

PLACES TO VISIT

The best of Languedoc-Roussillon

The Languedoc-Roussillon region is the "real" south of France. Still authentically French, it is a beautiful region of almost untouched mountains, fragrant "scrubland", endless beaches and rolling vineyards - dotted with medieval villages and towns.

The region offers the best medieval and Roman ruins in Europe, the majestic Canal du Midi and of course some of the best wine and delicious seafood in the world along the coast.

It's the south of France, but not as we know it. A south of France with quiet roads and long, uncrowded sandy beaches (even in August there is plenty of room), and without a lot of tourist buses, souvenir shops and high prices on the Côte d'Azur. 80% of all summer visitors in this region are French.

With more than twice the size of the UK, France has a lot to offer beyond Provence, the French Riviera and the Loire Valley, such as this lesser-known region with rugged coastlines, rugged hills, beautiful villages and castles galore. And that's why this region of Languedoc is a great place to stay and explore the lesser-known gems of the South.

The time in brackets corresponds to the approx. driving time to the destination (from Pincardel). Please refer to the map below to plan your adventures. Key locations are indicated. If you are traveling further, you can combine activities. For example, first head to one of the markets, then elsewhere for lunch, then in the afternoon, visit a castle, a beach, a lake.

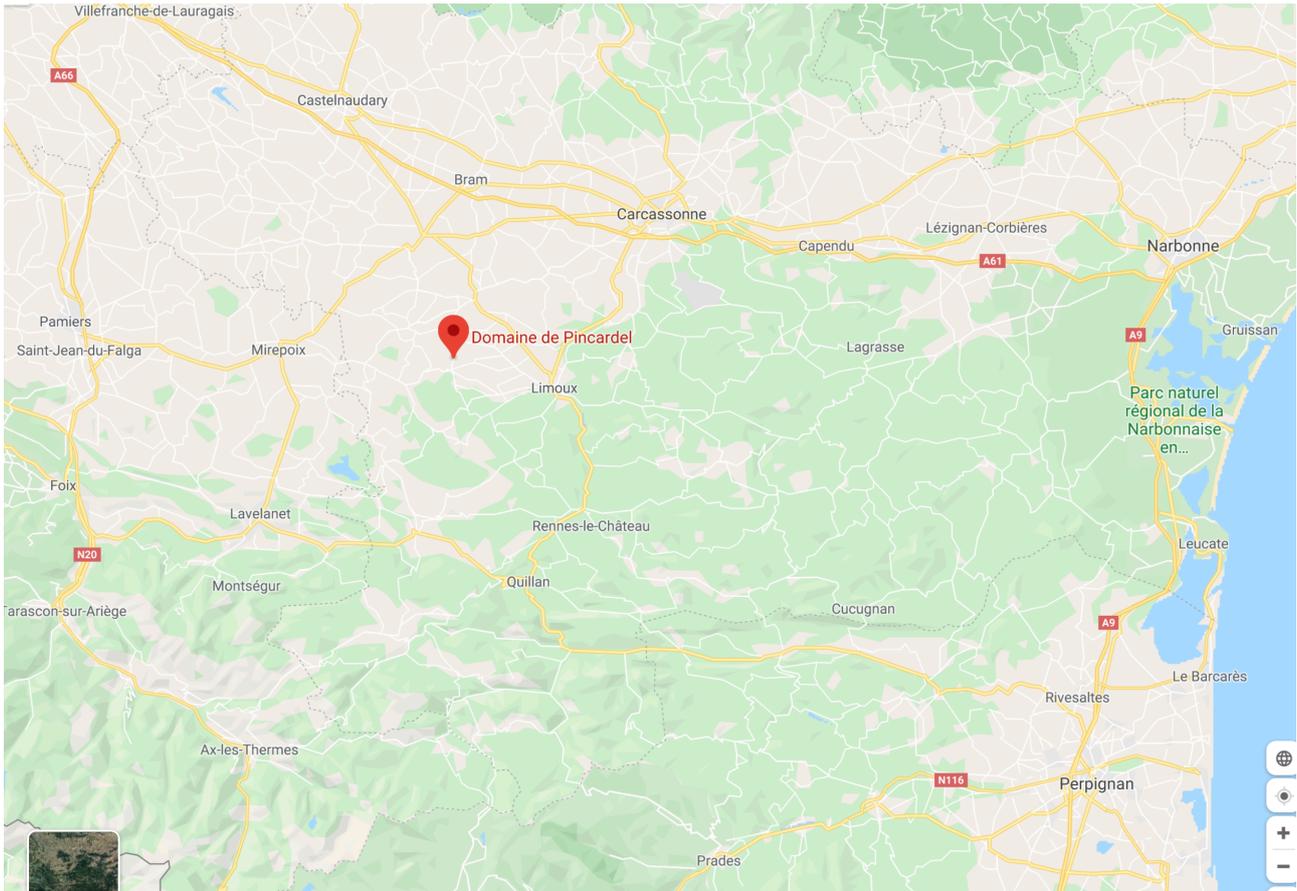
LIMOUX (15 mins)

Turn right at the exit of our drive then left at the end of the road.
Bigger than Mirepoix and an easier, straighter drive.

Visit the winery called "Sieur d'Arques" where you can taste the famous Bulle de Blanquette wines. Located on the left (need to drive in a side street) before reaching the town of Limoux proper. See the wineries and restaurant guide for more information on this.

Free outdoor parking is available on rue d'Aude, next to a large garden center. This is perfect for everyday use, but please note that on market days it is closed (the market for fruits and vegetables, bric a brac and housewares is based on it).

If the parking lot is occupied by the market, you can walk past it, following the road to the right, and see if you can find a parking lot by the water (spaces are very very narrow / thin).



There are also plenty of options along the main road (Avenue Pont de France) before you turn into the aforementioned street. Parking can be difficult to find on market days, so it's best to get there early.

On the Place de Limoux (Place de la République), another market is held (for more souvenir-type items - think incense, headbands, baskets and clothes).

In Place de la République there are a number of restaurants to try. The Italian at the end (La Bellavita) is always a hit with children and adults. Bar a Vin Tapas is always very busy and good for small tasty bites. The brasserie serves huge portions of omelettes and chips and the local stew of the day. Le Concept serves a variety of French style dishes and Le commerce is also recommended. Please read the restaurant guide for more information.

Limoux has a more industrial area where there is E.Leclerc, the large supermarket, and Mr Bricolage (their version of B&Q). When you drive home from here you will walk past GIFI, it is a store selling everything from housewares, decorations, furniture, appliances, toys, makeup. A place that children love! Cheap and cheerful. Next door is an excellent bakery. Along this road there is another winery too.

The Limoux Carnival takes place every weekend between January and Mardi Gras (3 months) and the Toques de Clochers wine festival takes place every spring in Limoux. Read the market and shop guide to learn more about the market days there.



The Musee Petiet, Promenade du Tivoli, Limoux

Fine Art museum and an approved Musée de France. Its collections are largely made up state owned works from the Musée d'Orsay and Musée national d'art moderne - Centre Georges Pompidou - and the Musée du Louvre. Three collections owned by the town include the work of three remarkable local artists : - Marie Petiet, founder with her father of the museum that bears their name, - Etienne Dujardin-Beaumetz husband of Marie and politician - Achille Laugé internationally recognized divisionist painter.

