

Toujours Provence Study Guide

Toujours Provence by Peter Mayle

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Plot Summary

Toujours Provence, by English author Peter Mayle, is a light take on life in the Provence region of France. The book is a series of interesting and comical anecdotes about the transition of foreign residents transplanted from London to a new life in the South of France.

Mayle introduces the reader to the Provençal first by focusing on an ailment that has become a national epidemic—some twenty percent of Frenchmen reportedly suffer from chronic constipation. Food and drink is such an important element in the lives of the French that it is deemed to be as vital as the air they breathe. The richness of the food and the amounts ingested by the French apparently have contributed to their gastronomical ailments.

Mayle's first book, *A Year in Provence*, was a best seller. Mayle makes an effort to respond to all of his fan mail which, in some aspects, backfires on him. Some fans become unwanted pen pals, asking Mayle's opinion on everything from French tax laws and the education system to his personal advice on whether they should move to the Provence. Some fans become so bold that they invade his personal space. He comes into his house from the yard one day to find an uninvited couple sitting in his living room, expecting conversation and perhaps some pastis.

The Mayles live in the Lubéron section of the Provence. This region is depicted in *Vogue* magazine as a chic locale where the elite and sophisticated vacation. Such publicity causes an invasion of unwanted tourists in the summer months which the locals, including the Mayles, must suffer through. The commercialization of the picturesque region, in addition to the crowds and traffic caused by the influx of visitors during the these months, is a downside to the locals, who cherish the charming and quaint elegance and laid-back lifestyle of the Lubéron.

Mayle focuses on local customs and some of the eccentric residents of the region. The intrigue and passion surrounding the French delicacy known as truffles is surprising and entertaining. The love of food and drink, especially the liqueur called pastis, is a focal point in many of the episodes contained in the book. While performing in his concert, Pavarotti reportedly dines on French food while taking breaks between arias. A passionate gourmet takes Mayle to lunch, explaining that he wears running suits when he dines out so that his stomach can comfortably expand. There are summer fetes and dog shows and picnics and visits to the famous wine caves of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape and to village pastis bars.

On a visit to London, Mayle decides he could never live in his hometown again. The Provence has become his home and he admits that he has "gone native." His life, in essence, has improved. He has no regrets, few complaints and enjoys many pleasures from his transplanted life in the Provence.



Les Invalides

Les Invalides Summary and Analysis

British writer Peter Mayle is living in the Provence region of France. After returning home from the pharmacy with several mundane purchases—toothpaste and suntan lotion—Peter finds a brochure in his bag which discusses the problem of constipation, which apparently is quite a prevalent condition among the French. The French pharmacist is a major source for the people to discuss and resolve their health problems—be it constipation, engorged throat or tender kidney. Mayle asserts that hypochondria is the most common ailment that the French encounter.

Mayle picks up an American visitor at the railway station. As soon as the young man, Benson, steps off the train, he claims to be deathly ill with "mono." At first Mayle does not realize what this disease "mono" is but later realizes it is mononucleosis. Mayle takes a jab at Americans who create their own lexicon for common diseases: mono for mononucleosis, hematoma for bruise, and migraine for headache. After arriving home, Benson asks Mayle to contact his brother, who is a doctor in Brooklyn. Mayle contacts Benson's brother, who advises Mayle on the medication that will help.

Mayle has a local doctor come to his house to treat Benson, but the young American seems to distrust the doctor who wants to administer an antibiotic via an inoculation in his backside. Benson claims to be allergic to most antibiotics. Finally Benson agrees to the shot and has no reaction to it. The doctor writes a slew of prescriptions and promises to get blood test results back to Benson on Monday. Mayle takes the prescriptions to a pharmacy that is open on Sundays. However, there is such a crowd of ailing Frenchmen that his wait is quite prolonged. The pharmacy has everything except one item, which the pharmacist claims is not crucial.

Benson feels somewhat better after taking the prescriptions and he accompanies Mayle on Monday to another pharmacy to obtain the item the other pharmacy was unable to fill. The language barrier provides a comedic turn when Benson is presented with a large medication wrapped in foil. Benson complains he will not be able to swallow it. The pharmacist, who does not speak English, illustrates through pantomime that the medication is a suppository to be inserted in the rectum. Benson is reluctant but Mayle points out that at least the pill wouldn't hurt his sore throat.

Mayle meets up with a neighbor named Massot who shares his distrust of French doctors—he'd rather go to a vet. Mayle does not distrust French doctors, but recalls the prolonged process he endured in order to receive the identification cards he was required to have as a foreign resident living in France. After being sent to one bureaucracy after the other, the final stop was a health check. The doctor found Mayle to be healthy but took his blood for one last screening which was to make sure he didn't have syphilis.



The English Écrivain

The English Écrivain Summary and Analysis

Mayle reflects on the solitary career of a writer. A writer faces long, unproductive periods in which he begins to doubt that his writing will ever be read by anyone. An occasional well-written sentence is rewarding, but since the writer is the only judge of its worth, any assessment may be premature. What is rewarding, however, is the idea that once he is published, a writer can bring enjoyment to people he has never met.

Mayle enjoys receiving fan mail from his readers. After publication of his first book, *A Year in Provence*, he began receiving letters from all parts of the world. They were of all description—from those on fine writing paper to those with addresses that were barely perceptible. Mayle's favorite letter was the one addressed to the "English Writer in Provence." Mayle made it a practice to respond to his fan mail; however, his well-meaning intentions opened a can of worms. He instantly became pen pals with many of the writers, who asked for his opinion on a range of issues including how the local schools rate, French income tax laws and their potential for happiness if they moved to Provence.

Mayle keeps up with the correspondence as best he can but is truly stunned when fans begin stopping by to get his autograph on their copies of his book. At first it is flattering, but when a pretty blond shows up at his doorstep, his wife begins to find it annoying. Mayle is most astonished when he finds an uninvited couple in his sitting room. They are unapologetic and apparently feel entitled to invade the personal space of their favorite author. They don't even have a book for him to sign, explaining that they are waiting for the paperback edition—the hard bound book is too expensive. The visitors are stunned when Mayle asks them to leave, muttering that they won't be buying his book.

Several local residents are mentioned in Mayle's book and become the focus of some of Mayle's readers. Fans seek autographs from Mayle's neighbor, Faustin, who is mentioned in the book as well as Monsieur Menicucci, a colorful, local plumber. Menicucci is described in Mayle's book as a likeable man who has opinions far beyond the scope of plumbing; i.e., politics, wild mushrooms, Mozart and rugby just to name a few. These Provençal residents rather enjoy their new-found celebrity.

