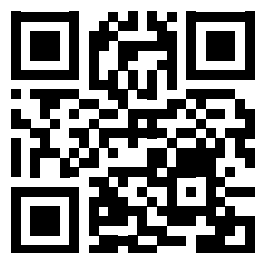


French Cottages

Make Yourself At Home in France



**Your Complete Guide on How To Organise
the Best Hub-based French Travel Itinerary
You'll Ever Experience!**



**Price: \$25 AUD
plus postage
and handling**

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Traveller’ Survival French

Testimonials

There's so much more to France than Paris!

This is Lesley and Neville's story: two Francophiles from Australia who adore travelling in France. **Let it be your story too! Read on...**



Some years ago, when Neville and I first visited France, we made Paris our only port of call. We both loved it. The galleries, the bistros, the beautiful boulevards, and a stylish ambience uniquely French, Paris seemed like a dream destination that couldn't be bettered. **How limited we were!**

It was only on later visits, bristling with Eurail tickets and hire car vouchers, that we discovered the enormous wealth of things to see and do in **rural France**, and how fascinating and varied were its regions. It was like a whole lot of different countries rolled into one.

The wine villages of **Burgundy**, **Brittany's** diverse coastlines, the sparkling waters of the **Mediterranean**, the haunting alpine vistas of the **Auvergne**, the **Canal du Midi** snaking its way through the **Languedoc** and the fairy tale towns floating in the clouds or nestling in the Massif Central, were just a few of these.

But amongst this dazzling diversity, there were four particular regions that stood out well above the others: **Dordogne, the Loire Valley, Provence and the Basque Pyrenees.**

We couldn't stop thinking about these wonderful places that offered us delights going beyond anything else in our many travel experiences.

The charming **Dordogne**, with its rolling green hills, châteaux towering above the surrounding Chestnut forests, its Medieval Bastide villages, the dramatically beautiful river, and the amazing variety of cultural, historic, artistic and leisure activities available there puts it squarely on our list of essential destinations in Europe.

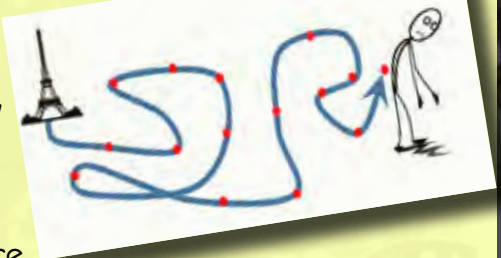
The Loire Valley, often styled the Garden of France, land of the great Châteaux, ancient abbeys, rugged fortresses staring imperiously over the wandering waterways with pretty little villages sprinkled along them, is the heart of modern France. Home to poets, artists, philosophers and Kings, this living tapestry is so rich that, like the fine wine grown there, it is too tempting to ignore!

But then there's the **Basque-Pyrenees**. A favourite of the Empress Eugénie and Napoleon III, this curious region manages to combine a strange folk culture with stunning scenes of snowy mountains framing sweeping beaches and is a traditional stepping stone on the celebrated pilgrim route to **Santiago de Compostella**.

But then mesmerizing us in a totally different way we have ... **Provence**. It's a mystery. What is so compelling about Provence? The rugged beauty, the vestiges of Roman architecture, its Impressionist artistic heritage, unique wine and food, lively outdoor

markets, the friendliness of the people who have retained the art of living, the lavender fields basking in the warm Mediterranean sun, all these conspire to exert an irresistible appeal. The Romans loved it - they called it Provençia - and Cézanne and Van Gogh fell under the spell, and we can't resist it any more than they could.

Yes, these places are wonderful; they bristle with "bucket list" destinations, but that's just the problem: there are almost too many! Which to see? Which to leave out? And having made your choice, how to organise the logistics of getting to them without falling into an exhausted heap? It all seemed too hard!



This is when I - Lesley - had a sort of epiphany! Since we are planning to go together, why not ask my travelling companion, and newly retired husband what he suggests?



So Neville and I started getting down and dirty about our Grand Tour of France. We both realised we were beyond the idea of the standard "linear" journey starting at one point and moving on every 1 or 2 nights. It may have suited the young aristocrats of the 18th. Century with their entourage of servants and fully-staffed estates as way points at which to break the journey, but Neville's cantankerous knees and my dodgy feet put paid to that idea.

It was Neville who came up with our cunning plan while cleaning out some of his old work files. He happened upon a diagram of a networking concept called **Star Topology** used by his former company to design workplace computer networking systems.

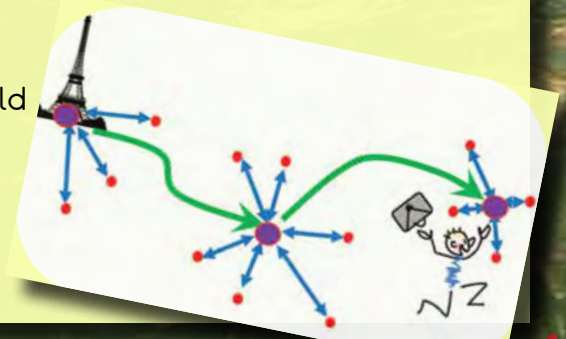
Before you zone out with **nerd alert narcolepsy** let me explain it simply.

The **network** is set up with a series of **hubs** - with the server or "brainpower" of the computer at the hub and it sends information to individual workstations radiating out like the spokes of a wheel.

"The **hubs** for our trip", explained Neville excitedly to me, "would be logistically convenient bases we use to explore a particular region. We find an optimal hub and stay there for a week or more while we explore that region. Then we move onto the next hub. **It's a win-win Les!**"

It was lovely to see Neville so animated so I'm sure I would have agreed to it had it been called Gobbledegook, but the concept did make perfect sense.

Here's Neville's diagram>



"But Nev", said I, "that's all very impressive but how are we going to select these **hubs**?"

"Easy peasy! We just make out our list of places we want to go to in three or four different groups and pick something in the middle of each group distance-wise as our hub. End of story."

I didn't think it could be that simple but I was now so swept away by Neville's enthusiasm I decided to see what he came up with. There was no stopping him; he was on a roll!

"It so happens Lesley darling that I haven't been sitting around the house these past few weeks doing nothing, I have actually been doing some research on the web and have made a list of destinations and even drawn up some maps showing where they are. Take a look at this!", he cried triumphantly as he unfolded an enormous map of France splattered with red dots depicting his choices.

"That's funny. So have I. So that's what you were doing on your iPad at the other end of the sofa all those evenings. I thought you were watching YouTube videos like that one about the magpie and the dog wresting each other around the Hill's Hoist! So there I was doing the same thing at **my** end of the sofa. Great minds thinking alike but not together... I'm busting to know how your list compares with mine. Show me!"

"Not so fast honey-bunch. Where's **your** map?"

"Now Nev, you know I'm no good at geography; actually I'm not even 100% sure of where France is if you want to know the truth. But I did get a really good list together by reading all about each place that caught my eye and then I used my secret weapon. I call it my weapon of **mass instruction**"

"What is this famous weapon then?", he replied drily looking at me askance.

"Women's intuition!"

"Oh for Heaven's sake Les, that went out with the Ark"

"So you say, but show me your list and we'll see."

Anyway, to make a long story short, I laid out my list and Nev his humongous map with annotations all over it and you won't believe what we saw next: we had chosen practically the same list of "must-sees/must-dos"! It was creepy.

"I have to admit Lesley," said Nev with a new look of surprised respect at my intuition-based ratings, "there's something in your secret weapon I can't deny. You've chosen really well. How long did it take you?"

"Oh about two days on and off."

"You should patent that weapon Les. It's taken me three weeks of painstaking research!"

I didn't tell him I had some help from these two Australian boys, Bryan and David, that put me on the right track. But I wasn't cheating really because my trusty intuition told me that their advice was the real thing. I just tweaked it a little, that's all. A woman's best friend is her iPad! Have iPad will travel!!

"I tell you what Lesley", Neville cut across my reverie, "since these lists are practically identical we can just merge them with my map and Bob's Your Uncle!", he chortled.

"And Fanny's your Aunt", I said coming down to earth, "but what about the hubs? Which of these places could count as a **hub**?", I said looking at the long list and dots all over the map.

"Mmmm. Good point. Well I guess that the first thing about a hub is that it must be located so we can actually get to our destinations easily each day - and back of course - then we wouldn't want the hub itself to be dull in case we weren't going out that day. Then, even if we know what place should be a hub, we want a suitable home base - let's call it a 'hubby-house!'"

"Very funny Neville. But you're right and what's more, I have already solved that too!"

"You little treasure. Spit it out then,"

I then had to confess about my secret discovery of the **two "French Cottages" boys**. Their choice of hubs were so good that they had set up their own fully equipped houses in each one just for people like us. Without going into the nitty-gritty details right now, suffice to say Neville was convinced and so we put together our plan of attack, booking those of the recommended "hubby houses" that my trusty intuition told me would be right alongside practical things like how big the houses were, did they have proper kitchens, parking etc. I won't go into those mundane matters but since they are important you can read the details further on in this little pamphlet But I must say now after the event that every one of them surpassed our expectations and nothing we needed was missing.

We stayed in the four regions mentioned above in four different cottages, two weeks in each one to give us time to really settle in and enjoy our little excursions. The accommodation was outstanding. Bryan and David give so much attention to detail it made life and changeover day really simple. All cottages were definitely in **living villages** and very, very well equipped. We could walk to everything as they were right 'inside the walls' so to speak. We only used the car for day trips. We are planning a return trip sometime soon because we didn't really see half of what was on offer: our 'bucket list' only got half emptied!

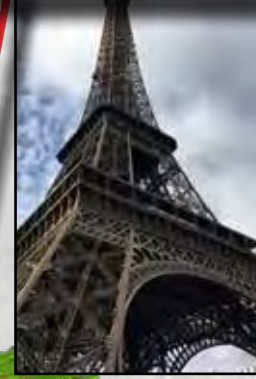
I can really recommend the itinerary we put together, but of course you may have your own ideas and variations. To get you started I am quite happy to show you ours; here it is!

Loire Valley



Well I wanted to empty my bucket list (that's me carrying it!) and took in all four regions. At each HUB (red dot) you have dozens of places to visit in easy reach. But of course I underestimated the time it would take and only half emptied the bucket. But never mind, we'll go again to catch the rest.

Paris



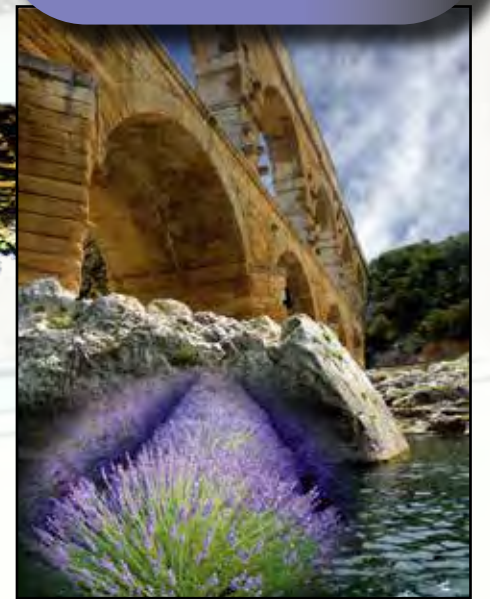
Dordogne



Pyrenees Basque



Provence



The Nitty Gritty of the Hubs



Earlier on in my story I mentioned about my discovery of our **HUB villages** which we planned to use as **bases** for exploring all the places and sites we wanted to take in.

But my gosh it was hard to choose!

Looking on the internet, there seemed so many pretty places that could be great candidates. But I soon realised that they couldn't **all** be equally fantastic. I was overwhelmed and needed some experienced person to guide me and that's when I discovered Bryan and David's site. I quickly realised that they had done all the homework and research, so let's allow them to explain it all. They can express it better than I can!



How we originally chose our hub villages

This was the first challenge when we started our project 25 years ago. First and foremost, a hub village had to be located in such a way that makes excursions to the places you wish to visit, be it by car or local bus, easy and enjoyable, returning to your cottage base within the span of half to one full day. This narrowed down the list a little!



But should they be in the countryside? ... a small village? ... a big town?... a well known spot or somewhere out of the way?

Much thought was given to this. There seemed to be so much to consider!

Large, industrial towns were definitely to be avoided; but so were the picturesque but remote hamlets without a bakery or café in sight.

We steered the middle ground.

The villages should be **beautiful, lively villages** with all the amenities – where you can just walk around the corner to buy a croissant, a newspaper or a cognac and where you can **LIVE LIKE A LOCAL** – but still be only a few minutes ride or drive from the many fascinating attractions of the French countryside around it. There was one more factor – a very subtle one, but really **the most important of them all**.

The villages chosen must be living villages. Living? What does that mean exactly?

They should not be ones that had **ossified into tourist museums** and **not** the “summer vacation” towns that had already been invaded and bought up by expatriate foreigners turning them into places whose French character has virtually been lost.

Of all the villages and towns we visited, many very pretty and interesting, only a small collection really satisfied all of our stringent stipulations.

And it happened that the final choice, which had seemed perplexing and difficult, wasn't so hard in the end. It just took a bit of time and effort. As there was no way to really know a destination except by staying in it and getting to know it profoundly, we simply visited all the places on our short list and if we didn't immediately reject one because of some glaring fault not obvious on the web description, we made sure we stayed several days in it to get to know it thoroughly.

The final decider was that indispensable thing called instinct. A village might satisfy all the logical criteria and pass the test of being lived in for a few days but if it didn't give us a feeling of **'yes! this is the one!'** we rejected it. After all we were about to **invest hard cash in our own cottages** and why would we buy a house in a village that just didn't have that extra **je ne sais quoi?**



Bonjour! It's me again. I just **had** to interrupt to tell you my disaster story! We once hired a house on one of those internet booking sites and it looked fabulous. It had a breathtaking view of the Bay of Naples and that volcano - Vesuvius, it's called.

But when we got there it wasn't quite as good as the reviews, star ratings and those little ticked boxes on that site led us to expect! **To say the least!** Things just didn't work as they claimed: the internet kept dropping out, there was only one wine glass and no corkscrew (so that solved that question), the motorised gate jammed closed so we were prisoners for a day till they 'fixed' it and the gas hot water boiler kept going out. Nev had to climb out each morning through the bedroom window dripping wet with nothing but a flimsy towel precariously wrapped around him to try to re-light it. This took about 10 minutes with Nev shouting instructions to me to keep turning the hot tap on and off which finally triggered the very reluctant burner, the neighbours watching the whole time. Often the towel fell off him first! The kitchen was woefully equipped so that in the end we just went to the local bar and pizza joint to eat. It was supposed to save us money renting this house, but in the end Nev says it cost a packet all told. Never again! So we're back to David and Bryan's lovely cottages which are like cheese compared to that chalk...

Your home in France

Homes...not holiday houses.

As Lesley indicates in her story, it's not enough to have a house - you need a **home**. A fully equipped home just like 'back home'; one with a delightful French ambience; one that feels permanent and not like a stage set; one where everything works as it should; one that feels like it is **yours**.

The houses should be **and are** very **cosy, attractive, cheery, comfortable and functional**. Then you can really settle in happily and just enjoy living in one of the most beautiful places in France. Having chosen a hub village in each of our regions, we then moved onto the finding, buying, renovating and equipping of a number of cottages - from large to small - in each.



Location (location, location!)

We chose the houses for their locations first: each had to be right in the historic centre, '**within the walls**' so to speak, yet in quiet and pleasant surroundings too. None of our cottages is on the main square - that would be **far too noisy** - but they are very close by. People often say that they want a house 'on the outskirts' of a village but we realised that this does not allow the same quality of experience as being right in the **lifeblood of the town**. After a good night at a restaurant, with perhaps one wine too many, you don't want to be groping your way home in the dark to some lonely, peripheral cottage!

Fully-equipped, beautiful and comfortable cottages

Traditional in style, age and construction, they are nevertheless equipped with all the conveniences you would find in your own home: **central heating, full kitchen with dishwasher, fridge, microwave, normal oven and cook top** and full cutlery and crockery sets, laundry with **washing machine, clothes dryer iron** and an **ironing board**. The living areas have **books** in English, a **radio or a CD or SmartTV music player, television** with a wide range of **English language International satellite TV** (not just CNN), **games for children**, an **unrestricted telephone** (to most fixed lines), **free broadband internet** for surfing the web, checking emails, etc. Most houses have **air-conditioning**, either entirely or in the main bedrooms. **Access** to the house is by a **digital lock with a unique code**. This popular feature provides for security and great convenience. **Your arrival time is therefore not critical** (no stressful meet-and-greet appointments to keep) and there are no keys to juggle or lose.

In each house there is a **house manual with clear explanations** and photographs so you will quickly master all appliances. There is also a **house book** with suggested local tours, places to go, recommended restaurants, local medical and dental services where English is spoken, as well as secrets and discoveries made by previous guests. You are encouraged to add your own ideas and findings to this growing resource! Brochures of current events and activities are also provided.

Apart from feeling so much at home in this way, there will be one final element that will complete your French Cottages experience:



Service

The Little Things Count!

As our guest we want you to have the very best holiday experience.

With us you will enjoy the following during your stay ...

- ▶ Enjoy the comfort and convenience that you are used to in your own home and
- ▶ Find all the little household essentials waiting for you when you arrive, yet
- ▶ Experience a style of accommodation different to anything you've known before, then
- ▶ Not have to worry about **language difficulties**, and
- ▶ Not have to worry about **parking**, and also
- ▶ **Not have any problems about keys**, and
- ▶ Have full and free access in the cottage to a **telephone and WiFi broadband internet** for your iPad or laptop, and
- ▶ Be fully informed of things to see and do, where to eat, where to shop, current festivals and special events, previous guest recommendations, etc, and finally
- ▶ Being able to rely upon English speaking assistance if the need arises by calling our **hotline number** and leaving a message. Our local coordinator will then call you back promptly.

And even before you go you will enjoy:

- ▶ Friendly, knowledgeable, efficient service and advice to help you during the planning stages of your trip
- ▶ A smooth and easy booking experience
- ▶ Prompt responses to your questions, calls, letters or emails
- ▶ Advice on your travel arrangements: how to book the TGV, what are the best car rental deals currently available, how to arrange your internal airline flights easily, and many other tips and tricks to simplify your itinerary. You will save a lot of time and money by listening to our hard-won counsels.
- ▶ Detailed maps and pictures showing how to move from one region to the other
- ▶ A detailed travel guide with suggestions of what to visit in each region reachable from your hub village.

