

P.O. *Life*

Life in the Pyrénées Orientales

Winter
2009/10



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URGENT: QUALITY PROPERTIES REQUIRED THROUGHOUT THE REGION

Christmas is almost upon us and RHF International continue to receive a healthy level of enquiries for property in the Languedoc-Roussillon. Right now we need more character homes in the 300,000 to 2,500,000 Euro price sectors plus B&Bs and properties with Gites to satisfy demand. Contact us now to arrange an honest valuation of your property with a view to getting it sold ASAP.

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« Docteur docteur!
Mes dents claquent comme
des castagnettes »
« Ah oui ! Ce doit être
la grippe espagnole »



Edito ...

Coucou !

Being a little short of leg and wide of body, I don't usually give myself a pat on the back when I put on weight, (mainly'cos I can't reach anymore!) but I must admit to more than a tingle of pleasure as this fatter version of PO Life rolled off the press.

These little fatties will now come out every three months, 9,000 copies redistributed monthly, plump with everything you need to know about the P-O. Of course, if you want to be ABSOLUTELY sure of securing your next PO Life, why not take out a subscription? (see page 57). Don't forget also to register for our free weekly newsletter at www.anglophone-direct.com to receive a detailed events calendar and local news by email.

This month, Mike Rhodes takes you snow shoe walking, Ellen Hall opens a door in Céret, John Fairclough visits a brewery in Argelès, Susie Hughes shares her frustrations on buying a second hand car, and John Frazer-Robinson heads for a hard day's relaxation at Domaine de Falgos.

And as autumn melts gracefully into winter, Jane joins with me in wishing you all good things for 2010!

Kate and Jane

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EL GAUCHO

This December 2009, Frank, of Papallonas fame, aided and abetted by Cyrille, opens his new restaurant in the heart of Perpignan!!

Free cocktail
on presentation
of PO Life

The food will be Argentinean, plenty of meat, grills and imaginative dishes with a South American / Spanish / Italian theme. Frank's innovative culinary skills teamed with Cyrille's front of house experience guarantee a warm welcome to all old Papallonas customers as well as new clients in search of exciting gourmet fare at reasonable prices.

The wine list will include carefully chosen Argentinean and Chilean wines as well as familiar local Roussillon choices.

Perfectly situated in Rue Jean Payra, the road from the Pont Joffre to the Galleries Lafayette and the Castillet, backing onto the Mediator and surrounded by easy parking.

Fantastic value lunchtimes menus include:

- ✓ €13.90 for three set courses from the daily 'ardoise',
- ✓ €15.90 for a choice of 3 starters, 3 mains and 3 desserts
- ✓ €19.90 for two dishes off the à la carte
- ✓ €29.90 for three courses off the à la carte plus apéro and coffee

Evening menu prices begin at €15.90 for 3 courses.

There is a room for private parties of up to 25 people.

There will be a gastronomic New Year's menu starting with champagne and canapés moving through six courses to coffee and petit four each course served a different wine for an inclusive price of €75.

An alternative New Year's menu of 35€ for three courses will be available for smaller appetites!

Summary



p6 - Walk : Snowshoe Walk Bac de Vallsera

p8 - Did you know?

p9 - French Life : Buying a second hand car

p12 - Festival & Christmas traditions

p18 - Restaurant review

p20 - Out for the day

p30 - Language exercises

p34 - Charities

p36 - Winter warmth

p38 - Post office

p40 - Winter sports

p42 - Book life

p44 - Things you might need to know

p46 - Art life

p48 - Quirky properties

p52 - Cap D'Ona Brewery, Argelès

*p54 - Changes to your British / Eire
Satellite TV / Radio*

p56 - Christmas markets

p58 - Festive french food

p60 - Emergency numbers

*p62 - English
speaking services*



Welcome to the Pyrénées-Orientales!

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SNOWSHOE WALK BAC DE VALLSERRA LES ANGES

with Mike Rhodes

This circular snowshoe walk passes through the vast Scots Pine forest above Les Angles and discovers the ruined village and church of Vallserra, deserted after the Plague. Distance 8km, 3 hours.

A super half day walk that can be combined with a ski holiday.

Remember that this is still a wild area and that conditions can change quickly.

Access : Starting on the route de Balcere, at the col at 1790m GPS 31N 424247E 4715570N where there is parking or take the Les Angles free navette to the same spot. Map IGN Font Romeu 2249ET.

Walk :

✓ From the car park, follow the piste SW for 100m and turn right NE at a fence and cattle grid (in summer). Follow the track descending slightly, just below the ridge line. After 700m the track passes close to the road but

continue on the obvious track in the same line through the forest. On your right you will see many fallen trees resulting from the hurricane in Jan 2009, which decimated the area.

✓ Winter is the best time to see the many tracks of wild animals that roam the area so try and identify as many as possible. You should be able to see tracks of wild boar, fox, roe deer, stags, marmots and many more. Wolves and bears have been seen in the Capcir but it is doubtful if you will see these!!

The entire population of Vall Serra was wiped out by the Black Death at the beginning of the XIV century.

Only two sisters survived.

✓ After 1500m, a small track turns left SW and descends through the forest for 1k to a junction with a wide piste. If you miss this turning you will arrive at a larger track in a further 200m. This track can also be followed to the same place. Follow the piste E for 500m to arrive at the ruined church of Vallsera at 1650m. The church is in a lovely open valley so take time to have a snack, drink and look at the information board by the church and consider what it was like to live here in the middle ages.

✓ It is possible to shorten this walk by retracing the route for 200m and following the track to the right (distance 5.5k in total) but our walk continues past the church and turns south past an ancient lime oven. Do not take the track to the right but continue following the open valley SW. If you are tempted to cross the open area behind the church, take care as there are several streams under the snow. 1500m after the church the track enters the

forest again and starts to climb steadily. The track through the forest is not always easy to follow but there are waymarks. If in doubt, stay to the right of the stream and left of the high crags until you reach the cross country & raquette piste near to lac de Balcere.

✓ From lac de Balcere follow the obvious piste for 2.5k back to your car/navette.

✓ If skiing is not your thing, why not combine this walk with some dog sledding in the Matte forest or a visit to the Parc Animalier at pla del Mir.



Mike Rhodes is an International Mountain Leader / Accompagnateur de Montagne, lives all year in Les Angles and specialises in guided walks in the high mountains and Snowshoe trips in winter.. He can be contacted on 0033(0)468043728 - mike.rhodes@free.fr - www.pyrenean-trails.com



WANTED: SHORT plump skis!

It seems that young females are the most at risk on the ski slopes; in fact they are 3.5 times more likely to sprain a knee or ankle than the male of the species! Apparently, this is partly down to the female form whose pelvis is "horizontale" as well as over-reliance on their quadriceps muscles and under reliance on their hamstrings. But never fear! You can now buy skis adapted specifically to the female shape. No rude comments please!

LEST WE FORGET ...

Louis Torcatis was a primary school teacher, born in Tautavel in 1904. In 1940, he joined the French Resistance under the pseudonym Bouloc and became head of the secret army of Languedoc Roussillon. Hunted by both the police and the Gestapo, he was ambushed in May 1944, at Carmaux in the Tarn. Mortally wounded and left for dead, he managed nevertheless to drag himself back to his waiting men and warn them of the dangers ahead. He is buried in Pia. After his death, his widow created the Tourcatis bookshop in Perpignan, still open today.

NO ONE EXPECTS THE MEDIEVAL INQUISITION!

The **Cathars** (believed to be derived from the Greek *katharos*, meaning perfect) were a breakaway religious sect, who spread their doctrine throughout the region in the eleventh century, at a time when many Christians were questioning their beliefs.

By the **early thirteenth century** it was probably the **majority religion** in the area, supported as much by the nobility as by the common people. The Roman Church was outraged. Some of their own priests had become Cathars and this was not to be tolerated. Worst of all, Cathars refused to pay their tithes.

Pope Innocent III quickly proclaimed the religion **heretic**, and called for a **crusade** to crush the Cathars. Men, women and children were massacred, the nobility disgraced, humiliated and replaced and the ruins of the famous "Cathar castles" (see p 22) are a sad heritage of the violence that took over a region which had, until then, always been known for its policy of tolerance. **The Medieval Inquisition**, infamous for their "robust" interrogation and conviction methods of torture, was also set up to eradicate the last vestiges of Catharism.

It has been suggested in some modern fiction and non-fiction books that the Cathars could have been the protectors of the Holy Grail of Christian mythology. Cathar Christianity does still exist today in the form of various Fellowships scattered around the world and who knows what treasures might have been passed on through the generations!

Buy "L'Argus" car magazine at any newsagent. It updates its prices **every six months** and is used by the motor trade for calculating car values, insurance premiums and claims. *La Centrale* is another good mag for defining 2nd hand car prices car.

Online, visit www.argusauto.com or www.321auto.com.



BUYING A SECOND HAND CAR IN FRANCE

Susie Hughes discovers that it's not quite as easy as it sounds!

At the end of May, I hopped on a plane to Perpignan with two thousand crisp Euros in my back pocket, planning to visit a couple of 'car superstores,' take my pick from the acres of gleaming second-hand cars and choose a three/four year old model with about 50,000 kilometres on the clock and 'one previous careful owner'.

Oh, how naive that all seems now. The second-hand car market is a very different animal in France than in the UK.

