

P-O Life

Le magazine anglais des Pyrénées Orientales

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A selection of events
from the Palais des Congrès

ENDE / CREATIV

n°14

December
January

2007-8

Bed & Breakfast / Gîtes

Le Vieux Rosier - St Laurent de Cerdans - www.davidandkates.com 04 68 81 43 96

Builders & Decorators

English paints in France - quote RM11ango for 10% discount 01962714249

Hussell Building - Céret - www.hussellbuilding.co.uk 04 68 98 03 24

Ian Rye - builder - Elne 04 68 39 75 45

IGC - Camélas 06 20 84 00 24

P. H. Insulations - plaques de platre - Plasterboards - Céret 04 68 22 56 65

P.O. Interiors - carpentry, general building, total renovation 06 72 42 07 04

Saper - painting and decorating - Amélie les Bains 04 68 39 15 84

General

Délices du Monde - British food - Perpignan - <http://www.delicesdumonde.fr.st> 04 68 53 45 01

Kevin Campbell - Handyman - Home, Pool & Garden maintenance 06 10 05 06 90

Accommodation, management & maintenance - Prades Valley - www.fuilla66.com 04 68 05 63 08

Kitchen

Léa cuisines - Le Boulou 04 68 88 19 80

Education and translation

Alfmed - Perpignan 04 68 62 20 20

Carole Howarth - Language training - Perpignan - carole.howarth@neuf.fr 06 01 93 55 04

Carole Cassoly - help for administration and translation - cassoly.carole@tiscali.fr 04 68 96 21 46

Idiomatic Language Service - Perpignan - marenostrum@idiomatic

Lucie Grimal - Albères, Vallespir 06 80 67 83 29

Susan Ramond - French / English language services 04 68 96 08 31

Estate agency

Cepage immobilier - Rivesaltes - www.cepage-immobilier.com 04 68 64 10 67

Cyprimmo - info@cyprimmo.com 04 68 95 72 58

France Europe Immo - Perpignan - Auchan shopping centre - jean-claude.maes@9business.fr 04 68 21 07 07

Med & Mountain Properties - throughout P-O - www.medandmountain.com 04 68 56 54 22

Richard Immobilier - Céret - richard-immobilier.com 04 68 87 66 70

Landscape and Garden maintenance

Vallespir Paysage - all gardening works undertaken 06 12 99 25 52

Plumbers/Electricians

Robert Morley - plumber/electrician - Le Boulou 04 68 83 38 54

Property and Project management

TPM - Maureillas - www.tpm66.com - info@tpm66.com 06 75 45 93 65

Ceret Associates - Céret - info@ceret.co.uk 04 68 39 13 53

Sky TV installation

British TV in France - Rennes les Bains - www.british-tv-in-france.co.uk - Mobile 06.82.10.55.35 04 68 69 83 76

CS Services - Perpignan and throughout the PO 04 68 82 08 53

Soft furnishing & upholstery

Aubergine - made to measure, curtains, upholstery - Maureillas - aubergine.deco@aliceadsl.fr 06 25 18 18 10

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tourist offices, most supermarkets, airport,
Palais des Congrès, Leroy-Merlin, Carrefour Argeles, France
Europe Immo in Auchan.... (for more precise details,
visit our site www.anglophone-direct.com)

Bon Nadal i Felicitany Nou (Merry Christmas and Happy New Year in Catalan)..

Well, November has been absolutely delicious
so far, with blue skies and warm sun throughout
the day, and cold crisp mornings and evenings.

(A 'petite laine' (a woolie) is definitely recom-
mended though if you're staying out to watch the stars!!).

The P-O are changing colour again as green leaves still
cling on determinedly, if a little desperately, to the trees and vines
turn red and russet, whilst nevertheless cocking a snoot at winter yet to come!

Et oui, it's that time again! Noël. Have you maybe considered that "pre-
mier bain de l'année" – brrrrrrrr!! (see p8). Personally, I'll be very happy to
curl up in front of a log fire with a Roussillon rouge and a good book and
wait patiently for Papa Noel.

Have a fantastic Christmas, and a Happy New Year out here, whether you
are on the ski slopes or sipping Xocolata (see P12) in the shade of the snow
topped Canigou.

Fins aviat (Catalan for see you soon) - Kate

SOMETHING TO SAY ...

*We are always quick to complain but rarely
voice our compliments and thanks publi-
cally. May I take this occasion through your
magazine to say thank you. Since moving
to the P-O last year, we have had nothing
but positive experiences in any of our
dealings with the Mairie, services and local
tradesmen. Merci - K. Lowe, Perpignan*

*Is it just me or is there just a lot more
litter around at the moment?*

*In the last 4-6 weeks I have noticed an
increase in the amount of litter around
the beautiful countryside where I
live - usually comprising empty beer
cans/bottles and cigarette packets. Is it
a coincidence that the hunting season
also started around 4-6 weeks ago? I'm
sure they are not the only culprits but
there's certainly a marked increase. - JB*

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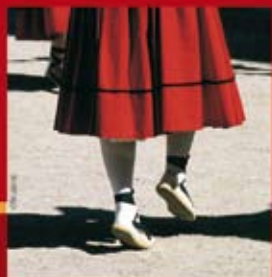
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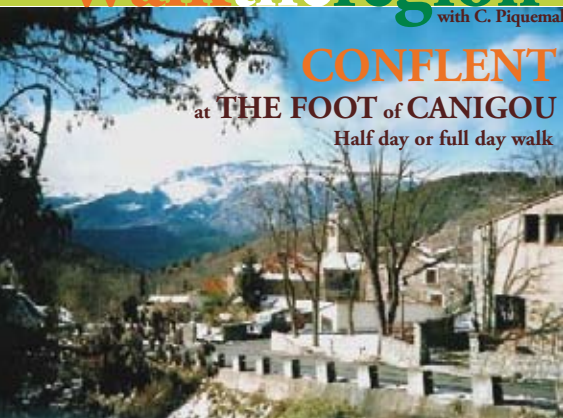
Move around, go out...
Consult the events calendar on:

www.cdt-66.com

Comité Départemental du Tourisme des Pyrénées-Orientales
16 avenue des Palmiers - BP 80540 - 66605 Perpignan cedex - France
Tél. +33(0)4 68 51 52 53 • Fax +33(0)4 68 51 52 50 • cdt66@wanadoo.fr



CONFLENT at THE FOOT of CANIGOUS Half day or full day walk



remarkable throughout with a special mention for a pre-historic dolmen and the Romanesque churches of Corneilla de Conflent, Fillols and Vernet les Bains. The oldest part of Vernet, perched on the southern side of a hill, deserves a longer visit.

Two walks are available. The shorter successively crosses both sides of the valley going to Corneilla and back. The longer takes in a detour to the charming village of Fillols. You can also start walking from Corneilla. All itineraries are marked out in yellow paint.

Please note that times indicated only cover the actual walking as there are many worthwhile stops along the way.

Access : Direction Prades to Villefranche de Conflent. At the roundabout in front of the ramparts, take direction Vernet les Bains. In Vernet, park anywhere near the Cadi River.

Start of walk : From the bridge over the Cadi, direction Sahorre, to the horse riding centre, walk alongside it and turn left onto a path across woods. You meet up with the track on the crest line. Follow it to your right, past the old Saint Clément chapel (10th -11th cent.) until you reach the dolmen. Turn 90° to the right and down across a pine forest to a little road leading to Corneilla. The 19th century castle on the right belonged to the Monfreid, a family of artists. Cross the D116 to enter the village. Once the residence of the Counts of Cerdagne and Conflent, it is dominated by the beautiful church Sainte Marie (11th -12th -13th cent.) *Walking time: 1h30.* To continue:

✓ **OPTION 1 :** Back to Vernet - 1h15. Follow the main street direction

Une blonde parle à
une autre :
Tu sais quoi ? Cette
année, Noël tombe un vendredi !
Oh non ! J'espère que ce n'est pas un vendredi 13.