Mayle is invited by a bookstore owner to hold a book signing in Cannes during the film festival. As Mayle travels down the main street in Cannes, he notices signs that Cannes and Beverly Hills are now sister cities. He imagines that both mayors find excuses to visit their sister cities at various times during the year at government expense. Mayle is rather surprised by the level of security provided for the festival—Clint Eastwood won't be kidnapped but the traffic is certainly snarled. Most of the population is star struck and in search of the famous.



Mayle fears his book signing will be a disaster and doubts anyone would be interested in his little book with all the famous names in town. However, the book store owner surprises Mayle—he had arranged for a group of Mayle's fans to attend the event. Mayle regrets not having brought Monsieur Menicucci, the plumber, along who could have better addressed some questions from several English expatriates who could not understand how the French, skilled in the development of a high-speed train and sophisticated electronic phone system, were unable to develop a toilet that worked properly. One lady claimed that a salad once surfaced in her toilet after flushing it.

Boy

Boy Summary and Analysis

Mayle's wife is a dog lover. One day she spots a man walking down the road to Ménerbes with a large dog at his side. The dog, as it turns out, does not belong to the man. The large shaggy animal is a stray and appears to be a French breed officially known as Griffon Korthals. The Mayles already have two dogs, one of which is a Korthals. Over the next several weeks, Mayle's wife stalks the dog, who she learns spends time outside a cafe where it can feed off scraps. Doing more detective work, she soon learns that the dog is staying at a man's house in the forest. He allows the dog to sleep on his terrace and provides some food for him.

With the fear that the dog might be captured by the local animal control authorities and ultimately put to death, Mayle's wife brings the dog home. Its coat is matted and littered with twigs and various other debris. The dog is so thin and malnourished that its bone structure is visible. Mayle takes the dog to a local groom where it is clipped and shampooed. His wife is not enthusiastic when Mayle suggests that they should search for the owner. A local couple, the Gregoires, who own and breed Korthals, are invited over to see the dog. The dog has no identifying numbers tattooed inside his ear and the Gregoires deem it next to impossible to find the owners. Madame Gregoire suggests that they plan on mating the dog with their female Korthals. The Mayles decide that the dog needs a masculine name and call him Boy.

After many visits to the vets for check ups and inoculations and after gaining sufficient weight from a proper diet, the Mayles bring boy to the Gregoire's for a romantic interlude with their female. However, Monsieur Gregoire is suspicious about Boy, questioning his pedigree. In the end, Gregoire concludes from Boy's unusually curly coat that he is not a Korthals but rather a mutt. The romance ends before it begins and Boy remains a bachelor.



Passing 50 Without Breaking the Speed Limit

Passing 50 Without Breaking the Speed Limit Summary and Analysis

Mayle's wife decides to have a picnic for Peter's fiftieth birthday. Mayle reminds his wife that he hates picnics, based on his experiences with damp ground and hordes of ants at picnics he attended in London. She promises that this one will be different. The party will be held in picturesque Lubéron and the guests will arrive by horse and carriage provided by local chef and friend, Maurice, who will also be providing the gourmet food as well.

Peter and his guests enjoy the leisurely ride on the horse-drawn carriages, which allows them to take in the beauty of the breathtaking countryside. Finally reaching the picnic area in what appears to be a thick and untamed forest, the party finds a table for ten set under a sprawling oak tree, replete with starched white linen, silverware and ice buckets. The party enjoys the idyllic setting and gourmet food, and toast the guest of honor with flutes of peach champagne.

Peter receives the heaviest birthday card in his life—a lifted metal speed limit sign with "50" in large black numerals, signed with best wishes from his party guests. On their return trip, a storm breaks out and soaks the guests, who recuperate with coffee and tea when they reach Maurice's restaurant. This outing has changed Peter's opinion of picnics.



The Singing Toads of St. Pantaléon

The Singing Toads of St. Pantaléon Summary and Analysis

One day at a cafe, Peter overhears two men discussing whether toads can sing. The men were drinking and the debate didn't seem like a serious one. One man is certain that toads cannot sing while the other man claims that a man in St. Pantaléon is training some songs to sing for the bicentennial celebration to take place on July 14th. Although Peter is skeptical, the thought of singing toads intrigues him.

Peter decides to travel to St. Pantaléon to learn if there is any validity to the man's claim about singing toads. His inquiries there lead him to a man named Monsieur Salques. The sign in front of Salques' home indicates that he is a teacher of diverse subjects, including music. Salques is happy to talk with Peter and is pleased that word has gotten around about his endeavors. Salques takes Peter to a shed in his backyard that has a back wall made of soil and is equipped with a microphone hanging from the ceiling.

Salques explains that the toads are dormant and hidden in the soil. In the spring, they will come out to mate. They will be trapped in the shed and their lovemaking sounds will be recorded on the microphone, which is connected to Salques' recorder in the house. Salques will then edit and remix the sounds until he is able to produce a recognizable version of the Marseillaise—the French national anthem. Monsieur Salques is also composing an original anthem for the newly created European Common Market.

Peter is greatly disappointed—he had imagined an orchestra of toads accompanying a star contralto toad delivering a moving solo. Peter visited Salques again in the spring but he was not home. The housekeeper, who says that Salques is off to work on the bicentennial, does not allow Peter to see the toads. Peter combs the paper during the time leading up to Bastille Day, but there is never a mention of the singing toads. "I knew he should have done it live" (p. 56), he comments.



No Spitting in Châteauneuf-du-Pape

No Spitting in Châteauneuf-du-Pape Summary and Analysis

In the oppressive heat of August, Peter decides to travel to the small town of Châteauneuf-du-Pape in the wine country. He was invited by his friend, Michel, a professional wine taster, to visit the famous wine caves of the region.

Peter tastes samples of the various wines—at first the whites, then the roses and then the darker, more potent reds. Fearing he may become sick or tipsy, Peter asks Michel if it would be acceptable after swishing the wine around in his mouth to spit out some of the wine samples. Michel feels that it would not be appropriate. At lunch time, Michel, with several cases of wine in hand, tells Peter and six other visitors to follow him to a nearby restaurant. Michel drives so fast that Peter almost loses him.

