

## C054-LU Marvels of the Causses



The Causses are not the vast, monotonous expanses that one might image. They offer fantastic landscapes which you will discover when, from the heights of the coastal roads, you look out over the Tarn or the Jonte Rivers. At the heart they conceal grandiose, fairy-tale settings sculpted by the passage of the waters throughout time. Such sites are l'Aven Armand and La Grotte Rose de Dargilan. After having crossed the Causse Méjean or the Causse du Milieu, the hike will bring you to the Causse Noir, once covered by pine forests which gave it a dark, somber coloring that resulted in its name.



Highlights : Chaos of Montpellier le Vieux, Capluc spur , Sèvres and China vase rocks, the Gorges of Tarn, La Malène, Abyss of Aven Armand, Gorges of la Jonte, Bramabiau abyss , pink cave of Dargilan

### Itinerary

J1 : Arrival at PEYRELEAU – LE ROZIER, two small villages, unable to be disassociated from each other, lying at the junction of the Gorges du Tarn and those of Jonte, and surrounded on all sides by the cliffs of the Causse of Sauveterre, the Causse Noir and the Causse Méjean.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel with swimming pool (rec. GM, GR)\*

J2 : MONTPELLIER LE VIEUX – PEYRELEAU (15 km). Taxi escort to the site of Montpellier le Vieux. The chaos of Montpellier le Vieux is a fantastic city of strange form, with the grey-stone of the Causse Noir sculpted by water and wind. This strange universe, accessible only on foot, is home to a delicate vegetation whose scent changes according to the time of day and the season. You will return to Peyreleau on foot, crossing the Causse Noir. You might choose to make a quick detour by the hamlet of La Rougerie to see some examples of structures made from *lauzes*, a material specific to this region, and the Romanesque church of Saint Jean de Balmes. This 11<sup>th</sup>- to 12<sup>th</sup>-century church consists of a square-shaped bell-tower, and a 15<sup>th</sup>-century chapel.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in the same 3-star hotel

J3 : PEYRELEAU – PEYRELEAU (15 km – ascent : 500 meters at the beginning of the stage). You will climb on the Rocher de Capluc (rock formation) which overlooks Peyreleau. The most daring among you will climb to the summit by way of metal staircases and will be rewarded with breathtaking panoramas of the surrounding area! From Pas du Loup (Wolf's Step) you will follow the path which towers above the Gorges de la Jonte, where erosion has sculpted the rock to form the Vases de Sèvres and de Chine (Sèvres and China Vases) and provides us with awe-inspiring views, such as those from Le Balcon du Vertige (Vertigo's Balcony). Along narrow paths, you will take off on the discovery of the Causse Méjean, covered by woods and pastures, and you will arrive again in Peyreleau by way of Pas du Loup and the Rocher de Capluc. A taxi will then bring you to La Malène at the end of the day.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star manor-hotel (rec. GM, GR)\*

J4 : Circular walk around LA MALENE. We suggest you take a boat ride in the morning hours down the Straight of the Tarn (not included in the tour charges). This is one of the narrowest and most beautiful parts of the Gorges. The cliffs dominate the water, rising up several hundred meters, and then, after a few kilometers, open up to form the magnificent Cirque des Baumes. At the end of the morning you will return to La Malène and prepare yourself for an afternoon climb along the Causse Méjean. From this Causse you will admire the Détroits (straights) du Roc des Hourtous and du Roc de Serre and will pass through several lovely hamlets.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in the same 3-star hotel

J5 : AVEN ARMAND – MEYRUEIS (15 km). Taxi escort to the Gouffre de l'Aven Armand (cave) for a change of scenery. Here you will find yourself on the arid Causse, with large stretches of a meager vegetation and herds of grazing sheep. You will descend into the gulf to discover the beauties of the subterranean world. More than 400 stalagmites hang their stone lace pattern several meters high in a vast cave larger than a cathedral. Again outside, you will cross through prairies on a progressive descent towards Meyrueis. There too, yet another astonishment awaits you : the Gorges de la Jonte. The striking landscapes and thrilling views...you won't be able to stop yourself from spinning in wonder.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel with swimming pool (rec. GM, GR)\*

D6 : VEYREAU – MEYRUEIS (18 or 23 km). Taxi escort to Veyreau. You will descend into the Gorges de la Jonte to the river bed by way of the Ravin (ravine) de la Castèle. You will then climb up the length of the cliff and cross the Causse Noir, passing through the hamlets of Pellalergues and Bré, to Dargilan. You may also choose, if you are less daring, to cross the Causse Noir towards the hamlet of Luc and the Pierre des 3 Evêques (Three Bishops' Stone) before arriving at the pink grotto of Dargilan. This grotto is a succession of fairy-tail rooms, each one stranger and more beautiful than the precedent, where water – heavy with iron oxide – gives off colorful mixtures of yellow, ochre, saffron and pink in a wonderful variety of form. You will then return to Meyrueis by the small village of Sérigas.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in the same 2-star hotel

D7 : CAMPRIEU – MEYRUEIS (15 km – ascent : 300 meters). Taxi escort to Camprieu. In this village, you will see La Perte du Bonheur (Happiness Lost). This peaceful little river snakes gracefully across the landscape, disappears suddenly into the earth and then emerges again not far off at l'Abîme de Bramabiau, which we highly recommend visiting. Passing through this large, dark crevasse, you will enter into the belly of the earth and start off on the discovery of this impressive subterranean river. This surprising scene presents immense halls accessible only by narrow, winding passageways, where the tumultuous river swirls, leaps up and crashes against the rocks, forcing its own path through the piles of stone. At each turn you will be amazed. You will then pass through the forest and by the château de Roquedols to return to Meyrueis.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in the same 2-star hotel.

D8 : MEYRUEIS. Escort by taxi to Peyreleau at the end of the morning. End of the tour.

*\* Listed by the famous travel guides Gault Millau (GM) and/or Guide Michelin (GM)*

## Season

From middle of April to middle of October but be careful this area is very crowded in summer time and we recommend you (if you can) to come outside this period. Nevertheless this area attracts a lot of tourists and you have to reserve earlier to get the best rooms.

## Walk difficulty

*Grade 3* : walks of between 5 and 8 hours a day with ascents up to 700 m. Some hiking experience is advisable. A reasonable level of fitness and some stamina are required for these walks. You may cover long distances in remote countryside and the terrain will be rough underfoot. In mountainous areas you will encounter some sustained ascents and descents

## Getting there and away

*By train* : From the Millau train station you will take a taxi to Peyreleau. To return from Meyrueis, a taxi will bring you the Millau station.

*By car* : The A75 motorway (Paris - Montpellier by way of Saint Etienne) will bring you to Millau. You will then follow route D907 to Peyreleau.

*Where to park* : Free, unguarded parking in Peyreleau. Return from Meyrueis to Peyreleau by taxi.

## What's included?

- 7 nights accommodation in selected 2 and 3-star hotels
- 7 breakfasts – 7 gourmet dinners
- hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- Taxi transfers : Peyreleau- Montpellier le Vieux, Peyreleau- La Malène, La Malène-L'Aven Armand, Meyrueis-Veyreau, Meyrueis-Camprieu, Meyrueis-Peyreleau
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) with the route marked on and detailed route notes describing the trail.
- A daily itinerary together with information about facilities and places of interest along the trail.
- Emergency assistance.

*Visa fees - transportation fees to and from the walk area - Insurance (strongly recommended on all trips) - Transfers except those mentioned above – Drinks - Additional meals - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls,...are not included*