

THE INSIDERS | UPPER PROVENCE

**GRAEME CLARKE**

WALKABOUT GOURMET ADVENTURES

STAY: Private apartment

We offer four properties on a beautiful cobblestoned street in the centre of Forcalquier, the 12th-century former capital of Provence. Each apartment has great character and atmosphere, with a private terrace or balcony or access to an internal courtyard and garden. Restaurants and cafes are a five-minute stroll away; walkaboutgourmet.com.

NATURE: Montagne de Lure

Experience solitude and walk through magnificent beech forests in this isolated mountain range in Upper Provence. From the summit on a clear day you can see the French Alps to the north and the Mediterranean to the south; forcalquier.com.

SHOP: Forcalquier Market

Every Monday morning, the town holds one of the most colourful markets in Provence. It's famous for its array of local produce: some of the best goat's cheese in France, lavender honey and a large selection of olive oils. In summer, the air is heady with the sweet smell of melons; in winter, the scent is of prized black truffles.

VISIT: Gorges du Verdon

To the east of the Durance Valley, the 700m deep, 25km long canyon, with a turquoise river at the bottom, will take your breath away. In summer, stop on the nearby Valensole Plateau, home to Europe's most extensive lavender crops; lesgorgesduverdon.fr.

EAT: In Vino, Forcalquier

Norbert Betron and chef Sheila offer just one small menu each night, based on fresh produce. The dishes are prepared in front of you, so don't expect fast food. Enjoy Norbert's wine recommendations (he has an extensive cellar) and savour the flavours of this delicious local cuisine; restaurant-invino.fr.

ESCAPE: Country drive

Combine a drive through the gorgeous countryside of Upper Provence with an afternoon of tastings. Visit the factories of L'Occitane, Oliviers & Co and Premiere Pression Provence — all three companies were founded by our neighbour and friend Olivier Baussan, a real visionary and someone who truly appreciates the amazing produce of the region; occitane.com, oliviers-co.com, ppp-olive.com.

Walkabout Gourmet Adventures has operated tours in Europe, Australia and Africa for the past 27 years.