

DESTINATION
FRANCE

Seaside village to another

SUNNING IN THE
BAY – The bay at
Collioure is small
enough to swim
across.



WE HAD a couple of days
spare for some Pyrenean
wanderings.

"Do you want the mountains
or the sea?" our French friend
asked.

We hesitated. "I know," she
said, pointing at the map, "you
can have both! But beware,
you'll fall in love!"

And so we did.
As soon as we stepped off the
train at the little platform
above the bay we knew it was
special.

Walking down the quiet tree-
lined avenue from the station
and onto the flag-stoned quay,
the vista opened before us.

The town buildings shone
like brightly coloured dominoes
stacked above the church
beach (the Boramar plage).

Its little port (le Port
D'Amont) was set under a horizon
of soft blue, fading to white
sea mists.

"This is it!" we said, almost
simultaneously. We had fallen
in love – and hard.

Collioure is a tiny seaside
Mediterranean village dating
back to Phoenician times,
tucked into the foothills of the
Pyrenees at the far southern
end of France.

The village is wrapped
around a circular bay.

Only 20km from Spain, it is
in the heart of French

Catalonia – a region France
claimed in 1659 – and has two
cultures and three languages.

Firmly French with a his-
toric vein of Catalan language
and culture – celebrated in fes-
tivals, food and dance –
Collioure is in a time warp.

Saved from the ravages of
developers of the 1970s and '80s,
and avidly protected by its
enthusiastic mayor, it has kept
its true coastal village 'his-
torique'.

Collioure is dramatic.

The 12th Century lighthouse,
the red copper-domed bell
tower, the castle (with block-
like layers jutting into the
water in the centre of the bay),
the windmill among olive trees

behind the Dominican convent
(now wine cellar), and the high
hills topped with watchtowers
founded by the Majorcan kings.

The village is framed by jut-
ting headlands and a landscape
of leaning vineyards and split-
rock retaining walls, cork trees,
thyme and rosemary scrubland,
with the snow-capped Mount
Canigou in the distance.

The light and colour brought
Matisse and Derain here in
1905. They established the
Fauvist movement by painting
on the balconies, streets and
quay fronts.

Signac, Picasso, Dufy,
Chagall and Mackintosh are
among the evolving constella-
tion of artists who still capture

WHERE to stay: The
Lemon House –
www.collioure.com.au

Village information:
Collioure Tourist Office –
www.collioure.com
Sightseeing: Anchovy
tours through the interpre-

tation centre and the facto-
ries.

Explore the century-old
Chateau Royale,
Collioure's centrepiece.

Visit the Dominican
Convent, now a wine inter-
pretation centre and sam-
ple or buy local wines.

Eat at the Hotel Des
Templiers, with its walls
adorned by famous artists.
Take a food, wine or
nature tour. Le Petit train

tours from the village into
the hills and neighbouring
towns. Snorkel, sail, scuba
dive in the bay or try a
day's fishing.

How to get there: Air –
RyanAir to Perpignan or
Girona – www.ryanair.com

Train – TGV/SNCF
(Paris to Collioure six
hours) – www.tgv.com
Car – Well-known hire
brands available from
local airports and towns.



If you go...

takes you back place in time

the town's spirit of colour and form.

Patrick O'Brian, the author of Master and Commander and more than 20 historical sea novels, lived there for more than 50 years and is buried there.

Strolling in the narrow flag-stoned streets between high-coloured walls hung with geraniums and festooned with blazing Bougainvillea, you walk through an ancient stone archway onto the waterfront.

There you can sip a chilled white wine or lick gelati by the limpid plane trees.

French families revel in the clear, clean, azure water, while Catalan ladies slice sausage onto crusty bread on the beach.

There are tourists, especially in the crazy months of July and August, though mostly French.

But all year, the town has its own rhythm.

Twice-weekly markets burst with fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese stalls, crusty breads and the heavenly scent of racks of roasting chickens, ribs and sausages.

The cycle of the wine year is celebrated and local wines are sold at the many 'caves' in the village and surrounding area.

Fishing – now mainly in nearby Port Vendres – is popular, with a fantastically diverse fish market open all week at La Crie tucked at the end of a true working port.

A few village fishermen sell their night's catch early in the morning by the little dock.

Anchovy products are a town mainstay, with boutique vendors selling fillets and 'anchoiades' among the local honey and olive oil.

The town is sufficiently small that a car isn't needed and only people roam in the old town and along the spectacular seaside promenade just made for lazing and eating.

A Catalan cuisine of



VILLAGE LIFE – Shopping for bread at the market.

grilled sardines (a la planxcha), squid, tomatoes and peppers, washed down with a local Collioure red is a must.

We regularly swim across the bay from one beach to another or walk the herb-scented hills on paths from the village streets. Scuba and boating are readily accessible and sketching or painting is a common pastime.

You can use Collioure as a base to discover the region.

French and Spanish Cataluna, Dali's house at Cadaques and Museum at Figueres are only an hour's drive; Barcelona two.

The Pyrenees and Andorra are easily reached by car or scenic train.

Then there's the Cathar region with its high castles and wines, the Tech and the

Tet river valleys and hill villages – but it's the light, colour and water that bring people here.

At 42 degrees north (our Australian home is at 42 degrees south), and with an average 320 days' sunshine a year, there's always plenty of light.

Collioure has called us back again and again.

We now own a small stone fishermen's house we've called The Lemon House in the Faubourg quarter, less than a minute's walk from the sea.

Our last evening in Collioure finished with four of us sitting on a bench gazing across the bay as the sun set, colours fading through pastel to soft shades of blue-purple.

Easy to see why it's called The Jewel of the Mediterranean.