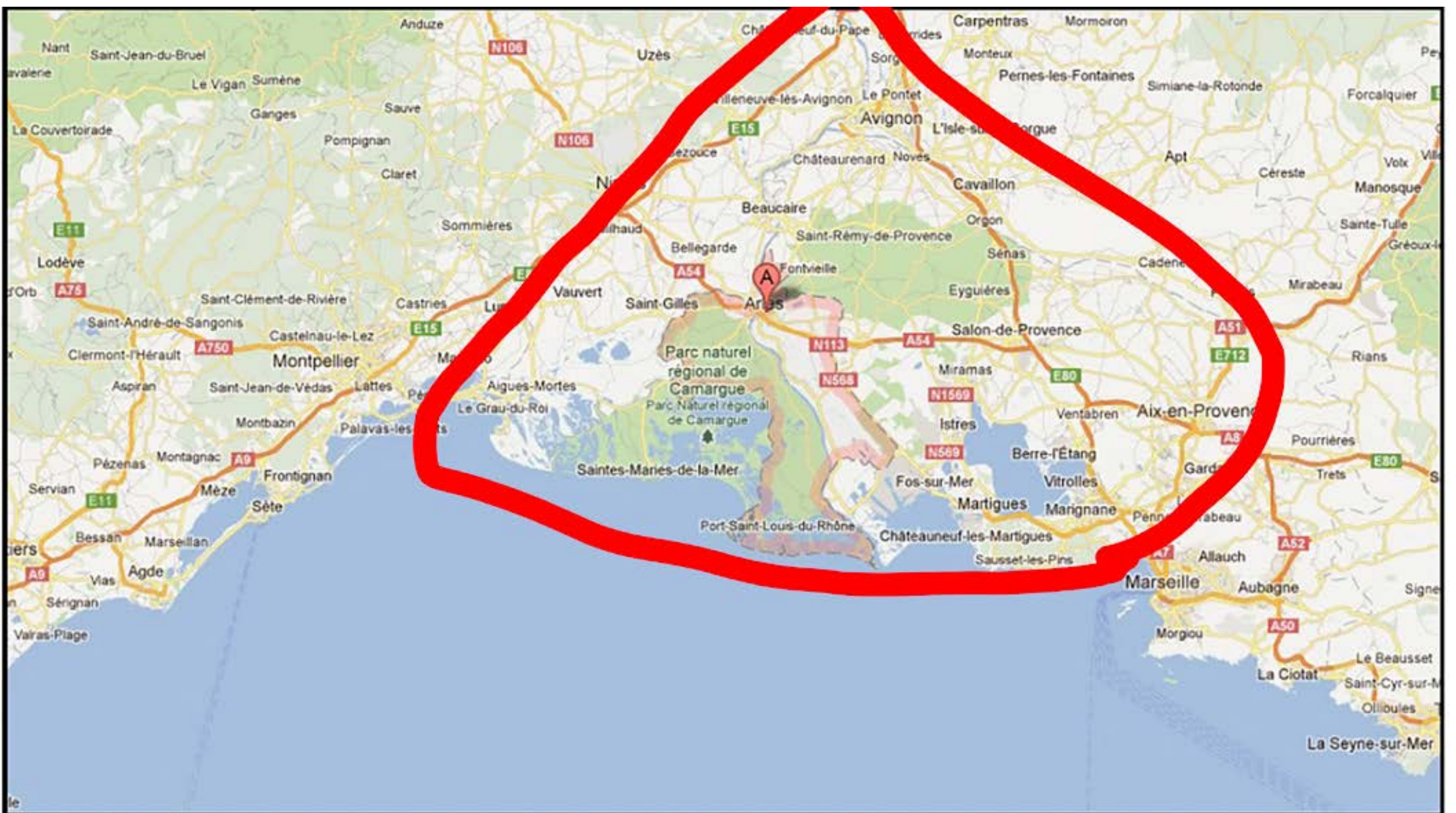


PROVENCE DESTINATION GUIDE



Definition and Borders

Shaped like a wedge, Provence stretches from the Camargue Seashore National Park up the Rhone River to Orange. Notice, on the map its eastern and western “boundaries” are defined by the diagonal motorways. The entire region is draped in wonderfully preserved Roman ruins. The Vatican was relocated here for several

hundreds of years, and before that, the Romans established outposts and cities in the area.

