

MIDI-PYRÉNÉES

Midi-Pyrénées is the largest region of metropolitan France by area, larger than the Netherlands or Denmark.

Midi-Pyrénées has no historical or geographical unity. It is one of the regions of **France** created artificially in the late 20th century to serve as a hinterland and zone of influence for its capital, **Toulouse**, one of a handful of so-called "balancing metropolises". Another example of this is the region of **Rhône-Alpes** which was created as the region for Lyon.

The name chosen for the new region was decided by the French central government without reference to the historical provinces (too many of them inside the region) and based purely on geography: Midi (i.e. "southern regions") - Pyrénées (Pyrénées mountains that are the southern limit of the region). The French adjective and name of the inhabitants of the region is: Midi-Pyrénéen.



Museums

THE FENAILLE MUSEUM: ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY IN ROUERQUE

In Rodez 170 years ago, the "Society of Letters, Sciences and Arts in Aveyron" created a museum to celebrate the history of Rouergue and preserve the heritage of an entire population. This has become the Fenaille museum.

Rodez - Aveyron (12)

The Fenaille museum owes its name to a generous donator, Maurice Fenaille, a patron of Rodin, who donated the Hôtel de Jouéry, to the town of **Rodez**, to house the museum. The museum, opposite the Town Hall, is still in this building, a fine example of Renaissance architecture in **Aveyron**. An interior courtyard with wooden galleries, a façade with pilasters and mouldings are just some of the remarkable elements which attract visitors.

The Fenaille museum retraces life in the Aveyron from 300,000 years ago to the 17th century. The visit begins on level 3, with a spectacular discovery: prehistoric dolmen statues from **the Rouergue**, the biggest collection in **France** of this type of object. They were the first 'life-size' representations of man. In the surrounding rooms, you can find out about the daily lives of the inhabitants of the Rouergue who constructed them.

The next two levels describe the Gallo-Roman period and the Middle Ages, and then the period covering the 16th century and the Renaissance, through sculptures, objects from everyday life, tapestries, stained glass windows, furniture, etc.

THE HENRI MARTIN MUSEUM: A POINTILLIST IN CAHORS

The painter Henri Martin, born in Toulouse, spent the last part of his life in the Lot after a long and rich artistic career. The Cahors museum is the main recipient of his works. But this is not the only reason it is worth visiting.

Cahors - Lot (46)

Since 1833, **the Cahors museum** has continued to enrich its collections and now includes nearly 18,000 works and documents. Large collections of prehistoric, Roman and medieval archaeology, numismatics, ethnography and fine arts are on display.

The Henri Martin museum in Cahors had the privilege of many donations, both public and private, to constitute an exceptional collection, thanks in particular to two remarkable donators:

- o **Léon Gambetta**, father of the Republic and a native of Cahors, donated nearly 3,000 documents and personal objects which tell us of his life and his collector's enthusiasm,
- o **Henri Martin**, a well-known painter at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, whose poetic inspiration marked his work, close to pointillism. He donated 17 of his paintings to the Cahors museum, which now bears his name.

THE CHAMPOLLION MUSEUM: A NEW PAGE IS WRITTEN IN FIGEAC

Born in Figeac, Jean-François Champollion revolutionised the interpretation of writing by deciphering the hieroglyphics on the famous «**Rosetta Stone**». The museum which bears his name reopened in July 2007, allowing visitors to discover «The Writings of the World».

Figeac - Lot (46)

Opened in 1986 in the house where the French scientist was born, **the Champollion museum** was, until 2007, mainly devoted to hieroglyphics and ancient Egypt. After two years of renovation work, the Champollion museum was moved and enlarged to compose an ambitious architectural and museographical ensemble, grouping several old houses in the town centre, to house all the "Writings of the World»

The Champollion room, on the first floor, plunges the visitor into the decipherer's passion, with the "great Egyptian treasure» made up of objects from funeral rites, sarcophaguses, mummies, statuettes of gods, Book of the Dead... All this to the sound of Champollion's voice telling of his expedition to Egypt, after 20 years of research. Your visit will be punctuated by installations and activities allowing an interactive discovery of the museum.

THE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC MUSEUM: THE SPLENDOURS OF ALBI

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, born in Albi in 1864, marked the history of French painting by depicting scenes from Montmartre and the working class world he frequented with a hitherto unknown modernity. The Palais de la Berbie in Albi houses the finest collection of his works.

