

Into the wild
**TRAVELS IN
THE CÉVENNES**

Jennifer Ladonne winds her way through the craggy wilderness of the Cévennes national park, crossing paths with Robert Louis Stevenson »

Naves is one of the many picturesque villages scattered throughout the Cévennes national park and has been listed as one of France's *villages de caractère*

IMAGE © N. DUPONT

“HOME TO PROTECTED PLANT, ANIMAL AND BIRD SPECIES, THE PARK MAY WELL BE THE CLOSEST THING TO WILDERNESS IN FRANCE”

Over 12 days in the autumn of 1878, Robert Louis Stevenson and his capricious donkey Modestine walked 120 miles through the Cévennes, a remote French territory due north of Montpellier, where he met impoverished peasants, silent monks, and lonely shepherds while reflecting on the region’s history of outlaw Protestants and a child-devouring beast. On the way, he climbed rugged windswept peaks, beheld boulder-strewn waterfalls that tumbled into crystalline pools “of the most enchanting sea-green”, and slept out of doors under a darkness so profound he called it “night within night”.

A century and a half later, the Cévennes national park remains much as Stevenson described it in his book *Travels With a Donkey in the Cévennes*, and is still one of the darkest places on earth. So much so that in 2018 it was named an International Dark Sky Reserve, or “Réserve de ciel étoilé”, as the French more poetically call it. The park covers 361 square miles of France’s least populated countryside, a land inhospitable to highways, whose ancient expanse of ragged gorges, steep forested ridges, river-etched valleys and high-altitude plateaus still shelter a rugged way of life that has persisted for millennia. Home to dozens of protected plant, animal and bird species, including endangered eagles and vultures, the park may well be the closest thing to wilderness in France.

HEART OF DARKNESS

Its remoteness is exactly what drew me to the Cévennes, which lies about 90 minutes northwest by car from Avignon and an hour from Nîmes. But to call it wilderness may be somewhat misleading. A drive through the craggy windswept landscape, alternating between steep gorges and endless valleys, reveals a criss-cross of picturesque villages and crumbling stone fences hewn from the grey, tawny or pink-hued local granite and limestone so as to be barely discernible from the landscape’s natural rubble. It is a living relic of a nearly extinct agro-pastoral tradition – now a preserved UNESCO Cultural Landscape and Biosphere Reserve – where shepherds still drive their flocks into the mountains each spring, tend them through the summer months and know each animal by name.

In October 2020, I left Paris’s Gare de Lyon on the 6.37am train, picked up my rental car at the Avignon TGV station and was on the road by 10am, heading northwest to Les Vans, where the Monts d’Ardèche butt into the Cévennes at the north-eastern edge of the national park. A good place to start, this lively town offers a welcoming tourist office that stocks every kind



Clockwise from above: The spectacular Gorges du Chassezac; the Cévennes is one of the wildest parts of France; La Garde-Guérin; inset, this is the heart of chestnut country; picturesque Payzac; the Chatus grape harvest; one of the many stunning roads you can take through the park; Le Pont-de-Montvert; starry skies above Causse Méjean; the Cascade de Runes



of map, guide and events calendar one could desire (though not all in English) and at least four very good restaurants, including a gastronomic option with a Michelin star. The blackboard menu at La Feuille de Chou, on a tiny street just steps from the town centre, featured the kind of locally sourced dishes I was hoping for. The affable chef is a staunch defender of terroir and showcases the local bounty in his homey dishes – Picodon goat’s cheese, honey from the native black bees, the many wild mushrooms found here, olives and, of course, chestnuts, which I sampled in the form of a delectable cake served warm.

Les Vans lies at the eastern edge of the park just outside the Piémont Cévenol, one of the Cévennes national park’s five major mountain ranges, making it a good base from which to explore.

Driving along the D220, a dizzyingly steep road that snakes along the Massif du Tanargue, I was grateful that my amiable guide Mireille had offered to drive the regional tourist office’s wee electric car so I could enjoy a breathtaking stretch of scenery without plummeting over a sheer cliff. I marvelled at towering banks of pine interspersed with golden chestnut, beech and oak plunging into the Vallée de la Drobie, a rocky, meandering river, in an autumn mosaic of copper, vivid yellow and deep green. Our drive culminated at the Col

de Meyrand, rising 4,500ft with views across the Rhône Valley to Provence’s Mont Ventoux. Standing at the summit’s observation deck, I was struck not only by the stupendous views but by a silence so complete it added an acoustic vastness to the landscape’s visual majesty.

FAIRY-TALE LANDSCAPE

Later, as we zigzagged our way through the Bois de Païolive, a landscape of scrubby oaks and ancient limestone boulders weathered into fantastical natural sculptures, I could appreciate its nickname ‘forest of the fairies’. It seemed this enchanted forest, a favourite hiking place for families during the autumn holidays, had worked its magic: the parking areas along the way were full but there was barely a soul to be seen.

