

VOL 8.0

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# discover

Sharing our love for France's spectacular waterways

## *Rick Stein's France*

Follow in the foodie footsteps of world renowned chef, Rick Stein, as he cruises the Canal du Midi and Canal de Garonne.



# Following in...

## YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO RICK STEIN'S CRUISE THROUGH FRANCE

Many years ago, this famous chef delighted all foodies and Francophiles worldwide with his French Odyssey TV series, which is still viewing on TV and via DVD around the world even today. Time has passed, though, and a few of the restaurants he visited are either closed or not what they were, so here's our updated version, offering a few more authentic places to dine as you cruise the delicious routes of the south of France.

The Canal Entre Deux Mers (the combined Canal du Midi and the Canal de Garonne) is the waterway that Rick Stein cruised for his Odyssey. He cruised aboard two hotel barges whilst making the series and the fine dining on these luxury barges is still founded on the wealth of fresh local produce and delicious local cuisine that he sought and discovered during his travels.

**You can follow in Rick Stein's footsteps aboard a choice of top luxury hotel barges. Those cruising the Canal du Midi include *Amour*, *Savannah*, *Roi Soleil* and *Esperance*. *Le Phenicien* cruises the Camargue's canal, the Rhône à Sète, and barge *Saint Louis* cruises the Canal de Garonne route near Bordeaux.**

*Ruth & the team*



# Introducing...

## AUTHENTIC CUISINE OF SOUTH WEST FRANCE

The culture of quality food in south west France is widespread and deeply entrenched. It is part of a lifestyle, of a quality of life, that has changed little over the years. It is a land of plenty, with a wide range of products from land and sea ending up on the table.

Rick Stein journeyed west to east, from Bordeaux to Toulouse, then to Sète and finally on to Aigues-Mortes.

You too can savour many of the same markets and restaurants that he visited.





## RIVER GARONNE + CANAL DE GARONNE



**Bordeaux** is where Rick Stein boarded the hotel barge for a journey up the Garonne River to the start of the Canal de Garonne at Castets-en-Dorthe. Bordeaux is a stunning city, worthy of an overnight stay and a day or two of sight-seeing and wine-tasting in its own right. Rick Stein appreciated the good traditional Bordelais cooking, and is seen sitting outside La Tupina café-restaurant in the city centre.

From **Castets-en-Dorthe** a side visit to make from your cruise in this region is a trip to Bazas, famous for its Boeuf de Bazas, which Rick Stein described as 'incomparable'. You can visit the local beef farm and enjoy entrecote de Bazas at Le Bistrot St Jean in the Place de la Cathédrale.

Luxury hotel barges can be found on the most beautiful waterways of France and offer delicious local cuisine and wines throughout their cruises, provided by their private on board chef. Many are highly trained to Cordon Bleu and sommelier standard and highly praised by their knowledgeable guests.





## RIVER GARONNE + CANAL DE GARONNE

**At Castets lock** at the entrance to the Garonne, Rick Stein, who is a sea and river food master chef, went fishing for Garonne eels with a local fisherman in a small dinghy. Locally caught day-fresh fish, eels and crustaceans are delicious and frequently served aboard luxury hotel barges along this route. During his cruise, Rick Stein finds the Canal de Garonne delightful and says that the area represents the very best of French produce and French cooking.

The village is well-worth a visit, with its extraordinary Canal-River lock (tidal, deep and with amazing historic flood markings) and its lock-keeper's cottage built high above the flood levels of the last century.

