

# C207-CO Gorges of Verdon

Highlights: Moustiers Ste Marie, Martel trail, Bastidon trail, Rougon, Castellane, St André des Alpes



The Verdon River, a tributary of the Durance River, winds itself through the magnificent gorges that it has carved out in the chalk plateaus of the Haute Provence. The most famous and most sumptuous of these stretches across more than 20 kilometers of land, from Castellane to the Sainte Croix Lake. This trip presents you with the opportunity to discover these gorges and the entirety of the large canyon, admiring its innumerable facets. A fairytale landscape, plunging drop-offs, the eerie sensations of crossing stairs that overhang the vast void... These aspects and others present an unforgettable experience... for strong hikers



## Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival at MOUSTIERS SAINTE MARIE. This lovely little city lies at the opening of a large gap carved into the cliffside by the Rioul River. The city developed around the 5<sup>th</sup> century monastery created by Saint Maxime, Bishop of Riez, and the monks who had come from the Lérins Abbey. Moustiers was at its height in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, known at this period for its pottery. But its fame declined, and in 1874 the last kiln was extinguished...momentarily. Towards the 1930's the activity picked up again and is now the driving force of the local economy. The best way to discover this city is by simply wandering through the narrow streets. The old priory church of Notre Dame was built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and is most distinguished by a three-story Romanesque bell tower. You also won't want to miss the Musée de la Faïence, dedicated to the local pottery, located in a vast medieval crypt built by the monks. For a beautiful view of Moustiers, climb up to the Notre-Dame-de-Beauvoir chapel, perched on a hill above the city - *Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 2 - MOUSTIERS SAINT MARIE – LA PALUD SUR VERDON (20 km – ascent : 700 meters). You will leave Moustiers, though keeping in mind an unforgettable image, by the Chapelle Saint Anne. You will follow an ancient Roman route to the hamlet of Venasclé and find yourself in a wild, desert-like space. Though dominated by stone and rock, the landscape lacks nothing in beauty. You will pass along the Font Roult Ravine before crossing the National Forest of Montdenier and through the Ane Pass. This pass will bring you to the Sainte Croix Lake and the last of the gorges. You will make your way along the crest, marveled by the expansive landscape and will then take off across the plateau towards the gorges of Vénarelle and the ravine of Le Coteau d'Acle. You will reach the La Croix de Chateauneuf Pass and then arrive in La Palud - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*



Day 3 - Circuit around LA PALUD SUR VERDON (16 km – 6 hour walk). You will leave the village, following the Mainmorte Ravine and Bastidontrail, which runs through the gorges along the cliffs. All the while you will enjoy breathtaking views. You will pass through the ruins of Cabrielle, and then, from the parking lot, you will come to the Mainreste Belvedere and, leaving the gorges, climb out of the ravine to Grinhan. You will welcome the shade and cool air of the forest that covers the north slope of Barbin. You will cross to the opposite slope to arrive at La Palud - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in the same hotel*

Day 4 - LA PALUD SUR VERDON – ROUGON (23 km – 8 hour walk). This is the most beautiful and most inspirational phase of the hike. You will leave La Palud and follow Route D23 to Chalet de la Maline. The length of the route will present you with fantastic views of the gorges and belvederes that stretch along the road. At Chalet de la Maline you will take up the famous Martel trail, which will leave you with unforgettable memories of the vast canyon. Be careful, as several precarious passages line this stretch – stairs, narrow passageways, tunnels. Those subject to vertigo might want to consider another route. Marvel after marvel, you will follow this path to its end at Point Sublime, very near Rougon - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a two-star hotel*



Day 5 - ROUGON – CASTELLANE (22 km – ascent : 400 meters). You will leave the village and skirt around La Barre de Catalan and Les Règles, which overlook the gorges, and pass through arid zones before arriving at a pleasant forest. The forest will lead you to the hamlet of Chastreuil. You will follow the path around rocky ridges to Saint Jean chapel and, by way of the Brandis Ravine, arrive at the small village of Villers-Brandis. This once-abandoned village has found rebirth in recent movements bringing city people back to country life. You will then descend slowly towards the small provincial city of Castellane, built on a magnificent site overlooking Le Roc, an immense chalk cliff - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 6 - SAINT ANDRE LES ALPES – CASTELLANE (21 km – ascent : 400 meters). Escort by taxi to Saint André. From Saint André you will climb slowly to the old village of Courchon to look out over the lake of Castillon, which has swallowed up a large part of the valley. You will arrive in the hamlet of Blaron, where, from a promontory, you will have a splendid view of the lake and the village of Saint Julien du Verdon, which once sat high above the waters but now finds itself on the lake's shores! You will arrive next at the village of La Baume and the La Baume Pass and will cross the Cheiron Ravine to descend finally towards Castellane - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in the same hotel*

Day 7 - CASTELLANE. Tour ends after breakfast. Be sure to spend time visiting the old quarters of Castellane, the narrow and winding roads that hide remarkable sites, such as the Romanesque church of Saint Victor and the Tour de l'Horlodge, one of the doors into the old city center. Climbing to the Notre-Dame-du-Roc chapel, you will have a magnificent view of the city.

## Season

From mid-April to mid-October. 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.

## What's included?

- 6 nights' accommodation in 2 or 3-star hotels
- 6 breakfasts – 5 gourmet dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- Taxi transfer : Castellane-St André
- 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 – Entrance fees - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls,...are not included*

## Walk difficulty

Grade 4 – 6 to 9 hours walking a day with long ascents and descents more than 1000 m. You walk big mountains on rough and stony paths. On occasion route-finding may be tricky and request some experience. Hill walking experience and a reasonably high standard of fitness and stamina are essential for enjoyment of a grade 4 hike

## Getting there and away

*By plane:* Nice International Airport, train and taxi to reach Moustiers

*By train:* No rail station at Moustiers. You have to join Dignes and take a bus to reach the village. Or, from Nice, train des Pignes to St André des Alpes (4 Links a day) and taxi to Moustiers

*By car:* From the A51 motorway (Marseille-Dignes) – exit « Manosque » and join Gréoux les Bains. Continue along D952 road to Moustiers Ste Marie

*Where to park :* Several carparks in Moustiers. Back from St André des Alpes to Moustiers by taxi.