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Thrill-Seeking in Languedoc-Roussillon

recommended by [Mike Martin](#)

Thrill-seekers and wine buffs or food connoisseurs are usually mutually exclusive but the Languedoc-Roussillon region of France offers something for all three.

With long, wide sandy beaches, mountains and rushing rivers, it's the perfect setting for an activity holiday while the local food and wine is outstanding.

[Ryanair](#) also serves four destinations within the region: **Montpellier**, **Carcassonne**, **Nîmes** and **Perpignan** - which means it offers really good value for money too.

[La Grande Motte](#), 10km from Montpellier airport, is a great place to stay if you want to learn to sail or sample lots of other sports.

The resort sprung up in the 1970s, which makes the architecture an acquired taste, to say the least. It's Aztec meets IKEA - kitsch would be a fair description.

But the facilities are superb. You can play golf at Parcours, football, tennis and rugby at Le Parc des Sports and sail at the marine centre, all for very reasonable prices. Or you can relax on one of the 13 private beaches which are open to the public. On some, you can even enjoy a Thai massage while sipping a drink.

The Languedoc-Roussillon area offers every type of terrain. In St Bauzille de Putois, you can [explore the Hérault Valley by canoe](#) with the [Aupalya company](#).

You paddle seven kilometres over some rapids that are described as 'sportifs' (which means they're pretty challenging) and are set amid stunning scenery. If you can catch your breath, you can see herons, hawks and some large fish in the river. It's €18 for a two-man canoe which goes through the picture-perfect village of **Ganges**, a nice spot to refuel.

Opposite the canoeing centre, you can go **mountain climbing and caving** in the [Grottes des Demoiselles](#). It's a great spot for climbing, and has the via ferrata system, which literally means "iron road".

You attach yourself to iron cables for safety and climb over, through and down the mountain. It includes a very scary descent into a dark cave - cling on. Once you emerge, you abseil - terrifying the first time, but once you trust your equipment and the guide, it's actually great fun.

Just don't look down. Our guide, Lionel, was nicknamed "The Goat" for his amazing ability to scramble up and down steep rocks. He fills you with confidence and gets you through any nerves. We had to go through another dark cave, before reappearing on a 100ft high ledge. The only options were back through the cave or to abseil down the rocks. Only one choice for me - down I went. You may be scared of heights or claustrophobic but the sense of achievement is worth it.

Reward yourself with a night at the sublime [Mas de Baumes](#), a converted farm house. A dip in the pool soothes aching muscles, then €25 buys you a sublime dinner on the terrace with the sun setting over the mountains. A bottle of stunning local Rausanne wine and you feel even more grateful to still be alive.

The fishing village of **Grissan**, setting for the opening scenes of the film Betty Blue, is a great spot for windsurfing and land yachting because of the constant breeze.



Windsurfing is all about balance rather than fitness or power, and a beginner like me spent most of the time in the water on my backside. However a three-day course costing €105 includes six sessions, and that's the way to crack it. It's all about practise and feel.

Land yachting is easier to pick up, and the feeling of speed is quite sublime. You sit in what looks like a bathtub with a wheel at the front, two wide wheels at the back and a big sail above, and use the wind to control your speed and to stop - there are no brakes.

With your backside inches off the ground, 25mph feels like you're really moving, but cornering is another skill altogether. The long beaches are perfect for gaining both momentum and confidence.

The village of **Leucate** is the home of the new sport of **sky-flying**. It involves sitting in a harness at the end of a bungee rope attached to a kite and using wind power to whizz through the air. It feels as if you're on a fairground ride. A practise session gives you the feel of the kite and its amazing power. It's a real adrenaline rush.

The Aude gorges are another spectacular setting for a spot of **white water rafting**. Gushing from the Pyrenees and regulated by two dams, the Aude is a beautiful setting for some rafting. Five people propel the boat while a guide steers, and after a brief explanation, you hit the water and off you go through some testing rapids.

The river cuts through spectacular limestone cliffs. There's always the danger of falling out, but everyone wears a lifejacket for safety. Elbows get bashed but again it's great fun, and the wetsuits keep out the cold. Halfway through the journey, we ate a riverside picnic featuring absolutely stunning local produce, especially the fois gras and goat's cheese. Go easy though, as you need a strong stomach for the second half of the rafting which is more testing than the first.

The Languedoc-Roussillon area has been in the shadow of its neighbour Provence for far too long. It offers much better value-for-money accommodation and food, and has a greater variety of scenery with similarly beautiful Mediterranean weather.

For activity holidays, it's hard to beat and it's less than a two-hour flight from London.

Useful links

[Aupalya River Tours website](#)

[Grottes des Demoiselles](#)

[La Grande Motte Tourist Office](#)

[Mas de Baumes](#)

[White Water Rafting in the Gorges de l'Aude](#)

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