

P-O Life

Le grand magazine anglais en petit format

pour tout savoir sur les Pyrénées Orientales

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February
March

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 visit our site www.anglophone-direct.com)

Bonjour !



Aieee!! I've just cycled over 50km along the small roads from Céret to Argelès and back and I'm sitting here in front of my computer on rubber legs and a sore bottom, sporting a red nose which has nothing to do with my wine consumption, and wondering why I would choose to ride my bike on one of the rare rainy days that we have around here! However, despite a nip in the air, splashes of colour are appearing all over the PO as the mimosa, almond blossom and early flowers are tempted out by the winter sun and spring looks set to barge its way in with a vengeance. I feel so lucky to be a part of it all! What's more it's our birthday! Yes, PO Life has been going for two years and continues to be the greatest fun to research and produce so to celebrate, I've been allowed to replace the letter section below with some of my favourite bad jokes!! Happy springtime!

Fins aviat (Catalan for see you soon) - Kate

My FAVOURITE FRENCH JOKES

Deux gommres se rencontrent.

"Comment ça va ?"

"Et ben, Gomme ci, gomme ça"

Deux abeilles discutent :

"J'ai pris un abonnement à Internet !"

"Tu me donnes ton e-miel"

How do you ask a French snake the time?

Quelle heure reptile?

Contact us on info@anglophone-direct.com

What do you call a Frenchman wearing sandals??

Philippe Phlopp.....

Comment appelle-t-on une gousse d'ail qui rebondit après avoir été jetée contre un mur ?

Le retour du jet d'ail

Quel est le fruit préféré de Beethoven ?

POMME POMME POMME POMME !

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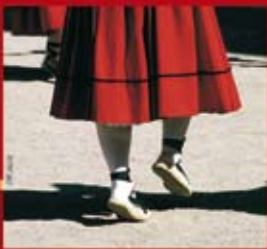
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Welcome to the Pyrénées-Orientales!

Move around, go out...

Consult the events calendar on:

www.cdt-66.com

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 16 avenue des Palmiers - BP 80540 - 66605 Perpignan cedex - France
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Tour de la Massane



This is a steep walk, which takes 2-3 hours each way depending on your ability. Walking boots are essential and a stick will help the trickier rock climbs. The views are stunning, all along the coast from Port-Vendres to Canet on a clear day, overlooking Collioure and Argeles, and across the plain to the Corbieres in the north.

Map IGN 1:25000 Banyuls/Col de Perthus/Cote Vermeille (GPS) 25490T

Access : There are two principal ways to reach the tower, parking either above Château de Valmy outside Collioure, or above Lavall outside Sorede, both at around 230m altitude. From there it is a steep climb (less steep from Valmy) up to the ridge of hills leading to the tower. If coming from Valmy, make your way up the dirt track to the turn off to Chapelle St Laurent. From there the walking path heads straight up the slope to about 380m alt. where you turn left and head to the Roc del Grill (501221E 4706520N), 525m alt. The path is well marked with yellow bars and meanders through the trees with

Qu'est ce qui fait IZB IZB IZB ?
Une abeille qui vole à reculons

The Torre de la Maçana or Tour de la Massane is another part of the early-warning defence system set up by the rois de Majorque to protect the Roussillon. It dates from circa 1293AD, and restoration works in the last 25 years or so have seen it rebuilt to almost its full height.

occasional fantastic views down to Valmy and Port-Argeles.

Walk : Yellow marks throughout

✓ If coming from Lavall the path is shorter but steeper and climbs through the forest with lovely views back down and across the valley. It joins the hill crest path at the Puig dels Oms, a rocky outcrop at 550 m alt. (501588E 4706081N)

From there the path climbs slowly along the crest of the hill weaving in and out of amazing rock formations and lovely forest, heading south east almost one km to a grassy clearing (502317E 4705604N) 660m alt.

Now you are almost there. The path climbs steeply for a hundred metres or so up to a rocky ridge, from where you can see the tower in all its glory! Beware of the wind which can accelerate up the valley and be quite strong, even when it's gentle elsewhere. The tower (502163E 4705089N) 790m alt. is reached from the north side by some steps set in the rock. The views from the top are fantastic and well worth the climb. From here you can see down to Collioure, Port Vendres and down to the Torre de Madaloc to the south east, one hundred and forty metres lower. Banyuls sur Mer is just behind it, and the Spanish border is just a couple of km to the south.

Take a picnic lunch and remember lots of water for the hike. Coming down is easier but take care on the rocky patches. Allow 4-5 hours for the whole walk, and head home for a well-earned apero!

Do you know of a great walk? Why not share it with us !

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CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH IN PORT VENDRES

In 1923, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret Macdonald came to the Roussillon to rest and recuperate. Her health was poor and as an architect and designer he had become outmoded. They were enchanted. The holiday became a **permanent stay** and Mackintosh rapidly developed his talents as an artist. They spent the last and possibly the happiest years of their lives together in the Roussillon and when Charles Rennie Mackintosh died, his widow scattered his ashes on the waters of Port Vendres.

ENTERTAIN ME FROM A DISTANCE PLEASE!

Joseph Pujol was a gentleman who became a very famous vaudeville act due to his amazing ability to control his **bottom muscles!!** His stage name of *Le Petomane* (loosely translated as "the farter") rather gives it away! One of the highlights of his act was pumping out the *Marseillaise* through his bottom!

ELNE

Did you know that Elne was so named in the fourth century when the Christian emperor Constantine changed its Roman name, *Illiberis*, to Elne, **in honour of his mother Helena.**

WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD

Beginning in late January, the PO transforms itself into a dazzling sunshine yellow as the tough **mimosa** tree with its graceful and fragrant winter blooms sets the land on fire, its fluffy clouds of cheeky golden blossom heralding the end of winter and the gentle début of spring. Known as "wattles" in **Australia**, from whence it originated, various mimosa species were introduced to the Côte d'Azur in the 19th century by wealthy English, who used them to brighten up their winter homes out of season! It is now cultivated, and the **cut flowers** are sold throughout France and abroad to brighten your day.



WHY THE FRENCH DRIVE ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE ROAD!!

Yes, it's true. We're right, Europe's wrong! Originally, in the middle ages, folk automatically kept to the left on the roads, to oblige strangers to pass them on the right – this meant they could go for **their swords** more easily if the stranger was a baddy! (Assuming of course that they were right handed.) Travelling on the left was actually **made official** in 1300 AD, when Pope Boniface VIII decreed that pilgrims to Rome should keep left. It wasn't until the late **1700s**, when goods wagons pulled by teams of horses had no driver's seat, that this was to change. The driver would sit on the left rear horse, (so he could whip the horses on with his right arm), and therefore drove on the right in order to see and avoid the wheels of oncoming vehicles. Later Napoleon enforced the keep-right rule in all countries occupied by his armies.