Our itinerary unwinds gently between elevations 700m and 800m. It provides 360° panoramas over mountains as well as perspectives over the Rotja and Cadi valleys. The historical heritage is

Vernet then on the left take the "Cami de Sant Jaume". After 50m, turn left up a cemented ramp between 2 houses. When you reach a small canal, cross it a few metres further on and take a steep way up to a wider track. It goes past a water tank and meanders across glades and forests to finally meet the road D27. Take it on your right. Leave it just after the small bridge and follow the path going down. Cross the metallic bridge over the river Saint Vincent to soon reach Vernet les Bains. *Total time: 2h45.*

✓ **OPTION 2 :** Detour to Fillols - 1h40. From Corneilla, follow the road D47 along the church direction E. After 100m, turn right along the old road gently leading across fields to Fillols. The pretty Romanesque church, the little square with its refreshing fountain and the convivial "Café de l'Union" offer a rewarding break. The place is one of the privileged starting points for climbing Mount Canigou. Go to the upper part of the village and take the road D27 direction "Vernet". Leave it when coming to a little bridge (signposted on the left). The old path "Vieux Col de Fillols" takes you over the hill and down to meet the D27 again. Follow it all the way to Vernet or take the shortcut described in option 1. *Total time: 3h10.*

For more details on this or any other walk in the region, contact Christian Piquemal at enchemin@mail.com or phone him on 04 68 83 15 19 // 06 21 66 42 15

phone : 04 68 67 28 51
fax : 04 68 50 48 85
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Catalan Christmas saying
Beure molt i anar dret no pot ser
Boire beaucoup et marcher droit est impossible
Excessive drinking and walking straight are impossible

FEELING A BIT TRAMONTANE?

Did you know that the word **Tramontane** can be used as an adjective and means "on or coming from the other side of the mountains" as opposed to **cismontane** which means on this (the speaker's) side of the mountain? It can apparently also be used to describe anyone who lives on the other side of mountains, or even more generally, anything seen as foreign, strange, or even barbarous!

CANIQUO

In a letter to M. Georges Aurio of Perpignan, **Rudyard Kipling** wrote: "*I came here in search of nothing more than a little sunshine. But I found Canigou, whom I discovered to be a magician among mountains, and I submitted myself to his power. . . I watch him with wonder and delight. Nothing that he could do or give birth to would now surprise me, whether I met Don Quixote himself riding in from the Spanish side, or all the chivalry of ancient France watering their horses at his streams, or saw (which each twilight seems quite possible) gnomes and kobbolds swarming out of the mines and tunnels of his flanks.*"



SPARE A THOUGHT

During the **Second World War**, the Pyrénées were a **natural escape route** for the many victims of the Nazi occupation and the British secret agents of MI-9 named the escape networks from Europe to Great Britain the "**Battle of the Pyrénées**". Brave Frenchmen and women, Spanish farmers and shepherds who had fled from their homes during the Spanish civil war led groups regularly over the mountains to safety. As you walk the well trodden paths of the mountains of the Cerdagne, close your eyes and spare a thought for the courageous men and women who went before you.

DON'T SHOOT! It's A Rifle!

From October onwards you'll see **Rifles** advertised everywhere you go in the P-O! No need to duck unless you're talking "two little ones"! It's bingo! (Well, yes, I always thought it was "Lotto" too but that's language evolution for you!). In fact, all non profit making **associations** are allowed to organise 2 rifles a year in order to **raise funds** for their activities, so it's all for a good cause.

SNOWBUSINESS

The official opening of the majority of **ski resorts** in the PO is usually around the **first weekend of December**, the 6th being *Le Saint Nicolas* and the 8th being *l'Immaculée Conception*, both of which are festival days and bank holidays in Spain. Over that weekend, the Spanish often *font le pont* - 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!

AND WHILST WE'RE TALKING SKI...

The *Neiges Catalanes*, is a **network of nine stations** (Bolquère, Pyrénées 2000, Cambre d'Aze, Cerdagne Puigmal, Font Romeu, Formiguères, La Quillane, Porté Puymorens and Puyvalador) all within easy reach of Perpignan (90 minute drive) and centred on Font-Romeu... **One single ski pass** will allow you access to all so that you can change ski resorts whenever you wish. It includes 190 runs, 110 ski lifts, situated at an altitude of between 1600 and 2500 metres. There are over 480 km of downhill runs or cross country tracks.

YERMITE GET TERMITE

If you enjoy a real fire on a cold evening, do remember to **stack your wood away from the house** unless you want to come home to find uninvited guests snacking on your priceless antiques! **Termites** are very keen to lurch on your logs and can find all kinds of inventive ways of entering your home on an extended visit from the log pile!

THE SURREAL STORY

Al Pacino will play the main role in the film "Dali and I: The Surreal story" based on the surrealist **painter's latter years** -- when the art was becoming less important than the money, fame and power, and his eccentricities and lifestyle were drawing as much attention to him as his work... The shooting is expected to begin in 2008 in both Spain and New York. The script is based on the book "Dali and I" by the Belgian author Stan Lauryssens, Dali's only neighbour in Cadaqués.

NEW YEAR IN SPAIN

As the twelve strokes of midnight sound on the 31st December, the Spaniards **pop a grape** into their mouth for each bong to bring **good luck** for the 12 months ahead (but only if all twelve grapes are eaten in time) and leads of course to much hilarity, spitting and dribbling. What better way to start off a new year?



EX-PATS TO LOSE STATE HEALTH ENTITLEMENT

In his election campaign speech, M. Sarkozy said: "If you feel you are old enough to retire at 53, go ahead, but don't expect the state to pay for it." It has now been confirmed that Britons living in France who are below UK state retirement age and are not working or in receipt of an E106 will need private health insurance from April 2008.

✓ If you are in possession of an E121 form, allocated to British citizens of UK state pension age, you will NOT be affected and will **continue to receive cover**.

✓ If you are in possession of a form E106, (valid around two years) you are still eligible for free healthcare until its expiry, after which you will have to take out private health insurance. If you have been paying voluntarily *cotisations* (payments into the French health system) your *Carte Vitale* will no longer be valid from 31st March 2008, and you will still need to purchase private healthcare.

✓ Britons who have been resident in France for more than five years will not be affected as they have a "permanent right of residence" after five years.

✓ If you are **working legally** (at least 60 hours per month) .and paying social charges, you will **continue to receive** all the benefits of the *carte vitale*.

✓ **New arrivals** in France will be expected to **visit their local Mairie** in the first three months after their arrival and provide proof of E121, E106, or private medical insurance. On verification

of this, they will be issued with a Certificate of residence (as yet unconfirmed).

✓ If you have a **chronic or serious pre-existing condition**, making it difficult to obtain private insurance, there is as yet, no specific exemption. It is hoped, however, that each case will be judged on its own merit and those unable to find insurance will be allowed to continue to benefit from the state health allocation.

✓ Where the husband is legally retired (and therefore eligible for a *carte vitale* under French state health care) his **wife is also covered** as a dependant. However, this does not necessarily work the other way round. Further information to come on this in the future.

✓ If you have been obliged to relinquish your state health care and take on private insurance, it will be reinstated once you reach retirement age.

✓ These changes affect **people living in France** and do not apply to people making a temporary visit to or holidaying in France.

✓ In Britain, the NHS continues to be free for all patients "ordinarily resident" in the UK.

✓ In theory, there is nothing to stop you starting up your own business. However, the cost of the various start up charges, social charges and business taxes to follow will very likely outweigh the cost of taking out a private insurance policy.

Do bear in mind that many details are still missing from the final picture and whilst it is certainly worth looking into different private healthcare options, it is advisable to wait until you have written confirmation of your own personal situation before you take out any private policy.

The British government site www.dh.gov.uk suggest that people seek further information from one or more of the following:

CPAM - The French Health Service (English language service): +33 8 20 90 42 12

CLEISS - (France's helpdesk for international mobility and social security):

11 rue de la tour des Dames 75436 Paris Cedex 09
Tel: +33 1 45 26 33 41

DWP Overseas Medical Benefits helpline: Tel: +44 (0) 191 218 1999 (Monday to Friday 8am - 5pm)

Healthcare in France

<http://www.expathealthdirect.co.uk/>

REAL ESTATE PROJECT IN MIND...

LA BAGEENNE IMMOBILIER
2 place de la République
66670 Bages
la.bageenne.immobilier@wanadoo.fr
www.labageenne.com
Tél: + 33 (0) 468 372 607
Fax: + 33 (0) 468 372 679



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25 rue J-F Millet
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info@cyprimmo.com
www.cyprimmo.com

Missing the point!

