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getting away!

Stunning sights made return to Med a marvel

By Neil Macdonald

Hidden wonders of le Var make ideal spot for holiday

MY LAST jaunt to the south of France was back in 1995, an enjoyable month spent on la Cote d'Azur.

The nagging thing was, though, that the glitzy high life of Juan le Pins, Cannes, Nice and Monaco was a little too much for my, dare I say it, more bohemian tastes. So, the invitation to return to the area, but further west, was too good to pass up.

Le Var, green and resplendent, is nestled snugly between the French Riviera to the east and Marseilles to the west. The first impression was that the landscape follows a similar pattern to much

of the Mediterranean coast: the ocean and beach gives way to palm-lined boulevards, beyond which terracotta-roofed houses are dotted across the rising mountain sides.

But shortly after our arrival, a certain mystique enveloping the region became apparent. Salt marshes inhabited by flamingoes flanked the road up to the village of Bormes-les-Mimosas, famous for its flowers which add an annual spectacular splash of yellow.

Le Grand-Hotel de Bormes, our base for the first night, belies its

meagre three-star rating, and it was all too easy to luxuriate in the tastefully furnished, rustic rooms. But after checking in, it was off to the coast for a wander along the beautifully preserved, winding seaside footpath – or Sentier du Littoral. Of course, when visiting the Med coast, a splash in the water is essential so, with the early September sun beating down, the walk was followed by a dip in the sea to cool off.

Next up was a trip to sample one of the le Var's specialities. Chateau Leoube vineyard is a proudly artisan project a mere two years in the making but the giant strides already achieved were evidenced by the superb range of rosé on offer. Each version of organically-produced rosé sampled was as clean, pleasant and fresh to the taste buds as le Var was to the eye – I was instantly converted to the Secret de Leoube in particular. The following morning we headed uphill to Hyeres-les-Palmiers, a charming town where Queen Victoria spent much time recuperating in its delectable climate. Towering above is a ruined feudal castle and from here a path winds its way down towards the Villa Noailles arts centre, a remarkable art deco structure



LUXURY: Le Grand-Hotel de Bormes.

TRAVEL FACTS

TRAVEL FACTS - LE VAR

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■ Le Grand-Hotel de Bormes: Three-star hotel in the town of Bormes-les-Mimosas
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