We often get letters and emails from our guests saying that dealing with us was everything they could hope for. See our testimonials on page 119.

We appreciate it too when you recommend us to your friends, and will honour this by giving them the same high standard of service.



In each village we have a local **coordinator** who, together with our loyal cleaners, will ensure that everything in the house is prepared for your arrival.

Beds will be made with fresh, crisply pressed hospitality quality bed linen and towels provided.

The house will be cleaned so that all is 'just so'; when you walk in the door it will bring a smile to your face!

Also you will find all the little **essentials** - tea, coffee, soap and 'papier hygiénique' for example - to get you going.

And our welcome bottle of the local wine!

Should you need assistance during your stay with anything in the house, medical attention (or other emergency) help is not far away.

Parking is provided - either street parking near the house or, where that is not available, in a private garage nearby so you need not worry about this if you have a hire car.

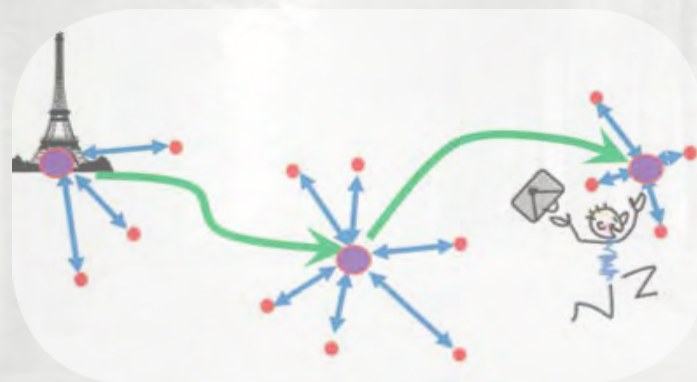


I thought it was about time that I got a word in edgewise. (I'm Neville by the way!)

I wanted to say that many first time visitors to France, and even those who reckon they're veterans like Les and I, often become bamboozled when trying to put together their itineraries. There are so many choices on offer in France! You might remember Les telling you that I am a retired number-cruncher and IT nerd - and proud of it! - and I cooked up my travel concept of network travel topology.

When Les told me that this had ***already been dreamed up by Bryan and David*** I was a bit peeved but I soon realised that these blokes knew what they are talking about. And it makes a lot of sense **to use their network and their expertise instead of dealing with a whole bunch of travel operators: it's a one-stop shop!**

We soon found ***many*** other advantages ... but I'm beginning to steal their thunder so I better get back in my box and hand over back to them... (Bon Voyage when you do go!)



Why not plan your whole Itinerary with French Cottages?

As people start to look at all the potential places to visit they quickly become overwhelmed with an ***overabundance of information***, pouring from the galaxy of websites out there, and before long it turns into a serious case of information overload. Then it gets messier. Which tours, trips, places etc to book first? ***Which to leave till later? Which are really worth seeing? Which could be left out?***

Many of these people, like Lesley and Neville, then experience the ***revelation***: that they could actually ***create a wonderfully diverse and memorable French itinerary by simply going from one of our cottages in one hub to the one in the next hub village.*** So simple! If you look at where our hub villages are located on the map on pages 6 and 7 you will see that as bases for exploration, they actually cover a large portion of France. Yet they are still within a pleasant and interesting day's drive or train ride from each other so you can move from one to the next on changeover day.

There are some huge advantages in doing this.

Firstly, our cottages and their villages are of a very high standard and offer a wonderful experience, either within the village itself or as a convenient base for exploring the surrounding region, or both.

Secondly, your holiday planning can be greatly simplified as you would be dealing mainly with us in creating the French leg of your holiday itinerary. Effectively you would have just one organisation to deal with instead of many with ***varying levels of service and efficiency.***

Thirdly, we can even assist you by recommending our favourite places in other parts of Europe that we personally have very much enjoyed and know to be of a high standard like ours since our travels have taken us all over the continent.

When you contact us next, let us know your dates and preferences and we'll be pleased to sketch out a truly comprehensive and first class itinerary for you consisting of a mix of our cottages and other accommodations we know and respect. You only have to ask!

How to get there ... and enjoy the trip!

Many of our guests visiting France also have other countries such as the UK, Italy, Spain or Greece on their agendas. For the French leg, the lucky ones have time to fit Provence, Dordogne, the Loire and the Pyrenees into their itineraries, spending a week or more in each place.

They find their experiences of these places complement each other. We'll have more to say on this in the next few pages.

But for now, here is some practical information showing times and distances - after all, there's a lot of logistics involved in getting your itinerary together! This first map shows how easy it is to fly directly from London (or other UK) airports directly to airports within one hour of our villages. You can also depart for other parts of Europe without returning to Paris. The **airports marked** on the map are close to our cottages. You can find out timetables and excellent fares if you visit the **SKYSCANNER page on our website at the link below.**

For routes and times by fast train (TGV) or by car see the following page. The schematic map shows the main train times and driving times between Paris and our villages as well as for getting from any one of our villages to any other.

For complete details of times and distances please visit our web page,

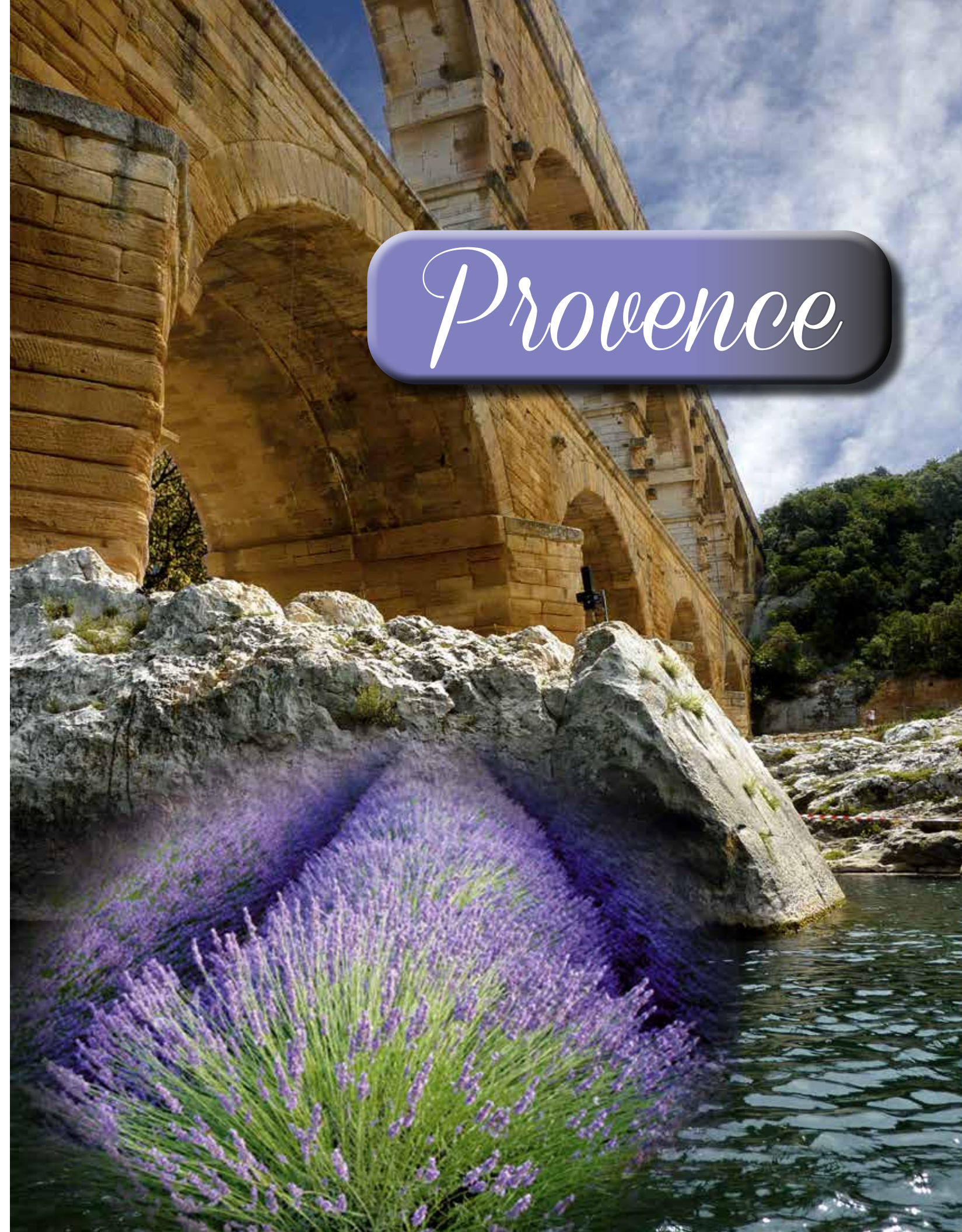
<https://frenchcottages.com/useful-travel-websites.html>

or flash this QR code with your smartphone.



BY CAR
BY TRAIN

Rome is about 8 hours drive from Nice; Barcelona is about 5 hours from our Provence cottages; Calais is about 11 hours from Provence; London is about 2 hours from Dover; Madrid is about 6 hours from Barcelona; Santiago de Compostella is about 6 hours from St Sebastian which is about 4 hours from our Dordogne cottages. Our Loire village is about 2 hrs 45 mins from Paris.



Provence

An aerial photograph of a historic town in Provence, France. The town is characterized by its dense, terracotta-roofed buildings and a prominent stone tower with a crenellated top. The town is surrounded by lush green trees and fields, with a river visible in the background. The overall scene is a picturesque representation of a traditional French village.

Your Home Base in Provence

Oh little town of my youth, said the writer André Gide,
“Were you in Umbria the Parisians would flock to visit
you!”

His observation is proving correct for after many years, our wonderful village in Provence has been quietly discovered as the gem it always was: *a little miracle town rich in art and history*. Hidden away in the Western part of the region, it was selected in 1962 as one of France’s 500 villes d’art, and since then much money has been lavished on restoring and repairing the then tumbling façades. *Not so long ago it provided the perfect stage backdrop for the Gerard Depardieu film, “Cyrano de Bergerac”.*



Lynne Gough, French Cottage Guest, 1998

PROVENCE HUB

Your home base in Provence

Oh little town of my youth, said the writer André Gide "Were you in Umbria, the Parisians would flock to visit you!"

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Climate

Summer in Provence is warm with long weeks of perfect weather, average daytime temperatures ranging from 24°-32° during the months of May to September. Sunset is quite late and the nights are comfortably mild.

In autumn the evenings are cooler but very pleasant for an evening walk. Even in the colder months of winter the skies are blue and you can often sit outdoors in the winter sun. The only exception to this is when the celebrated Mistral wind descends from the North-usually in February. This period of wild clear skies (Van Gogh's "Starry Night"), though severe, usually only lasts for a couple of weeks

The Mediterranean light of Provence has a poetic luminosity, which inspired many French painters: Cézanne, Monet, Van Gogh and Picasso amongst them. Each of these produced works portraying some version of this quality. It underscores the atmosphere of nostalgia in the writings of Marcel Pagnol (Jean de Florette). There is a marvellous quality in the landscape that is really very different to our own harsher terrain.



One of the winter specialities of the region is the elusive...

Truffle!!

Hidden away in the forests of truffle oaks growing in the region, these can only be found with the aid of a pig or truffle dog. You can discover this rare and highly prized fungus at the market held weekly in the central square. But beware; the price can give you a shock!



Architecture

There are many historical influences at play in the architecture of this little town and in the surrounding paysage. The legacy of the Greeks and Romans is particularly obvious with many ancient temples, coliseums, monuments and other buildings still standing today. The most famous monument is, of course, the Pont du Gard, located only 15 km away. This marvellously preserved portion of the original 52 km long Roman aqueduct is well worth a visit.

In the historic heart you will find the grand fortified residence of the first Duchy of France. Its oldest section, the rectangular dungeon called the Tour Bermonde, dates from the 11th century. You can climb the steep spiral escalier d'honneur to the top for views over the shimmering tiles of the rooftops. The interior is well stocked with period furnishings, complemented by wax dukes and duchesses in their 16th-century finery. Unique in France, the 12th-century Tour Fenestrelle is a cylindrical six-storey gem, named after the rows of double-lit windows that encircle it, inspired by the towers of Ravenna and Lombardy. Inside the Cathédrale St.Théodorit, is a splendid organ of 1670, the only one in France to have retained its original painted shutters. Recently restored, it is the centrepiece of the end-of-July music festival, **Nuits Musicales**.



Landscape and Scenery

The countryside around - where fields of asparagus, cherry orchards, forests of truffle oaks and vineyards alternate with scrub lands - is dotted with attractive old villages. Stark geological features contrasting with these cosy little places nestling amongst them make outings in it continually surprising.

Leisure Activities

Swimming (at the local swimming pool or at the Pont du Gard "beach"), canoeing (along the Gardon river), golf, Montgolfière (hot air ballooning), abseiling, walking, bicycle touring, and an aquatic park for kids are just some of the many sporting activities in immediate reach of the town.

Cultural activities include art and pottery exhibitions, theatre, concerts, dance performances and the famous International festival of Ancient music (Nuits Musicales) held every year in July in the precincts of the Château. Full details of these are available in our guest's guidebook available in each cottage and at the Tourism Office.



Savouring the Provençal cuisine: restaurants.

More than anything else, it is the celebrated cuisine that has put Provence in the public eye. A chilled rosé, slices of fresh saucisson, salty olives and goat's cheese under the Pont du Gard have made a heavenly repast for many a visitor including Marcel Pagnol and Lawrence Durrell. The range of restaurant dining is staggering - stretching from quaint cafés, Carmarguais fishermen's eating-houses to three-star Michelin elegance.

In each of our cottages you will find a visitors' house book full of suggestions - both our own and also the discoveries of past guests. Please add yours too! French restaurants and bars always have their menus prominently displayed in their windows for passers-by to read and check the prices. The "set menus" offered are generally excellent value. These are typically around 14 euros for two courses and some include a glass of the local wine as well. Restaurant hours are usually 12 pm till 2.30 pm and 7 pm till 10 pm. Lunch is France's most important meal: you may need to book at the popular ones or arrive very early to ensure a place. Restaurants abound in unlikely locations (off the tourist track), which are often truly excellent.

You can tell fairly quickly when you discover one of these gems (perhaps in a basement, an old railway building or in nearby hamlet) by the number of locals patronising it and the happy hum of activity there.

Look for the ones surrounded by many cars and freight trucks at lunchtime for a gastronomical experience extraordinaire!

Cooking Classes and Wine Tours in Provence

If you have always had a yen to learn more about the Provençal style of cuisine, wine and produce of the '**terroir**' by participating in cooking classes and tours, then you may wish to book with our associate for one or several days of his **Culinary Discoveries** programmes. Details are available in each cottage there.



Shopping and Markets

Blessed with a most wonderful open-air market selling fresh food, an amazing variety of delicious fungi and other local produce, crafts, local artwork, books, antiques, brocante, curios, and clothes, you'll be keen to absorb this wonderful local experience. The days and times this is held, as well as other notable markets in neighbouring towns, is listed at each house.

It is well worth a visit!

You'll also find an amazing variety of shops and boutiques, bars and restaurants, cafés and bakeries, a cinema, jazz-clubs, and galleries. All of this is within two or three minute walk from the houses.

Food prices are similar to those at home, sometimes even cheaper. You can buy excellent local wines for as little as 3 Euros per litre! Try the 'Grand Chemin' gris rosé. Food shops are open all week - some closing Sundays or Mondays.

Most shops close from 12 midday till 2 pm but the "hypermarket" on the outskirts of town is open all day. Banks and Post Offices close at 12 midday on Saturday and don't re-open till Tuesday, but you can use the ubiquitous 'distributeurs de billets' to obtain cash easily with your credit card at any time.

Antiques and Collectables (brocante)

The village also boasts no less than 19 antique and brocante shops within its walls. There are also some world-class antique boutiques at the nearby villages of Argilliers, Castillon du Gard and along the route to Avignon.



Provence Hub Destinations

All of the following are well worth visiting and within an easy day return trip from our Provence hub village.

For each destination we indicate approximately how much time to allow for your visit. See the map on page 33 for locations and whether they can be accessed by car or public transport or both.