Did you know that knives had sharpened points until the seventeenth century, when the renowned Cardinal Richelieu of France changed all that? Legend has it that Richelieu, a fussy and finicky eater, objected to his house guests using the point of their knives as toothpicks. He ordered his steward to round the ends of all his knives, a fashion which spread throughout France and most of the Western world.

PAYING FOR CASUAL LABOUR - THE CHEQUE EMPLOI SERVICE CESU

If you wish to keep everything legal when paying **casual labour** (work around the house, help with homework, private lessons, home help for the disabled and small gardening jobs), and protect yourself in case of injury or accident, why not pay via the *chèque emploi* system?

There are several advantages to both employer and employee.

- ✓ **For the employer:** by paying in this way you benefit from a **50% tax reduction** and you are **insured in case the person has an accident** whilst working for you.
- ✓ **For the employee:** you benefit from being declared and therefore have a **status in the French social security system** for pension, unemployment, training...

IMMO LIFE Advice for vendors - with LOUISE SAYERS

With national figures from the FNAIM showing prices for resale property static for the first time in a decade, it's a buyer's market at present. There's no need to panic - demand in the P-O remains relatively strong, however vendors wanting to sell quickly for the best price possible should put some time and effort into the **presentation of their property**.

While in the UK you would have to have lived in a cave to avoid all those property shows with advice on how to present your home for sale, it amazes me how many people seem to forget this advice once on foreign soil. Here are my top tips for a painless sale:

- ✓ **Be realistic about the value**
There are lots of **overpriced properties** on the market, which can skew your view of what your property is worth. Ask your agent what he has sold and for what price in order to get a more accurate idea. Even if you are prepared to significantly drop your price, you risk buyers not enquiring about the house if it is overpriced, or above their budget.
- ✓ **Limit the number of agents you use**
Buyers are much more savvy than in the past and tend to do

To participate in this scheme, ask your **bank** for an application form. Remember that the potential employee must agree to payment by Cesu.

There are two kinds of Cesu :

- ✓ **The bank Cesu** (*Le CESU bancaire*)

A cheque book with bank cheques and special declaration forms (*volet social*) which the employer should send to the CNCESU (national Cesu centre).

- ✓ **The pre-paid Cesu** (*Le CESU préfinancé*)

Cheques already made out for a specific amount to a specific destination (similar to luncheon vouchers).

Fill in the declaration form (obtainable from your bank or online at www.cesu.urssaf.fr), and send it to the Cesu Centre (address below) at the end of each of month. They will work out the contributions, send off a pay slip to the employee, send you a bill and tell you how much will be debited from your account and when.

For more info:

Centre national du Chèque emploi service universel

3, avenue Émile Loubet

42 961 Saint-Étienne cedex 9

N° Indigo 0 820 00 CESU or 0 820 00 23 78 (0,12 € TTC / min)

more research. A house which is in every agent's window and on numerous websites looks **suspiciously unsaleable**. Agents are also more likely to work to sell your house if it's not with every other Jean, Pierre and Françoise. Exclusive mandates, however, are unlikely to benefit anyone other than the agent.

- ✓ **Define rooms**

If you're marketing your house as a 3 bed property but the 3rd room is a junk room which potential buyers can't even get into, they will feel that they are being short changed. Clear it out, put in a bed (to prove that you can) and they will know that you aren't hiding anything.

- ✓ **Neutralise décor**

It will make it easier for potential buyers to imagine themselves living in the house.

- ✓ **Open shutters & clean windows**

No-one likes a dark house – maximise the amount of light during viewings and your house will seem **more appealing**.

For more advice on selling your house, contact Louise Sayers at info@medandmountain.com - 04 68 56 54 22 - 06 12 29 52 59

Rivesaltes

FÊTE DE LA SAINT-ANDRÉ

2nd December

Bénédiction du Muscat de Noël et Trobade de Gegants à l'église (Blessing of the Christmas Muscat and parade of the Giants with live music and dancing)

National
Christmas

SANTA GOES GREEN

If you happen to come across a green Father Christmas, Santa has not gone *bio*! He is the *Père Noël du Secours Populaire* and his job is not to hand out presents but to collect them. The *Père Noël du Secours Populaire* 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,



Canet Plage

New Year's Eve

Collioure

Place Méditerranée
Musical firework display to see in the New Year
23h30 Complimentary hot wine and chocolate with live music
23h55 Firework display
0h10 Dancing

Party on the beach - from 19h
Fancy dress (if you wish) based on the theme «Nuit de Chine, nuit câline» Wear your Chinese kimono or your teddy bear outfit!! Bring your own New Year's Eve picnic. A tent with tables will be set up on the beach, and there will be bodegas (stalls selling champagne, drinks and nibbles.) To book a table, contact the Town Hall on 0468820566) Entertainment for children until midnight. Live music in the streets throughout the evening and if you fancy a top, a DJ will provide non stop music under canvas. Fireworks at midnight in the bay.

1st January Argelès

ONLY FOR THE VERY BRAVE!!

DONT FORGET THAT FIRST SWIM OF THE YEAR!
Premier bain de l'année (first dip of the year!) - meet up at 10h30 at the rond-point d'arrivée by the beach - et bonne chance!

8th December

FANCY A MINCE PIE?

Perpignan

Claude invites you to *Délices du Monde*, for a cuppa and a mince pie. Pop in at any time during the day for a chat in English or French and a bit of Christmas spirit.

86 bd Aristide Briand 66000 Perpignan (easy parking in the streets around)
Tel: 04 68 53 45 01 (Order now for Christmas) - delices-du-monde@orange.fr

National
7th - 9th December

THE AFM TELETHON

Association Française contre les Myopathies et les maladies neuromusculaires

The AFM Telethon has become France's major fund-raising event with a record 106 696 532 euros donated in 2006! Look out for fund raising events taking place throughout the region from the 7th - 9th December 2007.

Some Téléthon FAQ

- ✓ The word *Téléthon* is a contraction of television and marathon and symbolises 30 hours of non-stop live broadcasting on France 2.
- ✓ The *Téléthon* idea comes from the USA and was launched by Jerry Lewis in 1966.
- ✓ If you dial 36 37, this will put you through to the *centre de promesses* or pledge centre.
- ✓ Eighty per cent of all donations go directly to charity whilst the rest is used for admin, publicity, organisation, personnel costs and preparation and production.
- ✓ Presenters and performers in the *Téléthon* all offer their services free of charge.
- ✓ Sixty-six per cent of your donation is tax deductible.

Perpignan
6th January

WE THREE KINGS...

Cavalcade des Rois Mages (procession of the Three Wise Men) Gaspard, Melchior and Balthazar, the three kings who brought Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh to the baby Jesus, will parade through the streets of Perpignan on horse and camel back, collecting letters from children which should contain their wishes for 2008 and will be read out at the Campo Santo. - 17h at place Arago

Banyuls-sur-Mer

FÊTE DE L'ORANGE

19th-20th January

Orange trees, orange tarts, orange juice, orange jam... if it's orange, you'll find it in Banyuls on 19th-20th January along with a market of local produce and other entertainment throughout the day.

EL PESSEBRE AND EL CAGANER

Don't ask me why, but poo seems to feature a great deal in Catalan traditions. Take *El Pessebre*, the representation of the Nativity Story. As in several countries, the Catalans have a Christmas tradition of creating a **Nativity Scene**, a tableau that they will often set up in home. However, a rather comical addition to this traditional scene is *El caganer*, (**the pooper!!**). This is the statue of a Catalan peasant, wearing a traditional red stocking hat called a *barretina*, and, sitting, with trousers half down, in a "toilet" position, making his small contribution to the land! The exact origin of the *caganer* has been lost over the years but the tradition is known to have existed since the 17th century. Some say that he is "fertilizing" the land to ensure a bumper crop the following year, others that he represents the equality of all people, regardless of colour or creed (we all do it!) !!



SANTS INNOCENTS (DAY OF THE INNOCENTS)

28th DECEMBER

Of pagan origin, this was the beginning of many days of festivity, culminating in a Carnival. *Por San Antón Carnestolendas son* and also known as the "Festival of the Crazy". Today, the festival is more for young children - practical jokes and silly stories, much like April Fool's Day in Britain. These pranks are usually innocent and funny, like sticking stickers on people's clothes without them knowing, and the newspapers sometimes take advantage of this day to invent news, so don't believe all you read!

