

Where to stay




➤ CUQ EN TERRASSES, CUQ-TOULZA

This 18th-century hotel is in Le Pays de Cocagne, the area around Toulouse, Carcassonne and Albi that became famous in the 16th century for producing a natural blue dye sold as little round balls (*cocagnes*). From its position in a hilltop hamlet there are wonderful views of the countryside and the hotel's terraced gardens and large pool. Weather permitting, guests sit outside to enjoy meals prepared by amiable Greek chef Andonis Vassalos, who runs the hotel with his partner Philippe Gallice. Vassalos shops daily at markets such as Revel ('The sort of place where you still get two 70-year-olds selling two tomatoes') but often gives the local produce a Greek twist. The decor is rustic, homely,

From its hilltop position there are wonderful views of the countryside and terraced gardens

occasionally haphazard, with terracotta flagstones, exposed beams and seven bedrooms of varying appeal. My favourites were the Terra Cotta room, a small double with steps leading down to the bathroom, and Lauragais, with its swathes of blue Toile de Joüy fabric.

 Fly to Toulouse with easyJet (0905 821 0905; www.easyjet.com), British Airways or bmi baby (0871 224 0224; www.bmibaby.com), or go by train. The hotel is 45 minutes from the airport


 **Cuq en Terrasses,** Cuq-Toulza, near Castres (00 33 5 63 82 54 00; www.cuqenterrasses.com). Doubles from €95; breakfast €12; five-course dinner €34. Closed November to March

menu (€42) or elaborate *dégustation* (€50) – include lighter versions of the hearty fare found in this part of south-west France and are eaten in a festive atmosphere around a communal table. Murrin introduces the main courses over an aperitif; Steggall presents the (Gaillac) wines and (Roquefort and Cantal) cheeses. The 19th-century farmhouse, one of just eight buildings in a hamlet surrounded by pastureland, has been updated along clean, contemporary lines and there is a chic lap pool in the back garden, which proves quite a draw despite the number of places to visit nearby, such as

LE MANOIR DE RAYNAUDES, MONESTIES

This exceptional new *maison d'hôtes*, hidden in the *bastide* region between Rodez and Toulouse, is excellent value for money. It is owned by Peter Steggall and his partner, the former BBC *Good Food* editor Orlando Murrin, who does most of the cooking and grows his own ingredients. His culinary creations – a seven-course


the medieval *bastide* town of Cordes-sur-Ciel. There are three guest rooms and four self-catering apartments.



 Fly to Rodez with Ryanair or to Toulouse with easyJet, British Airways or bmi baby. The house is less than two hours' drive from either airport. Or go by train to Toulouse

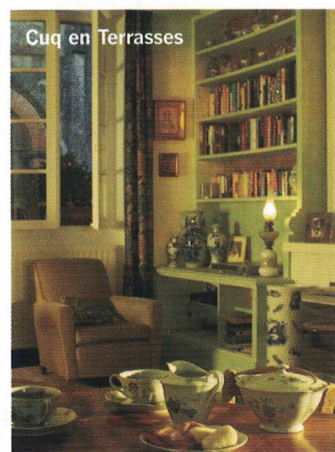
 **Le Manoir de Raynaudes,** Monesties (00 33 5 63 36 91 90; www.raynaudes.com). Doubles from €110 B&B

HOSTELLERIE LE CASTELLAS, COLLIAS

This *hostellerie* near the Pont du Gard aqueduct (a UNESCO World Heritage site) is a good option for those who want great food, plenty of fresh air and activities such as horse riding, kayaking, mountain biking and trekking (along the River Gardon) and gliding (at Uzès airfield). Owned and run by Raymond and Chantal Aparis and their daughter Aurélie, the hotel opened in 1989 in two 17th-century houses linked by an inner courtyard. The restaurant spills out on to a wisteria-covered terrace overlooking romantic gardens and a pool, and the cuisine is Michelin-starred (spring salad with foie gras shavings; duck in hazelnut oil; sea bass in a lemon-and-honey sauce). There are 17 bedrooms in assorted styles, incorporating wooden beams, terracotta and mosaic tiles, wrought-iron furniture and Provençal prints. I liked number 16, a double decorated in shades of stone and white with a freestanding bath (from €140), and 17, a large, blue-and-white suite (from €165). Collias is a sleepy labyrinth of medieval streets within easy reach of the Saturday market at Uzès as well as Avignon and Nîmes.

 Fly to Nîmes with Ryanair. Or go by train to Avignon

 **Hostellerie Le Castellat,** Grand' Rue, Collias (00 33 4 66 22 88 88; <http://lecastellat.fr>). Doubles from €80; breakfast €16. Closed 7 Jan to 13 Feb 



LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

Condé Nast

Traveller



TRUTH IN TRAVEL®

SEPTEMBER 2006 £3.50

WIN
A 10-NIGHT HOLIDAY
IN THAILAND

Spain's new-wave tapas bars

In Barcelona, Granada,
Seville and San Sebastián

Revealed

Morocco's

most seductive seaside town

The great picture show

Venice film festival

Experience the

Unspoilt Aegean

Emerald greens The finest golf in Ireland

The new Caribbean

The hottest resorts
on Turks & Caicos