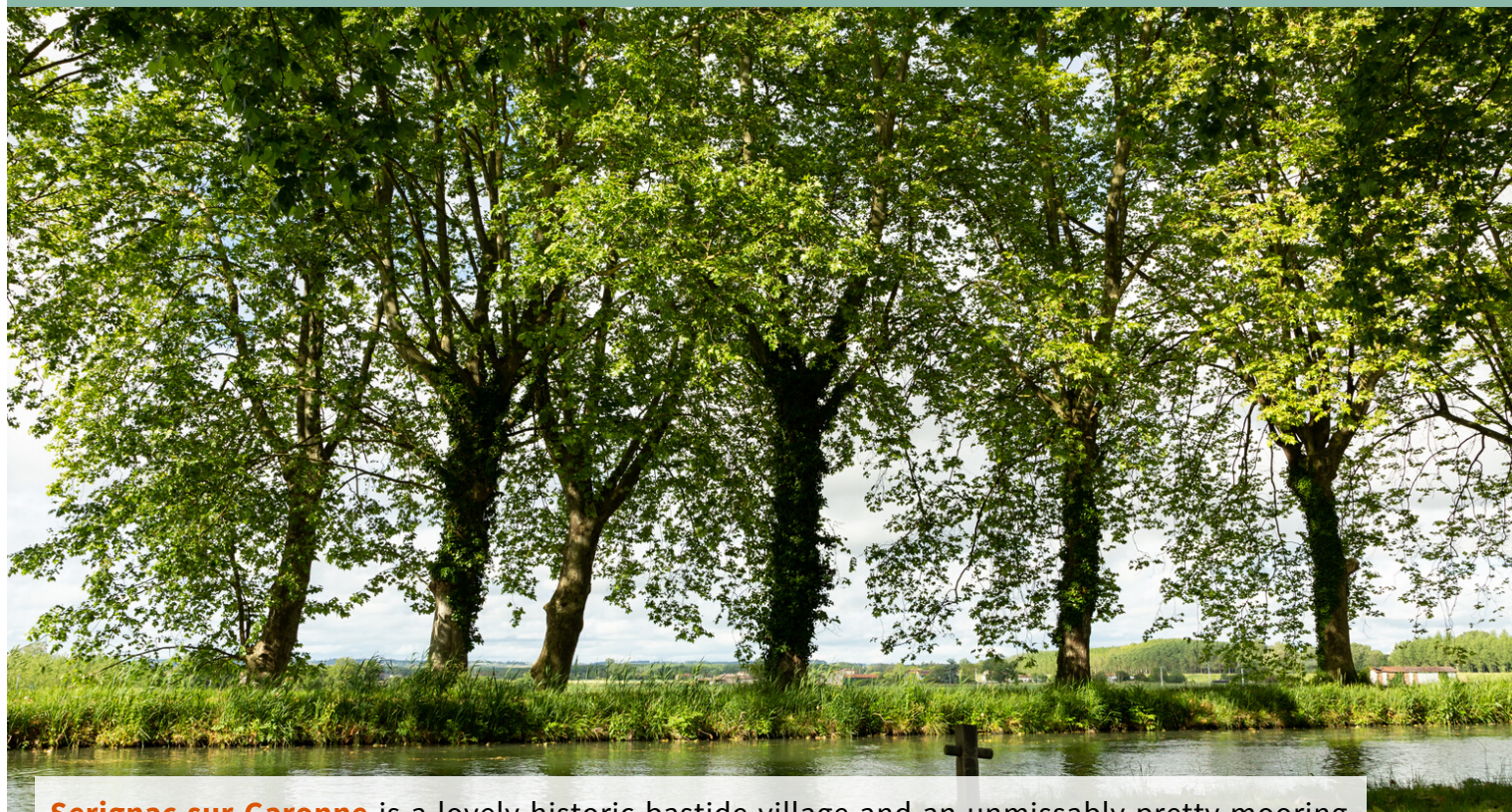


**Mas d'Agenais** is next to the Bernes lock. And the Crêperie des Matins Verts (now closed) is where the owner Yvette Pompele cooked Canard au Vin for Rick Stein, using the local Marmandais wine that he tasted at nearby Cocumont winery.

During the French Odyssey series, Stein often mentions the wonderful 'marriage' between local food and local wines, of which there are plenty. On board Saint Louis barge, for example, which cruises this same section of Stein's route, the wines are carefully selected to demonstrate this. Bold Malbecs from Cahors are teamed with duck, and lighter Medalion d'Or reds and rosés from Fronton work beautifully with quail or guinea fowl. Cruising in the Bordeaux region offers the taste-buds a vast selection of world class wines featuring St Emilion, Pomerol, Fronsac and so on. All are carefully selected and with around 400 bottles safe in the constant cool of Saint Louis barge's hold, you can be sure of a superb and varied wine experience on board.



