

WHAT TO EAT AT THIS YEAR'S STATE FAIRS page 31

# SAVEUR

*Savor a World of Authentic Cuisine*



## FRENCH ROAD TRIP

A delicious odyssey along the legendary Route Nationale 7  
page 88

ROAST PORK,  
FRESH PASTAS,  
AND 7 MORE  
RECIPES FROM  
AMERICA'S  
BEST FOOD  
CARTS

# BRING ON SUMMER!



Spicy Thai  
chicken wings  
See page 84 for  
the recipe

148

SAVEUR.COM





France's *Route Nationale 7* covers rich culinary ground, from sun-soaked Provence, with its Mediterranean specialties like (A) *nicotise salad* (see page 106 for a recipe), to the grand brasseries of Lyon, like *Brasserie Georges* (B), in the north. The author and her family start their road trip (C) in Geneva, join Route 7 in Lyon, and drive until its end in Menton.



(A)



(B)



(C)

# THE ROAD TO PARADISE

ROUTE 7 IS FRANCE'S MOST LEGENDARY- AND MOST DELICIOUS—ROAD. FROM THE CHARCUTERIE OF LYON TO THE PISS/LADIERES OF PROVENCE, THIS IS AN EATING TOUR OF A LIFETIME. BY SYLVIE BIGAR PHOTOGRAPHS BY LANDON NORDEMAN



After Paris, the first major gastronomic destination on Route 7 is Lyon. Stop by a *bouchon* (P), a casual neighborhood restaurant such as La Tournade Blonde, offering simple, hearty fare; visit the legendary Brasserie Georges, known for its tableside *steak tartare* (A; see page 106 for a recipe); or browse the *Marché Saint Antoine* (C), an excellent source for the city's famed charcuterie.

Lining stretches of the Route 7 are *platanes* (D), or plane trees, iconic markers of the French road. Though their numbers are dwindling, there are still places where their branches protect drivers from the sun. This one is north of Aix-en-Provence.



Halfway between Geneva and Lyon is the home of the *gâteau Labully*, an orange-blossom-scented brioche with pink pralines. It's one of many sweets, such as Provençal calissons or candied fruits from Nice, to look forward to along the route.



EVERY SUMMER, MY GRANDPARENTS would rent a château near Cap d'Antibes, an unspoiled peninsula between Nice and Cannes overlooking the Mediterranean. I was too young to remember my first trip from Geneva, Switzerland, where I was born, to La Garoupe, as we called it, shorthand for the entire area which included beaches, a lighthouse, and an old chapel. It was the 1960s, and together with my mother, father, and three sisters, I would spend the next ten summers here. Though the landscape was incomparable, with steep marble steps leading from the grounds to the boulder-lined sea, the part I cherished most was the journey there. We'd pile into our 1969 Citroën DS and embark from our home in Geneva to the south of France. The trip could have been quick if we had taken the Autoroute du Soleil, the brand-new

Beginning in Lyon and ending in Menton, the following photos are a chronicle of the author's road trip along the Route Nationale 7. Here she is pictured beside a vintage Citroën DS in Trets, Provence (E), the same model her family would drive to the Riviera when she was a child. Pictured above (B), her family lunches at their Côte d'Azur escape, La Garoupe, in 1951.

thoroughfare that could whisk us to the Riviera in less than a day, but my father insisted that we travel the scenic route, the Route Nationale 7.

"La Nationale Sept" (the National 7), or "N7," was France's very own Route 66, a mythical road that defined summer for generations of people, including me. The meandering path, about 600 miles long, snakes its way from Paris to Menton, a small town near the border with Italy. According to historian Thierry Dubois, author of *C'était La Nationale 7* (Editions Paquet, 2012), Route 7 is often called the spine of France, as it connected the cold north to the sunny south, traversing the Loire Valley, crossing the Rhône River, working its way through Provence, and ending at the Riviera. The road has existed under one name or another since Roman times (you can still see ruins along the way), until it became Route Nationale 7 in 1871.

During its heyday in the 1950s and '60s, the road was dubbed La Route des Vacances. A newly extended paid vacation for French work-

Sylvie Bigar is a food writer based in New York City. Her most recent article for *SAVEUR* was "The Big Cheese" (December 2010).