Expectations :

1. Expect to pay considerably more for a used car in the P-O;
2. Do not expect to find anything with less than 100,000 km on the clock;
3. Do not expect to find a wide choice - it is not a buyer's market;
4. Expect your car to come with battle-scars;
5. Don't expect any sort of lengthy warranty (if at all);
6. Prepare to devote three weeks of your life to the task;
7. Find a French speaker with a car to assist you in your task.

Private sales :

The preferred mode for private sales seems to be to stick an *à Vendre* notice in the car window with a phone number and, often, not much more information.

I tried to call a few of these without success. Most of them were what I considered seriously over-priced for what was on offer. For example, I was quoted 4,000 Euros (non-negotiable) for a seven year old Fiat Punto.

Dealers :

Deciding that "caveat emptor" ("Let the buyer beware") was advisable, I chose to buy

from a dealer as a safer option. Many of the dealerships around Perpignan do a side-line in second-hand models, but these tend to be limited and at the top end of the price-scale.

After finding a suitable dealer and leaving my "specifications", I quickly received a call to say that they had found "my car" - a 2002 Opal Corsa, 120 000km on the clock, around 3,000 Euros. One careful previous owner!

It seemed the bargain of a life-time. And it was diesel. Buying a diesel rather than a petrol car seems a huge plus-point. I think that, given the high mileages on second-hand cars, it is generally deemed that a diesel car is more reliable in the autumn of its life.

My French speaking friend Daniel gave me strict instructions as we went to see it. I was not to jump up-and-down with joy the moment I saw it. I was merely to nod in his direction if I liked it and leave the negotiating to him.

Given that it was twice the age, had twice the mileage and was twice the price I'd anticipated three weeks earlier, I thought I could restrain myself.

Paperwork...

It is up to the seller to provide the buyer with the necessary paperwork. They can download forms from the internet at www2.equipement.gouv.fr/formulaires or pick them up at the Prefecture. Without these documents, you will be unable to apply for a new carte grise from the préfecture, without which you will not be considered the legal owner of the vehicle.

Before buying, check that the vehicle....

- ✓ has a contrôle technique (CT) certificate, if applicable.
- ✓ hasn't been involved in a major accident. If in doubt, ask for a "déclaration sans accident/non-accidenté" in writing.
- ✓ is not under hire purchase (certificat de non-gage).
- ✓ comes with a "certificat de non-opposition" confirming that the vendor agrees to sell you the car (i.e. you aren't stealing it!).

Carte grise :

The next stage is to acquire a **carte grise** - a sort of "log book", which must be done within a month. The equivalent procedure in the UK would be to send the relevant forms of sale and purchase to the DVLC in Swansea. It's not quite so straight forward. We had to go to the local town hall with a range of documents, including:

1. Bill of sale and purchase - transfer of ownership (the original!) This caused a bit of a problem as the only copy had my original signature on a photocopy of the vendors.
2. "Old" carte grise, which you will have received from the vendor.
2. Proof of ID - ie passport.
3. Proof of residency ie a utility bill.
4. Valid CT.
5. Driving licence.
6. Cheque book.

The payment for a carte grise is a one-off and is based on the horse-power of your car. Mine was a four CV which equated to about 150 Euros. About ten days later and several phone calls to the town hall, I was

able to go and collect my carte grise and was now officially an owner-driver of a French car.

Conclusion :

Three months down the line my little Opal Corse is still going strong. Maybe I was one of the lucky ones, I've certainly heard several horror stories of second-hand car purchases which have ended in disaster at a high price.

As with any significant purchase, you need to do your homework, be patient, be prepared for the worst and avoid it before it happens.

Useful vocab

- L'année* the year
- Le kilométrage* the mileage
- Une voiture neuve / d'occasion* a new/second-hand car
- Un monospace* a people-carrier
- Un break* an estate car
- Un quatre quatre* a four-wheel drive
- Un cabriolet* a convertible
- La puissance fiscale* engine rating
- La climatisation* air conditioning
- Un toit ouvrant* a sunroof



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CHRISTMAS IN CATALONIA

Le caga tió



The caga tió (literally "poop log!!!), is a hollow log standing up on four little stick legs with a smiley face painted on one end and red "barretina" hat. From December 8th, he is "fed" every night and on Christmas Day, beaten with sticks to make him drop the sweets and torrons (turrón in Spanish and torró in Catalan) placed inside him.

Pessebres vivants

El Pessebre is a **representation of the Nativity Story**. A "pessebre vivant" consists of real people acting out living Nativity scenes, dressed in period costumes on decorated stage-sets portraying traditional, historical and biblical scenes. Sometimes they will also sing and talk, other times they will just stand or sit without moving! In some of these creations, there will be a commentary and spectacular special effects and lighting.

The "caganer" and the "caga tió" may explain this Catalan saying "menja bé, caga fort i no tinguis por a la mort!" (Eat well, poo strong and don't be afraid of death!).

Visit our site

www.anglophone-direct.com
for a detailed description of
What's on around the region.

Caganers

Look out for the caganer, (the pooper!!), a small statue of a Catalonian peasant, wearing traditional red stocking hat (a barretina,) and, sitting, with trousers half down, in a "toilet" position, making his small contribution to the land, often smoking a pipe or reading a newspaper! He will usually be found crouching in the Pessebre, adding a rather comical aspect to this traditional scene.

The Caganer is one of a type of small figures called "santons" (coming from the Provençal santoun or "little saint") which became popular in Provence after the French Revolution of 1789 when churches were closed and Nativity scenes were banned. They gave a chance to ordinary people to "bring religion home" by setting up crèches in their own homes, a tradition previously reserved for the rich. The most famous santons portray common Provençal folk in 18th and 19th century clothes who visit the Holy Family and bring presents.



CHRISTMAS

& NEW YEAR...

OVER THE BORDER

Ski season

The official opening of the majority of ski resorts in the PO is usually around the first weekend of December, depending of course on the snow forecast. The 6th December is "Le Saint Nicolas" and the 8th is "l'Immaculée Conception", both of which are festival days and bank holidays in Spain.

St. Nicholas of Myra, Turkey, was born in 271 AD and died around December, 342 or 343 AD. He was known for his kindness, generosity, and secret gift-giving, being a shy man, and when he died, all sorts of stories were told of the wonderful things he had done during his life, a perfect role model for the future Santa Claus! He is also the patron saint of judges, murderers, pawnbrokers, thieves, merchants, paupers, scholars, sailors, bakers, travellers, maidens and poor children!! A heavy workload for even the most saintly saint.

The Immaculate Conception was established as a Catholic feast day in 1476 by Pope Sixtus IV. Over that weekend, the Spanish often make a long weekend of it - and the ski season gets off to a festive beginning. Not a good weekend to pop across the border for a spot of shopping of course as the shops will be closed!

New Year

As the twelve strokes of midnight sound on the 31st December, the Spaniards pop a grape into their mouth with each bong to bring good luck for the 12 months ahead. Much hilarity, spitting and dribbling starts the New Year off in style! (Seedless grapes recommended if you are thinking of going Spanish this New year!)

JANUARY...



We three kings...

La cavalcade des Rois Mages

This is a big celebration for children, telling of the arrival of the kings who lavish children with toys and sweets. Children go to bed and leave shoes and a snack near the window or on the balcony. On the morning of the 6th, they find the gifts left by the kings, sometimes accompanied by a piece of coal, if they have not been well behaved!

In the first week of January (check exact dates with tourist office) the three kings will ride through the streets of Perpignan on horse and camel back, collecting letters from children, which will be read out at the Campo Santo. The procession will also contain "gégants", giant painted papier-maché figures, sometimes 14 or 15 ft tall, with traditional clothing and a person inside.

JANUARY...

La Fête des Rois

La Fête des Rois also celebrates the 3 kings, this time with a frangipane based cake, the *galette des rois*! The festival takes place around Epiphany, the twelfth day of Christmas, when the wise men visited baby Jesus. According to tradition, the *galette des rois*, was to "draw the kings" to the Epiphany. During the French Revolution, the name was replaced with *Gâteau de l'Égalité* (Equality cake), as the word "king" was hardly in fashion!

A lucky charm (*une fève* - originally a bean but now more often a plastic trinket) is baked inside the *galette des rois*, and shared around the table. Whoever receives the fève is then crowned king or queen for the day. According to tradition, the cake should be cut into as many slices as there are people present, plus 1 extra. This extra slice is called the *part du pauvre* (poor man's slice) and should be offered to the first poor person who walks in through the door!

(Tip: Watch out for your teeth if you are the lucky winner of the slice with the *fève*!)



FEBRUARY

Fête de l'Ours



- 7th February 2010 : Arles-sur-Tech
- 14th February 2010 : St-Laurent-de-Cerdans
- 14th - 16th February 2010 : Prats-de-Mollo

Prats-de-Mollo, Saint-Laurent-de-Cerdans and Arles-sur-Tech come out of hibernation in style in February, with the *Fête de l'Ours*.



According to legend, a young shepherdess was spirited away by a bear, actually the devil in disguise, who intended to seduce her and steal her virginity. The young damsel however, prayed to *Notre Dame du Coral* to preserve her virtue, and the bear was unable to approach her.

She was finally rescued on the *jour de la Chandeleur*, (Candelmas) and the bear was killed!

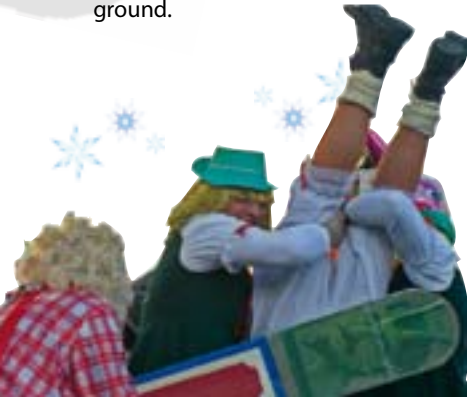
The re-enactment of this legend in Prats-de-Mollo and nearby communes is great fun.

