



with **GPS**

walk & eat around
AVIGNON



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This pocket guide is designed for short break walking holidays based on Avignon, at the apex of what we call the 'golden triangle', with the Roman cities of Nîmes and Arles forming the base. Both Avignon and Nîmes are served by TGV and discount airlines, Avignon by daily coach and (we hope) by Eurostar from May to September. The walks can be reached by public transport (or by car), and the climate makes for brilliant walking — and eating — all year round.

Hop on a train, plane or bus for a long weekend or a week. This guide has enough walks, excursions, restaurants and recipes to last almost two weeks — so you can pick and choose the most appealing. The highlights at a glance:

- 10 varied day walks, each with city plan or topographical map
- recommended restaurants
- recipes to make at your self-catering base or back home
- hints on wheat-, gluten- and dairy-free eating and cooking in Provence

INTRO

THE WALKS

The walks range from strolls around the three great cities of Avignon, Nîmes and Arles to some undemanding walks in the Alpilles and at the edge of the Lubéron. The book is specifically designed for visitors using public transport. If you've only a long weekend, you may not want to spend time filling in forms to hire a car. Of course, if you *do* want to hire a car, you will have many more options. Our wider-ranging book, *Landscapes of Western Provence* (see sunflowerbooks.co.uk), would take you from Aix-en-Provence to the Pyrenees via 12 car tours and 76 long and short walks.

But rest assured that you do not need your own wheels to discover the glory of the 'golden triangle'. All the walks in this book are easily reached by bus or train, and getting to the walks is half the fun. Sightsee while someone else does the driving. It's amazing how much ground you can cover in just a week.

THE RESTAURANTS

There are restaurants at the start and end of all the walks; in the cities they are everywhere. But, apart from those in the cities, some of them close out of season — just when the walking is at its best! We have concentrated on restaurants that are open all year round and, in the three cities, those that are at the 'heart of the action', *not* the *recherché* places on back streets. The reason is twofold: if it is your first visit, we think you will want to soak up the atmosphere in the main squares; secondly, *out of season*, the 'hidden away' restaurants may be almost empty (most disheartening) — or *closed*. Note that restaurants are generally



Following our Avignon walk, you'll pass this restaurant, called 'Tarasque' on Rue des Teinturiers. It was closed, but we were enchanted by the sign above the door (which lights up at night). Several churches in Provence have paintings about this legend — wherein St Martha, making the sign of the Cross, tamed and captured the Tarasque, a dragon-like monster which periodically emerged from the Rhône to devour anyone in its way.

open for lunch from 12.00-14.00 and for dinner from 19.00-21.00 or 22.00. *No restaurant has paid, in cash or in kind, to be included in this guide.*

THE RECIPES

Most of our recommended restaurants were happy to share with us the *ingredients* used in their recipes, but the actual preparation remains their 'secret' (in truth, they are simply not written down, but just passed on from cook to cook over the years). So you can rest assured that we have cooked *all* of these recipes ourselves, to make sure they 'work'!

What we cannot guarantee, of course, is that they will taste as good back home as they did in France! So many factors come into play to make food taste better when you are in Provence — from the intangibles (the relaxed atmosphere) to the tangibles

(the marvellous variety of super-fresh produce you can seek out at the markets).

So if you are in self-catering, why not try some of these recipes while you're still there? We've made most of these dishes on the simple kind of cooker usually found in self-catering (two rings and a decent oven). Many of them are casserole-style, not only easily managed with limited cooking facilities, *but* also virtually impossible to overcook, and there is hardly any washing-up! What's more, they always taste better when reheated after a few days. And good news for anyone suffering food intolerances: all of the recipes can be **gluten- and dairy-free** (see page 138).

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

When to go

The simple answer is — anytime, but remember that from **mid-June to mid-September** it's usually swelteringly hot, crowded to overflowing, and prices are at their highest. Moreover, some of the countryside walks will be closed; see 'Fire hazard' on page 72. On the other hand, most of the excursions suggested on pages 20-23 and some bus services *only* operate in summer, more restaurants open ... and the lavender is in full bloom...

Despite the reduced facilities outside summer, that's when we prefer to visit. **Late September and October** are ideal for the mild temperatures and the autumnal colours. One has to take a chance with possibly heavy rains in October and **November**, but you can still expect temperatures in the 60s (17-19°C).