Peter intends to eat moderately but is unable to resist the delicious gourmet fare placed before him—from salad and cheese to the entrees and desserts. The diners manage to polish off most of the wine, with the help of Andre, the restaurant's proprietor. Peter is so full after lunch that he falls asleep under a tree in the backyard and does not wake until almost dinner time. After arriving home, Peter is still full from lunch and is not interested in having any dinner.



Buying Truffles from Monsieur X

Buying Truffles from Monsieur X Summary and Analysis

Peter's friend, Frank, calls him from London. He seems worried and on edge as he fears that he has missed truffle season. Since it is the end of March, Peter agrees that the truffles could all be gone. Frank is dismayed but Peter offers some hope. He knows of one man who still may have some truffles. Frank, a wealthy businessman, wants two kilos of the delicacy, which will cost him, even in a direct purchase, at least one thousand pounds.

The world of truffle business is a murky one. Inferior Italian truffles are often passed off as the French delicacy. Some truffles have been sold full of buckshot and mud to make them heavier and thereby more expensive. Peter vows to do what he can to get Frank his truffles. Peter contacts a chef, identified only as Monsieur X, who at first is reluctant to sell an Englishman truffles this late in the season. However, he finally agrees to take his dogs out and try to hunt some down. A few weeks later, Monsieur X calls Peter and arranges a rendezvous at a nearby pay phone booth. Monsieur X cautions Peter that he must pay in cash so that there is no record.

After meeting at the designated location, Peter follows Monsieur X to his home. There, piled on the table, are the two kilos of truffles. Monsieur X has removed all the mud and squeezes each truffle making sure they are all fresh. Monsieur X tells Peter he must join him next spring to hunt for truffles.

He has trained a pig to sniff them out—pigs have a much keener sense of smell than do dogs. The pungent smell of the truffles lingers in Peter's car. When he flies to London with the truffles, he is embarrassed when he realizes that everyone on the plane can smell them. He gets through customs with no problem and delivers them to Frank, who is more than delighted.

Being back in London is an enlightening experience for Peter. He realizes that either he or London or perhaps both have changed in the two years he has been gone. Everyone in London seems to be obsessed with money and property. He had forgotten how much it rains in London and how snarled the traffic always is. Peter realizes he could never live in London again.

Peter telephones Monsieur X, who is pleased to hear that Frank liked the truffles. Monsieur X, who reveals that his name is Alain, invites Peter over to watch a movie he made. The movie is a documentary which shows how Alain and his dogs hunt down and dig up truffles. In a subsequent scene, an old man and his pig are featured. The pig reportedly found three hundred kilos of truffles during the last season.



After the movie, Alain shows Peter his black, pot-bellied pig which he plans to train in truffle hunting for the next season. He invites Peter to come along when he takes her out on her first hunt. Alain tells Peter about an upcoming charity event where the largest truffle omelet in history will be prepared. Peter is intrigued and toys with the idea of inviting Frank over for the event.



Napoléons at the Bottom of the Garden

Napoléons at the Bottom of the Garden Summary and Analysis

Mayle begins to clear a pile of construction debris left by the workman who had built his pool. After removing the clutter, Mayle finds a gold coin, a 20 franc piece dated 1857, buried in the now exposed soil. A little more digging unearths a 20 franc piece dated 1869. Mayle believes that the two coins must have spilled out from a larger cache of francs and keeps on digging. Faustin, Mayle's neighbor, drops by and expresses doubt that more money is buried by the pool. In Faustin's opinion, the location of such treasure would more likely be by the well or near the chimney.

Mayle visits his other neighbor, Massot, to gain his insight into the possibility of a large cache of buried coins. Massot explains the importance and value of gold over currency, which can be devalued at the whim of the government. Massot returns with Mayle to view the area by the pool where the two coins were found. Massot rents a metal detector so he can find additional coins in the area. The two men agree to share any profits, with a seventy-five percent share for Mayle and twenty-five percent share for Massot.

Massot, using the metal detector, searches for gold coins in the pool area, where he finds a myriad of metal objects including rusty nails, bottle tops, bolts and keys but no gold. Massot thinks the gold is buried under the walkway surrounding the pool. Massot suggests they rent a jack-hammer to demolish the pavement in order to find more gold coins. Mayle envisions the destruction that would ensue and the possibility that they still wouldn't find any coins and rejects Massot's plan. Mayle fears that one drunken evening, Massot, itching for gold, may demolish Mayle's pool walkway. He prays that no one gives Massot a jack-hammer for Christmas.



As Advertised in Vogue

As Advertised in Vogue Summary and Analysis

The Provence region is experiencing an influx of visitors. A high-speed train is planned for the area to cut the travel time from Paris. The tiny airport in Avignon is boasting direct flights to New York and will probably soon be referred to as Avignon International Airport. The food and shops of Provence have been discovered and word is spreading. Elites, including those in the world of fashion, are making the Provence region a fashionable place to vacation. The Lubéron is described in a recent issue of American Vogue as "the secret of South France." French Vogue follows up with a twelve-page spread about the Lubéron. "Good-bye privacy," he says.

While the tourists are disrupting the tranquility of the Lubéron, real estate prices are increasing by unheard of amounts. The local real estate agents are in great demand and becoming quite wealthy. The competition among the agents has grown as well and buyers are cautioned to be discriminating in their choice of agents. That there are a limited amount of properties heightens the competitiveness among the agents, confuses the distribution of fees and spawns unethical behavior. The real estate deals in the Lubéron are often examples of worlds colliding—a peasant whose family has owned land for centuries is selling it to a Parisian or foreigner whose main concern may be where to put the tennis court. The peasants are never in a hurry to make a deal while the buyers are on a fast-track to close one.

The peasants often prove to be slicker at deal making than their sophisticated buyers. Often after a sale is finalized, the buyer notices that an item, like the bathtub, is missing. The peasant will claim that such an heirloom was not part of the sale but offers to negotiate on an additional price on the piece. Despite any problems, sales and prices continue to increase. Based on its mild climate and upscale life-style, the Provence region is often referred to as "the California of Europe."

The epitome of the Lubéron is its charming and picturesque group of villages, the jewel of which is a tiny town named Gordes. Sixteen years before, Gordes was an unspoiled village boasting a Renaissance chateau, cobbled streets and modest services, including a butcher, baker and simple hotel. The area surrounding the village was an open expanse of year-round greenery. Now that it is a fashionable place for the elites to visit, the charm has been scaled back by modernity. There are too many signs, too many autos, a larger modern hotel, fast food restaurants and Gordes T-shirts for sale. The tiny village of Ménerbes closer to the Mayle residence is beginning to show signs of change as well.