THE "HOME DELS NASSOS"

The *home dels nassos* (man of noses) is a **curious character** in Catalan tradition, who is said to appear on the 31st December, day of Saint Sylvester, and has "as many noses on his face as days remaining in the year!" It takes a bit of working out doesn't it? One of his relatives is the *home de les orelles*, the man of ears, who appears on the 30th.

SANTONS

A santon (coming from the Provençal *santoun* or "little saint") is a small figurine, usually made out of clay and used in nativity scenes. Santons became popular 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.



LE CAGA TIÓ

Still on the subject of poo, (sorry to the sensitive souls amongst you!) another Catalan Christmas tradition is the *Le caga tió* (literally 'poo log!!'), a **hollow log** standing up on four little stick legs with a smiley face painted on one end. From December 8th, (the Feast of the Immaculate Conception) he is given something to "eat" every night and covered with a blanket so that the poor little chap will not be cold at night. On Christmas Day, he is **beaten with sticks** to make him drop the sweets, gifts and *torrons* (type of nougat) placed inside him.

These traditions may shed some light on the popular Catalan saying "*menja bé, caga fort i no tinguis por a la mort!*" (Eat well, poo strong and don't be afraid of death!).

THE DAY OF THE THREE KINGS

5th JANUARY

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

LA GALETTE DES ROIS (THREE KINGS DAY)

THROUGHOUT FRANCE

The French tradition of serving a **frangipane filled tart** known as the *galette des rois* (or the *gâteau des rois* in the South of France) on, or around the 6th January, (the first Sunday of each New Year) actually dates back to the 14th century, an ancient festival which celebrates the **3 kings** who brought **gifts to Jesus**, soon after he was born.

Although a normal school and working day, *La Fête des Rois* is still very much a family tradition. A *fête* (*originally a bean but now tends to be a plastic trinket) is **baked inside the cake** and the cake is shared around the table. Whoever receives the *fête* is then **crowned king** or queen for the day and has the much coveted opportunity of bossing the rest of the family about! That same person can also choose someone to be their king or queen. 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 either, the *part du Bon Dieu* (God's slice), the *part de la Vierge* (the Virgin Mary's slice) or the *part du pauvre* (poor man's slice) and should be offered to the first poor person who pops round!

(*Tip: Watch out for your teeth if you are the lucky winner of the *fête*; Trust me - I talk from experience!) Visit our site for a recipe for this cake

WATER WATER EVERYWHERE...

BUT NOT A DROP TO DRINK!

Water supplies in reservoirs around the region were dangerously low by September of this year and the *préfet* for the Pyrénées Orientales, Hugues Bouziges, kept **water restrictions** in force until well into October.

The problem dates back to the drought of autumn 2006. With very little snow during the winter of 2006 to 2007, and a deficit of rain since the month of April of this year, **reservoirs were 25% to 50% less full than normal**. Shallow water can be affected by nitrates and pesticides, causing risk to our water consumption. With consumption rising and resources falling, pollution of our water could become a real problem in the future.

THT NEWS

It seems that the THT will no longer be passing through the Vallespir or the Albères. This particular project has been dropped and the RTE are now looking for **other options** less likely to whip up the enormous amount of angry opposition that has stood up to be counted over the past few years - a great victory for groups such as "Non à la THT", who have relentlessly fought this initiative since its proposal several years ago. However, whilst it seems that Mont Capell and Canigou are no longer in danger, we can be sure that, one way or another, what the Vallespir and the Albères have gained on the roundabouts, somewhere else is eventually going to lose on the swings!

CAVES DE BYRRH IN THUIR

A reprieve in October for the **Caves de Byrrh** in Thuir, which have been **under threat of closure by Pernod-Ricard**. The one hundred or so employees of the Caves Byrrh were relieved to find that only voluntary early retirement was on the cards, and all other jobs were safe for the time being.

Created by the Violet brothers from Thuir in 1873, and otherwise known as *vin tonique et hygiénique au quinquina*, Byrrh used to be a world renowned Catalan *apéritif*. The brothers apparently started off as travelling salesmen, selling various things including *tonic*. With the arrival of the railway in Perpignan in 1858, they saw the chance to take full advantage of the new industry that it brought to the region, and put together the recipe for Byrrh, which was to become famous throughout the world. It is created from good quality Roussillon wines and quinine water, and said to be medicinal. If you visit Thuir, take a tour of the Byrrh winery, which takes in what they claim is the **largest wooden vat in the world**. Lots more details in French at www.byrrh.com, including a quiz, a virtual tour, and recipes.

FIRST SNOW

The first snow fell over 1,800m in the Capcir and Cerdagne **IN THE LAST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER** - a shock indeed for mushroom hunters and chasseurs alike! However, skis remained firmly in their bags as the thermometer rose again quickly to melt away the snowflakes!



MORE TEA VICAR?

Tucked away in the outskirts of Perpignan, just a stone's throw away from the Palais des Rois

de Majorque, the British food shop "Délices du Monde" is preparing for Christmas, with stocks of Christmas crackers, mince pies and brandy butter, musical biscuit tins (what fun!) puddings, cards...

Or how about scrumptious home-made date and walnut or fig and almond cakes, or, of course, if those are too rich for your tastes (or diet!), good old McVitie's Digestives, Rich Tea or Hobnobs - and a host of other familiar "yummies" from Pickled Onions and single, double & whipping cream, (not together of course!) to Newcastle Brown, Old Speckled Hen, Crumpets, quorn and other vegetarian products, Middle & Streaky Bacon, fruit gums, flakes...

Sample these with a welcome cup of Yorkshire tea at the Wednesday morning get-together, bringing French and

English speakers together to chat. You could be in your local corner shop in the UK, except that, having spent 30 years in England before returning to her native country, Claude is perfectly at home in either English or French and she will entertain you delightfully in either! If she doesn't have what you're looking for, she can soon get it - at very competitive prices too - and she will make up baskets and hampers to your requirements - and deliver them! Take along books or DVDs you no longer want to read or watch and exchange them (gratis!) for any in her rack that may suit your interest. From mid November, Claude will hand out raffle tickets to all who visit and buy. She will draw the raffle on Saturday 8th December when she invites you all to pop in for mince pies and a cuppa!

86 bd Aristide Briand 66000 Perpignan / Tel: 04 68 53 45 01

(Order now for Christmas) delices-du-monde@orange.fr

Open from Tuesday to Saturday . 10:00am - 1:00pm / 3:00pm - 7:00pm



THT, TGV, TNT, T42... OK, I made the last one up but it can be very confusing living in the PO "amongst the T's" so here are a few reminders of what they all mean.

✓ **THT (Très Haute Tension)**

A project to install a double extra-high voltage line (400,000 volts each way) in the department of the Pyrénées-Orientales, leading into Spain. After years of fighting this initiative, it has now been decided that the line will not pass through the Vallespir or the Albères and alternatives are being studied.

✓ **TGV (Train à Grande Vitesse)**

The creation of a new TGV line between Perpignan and Barcelona via le Perthus will revolutionize travel time between the two cities, changing the journey from 2h45 to 50 minutes! The completion date of 2009 has now been put back to 2012 as excavation works in Barcelona have created problems for the foundations of buildings such as Gaudi's Sagrada Familia. The original plan to take the TGV around the western side of the town has now been abandoned and the decision has been made to direct the line UNDER Barcelona via a tunnel, a safer option apparently but one which will take a further three years to complete. Perpignan to Figueras is still expected to be completed by 2009

✓ **LGV (Ligne à Grande Vitesse)**

The TGV track which is different to a normal railway track. (not a T I know – just snuck it in!)

✓ **TNT (Télévision Numérique Terrestre)**

Known as *La Télévision Numérique pour Tous* (*digital television for all) TNT has been available in the Pyrenees-Orientales since October 2006, for those within reception distance of the Pic Neoulous. All you need is a *boîtier de décodage* (TNT decoder box) which you should now be able to buy from any electrical shop throughout the department for around 40 - 50€ and you will have immediate access to a further 11 free viewing channels .

To find out if your area can receive TNT, and to see what new channels are available, visit <http://www.tnt-gratuite.fr>

✓ **T42**

An non alcoholic alternative to 'wine for two' or 'beer for two'!!

