

Instant weekend ... Marseille

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Drink in the view ... enjoy an aperitif at La Caravelle. Photograph: Alamy

Why go now?

Plunge into Mediterranean springtime with a visit to Marseille's annual **Salon des Vignerons et des Producteurs Fermiers** (French Winegrowers and Farmers Spring Fair, savim.eu) taking place at Parc Chanot from 28-31 March. The €5 entrance ticket (glass of wine included) affords visitors the chance to browse stalls of local cheeses, air-dried saucisson, hand-made chocolates and the finest French rosés. Purchases are a bargain, as stalls are manned by the producers themselves.

Checking in

Perched on a sweeping bend of the JF Kennedy corniche, **Le Péron** (00 33 4 9131 0141; hotel-peron.com; rooms from €79) is family run and friendly. Book a corner room (individually decorated in the 1960s) to gaze out from your bed over the Château d'If and the Med. If architecture is your passion, stay at **Hotel Le Corbusier** (00 33 4 9116 7800; hotellcorbusier.com; rooms from €59) on the seventh floor of the Swiss architect's futuristic complex, the Unité d'Habitation.

Hit the streets

Head down to La Joliette to check out the city's Euroméditerranée Project, where urban regeneration provides a sharp contrast to historical architecture. Start your wander at **Fort Saint-Jean**, built by Louis XIV and soon to be the southernmost point of Yves Lion's new Cité de la Méditerranée. Head up to the 19th-century **Cathédrale de la Major**, inspired by Istanbul's Hagia Sofia, and continue on to the brick **Joliette Docks**, built in 1858. Renovated by Eric Castaldi, the docks now house more than 300 offices. At the northern boundary of the planned Cité, Zaha Hadid's stunning **CMA-CGM** skyscraper is under construction.

Coffee break

Go Provençal: grab an aperitif and play pétanque on the hidden boules pitch at **Café Parisien** (1 place Sadi-Carnot). Or enjoy tea in the sunshine at **Les Filles du Soleil Gourmand** (71 cours Julien) on the city's most alternative

boulevard.

Neighbourhood watch

Until recently, the winding streets of **Le Panier**, Marseille's medieval quarter, were best known for their shady, criminal reputation. In recent years, however, wealthy buyers have developed a serious crush on the area's pretty townhouses, causing rapid gentrification. Try tasty tagines at **Les Treize Coins** (45 rue Sainte-Françoise), a tiny spot featured in Jean-Claude Izzo's Marseillaise detective novels. Shop for chandeliers decked out in faux flowers, fruit and crystals at **Des Années Lumières** (rue du Panier, near rue des Mauvestis). Got a serious sweet tooth? Stop into **La Chocolatière du Panier** (49 rue du Petit Puits), where three generations of Le Rays have been crafting chocolates according to a secret family recipe.

Retail therapy

Shops are crammed into the streets surrounding rue Paradis, just east of the port, and a shopper's paradise it is indeed. Try hit milliner **Manon Martin** (10 rue de la Tour) for heavenly hats, or **Honoré** (121 rue Sainte), where owner Annick designs funky items in the boutique behind a tiny tapas restaurant. No money to spend? Visit the small but smart **Musée de la Mode**, dedicated entirely to fashion (11 la Canebière, espacemodemediterranee.com).

Worked up an appetite?

It may have simple white tables and no-frills decor, but **Heng-Heng** (65 rue de la République) boasts the best Vietnamese cuisine in Marseille. Or sit on the sunny terrace of **La Virgule** (27 rue de la Loge), where Michelin-starred Lionel Lévy uses scientific cooking methods to create funky versions of classic 1970s comfort foods.

Big night out

Watch the sun set over the Vieux Port from **La Caravelle** (34 quai du Port); aperitifs are served from 6-9pm, accompanied by lashings of free snacks. Continue on to **La Friche la Belle de Mai**, a former tobacco factory that stages everything from cabaret or clubbing till dawn (41 rue Jobin; lafriche.org). End the evening with live jazz and a nightcap at **Pêle-Mêle** (8 place aux Huiles).

Escape the city

If the wines at the Salon des Vignerons served simply to whet your tastebuds, take a 30-minute train ride to **Cassis**. Pick up a free Vin et Terroir walking map from Cassis's tourist office and ramble off into the vineyards. If strenuous hiking is more your thing, the **Massif des Calanques** spans the 20km between Marseille and Cassis. It's a mix of rocky cliffs and parkland, and spring is the ideal time to explore the myriad trails and coves.

Getting there

Ryanair (0871 246 0000; ryanair.com) flies to Marseille from Stansted, Bournemouth, Glasgow and Dublin from £20 return, including all charges; **Easyjet** (0905 821 0905; easyjet.com) from Gatwick and Bristol from £46 and **bmibaby** (0871 224 0224; bmibaby.com) from Birmingham, from £46 (all fares include taxes and charges). Alternatively, hop on the **Eurostar** (08705 186186; eurostar.com) from St Pancras to Paris Gare du Nord, where 17 daily connections continue on to Marseille's Gare Saint-Charles, from £109 return.

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