Open Tuesday to Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (July 1 to September 20)

<https://musees-occitanie.fr/musees/musee-petiet/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Mus%C3%A9e-Petiet-384107738735364/>

+333 (0) 9 63 68 34 54

MIREPOIX (26 mins)

The bastide of Mirepoix was rebuilt in the 13th century following a flood. From its medieval past, it has preserved a fortified gate from the 14th century and a superb market square surrounded by beautiful half-timbered houses, the first floor of which juts out onto the square creating an arcaded footbridge below. The sidewalk cafes, shops and the traditional Monday morning market make it a pleasant place to visit. Make sure to stop and admire the old facade of the Maison des Consuls for its typical medieval wood carvings.

Next to the square stands the Gothic-style Saint-Maurice Cathedral of southern France with a vast nave 48 meters long and 22 meters wide, making the cathedral worth a visit.

The town organizes many activities: The Historical Festivities with shows and costumed procession the third weekend of July; a puppet festival in early August; and one dedicated to apples the third weekend in October.

There are cafes and restaurants around this square (Place du Maréchal-Leclerc) and a few in the side streets offering a variety of dishes to suit all tastes. Lots of ice cream options for kids and adults alike.

There are plenty of parking options on the streets around the main square. If you park on the side of the road in front of buildings, watch out for signs as it is easy to block hidden garages. For example try to park along: Cours du Chabaud.



ON FROM MIREPOIX

L'église de Vals

A few kilometers from Mirepoix is this rupestrian Carolingian church, a unique monument, which is one of the most curious sanctuaries of Ariège. It was carved out of the rock using the access as a natural fault in the rock. The church has three floors and the apse and choir are decorated with remarkable 11th century Romanesque frescoes. These frescoes certainly contribute to making the church of Vals one of the most visited sanctuaries in Ariège. <https://www.ariège.com/en/what-to-visit/romanesque-art-and-architecture/troglodyte-church-at-vals>



The Tufa Waterfall of Roquefort-les-Cascades (48 mins)

In the Cathar Pyrenees, just off the D1 road between Foix and Laroque d'Olmes, is a small village named for the unusual 30-meter waterfall just above. The spring water that feeds these falls is very hard and calcium deposits form on the rocks and moss over which it flows. When the vegetation under the deposits dies, it ferments and the beige crust left behind has a porous, sponge-like texture. This type of waterfall, called Tufa waterfall, is fragile and rare.

The best time to visit these falls is spring and fall, when the snow melts and the rains provide abundant water flow. In winter, the frozen falls are worth a visit. Although in summer the waterfall is dry, the site is very pleasant and shaded, with picnic areas and trails that wind around the falls. When the falls are not in full swing, you can see a face in the rock face. The site is free and open to the public all year round.

<https://www.ariège.com/en/discover-ariège/geology/tufa-waterfall>



Camon (28 mins)

Nicknamed "Petite Carcassonne", the fortified village of Camon is nestled around an old Benedictine abbey and is ranked one of the "Most Beautiful Villages of France". Among the gems to discover are the Porte de l'Horloge (Porte de l'Horloge), the Maison Haute (Maison Haute), ramparts, abbey-castle and 16th century church and treasure. Also known as the "village of 100 roses", Camon is in bloom with a multitude of roses each May. This magnificent spectacle is put in the spotlight with an annual rose festival on the third Sunday in May.

A thematic trail in the surrounding hills takes walkers to discover numerous dry stone huts - a wonderful illustration of Camon's rural heritage and wine-making past.



Montségur castle (58 mins)

One of the most famous sites in the region (Ariège), known as the last site of the last Cathar residence where the survivors were laid to the stake! It is a steep walk to the top of the mountain where the ruins of the small castle remain.



Montsegur Fortress is perched on top of a rocky outcrop at 1,207 meters above sea level and can be reached on foot in 30 minutes. It may be more difficult for young children. In addition to its medieval remains, it offers visitors a magnificent panoramic view of the village below and the surrounding landscapes.

CARCASSONNE (40 mins)

<https://www.tourism-carcassonne.co.uk>

Carcassonne is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the inspiration behind many famous books and the Disney Castle. This magnificent walled city is steeped in history. Although very touristy (second most visited place in France), it is a must. In high season, leave early or late to avoid tourists. In the castle there are many museums, restaurants, ice cream, souvenirs and local craft shops.

When visiting the castle, I recommend parking at Parking l' cité. Address: 240 camin dels orts, 11000. There is an upper and lower car park. As you make your way towards the castle you will

pass a vintage carousel (one for the kids) and to the right of this mini train. The little train offers tours of the region (for adults and children).



Just before the castle you will see a tourist tent on the left where you can get detailed maps (in different languages) of the area. Depending on the season, pony and cart tours of the castle ramparts are also available. These will be clearly signposted as you walk through the main gates.

The Carcassonne Music Festival takes place every July (attracting 250,000 spectators with previous titles including Moby and Elton John). You will need to book in advance for tickets.

I would highly recommend going down to the Bastide (part of the city centre) if only to get a fantastic view and a brilliant photo of the city with the old bridge and the river in the foreground.





Bastide St Louis, Carcassonne (36 mins)

Located on the left bank of the Aude, the Bastide was built under the reign of Saint Louis in 1260 on a rectangular plan arranged around the central square, called Place Carnot. Today, the Bastide, delimited by the boulevards laid out in the 18th and 19th centuries on the site of the old moats, has retained its layout of checkerboard streets and has a remarkable architectural heritage, both in its old mansions and in its buildings. religious..

There are several parking options. We usually park in the outdoor parking spaces on Boulevard Marcou. You can easily walk to Place Carnot from there. This is where their market is regularly held (see "market days") and where many restaurants surround it. There are plenty of shops in the surrounding streets to explore. In the winter there are Shetland pony rides at the end of the parking lot just beyond the fountain and an outdoor ice skating rink in Place Carnot itself (they



have the push stands/ride ons for younger children on the ice).

La Cavayere lake, 11000 (44 mins)

5 minutes from the city of Carcassonne. Occupies over 40 hectares of land and 18 hectares of water. Swimming is authorized at Lac de La Cavayère from June 6 to August 30, 2020 every day from 12:30 p.m. at 7 p.m. (holidays included). There are three sandy and pebble beaches with lifeguards. <https://www.tourism-carcassonne.co.uk/discover/cavayere-lake>



O2 Adventure Tree climbing

Based at Lac de Cavayere Lac Cavayere

This is a forest course at the top of the trees by the lake. There are 8 routes of increasing difficulty. 4 zip lines above the lake. Great for all ages (unless you're afraid of heights). Ages 3 and up. Good value for money and hours of fun climbing through the treetops and zip-lining across the lake. For those who prefer the terra firm - wait for the others on one of the two beaches on the nearby lake, rent pedals, try the ski lift / wakeboard.

Across the lake (a bit of a walk but worth it) is the Aquaviva inflatable water park. For 7 years and over. Better to get there at opening time (around 11am) to bag a lounge chair or hammock and get there before it gets too busy. There are also large slides and paddle boards.

Adults 18 euros, children 8-16 euros. 1 to 5:30 p.m.

<http://www.o2aventure.com/en/contact/>, +33 (0) 4 68 25 33 83



Aquaviva Water Park

Based at Lac de Cavayere, 11 am-7pm

This is made up of many inflatable and floating modules.

