



On the Table



Clockwise from top left: Beach time south of the city at Calanque de Saména, sashimi of sea bream with strawberries and avocado at Chez Pépé, and drinks and dinner at Sépia.



Yes Way, Marseille

Fishing for local flavor in this city by the sea.

BY ALEXIS STEINMAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY CATHERINE KARNOW

OUR RAW OYSTERS ARRIVE, FITTINGLY, DELIVERED BY A WAITER SPORTING A *MARINIÈRE* – THE classic striped French sailor shirt. Instead of the usual half-shell presentation, craggy top shells cover the briny bivalves. When I ask the enigmatic owner, Fabien Rugi, about the story behind the second shell, he winks and says, “Because they’re prettier that way. And you have something to discover – a surprise.”

On the Table



Clockwise from top left: Sardine cans from all over the world at La Boîte à Sardine, the restaurant's interior, the Panier neighborhood, and La Bonne Mère's anchovy pizza.

Rugi's words and his funky fish shack, La Boîte à Sardine, capture the culinary spirit of Marseille: locally driven, convivial, and original. Though it's France's second-largest city, locals liken the metropolis to 111 villages (for the number of *quartiers*, or districts, it has). Marseille's dining scene, like the salty air that blows along its Medi-

terranean shores, has a casual vibe and a welcoming warmth. The culinary landscape is infused with a collective, can-do spirit shaped by the waves of immigrants who have passed through its bustling port.

Anchored in an oasis of enviable ingredients, Marseille is where Provence comes crashing into the sea. Pungent garlic and

earthy tomatoes mingle with briny sardines or succulent squid and generous glugs of olive oil. "All these flavors are *populaire*," which translates as both "of the people" and "informal," local food writer Pierre Psaltis explains.

Marseille's signature dish, bouillabaisse, began as a simple stew made from fishermen's leftover scraps but has evolved into overpriced tourist fare. To truly taste Marseille, leave the squawking seagulls at the Old Port behind and follow the scooters to these nearby neighborhood tables. Located in or around the *centre-ville* (city center), they're all easily reached by public transport, on a bike, or on foot – depending on how much you want to work up an appetite. Like Rugi's oysters, these gastronomic gems are worth uncovering.

Catch of the Day LA BOÎTE À SARDINE

Although its walls are lined with sardine tins from around the world, Fabien Rugi's whimsical spot serves up the freshest fish in town. Chef Céline Bonniou "knows how to cook every fish and crustacean in the Mediterranean," Rugi says. Depending on how the local fishermen fare, diners can dive into sautéed sardines, whelks dipped in aioli, and flash-fried sea anemones. The smiling staff is happy to suggest a wine (white only) and offer a limoncello for dessert. From the yellow buoys strung across the ceiling to the stools made from giant white hooks, the restaurant is covered in nautical kitsch, made cool by Rugi's window-stylist wife. Plan to while away an afternoon at this mostly lunch-only spot – dinner is served only on Thursdays. 2 boulevard de la Libération, Réformés-Canebière; laboiteasardine.com.

Garden Retreat SÉPIA

A tiny footbridge takes you to this chalet, tucked under a canopy of pine trees in Marseille's oldest park, Jardin de la Colline Puget. Young chef Paul Langlère honed his culinary chops in Michelin-starred kitchens; now he produces seasonally driven, locally sourced cuisine suited to the garden setting. Amiable waiters in stylish linen-and-leather aprons serve just-caught bonito accompanied by avocado two ways – grilled and as guacamole sprinkled with mint from

On the Table



Left to right: Farmers' market finds in Cours Julien; grilled mackerel with pickled radish, onion, and cauliflower at Sépia; and Gaspard's Pisco Flower, a twist on the pisco sour, with elderflower, rhubarb, and lemongrass.

the restaurant's petite garden – and cod perched atop a celery root-and-zucchini “ri-sotto.” Even Sépia's name is local: It means “squid ink” in French, Italian, and Arabic – an homage to Marseille's multiculturalism and to the cuttlefish and calamari that swim in the Mediterranean. Pick a table in the minimalist-chic dining room, where wraparound windows dish up views of the city and sea, or on the straw-shaded terrace. Or settle in on the patio for parkside *apéros* – the French predinner drink ritual. 2 rue Vauvenargues, Saint-Victor.

