**Eva ANGLESSY** **14 November 2026**

# Aix-en-Provence and its area



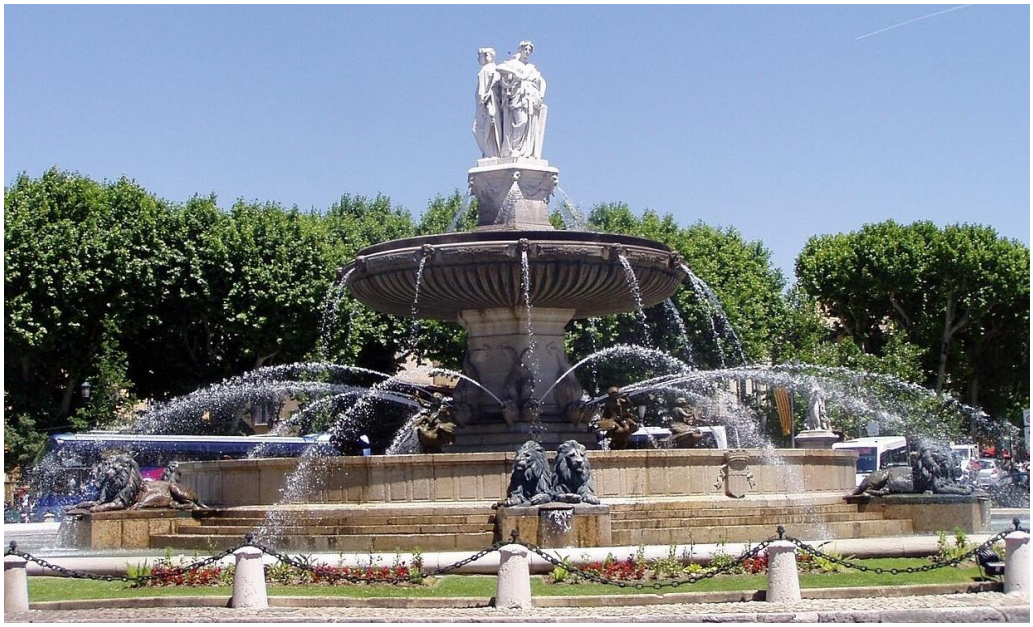
View of the Sainte-Victoire Mountain from the dam and artificial lake of Bimont.

**Aix-en-Provence** is a magnificent city—home to thermal baths and over 250 fountains—as well as a hub of culture. Beyond its university, which has been renowned since the Middle Ages, its opera festival, and its various museums, the city centre can boast a remarkable architectural heritage.
I did not want to replicate here the content found in many guidebooks—which already provide all the information you might need to discover the treasures of Aix (including its culinary delights)—but rather offer a more intimate perspective. I have included photos of a walk into the city streets and two short drives around Aix, that I took in 2026 with my sister who has been living in the region for years and shared some of her favourite spots with me.

**Note**: All photographs in this guide are my own, unless otherwise specified.

# A walk into the historic centre of Aix (August 2026)

One cannot visit the old town of Aix-en-Provence without strolling along the *Cours Mirabeau*, with its plane trees, 17th-century mansions, restaurants, cafés, and art galleries—not to mention its four historic fountains. The most majestic of these is the *Fontaine de la Rotonde* (1860), the first to feature a cast-iron basin. The three statues that adorn the fountain represent the city's primary spheres of activity: Justice, Agriculture, and the Fine Arts.



*Fontaine de la Rotonde*, 1860. Photo by Rainbow0413. Public Domain.[1]



*Fontaine des Neuf Canons* (1691)

[1] Source : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fontaine_de_la_Rotonde_-_Aix-en-Provence.JPG

The *Fontaine des Neuf Canons* (1691) replaced a watering trough where migrating herds would come to drink long before the creation of the *Cours Mirabeau*. The moss conceals the nine sculpted water outlets distributed across the two upper basins. Yet, during last summer's heatwave, the fountains stopped flowing…



The « Hot Water » fountain, or *Fontaine Moussue*.

