

[A southern Rhone wine tour - Introduction](#)



Last year we were asked to propose an outline for a short wine tour in the southern Rhône Valley. This is an area we know well and like - and it is a great area for a wine enthusiast, as the region offers a really good selection of wines from quite a small area, including stunning reds; some of the best rosés; dry, medium and dessert white wines. Plus there is plenty to offer besides wine - rich Provençal food (especially olives and olive oil) and markets, history, great landscapes and the source of inspiration for many artists.

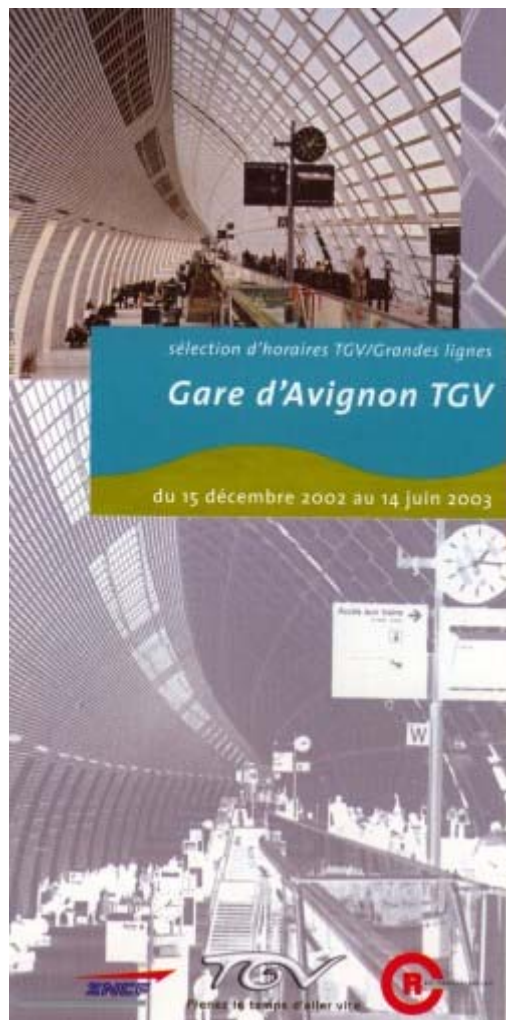
We based the tour on the small town of St Remy de Provence (13 Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence), about 15 miles south of Avignon. I like Avignon, but St Remy offers a more intimate experience in a delightful small Provençal town

(great market on Wednesdays), strong connections to Van Gogh and to bull-running through the streets!!

There are a number of reasonable hotels and a good selection of restaurants within walking distance. Although there are more stylish and pricey hotels around St Remy, we chose to be within walking distance of the town and the itinerary usually means that the hotel is essentially just for washing and sleeping rather than indulgence. Choose a different restaurant every night!

Two hotels in the town which are reasonable for a few nights are the [Logis de France](#) AUBERGE DE LA REINE JEANNE on boulevard Mirabeau – with courtyard restaurant – and the [Hotel du Cheval Blanc](#) in avenue Fauconnet – no restaurant and a little basic, but clean, comfortable and cheery.

St Remy is ideally positioned for this wine tour - a few miles south lies Les Baux de Provence, to the west is the Camargue and Costières de Nîmes AC, to the east lies Cavaillon (for its melons) and north of there you access the best of the southern Rhône - Côtes du Rhône, Vacqueyras, Gigondas, Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Lirac, Tavel, Beaumes-de-Venise to name but a few.



Getting there is easy - just about 15 minutes from the futuristic Avignon TGV station (under 150 minutes from Paris on some services) - about 50 minutes from Marseilles Airport at Marignane, 30 minutes from Nimes, about 1.5 hours from Montpellier and only 2.5 hours from Nice

CONTACT DETAILS-

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L'Hôtel du Cheval Blanc 6 avenue Fauconnet, 13210 Saint Rémy de Provence T: 04 90 92 09 28; F: 04 90 92 69 05

[A southern Rhone wine tour - Tour 1](#)



St Remy de Provence and Les Baux de Provence

If it is summer, then it is advisable to make an early start - for although the distances to be travelled are not huge, the afternoon sun and heat can inhibit your tasting faculties - and besides the freshness and clearness of the morning air on a good day can really bring out the best in the short journey over the **Alpilles** towards Les Baux de Provence.