BAGES

Bages - or "Baiae" (meaning water) as it was known in the olden days used to be **home to fishermen** who lived on the edge of the boggy lake. " A Bages, No hi Vagis !" was heard regularly around Baiae meaning "Don't go to Bages!" When disease and illness caused by the *étang* became rife, the **Templiers decided to dry the lake** and the village that grew up there became Bages. Gradually, conditions improved in Bages. A school was built, small businesses moved in and the village started to flourish.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

According to legend, the Pyrénées were named after *Pyrene* (fire in Greek), daughter of Bebryx who, after being raped by Herakles, fled to the mountains and was either buried or eaten by wild animals.

THE BOARS ARE BACK IN TOWN

It may sound a little like a song you once knew but it's true. In September 2007, three **wild boar** (*sangliers*) knocked over a British cyclist near the bullring in **Céret** and in November, two wild boar were spotted trotting **through the centre of Perpignan!** There is also daily evidence of their presence in gardens, school playgrounds and sports complexes around the region but as more and more land is made *constructible* and built upon, is it really surprising that they are venturing further in man's territory as man slowly takes over theirs?

Voting in France

Election municipale March 2008

Local elections (les élections municipales) will be taking place in March 2008 throughout France. As long as you are resident in France, (at least six months of the year) and paying "taxe foncière" and "taxe d'habitation", (whether you own or rent) you have the right to vote in municipal elections and have your say in the running of your town or village.

Can I vote?

Yes, if you are an EU citizen living in France and eligible to vote in your own country, you may take part in **local and European elections** in France, according to the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. You cannot take part in the French presidential elections.

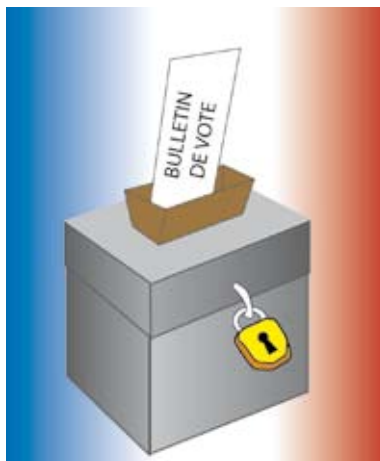
How can I join the voting list?

As mentioned in the last P-O Life, the **deadline** for registering to vote in the 2008 local elections was 31st of December 2007. If you have not done so, you will be unable to vote in March this year. However, it is worth registering in order to be ready for the next elections!

To do this, visit your **local Mairie**, taking with you **proof of identity and proof of residency** such as tax form (les impôts locaux) or services bill. You will then receive *une carte électorale* which you will have to present when voting, along with your ID.

What is *une liste*?

La liste is the list of all the **names of the potential councillors**. You may have several lists to choose from. Some may belong to a political party and others may be apolitical (*sans étiquette*). On each



list you will have a **tête de liste** who will then, if elected, become Maire.

What are the *Elections municipales*?

Municipal councillors, (*le conseil municipal*) are the "decision making" body for each commune, and are elected by **direct universal suffrage** for a renewable **six-year term**. Once elected, these members (*les conseillers municipaux*) choose the **Mayor (le Maire)** and the deputy Mayors (*les Maires adjoints*).

The method of voting used in these elections is not the same throughout France. It varies depending on the size of the population of the commune in question.

Communes with fewer than 3,500

inhabitants elect 9 to 23 councillors via the "first-past-the-post" system. There are 2 rounds. Voters can delete or add names or change the order of candidates on a list. However, it should be born in mind that lists are put together according to a common vision within the group and the joining together of experience and expertise. It is therefore usual, though not compulsory, for lists to ask voters to vote for the list as a whole, (*la liste entière*) as opposed to individuals

Communes with 3,500 or more

inhabitants elect 27 to 163 councillors via a two-ballot list system. Voters must vote for a single list and cannot delete or add names or change the order of candidates. Only lists which have obtained 10% of the votes cast may go forward to the second round. (There may be no second round if one list obtains the absolute majority in the first round).

Certains (politiciens) ont l'air honnête, mais quand ils te serrent la main, t'as intérêt à recompter tes doigts ! COLUCHE



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PANCAKE DAY

Dating back to roman times, *La Chandeleur* (Candlemas), the Feast of the presentation of Jesus, used to mark the end of the Christmas season and is celebrated 40 days after Christmas on the 2nd February. The tradition was to light a candle in the church and carry it

home without the flame going out, hence the saying

Celui qui la rapporte chez lui allumée

Pour sûr ne mourra pas dans l'année

Lucky for some eh? The tradition of pancakes came about from a belief that one had to eat pancakes on that day if the crop was to be plentiful for the season.

Si point ne veut de blé charbonneux

Mange des crêpes à la Chandeleur

Another custom on this day is to hold a golden coin in one hand and flip the pancake with the other to ensure good luck for the future (or bad luck if you drop the pancake!) Finally... another saying....

Soleil de la Chandeleur

Annonce hiver et malheur

Oooops! Let's pray for rain on that day then!

Things you might need to know...

Apply for or renewing your British Passport

✓ All British passport applications made in France are processed in Paris at the British Consulate General. Applications can be sent by post or made in person at 18 bis Rue d'Anjou, Paris 75008 (Monday to Friday from 09.30–12.30 and 14.30-16.30.)

✓ The simplest way however, if you don't fancy the trek to Paris, is to print off the appropriate application form at www.britishembassy.gov.uk/france and send it to British Consulate General, BP111-08, 75363 Paris CEDEX 08.

✓ The fees (applicable from 4th October 2007) are below but please note that the Passport office is unable to take personal cheques and suggests that payment be made by Mandat (postal order) available from post offices, or by cash and credit card in situ.

Adult (over 16): 170 Euros (gulp!)

Children (from 0 to 16): 112 Euros

Jumbo (when available), (48 pages): 213 Euros

Amendment (for name changes): 144 Euros

✓ Applications are processed (in theory) within 10 working days. In exceptional circumstances and upon proof of travel commitments booked, this could be shorter. You may collect your passport from your nearest British Consulate or arrange to have it returned by registered post or Chronopost. (For more details, check with your post office)

Your right to vote

Bank holidays

The many bank holidays in France are often extended into a long weekend called a "pont" or bridge. For example, if the holiday falls on a Tuesday or a Thursday, many businesses will "faire le pont" and take the Monday or the Friday off as well (major chains are unlikely to do this).

Good Friday Friday 21st March (not a bank holiday in France)

Easter Sunday (Dimanche de Paques) - Sunday 23rd March

Easter Monday (Lundi de Pâques) - Monday 24th March

School holidays for our region (Zone A) 2008

February half term Saturday 16th February – Monday 3rd March 2008

Easter Saturday 12th – Monday 28th April 2008

Summer Thursday 3rd July – Tuesday 2nd September 2008

Did you know that, whilst around 200,000 British expats are resident in France, only a small handful are actually registered to vote in the UK, even though they can? In fact, as long as you have been registered to vote in the UK at any time within the past 15 years, you can continue to vote in UK General Elections and European Parliamentary elections, as long as you register as an overseas voter. (You cannot vote in UK local or mayoral elections, elections to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales or the London Assembly.) You can also vote in France's own local and European parliamentary elections.

