HAUTE-LOIRE, 
THE BEST-KEPT SECRET 
IN AUVERGNE 
p.3

STONE IN ALL ITS 
GLORY 
p.17

A FEAST FOR THE SENSES 
the perfect recipe to let go 
p.28
Tackle the rapids in the Gorges de l’Allier

This morning we’re going rafting with Olivier, our guide for our adrenalin-pumping trip down this almost inaccessible river’s rapids. On the agenda: Trou du Curé, Rince-Sinus and stops to dive off the granite rock before a picnic on the sand and pebble beach. The afternoon is more chilled out with a canoe ride down calmer water to Langeac. Then it’s a train ride back to Monistrol-d’Allier whilst we relive our exciting adventure.

Climb to the top of Mont Mézenc for a 360° sunrise

The dawn light slips through the leafy forest trail in Les Estables, the highest village in the Massif Central. Then it appears before your eyes, the «Bald Giant of the Cévennes» at 1753m. A light breeze whips up and you get your reward: a breath-taking view of South West France bathed in the sun’s glowing rays. A 45 minute ascent is enough to chat with Mont Gerbier-de-Jonc, Puy de Sancy, the Cévennes, Alps and Mont-Blanc.

Take a hot-air balloon ride over the Wild Loire Gorges and its first châteaux

Glittering in the morning dew, the hot-air balloon slowly inflates to weightlessly transport us. You feel tiny in the basket that seems to float above the endless landscapes. The wind alone knows where it will take us...

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Trudge around the ridges of the Colorado auvergnat

It’s like the Earth’s crust has cracked open to give us a glimpse of its beige, green and blue clay layers up to 50m thick. Slow geological work that makes these Ravins de Corboeuf feel like canyons. You may get a glimpse of it from the hamlet of Chastel (Rosières) but you don’t realise how huge this sedimentary giant is until you take the 3.2km footpath around it.

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Feel the power of the volcanoes
from Mont Mézenc

The mountain sets the scene for us...
It’s up to us to come up with the story to go with it!

Nicolas Helmbacher (adventurer)
Get up close and personal with white water in the Gorges de l’Allier (Chapelle Sainte-Marie-des-Chazes)
They did not know it was impossible, so they did it.

Mark Twain

Be curious in the Cloister at La Chaise-Dieu Abbey

Gaze in wonder at Saint-Julien Basilica in Brioude

Seek the meaning of life on the Santiago de Compostela route (Chapelle de Rochequade)

Culture & Footpaths
THE START OF AN ADVENTURE!

Venturing off the beaten track means choosing another way to paddle. So we’re leaving the overcrowded waterways to go on a real adventure: one which opens our eyes to the world so we can get to grips with our surroundings.

«The highlight of the day was passing through Lavoûte-Chilhac where the river carves out an «omega» around the stunning village. On top of that there were dozens of kingfishers, white-throated dippers, herons, cormorants and cows! We’re even sleeping with them tonight...»


SECRETS OF THE STONES

This boat is undoubtedly the most natural way to see the basalt giants and stone villages that seem to watch over the furrowed Gorges de l’Allier. Then we stop for a coffee on the sun-soaked banks of Lavoûte-Chilhac and a stroll in Vieille-Brioude’s parks. We set off from Sageasse beach with a guide on a nautical trail® to find out more about these waters teeming with salmon.

Ages 6 and up. Half-day, full day or 3-day trip from Prades to Aurizon: 20/25km per day (appro. 5 hrs). Accommodation in B&Bs, stopover gîtes or campsites. Solo or guided village tours. tonti-aventure.fr gorges-allier.com ot-brioude.fr

RIVER EXPLORER

If you see a canoe with some funny explorers on board with thermometers in one hand and nets and masks in the other: stop! It’s Allierypso: a floating scientific base jam-packed with fun-filled educational equipment. A beaver skull is unearthed and the investigation into the rodent begins. Tracks on the beach spark our curiosity that draws us to the semi-aquatic mammals. A discussion about water levels and the river’s hydrology is clear as crystal.