Slides, catapults, trampolines, sliding mats, climbing iceberg (5m high) and obstacle course, 10 sliding tracks, 2 jumping platforms (5m and 8m). Suitable for the youngest to the more adventurous. Helmet and life jackets provided. 8-10 euros per person or 18 euros pp for the whole day. If you have a rash vest and shorts wear these as you can get swim burns from sliding on and off the inflatables.

They also have pedal boats, ski lifts, paddles, mini golf, and an acrobatic forest trail (tree adventure). You can also walk or cycle on the trails around the lake (5 km). There is free parking and a picnic area.



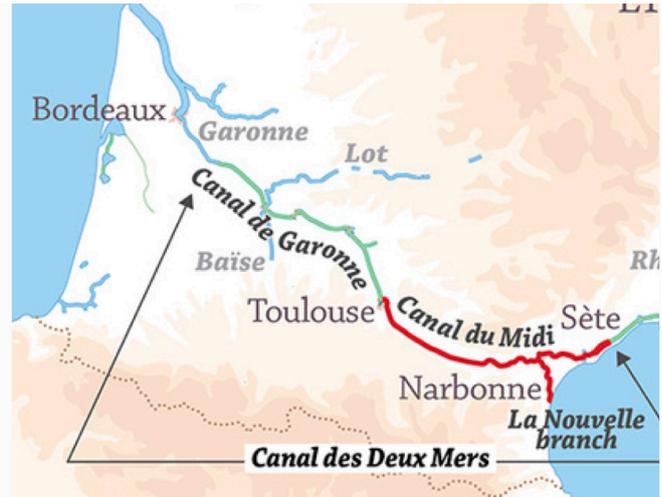
LE CANAL DU MIDI

The Canal du Midi is the oldest canal in the world, and winds its way from the bustling city of Toulouse to the golden sands of the Mediterranean Sea under a canopy of plane trees. The Atlantic meets the Mediterranean. Built from 1667 to 1681, this 240 km network of waterways has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site since December 1996, which represents a major engineering achievement in the history of France.

Perfect for boating, biking and walking.

Whether you are in love with nature, culture or gastronomy, the picturesque Canal du Midi is a must-see. Why not hire a bike and take a ride along this tree-lined trail, or perhaps dream of a romantic stroll along the shores at sunset or an adventurous day-long boat trip. Whichever you choose, you'll savour the slow and easy pace as you pass lush vineyards and historic locks, charming medieval villages and ancient fortress towns.

Biking along the Canal du Midi in southern France is a great trip that you can fit into a week's vacation. The 240 km canal connects Toulouse in Haute Garonne to Sète on the Mediterranean coast. The flat and panoramic course is divided into five stages of approximately 50 km each.



Don't miss:

- A visit by river boat passing through the many locks
- A stroll at sunset under the plane trees
- A picnic by the canal while watching the boats go by
- A wine tasting along the way
- Visit the beautiful villages and towns crossed by the canal
- A beautiful bike ride along the towpath
- A fabulous French lunch in a restaurant by the canal

Perfect for wine tasting.

Nestled in the Languedoc wine region, the Canal du Midi is an ideal place for wine tasting. Tour vineyards, visit wine cellars, and taste free samples. Homps, Ventenac, Paraza and Capestang offer a lot to wine connoisseurs!

Perfect for history and heritage.

The Canal du Midi is steeped in history and heritage. You will see stunning cathedrals, great castles, ancient ruins and medieval towns. Carcassonne, the largest citadel in Europe is a real gem with its location on top of a hill and more than 2 km of ramparts dotted with 53 towers. Museum enthusiasts will love Béziers and Narbonne. Narbonne also has a very impressive Romanesque cathedral, the best possible view from the tower of the Palais des Archevêques

Perfect for gastronomy.

Friendly cafes and gourmet restaurants abound on the Canal du Midi! Try La Raffinerie in Béziers or L'Auberge de la Croisade near Argeliers. Or stop for a coffee and stroll through the quaint little Le Somail, home to Le Trouve Tout du Livre, a bookstore housing over 50,000 volumes that rivals the largest of all capitals and Tamata, a barge of floating charcuterie selling local products and wine.

Seasons

Suitable all year round. Busier and hotter in the summer, but with a lot of options; ideal temperatures but higher average rainfall in spring and autumn; quieter in winter, but with Christmas markets and fairs.

Difficulty

Suitable for all skill levels - cycling along the Canal du Midi is flat and car-free with optional slightly more hilly cycles if desired. Can be uneven in places - hybrid bikes or mountain bikes recommended.

To see along the way

The historic towns of ancient Greece of Agde, the Roman Narbonne, Toulouse, the "pink city" and the 12th century fortified city of Carcassonne. Hundreds of picturesque villages. True French culture of this less known region, with a myriad of local festivals. Varied countryside with a wide range of animals and plants.



The history of the Canal du Midi

It was the dream of many - from Caesar Augustus to Louis XIII - to link the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Providing a safe interior route that avoided the treacherous journey around the Iberian Peninsula with its storms and pirates. The lack of money and the technical difficulties proved insurmountable until 1662.

A brilliant civil servant by the name of Pierre-Paul Riquet had become obsessed with the project. He believed he had the solution. He proposed to dig a canal between Sète and Toulouse, via Bordeaux and on the Atlantic. Work began on April 15, 1667, with remarkable speed, with the men using picks and shovels to dig. In the process, they removed 7 million cubic meters of earth over 240 km. The Canal du Midi was completed in May 1681.

The Canal du Midi quickly became a major route for freight and passengers, and opened up cities such as Toulouse and Carcassonne to trade. Specially designed freighters were built for the canal and towed by horses. These were capable of carrying loads of 120 tons - much more than carts traveling by road.

At any one time, up to 250 freighters were crossing the canal, with the journey between Sète and Toulouse taking around a week. The cargo was mainly wine, dried fish, grains and fruit. Passengers, meanwhile, were carried on horse-drawn boats called courier cars.



Cycling on the Canal du Midi

Department of Haute-Garonne Midi-Pyrénées

From the enormous Port de l'Embouchure in Toulouse, you pedal under the bridge and join the towpath of the Canal du Midi. You then pass the urbanization of Toulouse and the station, the Matabiau station, a statue of Riquet bidding you farewell on leaving.

The canal weaves its way through the outskirts of town and into the fertile countryside until it reaches Escalqueuns. Next comes the Ayguevives lock with its mill dating from 1831, then via the Sanglier lock to the Negra lock. It was a "dinner", a lunch break, for the passengers on the canal. A small village has been built here to accommodate these travellers; hotels, restaurants and stables, even a well-preserved church.

There are three villages along this stretch, two beautiful and one eccentric. These are Montesquieu-Lauragais, with its two castles, and Villenouvelle and its superb bell tower. On the other side, Saint Rome is where an eccentric architect built a village in an assortment of styles: Moorish, Flemish, Neo-Byzantine, and also Baroque and Tudor for good measure. It is then the return to the canal and to normality, crossing the magnificent Lers aqueduct, designed by Jean-Polycarpe Maguès, who was the engineer in charge of supervising the construction of the canal itself.

