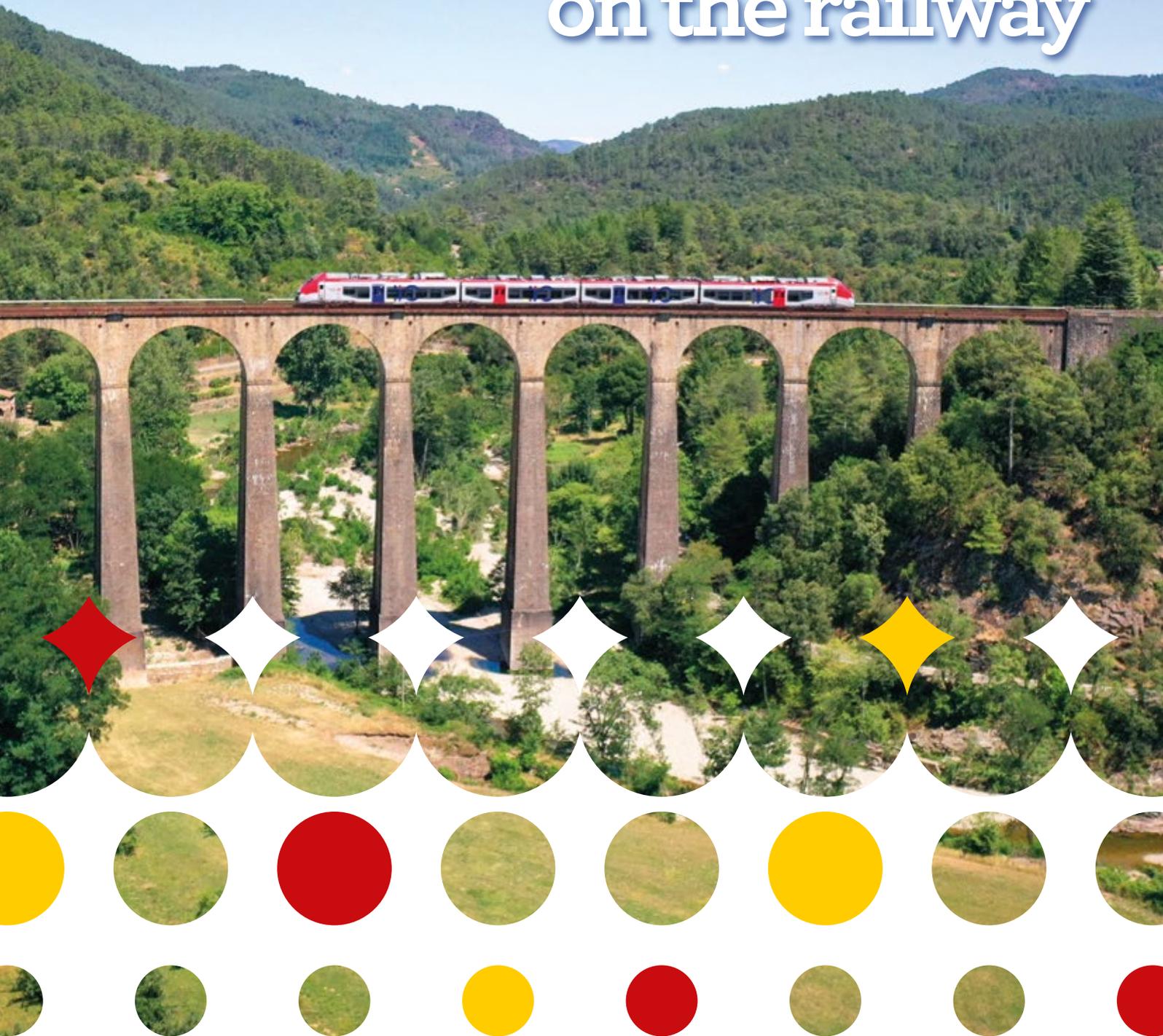


Press pack
Occitanie
on the railway





FRANCE'S SECOND-BIGGEST REGION,

13 'departments' in an area bigger than Ireland



9 SITES INSCRIBED ON UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE LIST:

the Canal du Midi, Gavarnie - Mont Perdu, Way of St James, the Episcopal City of Albi, the Causses and the Cévennes, the Pont du Gard, the Historic Fortified City of Carcassonne, the Fortifications of Vauban (Villefranche-de-Conflent and Mont-Louis), La Massane Forest



2 NATIONAL PARKS



1 MARINE NATURE PARK



8 REGIONAL NATURE PARKS



44 WINTER SPORTS RESORTS



41 TOP OCCITANIE SITES

Agde-Pézenas, Aigues-Mortes - Camargue Gardoise - Saint Gilles, Albi - Vallée du Tarn, Ariège médiévale : Foix - Mirepoix - Montsegur, Ariège préhistorique : Niaux - Tarascon - Mas d'Azil, Armagnac - Abbaye et Cités, Auch, Aux sources du Canal du Midi (Sorèze, Revel, Saint Ferréol), Bastides et Gorges de l'Aveyron (Villefranche de Rouergue, Najac, St Antonin, Caylus, Villeneuve d'Aveyron), Canal du Midi - Béziers, Carcassonne et les Citadelles du vertige, Cévennes, Cirque de Gavarnie - Cauterêts - Pont d'Espagne, Cirque de Navacelles - Lodève, Collioure en Côte Vermeille, Conques, Cordes et cités médiévales, Gorges de l'Hérault - Gorges du Tarn, Gorges de la Jonte - Causses & Vallées Cévenoles, Grand Figeac, vallée du Lot et du Célé, La Grande-Motte, Le Grand Montauban, Lourdes, Luchon, Marciac, Massif du Canigò, Massif du Néouvielle-Vallée d'Aure et du Luron, Mende coeur de Lozère, Millau-Roquefort (regroupement de deux candidatures), Moissac, Montpellier, Narbonne Méditerranée, Nîmes - Pont du Gard - Uzès, Perpignan Méditerranée, Pic du Midi, Rocamadour Vallée de la Dordogne, Rodez, Saint-Bertrand de Comminges, Valcabrière, Sète, Toulouse, Vallée du Lot, Cahors, Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, Puy-l'Evêque



28 THERMAL SPA CENTRES



220 KILOMETRES OF MEDITERRANEAN COASTLINE



MORE THAN 50 MARINAS



A TOURIST TRAIN IN OCCITANIE

The Occitanie Rail Tour details eco-friendly journeys by train (or regional buses) so you can explore Occitanie on all or some of the routes described below. They are your ticket to Fabulous Voyages on your travels with stops at the stations and towns along the way.