Heading south out of St Remy-de-Provence on the D5 (signposted **Maussane-les-Alpilles**) the road climbs quite steeply and dramatically to cross the Alpilles mountains - but the road is wide and well-surfaced. En route up the climb you will pass the roman remains of **Glanum** which may be worth a separate visit .

As you come down the other side of the Alpilles, (and before the right turn onto the D27 towards Les Baux) you will pass the entrance on the right to [Mas de la Dame](#) one of the best Baux de

Provence vineyards - we worked with them for several years, but they hit an inconsistent patch in the mid 90s. - we always enjoyed their Cuvée Gourmande red in the distinctive-shaped bottle. Well worth a visit, but if you only do one Baux de Provence vineyard visit we'd suggest you carry on a few hundred more metres and take the right onto the D27 signposted to Les Baux de Provence.

Less than a kilometre along the D27 (and before you reach the hill climb up to the village) take a left signposted to [Mas Sainte Berthe](#) our favourite vineyard in the region. The wines are superb across the range, and they have their own olive oil, tapenade etc on sale. The winemaker, Christian Nief, originally from Burgundy, is both affable and professional, and the tasting room is well laid-out.

A 30-minute signed walk, accessible to all, starts from the cellar, leading you through vines, scrubland and olive groves... for a tour of the stunning landscape. As you follow the trail, information boards tell you all about the various grape varieties and describe the annual tasks carried out in the vineyard.

The landscape and views are superb so this makes for a very good stop.

[Les Baux de Provence](#) is a medieval village perched high on the hillside - well worth a visit, but in the summer visit early, before the place gets swamped with visitors.

From Les Baux I would head on south to **Mausanne-les-Alpilles** - a sleepy little Provencal village, but a good place to stop for refreshment or lunch - can recommend **L'oustaloun** in the Place de l'Eglise - good and very provencal menu - lots of olives, Camargue lamb and I have vague memories of a dish which combined chocolate and tapenade!??

The other reason for going to Maussane is that there are several **olive mills** in the village, and although the harvest is not until late Autumn, you can see something of the process and taste and buy some oil and olive products - There is [Coopérative Oléicole de la Vallée des Baux at Moulin Jean-Cornille](#) on the outskirts of the village.

From Maussane head west beyond Paradou on the D17, taking the D33 on the right (before Fontvielle) signposted Tarascon. At Saint Gabriel fork right onto the D32 towards **St Etienne du Grès** Just beyond the village take a right onto Avenue Notre Dame du Chateau which becomes the "Vieux Chemin d'Arles", About 1km along this round you will find the **Domaine de Travallon** which offers a variation on the local wine styles. Your journey will have taken you across and around the Alpilles mountains, and this domain is on the north side with north facing vineyards. Hence the climate is a little less extreme. But this does mean that some of the traditional grape varieties such as Mourvedre and Grenache have some difficulty in reaching full maturity. Hence the owner, Eloi Durrbach, planted easier ripening vines such as Cabernet Sauvignon, much to the "horreur" of the locals. As a result he was forced to label his wines as "Vin de Pays des Bouches du Rhône", but have no doubt that despite the lower status, these are great wines - and very interesting combining Bordeaux's Cabernet Sauvignon and the Rhône's Syrah! From here just continue along the road into St Remy to complete your day - a gentle and enjoyable day with varied landscapes and wines (only about 25 miles travel 40 minutes driving) - and back in St Remy in time to enjoy a stroll or an aperitif!

CONTACT DETAILS

Mas de la Dame route départementale 5. 13520 les Baux de Provence

T: 04 90 54 32 24 F: 04 90 54 40 67

Mas Sainte Berthe; 13520 Les Baux-de-Provence T: 04 90 54 39 01; F: 04 90 54 46 17

E:info@mas-sainte-berthe.com

Coopérative Oléicole de la Vallée des Baux Moulin Jean-Cornille, Rue Charloun-Rieu, 13520 Maussane-les-Alpilles ; T : 04 90 54 32 37 F: 04 90 54 30 28

Domaine de Trevallon, SCEA Domaine Trevallon. chemin Romain Arles a St Rémy 13103 Saint Etienne du Gres T: 04 90 49 06 00 F: 04 90 49 02 17

[A southern Rhône wine tour - Tour 2](#)



Tour 2- Beaumes de Venise, Vacqueyras, Gigondas, Cairanne and the Côtes-du-Rhône

After a gentle first day, this second outing is rather longer, but should be worthwhile. For here you will get a taste of essential Southern Rhône wines - and again pass through some great countryside and villages en-route.

