

San Francisco Chronicle

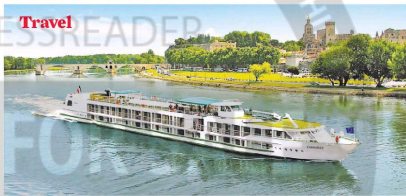
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Food + Home



It's time to get excited about tomatoes. **L1**

Travel



Cruising southern France's wild Rhone River. **F1**

Insight

Trump's eco-attack hits the Golden State hard. **E1**



ANN KILLION

Football in decline at schools across U.S.

Novato High slip may be harbinger of sport's future

When high school football practice officially begins Monday afternoon all across California, Novato High administrators are optimistic they will have enough participants to save their varsity team.

Last week, the school had petitioned Marin County authorities to discontinue playing varsity football due to lack of player interest. Ironically, that got everyone's attention.

"We've gotten tremendous support from the community," said Assistant Principal Greg Fister. "We'll assess the situation on Monday."

Regardless of what happens in Novato, the situation raises interesting questions. The same scenario — a high school canceling a storied football program because of too few athletes — will certainly happen again in communities across the country. In that way, Novato may be a harbinger of the future of high school football, at least in affluent areas that aren't wedded to the sport.

"Our situation is not going to be an anomaly," said Jason Searle, who stepped away as Novato's varsity coach this summer after five years at the helm and 12 years in the program. "There's going to be a struggle for numbers over the next to years."

Indeed, a survey released last week by the California Interscholastic Federation discovered that while overall

Killion continues on A16

Traveling to Big Sur? It's become quite a hike



Photos by Santiago Mejia / The Chronicle

Hikers cross a footbridge on a bypass trail used to reach the Big Sur area isolated by the Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge closure.

Trail built to give residents access to cut-off area a draw for tourists

By Kurtis Alexander

BIG SUR, Monterey County — After flying his family nearly halfway around the world to vacation in California, Tokyo resident Iain Ferguson wasn't about to miss Big Sur's renowned beauty — even if a lot of it is cut off by landslides.

So one morning last week, Ferguson and his wife, Chee, trudged with their young child-

dren, Riki and Hana, up one of the state's newest and least expected trails, a steep half-mile footpath that skirts around a washed-out bridge on Highway 1.

The forested trek provides a singular, if backbreaking, link between Big Sur's accessible north and its largely inaccessible south, where hotels, restaurants and gift shops that

Trail continues on A17



Popular destinations along the rugged Big Sur coast were cut off after winter storms closed stretches of Highway 1.

Outside Lands finds its rhythm for 10th festival

By Aidin Vaziri

In a city accustomed to big anniversaries, 10 years might not seem like a long time. But for the promoters of the Outside Lands Music and Arts Festival, it's a milestone worth celebrating.

As corporate promoters like Live Nation and AEG have gobbled up events like the Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival, Lollapalooza and BottleRock Napa, Outside Lands stands as the largest independently operated music festival in the country — a co-production of Berkeley's Another Planet Entertainment and New York's Superfly marketing company.

The annual three-day concert that draws an

Lands continues on A12



Jason Henry / Special to The Chronicle 2012

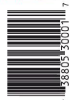
Fans dance to the music of Justice at the 2012 Outside Lands festival. The event has overcome many challenges in the past decade.

In Datebook

- » A look back at triumphs and growing pains. 14
- » Here are the acts not to be missed. 17
- » 10 culinary delights we're most excited about. 18



Weather
Partly cloudy, patchy fog.
Highs: 63-92.
Lows: 49-63.
C14



A \$olar eclipse — businesses look to sky to cash in

By Steve Rubenstein

Eclipse camping trips, eclipse horseback rides, eclipse steamboat excursions.

Eclipse whiskey tastings. Eclipse cowboy adventures.

Seventy-dollar motel rooms marked up, on eclipse eve, to \$1,000. Take it or leave it.

Cashing in on a good thing is a constant of nature, every bit as much as the heavens above. It's the American way. On the morning of Monday, Aug. 21, a good part of the U.S.

Eclipse continues on A15

PHOTO BY JASON HENRY FOR THE CHRONICLE

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 6, 2017

Travel

Home on the Rhone

A river cruise from Lyon to the Mediterranean reveals a wild side of France. Page 4

TRAVEL BOOKS EXPLORING NEW YORK THROUGH CITY'S VORACIOUS SWEET TOOTH. **PAGE 2**

ONE DAY, ONE PLACE CAPITAL'S TRAIL OF ESPIONAGE. **PAGE 3** | **RICK STEVES** SIENA'S AMAZING RACE. **PAGE 6**

COVER STORY

Cruising the wild Camargue

Adventures abound in the cowboy country and medieval towns of southern France

By Mark Sissons

Galloping four abreast toward me on their creamy white steeds, they could be the Cartwrights of "Bonanza," riding across the Ponderosa. Except that it's not the West, it's the South.

