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Avignon - Great City Of The Popes

By Steven Cronin

Avignon, an enticing medieval town in southern France, is found in the region of Provence. At times

referred to as city of the popes, Avignon was sanctuary for nine such men who sought reprieve from the hostilities of Rome. Once established, these illustrious men embarked on an architectural odyssey, and a distinguished town was born.

Today, Avignon is a magnet for sightseers in quest of rich history and an ambience absorbed in fervour, none more so than during the annual drama festival. Every July thousands of visitors congregate in support of this celebrated occasion, though accommodation may perhaps come at a premium. If you can endure the squeeze then this event comes especially recommended.

The heart of Avignon is enclosed via a commanding wall, constructed in the fourteenth century by the now occupant popes, and serving as a gauge of their intent for remaining at their recent quarters. These prominent walls prevail today – as does much of the ancient architecture - in a remarkably preserved state, presenting an immense contrast among early and progressive worlds.

Set against the magnificent backdrop of Palais des Papes, the bustling principal market of place de l'Horloge is alive with activity. Business prospers as tourist and native endeavour to seek bargain of the day. Take a seat, quench your thirst, and devour the unique ambience afforded from this mature, town emporium.

Neighbouring the frenzied coffee shops and market district, you soon discover the Musee du Petit Palais and its fine collection of religious art. Some of this work dates as far back as the thirteenth-century, inspiring many a young artist privileged to have encountered this distinguished city.

On behalf of modern art, the Musee Calvet is well worth a look, possessing a number of exquisite works. Once engrossed in the splendour of these canvases, afternoons merely lapse unnoticed, every print inciting your mind's eye.

Protruding from the riverbank, the Pont d'Avignon is testament of the sands of time. Built in the fourteenth-century in support of a developing township, this charismatic bridge was relentlessly

plundered by the ceaseless course of the Rhone, ultimately succumbing in the seventeenth-century when preservation was considered no longer viable. Today it remains as a monument to the triumph of the river and is perhaps the most instantly recognisable feature of Avignon.

Steven Cronin writes for Travel Sargas online magazine, the number one home for travel reviews, opinion, news, insight and special offers. For further reading please visit

<http://www.sargas.co.uk>

The Attractions Of Owning Property In Provence

By Cecil Jones

France is the world's number one tourist destination, and within this country of wondrous natural beauty one of the most-visited regions is the area of southeast France known as Provence.

The classic region of Provence, as named by the Romans, was a huge area that stretched west from the current Italian border near Nice to Marseille at the mouth of the Rhône. Nowadays when we refer to Provence we generally exclude the Mediterranean coast, now called the Côte d'Azur (or Côte Varoise near Saint-Tropez), and think of the area that stretches north of the coast a 150 kilometers or so to the vineyards and rolling countryside, dotted with tiny villages, in the area around Aix-en-Provence and Avignon.

Provence offers a number of unique attractions not only for a tourist but also for those who would like to buy property and settle down here. A Mediterranean climate featuring more than 300 days of sunshine per year is a major drawing card. Whether you enjoy swimming at nearby seaside beaches or hiking in the hills, the climate of Provence offers numerous advantages for those who are physically active and enjoy the out-of-doors. And even with its well-deserved reputation for warm and sunny weather, major ski resorts in the Alps are only a drive of two hours or less from most parts of Provence.

While Provence is best known for its warm-weather attractions, many visitors especially enjoy visiting in the winter, when there are few tourists and the days are bright and sunny with mild temperatures. If you purchase property and take up residence in Provence, you will not have to worry about heavy heating bills in the winter, for even in the coldest month of the year the temperature during the day ranges from 3° to 15° degrees centigrade (37° to 59° Fahrenheit).

Provence is also rich in history. Well before the arrival of Caesar's legions in the first century BC, Greeks and Phoenicians fishermen and traders established villages along the coastline. The region got its name when it became a province of the Roman Empire. Many antiquities from the Roman era remain, as do churches, monasteries and cathedrals dating back to the Middle Ages. Many villages still have their original ramparts constructed in medieval times to ward off invaders.

While it is best known for its countryside attractions, in recent decades Provence has evolved into one of the most sophisticated regions of France, thanks partially to the fact that many Europeans and North Americans rent seasonally or have purchased homes here. Marseille, France's second largest city, is a

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major port and features world-class boutiques, as do Avignon and Aix-en-Provence, both of which are university towns. Orange, north of Avignon, and Aix are also famous for their summer opera festivals, and Avignon for its world-renowned theatre festival in July. Aix hosted a major Cézanne exhibition in the summer of 2006 that drew visitors from all over the world.

If you fancy life in a small village set in the vineyards for which the region is famous, there are many picturesque localities that beckon in Provence. Travel magazines rhapsodize about the constellation of villages perchés in the Luberon region east of Avignon. Each of these hilltop villages – Gordes, Bonnieux, Lacoste and Roussillon, to name only a few – seems more charming than the last. Equally seductive are the towns and villages of the Alpilles area south of Avignon, among them Saint-Rémy-de-Provence (many of Van Gogh's paintings were created near here), Eygalières and Les

Baux-de-Provence. Provençal villages are especially enjoyable to visit when the weekly open-air markets are taking place.

In addition to its beautiful countryside and vivid colors, which drew many of the Impressionist painters here, Provence is also renowned for its herbs and its aromas. In the springtime, take a walk in the countryside and you can breathe in the fragrances of thyme, rosemary and lavender. In the spring the apple and cherry trees are in full bloom. One of the most enjoyable times to visit Provence is in autumn, when the annual grape harvest is underway and the vines are just beginning to take on their fall colors.

During any time of the year you can enjoy the fine food and drink for which France and this region are well known. Restaurants abound everywhere in the region, ranging from sidewalk cafés to family-run village restaurants that routinely offer regional cuisine of a level that would be awarded high marks by restaurant critics in other countries. For fine dining there are numerous Michelin-starred establishments, among them Bistro d'Egaylières at Eygalières, and the famed L'Oustaù de Baumanière at Les Baux-de-Provence.

With all of these attractions it is no wonder that Provence is a must-see destination for anyone who visits France. And for the visitor who is interested in establishing a residence or owning a vacation home in France, Provence should be at the top of locations to consider, both in terms of an enjoyable lifestyle and a sound investment that will appreciate in value.

Cecil Jones is a Philadelphia attorney, businessman and dedicated Francophile. He is the CEO of Just France Sales,

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