We often go at **Christmas/New Year**, to enjoy the festivities



Place de l'Horloge in January — the carousel (in front of the theatre) is just being cleaned before opening for business.

and the clear winter skies. The early mornings can be nippy, but once the sun is up it's fine and warm — *super* walking weather. And unless it is unseasonably cold (below the mid-40s — 7-8°C) or a *mistral* is blowing, the terraces in front of the cafés will be full of people eating out of doors.

February is warmer still, and by **March** it's virtually spring. Plan on some rainy days in March and **April**, but rainy spells don't usually last very long. And at least when it rains here, there's plenty to do indoors (apart from trying new recipes).

May and early June, with wild flowers galore, are simply glorious, as you would expect. And that's when we hope and expect the Eurostar service — cancelled during the pandemic and for a few years afterwards due to Brexit constraints — will start running direct again from London 3-4 times a week!

Where to stay

Of course there is a wide choice of hotels of all grades throughout the area described in this book. While the *best* public transport base is Avignon centre, there are good, fast con-

EXCURSIONS IN THE AREA

By rail, coach or boat, there is plenty of choice in the 'golden triangle'. Our top all year round excursions by train would be day (or overnight) trips to Aix-en-Provence or Marseille. By coach, top of the list would be the Camargue, but there are many other destinations. Year-round boat trips are more limited, but there are a few possibilities. Note that while there are many operators who will take you *privately* (whether by mini-bus, plane, on horseback or in a kayak!), **Avignon** and **Arles** are the best bases for scheduled (less expensive) trips.

Below are some suggestions you might enjoy, but note that some only operate in the summer. The local tourist offices will help you plan seasonal trips to suit your budget and interests.

Excursions by train

Unfortunately the last tourist train in this area (the Petit Train des Alpilles) closed in 2013. The nearest venue for enthusiasts is about 50km to the west: the **Train à vapeur des Cévennes**, a steam railway between Anduze and St-Jean-du-Gard (access: train from Nîmes to Alès, then bus line 72 or 81 to Anduze or bus line A12 from Nîmes to St-Jean-du-Gard).

A longer trip would take you from Nîmes into the Cévennes on **Le Cévenol**: a supremely scenic route through gorges and over viaducts. You need not go all the way to Clermont Ferrand (five hours); day trips are possible. See **midnight-trains.com** (for a history), and enquire at the railway station in Nîmes.

Easiest of all would be a train to **L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue** (40min



25 motorway junction numbers

3 area of the walk and number



Just two and a half hours from Paris by TGV — six hours from London in summer if and when Eurostar reinstates the route — Avignon is an ideal short break destination all year round. Not only is there plenty to see in the city itself, but the fine Roman remains at Nîmes and Arles are just half an hour away.

around avignon

WALK

Start out at the main railway station [2]: walk straight ahead over the tram lines and through the city walls via the **Porte de la République**. Follow **Cours Jean Jaurès** for 200m/yds, to where the 14th-century **Abbaye de St-Martial** rises on the right. The **tourist office [1]** is just beyond it, also on your right. Call in and stock up on the city plan, brochures about excursions, and a calendar of events. You can collect an 'Avignon Pass' here as well (see page 17).

Out of the tourist office, turn right and right again on narrow **Rue Jean-Henri Fabre**, hugging the side of the abbey. A lovely space, **Square Agricol Perdiquier**, lies just beside it. Rue Fabre quickly becomes **Rue des Lices**, a scruffy street initially, which traces the wall of the 13th-century fortifications (*lice* originally referred to wooden

See plan inside front cover

Distance: 8.4km/5.2mi; all day

Grade: easy, but several sets of steps

Equipment: see page 9

Transport: 🚶 to Gare Avignon Centre (not the Gare TGV!) or 🚌 to the gare routière (main bus station) in Avignon – adjacent to the railway station. Or 🚗: park at the railway station (see notes on page 15).

Refreshments: throughout

Market days:

food/general market at Les Halles (daily ex Mon); see page 19

Sat: flower market, Place des Carmes

Sun: flea market, Place des Carmes

Opening times/full entry fee*

Palais des Papes: daily 10.00-19.00,

12 €; Pont St-Bénézet: 10.00-19.00,

5 €; Petit Palais Museum (cl Tue, 1/1,

1/5, 25/12): 10.00-13.00 & 14.00-

19.00, free; Fondation Angladon (cl

Mon, Sun in winter, 25/12 and Jan):

13.00-19.00, 8 €; Lapidary Museum

(cl Mon, 1/1, 1/5, 25/12): 10.00-13.00

& 14.00-19.00, free; Calvet Museum

(cl Tue, 1/1, 1/5, 25/12): 10.00-13.00 &

14.00-19.00, free; Requien Museum

(cl Sun & Mon, 1/1, 1/5, 25/12): 10.00-

13.00 & 14.00-19.00, free

***High season** opening times; in winter open slightly later



The impressive almshouse on Rue des Lices; below: Rue des Teinturiers skirts the Sorgue — a wonderfully evocative street, even in winter



fencing enclosing a stronghold). Then, on the left, the huge galleried 18th-century **almshouse** [4] takes you completely by surprise. Not far past here, also on the left, is the classical **Chapelle du Verbe Incarné** [5], its door badly defaced by graffiti.