The Occitanie Tourist Board website provides an interactive map to help travellers design their own journey. It includes the top 10 things to do within 40 minutes of the station stops, a selection of 3-5* accommodation nearby, contact details for Tourist Information and stations plus a direct link to the SNCF - TER Occitanie website to book train tickets. This year there will be a full range of tourist services including accommodation, activities and tours alongside a discounted rate for using the regional train and bus network (see insert). There will be twenty identified routes so visitors can explore most of Occitanie's Grand Sites with the fifty-odd station stops taking them there.

www.visit-occitanie.com/en/discovering/wonderful-journeys/occitanie-rail-tour-the-fabulous-voyage-by-train

THE OCCITANIE RAIL TOUR, A TOURIST TRAIN IN OCCITANIE..... 6

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4th France's fourth biggest tourist region

 with **15.9 BILLION** euros visitor spending

 and **125 000** paid tourism jobs

 or **10%** of regional GDP

 **1st region for French tourists**

 **3rd region for overseas tourists**

30 MILLION visitors every year



1st The highest accommodation capacity in France

 with **3.3 MILLION** beds

 nearly **26.3 MILLION** nights at open-air accommodation sites (highest rank in France)

 **16.3 MILLION** hotel nights (4th highest in France)

 **1st France's most popular thermal spa destination**

 drawing **188,000** spa users

 around **1/3** of the national spa market

The Occitanie Rail Tour, a tourist train in Occitanie



1€ TRAIN TICKETS FOR EVERYONE ON THE 1ST WEEKEND OF EVERY MONTH!

The Occitanie Rail Tour isn't just eco-friendly as it reduces its users' carbon footprint; it's people-friendly and budget-friendly too. It provides discounted rates for young travellers (18-26 years old) and enables train users to switch down a gear and make the most of the experiences along the way. The regional council has implemented a fixed rate for the end of 2022 to encourage people to travel by train: 1€ tickets for any journey in Occitanie on the first weekend of the month. (except in July and August)

TRAIN & BIKE, THE WINNING COMBO



You can take your bike on board some carriages on regional trains in Occitanie (at no extra charge). The main greenways and bike paths near stations and stops are detailed in this press pack so you can linger a little longer, switch down a gear and soak up your eco-friendly Fabulous Voyages.

THE OCCITANIE GRAND TOUR

TOULOUSE - BRIVE DORDOGNE AND LOT VALLEY LINE

After gazing at the old town landmarks (Saint-Sernin Basilica, Dôme de la Grave etc.) or exploring the museums (Fondation Bemberg, Les Abattoirs Museum) in **Toulouse**, head to the Halle de La Machine (Machine Hall), Envol des Pionniers (Flight of Pioneers), Cité de l'Espace or Aéroscopia to experience the European capital of aviation and space. www.toulouse-tourisme.com

SEE THE WORLD THROUGH ROSE-COLOURED GLASSES IN TOULOUSE
www.visit-occitanie.com/en/discovering/wonderful-journeys/la-dolce-vita-in-toulouse-the-pink-city/



CAUSSADE: EXPLORE THE HOMETOWN OF HATS
www.visit-occitanie.com/en/activities/visits/traditional-villages-and-towns/caussade-hat-experience/

Roll into **Montauban** by the Tarn to visit the unmissable Ingres - Bourdelle Museum before you take time out on the terrace at the outstanding and recently restored Place Nationale. A short ride brings you

to **Caussade**, famous for its straw boater hats (Maurice Chevalier was a huge fan). If you want to find out more about the town's unique millinery expertise, visit in July during the Estivales du Chapeau hat festival.

www.montauban-tourisme.com

Head to **Lalbenque**. This plays host to the start point for countless treks on the Causse as well as its popular farmer's market every Saturday and famous

truffle market in winter. An institution! **Cahors** is a pretty medieval town tucked into a bend in the Lot River. Its attractions include Pont Valentré Bridge and Saint-Etienne Cathedral, both UNESCO sites as part of the Ways of St James. Keen cyclists can hop on their bikes to ride the Lot Valley véloroute bike path.

www.cahorsvalleedulot.com

Next stop: **Gourdon** for a delicious 100% "duck" break and a stroll around this quiet medieval market town's pretty lanes on the edge of the Périgord region. Your last stop is **Souillac** on the River Dordogne. Gaze at its beautiful Byzantine-style abbey before heading off on more adventures (on foot or canoe) to explore the fabulous Dordogne Valley in the Lot and its unspoilt villages.

www.tourisme-gourdon.com
www.vallee-dordogne.com



A day trip sailing on the River Lot (return journey by bus) takes you to **Saint-Cirq-Lapopie**, one of the valley's gems and undoubtedly one of the "most beautiful villages in France."





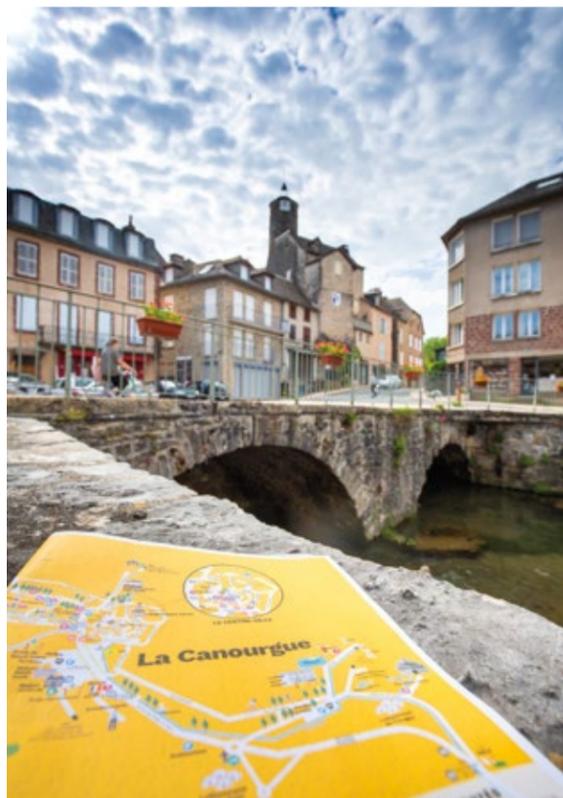
BRIVE VALLEE DE LA DORDOGNE - RODEZ THE LINE OF CAUSSES AND QUERCY

The train from Saint-Denis-près-Martel (regional bus services from Souillac) crosses the Dordogne and its green valley before running through the untamed Causses du Quercy. Your first stop is **Rocamadour** station, the gateway to the world-renowned cliff-top pilgrimage site towering above a canyon.
www.vallee-dordogne.com/rocamadour