An early-ish start is recommended to head east from St Remy on the D99 to **Cavaillon** - an

otherwise unremarkable Provençal town, excepting for its deserved reputation as the centre of melon production!

(If you have time, you could make a small detour before reaching Cavaillon and the A9 autoroute - to another interesting wine and olive domain - [Domain de Valdition](#) - take a right (head south) off the D99 about 10km from Saint Remy-de-Provence to Eygalières, and .then left (east) onto the D74 towards Orgon - the domain is a few kilometres along on the left) - here they have some very well-made classy wines (despite being classified as Vin de Pays des Bouches du Rhône) - in a delightful chateau and tasting room. Unfortunately the website is over-engineered and does not work properly - but otherwise fully recommended - you could always do this as a short side-trip from St Remy if you have an hour to spare some other time)

From Cavaillon you need to find the D31 heading north towards Carpentras - the road network and signposting is not brilliant, so I would suggest going through "Centre Ville" as otherwise you may find yourself heading for Avignon, which is not be advised.

The D31 takes you past **L'Isle-sur-Sorgues** - a delightful town surrounded by the river Sorgue - and now famous as an antiques centre - excellent Provençal market on Thursday and Sunday mornings, although Sunday now gets very crowded with a major Antiques and Bric-a-Brac market. Worth a visit - but time may not allow on this day's itinerary.

Continue on the D31 (ignore a right to Carpentras) but keep on through Monteux and Sarrians towards **Vacqueyras**. The D31 becomes the D21 which you need to follow through to Beaufort-de-Venise. Turn left(north) onto the D7 towards Vacqueyras, and on the outskirts of the village you will find on your left the **Co-operative of Beaufort de Venise**. It is admittedly not an inspiring sight, but it is a good place to get a sense of these wines, the prices are good and the staff are helpful. Beaufort-de-Venise is best known for its very delightful dessert wine made from Muscat, sometimes in a distinctive bottle shape. However, don't overlook the fact that Beaufort-de-Venise is one of the Côtes-du-Rhône Villages AC and produces some excellent reds and rosés as well. Opposite the winery you'll see the Dentelles de Montmirail - the jagged mountains which dominate this part of the Vaucluse as an extension of the Mont Ventoux range. "Beaufort" apparently means grotto or cave. The "Venise" part of the name does not refer to Venice, but to the town Venasque (84 Vaucluse, Provence) which was previously the local capital of the area known as the Comtat Venaissin.



Back on the D7 head on to the village of **Vacqueyras**, and continue beyond the village on the D7 Route de Bollène. You will pass a right hand fork to Gigondas, but continue on the D8 for a few hundred yards where you will find [Domaine la Fourmone](#) on your right. This is to my mind one of the best wineries in the area, featuring Côtes du Rhône AC, Vacqueyras AC and Gigondas AC - and a Muscat de Beaufort de Venise AC - Cuvée Souleu. I am not alone - Robert Parker awarded their Gigondas 93/100 in 2007! Madame Combe is very welcoming to wine enthusiasts, and you will be treated to an excellent tasting in their small tasting room. If you like BIG reds, then you must try the Gigondas AC l'Oustau Fauquet - Cuvée Cigaloun has been my favourite - very rich

and intense, but probably not to everyone's taste.

As an added bonus [Marie-Therese Combe](#) also has an art gallery and studio on the Domaine with some excellent acrylics.

(One option could be to make this a 2-centre trip, as in Gigondas there is an excellent hotel at Hotel Montmirail (no website) Téléphone : 04 90 65 84 01 Fax : 04 90 65 81 50 E-mail : hotel-montmirail@wanadoo.fr)

From Domaine la Fourmone I would suggest heading north on the D8 to Cairanne - another Co-operative Wine Cellar just after the main road takes a sharp left turn in the village - [Cave de Cairanne](#) is on your right. Again a good selection of good value wines from this Côtes du Rhône Village AC - their Reserve red is silky and smooth.