## RIVER GARONNE + CANAL DE GARONNE



**Serignac sur Garonne** is a lovely historic bastide village and an unmissably pretty mooring for a hotel barge. The church spire has a very interesting intentional twist, restored by master carpenters. Here's where you'll find the Restaurant l'Escale, recommended by Saint Louis' captain, serving very good, honest local French cuisine in an authentic, friendly atmosphere. There is also Le Prince Noir down the road for those who prefer something more upmarket.

### **Fongrave (Lot river)**

Whilst the Ferme des Tuilleries no longer offers its Tourtière demonstrations nor sales of this apple dessert, it still supplies the area with wonderful fresh vegetables and fruits, picked daily at their best, including plums. Catch the harvest in mid-August, or not far away lies the locally famed Prune 'Museum' (you'll be amazed!) where you can see how it's all done now and in past times, and purchase an amazing variety of fresh prune products to take home.

Just across the Lot, on the south bank, lies Le Temple, where at Latour de Marliac, Monet purchased the water lilies that still grow in his famous garden at Giverny, near Paris. The lily gardens are a favourite excursion for barge guests, stopping there for lunch before returning to their cruise, and during July and August you can also experience a wonderful evening's dinner concert in the grounds.



## RIVER GARONNE + CANAL DE GARONNE

### Valence d'Agen

Above Valence run the Quercy hills and the whole region is one of France's premier fruit-growing areas. Quercy melons and cherries delighted Rick Stein and in this area you can also savour apples, kiwi fruit, apricots and the renowned Chasselas grape of Moissac.

The weekly market at Valence d'Agen is superb, an excellent example of French provincial life – where the essential food stuffs are bought and sold, but also where the community gathers to pass the time and catch up with all the village news. Saint Louis' guests visit with their chef and challenge him to create the evening's dishes with their choice of wonderful fresh meats, fish and vegetables on offer and delicious ingredients for the dessert course, too.



### Moissac

The attractive port of Moissac is very popular, loved by guests and crew alike. The Abbey (the oldest in France) and the town itself draw tourists from the world over. The broad river Tarn also flows close by providing an opportunity for a short river cruise on your trip. Rick Stein cooked pike in the kitchens of the canal and riverside Pont Napoleon hotel and ate foie gras and goose in the restaurant. The chef in that episode has now opened his own self-named restaurant, *La Table de Michel Dussau*, and you'll find it by the river at Agen.

In Moissac's main square, right next to the wonderful Abbey, is restaurant *Le Florentin*. It's busy, bustling and an excellent spot to savour an honest French and reasonably-priced meal. Barge vacation guests often dine here and relax with a digestif to watch the world go by.



## RIVER GARONNE + CANAL DE GARONNE

### Toulouse

Like Bordeaux, Toulouse is historic and attractive – a fascinating mixture of the old and the new (the European Space Centre is located here) and it's easy to arrange an extended stay before or after your barge cruise. The Victor Hugo market, thought to be one of the best markets in the world, was an immediate attraction for Rick Stein.

He recommends the traditional dish of Pissaladière and of course the famous Toulouse sausage, a firm mixture of cured and fresh pork (usually cooked in duck fat), which are available from the market's charcuterie, the best butcher in town, he claimed. He dined, well and inexpensively, close to the market in an ordinary restaurant with everyday French families – “better than a posh gourmet restaurant”.

Rick Stein also enthused about the completely authentic character of Bar Père Louis (founded in 1889), and also enjoyed their speciality aperitif, Quinquina.





