

# Desperately SUN

# seeking SHINE

It's that time of year when our minds wander to lovely weekends away. These four destinations are at their dreamy best in spring, with blue skies, blooming flowers and balmy temperatures

Compiled by Rachel Sullivan



Above: Medieval hilltop towns are dotted throughout the Languedoc region of southern France. Right: The lavender fields look and smell heavenly

## 1 Rural R&R IN LANGUEDOC, FRANCE

Provence too pricey—or too passé? A more chic and less commercial option is southern France's gloriously rural Languedoc region, for year-round sunshine, charmingly unmanicured scenery and world-class wine. Poke around the pretty old town of Pézenas, where fresh shellfish is sold from trucks in the central square, and restaurants tucked down cobbled alleyways serve surprisingly tasty raw mussels. May is warm enough for outdoor swimming, but take a tip from the locals and avoid the overcrowded coast, heading instead for the river beaches with their charming rock pools—nearly Roquebrun has clean, fresh,

shallow waters. Montpellier, too, is entrancing, with its beautifully preserved medieval streets, teeming with hundreds of courtyard cafés. After all, relaxing with a glass or two of *vin* seems to be what Languedoc locals do best. **STAY:** The perfect base is Château Les Carrasses, a restored 19th-century estate that's starting to produce the first new wines from its old vineyard. It offers tastings with a Master Of Wine; spend a fruitful few hours sipping eight regional tipples, from bone-dry whites to rich, fruity reds. You could

while away the rest of the day basking by the château's heated infinity pool, rising only for the delicious tapas—think guinea fowl spring rolls or anchovies with red pepper and creamy mozzarella—served on the roof terrace. The château's philosophy of luxury self-catering means you can stay in anything from a one-bedroom suite to an eight-person cottage. All boast iPods pre-loaded with scene-setting French music from Edith Piaf and Brigitte Bardot, and, in many cases, a bath with a view. ▶

### NEED TO KNOW

Château Les Carrasses costs from £125 per night for a short break in a one-bedroom suite. Visit [lescarrasses.com](http://lescarrasses.com). Flights to Montpellier cost from £35 one way with EasyJet, [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com). Flight time: two hours, 50 minutes.