



09 Ariège is situated in the south of France to the north of Andorra and the border with Spain. The town of Foix is the capital of the department, which can most easily be accessed from Toulouse to the north. The principal appeal of the department is the scenery of forested hills and low mountains.

There are also several attractive small villages and towns with historic centres to explore.

Ariège can be seen as two regions, Foix and the east and the south-western region that falls within the Natural Regional Park of the Pyrenees-Ariegeoises.

Tomme des Pyrénées is a cheese made from pasteurised cows' milk. There are two sorts of tomme des Pyrénées: one with a black rind and one with a golden rind. This cheese is liked for its fine texture and strong, enjoyable taste and is usually eaten as a snack, or at the end of a meal, with a fruity red wine such as Côtes du Frontonnais.

Azinat is a typical regional dish made with cabbage and local pork products also known as cabbage soup. There are three different recipes, one with cabbage, one with Swiss chard (another vegetable that's very popular in the region) and one with green beans. However, all forms contain rouzolle, a sausage meat, ham and streaky bacon stuffing. Azinat is generally enjoyed with a glass of red wine from the South-West, such as a Fronton or a Béarn.

Mounjetado is an Ariège variant of cassoulet and made of lingot beans, onions, carrots, duck confit, rind, heel of ham, duck carcass, duck fat, Toulouse sausages and duck leg confit. The whole thing is seasoned with herbs such as laurel and thyme, and salt and pepper.

Flocons d'Ariège are artisan sweets consisting of a very light little meringue the size of a walnut, flavoured with vanilla, with a particularly creamy hazelnut praline in the middle.

Bethmale is an unpasteurised cow's milk cheese with a pressed curd that originates from Le Couserans. Matured in a traditional way, this fruity and creamy cheese goes wonderfully with a slice of bread and a glass of red Madiran wine.

Mounjetado or Ariège Cassoulet

Ingredients

1 kg dried white beans

3 pieces of coustillous (pork ribs)

Half a ham

2 saucissons de Couennes (a kind of sausage)

4 goose or duck thighs or 8 wings, preserved (confit)

2 large onions, chopped

4 garlic cloves, chopped

500g tomatoes, chopped

Method

Soak the beans overnight in water with a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda.

Drain and rinse.

In a pan, sauté together the onions, garlic and tomatoes until soft.

Transfer to a large pot

Add the saucissons de couennes, coustellous, ham, beans and 2.5 litres of water.

Bring to a boil and simmer for at least 3 hours.

Meanwhile, brown the fresh sausage in a frying pan.

Split the dried liver sausage in half and chop into pieces.

Cook for a few minutes in a pan.

Add pepper.

Half an hour before the end of cooking, add the defatted duck

or goose confit, the cooked sausage and liver sausage.

The sauce shouldn't be too thick — add water during cooking if necessary.

Millas

This dessert resembles a sweet polenta. To make millas, you need

A copper cauldron or a very large pot,

A large spatula

Large, white, coarsely woven cloth

Ingredients

400 g maize meal

300 g flour

1.5 l of milk

1.5 l of water

125 g butter, cut in pieces

125 g sugar

15 cl orange flower water

1 tsp salt

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Method

In the cauldron, boil the water and milk.

Add salt and slowly pour in the flour and maize meal, stirring constantly.

Add the butter, sugar and orange flower water.

Cook on low heat for 1 hour, stirring often.

The millas is done when the spatula stands up by itself in the mix.

Pour out the millas onto a cloth and spread out 2 cm thick.

Let cool and then cut into small squares.

To serve, fry in butter and sprinkle with sugar.

It's good with maple syrup.

Azinat

This is a traditional staple dish in the valleys of the high Ariège.

Ingredients

1 large cabbage

750 g firm potatoes

4 sauted pork ribs

2 saucisses de couennes

Duck confit (4 thighs or 8 wings)

4 garlic cloves

4 carrots

2 large onions

1 bay leaf

500ml ham stock (make from dry cured ham -- "jambon du pays")

1 dried liver sausage (300 g)

pepper

Method

Wash the cabbage.

Blanch it for 5 minutes in boiling water.

Mince the carrots and onions and sauté in duck fat.

Add the washed pork ribs (coustellou), saucissons de couennes, ham broth, bay leaf

Cover with 2.5 l of water, season with pepper and bring to a boil.

Add the cabbage.

Cook on a low flame for 2 hours.

Add the potatoes, liver sausage cut in pieces and duck confit with excess fat removed.

Lay the rouzole on top.

Cook for another 30 minutes on low heat.

After cooking, skim off the fat and pour the broth into separate pot.

You can serve the broth as is or after cooking some vermicelli in it.

Serve the vegetables, the meat and the rouzole on a large platter

With mustard and cornichons on the side.

Croustade

Originally a speciality of the Couserans, this pastry filled with prunes, apple or pear has become popular throughout all of Ariège.

Ingredients

300g flour

1 egg

125g butter

150g sugar

1 egg yolk

125 ml of water flavoured with orange blossom water and brandy (eau de vie)

A pinch of baking powder

1 packet vanilla sugar

1 Tbsp duck fat or oil

Method

The night before

Make a well in the flour, break the egg in the centre

Add the salt and baking powder dissolved in the water.

Incorporate the flour and mix together until it makes a smooth ball.

Flatten and stretch out the pastry on a floured surface.

Lay the butter cut in thin slices on top of it and fold the pastry over.

Stretch it again.

Spread the duck fat over it, fold it over again and let it rest.

The next day, prepare the chosen fruit.

Prunes should be soft and not too dry.

The peeled apples or pears are minced.

When the pastry has risen, divide it in two.

Roll out one half and lay it in a 30 cm shallow tart pan.

Spread the fruit in one layer.

Sprinkle over the sugar and vanilla sugar.

Sprinkle over the flavoured water.

Roll out the other half of the pastry to make a disk to lay on top.

Daub with a mixture of milk, vanilla sugar and egg yolk.

Bake until golden.

After removing it from the oven, sprinkle with sugar.