

WEEKEND
LIKE A LOCAL IN

Provence



A MESSY NESSY MINI GUIDE



WEEKEND LIKE A LOCAL

DESTINATION

PROVENCE

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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How easily I could slip back into my sleepy Provence, to a village called Vers, next to the Roman aqueduct I used to swim under, near the medieval town of Uzès where my mother bought our vegetables, in a garden where an imagination could run wild. I'll find my way back, with silver hair and the wrinkles of time. But for now, I'll settle for weekends here and there....

Where to stay

For a weekend, I recommend staying in a village or in a town and soaking up the life of a local in Provence.



Maison de la Bourgade

THE ROMANTIC CHATEAU D'ARPAILLARGUES

is in the valley of Uzès, with a wonderful restaurant and a great swimming pool.

HOTEL D'ENTRAIGES

is a restored townhouse in the heart of Uzès, with a terrace pool.

MAISON DE LA BOURGADE

(pictured above)

The lovely and chic Elizabeth hosts a B&B in her charming home, an oasis in the heart of the town with a pool and peaceful garden. Rooms are simple but affordable.

THIS AFFORDABLE AIRBNB

great for solo travelling on a budget, with a back garden, on one of the most beautiful backstreets in Uzès.

LE GARDIEN DES ANGES

A small and charming B&B in the village I grew up in, a bike ride away from the Pont du Gard.

A SELECTION OF PROVENCE HOUSE RENTALS

A great townhouse in a historic and friendly Provencal village, with a pool terrace (pictured below).



L'écrin de la Regordane

Friday

But of course you should begin
the weekend with dinner at a château!

If the weather is good, book a dinner at [Chateau d'Arpaillargues](#), set in a small village by the same name, in the valley of Uzès where Jacques Brel once lived. If you have time before or after dinner, take a stroll around the village and have “un pot” (a drink), at the local bar with a pretty terrace on the main square, **Le Boit Bernard**.

Before bed, wander the streets of Uzès under the moonlight, making your way to the **Places aux Herbes** to see the evening's entertainment (usually live music by the fountain), but don't drink too much of that Provençal rosé. We've got a big day ahead tomorrow...



Chateau d'Arpaillargues

Saturday

BREAKFAST

Saturday mornings are the liveliest day in the region for activity, so we'll need to be up early to squeeze it all in. First, we don't want to miss the Uzès food market on the town's timeless square, **Place aux Herbes**, which starts as early as 7.30. Wander the stalls, eye up some breakfast nibbles, maybe pick up some local honey, and observe the locals doing their weekly shop. It is one of the most magical and authentic markets in the region.

MID-MORNING

Hop in the car, direction: **Villeneuve-lès-Avignon** for the best weekly antiques market in the region. Situated just across the river from Avignon, Villeneuve is the sleepier and smaller sister town to the famous papal city, surrounding a fort that once kept a lookout for the Pope's enemies.



Held on **Place Charles Daniel** every Saturday for the last 25 years, this is not just any old antiques market; this is the market, where professionals take their hunting very seriously. You'll find more 20th century treasure than 17th century furniture these days however, as is the present trend of the industry, but you can come away with anything from a Louis Vuitton suitcase to a good salad bowl for 15 euros.

After the market, walk up through the village of Villeneuve to the lovely Italianate **Jardins de l'abbaye Saint-Andre** for a delightful walk through history. You'll be rewarded with a great vista of Avignon across the river, discover the old churches, olive orchard, cemetery and quiet corners to sit and relax and just take in the view.



LUNCH

I imagine by now you've worked up an appetite. Walking through the village, you probably found numerous cute little terraces where you can have lunch. So. Here's where you need to make a decision. Do you go for an easy lunch there in town, or do you hop in the car and drive 30 minutes to a bucket list-worthy chateau lunch. It's your call.

I've left a photograph of the [Chateau des Alpilles](#) to help you decide. It's open for non-residents for lunch with an advanced reservation.

AFTERNOON

Our afternoon activity is a visit to a wonderful little museum, dedicated to the story of the **“indiennes”**, the vividly colored cotton fabrics imported from the Great Indies to the port of Marseille at the end of the 16th century.

These prints are a part of Provence and since 1806, they’ve been produced by my favourite French fashion house since I was a little girl.

Souleaido (a brand that speaks to the French peasant girl in me), began in a sleepy town called Tarascon, and their headquarters is found in a beautiful mansion in the old streets where they’re set up a wonderful textiles museum. A visual feast tells the story of Provence and its bohemian aesthetic, with time capsule workshops and colour laboratories – you can even have a go at making your own prints. Hopefully you’ll fall in love with them as much as I did. (*Open Monday-Sat, 10am-7pm*)

And don’t forget to have a little wander around the silent streets of **Tarascon** after your museum visit. The architecture is truly stunning and untouched– or as we say in French **“dans son jus”**.