About 150m further on, at the crossroads, turn right on **Rue des Teinturiers** ('Dyers' Street'), immediately passing a large **belltower** on the right — the remains of a Franciscan convent. This enchanting, plane-lined, cobble street runs to the left of the **river Sorgue**, and you will see the reason for the name: the river was used by the cloth-dyers, and several of their large **waterwheels** remain today. But before you come to them you pass to the left of the 16th-century **Chapelle Ste-Croix** (a Grey Penitents' Chapel), restored in the 19th century.

Notice the stone benches alongside the road, obviously fragments from ancient buildings and carved with gargoyles, crosses and even skeins of rope. One of them is dated 1483.

When you come to the town walls, turn back and retrace your steps *past* Rue des Lices, then take next left turn into **Rue de la Masse**, passing a couple of impressive old mansions. This street becomes **Rue du Roi-René** (named for 'Good King René', under whose reign the region was politically and economically stable, allowing the arts to flourish and who supposedly lived here when visiting Avignon from his base in Aix-en-Provence).

You then come into **Place St-Didier**, with its 14th-century eponymous Provençal-style single-nave church [6]. From St-Didier, walk back, around the east end of the church, on **Rue de la Sarailerie**. This becomes **Rue Galante** and runs into a pedestrianised shopping area and takes you straight to **Place de l'Horloge** — the real heart of the city, bustling with cafés and restaurants. The plane-shaded square is named for the 14th-century Gothic **clock tower** (*horloge*), part of the **Hôtel de Ville** [7; Town Hall]. Two large wooden figures, Jaquemart and his wife, strike the hour (but are not easily seen when the trees are in leaf). Next door is the city's **theatre** [8], with a delightful two-tiered **carousel** in front. A lovely gate on the right fronts the house of Jean Vilar, who founded the Avignon International Theatre Festival. Over the Christmas period, the whole square is 'canopied' with lights, above a large and lively Christmas market with about 20 traders.

Continue north, past the **Banque de France** [9], into the huge **Place du Palais** [10], dominated by the Palais des Papes. (If you



The Mint (Hôtel des Monnaies)

are running out of steam, the 40-minute guided tour of all the sights on the **tourist train** leaves from here.) Before exploring the palace, take time to look at the 17th-century **Hôtel des Monnaies** [11; The Mint) on the left, once home of the Borghese

family, who administered the city on behalf of the then pope. Later it became the city's mint, and is now the Conservatory of Music. Its baroque façade, with fat cherubs, lions chomping on fruit, and the Borghese coat of arms (dragons and eagles) is in complete contrast to the austerity of the papal fortress.

Despite the fact that the Avignon Papacy only lasted just under 100 years, the city of Avignon remained papal property until 1791 and has always been known as the 'city of the popes'. The massive (15,000 sqm) fortified **Palais des Papes** can be seen from miles around, rising above the city walls. (It consists of two adjacent buildings — the old palace to the north, and the newer one to the south.) Allow a good hour for your visit — either on your own or with a guided tour (in English).

Just north of the palace is the cathedral, **Notre-Dame-des-Doms** [12]. Built in the middle of the 12th century, the cathedral was damaged repeatedly — especially during the Revolution. Most critics are unimpressed by its subsequent rebuilding,

citing especially the 1859 addition of a huge gilded statue of the Virgin atop the 15th-century Romanesque bell tower. But whatever the critics say, one cannot help but admit that it is impressive. Inside, the Romanesque dome covering the chancel is remarkable, as is the octagonal lantern over the transept crossing. At Christmas there is a beautiful crib in the cathedral (see page 32).

From the cathedral go through a gate and walk up **Montée des Moulins** (not signed on our last visit, but obvious) to the gardens on the **Rocher des Doms**. From this bluff there is a stupendous view over the curving Rhône and St-Bénézet Bridge, with the Tour Philippe le Bel at Villeneuve behind it. Be sure to go on to the **viewing table**, which will help you identify points much further afield — from the Alpilles to Mont Ventoux.