Gramat is a relaxing stop where you can soak up all the area has to offer and explore Padirac Cave before visiting the village of **Assier** and its Renaissance castle, a real oddity in the Quercy region. We are now arriving at **FIGEAC** station. Visit the World Writing Museum in Champollion's homeland (decipherer of Egyptian hieroglyphs) and keep your eyes peeled for the medieval buildings that make the old town so magical.

www.gouffre-de-padirac.com
www.chateau-assier.fr/en/
www.tourisme-figeac.com

There are only a few (hundred) steps between Figeac and **Capdenac** so head off on a trip to visit the hilltop Capdenac-le-Haut, one of the most beautiful villages in France, then hop over to **Cran-sac**, the only spa resort in Aveyron: a golden opportunity to "pamper yourself" with a few treatments. It's time to make your way to **Rodez**, famous for its Soulages Museum and fabulous red sandstone cathedral
www.rodez-tourisme.fr



LABASTIDE-SAINT-LAURENT - MARVEJOLS THE LOZÈRE LINE

A regular bus service takes visitors from Rodez to **Séverac-le-Château** where you can drink in the view from the fortress terraces before you catch the train to **Banassac**. Satisfy your sweet tooth at Malakoff chocolate shop before you visit **La Canourgue**, "Lozère's little Venice". **Chanac** is your next magical stop, an unspoiled little village overlooking the Lot.
www.aubrac-gorgesdutarn.com/en

Mende is a peaceful Lozère prefecture and the perfect place for a stroll. Spend time at the brand new Gévaudan Museum before you step into its majestic cathedral or explore its bustling streets. The railway line takes you back up the Lot Valley as the river turns into a stream and stops in **Bagnols-Les-Bains**, another excuse to take the waters and unwind. The railway line's last two stations (**Chasseradès** and **La Bastide-Saint-Laurent**) are stops on the Stevenson Trail. Get your hiking boots out!
www.mende-coeur-lozere.fr/en/



LOZÈRE EXTENSION TO SAINT-CHÉLY D'APCHER

Marvejols takes you on a trip back in time in its pretty town of slate rooftops. Marvejols was once a royal city, former capital of Gévaudan in 1307 and Protestant stronghold in the 16th century. Nowadays you can join Céleste the magician on a fun-filled tour of the town and follow in the footsteps of famous names who have made it what it is (Baludik app available to download for free). The next stop, **Aumont-Aubrac**, is famous among pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela whilst foodies make their own pilgrimage to Chez Camillou, Cyril Attrazic's Michelin-starred restaurant. **Saint-Chély-d'Apcher** is proud to be a stop on the Grande Traversée du Massif Central (the GTMC MTB trail) and the start point for a "Vélo et Fromage" (bike and cheese) route on the GTMC
<https://ot-aumont-aubrac.fr/?lang=en>
www.margeride-en-gevaudan.com/en/home/

CLERMONT-NIMES THE CÉVENNES LINE

Set off from Labastide-Saint-Laurent on an adventure northbound to drink in some of Lozère's best scenery. This railway line leads to **Langogne** where you can soak up the bustling market on Saturday morning (one of the most traditional in Lozère) before heading to Naussac lake shore (an inland sea) for water sports and walks. Langogne is also a popular spot for hikers on the Stevenson Trail.

Head south and make your 1st stop in **Villefort**: a leafy and peaceful place popular with outdoor





sports fans (canoe, SUP, swimming, via ferrata etc.) near one of the area's crown jewels: **La Garde Guérin**, listed as one of the "most beautiful villages in France". Villefort is also a stop on the GR700 (Chemin de Regordane hiking trail) and gateway to the Gorges du Chassezac (canyoning).

The train pulls into **Génolhac** station at the foot of Mont Lozère. It's an ancient town and the perfect base for exploring the Cévennes National Park. With the Cévennes mountains behind you, the train rolls into **Alès**, a multi-faceted town with a vibrant industrial history (mine tour) and major cultural hub (modern art at PAB Museum, archaeology at Le Colombier Museum).
www.visit-occitanie.com/en/discovering/natural-regions/holidays-cevennes/

NÎMES - PERPIGNAN THE MEDITERRANEAN LINE

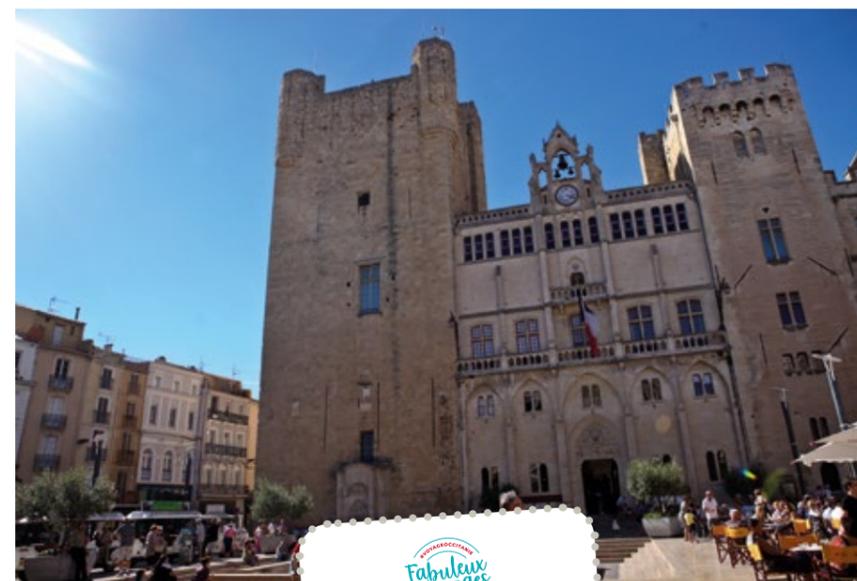
All roads lead to **Nîmes**, "French Rome". Visitors to Nîmes love its incredible Roman heritage (Maison Carrée, arena) and Latin/Spanish vibe. Continue onto Lunel or "medieval Jericho", the roots of Jewish/Christian Europe. Take time out to visit the oppidum ruins and Ambrussum Roman bridge, a major trading post on the Via Domitia.
<https://nimes-tourisme.com/en/>