## CANAL DU MIDI + CANAL RHÔNE À SÈTE

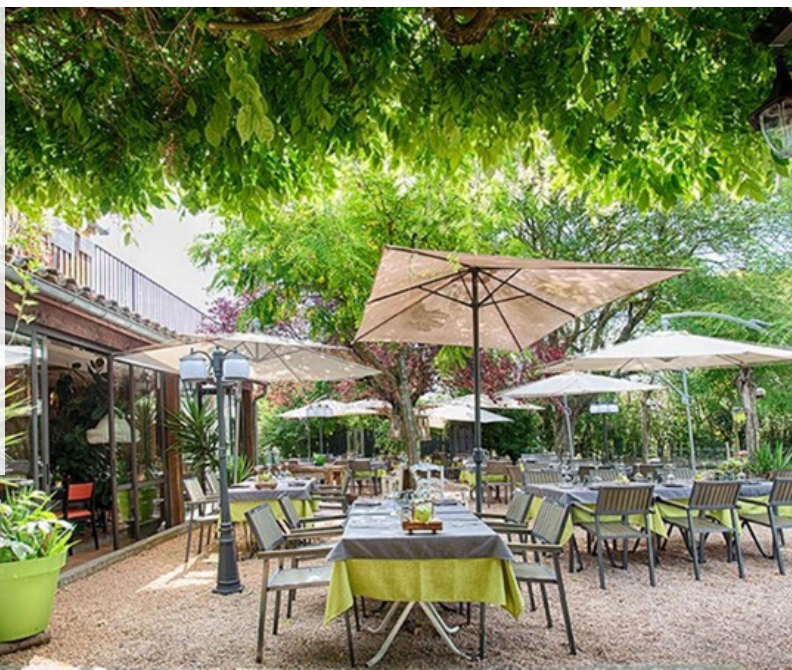
### Castelnaudary

Travelling eastwards from Toulouse on the Canal du Midi, Rick Stein visits a renowned local wine-maker, Pi  re Cros, to taste his 'Vieilles Vignes' made from the Carignan grape, before moving on to Castelnaudary, home of the popular cherished dish of Cassoulet.

He visits the canteen of the French Foreign Legion to discover that their lunches include simple French dishes of haricots verts wrapped in bacon, confit of duck gizzards and pasta with duck, but is so inspired by the huge number of nationalities in the force, especially from north Africa, that he devises a special recipe for a tagine of lamb and sweet spices.

Along this route you'll be able to cruise with a greater variety of hotel barges, each offering varying amounts of accommodation with luxury service and excursions to many of the places mentioned in this guide. Gourmet cuisine awaits all hotel barge guests as does one meal ashore, which is typically at a Michelin star restaurant.

A great variety of self drive hire boats are also available, which provides ample opportunity for authentic dining with the local population. Le Tirou (pictured bottom right), voted the best for cassoulet, would be one such recommendation.





## CANAL DU MIDI + CANAL RHÔNE À SÈTE

### Carcassonne

Once a stronghold of the Cathars, a rebellious religious sect eventually exterminated under the Pope's edict, the 'new' town of Carcassonne is dominated by its now restored medieval castle, le Cité, famously featured in many Hollywood films.

Truffles are a favourite ingredient for fine dining but if you'd like a taste that won't break the bank head for l'Atelier de la Truffe, a truffle and wine bar. Local truffle farmer, Phillippe Barrière, runs this small authentic establishment at the foot of the Cité, another fabulous treat for all cruising visitors, whether on board a hotel barge like Savannah or a self-drive hire boat.

Rick Stein visits the Hotel d'Alibert, a favourite hotel-restaurant in Caunes-Minervois, a medieval village nearby, to discover a local dish of tripe and veal legs, cooked in vinegar with a whole bottle of white wine.





## RIVER GARONNE + CANAL DE GARONNE

### Trèbes

A very popular town, with the waterway lined by many smaller boats, was passed through on the way to Homps. He stops at Eric Saulnier's farm and at a ferme auberge enjoys a five course menu – of garlic soup, rabbit and hazelnut pâté, salade au chèvre chaud, joint of roast kid with potato gratin and strawberries and chantilly cream to finish.