In a frenzied bear hunt though the streets, the "bears", men and women dressed in sheep skins, their faces



and hands blackened with a mixture of suie (soot) and huile (oil), flee the hunters who carry shot guns filled with blanks and a gourd of *bon vin*. With much hilarity, the *hommes en blanc* or *barbiers*, covered in flour and dressed in white with lace bonnets, intervene to bait the bear! Armed with heavy chains, axe, *botifarra* (locally made black pudding!!) and a cuvette (basin), they chain up the "bears" and take them to the place du Foiral, accompanied by the *cobla* (traditional Catalan music) where they are "shaved" and "humanised" by the *barbiers*, using the axe for a razor and the black pudding for soap.

The day of the bear finishes with a *Bal de Corre* in which bears, hunters and barbers dance around in a frenzied circle until a gun shot rings out and the bears fall to the ground.



It's Carnival time!

What better way to liven up the dreary winter months than to declare carnival time?

February and March are carnival months in the PO. Most of the larger towns and communes have processions and parades through the streets. Watch out for the burning of the straw-filled Carnival king, symbol for infertility, sins, and bad luck – an important character in the traditions of modern carnival, who is burned in a spectacular ritual at the end of the festivities.

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Restaurant reviews
with John Frazer-Robinson

WORTH THE DRIVE!

Falgos

Golfers please excuse the pun from our new Restaurant Reviewer, John Frazer-Robinson, who steps into the shoes of John Fairclough and visits Le Domaine de Falgos near Saint Laurent de Cerdans.

✓ Here's the deal – a great day out spoiling yourself in the **fitness centre and spa with three course lunch including house wine and coffee for €35** a head (varies slightly by season). It would be difficult to find a more beautiful setting. Not the most accessible location but that's a small point amply repaid by the magnificence of the views and the benefits of swimming in a near empty pool and the hot tubs and sauna available for afters!

✓ We started with salads, two smoked duck and **foie gras**, two **chèvre** which came with a slice of Serrano ham. Portions were ample and tasty, and the foie gras excellent. The dressing was delicious and all were topped with an interesting mix of nuts and pine kernels.

✓ Mains were one perch, one lamb chops, one entrecote and vegetarian Debbie had

Food ***

Wine **

Price ****

Service****

Ambience/Location *****

ratatouille and chips! Again we were more than happy with the fare and the portions and, despite no enquiry as to how we would like the meat cooked, it was pink and fine throughout. To follow Elaine had ice cream, three balls chosen from a good range of flavours and the rest of us polished off millefeuille. Ice creams declared ecstatic. *Millefeuille?* Well, two went down a storm but I gave up deciding the portion too large and a bit bland. Although I don't generally do puds, for reasons of journalistic integrity, I did try!

✓ The quart

of house wine included for each was very drinkable. And for the more discerning there is a pretty good choice. By now, we were replete and ordered our coffees. So was this a remarkable lunch? Probably not. But look at the overall package and ask yourself "would you go again"? I have to say ABSOLUTELY! The value offered including the surroundings, the free use of the spa, the lounge and heavenly walks make it irresistible for a return visit. And I don't play golf!

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infiniment nature

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04 68 39 51 42

www.falgos.com

Font Romeu Odeillo

Font Romeu was a fashionable ski station in the XIX century at the time of the Grand Hotel. The Grand Hotel still dominates the town but is now split into apartments. Font Romeu remains a highly successful ski station, twinned with Pyrenees 2000 to offer 60 downhill pistes and 100 km of cross country as well as paragliding, boarding, snow shoe walking, husky sledge riding and quad vts.



In 1968 it was the site chosen to train French athletes for the Mexico Olympics and remains the "Centre National d'Entrainement en Altitude" for athletes of all disciplines to this day. Small wonder it has been voted "Ville la Plus Sportive 2009" by the sporting magazine L'Equipe. And what a wonderfully healthy resort in which to enjoy being sportive. The high altitude Mediterranean climate



combined with a low level of pollution, plus sparkling snow and fairy tale pine forests, make sporting exertion positively delightful.

With 3000 hours of sunshine a year, fabulous views over the Pyrenean peaks and situated on the high Cerdagne Plateau in the heart of the French Pyrenees, Font Romeu is the perfect winter holiday resort. As well as a lively local life to enjoy there is the fun of visiting the Spanish enclave of Llivia, a curiosity formed in 1659 at the signing of the treaty of the Pyrenees when the present day borders were formed between France and Spain, Catalonia South and Catalonia North.



After centuries of fighting and disagreement the Pyrenees were named as the true border bringing Roussillon, the Vallespir, the Conflent, Capcir and thirty-three villages of the Cerdagne under French rule. By a strange quirk of fate it was decreed that Llivia, in the Cerdagne, was not a village but a town and so there remains, inside France, a small enclave of Spanishness. For those dedicated to relaxation there are the natural hot baths at nearby Llo, Dorres or St Thomas. In Font Romeu the casino/ cinema/disco adds glamour and the town is full of hotels, bars, restaurants... and... sports shops... Tourist Office:04 68306830.

The name Font Romeu signifies "Pilgrim's fountain". According to legend, Notre Dame de Font Romeu was discovered by a cowherd whose bull was scratching at some water and bellowing loudly. The cowherd went to investigate and found a statue of the Virgin. The Fountain of the Pilgrim is to be found in the chapel of the XVII Hermitage at the top of the town and can be visited by checking times with the Tourist Office. The fountain immured in the walls of the chapel fills an interior basin in which the pilgrims bathe. Sunyer is responsible for the magnificent altar.



It is to Odeillo one has to go to visit the Four Solaire. Created by Felix Thrombe in 1969, 63 heliostats direct the rays of the sun onto a parabolic mirror of almost 2000 square metres. The solar energy can produce temperatures in



excess of 3200 degrees Centigrade. There is a permanent exhibition on renewable energy and the role of the Four Solaire in scientific research. 04 6830 7786

The immense parabolic mirror, tall as the Arc de Triumphant in Paris, reflects the countryside and sky, giving an ever changing patchwork view of the surrounding countryside that is beautiful and fascinating to watch...

Cathar Country

A day out in Cathar Country:
Three fantastic medieval castles,
three of the “five sons of Carcassonne.”



Quéribus

In 1258, with the Treaty of Corbeil, Quéribus, Peyrepertuse and Puilaurens were right on the frontier between France and Aragon. The HQ was Carcassonne and, with Aguilar and Termes, they were known as the “five sons of Carcassonne”. Veritable eagles nests, owned by noblemen sympathetic to the Cathar religion, they became the last resort for the Cathars as the Albigensian Crusade threatened to wipe them off the face of the earth.

It is possible to visit all three in a very full day but, to be honest, they warrant considerably longer.

Perched on their unbelievable mountainous rocky outcrops, the castles of Quéribus and Peyrepertuse dominate the beautiful rolling vineyards of Maury and Cucugnan. From Estagel take the N117 towards

Maury and follow the signs to Cucugnan. As you climb the Grau of Maury towards the border with the Aude you will see Château de Quéribus on the right, built on its 728m high rocky pinnacle in the XI Century.

The last stronghold of the Cathar defence, it fell in 1255. Hard to imagine a more dominant stronghold. It has overlooked the Corbieres, Fenouilledes and Plains of Roussillon for centuries, guarding the mountain pass of the Grau de Maury. A mere 15 – 20 men were all that was required to man the castle, so clever were its systems of defence.

It remains to this day a monument to the dramatic events that have marked the turbulent history of this border country.

From Quéribus Château de Peyrepertuse is easily visible, an amazing fortress seeming to grow out of sheer rock on the skyline.

Eight hundred metres high, occupied since Roman times, the castle itself is first mentioned in 1070 when it was owned by the Catalan Counts of Besalú. It formed an important part of the Cathar defences and a secret passage ending in a movable ladder afforded vital access. It can still be found, the last part of the climb a vertiginous cliff “voie escalade”...

Peyrepertuse



It continued to be enlarged and improved until 1659 when the border changed and it lost its strategic importance. However it remained in use till the Revolution when it was deserted by the fleeing nobles and, like so many other French castles, was sold to the State.

Now it can be visited and enjoyed. It appears inaccessible but from the ticket office a 1/4 hours narrow, shady walk through the scented box brings you to the entrance keep of San Jordi. The steep steps of Saint Louis, cut into the rock, lead to the chapel of St Jordi from which, clearly visible is Château de Quéribus, the Forca Real and the lookout tower of Tautaval. History oozes from the ancient walls and in spring cowslips and fritillaries flower between fallen stones.

Puilaurens



de Bourbon was reputed to have stayed on her way south to her ill-fated marriage with Peter of Castile, has a duct through the wall that acts as a speaking tube. Aged fourteen in 1353, after three days of marriage, Peter abandoned her in favour of Maria de Padilla, imprisoning poor Blanche, who, at the age of twenty two, was assassinated. One can only hope she made good use of her speaking tube and enjoyed the marvellous

Back to the N117 and on to St Paul de Fenouillet, cross into the Aude after Caudies de Fenouilledes and follow the road to Lapradelle. Château de Puilaurens rises high above the village and the valley of the Boulzane. A noble and fairytale castle, it is easily accessible by a 20 minute shaded walk from the car-park. The area is rich with evidence of human habitation since Palaeolithic times and “Mont Ardu” the old name of the mountain on which the castle stands appears on a map dated 958.

