



Thanks to a Netflix series, Marseille gets an overdue close-up

A French city
long stereotyped
as a center for
grit and grifters
is more beautiful
and enjoyable
than its
reputation

BY EMMA JACOBS

Special to The Washington Post

It's always been Paris. Paris has always been the star, the setting of novels, of films, of television programs, of vacation fantasies. But Marseille, France's next-largest city, is the setting of Netflix's first French production, an eight-episode political drama, starring Gerard Depardieu, that was released earlier this year.

Watching "Marseille" isn't likely to send you rushing to look up the price of flights. It depicts a dark — many would say clichéd — version of its namesake French city as violent and corrupt, and the mayor (Depardieu) has a cocaine habit. These stereotypes of Marseille as troubled by drugs and smuggling are old; see the 1971 American film "The French Connection."

But viewers of the new series might also notice the very un-Paris-like beauty of this diverse city on the Mediterranean, especially in the beautiful shots taken from above. Even when two burglars speed away from a jewelry store smash-and-grab on a motorcycle, they disappear up one of the city's many picturesque, steep and narrow streets.

Travelers interested in separating fact from fiction will find a city that is as friendly to the eyes as to the camera — actually, it's just plain friendly. Marseille, which was one of the host cities for this year's European soccer championship, has made significant investment over the last several years to attract more visitors, and the city they see is far

more enjoyable than its reputation might suggest.

But all publicity is good publicity, it's been said, and the Netflix series "has created a buzz about Marseille," says Mustapha Kachetel, owner of Le Femina Chez Kachetel, which serves cuisine from the Kabyle region of Algeria. "I see it every day at the tables because I have people coming of all nationalities."

Founded in 1921, it is one of one of many excellent North African restaurants in Marseille, which has long been a magnet for immigration from around the Mediterranean, particularly France's former North African colonies.

Here, the specialty is a cous-cous made from barley rather than the more typical wheat semolina, stewed with vegetables for three hours and served with different types of meat. The recipes, Kachetel says, come straight from his great-grandmother: He's the fourth generation of his family to run the restaurant, and the fifth is preparing the dining room for dinner as we talk. The colorful decor is of his own design, including his own photographs as well as ceramics and other objects from Algeria covering all the walls.

"I have children who I saw 15, 20 years ago with pacifiers who arrive now with their fiance or their wife or their children," says the longtime restaurateur.

Nowhere is the recent investment in Marseille more apparent than in the view from the Quai de la Port, a few blocks away.

Look across the water, and

you'll see a pair of historic forts with crenellated walls guarding either side of the entrance to the harbor. The one on the right, the 17th-century Fort Saint-Jean, has been connected by bridges to the recently constructed Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (MuCEM). The striking museum building, a cube of glass set inside an intricately lacy concrete shell, was the capstone of Marseille's preparations for its year as a Capital of European Culture (a European Union designation) in 2013.

The museum's core exhibition traces common practices across early civilizations around the Mediterranean, such as wine-making and bread-baking. Temporary shows this summer included a comprehensive survey of Picasso's folk influences; exhibitions this fall include art and objects related to the history of coffee, as well as works by young Albanian artists.

The Quai de la Port is at the heart of the city's Old Port neighborhood (a modern, larger harbor a short walk away has taken over the industrial activity and is also the stopping point for a number of cruise lines). Mornings, you can still browse stalls selling freshly caught fish including, on one day this summer, a small shark. You'll also see the new, futuristic-looking stainless-steel canopy defining a pavilion that hosts concerts and performances and, on occasion, the venerable French tradition of labor demonstrations.

It's just a block up from the waterfront to the Palais de la



Bourse, the monumental former stock exchange building. Dating from 1860 and the reign of Napoleon III, it plays the role of City Hall in "Marseille" but now is home to the Chamber of Commerce.

Head up the hills above the harbor, and you can get lost in the city's oldest neighborhood — the Panier, or breadbasket, which today is home to many artists' studios and restaurants. Or take a bus around the opposite side of the harbor to St. Victor, a dense neighborhood where new restaurants and boutiques mingle with examples of the region's older traditions.

One of these is the Musée du Santon. Tucked away on a side street and not heavily publicized, this museum holds a fascinating collection of santons — "little saints" — figurines for Christmas crèches in the tradition of Provence. In addition to the traditional manger scenes, they include bakers in aprons, women in traditional skirts, fishermen and shepherds who have all stopped work and come down from the hills to see the newborn son of God in his manger.

The museum also has a collection of crèches from around the world, collected by the master santonnier Marcel Carbonel, who was inducted into the French Legion of Honor shortly before his death in 2003.

The workshop of the company he founded is next door to the museum. Still owned by his descendants, Santons Marcel Carbonel produces 130,000 clay santons a year, including animals and other pieces including cradles and pigeon coops. Each is painted by hand using colors produced in-house. A few of the decorators, many of whom work from home, have been painting santons for more than three decades.

"Because everything is done by hand, it's difficult," said the workshop's director, Michel Barbaudy, adding that it can be challenging to find new employees interested in doing this painstaking work.

The amount of labor that goes

into the santons means they're not cheap; the smallest figures start at about \$15, and the largest, about seven inches tall, with much more detailed painting, can cost more than \$100.

