

Pitch perfect: The poshest campsite in France

Want a five-star holiday for a fraction of the price? Les Criques de Porteils in Argelès-sur-Mer boasts luxury accommodation, fine dining and even yoga sessions...

by Sabi Phagura

THERE has been a mistake, surely. I'm walking up to a glitzy reception area, looking for a campsite, but I think I've wandered into the lobby of a five-star hotel by mistake. I actually have to ask the reception staff. They reassure me that this is a campsite. But gosh - it's the crème de la crème of pitches.

Perched atop the rocky coast of Côte Vermeille, this medium-sized campsite offering 248 pitches towers over the Mediterranean sea on one side while bordering a protected nature reserve on the other. Campers are surrounded 360 degrees by nature. To me, that is pure bliss.

Tucked away just 30km or so from the Spanish border, Argelès-sur-Mer is often unofficially referred to as the 'European camping capital', with a variety of campsites offering diverse amenities and activities. The current count stands at 48, boasting some 13,500 pitches in total, just behind the four-mile beach of fine sand. It's no wonder Argelès-sur-Mer is such a popular destination - the variety of sites suits all budgets.

But the ultimate five-star camping crown goes to Les Criques de Porteils, for its location here, and everything else it has to offer. The site has a wide choice of pitches as well as luxury mobile homes of various shapes and sizes and with electricity as standard.

The premium pitches include my sizeable mobile home, which has a complete operational kitchen including cooker and fridge, a shower, one bedroom, a sitting area that can be converted into a second bedroom, and a covered terrace with a ready-to-use BBQ for alfresco cooking and dining.

It feels cosy and I'm ready to put my feet up after the two-hour drive of about 130 miles from Barcelona - the most convenient airport when coming in from the UK.

I wake at 7am, sip my tea outside watching cyclists and joggers pass my cabin, and then I stroll to the on-site



What a view: Seafront cabin with covered terrace at Les Criques de Porteils

shop for freshly baked bread.

Warning: This holiday can do serious damage to your waistline!

There's plenty of privacy and space for reflection and winding down. Les Criques de Porteils owner Laurent Raspaud tells me later that he never wanted the campsite to be

cramped. He set eyes on the site back in 2005 and turned the then-failing, rundown campsite into a luxury camping ground over the subsequent four years. He wanted to offer a top service - the best in the area, he says. And the holidaymakers certainly flock

here. Among a string of activities included in the price at Les Criques de Porteils are introductory mountain-biking sessions, yoga, tennis, padel and stand-up paddleboarding. Yoga, led by instructor Winde Symons in the

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Travel



Magic of the Med: France's Côte Vermeille is a haven for motorhome fans



Steady, now: Sabi Phagura tried a stand-up paddleboard session, included in the price along with a list of other activities

Travel / GLAMPING BY THE MED

'I think I'm in the reception area of a five-star hotel but staff tell me this IS a campsite'



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shade of the pine trees facing the sea is a holiday-high for me. Daily morning aqua sessions in the heated pool are a chance to make friends with other campers. There's also a Jacuzzi and two slides, which make up part of the water park.

The intense blue of the Med in the bays of the Côte Vermeille tempts me to book a stand-up paddle session through Pierre at Riverside Paddle. It's a pleasant ride in and around the bay beside Ouille beach. There's plenty of

French flair: Just a coastal stroll away, the colourful homes, bars shops and restaurants of Collioure town are captivating

walking to be had in this area, too, and to dry off I take the coastal path towards the nearby seaside town of Collioure. It's not too strenuous a hike – there are steps and steady paths to ascend and descend – and the views are well worth it.

At Collioure, I'm greeted by colourful houses, shops, restaurants and bars nestled around the bay. It's hard not to fall in love with this charming place and I stop to enjoy a coffee and a croquant de Collioure – a crunchy almond biscuit.