Back in Joyeuse’s medieval fortified old town, I strolled past a dignified 12th-century church to Castanéa, the chestnut museum, to unlock the mysteries of the tree that for centuries has provided the Cévenols’ most lucrative commodity. I learned that the Cévennes harbours more than 20 varieties of sweet chestnut with evocative names like Bouche de Betizac, Belle Épine and Figarette. The texts were all in French, but visitors can get the gist without workable French through diagrams, models, videos and a collection of antique tools, including a menacing pair

IMAGES © MATTHIEU DUPONT, DE BEAUX LENTS DEBANS, LC-ADT07-PAYZAC, M INSSOAN, FRED JULIEN, R. DOMERGUE, JULIAN SUAU

“I WAS STRUCK NOT ONLY BY THE STUPENDOUS VIEWS BUT BY A SILENCE SO COMPLETE IT ADDED AN ACOUSTIC VASTNESS TO THE LANDSCAPE'S VISUAL MAJESTY”



Paragliding at the Col de Meyrand is a great way to really make the most of those views

IMAGE © MATHIEU DUPONT

“THINES IS A ‘LOST AND WILD’ MEDIEVAL HAMLET SET PERILOUSLY ON A CLIFF OVERLOOKING A VAST STRETCH OF THE TARN VALLEY”

of spike-soled shoes ingeniously designed to remove the nut’s spiky outer skin. Everyone comes away with a tube of sweet chestnut paste.

Joyeuse is also known for its namesake macaron, a crisp almond cookie whose recipe has remained a well-guarded secret since the 16th century. At Maison Charaix you can buy them fresh or tinned along with a selection of chestnut delicacies: sweet biscuits, marrons glacés and crème de marrons.

