

Flirting gets you everywhere in Provence



Ann Rickard spent some time in Provence where she met her match in vivacious new best friend, Amanda.

Trawling your way through a bustling market in a charming Provencal town on a sunny Saturday morning is like stepping into a chapter of a Peter Mayle book. Doing it with Amanda takes the whole surreal experience to a level beyond your most giddy Provencal dreams.

Amanda is a Kiwi - self-described as "voluptuous" and "a woman of a certain age".

She has been living in the tiny a French village of St. Maximin -40 minutes north of Avignon - for the past decade.

Fruity of laugh, generous of both cleavage and hospitality, Amanda gives new freshness to the word "living".

This lady does not live life, she charges through it, relishing every day, enjoying every hour, savouring every minute. And she is a maestro of flirt.

I witnessed her virtuoso performance as we squeezed our way through the tumult of the market crowds at the nearby medieval village of Uzès.

"Bonjour, chou chou," she called to the cheese man frantically serving a cluster of demanding customers.

All his fromage duties were temporarily forgotten as Amanda blew noisy air kisses at him over slabs of Roquefort and Emmental cheeses. What could he do but blush, giggle and add a complimentary triangle of creamy brie to her order?

"Bonjour chérie," she shouted to the fish man, who smiled broadly and tossed in a half a kilo more than she had requested of his glistening black mussels.

"Hello darling," she greeted other marketgoers, squeezing her way through the crowds, constantly stopping, giving unselfconscious lip-smacking three-cheeked kisses to everyone in her formidable path.

At the end of the morning we had gathered extra scoops of fennel-soaked olives two additional



Amanda – the maestro of flirt – with her favourite cheese man at the Uzès markets.

dry white wine made in heaven by God and his angel helpers who had sought (and found) the perfect match for oysters. "Do you do this every Saturday morning?" I asked Amanda, who was too busy giving effusive greetings and loud cheek-kisses to passing friends to answer. The wonderful hullabaloo continued all the way to the end of our oyster and wine slurping.

Back at Amanda's 18th-century rambling stone maison at St Maximin, we slipped into swimwear, opened a bottle of pale pink rose wine and prepared our market spoils for a lazy lunch in her flower-filled stone courtyard. In the dappled sunlight beneath the vinecovered terrace ("dappled sunlight is so much more flattering, darling" - Amanda even has nature work to her advantage) she told me her story.