



La Maison Alex Newsletter

December 2018

DR GRAHAM & SANDRA BROWN

Some Background

As we approach 2019, there is much to discuss in our latest Newsletter. Our last Newsletter was Nov 2016 but we hope to be able to produce a Newsletter every year from now on and Issue 2 is the 2018 edition. We hope that prospective guests will find the Newsletters useful and informative.

Firstly, some boring statistics which serve to underline both the popularity of La Maison Alex and illustrate that we as proprietors have gained a lot of experience and hopefully learnt what our guests like and dislike from the feedback you have given us over the years.

- we have now been hosting guests since 2007 so we are entering our 13th season in 2019
- we have had 107 guests so far
- our guests have primarily been from the UK but also from France, Ireland, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Canada and incredibly, Australia
- we have had overwhelmingly positive feedback from all our guests and have only ever had 2 minor complaints in 12 years

Our motivation for hosting guests is to make use of the villa when we are not using it. La Maison Alex is our holiday home and we spend a month there in May/June and autumn. We are not a registered business and our motivation is not to make substantial profit but to recover most, if not all of the cost of ownership.

Where we have made a trading excess we have endeavoured to reinvest in the property and our regular guests will have observed some significant changes, we hope for the better, over the past few years.

We have, for example, completely refurbished the kitchen and the living room and, conscious that summer guests will spend a lot of their time outside in the glorious weather, we have landscaped and improved the garden and added a hot tub and we have added new roller shutters to all windows and doors to improve security. Our approximate reinvestment in the property in the last 4 years has been: £39,400 or €45,300.

Our reinvestment strategy has been to focus on the most regularly used parts of the villa – so the outside space, the kitchen and living room have received significant investment. The new electric roller shutters were in response

to a break-in in 2015. The old French style wooden shutters are notoriously easy to forcibly open and in spring 2016 we started a programme of complete replacement which is now complete making the villa very secure and more energy efficient.

We have also donated some of the trading excess to charity and have, for example 'Twinned' the villa toilets with a public toilet in Nepal – this is a scheme whereby one's donation helps improve toilet facilities in countries where sanitation is poor. In addition, we have made donations to Shelter – a gesture to help those without a home, since we are fortunate enough to have two.

Things to do if you stay at the villa

So enough background. If you stay at La Maison Alex you are in an area of France that offers a lot of outdoor activities.

Relaxing by the pool and on the beach is clearly something in which most people wish to partake on holiday. Our outside space is very conducive to lapping up the sunshine, there is plenty of comfortable furniture to relax on and 2 parasols/umbrellas if your preference is shade. Alfresco dining is easy with a gas plancha style BBQ or if you prefer traditional coals there is a Weber kettle BBQ as well.

As the temperature falls in the evening you may wish to try the hot tub and watch the sun go down.

The local beaches are about 20 minutes drive when traffic is light. There are very contrasting types of beach with Cap d'Agde and Valras Plage being the commercial style and Marseillan Plage and Serignan Plage having dunes and less by way of facilities.

If your interests involve getting active you could try any of the following.

Hiking



There are many walking routes in the area. Casual walkers can walk the tow path of the Canal du Midi which is a short drive away and stretches from the coast at Marseillan Plage to Toulouse. There is also a well established hiking route which comes close to the village of Castelnau de Guers called the Circuit de St Antoine and is 10 km long and takes you through the local vineyards and farm land.

Cycling

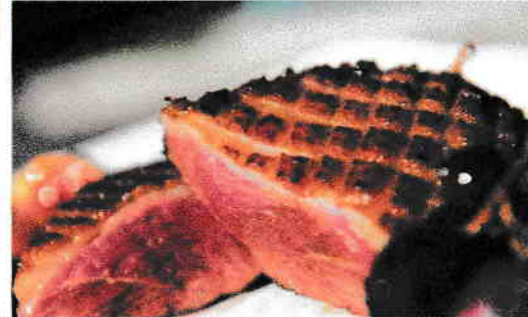


There are many cycling routes. The area is very popular for cycling holidays. If you are a casual cyclist and need to hire your bikes you can do so in the nearby town of Pézenas at Velo (30€ per day). The middle photo is cycling

around Lake Salagou which is only a 30min drive north. If you are cycling spectator, some years, Le Tour comes nearby and the photo above is Chris Frome leading the 2016 Tour in the nearby village of Montagnac and the photo was taken by our guests Mr&Mrs Price. In July 2019 Le Tour will go past the spectacular Pont du Gard which is a 40min drive east.

