

Pretty as a picture

With its picturesque countryside and quaint mountain villages, Provence offers the quintessential French experience.



L'isle-Sur-La-Sorgue, Town on the River

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EVERYONE has a particular place in the world that they dream of running away to. For me, it is the beautiful region of Provence.

Last year I was fortunate enough to accompany my mother on a business trip to the South of France to take photographs for her website. With its spectacular countryside, gently sloping vineyards, picturesque hilltop villages and fields full of poppies, Provence literally stole my heart.

Even the journey from Paris to Provence was exquisite as we travelled at high speed on the TGV through countryside that took my breath away. I was amazed to find out that the TGV was built to travel up to speeds of 550kmph, however, generally only travels at the slower speed of 330kmph!

Arriving at Aix en Provence we picked up our hire car. Seeing my mother have her first experience in a left-hand-drive manual vehicle on the opposite side of the road was akin to watching 'Miss Daisy' driving.

As we wound our way through the villages towards Lourmarin, I could feel a sense of excitement building up inside me and couldn't wait to explore the beautiful cobblestone streets. The people of Lourmarin were so welcoming and friendly, each stopping to say hello and have a chat. As we walked through the town we came across the Chateau de Lourmarin, a converted 16th century castle. Going through each room took me back to a different era, as the smell of the old furniture wafted through the historic building.

A quick drive following the curves of the mountain brought us to Bonnieux. The incredibly steep, winding roads had my heart in my mouth as yet another car or the odd Winnebago came around the bend on our side of the road. After arriving with all limbs attached and a car still in one piece, the views were astounding to say the least. Narrow laneways led up to a panoramic vista of green and gold fields overlooking a valley where you could see Gordes and Lacoste in the distance.

As the days went by I fell more and more in love with this incredible place.

Roussillon, with its houses and buildings built using bright shades of red and orange, was a real showstopper and I loved taking photos of the pantone-esque colourings.

We also travelled to Gordes, another charming village perched on a rocky cliff. We stopped to capture the awe-inspiring photo opportunity of the town from across the valley before we sat down with a glass of wine to enjoy the view.

There was something about watching the sunset that just made me feel at peace as I basked in its beauty.

The following day we adventured out to L'isle-Sur-La-Sorgue, a town built around a river. The photographer in me wanted to capture the uniqueness of the slow moving, moss-covered waterwheels that were mounted to the side of the river. The way the water was pulled through the wheels with utter grace as it flowed down the river was strikingly beautiful. >>



Town of Lourmarin



Lourmarin Markets



Pont Du Gard



Carrières De Lumières

After an amazing lunch and a glass or two of wine, a local friend took us to Fontaine de Vaucluse, a place otherwise unknown to most. The walk up posed a rather difficult challenge, as I was wearing shoes that weren't designed for cobblestones or climbing rocks. However, the sight of the incredibly clear, rushing water, that ended in a deep pool beside wonderful eateries that dotted the roadside, was truly amazing, especially as the awe-inspiring fountain is yet to reveal its source.

As we moved across the region we found ourselves in St Rémy de Provence, another delightful township. We visited the asylum that was home to Vincent Van Gogh, and I was thrown back in time by a re-creation of his bedroom where the walls depicted his life story. As a creative soul, I was left feeling inspired having witnessed replications of some of Van Gogh's famous artistic works.

Following this marvelous experience I travelled to Le-Baux-de-Provence. By this point of the journey I thought I had already witnessed some remarkable highlights, but nothing prepared me for entering the cavernous stone quarry known as the 'Carrières De Lumières'.

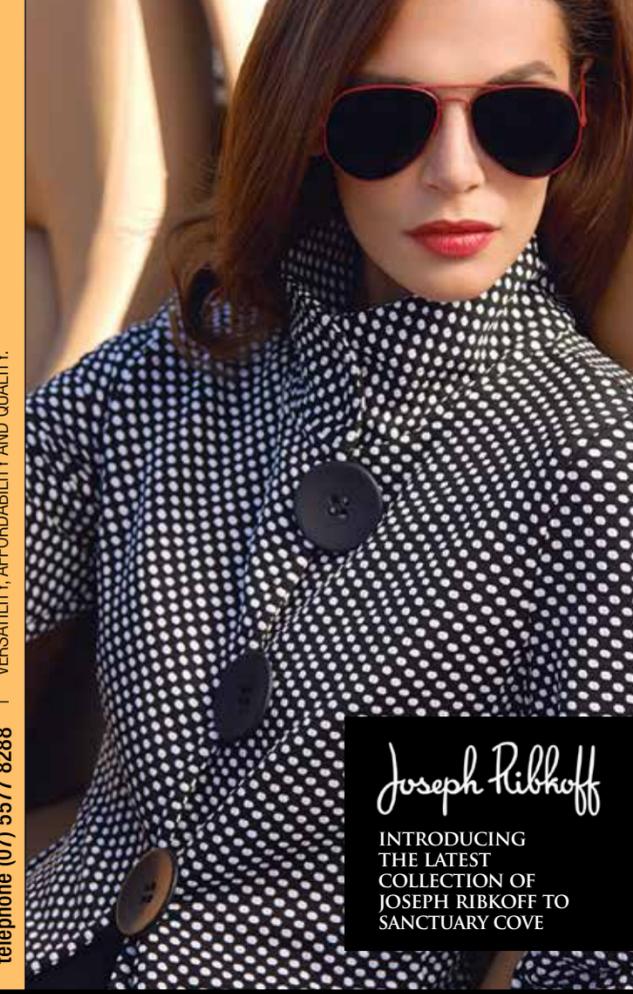
It was a place where light and sound took over and the outside world withdrew. I was entranced by the music and pictures portrayed on the walls. Watching as the works of Klimt, an artist most famous for his piece 'The Kiss', moved across the stonewalls of the cave was an experience that touched me deeply and I could never forget the feeling of being but a small figure in a cave of vast dimensions.

As the journey came to a close, I found myself looking for excuses to stay in Provence and soak up all the beauty and experiences this wonderful region had to offer. While I certainly came up with a bigger list of reasons to stay than to leave, I now have a new appreciation for the world and the beauty waiting to be discovered. ●

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