Pont du Gard

This amazing 2000-year-old Roman aqueduct still stands strong today and probably will for millennia to come. There's much to see and do here. Canoeing, swimming under it at the little river beach, dining at the local café and visiting the museum describing how it was built are just some of the activities possible. Great for all ages! (allow most of the day)



Avignon

« Sur le Pont d'Avignon, l'on y danse » the famous song goes and so you will dance too when you visit this important French town. Things to see there: Palais des Papes (Palace of the Popes), the famous half demolished bridge with the Chapel of the Lonely Pigeon, the Gardens overhanging the Rhône and much else awaits you. (allow most of one day)



Nîmes

Pronounced NEEM without the 's' at the end. This is a very interesting town originating from Roman times. Things to see are: Les Arènes (better preserved colosseum than the one in Rome), the Maison Carrée, les Jardins de la Fontaine (Gardens of the Fountain), Les Halles (excellent market open every day in the town centre, the Temple of Diana, the Cathedral on the Place aux Herbes (take lunch at the café next to it), the Roman Gates and lots, lots more. We like Nîmes more than Avignon by far (as you can see) (warrants several visits of several hours if possible)



Castillon-du-Gard

Charming for an afternoon's visit. There are four excellent restaurants : Le Clos des Vignes, L'Amphitryon, Les Jarres and Le Vieux Castillon. (allow 2 - 3 hours)

Aigues Mortes

Walled city on sea in the Camargue region of France, famous for its flamingos and wild white horses. (allow half a day)

Arles

The amphitheatre is the central feature of this famous place where Vincent Van Gogh was a "habitué" of a café not far away which is in one of his paintings. There are the vestiges of a Roman Theatre too and much else to see. Many people adore this town, but I/we are not so fond of it despite its fame. There's a much better one coming up... (allow half a day)



Uzès

This magnificent little Citadine of the South was the first Duchy of France. The Duché - château of the Duke - still stands intact today after a thousand years of a very varied history. You can visit it and a hundred other attractions around the village. Two great cathedrals, a beautiful central market square, a Medieval garden, the vineyard "Domaine St. Firmin", the Valley of the Eure (Roman vestiges), the Haribo confectionery museum... (allow plenty of time for this destination)



Saint-Rémy-de-Provence

This is an elegant little town famous for its lavender and perfume production. Its graceful boulevard is pleasant to stroll along or to have lunch, but the main square is nothing special. In fact, many have questioned just why St Remy is so popular; it's full of tourist shops and just doesn't have the feeling of being a living French village. (allow 4 hours maximum)

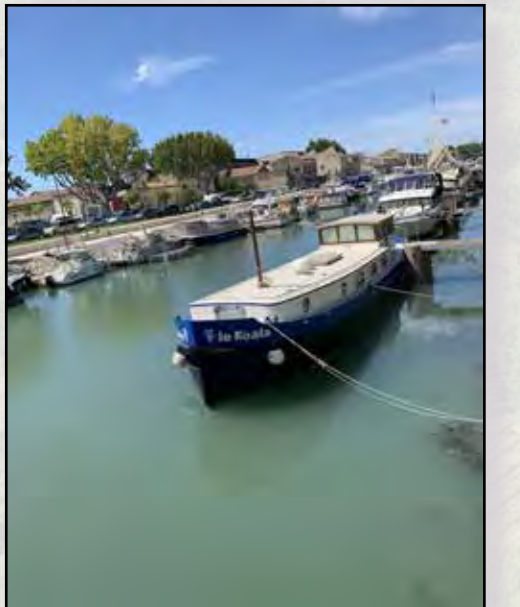


Orange

Another Roman built town with a very well-preserved amphitheatre and excellent museum next to it. There are some lovely squares to dine in nearby. (allow half a day)

Châteauneuf du Pape

Châteauneuf-du-Pape is a French wine, an Appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC) located in the Rhône wine region just north of Avignon. It is one of the most renowned appellations of the southern part in the Rhône Valley: great wine tastings. (allow half a day)



Sète

Sète was founded in the 1660s as the Mediterranean terminus of the ambitious Canal du Midi. It is sometimes called the Venice of the Languedoc and there are indeed many lovely walks along its waterways. Don't miss a visit to the Cimetière Marin - the graveyard of the sailors overlooking the Med. Many have Italian names! (allow half a day)

[Bouzigues](#)

This is where you go before your visit to Sète (above) for the great Oyster Restaurants looking out to the oyster farms on the sea. Try "Le Marin". (allow most of a day including the trip there)

[Roussillon](#)

Great place to visit if you love the colour RED. All the houses are made of red stone or brick. Feels like a touristic gimmick to us but then there's none so queer as folk. (allow 1 hour)

[Fontaine de Vaucluse](#)

Source of the Sorgue River. Supposedly the bottom has never been plumbed to its full depths. (allow 1 hour then proceed onto the next destination)

[L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue](#)

Built on a series of islands over the river Sorgue this is a pretty place with its rushing waters, millwheels and tranquil waterside gardens. Sunday is best day to visit when the huge brocante (antiques and bric-à-brac) market takes place and many fine antique shops open their doors. There is a great gallery of modern sculpture that impressed even us though we are not so much into that sort of thing. Try lunching at "Au Chineur". The name derives from the French word "Chiner", which means "to go around the second-hand shops". Gee, that one word covers a lot! (allow most of the day on the weekend)

[Lacoste](#)

The château of the Marquis de Sade is located in this little village in the Luberon. Worth visiting as part of a local Luberon itinerary but not going out of your way for. (allow 1 hour)

[Bonnieux](#)

Just opposite Lacoste is Bonnieux, which is really pretty and has some splendid views of the Luberon as well as a couple of fine restaurants for lunch. (allow 2 - 3 hours including lunch)

[Aix-en-Provence](#)

Lovely, just lovely. Visit the studio of Paul Cézanne, market on Thursdays, Cours Mirabeau, Museum Estienne de Saint Jean or just wander about this vibrant college town. Afterwards you can either visit the nearby Montaigne St Victoire, painted by Cézanne, or head off to Marseille for dinner before returning to your hub village that night. (allow half to one day)



[Marseille](#)

A very interesting and important town in France, being in Marseille feels more like being in Italy or Portugal! Make sure you visit the Old Port, Palais Longchamp (Art Gallery and Gardens) and do take a bus from the Old Port up to Notre Dame de la Garde. (allow half to two days)

[Cassis](#)

Famous for its harbour, cliffs with sheltered inlets called "Calanques" where you can swim if you are so inclined. This is a very pretty spot to visit. (allow half a day)

[Tarascon and Beaucaire](#)

Beaucaire is a port on the Canal du Midi. There are some great seafood restaurants on the sunny quay and after you've partaken of a dish of Moules Marinières (Mussels in white wine) stroll across the bridge and visit the great castle, Le Château de Tarascon. (allow the best part of a day)

[Sommières](#)

Lawrence Durrell lived here in a lovely 19th century house just on the other side of the Roman bridge. Unfortunately, some people mix him up with his more popular brother Gerald Durrell who wrote **"My Family and Other Animals"** set in Corfu, much to Lawrence's annoyance. The village is small but worth visiting to have lunch and to wander about. (allow half a day)

[Cévennes National Park](#)

Head up towards Alès and keep going! This mountainous region is breathtakingly beautiful in fine weather to drive about, but not so attractive in overcast or wet weather. (allow a day) While you're in the vicinity you could call into the strange little town: Lodève (allow 1 hour if passing by)

[Gorges of the Ardeche](#)

"A Home in France" TV series based in this wild region with many scenes of natural beauty to be enjoyed. Perfect for sporty types like rock climbers and canoeists. (allow half day's ramble)

[Montpellier](#)

The Roman influence is very predominant here. The historic centre is well worth visiting either by car (park in the central underground carpark) or by TGV fast train from Nîmes.



Courdargues

The Venice of the Gard region they say and although somewhat smaller, there is some justice to the remark. Just go! Go for lunch at one of the canal-side restaurants then take a stroll about this gorgeous little town. You'll be glad you did! (allow 2- 3 hours with lunch)

Gordes

Very famous tourist mecca made even more famous by the excellent film **"A Good Year"** starring Russell Crowe. But it actually isn't as good as they say! Though stunning to view from a distance, once you're within it there's little to see except endless tourist buses. To us it has no soul. So, visit it to tick the square on your bucket list but linger no longer. (allow 44 minutes)

Saint-Quentin-la-Poterie

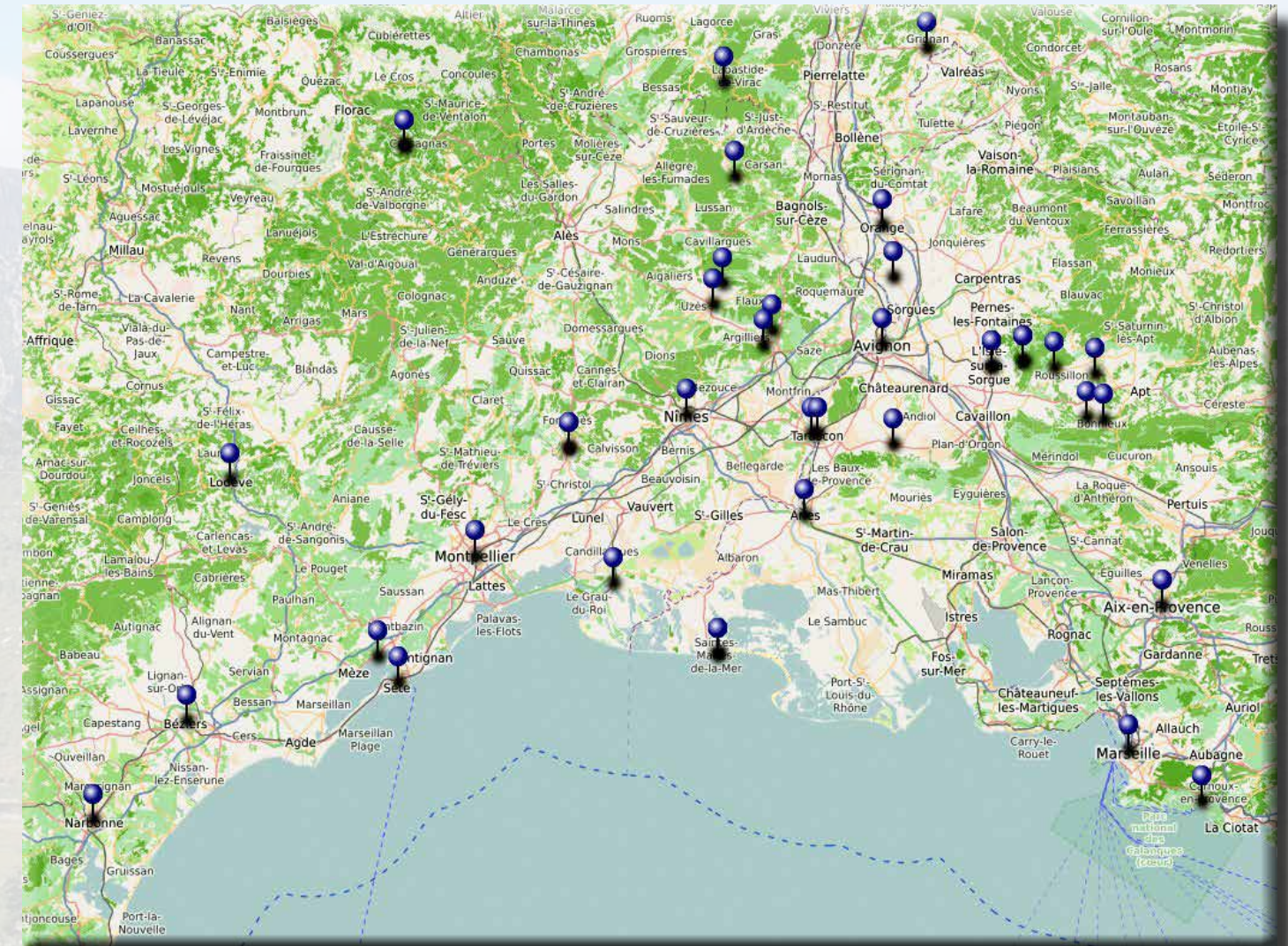
Charming village renowned for its local production of artisan pottery. (allow 2 - 3 hours with lunch)

Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer

Visit the Musee Baroncelli or just enjoy the local festivals, flamingos and wild white horses of the Camargue. (allow half a day)



Map showing the recommended destinations to visit from our Provence Hub
Flash the QR code on page 32 for more information on getting to each destination.



For more information on these destinations visit

<https://frenchcottages.com/provence-hub-destinations.html>

or flash this QR code with your SmartPhone



**OUR FLAGSHIP PROPERTY
IN PROVENCE: L'OLIVIER**

You couldn't really say that this beautiful traditional house was a "cottage" but neither is it a "villa", really. Some say it is like a small château.

But it is really better described as a large and very old village townhouse.

Actually words fail, as it is quite unique with its unusual layout and character. Large rooms, a very beautiful garden, not one but TWO wine caves - the lower of which even has the vestiges of an old Roman road! (so the town architect has confirmed) - these are just some of the aspects that give this striking edifice its special charm and 'cachet', as the French would say.

Only a very short distance from central market square and belonging to the one of the oldest quarters, L'Olivier's 'modern' history dates back to the 17th century when it was employed in the lucrative silk worm trade, a trade which made the local region a very wealthy place some centuries back.

It abounds in original features, which we have striven to preserve, but one such embellishment was something we ourselves added to the back garden: a 300-year-old Olive tree. This talismanic tree seems to possess a soul as you sit and observe it under the dappled Provencal sunlight, the little ants running up and down its gnarled and noble trunk on their way to ... who knows where?

The house has all modern comforts including central heating and air-conditioning.



Provence Villa: "L'Olivier"

Layout

First Level

- ▶ Large dining room and sitting room with grand open fireplace and view over the garden, the old Cinema and the market garden fields in the distance. **This room has air-conditioning.**
- ▶ Study and library which also serves as a sort of ante room to the bathroom and toilet on the living room level.
- ▶ Fully equipped kitchen with **AGA style** gas cook top and DOUBLE electric oven, microwave, dishwasher, fridge and freezer, etc.
- ▶ This kitchen, leads onto a little terrace with commanding views (ideal for sipping an evening rosé I have found!) and then down a short flight of outdoor steps to a walled garden.
- ▶ A full complement of cookware and dinnerware so you can practise your Provencal cookery and eat at home in grand style!
- ▶ Free broadband internet, USB charging points for phones and tablets, etc.
- ▶ SMART TV with Netflix and French TV available as well as Satellite TV with a large range of English stations (not just news channels).
- ▶ Radio.
- ▶ Telephone with free, unlimited use to fixed phones anywhere in the world and to French mobiles as well.

A set of stairs from the kitchen leads down to the ground floor and the oldest part of the house...



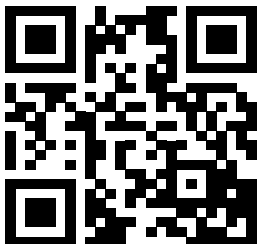
Ground Floor Level

- ▶ A small den area where you can set up your laptop or read a book on the spacious round table.
- ▶ Large, vaulted space which serves as a rumpus room for kids, occasional fourth bedroom with King bed, en-suite shower room and toilet. Two divans that can convert to two double beds. The King bed can also be split into two King Singles.
- ▶ Laundry area with THREE WASHING machines and THREE DRYERS. All necessary detergents are provided by us!
- ▶ Stairs leading down to the two traditional, vaulted wine cellars ('caves').
- ▶ View of Roman vestiges in second cellar.



Second Level

- ▶ Three King-sized bedrooms, two with en-suite bathrooms. The occupants of the third bedroom may use the nearby first level bathroom.
- ▶ Air-conditioning (reverse cycle) in all three bedrooms. There is also air-conditioning in the sitting room for the lower levels.
- ▶ Storage robes in all bedrooms for your clothes and belongings.
- ▶ Beds are luxuriously comfortable and large.
- ▶ High quality bed-linen is used and posture-pedic mattresses also; you need never worry about the quality of our beds!
- ▶ Flash this QR code for a video tour of the house.



Parking

- ▶ A private lock up garage is provided nearby.



L'Olivier, Second Level



L'Olivier, First Level



L'Olivier, Ground Floor

L'Olivier suits from 2 to 12 guests

Walled Garden: L'Olivier

There's something magical about this tranquil garden. The ancient walls surrounding it provide privacy but still allow sweeping views of the azure skies of Provence, skies full of bird life and the sounds of distant bells.

Screened from the hot sun in Summer by the old Alder or 'Micocoulier' trees, you can sit at the table on the terrace near the old Olive tree and read, sip a local wine, dine, talk or just get lost in reverie .

There is a little "mazet" (cabana) with a divan to shelter from the heat - or rain - and various seats scattered about giving many opportunities for a variety of viewpoint.

At night, the whole garden can be lit providing a most beautiful atmosphere, conducive to enjoying the balmy evenings in the warmer months. Even on extremely hot days, the cool evening breezes descending from the nearby Cévenne mountains make the temperature outdoors very comfortable.

The mazet is equipped with an electric Weber barbecue so you can prepare delicious grills for en-plein-air dining without having to return to the main house.

There is also a herb garden where you can pick fresh 'herbs de Provence' to garnish your latest gastronomic miracle.



Walled Garden at our Villa, L'Olivier

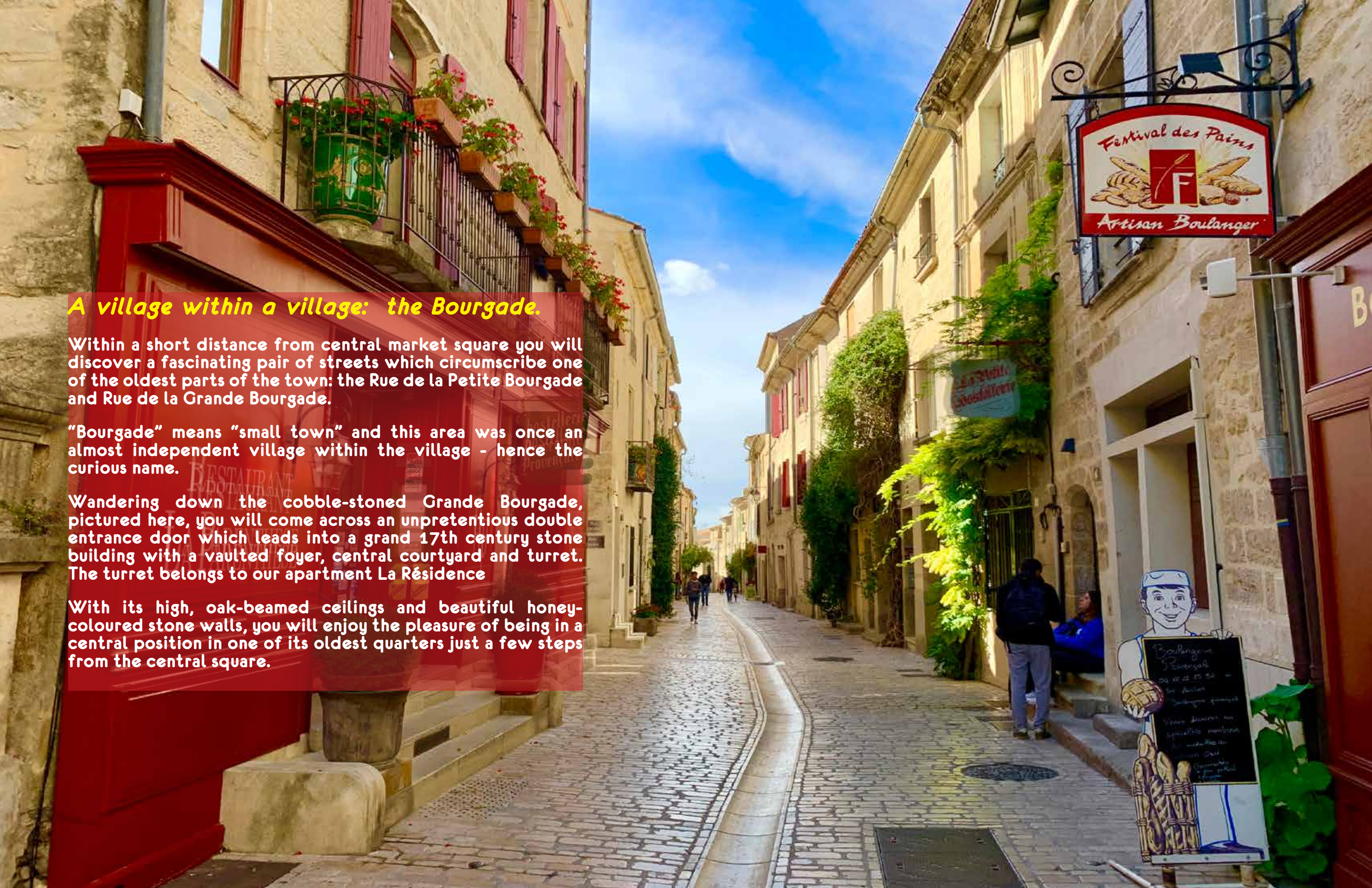
A village within a village: the Bourgade.