Mainly Dry Periods, with Scattered Fires

Mainly Dry Periods, with Scattered Fires Summary and Analysis

During the first six months of 1989, the rainfall in the Provence is well below normal. The farmers are concerned about their crops; in addition, the potential for fire, made more dangerous by the gusty winds, is an ever-present threat. In addition to fires from natural causes, arsonists seem to be drawn to these dry areas where fires are easy to set and catch on. In July, the Mayle residence is threatened by the outbreak of nearby fires that eventually destroy a good portion of the surrounding forests.

Although the wise men in the village had promised rain by August, conditions remain dry and parched. Even though the water in the Mayle's pool is warm as soup, it attracts a herd of wild boars one evening that back away when Boy scares them off. The drought results in a miserable truffle crop, a reduction in game for area hunters and an absence of wild mushrooms.

The parched Provence region is officially declared a threat to the safety of its residents. During November, in an effort to prevent the outbreak of fires in the spring, the government trims back dry brush and undergrowth from the region. After enduring another mild winter, dry conditions lead to a big fire that destroys six thousand acres near Marseille the following summer. Mayle is careful to keep his identify in a fireproof container in case their house goes up in flames. A neighbor tells Mayle that he is becoming less English because he now delights in rain.



Dinner with Pavarotti and a Pastis Lesson

Dinner with Pavarotti and a Pastis Lesson Summary and Analysis

The people of Provence are eagerly awaiting the arrival of Pavarotti, who is scheduled to perform at the open air Antique Theatre of Orange. The venue is fitting for the Italian since the huge theater was built by his countrymen some nineteen centuries ago. The history of the structure is interesting, with seating in ancient times having been separated by class—beggars and prostitutes were seated in the highest seats far away from the respectable people. But none of those restrictions apply in 1990, and the Pavarotti concert is a sell-out.

The entire town of Orange is excited about the impending arrival and performance of Pavarotti. The restaurants have created special menus just for the occasion. The Mayles and their friend Christopher arrive early to the concert area, equipped with cushions to make the stone seats more comfortable. Everything is perfect until it starts to rain. Fortunately, by 9 pm the rain stops and the concert goers are able to take their seats in the magnificent theater.

The orchestra plays a brief overture prior to the maestro's performance. Pavarotti appears and his powerful voice easily reaches all sections of the theater, seemingly reducing it to the size of a room. The applause of appreciation thunder after each aria. After the second song, Pavarotti leaves the stage for a short period. Mayle figures he is taking a small break to rest his voice, but a woman sitting nearby insists that he is eating small meals in between songs. He is a big man and fond of gourmet food, so the woman's theory is certainly a plausible one. The audience calls for an encore after Pavarotti's last song. He returns to the stage and thrills the audience with a few more songs. If the woman sitting near them was correct, thirteen thousand fans just had dinner with Pavarotti but didn't know it.

In the chapter A Pastis Lesson, it is explained that the "milk of Provence" is pastis, a yellow/gray anise-flavored liqueur. Michel Bosc runs a restaurant and bar in the village of Cabrières. Despite its chic image, Michel's bar serves as the village bar where blue-collar workers gather every evening after work. The choice of drink is generally pastis. One evening when Mayle is in the bar, Michel is conducting a tasting contest to determine which brand of eight is the best pastis. Mayle tastes one that he thinks is unusually strong. His suspicions are confirmed when Michel tells him that the alcohol content is forty-five percent, just at the legal limit for pastis.

Michel shows Mayle some ancient glasses from which absinthe was served. The drink, which was sixty-eight percent alcohol, was outlawed in 1915. Reportedly, Van Gogh was under its influence when he cut off his ear. Blindness, epilepsy and insanity were

possible results from drinking the strong liqueur. Over the course of the evening, Mayle drinks various brands of pastis including Granier, Pernod and Ricard.

Mayle becomes curious about pastis. He wonders who created it and why it is so closely associated with the Provence. Michel invites Mayle and a few other guests over to his restaurant to answer Mayle's questions and to provide a little history of pastis. Ricard and Pernod had both bottled and marketed pastis but they hadn't invented it. One popular legend explaining its origin is that pastis was invented by a hermit who lived in a hut in the Lubéron forest. A plausible explanation for the connection between pastis and the Provence is that the herbs used in the liqueur are cheap and readily available in the region.



The Flic and The Mouthful for Mouthful with the Athlete Gourmet

The Flic and The Mouthful for Mouthful with the Athlete Gourmet Summary and Analysis

Mayle finds a parking spot on the crowded main street in Cavailon. Since Mayle has no change for the parking meter, he dashes into a nearby cafe to get change. Just as he is returning to his car, a traffic officer is peering at his meter. As Mayle approaches, the officer explains that the meter has expired and that he is in violation of the law. Mayle tries to dissuade him from writing a ticket by explaining that he rushed in the cafe to get change. The officer is not persuaded. Just as the officer is about to write the ticket, a man comes rushing out of the cafe defending Mayle. The man points out other far more blatant violations—a truck blocking a drive, cars that are doubled-parked. The officer finally relents and warns Mayle to have change available before he parks his car in the future.

Mayle offers to buy the man, whose name is Robert, a drink. Robert is an engaging fellow but there is something edgy and slightly shady about him. As it turns out, Robert currently sells alarm systems but had a prior career as a police officer. During the period when he was in law enforcement, Robert ate breakfast at the same cafe by the sea each morning. He would see the same man taking windsurfing lessons each day. The man looked familiar and Robert finally realized that he had seen his face on a police mug shot. The man was an escapee from prison and the leader of a very dangerous criminal gang. The man was subsequently captured and sent back to prison. Robert was credited with the arrest and was promoted to detective. Some years later Robert was later fired when he was caught having sex with a female suspect.

Robert offers to stop by Mayle's house and offer his security recommendations. During his inspection of Mayle's house, not surprisingly, Robert recommends that the Mayles install a security system. Beyond protecting their property and their personal safety, there is another reason to keep burglars out. There is a superstition among burglars that they can rid themselves of any bad luck caused by their crime by defecating on their victim's carpet before they leave. Robert recommends a steel gate at the entry to the driveway, floodlights and a system that would turn the Mayle residence into a "howling house" if a burglar managed to get past the gate. The shrieking alarm would be heard several kilometers away and after it was set off, Robert's partner, armed with his Alsatian and a revolver, would drive over immediately to capture or drive off the offenders.