The mikveh (ritual bath in Judaism), Arc de Triomphe (incredible views of the city), Place de la Comédie (the bustling Languedoc capital's main square) and regional cultural hotspot Fabre Museum in **Montpellier** are well worth a visit. If you don't want your adventure to end, hit the bike path along the Lez: it takes you to the beach and the amazing Maguelone Cathedral, known as "the cathedral of the sands".
www.montpellier-tourisme.fr



Frontignan is your next stop among the sea, vines and wetlands. Sample a glass of Muscat (... from Frontignan) or a zézette (local pastry) before tackling the Gardiole peaks and their breathtaking hikes. You'll love nearby **Sète**, a classic port town popular among artists: Pierre Soulages lived here whilst the port still echoes the soulful songs by Georges Brassens.
www.frontignan-tourisme.com
<https://en.tourisme-sete.com/?origine=switchLangue>




NARBONNE: OUTING ALONG THE CANAL DE LA ROBINE
www.tourisme-occitanie.com/destinations/fabuleux-voyages/narbonne-balade-canal-robine

Port-la-Nouvelle is a fishing port and sea resort; it's also the perfect base for a hike on île Sainte-Lucie, an unspoilt nature reserve surrounded by lagoons and one of the highlights of the Narbonnaise en Méditerranée Regional Nature Park.
www.audetourisme.com/en/au-de-in-brief/corbieres-minervois-narbonnaise/

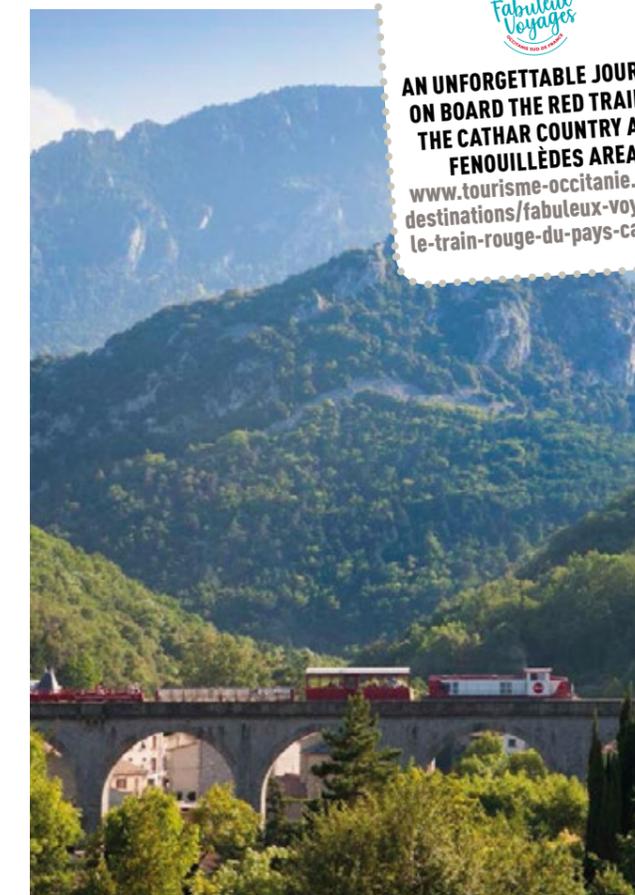
The train runs along the coast through the most untamed landscapes, from wetlands to salt marshes. Your stop in the deliciously retro sea resort of **La Franqui** comes to life in spring with the major Mondial du Vent international windsurfing event. Nature lovers can take a walk on the Leucate cliffs or Coussoules Beach and its miles of untouched sand.
www.audetourisme.com/en/au-de-in-brief/corbieres-minervois-narbonnaise/leucate/



Steam past the coastal lagoons towards the curvaceous Château de **Salses** and its defensive architecture. It was built in the late 15th century on what was once the border between Catalonia and France and has left our two countries a fascinating monument to our shared history.

Renowned for its wine and Muscat, **Rivesaltes** opens the doors of some of its biggest wineries to visitors. One of them is Maison Cazès and its wide variety of biodynamic wine. Rivesaltes also sets the scene for another adventure on board the legendary red train: a trip back in time between Fenouillèdes and Cathar Country.
www.forteresse-salses.fr/en/


AN UNFORGETTABLE JOURNEY ON BOARD THE RED TRAIN IN THE CATHAR COUNTRY AND FENOUILLEDES AREA
www.tourisme-occitanie.com/destinations/fabuleux-voyages/le-train-rouge-du-pays-cathare





Did you know?

The Catalan artist Salvador Dali described Perpignan train station (Pyrénées-Orientales) as the centre of the world. The station's forecourt is actually based on his painting called "La Gare de Perpignan" (Perpignan Train Station).

The last stop of your coastal adventure is **Perpignan**, the capital of the Catalan region. Soak up the city's signature architecture, iconic landmarks (Palace of the Kings of Majorca, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Cathedral), fantastic collections at Rigaud Museum or the buzzing market atmosphere at Halles Vauban. www.perpignantourisme.com

PERPIGNAN - VILLEFRANCHE DE CONFLENT THE CATALAN LINE

A slice of the Wild West awaits in l'**Ille-sur-Têt** whilst **Villefranche - Vernet-les-Bains** is home to Vauban fortifications protected by UNESCO. www.tourism-mediterraneanpyrenees.com/orgues-ille-sur-tet

VILLEFRANCHE DE CONFLENT - LATOUR DE CAROL "CANARY" YELLOW TRAIN LINE

This is the start of the legendary yellow train route (see page). The classic slow train carves its way through the mountains and runs through the highest railway station in France (Bolquère at an altitude 1592m). Stop at **Thuès-Carancà** station for a breathtaking hike in the Gorges de la Carança, in **Fontpédrouse** to take the waters (hot springs) at Saint-Thomas baths, in **Mont-Louis** to explore another UNESCO-listed Vauban citadel or in **Font-Romeu**, a renowned weather and sport resort with dozens of hiking and cycling trails. www.tourism-mediterraneanpyrenees.com/yellow-train



TOULOUSE - LATOUR-DE-CAROL THE PYRENEES LINE

Say a fond farewell to the yellow train in Latour-de-Carol, hop on board a standard locomotive and feast your eyes on the Ariège upper valley as soon as you exit the Puymorens Tunnel. **Ax-les-Thermes** is a welcome break to relax and experience the spa facilities at Bains du Couloubret or tackle the slopes in Ax-Trois-Domaines (skiing in winter or mountain biking in summer). Uncover the valley's industrial heritage on an exciting tour of the Trimouns Luzenac talc quarry (the biggest in the world!) in **Luzenac** or climb up to Château de Lordat towering above the valley. Treat yourself to an e-bike ride up to Beille Plateau in **Les Cabanes** where you can soak up the idyllic countryside and drink in stunning views of the Ariège peaks. Visit the sprawling Lombrives Cave during your stop at **Ussat-les-Bains** station. www.pyrenees-ariegeoises.com www.grottedelombrives.com



Did you know?