Albi - Tarn (81)

The fortress of la Berbie, dating back to the 13th century, was one of the residences of the Bishops of the Midi, certainly the largest. It recalls their power and wealth. The 'cour d'armes' or courtyard of arms was transformed in the 17th century into beautiful French style gardens. Entirely restructured since 2002, the Palais houses more than 1000 works by the great artist Toulouse-Lautrec, as well as archaeological collections, ancient and modern art (Bonnard, Matisse, Vuillard, etc.).

The works of **Toulouse-Lautrec** cover the painter's entire career: early works, which show his precocious talent for pictorial art, portraits, his extremely famous portrayals of Parisian life (Au salon de la rue des Moulins, etc.), posters and lithographs (**La Goulue**, Ambassadeurs. etc.), his drawings, as well as impressive later works.

LOURDES FORTRESS

Erected on a rocky peak, it overlooks the town of Lourdes and the entrance to the seven Lavedan Valleys.

Lourdes - Hautes-Pyrénées (65)

Initially the main residence of **the Comte de Bigorre** (9th to 12th centuries), then a mediaeval fortress (13th to 16th centuries) and finally royal prison (17th to 18th century), the fortress has been adapted many times over its history: primitive amphitheatre, fortified Roman chapel and doors, 14th century keep, canon platform,

drawbridge. It was a frontline military post up until the 19th century and a remarkable example of the development of fortifications in **the Pyrenean** foothills from the Middle Ages to the Second Empire.

THE GOYA MUSEUM: SPAIN IN CASTRES

The Goya museum in Castres houses all the great Spanish masters from ancient times to the 20th century, making this museum unique in France.

Castres - Tarn (81)

The museum houses some major works by **Francisco de Goya**, "Self-portrait with spectacles" (c. 1800), "Portrait of Francisco del Mazo" (1815-1820), "The Assembly of the Royal company of the Philippines" known as the "Junta of the Philippines" (1815), and the four series of etchings: "Los Caprichos" (1799), "Tauromachy" (1816), "Disasters of War" (1863), "Disparates" or "Proverbios" (1864).

The history of Spanish pictorial art is revealed as you go from room to room, from Iberian statuettes from the 15th and 16th centuries, and the great masters of the golden age, Velázquez, Murillo, Valdés Leal, Cano, Zurbarán, Ribera... up to impressionists and modernists of the 19th and 20th centuries, Beruete, Rusiñol, Sorolla, Zuloaga, Mallo, Bueno, Picasso...

In addition to this collection, the Goya museum hosts temporary exhibitions, always on the theme of Spain, as well as lectures, workshops and courses for all.

Castles and stately homes

CHÂTEAU DE ROQUEFIXADE

The vertiginous citadel of Roquefixade is a major Cathar site

Roquefixade - Ariège (09)

The word «roquefixade» means «fissured rock» and evokes the huge natural fissure that was spanned by the construction of one of the castle's stone arches. Perched on a rocky peak, this 13th-16th century castle is a major **Cathar site**. It served as a place of refuge and resistance for the Cathars. The castle's strategic location allowed it to control the road to **Foix**.

CHÂTEAU DE BROUSSE

13th-18th century fortress. It has retained its fortified wall, as well as a major part of its wall walk.

Brousse le Château - Aveyron (12)

Château de Brousse sits on an elongated platform of rock that resembles the prow of a ship, where the waters of **the Tarn** and the Alrance meet. The castle has retained its fortified wall, as well as a major part of its wall walk. It belonged to **the Comtes du**

Rouergue, then to the powerful **Arpajon family** (from the 13th to the 17th century). There are various exhibitions inside the castle, including paintings, photographs and old tools.

CHÂTEAU DE CALMONT D'OLT

11th and 15th century castle, with reproductions of mediaeval war machines and exhibitions about the besieging of castles.

Espalion - Aveyron (12)

Perched on a basalt peak, from where it overlooks **the Lot Valley**, Château de Calmont d'Olt is the highest point of a site offering an exceptional panorama over **the Aubrac** massif and **the Causse** limestone plateaux. At the foot of the peak a rippling lava flow covers more than two acres. A reconstructed siege has been built around the remains of the castle, with life size and fully functioning «infernal machines», constructed by an historian with an eye for detailed authenticity and realism.