Look out for them in summer as you go round a bend between Langeac and Brioude (Les Pieds à Terre). lespiedsaterre.fr

SAILING THROUGH UNTAMED TERRITORY

Jérôme is passionate about the Gorges de la Loire and it’s obvious. When he joins your «canoe» trip it’s like he’s opening the doors into his own wild land that he wants to protect. He tells us the story of otters, red kites and snowy mespilus. As we’re paddling along we can see the natural symbiosis that we’re quietly caught up in.


FISHING FOR ADVENTURE

Steeve is a master at finding the best fishing spots in the Allier. What could be better than a canoe to reach them? Two days unearthing our inner trappers with bivouacs to boot...

«It’s time to sample local specialities cooked on the barbecue. The atmosphere at that very moment is at its height. Everyone relives their day with a head full of memories and images! Just like the fishing scenes in «A River Runs Through It» starring Brad Pitt. Everyone takes their turn to tell their best jokes. The laughter is infectious. We’re all completely disconnected from our everyday lives. Mission accomplished for the monitors and their trappers.» Éric, fishing enthusiast.

Trapper canoe fishing breaks in the Allier or horseback fishing in the Loire: emotionpeche.com
The realm of the salmon king

We don’t just do a spot of fishing in the Haute-Loire! Salmon swims 5000-10,000km along the currents from Greenland to come to breed in the Gorges de l’Allier. There’s proof of the excellent standard of the water here. We salute this amazing tourist. You can’t catch salmon as it’s a protected species, but fishing fanatics can catch grayling and brown trout.

Jean-François Viallette, recent world junior fly fishing champion

 Salmon leaping out of the Allier’s water

Shedding light on Auvergne’s Grayling Area

Is there a pretender to the salmon’s throne? Grayling... The Allier River is an incredible breeding ground for species that only live in freshwater. Grayling is one of them and it’s also a fantastic bioindicator.

Hurray, remember that there are 3300km of category 1 rivers in the Haute-Loire! This Thymallus from the Salmonidae family loves fresh and well-oxygenated water. It swims in the currents of the Gorges de l’Allier, the Ance river and the Loire’s high valley. What’s the benefit of fishing for it? It lasts into autumn/winter in category 2 rivers whilst Mrs Brown Trout rests.

Salmon breeding tours:
saumon-sauvage.org
La Maison du Saumon et de la Rivière (Salmon and River Centre) (Brioude)
aquariummaisondusaumon.com

KING OF FRESHWATER FISH

Nicknamed the «King of Delights» in Germany, the «Lady of the Stream» in Britain and the «Thymallus Queen» in Italy, the grayling’s delicate flesh and sweet thyme fragrance has won over Michelin-starred chef Philippe Brun who has since become a leading ambassador for the so-called «King of Freshwater Fish».

With its great flavours and thriving breeding in Chanteuges, grayling has made its way onto the best chefs’ menus: Régis and Jacques Marcon and as far as Aveyron with Chef Sébastien Bras to become a premium fish.

Grayling, a wild aggressive fish sought-after by sport fishing fans.

La Tallide, bend in the Allier River in Saint-Vénérand, the birthplace of Atlantic salmon

Meet a Great Migrator

Salmon reigns supreme here. Every bridge over the Allier from Langeac to Brioude salutes it with the plaque «Allier, rivière à saumons» (Allier, salmon river).

People from all over Europe used to come here to go fishing. There were so many people that the labourers who were building the «Le Cévenol» railway track in the late 19th century went on strike because they were given salmon to eat 2 or 3 times a week!

The species is now protected and the Conservatoire National du Saumon Sauvage (National Wild Salmon Conservation Centre) in Chanteuges pampers it to ensure it reproduces, is safeguarded and to teach our little ones about protecting the aquatic environment.

Salmon breeding tours:
saumon-sauvage.org
La Maison du Saumon et de la Rivière (Salmon and River Centre) (Brioude)
aquariummaisondusaumon.com

«I mainly catch brown trout. I trained in the Dunière, Sémène and Allier rivers. The standard of water is great in the Haute-Loire and there’s a good density of fish. And the number of rivers is incredible.»

Jean-François Viallette, recent world junior fly fishing champion
Here, all roads lead to the source. A source of stamina with trails flirting with the Loire and Allier, 2 rivers that spring up on the edge of the Haute-Loire... or a source of spirituality and history with the Santiago de Compostela route.

