



Take One French Market

Size isn't everything as far as Provençal markets go says Marjorie R. Williams, author of *Markets of Provence* and a lady who knows her onions when it comes to markets...

Large markets in Provence, such as les grands marchés in Arles and Aix-en-Provence, are extravaganzas that extend over multiple blocks with a couple hundred vendors selling almost every kind of goods from soaps and handbags to fresh fruits, vegetables, and fish. To appreciate the range of Provençal markets, however, I recommend visiting a mix of city and village markets. Many of the small village markets exude an outsized charm.

Take, for example, the Tuesday morning market in the village of Cucuron. Nestled in the Luberon - hilly and mountainous terrain that extends eastward from the Rhône to the Alps - Cucuron is surrounded by grapevines and olive trees.

What gives the Cucuron's market its distinctive character is its unique physical setting. The market takes place around the l'étang, or water basin, in the village's center. Plane trees over 200 years old grace the perimeter of the pond. The water's calm surface reflects their mottled trunks and broad leafy canopy, creating a visual spectacle. Vendors set up stalls along three sides of the basin. The market activity continues up a path at the far end.

Amble the market, and you'll find sweet cherries and apricots plucked from nearby orchards, goat cheese (plain or sprinkled with dried herbs), honeys and jams, fat spears of local asparagus, charcuterie, olives, Iberian ham, and fresh fish.

The butcher's case includes a local specialty called caillettes aux herbes, or large meatballs made of pork and spinach. One vendor sells a wide range of kitchen tools, and I always stock up on cheese knives and other useful gadgets for my home or as gifts. There's usually at least one local potter, and bowls and dishes in hues that evoke the green and golden hues of the landscape.



The quality at this market is high, and the ambience couldn't be more pleasant. I've visited several times, including once when the windy Mistral raced through like a delinquent child, flipping over table cloths and sending merchandise flying. And yet there's an imperturbable serenity and sense of continuity to be found at this market.

Customers are mostly locals who've been coming here on Tuesday morning for generations. It's a typical Provençal market in that the weekly rhythm of villagers coming out for the market is deeply embedded in the social routine.

After market, stroll the village streets and you can discover tucked away fountains, a medieval clock tower, and the remains of a dungeon. Or enjoy a meal at La Petite Maison de Cucuron where the accomplished chef Eric Sapet presides.

There are many outstanding markets open on Tuesday in Provence - Vaison-la-Romaine, Gordes, and Tarascon to name just a few. But anyone lucky enough to visit the lovely market and village of Cucuron is likely to feel they made a good choice.

[Click here to go to a detailed list of the markets of Provence.](#)


Marjorie's book *Markets of Provence: Foods, Antiques, Crafts and More*, is the essential guide to the Provence markets, crammed with details and snippets of information. [Details page 80](#)





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