It was used by the Cathars for refuge in 1245/46 and, as with the other “sons of Carcasonne”, was one of the main border defences and setting for endless battles between the French and the Spanish. After the border changed it was maintained for a while by a feeble garrison of veterans before falling into disrepair and disuse. Now the castle is cared for and fascinating to visit.

The Square Tower dates from the time of the Crusade against the Cathars. The so-called “White Lady” Tower, where Blanche

views over the village, the 1904 railway viaduct and the Forest of Fanges from the battlements. Of course she was too early to have seen the railway...

Porte Blanche



In the Carol Valley



Follow the Carol valley from Bourg Madame to the Col de Puymorens and the end of the Pyrenees Orientales. It is grand and beautiful. High mountains form the frontier with Andorra, huge granite boulders and small waterfalls are scattered down their sides to the



banks of the fast running Carol river. A single track railway snakes through the valley beside it. Latour de Carol is the last station stop of the Yellow Train, and from there connecting trains take you Toulouse or Barcelona.

It is farming country. The mountain meadows are full of sturdy horses, peaceful cattle graze and, higher up are sheep and small shelters for the shepherds.

The ski resort of Porte Puymorens has 16 pistes for skiing of all levels and 21 kms of cross country. Para ski-ing and snow boarding enthusiasts are also catered for.

It is a valley opening into vast open spaces, there are lakes and tiny villages of sombre grey stone houses with fish scale roof tiles, and all around the towering mountains form a spectacular backdrop.

The towers of Carol are actually not in Latour de Carol although an interesting church is. To find them it is necessary to go further up the valley to Carol itself. At 1300 metres, although in ruins, they still stand guard on their rocky promontory above the village.

The road winds its way up to the 1900 metre Col de Puymorens before plunging down either to Pas de la Casa in Andorra or into the Arriege.

OUT FOR THE DAY • • • •

Céret

The cherry capital of France lies up the Tech valley on the N115. Céret has the right to send the first crate of cherries to the President of France and, in the cherry season, little stalls laden with the fruit appear



outside every garage. There is a cherry festival and the surrounding orchards are a froth of white blossom in spring and a sea of rich red and russet leaves in autumn.

Céret is also the birthplace of Cubism. Picasso and Braques worked together in 1911, researching and inventing “Cubism”. Céret’s wonderful Museum of Modern Art, started by the artist Pierre Brune in 1950 has a permanent collection of both internationally famous and local artists including 78 pieces by Picasso, 57 of which were gifts of the artist. Each summer it stages an impressive exhibition, often of the work of famous XX century artists who were influenced by a sojourn there. Not only Picasso and Braques but Matisse, Gris, Max Jacob, Marquet, Maillol, Manolo, Chagall, Dufy, Miro and Dali have all fallen under the charm of this gentle Catalan town.

The Saturday Market beneath the huge 30 metre high plane trees attracts visitors from far and wide. The old ramparts, the grand city gates, the Place des Neuf Jets with its attractive fountain and choice of cafes and restaurants, all make Céret a delightful town through which to stroll.

Three bridges span the Tech in Céret. The railway bridge, the road one and, 22 metres high, the XIV century Devil's bridge. By far the most attractive, it was supposedly built by the devil in 1321 in exchange for the soul of the first Ceretian to cross. The engineer sent a cat



across first but, even so, the locals at the time were very wary of using its single 45 metre arch.

In the summer there are many festivals including Bull fighting, Classical Music and Sardanne dancing. Tourist Office 046887 0053



Rainy days

In the P O rain is rare and days without sunshine are unusual, few and far between. Here are some ideas of how to make the most of them:

Thir, a lively town, full of sculpture and good restaurants, is probably most famous for the Caves Byrrh: A veritable cathedral to Aperitifs, it was started by the Violet family more than 100 years ago. Simon Violet began manufacturing his Byrrh, from local wine, aromatic plants and quinine in 1866. Instantly popular, a station hall was ordered from the Gustave Eiffel workshops. From it 30 million litres made their way annually to 350,000 customers world-wide. Now, not only Byrrh but



Cinzano, Dubonnet, Ambassadeur and Suze are made and matured in the 600 huge oak barrels that line the chais leading to the biggest oak barrel in the world. 10 metres high it contains 420,500 litres. A fascinating guided tour takes you through the station concourse, shows you how the wines are flavoured and fortified to make the aperitifs, passes by evocative old advertising posters and ends with a tasting. Open 7/7. Res: 0468530542. www.byrrh.com

Why not get wet in the rain at one of the naturally Hot Baths? At St Thomas les Bains, up the N116, direction Andorra, left on the CD28 just after Fontpedrouse, are three open air baths of hot mineral waters cooled to 37 degrees. Together with the hammam, the jacuzzi and a series of massage treatments they make it the perfect place to relax in calm serenity, surrounded by high mountains and stunning scenery. Open 7/7 Check times and book treatments on: 0468970313

To find the Baths of Llo turn left at Saillagousse on the N116 between Mont Louis and Bourg Madame Hot, sulphurous, well organised, they are open most of the year. They offer both open air and indoor swimming in water at 37 degrees, they too have a jacuzzi, hammam, bar and sauna and are surrounded by beautiful scenery and much snow in winter. 04 68047455.



Or try the Roman Baths of Dorres. Rather more rustic than Llo or St Thomas, nevertheless, lying in the 42 degree water and enjoying the magnificent view of Carlit's peak, and the chain of mountains separating France from Spain, is rather special. 04 6804 6687 for opening hours. (Between Bourg Madame and Envieg take the D618 then the D10 to Dorres.)



The Art Centre of St Vicens where ceramics, paintings and tapestries fill an exuberant Aladin's cave of artistic treasures in the old vaulted wine cave of Mas St Vicens in the St Gaudriquer quarter of Perpignan is well worth visiting. At Christmas, (most of December in fact), a spectacular Creche, created in the Sant Vicens workshops takes up the main

stage of the old wine vault. 04 6850 0218 It is signposted off the Macdonalds roundabout at the end of Bvd Kennedy

Saint Laurent de Cerdans, off the N115 after Arles sur Tech has a super-interesting Museum of Traditional Crafts 04 6839 5575. The local skill of



espadrille making is well represented and there is a moving exhibition of the history of the Republican retreat from the Spanish Civil War. A display of old movie equipment and a great collection of cinema posters lead on to many pictures of the Bear Festivals for which St Laurent is famous.

While in St Laurent, the factory and factory shop of the beautiful striped Catalan fabric, the "Toiles du Soleil", is an essential visit: 0468395002. The vibrant colours of the cloth emerging from the ancient industrial revolution machines in the Dickensian factory behind the shop are a marvel. It can be bought by the metre or as cushions, table mats and napkins, table cloths and teddy bears.

Here are a few more ideas. All worth visiting, ring to check opening hours.

- The Modern Art Museum in Ceret 0468872776
- The Aquarium at Banyuls sur Mer 0468887373
- The Church and Cloisters of St Genis des Fontaines 0468898433
- The Museum of Catalan Agriculture in St Michel de Llotès 0468847640
- The Museum of Prehistory at Belesta 0468845555
- The Grottes des Grandes Canalettes at Villefranche de Conflent 0468962311

Répétez cinq fois !

Virelangue

Trente-trois très gros crapauds crados
33 very fat dirty toads

1

E for egg! Match up these words, all beginning with E, with their definitions.

- | | | | |
|--|----|---|-------------|
| construction pour faire des travaux en hauteur | 1 | a | échalote |
| petit essai du produit | 2 | b | embaucher |
| engager pour un travail | 3 | c | entracte |
| petit oignon | 4 | d | écureuil |
| abri pour les chevaux | 5 | e | étranger |
| personne qui vient d'un autre pays | 6 | f | épave |
| mannequin qui fait fuir les oiseaux. | 7 | g | échafaudage |
| petit mammifère rongeur roux or gris. | 8 | h | épouvantail |
| bateau au fond de la mer | 9 | i | échantillon |
| pause entre deux parties d'un spectacle | 10 | j | écurie |

QUEL ANIMAL A
SIX PATTES ET
MARCHÉ SUR LA
TÊTE?

UN pou

(UN pou
A LOUSE)

✓ "Coup"

What a great word in French! On its own, it means "hit," "blow," "strike" but combine it with another word and it has so many completely different meanings. Here are just a few..

coup d'oeil - glance

coup de soleil - sunburn

coup de chance - stroke of luck

coup de couteau - stab wound

coup de feu - gun shot

coup de fil - phone call

coup de foudre - love at first sight

coup de main - helping hand

coup de pied - a kick

coup de tête - headbutt

coup de tonnerre - clap of thunder

coup de vent - gust of wind

CHRISTMAS JOKE

COMMENT S'APPELLE UN CHAT TOMBÉ DANS UN
POT DE PEINTURE LE JOUR DE NOËL ?

UN CHAT PEINT DE NOËL...

(SAPIN DE NOËL – CHRISTMAS TREE)

✓ Naughty, naughty !

A few choice expressions NOT to use with your grandmother!

Ta gueule! (tagir!) – shut yer gob!

Casse-toi! (kass-twah) – get lost

Putain – (putenn) - exclamation

equivalent to "oh cr-p!"

C'est le bordel – (say luh-bordell) -

what a mess (literally "It's a brothel!")