Christmas markets

(a selection of christmas markets around the region)

- Alenya . 8th - 9th December
- Amélie-les-Bains . 25th November & 9th December
- Argelès-sur-Mer 15th - 23rd December
- Canet Village 9th - 16th December
Christmas market & Foire au gras
- Céret 16th December
- Collioure 6th - 9th December
- Coustouges 2nd December
- Elne 1st - 2nd December
- Laroque-des-Albères 1st - 2nd December (with bouncy castle, music and entertainment)
- Le Boulou 1st December
- Le Soler 24th - 25th November
- Molitg-les-Bains 18th November
- Mont Louis 10th December
- Perpignan 1st December onwards - 10h - 20h - place de Catalogne and place Gambetta (with a Portuguese flavour as the town honours Tavira, its twin town in Portugal)
Crafts, local products, presents, sweets, decorations... in fact all things Christmassy on display in specially constructed wooden chalets and tents, along with the traditional hot chestnuts, crêperie, hot wine...Take the *petit train de Noël* - a free service with stops all around Perpignan.
- Palau de Cerdagne 15th - 16th December
- Pollestres 2nd December (place de l'Europe)
- Prades 21st - 23rd December Arts and crafts, honey, *foie gras*, Christmas turkeys etc, wines & spirits / 18th November. Foire au gras
- Prats-de-Mollo 15th, 21st & 22nd December
- Saint Estève 9th December
- Saint-Genis-des-Fontaines 15th December
- Sorède 2nd December
- Thuir 4th December - Foire au gras
- Vernet les Bains 15th December
- Villelongue-de-la-Salanque 9th December

Christmas shopping : Perpignan shops will be open for Christmas shoppers on Sunday 16th and 23rd December. There will also be free parking in Wilson, Arago, Saint-Martin and Catalogne carparks in the city centre..

Selection of events from the Palais des Congrès, Perpignan

For the full programme of events, visit www.anglophone-direct.com or www.congresperpignan.com

PALAIS DES CONGRES

15th December - 8.30 pm

Christmas concert - "Puccini di Gloria" with guest soloist Carlos Llabres Carreras tenor – Orchestre Perpignan Méditerranée

8th January - 8.30 pm CARMEN by the Française de l'Opéra à l'Opérette company

12th January - 3.00 pm

New year Concert European music theme Indiana Jones, Fantômes, Charles Aznavour. L'Auberge du Cheval Blanc, Johann Strauss

18th January - 8.30 pm Flamenco!

PARC DES EXPOSITIONS

7th December - The Emperor's Ball with the Budapest Strauss Symphony Orchestra & the Ballets viennois Pannonia

Magic Park - Bouncy castle theme park

5th, 12th, 15th, 16th, 19th, 22nd, 31st December

1st - 6th January - 10.00 am / 7.00 pm

5th - 6th January International cat show



CHURROS

Feeling wicked? Try your hand at making churros, strips of deep fried pastry sprinkled with sugar. It is believed that the churro is named after the shape of the horns of the Churro breed of sheep which is reared in the Spanish grasslands.

Vegetable or Olive Oil - 1 cup water - 1/2 cup margarine or butter - 1/4 teaspoon salt - 1 cup all-purpose flour - 3 eggs - 1/4 cup sugar - 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon (optional)

- ✓ Heat water, margarine and salt in a pan.. Bring to the boil and remove from heat. Stir in flour until mixture forms a ball. Beat eggs together until smooth and stir into mixture.
- ✓ Heat oil for frying in a deep-fat fryer or deep pan.. Spoon mixture into cake decorators' tube

with large star tip and squeeze 4-inch strips of dough into hot oil, or form the dough into long, thin strips and drop them into the oil. Fry until golden, about 2 minutes on each side, turning once.

- ✓ Drain on kitchen roll. Combine 1/2 cup sugar and optional cinnamon in a tray and roll the drained churros in the sugar mixture to coat. Voilà! C'est délicieux!

...and why not go the whole hog, be thoroughly decadent and dip your churros into ...

XOCOLATA

50g of a black chocolate bar - 3 teaspoons maïzena (cornflour) - ¼ litres milk - Sugar, depending on your preference

- ✓ Thin out the maïzena in some milk..
- ✓ In a saucepan, melt the chocolate, which should be cut into small pieces, or grated.

- ✓ Add the milk gradually, then, the maïzena and the sugar.
- Cook over a low heat while stirring constantly until the mixture thickens. Enjoy!!



John Fairclough

AL TRES PERPIGNAN

The old streets between the Arago and Republique squares in Perpignan form an atmospheric labyrinth, with a variety of specialist shops, bars and restaurants. It is here in the unbelievably narrow Rue de la Poissonerie, at number 3, that one will find Al Tres.

Décor is an eclectic mix of antique furniture, chandeliers, modern art and brightly painted walls. In truth the bare tables, and somewhat uncomfortable trendy metal chairs, are not to my taste, but are practical in the rather confined space available.

Fresh ingredients are the cornerstone, so there is no permanent menu, the day's dishes are clearly chosen round what is best on the market, and are displayed on a chalk blackboard that is brought to the table.

Recent visits have seen starters such as terrine de foie gras with fig bread and chutney, gratinéed scallops, tuna tartare, and calamari stuffed with langoustines and range from 10 to 15 €.

Mains provide the chef with the opportunity to use the freshest fish from

the Mediterranean (Tuna, Sea Bass, Sea Bream) and further afield (John Dory, Turbot and Brill) all cooked with an interesting variety of subtle herbs and sauces. Meat eaters have a choice of an excellent fillet of Charolais beef, a juicy rack of local lamb, and veal sweetbreads, amongst other things, again with appropriate sauces to accompany. Prices are around the 20-25 € mark.

Dessert choice is wide with puddings, cakes, patisserie, accompanied by a weird and wonderful range of ice creams (for example, rose petal), at around 8 €.

Wines are presented in an equally unusual way; handwritten in what appears to be a well-thumbed exercise book. Choice is far too large to go into any detail. Suffice to say all local quality suppliers, plus other regions of France are offered, but lower end price wines do not feature.

A full meal, with drinks will cost 60€ per head or more, so perhaps is not the place for a weekly visit, but for special occasions, particularly over the festive period, it will fit the bill perfectly.

Restaurant reviews

Easy parking nearby



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Beaucoup de choses peuvent être préservées dans l'alcool ; la dignité n'en est pas une !

Domaine Laguerre "le 20" côtes du Roussillon blanc

Aged in double wine barrels, this bone-dry wine is fresh, but with citrus like acidity, and the earthy finish so redolent of local whites. Made for oysters, scallops, and other fruits de mer. 12.5% abv 6€80

Domaine Piquemal

côtes du Roussillon rouge "tradition".

A tannic local red, not surprisingly consisting of Carignan, Grenache noir and Syrah, its distinctive flavour and body comes as a result of its non-filtered ageing. One for poultry, but would also work with roast pork and lamb. 14% abv 6€50



Closed all day Sunday and Monday, I've never had a problem getting a table on spec, but to be sure, ring 0468348839 for reservations. Please note that over the festive period the restaurant will be closed on Dec 25th and 26th, also Dec 31st and New Years day.

Le Cellier des Arcades

Henri Raynaud

3, rue Danton 66400 CERET
phone/fax : 04 68 87 19 58
www.lecellierdesarcades.com
henri.raynaud@tiscali.fr

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WINE RECOMMENDATIONS

Henri, from Cellier des Arcades in Céret recommends the following wines to accompany your meals over the Festive season.

Domaine de Rectories collioures rouge "Coté Mer"

A spicy dark red wine which is half and half Grenache and Carignan. Grown on the steep Collioure hillsides facing the sea, it is rich, warming, and a must with beef or game. Apparently is drunk with oily fish too. 14% abv 14€

Champagne tradition H.Blin

Any list of festive wines has to include a bubbly, doesn't it? Dispelling the myth that co-ops cannot make good champagne, the house of Blin from the Marne valley is not one of the well known brands, but all the better for that. Brut is 20€ a bottle. Rosé 25€

Both are standard 12% abv.

Did you know ?

Dom Pierre Pérignon (Dom being a title of respect – derived from Latin «Dominus») was quoted as having said "Come quickly, I am drinking the stars!" when he tasted the first sparkling champagne. In fact, it seems that Dom Perignon did not actually invent sparkling wine as many believe. Mais non! There is documentary evidence that sparkling wine was first intentionally produced by Englishman Christopher Merrett at least 30 years before the work of Dom Perignon, whose main contribution to champagne was apparently the invention of a wire collar to hold the cork in place to withstand the fermentation pressure.