Walking these footpaths is a great way to recharge your batteries: go back to basics, reconnect with nature and, along the way, get back to your own nature.

**THE RARE PEARL**

As you wander around the uplands of the wild Loire Valley, you stumble upon the Bonnefont mineral water spring in Saint-Martin-de-Fugères. Operated until 1914 and rich in trace elements, it was said to have health benefits: diuretic, anti-rheumatic and digestive. « No to alcohol...but yes to chalybeate! » said Bourvil.

me2encloiresauvage.com

**1ST DIGITAL GR® HIKING TRAIL IN FRANCE**

Pack light with the first digital pocket hiking guide. It’s free too! It guides us as we follow the Allier back up to Brioude to its source at an altitude of 1500m on Moure de la Gardille in Lozère. Hiking the «Sources & Gorges de l’Allier» GR® 470 trail is an ode to landscapes that are as diverse as they are dramatic: rows of gorges, hairpin bends, granite and basalt plateaus, volcanic curiosities, stunning resinous or leafy forests and more. To end the trip on a high, a train ride back along the river on the legendary Le Cévenol railway is a must.

gr470-gorgesallier.com

**AN UNEXPECTED TRAIN RIDE**

We hop on board the Gorges de l’Allier Tourist Train in Langeac to Langogne to see the wild and volcanic gorges that no road has ever reached. An unexpected train ride at slow speeds as you approach the best sites. Photo opportunities guaranteed! Before our very eyes is a parade of unspoilt landscapes sculpted by the water and volcanoes interspersed by 16 tunnels and 51 viaducts. The train shares the best secrets of the Gorges de l’Allier with extra anecdotes and funny stories from the guide.

train-gorges-allier.com

**GO EXPLORING**

With stages lasting between 20 and 25km, the route is first and foremost a physical challenge. But there’s far more to it! From Le Puy-en-Velay Cathedral, a start point for the Santiago de Compostela route, everyone goes on their own journey: self-discovery, friendship, spirituality, nature, creativity etc.

**WALKING LIKE A PILGRIM AND MAKING THE MOST OF THE PATH IS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION JOURNEY.**

Lu Yongzhong, painter

Arrival at the Domaine du Sauvage (Chanaleilles), a welcoming hotspot for Santiago pilgrims managed by a group of farmers.
sauvage-en-gevaudan.com
Go your own way
There are lots of ways to get to Le Puy-en-Velay. You can reach the Jacobean route from Geneva and most recently from Cluny and Lyon if you pack the brand new GR® 765 hiking guide in your backpack.

rando-hauteloire.fr

Saint-Michel d’Aiguilhe
Rock, start point for the GR® 300 that will link up the top Saint Michael sites in Europe including Mont Saint-Michel. (Digital TopoGuide® hiking guide available for the route from Aiguilhe to Ébreuil in the Allier)

« Le Puy is a town of art and history that has transformed its volcanic architecture to glow in Southern French colours in a matter of years. »

Jean-Claude
@jcg48

*shots published by Instagram users. #myHauteLoire #LePuyenVelay
« Its unique, special atmosphere, the start point for pilgrims on the Santiago de Compostela route. »
Christine
@en.instantanes

« Its colourful houses, its old porches and doors worn down by time, a town that’s teeming with gems and secrets... »
Blandine
@blandinette42

« When I reached the top of the staircase after 268 steps at sunset, I felt something special as I explored the little chapel standing on a former volcanic pipe and the incredible views encompassing the town... »

« Where do you start? What with local produce galore, the colours of Le Puy-en-Velay, its fabulous history and warm-hearted locals, it was hard to leave at night. In a few words: Le Puy is joy in its purest form! »
André
@andre_berthet

A slice of local life

LE PUY-EN-VELAY MARKET
By Laurette, a local foodie and addict of Le Puy-en-Velay’s market which is known as the best in Auvergne.

Saturday, 6am, the streets are filling with benches, boards, calling voices, rolling carts that whip along the town’s old cobbles. Here they are... I gobble up my breakfast so I can join them.

