

Self-catering guide to...  
**Pézenas, Hérault**  
*Eat like a king, without eating out*



The town of Pézenas is filled with the aromas of the Mediterranean, but also has an unlikely culinary link with the British Empire, says **Jon Bryant**

**H**oney, figs, olive oil and sweet onions are the specialties of the area around Pézenas, so it is strange that the culinary centrepiece of this Languedoc town has more to do with the British Raj.

The *petit pâté de Pézenas* was introduced by Lord Clive of India in the mid-18th century when the soldier and administrator arrived on holiday. His cooks prepared the dish and the local chefs adopted the recipe.

The *petit pâté* looks like a gently sagging cotton reel and is eaten as a warm starter or snack. “It is especially popular at local weddings as the hors d’oeuvre,” says Mme Quatrefages at her *pâtisserie* on Rue Conti. “Serve two or three as an aperitif; they are delicious with a glass of local wine.” Her husband has been making them for more than half a century, just as his father did before him. The sweet, suety pastry case is filled with mutton, so it has

a sort of savoury meat pie taste mingled with lemon, brown sugar and spices.

The shop walls are covered in awards and certificates, as well as a *petit pâté* preparation kit with a wooden dibber to insert the stuffing into the pastry ‘cotton reel’. Pézenas head of tourism Christine Personnaz describes them as “an acquired taste – people either love them or hate



them.” I loved their flavour, but two is probably enough.

The other local speciality is *berlingots de Pézenas*, brightly coloured boiled sweets flavoured with aniseed, lemon, coffee or red fruits. Only one firm makes them today, Boudet, which has a small shop on Place Gambetta. Every Saturday morning this square hosts an organic farmers’ market. It’s a great place to buy herbs and wander around the exhibition spaces. The roads leading off Place Gambetta take you into the town’s historic quarters and its modern-day food shops. Beneath the hand-carved pillars and grimacing sculpted heads are boutiques selling nougat, linen tablecloths, spiced bread and olivewood salad bowls; there is even a horsemeat butcher.

In Rue de la Foire, the *Épicerie Gaillard* has vats of brine-soaked olives, pickled garlic, *tapenades* and racks of virgin olive oil in steel canisters. Even on a Sunday

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when everything is closed, the area smells of herbs and oils. At one end of the road is Goûts et Couleurs, which sells flavoured salts and herb-filled vinegars. At the other end is homemade ice cream seller Aux Parfums d'Italie, which opens until midnight on Wednesdays and Fridays. The takeaway tubs of salted-butter caramel ice-cream make an all-too-tempting alternative to self-catering.

Today, the shop fronts may have changed, but street names such as Impasse Fromagerie Vieille, Rue Triperie Vieille, Rue du Four de la Ville and Rue des Chevaliers-de-Saint-Jean hark back to an age when Pézenas was the seat of the Governors of Languedoc and capital of the region's fairs.

Pézenas, or 'Pez' as the locals call it, was where the young Molière based his

**TOP, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** The cobbled streets of Pézenas; Vats of olives and garlic at the Épicerie Gaillard; Inside Épicerie Gaillard; Herbs at the farmers' market; **LEFT:** Mme Quatrefages in her *pâtisserie*

## LES BONNES ADRESSES

### MEAT

• Martine et Michel Audrin  
11 Rue Conti  
34120 Pézenas  
Tel: (Fr) 4 67 98 14 01

### GROCERY

• Gaillard  
Rue de la Foire  
34120 Pézenas  
www.olives-gaillard.com

### WINE

• Cave Alain Reinaldos

7 Place de la République  
34120 Pézenas  
Tel: (Fr) 4 67 90 76 34

### PÂTISSERIE

• Confiserie Quatrefages  
3 Rue Conti  
34120 Pézenas  
Tel: (Fr) 4 67 98 16 29

### 'GOÛTER'

• Les 3 Lutins  
8 Place Ledru-Rollin  
34120 Pézenas  
Tel: (Fr) 9 61 36 93 68

### BREAD

• Maison Sanhet  
5 Avenue  
Louis-Montagne  
34120 Pézenas  
Tel: (Fr) 4 67 98 12 42

### SWEETS

• Confiserie Boudet  
5 Place Gambetta  
34120 Pézenas  
Tel: (Fr) 4 67 98 16 32  
www.berlingotsdepezenas.com

## RECIPE

### PETITS PÂTÉS DE PÉZENAS

MAKES  
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The recipe for *petits pâtés* is so challenging that Michelin-starred chef Michel Roux Jr asked contestants to prepare it during the BBC's *MasterChef: The Professionals* in 2012. What makes it difficult is to find "the correct balance of sweet and salty and spicy," says Roux.

#### FOR THE PASTRY CASES

- 400g flour
- 200g butter
- 1 egg yolk
- ¼ glass of water
- ½tsp salt

#### FOR THE FILLING

- 300g mutton
- 100g mutton fat
- 75g raisins
- Zest of half a lemon
- 1dsp brown sugar
- Pinch each of nutmeg, cinnamon and cumin
- 1 egg, whisked
- Salt and pepper

**1.** Combine the pastry ingredients by hand in a mixing bowl before chilling for an hour in the fridge.

**2.** Cut up the mutton into small chunks, removing all the gristle. Place in a large bowl and add the diced mutton fat, sugar, raisins, salt, pepper, spices and lemon zest. The filling should be firm yet moist.