Down the street, Marseille's oldest bakery, La Four des Navettes (founded in 1871), continues another tradition — baking navettes, the little canoe-shaped cookies. They are a little bland, but the bakery's orange and anise-flavored canastrelli are light and delicious.

From the harbor, visitors can take a boat ride out to see the historic Chateau d'If — probably best known to Americans as the fortress that imprisoned the fictional main character of "The Count of Monte Cristo." It's difficult to reconcile Alexandre Dumas's description of a "gloomy fortress" standing on a "black and frowning rock" with the light-colored stone structure shining brightly in the sun, rising from the turquoise water.

It seems the chateau is another aspect of Marseille that defies its reputation.

travel@washpost.com

Jacobs is a multimedia journalist based in Paris.

If you go

WHERE TO STAY **Intercontinental Marseille** **Hôtel Dieu**

1 Place Daviel
1-877-660-8550, 011-33-4-13-42-42-42

ihg.com/marseille

If you want to live like the stars, stay at the five-star hotel that played host to much of the cast of "Marseille" during production, where some scenes were filmed as well. The grand 18th-century building, a former hospital, has an uninterrupted view down to the harborfront. The hotel also has two restaurants and a spa. Rooms start at \$250.

ALEX Hotel
13-15 Place des Marseillaises

011-33-4-13-24-13-24

alex-hotel.fr/en/hotel

This boutique hotel, which opened in 2014, is conveniently located right across from the main train station and is color-coordinated by floor. Instead of generic paintings, rooms feature posters from past events around the city. Cozy rooms, which are air-conditioned, start at \$79. Breakfast, prepared-to-order by the hotel chef, is available for an additional \$14.

WHERE TO EAT **Restaurant Le Femina** **Chez Kachel**

1 Rue du Musée
011-33-4-91-54-03-56

wapo.st/

RestaurantLeFeminaChezKachel

Serving Algerian cuisine since 1921, this restaurant is still run by the same family. Try the couscous and kalb el louz pastry for dessert. Open Tuesday to Saturday, 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. then 7 p.m. to midnight; and Sunday 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. A meal starts at around \$23 before drinks.

La Ruche
128 Rue Sainte
011-33-4-91-21-62-03

laruche-marseille.fr

For a newer venue, head to La Ruche in the St. Victor neighborhood. Post-industrial chic, La Ruche, which means "the beehive" is what the French would call "branche," or plugged in. It fills up quickly in the evenings with a younger crowd dining on the bar's creative, generously portioned tapas dishes (around \$11) and cocktails. Open Tuesday to Saturday, 6 p.m. to 2 a.m.

La Four des Navettes
136 Rue Sainte
011-33-4-91-33-32-12
fourdesnavettes.com/en



The oldest bakery in Marseille, which has employed the same oven for more than 200 years, is charming and popular with both tourists and locals.

WHAT TO DO
**Santons Marcel Carbonel
Museum & Workshop**

47 Rue Neuve Sainte Catherine
011-33-4-91-54-26-58
santonsmarcelcarbonel.com

The museum features more than 2,000 figurines from around the world, both historical and contemporary. Wander into the working atelier to see santons being molded and painted.

**The Museum of European and
Mediterranean Civilizations
(MuCEM)**

7 Promenade Robert Laffont

011-33-4-84-35-13-13

mucem.org

The MuCEM hosts both permanent and temporary exhibitions. The rooftop restaurant is overseen by one of the city's noted chefs, Gerald Passedat. The modern museum blends surprisingly seamlessly with the 17th-century Fort Saint-Jean. Closed Tuesdays. Admission costs \$11, family tickets \$16.

Chateau d'If

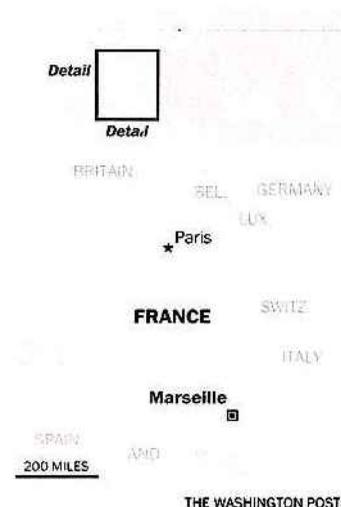
Embarcadere Frioul If
011-33-6-03-06-25-26
chateau-if.fr/en/

Multiple companies run ferry service from Marseille, including from the centrally located Quai du Vieux Port. Hours for the chateau vary by season, so check online before your trip. Admission costs \$6, not including the ferry ride.

INFORMATION

marseille-tourisme.com/en.

— E.J.





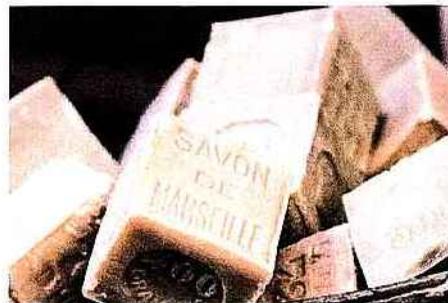
PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE GRANITZ



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A view of Marseille, France, from hills overlooking the city and the Mediterranean Sea; a woman lounges and takes notes in the Old Port neighborhood; olive-oil soaps are among some of the artisanal offerings; the Marseille Cathedral, a national monument, looms in the background behind the 17th-century Fort Saint-John.