Above, the "Hot Water" fountain—known as the *Fontaine Moussue* due to the thick moss covering it—is fed by water at 18°C (64 F) originating from the Bagniers spring. It was the first fountain built on the *Cours* and remains the only one supplied by a thermal spring. Finally, at the very top of the *Cours Mirabeau* stands the Fountain of King René (1819).

Among the superb mansions built along the *Cours* during the reign of Louis XIV, my eyes were drawn to the large façade of the *Hôtel d'Arbaud-Jouques* (at No. 19), which spans eight bays. While the arrangement of the pilasters follows the classical orders, the entrance door on the right side—with its rich, trophy-themed ornamentation on the door panels—points toward 18$^{th}$-century architectural styles. The elegant, wrought ironwork of the balconies and the graceful masks on the keystones of the window arches further distinguish this façade as one of the finest in Aix from that period (1700–1732). Today, the building houses commercial establishments.



*Hôtel d'Arbaud Jouques* (No.19 *Cours Mirabeau*). General view of the façade, photo by Jiri Matejicek. Public Domain. [2]



*Hôtel d'Arbaud Jouques*: detail of the façade.

[2] Source : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aix-en-Provence_Cours_Mirabeau_19.jpg




Entrance hall of the *Hôtel d'Arbaud Jouques*, with its monumental stairs.





Original 18th-century panels of the entrance door of the *Hôtel d'Arbaud Jouques*.

The Baroque architecture[3] of the old town takes us by surprise around the corner of a street or charming little squares:



*Place d'Albertas* and its fountain. The square is being renovated.



Detail of a renovated façade illuminated by a warm sunlight

The *Hôtel d'Albertas*—or rather, the *Place d'Albertas*—was built in the 1740s by Georges Vallon. Though its layout draws inspiration from the royal squares of Paris, it is tempered by the delicacy of the Regence-style ornamentation, offering a free reinterpretation of Baroque themes. At the centre of the square stands a fountain featuring a cast-iron basin created in 1912.

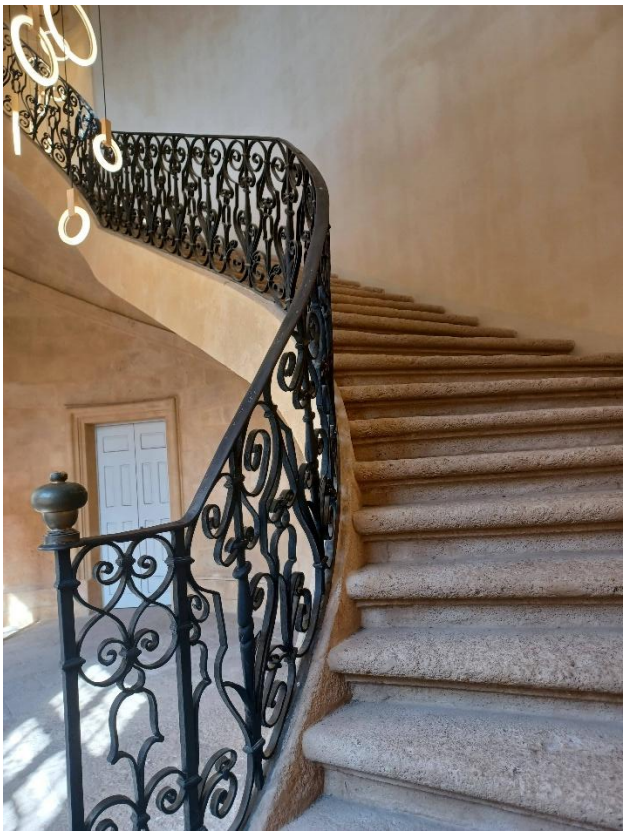
[3] Baroque architecture (1600–1750) emerged in Italy at the beginning of the 17th century and spread rapidly throughout Europe. Linked to the Counter-Reformation and to absolute monarchies, the style seeks to impress, to stir emotions, and to theatricalize the space.

