with chic modern furniture. Colour-themed bedrooms are large and individually decorated.

Price €122 (£107)

Rooms 14

Disabled access none

VIVES

■ L'hostalet de Vivès

☎ 00334 6883 0552

A 12th-century stone house extended over the centuries is in the centre of the village overlooking a valley at the rear. This restaurant with rooms has two timber-beamed dining rooms decked out in rustic fashion with garlands of garlic strung from the walls and niches displaying plates and glasses. Rear-facing comfortable bedrooms are simply furnished and overlook a wide valley. A paved terrace is used by guests for drinks and taking the huge breakfast.

Price €60 (£53)

Rooms 4

Disabled access ground-floor rooms, not suitable for wheelchairs

RECOMMENDED MAP, GUIDEBOOK AND WEBSITE

■ *Régionale Routière: Languedoc-Roussillon*, £6.50

(ISBN 9 782758 512677)

■ *Lonely Planet: Languedoc-Roussillon*, £13.99
(ISBN 978-1-74179-280-5)

■ French Tourist Board (www.franceguide.com)



GOOD PLACES TO EAT

CARCASSONNE

■ La Marquiere

13 Rue Saint Jean

☎ 00334 6871 5200

Local fare is given a modern twist. Our three-course meal of melon balls with ice cream and port, duck breast on a bed of roasted potato slices, a cheese platter and half a bottle of wine came to €34.

■ Le Trouvere

1 Place Marcou

☎ 00334 6825 7260

Join the open air diners in the square thronging with tourists at tables. An omelette with side salad and fries along with a glass of apple juice costs €15.50.

CASTELNAUDARY

■ Hôtel de France

2 Ave Frédéric Mistral

☎ 00334 6823 1018

A 'Membre d'Honneur Grande Confrerie du Cassoulet de Castelnaudary', the hotel's restaurant richly deserves its accolade for producing such a wonderfully inspired *cassoulet*. A large

portion with a side salad and a bottle of wine costs €36.

LE VIGAN

■ Le Chandelier

19 Rue Pouzadou

☎ 00334 6781 1704

Dine under the street-side cherry trees to savour a series of first-rate local dishes.

A three course meal of *pâté* with sweet onion chutney, fish and vegetables in a butter sauce and fresh raspberries in a thick, creamy custard costs €18.50.

LIMOUX

■ La Maison de la

Blanquette

46 Bis Promenade du Tivoli

☎ 00334 6831 0163

A glass of Blanquette here launches your culinary journey. The menu of the day consists of goat cheese, duck and half a bottle of wine for €26.50.

NIMES

■ L'Osmos

27 Rue de l'Etoile

☎ 00334 6621 3820

A chic city eatery with local dishes. Fried goat's cheese salad, magret of duck with

honey dressing and roast potatoes and vegetables, a cheese platter and half a bottle of wine costs €24.

ROQUEFORT

■ Les Fleurines

27 Av des Baragnaudes

☎ 00335 6562 3894

Enjoy the blue cheese and local dishes in this barrel-vaulted cheese store. Omelette with Roquefort cheese with salad costs €9.

SETE

■ La Calanque

13 Quai Général Durand

☎ 00334 6774 2837

Gorge on the superb cuttlefish stew at this fine eatery and half a bottle of wine for €15.

VIVES

■ L'hostalet de Vivès

Le Village

☎ 00334 688 30552

www.hostalet-vives.com

Vast portions of Catalan food served up at this lovely restaurant with rooms (see 'Good places to stay') Try the *congolade* (many, many snails are grilled and served with diced bacon). €38 for two.