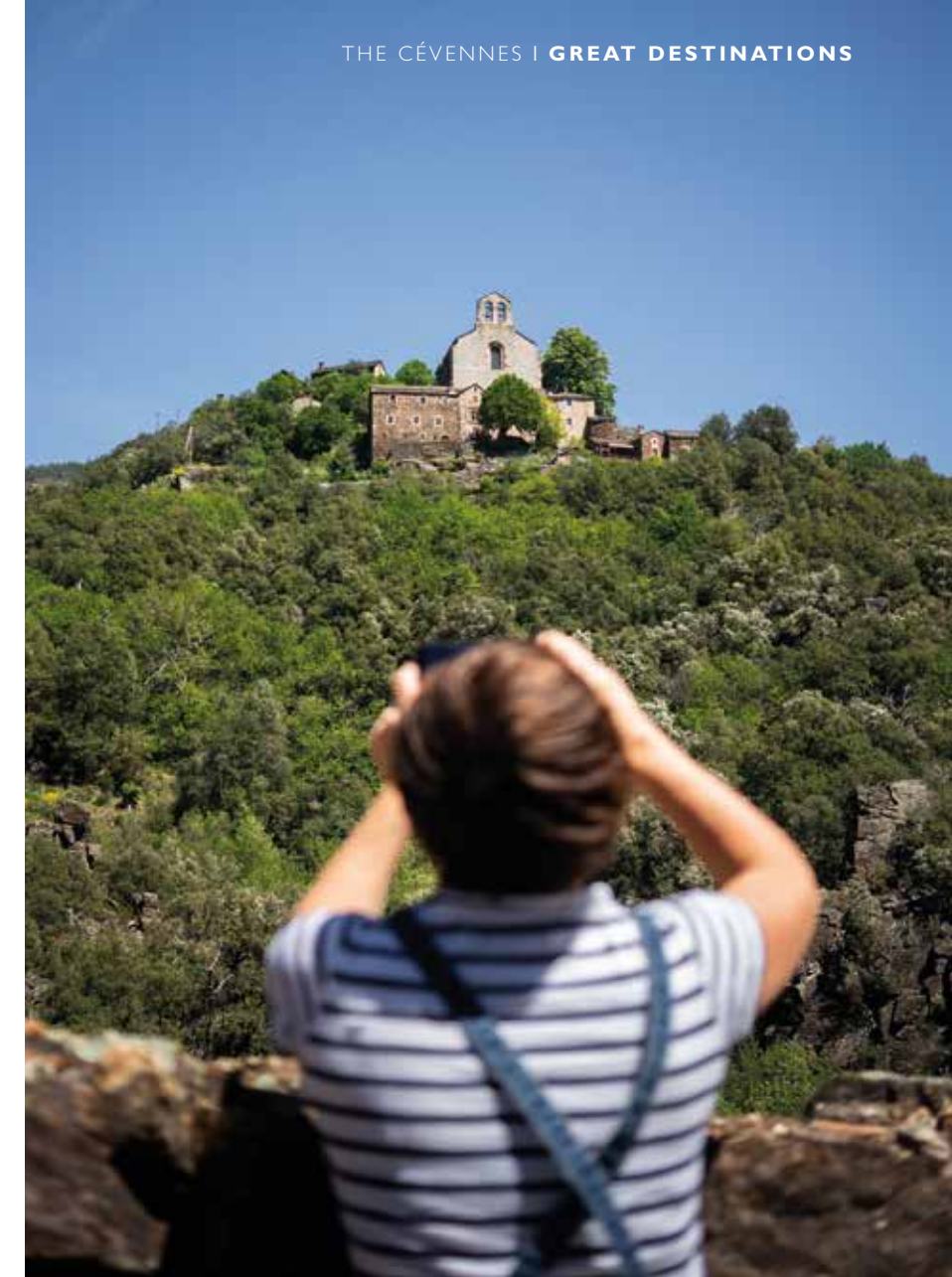
ABUNDANT HARVEST

The month of October is hands down the best time to appreciate the astonishing abundance of this versatile nut. The trees’ turning leaves not only gild the forests, everywhere you walk the barbed skins and nuts crush underfoot. Alongside the prodigious chestnut, grape vines and silvery olive trees line the steep hillsides in stepped groves. There are 26 native olive species grown in this semi-arid Mediterranean climate, according to Jocelyn Vigouroux, of Domaine Le Pigeonnier, fourth-generation producers of olive oils and tapenades on their 300-acre estate.

Wine is another newly revitalised commodity. Since 2008, Élise Renaud and Benoît Salel have cultivated typical Rhône Valley grape varieties at the Domaine Salel & Renaud alongside little-known native species they are intent on reviving: Dureza, Raisaine, Picardan and the distinctive Chatus. I jumped at the chance to sample their wines at the winery, set in a steep wood off a narrow twisting road with views over a blue-tinged valley and the vineyards below. In their cosy kitchen, warmed by a wood-burning stove, we sampled four reds and four whites, including Qué Sa Quo, a deliciously floral Viognier, and the earthy, mildly tannic Le Temps Qui Reste, made with 100 per cent Chatus. The next evening, this same red wine arrived beautifully paired with a plate of aged Picodon cheeses from local artisans Élevage du Serre at dinner at the Mas de Baume, my hotel for the night.

VILLAGE LIFE

‘Perched’ village does not quite describe the giddy heights of Thines, a ‘lost and wild’ medieval hamlet set perilously on a cliff overlooking a vast stretch of the Tarn Valley. The serpentine drive up the D513 alone is worth the trip, as it winds its way up alongside the Thine River’s storybook pools and falls. Visitors (gratefully) leave their car at the parking area below the village for a picturesque 15-minute walk through dense chestnut forests to arrive at the Maison du Gerboul, equal parts visitor centre, café and gift shop. Along with truly a breathtaking panorama, Thine’s exquisite 12th-century Romanesque church and



picturesque cemetery are the stars of the show. There’s also a monument to a band of Second World War Resistance fighters who, betrayed by a mysterious stranger, were murdered by the Nazis in 1943.

