

## The West (Continued)

### Narbonne

Built by the Romans it rivalled Rome in its splendour, and was in its day, a major seaport. The Cathedral of St. Just, *le Passage de l'Ancre*, the *Palais Vieux* (Old Palace), the Donjon and Treasury... and more. Easy to spend a whole day in Narbonne.

### Perpignan

An airport, outside a bleak seaside resort. Set below Carcassonne there is always wind because of the funnel effect between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. It is said that it is impossible to stay on the beach if a southerly wind blows - so choose your visit to Carcassonne with a northerly wind.

### Spain

An easy journey, but the border towns are dedicated to selling low price goods. The tax variations mean some good bargains on cigarettes and spirits, and with fuel sufficiently cheaper the journey can be self-funding. Don't expect anything attractive, however. One needs to get close to Barcelona for that.

### Travel Tip

Invest in an autoroute pass if you have a French bank account. They are not expensive, perhaps 24 Euros a year, but they get one through tolls extremely quickly and with no need to pay at the time.

With summer queues of perhaps 40 or more cars it is lovely to sail through without any delay.

Get one at the first toll point as you enter France. It operates immediately.

## Wines

Langudoc wines are some of the oldest and best known. Many vineyards were founded by Roman Legionnaires who took their demobilisation in the Languedoc, with a grant of land.

### Picpoul de Pinet (white)

Local to Marseillan, Picpoul de Pinet is a fine, clean white wine. It can be bought everywhere, Marseillan's own is pretty good (!). But it is fun to visit the many domaines and choose the one that best suits you.

### Faugères (red)

Just above Béziers are the extensive Fauères vineyards. The old village is also a delight to visit.

### Corbières (red)

A little further west are the Corbières wines. Again the town is worth a visit, very different to other wine villages!

### Fitou (red)

A less well known wine, but truly excellent. There are two Fitou regions, within the Corbières area. (There is also an excellent medieval exhibition in an old castle just off RN 9.)

## Contact

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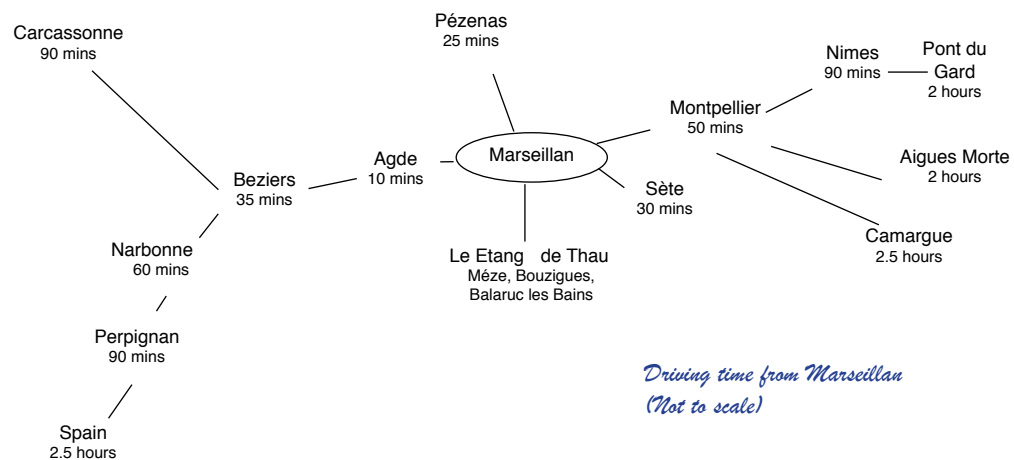
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# Marseillan Holiday

## Visit the ancient Midi



Marseillan is ideally placed for exploring the delights of the Midi. From the Camargue to the east, Carcassonne to the north and Perpignan and Spain to the west all are a short and easy trip.

This whole area is steeped in history. Once the land of Oc (hence Langedoc) it spoke the language of the troubadours who carried the news from town to town, village to village across the whole of Europe.

Settled by the Greeks and developed by the Romans there are wonderful places to visit, antiquities to see, views to delight in and buildings to experience. From the marvel that is the Pont du Gard to the more modern wonder of the Canal du Midi, and the small town of Aigues Morte, there is something for everybody.

Go up into the foothills of the Masif Centrale and you will find Grottos, tumbling water in narrow gorges, wild and wonderful country, reservoirs and man made lakes.

Go west through some red wine areas: Faugères, Corbières, Fitou, and on for Rioja just over the Spanish border.

Go south for the beaches, and every type of water based sport and pastime.

*What a wonderful place to visit!*

### How to get there

By car it is, of course, easy. Choose from the autoroutes or use the quieter Routes Nationale. SNCF trains run along the coast and up to Carcassonne. Coach trips run in season.

## *L'Etang de Thau*

A shallow 'lake' some 19 by 5km it is home to a wealth of fish and shellfish. The drive round the Etang takes at least half-a-day (an enjoyable full day when one makes stops along the way).

## *Mèze*

Focused on mussels and oysters, Mèze is in the centre of the northern shore. The only access to the sea is via the canals at Sète and Marseillan. A thriving, go-ahead little town Mèze has an attractive port, and a small sandy beach.