Then we move towards the "summit", so called because it is the highest part of the canal. The Seuil de Naurouze is where the canal's water supply is controlled by a series of locks. Here is both the beauty and the story. There is an Arboretum, a spectacular avenue lined with 62 plane trees leading to an obelisk in homage to Paul Riquet. It is the place where a Napoleonic general went to Wellington after the Battle of Toulouse and where an old Cathar fortress still stands.



Aude department of Languedoc-Roussillon

After the threshold, it's Mediterranean Lock; now you cease to be an "upstream" and you become a "downstream", the water which now flows towards the Mediterranean. The most hilly terrain is noticeable and the locks more frequent as the canal begins its gentle descent towards the Mediterranean.

One of the main canal ports is Castelnaudary, a picturesque town famous for its cassoulet. It is now a slow meander through this peaceful landscape, pretty villages basking in a scorching sun. Next stop is the UNESCO-listed walled city of Carcassonne - a must see, and it's just a short detour to Bastide Saint-Louis, the town through which the canal passes.

From there, the canal - itself a World Heritage Site - closely follows the course of the Aude through the gentle and hilly landscape of the Aude valley. This part of the canal is lined with ancient villages, their Gothic and medieval churches, castles and ramparts all of interest. There are also some attractive locks, well maintained by the 'lock keeper'; some, like Puicheric and Jouarres, sell coffees and "local products" (local products). There is also Ecluse de l'Aiguille, where the lock keeper transformed his lock into a fascinating gallery of metal and wood sculptures, also carving figures and faces from the surrounding trees.



The small port of La Redorte was a "diner" for the first travelers, and the tradition continues today with a restaurant on the quayside. From here you will reach the once important port of Homps,

now a large yachting center, with plenty of restaurants and plenty of hustle and bustle in the port itself.

Further down is the first canal bridge built in Europe, the Repudre aqueduct, which crosses the Repudre river. A few kilometers away is the charming port of La Somail, which looks a lot like it would have been 300 years ago when it was an overnight stopover.

Approaching Béziers the canal weaves its way somewhat erratically through what was difficult to cut a canal. The number of curves is increasing, sharp bends make their way and aqueducts abound - seven in total between Argeliers and Capestang. Other great engineering feats are also here: the first canal tunnel at Malpas and the Fonsérannes ladder, a succession of 8 locks, rising 21 meters by 300 meters.

Béziers marks the last leg of the journey. Between here and the Mediterranean lie the towns of Villeneuve-Lès-Béziers and the picturesque Agde, founded 2,500 years ago by the Phoenicians and today an architectural treasure. It is after Agde that you can smell the sea. The last 12 kilometers a cycle path between the Bassin de Thau - a large saltwater lake - and the Mediterranean which leads you to the port of Sète and at the end of your trip. trip. cycling adventure on the Canal du Midi.



[Recommended spots along the Canal du Midi:](#)

[Halls of Aude \(1 h 23\)](#)

A fascinating and pretty village on the Canal de Jonction, which connects the Canal du Midi to the Canal de la Robine which crosses Narbonne, to Port La Nouvelle, on the Mediterranean Sea.

Just south of the village of Salleles d'Aude - is the magnificent Lock of Gailhousty - consisting of 2 locks, built in 1770. There is also a dry dock for repairs and maintenance of barges, boats and the like. Often on Sundays, the track from the village to the Lock becomes a flea market - a garage sale.

For the hungry - there are a few restaurants in the village, including the Michelin "Les Ecluses", offering good value for money and traditional dishes, and a pizzeria overlooking the canal, Pizzeria La Mouche, which is popular during the summer. been for its reasonably priced food.

Port du Somail, Le Somail Canal Du Midi (1 hour 20 min)

The Somail was built at the same time as the Canal du Midi and served as a night stopover for the postal boat and its passengers. It is not a village but a hamlet (hammeau in French) of about 500 inhabitants. There are several good restaurants which are always crowded during the summer.

The local supermarket is located inside a boat on the north shore of the Canal du Midi. The name of the boat is the Tamata.

There is also a very large second-hand bookstore with over 50,000 books (closed during lunch hours). A unique hat museum with over 6,500 hats is also located in this small hamlet. It is open from March to October every day from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Bella Mia, La Souqueto 11120 Mirepeisset, (1h16) is a boat piloted on the Canal du Midi. Fully equipped for guided boat trips along the canal. A 3 hour round trip that can accommodate up to 6 people seated or 10 for a gathering. Wine and snacks can be purchased by the bottle on board, by arrangement, or you can bring your own. Price around 210 euros. To book contact Jon or Mel Alport at info@lasouqueto.com, www.lasouqueto.com, +33 (0) 486 708 783



MIREPEISSET (1 hr 18 mins), Route de Ginestas, 11120 Mirepeisset

This is where the Bella Mia (boat trips on the Canal du Midi) are located. Book for day trips or two-hour cruises. In Mirepeisset, you can visit the Domaine de l'Herbe Sainte where you can taste and buy wines (see the wineries and restaurant guide). Open Monday to Saturday and Sunday, by appointment only. Closed for lunch. <http://www.herbe-sainte.fr/en/>
+33 (0) 4 68 46 30 37

LAGRASSE (1hr 15 mins)

Nestled in the heart of the Corbières, you find the picturesque village of Lagrasse, classified among the most beautiful villages in France. It makes a pretty picture, with its old humpback bridge over the Orbieu, its medieval houses, the remains of ancient ramparts and its abbey

dominated by an imposing bell tower. Before visiting the Abbey of Sainte-Marie d'Orbieu, take a stroll through the medieval city, a charming place, where you can admire an old covered market from the 14th century with stone pillars, art shops and restaurants. 'crafts, and a Gothic church classified as a historical monument.

There are also a number of great restaurants and cafes here. Stroll through the old market (Saturday mornings are great for local produce), browse the many pottery shops, shop for handmade leather shoes, handmade soap, grab an ice cream, and even swim. There you will find a lot of people stopping to paddle in the river.



Then, on the opposite bank, you will find the Benedictine Abbey of Sainte Marie d'Orbieu, founded in the 8th century, which was very prosperous in the past and had considerable intellectual influence. The courtyard of the old palace, the lower chapel, the cellar, the bakery, the

sacristy, the north transept, the pre-Romanesque tower, the monks' dormitory, the Saint-Barthélemy chapel, the room of the master of Cabestany and the guards are so many fascinating sites to see during your visit of the medieval part of the city, which belongs to the General Council of Aude.

ASSIGNAN (1h30)

Assignan is located in the heart of the AOC Saint-Chinian vineyard and enjoys a quiet and unspoiled setting. Ten years ago, no one stopped there. It took a few wealthy Belgians to transform Assignan from a place of passage to a destination. The narrow streets of this sleepy village are now bathed in purple and pink hues and since 2015, Assignan has become a "wine tourism village".



So much to learn

There are many workshops around gastronomy, wine, the arts and well-being. You can get a massage at the spa, go to wine school, have cooking classes, learn ceramics, photography and vegetable garden culture, you can explore the surroundings by renting an electric bike, 2CV or Vespa, by preparing a picnic for you by one of the three award-winning restaurants.



Spoiled for choice when it comes to dining out

La Petite Table serves delicious tapas and other dishes on the colourful terrace.