Streets of Tarascon



BEFORE SUNSET

If you make it back to Uzès in time before the **Jardin Medieval** (medieval gardens) closes at 6pm, it's well worth a quick tour prior to dinner.

Set inside a part of the Duke's old castle, this little paradise transports you to simpler times, when gardens were our pharmacies and one of the most important parts of a household. Take the narrow stairs in the King's tower all the way to the top for a panoramic view of Uzès.



DINNER

One should never leave Uzès without a dinner at **Le Bèc a Vin**, hidden down a tiny backstreet in the shadows.

The ownership has changed hands several times over the years, but the setting is always magic on a warm Provençale evening.

Call a day in advance and ask for a table in the courtyard (dans le cour).

*(6, rue entres les Tours; +334 66 22 41 20;
Around 25 euros per head with wine)*

Sunday

MORNING

Let's spend the first half of Sunday ... village hopping! Perhaps you might first want to have a wander around the one that raised me: **Vers**, just a 15 minute drive from Uzés. Have breakfast at **La Grange**, a café recently opened by an English ex-pat and wine-grower, on the main square, where the elderly locals play pétanques in the evening.

Next, drive through the fields over to the next village, **Castillon-du-Gard**; once a hilltop ghost town that rose from the ashes in the 60s to be restored and somewhat revived, with a handful of restaurants and cafés. Photo opportunities a plenty.

Our third village visit is **Saint-Hilaire-d'Ozilhan**, where we'll be stocking up at the local épicerie for a picnic lunch.

At the heart of the town is the locals' well-loved café and produce shop, **Terra Nostrum** (open until 1pm on Sundays). You can buy cold cuts, cheese and various fresh snacks to take with you for a Sunday feast.



Castillon du Gard



La Grange

AFTERNOON

The plan is to lay a picnic blanket on the **Gardon** river, the one that runs under the Roman aqueduct, **Le Pont du Gard**. The monument itself and the museum and other facilities are impressive, but my best memory is swimming in the river that flows under the aqueduct.

The water is perfect in the summer, cool and deeper than you expect. You can find a spot a hundred yards or so upstream from the bridge, and swim/drift with the current down near the aqueduct itself. If you're feeling sporty, you can also find kayaking in the village further upstream in **Collias**.

If you want to avoid the crowds of the Pont du Gard, my advice would be to park in Collias and find your spot along the river there.

DINNER

After a long day by the river, back in Uzès, don't fret about everything being closed on Sunday- **Ten** is a friendly restaurant under the stone arches behind the main square that will welcome you with hearty portions and fresh oysters.

After dinner, take a timeless stroll via the **Cathédrale Saint-Théodorit d'Uzès**, under the orange glow of the street lights, as the bells softly chime on the hour, and the cicadas sing you home.



La Grange

Extra day

GOT AN EXTRA DAY?

If it's not your first time in the area, I'd highly recommend discovering **Sommières**, a beguiling town in its unspoilt charm, reminding me of what Uzès once looked like 20 years ago, or what the French would call "**dans son jus**" (well marinated, in its juice).

A place lost in time, built next to a river, Sommières has many similar architectural features to Uzès but has somehow managed to fight off gentrification and keep the crowds away.

There's a few cute restaurants, but it's all still quite hippie dippy, so nothing too pretentious. British writer Lawrence Durrell ended his days in this lovely little town that holds a nocturnal market every Wednesday night.

Don't miss the brocante in an old 18th century house and garden tucked away in the side streets called **Belle Brocante** (open Fridays and Saturdays only). But try to keep this one between us okay?!

ALSO OF INTEREST

NEARBY



THE HILLTOP VILLAGE OF LUSSAN

(awarded one of the “plus beaux villages de France”)



**THE VILLAGES
WHERE PROVENCE
MEETS THE CÔTE D’AZUR**



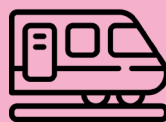
A GHOST VILLAGE IN PROVENCE



**THE DISAPPEARING
MEMBERSHIP CAFÉS OF
PROVENCE**

GETTING THERE

FROM PARIS



The TGV train from Paris to Avignon takes 2h30 minutes.
You can (and probably should) pick up a rental car from the TGV station.



CONCLUSION

If you liked this Mini Guide, chances are you will love my book **Don't Be A Tourist In Paris - the Messy Nessy Chic Guide...** that is, if you like Paris. But who doesn't? A vault of local secrets, insider advice and little-known urban anecdotes, finally unlocked and in print. The result of seven years of discovery in one of the most fascinating cities on earth, this is not your average guide book... This is the ultimate bible to Paris unknown.

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