The *Hôtel Boyer d'Eguilles* (1672), its stone stairs, and its later carriage gate (1715):












The *Place des Trois Ormeaux* and its fountain




The sculpted wooden door of the *Hôtel de Saphallin*, dating back to 1672.



Entrance door of the *Hôtel d'Arbaud* (1670), No.7, *rue Maréchal Foch*



Entrance door of the *Hôtel d'Agut* (1676), No.2 *Place des Prêcheurs* (see next page)

On the *Place des Prêcheurs*, we admired the splendid *Hôtel d'Agut* (1676), and a clock featuring a Chinese automaton (originally the sign for a watchmaker who set up shop in this building in the early 19th century), which strikes the hours on a bell with its hammer:



The *Hôtel d'Agut*, 1676, No.2, *Place des Prêcheurs*. Photo by JM Campaner. [4]




No. 36, *Place des Prêcheurs*: detail of the sundial and the automaton (19th century).

[4] Source : Public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hotel_d%27Agut_by_JMC.jpg

We finally arrived on the *Place de l'Hôtel de Ville* (the Town Hall Square):



The *Hôtel de Ville* (1655-1678) and its clock tower dating from 1572. Photo by Gilbertus.[5]





Details of the entrance gate of the *Hôtel de Ville*

Established at the foot of the Clock Tower since the 14th century, the Town Hall was rebuilt from 1655 to 1678. Its overall design is inspired by Italian palaces. The passage of time and the French

[5] Source : Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aix-en-Provence-H%C3%B4tel_de_Ville.jpg

Revolution stripped the façade of its rich original ornamentation—which included statues of angels, busts of the Counts of Provence, and the King's monograms. The inner courtyard of the Town Hall is more understated, yet every bit as elegant as the exterior façade.





The inner courtyard of the Town Hall.

After this lovely stroll in the old town, we indulged ourselves with a delicious tea break at Weibel, No. 2 rue Chabrier: http://www.maisonweibel.com/

## A drive to the *Sainte-Victoire* Mountain (March 2026)

A short excursion to the Bimont dam and its artificial lake proved to be the perfect way to admire the *Sainte-Victoire* Mountain and enjoy a walk in the heart of nature (see also the cover photo). Located at only twenty minutes from the city centre, this site is very popular among the residents of Aix-en-Provence, especially those who enjoy hiking.



Le barrage de Bimont, et la Sainte-Victoire en fond.

The dam was inaugurated in 1952. Following a major renovation between 2016 and 2019, it remains in operation. For further information, please visit the website: https://barragedebimont.com/.

# A tour of the *Petit Luberon* (November 2026)

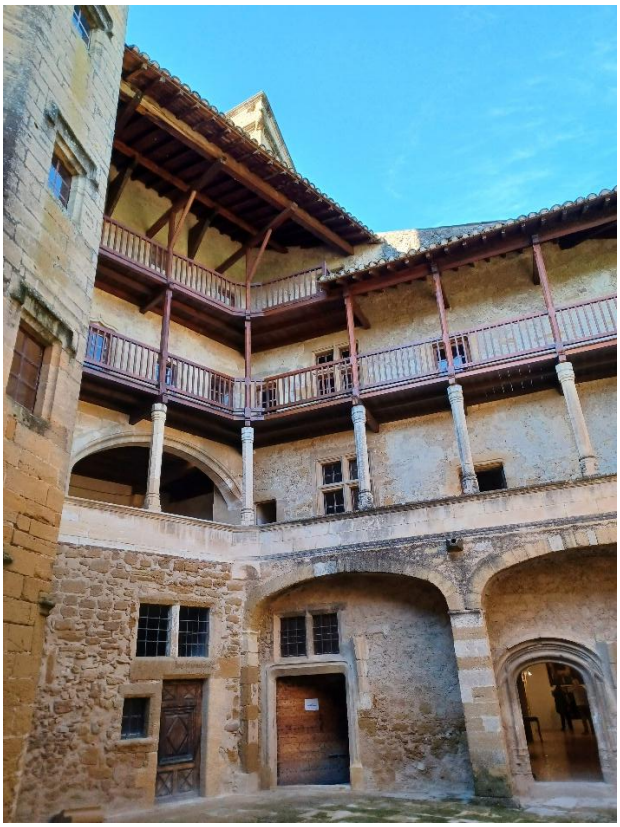
On a beautiful, sunny day, we drove about forty kilometres from Aix-en-Provence to the *Petit Luberon* mountains. Upon crossing the Durance River, we entered the Vaucluse district. The whole Luberon Regional Natural Park, covering an area of 1,867 km², is a vibrant and well-preserved land. Its mountain range stretches 75 km from west to east, between Cavaillon (in the *Vaucluse* district) and Forcalquier (in the *Alpes-de-Haute-Provence* district).

