

The Weekend

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venue

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR TIME AND MONEY IN BRISTOL ON SALE FROM FRIDAY, JULY 20 2012 ISSUE 9

Global style

Add an international flavour to mealtimes with our shopping ideas selection
Shopping: Page 5

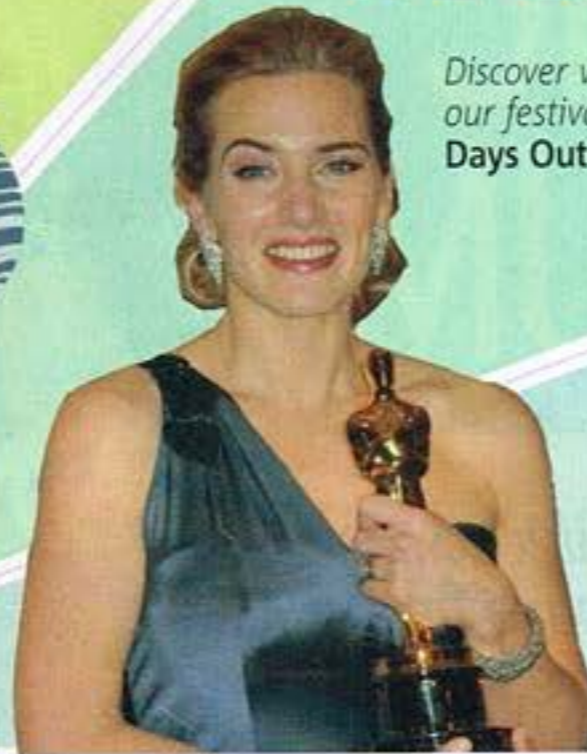


whole family to homewares including this three-tier Whitby cake stand
Shopping: Page 6

Find your way

If you're heading to the Harbourside

Discover what's going on and where with our festival round-up and events map
Days Out: Page 10



If you're staying in

Watch The Reader

Kate Winslet picked up an Oscar for her role in this film as Hannah, a woman with a dark, disturbing secret
Television: Page 49

Ideas for the weekend and the week ahead

Get on a bike

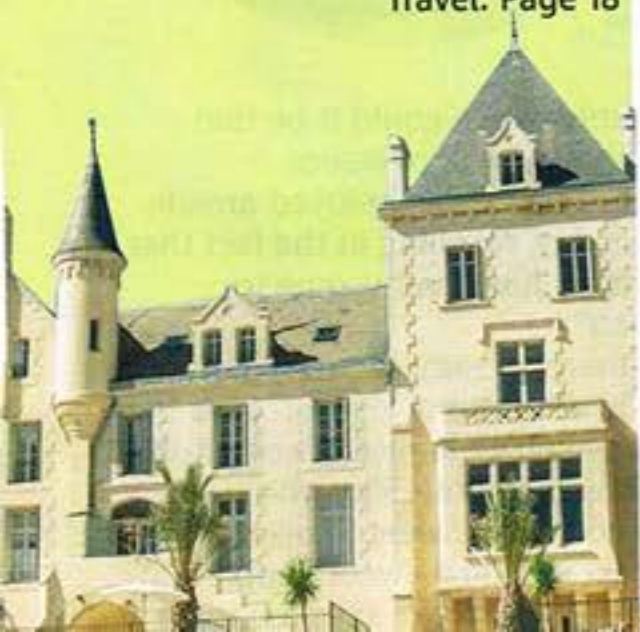
Expert tips to help your kids get on their bikes and keep them safe
Cycling: Page 46



If it doesn't stop raining

Head to a Chateau

Looking for a holiday destination idea? We visit Béziers in France to try the beautiful Chateau les Carrasses' apartments
Travel: Page 18



If you want to impress

Masterclass in fish & chips

Michelin-starred chef Josh Eggleton of The Pony and Trap shares his recipe for the perfect homemade fish and chips
Eating in: Page 16



If you see one film

The Dark Knight Rises

Anne Hathaway joins the cast as Catwoman in this final instalment of Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy – which we think is the best of the three
Film: Page 31



TRAVEL

FLY SOUTH FOR THE SUMMER

Rachael Sugden escapes the soggy weather on a long weekend in France

If the incessant rain and autumnal wind of recent weeks haven't pushed you to make a great escape overseas, perhaps the pending Olympics (or simply the school summer holidays), will

With flights from Bristol heading to the South of France (and further afield) daily, it couldn't be easier to find yourself some Mediterranean sunshine.

When my Mum and I needed a break, we headed to Béziers, in France's Languedoc Roussillon region, for some long-overdue rest and relaxation.

Our ultimate destination was the beautiful Chateau les Carrasses' self-catering apartments, about a 20-minute drive from the airport.