The boom of hot springs in the late 19th century Pyrenees is intrinsically linked to the railway's expansion. The Toulouse - Ax-les-Thermes line launched in 1888.

The last major stop before you reach Toulouse, **Foix** is well worth a trip for its medieval castle standing proud on its rocky spur, half-timbered houses and pretty market hall hosting local producers every Tuesday morning. www.foix-tourisme.com



A 54km greenway runs from **Foix** to Saint-Girons: a great way to explore the unspoilt landscapes of the Pyrenean plateau by bike. (see page xx).

WITH TOULOUSE AS YOUR BASE

TOULOUSE - MOISSAC THE 2 SEAS CANAL LINE

Gaze at Montauban and its red brick buildings before you head to **Castelsarrasin** for a bit of nostalgia at the Firmin-Bouisset Centre (do you recognise the vintage Banania or Chocolat Meunier ads?) Like all the stations on this line from Montauban, in Castelsarrasin you can hook up with the greenway along the Garonne Canal to ride through the idyllic Tarn-et-Garonne orchards or hop on a mini-cruise from the canal's main ports. **Moissac** sets the scene for an architectural gem: Saint-Pierre Abbey's chapel and listed capitals (UNESCO site as part of the Ways of St James). All aboard for your next stop: **Valence d'Agen** and its fascinating washhouses, the start point for fantastic hillside hikes in the Garonne Valley or along the canal. www.visit-occitanie.com/en/discovering/major-sites/moissac-lauzerte-auvillar/



Between Montauban and Laguëpie (where you can get back on the train), the Vallée et Gorges de l'Aveyron bike path takes you upstream along quiet little roads so you can feast your eyes on the stunning scenery.





TOULOUSE - AUCH THE GERS LINE

Head due west to Auch, the Gascon capital. Curious travellers will stop at **L'Isle-Jourdain** to visit its unique bell museum, soak up its leisure centre or go cable skiing before making a beeline for **Gimont** and its famous winter-long foie gras and duck market. Once you pull into **Auch**, Sainte-Marie Cathedral is your compass (UNESCO site as part of the Ways of St James) to guide you through the "pousterles" (steep lanes) in the old town, greet the statue of d'Artagnan surrounded by fantastic staircases or explore the Jacobins Museum, home to the biggest collection of Pre-Columbian art in France (after the Quai Branly Museum).
www.auch-tourisme.com

TOULOUSE - LOURDES THE PIEMONTE LINE

The Pyrenean peaks that you can see from Toulouse, are your ticket to adventure. That's lucky! The Toulouse - Lourdes line gets you up close and personal with the mountains. Whilst in **Muret**, don't miss a trip to the museum devoted to the town's own Clément Ader, the airmail pioneer, before visiting **Carbonne** and **Ca-zères** on the River Garonne. Cyclists using these stations can ride the bike path up the Garonne whilst ramblers can hike the river-side Via Garona as far as Saint-Bertrand de Comminges.
<https://tourisme.volvestre.fr/home/>
www.hautegaronnnetourism.com/via-garona/

Craftsmanship rules the roost in **Martres-Tolosane** so feast your eyes on the painstaking work of potters keeping an age-old tradition alive. Take time out to visit Saint-Pierre Collegiate Church in **Saint-Gaudens** then stop in **Montréal** to explore the village of Saint-Bertrand de Comminges (the "Mont Saint-Michel of the Pyrenees") and Château de Valmirande (a "mini Chambord"). Linger a little longer and visit **Luchon**, "the queen of the Pyrenees", a timeless spa resort and start point for fantastic mountain hikes.
www.tourisme-stgaudens.co.uk/

Stop in **Capvern-les-Bains** to unwind at the Edenvik spa centre before you get into Lourdes. Change in **Tarbes** for an in-depth tour of the national stud farm and Massey Museum whose grounds are listed as a "Remarkable Garden".
www.visit-occitanie.com/en/fiche/equipement/l-edenvik-institut-thermologique-capvern_TFOLOIMID065FS0000F/
www.tarbes-tourisme.fr/en/

Soak up the spiritual side of **Lourdes** as you explore the town, the last stop on your journey. From the sanctuary to the château or with an extra bike ride on the Graves greenway, Lourdes is the perfect base for visiting major Hautes-Pyrénées attractions such as Cirque de Gavarnie and Cauterets.
<https://en.lourdes-infotourisme.com/>



TOULOUSE - FIGEAC THE LINE OF BASTIDES AND BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES

This line runs through the magical Tarn and Aveyron landscapes, introducing you to some of the region's most beautiful "bastides" or fortified towns. Your 1st stop is **Rabastens** where you can visit Notre-Dame-du-Bourg Church (UNESCO site as part of the Ways of St James) before continuing your adventure into Occitanie's Tuscany: **Lisle-sur-Tarn** (and its stunning square lined by eateries) and **Gaillac** (and its Maison des Vins for some wine time). Your next stop is **Cordes-sur-Ciel**, one of the "most beautiful villages in France" and the most Instagrammable site in the Tarn.
www.la-toscane-occitane.com

Then head to **Najac** to scale the steep lanes up to the medieval castle before you pull into **Villefranche-de-Rouergue** to soak up the atmosphere of the Thursday morning market outside Notre-Dame Collegiate Church.
<https://en.bastides-gorges-aveyron.fr/>

TOULOUSE - RODEZ THE LINE OF CATHÉDRALES

As soon as you've covered the 1st section shared by the bastide line, you pull into **Albi** station near its UNESCO listed episcopal town. You'll be blown away by the Toulouse Lautrec Museum, celebrating the homegrown artist, and a trip to Sainte-Cécile Cathedral (the biggest religious building in brick in the world!). A trip on a gabarre (traditional flat-bottomed boat) gives you unique views of the old town so you see another side to it from the Tarn riverbanks.
www.albi-tourisme.fr

 Cyclists will adore the Chemin des Droits de l'Homme greenway whose limestone path covers 45km between Albi and Castres.