A sure sign that you have arrived in Provence, at the southern reaches of Route 7, is the appearance of *pissaladières* (Q; see page 104 for a recipe) on restaurant menus and in the markets. This oniony, olive-studded flatbread takes its name from *pissala*, the traditional anchovy paste that is the defining ingredient of this specialty.



The *borne*, a red-and-white cement road marker, came to be a symbol of Route 7. Each one signifies the passage of one kilometer. A popular card game called *Mille Bornes*, created in 1954, was inspired by the route's nearly 1,000-kilometer span.



ers, combined with the production of two new affordable automobiles, the Renault 4CV and Citroën 2CV, kicked off an era of traffic jams, or *bouchons* (the French word for "cork"), as families inched toward the South with rowboats strapped to the roofs of their cars. Residents of one Provençal village joked that during those congested times, even the pastis smelled like gasoline. To travel the road was a rite of passage; the French singer Charles Trenet even penned a song in its honor.

Restaurateurs were quick to open places where families could refuel, and there was food for every budget. My father would plan our stops according to the delicious things we would eat along the way. Each summer, we'd connect with Route 7 in Lyon, the gastronomic capital that marked the halfway point between Paris and Menton. "Three rivers flow through Lyon," my father joked, referring to the nearby vineyards, "le Rhône, la Saône, and le Beaujolais!" We'd forfeit the *bouchons*, the simple taverns Lyon is known for, in favor of a formal restaurant, such as La Mère Brazier, one of the first to win three Michelin stars, or the great Brasserie Georges, where I developed a taste for steak tartare, and my parents enjoyed the ripe local cheeses, like creamy St-Marcellin.

## THE BEST MEALS OF THE ROAD

In 1900, brothers Edouard and André Michelin, makers of Michelin tires based in Clermont-Ferrand, France, printed the first edition of *Le Guide Michelin*, which came to be known colloquially as *Le Guide Rouge* (Red Guide). The book provided road maps, car repair advice, listings for garages and mechanics, and recommendations for places for drivers to eat and sleep. Over the years, as more cars took to the road, the guide evolved: By 1920, Michelin started to assign anonymous inspectors to evaluate restaurants and ensure their standards. In 1926, the first star rating appeared. Two- and three-star ratings were introduced in 1931 to distinguish the top eateries. Soon, the same system that is in use today took hold: One star signified a very good restaurant, two meant it was worth a detour, and three made it a destination. Hundreds of thousands of copies of each edition were printed, and the guide's success celebrated ambitious gastronomy all over France, and eventually, the world. Fernand Point in Vienne and Eugénie Brazier, in Lyon, both located along Route 7, were among the first chefs to garner three Michelin stars in 1933. Today, there are 14 such restaurants on the route. --S.B.





Route 7 is a **wine** lovers' route. The journey can be tracked by the glass, from Beaujolais to Côtes du Rhône and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and finally, the Côtes de Provence.



From tapenade (C) to fresh-pressed oil, Provence is swimming in **olives**; the town of Nyons on the N7 was the first to receive AOC status for its oils.

Provence is known for **cooking** that emphasizes clean flavors and local bounty, with dishes such as herb-laced fish en papillote (A), but it's equally famous for its **street foods**, such as secca (B), a chickpea-flour crêpe. (See page 104 for recipes.)



(A)



(B)

Other times when hunger struck, we could count on the casual roadside restaurants that fed travelers, as well as truckers who drove the route year round. I remember filling my plate from their generous buffets with as much leg of lamb or entrecôte as I wanted. After spending a night at one motel or another, my father might say, "Let's push to Roanne," referring to the iconic Troisgros restaurant, and its famous salmon filet with tangy sorrel sauce. Or we might stop at Restaurant de la Pyramide in Vienne, the legacy of the epicure and founder Fernand Point, who died in 1955, about whom my grandparents liked to reminisce—they told me about his laugh, his expansive waistline, and the champagne magnums he polished off throughout the day.

And so the journey went, my sisters and me crammed in with beach toys, old suitcases, and tangled shrimp nets, my father gripping the wheel with his worn-out Hermès gloves, the *Guide Michelin* on the dashboard. We zigzagged from the charcuterie of Lyon, to the *calissons* (almond-paste candies) of Aix-en-Provence, to Cavaillon's melons the size of *pétanque* balls, whose musky perfume scented the car. The delicacies that lined Route 7 were as much an indicator of where we were as

the *bornes*, the red-and-white cement markers that herald the passage of every kilometer. The flavors changed as we traveled south—the rich tripe dishes of Lyon were replaced by the lighter crayfish gratin in Valence, and finally, the olive-studded *pissaladières* that marked our descent into sun-drenched Provence. Each summer I grew to crave our Michelin-starred feasts, truck stop meals, impromptu picnics, and detours for local delicacies. Though this road is called so many things—La Route des Vacances, La Route Bleue—to me it was always La Route Gourmande.