There is also a Thai restaurant, popular with local winemakers and La Table, a Michelin-starred gourmet restaurant, which buys its provisions at the Saint-Chinian market, has its own vegetable garden and henhouse. The village also has an art gallery and a delicatessen which acts as a wine merchant.

For lovers of the outdoors

If you like outdoor sports, why not take a horseback ride or take one of the marked trails?

The "Les Barralets" trail (n ° 27) is 6.5 km long. It is the ideal way to discover the natural, archaeological and artistic wonders that dot this scrubland and its limestone plateaus.

"Les Bousigues" (n ° 28) has a length of 7 km. It offers a magnificent juxtaposition of gentle slopes and daring red earth, all accompanied by a scent of rosemary.

Hiking maps are available at the reception desk of the Canal du Midi tourist office in Saint Chinian.

Finally, you cannot leave Assignan without first experiencing a traditional evening in the south of France. Musical entertainment is organized on summer evenings in the charming village square.

Do not miss....

- The red earth landscapes between Assignan and Villespassans
- A picnic in the vineyard
- A gourmet lunch
- A wine tasting session and visit to the impressive vineyard in the shape of a wine bottle
- A horseback ride among the vineyards and the scrubland
- A stroll along the magnificent trails

MINERVE (1h20)

Just up the road from Bize to the Black Mountains, Minerve is perched on a rocky head and is surrounded by vineyards (Minervois wine label). Millions of years ago it was below sea level!



Formerly a bastide of the Cathar heretics, Minerve is ranked among the most beautiful villages in France.



A beautiful village steeped in history.

In 1210, a group of Cathars took refuge in the village after the massacre of Béziers during the Albigensian crusade.

The attacking army besieged the village for six weeks before surrendering. Four catapults were set up around the ramparts, three to attack the village itself and the larger one, known as the Malvoisine or "bad neighbour", to destroy the town's well. With the town's only water supply cut off, the commander of the 200-man garrison relented and negotiated a surrender so that he and the villagers were spared death.

However, 140 Cathars refused to give up their faith and convert, and were burned alive at the stake on July 22.

Don't miss:

- A visit to the original Hurepel museum
- A wonderful hike followed by a cool swim in the Cesse river
- A delicious lunch in one of Minerve's many restaurants
- Try the local olives, oils and wines in the shops in the village
- Enjoy the breathtaking view of Brian's Gorge

A visit to the museum

Minerva is such an evocative place to visit, and the gem of a museum brings tragic history to life through a series of paintings inhabited by tiny, hand-made figures depicting the events.

For lovers of the outdoors.

The village is located at the top of the gorge of the Cesse river, near the village, the river disappears underground in a huge spectacular and naturally sculpted tunnel.

Many walks and hikes from Minerva and its surroundings take you back to prehistoric times, through fabulous landscapes, with rock pools to cool off on the way. It's best to take a two-hour tour between April and June - for more water and less crowds. Or there are more in-depth hikes in

the area for the more intrepid visitors. It is one of the best places in Languedoc for the landscape and the sense of history.

GRUISSAN (1hr 20 mins)

BAGES (1h36)

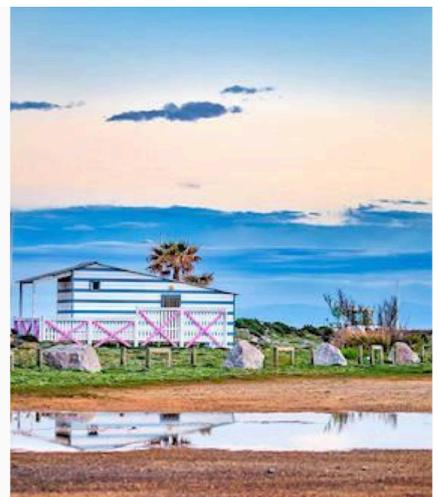
PEYRIAC SUR MER (1h18)

All of these places are on the coast or on the lagoon along the coast. Admire the old villages. In Gruissan, there is a charming old fort to climb with a magnificent view at the top. In Bages, there are art museums. Peryriac has a nice promenade where you can walk for miles in a nature reserve and if you are lucky enough you can see the flamingos that live there. All of them have fabulous restaurants.



GRUISSAN - A fishing village

Nestled between sea and lagoons, in the heart of the Narbonne Regional Natural Park, stands Gruissan. This ancient circular fishing village is dominated by the 13th century Barbarossa tower and church. In addition to its traditional village with small typical alleys, the town of Gruissan has two marinas and a pretty beach classified Blue Flag.



The iconic Plage des Chalets

Just 5 minutes from Gruissan Village is Gruissan Plage, the setting for the iconic 1986 film *Betty Blue*. It stands out for its picturesque neighborhood made up of 1,300 chalets on stilts. Families grill in the spaces under their cabins in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Contrast this beach with those of the highly marketed Côte d'Azur. There is no payment for beach access here or for umbrellas and sun loungers.

A gourmet paradise

It is also a village renowned for its gastronomic cuisine, such as the brasucade of mussels, sardines, Bourride d'Anguilles, (a local dish with eels and potatoes) and to accompany some of these dishes the now famous fleur de sel Salinas of Saint Martin Island.

The salt works of Gruissan extend over 400 hectares on the edge of the village. Here there is a restaurant, museum, art gallery and shop selling local specialties, flavoured salts and even liquid salt. Sitting in the restaurant and enjoying seafood, you can watch the amazing changing pink landscape.



Sport for everyone

There are so many water sports on offer here: sailing, windsurfing, kitesurfing, jet boating and jet skiing, banana boats, tubing, to name a few. There are also many dedicated cycle paths, such as a gentle beach 15 km north of Gruissan, hiking trails and mountain biking trails.



Some unmissable festivals

In May of each year there is a big festival called Les Festejades, lasting three days, where the public can enjoy concerts, marching bands and batucada samba groups in a festive atmosphere.

In October, Gruissan celebrates its winegrowers during the famous Fête des Vendanges. As the sun rises over the village, the cellars invite you to their cellars to taste the products of their harvest. There are also vineyard walks, oyster tastings in the salt flats, a grape harvest procession and the blessing of wine in the church.

See the beach clubs section of this guide for recommendations in this area.



Don't miss:

- A visit to the Plage des Chalets - with its 1300 chalets on stilts Create your own salt in the salt marshes
- A lunch at the port
- A visit to the Barerousse tower for fantastic views
- Wine tasting and gourmet tours in the Massif de la Clape
- Water sports at the beach
- The harvest festival

ROQUEBRUN (1h 51 min)

Roquebrun is a charming village in the Haut Languedoc National Park, overlooking the Orb valley.



It has its own special microclimate.

The soil near Roquebrun is very rich in mineral shale which retains water and absorbs heat during the day and slowly releases it at night. This virtue leads locals to claim that their grapes even ripen overnight! This rock and the sheltered position of the village have given it a microclimate which, besides being good for grapes, has led to one of the main attractions of Roquebrun, a beautiful Mediterranean garden which has an impressive selection of plants. In addition to a collection of mimosas and lemon trees and many exotic plants, there are many succulents and cacti growing on the rocky hill. The steep climb, through the narrow streets, past the old houses of the village, which luckily are not yet overly renovated, is not only worth the effort for the unique plants, but also for the view of the village and the river. You could easily spend several hours here, sitting and enjoying the view and having a picnic.