Domaine du Mas Rous "macabeo"

This sweet wine is made from grapes picked in Nov 98, immediately after the first frost. Only macabeo was used, resulting in a magnificent mouthful of distinctive sweet fruit that will set off foie gras superbly. 14% abv 15€ per bottle

Domaine du Mas Rous côtes du Roussillon rosé

A full bodied rosé made from Syrah, Grenache and Cinsault . Complex for its type, it could well accompany pork, turkey or even fish such as salmon.

13.5 abv 6€

All these wines are available from the Cellier des Arcades, Ceret. Henri offers 5% reduction on any quantity of wine purchased in the shop (opposite the Pablo up the small cobbled street) upon production of a copy of PO life.

Test your idiomatic French 1

1. "Occupe-toi de tes oignons" veut dire:

- a) ça ne te concerne pas
- b) surveillance ta soupe
- c) Arrête de pleurer

2. Si vous avez "que dalle" vous avez :

- a) une belle terrasse
- b) rien du tout
- c) faim

3. Il me "casse les pieds" veut dire:

- a) est énervant
- b) fait mal
- c) est maladroit

4. Que signifie l'expression "perdre la boule"?

- a) être gros
- b) devenir fou
- c) perdre un je

5. Que signifie l'expression "filer à l'anglaise" ?

- a) partir en vacances
- b) courir après les filles
- c) partir sans permission

5. Si vous faites beaucoup d'efforts sans résultats, on dit que vous pédalez dans :

- a) le cassoulet
- b) la choucroute
- c) le couscous

ATTENTION !

Actuellement = right now, currently

je travaille *actuellement* à Perpignan (I am working in Perpignan at the moment)

Use *en fait* or *en effet* to express "actually"

En fait, je ne l'ai jamais rencontré (Actually, I've never met him)

2 Trouvez la bonne définition

1. un agneau

- a) une petite bague
- b) le petit de la brebis
- c) un oiseau rapace

2. un impôt

- a) une contribution exigée par l'état
- b) qui a de l'influence
- c) le commerce des marchandises

3. un marteau

- a) un outil pour frapper
- b) un vêtement contre le froid
- c) venant de la planète Mars

4. supprimer

- a) ajouter à la fin
- b) faire disparaître
- c) réduire le volume

5. périmé

- a) hors date
- b) hors d'oeuvre
- c) hors sujet



Remplissez les blancs avec les mots en Italiques 4

1. Elle s'est cassée la jambe et elle doit marcher avec une -----
2. C'est bien. Ma voiture a ----- tout de suite
3. Eteins la lumière ! Tu ----- l'électricité
4. On devrait ----- les gens qu'on ne connaît pas
5. Je ne lui fais pas confiance – il a l'air ----
gaspilles louche vouvoyer béquille démarré

Match the useful expressions 3

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ne tourne pas autour du pot!! 1 | a) I'm back |
| ça s'arrangera 2 | b) it's exactly what we need |
| je tiens toujours ma parole 3 | c) to talk for the sake of talking! |
| je suis de retour 4 | d) breathless |
| c'est de la part de qui ? 5 | e) everybody's talking about it |
| c'est juste ce qu'il faut 6 | f) mum's the word! |
| parler pour ne rien dire 7 | g) It'll all work out. |
| à bout de souffle 8 | h) who's calling (tel) |
| motus et bouche cousue ! 9 | i) don't beat around the bush! |
| tout le monde en parle! 10 | j) I always keep my word. |

Match up the proverbs 5

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| all's well that ends well.. 1 | a) qui va lentement va sûrement |
| every penny counts 2 | b) vouloir, c'est pouvoir. |
| more haste less speed 3 | c) un sou est un sou |
| nothing ventured, nothing gained 4 | d) tout est bien qui finit bien |
| where there's a will, there's a way 5 | e) qui ne risque rien n'a rien |

ANSWERS TO 'TEST YOUR FRENCH' PO LIFE n°13

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

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Améliorez votre Anglais

Trouvez l'équivalent

en anglais de chaque proverbe français

- 1
- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 tout est bien qui finit bien. | a forgive and forget |
| 2 il faut réfléchir avant d'agir. | b it never rains but it pours |
| 3 mieux vaut s'adresser à Dieu qu'à ses saints. | c there's no smoke without fire |
| 4 mieux vaut tard que jamais. | d better to talk to the organ grinder than the monkey! |
| 5 il faut oublier et pardonner. | e look before you leap |
| 6 après la pluie vient le beau temps. | f it takes all kinds |
| 7 il n'y a pas de fumée sans feu. | g nothing ventured, nothing gained |
| 8 la fin justifie les moyens. | h all's well that ends well |
| 9 un malheur ne vient jamais seul | i every cloud has a silver lining |
| 10 tous les goûts sont dans la nature | j J Better late than never |

Répétez cinq fois ! *Tongue twister*
 Three thieves seize skis
 (Trois voleurs saisissent les skis)

Choisissez la bonne partie du corps (ci dessous) pour compléter ces phrases idiomatiques !

- discuter : to have a 1 wag
 changer d'avis : to have a change of 2
 couter cher : to cost an 3 and a 4
 bonne chance : break a 5 chin / hart / arm / leg

Trouvez l'équivalent

pour ces mots américains

- 4
- | Américain | Anglais |
|--------------|-----------|
| vacation 1 | a rubber |
| eraser 2 | b bottom |
| trunk 3 | c torch |
| diaper 4 | d bill |
| garbage 5 | e holiday |
| apartment 6 | f boot |
| check 7 | g flat |
| flashlight 8 | h rubbish |
| motorway 9 | i freeway |
| butt 10 | j nappy |

Remplissez les blancs

3
 An English Christmas : Christmas is 1 on the 25th of December in England, with a Christmas 2 for the whole family. 3 the weeks before Christmas Day, we 4 cards, 5 nativity plays and 6 to carol services. We also decorate our 7 and churches with green leaves, paper decorations and 8 electric lights. The day 9 Christmas Day is called Boxing Day. 10 Christmas Day, Boxing Day is a public holiday.

During - after - Like - homes - watch - colourful - send - celebrated - go - dinner

✓ **Language tip :** To get - recevoir / obtenir / s'acheter / devenir / commencer à

Et oui ! 'Get' a plusieurs sens et est largement utilisé en anglais. En voici quelques exemples

We're getting nowhere (Nous n'avançons pas) *It's getting dark* (Il commence à faire noir)

I'm getting a new car tomorrow (je m'achète une nouvelle voiture demain) *Let's get to work* (Mettons nous au travail)

What did you get for your birthday? (Qu'est ce que vous avez reçu pour votre anniversaire ?) *I can't get over it* (Je n'en reviens pas)

Trouvez les équivalents

- avec 'get'
- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| 1 to get engaged | a se fiancer |
| 2 to get away with something | b être pris |
| 3 to get going | c se faire irer |
| 4 to get drunk | d s'en aller |
| 5 to get in the way of | e s'améliorer |
| 6 to get old | f faire obstacle |
| 7 to get the sack | g vieillir |
| 8 to get better | h se débrouiller |
| 9 to get by | i s'en tirer |
| 10 to get caught | j se souler |

Réponses d'Améliorez votre Anglais PO Life n° 13

- 1 1was/were telled/tell teenager/teenage their/his taking/
 takes who/which follows/follow Harrys/Harry's what/who
 release/released july/July
- 2 1j 2i 3g 4f 5h 6d 7c 8e 9b 10a
- 3 1in 2 wet 3 smooth 4 late 5 far 6 wide 7no/none 8 full 9 cheap
 10 single some - in - empty - expensive - wet - late - marri
- 4 1c 2e 3f 4a 5d 6b
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SANT PERE DE RODES

Situated in North Eastern Catalonia, in the province of Girona, the **Benedictine monastery** of Sant Pere de Rodes is an important former monastery, constructed on the side of the Verdera mountain. The views from the monastery are superb, stretching over the bay of Llançà, from Cerbère in France to the Cap de Creus. Constructed by the Benedictines between 979 and 1022, the monastery was ransacked and abandoned in the eighteenth century and its most important treasure, an **illustrated bible**, is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris.