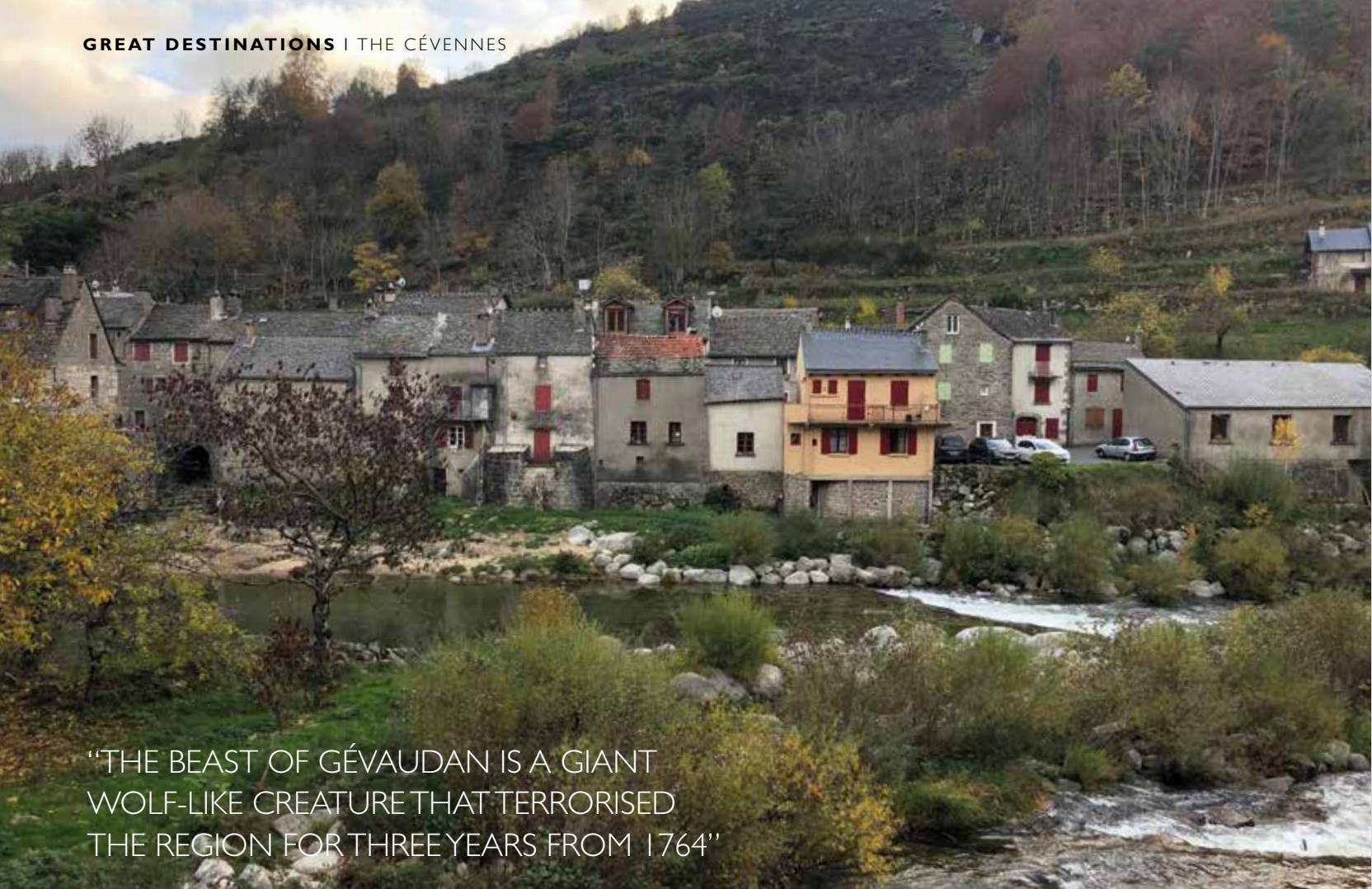
From Les Vans, I headed west toward Mont Lozère on the D901, a steep road progressively more sinuous and beautiful the closer you get to Le Bleyard, a stop on Stevenson’s route and my destination for the night. But first a detour to moody La Garde-Guérin, a beautifully restored medieval village set on a windswept plateau overlooking the Gorges du Chassezac. The village was founded by the Chevaliers Pariers, a sort of medieval police force, and was a vital market town and a major stop along the Chemin de Saint-Gilles, the medieval world’s fourth most important pilgrimage route. Garde-Guérin’s graceful Église Saint-Michel is another Romanesque jewel topped by a *clocher à peine*, the horizontal comb-shaped bell tower characteristic of Cévenol churches of the Middle Ages. The romantic ruins of the village’s ancient castle are a fine spot from which to take in endless views of the gorges.

Another good reason to stop here is the Comptoir de la Régordane, a loft-like rustic-gourmet restaurant where I feasted on wild trout (the Cévennes is one the last places in France where these sensitive fish still >>



Main and above: The perched village of Thines is a must-see, along with its stunning 12th-century Romanesque church

AD PAGE



“THE BEAST OF GÉVAUDAN IS A GIANT WOLF-LIKE CREATURE THAT TERRORISED THE REGION FOR THREE YEARS FROM 1764”



From top: Le Pont-de-Montvert; a bridge deep in the gorge; La Garde-Guérin

survive) and stocked up on edible delights made by local artisans. My hotel at Le Bleymard, whose restaurant walls were bedecked with portraits of Stevenson’s companion Modestine, was the closest I would come to crossing paths with the Beast of Gévaudan, a giant wolf-like creature that terrorised the region and fascinated the world for three years from 1764. Before being (allegedly) shot by a marksman sent by Louis XV, the beast brutally dispatched at least 113 Cévenols, with a particular taste for children, and left dozens of survivors as witnesses to the creature’s authenticity, if not its true identity.

But it was another beast, Covid-19, that would determine the course of my visit. I rushed back to my room after dinner just in time to hear President Macron announce France’s second lockdown, beginning at midnight the next day. My next hotel confirmed it would stay open for one final night – with dinner – but after that everything would shutter, lopping three precious days off my trip.