To register to vote from overseas, download an overseas registration form from www.aboutmyvote.org.uk and return it to your electoral registration office for the address where you were last registered to vote in the UK. Once you are registered, you may choose to vote in person at your local UK polling station, by post or by proxy. (This form does not apply to Northern Ireland. Visit www.eoni.org.uk for more information.)

Adios el coche

Watch out for a new form of car theft which is becoming "popular" in Spain.

A motorist returns to his car, opens it, puts in his bags, shopping, laptop... starts up the motor, looks in his mirror and sees a **large piece of paper stuck to the back window**. Naturally, he leaps out of the car to remove it, leaving the door open and the engine running, the thief waiting nearby slips into the car and drives off. (taking no particular care to avoid the car owner!!) Insurance companies will apparently not deal with these thefts as there has been no break-in and the vehicle has been left without proper security! If this happens to you, **remain in your car with doors locked and DRIVE OFF WITHOUT REMOVING PAPER**.



DÉFENSE DE FUMER

Last year's ban on smoking in the workplace paved the way to a **complete smoking prohibition including bars and restaurants**, which took effect on January 1st 2008. Whilst some may consider it rather "unfrench" to lie back and accept new laws without protest, there is evidence that public opinion is changing and that this new law will be received, if not with open arms, with understanding and cooperation.

Smokers in violation of this law will receive a fine of €68

The latest **speed trap** to be installed in the PO was activated in December 2007 on the RD115, in the commune of Saint Jean-Plade-Corts, direction Le Boulou – Céret - a 90km/hour speed restriction area. Other recent installations are the RN16, in the commune of Rodès, direction Prades – Perpignan, which is a 90km/hour speed restriction area, the D612A, direction Thuir – Toulouges, also 90km/hour. The highest number of "flashes" were recorded by the camera on the A9 autoroute (direction Spain to Perpignan) which is situated about 2km from the frontier. This may be due to the relatively higher number of vehicles using that road but it's also worth noting that, although it is an autoroute, the speed limit on that section is 110km/hr not 130km. Apparently this was introduced at the same time that the camera was installed, definitely one to watch if you have spent 30 minutes queuing to get through the Douanes into France and then you put your foot down!! For information the camera is located just after the Viaduc du Pox behind the brown Vallespir sign.

There is now a specific phone number (French only) to ring, if you have any questions resulting from being "flashed" Tel: 08 11 10 20 30. To check out speed traps throughout France, visit www.securiteroutiere.gouv.fr

LE PLEIN POR FAVORE

Recent rises in the cost of petrol and diesel in France are apparently sending more and more people **over the border to fill up their tanks**, paying up to 19 centimes per litre less in Spain for petrol and 9 centimes less for diesel. Both are expected to continue rising in France, not boding well for traffic queues into Spain, or for French *stations services!*

PINE PROCESSIONARY

OR TENT CATERPILLAR

LES CHENILLES PROCESSIONNAIRES

Look up into the pine trees of the P-O in February/March and you cannot fail to notice the light coloured, **web-like cocoons** swinging from the tree tops. These are in fact **caterpillar nests**, constructed by the *chenille processionnaire* larva which live in large "tents" and **march out at night in single file** (hence the name) to feed on the pine needles, leaving behind them a pheromone trail (a kind of chemical message), which enables them to find their way back to the nest after feeding. French naturalist, Jean Henri Fabre arranged a group of these caterpillars into a complete circle around the edge

of a flowerpot to test out their urge to follow each other in a single-file head-to-tail line, and they followed each other round and round for seven days! If you have nests on your property, you are advised to **cut off the branch of the tree and burn the nest**. If the property has a large quantity of nests, ask advice at your local mairie. Which ever option you choose, do take care. Quite apart from the damage caused to the trees, the caterpillars have fine hairs on their back containing a protein which causes **severe irritation and dermatitis**, and in some cases an allergic reaction (anaphylactic shock) to

both humans and animals. Even after the caterpillar is dead, the hairs remain toxic. Take care when walking your dog in areas where the caterpillars may be, or have been. Initial symptoms to watch out for in your pet may include vomiting and tongue swelling.



At this time of the year



FONT-ROMEU / PYRÉNÉES 2000

alt : 1800m

GETTING THERE

From Perpignan, follow the RN116 via Prades, Villefranche de Conflent to Mont Louis, then the D618 Font Romeu. Note that the road between Villefranche de Conflent and Mont Louis is a **mountain road** with many hairpin bends. If you are unfamiliar with driving in France, expect some hairy driving to be going on.

Approaching Font Romeu, you have the choice of turning right as signposted at a roundabout and going directly to the skiing

THE RESORT

Developed as a ski resort as early as 1921, the linked ski area of Font-Romeu and Pyrenees 2000 is the largest artificially snow covered ski-area in Europe with 40 ski runs to suit all levels (downhill and cross-country skiing), 52km of pistes, 80km of slopes for cross-country skiers and the biggest snow making machine in the Pyrenees.

Originally nothing but a small cluster of chalets, Font Romeu flourished as a result of the arrival of the *Petit Train Jaune* in 1908, followed in 1911 by the building of the **fashionable and luxurious Grand Hôtel**, frequented by royalty and the rich and famous from all over the world during the 1920s and 30s.

Worth visiting amongst other things, is the *Chapelle de l'Ermitage* built in the 17th century on the site of a fountain (hence the name Font Romeu - the pilgrim's fountain) and *Le Grand Hotel* itself. Also in this area is the *Four Solaire d'Odeillo*, the **biggest solar furnace** in the world, so if you see any strange constructions in the country side, don't worry - the aliens haven't landed yet!

area at **Les Airelles** or of continuing straight on into the town itself.

If you go right, you reach a large open carpark at the foot of the slopes. In this area you will find a ticket office, the offices of the *École du Ski Française* (ESF) and the *École de Ski Internationale*, a large cafeteria on two floors and a *salle de pique-nique* where you can eat packed lunches and also get hot drinks, sandwiches, croissants and beer. Be aware, however, that there is **no ski rental in this area** so if you need to hire equipment, either do so at one of the shops en route or continue into Font Romeu instead of turning right.

If you go on towards Font Romeu itself, there is a rental shop and bar on the right before you get into the town. After that, look out for the tourist information office on your right and a car park sign on the left. There is covered parking here for 240 cars. On either side of the car park there are ski rental shops. The ticket office for your lift pass is at the tourist office where there is also an ATM. Immediately behind the office is a gondola station to take you up to *Les Airelles* at the foot of the slopes. All of this is within a hundred metres or so....

Before leaving, consult:

...the weather forecast (PO): tel: 3250

...road conditions (PO): 04 68 38 12 05

THE SKIING

The combined area has 26 lifts serving some 53 kms of pistes. There are 36 runs: 11 green; 7 blue; 7 red; and 3 black. Vertical drop is 563m.

