



Duck Season: Eating, Drinking and Other Misadventures in Gascony, France's Last Best Place

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A delicious memoir about the eight months food writer David McAninch spent in Gascony—a deeply rural region of France virtually untouched by mass tourism—meeting extraordinary characters and eating the best meals of his life.

Though he'd been a card-carrying Francophile all of his life, David McAninch knew little about Gascony, an ancient region in Southwest France mostly overlooked by Americans. Then an assignment sent him to research a story on duck. After enjoying a string of rich meals—Armagnac-flambéed duck tenderloins; skewered duck hearts with chanterelles; a duck-confit shepherd's pie strewn with shavings of foie gras—he soon realized what he'd been missing.

McAninch decided he needed a more permanent fix. He'd fallen in love—not only with the food but with the people, and with the sheer unspoiled beauty of the place. So, along with his wife and young daughter, he moved to an old millhouse in the small village of Plaisance du Gers, where they would spend the next eight months living as Gascons. *Duck Season* is the delightful, mouthwatering chronicle of McAninch's time in this tradition-bound corner of France. There he herds sheep in the Pyrenees, harvests grapes, attends a pig slaughter, hunts for pigeons, distills Armagnac, and, of course, makes and eats all manner of delicious duck specialties—learning to rewire his own thinking about cooking, eating, drinking, and the art of living a full and happy life.

With wit and warmth, McAninch brings us deep into this enchanting world, where eating what makes you happy isn't a sin but a commandment and where, to the eternal surprise of outsiders, locals' life expectancy is higher than in any other region of France. Featuring a dozen choice recipes and beautiful line drawings, *Duck Season* is an irresistible treat for Francophiles and gourmands alike.

Duck Season: Eating, Drinking and Other Misadventures in Gascony, France's Last Best Place Details

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Gascony, France's Last Best Place David McAninch**

From Reader Review Duck Season: Eating, Drinking and Other Misadventures in Gascony, France's Last Best Place for online ebook

Jeffrey Ruby says

This is the kind of warm, self-assured food writing that doesn't exist much anymore. McAninch writes with such quiet detail that every smell and flavor, every memorable character and rustic setting, practically jumps off the page to greet you. What you're left with a desire to travel. And to eat. And not to worry so much about life. Any book that can do that—and do it with style and humor—is worth reading.

Sarah says

Probably the best travel memoir about France I've read. Each chapter focuses on a unique Gascon culinary or cultural experience and is deceptively funny and engaging; all the while, McAninch is drawing you in. We know from the start that he and his family plan to be in Gascony for less than a year, creating a sense of urgency around both their stay and the strong but slowly fading heritage McAninch has fallen in love with. Tradition and change are simultaneously present throughout. By the end, I was feeling super sad they left, dismayed at the thought of Amandine selling her cheese van, guilty about my complicity in the Instagramming of the world, but also somehow reassured that there will (probably?) always be someone (well, three people) pouring batter onto a rotating spit before an open flame for two and a half hours to create a three-foot gateau a la broche in Gascony.

I also learned a lot of really useful French vocabulary:

Le troisième âge: A nice way to refer to retirees

Piment: A hot pepper (as in, "Eh ohh, tu es un piment!")

Je vous emmerde: Screw you (or, as I like to think of it, I enshit you)

Debrouillard: Resourceful, in a MacGyver sort of way

Gratte-cul: Ass-scratcher (and a colloquial word for rose hips)

Mondain: Basic (as in bitches)

And a special shoutout to my favorite word in the book, Les Esbouhats. Les Esbouhats are the culinary society, comprised mostly of former rugby players, that McAninch falls in with. I'm guessing the proper pronunciation is closer to "lez-eh-bwah" but I enjoyed hearing it in my head as the "es-BOO-hats."

I read a free copy that miraculously dropped onto my desk at work.

Carolyn says

If you love food and can't travel to the Southwest of France this year, read this book and enjoy a virtual visit!! David McAninch has already been there, then takes his family for an extended visit of several months, establishes them in a rural village and they become part of the community! This is a travel dream I've had over and over, but not yet achieved. We learn about their lovely neighbors, friends of neighbors and their friends! It's an endless connection and on that I followed with relish! This is a book that I did NOT want to

end, I wanted to adventure to go on and on!
Be prepared to fall in love with Gascony, the SW part of France!!