Mayle envisions the alarm going off accidentally and disturbing the neighborhood. He decides he doesn't want to live in Fort Knox the rest of his life and would rather take his chances.



In the next chapter, Mayle learns about a man named Régis from mutual friends. He is known to be a lover of good food. After being invited to the friend's house for dinner, Régis had called ahead to find out what was being served. He was informed of the planned fare but was asked why he wanted to know in advance what would be served. He explained that he had a bad case of piles and could only sit through one course. He called ahead to so he could decide which course he should choose.

The Mayles are invited by the mutual friend to a dinner that the now recovered Régis will be attending. Régis is a large man and is dressed casually in a running suit. He explains that he must be comfortable when he eats and that nothing is more comfortable than athletic wear. Régis asserts that beginning in babyhood, the English are fed bland food. The food that is served to English school children is awful as well. The masses in England suffer from poor restaurant food since only the rich can afford to go out and eat well. By contrast, the French feed their babies and children gourmet food and good restaurant food is available at reasonable prices so that everyone can enjoy it.

Régis suggests that he take the Mayles to two of his favorite restaurants for lunch. The first lunch takes place in a quiet, high-tone restaurant. The meal that includes appetizers, lamb, gratin potatoes, wine, cheese and dessert is delicious. Mayle is quite impressed with the quality of the food and the relatively low price. Several weeks later, Mayle meets Régis for their second lunch outing. In contrast to the first restaurant, the second restaurant has a bar and is crowded and loud. Mayle learns that most of the clientele are truck drivers. For the first course, the men serve themselves from the salad bar. The next course of meat and vegetables is served to them. Mayles is impressed with the quality of the food, the large portions served and the affordable cost of the meal.



Fashion and Sporting Notes from the Ménerbes Dog Show

Fashion and Sporting Notes from the Ménerbes Dog Show Summary and Analysis

The Mayles plan to attend the annual dog show held in June in the Ménerbes stadium. The Mayles skip the morning trials, which eliminates mongrels and dogs with bad behavior. After the lunch hour is over, the Mayles make their way to the stadium. Near the parking lot, dogs of various breeds and purpose are being sold by dealers. Oddly, there is a table displaying pump-action riot guns and Ninja throwing stars for sale.

There is often comment about dogs resembling their masters or vice versa. At the Ménerbes dog show, the dogs are dressed in fashions to resemble their masters. One blond woman is dressed in white shorts and white cowboy boots and her miniature white poodle is tethered to a white lead. A man who is entering his tall black Great Dane in the contest is himself dressed in black from head to toe. They both are wearing heavy metal necklaces.

Scores of puppies are on sale everywhere one looks—laying on blankets, under trees and stacked in boxes. The dealers easily detect Mrs. Mayle's weakness for dogs and are constantly shoving a cute puppy in her face. Hunting dogs are the first to go through the trials. A quail is tethered and hidden in large mounds of hay, and one by one the dogs are unleashed to test their skills in sniffing out the bird. After sunset, the awards are presenting to the winning dogs. The humans continue to celebrate with clinking glasses into the night.



Inside the Belly of the Avignon and Postcards from Summer

Inside the Belly of the Avignon and Postcards from Summer Summary and Analysis

Place Pie serves as the town square in the center of Avignon. Elegant old buildings are located on one side of the square, while a hideous modern sculpture is located on the opposite side. Mayle is in Avignon to shop at the fresh food market, Les Halles, located there. He has arrived at 6 am, before the market is open, in order to get a place to park.

Inside the market, Mayle observes other shoppers eating breakfast of croissants, coffee and wine. Mayle joins them, limiting his order to coffee. The produce sellers are laying out their fruits and vegetables and deciding on their prices. Down the way, fish sellers are setting up, causing the floor around them to become wet and slippery. Butchers are busy sawing bones and carving out steaks and chops.

Every food imaginable is for sale. Two stalls are devoted to selling just olives. Another unit sells anything with feathers—capons, duck and pigeons to name a few. Squid, shrimp, tuna, cod and a myriad of fresh and seawater fish are kept fresh and cool in long banks of ice against the wall. Other stalls display caviar, smoked salmon, a variety of cheeses and of course bread.

Three bars are located inside Les Halles, one of which called Chez Kiki, which serves champagne long before most people in town are awake. Mayle is not successful in gathering in-depth history on Les Halles. The market was originally opened in 1910 but the current hall had been operational only since 1973. Mayle asks an office girl how much food is sold in a week. She shrugs and just says "lots."

In the next chapter, Postcards from Summer, Mayle jokes that he and his wife live in the same house but in two different places. Normal life begins in September when the traffic is sparse and there are no crowds and there is never a problem to get a table at a restaurant. Life is uncomplicated and quiet for everyone. However, once July and August hit, and the influx of vacationers and tourists make the Lubéron seem like a different region.

In postcard format, Mayle makes some observations about his summers in the Lubéron. A card from Saint-Tropez notes the nudist beaches are increasing the number of applicants for the Saint-Tropez police force. In another card, Mayle warns his friends how oppressive the heat is in the Lubéron during summer. He advises them to either rent a vacation house with a pool or stay near the sea. Since the Mayles have a pool, they usually have a number of friends stop by to take a dip. Water loving wasps inhabit the pool during the summer and often sting unsuspecting swimmers. Mayle purchases several wasp traps that work by using French liqueurs as bait to lure the insects.



Mayle is given a lesson by a neighbor in the art of trimming lavender with a sickle. When he is almost finished with his row of lavender bushes, he almost cuts a finger off. The neighbor, who has an odd sense of humor, asks if he was giving himself a manicure. Common summer ailments include third-degree sunburns, rashes from poison ivy, scorpion bites and a general nausea from having to deal with French officials. Permanent residents suffer from loss of appetite, shortness of temper and paranoia from the seasonal invasion of tourists. An annual party, the fete votive, is held every summer in the town square. In addition to food, local artists and craftsmen display their ware during the festival. In the evening, there is music and dancing.



Arrest that Dog! And Life through Rosé-Tinted Spectacles

Arrest that Dog! And Life through Rosé-Tinted Spectacles Summary and Analysis

A friend from London sends Mayle an article about a gang of hoodlums who took inferior white Italian truffles, dyed them with a walnut stain to make them look like dark French truffles and sold them at the going price for the real thing to of all people, a Frenchman! Mayle contacts Alain about his truffles and truffle-hunting pig only to learn that the pig had failed as a hunter and that Alain had very few truffles for sale due to the drought. Mayle meets Alain in a cafe in Apt to buy some of his truffles. While in town, Alain will be looking at a truffle hunting dog that he may eventually purchase. The dog would have to be field tested before Alain would complete the deal.