There are two ski schools *École du Ski Française* (ESF) and *École de Ski Internationale* (ESI). As well as offering a range of instruction both ski schools can look after young children (from age 3) - the ESF in its *Jardin d'Enfants "La Marmotte"* and the ESI in "Les P'tits Indiens".

The facilities for going from total beginner to your first green/blue run are excellent. There are beginners' areas of progressive inclines served by easy drag tows (*téléskis*) from which you can move on to a chairlift - the friendly kind that slows down for getting on and off (*télesiege débrayable*). Alternatively there is also a double drag lift. These lifts take you to the Gallinera area from where you can take a green or a blue slope back to Les Airelles, or blues all the way down to Pyrénées 2000 - a much longer run (and remember to leave time for getting back). The gradients are steady with no nasty surprises.

At the time of trying out the resort, there was very little snow so I was unable to check out many of the runs - for instance, none of the runs from the Roc de la Calme. The one black that was open (from Gallinera down to Aveillans) was not too demanding and the couple of reds were similarly straightforward.

What's on?

Our pick of events around the region.

For a more detailed events calendar, visit us on www.anglophone-direct.com

CARNIVAL TIME

February and March see carnivals (or carnivals) all over the PO – singing, dancing, eating and drinking, live music, **fancy dress**, **parades** and fireworks, along with the symbolic burning of evil spirits - but the origins of these celebrations, ending on Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) around forty days before Easter, are actually less frivolous than the word carnival denotes today.

Hundred of years ago, the followers of the Catholic religion in Italy started the tradition of holding a wild costume festival right before the first day of Lent. Catholics are not supposed to eat meat during Lent, so they called their festival, *carnevale* — which means “to put away the meat.” As time passed, carnivals in Italy became quite famous; in fact the practice spread to France, Spain, and all the Catholic countries in Europe. As the French, Spanish, and Portuguese began to take control of the Americas and other parts of the world, they took with them their tradition of celebrating carnival.

In fact, Mardi Gras used to represent a “last fling” before the thin times of lent where, in more primitive societies, the winter stores of food for both humans and animals were running down, in a society before fridges and freezers allowed us to store provisions indefinitely. It was necessary to **use up all remaining meat and animal products** such as eggs and butter so why not make a party of it? It also used to be a time of “acceptable naughtiness” when people disguised themselves **behind masks and got up to things** they “didn’t ought to!” Watch out for the burning of the straw-filled Carnival king, symbol for infertility, sins, and bad luck – an important character in the traditions of modern carnival, who is burned in a spectacular ritual at the end of the festivities, the day before Ash Wednesday.

Check out your local tourist office or visit us on www.anglophone-direct.com for details of more carnivals around the region (Argeles, Amélie, Font Romeu, Les Angles, Vernet, Roses... to name but a few)



FOIRE DE LA TRUFFE

10th February

Lesquerde

Once again Lesquerde hosts the Foire de la truffe, which traditionally takes place on the second Sunday of February. Apart from the truffles and Lesquerde wine, there will be a local product market, bouncy castle, clown, entertainment.

...and also Fête de la Truffe in Arles-sur-Tech on 3rd February

29th - 30th March

Le Barcarès

FÊTE DE L'HUÎTRE

Mas de l'Ille (exit 12) "The world is your oyster", Oyster fans should make a



special effort to visit Le Barcarès this weekend when music, dancing and oysters *à volonté* (as many as you can swallow) await you.

FETE DE L'OURS

Prats de Mollo

24th Février

The legend of the *fête de l'Ours* tells of a young **shepherdess spirited away** by a bear, actually the devil in disguise, and rescued by woodcutters. On the third shot from the redan 5^{te} Marguerite at Fort Lagarde, the enactment of the hunt begins! **Men and women dressed as bears and hunters run through the streets** as the crowd cheers and screams, deafened by gunfire, excited by the smell of gunpowder, drunk on the atmosphere.... Eventually the **hommes en blanc** or **barbiers** intervene, covered in flour, armed with heavy chains and dressed in white with lace bonnets! One of them has an axe, another carries a *botifarra* (locally made black pudding!!) and a *cuvette* (basin) with which they “shave” the bear, using the axe for a razor and

the black pudding for soap.

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

Watch out for the *mascarade* in which the children parade noisily through the streets, dressed in white with faces covered in flour, or the *Encadenat*, (link up) a conga like dance through the streets. Have a giggle too at the Ball de la Posta, where naughty “damsels” get smacked on the bottom with a plank or the *Tio-tio* where dancers dressed in white, covered in flour, and equipped with a lit candle try and set fire to the bottom of the person in front of them!

Don't forget to turn your clocks forward! Sunday March 30th 2008 - Clocks go forward one hour (during the night of Saturday/Sunday morning)



Snow golf

golf sur la neige

Based on golf but played over snow instead of grass, at an altitude of 1800 metres, in temperatures well below 0°, snow golf is very much "something completely different".

Played on a **multi-levelled course**

covered in snow, hopefully under blue skies, this is a game for any golfer looking for a new challenge, both **amateur and professional**, and is open to members of the FFG (handicap 36), and to foreign players who are members of federations in their own country. There is also a *série Pro*.

Players will play in **teams of two**, with a rubber tee, which will allow them to **raise the ball up higher**. The ball will be a fluorescent orange!

Snow golf is certainly a **little more difficult to play** than normal golf - high altitudes, low temperatures, and the wearing of heavy clothing make the swing more difficult.

Clubs are limited to six with a light golfing bag as there is no caddy or golf buggy available and it is essential to be able to move around freely.

Registration on: www.snow-golf.fr or contact the Office de Tourisme de Font-Romeu on 04 68 30 68 30

15th March

Camplé

CONCERT FOR CHILDREN

10h - auditorium du conservatoire, **PARCOURS ZOOLOGIQUE, Mon 1^{er} récital** (from 4 years old)- This trip to the zoo with a difference is a **light hearted and fun recital** by soprano Donatienne Michel-Dansac and pianist Vincent Leterme who sing, speak and play a series of animal stories.

"...une puce dans sa voiture tirait un petit éléphant mon Dieu, mon Dieu ! Quelle aventure!" (Maurice Carème)

RUBBER DUCK RACE

1st March Torreilles



For the fourth year running, **400 rubber ducks**, each bearing a number, will be set loose on an unsuspecting public, in this rubber duck race involving betting on the winning duck!

Torreilles is one of the only towns in France to put on this very original race, particularly appreciated apparently by the British!

Selection of events from the Palais des Congrès, Perpignan

Events at the **PALAIS des CONGRÈS**

6th March

Gala Viennois Johann Strauss with the 'Philharmoniques du K&K' The 57 piece band joins with Austrian ballet corps to present the most well known music of Johann Strauss, father and son.