ANSWERS TO 'TEST YOUR FRENCH' PO LIFE n°25

1 1f 2j 3h 4b 5a 6i 7c 8e 9d 12g

2 1c 2f 3j 4a 5i 6g 7b 8h 9d 10e

Remplissez les blancs

2

Quand le bus arrive dans le **1** de Perpignan, une superbe **2** en mini jupe est la **3** dans la queue, et monte **4** (direction l'Espagne) en montrant deux belles **5**. Assise sur un **6** pas loin de l'**7** du bus, une femme **8** dit à son mari:

Tu ne trouves pas cela **9** comment les hommes regardent les **10** de cette fille qui monte dans le bus?

Le mari répond : "Quel bus ?"

1 dedans - 2 première - 3 cuisses - 4 arrêt - 5 honteux - 6 centre - 7 fesses - 8 blonde - 9 indignée - 10 banc

Test your French slang!

3

bousiller	a	to burn
chouette	b	disgusting
une clope	c	policeman
cramer	d	cigarette
dégueulasse	e	clothes
dingue	f	to ruin
un flic	g	crazy
un(e) frangin(e)	h	brother or sister
le fric	i	lovely
les fringues	j	money



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Améliorez votre Anglais

Trouvez la définition de ces mots d'argot anglais...

1

- | | | |
|----------|---|--------------------------------|
| bangers | a | une fille |
| Tal | b | un petit gâteau |
| a bikkie | c | bête |
| a bimbo | d | rien |
| a bird | e | fou |
| zilch | f | merci |
| yobbo | g | des saucisses |
| tiddly | h | un voyau |
| thick | i | un peu saoul |
| barmy | j | belle femme peu intelligente ! |

✓ Language tip!

Attention ! Ces mots ne changent jamais dans le pluriel en anglais

advice - conseils

clothing - vêtements

furniture - meubles

rubbish - déchets, ordures

homework - devoirs

information - renseignements

knowledge - connaissances

pasta – pâtes

✓ How to make the perfect cup of tea

Put these instructions for making a perfect cup of tea into the right order

1. Add milk and sugar if required
2. Enjoy your cuppa
3. Pour the tea into the cup
4. Bring the kettle to the boil
5. Fill the kettle with fresh water
6. Put the tea in the teapot.
7. Leave the tea to brew for five minutes
8. Warm teapot with hot water and pour away
9. Pour the boiling water into the teapot

Trouvez la définition de ces abréviations d'usage courant (les réponses sont ci-dessous mais ne trichez pas.... Je vous surveille !)

2

- | | | |
|------|---|-------------------------------|
| AKA | a | généraliste |
| ASAP | b | absent sans prévenir |
| GP. | c | pour info |
| Ltd | d | sandwich au bacon |
| AWOL | e | société anonyme |
| BLT | f | un peu de tendresse |
| FYI | g | aussi connu sous le nom de... |
| TLC | h | dès que possible |

...et les voilà

Also Known As

As Soon As Possible

General practitioner
Limited.

Absent Without Official Leave

Bacon, lettuce and tomato

For your information

Tender Loving Care

Répétez cinq fois ! *Tongue twister*

Flo thought three free fish
were fine

RÉPONSES D'AMÉLIOREZ VOTRE ANGLAIS PO LIFE N° 25

1 1c 2h 3e 4i 5f 6a 7j 8d 9g 10b

2 1g 2e 3j 4a 5d 6c 7h 8f 9b 10i

3 1d 2e 3f 4g 5c 6b 7a

F is for fish! Trouvez les définitions de ces mots suivants, qui commencent tous par F

4

Birds have these ❶ a Fahrenheit

Tables, chairs, beds.... ❷ b fall

Machines that makes a breeze. ❸ c fan

Bread is made from this ❹ d feather

Above eyebrows and below hairline. ❺ e file

A measure of temperature l ❻ f foal

Pretty explosions in the sky ❼ g fireworks

A young horse ❽ h furniture

Used to smooth things ❾ i flour

This may happen if you lose your balance ❿ j forehead



Daft joke

*Doctor, Doctor I feel like a sheep.
Oh dear, that's baaaaaaaaaaaaaad!*

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les pauvres de l'appétit. **Coluche**

THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD....

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." *Anne Frank.*

There are several charitable organisations around the region who would be very happy to accept your donations, house clearances etc. Here is a glimpse into the origins of three of these charitable associations who hope you will be thinking of them this winter.



✓ *J'ai une petite idée'....*

Les Restos du Cœur Les Restos du Cœur is a French charitable association

which provides food packages and free meals to the poor and homeless, organised and served up by 45 000 volunteers around France. There were 417 such volunteers in the PO last year and more are always welcome, particularly if you have a skill such as IT, painting, help with form filling... that you are able to pass on.

The concept was originally launched by popular French comedian Coluche, in August 1985 on a radio programme. It quickly became the 'in' thing to support and was

backed by television and pop stars, artists, sports personalities, media

and politicians throughout France. The death in 1986 of

this big hearted clown only strengthened the resolve

of his many famous friends to continue to support

the cause that he had created. **Les Enfoirés**,

(a rather rude word if

you look it up in the dictionary but I will loosely translate it as the "rascals"), some of France's biggest stars who performed in an annual benefit concert whilst he was alive, continue today to meet up for concerts throughout France, donating proceeds to the Restos du Cœur. By doing so, they prompt the media to explain the goals of the organisation and remind people of where they can donate or volunteer.

Today, the organisation has 18 centres in the P-O and is expecting to distribute more than a million meals over the 2009 – 2010 winter period. They also run **Les Restos bébés du cœur** for children, and are always in need of baby products and clothing, high chairs, prams, toys.....

As well as donations of food, furniture, cutlery and crockery and of course any financial aid, **Les Restos du Cœur** badly need vehicles and more space for storage, so if you have a large empty building available, they would love to hear from you!

27 rue Monticelli 66000 PERPIGNAN Tel 04 68 85 04 53 - restosducoeur66@wanadoo.fr - <http://66.restosducoeur.org>



✓ Emmaus

Emmaus was founded in Paris in 1949 by Father Henri-Antoine Groues, Catholic priest, MP and former member of the

French Resistance during WW2. He was better known by his resistance name of **Abbé Pierre**.

When a desperate, suicidal man came to him for help, he took him in and asked him to join in his mission to help the homeless. Georges became the first of a group of **Emmaus Companions** supported by and living in the home of Abbé Pierre, working to build temporary homes for those in need. When the money ran out, Abbé Pierre toured the restaurants and businesses of Paris begging for donations. His **companions** were outraged. There had to be another way. They became rag and bone men, going through bins, collecting people's unwanted items and selling them on....and so Emmaus was born.

Donate any unwanted items by taking them along yourself or arrange for larger items to be collected.

Mas Garria, Pollestres - 04 68 54 59 60



✓ « Tout ce qui est humain est nôtre » (« all that is human is ours »)

If you happen to come across a green Father Christmas,

Santa has not gone 'bio'! He is the 'Père Noel du Secours Populaire' and his job is not to hand out presents but to collect them.

The Père Noel du Secours Populaire has been giving the real Papa Noel a hand since 1976. He is green 'comme l'espérance' and hands out happiness in his aim to provide Christmas festivities and presents for families who are

unable to be 'merry' at Christmas, due to poverty or other circumstances. You should see evidence of him all over the region over the Christmas period.

Created in 1945, the **Secours populaire français** is one of the most active charities in France, dedicated amongst other things, to exclusion problems related to children and poor families, provision of food and clothing, professional integration, access to culture, sports, hobbies, health, holidays, defense of human rights... Find out more at www.secourspopulaire.fr



✓ The AFM Telethon

(l'Association Française contre les Myopathies et les maladies neuromusculaires)

A yearly event, taking place this year on the 4th & 5th December, the AFM Telethon is France's major fund-raising event. Behind the fun and entertainment is the raising of funds to support AFM's research programs and services for people with neuromuscular diseases and to inform the general public about rare genetic disorders.

For those who fight every day against a devastating disease, each Telethon is a new step on the road to victory over these diseases. Your donation will help accelerate research progress and raise patients' hopes.

✓ SPA

... and please don't forget the SPA (**Société Protectrice des Animaux**) and the many animal refuges around the region who are desperately in need of support this winter.

Refuge SPA Le Jardin de la Padrine - Torreilles

Route de Villelongue 66440 TORREILLES Tel: 04 68 28 20 36

Refuge SPA de Perpignan - Lieu dit la Llabanère 66000 PERPIGNAN
Tel: 04 68 57 20 43

Some funny equivalents...

Filer à l'Anglaise - to take French leave

Une capote anglaise - a french letter

CHOOSING YOUR WOOD FOR YOUR WOODBURNER

by Gill STOREY

Rating 10 corresponds to wood which gives the greatest heat per dm³ (litre) and 5 to the wood which only gives half as much heat. All firewood must of course be properly dried and stored carefully.

GOOD

Charme	(Hornbeam)	10
Chêne	(Oak)	9.9
Frêne	(Ash)	9.2
Érable	(Maple)	9.1
Bouleau	(Birch)	8.9
Orme	(Elm)	8.4
Hêtre	(Beech)	8

AVERAGE

Saule	(Willow)	7.1
Sapin	(Fir and Pine)	7
Aulne	(Alder)	6.7
Pin Sylvestre	(Scots Pine)	6.7
Mélèze	(Larch)	6.6
Tremble	(Aspen)	6.5
Tilleul	(Lime)	5.7
Peuplier	(Poplar)	5



Comment appelle-t-on
un boomerang qui ne
revient pas ?