Alain cautions Mayle to never buy a dog at a cafe. He told the story of a man who cheated people out of money by pretending his dog could find scores of truffles when no one else can. The dog was sold for 40,000 francs but then failed to find any truffles at all. The case went to court and the man had to take his dog back and return 20,000 francs to the man. The man pulled this scam several times.

Alain told of an old man who made his money from selling truffles. One day he noticed that the earth under his oak trees, where the truffles grew, was displaced. When it happened again, he knew he was being robbed. He and three neighbors sat in the dark with their shotguns one night to ambush the thieves. A man and his wife arrived and were caught red-handed, ready to dig up more truffles. The old man ordered the thief to walk to town, withdraw the money from his bank that he made from the truffles and bring it back to him. The old man was detaining the man's wife, dog and car until he got the money. The man never returned. The wife never saw him again and the old man died an angry man.

In the next chapter, Life through Rosé-Tinted Spectacles, an old friend who the Mayles had not seen for five years stops by. The friend thinks that living in the Provence has changed Mayle. He insists, although he could not be specific, that Mayle had "gone native." Being honest, Mayle sees changes in himself. He now usually dresses casually in shorts and no shoes. Planning a meeting at a precise time is no longer important—a rendezvous at an approximate time is preferred. Mayle has never felt a difficulty in adjusting to his new home, the transition has been gradual and not taxing.

Mayle and his wife read books now and don't watch television. The quality of the food they prepare and eat has improved while the cost has decreased. They prefer fish to red meat. Mayle and his wife have both lost weight and exercise more. They are naturally outdoors more due to the mild climate and work off calories by walking more

and working in the garden. Long walks in the Lubéron also provide the opportunity to enjoy the natural beauty of the countryside.

Their French has improved, although it has been a struggle. French is a beautiful, romantic language, but to keep up with global marketing, business French has morphed into a new language sometimes referred to as Franglais. This new language has emerged because there are many more words in the English vocabulary in general than in the French. When in doubt, Mayle responds with grunts and clicks and even throws in an "Ah bon" which, depending on inflection, can express shock, anger or joy.

Mayle's old friends think he turns a blind eye to the foibles of the Provençal. However, Mayle and his wife enjoy their life there. The Provence has been good to them and they have few complaints, many pleasures and no regrets.



Characters

Peter Mayle

British writer Peter Mayle is not only the author of *Toujours Provence* but he is also the book's main character. Mayle and his wife left London to relocate to the Provence region of France, which is in the southern part of that country. In this, his second book about the region, he tells of his experiences in becoming familiar with and adapting to the customs that are specific to Provence and to France in general, and of the interesting and sometimes eccentric characters that he meets along the way.

Mayle is a writer and he often shows the keen sense of an observer in episodes that he will later transfer to the written word. He is bemused by the French and their love, or more correctly, their passion for food and drink. He must endure barbs from Frenchmen who are vocal and condescending in their views of English food. Mayle notes that while English food is indeed bland compared to French, the rich food and drink that the French so adore, however, causes epidemic-like instances of gastronomical conditions.

Mayle, a gentle and unassuming man, is patient with the bolder nature of many of the people in his new homeland. His neighbors are as quick to give him advice as they are to provide unasked for critiques in his skills at such diverse activities as finding buried treasure or trimming lavender bushes. His patience is tested in several instances. Fans of his book become so intrusive that in one incident, an uninvited couple barge into his house expecting to be welcomed with conversation and pastis. The summers prove to be a challenge as well. The Lubéron region of the Provence has become a chic stop for the elite, resulting in droves of tourists invading the region in June and July causing overcrowding and the commercialization of the picturesque region.

When Mayle returns to London to visit a friend, he concedes that either he or London or perhaps both have changed. He realizes that he could never return to London with its snarled traffic and money obsessed residents. In the end, he prefers life in the Provence, which has given him many pleasures with a minimum of complaints.

Mrs. Mayle

Mrs. Mayle, whose given name is not provided, accompanies Peter on many of his outings. She is a supportive figure to her husband and is as protective of maintaining the quiet charm of their new homeland as much her husband. Like her husband, Mrs. Mayle is learning to appreciate the rich food and drink that is the pride of the Frenchman.

One of Mrs. Mayle's passions is her love of dogs. When the story begins, the Mayles are the owners of two dogs, one of which is the French breed Griffon Korthals. However, when Mrs. Mayle spies a shaggy dog who appears to be a stray, she is bound and determined to make him her own. She stalks the dog, which she learns is spending



many days behind a restaurant where he has access to some thrown away food scraps. She then follows some leads and finds that a man in a forest residence is allowing the dog to sleep on his terrace and is providing him with some food.

Mrs. Mayle is finally able to bring the dog home. After much needed grooming and a steady diet of nutritious food, the dog, who is also a Griffon Korthals, begins to flourish. Although Peter wants to try to find its owner, Mrs. Mayle has already fallen in love with the dog, whom they name Boy, and he becomes part of the family.

Peter is somewhat concerned when dealers at a dog show keeps showing the vulnerable Mrs. Mayle their puppies. Just as she is about to cave and ask Peter to agree to another dog, the show begins and Peter is able to dodge that bullet.

Like her husband, Mrs. Mayle loves their new home and has no desire to return to London.

Benson

Benson is a young American visitor on his first trip to Europe who Mayle befriends. The young man becomes sick and Mayle helps him recover.

Monsieur Menicucc

Monsieur Menicucci, the plumber and resident of Provencal, is described in Mayle's first book, *A Year in Provence*. He became a fan favorite because he was depicted as a loveable character who has opinions on many subjects other than plumbing.

Boy

Boy is the stray Griffon Korthals dog that Mayle's wife brings home. He is thin and has matted hair, but after some repair work and adequate food, he becomes part of the family.

Maurice

Maurice, the chef and owner of the Auberge de la Loube, catered the picnic arranged for Mayle's fiftieth birthday party. Maurice also provided horse drawn carriages for Mayle's invited guests.

Massot

Massot is a friend and neighbor of Peter Mayle. Peter turned to Massot for his opinion on the possibility that frogs could sing. Mayle turns to Massot for his advice on a variety of issues.



Monsieur Salques

Monsieur Salques is the music teacher who lives in St. Pantaléon and reportedly is teaching toads to sing. When Mayle visits him, he learns that Salques is recording the mating sounds of the toads and editing and remixing them in order to create music.