Careening down the wildly curving D20 the next morning was also the closest I would come to crossing Stevenson’s path. Here he climbed the rock-strewn and windswept Sommet de Finiels 5,600ft to the top of the Mont Lozère massif on his way to the hamlet of Le Pont-de-Montvert, all the while ruminating about the protestant Camisards, who fought a bloody guerrilla war in “that indecipherable labyrinth of hills” for two years against the king’s soldiers. Though it was too cloudy to marvel at the views south to the Mediterranean and east to the Alps, my own solitary walk posed a lovely, lonely vista.

LET’S GET LOST

A GPS is a many splendoured thing when travelling alone, but when it goes wrong, it can go very wrong. A much-anticipated late-morning hike with a local guide was scuppered when my GPS whisked me past our meeting place to a hairpin curve three kilometres down the road. I suspected this was a mistake, but a U-turn on this leaf-strewn one-lane (but two-way) road engulfed by dense forest, was not an option. Arriving at an impossibly picturesque stone church with glorious vistas over the valley – the minuscule Église de Saint-Andéol – I could finally turn around and find my way back to the rustic café where I was to meet my guide, already long departed.

This was not my day. Headed toward my next destination, the Cascade de Runes, the Cévennes’ highest waterfall near Le Pont-de-Montvert, I was led to another tiny road that twisted crazily »



IMAGES © BORRE ZIMMERMANN, JENNIFER LADONNE

AD PAGE

“THE PARK ENCOMPASSES A MIND-BOGGLING 5,000 MILES OF MARKED TRAILS AND 30 CYCLING CIRCUITS”



From top: Transhumance is an important historical way of life in the area; all sorts of outdoor pursuits are on offer in the park; the village of Cocurès

through forest, valley and steep hillsides extending an easy 15-minute trajectory by more than an hour. Go with the flow, I thought (a turnaround being quite impossible anyway), and sure enough the drive turned out to be a splendid detour on my trip, miraculously completed without meeting another car, which would have required a long and perilous backward retreat.

The roaring, 230ft-high Cascade de Runes was as magnificent as promised and Le Pont-de-Montvert, at the confluence of the Tarn and Rieuumalet rivers, as pretty as a postcard. In the late afternoon, I rejoined the D998, by now my favourite route, to traverse another dramatic stretch of cliffs and forest ablaze with autumn colour and plunging toward the boulder-strewn Tarn. Passing the storybook Château de Miral, I arrived before sunset in the hamlet of Cocurès. As I took in a deep magenta sunset over the village from the balcony of my cosy wood-panelled room at La Lozerette, a snug century-old family hotel run by three sisters, I felt lucky. But luckier still at dinnertime in La Lozerette's spacious dining room over the best meal of my trip, presided over by Pierette, one of the three owners, who served me stellar glasses of local wine from an inch-thick wine list covering every region in France with an emphasis on natural wines.

A REASON TO RETURN

On the morning of my last day, I hurried off to nearby Florac to the UNESCO park headquarters and the Maison du Tourisme et du Parc National des Cévennes, seat of the national park, two vital resources for visitors, which would be closing for lockdown at noon.

At Maison du Tourisme et du Parc National des Cévennes I learned about the park's tremendous natural diversity and array of outdoor activities. The

park encompasses a mind-boggling 5,000 miles of marked trails and 30 cycling circuits, along with equestrian routes, canoeing, kayaking and paddling (with guided night visits for beaver-spotting), swimming and trout fishing in its pristine rivers and dozens of world-class caves to explore.

Daring souls can traverse canyons at dizzying heights on a slackline or paraglide among the raptors. Guides for everything from mushroom scavenging to spotting the park's many birds or wild orchids are all to be found here.

At UNESCO, visitors can learn all about *transhumance*, a protected agro-pastoral way of life, which has been practised intermittently in the Cévennes for 3,000 years and has been done so continuously since the Middle Ages.

I didn't weep when I returned my car, as Stevenson had after parting with Modestine at the end of his journey, yet thinking back over all I'd seen – and all I'd missed – I knew that I was far from done with the dramatic and fascinating Cévennes. **FT**



IMAGES © M. DUPONT, JENNIFER LADONNE

12 NATURAL WONDERS OF THE CÉVENNES

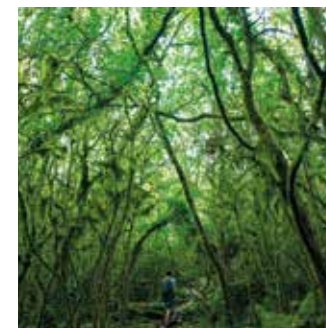
This extraordinary national park is bursting with peaks, gorges and caves

