

french affair

ALANA LOWES ROMANTICISES ABOUT PROVENCE IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE AND UNCOVERS AN INTRIGUING LITTLE HIDEAWAY.

IMMORTALISED BY VAN Gogh and Cézanne in vibrant artwork, Provence is famous for its bustling village markets, flavoursome local produce, fresh seafood and Mediterranean flavours, but with a little exploration you can discover the perfect place to begin and end the day in the most romantic way.

The Luberon region in Eastern Provence comprises a number of adorable villages situated in and around rugged limestone cliffs and rich ochre-coloured hills. It is a land of medieval villages filled with a mix of old stone huts and lavishly restored homes perched high above flourishing valleys abundant with vineyards, cherry tree orchards, olive groves and lavender fields.

A petit unknown village off the tourist route worthy of a stopover is the 15th century village of Les Baumettes. It is the ideal location to escape from the more popular tourist villages that can, at times, be overcrowded. Within a 30km radius you can visit the most beautiful Luberon villages including Gordes, Goult, Lacoste and Fontaine-de-Vaucluse – a beautiful oasis that inspired Italian poet Petrarch to write poems addressed to “Laura”, a woman he’d had a passionate but unrequited love affair with. One of my favourite villages is Gordes. This charming old town was built high on the edge of a plateau and



The village of Gordes
Left and below left: Au Ralenti du Lierre



offers spectacular views on sunset. The most romantic way to spend your day is to pick up a baguette from a boulangerie (bakery), grab some cheese and fruit from the local market and sit by the town fountain or make your way to the grounds of a crumbling castle.

I was fortunate to stay at a gorgeous bed and breakfast, Au Ralenti du Lierre in Les Baumettes. Built in the 16th century, this bright and spacious maison de maître (“master’s house”) fronts an internal courtyard, a Provençal garden and a swimming pool surrounded by ancient dry stone walls. The interior of the building houses rustic furnishings and antiques from across the world, evoking a real sense of romance.

Each morning you are greeted with the smell of freshly baked bread and chocolate brownies. It’s not until you arrive at the breakfast room that you become aware there are other guests staying in the five-bedroom residence, and all seem to agree that Au Ralenti du Lierre is the most idyllic place to retire during a stay in Provence.

At the end of a big day you can relax on your private terrace with a glass of chilled French rosé, a specialty of the region, before slipping off to soak in the bath to daydream about tomorrow’s adventures in enchanting Provence.

HOW TO GET THERE:

From Paris catch the TGV Train to Avignon and then hire a car.

WHERE TO STAY:

Au Ralenti du Lierre – double rooms from \$120 including breakfast.
www.auralentioulierre.com

WHAT TO DO:

- Wine tastings from the boutique vineyards and wineries;
- Check out the antique and fresh produce markets that are held at a different village each day; and
- Watch the sun set from La Bastide de Gordes & Spa in Gordes, a medieval town perched high on cliffs.

NEW QLD VIP THEME PARK PACKAGE

**3 nights accommodation plus 2 QLD
VIP Passes for UNLIMITED FUN
until 30 June 2010* at Warner Bros.
Movie World, Sea World and
Wet'n'Wild Water World!**

**BOOK NOW. CALL 07 5519 1880
OR VISIT**

myfun.com.au

*Valid until 30/06/10. Subject to availability. See myfun.com.au for QLD VIP Pass and package terms and conditions.
SEA WORLD © 2009 & TM Sea World Property Trust. WARNER BROS. MOVIE WORLD and logo and all related characters and elements are trademarks of and © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 001100