From the viewing table go back and walk round the shady **duck pond** area (with picnic tables and a seasonal café). Pick your way past the courting couples, heading back towards the cathedral's octagonal lantern. Then retrace your route back down Montée des Moulins. On your right is the **Petit Palais**. This most attractive building was bought by the popes in 1335 and eventually became home to Pope Julius II in the 16th century. A patron of Michelangelo, he took a great interest in the arts and established a fabulous collection of painting and sculptures with two main themes — Avignon in the Middle Ages and early art (the Italian primitives are especially noteworthy). Later the building was often used by the city to house visiting royalty and dignitaries.

Continue back down to the Palais des Papes, then take the

alleyway at the right of the Mint, **Rue de la Monnaie**. This takes you to at T-junction at **Rue de la Balance**, where you turn right. Home to gypsies in the 19th century, the street was completely revamped in the 1970s. Despite some old restored mansions on the right, it's not very attractive, on account of the modern buildings on the left. Following brown signposts to 'Pont d'Avignon', go left on **Rue du Puits de la Reille**, right on **Rue de la Grande Fustière** and then left on **Rue Ferruce**. The **Port du Rhône** takes you through the ramparts and out to the famous 'Pont d'Avignon' — **Pont St-Bénézet**. You may content yourself with this view, but if you want to walk on the bridge, you must retrace your steps to the entrance on Rue Ferruce. There is plenty of free information here, or you can opt for a ticket to the '**Musée en Images**' telling the story of the bridge on a huge video screen (English narrative available). *Note that the next part of the walk, along the ramparts, was only possible if one paid to visit the bridge; all other approaches are kept locked. However, when we researched this edition, the ramparts were off limits.*

The narrow cobbled bridge dates from 1177, built by the 'Bridge Brotherhood' — a group of volunteers inspired by the legend of a young shepherd boy called Bénézet, who had been commanded by an angel to build a bridge at that spot. Standing here, contemplating the full force of the Rhône, it seems astounding that such a project could *ever* have been completed in those days — no less in just 11 years. The original bridge crossed two arms of the river via the Ile de la Barthelasse — 900m/3000ft long, with 22 arches, and ran to the base of Philip the Fair's Tower at Villeneuve. The bridge was rebuilt and



Pont St-Bénézet: today one has to pay to be 'sur le pont d'Avignon'.

raised in the 1230s, at which time a little Gothic-style chapel was superimposed on the Romanesque **Chapelle St-Nicolas** which stands on the centre pier. Today only four of the 22 arches remain — the Rhône finally took its revenge in the floods of 1668, but the setting of this bridge is indescribably lovely.

Return from the chapel if you pay to go there, and follow the **ramparts** south if you can — they were closed off on our last visit; instead we followed the alley just below them (despite a sign in French warning of rockfalls). These magnificent 14th-century walls still completely encircle the city for a distance of over 4km/2.5mi. Built by order of the popes, the original walls



At Christmas there is a beautiful crib in the cathedral, with huge *santons* — almost half life-size. The tradition goes back to Pope Joan XXII who initiated the custom in the 14th century, but the crib that one sees today is very old as well. Most of the figures and costumes were collected by the Carmelites in the early 19th century; they have since been repaired twice.

were much higher than they are today (the lower parts now being covered by roads), and there was also a moat outside the walls. Nevertheless, from a military standpoint the walls were more symbolic than effective, as they lacked any projecting parapets from which to survey and attack the enemy below.

If when you visit you are able to walk on the ramparts, you will find only a short section accessible, and as you pass the modern road bridge over to Villeneuve, you'll have to descend — into elegant **Place Crillon**, where the famous **Hôtel d'Europe** is on the left (from Napoleon to the present day, anyone who is anyone stays here). Walk across the square and follow the sign 'Voie Piétonne, Rue Mazan', then go right on **Rue Joseph Vernet**, a posh shopping street (the 'Bond Street' of Avignon). After 150m, opposite a church, turn left on **Rue St-Agricol**. A large staircase leads to the 14th/16th century church of **St-Agricol [14]**, with its finely carved 15th-century façade. Inside there are some noteworthy works of art contemporaneous with the church ... if you're not flagging by now.