Don't miss:

- A visit to the Mediterranean garden with its spectacular views
- An exciting canoe trip on the Orb River
- A swim in the Orb river with the village in the background
- A delicious lunch in one of the wonderful restaurants of Roquebruns
- Try the famous local cave wines
- The Mimosa Festival and the village festival

A trip on the Orb River.

Canoeing on the Orb River is highly recommended. There are options to make trips of 5, 10, 15 or 21 km, which take between 1.5 and 7 hours. So something for all skill levels, with calm flat sections and a few rapids. Take a leisurely trip at your own pace, stopping where you want to swim, jump rocks, or have a picnic. You will cross vineyards and mountains, mills and bridges. Just wonderful. Refer to the water sports section of this guide for canoeing and whitewater rafting companies.



Wine tasting

There are many possibilities in the village and its surroundings for a small tasting of these famous grape varieties, which are part of the Saint Chinian appellation.

Local events.

Roquebrun is also famous for its mimosa festival, which takes place on the second Sunday in February: here they celebrate the arrival of spring with a mass blessing of the mimosa. There is a parade, musical entertainment, a fun fair, a market and food available throughout the day. The last weekend of July is the village festival with food, concerts, the Roquebrun Olympics and a night garage sale. Every Tuesday in summer, free guided tours of the village with the possibility of buying local products

BÉZIERS (1h 31min)

One of the oldest cities in Europe, Béziers combines century-old architecture with the beauty of the Orb, the emblematic river of the Hérault. It is a beautiful town famous for its wines, its feria and its passion for rugby



Béziers is an old town full of surprises. It sees far fewer tourists than some of its neighbours, and this little gem has a lot to offer the discerning traveler who likes to hunt attractions under the radar to get a taste of the real South of France. In its medieval center, a tight labyrinth of cobbled streets lined with shops, is the Saint Nazaire cathedral, the Musée des Beaux Arts and the Paul-Riquet alleys.

A breathtaking view from the cathedral

The 13th-century cathedral, a majestic monument cherished by architecture enthusiasts, stands atop a steep rock face. This Gothic fortress dominating the city is of unique originality. The ornate castle-style exterior and the magnificent century-old stained-glass windows are quietly impressive. From there, you can admire breathtaking panoramic views over the whole of Béziers and its bridges and vineyards for miles.

The Museum of Fine Arts is the best of the city's museums with paintings by Rubens and Delacroix, as well as several local artists.



Don't miss:

- A visit of the 9 locks of Fonsérannes
- Stroll through the beautiful Friday flower market
- Climb up to the cathedral cloister for a breathtaking view Stroll the streets of the medieval town
- Enjoy a tasting of a local craft beer at the brewery
- Party like a local at the famous Feria
- Watch the light and music show at the city fountains

The perfect place to people watch.

The legendary Paul-Riquet alley, named after the founder of the Canal du Midi, born here, is a very pleasant avenue lined with plane trees, shops and lively café terraces. Different markets are held almost every day of the week, from amazing flower markets to bric-a-brac markets.

An incredible feat of engineering.

The Ecluses de Fonsérannes (or Ecluses de Fonseranes) on the Canal du Midi, which runs through the city, is an engineering masterpiece that has become a tourist attraction. This set of 9 staircase locks is unusual not only for their number, but also for the technical prowess accomplished in

finding a solution to a fall of more than 20 meters, with a total of 8 oval shaped airlocks and 9 portals. Since 1996, the Fonseranes locks have been a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Very close to the locks is the Alaryk craft brewery, established in Béziers in 2016. You can visit the brewery and try the range of 100% organic beers, without additives, local and sustainable, intended for lovers of gourmet beers.

Party like a local

Every year in mid-August, the streets of Béziers come alive for the Feria. A local festival inspired by Spanish bullfighting (bull festival), the Feria lasts four full days. The streets of the city centre are lined with countless stalls selling food and beer, and after tasting their wares, you can join the crowded crowd to witness the bullfights, as well as live music, dancing and costumes (like human puppets). If you want the chance to party like a real local, mark your calendar for this year's Feria.

BIZE-MINERVOIS (1 hr 18 mins)

A small charming village on the banks of the Cesse, nestled in the middle of a mountain gorge, in a picturesque basin entirely covered with vineyards and olive trees.

The river runs through the medieval center of cobbled streets and old stone houses offering a lovely swimming pool and sunbathing spot, where there is a lifeguard during the summer months. There are also many secret river swimming spots further upstream for those who don't like crowds. It has a good selection of restaurants, small shops, and historic sites to visit.

It's wonderful to walk through the streets of the village and discover its towers and ramparts, to stroll through the small artisan shops and bakeries. And you can't help but notice the quaint displays of plants, in unusual containers. A small group of residents decided to bring life, joy and colour back to the old centre by using old watering cans, bowls, buckets, wheelbarrows, baskets, etc.

Bize even hosts an "Olive Festival" every year on the third weekend of July, where there are also numerous wine tastings and an impressive fireworks display.



Head to the local market

The bustling Bize market is held every Wednesday morning on the promenade. Market stalls sell fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables, delicious breads and cheeses, fresh fish and seafood, as well as clothes, shoes, flowers and plants.

Get in the saddle

Located between Bize Minervois and Montouliers is the Appaloosas du Pech ranch for horse and pony rides and hiking. It really is an ideal setting for going out on horseback, exploring forests and quiet country roads. and they are aimed at beginners and experienced riders. You can even take night walks and river walks - but be prepared for really rainy weather!

Don't miss:

- A visit to the world famous olive mill Cool off with a swim in the river
- Opt for an overnight horseback ride which could include a dip in the river
- Enter the streets of the village by spotting the colourful stalls
- Enjoy an olive and wine tasting at the Olive Festival



L'OU LIBO, Bize Minervois

Everything you always wanted to know about olives

The world famous "Oulibo" oil mill is the only cooperative in Aude and is definitely worth a visit. With their know-how, they perpetuate a tradition of dedication, always demanding the best throughout the production process.

You can take a guided tour "The Odyssey of the Olive Tree" which lasts about 1h30. After the visit, you will find the producers' shop and can taste the delicacies of Oulibo as well as buy the best of local products. Be sure to try the buttery "lucques" which are a local specialty.

Open 7 days a week, all year round. Closed for lunch.

All visits are guided and last 1.5 hours. In low season (January and February, reservation required).

Prices: adults 6 euros, children 4 euros.

<https://www.loulibo.com>, +33 (0) 4 68 41 88 84

FOIX (58 minutes)

A small but important medieval town with a magnificent castle right in the middle - Le Château des Comtes de Foix.

The car parks are signposted. The market is good for food bits very outdated otherwise (think incense sticks, dvds and cheap clothing), cheap necklaces galore for kids.



NARBONNE (1 hr 12 mins)

A beautiful Roman town with many historic places to visit - the cathedral dating from 1272 with its quiet cloisters and cut hedges from the garden is well worth a visit, but be sure to take a photo on the BIG bench hidden behind the great wall at the end of the gardens. There is also the Roman Horreum, a former grain warehouse built underground. Sit in the main square of one of the many cafes and watch the world go by as the kids run around the preserved section of the ancient Roman road. Stroll along the Canal du Robine, a tributary of the Canal du Midi, and have lunch in one of the many quail restaurants. A good place to go is the Covered Food Hall - a magnificent building in itself. Come in and enjoy the hustle and bustle, sample cheeses and olives, a glass of wine or a plate of tapas in one of the many bars. Find the details of the all-you-can-eat buffet, beach clubs and water sports available in Narbonne in the corresponding sections of this guide.