Within a short distance from central market square you will discover a fascinating pair of streets which circumscribe one of the oldest parts of the town: the Rue de la Petite Bourgade and Rue de la Grande Bourgade.

"Bourgade" means "small town" and this area was once an almost independent village within the village - hence the curious name.

Wandering down the cobble-stoned Grande Bourgade, pictured here, you will come across an unpretentious double entrance door which leads into a grand 17th century stone building with a vaulted foyer, central courtyard and turret. The turret belongs to our apartment La Résidence

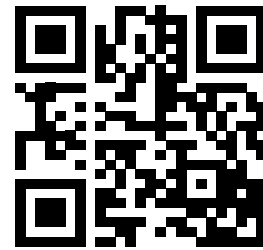
With its high, oak-beamed ceilings and beautiful honey-coloured stone walls, you will enjoy the pleasure of being in a central position in one of its oldest quarters just a few steps from the central square.



Provence Apartment: "La Résidence"

Layout

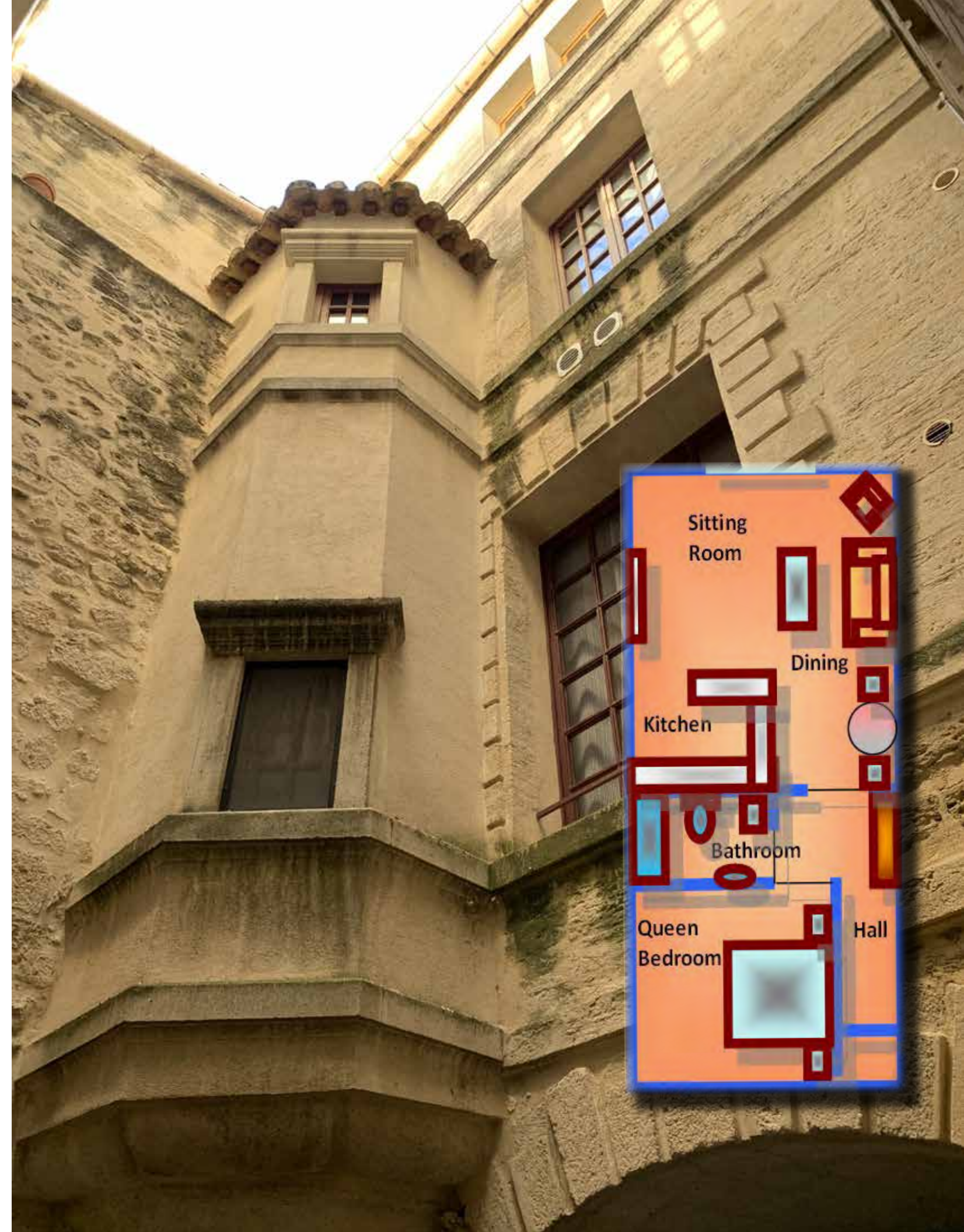
- ▶ The apartment is totally on one level (first floor) and includes...
- ▶ Large sitting/dining room with view of the old street.
- ▶ Bathroom with bath/shower, hand basin, toilet, washing machine and dryer adjacent to the bedroom.
- ▶ Queen Bedroom at rear (quiet) which is air-conditioned. Extra single sofa bed available for a third person or visitor.
- ▶ Apartment is centrally heated, has satellite TV, music, books and phone (unrestricted to most fixed lines in the world)
- ▶ Free broadband internet. USB charging points for phones and tablets, etc.
- ▶ Compact corner kitchen with all necessary appliances (dishwasher, microwave, induction cook top and high quality oven). A full complement of cookware and dinnerware so you can practise your Provençal cookery and eat in grand style!
- ▶ Flash this QR code for a video tour of the apartment.



Parking

- ▶ A private lock up garage is provided nearby.

La Résidence suits a couple

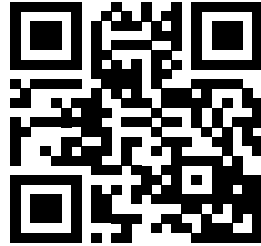


Provence Apartment: "La Provence"

In the same beautiful stone building as La Résidence we have our two-bedroom apartment "la Provence".

Layout

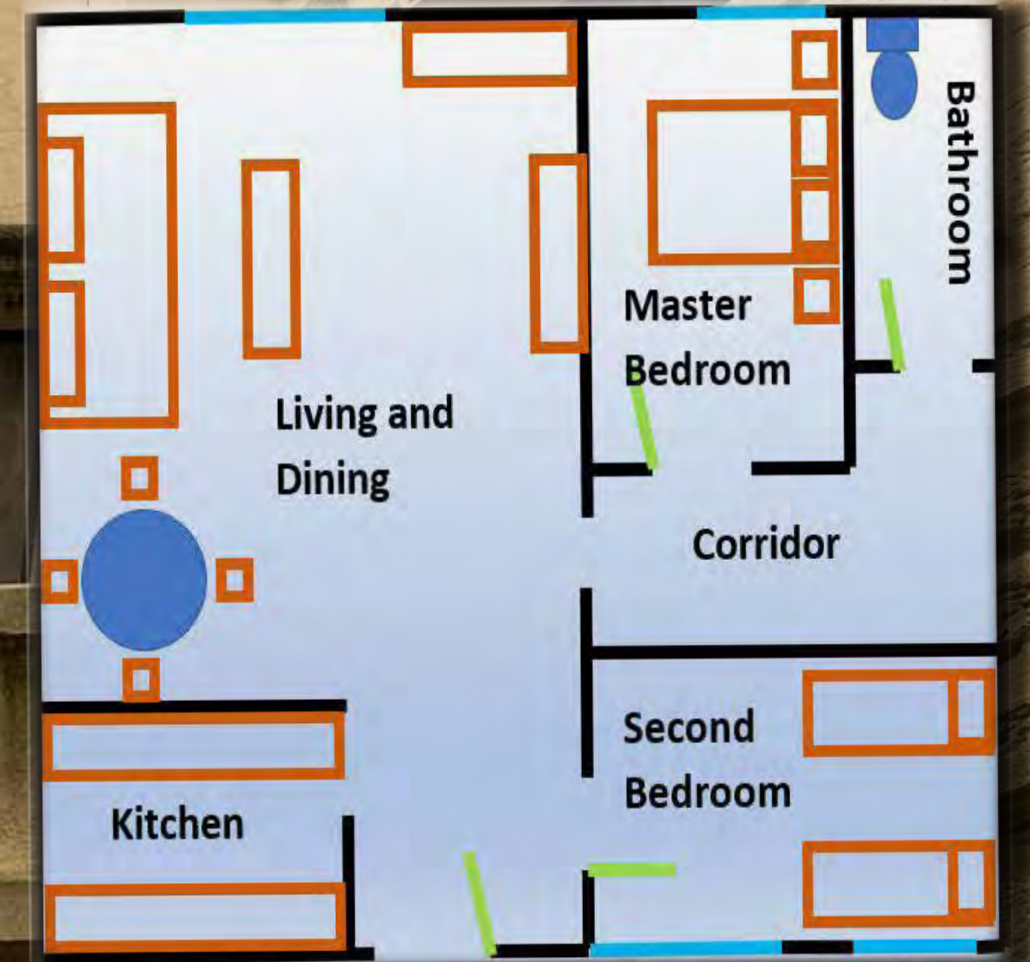
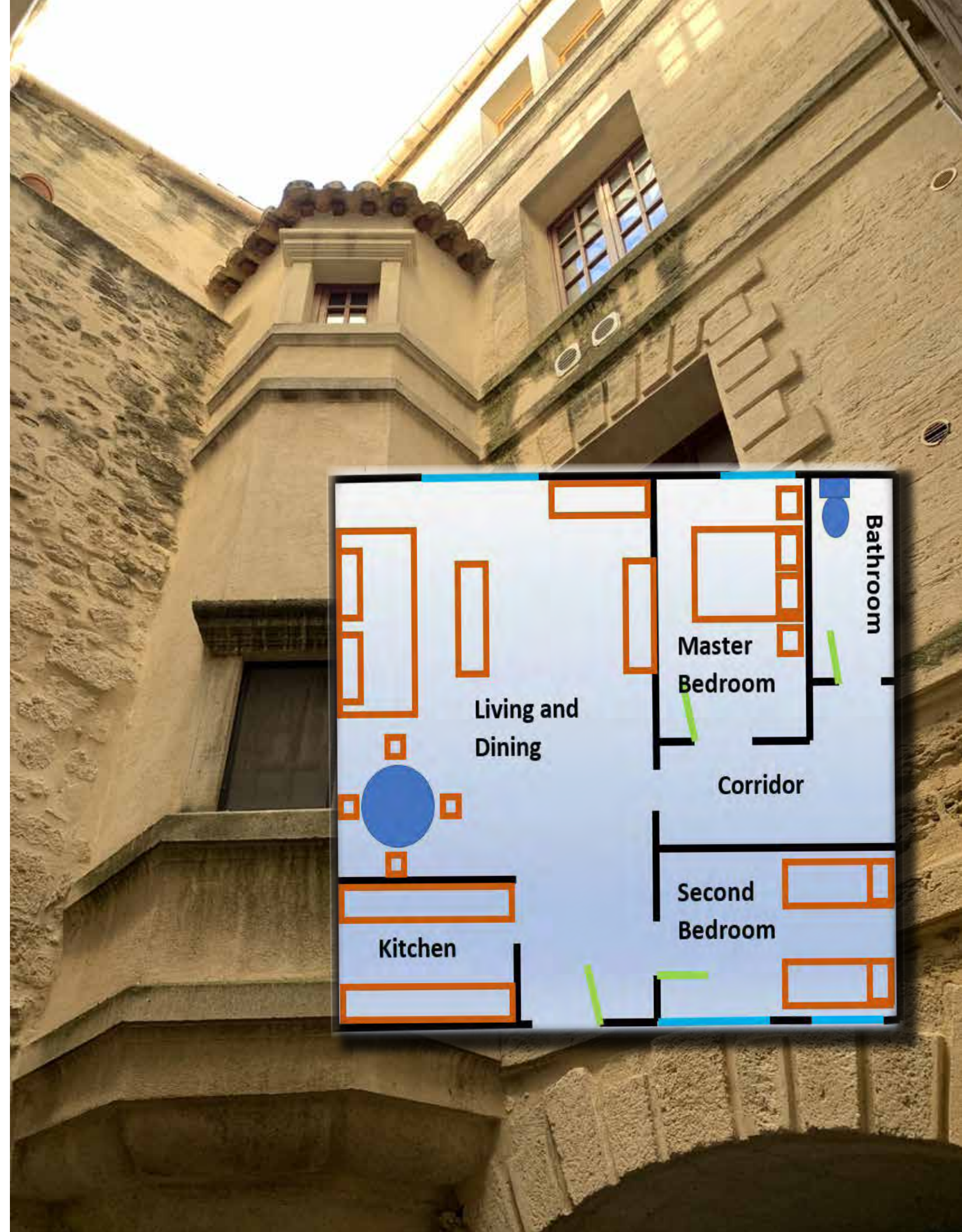
- ▶ The apartment is totally on one level (first floor) and includes...
- ▶ Large sitting/dining room with view of the internal garden courtyard of the building
- ▶ Bathroom with shower, twin hand basins and toilet
- ▶ Queen Bedroom at rear (quiet) and second bedroom (twin beds) on inner court side.
- ▶ Apartment is centrally heated, air-conditioned, has satellite TV, music, books and phone (unrestricted to most fixed lines in the world)
- ▶ Free broadband internet. USB charging points for phones and tablets, etc.
- ▶ Compact corner kitchen with all necessary appliances : dishwasher, microwave, cook top and high quality oven, washer/dryer combination. It features a full complement of cookware and dinnerware so you can practise your Provencal cookery and eat in grand style!
- ▶ Flash this QR code for a photo tour of the apartment.



Parking

- ▶ A car parking space is provided nearby.

La Provence suits a couple, two couples or a family of four.

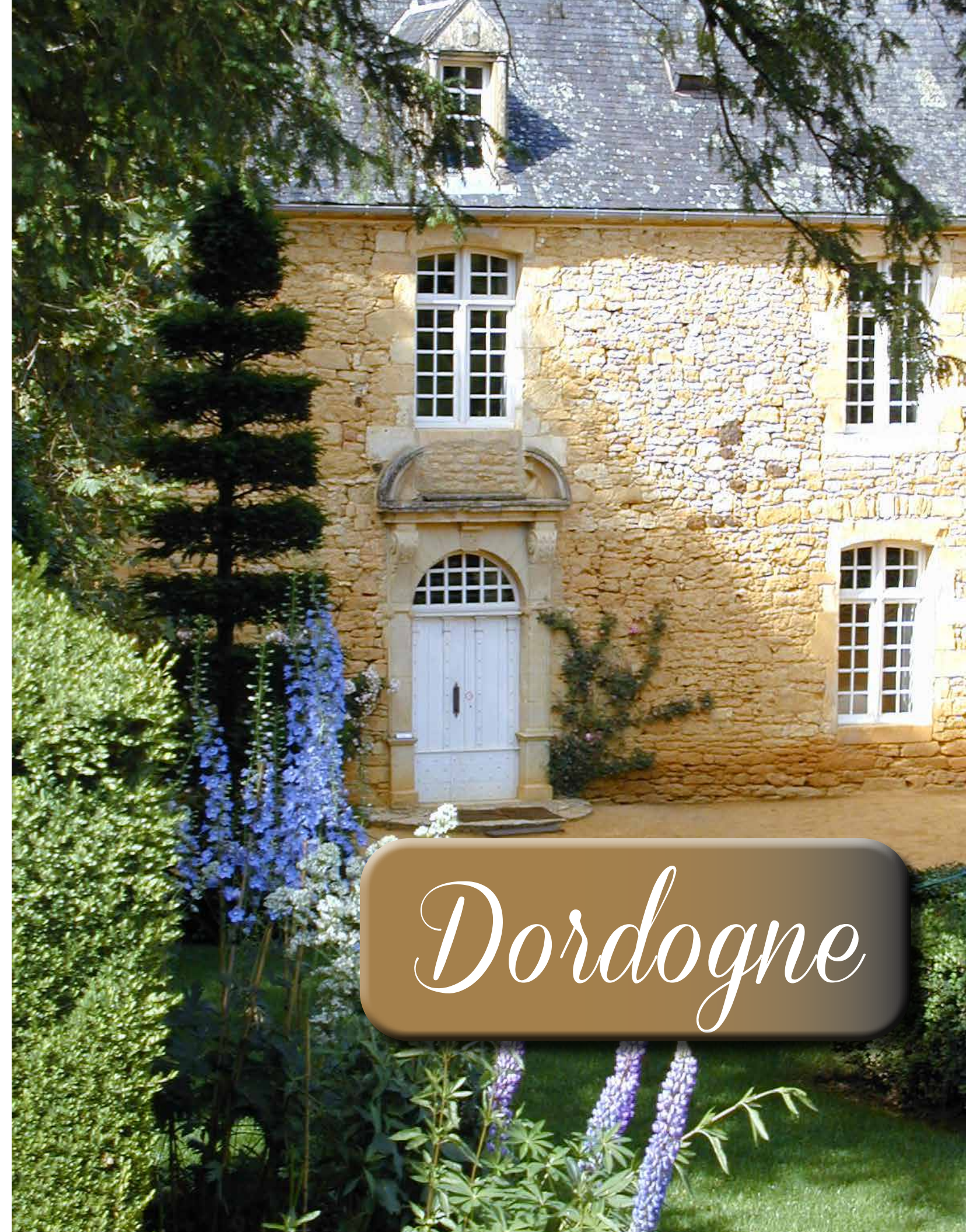


The PONT DU GARD

Built by the Romans over 2000 years ago, this amazing feat of engineering still stands intact today and is just 15 minutes' drive from our Provence cottages.