The village of Lourmarin is in a valley pass connecting the northern and southern parts of the region and separating the *Petit Luberon* to the west from the *Grand Luberon* to the east. As a strategic passage, the site saw the construction of a fortress as early as the 12th century. During the Renaissance, the d'Agoult family built the first part of the *Château de Lourmarin* (known as the *Château-Vieux*, "old castle") between 1480 and 1526, atop the remains of the original fortress. Then the Renaissance wing (called the *Château-Neuf*) was added starting in 1526. Magnificently restored in 1920 by Robert Laurent-Vibert, an industrialist from Lyon, the château still overlooks the village of Lourmarin today—a village officially recognized as one of the "Most Beautiful Villages of France."



General view of the *Château de Lourmarin*.

From the medieval courtyard, three levels of galleries provide access to the rooms in the older part of the castle. The high hexagonal tower (see photos next page) houses a spiral staircase that serves the various levels of the *Chateau Vieux*: on the first floor, the loggia leads to the libraries, while the third level provides access to the oratory. Gargoyles adorn its crenelated top.

The old part of the castle, or *Château Vieux*, with its high hexagonal tower and its loggias




In the "*Château Vieux*" section, a stained-glass window bearing the coat of arms of the d'Agoult family is set into a wall of the castle's former chapel—or oratory. An interesting library can be reached via the loggia on the first level

The other part of the *Château de Lourmarin* is notable for being the first Renaissance-style structure in Provence. Designed as a pleasure residence and featuring a grand staircase, its façade is articulated by cornices, mullioned windows, and Doric pilasters—architectural elements inherited from classical antiquity. Its design draws inspiration from the châteaux of the Loire Valley.
From the entrance located within the tower, one gains access to the kitchen, which boasts a vaulted ceiling and a monumental fireplace—the largest in the entire castle.



The Renaissance wing, as seen from the terrace of the castle.



Renaissance tower housing the spiral staircase



Kitchen and its vaulted ceiling.



The spiral staircase with a double central twist: at its base, on the left, and, on the right, the terminal vault—a cupola resting on a slender column that connects it to the twist of the staircase.

Among the many ornaments which adorn this monumental staircase we can detect a salamander, the emblem of the French King Francis I, who stopped at Lourmarin in 1537:



On the first floor, one can visit the "sallestre" (the Great Chamber) and an adjoining parlour, each room featuring a monumental, floor-to-ceiling fireplace with a highly original design: the usual classical figures are replaced by Indigenous people wearing feathered headdresses—a reference to pre-Columbian art and an early echo of the discovery of the Americas.



Detail of the statues on the hearth.



Monumental fireplace in the parlour



View of the village of Lourmarin and its “three belltowers”, as seen from the Château’s terrace.