Beyond Cairanne on the D8 for a couple of kilometres take a left (south) on the D978 towards Orange and then a left after a few miles onto the D41 signposted Camaret. In the village follow signs for Vaison-la-Romaine and as you leave the village watch for a sign to the left for rue Buisseron and [Domaine du Vieux Chene](#). Here Jean-Claude Bouche produces organic wines on a modest scale - but really excellent wines. We discovered the domaine many years ago when staying in the region, but were unable to import it as he had an exclusivity deal with another UK wine merchant. Jean-Claude and his wife Beatrice are charming and modest people who will give you a warm welcome in a rather sparse tasting room - try the Cuvée La Haie aux Grives (hedge of thrushes) Côtes du Rhône-Villages AC red.

If you are now heading towards late afternoon, then your journey back to St Remy-de-Provence holds a special treat. From Camaret head east back towards Vacqueyras, then south on the D7, Just after the village take a right onto the D52 then D21 to Sarrians, where you rejoin your outward route. Head south on the D31 through Monteux and on to **Velleron**. Here, just beside the D31 a farmers market (**Marché Agricole**) is held every evening from 18h00 from April to September (except Sundays and holidays), Predominantly small grower and producers of fruit, vegetables, poultry, olive oil and other goodies sell their produce often from the back of their cars - you will not find fresher unless you go to the farm.

Return south on the D31 to Cavaillon and then west on the D99 to St Remy-de-Provence.

Summary: About 140km (90 miles) travelling distance - about 2½ hours time.

CONTACT DETAILS:-

Domaine de Valdition Route d'Eygalières, 13660 Orgon; T: 04 90 73 08 12 F: 04 90 73 05 95
E:contact@valdition.com

Domaine la Fourmone Roger Combe et Filles, Route de Bollène, 84190 VACQUEYRAS; T: 04 90 65 86 05 F: 04 90 65 87 84

Les Vignerons de Beaumes de Venise Quartier Ravel, 84190 Beaumes-de-Venise T:04 90 12 41 00 - F: 04 90 65 02 05

Cave de Cairanne route de Bollène, 84290 Cairanne; T: 04 90 30 82 05; F:04 90 30 74 03

Domaine du Vieux Chene Jean Claude & Béatrice Bouche, Rue Buisseron
84850 Camaret; T:04 90.37.25.07 F:04 90.37.76.84

[A southern Rhône wine tour - Tour 3](#)



Lirac, Tavel and Chateauneuf-du-Pape

The third and final day trip from Saint Remy-de-Provence (13 Bouches-du-Rhône, Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur) takes us northwards to the western side of Avignon and includes 2 lesser known appellations and probably the most famous!



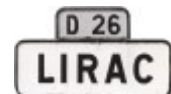
First stop is **Tavel**, where reputedly the "best rosé wine in the world" is produced - and this is not some light, frivolous summer salad wine, but it can be a seriously good, full-bodied dry rosé.

Although the most direct route is via Avignon, I prefer to avoid the frenetic and sometimes confusing and busy Avignon ring road, and instead head west on the D99 from St Remy to TARASCON, and then onto BEAUCAIRE. Then head north on the D986L to REMOULINS, where you turn right (north) onto the N700 signposted to Avignon. About 2 miles outside of Remoulins, take the left fork to ROCHEFORT-DU-GARD on the D976. (If you have a good map and navigator you could follow the D2 from BEAUCAIRE alongside the River Rhône to ARAMON, and then cut across country to DOMAZAN to ROCHEFORT-DU-GARD). About 2 miles beyond ROCHEFORT-DU-GARD take a left signposted to the village of TAVEL.

On the way in to the village you will pass the Co-operative (which is not one of the best), but I would head on into the village for **Domaine Maby** - on the northwest side of the village in rue St Vincent.

Maby has always been one of the best Tavel producers with **Cuvée La Forcadière**, and as a bonus they also produce **Lirac (La Fermade)**. In recent years Richard Maby has taken over from his illustrious father, so we may see some changes in style in years to come. But for now these Grenache and Cinsault dominated rosés are the classic style being high in acidity and distinctly dry and full-bodied and should present a challenge to those who think rosé wine is for wimps. Tavel is an appellation exclusively for rosé wines, but confusingly the neighbouring Lirac appellation produces both red, white and rosé, although is better known for its reds.