RIBAUTE (64 mins)

A small village between Fabrezan and Lagrasse. You can picnic down to the river and swim, rest, paddle in the many mini waterfalls and water pools. Young and old alike will appreciate this.



ABBAYE DE FONTFROID (1h13)

Private abbey, which is really nice to visit and has a magnificent rose garden. The restaurant is also worth a visit.



RENNES LE CHATEAU (37 mins)

Inspiration behind the Da Vinci Code, where the local priest apparently found scrolls that lead to the mystery of the Holy Grail! A superb walk through the countryside.



QUERIBUS (1hr 33 mins) AND PEYREPERTEUSE (1hr 35 mins)

Cross the winding Corbières and discover these devastated Cathar castles. There is a steep climb so wear proper shoes. After taking the trip, you may want to combine the quad with this trip.

Quad Cycling: www.facebook.com/pages/Quad-Jet-11/470956599903076

20 rue Alphonse Daudet, 11350 Cucugnan, www.quad-jet11.com, +33 (0) 4 68 45 16 29



LASTOURS (48 mins)

Here you will find 4 small castles each built on a high rocky ridge. Take some water and don't underestimate the climb of each ridge! Worth every step.



CHATEAU DE CHALABRE (32 mins)

We haven't been and it has received mixed reviews, although it has had a recent revamp. People used to say that it was better for the younger children, under 8. Open from 12:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. They offer interactive medieval activities at the Château. You can watch games, try out junior archery, play with old games, write with feathers, build little bridges, take a little horse ride, get dressed, and more.



The surrounding city is supposed to be interesting. In the old center, it is possible to admire the remains of the old country house enclosed between four courtyards adorned with two hundred year old plane trees with illustrious names. To find out more about the site, you can take the

discovery tour "Once upon a time in Chalabre" with around thirty plaques describing the main places. There is also a "Kingdom of the Dolls", a museum with more than 300 characters. If you go there, the Hotel de France apparently serves good food.
Hôtel - Restaurant, Cours Joseph Raynaud. 11230, Chalabre
www.hotel-de-france-chalabre.com, +33 (0)4 68 69 68 60



LAGARDE (25 mins)

Chateau de Lagarde, 09500

French chateau which had been almost completely destroyed during the French Revolution but which has retained enough design to be very impressive. It is located in the village of Lagarde, 7 kilometers south-east of Mirepoix. The silhouette of the castle ruins can be seen from afar and it has a rather imposing presence overlooking the valley below and it is an interesting tourist attraction.

You cannot go inside because it is too dangerous. There are a lot of ruined structures. Only the exterior walls and towers remain, so you make a circuit around the exterior and you can get different views from the interior.

In the courtyard, a 20-minute video provides a better understanding of the history of the castle with an animated 3D reconstruction. On the second floor of the main building, there is also an exhibition of artifacts. The local association of Lagarde has produced a detailed booklet (written in English) on the family history and the evolution of the castle.

In summer, there is much more activity at Château de Lagarde, with a "Gourmet Market" organized every Saturday evening in July and August. Grilled meats and other foods are sold by local owners and producers and picnic tables are set up for eating although visitors can picnic on the grass.

Certain days from April to September there are special events such as fireworks, "garage sales", Easter egg hunts, medieval fairs and horse shows. So if you can visit during one of these events, your visit will be even more interesting (check their website). € 4 (Adults) and € 1 (Children, parking is in a land adjoining the Castle and refreshments are sold on site.

July and August open Monday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 1.30 p.m. to 6 p.m. Closed every Wednesday.

<https://chateaudelagarde7.wixsite.com/chateaudelagarde>, +33 (0) 682314128



FISHERMAN'S CEMETERY (1 hr 27 mins)

Also known as Notre Dame des Auzils and the Cimetiere Marrin - on the way to Gruissan (1h21). The drive and short, steep walk to the chapel, which pays homage to all the fishermen who died at sea, are worth the view alone. But the church fascinates us with all the paintings / murals of the boats on the walls.



COLLIOURE (2 hours 6 mins)

On from Narbonne and Perpignan. A little place but worth it. One to combine with other adventures / sightseeing in this way. Collioure is a charming and quaint seaside village with tons of seafood restaurants and small alleys with interesting shops. Perfect image but very busy in August.



SPAIN: FIGURE, CADAQUES AND ANDORRA (2hr 45mins)

If you want to go to Spain, there are great shopping, great tapas, and the added bonus of the remarkable Salvador Dali Museum. A little windy but wonderful drive to the coast to his house in Portlligat, Cadaques.

www.salvador-dali.org/en/museums/house-salvador-dali-in-portlligat/

FORGE DE PYRENE (57 mins)

You will see a change of scenery in the Ariège department. Almost no vines, closer to the mountains with spectacular views. Les Forges is a charming "theme" park for the whole family (no rides). A village where days gone by come to life. See the old trades and tools in action.

There is a fascinating museum: www.forges-de-pyrene.com (57 minutes).



PEZANAS (1 h 40 min)

A charming medieval town with a pretty and atmospheric compact old town. Lots of antique and quirky shops and plenty of restaurants and lounges in the area.



TORBES 1 hr 36 min)

Charming medieval village with tiny narrow streets, its church and its porticoed square is a beautiful stopover on the way back from Pézenas.

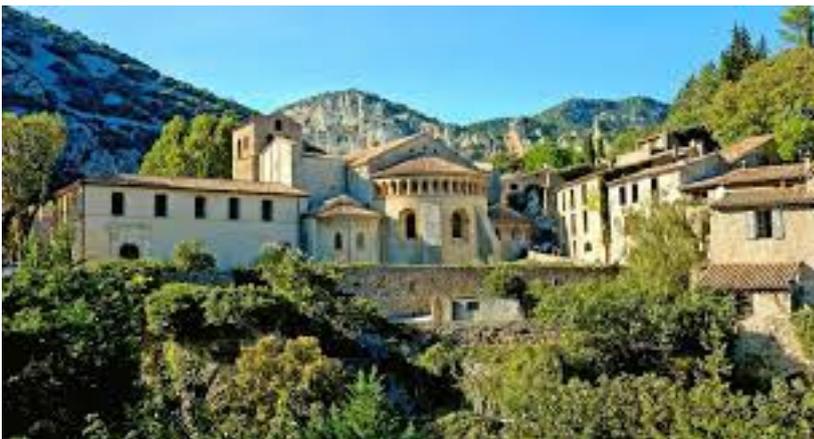
ABBAY DE VALMAGNE (1hr 46 min)

Beautiful abbey - one of the richest in the south of France. It is today the largest wine abbey in France. The wine vats of the Gothic church are huge and give the whole church a delicious scent of woody wine. It has a cloister, a chapter house and very well preserved gardens and sometimes hosts exhibitions. Set in beautiful countryside, it is well worth it.