Religious sites

SHRINE OF NOTRE DAME DE LOURDES

The main sites to visit: The Grotto where the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette, the Crypt, the Basilica of the Immaculée Conception, the Basilica of Notre Dame du Rosaire, the Basilica of Saint-Pie X, the Church of Sainte-Bernadette, the Tent of the Adoration, the Chapel of the Reconciliation and the Chemin de Croix.

Lourdes - Hautes-Pyrénées (65)

The shrines are open every day and access is free of charge. Mass may be celebrated every day in many languages in 22 places of worship. From April to October major celebrations such as the International Masses every Wednesday and Sunday, Procession, Eucharistic Adoration and Blessing of the sick in the afternoons, and Marial Procession with torches in the evenings draw pilgrims both sick and well. Contact the Information Forum for times of services from November to March. Every day there is a free video screening about the story of the Apparitions and the **Lourdes** Message.

ST-LIZIER CATHEDRAL

It owes its renown to the first large Romanesque paintings in the Pyrenean region, which decorate the apse and the apsidiole.

St Lizier - Ariège (09)

This cathedral dates from the 11th century. Its chevet is composed of numerous Gallo-Roman elements that have been reused, including two elegant friezes of foliage. A collection of frescoes, the work of an Italian studio, decorate the apse: they are the first large Romanesque paintings in **the Pyrenean region**. A collection of frescoes from the same era depicting Celestial Jerusalem are to be found in the north apsidiole.

CONQUES (ABBEY CHURCH)

Sainte-Foy Abbey (11th to 12th century) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
Conques - Aveyron (12)

Romanesque sculpture and architecture, mediaeval gold and silverwork are the themes discussed during the guided tours run by the Tourist Office. It is possible to visit the galleries of the abbey church. The abbey church and the mediaeval gold and silverwork museum are open every day of the year.

CATHEDRAL OF SAINTE-CÉCILE

A masterpiece of southern gothic with a remarkable contrast between its exterior rigorousness and sumptuous interior decorations.

Albi - Tarn (81)

A masterpiece of southern gothic (13th to 16th century). Outside, the building boasts the Dominique de Florence door (1392), a bell-tower keep and a canopy over the entrance door (1515-1540). Inside, the frescoes of the vault (1509-1513) are comparable to those of the Sistine chapel, while the huge paintings of the Last Judgement by the Flemish School (1475-1480), the astonishing flamboyant rood-screen, the choir enclosure that is decorated with large multi-coloured statues, and the monumental 18th century organ make it a true museum of Christian art.

Grottoes and underground sites**GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC**

A boat excursion that travels 112 yards underground and 550 yards along a river to admire the world's leading underground site.

Padirac - Lot (46)

After the boat trip, continue the visit on foot to admire huge galleries, including the Salle du grand Dôme (102 yards high). Three lifts provide access to this unique and grandiose natural curiosity.

GROTTE DES MERVEILLES

Geological and prehistoric grotto covered in a multitude of crystalline concretions and decorated with drawings.

Rocamadour - Lot (46)

Discovered in 1920 and listed as an **Historic Monument** in 1925, the Grotte des Merveilles opens on **the Causse de Rocamadour**, a vast limestone plateau eroded by the flow of underground waters. The highlight of the visit is the art from the Upper Palaeolithic period. This geological and prehistoric grotto is covered in a multitude of

crystalline concretions and decorated with drawings (cave paintings) dating from 20,000 years ago: hands, horses, stags, cats.

MAS D'AZIL CAVE

A world-famous cave full of discoveries, which gave its name to the Azilian era
Le Mas d'Azil - Ariège (09)

Accessible via a natural tunnel that is today crossed by a road that runs along **the Arize river**, it was for a long time a place of refuge for animals: rhinoceroses, bears, mammoths and humans (from Magdalenians to Huguenots). There is a sound and light show as well as a reproduction of a Magdalenian dwelling.

PECH MERLE GROTTUE

A rich and varied tour to discover an underground world.

Cabrerets - Lot (46)

Seven chambers provide a complete sample of natural geological formations and a series of prehistoric paintings and engravings covering more than 20,000 years and depicting mammoths, horses, bison, signs, human hands, silhouettes and footprints. An art gallery in a palace of nature.