Pizza Magnifique LA BONNE MÈRE

With its strong Italian ties, Marseille may rival New York for number of pizza parlors. Everyone is treated like a friend at this 25-seat joint run by childhood sweethearts Jérémy Piazza and Mahéva Angelmann. Sporting a “La Bonne Mère” trucker hat and chile-pepper-printed clogs, Piazza, the *pizzaiolo* with a last name to match, explains that his Naples-meets-Rome-style pies are all about simple, quality ingredients. Eat his words by ordering the delectable anchovy

pizza, topped with fresh *anchois* (elsewhere, this Marseille classic typically comes with tinned anchovies) and drizzled with garlic- and basil-infused olive oil. Like “la Bonne Mère,” the statue of a golden woman who watches over Marseille from the hilltop Notre-Dame de la Garde basilica nearby, Angelmann oversees the room, filling glasses with earthy nero d'Avola and handing out bonbons to kids. “All the wallets are the same here,” she says, praising pizza's appeal across economic strata. Reservations are a must. 16 rue Fort du Sanctuaire, Vauban; pizzeria-labonnemere.fr.

Nouvelle Comfort CHEZ PÉPÉ

Hunting-themed wallpaper, vintage photos, antique plates, and graffiti art create a hip, homey ambience here. The modern grandpa style (*pépé* means “granddad” in French) is an apt setting for chef-owner Jérôme Benoît's electric, convivial cuisine. He crafts tasty, inventive combos, such as grilled artichokes with mint, olives, and lardo di Colonnata, or steak tartare with green peas and bottarga. Known for his “amphibian”

TIP

“I like to wake around 7:30 AM, grab croissants at a nice boulangerie, have breakfast on a small beach in or near Marseille, then go snorkeling. Pointe Rouge is an amazing beach, especially before the crowds arrive (around 11 AM in summer). Your travel advisor can arrange a small boat to take you to beaches that aren't accessible by car or on foot.”

– Edwige Chevallier, owner,
W Travel France

food, where the land (meat) meets the sea (fish), Benoît has such a knack with sauces that local fans call him the “*homme de jus*,” the juice man. His picturesque plates – sprinkled with flowers and swooshed with sauces – reflect his past as an art dealer. On warm nights, dine on the sidewalk terrace while watching Marseillais stroll by. Benoît wants diners to eat, drink, linger, and laugh, just like at home. (Sister restaurant Mémé is slated to reopen in Longchamp this fall as well.) 15 cours Julien, Cours Julien.

Hipster Hangout BAR DE LA RELÈVE

This neighborhood hub puts a current spin on the beloved all-day French café. Fuel your morning with fresh OJ and homemade almond cake. The popular lunch offers three daily comfort-cuisine specials – monkfish with celery-root purée, say, or penne in watercress cream – and homemade desserts. Night brings small plates for sharing: rare beef with capers, garlicky *pan de tomate*, and wedges of *panisse*, Marseille's iconic chickpea fritters that put French fries to shame. Inside, just 24 seats fill the space, whose embossed wallpaper, mirrors, and long bar evoke classic bistro style. Outside, the seating capacity doubles – locals sit snug as sardines at tables that spill out onto the sidewalk. Over the beat of banter and '90s hip-hop, the affable Greg Hessmann, one of two owners, says, "This is a friends' bar. Just good wine and good food." If you lived in Marseille, Relève would be your local. 41 rue d'Endoume, Saint-Victor.