25th March- 8.30 pm

L'EVENTAIL DE LADY WINDERMERE (Lady Windermere's fan) by Oscar Wilde First staged in 1892, 'Lady Windermere's Fan' was Wilde's first great stage success. The play is a tale of confusion and misinterpretation with Wilde's brilliant wit woven throughout the dialogue - guaranteeing an evening of classic entertainment

27th March

Show «La revue des 30ans» Operettas reviews and variety

Events at the **ÉGLISE des DOMINICAINS**

14th-22nd March

Sacred music festival

Exhibitions at the **PARC des EXPOSITIONS**

9th February

Mineral and fossil salon

15th - 21st February -

Stéphane Zavatta Circus presents 'Bel Canto' - circus and song Bengal and

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

white tigers, trapeze and high wire acts, clowns, huskies, elephants, jugglers...

1st - 2nd March - 10 am - 7 pm

Salon Animalières: Puppies and kittens of every shape, size and breed for sale and exhibition, are just a part of this week end of animal magic. Don't miss the magic show, and illusionist act with tigers and panthers.

8th - 9th March - 10 am - 7 pm

International day of the insect and nature - creepy crawlies galore!

I cook with wine; sometimes I even add it to the food.

W.C. FIELDS

Catalan cuisine

MAR I MUNTANYA

Mar I Muntanya (sea and mountain) is a regional expression for traditional local recipes that combine seafood with meat, poultry, or game. ...

4 chicken breasts cut into strips - 12 large prawns, heads and shells on - 2 onions, chopped - 4 tomatoes, peeled seeded and chopped - 4 fl oz dry white wine - Dash pastis - 4 garlic cloves, finely chopped - 2 sprigs parsley, finely chopped - 1 slice of fried bread - 30 g dark chocolate, grated - 8 almonds, blanched and roasted and finely ground - Salt, pepper, olive oil

- ✓ Sauté the Chicken pieces and set aside.
- ✓ Cook the onions until beginning to caramelize. Add the tomatoes and mix well. Continue cooking until liquid has evaporated and tomatoes have begun to melt into the onions. Mix chicken with tomato & onion mixture, add 1/2 litre of water and bring to the boil. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, for 20 minutes.
- ✓ Add wine and pastis, return to the boil,

reduce heat and continue simmering. After 20 minutes add prawns. Simmer for another 20 minutes until chicken is very tender, adding more water if necessary.

- ✓ Blend together garlic, bread, chocolate and finely pre-ground almonds. Blend in the parsley. Add enough olive oil to make a thick paste (the Picada, traditional Catalan sauce). Add salt and pepper to taste and stir in the picada



WINE Recommendations

Château Montner 2005 "Premium"

AOC Cotes de Roussillon Village Rouge

Another of the robust reds made from grapes from old vines that the established wineries in this part of PO do so well. In this case the Carignan and Grenache component comes from 50 yr old stock, and the Syrah 15 years.

The dark, ruby red colour betrays the rich nature of this wine; the flavour certainly is not a let-down either, complex as it is, with hints of black cherry, vanilla, and a veritable masala of spiciness.

To be enjoyed, needless to say, with the red meats and game that feature at this time of year. 7€ and 14 ABV



Henri, from Cellier des Arcades in Céret recommends the following wines to accompany your meals. Pop in to the "cave" Céret (opposite the Pablo, up the small cobbled street) and pick his brains. He will be happy to advise.

Domaine de Mas Cremat

AOC Cotes de Roussillon Rouge

This popular wine is a subtle blend of Grenache Noir, Syrah and Mourvedre. Pleasant on the nose, with a true mixture of Forest fruits, with a lovely flowery sidekick. A satisfying mouthful, with a long finish, this wine is a winner with lamb, and even with chicken (casserole or roasted). 6.90€ and 12% ABV

HOT WINE VIN CHAUD

You don't need to visit the ski slopes to treat yourselves and your guests to this delicious French version of mulled wine.

In the olden days, wine often didn't keep for very long so by adding various spices it could remain drinkable for longer.

1litre red wine (cheap and cheerful) - 1/2 cup of cassis - orange zest and lemon zest to taste - 2 cinnamon sticks - 4 whole cardamom pods - 4 whole cloves - OPTIONAL: 4 allspice berries

✓ Mix the wine and cassis in a large bowl, add the orange zest and lemon zest, and spices. Heat the wine until it just begins to simmer. Do not allow to boil. Lower the heat and simmer for 20-30 minutes for the spices to infuse. Serve hot with a cinnamon stick and a slice of orange floating on top. Enjoy!

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Restaurant reviews

John Fairclough



LEON BLUM CATERING COLLEGE

PERPIGNAN

The word 'bistro' apparently comes from the Russian word 'Hurry' and originated during the Napoleonic Wars when Russian soldiers occupying Paris would enter cafés and restaurants and shout 'bistro, bistro' demanding that their food arrive quickly. The word was adopted as a nickname and came to signify any small eatery where meals were simply and quickly prepared.

I recently accepted an invitation to dine at the restaurant of the Lycee Leon Blum, **catering college**, tucked away near the University 5in the Moulin à Vent area of Perpignan, on Av de Villeneuve, immediately opposite the Swimming pool.)



It is here that students put their studies into practice and the general public are invited to come along as paying guinea pigs. Having been to a couple of similar establishments in the UK, I was intrigued to see how their French equivalents fare. British ones I'd visited were a little "college canteen" in their décor and ambiance, but Leon Blum is rather different, with a

wood-panelled bar, open fire and twenty or so tables of varying sizes dotted around the warm, recently decorated dining room.

Clearly **presentation is high on the list of priorities here**. The tables are sumptuously decorated with starched linen, up market cutlery and quality glassware/porcelain. Upon arrival you are shown to your table by your own personal waiter, in our case, Kevin, a personable young man of 17, who was delighted to be able to practice his English on us.

Basically the restaurant offers a fixed 4 course meal, consisting in our case of a macedoine of vegetables and tomato salad, followed by mixed shellfish with American sauce, a main course of roasted chicken in saffron cream with garnish and various patisseries/gateaux to finish. The **menu changes daily** and it must be stressed that there is no choice or vegetarian option, so this place is not recommended for those with special dietary requirements.

All the food on offer was **superbly prepared, very tasty and impeccably presented** and served by Kevin. Every effort is clearly made to ensure that the customer's dining experience is a memorable one.

The **price** of this meal makes the whole thing all the more remarkable, with both lunch and dinner on offer at a very low price. Of

course what would be a superb French meal like this without wine? This area is not neglected, with **good local Roussillon wines** at bargain prices, and a wide (for this area) choice of vintages from other French regions at equally tempting prices.

It was explained to us that, being an educational establishment, the Leon Blum is not allowed to advertise. That is why you'll not find it in the paper, magazines or restaurant guides, so its fame is spread by word of mouth (or articles like this!). Also it is exempt from TVA, no doubt explaining the bargain prices. Because of this, tables are quite sought after, and **booking is essential** (04 68 54 77 89). Opening hours are Mon to Fri only, 12-2 and 7 to 10. In the evening customers are **requested to be at their tables by 7.30 at the latest**.

A meal at the Ecole Restaurant Leon Blum is a very rewarding experience, and one with a difference. Not only does one get to enjoy a superb feast at attractive prices, but one also feels one is helping in the education and training of what are, let's not forget, the young folk who are going to be the future restaurateurs, chefs, pâtisseries, sommeliers etc of the area. I would urge as many people as possible to visit this place, to witness at first hand the dedication of the teaching/training staff, and their extremely talented, and enthusiastic young charges.