For more places to see in the Cévennes go to www.cevennes-tourisme.fr



VALLÉE DETHINES

The valley's high passes and deep gorges typify the grand landscapes of the Cévennes. Its rock-strewn chestnut and oak forests are especially stunning in autumn. Thines itself has an extraordinary 12th-century church and breathtaking views. www.ardeche-randonnees.fr



BOIS DE PAÏOLIVE

This ancient forest of scrubby oaks and limestone boulders weathered into fantastical natural sculptures is a classified Sensitive Natural Area. Nicknamed 'forest of the fairies', these natural labyrinths, cover 16km and harbour a wealth of biodiversity. en.ardeche-guide.com



COL DE MEYRAND

This high pass through the Tanargue Massif connects the regional parks of the Monts d'Ardèche and the Parc National des Cévennes and offers exquisite views of the entire countryside. At nearly 4,500ft, it's a favourite with hikers and paragliders. en.ardeche-guide.com



GORGES DE CHASSEZAC AND RIVE

This remarkable formation of sheer granite cliffs and outcrops offers a stunning variety of landscapes and activities. Its rugged terrain and tumultuous river make it a favourite for river sports and trout fishing. en.ardeche-guide.com



CAUSSES MÉJEAN

This rugged stepped landscape has been compared with Mongolia for its wide-open spaces and high limestone plateaus. Giant dolomite structures, interspersed with ancient hamlets, are home to a 3,000-year-old pastoral tradition and four rare vulture species. www.cevennes-gorges-du-tarn.com



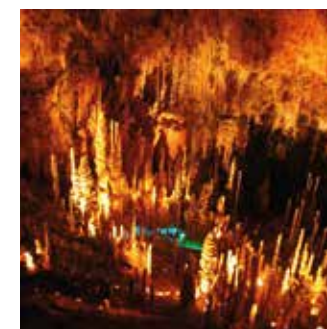
CASCADE DE RUNES

A mighty roar precedes your view of this famous waterfall, reached via a pretty 10-minute walk down rocky steps to the perfect viewing spot. Rising 200ft above crystal clear pools, it is set among forest and the giant granite boulders of the Mont Lozère. www.lozere-tourisme.com



GORGES DU TARN

One of the most remarkable landscapes of France, its gorges, forests and fertile valleys are protected natural sites and a Special Protection Zone for its abundance of birds, including raptors and the endangered Ortolan sparrow. www.cevennes-gorges-du-tarn.com



GROTTE DE L'AVEN ARMAND AND DARGILAN

Aven Armand's glittering formations include the tallest known stalagmite (100 ft). "The cave of a thousand colours", Dargilan is hailed by cavers as one of the prettiest in the world. avenarmand.com www.grotte-dargilan-48.com



MONT AIGOUAL

A circuit on the Tour de France 2020, this 5,100ft peak offers unlimited panoramas with views of the Med and the Alps. It's a spectacular place to visit, especially the fortress-like observatory, France's highest weather station. Don't miss the Meteorological Museum. www.aigoual.asso.fr



CIRQUE DE NAVACELLES

A Grand Site de France and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this extraordinary natural amphitheatre offers three lookout points over one of the deepest canyons in Europe and some of the most breathtaking hikes in France. tourismecevennesnavacelles.com



BAMBOUSERAIE

Unique in France, this 160-year-old park and forest harbours 240 species of bamboo, Japanese maple, Ginkgo, Sequoia, and so much more, covering 84 acres of rolling hills and lakes. Stroll through the Dragon Valley, Laotian Village and water gardens. www.bambouseraie.fr



MIALET VALLEY

The Musée du Désert tells the violent history of the Camisards, protestant insurgents who resisted the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Don't miss the Trabuc cave, the Cévennes' largest underground network. www.museedudesert.com www.grotte-de-trabuc.com

WHAT TO SEE AND DO IN THE CÉVENNES

Renowned for its natural splendours, the Cévennes is also host to beautiful villages, fascinating museums and more



ARDÈCHE

Les Vans

Marché des Vans

The region's best Saturday morning farmers' market (second place winner in the Trophées des Marchés, Auvergne-Rhône Alpes) is not to be missed. You'll find all the regional specialties and artisanal delicacies and rub elbows with the Cévenols. Held from 8am to 1pm every Saturday of the year, with special events in late July and early August.

www.ardeche-guide.com

www.cevennes-ardeche.com



The popular market at Les Vans is one of the best in the area

Faugères

Domaine Salel et Renaud

Élise Renaud and Benoît Salel cultivate Rhône Valley grape varieties alongside the little-known native species they are intent on reviving: Dureza, Raisaine, Picardan and especially a distinctive red called Chatus. The couple offer tastings of their stellar wines at the domaine, set on a lovely road in the woods with views over a blue-tinged valley.

