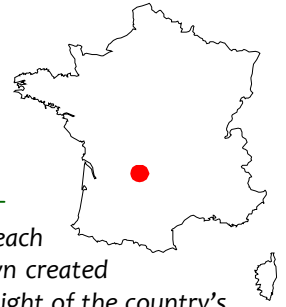


C266-ST The Saint James'way

From Conques to Cahors via Rocamadour



From Conques, you will reach Figeac via Decazeville, a town created in the 19th century at the height of the country's industrial coal mining revolution. From Figeac, pilgrims heading to Santiago de Compostela had several routes to choose from. Crossing the Causse de Limogne, a limestone plateau, was the quickest route but also the most dangerous because the forest provided the perfect cover for ambushes. Or they could climb to the top of the Célé valley, or even go via Rocamadour, the sanctuary dedicated to the Black Madonna that has been welcoming visitors since the early Middle Ages.

You will cross richly contrasted landscapes, from the many wild, closed-in, wooded valleys to the plateaux, where large numbers of animals graze. Past Lacapelle-Murat you will discover the landscapes of the Causse,

pastures hemmed by low dry-stone walls and copses of stunted oak trees, before reaching the Lot valley, which you will walk along to Cahors. Before reaching this point, you will have plunged into the verdant, damp Alzou canyon, been astonished by Rocamadour, a real eagle's nest hanging from the rock face that is so perfectly summed up by these few words, "Houses on the river, churches on the houses, rocks on the churches and the château on the cliff"! You will climb once again onto the plateau to reach Labastide-Murat then Vers. You will walk along the riverbanks of the Lot, as it meanders towards Cahors, an old town with a rich past.

The walk

Day 1 – Arrive in CONQUES, one of the jewels of Romanesque art set against a verdant backdrop. The Abbey Church houses more than 250 sculpted capitals and boasts, on the west side, a magnificent tympanum representing the Last Judgement. The Romanesque cloister's remains are laid out around a fantastic serpentine basin. The Trésor de Conques (Conque Treasury) comprises priceless gold pieces including the St. Foy 'Majesty', a 10th century gold statue encrusted with jewels donated by pilgrims. The medieval village still has its old streets lined with timber-framed houses, Romanesque fountains, the town gates and some remains of the ramparts.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.

Day 2 – from CONQUES to LIVINHAC LE HAUT (24km – 6hrs 30 walking). After a final stroll around the village and one last look at the abbey's tympanum, it is time to hit the road again. You will walk down the rue Charlemagne, passing under the Barry gate and cross the 'romain' bridge over the Dourdou (dating from the 14th century, 'romain' was a distortion of 'roumieu', meaning pilgrim!). You will climb up to the St Roch chapel, once a place of pilgrimage, then cross the Noailhac plateau, past the chapel, and Laubarède before reaching Decazeville, a town founded in the 19th century and named in memory of the Duke of Decazes, who spearheaded the mining industry in this basin. You will leave the town quickly and climb up onto the hills before going back down into the Lot valley and arriving in Livinhac le Haut, nestled in a river loop. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a guesthouse.



Day 3 – from LIVINHAC LE HAUT to FIGEAC (25.5km – 7hrs walking). You will depart towards Montredon, built on a hillock dominated by the St. Michel church, then reach Guirande and the Romanesque St. Marie chapel. The route makes several detours across the countryside, which is however incredibly beautiful, to avoid the tarmac roads, and passes via La Cypière, St Félix and the Romanesque St. Radegonde church, before reaching St. Jean Mirabel, where the church has a beautiful 13th century tympanum. Finally, you will begin your descent into the Célé valley towards Figeac. The town still has many vestiges of its rich medieval past. Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.

Day 4 – from FIGEAC to LACAPELLE-MARIVAL (21.5km). From Figeac the path takes you to the superb medieval market town of Cardaillac, huddled around its fort and situated on a sheer plateau covered in chestnut trees. After visiting the village and its little museum, you will continue your walk in a landscape of hills and small closed-in valleys, the last foothills of the Massif Central. You will cross the forests where many streams flow, passing close to the village and peak of Saint Bressou that soars to 618m. Then you will spot the imposing château of Lacapelle-Marival, a small old town that also boasts a beautiful covered market and a few houses built in the traditional regional style. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.

