

## FRANCE – AUVERGNE & UPPER LOIRE

**GREAT VALUE**

8-days / 7-nights Centre-based at Les Estables GUIDED walks in the Massif Central and Loire headwaters



Based in a small mountain resort deep in rural France, we offer a unique walking holiday concept that is ideal for active people of all ages wanting to explore the magnificent countryside on the French Massif Central. The hotel accommodation has been established specifically for walkers in summer and it is a base for cross-country skiing in winter. Each day from May to September there is usually a choice of guided walk offered: **'tranquille'** for easier walks and **'sportif'** for those wanting more of a challenge. If there is only a small group of walkers, a medium standard of walking is offered. Walks are led by knowledgeable and enthusiastic English speaking guides, and both walking groups meet at lunchtime for a traditional picnic. The walking itinerary changes on alternate weeks, so guests staying for two weeks of walking enjoy different itineraries on each week. There is a minibus for transfers to different walking areas selected by the guides.

There are guided walks each day and a rest day where you can explore on your own, visit the local markets and nearby towns or villages or to just relax at the hotel's heated indoor pool. On each walking day, you can always arrive or depart with the picnic vehicle – as the mood takes you!

Guests are encouraged to make themselves feel at home. The hotels provide typical regional cuisine and dinners are *table d'hote* enjoyed with fellow guests. French wine and drinks are available. Evenings may be spent at a variety of pursuits, from boules to barbecues.

Start Date – Saturdays	Cost per person (twin share)	Single room supplement
4 <sup>th</sup> , 11 <sup>th</sup> May	\$1320	None charged
25 <sup>th</sup> May; 1 <sup>st</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> , 15 <sup>th</sup> , 22 <sup>nd</sup> June	\$1320	\$195
6 <sup>th</sup> July	\$1360	\$230
13 <sup>th</sup> , 20 <sup>th</sup> , 27 <sup>th</sup> July; 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> , 17 <sup>th</sup> August	\$1405	\$290
24 <sup>th</sup> , 31 <sup>st</sup> August	\$1360	\$195
7 <sup>th</sup> , 14 <sup>th</sup> September	\$1320	None charged

**Includes:** 7 nights twin/single accommodation with private bathroom in a comfortable family run hotel, full board (breakfast, picnic lunch and dinner each day), daily guided walks (with a rest day for sightseeing), local transfers for walks, evening activities, arrival and departure transfers from/to Le Puy en Velay train station.

**Not included:** Drinks (available at extra cost), Visitors Tax (€1 per person per day paid locally), Wellness Centre and Spa (available at extra cost), entrance fees for optional sightseeing, gratuities, personal expenses.

**Transfers:** Standard transfers from and back to **Le Puy en Velay train station** are included in the cost. They meet the train arriving at 5.20pm on the arrival day and the train departing at 10:30am on the departure day. Times are subject to change and will be confirmed in your travel documents.

**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**



**Accommodation:** Les Estables is a comfortable modern 3-star hotel with panoramic views of the high plateaux of the Velay. The 20-room hotel offers accommodation specifically designed for walkers and other active pursuits. It lies on one of the highest plateaux in the region, on the slopes of Mount Mézenc. It has an indoor pool, a tennis table room, a billiards table, a lounge with fireplace and free Internet station, a self-service bar, a restaurant with sweeping views, a bowling green, a garden, a terrace and a Wellness Centre & Spa offering a sauna, Jacuzzi, spa treatments, massage and relaxation therapy at extra cost.

The centre is 32km from the historic pilgrimage and lace centre of Le Puy and close to the Gerbier des Joncs, one of the sources of the Loire. The walking takes you to a land of ancient volcanoes and the forested ridges of the Auvergne, with views of the Alps and time for a dip in a mountain lake.

There are guided walks each day or you can walk by yourself if you prefer, or relax at the hotel.

**Walking Grades:** There are usually a choice of two levels of guided walk each day:

'*Tranquille*' walks: @ 10 – 15 kilometres (5 -6 hours walking, with 300 – 500m height difference)

'*Sportif*' walks: @ 14 - 18 kilometres (5 -6 hours walking, with 400 – 700m height difference),

If there are only a small number of people then you will walk as one group, at an intermediate grade of walk.

### **Suggested itinerary and examples of day walks:**

**Day 1: Arrival day.** Meet at 5.20pm at Le Puy en Velay train station, for the standard transfer to your hotel. That evening at 6.30pm, enjoy a welcome drink and meet your walking party and your guides for the week.

#### **Day 2: Les Roches de Borée**

Across the Echamps plain, walk out to the Soutron rock, a sort of suspended world on the summit of a dome-shaped volcano, offering a lovely view of les Boutières. Your host will meet you with a picnic at lunch time.

#### **Day 3: Mont Mézenc and the Cirque des Boutières**

Climb to the highest point of the Ardèche and Haute-Loire départements, the site of intense volcanic activity in the distant past. From the summit, we'll probably see the entire chain of Les Alpes. Your host will meet you with a picnic at lunch time. Once back to the hotel, you can relax in the Wellness Centre & Spa (at extra cost) or visit the village of Les Estables. After dinner, take in a slide-show about the Mézenc massif.

#### **Day 4: Les Moulins du Chapeuil**

We discover the heritage of the area on our walk today: water mills, bread ovens, "béate" houses and the ruins of Chapeuil castle, perched on volcanic columns. We carry our picnic lunch in our rucksacks to have lunch on the summit of the old volcano of Suc de Chapeuil.