This astounding example of Roman engineering spans the Gardon River at a point where a little river beach offers you the opportunity to picnic or swim under the vestiges of Antiquity - a truly unique experience!





Dordogne

The Impressive Château de Biron, the largest in the Dordogne, is just a five-minute drive from our village.



Your home base in the Dordogne

Founded in 1284, our hub village is regarded as the model of all the so called "Bastide Villages" because of its perfect layout and the quality of its buildings.

Perched on the summit of a gentle hill, it's an ideal base to explore the rich variety of attractions of the Périgord.



DORDOGNE HUB

Your home base in Dordogne

Founded in 1284, our hub village is regarded as the model of all the so called Bastide villages because of its perfect layout, and the quality of its buildings. Perched on the summit of a gentle hill, it's an ideal base to explore the rich variety of attractions of the Périgord.



Climate

Summers in Dordogne are sunny, and can actually be hot (24°-27°) at any time from June to the end of September. This is a beautiful season, and a good time to visit. In some summers, hot weather is interrupted by violent storms, but others have no storms at all. It is possible to eat outside all summer, but evenings in early May and late September can be a little fresh. Summer often continues right through October, when the autumnal tints make walking and wandering a real pleasure. Autumn (October and November) has average temperatures of 16° to 23°, and spring (April and May) reaches 17° to 24°. Winter, usually mild but sometimes cold and dry, is the season when you can buy fresh truffles and other local specialities in the market. Visitors to the many caves in the Dordogne should think of suitable clothing; the weather can be 17 degrees cooler underground than on the surface!



The perfect view of the Dordogne countryside from Hautfort Château, near Périgueux

Architecture

Visitors to the Dordogne, long regarded as one of France's most architecturally diverse regions, should look out for the very distinctive houses, often limestone with steeply pitched roofs, chartreuses (manor houses), quercy houses, dovecotes and dry-stone huts. Ecclesiastical and military buildings are striking too: churches, châteaux, and the remarkable bastides (fortified towns); our village was one of the first, and is now considered the best preserved of these, with more than 32 buildings classed as historical monuments. Its perfect rectangular town plan is built around the central market place, with galleries and houses constructed between the 13th and 17th centuries.



Landscape and Scenery

The region of the Dordogne is also known as the Périgord. Périgord Blanc (white) is named from the frequent chalky outcrops of rock; Périgord Noir (black) after the dark foliage of oak trees; Périgord Vert (green) after its lush green forests; Périgord Pourpre (purple) after the deep purple of much of the wine produced there.

The area is characterised by river valleys and undulating hills, scenery on a peaceful, re-assuring human scale. Its most famous geological feature is undoubtedly its caves, many of them noted prehistoric sites. Primitive people used the caves for shelter and to create remarkable engravings and paintings, such as those at Lascaux (near Montignac), most of them about 40,000 years old. Other notable caves are at Rouffignac and Combarelles.



Apart from sightseeing, other activities abound, such as...

Sports and Leisure Activities

Swimming, cycling, canoeing, fishing, horse riding, golf, walking and visiting local wineries and restaurants are just a few of the leisure activities available. For the more courageous, you can even take breathtaking flights over the tops of châteaux in a locally hired ultra-light plane.

There are numerous opportunities for swimming too: a lovely natural swimming lake with clear, fresh water just 15 mins walk (2 mins by car), a number of river beaches (safe for children) and of course the Dordogne river itself.

You can also hire push bikes locally to tour the surrounding villages. For those intrepid people (who aspire to follow in the footsteps of Jules Verne) you can also take a boat down the underground river in the Gouffre de Padirac.

Savouring the Périgordian cuisine: restaurants.

Rich and filling cassoulets, duck confit and the most exquisite foie gras are to be found in abundance in the Dordogne. For this is the traditional home of producing every conceivable delight from the gaggles of geese and ducks running about the idyllic countryside. Foie gras is especially delicious when accompanied by a glass of the sweet Monbazillac or Cadillac dessert wine. Trout and truffles, omelettes aux Cèpes and many other heavenly delicacies are to be found in the numerous wayside restaurants – many unpretentious and charming, others expensive.

You'll find our house book bulging with a host of tantalising suggestions!



Shopping and Markets

Being a living village, you have at your disposal a complete range of shops: alimentation (fruit, vegetables and groceries), butchers, charcuteries (delicatessens), fromageries (cheese), patisseries (pastries), boulangeries (bread), tabacs, newsagents, bookshops, cafés, bars, restaurants, pharmacies, ice-creameries, antiques shops, bicycle hire shops and much more are all within a two minute walk from your door. Every Thursday there is seafood and poultry market under the Medieval Marché aux Cèpes; and every October for three weeks the square is alive with shoppers haggling over this ugly but delicious fungus (Cèpe). There are many other markets in the neighbourhood – see the current listing in our house book.

Antiques and Collectables (brocante)

There are four or five shops selling brocante and antiques. The hours of these vary according to the season and the enthusiasm of the proprietors! There is also a rather good boutique of pottery and terra cotta that, though new, are made according to traditional designs. You'll have much fun seeking out treasures like these in the village and nearby.



Dordogne Hub Destinations

All of the following are well worth visiting and within an easy day return trip from our Dordogne hub village.

For each destination we indicate approximately how much time to allow for your visit.

See the map on page 61 for locations and whether they can be accessed by car or public transport or both.

Château Milande

is definitely worth a visit. It has a Falconry show several times a day, and inside is a museum to the famous cabaret singer and dancer, **Josephine Baker** of Folies Bergère fame. You can also see and admire the amazing fountain designed by the visionary landscape architect, **Jules Vacherot**, who was the chief gardener of the city of Paris for the 1900 Universal Exhibition. (allow a full day)

Canoeing on the Dordogne river

Picnic and swimming on the way. You can hire canoes like the couple in the picture opposite and paddle downstream past the many imposing châteaux lining the river. At the end they will bus you back to the starting point (so you won't have to walk back!). (allow a full day)

While in the neighbourhood you can visit the following ...

Château de Beynac

and also

La Roque Gageac

SARLAT and its Market

Market on Saturday morning is one of the best in the region but get there early as it is SO busy! After you've seen the market and had lunch you can then visit the wonderful gardens of Eyrignac ... (allow most of a day if you also visit the next two places on the way home)

Gardens of Eyrignac

are wonderful for an early afternoon visit and if you have time on your way back home you can also call by these extraordinary gardens with a commanding view of the Dordogne valley below.



Domme

Take lunch at the belvedere as you enjoy panoramic view of the river Dordogne. Many interesting little shops are to be found in the village. On the way back you should call by the following "hanging" gardens.

Gardens at Marqueyssac

These are absolutely not to be missed! (allow 2 hours)

Market at Issigeac

Market on Sunday, then proceed onto the famous maker of sweet dessert wines in the region at Montbazillac. (allow 2 hours)

Chateau Monbazillac

for a visit and wine tasting; speciality is their dessert wine.

Bergerac to see the old port

and, go on the river boat, the kids may like it.

Market in Monpazier

Built by the English King Edward I in 1284, it is still regarded as the most remarkable and best-preserved of the Bastide villages in France. This is a must! Market on Thursday. (allow plenty of time for this destination)

Chateau de Biron

Largest château in the Périgord and only 8 km from our Dordogne village.

Grottes de Lascaux

These are very famous but for the more adventures take a trip down the underground river at the following ...

Gouffre de Padirac

Explore under the earth in a boat, just like Jules Verne. (allow 2 hours)

Rocamadour

but make sure you take your walking stocks there!

The Grottes de Font de Gaume

Here you see the original paintings (not replicas) over 17,000 years old. Take warm clothing as it can be cold down there! (allow 2 hours)



[Rouffignac](#)

[Les Eyzies](#)

[Castelnaud](#)

Chateau with catapult and other medieval weapons high above the river.

[Troglodite caves in Belves](#)

[Wine village of St Emilion](#)

and have lunch in the main square.

[The beautiful chateau of Hautefort](#)

just north of Perigueux.

[Badefols-d'Ans](#)

[Brantome - Abbey](#)

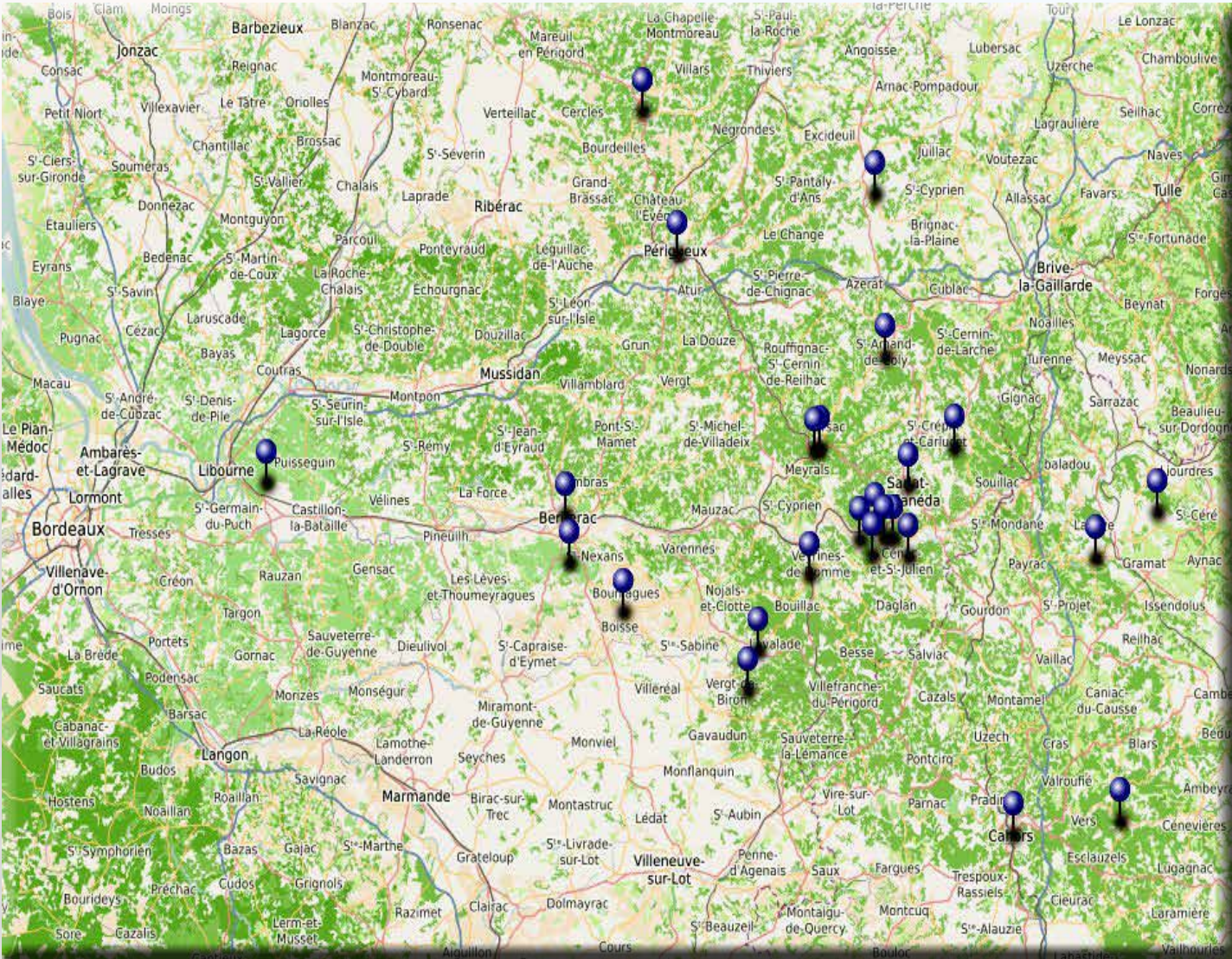
[Cahors](#)

The Lot river and ancient bridge are well worth seeing.

There are some very nice restaurants near the market square too!



Map showing the recommended destinations to visit from our Dordogne Hub
Flash the QR code on page 60 for more information on getting to each destination.



For more information on these destinations visit

<https://frenchcottages.com/dordogne-hub-destinations.html>

or flash this QR code with your SmartPhone



Dordogne Cottage: "La Bastide "

About the cottage

"La Bastide" is a traditional stone house located in the heart of the 13th Century village and only a few steps from the central market place. The minute you enter the village by any of its 3 arched gateways you feel there is something special and exciting in the air; a peaceful charm about the shops and the people that is not lost on any visitor to this ancient 'bastide.'

Substantially and sensitively renovated in early 2013, this traditional French country village house stands on the corner of a quiet street and a charming "carreyou" (small lane) and is built from a mixture of ash and honey coloured stone. Solid and imposing with walls over two feet thick, its façade boasts a beautiful double entrance door surmounted by a crest, another larger quadruple French door and, higher up, a graceful window looking out onto the street.

There are three levels. The living area is on the ground level; two bedrooms and a bathroom are on the middle level; and there are an additional two beds and bathroom on the open plan top level in a converted attic ("grenier"). With its thick ancient stone walls, the house is cool in summer and the automatic electric central heating makes it cosy and inviting in winter. The house is ideal for a couple, two couples or a family of up to six.

Layout

Ground floor

- Terra cotta tiled floors with rugs, rendered white stonewalls and exposed oak beam ceilings.
- Large open space comprising a living room, dining area and kitchen at the rear.
- The living room has a large comfortable sofa, two spacious armchairs, coffee table, Satellite TV and stereo with CD, telephone and bookshelves with some books in English and French.



La Bastide, Ground Floor



La Bastide, First Floor



La Bastide, Top Floor

La Bastide suits from 2 to 6 guests



- Broadband internet for guest use. USB charging points for phones and tablets, etc.
- The dining room has a long traditional oak table seating 8 people. You can open the French doors give a feeling of "en-plein-air" dining. The handmade chestnut staircase, added in 2013, is a beautiful feature on this floor.
- The newly renovated kitchen has a high efficiency oven, induction cook top, microwave, dishwasher, fridge, newly designed lower cupboards, range hood and all utensils and cutlery, etc.
- Telephone provides free calls to most fixed lines in the world.

First floor

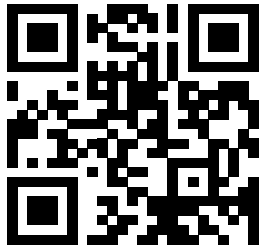
- Polished oak floors with rugs and exposed oak beam ceilings.
- Two double bedrooms: one with a Queen Bed.
- Portable air-conditioner that can serve either room.
- Fully renovated and updated bathroom with washbasin, WC and enclosed shower recess. The floor tiles in this and the top floor bathroom are handmade tiles from Bordeaux.

Top floor

- King bed (or two singles), air-conditioner and second bathroom with shower, hand basin and WC.
- Washing machines and dryers.
- Flash this QR code for a video tour of the house.

Parking

- Right outside the house!



Dordogne Cottage: "Le Séjour "

About the cottage

"Le Séjour", as the name suggests, is a very comfortable village house in which to spend time enjoying the unique atmosphere and history of the 13th Century village. Only a few steps from the central market place, Le Séjour is a traditional *maison de colombage* or *half-timbered* house.

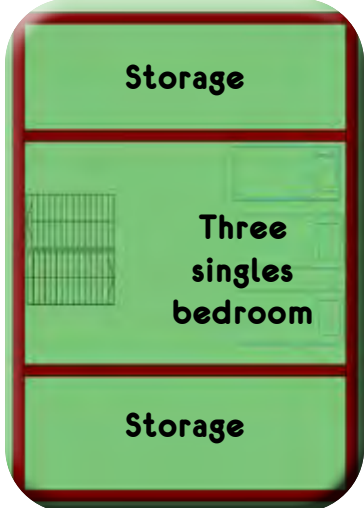
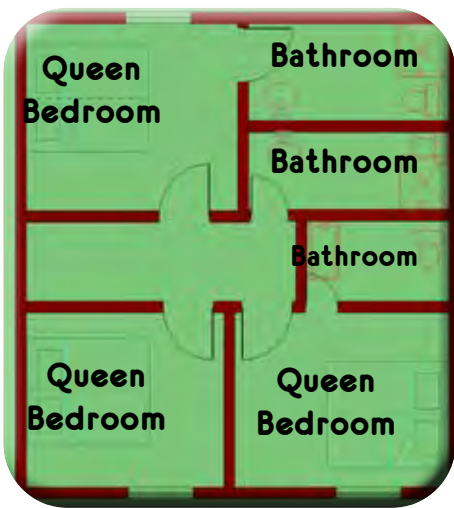
A thoughtful restoration has made this cottage spacious and suitable for larger groups, as well as couples, with several bathrooms and a large kitchen. There are 3 storeys, but all the living areas are on the ground level, including a conveniently located WC.

First floor, 3 bedrooms (2 air-conditioned) with Queen sized beds and 3 bathrooms, one with Spa bath. The grenier (attic) has 3 single beds. With its thick ancient stone walls, the house is cool in summer and the electric central heating makes it cosy and inviting in winter. Parking is available just outside.

Layout

Ground floor

- Large open space comprising a living room, dining area and kitchen at the rear.
- Semi-separate TV and music area.
- Terra cotta tiled floors with rugs and rendered white stone walls.



Le Séjour suits from 2 to 9 guests



- The dining room has a long table seating 8 - 10 people and is looked over by a reproduction 18th century tapestry giving a baronial air to your banquet!
- Laundry with washing machine, dryer and toilet.
- The living room has a lounge, two sofas, a coffee table, Satellite TV connection, SMART TV with Netflix available, telephone and bookshelves with some books in English and French. Also games for children.
- Broadband internet. USB charging points for phones and tablets, etc.
- Telephone with free calls to most national and international fixed phones.

