

TRAVEL HEALTH

Accessing medical care when travelling can prove challenging in some countries, which is why fitfortravel.nhs.uk advises people to carry appropriate first aid and travel health kits. Featuring everything from blister plasters to steri-strips, the check list below has even the most intrepid explorer covered.

BASIC FIRST AID AND TRAVEL HEALTH KITS

The contents of any first aid/travel health kit should be tailored to the individual's itinerary, taking into consideration the type of travel, destination, duration and any existing medical conditions.

BASIC FIRST AID KIT

- First aid quick reference card.
- Disposable, latex-free exam gloves.
- Adhesive plasters, assorted sizes.
- Hydrocolloid blister plasters.
- Gauze.
- Adhesive first aid tape.
- Elasticated bandage wrap.
- Steri-strips.
- Cotton swabs.
- Antiseptic and antibacterial (to prevent infection) such as iodine.
- Saline sachets for wound irrigation.
- Aloe Vera gel for minor burns.
- Topical corticosteroids for bites, stings and other skin irritations.
- Thermometer.
- Tweezer.
- Scissors.

GENERAL TRAVEL HEALTH KIT

- Supply of regular medication (for duration of trip and additional in case trip unexpectedly extended).
- If you have a history of severe allergic reaction, carry Epinephrine auto-injectors; these should always be carried on one's person.
- Antihistamines for symptomatic treatment of mild or moderate allergic reactions; consider both oral and topical preparations. Oral antihistamines may also be used to treat motion sickness.
- Painkillers to treat pain and/or fever such as paracetamol, ibuprofen and aspirin.
- Mild laxatives for treating constipation and antacids for treating indigestion.
- Medication to manage diarrhoea; oral rehydration salts for hydration, anti-diarrhoeal agents for symptom management of mild diarrhoea.
- Water purification measures.
- Insect bite avoidance measures.
- Sun protection measures (above).
- New sexual partnerships and unprotected sex abroad is not uncommon; travellers should therefore consider barrier contraceptive measures such as condoms.

For further advice, visit fitfortravel.nhs.uk or contact your GP before travelling.



One night at Château St Pierre de Serjac from €220 per night, including breakfast (serjac.com). The chateau is offering three nights for the price of two until 31 May

= EUROPE =

Back to life

John Clarke visits Pézenas in the Languedoc and stays at a renovated 19th-century vineyard where the grapes are set to be pressed once more

Major-General Robert Clive, better known as Clive of India, was in the words of my old history master, a bit of a rum cove. He swashbuckled his way around India, conquering most of it for the East India Company (and we all know about them after watching BBC1's *Taboo*), amassed and lost several fortunes and generally behaved in a Jack Sparrow sort of manner.

Ennobled, and fresh from his Indian adventures, he moved to Pézenas in the Languedoc-Roussillon region in southern France in 1768, and with his continent-conquering days over, concentrated on the sweeter things. Living in a nearby chateau, he gifted the town the recipe for a sweet, cotton reel-shaped pastry, based on the Indian snack keema naan, that became known as le petit pâté de Pézenas.

Move on 250 years and Pézenas – with its ravishing 18th-century apartment blocks built of honey-coloured stone – is one of the must-visit towns in the Languedoc. Its historic centre is honeycombed with narrow, twisting streets, and is home to one of the best markets you're likely to encounter in this part of France. Stalls cover most of the streets, selling everything from dodgy men's underpants to fresh strawberries – and, of course, Clive of India's little sweetmeats. Now a world-famous pastry (it has even made an appearance on *The Great British Bake Off*), le petit pâté is one of the town's most famous exports.

Perhaps even more surprisingly, modern holidaymakers are able to enjoy one of these pastries – made with mutton or lamb, they go down a bomb with a sweet desert wine such as a Muscat or Sauternes – while, like Lord Clive, living in a nearby chateau.

Twenty minutes from the city of Béziers and situated between Montpellier and the Spanish border, Château St Pierre de Serjac is a new vineyard estate that opened last April, with eight period-inspired rooms, 36 self-catering residences, restaurant and bar, pool and spa.

The chateau, only 18km from Pézenas, was originally built in the 19th century by French winemaker Baron Cyprien de Crozals, who, as owner Karl O'Hanlon explains, was making money hand over fist by selling wine "in industrial quantities to the mills and factories springing up through France as a result of the Industrial Revolution". Each worker would drink his daily allocation of vin rouge or blanc during their equivalent of the British tea break.

The property has been tastefully and sumptuously refurbished in a manner that juxtaposes old and new. Antique warehouses, shops and markets have been scoured to provide stunning chandeliers, mirrors and period furniture along with all the trappings that hotel guests now expect – super kingsize beds, fully equipped bathrooms and the rolltop baths that are now a welcome feature of most upmarket rooms. The self-catering rooms – all of which are individually owned but let out by their owners – are equally swish and stylish, having been converted from the estate buildings.

The chateau is surrounded by 80 hectares of vineyards, two-thirds red grapes (merlot, cabernet sauvignon, syrah) and the rest white (mainly chardonnay). Wine-making equipment is to be installed, but for now, the wine is made at Domaine de Cibadies, the nearby headquarters of local wine company Bonfils, for a range of white red and rose cuvées that will be launched this spring.



Oenophiles will be able to take part in dedicated tastings, activities and other wine-related events later this year.

Food, nearly all locally sourced, is provided by chef Frank Pujol, recruited from Château de Mazan in the Luberon, and served in an elegant dining room. Dishes range from roasted half-pigeon and langoustines to fillets of quail and – for the more discerning – blanquette of frog's legs and pan-fried snails.

Away from the hotel, the Parc Naturel Régional du Haut-Languedoc is 30 minutes by car, with the best areas for canoeing or kayaking at Roquebrun on the River Orb. It's also not far (33km) to the immensely pretty, but not over-commercialised attractions of the port town of Marseillan, a protected heritage site.

Situated on a salt-water lagoon, the oyster-rich Étang de Thau, Marseillan is the southern entry for the 241km-long Canal du Midi that cuts through to the Garonne valley, and is also home to another French institution, Noilly Prat, the famous vermouth. The winery is almost on the water's edge; a tour of the compact but fascinating "La Maison Noilly Prat" takes in the indoor cellar (below left), which houses gigantic 40,000-litre barrels big enough to build a house in, and the outdoor fermenting area, where the vermouth continues to mature in hundreds of weathered oak barrels.

But perhaps the most rewarding part of the visit is the final one, the tasting room, where visitors can sample the complete range of vermouths, including the hard-to-find beautifully mellowed and fruity ambre vermouth.

Sipping one with a twist of citrus and a warm sun overhead while munching on a le petit pâté de Pézenas, you have to admit that despite his knavish reputation, Clive of India got some things very right indeed.

Tours of Le Maison Noilly Prat can be taken daily. An adult ticket costs €7.50 (£6.50), noillyprat.com/la-maison-noilly-prat/tickets. For more: pezenas-tourisme.fr, marseillan.com