Day 5 – from LACAPELLE to GRAMAT (21km). The landscape changes once you leave Lacapelle. You will cross the Limargue, pasture land, also used for arable farming. You will reach the old walled town of Rudelle founded in 1250, which has a magnificent fortified church. Then the path leads you to Thémines, an old village where the only remaining vestige of its rich past is the 13th century covered market. Nothing remains of the castle that stood in the village. You are now on the Causse plateau, covered by scrub vegetation, with a few stunted trees. Low dry-stone walls mark out meagre pastures where Causse sheep, with their recognisable eye markings resembling sunglasses, graze. You will reach Gramat, a little town which dates back several thousand years and is still a market town on the pilgrims' route to Rocamadour. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.

Day 6 – from GRAMAT to ROCAMADOUR (12km). A short, but very beautiful, stage that will leave you time to visit Rocamadour. The path leaves Gramat and runs along the Causse for a few kilometres before going down into the base of the Alzou canyon. In the semi-darkness of the dense, damp undergrowth you will discover the ruins of several mills that once used the river's fast current. The most spectacular is without doubt the Saut mill, built on a rocky bank where the river bed narrows. The sometimes chaotic path jumps from one riverbank to the other, from mill to mill, to arrive at the foot of the village of Rocamadour where the valley widens. The view is striking. The village is a real eagle's nest clinging to the rock face. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.



Day 7 – from ROCAMADOUR to LABASTIDE-MURAT (29km). You will descend again into the Alzou valley, to go up onto the plateau once more via the Berthiol fountain. You will pass the Saint Namphaise lakes, which are in fact ponds cut into giant limestone slabs that hold rainwater and, according to legend, were carved by one of Charlemagne's officers. After finding faith, he retreated onto the Causse plateau. You will begin to cross the Causse. The path zigzags, climbs and descends across prairies and through undergrowth. You will reach the small village of Couzon and walk around the village of Montfaucon before reaching the Boutanes lake and its washhouses. Finally, you will arrive in Labastide-Murat, where General Murat, the future king of Naples, was born. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.

Day 8 – from LABASTIDE-MURAT to VERS (25km). A long descent will take you from the village towards the hollow at Londes, where you will walk along a stream. You will go up again towards the village of Montigny, across pastures and a few vineyards. Then you will walk around the village of Cras before a long section through the undergrowth and along a river. This stage, which is most agreeable on hot days, passes by the foot of the Château de la Gironde. You will continue your walk along the Vers river in a narrow valley that offers beautiful views of the rock faces to reach the village of Vers, near the Lot. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel.



Day 9 – from VERS to CAHORS (21.5km). You will cross the Lot and climb up to the hamlet of Béars, perched on a mound in one of the Lot's meanders. You will walk around the Puech de Béars and, via the forest, reach the banks of the Lot, which you will stay on until Cahors. At Arcambal, you can enjoy the Château du Bousquet, a building that has retained its very military air. On the other bank you can admire the magnificent village of Laroque sur Arcs, reflected in the river's tranquil waters. Finally you will reach Cahors, an ancestral town with a rich past, nestled in a meander of the river Lot. Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel.

Day 10 – CAHORS – end of the tour after breakfast

Season

From mid April to beginning 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.

What's included?

- 9 nights' accommodation in selected 2 or 3-star hotels and guesthouses with breakfasts
- 7 dinners (not dinner at Figeac and Cahors, several restaurants by the hotels)
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) or topoguide 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.
- Phone emergency assistance with English-speaking support (24/24 - 7/7 days)

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

Getting to Conques

By car : From the A20 motorway take D802 road coming from North of France or D653 road from South (Cahors). Continue on D840 to Decazeville and St Cyprien sur Dourdou. Reach Conques through the Dourdou valley. Free unguarded car park in the village of Conques

By train : the nearest train stations are St Christophe Vallon or Rodez. Then taxis to reach Conques. Contact us for taxis reservation.



Back from Cahors

Several trains a day from Cahors to Toulouse or Paris.

Back to Conques : Public taxi from Cahors to Conques. Please contact us for more details.

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.