Of France.

I'm visiting the Arnauds, a French family of *manadiers* (ranchers) who raise black bulls and ride *les chevaux blanc Camarguais*, the legendary semi-wild breed of horses native to the Camargue. This vast, marshy UNESCO protected national regional reserve — the largest river delta in Europe — drains into the Mediterranean Sea west of Marseille and south of Arles.

Here in the heart of France's cowboy country where the violent winds of the mistral often blow, the bulls and the *manadiers* roam. Among other animals.

Slipping Sable de Camargue, a sparkling local wine, on the shady porch of the rambling ranch house, patriarch Gilbert Arnaud points toward a candy-colored mirage shimmering in the distance.



Todd Trumbull / The Chronicle

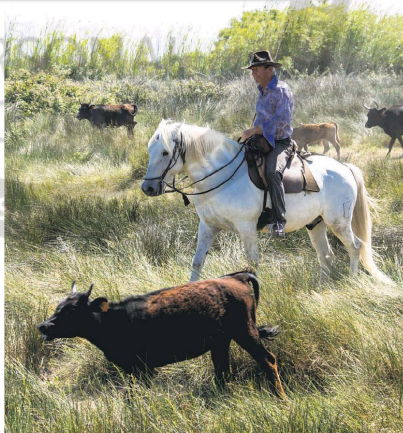
"*Les flamants roses*," he says: hundreds of wobbly-kneed pink flamingos. Over 20,000 breeding pairs nest each year in the Camargue's 400 square miles of wetlands.

The family ranch and the wetlands are a wild side of France I had not expected during my voyage down the Rhone on a riverboat, between Lyon and the Mediterranean. In a part of the world known more for lavender, wine and refined cuisine (and writers who spend a year here), we're finding cowboys, canals, Roman ruins and, apparently, flamingos.

The leisurely pace of riding on the river matches the laid-back culture and landscape — and has been ideal for having time to absorb the region's surprises.

☆☆☆

The five-day journey into the heart of France's wild southeast begins as I board the Camargue, a recently refurbished two-deck, 148-passenger vessel operated by CroisiEurope. France's second longest river — and the country's only one that empties into the



Mark Sissons / Special to The Chronicle



CroisiEurope



Franco Origlia / Getty Images

Clockwise from top left: the Camargue horse, the traditional cowboy mount of the region; the Palais des Papes in Arles and the sculpture "La Priere Universelle"; Ardeche Gorges Nature Reserve, Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur; the Place de l'Horloge (Clock Square), Avignon's main square and heart of the city; and the vessel Camargue on the river.

Mediterranean — the 504-mile-long Rhone has been an important inland waterway since Greek and Roman times. It used to regularly flood its banks, wreaking widespread death and destruction.

Today, a series of dams and locks — some as deep at 75 feet — make for smooth sailing as it flows through the western edge of Provence, France's gastronomic and wine producing heartland. With its sun-baked Mediter-

anean climate, the Rhone Valley south of Lyon is ideal for grape-growing, and wine tastings are hugely popular at its more than 1,800 private wineries.

Europe's thousands of miles of rivers and canals have long been the continent's commercial and intellectual lifeblood, carrying a steady flow of commerce, culture and ideas. From my vantage point on the Camargue's sun-deck as we cruise south toward the Mediterranean, little appears to have

changed; we pass medieval castles, ancient cliffside villages, and fields of sunflowers, wheat and lavender.

Then an enormous nuclear power station or windmill farm will appear, reminding me of what century it is.

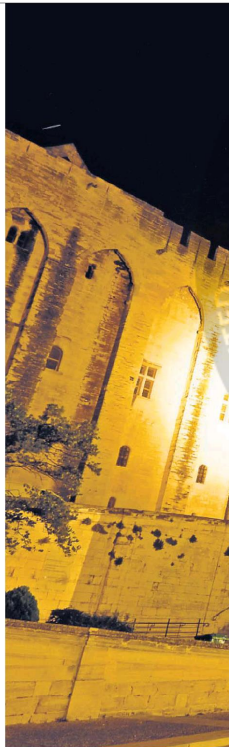
There are more advantages than just the leisurely pace: no constantly changing hotel rooms, climbing on and off of hot buses, or getting lost navigating highways or byways. Just smooth sailing down one of the continent's most vital arteries, where history is always just a dock away. And sometimes sailing by night, which frees up my days and evenings to venture ashore and explore some of the region's *pièces des resistance*.

☆☆☆

Gilbert Arnaud can trace his family's roots in the Camargue back to the 16th century. He once competed in professional rodeos all over Europe as a bull rider, but now he rears wild Camargue black bulls. The best and brightest he selects to compete in the traditional French sport of *course camarguaise*, a kind of bloodless bullfight considered much more humane than the Spanish-style *corrida*.