Twenty years later, I live in New York with my husband, Stephen, and our two children, Sébastien, 8, and Sophie, 10, who are around the same age that I was when we would make those epic journeys. Much has changed since those days. Since 2006, the road is no longer called the N7 but is now Départementale 6007, a demotion of sorts that signifies the road's secondary status—there are far faster ways to get from Paris to the south. My father passed away in 2003, and each summer since I have felt an itch to retrace our steps on Route 7. In homage to him, I decided to plan a trip for my own family last summer, revisiting old favorites and making new traditions, too.



Flowers are a hallmark of summers in Provence: in abundant, colorful bunches on cafe tables (E); edible varieties, such as fragrant lavender and coquelicots, wild red poppies, that crowd the markets. In Avignon, acres of sunflower fields line the highways, while Mandelieu-La-Napole on the Côte d'Azur is famous for its mimosa forests.



Chef Fernand Point, the father of modern French gastronomy, named his **Restaurant de La Pyramide** (D) after the Roman monument in the town of Vienne. In 1933, it was one of the first to win three Michelin stars, and became a destination of Route 7.



"ARE WE THERE YET? I AM HUNGRY!" whines my son Sébastien. I momentarily panic. We are merely a few miles into our trip, and the scene in the backseat is much less romantic than in my fantasy. "Stop kicking me!" yells Sophie. Thankfully, our first stop, Pâtisserie Gâteau Labully in St. Genix sur Guiers, is only an hour away. (Now I wonder if this is the reason my parents always made it the first stop.) We are there to eat gâteau Labully, a Rhône-Alpes specialty. It's a brioche bun scented with orange blossom water, studded with rose-colored pralines that are also baked into the dough. Inside, the bakery hasn't changed—the glass display case is as I remember it, stocked with cakes—nor has the smell, a waft of yeast and sugar. As soon as we leave the shop, we sit outside and eat without a word: The bread is tender, fragrant, and crunchy with pralines.

Back in the car, I unfold the Michelin map like a tablecloth on my lap. Our next stop will be Lyon. Like my father, I prefer Brasserie Georges, a convivial institution that has been feeding diners since 1836. My adventurous Sophie orders her first steak tartare and stares while the efficient waitress blends capers, onions, pickles, raw egg and beef so fast there's no time for a "but I don't like..." to be uttered. Sophie dives in fork first

## TO MARKET

The markets along Route 7 are some of the best places to experience local delicacies and witness the transformation of flavor as the road progresses from north to south. In Lyon, the Marché Saint Antoine overflows with hearty charcuterie, such as andouillette (pork tripe sausage), and rich cheeses, like cervelle de canut, a seasoned fromage blanc. In Aix-en-Provence, the market on Place des Prêcheurs is steeped in the smells and tastes of the region, with items like garlic, lavender, local olives and olive oil, and starting in July, fragrant melons grown in nearby Cavaillon. Mediterranean flavor is in full force at the Marché Cours Massena in Antibes, and the market at Cours Saleya, up the coast in Nice. Both offer tapenade, preserved lemons, anchovy paste, and more. At the end of the road is Les Halles at Quai de Monléon in Menton, where prepared local dishes, like pan bagnat (nicipise salad on an olive-oil-drenched bun) and barbaJuan (Swiss-chard-and-spinach-stuffed pastry), are especially good. --Nidhi Chauhary





Eric Denis has been a waiter at Brasserie Georges in Lyon for the past 39 years. It's the city's oldest restaurant--open since 1838--and its largest, with 550 seats.



The breadth of dining options along Route 7 is among its greatest joys: the outdoor cafés of Aix-en-Provence (A); the Michelin-starred finery of Pic in Valence (E); satisfying truck stops like La Mule Blanche (B, D) in Tain-l'Hermitage; bistros such as Le Brulot (F) in Antibes, with seasonal dishes like baked red snapper with fennel and tomatoes (see page 106 for a recipe).

