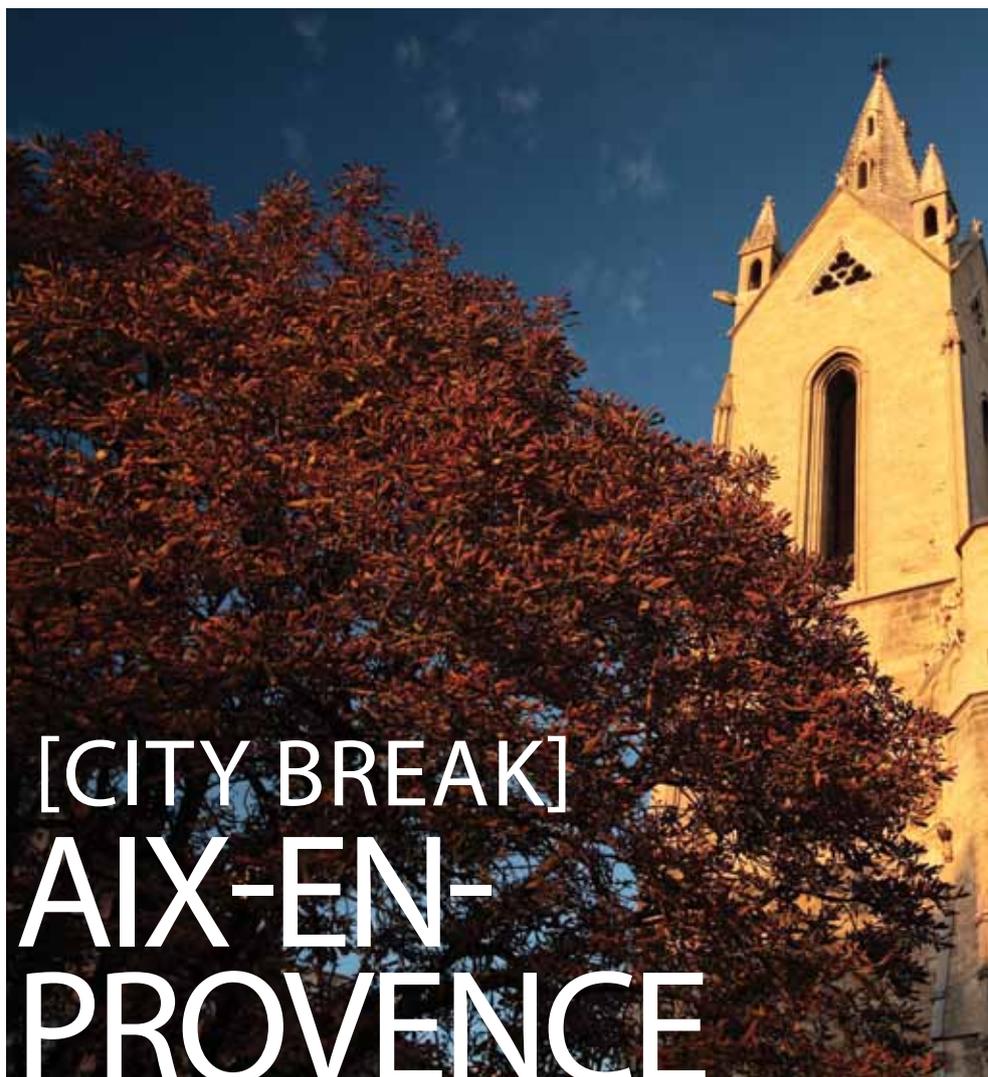


**A**lthough the populous locations of Saint-Tropez, Monaco and Cannes are well frequented by the British, the exceedingly elegant and suave smaller Provençal towns, bafflingly, see less footfall. One such spot is Aix-en-Provence, a historically magnificent treasure trove a mere 30 kilometres from the coast.

Having spent one balmy winter in Aix – for southern France is still wonderfully warm in the ‘cooler’ months – it has always captured my imagination as the quintessential image of provincial France. And with dozens of exquisite eateries, bars and culturally rich vestiges to explore, it’s all too easy to slip into a traditionally French lifestyle.

Aimlessly ambling throughout Aix, the ancient pedigree of this town is clear, which dates back to the Roman Empire. The numerous scenic wonders would leave me in awe, such as the insatiable might of the Aix Cathedral, with its multi-century architecture and delicate tapestries, it reigns king over the narrow cobbled streets, ramshackle buildings and wooden shutters of Aix’s medieval quarter. Throughout these streets, I would stumble across hidden boutiques, each one offering a new and enticing accoutrement for my travels. And along the Rue Espariat and its wondrous side streets, numerous luxury retailers are opening their doors to Aix’s locale; it’s here where there is a remarkable harmony between the contemporary and the traditional boutiques.

Aix’s pièce de résistance is the imperial Cours Mirabeau, a wide thoroughfare that is lined with a magnificent double-row of plane trees and First Empire architecture. Here you will find the infamous brasserie, Les Deux Garçons – a mesmerising place that counted Picasso, Satre, Cézanne and Hemingway as patrons. Sitting on the terrace, I indulge in its signature dish, the croque monsieur. As the brioche oozes with Gruyère and the ham bubbles from its flash frying, I can feel the welcoming radiance of the Provençal sun against my face and, for a moment, I almost feel French. ☒



## [CITY BREAK] AIX-EN- PROVENCE

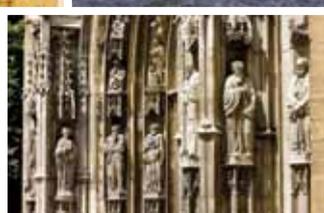
Offering a plethora of spectacular architecture, delectable eateries and historic landmarks, Aix-en-Provence is the perfect place to embrace traditional Provençal culture

WORDS: HUGH FRANCIS ANDERSON





IMAGE © LEONARD ZHUKOVSKY



**Where to stay**

La Villa Gallici gloriously radiates what Aix-en-Provence is truly about; old world charm. Situated a few minutes' walk from the town centre, the 18th-century country residence is the epitome of France's regal past. Its restaurant, which assumes a Florentine terrace, is a gourmet opening to Provençal cuisine; make sure to try the tasting menu for a well-rounded taste of southern France. (*villagallici.com*)

**Eating and drinking**

For the best seafood in the area, head to Toinou: Les Fruits de Mer. Hailed as the greatest restaurant for fresh seafood in Aix, Toinou specialises in mixed platters including crab, oysters, shrimp, lobster and, of course, escargot de mer. (*toinou.com*)

**Mayfair recommends**

To fully embrace the culture of Aix-en-Provence, a trip must be made to the cloister of the Aix Cathedral. Walking through a medieval oak door, the Romanesque 7th-8th-century cloister comprises slender, intricately carved stone columns overlooking a garden. The pillars at the four corners are carved with depictions of the Apostles and topped with the symbols of the Four Evangelists, making for a truly eye-opening journey into Aix's rich history.

**SUITCASE**

**ESSENTIALS**



**#1 Sunglasses**, from £147 Persol (*persol.com*)



**#2 Shirt**, £145, Gieves & Hawkes (*mrporter.com*)



**#3 Weekend Bag**, £595, Aspinal of London (*aspinaloflondon.com*)



**#4 Shorts**, £125 Ralph Lauren (*harrods.com*)



**#5 Loafers**, £579, Ludwig Reiter (*ludwig-reiter.com*)