

Continued from Page 49
bargain. That evening we ate at Christies Bistrot – a relaxed eatery where you can grab a burger and a beer or have fine dining and wine.

GUERN ON A HOLIDAY



The following day – our final in our all too short break – was spent walking some of the beautiful beaches dotted around the coast. We also managed a tour of the Occupation Museum.

TRANQUIL . . . St Peter Port
home and we grabbed the flight to Southampton with heavy hearts.

The Channel Islands were the only British Territory invaded during World War Two with Hitler seeing them as a key strategic launch-pad.

The hop across the Channel done, we alighted the plane to get a bus to the terminal and I pressed-up beside one of my fellow passengers.

The museum, just a few minutes from the airport, had an incredible collection of stories and paraphernalia including an Enigma code writing machine.

Looking up to give an apologetic smile for the tight squeeze I was delighted to have a final reminder of Guernsey as I realised I was sharing the trip with good old Matt. The Southampton FC legend must have been enjoying a trip home over the weekend and was returning for the week.

Concrete gun towers and bunkers at points around the coast are another reminder of the island's colourful history and are fascinating structures. All too soon it was time to head

ITALIANS never miss a marketing opportunity . . . but this might backfire.

After British tourists were charged an eye-watering £54 for four ice creams in Rome, the city's 5★ Hotel d'Inghilterra has invented the Dolce Vita Deal.

NEWS

Two scoops of homemade gelato in their swish Café Romano cost 16 euro (£13.60), including a glass of prosecco. But do the maths and it's MORE expensive than the original deal: £13.60 x 4 is £54.40. Add ten per cent tax and a tip and it's more than £60! Not even Silvio Berlusconi could make that one fly. For bookings, see royaldemeure.com.

● A DINOSAUR trail opens on the Isle of Wight next month, ahead of the release of 3D movie Walking With Dinosaurs later this year. The island is so full of fossils it has been named the UK's dinosaur capital by the Natural History Museum.

Now a smartphone app will let visitors follow the new Walking With Dinosaurs trail. See visitisleofwight.co.uk/attractions/dinosaurs.



UP THERE . . .
the stunning cathedral in Beziers town

LIVE LANGUE & PROSPER

GO: LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON
RYANAIR operates two flights a week from Edinburgh to Beziers – on Wednesdays and Sundays. Fares are from as little as £19.99 one-way for travel in May. For a full list of destinations and low fares from all Scottish airports visit ryanair.com.

MASTERCHEF judges John Torode and Gregg Wallace are the "official taste buds" of Heathrow.

They were challenged to eat their way around the airport, then set a six-month challenge to improve the dining.

After their tour, they recommended the introduction of healthier options. They will also contribute to Heathrow's first ever gastronomic guide – Food On The Fly.

Every year, 26million orders are placed at Heathrow's restaurants and bars, with fine dining options such as Gordon Ramsay's Plane Food, Oriol And Rubarb, as well as High Street chains including Strada and Carluccio's.

I wonder if they'll advise them to cut their prices? Gregg said: "Food is our first love and at the heart of everything we do so we were delighted when we were invited to take part in this eating challenge – and to contribute to the guide."

"We were blown away by the range on offer to hungry passengers at Heathrow. Catering for such a huge spectrum of passengers is a truly Herculean task."



PRINCE HARRY heads Stateside this month to visit the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs to see the 2013 Warrior Games for injured troops.

The academy, with its 4,000 cadets, attracts more than a million tourist visitors a year.

Overlooked by stunning Pikes Peak, Colorado Springs is also noted for its natural beauty – home to the famous Garden of the Gods state park and the Pikes Peak Cog Railway.

Tour operator DialAFly offer a nine-night tour of the US from £1,689pp, valid for selected departures until June 23. Includes flights from London to Colorado (via New York), flights from New York to Washington DC with United Airlines, 3★ accommodation on a mixed-board basis in Colorado Springs, New York and Washington and car hire in Colorado.

Those wanting to also visit leafy New Jersey and Connecticut can book additional car hire from £16 per day. See dialaflight.com or call 0844 556 6060.

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BREATHTAKING BEAUTY OF SOUTH-EAST FRANCE

GOOD food and drink may be wasted on me but good weather never is.

At 4.00 on a wet, windy Wednesday afternoon, my Ryanair flight soared into the clouds above Edinburgh Airport.

Barely 2½ hours later I was walking across the warm tarmac at Beziers-Cap d'Agde airport against a backdrop of the glittering Mediterranean.

I was leaving behind a world of rain and cold . . . but also a world of microwave dinners and Sainsbury's £3 meal deals.

Masterpiece

For the next five days I was to be treated to the best of everything in this breathtakingly beautiful corner of south west France.

The most beautiful views, the most elegant accommodation, the friendliest welcomes. Yes, I did say friendliest. Paris isn't France.

Oh, and the finest grub and vino the restaurants and vineyards of the Languedoc-Roussillon region have to offer. A place where I suggested we might pack more in if we trimmed the marathon lunch sessions back and got the genial reply: "That's not what we do here."