Cuisine

Anything *à la provençal* almost certainly includes lots of garlic, herbs, olive oil, and tomatoes. It is a far cry from the stuffy foods of Northern and Central France. I like to think of it as a tongue-tingling link between Italian and Spanish cuisine. Here are some of the best specialties: ratatouille (vegetables in a herb sauce), aioli (garlicy mayonnaise), au pistou (vegetable soup with a sauce called pistou made from garlic, basil, and cheese), soupe à l'ail or aigo boudo (garlic soup), and taureau (bull meat).

The Romans

Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River and invaded Provence in 49 B.C., killing about a third of the population and defying the Republic leadership, as well. He made it all the way to Paris, leaving Roman settlements and outposts in his wake.

As a result, Julius Caesar became the ruler of the Romans and ushered in the changes necessary to transform the Republic into the Empire.

The concept of “Emperor” lived on with Octavian, Julius Caesar’s distant nephew and later, his adopted son. Octavian took over after Caesar’s death and eventually killed his opposition and united Rome’s warring generals. Octavian

changed his name to Augustus and took the title of Emperor of Rome. A long line of “Caesars” followed him for the next 500 years.

The Roman Peace or Pax Romana, began with Augustus and lasted for about 200 years. This was a time of great expansion within the Empire; eventually it reached from the Scottish borders, to Northern Africa, Spain, and present-day Iraq.

With all this conquered territory there was a need to “Romanize” the people and communities. Consequently, the Romans remodeled these newly acquired towns in the image of Rome. Each had a forum, a theatre, bathes, aqueducts, and so on.

In some towns, arenas for sporting events were built to keep the people satisfied and entertained. A system of roads and bridges were constructed to provide safe and smooth transportation from one locale to the other. One common language and currency fostered trade between different areas of the Empire.

Arles

Arles played a strategic role in trade because it was located on the Rhone River. The Romans built a bridge here tying the trade route (via Domitia) between Spain and Italy and fortified the city. The city of Arles was laid out in the traditional Roman grid plan. Two roads, one running north to south, the other east to

west, intersected in the center forming the forum. The most important public buildings, markets, and temples were located in this forum. It is calculated that the population of Arles was near 100,000 in Roman times, much larger than the 40,000 living there today.

Arles town is small, an easy 20 minute walk from the town wall to the river. You will delight in “getting lost” in the tangle of medieval streets, Roman ruins, quaint cafes, and riverside promenade.

The Forum Square

The Roman Forum once stood here. Today, it is a lively spot loaded with cafes. It is very touristy, but yet frequented by locals who want to get a glass of wine or a pastis.

The Classical Theatre

The theatre was built by the Romans in the 1st c. B.C. It is quite large, seating near 10,000 people. A couple of Corinthian columns are all that remain of the three-storied stage.

The Roman Arena

This arena could seat up to 20,000 people. In Roman times it was used for games and sporting events, just as in Rome.

Vincent Van Gogh

Vincent showed up in Arles in the winter of 1888. He was fed up with the city life in Paris, and decided to head south. Being from The Netherlands, where everything is flat and drea-

ry, Provence offered a change with its vivid colors, climate, flowers, mountains, and sea. He lived here for two years producing almost 200 paintings.

Sadly, there are none of his paintings in Arles, but you can walk the streets he walked and see some of the subjects of his paintings. Placed around town are concrete/steel markers, shaped in the form of an easel, with photos of the Van Gogh images he painted on the particular spot.



Starry Night over the Rhône, was produced here, just outside the town gate, along the river. Look for the marker on the embankment for details. By the way, this is not the “*Starry Night*” painting you probably are thinking of. That one was produced in a hospital near St. Rémy.



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