GOUFFRE D'ESPARROS

One of the most beautiful in the Pyrenees.

Esparros - Hautes-Pyrénées (65)

What is remarkable here is the profusion of aragonite (true rock crystal) concretions. Sound and light visit of huge chambers and galleries decorated with hangings, panels covered with aragonite, gypsum or calcite. This protected and listed site is unique because of the ecological fitting-out and the study and protection of the concretions.

Parks and gardens

PARADISE GARDENS

A garden that deserves its name

Cordes sur Ciel - Tarn (81)

A contemporary garden of oriental inspiration, medieval and poetic, set in the old terraces of the lower town, this plant paradise will awaken all your senses. Its fountains, its green walls, its blends of flowers and vegetables cannot fail to move you. Olfactory trail, active tour, permanent exhibition of seeds from around the world. Listed as a national 'Jardin remarquable'.

JARDINS DES MARTELS

A magnificent landscaped English style flower garden.

Giroussens - Tarn (81)

An English style landscaped flower garden. Covering over 7 acres with more than 2,500 varieties of plants from the 5 continents: many ponds full of wild and exotic water lilies. Exotic greenhouse with datura, banana trees, tree ferns, etc. A shaded trail. A mini farm. Many animals live together in semi-freedom: deer, Senegal goats, angora, Ouessant sheep and Astrakan, ponies and chinese pigs, ornamental hens and ducks. There is also a pond area of 150 m2 with fish and turtles.

MASSEY GARDENS

A remarkable garden in the town centre. A 34.5 acre garden where you can see the world from tree to tree.

Tarbes - Hautes-Pyrénées (65)

American oaks, Antarctic beech, Zelkova elms, European hackberries, magnolia soulangiana, American sassafras tree, Saphora japonica, false acacia, and many other species.

Developed between 1829 and 1852 by Placide Massey (a naturalist from Tarbes), this English-style garden will show you some rare botanic species. You can enjoy the setting, the streams and colourful flower beds as you stroll around. And if one early morning you see a squirrel, don't be surprised. There are many of them here in the gardens. You will love this oasis of green with its variety of plant types, and for its pure beauty.

Picturesque towns and villages**BELCASTEL- Aveyron (12)**

Belcastel, a little jewel on the banks of the Aveyron.

The pretty little village of Belcastel is listed as one of the most beautiful in **France**. Located in the **Aveyron**, 25 Km east of Rodez, it is set in amongst wooded slopes where there is nothing to disturb either its peace or its architectural beauty.

SAUVETERRE-DE-ROUERGUE - Aveyron (12)

Sauveterre-de-Rouergue, a charming bastide full of energy

A royal 13th century bastide, Sauveterre-de-Rouergue is listed among the most beautiful villages in France. Located just 30 Km southwest of **Rodez**, it attracts visitors seeking beauty and authenticity.

CAHORS - Lot (46)

Cahors, stone, water and wine

In the majestic Lot valley, Cahors, city of art and history, exists for your enjoyment and discovery. From the Valentré bridge to the Saint-Etienne cathedral, via the market place and the boulevard terraces, the Lot's first city combines southern atmosphere, historical riches and gourmand pleasures.

LOURDES - Hautes-Pyrénées (65)

Lourdes, a town with a universal message

A small town with 15,000 inhabitants at the foot of the Pyrenees: this is how Lourdes appears, one of the world's great spiritual places. Each year some 6 million visitors come to the Marian City (there were 8 million in 2008 for the 150th anniversary of the Apparitions). Experience the unique climate here, an air of spirituality, peace and fraternity.

LAUTREC - Tarn (81)

Lautrec, the land of pink garlic

29 Km south of Albi, in the department of the Tarn, Lautrec is a charming village listed as one of the most beautiful in France. It is well known for its pink garlic, remarkable both for its colour and its taste.

TOULOUSE - Haute-Garonne (31)

Toulouse, «with pleasure»!

There are cities whose charm just bewitches you. Toulouse is one of them. The pink city of the Haut-Garonne seduces, attracts and holds. Capital of the Midi-Pyrenees region, it is with 437,000 inhabitants the 4th largest town in France. Young, modern, active, this metropolis of European scale vibrates with a Latin warmth that inspires its temperament and its architecture. It's your turn, vibrate with Toulouse!.



INFORMATION

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