

Late deals

■ Flying from Glasgow on May 16, seven nights in Lanzarote, staying at the three-star Don Paco Castilla, all inclusive, from £357 per person.
 ■ Flying from Glasgow on May 23, seven nights in Majorca, at the three-star Hi Honolulu, all inclusive, from £359 per person.

■ Flying from Glasgow on June 8, seven nights in Benidorm, staying at the three-star Regente Hotel, half board, from £369 per person.
 ■ For these and other deals, log on to www.barrheadtravel.co.uk or call 0141 222 2223.

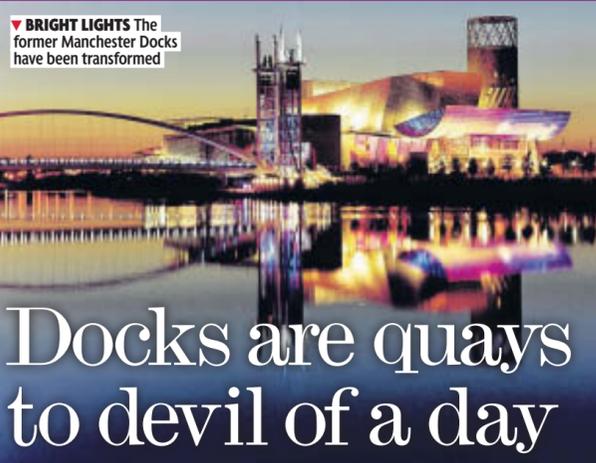
Late deals

■ Flying from Prestwick on May 21, seven nights in Tenerife, at four-star Sunwing Fanabe, self catering from £389 per person.
 ■ Flying from Glasgow on May 21/28, seven nights in Benidorm, at three-star Rio Park, half board from £359 per person.

■ Flying from Glasgow on May 30, seven nights in Majorca, at three-star Skorpis Marina, all inclusive from £439 per person.
 ■ Flying from Glasgow on June 6, seven nights in Lanzarote, at three-star Los Fiscos, all inclusive from £399 per person.

■ Call 01698 425444 or log onto www.holidayandflightcentre.com

▼ **BRIGHT LIGHTS** The former Manchester Docks have been transformed



Docks are quays to devil of a day

ONCE the third busiest port in Britain, Salford Quays is now a bustling community of business, culture, sport and history.

Twenty years ago, the area was left devastated when the decision was taken to close the Manchester Ship Canal, resulting in the loss of 3000 jobs.

Now there is plenty to offer visitors, either looking for a relaxed discount shopping experience, a theatre performance or an insight into the effects of war.

And football fans can pay a visit to one of the world's most famous clubs, with Manchester United's iconic Old Trafford stadium just a short walk away.

Tourists from all over the world flood into the Red Devils' home to view museum exhibits and embark on a tour. Demand is so high, groups leave every 10 minutes from 9.40am until 4.30pm seven days a week, excluding matchdays.

It is marketed as the greatest football story ever told and is certainly spectacular.

For those who love to shop, The Lowry Outlet offers great discounts on a variety of popular high street brands, including Marks and Spencer, Nike, Denby, Gap and Cadbury's.

It also boasts a host of delicious eateries, including the stylish Lime Bar and Restaurant.

We were lucky enough to enjoy a performance of The Ladykillers by Graham Linehan within The Lowry, a modern and spacious theatre with a packed calendar.

In stark contrast, The Imperial War Museum North is an architectural marvel and its interior is equally as breathtaking. The exhibits outline the history of

By Lorraine Waddell

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The museum also offers a stunning view over the docks from its 100m tall viewing platform, the Airshard, for those brave enough to take the journey into the skies.

To be able to get the full view of The Quays from sea level, Manchester Cruises' boat tour gives visitors the chance to see Pomona Docks, the Trafford Swing Bridge and the new ITV studios.

The comprehensive commentary provides an insight into the industrial importance of the area over the years. Ordsall Hall is a stunning manor house nearby, which dates back to 1177.

Sitting within beautiful gardens, it makes a stunning location for a leisurely Sunday stroll.

Everything is on the doorstep of Salford Quays, including the unique Old Trafford Lodge hotel with stunning views over Lancashire County Cricket Club's ground from executive rooms.

Its sizeable car park and comfortable rooms provide a perfect base for a fun-packed weekend.

