

South of France

Immersion in southern LUXE

Above: Terrace restaurant at a luxury hotel overlooking the majestic ramparts of Carcassonne.

THE DELECTABLE SOUTHERN FRENCH REGION OF **LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON** IS A MICROCOSM OF THE BEST FRANCE HAS TO OFFER – VINEYARDS, CHÂTEAUX, MOUNTAINS, SEA AND MORE CULTURE THAN YOU COULD IMAGINE.

From coastlines to canals and châteaux to cosmopolitan hubs, Languedoc-Roussillon has it all. The region, in the southwest of France, comprises five departments: in the mountains and higher grounds are the spectacular Pyrénées Orientales and Lozère departments, while Aude, Gard and Hérault sweep down to the Mediterranean.

Fishing villages, Roman amphitheatres, vineyards and canals are just some of the features ideal for a French holiday romance or family adventure. For foodies, the vastness of Languedoc-Roussillon ensures a smorgasbord of fresh produce and traditional delights from mountain to sea. And to top it off, capital Montpellier is one of France's favourite cities, with its blend of culture and a climate almost too good to be true.



Left: Fountain in the modern Antigone district of Montpellier (photo: Cécil Mathieu).

THE QUALITY LABEL: QUALITÉ SUD DE FRANCE

Sun, sea, fine food and wine – coupled with warm, professional hospitality – are the traits of the region. To ensure the most rewarding visit possible, Languedoc-Roussillon's 'Qualité Sud de France' is a scheme to assure that you are in the trusting hands of tested local establishments. Keep an eye out for the plaque at places you visit, or go to: en.sunfrance.com/book_online/qualite_sud_de_france



Above: Panoramic mountain views from a hotel swimming pool in Languedoc-Roussillon.

EATS AND STAYS TO DREAM OF

Whether you'd like to camp, stay at a cheap and cheerful B&B, settle into a family-friendly cottage or kick up your heels in a château, there are many accommodation possibilities in Languedoc-Roussillon. For the buzz of a city with the relaxed flavours of the south, visit Montpellier, Nîmes, Perpignan, Carcassonne, Béziers, Narbonne or Mende.

For beachy retreats, head to Sète, le Cap d'Agde, Collioure, Argelès, Carnon, Saint Cyprien or La Grande Motte. Enjoy long beach days, followed by dinners of crisp white wines and Mediterranean seafood, antipasto and salads. Some beachside cafés even have power outlets so you can settle in and work, inspired by the lounge music and sea air, before taking a dip for a break.

A trip to Languedoc-Roussillon is not complete without some serious dining and wine-tasting. Over two dozen Michelin-rated restaurants and literally thousands of other high quality eateries boast fresh local produce, discerning chefs and fine wines that match each dish.



Above: Roman-era amphitheatre at Nîmes (photo: B Liegeois); the Norman Foster-designed Carré d'Art contemporary art museum and library, in Nîmes (photo: OT Nîmes).



Above: Private cruise on the Canal du Midi.



Left: Fine dining with sunny, southern French flavours.

THE PRESTIGE CLUB & BUSINESS CLUB

Care to awake in the charm of a château after an evening of fine dining? Or wander through a wine estate brimming with medieval monuments? Prefer to head out, after a leisurely breakfast, for a game of golf or a morning shopping? Go online to browse the Prestige Club, a selection of the region's finest establishments. Work to be done? The business club offers comfortable conference centres – and a host of business services to make it enjoyable. Visit en.sunfrance.com/prestige.

GLIDING DOWN THE CANAL DU MIDI

Fancy a floating tour through the region? The Canal du Midi, classed as a World Heritage of Humanity site by UNESCO, is a snaking network of canals flowing east from Toulouse on the Mediterranean, to Sete on the Atlantic. Hire a barge to enjoy the 300 kilometres of waterways, passing through some of the quaintest towns and prettiest countryside of the region. Hop on and off for picnics, village tours and leisurely strolls. Visit the vineyards and enjoy a drop of fine local wine back on the barge, under the stars. Your canal sojourn can be as long or short

as you wish. Book a short trip around the canal's Mediterranean side, enjoying the coastal lagoons and beaches, or simply book for dinner aboard a floating restaurant. Further inland, the canal offers picturesque cycling routes if you're looking to build up an appetite or ride off last night's fromage. Pedal at your own pace, or sign up for a six-day guided bike tour that includes accommodation, meals and much insight into local history and culture. For details, visit the tourism office website (below).

INSIGHTS ON ART AND DESIGN

The diversity and natural beauty of Languedoc-Roussillon has long inspired visual artists from all over. The regional Centre d'Art Contemporain in Sète (crac.languedocroussillon.fr) has exhibitions of photography, paintings and installations all year round.

For a sensual immersion in colour, visit the Marcher dans la couleur ('walk in colour') exposition until 28 October at the Musée Régional d'Art Contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon (mrac.languedocroussillon.fr) in Sérignan. International artists participating include Daniel Buren, Ann Vernoica Janssens and Felice Varini, but there are many more. Other centres include Carré d'Art in Nîmes, (www.carre-dart.fr) and the much-loved Musée Fabre in Montpellier).

FESTIVALS IN THE REGION

Summer in France is all about enjoying the good weather at festivals in the south. Plan your itinerary accordingly. Headline acts at this year's Nîmes festival (www.festivaldenimes.com), between 29 June and 18 July, include Depeche Mode, Green Day and Neil Young. From 13 June to 19 August, the stunning festival of Carcassonne (www.festivaldecarcassonne.fr) will host a huge roll call of events in theatre, classical music, dance, circus and music. The star-studded international line-up includes Patti Smith and David Guetta, and theatre highlights include The Diary of Anne Frank along with children's shows.

Of course, throughout the region, villages have their own festivals, all very family-friendly and a wonderful way to experience local specialities, traditions and culture. ■

>> FURTHER INFORMATION

Tourisme Languedoc-Roussillon Sud de France
en.sunfrance.com

