



Detour de France: An Englishman in Search of a Continental Education

Michael Simkins

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Though happy enough with his lot, Michael Simkins has never truly shaken the nagging doubt - helpfully upheld by his partner Julia - that he somehow lacks worldly sophistication. While she spent her teenage years as a nanny on a boat moored at Cannes, his utter lack of travel experience (Weymouth, Cleethorpes and a day trip to Dieppe) still has the power to shock people into leaving dinner parties early.

So as he hits middle-age, Michael takes up the challenge of broadening his horizons. He decides to improve himself in the same way English gentlemen lacking refined edges have for centuries: by learning from our more cultured French neighbours. Michael, an English provincial *ingénue*, sets off to discover just what the Gallic nation can teach him and the rest of us Anglo-Saxons about living the good life. Armed only with *50 Useful Phrases in French*, he waits to see if his odyssey from La Manche to the Riviera will finally turn him from the scotch-egg eating spawn of Anne Widdecombe and John McCririck into the champagne-sipping love child of Serge Gainsbourg and Catherine Deneuve. Julia is saying a prayer for him at Lourdes.



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