By the waterway itself, Savannah barge recommends Le Moulin by the triple lock, a place to stop and sample honest French cooking where everything is fresh and original.

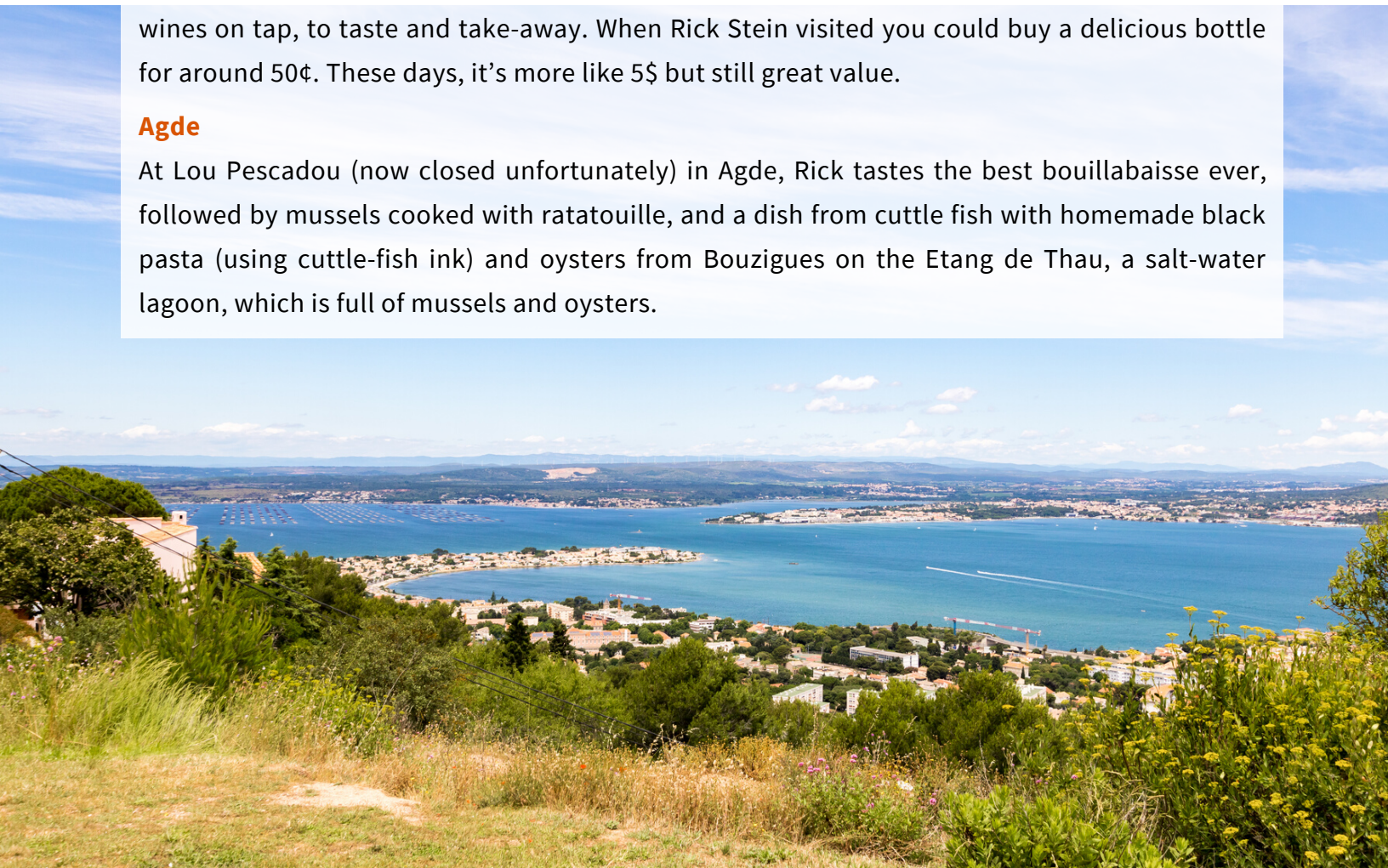


### Argeliers

A fine winery to do some tasting – a caveau dégustation – is at Argeliers, with medal winning wines on tap, to taste and take-away. When Rick Stein visited you could buy a delicious bottle for around 50¢. These days, it's more like 5\$ but still great value.