The first official mention of the monastery originates from the year 878 although a pot pourri of legend surrounds its creation. Some say that in 600 AC, Christians returning from Rome were stranded in the bay and took this as a sign from God to build a monastery in that spot. Others say that when Rome was threatened by Barbarians, Pope Boniface IV ordered the Church's most powerful



relics - including the head and right arm of St. Peter - to be hidden. They were brought to this remote Cape for safe-keeping and hidden in a cave, though when the danger had passed the relics couldn't be found. A monastery was duly built on the site and dedicated to St. Peter (Pere in Catalan).

Whatever you choose to believe, there is no doubt that the views are breathtaking. Walkers can reach the monastery via the GR10, from the campsite at Port de la Selva (approx 2hrs there and back) but there is access by car to within 10mins of Sant Pere de Rodes.



PUIGCERDÀ

Founded in 1177 by King Alfonso I of Aragon, Count of Barcelona, Puigcerdà, meaning "Cerdanyan hill" in Catalan, replaced Hix (now a village in the French part of Cerdagne) as the capital of Cerdanya in 1178. Located at 1,202 metres above sea level, by the river Segre, and just over the (non-existent) French border, it's difficult to know when to stop saying bonjour and start saying hòla! If you arrive like I did, on a winter's night, from the slow calm of the small villages of Bourg Madame or Porté Puymorens above Font Romeu, you are in for quite a surprise. The town is crackling over the festive season! Bars and restaurants, classy shopping precincts, hot chestnuts and churros stands (type of freshly-fried fritters in long strips, dusted with sugar - see our recipe page) bright lights, floodlit frozen man-made lake (built in the 14th century to irrigate the surrounding farmland) with very cold ducks and swans..... This town is apparently a great favourite with the Barcelonans, who buy holiday homes here and

come up for weekends to ski or just chill.

For skiers, Puigcerdà can be an excellent base for daily ski trips as long as you don't mind a 30 minute drive. La Molina - Masella (Spain) and Font Romeu (France) are close by as well as Pas de la Casa (Andorra). In fact, in the not too distant future, it is planned to link Porté Puymorens, a fifteen minute drive from Puigcerdà, with the vast skiing domain in Andorra, Granvalira, making it the largest skiing area in the Pyrenees.

Excerpt from online diary My life in the P-O

On the way back down the mountain from Puigcerdà on Sunday, we stopped to take a look around Mont Louis, fortress town built by Vauban 1600m above sea level, and claiming to be one of the highest fortified towns in France. (Briançon and Mont Dauphin, in the French Alps, covet the title also) Situated on one of the three chief roads linking Roussillon and Spain, Mont Louis holds an excellent strategic position to prevent access from the Cerdagne valley into the narrow descent that carries the road down to Villefranche-de-Conflent and on then to Perpignan. According to history, Vauban chose the position for the fort based on the good health and fine teeth of the inhabitants of nearby villages!

I found a map on one of the ramparts depicting the mountain layout around Mont Louis and was delighted to discover Pic Bastard. Sad, I know!



Top tips from our forum

(All comments, questions and answers come from our discussion forum on <http://forum.anglo-phone-direct.com/>. Nobody professes to be an expert – opinions, advice and answers are based only on personal experience! Please don't sue us if it is not all correct)

ON...

Skiing in the Pyrenees...

I'm told that Font Romeu is fine for all levels of expertise, and that Les Angles is good too, although with perhaps a bit more at the top end... My grandchildren all learnt to ski at Les Angles. We find it convenient because the ski slope comes right into the town and there is a wide choice of accommodation. For those who need to hire gear there is a wide choice of suppliers although the cheapest option is probably to hire from Decathlon before going up to the mountains! ... We normally reckon to lose one day in seven due to bad weather. If there is a heavy snowfall chains may be mandatory. Buy them in advance and make sure you know how to fit them. Take a shovel and a bit of old carpet. Lying on the snow trying to fit the chains is no joke. Cat litter is great for giving slipping wheels a bit of extra grip! ... The

Cerdagne is popular with Spanish skiers and can become very busy during Spanish public holidays and weekends. In our experience Spanish skiers are not as well behaved as their French counterparts...

If you get the snow, it's also worth trying Porté Pymorens as Pas de la Case on the Andorra border is just around the corner and it's great for shopping, tax free stuff - a bit like Le Perthus but even worse if you like that sort of thing. Some very good restaurants too at very decent prices but the road up into this duty free haven (in the morning and down from 7pm ish onwards) can be absolute hell so definitely not recommended if you're not too keen on long waits... I have been to Pyrénées 2000 several times, rented skis from the little shop next to the small car park, friendly staff and not very expensive. If I do a day trip I usually leave St Cyprien at 9.30 (to miss the traffic at Perp) and arrive in time to hire skis, have a bite to eat and then buy the 1/2 day pass. My tip is read the big road signs just out of Perp. If they say the road is closed, believe them and try another day... I would recommend Eyne, just to the left of Mont Louis. There is a good ski hire shop, bar and the slopes are ideal for beginners. But check out the snow first!



de Dorres, about 10 miles from Font-Romeu and Bains de Llo, about 25 km from Font-Romeu... The St. Thomas one is VERY GOOD (3 pools and a sort of mini-amphitheatre) and had some pampering facilities as well. The dress code can be strict at times I hear (no shorts - speedos only). It is not expensive, (unlike say Caldea in Andorra which is a treat, and well worth it!) ... Above St Thomas there is a great Spa Sauvage. Idyllic mountain stream with steam rising above the trees. No fee, no changing rooms or showers, no dress code, or a "no-dress" code as suits you.

ON...

"FOIRES AU GRAS"

I know foie gras is a no-no on the animal protection front but it still seems to be an enduring part of the menu in sw France. It's not something I've ever bought other than ready prepared (very occasionally!!) in a restaurant so would be quite clueless as to what/how to buy. Morals/ethics to one side, advice please on how to go about buying and consuming foie gras chez moi... There are various types. The one we go for is Foie gras de canard entier - whole duck foie gras prepared as Foie gras mi-cuit: (semi-cooked) This preparation is sold in cans and will keep for 3 months in the refrigerator once it is opened... A viable alternative for non-festive occasions (i.e. the occasional binge!) is Foie gras de conserve - preserved foie gras which is sold in jars and preserved in its own fat, it will keep for years and improves like wine... Simplest way to serve is with lightly toasted farmhouse bread which enhances the flavour! Alternatively use lightly toasted brown canapé bread. Carefully extract the entire foie gras from the container ensuring it remains whole. Transfer to a foie gras dish - usually glass or crystal - which is the right size and has a cover. Serve on a festive table with toast separately (NEVER already on the toast and never spread!!) so you and your guest(s) can help themselves. The usual is to slice off a portion of foie gras on the side of your plate, take the toast out of a "keep-warm" basket, put a small unspread portion onto the toast and munch thoughtfully (!) Bon appétit!

ON...

Hot (sulphurous water) springs...

Bains de Saint Thomas at Fontpedrouse, close to Font-Romeu, Bains



Installing sky...

If you want to have access to UK TV and Radio there are broadly three options.

✓ What's available?

1. All BBC and ITV programmes plus many minor channels.
2. As 1 but with Channels 4 and 5 also. Roughly similar to the coverage available on Freeview in the UK
3. A Sky subscription package (above included)

For the first option a Sky Digibox is not needed. These programmes can be heard/seen with an off the shelf **digital (numérique) reception** kit bought locally. Prices are as low as €70. The other options require a Digibox. The Digibox option is more expensive, the upside being that the box is self adjusting and set-up is automatic. Off-the-shelf kits are rather more flexible in use and many have features missing from the Digibox but they lack the 7 day programme guide.

✓ Radio and computer possibilities

You don't need to turn on the TV to listen to the radio. **Just plug an amplifier into the stereo output from the tuner.** Non Digibox tuners usually have a channel number display which makes them easier to use when switching radio stations. It is quite possible to have radio from your satellite box anywhere in the house. A simple **low power FM transmitter** will do the trick, readily available, and costing as little as € 20. Digibox users can buy a Sky Gnome, at around €100, (UK address delivery only.) This acts just like a digital radio - you can change channels without touching the Digibox and it gives a much clearer signal than an FM transmitter.

Digital tuners are available for computers; all that is needed is a spare PCI slot. The software usually supports recording on the hard drive. This turns a PC into a true all-in-one device. Cost: about €100. Fit a cheap video card and you can play direct to your TV as well as watching on the computer monitor!