No journey along Route 7 would be complete without a stop for almond-and-pistachio studded nougat (C, G) in Montélimar; it's still made at Nougat Arnaud Soubeyran Museum. Parents traveling the N7 would placate their car-bound kids with these sweets.



The Relais Routiers (B, D) is a list of roadside eateries that caters to truckers and travelers along France's highways, like the N7. The blue-and-red "Les Routiers" sign denotes a restaurant where drivers can count on finding good, affordable fare.



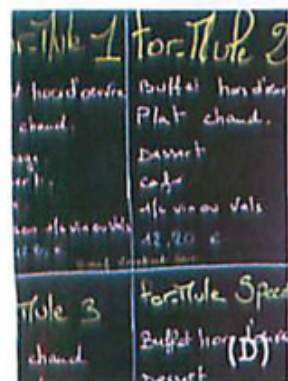
(A)



(B)



(C)



(D)



(F)



(G)

and utters what, to my relief, will become the refrain of our journey: "Mmmmm." I echo her sigh as I slice into thick disks of nutty *saucisson pistaché*, pork sausage with pistachios, another Lyonnais specialty.

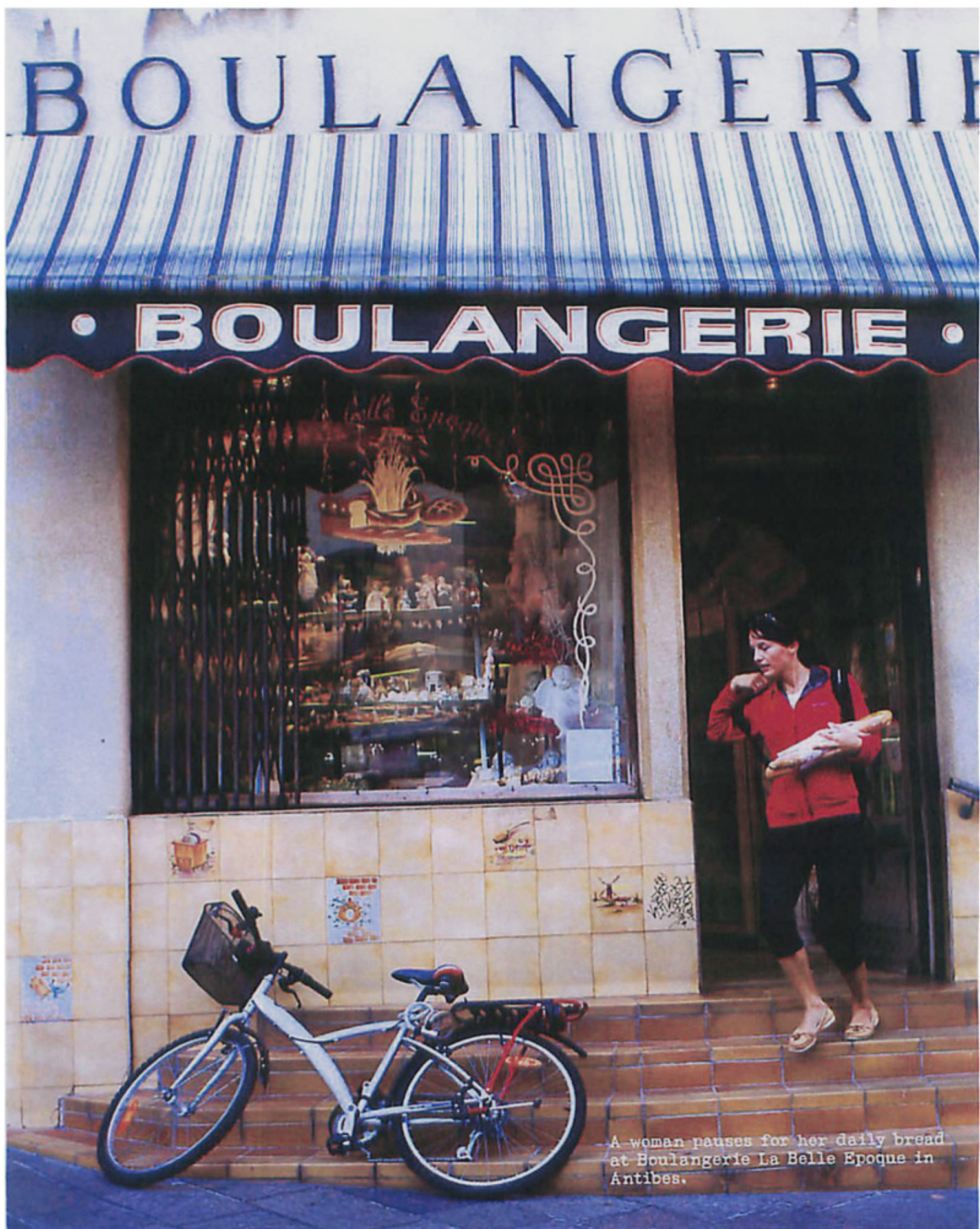
The following day, as we cruise past the vineyards of the Côtes-du-Rhône along the steep banks of the river, I glimpse the first well-worn Nationale 7 mile marker of our trip. As we whiz past the *borne*, I am overcome with emotion. Seeing this symbol after so many years has brought back sentimental memories. I hide my tears as we slow down in Tain-l'Hermitage—site of some of the worst traffic jams I remember—for a much-needed detour to the Valrhona chocolate factory. Taking its name from "vallée" and "Rhône," the place has been turning cocoa beans into chocolate bars since 1922. We visit the boutique, where the children choose enough bonbons to sustain us for months.