Remplissez les blancs avec les mots ci-dessous 1

Un monsieur **1** dans le commissariat de police **2** un pingouin.
 " Je **3** de trouver ce pingouin dans la rue " dit il. " Que **4**-je faire? "
 " Emmenez **5** au zoo " lui répond le **6**.
 Le **7**, le policier **8** le même monsieur dans la rue, **9** avec le pingouin.
 " Mais... Je vous avais **10** de l'emmener au zoo " dit l'agent.
 " Oui, mais on s'est tellement bien amusé au zoo, qu'aujourd'hui, on va au cinéma! "
 A dit B lendemain C toujours D avec E le F rencontre G policier H viens I dois J entre

LANGUAGE tips

In French, there is no single word for...
 shallow = peu profond (not very deep)
 drop = laisser tomber (let fall)
 lock = fermer à clé (close with a key)

Cours d'histoire
Que s'est-il passé en 1111 ?
L'invasion des Huns. (Think about this one!)

LANGUAGE tips

Dessus v Dessous

Despite a similar spelling and pronunciation (to the untrained ear that is) these two words are complete opposites.

Dessus means "on it" "above it" or "on top of it" - similar to "sur" except that "sur" must be followed by a noun, while dessus can only be used when the noun has already been mentioned

Ce livre a mon nom dessus (or mon nom est sur le livre)
 Il est assis sur la chaise – Il est assis dessus

Dessous means "under it", "beneath it", or "below it" - similar in fact to "sous", except that "sous" must be followed by a noun, while dessous can only be used when the noun has already been mentioned

Elle se cache sous la table. Oui je la vois dessous
 On achète cette bouteille ? Le prix est marqué dessous
 Some useful expressions...

avoir le dessous - to be at a disadvantage
 avoir le dessus - to have the upper hand

Match up the words with their definition 4

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| utile 1 | a chemin qui mène quelque part |
| collation 2 | b qui évoque la moquerie |
| voie 3 | c repas léger |
| coupable 4 | d intelligence perspicace ou malicieuse |
| risible 5 | e qui rend un service |
| malin 6 | f qui a commis une faute |

Choose a synonym for each of the words above from the list below

pratique – rusé – responsable – snack – allée – ridicule

Faux amis 2

Choose the correct definition

1. abuser

- a) to overstep the mark
 b) to insult

4. un slip

- a) petticoat
 b) underpants

2. user

- a) to use
 b) to wear out

5. reporter

- a) to postpone
 b) to inform

3. un surnom

- a) second name
 b) nickname

Match the useful expressions 3

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| à fond 1 | a It's essential |
| bon débarras! 2 | b It's driving me mad! |
| j'ai un petit creux 3 | c Get lost! |
| Ça me prend la tête! 4 | d As soon as he opens his mouth |
| Dès qu'il ouvre la bouche. 5 | e That's right, for sure |
| Casse-toi (cassez-vous) 6 | f Shall we have a bite to eat? |
| On casse la croûte ? 7 | g good riddance! |
| C'est clair 8 | h thoroughly |
| C'est indispensable 9 | i I suddenly feel exhausted |
| j'ai un coup de barre 10 | j I'm peckish |

Say.....

miam-
 miam (for
 yummy
 yummy)

ANSWERS TO 'TEST YOUR FRENCH' PO LIFE N°14

- 1** 1a 2b 3a 4b 5c 6b
2 1b 2a 3a 4b 5a
3 1i 2g 3j 4a 5h 6b 7c 8d 9f 10e
4 1beuille 2démarré 3gaspilles
 4vouvoyer 5louche
5 1d 2c 3a 4 e 5b

Choosing your health insurance

The French healthcare system is currently the subject of vast reform and what is true today may not be true tomorrow ... so in a nutshell...

- ✓ If you are of UK state pension age you will continue to benefit from state health care.
- ✓ If you were already registered with the CMU (Couverture Maladie

We put some of your insurance questions to Jean-Paul Sicre of Generali Argeles, an English speaker who has studied the British health care situation in France.

What is the minimum insurance people should be looking at?

Any basic policy should offer **partial or total refund** of all hospitalisation costs, primary care expenses, i.e. medical fees, tests, and drugs at the same rates as the French state healthcare system. Beware policies that have been introduced at short notice in response to the new legislation as they may not be "tried and tested".

What are the risks/consequences of NOT taking out any health insurance?

Apart from the obvious risk of being faced with massive bills in case of illness or accident, inactive EU citizens living in France

Universelle) before the 23rd November 2007, you may continue to pay

your contributions and benefit from state health care.

- ✓ If you can prove that you have lived in France for 5 years (minimum six months uninterrupted residence per year), you can remain with or join the CMU and benefit from state health care.
- ✓ If you have a chronic or pre existing medical condition, or a sudden life change such as illness, redundancy or death of a spouse, and are unable to obtain private health you may appeal for entry into the French health care system. (Beware! Local CPAMs have the power to interpret special circumstances individually, on a case-by-case basis, so may well be open to interpretation from region to region! Ooops!)

without proper health insurance will now be considered to be living **illegally** in this country.

What questions should people be asking their insurers?

Besides the obvious questions, they should check possible **age limits, excesses, annual financial limits, life cover, cover of pre-existing conditions, direct refunds** of hospital costs (no payment needed), etc.

Local fluent English speaking support may also be essential to take you through the small print.

For those who DO still benefit from state health care, why is a "mutuelle" or top up insurance so important?

The French healthcare system repays only a **percentage** of medical costs, next to nothing for modern dental and optical

treatments and nothing for ambulance costs, a stay in hospital, the use of a private room.... To make up the increasing difference of what the State does not cover, a *mutuelle* is strongly advised.

What is the next step for those who find themselves with an E106 form that has expired, or is about to expire?

They should **discuss their situation with their local CPAM** office or give us a ring, since there is still uncertainty as to how the rules of the new circular are to be applied. In the (unlikely) event of the government making further concessions to E106 holders, your policy with Generali would automatically become null and void if you were accepted back into the state system.

General conditions of policies available in English

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 **GENERALI**
assurances

Améliorez votre Anglais

Corrigez les six erreurs dans le texte ci-dessous 1

English humour! I was walk down the road with my dog went a lady come up to me and says "What are you doing with those smelly beast?" "He's not smelly at all" I repliqued indignantly. "I wasn't talking to you" replied the lady. "I was talking to the dog!"

Répétez cinq fois ! *Tongue twister*
A noise annoys an oyster
 (un bruit énerve un huître !)