The three belltowers of Lourmarin: in the foreground stands the Protestant church (1806); in the centre we can detect the green roof of the Catholic church's bell tower (12th and 16th centuries); and finally, the 17th-century belfry, built upon the foundations of a medieval fortification.
The village centre is highly picturesque with its narrow, winding streets and moss-covered fountains—all typical features of Provençal villages.
More information on: https://www.destinationluberon.com/decouvrir/villes-et-villages/lourmarin









Opposite views of the *Rue de la Juiverie* ("Jews' Street")






Also typical are the many craft shops and art galleries that flourish in touristy areas. Though some art galleries are closed during the off-peak season, many restaurants and bars remain bustling with local visitors. We had lunch on the terrace of the restaurant "La Récréation" (reservations recommended): https://www.restauration-la-recreation-lourmarin.fr/

On our way back in the afternoon, we stopped in Cucuron, another charming village bordering the *Petit Luberon*. See more information on:
https://www.sud-luberon-tourisme.fr/les-villages-du-luberon/cucuron/

The "Bassin de l'Étang"—a large pool of water in the heart of the village—is an unmissable landmark (see photo on next page). Lined with majestic plane trees (most of which were planted in 1813), it once served as a water reserve for the many flour mills located downstream. The basin is fed through gravity pipes by springs in the Luberon mountains.

The "Portail de l'Étang" (Pond Gate) is one of two surviving gateways from the 16th-century fortified wall that once defended the village. The openings were used for the chains of a drawbridge (see photo on the following pages).

The second gate, known as the "Porte du Revelin" (Revelin Gate) served as the main entrance through the 13th-century ramparts. The belfry and clock, built atop this gate in 1541, were designated a historical monument in 1921.



The *Bassin de l'Etang* in Cucuron




A mossy fountain, located near the *Portail de l'Etang*



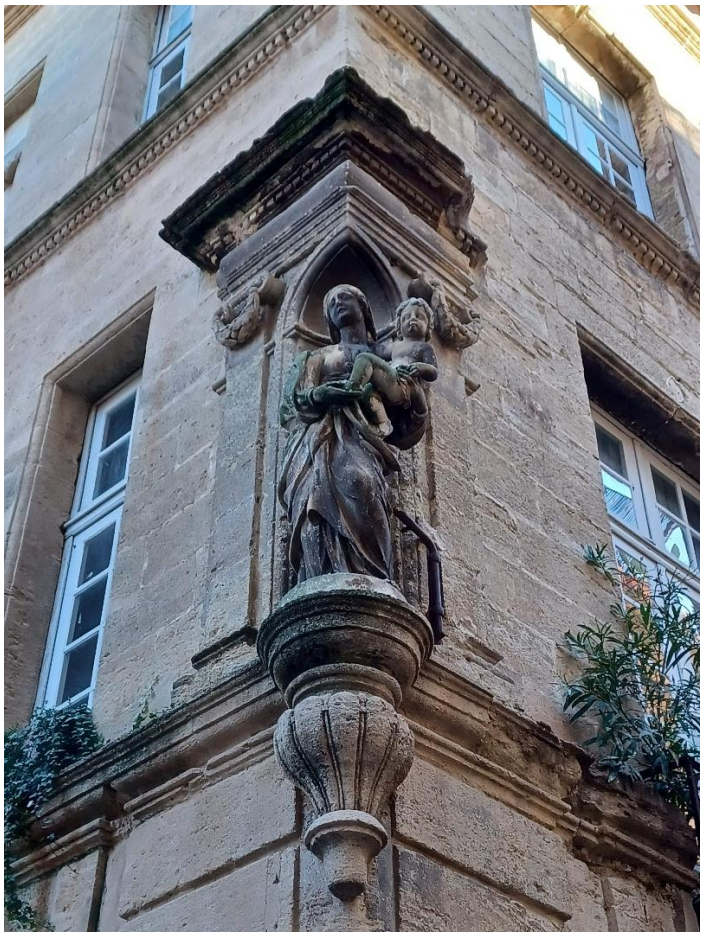
The *Portail de l'Etang*, giving access to the village centre.



Medieval "Porte du Revelin" with its belfry and clock



A charming, modest village house



Detail of a building ornamentation at street corner

So ends our stroll through the picturesque villages of the *Petit Luberon*! I hope you enjoyed this introduction to the beautiful area of Aix-en-Provence…