First floor

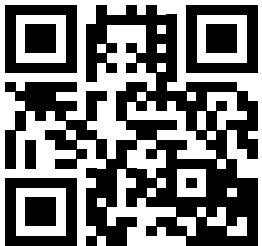
- Three double bedrooms, (with Queen size beds) two with ducted air-conditioning.
- Three bathrooms, (two en-suite to bedrooms). One bathroom has a spa bath and a decorative traditional stone sink as well as modern hand basin and toilet.
- Electric instantaneous hot water showers to accommodate the demand of even the largest groups staying.

Top floor

- Extra bedroom for children or single adults with three single beds
- Flash this QR code for a video tour of the house.

Parking

- Right outside the house!



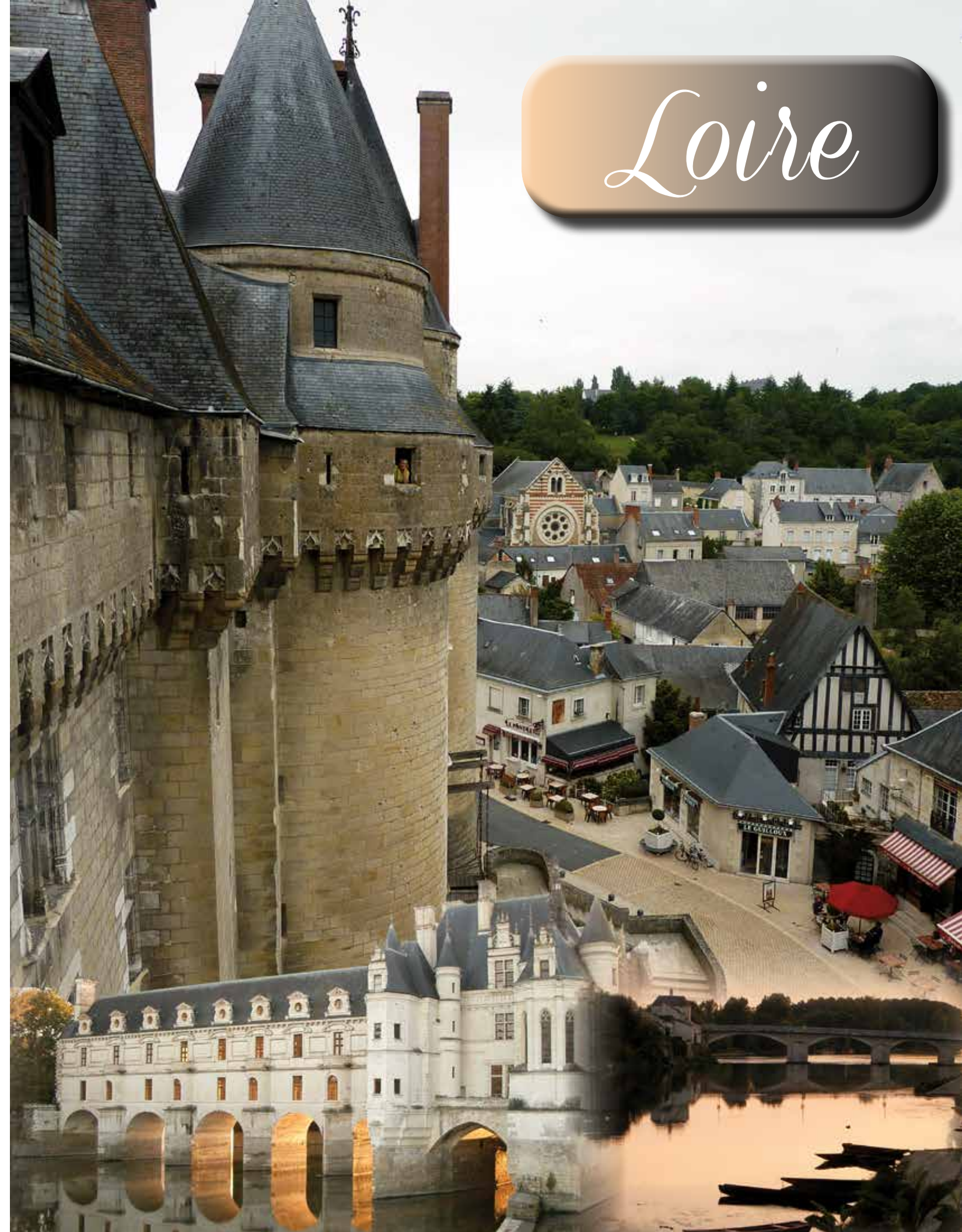
*The Romantically Beautiful Medieval
Market Square, dating from 1284*



Loire



Rue Voltaire circa 1680





***Your home base in the Loire ...
Home of the Plantagenet Kings***
With origins going back to Roman times when it was a Castrum (Gallo-Roman fortress), our village became an English possession in the 11th century. It was the favoured home of Henri II Plantagenet, who became King of England in 1154, and it was he who commissioned the basis of the present day château. Thereafter followed a prosperous development; fine medieval houses with beautiful decorative features were built - many surviving today - particularly along the Rue Voltaire.

LOIRE VALLEY HUB

Your home base in the Loire

*Petite ville, grand renom,
Assise sur pierre ancienne,
Au haut le bois, au pied de la Vienne*

*Little town of great renown,
Perched on stone of long ago
The wood above, the Vienne below.*

With origins going back to Roman times when it was a Castrum (Gallo-Roman fortress), our village became an English possession in the 11th century. It was the favoured home of Henri II Plantagenet, who became King of England in 1154, and it was he who commissioned the basis of the present day château. Thereafter followed a prosperous development; fine medieval houses with beautiful decorative features were built – many surviving today – particularly along the Rue Voltaire. With so many corners to explore, from the heights of the château, to the vineyards with little restaurants hidden away to the peaceful banks of the beautiful Vienne River, abundant with fish and wild birds, you'll be hard pressed to find the time to fit in the celebrated castles and other historic attractions all so temptingly close!



François Rabelais

Climate

The Valley of the Loire is exceptional in Northern France for its soft and gentle climate – a garden where you will see palms and plants normally associated with warmer regions. Its unique geographical position allows the warm Atlantic breezes to penetrate and accounts for a relatively mild winter, long and peaceful autumns and warm summers.



Architecture

The Loire is celebrated for its great châteaux, but there is also a large range and variety of other interesting buildings to see: mills, slate-roofed cottages, grand abbeys and monasteries, the peculiar troglodytic dwellings, frequently still occupied, and the characteristic half-timbered houses that defy gravity with their expanding upper storeys. The "Maison Rouge" is a very fine example of this genre.

The town has a wealth of historic buildings including the Hotel Gargantua with its magnificent tourelle (tower), the 15th Century Hotel du Grenier à Sel, just opposite our cottage La Touraine, and the Chapel of St Radegonde embellished by a beautiful 13th century Romanesque fresco. You'll discover new corners every time you go out for a stroll!

Landscape and Scenery

Apart from the beauty of its buildings, from opulent to rustic, the Loire is a region of both natural and cultivated beauty. Picturesque streams, fields, forests, and formal gardens make up a varied landscape that has something to offer at every turn in the road. Armed with a picnic lunch ("pique-nique") and a bottle of the local red, you can lunch by the Vienne, the Loire or one of the many other charming locations after your visit to a stately home just around the corner.

Sports and Leisure Activities

Swimming, cycling, canoeing down the Vienne, fishing, golf, walking and visiting local wineries and restaurants are among the many pleasures available. There are many riverboat and barge trips that operate along the Loire and its tributaries. For horse lovers and equestrians, a visit to the Château of Saumur is a must.



Savouring the Touraine cuisine: restaurants

Exquisite river fish, hazel grouse in truffle sauce, rillettes, fine cheeses of an unimaginable variety accompanied by one or two of the many fine wines produced in Touraine - reds, whites or rosé - and topped off with a slice of Tarte Tatin swimming in crème fraîche is just one example of a truly kingly repast that, alas, won't be kind to your figure. But this is the region of a highly delicate and sophisticated cuisine: whether you cook at home or visit some of the many little local restaurants, you'll be pleased to take a holiday from your customary sensible diet.



The combination of climate and rich soil enables the production of some of France's best fruit and vegetables and it is here that the true champignons hail from, called erroneously, "Champignons de Paris"

Don't forget to order some "Piores tapées", delicious when marinated and a specialty of this region to top off your Pantagrueian debauch.

You'll make Rabelais dance on his grave!



Shopping and Markets

You have available a complete range of local shops of every description: alimentation (fruit, vegetables and groceries), butchers, charcuteries (delicatessens), fromageries (cheese), patisseries (pastries), boulangeries (bread), chocolateries, tabacs, newsagents, bookshops, cafés, bars, restaurants, pharmacies, ice-creameries, antiques shops, bicycle hire shops and much more are all within three-minute walk from your door. On Saturday, Sunday and Thursday there is a small local market in the square. For entertainment in the evening visit the many jazz clubs, pizzerias (French Style) or quaint bars like the Café Français shown opposite. Or, if your French is good, you can visit the local cinema.

Antiques and Collectables (brocante)

There is also a good selection of shops selling antiques, both old and reproduction. The best places may be found on its outskirts.

Keep an eye out for the BROCANTE signs where you'll find fine furniture, paintings, sculptures and decoration items for your garden such as stone statues and wrought iron gates. Your only problem here will be getting them home on the plane...

Loire Valley Hub Destinations

All of the following are well worth visiting and within an easy day return trip from our Loire Valley hub village.

For each destination we indicate approximately how much time to allow for your visit.

See the map on page 81 for locations and whether they can be accessed by car or public transport or both.

Candes St Martin

A pretty little Medieval village at the confluence of the Loire and Vienne rivers. Go there for lunch. The cathedral is worth seeing with many lovely artworks including this painting of St Martin cutting his cloak in half to share with a beggar. (allow 2 hours)



Saumur and its château

The château of the horse. Again, great for kids and equestrians! (allow half a day)



Musée Rabelais

Chinon

The château overlooks the village and the magnificent river below. This is the place where Joan of Arc met the French King Charles VII and where the poet Rabelais was born. If you have a chance, visit the little Guinguette – a little outdoor bar with dance floor – which is open on the banks of the Vienne in the Summer months. It’s divine sitting there of a Summer’s evening enjoying a local wine and gazing at the impressively lit up fortress on the opposite bank. Here is a famous mediaeval chapel built into the rock ST RADEGONDE. A semi-troglodyte chapel of the twelfth century built around the tomb of John the Hermit, the recluse who had his hermitage carved into the hillside in the fifth century. Queen Radegonde would come visit him, hence the origin of the name of the Chapel.

(allow plenty of time for this destination)



The Royal Abbey of Fontevraud

It is here that Richard the Lionheart and Eleanor of Aquitaine are buried. Fascinating to see, especially if you’ve seen the feature film with Peter O’Toole and Katherine Hepburn, “The Lion in Winter” (allow 2 hours)



Villandry

The gardens are superb and unique in that some sections are entirely composed of vegetables! The staff often take the produce home or donate it to the locals. (allow half a day)



Langeais

Have a coffee and cake here looking at the drawbridge and façade, at the little patisserie just opposite the entrance. (allow half a day)



Château d’Ussé - Château of the Sleeping Beauty

This is often called the “Château of the Sleeping Beauty” and sure enough, there she is on the top floor waking from her 100-year-long sleep with her coiffure still perfectly intact – not a hair out of place! How does she do it? If you do not go inside, trot over the Bridge away from the château, where you can then see over the wall and get a great photo.

(allow a hundred years plus half a day)



Azay-le-Rideau

A wonderful château with fascinating interiors set in the middle of a man-made lake. (allow half a day)

Château de Brézé

Great day visit for kids with its incredibly deep dry moats and wine caves to visit. (allow half a day)

Chenonceau Château

Arguably the most beautiful and extraordinary in France, entirely built over the river Cher. Take a stroll through the beautiful formal gardens and lunch at the restaurant there. (allow a full day)

Amboise Château and the Clos Luce.

There's lots to see in the château and just opposite is the museum and home of Leonardo Da Vinci where he spent his last years. (allow half a day)

Cité Royale de Loches

Loches is home to one of the most beautiful fortified cities in France, which dominates the town and the bucolic Indre valley. (allow half a day)

Musé Balzac

For lovers of French literature, this little château is worth a visit. Balzac was born in nearby Tours and often visited the owners of this castle. He never had any money despite his literary success! (allow 1-2 hours)

Blois

The Chateau of Blois is a brilliant illustration of the development of French architecture from the Middle Ages to the 17th century. It has a royal history from Louis XII who built the oldest part of the chateau to Francois I who added the renaissance wing with the unique open circular staircase. (allow half a day)



Chambord

It looks like an enormous wedding cake and is one of those 'must-sees' that you probably wouldn't return to as once you pass through the grandiose exterior there isn't much to see inside at all. Disappointing. (allow 2 minutes...just kidding, 1 -2 hours will do it)

Tours Cathedral

Amazingly high spires and much else to see around it in this important rural city. (allow 2 or 3 hours)

Richelieu

This is a 'model' town built at the order of Cardinal Richelieu who grew up there and was rich and influential enough in later life to buy and reconstruct the whole town! It's worth going there for lunch then wandering around the beautiful park that belonged to the now demolished château. (allow 2 - 3 hours)

Château du Rivau

You can visit this on your way back from Richelieu. (allow 2 hours)

Montresor

Lovely château and sweet little village about it. (allow 2 - 3 hours)

Cheverny Chateau

One of the better small castles in the region. Visit it but it isn't worth actually staying in. (allow 2 - 3 hours)

Valençay Chateau

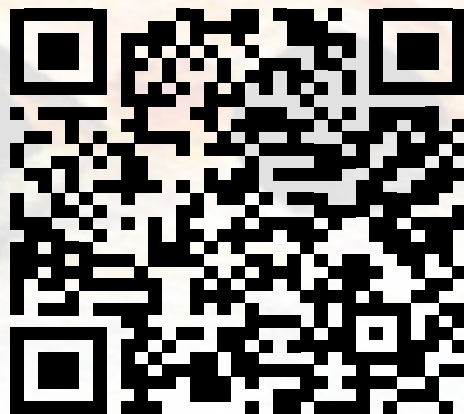
Once owned by Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, this is also worth a visit if you are not already "château-ed out" after visiting the previous castles above. (allow 2 hours)



For more information on these destinations visit

<https://frenchcottages.com/loirevalley-hub-destinations.html>

or flash this QR code with your SmartPhone



**Map showing the recommended destinations to visit from our Loire Valley Hub
Flash the QR code on page 80 for more information on getting to each destination.**



Loire Valley Cottage: "La Touraine "

About the cottage

The beauty and fame of this little town has been praised by many French poets, the most famous being François Rabelais, who thought that there could be nothing better than to eat, drink and be merry in his blessed birthplace. As you wander through the medieval quarter where many important events in French history have taken place, you will discover many quiet corners; and tucked away in one of these our cottage "La Touraine" may be found. This attractive stone house with its little courtyard garden, grape vine and mansard roof makes a very comfortable and centrally located base for your explorations of the town and surrounding countryside. It is centrally heated and has ducted air-conditioning in the bedroom.

On-site parking, grand master bedroom with a stone fireplace and royal atmosphere are just some of the appealing features of the cottage. The cottage is ideal for a couple, but can accommodate an extra visitor, or up to two young children with the visitors' beds supplied.

Layout

Street Level

- Double entrance gate opens onto a small, private courtyard. Under cover lock up parking and laundry under the house with washing machine and dryer. A small set of stairs leads to...



Ground floor

- Table for 4, sitting room framed by double French windows opening onto a small Juliet-style balcony overlooking garden and street.
- Sitting room has Television (satellite) and music system, radio and books.
- Telephone. Free for calls to most fixed phones.
- Broadband internet. USB charging points for phones and tablets, etc.
- Ground floor toilet and hand basin.
- Well-equipped modern kitchen with oven, cook top, microwave, refrigerator, dishwasher and all necessary utensils and kitchenware.
- One of the two sofas converts to a comfortable double bed.



La Touraine, Ground Floor

First floor

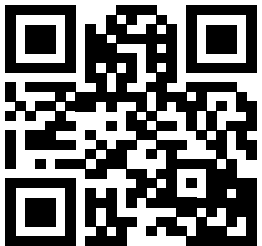
- Spacious Grand Master Bedroom with rugs, four-poster-style Queen sized bed, château quality wall hangings. **Ducted Air Conditioning.**
- Very comfortable sitting area with armchairs and open stone fireplace.
- En-suite bathroom with separate shower enclosure, washbasin & WC.



La Touraine, First Floor

Parking

- On-site, right underneath the house.
- Flash this QR code for a video tour of the house



La Touraine suits from 2 to 4 guests



Master Bedroom in La Touraine Cottage



A FIVE STAR RESIDENCE IN THE LOIRE: La Mirabeau

As you continue to wander through the medieval precincts you will discover a lovely little square called "la Place Mirabeau" which is the focus of a little quarter that seems to be a separate village within the town; just nearby our 18th century villa "La Mirabeau" may be found.

This large and handsome stone house with its 11th century courtyard garden, Virginia creeper and mansard roof makes a very comfortable and centrally located base for your explorations of the town and surrounding countryside. It is the companion piece of our other cottage "La Touraine" but is larger, having four large bedrooms and three bathrooms as well as a beautiful little garden courtyard, just off the kitchen.

Parking nearby, grand master bedroom with en-suite, a stone fireplace and three other large bedrooms with facilities near at hand are just some of the appealing features of the house.

As some guests observed, "you have tastefully restored the house to five-star quality with sensitivity to its traditional features - we feel like we are living in the pages of a magazine!"

You will think so too.

The villa is ideal for larger groups or families, but also suits couples who love space.

The house is centrally heated throughout with hydronic gas heating and a beautiful gas ceramic stove on the ground floor. The bedrooms are air-conditioned.



Loire Valley Villa: "La Mirabeau"

Layout
Ground Floor Level

- ▶ Entrance vestibule with fireplace and room to deposit suitcases, clothes etc.
- ▶ Dining table for 6 to 8.
- ▶ Large sitting room just off kitchen with gas operated fire, two sofas, armchairs, television (satellite) and music system with CD, radio and books.
- ▶ Telephone (unrestricted to most fixed lines in the world)
- ▶ WI-FI internet.
- ▶ USB charging points for phones and tablets, etc.
- ▶ Ground floor toilet.
- ▶ Well-equipped luxury kitchen with large gas cook top and oven, microwave, refrigerator, dishwasher and all necessary kitchenware.
- ▶ Kitchen leads outside into walled courtyard which is sunny, private and protected.
- ▶ Laundry with two washing machines and two dryers.