Un bout du bois

It is best to order wood from your wood merchant in early summer, as the price may go up later in the season. Make sure that you buy seasoned firewood that has been cut and dried out for at least a year, as freshly cut wood has a very high moisture content and will leave creosote deposits in your chimney.

Wood is sold by the stère (cubic metre) and there are 1000 dm³ in a stère. The price varies with its efficiency as heating material. It can be ordered by length (usually 50cm) although some stoves may take shorter lengths of wood.

THERE'S NO SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE



Fire damage resulting from a chimney fire is one of the most common insurance claims in France.

Any chimney that is in use needs to be swept at least once per year. Many insurers will NOT pay out for fire damage without a cleaning certificate ("certificat de ramonage") which your chimney sweep (ramoneur) will leave you when he cleans your chimney. Of course, the most important reason for keeping your chimney clean is the risk of fire and the danger of breathing in carbon monoxide which stays in the house instead of being released through the chimney



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Heating maintenance

Since 9th June 2009, it has been compulsory to maintain your boiler on an annual basis, whether it be oil, gas, wood, pellets..... Of course it is also in your best interest to respect this legal requirement, as a badly maintained boiler uses more fuel and can become polluting and dangerous in the long run.

During our inspection, we check the levels of carbon monoxide (gas responsible for many deaths) and nitrogen oxide (NOX)

As well as traditional heating, (oil, gas...) we also specialise in the installation of renewable energy systems : Solar panels, Heat pumps, Installation of wood and pellet boilers

We are happy to discuss with you and explore all possibilities to reduce your fuel consumption and limit the impact of your heating on the environment. English spoken.

THE post office



A great place for a gossip

The French village post office is a bit of a national institution. The fact that you can still find one in most small villages is really rather nice, particularly given that they offer banking with very low charges and a widening range of services.

However, if you don't wish to hear about the state of Mme Dupont's chilblains or the results of M. Leblanc's latest miracle haemorrhoid cream, you may prefer to choose, buy and print out your stamps on line at www.laposte.com. (English-language site).

There are 200 different stamp designs to choose from, and you can even create your own stamps with personal photos of the dog, the mother-in-law... You will also find a calculator on the site to help you to work out how much postage your letter or parcel requires, dependant on weight and destination.

Alternatively, many post offices have automatic stamp machines (coins only) with instructions available in English. These allow you to weigh letters and packages and issue postage in the form of the appropriate *vignettes d'affranchissement*.

Registered mail :

If you wish the recipient of your letter or parcel to sign at the other end, send it *recommandé*. If you would also like to receive confirmation that the recipient has signed and accepted the mail, it should be sent as *recommandé avec accusé de réception*. This is particularly recommended if you are sending valuable items, legal documents or anything that might later lead to dispute.

Moving house?

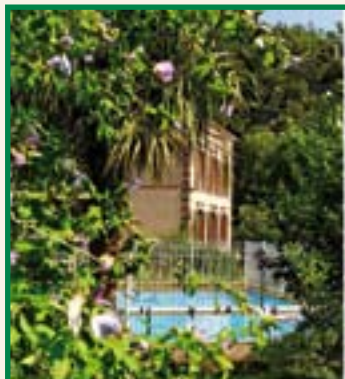
The post office will either redirect your post to a temporary or permanent address (*réexpédition du courrier*) or hold on to it at the post office until you are ready to collect it. (*garde du courrier*). You may also arrange for your post to be sent directly to the post office if you do not yet have an official address (*poste restante*).

Post codes:

The first two numbers of the post code represent the *département* (66) and the last three show the commune.

Useful vocab

<i>accusé de réception</i>	<i>acknowledgment of receipt</i>
<i>adresse de réexpédition</i>	<i>forwarding address</i>
<i>timbre</i>	<i>stamp</i>
<i>destinataire inconnu</i>	<i>unknown</i>
<i>expéditeur</i>	<i>sender</i>
<i>guichet</i>	<i>counter</i>
<i>port payé</i>	<i>postage paid</i>
<i>retour à l'expéditeur</i>	<i>return to sender</i>
<i>colis</i>	<i>parcel</i>
<i>enveloppe prêt à poster</i>	<i>paid envelope</i>
<i>la levée</i>	<i>collection</i>



L'Andréu was built as the private hunting lodge for the wealthy owners of châteaux Aubiry and Valmy. Today the facilities of this beautiful 19th century mansion can be enjoyed by all. Set in the tranquil Riuferrier valley, we are 5 mins from the charming hilltop village of Corsavy and 15 mins from the ancient market town of Arles sur Tech.

Fully restored in 2009, L'Andréu combines fin de siècle elegance and charm with modern style and comfort.

All rooms have views of the forested valley, are equipped with showers and have pc's with dvd players, free and unlimited internet access and wifi. There is a heated 10m swimming pool and a 4-seater hot-tub available all year round.

The house is set in extensive gardens and forest bordering the Riuferrier river. It is an ideal base to explore the region, go walking, fishing, bird-watching,.... or just relax in the grounds and enjoy a taste of the belle époque.

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WINTER SPORTS IN THE HIGH PYRENÉES!

A December, January or February day out in the mountains can be pretty invigorating. So easy to drive up or take the bus or Yellow Train. All the Pyrenean resorts are super friendly and very family orientated. The skiing may not be quite as challenging as the Alps but the slopes are well tended and, for the middle to beginner skier, perfect. Booking is certainly recommended for the Christmas and Half Term school holidays.

Les Neiges Catalanes offers a fixed price ticket for 8 resorts and 4 cross country areas giving access to 288 kms of Alpine skiing, 107 ski lifts, 1330, 360 kms of cross country, 13 ski schools and 10 snow parks. 1330 snow blowers make sure you will have plenty of snow even if the winter is a mild one. www.neigescatalanes.com

For boarders the snow parks have half pipes, slide kick and box ramps galore and the region is famous for its competitions. The

cross country ski runs through breathtaking scenery are long and varied.



Snow shoeing (Randonnées en Raquettes) can be fun. (See the walk on page 6). Snow shoes used to be used by trappers and fur traders. Although forest rangers still wear them, their use has become predominantly recreational, the freedom they give enabling one to get around areas of deep snowfall. Take a guide and rediscover

the tracks of wild animals and birds, enjoy the calm rhythm of the countryside and closeness to nature. Mike and Jenny Rhodes of Pyrenean Trails www.pyrenean-trails.com can not only accompany you but can arrange a lunchtime barbeque picnic halfway through the day or an overnight in a mountain refuge in the majestic scenery they know so well.



Snow-shoeing is strenuous. A more leisurely way to swoosh through the snow is on a **husky drawn sledge**. Husky Forever at Matmale 0687760266 or Drakkar Traineau Adventure in Font Romeu 0608628745 are the people to contact for that activity.

Or you could hire a **four wheeled mountain bike** and follow well bashed trails through the forests. Both ecologically sound and original, "le Quad VTT" can be hired by ringing 0688582716.

Or why not take to the skies??? Kite skiing is

pretty exciting! The sun, the thermals and the Tramontane all combine to make C.KITE on 0614598087 another must ring number for an extraordinary winter sporting experience.

Ski'n'co will fly you tandem for an unforgettable view of the mountains and teach you all you need to know about winter paragliding...

Vol'aime (0468301010) also arrange paragliding courses for all levels

If the sky is not to your taste you could go **diving** beneath the ice of Lake Matmale with the Rederis dive club of Banyuls sur Mer. Contact Gilles on 06 11 58 52 28 for a bit of plongée sous glace!

All year round the **Parc Animalier** offers the opportunity to see many of the animals of the Pyrenees in their natural surroundings. The two-hour walk through enclosures of boar, wolf, bison, bears, reindeer, marmotte and izards is a pleasure of all ages. Picnic spots and beautiful views through to the lake and mountains add to the pleasure.



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WINTER READING

Featuring five books set in the Pyrenées, written by local authors and offering a variety of possible presents or holiday literature for lovers of the Pyrenées Orientales.



“Love and War in the Pyrenees” by **Rosemary Bailey** is now available in paperback, a fantastic read, brilliantly researched and written in her inimitable blend of personal experience and historical fact. A written record of a dark period in the history of the Pyrenees Orientales, lightened by the deep love Rosemary has for both the country and the people who live here.



In **“Life in a Postcard”** **Rosemary Bailey** tells the story of living in and the restoring of the converted monastery of Corbiac, on the outskirts of Mosset. She blends the everyday routines of the medieval monks with her own to make a fascinating tale of the simple and not always so simple life as it can be lived in the 21st century and as it was lived in the middle ages.



“The Man who Married a Mountain” takes us into the 19th century world of aristocratic explorers and mountaineers who gravitated

Shop opening hours over the festive season

Main supermarkets (Carrefour, Auchan, Intermarché, Champion etc) will be closed on Christmas Day and New Year's Day but open as usual at all other times (early closing - 19h - on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve).

Boxing Day is not a bank holiday in France.

Smaller shops will be open at the discretion of the owner but closed on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

towards the Pyrenees in search of the “Sublime”. Her hero is Sir Henry Russell-Killough, half French, half Irish, totally eccentric, he climbed every mountain in the Pyrenees. Accompanied by her young son, **Rosemary Bailey** leads us in his footsteps, interweaving her own Pyrenean experiences with those of Sir Henry in a travel tale par excellence.



“Collioure from A-Z” by **Jane Mann** is more than just a guide book.

It overflows with an eclectic mixture of information, anecdotes, history, photographs and stories of Collioure, its inhabitants and visitors. All told with a fondness that has grown over the twenty years since she first set foot in the small Catalan village known as the “Jewell of the Cote Vermeille”.