The airport's ever-helpful Elisabeth Houry whisked us off to the nearby Clos de Maussanne, a former convent in the sleepy countryside outside Beziers. We were allowed to choose our rooms. They were all jaw drop-pers. My suite boasted a mezza-



ELEGANCE . . . the Grand Hotel in the stunning port of Sete

nine floor. Not that I had the chance to get a party going as Olivier Grataloup introduced us to some of the wines of the area and beneath a setting sun before we moved inside for dinner.

The next morning saw us by the Canal du Midi to see the nine Fonseranes Locks, an engineering masterpiece carrying boats 21 metres up or down in the space of just 300 metres.

Next stop was the Centre Naturiste . . . to take a picture of the entrance. Thankfully, one of the world's most famous nudist colonies was not on our itinerary.

The two miles of beach, dunes and rare fauna of the protected Orpellières gave us the chance to kick off our shoes, dip a foot in the Med, and unwind ahead of another demanding round of gourmet food and wine tastings.

A 2½ hour seafood lunch at the Bouille du Pecheurs in Valras-Plage and we were ready for . . . more food and drink. Florent Tarbouriech ushered us on board an electric barge for a

trip into the giant coastal lagoon to see at close hand how solar power is being used to simulate tidal movements . . . and produce the most perfect oysters that will ever grace the tables of the world's poshest restaurants . . . or slide repeatedly down the throat of an approving Sun sports hack.

A short distance away in the attractive port of Marseillan, we had a guided tour of the Noilly Prat cellars, filled to overflowing with the vermouth produced locally since 1813 to a secret recipe of aromatic herbs and spices. We dutifully tasted all three types – I pocketed a recipe leaflet.

A packed day ended at the modern resort of Cap d'Agde, checking into our massive rooms at the Palmyra Golf Resort, just in time to be whisked off to dinner at Les Halles, another chance to show off my inadequate schoolboy French and uneducated palate.

The next morning found us high above Cap d'Agde on Mount Saint-Loup enjoying panoramic views . . . thankfully not of the naturists. The expanding resort is set to become a Mecca for golf lovers – just a couple of hours earlier – had been given a mild ticking-off for jogging over the sacred fairways.

If the dark, volcanic sand on the local beaches doesn't appeal, you can try the 6,000 square metres of the Aquatic Centre, like a giant beetle flexing its wings, where we were proudly shown around the pools and sumptuous spa facilities.

Lunch back at the Palmyra and we were on the move again, this time to the attractive port of Sete, the Venice of France, with our rooms at the elegant Grand Hotel overlooking the Royal Canal.

There was no time to waste though as we explored this lively and attractive town – by boat as we motored down the Royal Canal and out of the port to see Sete from a new angle; on foot with Nancy McGee on a whirlwind gourmet walking tour that ended with a slice of a European champion frescati

cake; and a car tour that showed us some hidden corners and amazing viewpoints.

We were ready to drop, but rallied for a night out at La Ola, on the beach, where I discovered what tuna is like when it isn't delivered from a tin, and where a long but unforgettable day ended with noisy boules on the beach in the darkness.

There was no slackening of the pace the next morning as we headed for the medieval town of Pezenas on market day, where we drove our hosts to distraction, lingering in the winding streets and alleyways where the shops proved irresistible.

We interrupted our shopping day for a visit to the Chateau Paul Mas, where the owner entertained us for lunch served up by his new Japanese chef, and chatted amiably about his four AOC label wines, plus the legendary Arrogant Frog which shows the French can laugh at themselves. There was time for one more wine tasting as we headed up into the mountains to rendezvous with Francoise

Ollier-Taillefir, a fifth generation wine maker and member of an all-woman association of wine growers in the region. Her passion showed through as she took us off up a mountain track to inspect her vines, which are ravaged regularly by wild boars. Francoise insisted on our sampling a dizzying array of her wines, with the incredible hospitality we encountered everywhere we went.

Our destination for the final night in France was the hotel/restaurant l'Ortensia, beautifully restored with a modern touch above the scenic village of Saint-Gervase-sur-Mare.

Gorges

Outdoor types with more time to explore the region can enjoy a range of hillwalks from facile to moyer to difficult.

Only an experienced hill-walker would tackle some of the gorges we saw en route.

Before our last lunch, we were given a guided tour of the elegant suites of the Chateau les Carrasses, a fairytale white castle where lucky guests can contemplate the beauty of the landscape from an infinity pool. Oh and one final lunch and tasting.

The departure lounge at the airport was crowded as we arrived for our fight back to Edinburgh. Clearly the secret is out.

Our five-day break merely scratched the surface of an area perfect for couples and families alike, golf lovers, hikers and bikers. Close enough for a weekend break, but with the variety to withstand repeat visits.

The perfect destination for people who appreciate the finer things in life. Their ranks swelled by one after my visit.

PAUL HICKSON

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