I scoot to the covered marketplace to find Raphaël, the baker with the big smile who sells crusty organic bread made using heritage flour straight from the oven. Then it’s off to Place du Plot to find Véro and her famous «artisous» cheese. She hands me a piece as though I’ve never tried it before. Unmissable!

On the way I visit brothers Antoine and Stéphane in the hope of leaving with the last saucisson. «Nice and dry for Mademoiselle!» I nod as I go past Fred who’s proudly holding a crate of vegetables from local producers that he’ll cook in his restaurant. I don’t leave the market before I’ve seen Christophe the beekeeper to woo me with his floral honey.

It’s already midday so it’s a great time to meet up with friends. I find them on a terrace on the covered market square looking for the last table for us to soak up the last of the sun. A little get-together with a bit of Auvergne wine and bread, cheese and cured meats with the memory of all the smiling faces we’ve seen on this special morning.

By Laurette, a local foodie and addict of Le Puy-en-Velay’s market which is known as the best in Auvergne.

8 illumination shows at landmarks in and around town from late April to late September every evening at nightfall.

puydelumieres.fr

The cathedral, the town’s landmark, during «Le Puy de Lumières» and the Notre-Dame de France statue in the background

« IT’S AS THOUGH THE RAYS OF LIGHT WERE CREATING A HALO AROUND THE LANDMARKS. »

« Rue Séguret, a narrow lane uptown »

« At the peak of Saint-Michel d’Aiguilhe Rock »
Le Puy-en-Velay, the start point for the UNESCO World Heritage Santiago de Compostela route
Haute-Loire
OPEN-AIR DECOR

SEEKING OUT THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES IN FRANCE

Arlempdes, picturesque and overlooked by the ruins of one of the first châteaux on the banks of the untamed Loire.

Blesle, with its half-timbered houses, film set for «La nouvelle guerre des boutons» starring Kad Merad.

A peaceful atmosphere with the scent of days gone by whips up the lanes in Pradelles.

The intriguing setting of the former Lavaudieu Abbey’s cloister, a star in «Crimson Rivers II».
Standing like a sentry, the ruins overlook the town of Allègre at the foot of Mont-Bar volcano.

A hive of activity in the village of Le Monastier-sur-Gazelle, a start point for the famous Stevenson trail.

Picture-perfect Chilhac on the banks of the Allier and its staggering basalt columns.

Houses with thatched roofs reminiscent of a Gaul village in Bigorre and Mouleyres.

The sun sets over the majestic fortress in Polignac.

Medieval backdrop and terraced gardens in Auzon.

Time to think in La Chaise-Dieu Abbey, a haven of peace.

The medieval village of Chalencon and its mysterious tale of the Devil’s Bridge.

TOWNS AND VILLAGES WITH PERSONALITY

3 « Petites Cités de Caractère »
FROM SPRINGS

LAFAYETTE, FROM THE HAUTE-LOIRE TO AMERICA

How about we get to know the famous Marquis de Lafayette, a hero in 2 countries and a champion of freedom? The «honorary citizen of the United States of America» was born on September 6th 1757 in the Château de Chavaniac-Lafayette. 1777 marked the beginning of his American saga. Alongside George Washington, he became an «iconic» figure for American independence. When he returned to France he played a major part in the French Revolution in 1789 which he threw himself into with ideas he’d brought back from the USA. The Treasury Room even has an original copy of the Marquis’ Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen. A 300 year old oak tree that has borne witness to the saga stands in the middle of the château grounds.

chateau-lafayette.com

HOMAGE TO THE RIGHTEOUS

Did you know that the tradition for hospitality and spirit of resistance in and around Le Chambon-sur-Lignon really came to the fore during the Second World War? The villages quietly and naturally transformed following the influx of refugees with almost as many refugees as there were households. Countless Jews and specifically children were saved among the refugees. In 1990, people from in and around Chambon were given a Yad Vashem certificate of honour that distinguishes them as «Righteous Among The Nations». You can explore this period on a historical and educational visit to the remarkable Lieu de Mémoire Museum in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. A moving journey that encapsulates the fate of the men and women involved in the resistance that was civil, spiritual and armed all in one.