Trouvez les synonymes

- 2 about 1 a) nearly
 to admit 2 b) tummy
 almost 3 c) absent
 stomach 4 d) approximately
 away 5 e) apart from
 forehead 6 f) deliberate
 total 7 g) to select
 except 8 h) complete
 intentional 9 i) brow
 to choose 10 j) to confess

Phrase utile

Let's keep in touch: gardons le contact

1. I haven't seen him ____ over five years.

- a) since
 b) for

2. That Matisse painting is ____.

- a) worthless
 b) priceless

3. I would like to get the ____ for crème catalane?

- a) receipt
 b) recipe

4. They ____ my passport at the Spanish border

- a) checked
 b) controlled

5. I'm too hot. I'm going to sit in the ____

- a) shade
 b) shadow

6. I spent my evening ____ television

- a) looking at
 b) watching

Confusing words 3

7. Will you ____ me to get some bread?

- a) remember
 b) remind

8. He ____ us all about his holidays

- a) said
 b) told

✓ Language tip : Suggérer quelques chose

Comme dans toutes les langues, il y a plusieurs façons de proposer quelque chose à quelqu'un. En voici quelques unes

How about + verbe + ing

How about going into Perpignan ? (Si on allait à Perpignan)

Shall we + Verbe

shall we go? (On y va?)

Why don't we + verbe

why don't we go to the cinema? (Pourquoi pas aller au cinéma)

Let's + verbe

Let's stay at home tonight. (Restons à la maison ce soir)

We could + verb

We could eat pizza (on pourrait manger des pizzas)

How do you recognize a worm's head from its tail?

Tickle it in the middle and see which end laughs!!

Pluriel ou pas pluriel? 4

1 I would like more information/informations

2 He has many talent/talents

3 He gives good advice/advices

4 You have a lot of equipment/equipments

5 He only has one pair of trouser/trousers

6 How many people/peoples are going?

7 There is too much traffic/traffics on the road today

Trouvez la bonne traduction pour chaque expression idiomatique 5

- Mind your own business! 1 a) Quand on parle du loup
 I'm fed up 2 b) Sauver la mise
 Speak of the devil 3 c) Mon petit doigt me l'a dit
 To save the day 4 d) Que le meilleur gagne.
 That goes without saying 5 e) C'est une façon de parler.
 A little bird told me. 6 f) C'est pas tes oignons
 It can't be helped, 7 g) Cela va de soi!
 May the best man win 8 h) J'en ai marre !
 It's a figure of speech 9 i) Arrêtez de chercher la petite bête
 Stop splitting hairs 10 j) On n'y peut rien

RÉPONSES D'AMÉLIOREZ VOTRE ANGLAIS PO LIFE N° 14

- 1 1h 2e 3d 4j 5a 6i 7c 8g 9b 10f
 2 1 chin 2 heart 3 arm 4 leg 5 leg
 3 1celebrated 2 dinner 3 during 4 send 5 watch
 6 go 7 homes 8 colourful 9 after 10 like
 4 1e 2a 3f 4j 5h 6g 7d 8c 9g 10b
 5 1a 2i 3d 4j 5f 6g 7c 8e 9h 10 b

For sale, to let or will pay you to take him away. One fifteen year old son. Lazy, useless around the house, grubby, slightly stinky. Nice smile.

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Are there any 'get togethers' in the Alberes area for cribbage or whist? Do let me know, please, would love to get involved! Edwin on edwinwinslade@hotmail.com

Art Exhibition of Margaret Dibben and Ken Wheatley at Domaine Treloor 22 March 2008 from 2 pm - 7 pm - 16 Traverse de Thuir 66300 Trouillas Ph 04 68 95 02 29

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WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2008?

2007 saw a sobering of the rampant market of the previous few years with **prices stabilising**. This meant that well priced properties did sell but there was, and continues to be, a glut of **overpriced property on the market**.

Let's start with the bad news affecting the property market this year - a less than buoyant French economy, high unemployment, rising interest rates and French concerns about their spending power. Like it or not, British buyers have a huge effect on the market in the Pyrénées-Orientales and they are facing a weak pound against the euro and unease about the state of the property market in the UK. This has undoubtedly affected the lower end of the market with fewer people seeking a small holiday home.

It is, however, not all doom and gloom for 2008 - there are some positive factors influencing the current market in France. These include **low interest rates** compared to the UK and measures introduced by Sarkozy to **encourage entry into the property market** for first time buyers. In addition, where the Brits are concerned, there are more buyers with higher budgets looking to relocate permanently, and of course, those lucky souls rich

Obvious really when you think of it, but the word **quarantine** comes from the French *quarante* (forty). Adding the ending *-aine* to French numbers makes a number approximate (a bit like *-ish* in English), so *quarantaine* means about forty. Originally when a ship arriving in port was suspected of being infected with a contagious disease, its cargo and crew were not allowed to go ashore for a period of around forty days. This term came to be known as period of quarantine.

enough not to be concerned with trifles such as interest and exchange rates!

Here at Med & Mountain we continue to have strong interest from buyers but they are calling the shots and can take their pick from a large number of properties. For sellers to make theirs stand out, it either has to be of exceptional quality, or well priced, and preferably both! If you want to sell, you'd be wise to take this on board.

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Spotlighton...

GOLF PLAYING AROUND IN LANGUEDOC

GEORGE BUCHAN TAKES A LOOK AT SOME OF THE REGION'S GOLF COURSES

As a generalisation, the courses I tried last May were in excellent condition, particularly the greens which were almost always true and fast. The bunkers, on the other hand, were usually below standard, the sand quality was frequently awful, and the bunker edges untended. Compared to the Algarve and Spain (in May) the French courses are quieter, you can play in couples rather than the obligatory fours if you wish, the cost is less, there are some seriously different and good courses (Falgos, definitely) and there are fewer Brits and Germans! At all the courses at which we played, our reservations were handled efficiently, and at almost all the quality of facilities were well above those at the average British club.

Golf de Saint Cyprien. This 18 hole course is about 6900 yards (medal tees) par 72, flat, fairly featureless, a cross between links and parkland, and technically demanding. The 9 hole is 3000 yards (medal) par 35, also flat, but more scenically attractive (parkland, with more trees and water) and although less demanding, is probably more fun, and it's worth considering playing twice to get the 18 holes in preference to the "big course". Facilities are excellent, and it's possible to hire clubs, trolleys etc. Cost of a round is between 40 and 55 euros depending on the time of year.



Golf du Domaine de Falgos is an outstandingly beautiful, relatively short (5500 yards, par 70) and technically interesting parkland/forest course, but not annoyingly "tricky" as some short courses are. Head past Le Boulou, Ceret and Arles sur Tech. About 5 or 6 kilometres after Arles, turn left for St Laurent des Cerdans, and Falgos is off the road to the right about a couple of kilometres beyond this village. It's difficult to imagine a golf course being here in the mountains, but it's worth the twisty journey just to see it. Predictably, the course is hilly/undulating, but exhilarating! The facilities are excellent, and clubs, trolleys and carts can be hired. Cost of a round about 45 to 55 euros.