Sarah says

Though I am no foodie, I enjoyed this book greatly! Very well written with wonderful descriptions of food, culture, countrysides, and life among a small village in France.

Manray9 says

Not a great book, but it will make you hungry.

Dlmrose says

3.5

Sjancourtz says

Like A Year in Provence, only with a little less condescension and a bit more genuine love for the French neighbors in Gascony. Less funny, but more sweet.

I enjoyed the writing very much--lively descriptions of places and people and events that made me want to hop on a plane and get to Gers as soon as possible. Of course, now that he's written the book, all of us annoying tourists will start going there, and ruin the place. We should all stay home and watch the travel TV shows and read the travel books. instead of trampling all over the globe and taking gazillions of selfies.

But I digress. Read this book! and then go grill some duck breasts and drink some lusty red wine.

Sarah Graff says

What a wonderful culture & community! I felt like I was in Plaisance with the author and his family. I cried a few times, like in the beginning when Charlotte, the 7 year old American girl, braved her first day of school in France. I laughed a lot too! Loved the author's wife's interjections throughout. I bet folks will travel to Plaisance and seek out Nadine to glean more of her knowledge. Jokester Basso cracked a little when saying good bye! I want to see Patrick's book of Plaisance's faces. I'd like to know more about Francis. "Into the Mountains" was a fun adventure! Maybe the sequel will be when the author buys Martine's estate!

Ebot says

3.5 stars

Enjoyable slow read to pick away at. Could have used more personal context to bring Michele and Charlotte into the picture, and even the author himself. But it was well organized and charming.

Erika Daniels says

Even though I am a totally non-adventurous eater and most of the food described in the book made me cringe, I thoroughly enjoyed Duck Season. David McAninch did a great job of making me feel as if I was in Gascony with his family, and he understands just how much detail to include to create a clear mental image without delving into tedium. He told us about the food he ate, the people he met, and the adventures he had. I felt as if I escaped to France for a few days.

Myrna Gottlieb says

I received a finished copy of "Duck Season" by David McAninch in exchange for an honest review. I loved it; so thank you Harper Collins for sending me this wonderful book.

David McAninch, a professional writer for magazines such as Chicago magazine and Saveur and an unrepentant foodie, in 2014 moves himself, his wife, and 6-year-old daughter to France for eight months. He chooses a small village in rural Gascony in the South of France- an area which is overlooked in favor of more upscale spots such as Provence. (After all, "A Year in Provence" had already been written).

They move into an abandoned 200-year- old textile mill, determined to live like Gascons. And cook and eat the traditional dishes, most of which center around duck: duck breast, duck fat, duck legs, duck fat, duck hearts, duck skin cracklings. Lotsa duck.

McAninch writes with wry humor as he describes his friends and neighbors and his experiences as he joins in the various feasts, fetes, and rituals of his adoptive home. Think George Plimpton -attending the slaughter of a pig named Mimi, participating in a pigeon hunt (he missed), visiting an eating club for rugby players (actually an overeating club), attending a bull fight-he loathed the spectacle but admitted that ragout of bull (the murdered beast's destiny) is a delicious dish.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys reading about food and/or France. There are even a few Gascon recipes at the end. Many of the review books which come my way, I pass along to a friend. But this one is a keeper.

Susan Zinner says

The best travel memoirs make you want to visit the location and this one certainly accomplishes that task! Author McAninch spent 8 months in Gascony, France and made excellent use of his time--he learns about foie gras, Armagnac, hunting pigeon, how local wines are made, etc. He even enrolls his young daughter in the local grade school and he and his wife make friends with the locals. Great job and really gives you a feel for the area!

Kenneth says

Excellent book. If you love food or France you will love this book. Similar to A Year in Provence, only better.

Bruce Reiter says

This is another book about culture through eating and drinking. The author spends eight months with his family in Southwest France in an attempt become intimately familiar with the region's foods. In the process, the family becomes a part of the culture. I don't have much contact with duck as a food source but it is a fun book. Recipes are at the back but the adventures in their preparation are sprinkled throughout the chapters.

Emily says

Ended up really loving this book. It will indeed make you hungry when you read it. You get a great understanding of the culture and community. It would have been helpful if I had some understanding of the French language, but certainly not necessary. Would definitely read anything else by this author. He makes things fun and interesting with great descriptors. Easy to read over the course of a few weeks.