memoireduchambon.com

PEAK OF THE RESISTANCE

Let’s visit the Mont-Mouchet Resistance Museum in Auvers. The tale of two cartoon characters, Lucien and Pierrot, depicts the key events that made their mark on this Auvergne resistance memorial site in a sensitive playful way. The 2 heroes joined the Mont-Mouchet group, one of the 5 largest resistance gatherings in France, in spring 1944. What did they do? They stopped the German army from advancing from their base in the South of France to Normandy. Authentic items, documents, photos and videos surround us with the realities of the time and reveal the secrets of the Auvergne Resistance throughout the visit.

resistance-mont-mouchet.com

Find out more about the locals’ commitment at the Lieu de Mémoire in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon.
So tell me...how do you explain the incredible restaurant scene in Saint Bonnet?
It all stems from Saint-Bonnet’s location almost 1200m high at the top of a mountain pass on the edge of the Ardèche and Haute-Loire. Monks from La Chaise-Dieu came here to clear the ground in the Middle Ages. So you needed cafés and taverns for the men clearing the ground. Then stagecoaches began to stop in Saint-Bonnet to eat and sleep. It all began because there was nothing at all...

And then?
Locals stayed here. An example is the Chatelard family who have been restaurateurs since their grandparents’ generation. Then others came such as Chef Thierry Guyot and his wife Cécile at Le Fort du Pré who hail from the Lot region. We’re used to seeing snowy winters here. There’s a real sense of community. Restaurateurs aren’t competitive. They’re pleased to see others do well and everyone does well! [laughs].

Chef Régis Marcon must have helped the village become famous?
Régis wasn’t going to live in Saint-Bonnet to start with. The Gault et Millau guide brought him to the world’s attention. He was offered jobs in Paris, Vichy, and in the end he never wanted to leave his land. He brought a lot of people with him. At the start we couldn’t believe it. Then he trained lots of chefs who have stayed here such as 2 Michelin-starred Serge Vieira in Chaudes-Aigues. Régis is proud...He’s a driving force, he attracts others, he’s very friendly: we never say «Mr Marcon» here, everyone calls him Régis.

Why did Régis introduce mushrooms into his dishes?
Here we have a mushroom legacy and the tradition of the mushroom fair that’s been running since the Middle Ages. People would pick mushrooms and dry them on ropes in front of the fire in farms. Mushrooms sold for the same price as today at the All Saint’s Day fair. They would swap goods with traders for warm clothes, chestnuts, nuts and apples to get through winter. It was a way to survive. The 2-day fair now attracts 40,000 visitors.

Is Saint-Bonnet the land of mushrooms?
Undoubtedly! It’s down to its wealth of woodlands, diverse soils and surrounding altitudes: it increases the opportunities!

Pamper yourself after tickling your tastebuds at Les Sources du Haut Plateau spa

When people come to Saint-Bonnet, they say they’re bound to find a good place to eat, if not the first then it will be the next. »
There are 46 of them. They’re crazy about Auvergne and its fine dining scene.

What have these Toques d’Auvergne always wanted?

To promote local produce by developing short supply chains with a close-knit network of producers. And we’d say that current trends prove they’re right...

12 chefs in the Haute-Loire

Philippe BRUN
Hôtel Restaurant Le Haut-allier
Alleyras - (00 33) (0)4 71 57 57 63

André CHATELARD
Restaurant André et Viviane
Chatelard
Saint-Bonnet-le-Froid
(00 33) (0)4 71 59 96 09

Sandy CAIRE
L’atelier by Sandy Caire
Beauzac - (00 33) (0)7 86 01 08 40

Dominique DUBRAY
Hôtel Restaurant La Bougnate
Blesle - (00 33) (0)4 71 76 29 30

Benoit FROMAGER
Hôtel La Terrasse
Saugues - (00 33) (0)4 71 77 83 10

Thierry GUYOT
Hôtel Restaurant Le Fort du Pré
Saint-Bonnet-le-Froid
(00 33) (0)4 71 59 99 83

Jacques MARCON
Restaurant Régis et Jacques Marcon
Saint-Bonnet-le-Froid
(00 33) (0)4 71 59 93 72