“Careless Love”, a novel is a tale of sex, love, betrayal, fidelity and family played out against the backdrop of windswept Cornish beaches, deepest rural Gloucestershire

and the Mediterranean sunshine of the French Pyrenees. A light and easy holiday read.



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contact@chalet-ana.com



When I left my home village of Nefiach, I left behind the sweet scents of pine and rosemary, vines and harvests and headed for the ski resort of Les Angles in the mountains and the odours of fir trees, mushrooms and yellow 'couscouills' flowers..



Here at the "Cellier de Camille", these same scents are blended into our Catalan wines, cheeses, charcuteries, jams, honeys and other local delicacies, and I thank the mountains daily for all the wondrous gifts they have bestowed on me to pass on to you..

Avenue de Balcère - Résidence La Matte (next to Sport 2000)
66240 LES ANGES 04 68 04 39 12

Things you might need to know...

HAVE YOUR SAY IN THE UK!

Did you know that, whilst around 200,000 British expats are resident in France, only a small handful are actually registered to vote in the UK, even though they can?

In fact, Every British citizen who has been registered to vote in the UK within the last 15 years is eligible to vote in UK Parliamentary (general) elections and European Parliamentary elections in the UK.

If you were too young to register when you left the UK, you can still register as an overseas voter so long as your parent or guardian was registered to vote in the UK.

You can also vote in France's own local and European parliamentary elections.

To register, download an overseas registration form from www.aboutmyvote.org.uk and return it to the electoral registration office for the address at which you were last registered to vote in the UK. (Addresses can be found on website). Once you are registered, you may choose to vote in person at your local UK polling station, by post or by proxy.

Quel est le fruit prefere de Beethoven ?

POMME POMME POMME
POMME !

MORE SCAMS

Watch out for an email scam going round with convincing looking headings and logos, claiming to be from the French tax office. Sent from remboursement@impots.gouv.fr, it informs you that you are eligible for a tax refund (remboursement) and asks you to click on a link and fill in your bank details. If you receive this email **DO NOT click on the link**. The DGFIP (Direction générale des finances publiques) says that they would never ask for your bank or credit card details in this way and warns people to be vigilant.

FRENCH LETTERS!

Visit www.conso.net -> 'Vos Droits' -> '100 lettres-types' for more than 100 specimen letters in French, to help you to complain, enquire, set up or cancel a contract... and dealing with insurance, banks, services, health, transport, neighbour and consumer disputes...

LOCAL NEWS

Check out www.la-clau.net for a good insight into the news around the region. It's in French but not too complicated and you can sign up to a weekly newsletter which covers the main happenings in Catalonia.

CUSTOMS ALLOWANCES FROM SPAIN AND LE PERTHUS...

The following allowances are PER CAR, not per person.

- **Cigarettes:** 5 cartons (1000 cigarettes) or 10 if you declare them at the motorway border. They will give you an *attestation* to show to police in case you are stopped on the way home.
- **Rolling tobacco:** 1 kilo
- **Spirits:** 10litres
- **Beer:** 110 litres
- **Fortified wines** - 20 litres
- **Wine:** 90 litres
- **Fizzy wine:** 60litres



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I have trained the young and the not so young in movement, dance, fitness and relaxation for many years.

There are various courses on offer. Sessions are either in the mornings or early evening.

Students learn how to move their bodies (for the very young) and how to exercise all the parts of their anatomy in order to keep fit and supple and strengthen the muscles.

It's fun. We do it to music. We don't use weights, we practise 'Chiball' or 'Swissball' to help our respiratory system and equilibrium.

A new course on offer is 'La Relaxation Coreenne'. A quiet hour of floor exercises to achieve harmony and well being.

Why not come and see me at Centre Energym, 15 Rue Beausoleil, Ceret
04 68 87 28 50 (French)

06 43 80 73 51 (English)

and I will be pleased to give you information on all courses, times and fees.

GIFT VOUCHERS AVAILABLE 45

Christmas shopping

Perpignan shops will be open for Christmas shoppers on Sunday 6th, 13th and 20th December.

There will also be free parking in Wilson, Arago, Saint-Martin and Catalogne carparks in the city centre..



Odile Oms

A door to art

The door of Galerie Odile Oms at 12 Rue du Commerce in Ceret is closed. Odile Oms says it is important to mark the difference between street and gallery, noise and silence, art and tourism.

Turn the handle and walk in. The white walls are splashed with Goyaesque figures by Caillard in vivid reds and greens. Towards the back garden another room is filled with works of modern masters like Brune, Derain and Vives. The gallery's mission is clear: to present contemporary and modern art with local connections.

On the same cobbled street where her great grandmother kept a grocery shop, Odile and her painter husband, Christian, bought no. 12 as a family home and workshop. Through Christian and his circle of artists Odile became fascinated with painting. When the bank where she had been working was restructured, she took the opportunity to open her own gallery on the ground floor of their house. That was exactly ten years ago.

The first exhibition was of 40 paintings by Pinkus Kremegne, who had fled Belarus and

eventually found refuge in Céret. The show was a noteworthy success and assured the gallery's future. She continued to explore the history of modern art in the region with shows of Pignon, Loutreuil and Derain.



In exhibiting contemporary painters Odile tries to give artists a space where people can come and "look and look again, get to know and learn to love" the paintings. Emmanuel Bolzoms' surreal creatures (Dali comes to mind) and Julien Descossy's meditative watery landscapes are examples of a new generation of painters promoted by the gallery.

Odile's office is on the first floor in a small room painted a restful green. In this inner sanctum, in the course of a conversation, drawings and paintings are produced to illustrate a point. She is forever in the process of discovering what painting is and what it can become. "You have to stand



alone, in silence, in front of a canvas and give it your complete attention. Only in this way can the dialogue between you and the painting take place. A painting is produced layer by layer, and it is the same with our perception."

In December, to celebrate the gallery's 10th anniversary, Odile will mount a retrospective exhibition. She relishes the opportunity to create a show of her own personal choices. In February 2010 she will exhibit the Ceretan artist, Christine Costeseque, whose work Odile describes as "subtle, with soft and transparent colours, uncannily both abstract and figurative."

So, why not open that door? You may find yourself wanting to return for another look, another dialogue.

Opening hours & complete gallery information available at www.odileoms.com



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Our Laurene Bijoux Jewellery Parties allow you to set up your own hours, make new friends and be thanked for your friendliness and most of all **ENJOY WHAT YOU DO.**

A friendly personality is all the experience you need to host a Laurene Bijoux Jewellery Party. Contact our Laurene Bijoux representative at holger@laurenebijoux.com or call 06 86 25 05 34 NOW. Wir sprechen Deutsch, Hablamos español, On parle français.

Quirky Properties

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Rare and much sought after, traditional country houses are hard to find. Here is a small collection.

Overlooking the Têt Valley is a traditional rustic stone Mas.

It has been lovingly renovated over the last ten years by an artist/sculptor making it as much a work of art as a beautiful home in which to live.



From its huge swimming pool are views over Ille sur Têt and Les Orgues to Château de Quéribus on the skyline of the distant Corbieres hills.

In winter its comfortable and spacious interior with under-floor heating and a large fireplace ensure warmth and in summer the thick walls insulate against excessive heat. Solar panels heat domestic and swimming pool water. In the grounds are an artist's studio, a gite and two independent studios, a zen garden and surrounding the ancient olive tree in front of the main house are harmonious terraces creatively lit by highly original sculpted lampposts. Houses like this are very rare and do not come on the market often.

(825,000 euros)

Ring 04 6884 7027
to view.

Useful vocab

<i>l'ancien propriétaire</i>	<i>the former owner</i>
<i>attendant</i>	<i>attached privately after a showing</i>
<i>cadastré</i>	<i>local town planning register</i>
<i>combles/grenier</i>	<i>attic</i>
<i>cuisine américaine</i>	<i>open-plan kitchen</i>
<i>de plein pied</i>	<i>bungalow</i>
<i>maison mitoyenne</i>	<i>semi-detached</i>
<i>double vitrage</i>	<i>double glazing</i>
<i>loggia</i>	<i>covered terrace</i>
<i>sans vis-à-vis</i>	<i>not overlooked</i>
<i>FAI</i>	<i>Agents fees included</i>



In the midst of the vineyards behind Banyuls sur Mer is a **delightfully renovated old stone "Bergerie"**. Several sunny terraces surround the attractive living-room/kitchen that, with a bathroom and small double bedroom, make up the main house. Steps lead down to two further rooms, all with the same views over vines and mountains. In fact, the mas comes with two vineyards with a total surface area of 5.335 m2.

It is unusual, charming certainly and, for peace and tranquillity a mere ten minutes drive from the sea, hard to beat.

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Plans are based on the development of environmentally-friendly architecture within the framework of traditional architecture.

The newly-opened studio at 29 Boulevard du Marechal Joffre, in the centre of Ceret, is conveniently placed for you to drop in to discuss your dream house - and the first consultation is free of charge.



Manuel GRAU, Architecte DPLG

29, Boulevard du Marechal Joffre

66400 Ceret

Tel: 04.68.39.45.45.