Once you leave the Tarn Valley, the line starts to climb and cross the Viaur into Aveyron over the breathtaking Viaur Viaduct (see page). Your next stop is **Naucelle** where there's a great hike to Sauveterre-de-Rouergue (one of the "most beautiful villages in France") or you can visit Château du Bosc. The train is already arriving in **Rodez**... (see page 8)
<https://en.chateaudubosc.com/>





IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PIERRE SOULAGES

There's a bus from Rodez to **Conques**, a creative hotspot for the artist Pierre Soulages. Whilst here, visit Sainte-Foy Abbey and feast your eyes on the stained glass windows that the artist created. www.tourisme-conques.fr/en

TOULOUSE - MAZAMET THE TARN LINE

The rolling and unspoilt Tarn countryside east of Toulouse is home to woad fields, a dye plant that brought local traders wealth in the Renaissance (hence the expression "pays de Cocagne" or "blue woad country"). From **Saint-Sulpice-la-pointe** where you can visit an incredible medieval underground shelter, the train takes you via Lavaur and Saint-Alain Cathedral to **Castres**, the "Little Venice of the Tarn" and home to the Goya Museum's collections. The train continues its journey to **Mazamet**, the start point for the passa pais greenway (see page) and countless mountain hikes on the Montagne Noire. Head over the suspension bridge to Hautpoul village to meet its many craftsmen. www.tourisme-castresmazamet.com/en/home/



TOULOUSE - NARBONNE THE CANAL DU MIDI LINE

The railway line between Toulouse and Narbonne has the Canal du Midi in its sights three quarters of the way. That means you can set off from any one of its stations to explore the canal on a bike ride along the towpath or a boat ride from its ports. Take time out in **Castelnaudary**, famous for its cassoulet (with its own annual festival in late August) and "grand bassin" lake. Make a pit-stop in **Carcassonne** to cross the Aude then scale up to the fortified city and its castle (UNESCO sites). <https://en.castelnaudary-tourisme.com/?redirect=FR> www.tourisme-carcassonne.fr/en/



FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN COAST

FROM NÎMES

NÎMES - LE GRAU-DU-ROI THE CAMARGUE LINE

The so-called "beach train" to Le **Grau du Roi** is an easy way to reach the Mediterranean shores and have a foodie break in the sea air. The sea may be a big draw but don't ignore the pearl of the Camargue Gardoise: **Aigues-Mortes**, the fortified town where ships set sail for the Crusades during the reign of King Louis IX. Visit the wall walk, the top of the ramparts and the Salins du Midi salt marshes, home to thousands of flamingos. <https://ot-aiguesmortes.com/en/> www.letsgrau.com/

NÎMES - PONT-SAINT-ESPRIT THE PONT DU GARD AND RHÔNE LINE

The "Rhône right bank" line was closed for almost 50 years before it reopened on August 28th 2022. This line runs along the river or through the Gard's classic Provence landscapes. It connects Nîmes to **Pont-Saint-Espirit**, on the edge of the Ardèche, via **Bagnols-sur-Cèze**, **Laudun-l'Ardoise** (home to Caesar's Camp, a major archaeological site) and **Villeneuve-lès-Avignon**, a lovely surprise in the shadow of the powerful Papal City next door. As you get closer to Nîmes, stop in **Remoulins - Pont du Gard** to shoot (with your camera) the most famous Gallo-Roman aqueduct in France (UNESCO). www.pontdugard.fr/en



Fabuleux Voyages
ACTIVE ADVENTURE IN THE CAMARGUE GARDOISE
www.visit-occitanie.com/en/discovering/wonderful-journeys/a-family-day-exploring-camargue/





Fabuleux Voyages
COLLIOURE, PEARL OF THE CÔTE VERMEILLE
www.visit-occitanie.com/en/discovering/wonderful-journeys/collioure-pearl-of-the-cote-vermeille/

Museum before treating yourself to a well-earned Banyuls wine tasting! All change at **Cerbère**, your last stop! It's a great opportunity for a few more clifftop hikes... you could walk all the way to Peyrefite Beach. Swim with groupers, moray eels and wrasse fish on a signposted underwater trail deep in the Banyuls-Cerbère marine reserve. It's heaven for them, and

probably for you too!
www.tourism-mediterraneanpyrenees.com/

FROM BÉZIERS

BEZIERS-CLERMONT THE AUBRAC LINE

This line heads due north from **Béziers** to the Massif Central foothills. Your first stop is Bédarieux, another start point for the "passa país", the Haut-Languedoc greenway. (See page) then the train begins to climb and run through the Larzac's steppe landscape before it pulls into **Tournemire-Roquefort**. Indulge your senses with a trip to the cellars where the "king of cheese" matures. The railway hooks up with the Tarn Valley and runs under famous viaduct in **Millau**, the capital of trail running, outdoor sports and artisan glovemakers.

www.roquefort-tourisme.fr/en
www.millau-viaduc-tourisme.fr/en



FROM PERPIGNAN

PERPIGNAN-CERBÈRE THE LINE OF THE CÔTE VERMEILLE

The Albères Mountains look impassable as they bar the way south of Perpignan. The train tracks bring you up to the mountains before skirting around them to reach **Cerbère**, the gateway to Spain. In the meantime, stop in **Elne** to visit its stylish Romanesque cloister and **Argelès** to chill on the beach or climb up to Tour de la Massane, a fantastic tower with views of the entire shore. No trip here is complete without visiting **Collioure**, pearl of the Côte Vermeille Soak up the Catalan atmosphere in **Port-Vendres** then hit the coastal path to the heavenly Paulilles Bay. A few coves later and you're in **Banyuls-sur-mer**. Explore the biodiversarium and Maillol



Fabuleux Voyages
AN ACTION-PACKED WEEKEND IN MILLAU
www.visit-occitanie.com/en/discovering/wonderful-journeys/action-packed-weekend-in-millau/

50 shades of train in Occitanie



RAILWAYS PAST AND PRESENT

TOURIST TRAINS

Despite cars becoming all the rage in the 70s, tireless train enthusiasts have kept the industry alive or revived it for tourism on some of Occitanie's best railway lines. Whether it be on the riverside, in the Gard area on the Cévennes steam train, in the legendary yellow train carriages, through the Catalan Pyrenees Regional Nature Park, along the Lot Dordogne Valley's cliffs, on board the Truffadou or tackling the "citadels of vertigo" on the Cathar Country and Fenouillèdes red train, Occitanie's tourist trains give you the chance to feast your eyes on fabulous unspoilt scenery with a deliciously retro journey that people with a love for bygone times will adore.

