

**ESCAPE TO
THE COUNTRY:
La Villa de
Mazamet**



A room with a phew

Melanie Wallwork falls in love with France's best bed and breakfast...

From the moment you step foot inside La Villa de Mazamet, the hustle and bustle of everyday life melts away.

Nestled in the pretty French market town of Mazamet, it is the perfect base for a relaxing trip but with easy access to a host of activities and days out.

The owners, Peter Friend and Mark Barber, spent three years restoring the building, which opened as a luxury bed and breakfast in May 2009.

With five sumptuous en suite bedrooms, it is too small to be classed as a hotel but benefits from the best of both worlds – the decor and splendour of a grand hotel but the intimacy of a smaller establishment.

Peter and Mark are on hand to help you make the most of your stay and are testament to why it has been classed as the number one B&B on travel website Trip Advisor since October 2009.

They were the perfect hosts as we explored the region, enjoying lunch at a cafe which was also a library and small theatre space one day and a mountain-side tartinerie the next.

The villa is a real home from home, the rooms are kitted out with everything you'd expect and more – from an iPod docking station to Egyptian cotton towels and free WiFi.

The establishment, at the foot of the Montagne Noire mountain range, is strictly non-smoking throughout, including the garden.

For those who want to take their relaxation up to the next level, Le Petit Spa with jacuzzi, sauna and massage is available at a small extra cost.

Breakfast is included in the room rate and you can ensure you are fully fuelled for the day's explorations with fresh



JUST PERFECT: One of the suites in La Villa de Mazamet

bread collected from the baker that morning, along with a choice of cereals, fruits, cheese, ham and cafetiere-made coffee.

A visit to Albi, added to the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites in 2010, is a must where you can explore the impressive Gothic-style Cathedral, built in the 13th century.

Around 45 minutes away by car or bus, Albi is also home to the Toulouse Lautrec Museum, dedicated to the great painter of the Post-Impressionist period.

Another must-visit destination is Carcassonne, also a UNESCO World Heritage site, which is home to a fortified medieval town.

La Cite is a vast castle which sits on the banks of the Aude River where visitors will find the self-contained town with narrow, meandering streets.

Back at base and dinner is served every evening, except Wednesday, and costs 32.50 euros for a four-course meal which will delight even the most discernable diner.

Peter uses fresh produce from the local market and ingredients from the garden to create French-inspired dishes, all washed down with the perfect wine from the villa's cellar.

Dining out is also a treat for the taste buds and there are some fantastic restaurants nearby serving up a variety of food, from succulent steaks to local delicacies at Le Table Rosette, which your hosts can recommend.

They can also advise on other days out to enjoy including visiting nearby chateaux, churches and villages built in the 12th and 13th century.

For those who enjoy outdoor pursuits, the region has a network of cycle

FACTFILE

■ Mazamet is one of the eastern most communities in the Department of the Tarn in the Midi-Pyrenees region

■ La Villa is 45 minutes north of Carcassonne Airport, served by flights with Ryanair from Liverpool and other UK airports

■ Bedrooms range from 85 euros (approximately £74) per night, for two including breakfast, to 140 euros (£122)

■ Other facilities include two guest lounges and a small swimming pool

■ The whole villa can be hired with the use of seven bedrooms for up to 14 guests

paths, kayaking on the River Agout and walks between 5km and 55km from the Lac des Montagne.

There are currently some fantastic offers online for a winter getaway, visit www.villademazamet.com.



COLLECTABLES



**allan
BLACKBURN**

of GB Antiques Centre,
Lancaster Leisure Park

Chaise Longue

SIMPLY put, chaise longue means "long chair".

It is an upholstered couch that is long enough to support the legs to provide comfort and rest during the day.

The ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians had resting couches, but the first daybed was developed in the late 1600s.

Used for sleeping at night and relaxing during the day, it really came to the fore in the 18th century. The first early examples were little more than elongated chairs, but the 18th century versions are typical of Régence, Louis XV and Louis XVI styles and were elegant, luxurious and sophisticated.

Modern chaise longues come in a variety of shapes, styles and finishes and are still regarded by many as being a luxury piece of furniture.



CHAIR: This chaise longue is £265

Sometimes referred to as a 'Fainting Chair', the chaise longue was deemed a necessary item during the 19th century for many ladies who would often pass out as their corsets were so tight.

Although there are many different shapes the traditional one that springs to mind is the couch shape that has a back that is raised at one end or on one side.

Others include The Récamier which has two raised ends, and nothing on the long sides and the Meridienne which has a high head rest and a lower foot rest joined by a sloping piece.

Nothing quite makes a statement in a living room like a chaise longue so purchase carefully and you'll have a stunning piece of antique furniture to enjoy for years to come.

This is a beautiful example of an Edwardian chaise longue. It is on sale at GB Antiques Centre for £265.

Allan Blackburn is owner of GB Antiques Centre at Lancaster Leisure Park. An antiques enthusiast for more than 20 years, his indoor centre now houses 85 dealers