Mobile: 06.76.84.84.21.

grau.architecte@orange.fr

Quirky Properties



This charming renovated farmhouse has origins dating from the 13th Century and is full of character and original features including beams, exposed stone and exposed rock face with an interesting split-level layout. However what really sets it apart is the resident ghost. As you can imagine, estate agents get to visit a lot

of properties and experiencing 'weird' sensations kind of comes with the territory but this house wins the spooky prize hands down. At 620,000 Euros (agency fees included), the price is not as frightening as it looks, as the house is set within 2.5 hectares of land with 10 rooms. If you're looking for a property that is a bit out of the ordinary then this renovated Mas could be for you. One proviso though, if you wish to visit, you have to promise to stick by my side all the way around. PLEASE don't make me do it on my own!

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THUIR-LLUPIA

CAP D'ONA BREWERY, ARGELÈS

By John Fairclough

Whilst the Roussillon area is without doubt renowned for its wines, and one of the top producing areas in the whole of Europe, beer has never been very high on the list of priorities of either producers or consumers here.

However, with microbreweries making a strong comeback all over the world, led particularly by Belgium, Holland, UK and USA, it is very pleasing to see the emergence of the Cap d'Ona brewery in Argelès.

Created in 1999 by the Engler family, who has a brewing tradition stretching back hundreds of years in Eastern France, they operate out of purpose built premises in the ZA near Carrefour in the seaside town.

Although the brewery is state of the art, the methods used are strictly traditional, with only quality ingredients used; malt, wheat, rye, yeast, and, of course, pure well water. The

process differs slightly for each beer, but, in the main, cool, top fermentation ensures a distinctive character and satisfying flavour.



There are six "regular" beers produced of varying types and strengths; Starting at the lowest ABV:

BLANCHE DE GARRIGUES (4.5%)

Flavoured with Rosemary, this is a light, slightly cloudy wheat beer, perfect for hot summer days.

BLONDE BIO (4.5%)

This is a pils type beer. Very refreshing and made with 100% certified organic ingredients.

BLONDE DES ALBÈRES (5.5%)

This light ale has a little Albères honey added after fermentation, giving it a pleasantly sweet finish.



BLONDE SPÉCIALE AU MUSCAT (6%)

A fascinating attempt at marrying their own product with another famous Roussillon beverage, this light beer is fortified with 8% Muscat de Rivesaltes, leaving a fruity aroma.

SPÉCIALE CÔTE VERMEILLE (6%)

Similar to the above, but with the addition of Banyuls wine rather than the Muscat.

AMBRÉE DU CAP (6.5%)

Cap d'Ona are justifiably proud of this bitter ale, made from 100% malted barley, as it has recently won a gold medal in a Concours of French microbreweries.

In addition, this year Cap d'Ona are producing not one, but two Christmas beers; an ambrée at 7.5% and a blonde at 8%.

For teetotalers/drivers, it is worth noting that a cola called Alter and a traditional low sugar lemonade are also produced.

The increased popularity of artisan beers has meant that the brewery's products are becoming quite widely available, not just in small specialist shops, but even in the Grands Surfaces such as Auchan and Carrefour. 33 and 75 cl bottles are both used. A growing number of bars, cafés and restaurants, particularly on the coastal strip, Vallespir and Perpignan also stock at least 2 of the range, even on draught in a few places!

The shop/tasting room attached to the brewery is open Mon to Fri during normal French working hours, and ,on Fridays, brewery visits for the general public are conducted, another



great rainy day activity! For private groups, a more detailed tour can be arranged, by phoning the boss, Grégor Engler on 04 68 95 75 09 or 06 20 25 17 26. For further info visit www.cap-dona.com





School holidays for our region (Zone A)

- Christmas - Break up: Friday 18th December
2009 Back to school: Monday 4th January 2010

- February half term - Break up: Friday 12th
February / Back to school: Monday 1st March

CHANGES TO YOUR Sky TELEVISION CARDS

Getting the message?

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✓ Once all these cards have been issued, the old cards will be turned off. This will mean that those of you who have a Sky box or viewing card only, will lose access to some FTV (free to view) channels including FIVE, FIVE USA, FIVE USA+1, FIVER, FIVER+1 Sky3) but you will continue to receive all other FTV channels.

✓ If you do wish to change your card, it will be replaced free of charge, as long as it is less than 3 years old, and registered to a UK

address or you may order a new one for 20€. (UK address also needed) Replacement is NOT automatic and must be applied for online at www.sky.com/replacecard/index.jsp. Just enter your viewing card number and it will tell you if you are eligible for a replacement.

Information supplied by Alex of Skydigi and Dave of British TV in France. For up to date information on UK TV visit their sites at www.skydigi.tv and www.british-tv-in-france.co.uk



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A selection of....
Christmas markets - December

27th November - 24th December

- Perpignan (Quai Vauban & around the centre)

1st - 31st December

- Elne (Christmas market)

Sunday 6th

- Saint-Laurent-de-Cerdans

- Thuir (Foire au gras)

3rd - 7th

- Collioure, Château Royal

9th - 13th

- Argelès-sur-Mer

10th - 13th

- Elne

Saturday 12th

- Le Boulou

- Sorède

12th - 13th

- Castelnou

- Port-Vendres 1

Sunday 13th

- Maureillas

- Amélie-les-Bains

- Vernet-les-Bains

18th - 21st

- Port-Vendres 2

18th - 24th

- Le Barcarès village

Sunday 20th

- Céret (Foire au gras)



Sunday 20th

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Christmas
lunch and
afternoon tea
and mince pies.

Carols, Santa,
cards and
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Palais des Congrès, Perpignan



PALAIS des CONGRÈS

8th January

Magic show with Dani Lary.

1st December

OTANGO The ultimate Tango show !

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2nd February

Les Rendez-vous du Caveau de la Huchette : "Nico and the Rythm Dudes". This regular jazz 'club' brings together talented jazz musicians.

PARC des EXPOSITIONS

13th – 28th February

Anatole Park : Bouncy castle theme park

27th – 28th February

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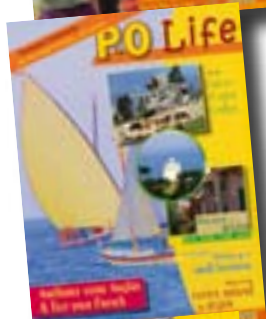
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FESTIVE FRENCH FOOD

Bon appétit!

A dinner party in France is seen very much as an opportunity for friends and family to spend quality time together and can last several hours and sometimes cover six courses or more.

Christmas or New Year's Eve dinner is called a "réveillon" after the word *réveil* (awakening), as in theory it involves staying awake until well after midnight. This tradition can be traced back to the mid-1800s when elaborate dinners were

eaten by families when they returned home from Church after the Midnight Mass.

A few specialities that you might be served over the festive season...

FOIE GRAS

Despite the many ethical issues surrounding the force feeding of ducks or geese to enlarge their liver, the resulting foie gras is nevertheless part of the French heritage, a delicacy eaten throughout France on special occasions.

Foie gras entier (whole foie gras), made of a whole liver, may be either cooked (**cuit**), semi-cooked (**mi-cuit**), or fresh (**frais**). Can be bought from the butchers and is often "pan-fried" in slices and served hot either as a starter or on top of a fillet steak. (**Tournedos Rossini**)

Bloc de foie gras, cooked and shaped, with a minimum of 90% foie gras. Should have rich taste and smooth texture. Buy it **avec morceaux** (with pieces) of foie gras for a rougher texture.

Pâté de foie gras/mousse de foie gras. Usually a combination of the meat of the bird and a small amount of the foie gras. Check the percentage of Foie Gras on the label.

Duck (Foie Gras de Canard) or Goose (Foie Gras D'Oie)?

Goose foie gras is less common and more expensive than duck foie gras because its production requires more intensive care and feeding. Its taste is more intense than duck foie gras.

To serve

Place it in the fridge for a couple of hours before serving so that it is chilled but not ice cold. Take out of fridge 15 minutes before serving and cut it into 10mm slices. Serve as a starter with toast triangles or crusty farmhouse bread or as a fabulous accompaniment to a sparkling glass of champagne to celebrate just about anything!



Recommended with Rivesaltes Ambré 2006 from **Domaine de la Perdrix, Trouillas**.

Naturally sweet, rich golden wine which goes particularly well with blue cheese or foie gras. Around 12€

Le facteur apporte une lettre
pour le fermier.

"Il est dans la porcherie, explique sa
femme, mais vous le reconnaîtrez,
c'est le seul qui porte un béret noir".

MARRONS GLACÉS



First created during the reign of Louis XIV, these candied glazed chestnuts are

eaten around Christmas time in France, a fairly costly luxury as true marrons glacés take several days to cook from start to finish. First, the chestnuts are washed & sorted, then boiled so that the shell and inner membrane come away easily. They are then cooked repeatedly in a rich vanilla syrup until the flavour seeps into the heart of the chestnut.

Wine recommendations

CAVE

COOPERATIVE in TROUILLAS

Seasonal bubbles and fizz with Cantarene white (5€35) or Cantarene rosé (7€25). Dry and festive, this local champagne-method wine is considerably better value/quality/price than many "real" champagnes.

Or why not try the "sweet and low" Dizzy? As opposed to alco-pops this light (5°), fizzy Muscat contains no nasty eees or additives and can be drunk straight from the bottle like beer. Refreshing, fun and very festive (4€20 75cl bottles, 11€ for 6 x 33 cl bottles)

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"During one of my treks through
Afghanistan, we lost our corkscrew.
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water for several days." **W.C.Fields**


CHÂTEAU
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in Banyuls dels

ASPRES

"La Fontaine des
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Described as a wine to "charm
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red cabernet sauvignon is delicious
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Eve solution - Port-Vendres 06 70 70 62 10
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British TV in France 04 68 69 83 76
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