Cassis

In the heart of the Calanques national Park

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Breathtaking scenery

NATURAL HERITAGE

Nestling between the steep-sided Massif des Calanques and Cape Canaille (the tallest coastal cliff in Europe), the traditional village of Cassis and its fishing harbour are located within a natural basin some 5 kms in diameter, in the heart of the Calanques national Park.

Cassis' setting is remarkable for its topography.
The roads all run to the town from the clifftops, providing plunging, panoramic views. The coastal mountains tumble down to the gulf. Beside the water is a small town, and a hillside vineyard adds a touch of lighter vegetation in the midst of the dark green pinewoods, the villas and their gardens full of trees.

The unity of the landscape, though, is misleading, an illusion created by the colourful yellow ochre or white rocks jutting up across the countryside and the plane created by the sea (a significant break between verticality and horizontality), the presence of vineyards that "bind the area together", the scenic importance of the pinewoods and gardens and the clear boundaries of urban development.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The natural diversity of the beauty spots and the variety of landscapes fully justify the conservation measures introduced in and around Cassis, especially by the Town Council through its Urban Development Scheme which integrated the constraints of coastal laws and Cassis' inclusion in a number of inventories such as 12 areas of outstanding interest for its natural environment, ecology, flora and fauna (Z. N. I. E. F. F.) (7 areas on land and 5 out to sea).
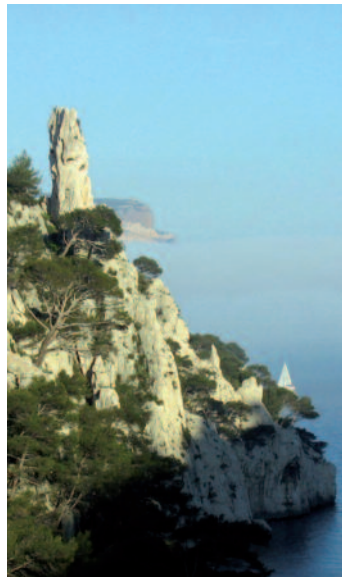
It should also be noted that the Massifs des Calanques and Cape Canaille are protected under the 1930 law on the protection of natural monuments and beauty spots (an order was passed on the hills and inlets in 1975 and on the headland in 1989).

The European Natura 2000 network for the protection of natural habitats, flora and fauna confirmed the area stretching from Cape Canaille to the islands off Marseille, including the Massif des Calanques, as a conservation area.
This European recognition of quality confirms the ecological and geological richness of the natural beauty spots in and around Cassis.

Since April 2012, Cassis a ville-calanque is located in the heart of the Park.

Source: town planning documents, Cassis Town Council; 2000 Environmental Charter drafted by AGAM (Agence d'Urbanisme de l'Agglomération Marseillaise)

A DIVE INTO HISTORY

In 1991, a diver from Cassis named Henri Cosquer discovered an underwater cave that was exceptionally well preserved. Scientists were able to show that the cave had been used in two different periods. The hands in negative date from some 27,000 years ago while the animal drawings and engraving are more recent, only 18,500 years old. For safety reasons, the cave is not open to the public.

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Beauty spots not to be missed

its beauty spots

THE INLETS

The inlets (or "Calanques") form a steep-sided range of rocky cliffs covering a distance of 20 kms between Marseille and Cassis. They are breathtakingly beautiful. Their formation, due mainly to water eroding the predominantly limestone rock, is similar to that of the fjords in Norway or the abers in Brittany. Only the one at Port-Miou lies within the boundaries of Cassis; the other 13 are part of Marseille. Yet they are all referred to as the "Calanques of Cassis" in common parlance, and the town is the usual starting point for any visit.

THE CALANQUES NATIONAL PARK

Since April 2012, the "Massif des Calanques" is classified National Park. It is the 1st sea, land and peri-urban National Park in Europe and includes the cities of Marseille, Cassis and La Ciotat as heart of Park. With an essentially maritime area (90 % on a total surface of 158 100 ha), its main missions are to protect the wonderful natural and cultural heritage of this territory, to inform and to make the users aware of its resources and its vulnerabilities.

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The park ensure:

- Global recognition
- More significant funding (for actions taken within the park)
- Significant human resources on land and at sea (environmental police, permanent team of rangers, scientists, technicians, experts etc.)
- High added value through the provision of skills (sustainable development, architecture etc.)

PRACTICAL
A prefectoral order regulates access to the Calanques throughout the year and the area may be closed by the authorities from 1st June to 30th September because of the serious fire risk. Visitors to the park may not smoke, light a gas stove, camp overnight or for longer periods, damage the flora and fauna etc. The hills backing onto the inlets is an environment that is not without risks (fire, landslides, falling trees etc.). Before setting off, contact the Tourist Office for further information.

CAPE CANAILLE AND THE HILLTOP ROUTE

Over a short section of coastline between Cassis and La Ciotat, Mount Canaille looks out to sea from impressive cliffs, the tallest in Europe at 362 metres at Cape Canaille and 399 metres at La Grande Tête.
Path and road are closed in case of strong wind all year long.

COASTLINE AND BEACHES

Faithful to its past, the town has preserved its traditional, truly Provencal appearance while, at the same time, welcoming visitors. No use looking for great expanses of fine sandy beach here; the coastline remains untamed and the sea is crystal clear. The natural beauty and the heritage of each location have been preserved to give visitors wonderful memories of an enchanting, unspoilt natural environment. Just try it and you'll see.

The coastline is a ragged series of secret coves and vast open spaces, ideal places to stop and drink in the special atmosphere of these somewhat timeless, totally natural locations. Take a deep breath and let yourself be carried away by the scent of the pine trees, the sun-drenched rocks and the sea, with the song of the crickets as a background. Lay out your beach towel or tartan rug and enjoy the local produce bought at the market in the morning. The simple joys of a picnic, almost an improvised meal.

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