

Sharing A Real Taste Of Provence

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We at [Only Provence](#) don't spend all of our time on the phone or booking [luxury villa rentals in the South of France](#). Knowing the region first-hand and spending quality time with the owners of our listed luxury properties is a big part of being able to deliver the best experience to families and groups of friends choosing to spend their holiday in Provence. A couple of weeks ago, some of our staff (Stan, Ingrid, Louise and I), had the pleasure of passing a fresh Spring morning with Bernard Roussel, the owner of villa Pierres des Luberon, traversing his magnificent 120 acre property on the edge of the Luberon National Park near Bonnieux. It is during moments like these that we are reminded of how much joy our owners receive from simply sharing what they believe makes their property so special. The desire to open their homes goes well beyond the need for supplemental income. A certain pride emerges— perhaps better described as an honor or dignity, in allowing others to enter their sacred sanctums. Offering families and groups of friends what they believe to be a real taste of Provence, truly matters to them – plain and simple.



On this particular day, when the Spring rains had given way to

the first warm days to lunch on the terrace, we were all in for a treat—one that had been on my bucket list for years, even after having lived in Provence for seven years. Bernard had invited us to join him on the last of the season's truffle hunts. Gosh this job certainly has its perks 😊 sigh.. ok I think I can squeeze that into my schedule. Luberon before us, Louise and I shot each other glances —I knew full well what she was thinking. If all went well we would be eating well tonight!

With dogs Carmel and Babu, happily bouncing along by our sides, Bernard and our little team stretched out our legs

along the ancient, herb-studded paths, past fields filled of oak trees and perfect rows of sleeping lavender. With a well-worn satchel slung on his shoulder, that had no doubt carried many a truffle, Bernard guided us through blooming almond trees while sharing his family stories of having been raised on the property. At one point, he



motioned to a medieval castle on the opposite hillside (the Fort of Buoux) dating back to the Middle Paleolithic age— I found it hard to even fathom how long ago that was. And with such seemingly endless rolling hills and fields around us, nobody would believe we were only a few short miles from the famous Provence villages of Lourmarin and Bonnieux.

Bernard guided us to a field a bit further from his normal hunting spot— “I am not sure if we will find anything there,” he warned. Shortly after arriving Babu began to dig.. Eying the the dogs with nervous anticipation, we watched as Babu began a casual scrape to the earth under an mid-sized oak

tree—within seconds his scraping became an all out scrounge. Bernard quickly trotted to Babu's side and with a mini garden pitchfork, he gently pushed the dog to the side for fear he would either damage the truffle or gobble it up if it were small enough. The dogs were known to snack well on these outings! Bernard then carefully pushed the earth surrounding the hole where Babu was digging. And lo and behold... didn't the most precious little nugget emerge? We hooped and hollered, each taking turns holding it and breathing in its earthy musty goodness—an aroma that I have decided is truly like no other on this planet.

But the spot didn't produce much else. Caramel and Babu just frolicked around in the warm sun, so Bernard had us backtrack to a field that we had passed on the way, closer to his ancient stone home. It was evident this was a trusted spot; we could see freshly dug holes under the oak trees where truffles had been found. For the next hour the dogs led us from one tree to the next, digging madly, unearthing one black beautiful black truffle after the other. Some were big, like the size of a small plum, others more like a walnut. It didn't matter to us how big they were— it was all gold in our minds. I could sense Louise's mind skipping from the evening menu...will it be pâtes aux truffes... soufflé aux truffes, ou tous simplement les oeufs aux truffes? The choices were so painfully difficult!



A quick look at Stan and Ingrid revealed faces pasted with grins— mine was most likely the same, although I don't remember much outside of the numb contentment that comes from a divine experience. We took turns helping the dogs as they located the jackpot spots. Bernard's aged sack soon began to swell—as did the joy that radiated on his face. He does this weekly, I

thought. Probably even more—so why the sense of such fun today? What was in it for him? But what I saw in that smile was a genuine sense of satisfaction of having shared something very precious, coupled with gratitude that his family had been the trusted steward of such gifts from Mother Earth. I could be wrong though, maybe he was just bemused at us—a handful of overgrown kids, thrilled at having spent a morning under the Spring sun, with a couple of happy dogs digging in the earth for forgotten treasure.

With a bounce in our steps, overwhelmed at having acquired so much with our own hands—ok, the dogs helped—in such a short period of time (although I think time stopped somewhere in there), we made our way back to the Roussel's rambling stone home. Stan and Ingrid had email to tend to, Louise had chef services to book and I had projects at Mas de Gancel. Conscious of having taken up his entire morning, we veered towards our cars, ready to return to our “real worlds.” But Bernard's wife Mathilde quickly ushered us in and onto their terrace—“It is nearing noon—surely time for an aperitif!”



March in Provence, especially in the Luberon where the nip in the new season breeze can still bite, can be idyllic, if you find the right perch in the sun. Mathilde directed us to a small terrace basking in the full midday sun overlooking the Luberon. Within minutes she had brought glasses, a bottle of local white wine, Bernard following with a basket of toasted baguette and a small dish of butter mixed with generous amounts of freshly shaved truffles. “I have to admit to something awful,” Mathilde said to me with a sly grin. “Bernard and I indulge in this every day!” That to me— sums up Provence.

—Lydia Dean