### Agde

At Lou Pescadou (now closed unfortunately) in Agde, Rick tastes the best bouillabaisse ever, followed by mussels cooked with ratatouille, and a dish from cuttle fish with homemade black pasta (using cuttle-fish ink) and oysters from Bouzigues on the Etang de Thau, a salt-water lagoon, which is full of mussels and oysters.





## CANAL DU MIDI + CANAL RHÔNE À SÈTE

### Narbonne

Built by the Romans 2,000 years ago it is reached by a branch canal from the Midi. Here, Rick Stein's visit to the fabulous local market inspires him to cook sardines, fresh from the previous night's catch, teamed with his simple tomato and red onion salad.

He discovers a local speciality called Boudin Blanc, white pudding – a type of sausage made at Hérépian from bread, eggs, milk, neck of pork and seasoned with nutmeg. The mixture is then wrapped in caul before baking. To serve, fry slices in duck fat!

He tries out Marcel Proust's favourite tea-time treat, the Madeleine, made with honey from local heather blossom and served with locally grown apricots.

He then stops at Pézenas to sample little lamb pies, known as the Petit Pâté de Pézanas. Tall, capped pastry cases are filled with minced meat and spices, always eaten warm, with wine.



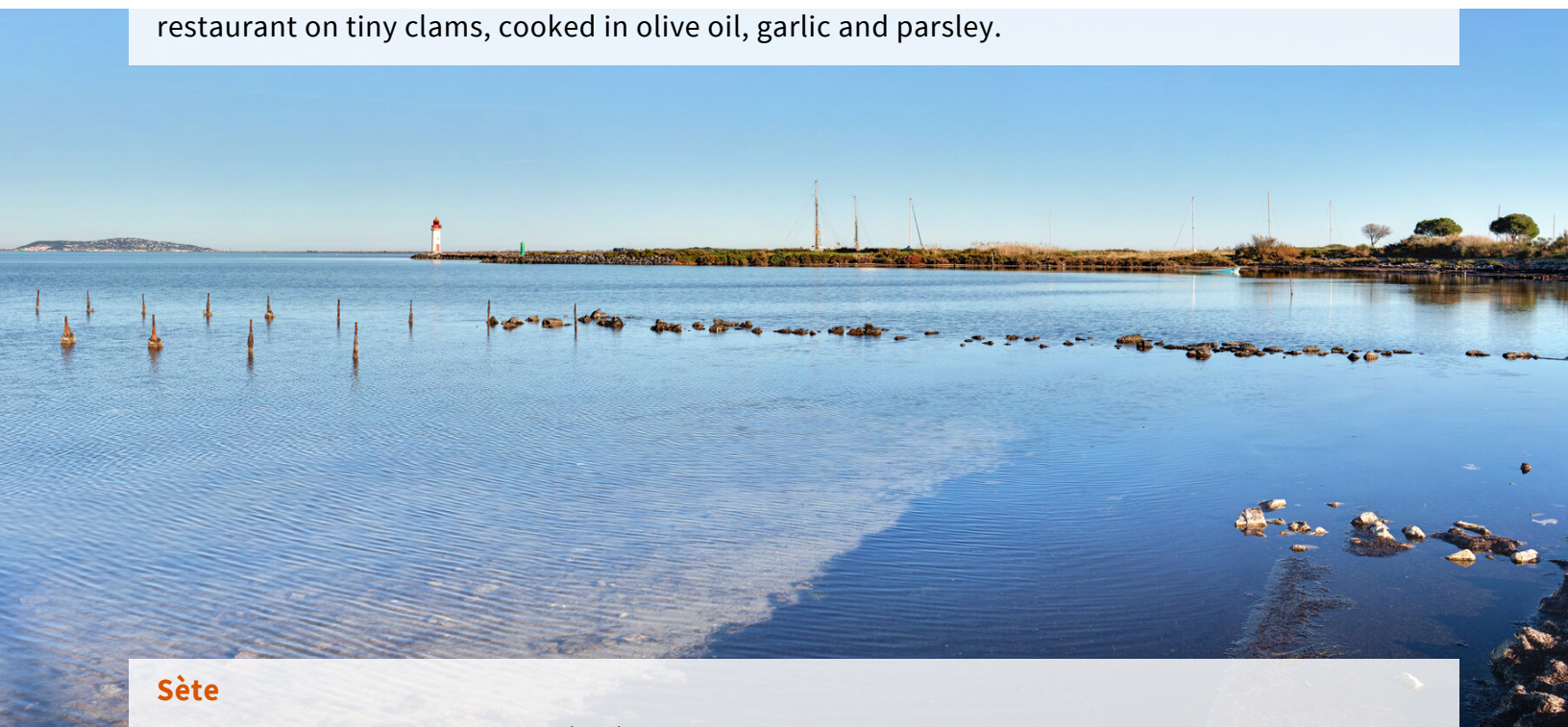


## CANAL DU MIDI + CANAL RHÔNE À SÈTE

### Marseillan

The famous vermouth, Noilly Prat (pronounce the 't'), is made here and stored in oak barrels for nearly a year in the open sunshine which improves the flavour. Rick Stein cooks with this to make a John Dory (corrupted from jaune d'orée = yellow gold) fish dish with cucumber, crème fraîche and a basil sauce.

The oyster trestles serve many different growers, reliant on the Grade A waters of this inland sea to produce the best sea-food in Europe, if not the world. He dined at a small local restaurant on tiny clams, cooked in olive oil, garlic and parsley.



