



# Slice of life

Susan Gough Henly discovers the GOOD life in the French COUNTRYSIDE, only 150 kilometres west of PARIS.

PHOTOGRAPHY THOMAS LE FLOC'H (PERCHE HILLS); MARIE-ANNAIS THIERRY (BAR-A-VIN); SUSAN GOUGH HENLY (HORSE); LAURENCE DE CALAN (LA PETITE GAULARDIERE ROOM); JOANN PAI (TRISH DESEINE PORTRAIT)



On the scene | **POSTCARDS**



While browsing a French lifestyle magazine recently I came across an article about a gorgeous cookbook called *Un Déjeuner à la Campagne* by Trish Deseine.

Literally translating to ‘lunch in the country’, the photos of rustic tables laden with scrumptious dishes celebrating country goodness had me so intrigued that I wanted to find out more, both about its author and the bucolic nook in France that inspired its creation.

It turns out that the Irish-born food writer and author has lived in France for 35 years. And while she’s not well known in Australia, her 30-plus French-language cookbooks have sold hundreds of thousands of copies, several winning France’s most prestigious awards in food writing. Fifteen years ago, *Vogue France* named her one of the 40 most influential women in the country.

Trish lives in Le Perche, the tucked-away inland region of Normandy laid out with rolling farmland and forest, Renaissance-era turreted manor houses and historic villages built from local limestone rendered with ochre sand. There is no Mont-Saint-Michel or Giverny to draw the hordes, so it’s blissfully off the tourist trail. The sturdy Percheron draft horse is its most well known (and appropriately unassuming) symbol.

“There’s nothing massively remarkable about Le Perche and that’s precisely its allure,” says Trish. “It’s quiet, protected and cherished ... a place where you can just be. Le Perche attracts three types of people: foodies, nature lovers and flea-market junkies. Just don’t tell the Parisians who’ve discovered its serene charms that I’ve let you in on the secret.”

For Australians visiting Paris, it makes an ideal long-weekend getaway for a French country fix, just two hours’ drive west of the city.

An undulating transition zone between the apple orchards and dairy country of Normandy and the grand châteaux, vineyards and market gardens of the Loire, Le Perche has been a crossroads for centuries, open to many influences including, most recently, the aesthetic talents of Parisians. Not the flashy types who want to see and be seen, but those who come to decompress and enjoy their *déjeuners à la campagne*. There’s also a trickle of young Parisian chefs who’ve traded in big-city glamour for potager gardens next to their country bistros.

Today, the Parc Naturel Régional Du Perche protects this artisanal rural lifestyle in medieval towns and villages and the 100-odd remaining turreted manor houses that dot its hedgerow-lined fields and wooded countryside. >>

**CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE:** *The bucolic Perche Hills; Cookbook author, Trish Deseine was inspired by Le Perche; Cosy stay, La Petite Gaulardière; The region is famous for the Percheron draft horse; A charming bar-a-vin in the village of La Perrière.*



POSTCARDS On the s



Trish recommends we base ourselves at La Petite Gaulardière in a painstakingly restored two-storey cottage attached to Béatrice Robin's traditional country house. Nestled among pale hydrangeas, the cottage looks across a field where grey Percheron horses munch contentedly and forested valleys fold upon themselves into the gauzy distance. This is where *Un Déjeuner à la Campagne* was photographed.

Arriving in the village of Perche-en-Noce, my husband and I find Trish sitting at a window table at Tandem, a popular gathering spot among locals. Over a flaky mushroom tart, *suprême de volaille* (chicken in cream sauce) and a dark chocolate fondant, Trish compiles a list of must-visit *brocante* (flea market) shops, foodie stops and design stores. Just next door, she introduces us to Sonia Revellat, who reimagines and repaints armoires, dressers, tables and chairs in her dreamy Creat & Broc atelier in the cottage garden of her village home.

Trish also shows us around the fortified medieval town of Bellême. Here, we meet trailblazers Jean-Luc and Sylvie Gonsard, who opened Le Comptoir du Porche 21 years ago. The boutique features jewellery, textiles and leather goods crafted by artisans, many of whom moved to Le Perche decades ago. We savour hot chocolate at Les Gourmandises de Jeannine before exploring Chez les Voisins' 1970s collection of pillows, ceramics and lamp shades. At Monteloup, Trish introduces us to antiques dealer and art historian Jérôme Pedrateïta, who specialises in French provincial dressers, elaborate vases and oil paintings, and we admire his partner Gil Bayar's exquisite floral arrangements.

We toast our discoveries with a glass of bone-dry local cider at La Verticale wine bar. Dinner is at Bistrot des Ecuries, a stone barn with an airy dining room anchored by a roaring fireplace. It offers the best



of country cooking: vegetables and fruit from the farm and chicken from the neighbours all delivered with bonhomie and fresh country air.

After a breakfast of local delicacies at La Petite Gaulardière the next day, we head to the buzzy Saturday morning market in Mortagne-au-Perche to gather ingredients for our own déjeuner à la campagne: mussels, local red onions, garlic and parsley, *paté-en-croûte*, ruby tomatoes, basil and local goat's cheese.

We browse the local design shops, including the remarkable Trait Noir, where we meet passionate young collector Lola Malek, who offers museum-quality Asian lacquerware and baskets at a fraction of Parisian prices. At La Vie en Rouge we pick up a Loire cabernet franc for lunch before stopping at Chez Nous Campagne concept store to browse Franck and Cécile Schmitt's inspired homewares, clothing and bric-a-brac in the stables of their country home.

