

ACCOMMODATION REVIEW

ADAGIO ACCESS AVIGNON

For three weeks in July, Avignon is transformed into the performing arts capital of the world with hundreds of concerts, plays, live performances and street theatre in the *Festival d'Avignon*. Sometimes, however, it's nice to have a good night's sleep.

Just three kilometres from the historic centre and with a regular bus service into the walled city, the Adagio Access hotel is a great option if you want a spacious room with kitchen and dining table, cupboard space and free, secure parking. The Adagio has studios, twin rooms and family apartments with top-floor views. The TGV station is only 300 metres away.

The decor and fittings are simple and functional but the atmosphere is very friendly and efficient. There's a Carrefour hypermarket five minutes' walk away. Breakfast is served from 7am to 10am during the week and an hour later at the weekends. There's a laundry, free internet access in the rooms (via ethernet cable) and free wi-fi in the lobby.

Adagio Access Avignon

6 Avenue de la Gare
84000 Avignon
Tel: (Fr) 4 90 16 23 00
www.adagio-city.com
Apartments in June from €51 a night.

For a stay in the historic centre, less than 10 minutes' walk from the Palais des Papes (pictured below), try:

La Livrée du Palais

21bis Rue de la Croix
84000 Avignon
Tel: (Fr) 4 32 62 88 69
www.lalivreedupalais.fr
Apartments from €95 a night in June for stays of fewer than seven nights.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Place de l'Horloge is a popular meeting place; Local melons; The famous Boucherie Saint-Didier

I asked the butcher about Avignon's culinary specialties and he showed me some local *andouillettes*, locally-produced pâtés and, of course, the *daube d'Avignon*. It's not widely known, but the butcher explained the recipe uses the same herbs as a Provençal *daube* stew, but is made with lamb and white wine instead of beef and red wine.

Across the road from Saint Didier's is Avignon's finest grocery, La Fine Bouche, opened by Sandrine Cahelo four years ago. She sells gourmet delights, everything from giant slices of honey and lavender nougat to *poutargue de muge* (at €21 for 110g, this grey mullet roe is a real delicacy), foie gras and organic teas plus crystallised violets which she says are great to put in a glass of champagne.

Safe to say, if there's a celebration in Avignon, they may not toast with champagne. The city is the capital of the Côtes du Rhône, a wine-growing region which includes such stars as Châteauneuf du Pape, Gigondas, Beaumes de Venise and Vacqueyras.

At Le Vin Devant Soi (a playful reference to Romain Gary's novel *La Vie Devant Soi*), down a cobbled street off Place de l'Horloge, they have 32 bottles permanently open for tasting in a special distribution cabinet. It's a clever idea from two friends, Stéphane Gilbert and Laurent Mersier, who met at military school in Paris.

"We give you a tasting card for €5, €10, €20 or more, and a glass, and there's a fantastic selection to taste from," says Gilbert. They work with the best small producers in the south. The bottles are 'loaded' on to a piston and kept fresh with nitrogen which means they can stay 'open' for a few weeks.

On the similar theme, try the pinky, tangerine-coloured *papalines d'Avignon*, available from the city's *pâtisseries*. Filled with Origan du Comtat, a liqueur composed of around 60 herbs gathered near Mont Ventoux, these sweet treats are the perfect fix for dealing with the Mistral wind that blows for half the year or for a picnic while dancing on the bridge.