Before I let them dig in, we have to eat lunch, and nearby I spot the truck stop restaurant La Mule Blanche. We enter the simple place, marked by the round red-and-blue sign of "Les Routiers," the stamp of approval from the trucking magazine of that same name. I take in the regional accents, the rosy faces, the wooden tables, the humongous

bottles of wine that appear as soon as we sit down, and the all-you-can-eat buffet holding shredded carrot salad, homespun pâtés, and *salade niçoise*, rich with olives, tuna, anchovies, hard-boiled eggs, and more. It's basic, joyous food. I watch my American children, utterly comfortable, joking in French with the waitress, and I can't help but beam.

Determined as I am to make our own rituals, I still must make time for a favorite of my grandparents: Pic in Valence. What started off as a café in 1891 has expanded to include a hotel and fine-dining restaurant, and, most recently, the casual Bistro Le 7. They are all run by Anne-Sophie Pic, a fourth-generation chef, and the only woman in France to hold three Michelin stars. Near the entrance, a collection of antique Michelin guides reminds us of the inextricable link between the evolution of French cuisine and the road. Valence marks the gateway to the region of Provence, and what the waiter has placed before us celebrates the local cuisine: We feast on a deconstructed *pan bagnat*, a *niçoise* salad served as an open-faced sandwich topped with lightly fried anchovies. A Mediterranean *daurade* is doused in *ratatouille*; a luscious veal roulade showcases *tapenade* made from the olives from a nearby grove.





A woman pauses for her daily bread  
at Boulangerie La Belle Epoque in  
Antibes.





At La Citronneraie, an organic citrus farm in the heart of the seaside town of Menton, owner François Mazet reaches for a branch heavy with fruit from one of more than 400 Menton lemon trees in his grove.





The allure of the beaches in the South of France (A) is what compelled vacationing families to make the trip down Route 7. The French Riviera, also known as the Côte d'Azur, accounts for 124 miles of Mediterranean coast. Even Brigitte Bardot traveled down the N7 each summer; she owned a house in St. Tropez, and subsequently made the town famous.



The release of two affordable cars in the postwar years, the Citroën 2CV and the Renault 4CV (C), empowered working-class French to take to the road. During peak season along Route 7, it was common to see cars pulled over for a mid-trip picnic.



For dessert, we visit Montélimar, the home of the sticky almond-and-pistachio nougat that is an emblematic treat of Route 7. I'd heard stories of motorists back in the day running out of gridlocked cars to buy the sweets to placate their children. As we pull up to the Soubeyran Nougat Museum, I have a sense memory of the candy clinging to my teeth.

Chewing noisily on our sweets, we drive past the Arc de Triomphe d'Orange, a marvelous Roman ruin, and a few miles later enter the Châteauneuf-du-Pape wine region. Stephen, a wine lover, insists that a vineyard be on the agenda. We had our pick, as the route travels from the Loire Valley through the Côtes du Rhône, then on to Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and into the rosé-producing regions of Provence. We visit fourth-generation vintner Jean-Pierre Serguier at Château Simian, who runs an organic vineyard. He pours us his delicious Châteauneuf-du-Pape Grandes Grenachières made from vines planted as far back as 1880, and reminisces about selling wine as a kid from a shed on the road that cuts through his domain. It's the end of August, and the harvest has just started. "Finally, a wine I like," appraises Sébastien, sipping fresh grape juice but convinced he's discovered rosé.

