

Learn the art of video-making in France

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Relax and unwind on an activity holiday in France while you study movie-making. By Karen O'Grady



Have you ever wished you had a little more know-how when using a digital camcorder? Whether or not you have experience of using a camcorder, the Creative Digital Film Making course is a fun way to develop expert filming techniques in a relaxed environment.

Whatever your skill level, the course is designed to give expert guidance on making the most of your camcorder, from filming techniques, animation and special effects to editing material on your home computer. Having never even picked up a camcorder before, I was looking forward to learning how to shoot and edit my own films

while also spending time enjoying rural France.

The French House Party Experience

The Creative Digital Film Making course is run by [The French House Party Experience](#), held at Domaine St Raymond, a stylish stone farmhouse in Carcassonne. Tuition, accommodation, food and transfers to the airport are all included, allowing time for rest and recuperation, while learning. Nestling between the Pyrenees in the south and the Black Mountains to the north, the house is easy to reach from either Toulouse or Carcassonne airports. I flew to Toulouse, just 40 minutes away and was chauffeur-driven through stunning countryside. My destination, an impressive 18th-century farmhouse, was named as the top learning retreat of 2008 in the National Geographic book '[The 100 Best Worldwide Vacations to Enrich Your Life](#)' I'm looking forward to a rewarding, but also relaxing few days.



Providing accommodation for a maximum of 16 guests, Domaine St Raymond has a fun, friendly atmosphere. Guests can unwind by the pool, play tennis, recline in the comfy lounge or take a walk or bike ride in the surrounding countryside. After a warm welcome from host Moira, I was shown to my elegant bedroom, The Terrace Room. With the sun shining I decided to sit by the pool and catch up on some reading before the arrival of my course mates.

Welcome evening

Our first evening began with drinks by the pool and a welcome talk from course tutor [Peter Ralley](#). Peter has been involved with film making for over 30 years and currently promotes the use of digital photography and film making as an educational and expressive tool.

Peter's son Jim, also an experienced film maker, was also on hand to help out whenever needed. Peter gave an overview of what to expect during the course, and assured us all that we would be competent film-makers in no time. As well as film-making on site, we learnt that our time in France

would also include 'location trips' to the [mediaeval city of Carcassonne](#), a chance to see the Airbus base in Toulouse, and also a wine-tasting evening.



We then sat down to a fabulous dinner prepared by outstanding chefs Carl and Debbie Hargreaves. The talented couple have been treating guests of the French House Party to exquisite culinary fare for three years. The food is exceptional with a different wine with every course. Gastronomic highlights during my stay included slow-roasted leg of lamb with minted lime salsa, Bailey's baguette and butter pudding, beetroot shots with tarragon yoghurt ice cubes and to round off every meal we were served the finest selection of delicious cheese

I've ever tasted.

Making a film



Day one, and I'm looking forward to my first day of filming. My task is to shoot footage around the grounds of the farmhouse, which will then be edited to create a short film. It's a beautifully warm and sunny day, so spending time outdoors filming is extremely pleasant. Having never used a camcorder before, I decided to focus on mastering techniques and becoming comfortable with filming different subject matter. I

practised sweeping shots of the Pyrenees (above left) and close-ups of the elegant sculptures around the grounds. When it came to editing the film, Peter demonstrated how to transfer the film from camera to laptop, and explained how to use the editing package Windows Movie Maker (available free from Microsoft.com - [click here to download](#)).

I found this software straightforward to use, and within minutes we were busy editing film, adding special effects and soundtracks. After day one I was amazed to realise that I had made a complete short film! After another fantastic dinner, which had us all toasting the brilliance of our chefs, we made ourselves comfortable as Peter presented the films we had made during the day on a big screen. It was great to see different interpretations of the day's filming, and we all agreed it helped to spark new ideas for our own films.



Mastering technique

To practise different filming techniques we visited various locations, including Carcassonne (right) to shoot a travel documentary style film. Trying different filming techniques at various locations is a great way to develop skills, and I soon found my ability improving. During a trip to a local market we took digital photos on a specific theme. With these still photos we created a moving slideshow using the Microsoft Photostory software (also available free from Microsoft.com - [click here to download](#)).

Photostory is easy to use and enables anyone to become a film maker in minutes. It's a creative way to bring special events such as birthdays or holidays to life. As the course progressed we learnt how to give our films structure with storyboarding (showing a story in comic-style frames) and also advanced techniques such as ways to incorporate animation into filming.

Film challenges

To further improve our film-making expertise we were set 'film challenges', designed to encourage creativity, fun and variety in filming styles. Consisting of just one minute's filming, challenges ranged from making a TV advert to shooting a film from a mouse's point of view. The challenges stretched our creative abilities and were fun to work on. Course tutor Peter encouraged us to learn at a pace that felt comfortable, helping everyone to thrive and have fun while learning.

On the final night an Oscar Awards ceremony took place to showcase the short films we'd made during the course. A real high point of the week, when I realised while watching the films that in just a few days the course had given me the confidence to produce short films that I'll be proud to show family and friends - something I could never have imagined before.

At the end of the course everyone takes away their own film tape, film clips on DVD to edit later and a copy of Peter's interactive training CD-rom covering the course material and further training.

Now watch the short film I made in the grounds of Domaine St Raymond, 'French House Party Experience'...

Further information

If you'd like to indulge your inner-movie maker, you can book film-making courses at Domaine St Raymond with online French activity holidays, property rental and travel specialist, French Connections (www.frenchconnections.co.uk/holidays-in-france.cfm; 01580 819303). Courses in 2009 run from July 26-31 and October 25-30, and cost from £895, including tuition, accommodation, all meals with wine, transport on filming trips, plus airport transfers.

Other courses on offer include Creative writing, Books and drama, Art and mixed media, Sketch, paint and stitch, Pre-wedding, Fitness, Golf and Gourmet breaks. Corporate and team-building events are also catered for. For more information visit www.frenchhouseparty.co.uk.

For more information and contact details for Peter Ralley, visit www.lcadigital.co.uk