Local Food and Wine

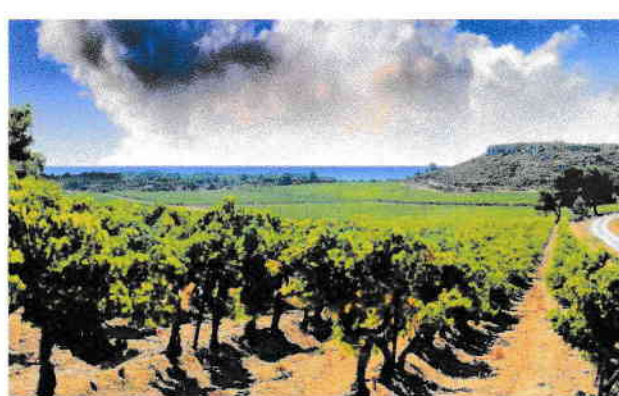
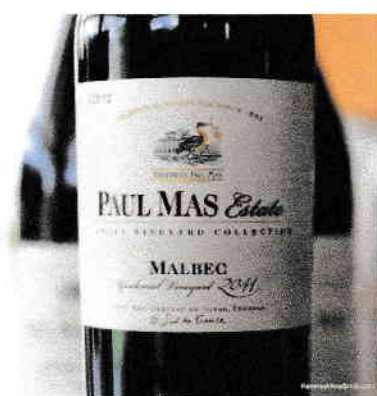
We do not pretend that we would be able offer a good food guide but we would like to recommend two local dishes that we enjoy. Firstly, oysters are grown in the nearby Basin de Thau and they appear on the menu in many restaurants but are most prevalent in the restaurants on the Basin de Thau such as Marseillan, Bouzigues or Meze. You can get just oysters or maybe you would prefer a fruits de mer which will usually be oysters, mussels, bulots (which are sea snails) and prawns.



Other common and usually excellent options on almost all menus are loup (sea bass) and maigrets de canard (duck breast)

Languedoc (or Ocitanie as it is now called) is the largest wine producing area in Europe. It is not all great wine but much of it is. The great thing is that you can try before you buy and we would like to identify two local producers that we think are worth a visit. The property behind La Maison Alex belongs to M. Cabrol who along with his brother own the wine producer based in the Castelnau de Guers village called Domaine De Laurier. You can try the wine in the village on Ave de Pézenas. Our recommendations are the syrah granache(8€) and the picpoul de pinet vermentino blend(8€) named after his son Baptiste.

Alternatively a short drive over to the village of Montagnac and a tasting at Domaine Paul Mas is also worth a trip. Paul Mas is a much bigger producer and exports wines to the UK. Tasting is charged at 5€ p.p. but there is a wide variety available. If you want to sample before you go you can buy Paul Mas in a number of UK supermarkets and the blended red Paul Mas Reserve available at Waitrose for £9 is worth trying



The restaurant at Paul Mas is also very good but you need to book in advance.

Finally, any of the wines from the extensive Gerard Bertrand estate is invariably good.

Politics in the UK and France

At the time of writing (15/12/18), to some it may seem that the world has gone to hell in handcart! Brexit is at its most uncertain and there is rioting on the streets of France. So how might this affect your stay in France?

Firstly Brexit, the main issue will be that after 29 Mar 2019 we will no longer be a member of the EU so we will probably not enjoy the current open access to France. From what we have seen so far, we will have to apply online for an ETIAS rather than a visa but this doesn't come in until 2021. You will need to do this for each of your party members, each of which will have to have a passport and you will need to enter their personal details and country of residency and pay for each visa by debit card. The cost will 7€ per application but those over 70 and under 18 are exempt from the payment. The good news is that it will last 3 years or until your passport expires if that is sooner and it is valid for all EU countries. More details can be found on the website:

<https://www.etiasvisa.com/>

The situation on the use of a UK driving licence and flights to Europe from the UK and vice versa, at the time of writing (15/12/18), is not yet clear and the subject of much scaremongering but we are assured by the current Minister for Transport, Chris Grayling that this will be sorted shortly

The activities of Gilets Jaunes in France is clearly a concern and, at the time of writing, there has been six consecutive Saturdays of riots in Paris in spite of concessions by President Macron. However, whilst there is violence in Paris, the actions have been more moderate in Montpellier and Béziers. The main area of concern is the blockading of motorway entrances, toll stations and exits. This has closed parts of the nearby A9 motorway at times. It can only be hoped that this unrest has subsided by the summer.