Leaving the church, continue on Rue St-Agricol, past the charming courtyard of the **Petit Louvre** hotel on your right; it incorporates the remains of a Knights Templar chapel dating from 1273, now a theatre/conferences venue. Coming to **Rue Bouquerie**, turn right (but first walk a short way left uphill past the east end of St-Agricol, to see some Gallo-Roman rampart ruins behind railings). Walk along Bouquerie, passing under the arch of the **Hôtel du Préfecture** [15] on your left and then past the **Hôtel du Département** facing it. After 200m/yds, turn right on **Rue Horace Vernet**. This brings you back to **Rue Joseph Vernet** — a long street which, like the Rue des Lices near the start of the walk, traces the edge of the 13th-century ramparts. On your right, as you join this street, are two small museums, **Requien** (natural history, botany, zoology), then **Calvet** (with some fine paintings ranging from 16th-century to late 19th). But if you like the Impressionists, perhaps save your ‘museuming’ for the next, final stop!

Turn left on Rue Joseph Vernet to continue. Coming back to where the tourist office is facing you, you have a chance to see the last Van Gogh painting of Provence still in Provence: walk left on **Rue de la République**, then turn right on **Rue Frédéric Mistral**, by the side of the **Lapidary Museum** [16], and left on **Rue Laboureur**. At No 5 you will find the **Musée Angladon** [17], set up in the mansion of two great collectors, themselves artists. There are works by Cézanne, Dégas, Sisley, Modigliani, Picasso, and Van Gogh’s *Railway Carriages*, painted in 1888.

From here retrace your steps to the tourist office and **railway/bus station**.

La Brasserie de l'Horloge

Location, location, location! For years we'd been suggesting Le Forum, since it was open all day in winter, unlike others in the



square. Users deplored its 'touristy' location and (recently) the mediocre food. But this book is meant for *short break* holidays, and if you've only one day in Avignon then perhaps, like us, you would prefer to lunch right at the heart of things, facing the town hall, theatre and carousel. Now you can have *both* — great food right at the heart of things! As soon as you walk

into this brasserie, wonderful smells waft up at you. Sensibly, the menu is small, concentrating on just a few seasonal dishes.

The Forum is under new management and not what it was when we first found it and so enjoyed the dish shown opposite — a real winter warmer!

into this brasserie, wonderful smells waft up at you. Sensibly, the menu is small, concentrating on just a few seasonal dishes.

LA BRASSERIE DE L'HORLOGE

26 Place de l'Horloge (04 90 01 91 82 or
(07 72 77 87 56; contact@horloge84.com
daily all year for lunch 12.00-14.30 and
dinner 19.00-21.30 €€-€€€

**limited menu, with 5 starters, 5
mains and 5 desserts**

**everything fresh, seasonal and
cooked to order** — from the new
green Provençal asparagus in puff pastry
shown left to risotto with fresh — not
frozen — scallops with truffle oil

lamb shoulder stew with pasta is
the house speciality, but there is always
beef and a fresh fish (caught nearby) dish

home made desserts include brie with
truffle shavings and the French staples —
chocolate mousse and crème brûlée

restaurants

eat

Petit salé aux lentilles (lean pork belly with lentils)

First draw the salt out of the pork belly: cover it with cold water and leave in the fridge for a good 5 h, changing the water 4-5 times.

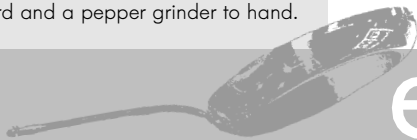
Put the pork belly into a cast iron casserole and cover completely with fresh cold water. Add the onion, garlic, bouquet garni and bay leaf — no other seasoning. Bring to the boil, then cook, covered and just lightly bubbling, for about 1 h 30 min. During this time, put the sausages (*unpricked*) in another pan, cover with cold water, and cook gently, *without boiling*, for 30 min. Then let the sausages cool in their own liquid and cut into chunks.

When the pork belly cooking time is up, add the lentils (and carrots) to the casserole. Let this all bubble away *gently* for about 30 min. Then remove the pork, cut into thick slices, and return to the casserole. Discard the onion; add the sausage, and taste. If it's not tangy enough, add a tiny bit of wine vinegar. Serve piping hot, garnished with parsley — with some mustard and a pepper grinder to hand.



Ingredients (for 4 people)

- 400 g salt-cured lean pork belly (*petit salé* in France)
- 3-4 sausages of your choice (Le Forum uses traditional fine-grained smoked sausage; we prefer unsmoked)
- 250 g brown lentils, rinsed
- 1 small onion, stuck with 1 clove
- 3 carrots, sliced (optional)
- 1 bouquet garni
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 garlic clove, peeled
- wine vinegar (optional)
- fresh parsley to garnish
- Dijon mustard (to serve)
- ground pepper (to serve)



recipes

eat