LATOUR-DE-CAROL - VILLEFRANCHE-DE-CONFLENT (PYRÉNÉES-ORIENTALES) THE "CANARY" YELLOW TRAIN, THE CONFLENT AND CERDAGNE'S PRIDE AND JOY

The yellow train is the symbol of the Catalan country and the highest metre-gauge railway in Europe! The 63km track runs from the Conflent Valley to the Cerdagne Plateau, crossing through 2 UNESCO-listed Vauban sites, pretty villages and some of the most beautiful landscapes in the Ca-

talan Pyrenees Regional Nature Park with incredible engineering structures along the way (such as Pont Gisclard, the last railway suspension bridge in France!).

www.visit-occitanie.com/en/discovering/wonderful-journeys/train-from-toulouse-to-collioure-through-the-pyrenees/

MARTEL (LOT) THE TRUFFADOU, A TIMELESS JOURNEY THROUGH THE DORDOGNE VALLEY HILLS

Hop on board a real steam train on a panoramic 13km (return) journey and feast your eyes on the Dordogne Valley's fabulous Lot scenery. Relive the heyday of the Quercy black truffle trade on the same train that used to transport the marvellous mushroom from Martel, one of the most beautiful villages in France, during the interwar period.

<https://trainduhautquercy.info/?lang=en>





RAIL BIKES AND GREENWAYS: REVIVING RAILWAY LINES

When railway lines are decommissioned, some hold onto their tracks and are turned into rail bike lines whilst others see their tracks removed to make them into greenways...

OCCITANIE RAIL BIKES

The **red train rail bike** brings you a fantastic ride through beautiful pine forests from Axat station (Aude) to Col Campérié on the edge of the Pyrénées-Orientales. Feast your eyes on the Hérault landscapes of vines sculpted by mankind on the **Canal du Midi rail bike** (you can take a ride at twilight) or **Saint-Thibéry pedalo rail**. You'll love the **Larzac rail bike** in the rolling Grands Causses Regional Nature Park teeming with flocks of sheep (this is where they make Roquefort after all). If wide open spaces are your thing then hop on the **rail bike from Cévennes** to Thoiras (Gard). If you like "gain" without the "pain" then the e-bike on the **Armagnac rail bike** in Nogaro (Gers) is just the ticket!

<https://velorailducanauldumidi.fr/en/>
www.surlesrailsdularzac.com/en/home-2/
www.veloraildescevennes.fr/en/home
<https://velorail-armagnac-gers.jimdofree.com/english/>



OCCITANIE GREENWAYS

The tracks on bygone railways are removed to make way for cyclists, hikers and horse riders: fans of the great outdoors will love the greenways thriving in Occitanie. Let's take a look at two of the best railway conversions in the region at the foot of the Pyrenees and in the spectacular Haut-Languedoc region.

ARIÈGE

SOAK UP THE PYRENEES ON THE ARIÈGE PIEDMONT GREENWAY

The tracks between Foix and Prat-Bonrepau have made way for a 54km limestone path with fabulous views of the Pyrenees. Visit Saint-Lizier (one of the most beautiful villages in France), Saint-Girons (famous for its farmer's market) and Rimont and its staggering Cistercian abbey inspired by Mudéjar architecture (a rarity in France) along the way. You can take a regional train (or bus) to get to the start or end of this route.

www.ariegepyrenees.com/en/preparer/faire-du-velo/velo-en-mode-loisir/voies-vertes/



HÉRAULT - TARN

THE PASSA PAÏS, A BRIDGE BETWEEN 2 INCREDIBLE LANDSCAPES

The 76km route between Bédarieux (Hérault) and Mazamet (Tarn) in Haut-Languedoc is called "passa païs" and covers a former railway line that carves through the rock. What sets this greenway apart is its beauty, variety of landscapes and the engineering structures you can see along the way (tunnels, bridges and viaducts). The cherry on the cake is that you can take the train to reach the start and end of this greenway!

<https://en.francevelotourisme.com/cycle-route/passapais>

PERKS OF THE TRAIN

ARCHITECTURE AND ENGINEERING: SHOW-STOPPING STRUCTURES

From the Industrial Revolution to the present day, railway construction and the stations or engineering structures it brought with it (viaducts, bridges) have created built heritage that often doesn't get the attention it deserves.

TARN - AVEYRON

THE VIAUR VIADUCT, A LOFTY LATTICE INSPIRED BY GUSTAVE EIFFEL

The Viaur Viaduct has just celebrated its 120th anniversary (in 2022). The working railway bridge is listed as a Monument Historique and spans the deep Viaur Valley between the Tarn and Aveyron areas. You'll be dazzled by the steel lattice's smooth curves. The 116m high and 460m long structure was designed by Gustave Eiffel's student, an engineer called Paul Bodin. Naucelle Tourist Information runs a guided tour in summer to reveal its secrets whilst a signposted footpath starting in Tanus introduces you to it in all its glory.

www.tourisme-tarn.com/uk/patrimoine-culturel/viaduc-du-viaur/

MONTPELLIER

MODERNISM AT SAINT-ROCH STATION

Montpellier Saint-Roch train station may have been built in 1844 and have a listed neo-classical façade, but it has steamed into the modern age of statement architecture with its 195m long glass and steel structure standing on a slab above six railway lines. The future-forward station is true to a city where avant-garde buildings abound (Higher Roch Tower, the "White Tree" etc.). Montpellier Tourist Information actually provides a tour exploring the city's contemporary architecture.

www.montpellier-france.com/



A TRAIN/BIKE COMBO FROM MONTPELLIER TO TOULOUSE
www.visit-occitanie.com/en/discovering/wonderful-journeys/train-bike-combo-montpellier-to-toulouse-off-the-beaten-track/



UNIQUE!

The 1752m long Saillens tunnel on the Toulouse - La Tour de Carol line is a spiral shape, a rare thing for railway tunnels in France. It takes trains up a 60m elevation in a short segment between Mérens-les-Vals and L'Hospitalet-près-l'Andorre (Ariège).





TRAIN MUSEUMS

Railway workers who love their job and want to share the golden age of train travel with future generations have opened countless museums in Occitanie presenting historical and unusual items, rolling stock connected to trains, railways and model railways. Let's introduce you to some of them...