www.domainesalelrenaud.com

Ribes

Élevage du Serre

Follow the signs up to the village and keep climbing to this third-generation goat farm where they make the delicious local Picodon cheese. See how the goats are kept in summer and winter, with a special bonus from February to April: adorable snowy white kids. Then taste the six varieties of Picodon: classic aged or fresh, a goat-milk tomme and camembert. Reservations a must; five persons minimum; 06 33 33 28 96.

www.ardeche-guide.com/lieux-de-visites/lieux-degustation/elevage-du-serre-58932?r=Elevage-du-Serre#

Payzac

Domaine Le Pigeonnier

Olive oil producers for four generations, the 1,200 olive trees



Enjoy breathtaking views over the Vallée des Gardons on a steam train

on this scenic 10-acre estate are sustainably cultivated and hand-harvested. The superior-quality oils are extracted at the family mill on the premises. In July and August visitors are welcomed for tastings and themed walks through the picturesque olive groves and vineyards.

<https://domainelepigeonnier.com/>

Joyeuse

Castanéa

At Castanéa you'll learn everything there is to know about the 20-plus varieties of chestnut, an important Cévenol speciality. Texts are in French, but diagrams, models, videos and antique tools unlock its mysteries. Call in advance to arrange an all-chestnut lunch. The boutique is just the place for a range of chestnut products. Bonus: every visitor comes away with a tube of sweet chestnut paste.

castanea-ardeche.com

Maison Charaix

Joyeuse is known for its namesake macaron, a crisp-chewy almond cookie whose recipe has remained a well-guarded secret since the 16th century. At Maison Charaix you can buy them fresh from the oven along with a



Domaine Le Pigeonnier has been producing olive oil for four generations



Chestnuts are an important local product – learn all about them at Castanéa

selection of chestnut delicacies: sweet biscuits, heavenly marrons glacés and crème de marrons.

www.maisoncharaix.com/en

LOZÈRE

Meyrueis

Maison des Vautours

This is the place to go for a fascinating introduction to the park's four protected vulture species – the Griffon, Monk, Egyptian and Bearded vultures – which were reintroduced to the Jonte Gorges in the 1970s. From the observation deck and via three mobile cameras installed in a nest, you can observe the birds feeding and raising their young.

www.lozere-tourisme.com/maison-des-vautours/meyrueis/loiloz048fs0005a

Florac

Atelier Tuffery

This fourth-generation enterprise has produced top-quality denim clothing and jeans in the Cévennes since 1892. Each pair of blue jeans is made by hand using up to 44 pieces from sustainable organic fabrics, including cotton, hemp and raw silk. From the stitching, rivets and leather label

everything is super chic and made in France. See for yourself how the jeans are made at the workshop-boutique.

www.ateliertuffery.com

Maison du Tourisme et du Parc National des Cévennes

At the Cévennes National Park headquarters you'll find everything you need to know about touring the area. Hiking and cycling maps, imaginative guided visits for both day and night, far-flung activities like paragliding, slacklining, or *Paddle de Nuit*, a paddleboat ride to spot beavers. You'll also find maps of the many caves, standing stones and *menhirs* and information on bird-watching and the park's exceptional flora and fauna.

www.cevennes-parcnational.fr/fr

La Ferme des Cévennes

At this authentic stone farm in the heart of the Cévennes you can ride a donkey (à la R L Stevenson), visit the *fromagerie* to see how the local cheese is made and aged then take a cheese-making workshop, pet the livestock, taste local delicacies, and learn about the land at the Ecomuseum. You can also spend the night in a charming rustic room and wake up to a farm breakfast.

www.ateliertuffery.com

Gard

Le Train à Vapeur (steam train)

Discover the beautiful landscapes and vistas of the cliffs, rivers and valleys of the Vallée des Gardons over bridges and through tunnels on an authentic steam train, travelling between Anduze and Saint-Jean-du-Gard.

Open July-October, daily in high season, on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday in low season. Be sure to check the website for departure times and prices.

www.trainavapeur.com >>



Atelier Tuffery is the place to go for handmade, top-quality jeans

AD PAGE

WHERE TO STAY AND EAT IN THE CÉVENNES

Our choice of hotels and restaurants to enjoy during your trip to this beauty spot



ARDÈCHE

Maison Muz

Owners Florence Kaiser and Bernard Dagan left their jobs in other parts of France after falling in love with the Cévennes (and each other) to open this beautiful and welcoming bed & breakfast, with two cosy rooms, where guests sleep in total peace and quiet and wake up to lovely views over the valley. Florence's gourmet vegetarian meals are served on the artist couple's own handmade pottery on a terrace overlooking the pool.