First Floor

- ▶ Spacious Grand Master Bedroom with rugs, King sized bed, lovely stone walls and view of the very quiet street. Double glazed windows.
- ▶ Very comfortable sitting area with armchairs and open stone fireplace.
- ▶ En-suite marble bathroom with shower and bathtub, washbasin & WC.



- ▶ Second King sized bedroom with adjacent second bathroom and WC. This bedroom has a view over the rear garden.
- ▶ The second bathroom is accessible from the staircase for general use.
- ▶ Both bedrooms can be configured with two King Single beds each.

Second Floor

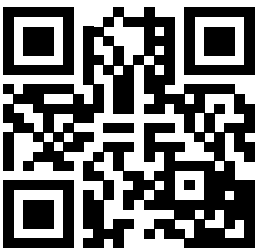
- ▶ King bedroom with rugs and view of the garden courtyard. Extra single bed. Can be configured as three single beds. Half-timbered ceilings.
- ▶ King Bedroom with King bed and additional Queen sofa bed. Can be configured as two twin Singles and Queen sofa bed or just left as small suite with bed(s) and comfortable sofa.
- ▶ Bathroom is accessible from both bedrooms on this floor.
- ▶ Up to two cots can be supplied for multiple families or families with twins!

Garden Terrace with BBQ

- ▶ This is just off the kitchen. See details on the next page.

Parking

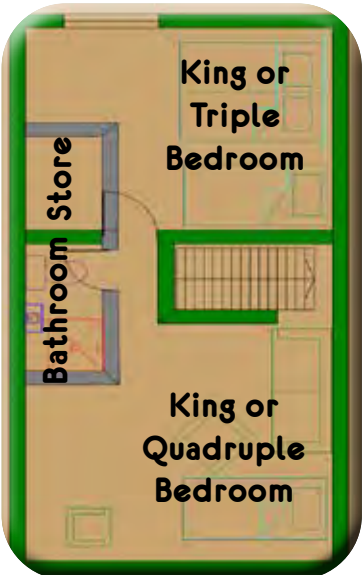
- ▶ There is a space in front of the house for dropping off your things. Street parking is available nearby or in the public free carpark just around the corner near the river.
- ▶ Flash this QR code for a video tour of the house.



La Mirabeau, Ground Floor



La Mirabeau, First Floor



La Mirabeau, Top Floor

Convivial Outdoor Space

Rabelais would have something witty to say about this little 11th-century courtyard, just perfect for indulging in a lunch of the local cheeses, a selection of patés from the shop down on the corner and some deliciously light pastries from the local patisserie just around the corner. Or, more seriously, a bottle of the renowned local red with a more substantial evening repast prepared in your own kitchen just two steps away or on our barbeque.

The high walls enclosing this delightful little spot keep out the direct sun of Summer but still allow the garden to flourish - roses, the wonderfully green and cool creeper, our lovely hydrangea pictured here and various smaller shrubs all seem to thrive in this peaceful little enclave.

The outdoor table and chair set is perfect for four to six and is a nice place to set yourself up to read a book or just relax and think about the things you've visited during the busy day.



High walled garden at our Villa, La Mirabeau

A photograph of a traditional flat-bottomed boat, known as a Gabare, on the Vienne River. The boat is silhouetted against the bright, golden light of a sunset or sunrise. The river's surface is calm, reflecting the warm light and the dark shapes of the boat and the surrounding trees. The background shows a hazy, sunlit landscape with distant hills and more trees. The overall mood is peaceful and historical.

Traditional Flat-Bottomed Boats on the Vienne River

Known as Gabares, these traditional wooden barges were the only practical method available before the invention of the steamboat and the development of the railways in the 19th century for transporting goods from the colonies via the seaport of Nantes (downstream) or from Lyons (upstream) to the villages and towns in the Loire Valley.

They are flat-bottomed because the Loire, the Vienne and their tributaries are often quite shallow in parts with unexpected hidden sandbanks and shoals making navigation a hazardous affair.



Pyrenees Basque



PYRENEES-ATLANTIQUES-BASQUE HUB

Your home in Biarritz

At the beginning of the 19th century Biarritz was merely a small Basque fishing harbour standing on the doorstep to Spain, just 5 km from the more famous Bayonne. But it was popular as a seaside getaway and was mainly frequented by the Bayonnais who could only reach it by donkey or mule.

But in 1838 it was suddenly discovered by the Spanish nobility. Princess Eugénie, the future Empress of France, commenced her annual visits and even persuaded Napoleon III to accompany her; it soon became a famous resort. The Emperor was captivated by its charms, and even more so by *hers*, so when they made their first trip together in 1854 he had a palace built – the Villa Eugénie, which is now the Hotel du Palais. The little fishing village suddenly became sought after by the rich, famous and aristocratic from all over Europe and the procession of these illustrious visitors has continued ever since: Edward VII, Sarah Bernhardt, Maurice Ravel, Stravinsky, Jean Cocteau, Ernest Hemingway, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Frank Sinatra, Rita Hayworth and Gary Cooper are amongst their number.

Climate

The Atlantic Coast generally is one of the sunniest regions in France and Biarritz enjoys excellent weather most of the year. In fact, in winter the geography of the Basque mountains conspires with the warm breezes from the Atlantic to create a micro-climate with a distinctly exotic, almost tropical feeling. For those fond of bathing, Biarritz is blessed with a beautiful, sweeping sandy beach with the best rollers for surfing in France and a water temperature reaching an average of 20 degrees from May – September. Those keen on Winter sports can visit the stunning slopes of the nearby Pyrenees between December and April.



Architecture

Two quite different styles of architecture are to be found side-by-side throughout the region: the traditional Basque farmhouse, similar to the chalets of the Alpine regions in Europe, with its red painted wood and white walls contrasts starkly with the grandiose palaces and mansions built in the 19th century Eclectic 'style' and the early 20th century Art Deco manner.

The Basques are extremely proud of their homes and even some quite humble ones often display the date of construction or even the original owner's name over the entrance doorway.

Landscape and Scenery

The picturesque Pyrenees appeal strongly to romantics, its steep-sided valleys with rushing torrents leading in their higher reaches to vast upland pastures populated with wild horses and picture-book cows, set off by snowy peaks mirrored in the tranquil lakes. This is an image that inspires artists and nature lovers alike. It is hard to believe such a contrasting landscape can be found less than two hours' drive from coastal Biarritz, but even more surprising to learn that you will also find hot springs there! For those lovers of hiking or walks in the woods, there are many mountain paths well worth exploring. Sprinkled with little Basque villages or shepherds' keeps, these delightful byways recall ancient traditions and stir the imagination.



Sports and Leisure Activities

Swimming, cycling, skiing, surfing, fishing, horse riding, golf, walking and visiting local wineries and restaurants are just some of the many leisure activities available. Even white water rafting is available, if you dare!

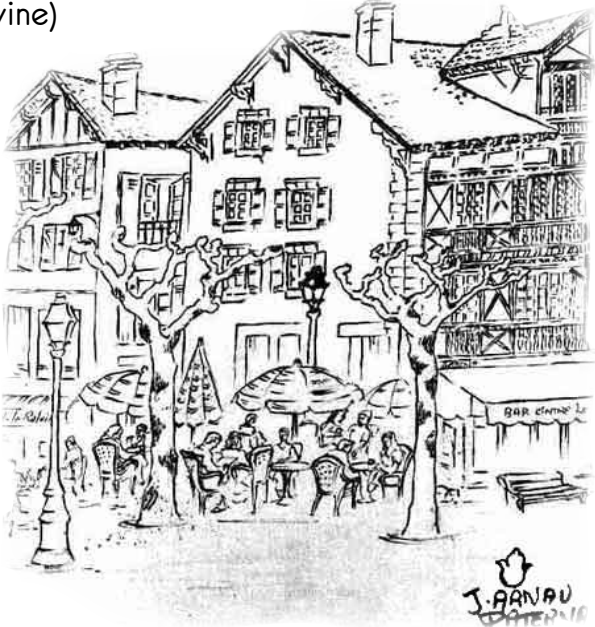
Savouring the Basque cuisine: restaurants.

Fresh sardines grilled over an open fire accompanied by the best olives you'll ever taste and a glass or two of txakoli (a Basque sparkling wine) is a culinary experience that you don't find anywhere else.

Spain is only 40 minutes away (San Sebastian or Hondarribia) and there you can also indulge in tapas, shaved ham and other Spanish delicacies. But you needn't go that far: just 20 mins away is Bayonne; try a slice of Bayonne's finest cured ham, Brebis (sheep's) cheese, the confit of Bearn (sauce Bearnaise!) or indulge and order a garbure soup, poule au pot, the salmon de Gaves, Ttoro, piperade... you'll find out what the word hot really means when you savour the red peppers of Espelette!

Shopping and Markets in Biarritz

Biarritz is a vibrant town and you will find a full range of shops, markets and even several casinos! Don't forget this is where the elite meet and you will soon discover why it boasts the highest real-estate values in all of France - even higher than Nice.



Language, Folklore and Traditional Music

The mysterious origin of the Basque language, Euskara, which bears no resemblance to any other Indo-European language, is reflected in an equally unique culture. The musical tradition is still strong and the most famous example of this is the Fandango, which is in fact a dance often described as both passionate and chaste. If you can catch a performance of this strangely formal yet energetic dance, don't miss it! Basque songs are haunting melodies, reminiscent of the American blues, with lyrics drawn from everyday life.

Places to visit nearby and further afield.

The unique position of Biarritz on the Spanish 'doorstep' enables you to visit the capital of the Basque region, San Sebastian, in less than 40 mins.

Other celebrated destinations in easy reach of Biarritz are: St-Jean-de-Luz (where Louis XIV was married), St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, a resting place for pilgrims trekking towards Santiago de Compostella in Spain and recognizable by their talismanic Scallop shells, Bayonne (they made bayonets there!), Pau, Lourdes, Bilbao, and many fascinating lesser known places.

Basque Pyrenees Hub Destinations

All of the following are well worth visiting and within an easy day return trip from our Basque hub.

For each destination we indicate approximately how much time to allow for your visit. See the map on page 99 for locations and whether they can be accessed by car or public transport or both.

Hondarribia: only 20 minutes by car.

Only 20 minutes by car or a bit longer by train. Go to Spain for lunch either here or at the next destination. (allow 2 hours)

Go to Spain for lunch!

San Sebastian

An elegant northern Spanish city, 25 mins further on from Hondarribia. Great tapas to be had here and many examples of fine Spanish architecture. (allow half a day)

The Getty Museum in Bilbao

This famous museum is only 1 hour 40 minutes from Biarritz. The building is impressive if the contents are disappointingly less so. (allow 2 hours)

St Jean de Luz

Bayonne

Biarritz itself

Eglise Alexandre Newsky ,Casino,
Market near the appartement, fish, cheeses, etc
Walk around to the Lighthouse, go in.
Virgin on the Rocks.
Old fishing port with its seafood restaurants looking out to sea.
Restaurants with Basque menus. Swimming in ocean beach.

Nearby town of Espelette, with its chilli products

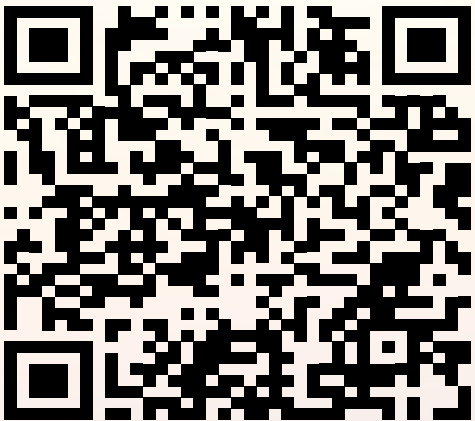
Musée de la Mer



For more information on these destinations visit

<https://frenchcottages.com/basquepyrenees-hub-destinations.html>

or flash this QR code with your SmartPhone



Map showing the recommended destinations to visit from our Basque Pyrenees Hub
Flash the QR code above for more information on getting to each destination.



Basque-Pyrenees Apartment: "L'Escale"

About the Apartment

Taking up the major portion of the ground floor of an attractive old apartment building, L'Escale is comfortably large, centrally located (just a few steps from the esplanade) and all on one level. With two Queen sized bedrooms (very comfortable beds) and a sofa bed for visitors if needed, it is excellent for one or two couples or a family of five. The fresh sea breezes from the nearby Atlantic ocean make for a very restful night's sleep.

Layout

Ground Floor

- ▶ Parquetry floors with oriental rugs, and traditional style furniture in the bedrooms and sitting room.
- ▶ Large sitting room with TV, cassette and CD player, music and books.
- ▶ The living room has two sofas, a small traditional dining table that seats 4, a coffee table, and an open fireplace. (But this is not in use).
- ▶ The kitchen has a gas cook top, oven, microwave, dishwasher, fridge, cupboards with all utensils and cutlery, a washing machine and a dryer. There is a granite topped dining table which can seat eight people.
- ▶ Hydronic central heating throughout.
- ▶ Master bedroom with comfortable Queen sized bed and traditional armoire for clothes.
- ▶ Second Queen bedroom with armoire as well.

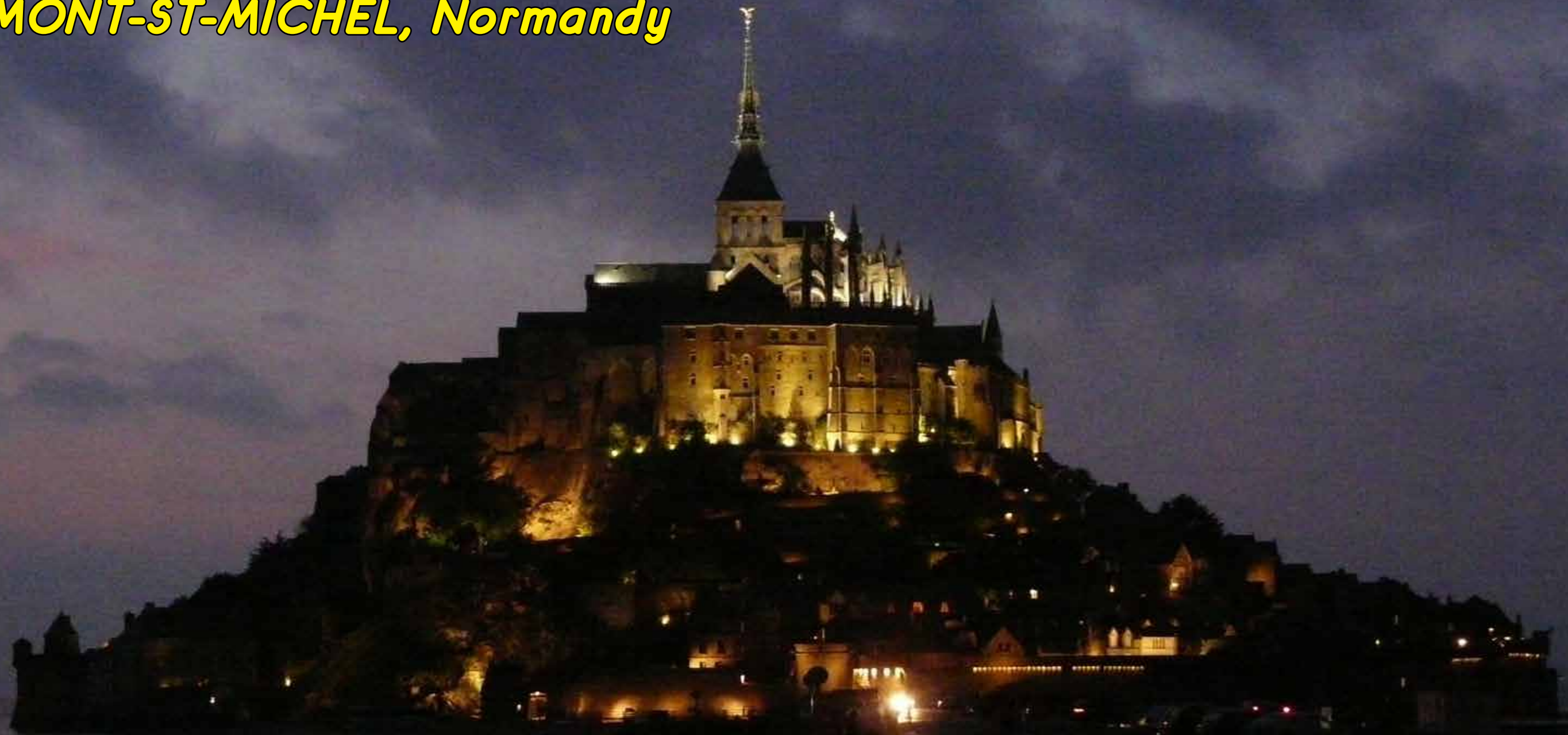
Parking

- ▶ Available outside the house but we also supply a reserved spot in the nearby underground car park .

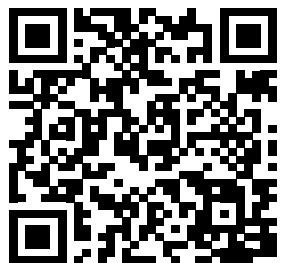


L'Escale suits from 2 to 4 guests

LE MONT-ST-MICHEL, Normandy



Everybody should visit this remarkable island once in their lives. Alternately an Abbey, a prison and a strategic defence location, this striking island has had a rich and chequered history. You can walk out to it when the tide is out but beware you are not marooned there and become part of its history!



***The writer GEORGE SAND's
beautiful and fascinating
château in NOHANT-VIC, Berry***

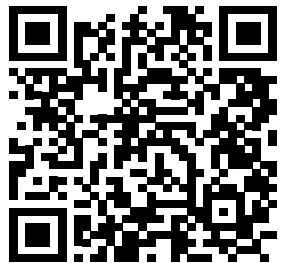
George Sand (Aurore Dupin), the great writer, lover of Frédéric Chopin and many other famous men, was an early non-conformist and feminist. Defying both the law and convention she often dressed as a man and smoked cigars in public. She was interested in personages from all levels of life from Napoleon to the local peasantry. She and her son Maurice established a little puppet theatre in the house shown here where she took great delight in seating the local gentry shoulder-to-shoulder with the lowliest farm hands. A fascinating person who lived life to the full, she is the subject of many books, plays and even Hollywood films such as the Merl Oberon movie "A Song To Remember". It is well worth going out of your way to visit this house, the museum and the gardens situated in her beloved Berry region, which in some ways feels like the very heart of France.