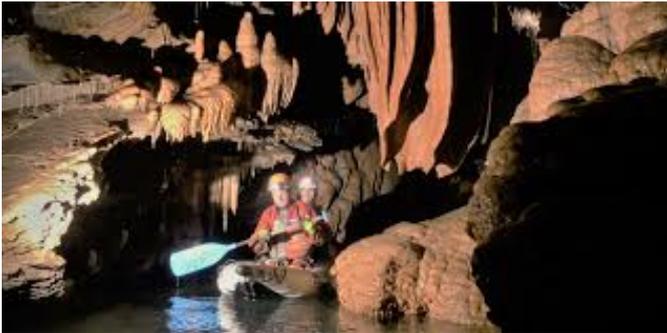
ST GUILHEM LE DESERT (2 hr 5 min)

A small medieval village with many narrow cobbled streets to explore. Located at the top of a gorge (much like Minerva) there are a number of craft shops for souvenir shopping. The village is a UNISECO World Heritage Site and it's easy to see why. The 11th century Gellone Abbey / Church is worth a visit and is the only surviving part of the monastic house. It is possible to see the relics of the crypt.



GROTTES

Many available. Great to do on a miserable day or a very hot day, to escape the heat! Discover the Grotte de Limousis (59 minutes), La Grotte de la Devez (1 hour 45 minutes) or the Gouffre de Cabrespine (1 hour 2 minutes) - the drive to these places is well worth it.



GROTTE DE NIAUX (1 hr 13 mins)

Really impressive atmospheric and moving. Located at the foot of the blond Pyrenees of Foix. Book a tour and walk through the caves to the Salon Noir, by torchlight, to see some of the earliest cave drawings ever discovered. Tours last approximately 90 minutes. Nearby is the Prehistoric Park, which is a lovely place to have a picnic and participate in some of the workshops. www.sites-touristiques-ariege.co.uk



LA BOUICHE (1 hour)

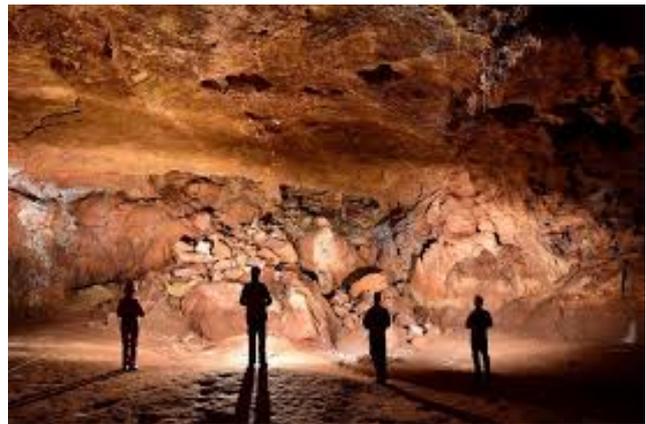
The longest navigable underground river system in Europe, the Souterraine de Labouiche river is well worth the detour. You will be guided along the boats that sometimes have to change boats due to the different levels and see some great stalactites and stalagmites.

Book on: www.labouiche.com



GROTTE DE CLAMOUSE (2 hours)

A guide will take you deep into the cave for an hour of exploration, culminating in a huge chamber with amazing crystal formations. A sound and light show is included.



AQUARIUM MARE NOSTRUM (1 hr 59 mins)

<https://www.montpellier-france.com/offre/fiche/aquarium-mare-nostrum/LOILAR034FS0009C>

Allée Ulysse, Odysseum, 34000, Montpellier, Port Marianne.

+33 467 1305 50

A visit to Montpellier is highly recommended as the old town is simply beautiful. You can park your car in the tram park and parking lot near Ikea and take the tram for 5 euros, which includes all your tickets and parking and takes the stress and expense out of driving around town. Children can enjoy a trip to the aquarium because it is really well done.



SIGEAN AFRICAN RESERVE (1 hr 17 mins)

<https://www.reserveafricainesigean.fr/en/contact-us>

Hameau du lac, 11130 Sigean

+33 (0) 468482020



Golf

Golf de Carcassonne, Route de Saint-Hilaire, 11000 Carcassonne

<http://www.golf-de-carcassonne.com>

+33 4 68 72 57 30



Fly Zone

Parachute simulator, age 7-70.

www.flyzone.fr

There are two in the South - Toulouse (1 hr 15 mins) or Lezignan Corbieres (1 hour 2 min)



Paragliding

info@enjoyparapente.com

<https://enjoyparapente.com/fr>

<https://www.facebook.com/enjoyparapente/>

Age 4 years +

Your local sites are:

Mirepoix - 31 rue Monseigneur de Cambon, 09500 (28 mins).

Limoux - 55 rue du consulat, 11300 (17 mins)

+33 (0)647747786



[Le Jardin Extraordinaire \(40 mins\), Gouziaud, Lieurac, 09300](#)

From July 6 to August 16, opening hours are: Thursday to Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Free activity and a great way to spend a few hours with young children. Pretty gardens, plants, flowers, some art installations involving oddly shaped plants, sticks, stones and rocks. Lots of bugs, land and rivers to roam.

<https://www.lejardinextraordinaire.net>

+33 (0)7 68 92 37 33

[Kart'are \(32 mins\), 09600 Aigues Vives](#)

Go karting, minimum age of 5 years.

<https://www.karting-ariege.com/location-karting/>

Paintballing also offered.

lekartare@gmail.com

+33 (0) 561013189



Sky Dive Pamiers (39 mins), Pamiers, 09100 Les Pujols

<http://parachutisme-pamiers.fr/?>

<https://www.facebook.com/SkydivePamiers/>

+33 (0) 5 61 68 72 00



Riding stables - Routier 11240 (8mins)

Les Fjords du Razès, Domaine de Molee, Hospital

Les Fjords du Razès are located in the town of Routier, a small wine-growing village. It is an equestrian leisure center in the heart of a multitude of trails to discover the Razès. The structure consists of a club house, a saddlery, a quarry, a PTV. In a warm and friendly atmosphere, they offer walks, hikes, lessons, etc.

Directions - Cross Alaigne as if you were going to Belveze du Razès. As the road turns left to exit the village, there is a small road on the right not far from the town hall of Alaigne. It is sign posted to Routier. <https://lesfjordsdurazes.ffe.com>



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Amateur-Sports-Team/Les-fjords-du-razes-222134681213490/>

You can find the program of events via their facebook page.

They also offer training days and outdoor outings, for example 5-day hikes at Lake Montbel (last week of August). +33 (0) 6 86 83 32 31



[DINOSAURS \(36 mins\), Avenue de la gare, 11260 ESPERAZA](#)

I have not personally been to these parks but we are told they are very good. There are a number of museums. Esperaza - south of Carcassonne is the closest.

https://en.audetourisme.com/diffusio/en/activities/culture-and-heritage/esperaza/the-dinosaur-museum_TFOPCULAR0110000046.php



[Le Parc aux Bambous - Broques 09500, Lapenne \(47 mins\)](#)

On 5 hectares, you will discover all kinds of bamboo and even a labyrinth. It's not just bamboo here. The park also offers a flower garden, an orchard with apple trees of old varieties, remarkable trees, a collection of ferns and herbs, a pond with water lilies and... donkeys.

<https://parcauxbambous.com>

Check website / call for restaurant, shop and gardens opening hours as they vary depending on school holidays etc. Often closed on Mondays and Tuesdays .+33 (0) 5 61 60 52 11