✓ Freesat

The BBC have just announced that they are reviving the Freesat initiative. The object is to **make Freeview available by satellite independent of BSkyB.** This should go live in 2008 and may well need specially made boxes to use all the facilities. They should be fairly cheap.

✓ TNT (Télévision Numérique pour Tous)

TNT, the new **French terrestrial digital TV service**, is starting to spread out over the region and if you are thinking about purchasing a new TV, **make sure it has a TNT tuner built into it**; this will

Vote for Kate!

OK. Only joking but did you know that as long as you are resident in France and paying tax foncière or taxe d'habitation (whether you own or rent), you have the right to vote in municipal and European elections, and have your say in what happens in your commune? Hurry though to your local mairie. Registration closes on 31st December.

mean you will not have to have a separate receiver. Your TV retailer should be able to advise you if TNT is in your area yet, the best aerial to receive it etc. There are no English channels on TNT - yet - but it's well worth it if you watch local TV (and an excellent way of improving your French) as the set top box, available for as little as €35, gives a much wider choice of viewing and a number of services not available on the old analogue system.

✓ Location, location, location!

Depending on the location of your dish, there are a number of factors you need to take into account. If you purchase a cheap dish and your location is unprotected you will experience viewing problems in this region of **high winds**. (It is worth adding additional bracing on the J bracket wall mounts. Another useful trick is to place a hoseslip around the pole at the base of the dish mount so that it doesn't fall down the pole when you slacken the brackets)

If you have property near the sea a "fibreglass" dish is the better option as it will not rust and look unsightly - these are more expensive but last longer and will give you a better reception than a standard metal dish. A suitable size dish for this area is 75-80cm. You can get away with smaller dishes, but expect viewing problems.

You can get great reception using locally purchased 80cm dishes but sometimes it pays to change the head (LNB/tete). Carrefour sells an Axil universal head for around €25 which really seems to make a difference. Avoid oval Sky dishes. They have specially made heads that have to be sourced from the UK and are quite expensive to replace.

Of course, if all this reads like double Dutch, the easiest option is to get the professionals in!

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Hors D'oeuvre

Literally meaning "outside the works", hors d'oeuvres was originally an architectural term for an outbuilding which was not part of the architect's main design. The phrase was 'borrowed' by French chefs to describe appetizers served outside the main design of the meal.

L'ARBOUSIER

ARBUTUS UNEDO, THE STRAWBERRY TREE

Native to the Mediterranean region, Western Europe and Ireland, it is difficult to miss these pretty fruit trees as you wander around the south of France. A tough, easily grown and trouble-free plant, the arbusier is surprisingly tolerant of strong winds, making it a great success in this region! From a distance, the colourful fruits (*les arbouses*) look a little like strawberries, hence the common name Strawberry Tree. However, the taste is most certainly nothing like the strawberry, and has been described as "sweet but insipid". Interestingly, its Latin name – *unedo* meaning "I eat (only) one"- suggests that the fruit is not tasty and one would not wish to eat more than one.

The strawberry tree produces masses of beautiful white flowers in November and December after which the fruits start to fall off the trees. If you wish to pick them before they fall, you should wait until they are deep red in colour and very soft to the touch. They need to be eaten within 24 hours as they start to decay very quickly. Whilst the fruits can be eaten fresh, they don't have much flavour,



and are more often used to make jellies and jams, particularly due to their high pectin content which allows for rapid setting without additives. They are also used to ferment and make drinks such as "medronheira" (strawberry tree firewater), a Portuguese brandy-like drink with a high alcohol content

HEALTH BENEFITS

It is said that one should not eat too many of this fruit as it ripens very quickly, ferments in the stomach and makes you feel drunk! However, to combat that, the fruit is supposed to have antiseptic, astringent and diuretic properties which have not yet been researched as thoroughly as they deserve

Kakis



Another winter fruit adding a splash of colour to our landscape is the persimmon (*kaki* in French.) Persimmons came originally from North-west China and were introduced into Europe in the mid-19th century. The fruits are very sweet with a soft and occasionally

fibrous texture. They have a high tannin content, making them fairly bitter until the fruit matures and the tannin levels are reduced. The colour of the fruit varies from light yellow-orange to dark orange-red and can weigh more than a pound!. There are many varieties of persimmon, which can be split up into two categories - astringent and nonastringent. The persimmons which grow in the P-0 are non astringent, requiring hot summers, and may be eaten whilst still crisp, although the sweetness improves with maturity. An unripe fruit can be ripened by placing it with other ripening fruits.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Persimmon pulp and peel are both good sources of fibre.. Rich in anti-oxidant vitamin C, which our bodies need to help protect against cell damage and to increase absorption of iron, they also contain a good amount of beta carotene, another anti-oxidant, which is converted into vitamin A in the body, which helps us to maintain healthy skin and mucous membranes, to strengthen immunity, and is necessary for good vision.

Recipe

PERSIMMON CHUTNEY

12 persimmons - 6 lemons - cup oil - 1 tsp. salt - 1 cups sugar - 1 tsp. chilli sauce or powder - 2 tblsp. finely chopped fresh ginger - 3 cloves chopped garlic - 2 cups cider vinegar - cup currants (optional)

✓ Cut up lemons and soak in vinegar overnight.

Blanch persimmons in boiling water for 5 minutes, then peel and dice.

Add the lemons with all other ingredients and bring to boil.

Continue boiling for about 40 minutes or until the mixture starts to thicken. Allow mixture to cool, bottle and seal.

The game of billiards was popularized in France by Louis XIV. The King started playing on the advice of his physicians. The constant stretching exercise that he received while playing, his doctors believed, would relieve him of his embarrassing digestive and wind problems.

GALLERY PHOENIX LE DÔME

From assemblies of legislatures that convene under them to zoological collections housed by them, domes signal unusual venues round the world. France has many, including Le Dôme restaurant, an Art Déco masterpiece on the Left Bank in Paris, Le Dôme Théâtre in Albertville and the ultramodern Le Dôme entertainment centre in Marseille. Though of lesser fame, Le Dôme in Port Vendres sets itself apart from its namesakes by having the most curious of dome histories.

Designed in the late 18th century by royal architect Charles de Wailly as one of the grand buildings contiguous with Place de l'Obélisque at the harbour, the neoclassical

Le Dôme originally was meant to be a hotel for foreigners. It must have done poorly at that, as in 1835, five years after Port Vendres became the principal port for dispatching soldiers and supplies to the French colony in Algeria,



M Hadler photo

Le Dôme was given to the Army as a flat for the military governor of the adjoining barracks. It fulfilled that role for some hundred years. Partly destroyed during the Second World War, Le Dôme was restored afterwards as an art and culture centre. The restoration was visionary, as today Le Dôme offers a pallet of exhibitions, concerts and other cultural events, peaking in summer. Inside, the chalk-white walls impart an aura of veneration

to works displayed, and the lower-level garden facing l'Obélisque affords a splendid view of the harbour as well as superb acoustics for concerts held there.

At the garden level there's a small, permanent gallery dedicated to the works of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the famed early 20th century architect, designer and artist. The location is fitting, as in 1923, the scenes in and around Port Vendres prompted him to devote himself entirely to painting.

Opening hours throughout the year are 2:30 to 7:00 pm, or longer for special events. For the schedule of upcoming events, contact the Port Vendres Office de tourisme Tel 0468820754 or the Mairie Tel 04 68820103.

A CLEAN SWEEP!

Oh the joys of a real log fire on a cold winter's night! However, do not underestimate the less than joyful task of cleaning out the fireplace and chimney regularly or the not-so-cheap option of ordering and stacking your logs.

It is essential to have your chimney cleaned (ramonage) regularly by a registered chimney sweep (ramoneur) who will provide you with a Certificat de Ramonage which would be required by an insurance company if you were to make a claim of any damage linked to the chimney or fire.

Sold by the 'stere', prices will vary according to the quality of the wood, as can the delivery service. Some will cut the logs in advance to your required length, deliver and stack them, whilst others will arrive with whatever they have and tip it all onto the pavement for you to stack yourself. It is worth checking beforehand so you know what to expect. Here in the P-O, oak (chêne) is possibly the best wood to burn. Chestnut (chataignier) is also good but not recommended for open fires as it tends to pop!



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