Rémy MICHELAS
Hôtel Restaurant Le Bourbon
Yssingeaux
(00 33) (0)4 71 59 06 54

Robert REDON
Restaurant Le Poivrier
Le Puy-en-Velay
(00 33) (0)4 71 02 41 30

Gilles ROUX
Restaurant La Tour
Dunières
(00 33) (0)4 71 66 86 66

Eric TOURNAYRE
Restaurant Tournayre
Le Puy-en-Velay
(00 33) (0)4 71 09 58 94

Jean-Pierre VIDAL
Restaurant Vidal
Saint-Julien-Chapteuil
(00 33) (0)4 71 08 70 50

A great gift idea?
The Chèq’Toq voucher valid in «Toques d’Auvergne» restaurants and available to buy on toques-auvergne.fr
Shopping
WHAT TO BRING BACK IN YOUR SUITCASE?

SWEET TREATS
Give into your sweet tooth with artisan treats: Jam by Bruno Moutcoudiol (Monistrol-sur-Loire) and Vincent Brun (Saint-Victor-Malescours), Confectionery by Le Cheyne and Doucours du Lignon (Le Chambon-sur-Lignon), «Le gourmand du Marquis» Cake (Langat/Paulhauguet) and «La Pouzzolane du Velay» biscuits.

Producers and artists join forces to take their little gems further than the markets:
madeingevaudan.com
terroirsdehauteloire.com
hallefermiere.com

ALCOHOL ABUSE IS DANGEROUS. PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

RED AND BLACK
Strawberries, raspberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants, blueberries and blackberries grown at over 1000m altitude. The Velay’s «Red and Black Pearls»: rare and vibrant vitamins!

SAINT-GÉRON MINERAL WATER
Packed with minerals and rare trace elements from the magma, you can hear it let out a soft fizz when it escapes from the bottle designed by Argentine artist Alberto Balli.

VERVEINE SOFT OR NOT?
Whether it’s an artisan liqueur for grandpa or a herbal tea for grandma, you should always have some in reserve. Why not use it to put a twist on a classic mojito?

SAVOURY TREATS
Mushrooms, mountain cured meats and «artisous» cheese. The cheese’s unique flavour comes from the tiny cheese mites that age it by aerating the rind. The «artisous» mites are hyperactive: a couple conceives a million babies in 40 days. Now there’s a record to beat...

A VEGETABLE PRINCESS
These lentils reign supreme with their delicate skin and slightly floury kernel enabling them to cook quickly. And let’s not forget that they’re packed with goodness: rich in plant protein, low in fat, they contain twice as much fibre, more potassium, phosphorus and iron! Would you like seconds Popeye?

FABULOUS FABRICS
Scarves made using traditional local weaving techniques. They bear the «Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant» accreditation that recognises businesses keeping traditional French expertise alive (available to buy at Monistrol-sur-Loire Tourist Information).

They are ceramicists, stringed instrument makers, metalworkers, jewellers and more. All of them love to surprise people and put a bit of their talent and soul into their work.

Lace unveiled
Le Puy-en-Velay’s old town is the place to gaze at lacemakers working their magic and keeping this traditional expertise alive. It’s so tempting to step into one of the shops and treat yourself to a lace souvenir. Countless sites pay tribute to it and pass a passion for it onto future generations: the Hôtel de la Dentelle (Lace Centre) in Brioude, the Musée des Manufactures de Dentelles (Lace Factory Museum) in Retournac, L’Atelier Conservatoire National de la Dentelle (National Lace Conservation Studio) and Centre d’Enseignement de la Dentelle au Fuseau (Bobbin Lace Training Centre) in Le Puy-en-Velay that provides courses all year round.

Treat yourself to something unique
Look out for the «Made in Haute-Loire» label to bring back a unique souvenir. We head to the collective Escandhia boutique in Brioude and the pop-up shops on «Rue des Arts» in Le Puy-en-Velay: Rue Chènebouterie and Rue Raphaël turn into a vibrant showcase for thirty artisans between May and September.
ALL THE GEMS OF Haute-Loire ON THE #myHauteLoire APP

Carry the very best of Haute-Loire around with you and get our expert’s tips on the tours, activities, excursions, festivals and restaurants in the neighbourhood!

AUVERGNE expérience #myHauteLoire