

BY PETER FRIEND

LA VILLA DE MAZAMET: “The Australian Connection” and a great base to stay!

Peter Friend operates a luxury award winning boutique bed and breakfast in the town of Mazamet in the south west of France and tells us about the towns’ unique relationship with Australia.



La Cité, Carcassonne

Photo from La Marie du Carcassonne

Nestled in the foot of the stunning Montagne Noire mountain range, which divides the Midi-Pyrénées from the Languedoc, sits the town of Mazamet. Not on the traditional tourist map, Mazamet holds onto its wealthy 19th century heritage from its wool industry and lasting links with Australia.

At its height, 1 million kilos of sheepskins passed through Mazamet each year from the southern hemisphere, much of which originated in Australia where every single kilo of Europe-bound wool passed through the Town (and continued until the 1990s).

Australia, and many Australian individuals & businesses, developed long lasting relationships with Mazamet; so much so that wandering around the town today you will discover “rue d’Australie” as well as streets such as rue de Tasmanie, rue de Brisbane, rue de Melbourne, rue de Sydney & rue Adélaïde. The town hall also holds a plaque from the Australian government in recognition of the close ties that existed between the town and its antipodean friends.

The wealth created from the wool & leather industry in Mazamet manifested itself in the creation of many bourgeois family residences. Built between the 1850s and 1950’s, these beautiful homes, with a mix of European architecture, line the wide streets and stand testament to how Mazamet rose to become the 15th wealthiest town in the whole of France.

Since the end of the 1990’s, Mazamet has looked to re-invent itself. Playing on its strengths of a traditional market town located in a stunning natural setting, Mazamet now attracts international visitors who come to experience a true slice of French life without it being a typical tourist-trap and using the town as an excellent base from which to explore an area not widely known nor discovered.

A number of the beautiful family residences have been given a new lease of life, playing host to boutique guest accommodation, like the 1930’s “La Villa de Mazamet”, completely renovated by two Brits, myself & Mark Barber and opening for business in 2009.



“Testament to the success of La Villa de Mazamet comes in the form of winning the coveted Trip Advisor “Traveller’s Choice Award” in five successive years since 2011 (the only property in France with such an accolade)”

La Villa at Dusk

continued ▶



Pont Neuf & Cathédrale Sainte-Cécile, Albi



Photo from Tourisme du Tarn



“Not on the traditional tourist map, Mazamet holds onto its wealthy 19th century heritage from its wool industry and lasting links with Australia.”

La Villa offers six luxuriously appointed ensuite guest rooms, each with an individually styled marble fireplace and the original parquet flooring. Hotel quality beds, fine monogrammed bed linens, Tassimo hot beverage makers, flat screen TV/ DVD and iPod dock (together with fast free Wifi) provide guests with everything expected in a high quality hotel, yet with the personality and individuality of a B&B.

To complement the guest rooms the ensuites, with deep baths &

showers, have large fluffy Egyptian cotton towels on heated towel rails, dressing gowns, slippers and luxury Gilchrist & Soames amenities.

As part of the extensive renovations, Le Petit Spa (with a sauna, Jacuzzi and massage treatments) and an outdoor pool in the landscape gardens were added. Two guest lounges, a small library and a restaurant for breakfast & dinner provide space for guests to relax & unwind.

Guests start their day with a fresh

continental buffet of cold meats, cheeses, fresh seasonal fruits and French favourites like pain au raisin, croissants & pain au chocolat – as well as home made banana bread, Bircher muesli and flapjacks....and don't be afraid of asking for a flat white here as excellent coffee is served alongside a choice a choice of juices.

During breakfast, we talk to our guests about plans for the day, what's on locally, where to have lunch or where to take a picnic. For the enjoyment of guests, we have written a series of 8 self-drive day tours (with a map & driving directions) which take in the must-see locations in the area from two UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Albi & Carcassonne, to small medieval villages & vineyards. For those seeking

the regions even closer ties with Australia, explorer Lapérouse hails from Albi where his discoveries are documented in a designated museum.

For those seeking exercise over culture, the Montagne Noire provides extensive walking options, lakes for a refreshing dip as well as great road cycling (and for those who like pedal power but on the level, a 65km cycle track, using a disused railway line, starts just 200 metres from the gates of La Villa and bike hire is available).

Guest not wishing to venture far can explore Mazamet on foot, two 35 min architectural tours; three weekly markets (plus a night food market in July & August), a beautiful park, shops, cafés & bars are all within 10 mins walk...or 15 minutes by train and explore the neighbouring town of Castres and its Goya museum and

river-front shopping.

Six evenings a week, a four-course table d'hôte dinner is served at La Villa (poolside during the balmy summer evenings) using fresh local & seasonal produce to create a menu that changes daily....and complemented with a wine list of more than 25 labels, all from SW France and personally selected (and tasted!) by myself and Mark.

Testament to the success of La Villa de Mazamet comes in the form of winning the coveted Trip Advisor "Traveller's Choice Award" in five successive years since 2011 (the only property in France with such an accolade) as well as being included in "Le Guide Michelin" since 2012 for its well appointed accommodation and the Alistair Sawday's guide of high quality French B&B's. 🇫🇷

LOCATION FACTS

- Mazamet (Department of the Tarn in the Midi-Pyrenees) is located three hours from Bordeaux, Provence, the Dordogne & Barcelona.
- Carcassonne's UNESCO World Heritage "La Cité" is 45 mins to the south and the 13th century red-brick gothic cathedral in Albi (also a UNESCO World Heritage Site) is 45 mins to the north. Guest can arrive by air into Carcassonne or Toulouse airport and hire a car or a transfer may be arranged. Those exploring France by rail can arrive in Mazamet by train via Toulouse.

LA VILLA DE MAZAMET

- Open from 1st April to October 31st annually; rooms range from 110€ - 190€ per night, for two, including welcome drink, Wifi & breakfast. A 15% discount from the third night onwards is available throughout the season and online booking is available via the website.
- Dinner is priced at 35€ pp for the four-course table d'hôte menu that changes daily.
- Payment is available with MasterCard & Visa at no additional charge.

LA VILLA DE MAZAMET
 Owners: Peter Friend and Mark Barber
 W: www.villademazamet.com
 E: info@villademazamet.com