Le Racou beach on the opposite side

of the campsite is just as pretty and I'm intrigued by the name alone. Le Racou translates as 'the corner' or 'hidden spot'. This little cove is home to a pretty hamlet with dozens of whitewashed houses built just off the beach. It oozes tranquility.

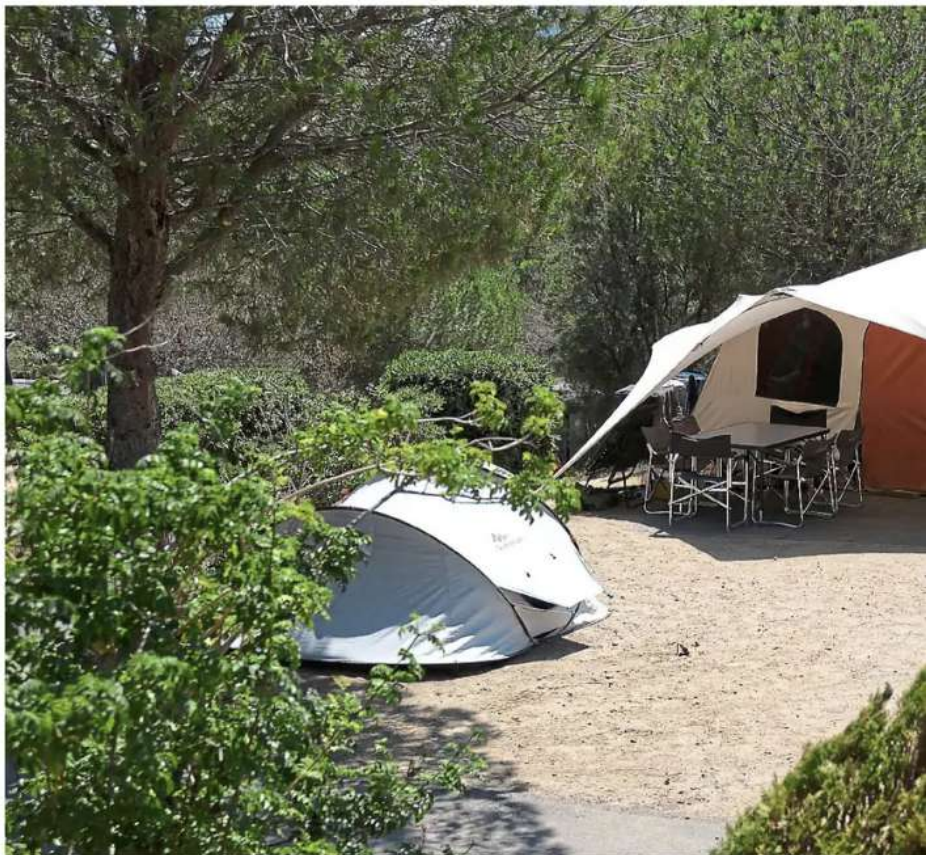
According to tradition, the name Argeles-sur-Mer derives from the Latin word 'argilla' which means clay – the material the town was built from. It's a beautiful, authentic place to stroll around. You'll find plenty of narrow streets, pastel-coloured houses, boutiques, restaurants and

“
It's very hard not to fall in love with this charming place”

bars, while the port nearby is brimming with more places to shop, eat and drink.

But you don't have to go into Argeles-sur-Mer centre for a bite to eat because Les Criques de Portails has an on-site restaurant overlooking the sea and the town from its panoramic roof terrace. The indoor-outdoor eatery serves up Catalan specialities using regional produce and plenty of seafood, while diners can enjoy breathtaking views of the sea.

For something a little more rustic, head over to its partnered restaurant



1. Adults-only Corfu

Book today to save at least ten per cent on stays before July 31 at Corfu's adults-only, all-suite Nido by Mar-Bella Collection hotel. On the large Greek island's wooded south-eastern coast, this boutique affair deliberately resembles a local hill village: there are peach-painted cottages and bedrooms in lemon. But they also have modern interiors to accompany their sea views. While the beach below is pebbly, a small infinity pool, à la carte modern Greek menu, spa, yoga sessions and yacht trips are ample compensation.