▼ **HIGH AND MIGHTY** Family days



▼ **QUAYS BEST** Plenty of water fun

Factfile:
 ■ Lorraine stayed courtesy of the Old Trafford Lodge.
 ■ Weekend breaks at the Old Trafford Lodge start at £59 per room, per night, including continental breakfast for up to two adults and two children.
 ■ Book online at www.lccc.co.uk or call 0161 874 3333.

▼ **HOWZAT?** The Red Rose home of cricket



By Chris Mooney

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MILLIONS flock to the south of France every year for its guaranteed sun, unrivalled plonk and fine cuisine.

But the Languedoc region on the southern edge of this ancient realm remains remarkably untouched by mass tourism.

It's as French as the part of your brain that stores stereotypes could have you imagine: rustic, languid and stacked high with the best cheeses and wines you are ever likely to taste. There's the odd chain-smoker, too.

So having never been to France before – yes, really – what a way this was to open my account.

Flying with Ryanair on a new route from Edinburgh to Beziers on the Mediterranean coast, my introduction was spectacular. Breathtaking. Boozy.

Beziers itself has still not decided if it really wants tourists yet, but what it lacks in fireworks it makes up for in honest charm – and the spectacular backdrop of the snow-capped mountains of the Pyrenees help create the postcard picture.

The French are renowned for being expressive, but the people of Languedoc don't appear to believe in the gaudy baubles of modern-day consumerism, plumping more for sun-bleached, shabby chic.

While regarded as the "country cousin" to more established and extravagant tourist spots of the south, such as Provence up the coast, the people here prefer to be stylishly understated.

There's money here, they just don't flaunt it. They put their faith and time into something quite different – the Terroir – the unique conditions which determine the vintage of



▲ **MAJESTIC** The chateau is beautifully decorated inside

their unique wines, a belief system these people hold with almost spiritual reverence.

More of which later. The drive to our digs at the wonderful Chateau les Carrasses, just five minutes from the wee town of Capestang, is a 30-minute, 80-euro taxi ride, so make sure you organise a cheaper connection beforehand.

You can hire cars at the small but perfectly formed Beziers Cap d'Agde Airport, but do so well in advance or there won't be any left, as I learned from bitter experience.

We took a four-day break in the Chateau les Carrasses at the start of spring, when temperatures are typically 16C, but reach an average 24C in the summer months.

We had one day of torrential rain, which I'm reliably informed was a freak weather event. The rain was good for one thing though – like everything else in Languedoc, the chateau is surrounded by the French countryside's ever-present companion – the grapevine.

Row upon row of the wine-giving fruit greet you at every turn. When

my wife Nicole and I were there, the roots (some 100 years old) remained gnarled, hibernating and looked barely capable of giving life, but the whole area must be a breathtaking sight in the green of summer.

On the approach to Les Carrasses, up a beautifully twisty country lane, the chateau suddenly looms before you like a fantasy castle in the blue sky, protected by trees, which also guard a very inviting eternity pool and terrace.

The 127-year-old building has been lavishly transformed into a retreat of utter class by former banker Karl O'Hanlon.

Centred around the refurbished wreck of the imposing, turreted chateau building, once used as rest stop for pilgrims, the 28 properties that make up Les Carrasses are interlinked by a sun-scorched, tree-lined avenue.

The traditional buildings – once used as the winery, farm worker quarters, the forge and stables – have all been given Irishman O'Hanlon's magic touch, and are now living up to their five-star billing. One of my favourite spots



▼ **TRANQUIL** The serene Canal du Midi in Capestang



▲ **BUSTLING** Narbonne town scene

at Les Carrasses is the stylish old hothouse Orangerie, rumoured to have been designed by Eiffel Tower architect Gustave Eiffel.

This stunning statement piece of architecture is like the most elaborate greenhouse you have ever seen, and is now used as a library.

A great place to while away an hour in the early evening sun with a bottle of Les Carrasses Pinot... book not essential.

The chateau's unique one to three-bedroom private residences are all different, but most come with private terraces and 10 have their own private pools.

The apartments are fitted with all mod cons for self-catering and are air-conditioned.

The grounds include floodlit clay tennis courts, beach volleyball pitch, petanque courts and BBO area where families can gather.

Our chic two-bedroom apartment was stunning inside and fitted with a huge sliding barn door, as well as a glass-covered hole in the living room floor, which was once used for grape-crushing. All this was just in case you forgot you were living in a rural French holiday dreamland.