## *Bouzigues*

A pretty little village that is the home of the famous Bouzigues oyster. Also the Museum of the Etang. This charming museum is well worth a visit. It has examples of the specialised boats and fishing gear, and of the rude shacks in which fisherfolk lived. Many restaurants along the front specialise in shellfish fresh from the Etang.

## *Balaruc-les-Bains*

*Balaruc le Vieux* - old Balaruc - is a tiny village. Modern Balaruc is a resort, built with a lot of concrete. It is a Spa town, offering Treatments. (A 200 feet depression in the Etang provides the hot water).

## *Sète*

The major fishing and commercial port after Marseille. An active shopping town as well as a major port and tourist focus Sète has a network of canals and bridges so that it is likened to Venice. Boat trips to sea, the Etang and the Canal du Midi operate from the quay, the car ferry leaves for Morocco, cruise ships visit, there are many tourist and local restaurants.

## *The East*

### *The Via Domitia*

Traces of the Roman road that connected Marseille with Barcelona can still be seen at Pinet (10 mins).

### *Montpellier*

One of France's major cities Montpellier is spacious and airy. It is built round magnificent open spaces where street theatre flourishes in the evenings. The Opera is superb. Lawyers in traditional embroidered waistcoats over white shirts, black trousers and shoes without socks can be seen at the law courts.

The Roman aqueduct that brought water in from the mountains can be admired.

### *Nîmes*

Many people are disappointed with Nîmes. Reconstructed in concrete, with many tall buildings it has lost its traditional charm. The *Maison Carré* and other Roman artifacts are to be seen, but they are well spread out and not well presented.

### *Pont du Gard*

Not to be missed! This aqueduct spans 273 metres and is 49 metres above the river! It is part of a 48km aqueduct that supplied water to Nîmes. There is a modern museum alongside.

### *Aigues Morte*

This little walled town was commended by Louis IX in 1229. He intended it as the assembly point for the Seventh Crusade, but it took forty years to complete. Petitions to change the name from 'Dead Waters' have all failed. A busy, tourist town. A base for canal trips to see the Carmague 'Cowboys' at work.

### *The Camargue*

A romantic area at the mouth of the mighty Rhone it still has its *guardiens* (cowboys), white horses and black bulls. Famous, also, for its rice.

An excellent day is to visit Pont du Gard, lunch in Aigues Morte and then visit the Camargue.

## *The North*

### *Castelnau de Grau*

Separated from Pézenas by the river Hérault this charming village occupies the south and west facing slopes of a rare rocky hill. The streets are narrow, twisty and on such a slope that it is difficult to keep one's feet. An old abbey is at the top of the village.

Note: From Castelnau it is interesting to leave from the top and explore the lanes that run between the vineyards. You might wonder where you are at times, but the views are super.

### *Pézenas*

A maze of tiny streets and courtyards that have been lovingly restored. Artisans ply their trades in the old town houses, everything from carved wooden toys and novelties through clothes boutiques to specialist food shops. Many good restaurants (best in the late evening, but then busy). A huge market on Saturdays.

The town of Molière, and the Comédie Français, his theatre has been restored and is open to visitors.

### *Foothills*

The foothills of the Masif Centrale are only 20km - drive to Clement l'Hérault, along to Bédarieux and then down the river Orb to Béziers.

## *The West*

### *Agde and Grau d'Agde*

Founded by the Greeks Agde is the oldest town in France. It straddles the river Hérault, besides which stands the black volcanic rock cathedral of St Etienne. Agde and the Grau are the base for deep sea fishermen, but very few pleasure craft. The unique round lock is a kilometre up the road to Bessan. The Hérault does not enter the Mediterranean peacefully. The waters at the mouth are always troubled and boats corkscrew their way into the river. At times the southerly storms are so strong that the river backs up and floods Agde. Boat trips on the Canal and the Etang leave from Agde.

### *Cap d'Agde*

With 30,000 hotel beds and 1,700 moorings Cap d'Agde is a major marina and holiday town. Boat trips run round the harbour, out to Fort Brescou and into Agde and the Canal du Midi. Little trains run east and west, there is a Casino, a fine funfair and water park, international quality tennis, and a golf course.

### *Béziers*

The old city is built on and around one of the area's few hills and is topped by the magnificent cathedral of St. Nazaire. Also by the old prison and barracks. The view is truly outstanding!

Fine shops occupy the town centre, with many restaurants along les Allées Paul Ricquet (builder of the Canal du Midi). Seven locks step the Canal up from sea level - a fine piece of engineering. Canal trips leave from the top.

### *The Cathars*

Cathar country starts with Béziers and extends to the Spanish border and up to Toulouse. They were a peaceful religious sect that denied Catholic doctrine and were brutally destroyed by an alliance between Church and State in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Many of their castles survive and can be visited.

### *Carcassonne*

This medieval city on the banks of the river Aude, was the largest fortress in Europe. It was built to control the border with Spain and was the seat of Simon de Montfort (father of the Simon who founded the English parliament). Fully restored to all its glory it shows how impregnable Middle Age fortifications were against the weapons of their time.

The 'new' town of Carcassonne nestles in the shelter of the castle, with an offshoot of the Canal du Midi running through. (Carcassonne refused financial help believing that the canal had to come to them, but Paul Riquet was a stubborn man. He by-passed the town. 100 years later the link had to be built and paid for by the citizens of Carcassonne.)