

FROM PARIS *to Provence*

By Sandra Iskander





Dine at Domaine de Fontenille's Michelin-starred restaurant and drive into the sunset with one of Hameau des Baux's vintage cars (opposite page)

Sweeping vistas, charming villages and the sense of losing yourself in the beautiful countryside of France is all part of what many visitors to France look for and with Provence only a few hours from the French capital a beautiful Provencal getaway is only a train ride away.

With the weather slowly warming up, now is a great time to discover Provence and its southern charm. While most people immediately think of Marseille when they think of Provence there are other equally charming destinations to discover in the region including Les Baux de Provence and the Luberon.

The French commune of Les Baux de Provence is arguably one of the most beautiful villages in the country and with reportedly only 22 people residing here the village lends itself to being one of the most sought-after destinations for people who are looking to escape the hustle and bustle of larger towns. In the heart of the town is where the Château des Baux is located, built in the 10th century it is perched high, overlooking the village. It is here at the chateau that you can discover the reconstruction of the trebuchet that was used to attack fortified sites during sieges. Measuring 16 metres in height the trebuchet was designed and reconstructed based on medieval drawings and visitors to the site can attend catapult demonstrations that are held here daily.

Just five minutes from the chateau is another incredible site that is worthy of a visit. Unlike any other cultural space the Carrières de Lumières, once a stone quarry, organises temporary exhibitions that showcase the works of renowned artists including Chagall, Monet and Renoir. Using 100 video projectors projecting images onto the entire surface of the former stone quarry including the ground, covering the space with wonderful images, the space becomes an interactive show, visually and musically, as visitors are invited to walk

around discovering the works while the images are projected on them as well, becoming part of the show. This month, starting from the 5th, the Carrières de Lumières is hosting The Fantastic and Wonderful World of Bosch, Brueghel and Arcimboldo, a multimedia exhibition that will see the 16th-century artists' works magically sweeping over the space, projecting their wonderful paintings.

Nestled between Baux de Provence and Maussane les Alpilles, Paradou is a tiny village where you will find Hameau des Baux. Awarded the Prix Villegiature award for Best Hotel Creativity and Ingenuity in Europe, this hotel is not only bursting with charm but if you are looking for accommodation that offers a unique kind of service this is by far the standout address of the region. Boasting hamlet-designed rooms, the hotel serves up serenity and French charm at every corner. Furnished with vintage pieces, the address is a hotel gallery hybrid where guests are welcomed to enjoy and feel comfortable in their surroundings but are also welcome to purchase the furniture and artwork displayed. This concept, which attracts lovers of vintage furniture and modern art, in turn means that the décor of the hotel is ever-changing. The hotel also has a collection of vintage cars, all convertibles, that is made available to guests to drive around, discovering the postcard region with the wind in their hair.

Another region worth visiting is the Luberon. Made up of three mountain ranges, the Lesser Luberon, the Greater Luberon and the Eastern Luberon, the Luberon is dotted with picturesque villages found in the valleys around these ranges. One of the most famous villages in the valleys is Lourmarin, which is surrounded by lush vineyards and olive groves, and it is where Albert Camus once lived and worked.

Full of charm with winding streets taking you through its heart, passing quaint squares and boutiques offering regional delights, the village is the

epitome of the French countryside, which has been captured and idolised by many around the world, most notably by British writer Peter Mayle who wrote *A Year in Provence*, which was later made into a film, entitled *A Good Year*.

While the village is the real gem here, you will not want to miss seeing the Renaissance castle and if you are in the area on a Friday make sure you make time to discover the Lourmarin market where the open-air market shows off local talents and edible specialties. Colourful handmade ceramic bowls, herbs and spices, and locally made soaps are only some of the goodies that you can find.

And of course visiting the Luberon region is incomplete without sampling some of the fine French wines produced here. Just 10 minutes from Lourmarin is the village of Lauris, sitting on a cliff with a panoramic view of the Durance valley, it is where you will find Domaine de Fontenille. Winning the Best Ambiance and Image in a Hotel in Europe Prix Villegiature award, the hotel is built on 35 hectares and boasts sweeping vineyards. Making wine onsite, the hotel's wines, including the rosé with delicate notes of raspberry, are served at the establishment's Michelin-starred restaurant, Le Champ des Lunes, which was just awarded its first Michelin star last month and where chef Jérôme Faure is at the helm. The menu changes frequently but is always modern and features fresh and seasonal produce, with the dishes beautifully complemented to one of the house's wines.

ADDRESS BOOK

CHATEAU DES BAUX

13520 Les Baux de Provence, 04 90 54 55 56

CARRIERES DE LUMIERES

Route de Maillane, 13520 Les Baux de Provence, 04 90 54 47 37

HAMEAU DES BAUX

Chemin de Bourgeac, 13520 Paradou, 04 90 54 10 30

DOMAINE DE FONTENILLE

Route de Roquefraise, 84360 Lauris, 04 13 98 00 00