Although the village of Lirac is a little to the north of Tavel, we head out of Tavel to the east back on to the D976 heading to ROQUEMAURE, where our destination is **Domaines Assemat and Castel Oualou**. (NB you need to book an appointment here (tel: 04 66 82 65 65) and you'll need some directions), The landscape here is decidedly more rugged and it is this which helps to produce red wines which tend to have strong mineral character.



From Roquemaure you continue on the D976 northwards crossing to the left bank of the Rhône, followed shortly thereafter with a right turn (eastwards) on the D17 to CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE



Chateauneuf-du-Pape is very definitely on the tourist route, being the summer home of the Avignon Popes and the birthplace of a wine that most people have heard of. As such the village can be quite crowded, and there are some obvious tourist traps - but there are plenty of winetasting shops, and

those which are owned by a domaine tend to offer best value for money.

The wines of Chateauneuf-du-Pape are complex in part due to the fact that the appellation rules allow up to 13 grape varieties to be used: Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, Cinsault, Muscardin, Vaccarese, Picpoul and Terret (all red) and the following white varieties: Rousanne, Grenache Blanc, Clairette, Bourboulenc and Picardin. These are blended with the red grapes to lighten the colour and regulate the maturation of the wine. Also in the village is an interesting wine museum ([Musée du Vin Brotte](#)) on the route d'Avignon

Although most of the old Pope's palace is now in ruins, there is one tower which affords a great view over the region (down to the Alpilles in the south, and the Ventoux range to the east - well worth the climb.

There are many good winemakers, chateaux and domaines in the region, many with names you may find familiar. Hence choosing one or two means missing many others which are equally worth visiting. Nearby is the [Domaine de Beurenard](#), which is one of the domaines I would select for a visit - the Coulon family makes an excellent standard of wines, with rich bouquets and great structure - these are BIG wines, which need some ageing to be at their best (5-10 years depending on vintage). Open daily except Sunday - 10, Avenue Pierre de Luxembourg (Route d'Avignon). There is also a winemaker's museum here (Musée du Vigneron) at their other domaine at Rasteau in the Côtes du Rhône (see www.beurenard.fr/)

The other recommended visit would be to **Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe**, a personal favourite as this was one of the first Chateauneuf wines I tasted. The domaine has a particularly hot microclimate, which enables them to pick their ripe grapes up to a week earlier than neighbouring domaines.

Vieux Télégraphe's blend is a typical one, with Grenache accounting for around two thirds, the rest being made up of Syrah and Mourvèdre in roughly equal proportions, and a tiny bit of Cinsault. When I first visited, unannounced I was lucky enough to be shown around by the redoubtable Henri Brunier who did so much to make this wine one of the flagship wines of the appellation. But since the 1980s, it has been his 2 sons who have managed the vineyard, (classy website at www.vignoblesbrunier.fr/)

Domaine du Vieux Telegraphe is at BEDARRIDES - head east out of Chateauneuf-du-Pape on the Chemin de Bedarrides (only about 2-3 miles). You will need to phone ahead to check they are open to visitors - Tel: 04 90 33 00 31.

From here your options are to head north and visit the town of ORANGE with its Roman remains, or south to AVIGNON.

The direct route back to St Remy-de-Provence is about 25 miles, and the whole day involves no more than about 60 miles travelling.

These 3 itineraries will provide you with an excellent understanding of the wealth of wines available in the Southern Rhône. Real enthusiasts may choose to spend a little more time exploring some of the Côtes du Rhône Villages such as Sablet, Vinsobres, Roaix, Rochegeude, Seguret, Valreas and Visan to name but some.

Other extensions to the trip would be west to the Costières de Nimes, or east to the vineyards of Provence. This is probably the best area in France to explore many different styles of wine, as you are spoilt for choice.

Contact Details:-

Domaine Maby rue St Vincent, 30126 Tavel;

T:04 66 50 03 40 F: 04 66 50 43 12

Domaine de Castel Oualou Vignobles Assemat, 30150 Roquemaure

T:04 66 82 65 65 F: 04 66 82 86 76

Domaine de Beurenard Paul Coulon et fils, avenue Pierre-de-Luxembourg, 84231

Chateauneuf-du-Pape

T: 04 90 83 71 79 F: 04 90 83 78 06 E:paul-coulon@beurenard.fr

Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe Vignobles Brunier, BP5, 84370 Bedarrides T:04 90 33 00 31 F:04 90 33 18 47