We enjoy a splendid *déjeuner chez nous* (lunch at our place) before driving to the bijou village of La Perrière, where Laurent Loingtier draws antique lovers to his hybrid restaurant, tea salon and bric-a-brac boutique. Sitting under glinting chandeliers, we savour Darjeeling tea alongside heirloom-apple tarte tatin and admire his crystal glasses, silver platters, porcelain and antique jewellery. Across the road, he's opened an atmospheric bar-a-vin, while Les Pains de Saint-Hilaire offers the sort of breads that boho-chic second homeowners crave. >>



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
*La Vie en Rouge*; *Le Manoir de Courboyer*; The medieval town of Bellême; Neo-bistro Oiseau Oiseau in Préaux-du-Perche.

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID COMMENCHAL (HORSES IN FRONT OF THE COURBOYER MANOIR); CORALINE ET LEO (RESTAURANT LE COMPTOIR DU PORCHE); SUSAN GOUGH HENLY (LA VIE EN ROUGE); JULIEN CHARLES/HELLO TRAVELERS (OISEAU OISEAU INTERIOR)

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A Traveller’s Checklist  
GETTING THERE

Le Perche is located two hours west of Paris. Rent a car or come via train on the Paris-Montparnasse-Le Mans line. Active types might enjoy a change of pace by following the cycle route that loops through the Chevreuse Valley, Perche region and Normandy countryside.

STAYING THERE

Stay at LA PETITE GAULARDIÈRE, a cosy stone cottage originally designed to protect shepherds and their flock. The property is a refuge for pheasants, hares and squirrels. From here, you can go for walks in the meadows and mingle with the Percheron horses. [lapetitegaulardiere.com](http://lapetitegaulardiere.com)

PLAYING THERE

The countryside around Le Perche is dotted with beautiful manors, villages with frescoed churches, and dinky little wine bars and restaurants that make the perfect pit stops. Fossick in a flea market, wander through its orchards, admire the architecture and get a taste of the Normandy lifestyle. [perche-tourisme.fr](http://perche-tourisme.fr)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Sea bass with pear shavings and turnips at Sauge; The restaurant is owned by Parisian chef Amandine Chaignot; Chez les Voisins; Browsing stores in Monteloup.



PHOTOGRAPHY MARIE-ANAIS THIERRY (MONTELOUP SHOP FRONT); JULIEN CHARLES/HELLO TRAVELERS (CHEZ LES VOISINS); EMILIE GUELPA (SAUGE)

WORDS KATE BETTES PHOTOGRAPHY GETTY IMAGES/ALXPIN (ST MARK’S BASILICA); GETTY IMAGES/NANTONOV (VENICE); GETTY IMAGES/SLOW CENTURY (SALZBURG); LIANEM (VÉZELAY ABBEY)



Marvel at  
St Mark’s Basilica

Stepping off a gondola and looking up at the five domes of St Mark’s Basilica in Venice is the stuff of dreams. Built in the Byzantine style, the Doges drew inspiration from the Eastern Roman Empire, their trading partners across the sea.

Got it on your cultural hit list? No need to bump elbows. On the Limelight Arts Travel Istanbul to Venice tour, you’ll take a private, after-hours stroll among the basilica’s golden mosaics. Italian art history specialist Dr Louise Marshall will guide you along the old Venetian trade route from the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul to this skip-the-line experience in Venice.

DISCOVER  
CONTEMPORARY  
MASTERPIECES  
IN VENICE

Every two years the who’s who of the art world throw down their brushes and descend on the Venice Biennale, where the big-hitter venues – Arsenale and the Giardini – house work from brilliant creatives around the world.

But Venice won’t be constrained. On Limelight Arts Travel’s Venice Biennale 2026 tour, art historians Dr Nick Gordon and Dr Lachlan Warner have curated an itinerary that captures the city’s full artistic soul, including Ca’ Pesaro, the Palazzo Fortuny, the Prada Foundation and the Biennale itself.



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FOLLOW IN  
MOZART’S FOOTSTEPS

In January, the mountains of Salzburg echo with homages to Mozart, celebrating the composer’s birthday. In 2026, performances include a new premiere of The Magic Flute, along with talks and tours exploring the composer’s life. Grab your baton and join the party on Limelight Art Travel’s Mozart and the Mozart Festival tour. Its editor-at-large Clive Paget will guide guests through six performances in Salzburg, followed by three more in Vienna, including at the Vienna State Opera and the Volksoper.



4 Gothic architecture  
of medieval Burgundy

THE WARS AND RIVALRIES OF BURGUNDY SHAPED EUROPE, BUT THE DUCHY ALSO LEFT A LESS BLOODY LEGACY: ARCHITECTURE. THAT PATRONAGE LIVES ON AT SPOTS LIKE THE VÉZELAY ABBEY (BASILICA OF SAINTE MARIE-MADELEINE), WHERE MEDIEVAL PILGRIMS ONCE TRAVELLED TO SEE THE RELICS OF MARY MAGDALENE. TODAY, IT’S ART PILGRIMS WHO COME FOR THE CURVES OF ITS ROMANESQUE PORTAL AND SOARING GOTHIC ARCHES. ON LIMELIGHT ART TRAVEL’S EXPLORING MEDIEVAL BURGUNDY TOUR, DR LOUISE MARSHALL TAKES YOU DEEPER INTO THE BURGUNDIAN INFLUENCE, ALONG WITH SIDE ADVENTURES, LONG CANAL-SIDE LUNCHES AND SPRINGTIME RAMBLES.

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