### Sète

Joining the Canal du Rhone à Sète, the town borders the sea and is a busy fishing port. Although small fish is landed, it is not thrown back into the sea – everything gets eaten. Meat stuffed squid is a local speciality, which Rick Stein has for lunch at Les Desmoiselles Dupuy, just outside the fish market. But he prefers squid another way, simply in a sea-food ragout with mussels, herbs, linguini and langoustine.

There are about fifty restaurants along the quayside in Sète, perfectly placed to watch the water jousting, a team sport played in the evenings up to Bastille Day (July 14th) when the winner is decided. Rick Stein cooks the famous cèpes omelette with mushrooms just bought at the roadside.



## CANAL DU MIDI + CANAL RHÔNE À SÈTE

### Aigues-Mortes

Tielle de Sète – or octopus pie – is the local dish in Aigues Mortes although Rick Stein dislikes the pastry – he thinks the Cornish pasty would be better! He discovers the local Fleur de Sel (salt) which smells like violets as it dries and is tainted pink by the shellfish in the water. He barbecues gilt-head sea-bream, known locally as Dorade, in olive oil, fennel, garlic, thyme and Camargue sea-salt.

Barge Le Phénicien, which begins its cruise to Avignon from this town, recommends a delightful restaurant, La Camargue, in the Rue de la République. Its gypsy style provides musical entertainment whilst you dine, either outside or in, on authentic French cuisine. Not far from Aigues-Mortes and close to Saint Gilles, this barge also recommends Château d'Or et de Gueules, a great vineyard to visit and discover delicious organic and vegan-friendly wines. Aigues Mortes is also cruised by luxury barge Roi Soleil, which carries eager guests eastwards from the Canal du Midi through the Camargue to the Rhône on this great culinary journey.





