

Quality hideaway in southern France

The sweet floral scent of lavender drifted across the extensive garden as we chilled after the two-hour Ryanair flight, Edinburgh to Marseille. There was not a cloud in the clear blue sky and very little wind.

Indeed, the French flag flying from a flagpole in the neighbouring garden hardly moved. We took in the sun and rejoiced in the experience. However, the temperature was rising steadily and, when it crossed the 30°C threshold, it was time for a cooling dip in the 10mx4m pool.

Our body temperature had shut up so there was a wee jolt to the system as the water crossed the shoulder line, but seconds later that was gone and we luxuriated in the moment.

It's a hard life following Scotland's women's hockey team around Europe, but somebody has to do it and we had luckily found an ideal spot in which to base ourselves around an hour in the car from busy Marseilles Airport.

Bastide des Martelieres is tucked away within 2.5km and an easy walking distance of the centre of stylish Salon-de-Provence, around 52km north-west from the bustling seaport of Marseilles.

It may be the home of a key French air and space force base

with a population of around 45,000, but the only air traffic we heard in our home-from-home hideaway was the occasional helicopter.

Initially, Salon was well positioned on the salt trade routes between the Adriatic, Atlantic and Mediterranean seas, and it was under Phocaean influence in the sixth century BC.

It's principal claim to fame currently, according to Wikipedia, is as the place where French astrologer, and reputed seer, Michel de Nostradamus, spent his last years and he is buried here.

We strolled into the city, a compelling mix of old a new, and with a historic and largely unspoiled centre lying near the walls of the imposing and well-preserved castle which hosts musical and theatrical events during the summer.

Indeed, they were setting up for one when we walked around. It was tres chaud as they say, with record temperatures peaking at 43°C in one June month, and this year they were in the high 30c bracket.

Far too hot for physical activity as, sadly, Scotland's women hockey team found out, despite bravely battling the heatwave. They lost their two Test matches, narrowly, but the exercise was a good one, we were told, for what lies ahead.

Thankfully, the taxi upped the air con in the car from the pitch to the accommodation and were back home in minutes for another welcome dip in the pool.

So, to The Bastide des Martelieres which is superbly run by charming couple, Sandrine and Cedric Bonnouvrier. Nothing is too much trouble and they go above and beyond.

We've travelled extensively and this, without question, is the most at home I have ever felt. It was, to use a French word, magnifique. The setting for the four room (nine-bed) hideaway

is an 18th-century farm dwelling.

It has been tastefully converted to ensure that none of the period feel has been lost. Rooms have en-suite and several boast air conditioning, a must with the thermometer remaining high.

There is a restaurant/breakfast area complete with every device you need and the lady of the house will cook on request if there are sufficient numbers. To say cook is an understatement. Sandrine is a chef par excellence. Her food was top class.

Salads with juicy tomatoes, crispy lettuce and a divine dressing, bull in a gorgeous, thick, red wine sauce, tuna with a touch of spice and tartes to die for, beautifully created and ozzing with local, seasonal fruit.

Breakfast choices were extensive and included eggs from their own six hens, bacon, ham, cheese, fruit, yoghurt and special bread brought in fresh from a local boulangerie plus specials including tasty brioche bread and mouth-watering pan au chocolat.

We cooked for ourselves as Innou, the adorable in-house dog, kept watch from afar, and tea and coffee plus freshly-squeezed orange juice was on tap.

You could choose to eat in or on an extensive gravel patio area which we used for picnic lunches after buying local from a range of quality shops.

On one occasion we needed some special food for our grandchild. It took three minutes to drive to the end of the road and onto a roundabout. Second exit then 300 yards to a well-stocked Lidl.

Bastide des Martelieres also caters for disabled clients with a sit-in shower in one of the rooms on the ground floor.

Wee extras make all the difference and we loved the elastic pool harness which tested our strength. There were floats for those less able to swim and Samdrime even produced blow-up arm floats for our grandchild. She progressed hugely from a wee one timid in the water to loving to play games and splash. The pool area has a special shower in one corner which is screened for changing.

Pitanque, a popular pastime in France, and growing in popularity in Scotland, is available and a special area was 15 steps from the pool.

As you can deduce from the above, we loved the place and would have no hesitation in returning. The hosts really do look after you and deserve all the praise I can give.

What's more, we felt secure, especially with our grandchild as the complex has electric gates and a discrete fence surrounding. Finally, the wi-fi worked a treat and I was able to send reports home to The Edinburgh Reporter with ease. This is, in my view, a top-of-the-range B&B and great value.

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