LANUÉJOULS (AVEYRON)

MODEL RAILWAY MUSEUM

www.cfpa-lanuejoul.fr/index.en.htm

MARTEL (LOT)

STEAM TRAIN MUSEUM

<https://trainduhautquercy.info/museum/?lang=en>

SAINT-LIEUX-LES-LAVAUUR (TARN)

TARN TOURIST RAILWAY MUSEUM

www.cfft.org/engl/

HOTELS, HOLIDAY HOMES AND RESTAURANTS: REAWAKENING BYGONE STATIONS

Occitanie's decommissioned stations have been given a new lease of life and turned into hotels, holiday homes, B&Bs, restaurants, tearooms and art galleries. Here's an overview...

NANT (AVEYRON)

LA GARE AUX ÂNES, AN UNMISSABLE STOP ON THE LARZAC PLATEAU

La Gare aux Ânes hotel and restaurant stands at an altitude of 755m deep in Larzac inside a former station on the Le Vigan - Tournemire - Saint-Affrique line. It's a fantastic base camp for visiting the surrounding Templar towns of La Couvertoirade and Sainte-Eulalie de Cernon or venturing out to the nearby Cirque de Navacelles, a Grand Site de France. If you want to stay put then you can enjoy the hotel's 2.5ha of grounds and pool.

www.lagareauxanes.fr/en/



SOMMIÈRES (GARD)

L'ESTELOU, A 3* BOUTIQUE HOTEL IN A BEAUTIFUL STATION DATING BACK TO 1870

This recently renovated hotel has 23 rooms, a pool and Mediterranean garden. What makes it extra special is its past life as a train station. Sommières station was a major interchange and is impressively big given the size of the town. Just picture a long building with a main structure with three doors, then a main concourse with two wings with three doors which was joined by an extension in 1910. Close your eyes and let your imagination whisk you away... Choo, choo, mind the gap!

www.hotelestelou.com/

LAMALOU-LES-BAINS (HÉRAULT)

LA CHEMIN'HÔTES, A WELCOME BREAK DEEP IN A BUSTLING SPA RESORT

Whether you're here for a treatment or for an overnight stay, you'll get a warm welcome from Edwige and Valéry, your hosts at La Chemin'Hôtes. The holiday home-B&B stands in the former Lamalou-les-Bains station by the Passa Païs greenway. This is your ticket to wellness and adventure among the nearby Caroux Mountain, Orb Valley and Lake Salagou!

www.lacheminhote.com

LACABARÈDE (TARN)

RELAXATION AT THE STATION, TIME OUT TO UNWIND IN THE THORÉ VALLEY

Carine and Johan opened their 4 guest rooms and holiday home in 2007 inside this former train station built in 1888, nestled by the passa païs greenway in the shade of the Tarn forest. There are two rooms in what was once the station's little waiting room and two more are upstairs. As for meals, they're served in the large waiting room between the ticket booths and original luggage closets. Your ticket to adventure...

www.lereposdelagare.com/en/welcome/

MILLAS (PYRÉNÉES-ORIENTALES)

STAY IN A COACH CONFISCATED FROM THE GERMANS AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II.

Millas station's former waiting room and luggage area are now home to cosy guest rooms whilst a Donnerbuchse (or "thunderbox" as the Germans called it because of the rumbling noise it made) has now been turned into a spacious holiday home with a terrace. These passenger coaches were built in the 30s and taken off Germany at the end of World War II as "war reparations".

<https://lagaredemillas.wixsite.com/lagaredemillas>

RISCLE (GERS)

AVENUE DE LA GARE: ESCAPE TO THE COUNTRY ON THE "ORIENT EXPRESS"

Riscle's little station still has its platform and ticket booth. Nadia and Guy have renovated the village station into a unique B&B. The waiting room on the ground floor has been turned into a large reception room covered in tourism posters that bring back memories. Upstairs there are three tastefully-decorated and magical guest rooms inspired by train travel, including the Orient Express room.

www.lagaredugers.com





CONDUCHÉ (LOT)
LES 2 VALLÉES BRASSERIE AND HOSTEL, THE MAGIC OF THE LOT AND CÉLÉ VALLEYS

Conduché's former station has been brought back to life as a restaurant and bar on the ground floor with a 10-bed hostel on the 1st floor. It stands where the Lot and Célé rivers meet with views of the fabulous cliffside foopath to Saint-Cirq Lapopie.
www.facebook.com/Les.Deux.Vallees



MONTGAILHARD (HAUTES-PYRÉNÉES)
BISCUITERIE VÉDÈRE: ALL ABOARD AT TEATIME

Maison Védère is a biscuit maker specialising in sponge fingers that has kept its legacy alive since 1905. The brand has now expanded next to the former Tarbes - Bagnères-de-Bigorre line opposite the village station. The stylish newly-built shop is designed to look like a train station (with its clock and platform). The cherry on the cake is the tearoom behind the railway crossing house in a renovated 1st class carriage on a BB4240 train (built in Tarbes in 1934, one of just 4 left in France!). So, are you ready to tickle your tastebuds on the train?
www.biscuiterievedere.com

ESQUIÈZE-SÈRE (HAUTES-PYRÉNÉES)
LE HANG'ART BRINGS MODERN ART TO THE VILLAGE'S OLD STATION

The little village of Esquièze-Sère (population: just 450) next to Luz Saint-Sauveur has turned the former train hangar for the Pierrefitte-Luz tram into a modern art museum. Le Hang'art displays work from the Regional Occitanie Art Foundation (managed by Les Abattoirs Museum in Toulouse) alongside private collections such as Ramuncho Studio. It has also become a centre for artists in residence.
www.esquizeze-sere.com/vie-culturelle/le-hang-art



Not forgetting:

CARLARET (ARIÈGE):
LA LAMPISTERIE B&B
www.lalampisterie.fr/en/indexen.html

SAUVE (GARD):
LE RESTAURANT DE L'ANCIENNE GARE
<https://restaurantlancienegare.fr>

CRUZY (HÉRAULT):
RESTAURANT LE TERMINUS
<https://restaurantleterminus.com/en/>



CERBÈRE (PYRÉNÉES-ORIENTALES)
HÔTEL DU BELVÉDÈRE: MAKE TRACKS TO THE MAGICAL 30S BETWEEN FRANCE AND SPAIN

Hôtel du Belvédère was closely bound to the railway industry in the Catalan region during the Interwar period. The "liner" building was built near Cerbère station in 1932 and listed as a monument historique in 2002. Its rooms have now been turned into holiday apartments with balconies and sea views. Restaurant, casino, ballroom and performance venue (where the likes of Fernandel, Maurice Chevalier and Mistinguett appeared), rooftop tennis court; Léon Baillet designed it with everything this stationary boat's passengers could wish for!
<https://hotel-belvedere-cerbere.fr>