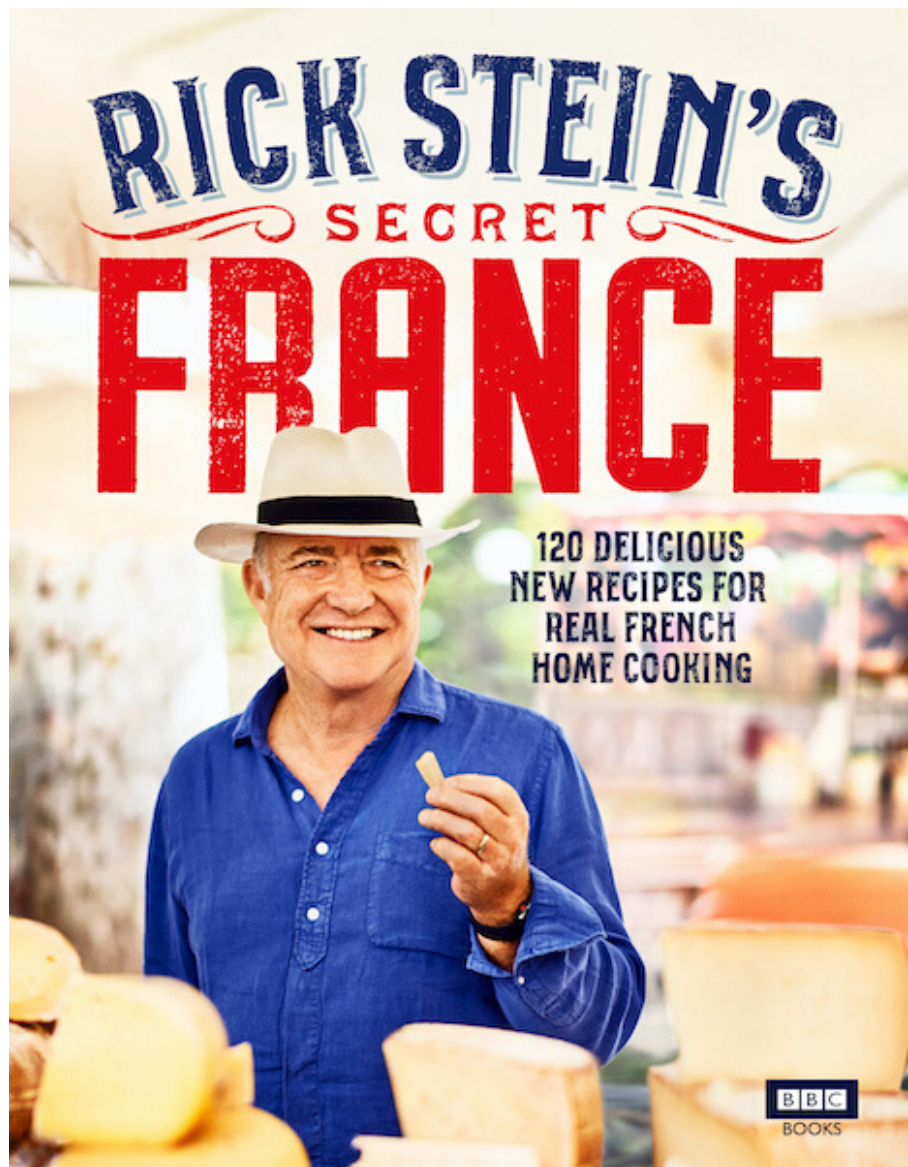
# Secret France

## RICK STEIN'S LATEST FRENCH ADVENTURE

There's nothing more relaxing than watching Rick Stein sojourn around France, taking over another's kitchen to recreate time-honoured local dishes to share with us, with perhaps a twist of his own magic.

In 2019 he completed a second, land-based tour of this wonderful country that he called Secret France, visiting many more regions, such as Alsace, Champagne and Burgundy to seek out delicious recipes in authentic kitchens. The collection is gathered together in a new book of the same name.

From Dieppe to Cassis, Stein tastes his way through the countryside discovering ever more delicious ways to enjoy fresh and home-grown produce cooked in the simplest of ways.





# Next steps

## HOW TO BOOK A BOATING HOLIDAY IN RICK STEIN'S FRANCE

**Find out more about cruising the waterways of France:**

[french-waterways.com/hotel-barge-cruises/barging-in-france/](http://french-waterways.com/hotel-barge-cruises/barging-in-france/)

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