



Former Lord Mayor of Brisbane Jim Soorley offers a frank, humorous and thought-provoking look at Queensland, Australia and the world from the man who was centre stage in local politics for 13 years.

**THE SUNDAY MAIL, Escape JULY 17, 2005**

**Page 2, 3, 4**

**[thesundaymail.com.au](http://thesundaymail.com.au)**

**[escape.com.au](http://escape.com.au)**

## **Connecting with France's countryside ... So good I'd love to stay**

*Beyond the romantic lure of Paris, Jim Soorley discovered the charming and intriguing side of rural France.*

Rural France conjures up images of fabulous food and wine, glorious scenery, and rude French people. I recently spent three weeks driving around the country and am happy to confirm and correct some of those perceptions – and add a few of my own. Driving is relatively easy as the roads are superb and the drivers even better. A Michelin map is a must. It has all the roads marked and we found it to be 100% accurate...

... Our drive the next day through the Auvergne, a huge plateau of ancient volcanic rock, was one of the most spectacular drives I've ever done. There was heavy snow on the mountains and the air was crisp and cool. We passed through gorges and valleys, fresh rivers and streams, cliff-hanging villages. It would not have been as stunning from a train window.

***That night we stayed in a chateau at Vezac. French chateaux look like fairy-tale castles – and they are. This one had a first-class restaurant, swimming pool, adjoining golf course, walking tracks, games room and library. For one night we got a glimmer of how the aristocracy must have lived in the pre-Revolution days.***

It's about a two-hour detour but Carcassonne, on the road to Spain, is worth visiting. Built over the ruins of a former Roman fortress, Carcassonne was the theatre of the Crusades against the heretics in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A wealthy local undertook the restoration of the town in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It's a wonderful example of how you can combine an ancient heritage city with modern living...