The Chateau opened last summer following a massive refurbishment, creating apartments and villas in the main house, stables and former working barns. It sits proud on a quiet hill overlooking the surrounding vineyards (of which there are acre upon acre) and when we visited, there were swathes of crimson poppies as far as the eyes could see, too.

For a short break you could manage to get around and see some of the area's highlights by taxi – and if you're planning some wine tasting, taxis will definitely be a good idea.

But to really get to the heart of

the region on a longer break, hiring a car is a must – not least for the supermarket runs into nearby villages that you will need to make.

The apartments' kitchens are excellently kitted out, but the fridges are bare. There is no basic supplies welcome pack to greet you on arrival, so if you crave a cup of tea, or have children who'll need sustenance as soon as they fall out of the car, you'll need to stock up en route.

Although, if you simply want to unpack and dive into the pool, the Chateau's brasserie will keep you going. It's open all day for refreshments, as well as offering a good Continental breakfast and delicious lunches and dinners, more of which later.

We were staying in a two-bedroom apartment in one of the old barns that once housed the estate workers. With a small private terrace at the front, complete with barbecue, the sensitive renovation has retained old wooden beams in the high ceilings and towering arched windows and doorways that flood the space with light.

Of course, there are also plenty of new additions, from an ipod dock and flat screen TV to a modern kitchen and luxurious bathrooms. Furnishings are in muted shades of grey, beige and cream.

While some apartments come

with their own pool, we were more than happy to use the Chateau's vast pool on the main front terrace, taking in the stunning views of surrounding countryside. It really is an idyllic setting.

If you can tear yourself away, there is plenty to keep you busy in the area.

We spent a few hours wandering the streets of nearby Béziers, through which the famed Canal du Midi passes. It's quite bustling, a centre of commerce and home to a Michelin-starred restaurant, while the medieval cathedral perched atop the rocky crag and postcard-perfect ancient bridge over the canal are worth seeking out.

If you prefer a quieter explore of an old town, you'll love Pézenas. About 30 minutes from the Chateau, Pézenas' narrow cobbled streets and old merchant houses were enchanting.

We took a tour with a guide from the local tourism office, which I can highly recommend. She opened heavy doors (literally) into courtyards and stone stairwells

dripping in history that we would have unknowingly sauntered past.

Pézenas is also home to a thriving artisan community, with the tiny old merchants' shops lining the pedestrian streets now filled with gorgeous handmade leather handbags, paintings, ceramics and jewellery. We could have spent a fortune and had to keep reminding ourselves about excess baggage charges. Given those baggage issues, we also avoided the town's many acclaimed vintage furniture markets and antiques halls.

The tiny village of Capeatang, sitting astride the ever-present Canal du Midi, is closest to the Chateau. There you can hire a barge (about 130 euros a day for up to eight people) to explore the famed waterway – and you could easily ride a bike there from the Chateau (pedal or electric), for a completely car-free day.

If you're travelling with children, there's plenty on offer at the Chateau itself to keep them busy while you sip cocktails in the sunshine. As well as table tennis,

volleyball and the pool, the kids' club in July and August will take them off your hands for a few hours.

So, to the food and wine. If we'd been staying longer, we would have stocked up the kitchen, but instead chose to eat in the brasserie.

Dishes are typical of the region, with the lunchtime plat du jour costing 23.50 euros each for two courses. The herb-stuffed chicken with creamy sauce and local veg, followed by a taste-bud tingling bowl of fruit in syrup was superb.

In the evenings we ate equally as well – local guinea fowl with a tapenade crust was a particular highlight.

The Chateau's wine cellar is extensive, and once you've got a taste for the local grape, you can head to the nearby Vin Auberge in Poilhes, also on the canal, for a tasting, some tapas and to order a case (or two).

We barely scratched the surface of all the surrounding area has to offer and didn't even make it to the white-sand coast about 30 minutes' drive south. Next time...

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From top: the Chateau's brasserie; view from the terrace; the Canal du Midi

Lead-in rates from £195 per night (based on two people sharing for a three to six-night stay) for accommodation in a Chateau Suite. Prices valid June 29 to September 2, 2012.

Rates go down from September 3 to 30, so for some late summer sunshine that is a great time to visit. Visit www.lescarrasses.com/offers.php for the latest offers. To enquire or to make a reservation call 0845 686 8067 or email resa@lescarrasses.com. For further information on Chateau Les Carrasses, visit www.lescarrasses.com.

Rachael flew from Bristol to Beziers with Ryanair (www.ryanair.com / 0871 246 0000).

OFFER: The Chateau is offering a free dinner for two with wine for all bookings of a week in any accommodation from September to December 2012, not including Christmas (valued at 100 euro). Mention *The Post* when booking.