The chateau also boasts a fantastic family-friendly brasserie and bar, where the menu is a constantly rolling example of what's fresh and in season in the area.

Try anything on the menu that is seafood, all locally sourced and straight out of the fisherman's net. The dishes are simple but delicious and are easily washed down with the finest Corbieres, of course.

Well, as I had to keep reminding the missus, when in France... There is plenty to do around the Languedoc region and Les Carrasses proves a perfect vantage point.

The chateau itself stages events, including the Festival of Rock Art and Wine later this month and Opera Under The Stars on June 30.

Elsewhere, there are dozens of medieval abbeys, Cathar churches and Roman monuments to visit.

Cycling routes, hillwalking, and golf courses are all within easy access and the ancient cities of Nimes and Toulouse are not far away. Montpellier, described as France's most exciting city, is less than an hour away.

Unfortunately for us, we chose the day of the deluge to drive to the

beautiful towns of Narbonne and Carcassonne.

We did try to brave the inclement conditions, but even the ducks were running for cover.

Despite the weather, the medieval towns were worth exploring, a maze of intricate old streets, which now serve as shopping precincts full of restaurants and bars.

After the rain on our first day trip, the next one proved far more fruitful for us, quite literally.

Les Carrasses has recently introduced wine tours of its own vineyards, several not normally open to the public.

Our gregarious wine expert Wendy Gedney, who runs tour firm Vin en Vacances, gave us a brilliant day and plied us with enough wine to drown a horse.

Incidentally, one of the chateau visits introduced us to a sensational white wine we brought home by the caseload. The Chateau Capitoul, owned by the famous Bonfils wine-making family, is to be the site of a new chateau to be built by O'Hanlon. A place worth staying when it opens if it gets you closer to the La Clape Opus white. Magic stuff.

▼ **DREAM** Chateau les Carrasses, surrounded by trees, is like a fairy tale castle



News..

FOOD and travel have always been inextricably linked – there's no better way to the heart of a culture than through its cooking – but how about theming your holiday around local grub?

Known for its healthy diet and diverse flavours, the Mediterranean is prime foodie territory. On the 11-day Gastronomic Italy tour, try an "agriturismo" lunch in the Tuscan countryside, a cookery course in Bologna, visits to watch Parmesan cheese and Parma ham being made, and a wine estate tour.

Or what about the Country Roads & Vineyards of Italy trip, departing in September? See how vintage Brunello wines in Montalcino compare to the lighter Nebbiolo-grape reds of Barolo in Piedmont, or Moscato Bianco grapes that make sparkling Asti.

Venice and Galicia feature on "bite-sized" breaks, bookable through Barrhead Travel, and the name is apt since the former focuses on cicchetti, tapas-like nibbles, served in bars known as Bacari, plus a class in cooking typical Venetian fare and tastings of local cheeses and salami. The latter sees artisan food producers at work in Santiago de Compostela, baking bread with the locals at a community oven, and sampling the fiery local liquor.

In northern Spain, there's a 10-day Wine, Walks and Tapas tour. From Bilbao, travel through the Rioja region to Logrono, which boasts more than 50 tapas restaurants in four square blocks, then sample wine in Montblanc, cava at Cordoniu vineyard, and finish with Barcelona's famed market La Boqueria.

Food and wine go hand-in-hand in France, so the Alsace and the Route des Vins itinerary features wine-tasting and dinner at a Michelin-starred restaurant.

Connoisseurs will love specialist Wine Tours, which offer wine-focused itineraries

Travel facts:
 ■ Chris travelled courtesy of Ryanair. Flights from Edinburgh to Beziers with Ryanair start at £34.99. Departures are on Sundays and Thursdays.
 ■ Prices for a suite for two at the Chateau Les Carrasses start at 152 euros per night for seven nights.
 ■ For more information on the chateau visit www.lescarrasses.com. To enquire or make a booking call 0845 686 8067, or email resa@lescarrasses.com

Top plonk in Languedoc

Discover charming chateaux and wonderful wine in southern France



▲ **BEZIERES** St Nazaire cathedral seen behind the stone bridge

▼ **WINE TOUR** So much to see and sample for all tastes



to destinations as diverse as the Douro Valley, South Africa, Chile and California. Closer to home, the Classic Alsace & Baden tour includes Alsatian wines plus a trip across the Rhine to two of Baden's biggest estates. For a special occasion, book a champagne weekend for that extra pizzazz.