

MORE TRAVEL 12-day tour from Provence to Burgundy

Day 4 :

Today we leave Provence by crossing the Rhône river and entering the Ardèche department (France is divided in administrative regions, divided in departments-like States and Counties in the US). For French people, Ardèche means nature at its wildest, the place where the hippies would go to raise goats back in the 1970s. There are still goats today, no more hippies, but people who enjoyed tranquility and nature.

On our way to the gorges of the Ardèche River, a mini Grand Canyon, we will pass through several villages:

-Pont Saint Esprit is where the Bouvier family is from. Do you know Michel Bouvier? He was the great-great-grand-father of one of your first ladies (can you guess which one?) and the cabinetmaker of Pont Saint Esprit....

For some people, this pretty town on the Rhône river may have another American connection.... linked to an old conspiracy theory... but I let you read about it!

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1951_Pont-Saint-Esprit_mass_poisoning



Next comes Aiguèze one of “*Les plus beaux villages de France*” / One of “the most beautiful villages of France”. There is an independent association which aim is to promote small and picturesque villages of quality heritage. The village must not have more than 2,000 inhabitants and have at least two protected areas.

Aiguèze, at the end of the Gorges, is one of the 158 villages bearing this label. More travel to plan ahead!



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But our destination today in Ardèche are the Gorges. The 20-mile long road along abrupt cliffs was not built until 1969, and then, the hippies came ;-).



To make it brief:

--110 million years ago, southeastern France was a sea, with time creating a limestone floor.

--Six million years ago, continents moved, the sea went away, the Pyrenees and Alps mountains pushed towards each other, and boom the Gorges were created with the power of river erosion giving birth to one of the biggest canyons in France, a pretty cool natural arch and dozens of caves to explore.

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Mot du jour: “la Châtaigne” (chestnut). Ardèche is the biggest producer of chestnuts in France (half the French production with 5,000 tons/year). That’s a lot of chestnuts; what do we do with them? Chestnut cream (better for the environment than Nutella’s palm oil inducing deforestation...), chestnut liquor (to make “Kir”: the most typical French aperitif drink is usually made with 1 volume of black currant liquor and four volumes of dry white wine- here in Ardèche they replace the black currant with chestnut), chestnut soup, bread, etc... but we also roast them and eat them as a snack in winter to warm up. All over Paris in December, you will see “*les vendeurs de marrons*”, chestnut sellers (“*marron*” is the fruit of another tree that is

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not edible... but roasted chestnuts are called "*marrons*" just to make non-French speakers confused).

Favorite memory: roasting chestnuts in the fireplace at my grandmother's when I was a kid. Every farm had one of these special chestnut-roasting pans. They would make a special pop (kind of like the sound of a champagne cork) when they were ready...

Any "châtaigne" recipe to share?