maisonmuz.fr



Maison Muz is a welcoming B&B owned by an artist couple

Rosières

Mas de Baume

A top-to-toe renovation in 2011 transformed this picturesque 17th-century stone farm into a sophisticated 11-room hotel in a beautiful country setting. The natural swimming pool and private forest are just the thing for rest, relaxation and strolling in the open air. Rooms are spacious and contemporary – some with large private terraces – and the excellent restaurant focuses on local products and wines.

mas-de-baume.com

Les Vans - Lablachère

Maison Bleue

It's plain to see why this charming salon de thé is a favourite among the locals. Besides its chic but homey atmosphere, filled with vintage finds and strewn with books and magazines, the menu features the kind of healthy seasonal comfort food anyone can love: good coffee and tea, delicious salads and small dishes and over-the-top desserts. Open from 10 am till 6 pm, it's perfect for brunch, lunch or teatime

www.cevennes-ardeche.com/restaurant/la-maison-bleue-cafe

La Feuille de Chou

Chef Didier Saint-André – Les Vans' ambassador for local and a fixture at Les Vans' superb Saturday farmer's market – serves exactly the kind fresh local cuisine, *traditionnelle et familiale*,



For a truly memorable experience, stay the night at La Cocalière cave-hotel

hungry travellers long for, paired with local wines and craft beer. Be sure to reserve in high season.

Tel: +33 4 75 88 51 12

LOZÈRE

Saint-Andéol-de-Clerguemort

Le Café Relais de L'Espinas

Popular with locals and tourists alike, this rustic café's magnificent setting along the Route des Crêtes (RD35) and giant outdoor terrace recommend it as much as the home-cooked meals. Dishes favour seasonal and organic local produce and feature local artisans: sourdough bread baked in a wood oven and quality local meats.

www.lerelaisdelespinas.org

HOTELS

La Lozerette

This welcoming third-generation hotel is run by three sisters who give every detail a loving touch, from the cosy, wood-panelled rooms (with sleek modern bathrooms, some with terraces) to the exceptional dining room. The excellent wine list, which favours natural wines from every French region as well as local vintages, foreshadows the gourmet meal to come. Expect high-quality, locally sourced dishes lovingly prepared and graciously served – all for exceptionally reasonable prices.

www.lalozerette.com



Enjoy the natural swimming pool and private forest at Mas de Baume

RESTAURANTS

Comptoir de la Régordane

This gourmet outpost with a soaring loft-like interior is open all day for a hearty lunch of local specialities like line-caught trout, a range of warm and cold salads, local cheeses and charcuterie, and desserts like chestnut cake or lemon verbena-infused panna cotta. Shelves are stocked with products from Cévennes-based artisans: chestnut biscuits, preserves, honey and crème de châtaigne, to local wines and craft beer; handmade woollens, pottery, gorgeous carved wood, jewellery and soaps.

facebook.com/comptoiregordane

GARD

Courry

Cave-hotel La Cocalière

To celebrate the park's 50th anniversary, La Cocalière, one of the biggest and most spectacular caves in France, invites up to two guests to dine and sleep in a glass pyramid suspended in one of the cave's soaring galleries.

Enjoy the cave's sparkling crystals from your chic, all-glass room fully equipped with luxury linens, contemporary furnishings and lighting, and champagne on ice on demand. The price is steep (€690) but includes breakfast and a VIP tour of the cave.

www.grotte-cocaliere.com

Saint-Sébastien-d'Aigrefeuille

Cabanes et Bulles

What better way to fully experience this International Dark Sky Reserve than in a transparent bubble, pyramid or dome? Four perfectly private accommodations scattered throughout a 20-acre property offer unobstructed views of woods, valley and stars, each with its own terrace, Jacuzzi, and bathroom. Breakfast in a basket, fetched from reception, is included.

www.cabanesetbulles.com

Mialet

Le Pradinas

This welcoming hotel is set in an 18th-century stone farmhouse (and former silkworm farm) on a lovely property that offers plenty of quiet and all the amenities: cool, spacious rooms, a pool, a gastronomic restaurant and proximity to the area's principle sights.

lepradinas.fr/en



Comptoir de la Régordane serves delicious local specialities

LES CÉVENNES ESSENTIALS

BY AIR

Fly from London Gatwick or Heathrow to Montpellier, then drive three hours via the A75.

BY RAIL

Paris-Nîmes by TGV (3h), then Nîmes-Alès (40 mins). Numerous trains between Paris, Lille, Lyon and the main cities of the Cévennes. en.oui.sncf

TOURIST INFORMATION

www.cevennes-tourisme.fr

www.cevennes-gorges-du-tarn.com



www.lozere-tourisme.com

en.ardeche-guide.com