Wine Bar Bites LE TIRE-BOUCHON

This welcoming wine bar stands steps away from the colorful street art for which the bobo – bourgeois-bohemian – Cours Julien neighborhood is known. Pull up a stool, or stand, French-style, at the long zinc bar to sip small-production, mostly biodynamic or natural wines, such as the crisp Pouilly-Fumé from the Loire Valley's Domaine Alexandre Bain. French *bars à vins* offer a way to eat well without the formality of a restaurant. Here, what's in season inspires the ever-changing menu. Co-owner Laurent Biggi says of his market-driven cuisine, "The only rule is there are no rules." On the menu, for instance: razor clams spiked with kiwi, paper-thin slices of boudin (blood sausage) and beets, and crispy whole cod served with a dollop of aioli. The friendly atmosphere makes this a fine spot for solo dining. 11 cours Julien, Cours Julien.

AMUSE-BOUCHE

Extra-credit epicurean exploration.

Coogee: It's worth the stroll or bike ride to the residential neighborhood of Baille to taste Marseille's best coffee. Pair your caffeine with a fresh-from-the-oven muffin, best savored on the café's vintage leather couch or on the terrace. 100 boulevard Baille, Baille.

Farmers' market: Provision for a beach picnic with heirloom tomatoes, whole-grain bread, and brousse du Rove – the local specialty goat cheese in a cone – at Cours Julien's happening market that sets up in the central square. *Wednesdays, 7 AM to 1 PM, Cours Julien.*

Gaspard: Sip thoughtfully crafted cocktails at this intimate spot, where palm tree wallpaper, a Mediterranean-blue bar, and dark wood walls create a tiki-chic vibe. 7 boulevard Notre-Dame, Palais-de-Justice.

MinaKouk: At this charming, tangerine-tinted café and tea-room, lunch on North African cuisine – chicken tagine and fava bean *harira* – or pop in anytime for homemade baklava and a glass of traditional mint tea. 21 rue Fontange, Notre-Dame-du-Mont.

Sylvain Depuichaffray: The display case at this popular patisserie is a pastry lover's dream, brimming with delights both classic (*brioche au chocolat*) and new (green-tea *mille-feuille*). Take your baked goods to go or tuck into them in the adjoining *salon de thé*. 66 rue Grignan, Opéra.



Drinks and diversion at all-day spot Bar de la Relève and (right) fruit-forward pastries at Sylvain Depuichaffray.

On the Table



Heirloom tomatoes, burrata, focaccia, and basil with the perfect pairing at Le Tire-Bouchon.

SOUTHERN CHARM

Essential Marseille details.

GO With 300 days of sun, Marseille has year-round appeal. To take advantage of its Mediterranean beaches and boating, visit from **April through October** – but **avoid August**, when many local spots shut down for summer holidays. Arrive by train (the TGV station is in the center of town) or plane (Marseille Provence Airport is just 15 miles away). You'll need at least three days to check out the street art; explore the area's limestone calanques (coves or inlets) by boat or hiking boot; search for treasures at Maison Empereur, France's oldest hardware store; sunbathe at l'Anse de Malmousque; and be wowed by the architectural wonder of MuCEM, the Museum

of the Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean.

STAY Housed in an eighteenth-century hospital, the 194-room **InterContinental Marseille – Hotel Dieu** is just steps away from the city's port. Its sprawling terrace serves up some of the city's best views and hosts soirees throughout the year. At Michelin-starred Alcyone, don't miss chef Lionel Levy's one-of-a-kind bouillabaisse milk shake. The hotel also has a new 12-passenger yacht available for day trips to nearby Calanques National Park. *Doubles from \$300, including a welcome amenity, breakfast daily, a \$55 dining credit, one complimentary cocktail per person, and complimentary spa access.* **VI**

The next culinary delight is closer than you think



Flanders - Belgium with its six beautifully preserved art cities

Antwerp, Bruges, Brussels, Ghent, Leuven and Mechelen and 122 Michelin star rated restaurants is closer than you think.

We are in the heart of Europe and less than 2 hours away from Amsterdam, London, Paris and Cologne.



Flanders
State of the Art

Contact your Virtuoso Travel Advisor today

VISITFLANDERS