Monsieur X

Monsieur X is the Frenchman who Mayle contacts in an effort to obtain off-season truffles for an English friend. Later, Monsieur X, also known as Alain, purchases a black, pot-bellied pig to train for truffle hunting.

Michel Bosc

Michel Bosc is the owner and proprietor of a village bar in the village of Cabrières. The drink of choice in his establishment is pastis. Mayle participates in a pastis tasting contest in his bar.



Objects/Places

the Provence

Provence is the region in the south of France where English writer Peter Mayle and his wife have relocated. The book details life in this region.

Cannes

Mayle is invited by a Cannes book store owner to hold a book signing at the same time the Cannes Film Festival is taking place.

Avignon

Avignon, France, is where a major railroad station is located. The small Avignon airport boasts about direct flights to New York City in hopes of becoming upgraded to an international airport.

Ménerbes

Ménerbes is a town located in the Provencal region of France and is the nearest village to the Mayle residence. Mayle's wife finds their dog, Boy, on the road to Ménerbes.

The Lubéron

The Lubéron is in the South of France and is the scenic location of Mayle's fiftieth birthday picnic party. It is a region that was featured in both American and French Vogue, causing an influx of unwanted tourists. The Lubéron has become a chic place for the vacationing elite.

St. Pantaléon

Peter learns that a man from St. Pantaléon is training frogs to sing for the upcoming bicentennial celebration on July 14th.

Châteauneuf-du-Pap

Châteauneuf-du-Pape is a small town located in wine country. The wines made in Châteauneuf-du-Pape are stored in cool, large wine caves. Peter visits Châteauneuf-du-Pape with his friend, Michel, who is a professional wine taster.



Gordes

Gordes is the jewel among the beautiful villages located in the Lubéron, where the mild weather and up-scale life-style are compared to that in Southern California.

Antique Theatre of Orange

Luciano Pavarotti appeared at the Antique Theatre of Orange. The theater was originally built by Pavarotti's countrymen some nineteen centuries before. The Mayles attended the concert.

Cabrières

Michel Bosc, a friend of Peter Mayle, lives and owns a restaurant in Cabrières. Bosc holds a pastis tasting contest in his restaurant and is an expert on the history of the liqueur.

Les Halles

Les Halles is a fresh food market that is located in Avignon. It is a popular market with the locals, who purchase everything there from fruit and vegetables to meat, fish, wine and cheese.



Themes

Invasions in Provence

The Mayles, who have become permanent foreign residents in the Provence region of South France, are confronted with the same issues that the locals have been facing for many seasons. In the summer months of June and July, the Provence, especially its picturesque section known as the Lubéron, is invaded by tourists. Publicity from magazines such as American Vogue and French Vogue, as well as from word of mouth, has spread the news that the Lubéron is a chic area that is a favorite stop for the elite and sophisticated.

The locals do not look forward to this time of year as the quiet elegance of the area gives way to crowds and snarled traffic as well as to the commercialization of the quaint and charming area. Although the French boast about their food, drink and climate, they would prefer to keep these treasures to themselves.

On a personal level, Mayle is invaded by several overly-zealous fans. His first book, *A Year in Provence*, was a huge success, gaining him a large readership. Although Mayle could deal with fan mail, he found it a challenge when fans begin stopping by to get his autographs on their books or engage the author in conversations. One day, after returning to the house from the yard, Mayle finds an uninvited couple sitting in his living room, waiting for some good conversation and robust pastis.

The Transition of Relocation

Peter Mayle and his wife have lived the majority of their lives in England. They decide to relocate to the South of France to a region known as the Provence. Although the idyllic area is charming and isolated and the weather is usually perfect, there are still adjustments that have to be made to the people and customs of a new land.

New customs do not always represent something negative. When Mrs. Mayle suggests that for Peter's fiftieth birthday they hold a small picnic party to celebrate with their friends, Peter is against the picnic from the outset. He recalls the many picnics in England when he was forced to sit on damp ground and battle with ants. When the picnic is held in the lush region known as the Lubéron, Peter learns that a picnic in France consists of a table set with linen and silverware, replete with champagne and gourmet food.

Mayle is the typical reserved Englishman and finds he must learn to adjust to the bold and opinionated Frenchmen, who are not shy about offering advice or criticism. After having lived and worked in both England and America in the high-octane world of advertising, he is bemused by the two hour breaks that the French finds necessary to devote to their lunch "hour."



Mayle realizes that he has "gone native" when he visits London. He had been away for two years and observes that London has changed, or he has changed, or perhaps both have changed. He has come to prefer the laid-back life-style of the Provence and knows that he could never return to his city of birth. The English are obsessed with money and property and the traffic is in a constant snarl. The French are most concerned with food and drink and celebration. The author says it all with the title of his book, *Toujours Provence*, which, when translated, means "always Provence."

The Frenchman's Love of Food and Drink

Mayle learns that twenty percent of the French population is plagued with chronic constipation. He deduces that these epidemic-like numbers are due in part to the Frenchman's love of rich food and robust drink.

When an English friend asks Mayle to obtain a large off-season quantity of a favorite French delicacy, the dark truffle, Mayle learns that the truffle business evokes strange behavior from the French. The chef who Mayle contacts is at first reluctant to do such a favor for an Englishman, even though he would make a good profit. After reluctantly hunting down the delectable fungi, the chef sets up a secret rendezvous at a pay phone booth to make the exchange. A gang of thieves color inferior Italian white truffles with dark walnut dye in order to pass them off as the French delicacy and sell them to, of all people, a Frenchman.

Régis, the friend of a mutual acquaintance, takes the Mayles to two restaurants to prove that French food is not only far superior to English food but is more economical as well. One of the most popular shopping places for the locals in the Provence is an open-air market called Les Halles, where everything from fruit and vegetables to meats and cheese and bread is sold. The French have an undying passion for their wines and for a favorite liqueur called pastis.

Mayles must endure many barbs about English food from the French. He is told that English food is bland and that the people are not allowed to develop proper taste buds because from babyhood on they have very little to choose from that is not tasteless.



Style

Perspective

Toujours Provence is written in the first-person narrative—the author is the main character in the book, which is a personal account of his experiences of living in a new land and becoming familiar with and adapted to its people and customs. Peter Mayle is a writer and an Englishman who relocates with his wife to the Provence region in the South of France. Mayle's writing credentials are without question. He is a seasoned writer, having had a huge success in his first book about the Provence entitled, *A Year in Provence*. He is also a sought after contributor to publications such as the London Sunday Times, the Financial Times and Esquire magazine to name a few.

