



AP Photo/Sally Carpenter Hale

This Sept. 2016 photo shows the view of vineyards and mountains from Domaine Terre de Mistral in France, 20 minutes outside Aix-en-Provence.



AP Photo/Sally Carpenter Hale

This Sept. 2016 photo shows the view of the Mediterranean Ocean from an open-air beachside restaurant in Bandol, France.

# Never mind April in Paris. Autumn in Provence is perfect

By SALLY CARPENTER HALE  
Associated Press

AIX-EN-PROVENCE, France — You can keep Paris in April. For me, the allure is Provence in September.

Sure, the lavender fields are past their bloom. But the flowers are freshly dried and ready for you to take home in bundles or sachets.

The hordes of tourists are gone, and the weather is glorious, mostly sunny with highs in the 70s F (20s C).

The ubiquitous open-air markets are brimming with local produce and herbs, and the wine grape harvest is in full swing. Tractors pulling trailers piled with grapes creep from vineyard to winery, where you can watch the crushing begin as the first step in transforming grape to rose wines.

My husband Rick and I flew to Paris, then took the TGV train south to Aix-en-Provence, about a 3½-hour trip. There we met our traveling companions, Janice Miller and Tom Belden, for a cab ride into town.

We stayed in old town at a three-bedroom flat we found online. We didn't expect the three flights of steps leading up to our flat, but the location was perfect for exploring Vieil Aix, which dates back to Roman times. The narrow streets are lined with boutiques, restaurants, medieval churches, fountains and piazzas.

The majestic Cathedrale Saint-Sauveur, which dates to the sixth century, stands atop a hill that reportedly once was the site of a pagan temple. Admission to the Roman Catholic cathedral is free



AP Photo/Sally Carpenter Hale

This Sept. 2016 photo shows a winery worker in the Provence region of France transferring ripe grapes into a bin as the harvest gets underway.

and it is open daily from 9 a.m.-noon and 2 p.m.-6 p.m. (Be sure to cover your shoulders when visiting the church.)

Cours Mirabeau, a boulevard through the heart of Aix, has wide sidewalks for strolling past cafes and grand old houses with wrought-iron balconies and intricate stonework, and is home to a large open-air clothing market.

We found the street markets were open most days except for Sunday. Some specialize in clothing, linens and crafts; others offer meats, cheeses, produce, dried fruit, flowers and, of course, lavender products.

Post-impressionist artist Paul Cezanne made his home in Aix, and we took an Uber to his studio, Atelier Cezanne, where the objects he used for his still lifes are on display and

where he made his famous painting of Montagne Sainte-Victoire, which rises above the city.

The highlight of our trip was a wine-tasting tour with Michael Ippolito, a native New Yorker who married a French woman and now owns Wine in Provence Tours. He drove us through the picturesque Provençal countryside to small family-owned wineries we never

would have found on our own, all of which produce spectacular dry roses, as well as excellent whites and reds. Prices were reasonable, generally less than 20 euros per bottle.

We had such a great time that we hired Mike again the next day to take us to Cassis and Bandol, on the Mediterranean coast. We had a lovely beachside lunch and stopped at more wineries on the way back.

Dining in Aix runs the gamut from small cafes to upscale restaurants. In addition to traditional French fare, Aix is full of Italian restaurants. And we saw a couple of cafes advertising the puzzling "hand burgers."

We especially liked Le Poivre d'Ane, where the food was delicious and service impeccable. (The staff thoughtfully provided lap blankets for cool evenings on the square.) Le Petit Verdout is a cozy restaurant that creates wonderful meals with locally sourced ingredients. Reservations are strongly recommended at both restaurants.

After 10 days, it was time to go home. But how to fit seven bottles of wine in our luggage? (Adults can bring one liter of alcohol from Europe back to the United States duty free. Additional bottles are allowed, but are subject to duty and federal taxes.)

We packed and repacked, dividing the bottles between our two suitcases. When we arrived at the Paris airport hotel, we were relieved to find a luggage scale. We just made it under the 50-pound (22 kg) limit per suitcase and didn't have to pay an extra charge.

Fortunately, all that lavender didn't weigh much.

## Summer treat: Hot fruit crisp topped with vanilla ice cream

By ELIZABETH KARMEL  
Associated Press

The crisp, cobbler, crumble, grunt, slump or buckle. What do these all have in common? They are all fruit desserts baked with a sweet "pastry" topping.

They're also the epitome of a fresh summer dessert — although I have been known to turn apples and pears into crisps in the fall. Still, a hot summer fruit dessert topped with vanilla ice cream is the essence of summer.

