

The Aude (11)



ACCESS

Air: Carcassonne Airport (Salvaza) Direct from Stansted with [Ryanair](#).

Rail: TGV to Narbonne then TER to Carcassonne Rail Station with [SNCF](#).

Car: Good access via motorways (13 hrs from Calais) with [Eurotunnel](#).

The Aude is the "other south of France". It's one of the departments in Languedoc-Roussillon. Other than the Mediterranean beaches and resorts it's a relatively undiscovered destination. Carcassonne, the major city is 900 km due south from Paris.

Places of interest

When I think of France I think of the Aude, in Languedoc-Roussillon. When I think of the Aude I think of beautiful medieval city. Life is relaxed. The wine is wonderful. There's little that can match the perfection of sitting outside at a cafe in Lagrasse late in the afternoon. The sun has already slipped below the hills. The light in the village is golden. The air is filled with the smell of grape juice with a trace of wood smoke from burning vines. There's a cat on the chair next to me waiting to see if I have food. There's a glass of local red wine to sip and olives to nibble on.



Attractions

Cathar Castles, Romanesque abbeys, mediaeval villages, incredible scenery, vineyards, wineries, the Canal du Midi, rivers, the Mediterranean, the list goes on and on. You can golf, fish, swim, laze, tour wineries, explore caves, visit abbeys, shop at markets, cycle, sail, hike, ride, almost anything you want. July and August see populations soar as vacationers arrive but the rest of the year you can go for days and not see another obvious tourist. The villages are small. The people



are friendly. They're always interested in where you come from and why you came to the Aude. Not many speak English but all are willing to bear with any attempt to communicate in French.



The canal is lined with plane trees. Sometimes it's the trees that show the path of the canal in the distance. The 14 July is the "Embrasement de la Cité", with fire works from 10.30pm, not to be missed as the whole town turns out, cafe's and bars are at capacity and the atmosphere is electric. Markets are on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday morning, and with a population of about 310,000 the Aude represents .5% of the population of France and 14.1% of the population of Languedoc.



Climate

With a Mediterranean climate, it enjoys an average of 300 days of sunshine each year. Tourism is 'gentle'. The geography is varied; in half an hour you can drive from the vineyard covered plains of the Minervois to the mountains of the Corbières with hilltop Cathar castles guarding small villages. Montpellier to the east and Toulouse to the west are large cities and only about 90 minutes away. The Aude stretches from the Mediterranean in the east to Castelnaudary in the west, the Black Mountains in the north and the Pyrénées in the south, Carcassonne is the capital and the other major centres are Narbonne and Limoux.