Toujours Provence takes a lighthearted look at Mayle's adjustment to his fresh start in a foreign land. He must become accustomed to the passion and pride displayed by the French for their food and drink and understand the need for the French to have a two-hour lunch "hour." After having spent time in the high-octane world of Madison Avenue, Mayle is the perfect arbiter to appreciate the change from a crowded, money-obsessed society to the low-key and genteel existence offered by the quaint though chic setting to which Mayle and his wife have chosen to relocate.

Tone

Author Peter Mayle takes a light touch with his tribute piece to his adopted home located in the Provence region in the South of France. While he focuses on some oddities in French customs and some oddballs among the population, Mayle's humor is never acerbic or biting; rather, there is a genuine affection and good-natured wonderment that shines through. He uses irony and other rhetorical flourishes sparingly to enhance his non-fiction narrative.

The anecdotes that Mayle relates in his book are interesting in the unique and imperfect way that only real incidents can be; however, Mayle's comedic take serves to polish them into delightful, memorable and genuinely relatable incidents. For example, when a neighbor shows him how to trim his lavender bushes with a sickle and he almost slices off a finger, she asks if he was giving himself a manicure. He politely questions, to his readers, her sense of humor. He fears that another neighbor who thinks gold is buried under his pool's walkway, may demolish his sidewalk one drunken night, and prays that no one gives the man a jack hammer for Christmas.

Like any society, the people of the Provence and their habits and mores no doubt have foibles and unattractive aspects on which Mayle could have focused, yet he instead chose to give them a pass on most counts and spotlight on the positives and pleasures that he and his wife have come to enjoy in their new land.

Mayle comes across as a gentle person who is open to change and willing to adapt to new ways and ideas. It is clear that Mayle takes extra effort to blend in and become part of his new home and country and to understand its people. The upbeat and lighthearted tone makes *Toujours Provence* an entertaining and easy read.

Structure

Toujours Provence is segmented into twenty chapters over its 241 pages. The book covers many anecdotal incidents which were either experienced directly by author Peter Mayle or related to him by others. The most common connectivity that exists from chapter to chapter or from incident to incident is their individual relationships to the overall purpose of the book, which was to provide an accurate and entertaining account of Mayle's adjustment to living in a new country with an unfamiliar language and somewhat alien customs.

Just as one gets the sense from Mayle's work that the Provence region of South France is an idyllic and timeless setting, the construction of the book mimics that ambiance by using only a sprinkling of references to date and time.

By creating relatively short chapters with lighthearted and succinct subject matter, the ease of the read is facilitated and moves the book efficiently along toward its conclusion.

Quotes

"It was indeed mononucléose, but we would conquer it with the resources of French medicine. The doctor began to scribble like a poet in heat." *Les Invalides*, p. 7

"'Writing is a dog's life, but the only life worth living.' That was Flaubert's opinion, and it is a fair expression of the way it feels if you choose to spend your working days putting words down on a piece of paper." *The English Écrivaine*, p. 15

I have always had doubts about the literary appetite of people in the film business. An old friend who works in Hollywood confessed that he had read one book in six years, and he was considered a borderline intellectual." (*The English Écrivaine* [Chapter 2], page 20)

"I had been hoping for live performances, massed bands of toads with their enormous vocal sacs swelling in unison, Salques conducting from his podium, the star contralto toad delivery a poignant solo, the audience hanging on to every squeak and gribbet." *The Singing Toads of St. Pantaléon*, p. 55

"So far as I know, there are no statistics to support my theory, but observation and heart-stopping personal experience have convinced me that a Frenchman with an empty stomach drives twice as fast as a Frenchman with a full stomach (which is already too fast for sanity and speed limits." *No Spitting in Châteauneuf-du-Pape*, p. 65

"But gold—Massot held his hands in front of him and wriggled his fingers in an imaginary pile of napoleons—gold was always good, and in times of trouble it was even better. And the best gold of all was dead man's gold, because dad men don't argue." *Napoléons at the Bottom of the Garden*, p. 92

"Even today, a Marseillais is regarded as a blagueur, an exaggerator, a man who will describe a sardine as a whale, not entirely to be believed." *A Pastis Lesson*, p. 145

"He grinned and raised his glass. 'To England and the English, as long as they keep their cooking to themselves.'" *Mouthful for Mouthful with the Athlete Gourmet*, p. 165

"A gendarme came up to them and gestured to them to move on, then stood with his hands on his hips, watching. They walked in the slouched defeated way of men with nothing to hope for and nowhere to go, and sat on the pavement on the other side of the place." *Inside the Belly of Avignon*, p. 194

"There is another affliction, worse than scorpions or rogue sausages . . . seen many times in permanent residents of this quiet corner of France. Symptoms usually appear some time around mid-July and persist until early September: glazed and bloodshot



eyes, yawning, loss of appetite, shortness of temper, lethargy, and a mile form of paranoia itself in sudden urges to join a monastery." Postcards from Summer, p. 212

"A gang of scoundrels had been importing white truffles from Italy and staining them with walnut dye until their complexions were dark enough to pass as black truffles. These, as every gourmet knows, have infinitely more flavor than their white cousins, and cost infinitely more money." Arrest that Dog!, p. 219

"The Provence has been good to us. We will never be more than permanent visitors in someone else's country, but we have been made welcome and happy. There are no regrets, few complaints, many pleasures. Merci, Provence." Life through Rosé-Tinted Spectacles, p. 241

Topics for Discussion

What type of fan mail does writer Peter Mayle receive from his readers? Who else in the Provence becomes the focus of his fans? How are some of his fans more than a little intrusive?

What causes the influx of visitors to the Provence region? During what time of year does this invasion occur? What effect did the interest in the region have on the real estate market?

When Pavarotti performs in Orange, what does he do during breaks between songs? How does Mayle learn about this behavior?

What problems are encountered in the truffle business in France? What animals are used to hunt for truffles?

What event is planned for Mayle's fiftieth birthday? How do the guests arrive at this event? What makes Mayle change his mind about picnics?

Who comes to Mayle's rescue when a police officer is about to write a parking ticket for a parking meter violation? What career did this person have formerly and why did he lose it?

In Mayle's own opinion, in what ways has he changed after being transplanted from London to the Provence? How does he feel about London when he visits it again?