Golf de Carcassonne is located on the south side of the A61 (opposite side from the city), off Junction 23, following signs first for "Centre Ville" and then for "St Hilaire" on the D118 (crossing back over the autoroute). The course is on the left hand side. It's a parkland

DOM-TOM stands for départements d'outre-mer and territoires d'outre-mer (the French overseas departments and territories) and are French-administered territories outside Europe

course, characterised by wide fairways, fast and challenging greens, some very interesting holes (1, 9 and 18 involve either steep climbs or drops) and lovely views across rolling countryside. It is just over 6300 yards, par 71. The facilities are pleasant and homely rather than glittering. Cost of a round about 35 to 45 euros, and half sets of clubs and trolleys/carts can be hired.

Golf du Cap d'Agde is located to the north, near Beziers. Leave the A9 at Junction 35 on the N112, heading for Agde. Don't

go to Agde, but follow the road to Cap d'Agde, and look for signs for "Golf", on the right hand side. Although close to the sea, it's a parkland rather than links course, with plenty of trees and water. Pleasant rather than stunning views. Although quite long (about 6900 yards from the back, par 72), it's not too much of a struggle. Greens magnificent, fairways good, bunkers poor. Facilities comprehensive. Cost from 20 to 50 euros.

The "Languedoc-Roussillon Golf-Pass" includes 5 green fees and allows the golfer to play for a period of 21 consecutive days in any of the golf courses listed. The pass can be reserved at the golf courses themselves, 48 hours in advance, or via the Internet at <http://www.sud-france-golf.fr/uk/>. A maximum of 2 green fees can be played on any one golf course. Cost: 210 € for 5 green-fees

Avocado

Here's a word origin which has absolutely nothing to do with the French language but it gave me a bit of a giggle. The word avocado was originally named "ahucatl" by the Aztecs - their word for testicle - both because of its appearance and the fact that it is supposed to be an aphrodisiac. To the Spaniards "ahucatl" sounded like avocado, and so the fruit came to Europe, via Spain, under that name.

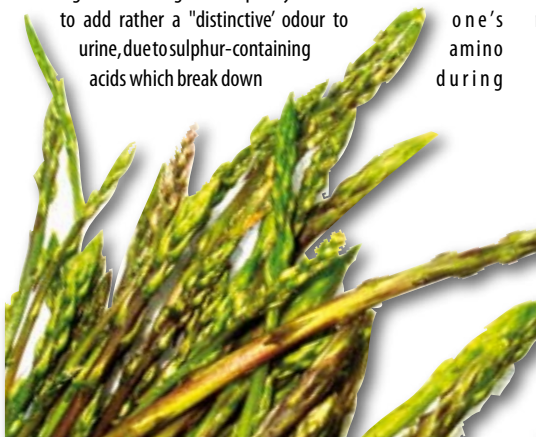
Wild ASPARAGUS ASPERGES SAUVAGES

Don't miss out on gathering delicious wild asparagus at his time of year. This fern-like plant, thin, spindly, and packed with flavour, is rather good at concealing itself amongst the briars and grasses as it winds its way along the ground and gets entangled in the undergrowth, so you need to know what you're looking for but it can make for a great day out hunting them down.

Asparagus has been around for many hundreds of years, cultivated originally by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, and many ancient herbal textbooks mention it as both, food and medicine. In fact, there is a recipe for asparagus in the oldest surviving book of recipes, Apicius, a collection of Roman cookery recipes, thought to have been compiled in the late 4th or early 5th century.

Low in calories, asparagus is a particularly nutritionally well-balanced vegetable as it contains no fat or cholesterol, is very low in sodium, and provides a good source of folic acid, potassium, and dietary fibre. It is also one of the richest sources of rutin, a drug which strengthens capillary walls. It is known to add rather a "distinctive" odour to urine, due to sulphur-containing acids which break down

one's amino acids during



digestion. However, it seems that whilst everyone digests asparagus the same way, only about half of us have a gene that enables us to smell the resulting effects on our pip!! Lucky for some! In 1891, Pellegrino Artusi, author of *The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well*, wrote that, by adding some turpentine to a chamber pot of asparagus provoked urine, one could transform the odour into the "sweet scent of violets!"

To cook, wash well under cool water, then steam briefly, stir-fry, or drizzle with olive oil and give a quick blast in the oven or on the barbeque. Beware! They begin to deteriorate as soon as gathered and toughen rapidly, becoming "stringy" within 24 hours unless refrigerated.

Truffles

Traditionally snuffled out by pigs and eaten by noblemen, the quantity of black truffles produced in France has diminished over the past century, forcing up prices. In the late 19th century, France harvested 1,600 tons a year, but less than 20 tons are expected to come to market this winter, prices are around 800€ plus for one kilo, (swoon!) and there are worries that the European market may be flooded with cheaper, and less tasty Chinese truffles. Grown alongside "truffle trees" - the varieties of oak that promote the growth of the incredibly expensive and revered underground fungi - the truffle is more often uprooted these days by sniffer dogs. Pigs, I was told on good authority, are very untrustworthy! Look away for a flicker of a second and they've scoffed the lot (very much like my dog actually!).

Recipe SAUTEED GARLIC ASPARAGUS

3 tablespoons butter / olive oil - wild asparagus - 3 cloves garlic, chopped

✓ Melt the butter or olive oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Add the garlic and asparagus spears. Cover and cook for 8 - 10 minutes,

stirring occasionally, or until asparagus is tender. If you like your asparagus well done reduce heat and cook an additional 10 minutes

✓ You can use them directly or incorporate them in scrambled eggs, quiche Lorraine or in a Soufflé.



Did you know that the "Ouija" board used in seances got its name from the combination of the French and German words for "yes" - oui and ja.

David Hall
Recycling woodsmith

A tall, slim man picks through a furniture factory rubbish heap, examining each bit of wood, keeping some, discarding others. His search seems purposeful. Indeed it is, for his finds will end up in

exhibitions and on bookshelves in homes and offices in the Pyrénées-Orientales as well as abroad.

Wood sculptor David Hall explains that the inspiration for his figurative and abstract works comes from the variety of bits of wood he finds. Sometimes he is intrigued by a feature in the wood itself, and sometimes he imposes an idea on the wood, but he always seeks simple forms that permit enhancing grains and natural colours. All his works are single pieces, with no glue or colour stain, and all are finished only with wax or penetrating oil.

His minimalist approach springs

from an early fascination with form and design. In his 20s, the fascination had expanded to include architecture and naval architecture, as he pursued a career in cargo and container shipping. When he found time, he carved, designed jewellery and made furniture.

The turning point came 25 years ago, when he and his wife, Ellen, bought land and built a holiday home in Collioure, drawn from his native England by "the mountains and sea, sun guaranteed in summer, and good communications." Ten years ago, he took early retirement, settled permanently in Collioure and set up a proper woodsmith workshop. In the past four years, he has held exhibitions in Banyuls-sur-Mer, Collioure, Port Vendres and Perpignan in

the Pyrénées-Orientales and in Mirepoix in Ariège.

A dozen of his works are on display until April 2007 at Les Caves du Roussillon at 6 pl Gén Leclerc in Collioure, and works not yet sold as well as a complete photo catalogue of all works to date may be viewed by appointment at his workshop, Tel. 04 68823550.



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