The IDEAL PALACE, in Hauterives

This extraordinary edifice was built by a postman all by himself to express his love for his daughter. It took him 33 years!

Based on photos of Hindu temples in postcards he found in the dead letter office sent from the Far East, he could find no other way to show his love for her. Laughed at by the locals, he ended up making their fortune as its fame spread throughout the world. It was declared a cultural landmark in 1969, by André Malraux, the then Minister of Culture. You can call by Hauterives on your way to Provence or after you have stayed with us there. And do see the 2018 film about it by the same name. It is very moving.



ROQUEBRUNE-CAP-MARTIN CÔTE D'AZUR - one of the "Wilder Shores of Love"

In 1954 the English writer Lesley Blanch wrote her seminal work on the lives of four extraordinary Victorian women and their love of wilder climes. At the time I was reading it, we happened to be driving along the Côte d'Azur and, seeing a sign pointing up to the medieval perched village of Roquebrune, we decided to take a look.

While wandering its narrow, labyrinthine streets I came across a sign saying, "Here, at numbers 4 to 6 from 1950 to 1957 lived the writer Romain Gary with his English writer wife Lesley Blanch.

Quelle coïncidence!!

This beautiful village with a breathtaking view is the perfect stopover if you are on your way to Italy.

And make sure you take a copy of Lesley's book with you!



Villa Bencistà: a divine family-run pensione in Fiesole with a view of Florence that Michelangelo would die for. Your side-trip to Italy!



How we discovered this gem in Italy

Years ago, on our first visit to Florence we had nowhere booked and it was already 9pm. Just when on the point of despair we saw a sign on the road pointing to **PENSIONE BENCISTA**. Why not try it? Stepping over the labrador sleeping across the main entrance we were presently greeted in English by the loveliest Italian lady : Beatrice - the proprietor. "Of course we have a room !" she gaily cried and added, "Have you eaten?" We hadn't. Dinner time was well and truly over but, being the very soul of hospitality, she rushed off and prepared a delicious Tuscan meal for us herself. She and her family have made us feel so at home there that we've been back every year for the past 25 years. Sadly, Beatrice is no longer with us but her soul lives on in this wonderful place. Everybody we have sent there just loves it. And the family name is Simoni - the same as Michelangelo's!



*Make Your
Adventure
a Reality*

How to book

Making the Reservation

- Firstly, please check with us to see if your weeks are still available. Flash this QR code or visit <https://frenchcottages.com/available-weeks-1.html>
- We will put the weeks you wish to book on temporary 'hold' for you and send you the booking instructions and a link to our on-line secure booking form by email.
- Fill out the on-line form choosing your cottages, dates and method of payment. You can pay by **VISA, Mastercard** or by **Bank Transfer** (no cheques please).



Payment methods

You may make payments by cash, bank transfer, or credit card. VISA or Mastercard are accepted. Cheques are not normally accepted. If you are opting for our Easy Instalment Plan (see "OPTION B: (Easy Instalments)" on page 115) then automated credit card debits are preferred. The total due for all your reservations must be paid in full no later than 3 months before your departure. Once paid, we then provide you with an information pack with maps of how to find the houses, entry codes and any useful last-minute information.

Cancellation or Change Policy

If you cancel your entire booking, we refund you the sums paid towards those weeks of your booking that we successfully re-book with a new client. If all weeks are re booked, you will receive a 100% refund - there are no cancellation fees.

If for some reason you find it necessary to cancel a booking, either completely or in part, please inform us immediately to maximise the chances of refunding the sums paid for those cancelled weeks. The earlier you tell us, the better!

Booked weeks are not transferable to another time once confirmed. Deferring or shifting booked periods to another time normally requires cancelling the week(s) no longer required then re booking new weeks, paying a new first instalment on these new weeks. Your instalment(s) for the

original cancelled week(s) will then be refunded, if and when we rebook them. We're sure you would appreciate the reasons for this.

We strongly recommend that you take out travel insurance before you book any travel services; it is no more expensive than taking it out later and will protect you if we are unable to rebook your cancelled weeks.

Minimum and Maximum Stays

Ordinarily, the minimum period you can book is one week. All our guests say that one week was good, but they could easily have stayed longer! So bear this in mind when planning your itinerary.

Normally the maximum booking is six weeks in any one cottage, but longer stays can be arranged if you have special circumstances.

Each cottage is available for bookings on a weekly basis (or multiples of one week) arriving after 4:30 pm on the Friday afternoon and leaving before 9:30 am the Friday morning of your departure. These arrival times allow our guests to enjoy the experience of the wonderful Saturday morning markets and to obtain the week's supplies - far better than a Saturday starting day, where you miss this great experience. Supermarkets and Commercial Shopping Centres are closed on Sundays too, another reason for arriving on a Friday rather than Saturday.

Costs

Tariffs are from \$2180 AUD per week all-inclusive (at the time of printing this). Flash the QR code at the bottom of this page or visit <https://frenchcottages.com/tariffs-by-cottage.html> for the current rates.

What's Included

This price covers **everything** (bed linen, towels, telephone, broadband internet, electricity and gas, initial cleaning, **parking**, local manager support, etc) for up to two people staying. For each extra guest *after the first two included*, it is \$280 per adult and \$210 per child per week. If unsure of your numbers at the time of booking, just book for those you are certain about then inform us of any changes if and when they arise.

Payment Options

We **do not require a bond or security deposit** so there's nothing of this sort to claim back when you return. You have a choice of two convenient payment options: in full at time of booking or by instalments. For bookings made 3 to 9 months before the date of departure, Option A - payment in full, is recommended. For more advanced bookings, six to eighteen months before the date of departure, you may prefer to use Option B - our easy instalment plan. If you are booking at a time that is less than 3 months before your departure, then Option A is the only valid choice.

With Option B, a \$100 surcharge per booked week applies but we will honour the tariffs in force at the time of booking, no matter how far in advance you reserve your weeks; you will therefore be protected against any price rises we may have in the interim.

All payments are in Australian dollars, so you need not worry about currency fluctuations when you book with us.

Details of the Options

OPTION A (Full payment)

Full payment on booking. We send you your instructions immediately and you are protected against any future tariff rises that may occur - the price is fixed at booking.

OPTION B: (Easy Instalments)

A first instalment of \$580 per week reserved is payable on booking. The balance (which is the balance of the total tariff plus the surcharge mentioned above) can then be spread over up to four equally spaced instalments by pre-authorising us to charge your card when the instalment falls due. The last of these instalments must be paid no later than three months before your departure for your holiday. Payments may be stopped at any time should you decide not to go ahead with your booking; see page 114 for our refund policy.

For up-to-date tariffs in Australian dollars (\$AUD) for each cottage visit

<https://frenchcottages.com/tariffs-by-cottage.html>

or flash this QR code with your smartphone



Tips for Our Guests

Car Hire

Leasing, the best option for longer Hire Periods

Many of our guests arrange hire cars for their transport in France. Firstly, there are the famous "lease" deals where you choose not only the model and type, but sometimes also even the colour of your brand new car (Renault, Citroën or Peugeot). Leasing is the best option for longer continuous hire periods. If you want a car for more than 17 days, this is the way to go, but you must organise your lease car at least 4 to 6 weeks before you travel. There is a little more paperwork involved in arranging a lease car **initially**, but much less later. And once you are in France, the process of pickup and return is often more straightforward – especially with the highly organised Peugeot Open Europe or Renault Eurodrive companies. As you can see by the map below, there are many locations for collection and return. Cars can also be returned to major locations in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, Germany and the UK. You can even collect your car in London and drive it to France! When you collect your lease car you will be shown over it as if you were its new owner, which indeed you are till it is returned for recycling. Leasing includes all insurance and assistance in the tariff.

Traditional Car Hire and How to Organise It

It's important to note that you will usually get dramatically better rates if you book your car (Avis, Budget or Hertz) from back home – often half the price of the same car from the same company booked on French shores. But check the extras such as the almost compulsory insurance excess waiver fee before booking and don't let them make you pay this if your TRAVEL INSURANCE already covers the excess – you'd be paying for nothing. Be aware that the car you get will almost certainly not be the one you asked for – usually it is larger, which can make negotiating smaller spaces in our villages more difficult. Hire car agencies expect you to put a security deposit and this can ONLY BE DONE BY CREDIT, NOT DEBIT CARD or ANY OTHER PAYMENT METHOD INCLUDING CASH. You should be very aware of this as not having the right card has led to some farcical situations in our experience.



The Best Places to Collect and Return

Do you need a car in Paris? If arriving there, you should consider if you will need a car during your stay. You almost certainly will not. In this case a downtown depot is the best collection spot. Otherwise the airport depot will be more convenient for immediate collection after clearing customs if you are bypassing Paris. The same logic applies to returning your car.

Who we hire from

For our latest recommendations about who to hire from, please visit our web page: <https://frenchcottages.com/useful-travel-websites.html>



A holiday from driving

Par contre, much can be said for having a holiday from driving along with the other stresses of our daily lives. Some people prefer to get about by train, or to be whisked through the French countryside at 330 km per hour on the marvellous TGV. Nevertheless, it is convenient to have a car during your stay in rural France, so you can ramble about the villages and countryside, or perhaps make a pilgrimage to Montpellier or Aix-en-Provence for a dose of cosmopolitan French art and culture.

What is the best way to get around?

There are a number of options, for example...

One – which is suited to a couple travelling together – is to use the French railway system for the longer journeys, then hire a car locally at or near each village. The SNCF (French National Railways) offers rail/drive options that you may well wish to investigate.

For families, and groups of four or more, hiring a car is usually the cheaper and easier option. If you are hiring from a major company, you can often arrange to return the car to another depot in France, or even in another country. The smaller local companies can't offer you this. There are car hire depots for both small and large companies at Nîmes, Montpellier and Avignon in Provence; in Bergerac, Bordeaux and Périgueux in Dordogne; in Tours in the Loire; and in Biarritz in the Pyrenees. Those of our guests visiting our Provence cottages who wish to be 'car-free' will find that the local **LIO bus network** will carry them to many of the places and attractions they wish to see. The buses are heated, air-conditioned and spacious and cost only a couple of euros per ride, no matter how far!

<https://lio.laregion.fr/>



Money and Banks

The most widely recognized credit cards are VISA and MASTERCARD which are accepted almost everywhere and will allow you to draw from most cash dispensers. Banks are generally open from 8.30 am – 12.30 pm and 1.30 pm – 4 pm; they close on Sunday, and most close on Monday as well. Most banks now **no longer offer a bureau de change** so it is really best to take your credit card one of those special traveller's cards offered by many banks. But beware when using the latter that they will **not** be accepted for security deposits as discussed on page 116.

The Importance of speaking (just a little) French!

Though you will have no trouble getting by speaking in English most of the time, it is important to observe a simple rule with French people: open your conversation with them in **French**, even if you must revert to English after only a few words. The response will be warmer! Here is how to do it with just four words.

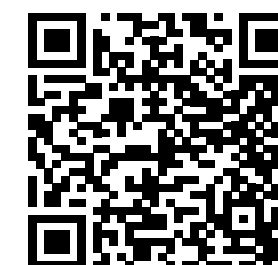
Bonjour! "Hello" or "good-day!"
(Pronounced bon-zhoorr)

Merci "thank you!" (Pron: mare-see)

S'il vous plaît "please" (Pron: sill-voo-play)

Au revoir! "Good-bye" (Pron: oh-rev-vwar)

If you'd like to learn a few more words and phrases, refer to the Traveller's Survival French table on page 118. And don't forget to download the audio version of this to your smart phone or computer from our website: <https://frenchcottages.com/travellers-francais.html>

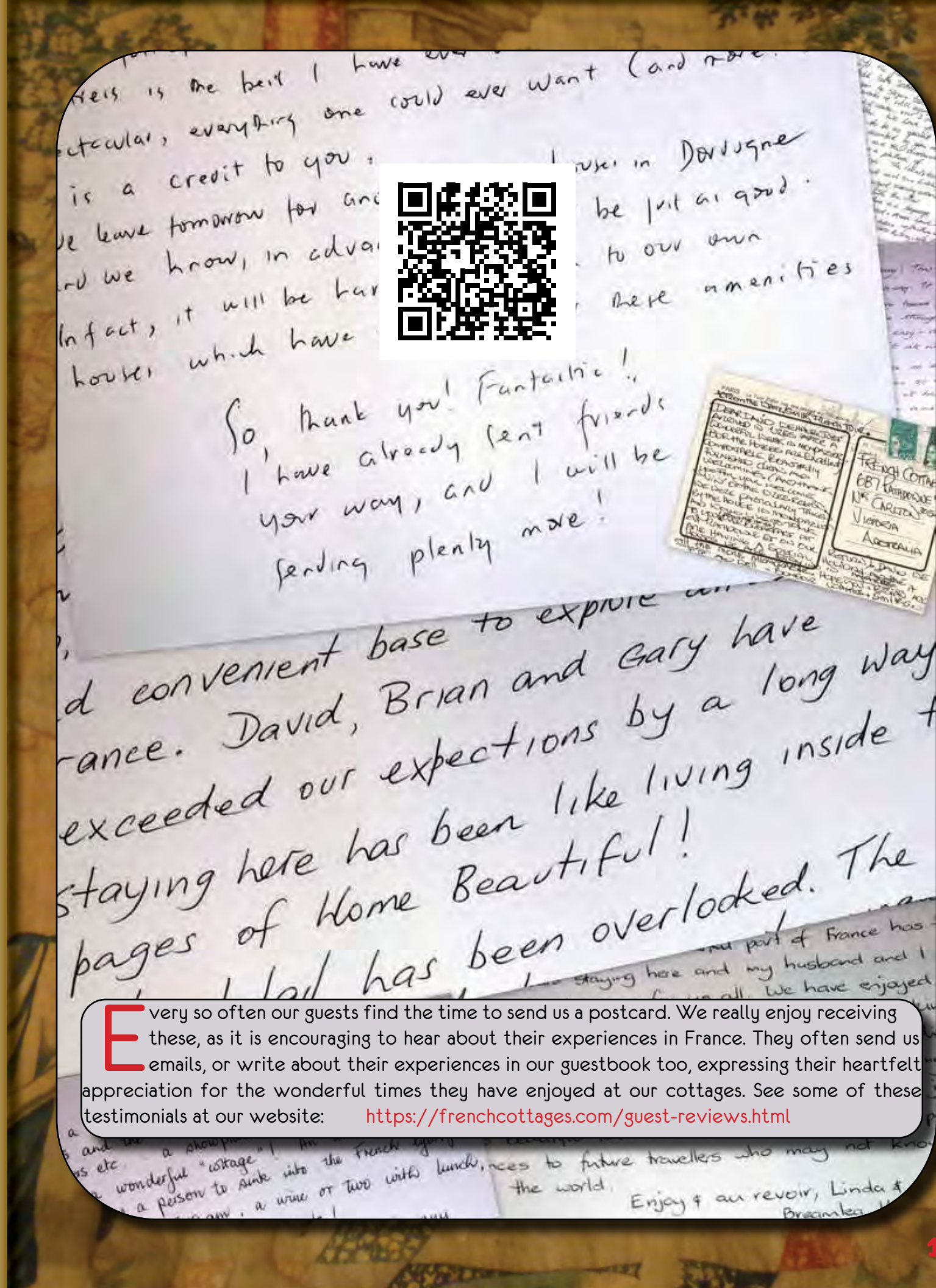


Travellers' Survival French Word List

Here is a basic set of useful words and phrases.

Yes	Oui
No	Non
Hullo (during the day)	Bonjour
Good evening (at night)	Bonsoir
Hullo (answering phone)	Allo
Please	S'il vous plaît
Thank you,	Merci
Where are the toilets?	Où sont les toilettes?
How much?	C'est combien?
Do you speak English?	Parlez-vous anglais?
I don't speak French	Je ne parle pas français.
I am Australian	Je suis Australien(ne)
A white wine please	Un vin blanc SVP
A red wine please	Un vin rouge SVP
Where is the Office of Tourism please?	Où est l'office du tourisme SVP?
Unleaded petrol	(Essence) sans plomb (SP)
Diesel fuel	Gazole
Excuse me	Pardon
It is good	C'est bon
Good	Bon(ne)
One	Un
Two	Deux
Three	Trois
Four	Quatre
Five	Cinq
Six	Six
Seven	Sept
Eight	Huit
Nine	Neuf
Ten	Dix
Twenty	Vingt
Thirty	Trente
Forty	Quarante

Fifty	Cinquante
Sixty	Soixante
Seventy	Soixante-dix
Eighty	Quatre Vingts
Ninety	Quatre Vingt Dix
Six euros	Six euros
Eight euros	Huit euros
Ten euros	Dix euros
One hundred	Cent
One thousand	Mille
How are you? (a familiar way of talking)	Ça va?
How are you? (polite and formal)	Comment allez-vous?
I 'm fine. (in answer to "Ça va?")	Ça va.
I am well, fine, etc. (polite)	Très bien, merci.
A coffee please	Un café, s'il vous plaît.
That one please (when pointing)	Ça, s'il vous plaît
Where is.....?	Où est....?
I am lost	Je suis perdu.
I don't know	Je ne sais pas
I would like a mineral water please	Je voudrais de l 'eau minérale SVP
I'd like a beer please (from the tap)	Je voudrais une bière SVP (pression)
Where is the railway station please?	Où est la gare SVP?
I am looking for...	Je cherche.
(I am) sorry	(Je suis) désolé.
Is there someone who speaks English here?	Il y a quelqu'un qui parle anglais ici?
Bad	Mauvais(e)
Terrible	Terrible



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CARLTON NORTH, 3054.VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.**

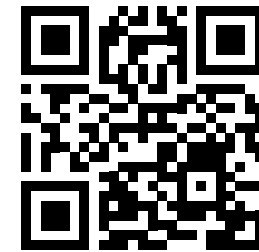
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