

ENVIRONMENT

Two miles to the west of **Vaour** on the road D 168 to **Belaygues**, you find our romantic farmhouse “**Les Pouarels**”.

The region has something for everybody, whether you're looking for adventure, sport, nature, culture, or good food and drink. The forest of **Gresigne** is a huge natural oak forest and is home to deer, wild-boar, and several species of rare birds. As the forest ranges over a series of small hills, it is possible to take one of the many marked trails - on mountain-bike or foot - and encounter several breathtaking views in a couple of hours.

Around the forest, heading towards **Gaillac**, are the rolling picture-book hills of the north-Tarn, patterned with the vines that produce the excellent local wine. **The Gaillac label** and distinctive shaped bottle is still relatively unknown outside France, so you can discover for yourself the superb robust fruity reds, crisp white and perlés, at any of the little “Châteaux” and “Mas” along the road.

Many of the local villages are “bastide” towns; hill-top fortified medieval villages, and are built of the beautiful sandstone found in the region. Each one has its own character, its own points of interest and history, and its own bistros and restaurants to seek out and savour.

The cuisine here is one of the hearty honest traditional kind based on the rich local game and agriculture. You absolutely must try Civet de Sanglier - wild-boar stew - at least once.

St. Antonin, whose Sunday market is probably the most popular and picturesque, lies beneath the spectacular Gorges d'Averyron. From here you can hire canoes and paddle along to **Penne** where a van will come to pick you up at the beach. You may decide to simply drive to the beach and lie on it all day - in which case there are plenty to choose from, with swimming and fishing too.

The most famous attraction in the area is **Cordes sur Ciel** a superbly preserved bastide town, looking like something out of a fairy-tale and worth a day's exploration. This 14th Century town of Cathar origin crowns a hill and is surrounded by a three-storey rampart, the most beautiful example of Gothic architecture in Southern France, yet it would look just as much at home in a Tuscan landscape. A secret magical city entirely preserved to this day. Here you will find all the necessary amenities, banks, supermarkets, chemist, post office and an excellent weekly market on Saturdays. As one of the 'plus beaux villages de France', besides local bars, restaurants and excellent bakeries it has a thriving leather and arts industry, many art galleries and brocante shops. It also has the celebrated restaurant at the Grand Ecuyer Hotel and lots more to discover.

Of course, you may wish to experience city life in France. **Albi**, the dreamy, pink-bricked capital of the Département is a city of history and culture. It sits proudly on the banks of the Tarn. Two of its internationally renowned monuments, Toulouse Lautrec and the imposing Ste Cécile Cathedral, a southern French Gothic masterpiece, have shaped Albi's image. The Toulouse Lautrec museum (he was born here) houses the best and largest collection of his works (over 1000). At the heart of the town, the late medieval Ste Cécile Cathedral dominates the surrounding architecture. Built entirely in brick, it offers a surprising contrast between an austere militaristic exterior and a lush interior decoration. Albi is also a city of tradition and has taken pains to preserve and restore its historic quarters, returning Albi's streets to their long ago charm. It also has a completely new central promenade with a band stand, water features and beautiful sculptures surrounded by sidewalk cafés and restaurants close to all the shops, boutiques and major banks. Albi is 'a must see'.

If you tire of the pastoral delights the perfect antidote is a trip to **Toulouse** less than an hour's drive away. Built almost entirely of red brick the city has a unique beauty. It is a university city second only to Paris and offers a wide variety of cuisine from gastronomique French, to North African and the Far East. There are two superb cathedrals, many art galleries and museums, elegant shops and a vibrant street life with cafes offering great places to sit and watch the world go by.

At the end, for those who have not visited this corner of France before, we feel it is one of the most beautiful and unspoiled areas to be discovered. The region has something for everybody. The climate allows for a long season of outdoor activities and is second only to the warmth and the charm of the local people.

RESTAURANTS

- *** **GRAND ÉCUYER**, Cordes-sur-Ciel, Tel.: 05 63 53 79 50
- *** **MOULIN DE LA MOTHE**, Rue de la Mothe, Albi Tel.: 05 63 60 38 15
- *** **LES GORGES DE L'AVEYRON**, Montricoux Tel.: 05 63 24 50 50
- *** **OUSTALL DEL BARRY**, Najac Tel.: 05 65 29 74 32
- ** **FALAISE**, Rte. de Cordes, Cahuzac – sur – Vère Tel.: 05 63 33 96 31
- ** **LES SARMENTS**, 27 Rue Cabrol, Gaillac Tel.: 05 63 57 62 61
- ** **TAVERNE**, Castelnau-de-Lévis Tel.: 05 63 60 90 16
- ** **HOSTELLERIE LES JARDINS DES THERMES**, Féneyrols Tel.: 05 63 30 65 49
- ** **JARDIN DES QUATRE SAISONS**, 19 Boulevard Strasbourg, Albi Tel.: 05 63 0 77 76
- ** **VIGUIÈRE D'ALBY**, 7 Route Toulouse – Lautrec, Albi Tel.: 05 63 54 76 44
- * **RESTAURANT LA TERRASSE**, Le Bourg, Penne Tel.: 05 63 56 35 03