**3.** Heat the oven to 200°C.

**4.** Roll the pastry to a thickness of 5mm and cut out two 6cm-diameter discs and a rectangle (18cm x 5cm) for each *pâté*. Make a ring from the rectangle and place over one of the discs. Gently seal the two together to make a casing. Once the edges are sealed, add a dessertspoon of filling to prevent the sides collapsing. The filling should come almost to the top of the case. Place another disc on top of the case and carefully seal the filling inside. Brush the top and sides with the whisked egg.

**5.** Repeat for the remaining *pâtés*.

**6.** Place on a buttered tray and bake for 25 minutes in the middle of the oven. Serve with pickles and a glass of white Languedoc wine.

*Recipe courtesy of chef Sarah Melling*

## BON APPÉTIT

### ACCOMMODATION REVIEW



#### CHÂTEAU DE ROQUELUNE

Waking up in this dreamy, fairy-tale château, it is almost unbearable to imagine that you will have to leave when the holiday is over.

With rabbits scurrying across the lawns and nightingales tweeting in the trees, Roquelune is a nature paradise, just two kilometres from Pézenas. Its six bedrooms and three reception rooms make an ideal place to share with a few families.

There are 15 acres of landscaped gardens, a secure swimming pool, tree-lined walkways, table tennis in the orangery, a chapel, real turrets and a listed stone fountain.

Cooking facilities are excellent, with a dining room overlooking the grounds, giant stone fireplaces, a sweeping staircase and a music room with grand piano.

#### VILLA AVA

Driving down a lane near the centre of Pézenas, it seems impossible that a contemporary, spacious villa with lawned garden, 15-metre pool and terrace is just over the wall.

The open-plan villa has vast windows overlooking the pool and garden, Wi-Fi and a spacious kitchen. With four bedrooms, three bathrooms and a modernist design, this luxury villa is a stylish yet homely place to stay. There is also a games room, flat-screen TV, garage parking and under-floor heating.

Both properties are available to rent through South France Villas (tel: 0871 711 3372 / (Fr) 4 67 36 05 54, [www.southfrancevillas.com](http://www.southfrancevillas.com)).

Château de Roquelune (ref: HE068A) sleeps ten to 12, and costs from €3,250 for a week.

Villa Ava (ref: HE070A) sleeps eight, and costs from €2,500 for a week.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Ice-cream sign from Aux Parfums d'Italie; Wine merchant Alain Reinaldos; *Petits pâtés* are sold all over town; Boudet's shop sells *berlingots de Pézenas*

theatre company in the mid-17th century. He changed his name from Poquelin during his stay. The town has built a monument in his honour and businesses named after him include a brasserie and a wine cellar as well as a hotel where the stars stay in June during an annual festival dedicated to the actor-playwright. Street theatre and Molière-inspired entertainment run through the twisting lanes, up ancient stairwells and into vaulted courtyards. You might even see Alain Robert, the 'French Spiderman'. The urban climber who ascends the world's tallest buildings with only a chalk bag and TV crew in tow, lives in the town.

The main Saturday market for which Pézenas is famous lasts all day and spreads out across Cours Jean-Jaurès, looping up towards the château. The area's chefs and cooks are here, testing artichokes and squeezing peaches, and there are long stalls of scented salts, lavender honey and piles of figs. I bought a kilogram of figs, halved them, covered them in brandy and crème fraîche and grilled them for five minutes. Also in my basket were fig bread, fig jam and a tangy, yet velvety olive oil from the Moulin du Mont Ramus in nearby Bessan. Mont Ramus also has the Hérault *département's*

famous *lucque* olives, which are too good (and too expensive) to crush.

Being near the Corbières, Faugères and Saint-Chinian *appellations*, Pézenas has many excellent wines to entice the visitor. Often hidden by the market is the Cave Alain Reinaldos 'À La Vieille Clairette' which has a wall lined with Languedoc-Roussillon's finest vintages, as well as the usual armagnacs and champagnes. Alain's secret supplies, however, are secured downstairs. He showed me the hard-to-find and expensive Grange des Pères which he describes as "the Pétrus of the Languedoc" – a reference to one of Bordeaux's great wines.

If visitors want to try something slightly stronger, the Noilly Prat vermouth winery is 20 minutes away on the coast in Marseillan. It is interesting to see the lines of giant oak barrels and the Salle des Secrets, where the wine, herbs and spices are stirred in a process called *dodinage*.

There are many puzzles in Pézenas: Molière's name change, hidden passages, trompes l'oeil, coded carvings and even the origins of the town's name. One other secret will probably never be disclosed: the original recipe for the *petit pâté de Pézenas*. But you can have a go at making them with our version (see page 73). 🍷

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