I am partial to a crisp which is fruit topped with a combination of "crisp" oatmeal, flour, butter and sugar and sometimes nuts. The topping ranges from streusel to granola and completely covers the fruit. Since the topping is everyone's favorite part of the dessert, I add pecans to make the crisp topping even more crunchy and substantial. I think of it as the dessert version of granola. The crisp is sometimes referred to as a crumble or a buckle when a more classic streusel topping is used.

Cobblers are generally topped with batters or biscuits and the topping is spooned on to the fruit leaving space that the fruit can bubble up and show through. Grunts or slumps are like cobblers and the name is purported to come from the sound that the fruit makes as it cooks and emits steam through the spaces between the biscuits.

No matter how it is topped, I love to grill this dessert. Even though the process is similar to baking it in the oven, it is much more dramatic and you will surely impress your friends and family.

In the summer, I make a crisp almost every week. Right now, I am making it with strawberries and



AP Photo/Richard Drew

### Strawberry-rhubarb crisp.

rhubarb, but it is good with whatever fruit you find at the market. Make sure that the fruit is ripe, and mix it with a little bit of sugar, citrus and cinnamon. The addition of Grand Marnier is optional but one that I always opt for as it makes a big difference in the depth of flavor, and marrying all the ingredients. If you don't have Grand Marnier, add a bit of bourbon or your favorite citrus or nut liqueur.

When you toss the fruit with the sugar and cornstarch, be sure to mix well and let the fruit sit for 5 minutes to bring out the natural juices and mix again.

When baking, make sure that you bake long enough for the cornstarch and fruit juices to bubble up and turn opaque or your crisp will taste slightly raw and gritty instead of silky smooth and fruit tart. The tale-tell sign of a crisp that is done cooking is the drips of this juice running down the side of the dish.

The dessert is made for easy entertaining since you can assemble it early in the day and bake it just before you want to eat it and serve it hot-off-the grill, or bake it in advance and serve it at room temperature.

If I am baking it while we eat, I put the crisp on the grill over indirect medium heat when I take the meat off the grill. That way, it is bubbling and hot when everyone is ready for dessert. I love the drama of lifting the lid of the grill in front of my guests and seeing their eyes light up with the thought of a grilled fruit crisp. Either way, it is enhanced by a scoop of best-quality vanilla ice cream!

Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pit master at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and the author of three books, including "Taming the Flame."

### STRAWBERRY-RHUBARB CRISP

Servings: 10

Start to finish: 110 minutes (20 minutes active)

#### Topping:

- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup regular oatmeal (not instant)
- 1 cup coarsely chopped pecans
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened, small pieces

#### Filling:

- 3 pounds strawberries, cleaned and halved
- 2 cups chopped rhubarb, about 3 stalks
- 1/2 cup granulated white sugar
- 1 orange, zested and juiced (about 1/2 cup total)
- 1 lemon, zested and juiced (about 1/2 cup total)
- 2/3 cup sugar in the raw
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons Grand Marnier, optional

Build a charcoal fire or preheat a gas grill. Or preheat oven to 350 F.

Make the topping: In a large bowl, combine all the topping ingredients except the butter. Work in the butter with a pastry blender or fork until the mixture resembles large, coarse bread crumbs. Set aside.

Make the filling: In another large bowl, place the strawberries. In a smaller bowl, toss the chopped rhubarb. Add the orange juice, lemon juice, orange and lemon zests, sugar, cornstarch, and cinnamon; mix lightly. Add the Grand Marnier, if using. Set aside for 5 minutes.

Place the fruit mixture in a deep round baking dish or souffle dish. Top it evenly with the streusel mixture.

In a grill, place the dish in the center of the cooking grate over indirect medium heat, cover the grill, and bake.

In the oven, set the dish on a sheet pan and place in the center of the oven. Bake for 60-90 minutes, or until the juices bubble over the baking dish, and are clear, and the top is browned.

Chef's Note: For those of you used to making fruit crisps, you may be surprised by the longer cooking time, but the rhubarb takes longer than most fruit to cook. I made this twice, and the first time that I took out the crisp at 60 minutes, the rhubarb was still crunchy. Ninety minutes resulted in a perfect texture.

Transfer the baking dish to a cooling rack. Serve warm with ice cream, if desired.

Nutrition information per serving: 444 calories; 160 calories from fat; 18 g fat (7 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 24 mg cholesterol; 107 mg sodium; 72 g carbohydrate; 5 g fiber; 50 g sugar; 4 g protein.