It's hard to fathom that we are hungry again the next day, but there are cries of "J'ai faim" coming from the backseat. Without a plan and past Aix-en-Provence, where we quickly stopped to get my beloved *calissons* (almond-paste candies) at the Marché de la Place des Prêcheurs, we pull over at Côté Jardin, a roadside restaurant in Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Beaume. I expect steak frites simplicity, but am awed instead by a succulent guinea hen stuffed with morels, and golden *pissaladières*, the best I have ever tasted, topped with two shimmering sardines. I am thrilled to find out that the N7 still delivers delicious surprises.

Another two hours and we leave the N7 to enter the lush courtyard of our hotel on Cap d'Antibes, which is just up the coast from La Garoupe, the château where I spent my early summers. I walk down the beach to search for the old rental. Eventually, I see the familiar rocky cape. The path that leads to the house is now guarded by a sturdy wall, but the overgrown garden, like my memories, cannot be contained.

LINING THE N7 AS WE DRIVE THROUGH the Riviera, palm trees have replaced the sheltering *platane* trees of the North. At the covered



The covered market in Antibes, brimming with lavender bunches and zucchini blossoms, offers an unexpected delicacy in the form of the **jumbo madeleines** (B) from the family-run **Boulangerie La Belle Epoque** (see page 104 for a recipe).



The Route Nationale 7 leads from the temperate climes of Paris to the warmth of the Mediterranean coast, known as the **Côte d'Azur** (A). The name was coined by the writer **Stéphien Liégeard**, a reference to the vivid blue color of the sea (Route 7 was also called **La Route Bleue** for the same reason). Here, the sun shines 300 days of the year.



(A)



(B)

market in Antibes, we graze on chickpea-flour socca, a savory crêpe baked in a wood-fired oven. I follow a buttery scent to **Boulangerie La Belle Epoque**, where warm madeleines await. Then, we taste pungent black-olive spread from the tapenade maker. It's high season, and the ripe tomatoes, plump apricots, and bundles of lavender resemble paradise.

As we drive through Nice, then above Eze, a cliff-top village with spectacular views of the sea, I'm saddened by the knowledge that the trip is coming to an end. Our final destination is the lemon groves of Menton. We visit **La Citronneraie**, owned by **François Mazet**, a retired Formula One racecar driver who now cares for citrus trees. He sells the fruit here in Menton and to some of France's most discerning chefs. Mazet cuts open a lemon for me to taste. I brace myself for harsh acidity, but the fruit gives off hints of sweet strawberry and bitter orange. I relish those nuances again at a local restaurant called **Les Saveurs D'Éléonore**, where I eat a tart made from these very lemons. The bittersweet taste is a fitting end for this trip. I have discovered new haunts and lamented the loss of old ones, but it's time to turn around. We have come to the end of the road.

## WHEN IN THE SOUTH, DRINK ROSE

As Route 7 winds south, it traverses two great rosé-producing regions: the Rhône Valley and Provence. Hot, sunny Provence tends to yield pale wines with tart minerality—perfect for summer meals. **Mas de Cadenet Sainte Victoire Rosé's** (\$17) earthy finish enhances the region's chickpea socca, while the citrus in **Domaine Serin Terra Amata Rosé** (\$17) complements rich *salade niçoise*. Cabernet lends juiciness to the **Château Vignolaure Rosé** (\$22), a foil to briny tapenade and *pissaladières*. Mellow **Palais Privé Rosé** (\$20), from Luberon, wedged between the Rhône and Provence, tames the sharp mustard in steak tartare. Ruddier and racier than its Provençal cousins, **E. Guigal Côtes du Rhône Rosé** (\$15) stands up to roasted fish dishes, while the herbal **Château Mourgues du Gres Fleur d'Eglantine** (\$13) is a match for milder preparations, like fish en papillote. For dessert, the tropical **Commanderie de Peyrasol Rosé** (\$20) from Provence heightens the flavor of lemony sweets like madeleines. —Betsy Andrews