Distinguished by their lyre-shaped horns, champion Camargue bulls can bring their owners enormous prestige and plenty of prize money. According to Arnaud, they're also exceptionally intelligent.

"Don't even bother waving a red cape at a *course camarguaise* bull," says Arnaud, who has faced down many a mad Camargue bull in the ring. "He's too





Boris Horvat / AFP / Getty Images



Andia / UIG via Getty Images

smart for that. He's going to go right around it and get you."

I ask Arnaud what happens to the ones that fall short of achieving glory for their owners in the *course camarguaise* ring.

"Some end up on the menus of Camarguais restaurants," he says — as le steak de taureau or daube de taureau mode gardienne, a popular Provençal beef stew named after *les gardiens*, the French cowboys who wrangle them.

The Camargue horse is an ancient breed indigenous to these wetlands. Most, I learn, roam free in the Camargue's marshes and salt flats, and on its endless stretches of deserted beach. During cattle drives, *les gardiens* press them into herding service. With their small, sturdy frames and calm, docile dispositions, they're considered ideal mounts for the work.

"Camargue horses are more pony than horse," says Arnaud.

And beloved ponies they are, given the prominent placement of a Camargue horse statue overlooking the main roundabout in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, a popular Mediterranean seaside beach resort a few miles south of the Arnands' spread.

Once a Roman fishing village, the Camargue's capital is also a popular pilgrimage site for Slovak and Hungarian Gypsies who gather here by the thousands each May to venerate Black Sara. According to legend, she was a servant washed ashore here in Biblical

If you go

CroisiEurope: The five-day Magic of the Provençal Rhone and the Camargue river cruise departs from Lyon, with stops in Arles, Avignon and Viviers. Sailings continue until early November. From \$1,448 per person, all-inclusive, not including airfare. www.croisieuropevercruises.com

times along with saints Mary Magdalene, Marie-Jacobi and Marie-Salomé — the three Maries from which the town derives its name.

Strolling along Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer's seaside promenade in the midday heat, I pass pastel ice cream stalls, shuttered cafes, a deserted amusement park and children playing in the sand while their parents sunbathe on the stony beach.

It's hard to believe that this languid holiday town is the Cheyenne of the Mediterranean. Then I pass the town's prominent bullfighting ring — guarded by a life-size black statue of a raging Camargue bull glaring at the cobalt sea.

In Arles, a town of 50,000 just upstream from where the Rhone forks into two branches forming the Camargue, it's said that if you start digging in your basement, you're likely to uncover an ancient foundation. An important Roman outpost, Arles contains a remarkably well-preserved 20,000-seat Roman amphitheater that still hosts plays, concerts and bullfights.

This famously sunny town also in-

spired some of Vincent van Gogh's masterpieces, which he painted while briefly residing here in 1888 and 1889. Standing in the exact spots where the Dutch master created some of his most famous works — including the "Bedroom in Arles" paintings, "Starry Night Over the Rhone" and "The Night Cafe" — is a popular bucket-list item among art history lovers.

So should be docking in Avignon, headquarters of Western Christianity during the 14th century. Built to house the popes who fled here from an increasingly corrupt Rome, the immense Palais des Papes is an architectural work of art and the city's main draw.

The largest Gothic building constructed during the Middle Ages, it is a magnificent stone labyrinth of chambers, cloisters, chapels, great halls and cavernous bedrooms where several renegade popes (called antipopes) who refused to recognize Rome's authority — outlaws in Europe's version of the Wild West — prayed, slept, ate, schemed and died.

Farther on up the Rhone, nature takes center stage on another excursion. We drive through Ardeche Gorges,

a densely vegetated stretch of canyons cut by the Ardèche River where the limestone cliffs on each side can reach nearly 1,000 feet. We marvel at the enormous natural archway — the Pont de l'Arc — hanging 200 feet above the valley floor.

We explore Vercors Regional Natural Park, a massif of densely forested mountains on a plateau east of the Rhone Valley, where the rugged vertical landscape is dotted with caves — once the haven of French Resistance fighters until Nazis brutally crushed the uprising. Between the gentle sound track of nature and the astonishing geologic wonders, however, the scene today is so removed from the bustling streets of Paris, the bistros of Lyon or the docks of Marseilles, it could be mistaken for another country.

Back aboard the Camargue after touring some of France's most rugged countryside, we depart for the voyage home, and after a final dinner of classic French dishes, I retire alone to the roof deck. The boat passes a tableau of orchards, fields, mountains and terracotta-roofed villages — and the same rippled lights in the water that added to Van Gogh's unorthodox, untamed style. Just another starry night over the Rhone.

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