

A SECRET PART OF FRANCE



What strange times we find ourselves in! Like many I am missing the thought of holidays, sunshine and sitting at a café watching the world go by. But on the flip side I am also concerned to be surrounded by hundreds of people around swimming pools, beaches, at the cafes and restaurants. It is with this need for a more secluded holiday that I would like to introduce you to one of the hidden gems in France, the Sud Sainte Baume. It is an area of nine communes situated between the sea and the vineyards. Located on the southern



coast of the Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur area between Marseille and Toulon.

The area is famous for the AOC Bandol vines and was one of the first areas to receive the A.O.P appellation in 1941. The Bandol vineyard lies in a natural amphitheatre where the vines are planted on terraces that run from the Massif of Sainte-Baume down to the shores of the Mediterranean. There is nothing better than walking or cycling in the early hours being surrounded by acres of beautiful vines as the sun catches the leaves. Taking time in the afternoon to quietly visit one of the many caves for wine tasting is a must in the area. With sixty-seven to choose from, there will always be a wine to suit everyone. Part of the experience is to spend time with "viticulteur" hearing the history of their vineyard and how they produce their wine.

After an afternoon of wine tasting you can head to one of the beautiful Provençal ports along the coast. The port of Bandol is one of the largest and oldest seaside resorts on the coast and is nestled between the pine and mulberry tree covered hills. While the bay at Saint Cyr runs in a beautiful arc from La Madrague to Les Lecques with a wonderful flat walkway around the sandy beach with bars and restaurants that you can visit along the way. Or you could visit Sanary sur Mer a town full of Provençal charm. A rich cultural life animates the place with its authentic fishing port that boasts one of the most beautiful markets in France. When you have had your fill of the market (which is difficult) you can wander the beautiful pedestrian streets running away from the port.

The Sud Sainte Baume is also well known for its two hill towns of La Cadière d'Azur and Le Castellet. The former boasts a rich and diverse

"The port of Bandol is one of the largest and oldest seaside resorts on the coast"

cultural life and has kept the charm and authenticity of a medieval Provençal village. You can walk around the mainly pedestrian only back streets catching glimpses of the beautiful stone houses or the endless views over the plains below covered in olive trees and vines. While Le Castellet is a striking image of what the fortified villages were like. The houses grouped behind the ramparts around the castle and the church have retained their medieval charm, and the many craft shops encourage you to stroll around endlessly.

The area allows the visitor so much to do without the crowds further down the coast towards Nice and Cannes. Of course, for the adrenaline junkies there is also the world-famous Circuit Paul Ricard where the French Grand Prix is located, with opportunities for track days and karting. You will never be bored visiting the Sud Sainte Baume. ■

www.olivesandvines.eu