

PRÊT À PARTIR



BREAKING BREAD

Where better to learn to bake your first baguette than in the City of Light? Travel Company Family Twist will keep small hands busy with its baking and brunch workshop. The morning session starts with a crash course in baking techniques, before parents and children get stuck into kneading dough, preparing *fougasse* and baking chocolate bread. The English-speaking chef explains recipes simply, and children are given mini-aprons, safe tools and chef's hats. After mastering bread baking, families can tuck into the results before having the option of enjoying another Parisian adventure such as a horse-drawn carriage ride. The price for a two-hour bread baking and brunch workshop is €400 for a family of up to six members. The minimum age is four years old.

Tel: 0203 130 4853, www.familytwist.co.uk



Love nest

For a night's sleep with a difference, why not spend a cosy holiday in this rural retreat perched in the heart of the Luberon? Part of the Domaine de Capelongue estate in the Provençal town of Bonnieux, this pigeon loft has been converted into a two-bedroom suite that combines old stone architecture with a contemporary interior. The open-plan space on two floors is decked out with state-of-the-art fixtures and the original furniture fits the curved walls. Guests can swim in the 40-metre pool while admiring the olive trees, lavender groves and views of the Luberon Valley. Prices start from €400 per night.

Tel: (Fr) 4 90 75 89 78, www.capelongue.com

Milking the applause

Cows are the stars of Gascony's answer to bullfighting, but no animal gets hurt in this world of dodges, jumps and somersaults



Visitors to Gascony who want to sample the authentic culture in this part of south-west France should look out for a *course landaise*. It is a close relation of the bullrunning and fighting traditions over the border in Spain, except that the displays of agility and machismo involve specially bred cows, which are not killed or injured and may have careers in the ring lasting more than ten years.

The cows emerge from the doors of stalls around the arena tethered by a long rope looped around their horns. Guided by the rope man, (*cordier*), they need very little encouragement to charge towards anyone standing in the ring.

The competitors aim to impress the judges in various ways. The *écarteurs* or dodgers, who wear embroidered velvet jackets, stand their ground in the face of the charging cow until the last possible minute, before spinning out of the way, striking a pose and leaving the beast bewildered. The *sauteurs*, dressed in white, have a different repertoire, leaping, somersaulting, or even pole-vaulting over the cow as it lowers its head to lunge at them. In

case that doesn't look difficult enough, they may also tie their legs together or stuff their feet into a basque beret and jump without taking a run-up. During the interval everyone troops out to the beer stall; for the full experience order it with a dash of peach or blackcurrant *sirop*.

Although the finer points of technique will be lost on the first-time spectator, anyone can appreciate the acrobatic displays and nerve of the competitors looking half a ton of charging flesh in the eye.

Competitions take place in more than 160 permanent *arènes* or rings as well as in temporary arenas dotted over Gascony. Dates are listed on the website of the *Fédération Française de la Course Landaise*, the official governing body.

If you want to find out more, the Musée de la Course Landaise in the village of Bascons, near Mont-de-Marsan (tel: (Fr) 5 58 52 91 76, www.bascons.fr/musee.htm) provides a fascinating insight into the local practice.

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www.courselandaise.org