Five nights from £919pp, B&B, dep Jul 2, marbella.gr

2. Self-catering in Tenerife

While mainland Europe's prices peak in July and August, those in the Canary Islands actually sometimes dip a bit as the archipelago gets seriously hot. But if you don't mind that, bargains await. Take the bright, balcony-equipped Colon II Apartments in Playa de las Américas – a lively resort town that reached 32C last July – on Tenerife's south-western coast. Well reviewed for their cleanliness, convenience, cafe, cocktails and salt-water pool, these are only 15 minutes' walk from the pleasant

LATE DEALS

Tan in Tenerife, safari in South Africa or mill about the New Forest, says **Richard Mellor**



Playa del Camisón beach and yet absurdly cheap.

Seven nights from £416pp, self-catering, incl flights, luggage and transfers, firstchoice.co.uk

3. New Forest in advance

Upham Inns is a collection of 14 upmarket, personality-packed pubs with rooms in rural locations in Surrey, Berkshire, Wiltshire and Hampshire. Covering a dozen of them, Travelzoo has an advance-booking offer which will save you an average of 30 per cent on multiple-night stays between October 1 this year and April 30, 2026. Especially lovely is the Old Mill, an 18th-century watermill turned 12-room inn beside the River Avon on the New Forest's eastern fringes. There are easy local walks to tackle on days of good weather. If it's inclement, the National Motor Museum in Beaulieu is close by.

Two nights from £60pp, room only, travelzoo.com

4. South Africa camping safari

Acacia Africa's 'Seven-day Kruger, Eswatini & Durban (Camping)' group tour – for up to 18 people – combines a Swazi village tour with two distinct wildlife experiences. While Kruger National Park promises all the



big-name animals and classic game drives, predator-free Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary – in the tiny country of Eswatini (Swaziland) – lets you hike past hippos and go horse-riding before sleeping in a cave. An estuary cruise past crocodiles then follows. The trip operates year-round, yet only its July 12 and 26 departures have been reduced by £175pp. You must book this month.

Six nights from £775pp, full board, incl transport, activities and camping equipment, acacia-africa.com

5. Virginia Beach for families

At the foot of enormous Chesapeake Bay on the US east coast, Virginia Beach is an easy-going resort city that



Paddleboard and picnic: A wooded, sandy spot is perfect for pitching your tent when you visit Argelès-sur-Mer



Dine in style: Les Criques de Portels restaurant offers alfresco dining, fresh seafood and a roof terrace with beautiful sea views

L'Imprévu. This bohemian beach bar, built above a creek overlooking the sea and rocks in Collioure, is a ten-minute walk from the campsite. Again expect plenty of seafood and fresh dishes.

From kids' club to adult art workshops – think face painting to pebble painting plus sports activities and a wellness area – Les Criques de Portels campsite has you covered. And if you've always toyed with the idea of heading to a campsite but you're not quite sure, I suggest you check this one out.

There's all the luxury of a five-star hotel... but without the hefty price tag.

Getting there

Pitch rates for a premium mobile home at Les Criques de Portels start from €60 (£51) per night. To book a stay see lescriques.co.uk

For more information on Argelès-sur-Mer visit argelles-sur-mer.co.uk

Flights can be booked with vueling.com, which operates daily from various UK airports to Barcelona. Sabi hired a car from Avis to the campsite.

offers outdoor pursuits from golf to paddling along 200 miles of waterways. There's also British colonial history and good restaurants. Above all, though, it offers sand: there's more than 38 miles of powdery shoreline here, with supervised coasts ripe for families to enjoy. American Affair is knocking up to £500 off summer packages for families at the Atrium Resort, whose indoor pool lies near Virginia Beach's boardwalk. With car hire included, you could drive to Washington DC and see the White House if desired.

Nine nights for a family of four from £1,834pp, self-catering, incl flights and car hire, dep Jul 28, americanaffair.com



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