#### **Day 5: Free day**

This free day mid-week allows an opportunity to relax, discover the local area or visit the town of Le Puy en Velay. Follow a self-guided walking trail from the hotel, hire an e-bike from the Les Estables tourist office, or visit the local Perrel Brothers' farm museum, Blue Lake Lauzière Park, and the fortress of Polignac. Perhaps take an excursion to the historic town of Le Puy en Velay – its Cathedral is the starting point for pilgrims on the Camino to Santiago de Compostela, and the photogenic Romanesque chapel of Saint-Michel is built on the summit of an old volcanic vent. Your hosts provide a picnic lunch to take with you.

#### **Day 6: Giants' steps of Saint-Clément**

Walk up to Saint-Clément, a hilltop village perched on twelve layers of lava flow, offering a spectacular panorama of the area. Your host will meet you with a picnic at lunch time.

**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**

### Day 7: Gorges of the Loire River

Walk along the wildest part of the Loire, taste the iron-rich waters of the spring of Bonnefond, and soak your feet in the longest river of France. We picnic close to the river and return to the village to buy some cheese or honey in the village or to relax in the heated pool. In the evening enjoy a drink on the terrace before the farewell dinner.

### Day 8: Departure day.

Tour ends after breakfast. Return transfer from the hotel to Le Puy railway station (usually arriving by 10.30am).

The above programme is only an example; your host chooses the circuits on a daily basis, depending on the group and on weather conditions. Guests staying two weeks running will not do the same tours twice. The daily walking schedule is at the discretion of your walks leaders – here are some of the other walking options:

- **Trek in the Massif du Meygal:** explore the village of Bousoulet with its charming church and Rocher de la Tortue at the summit of the Testavoivre;
- **Trek to Saint-Martial lake:** follow the '10 hamlets circuit' in the Boutières;
- **A popular day excursion:** visit an eco-museum farm with its thatched roof at Moudeyres then discover Le Puy-en-Velay, the historical starting point of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage;
- **The Sucs of the Ardèche plateau:** explore Montfol and Tauperna, a stone's throw from Gerbier de Jonc;
- **The Loire gorges:** walking alongside the river: Arlempdes ruined castle, the first chateau of the Loire Valley.

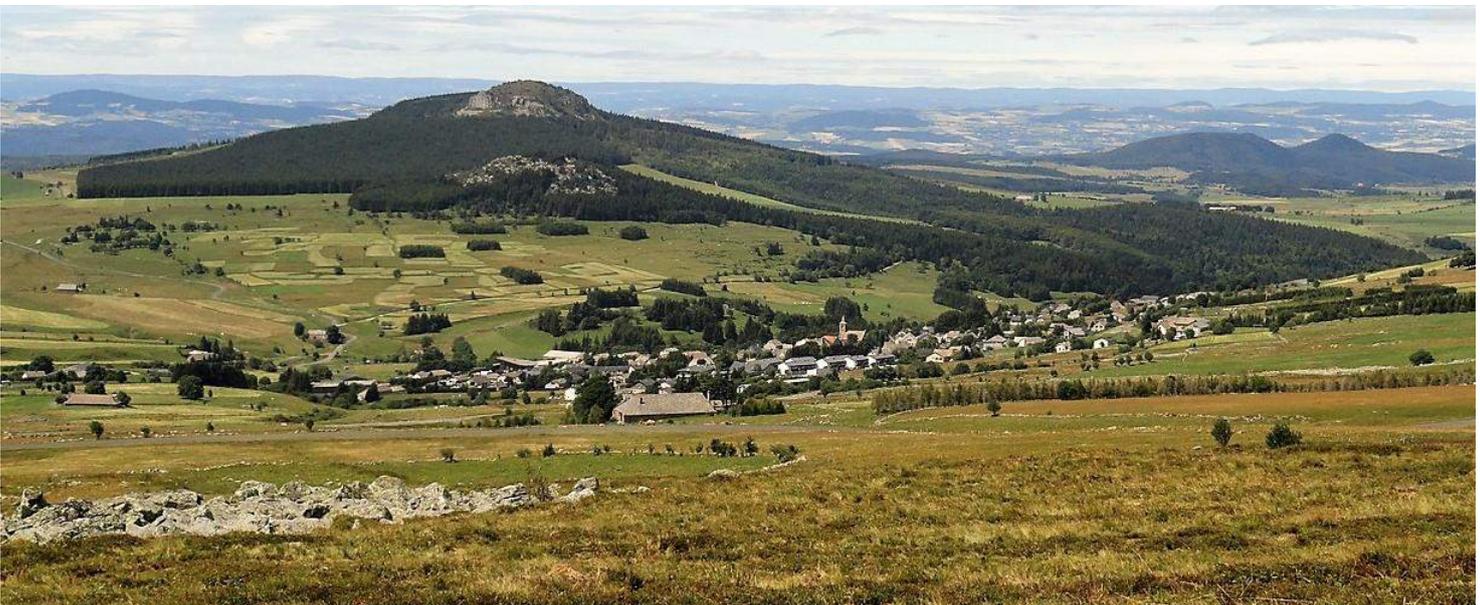


**Outdoor Travel** offer a wide range of self-guided inn-to-inn or guided, centre-based walking holidays in most regions in Europe. Other walks available in France include Provence, Burgundy, the Alps, Riviera Coast, Canal du Midi, the Pyrenees, in the Dordogne and following in the footsteps of R.L. Stevenson in the Cevennes.

In France, Spain & Portugal we offer the **Camino de Santiago** pilgrimage route and in Italy the **Via Francigena** – the pilgrim's *Road to Rome*, **Tuscany**, **Umbria**, **Lake Como**, the **Alps** or **Dolomites**, the **Amalfi Coast** or the **Cinque Terre** coast. Ask about walks in Croatia, Austria, the Alps or Bernese Oberland in Switzerland, in Bavaria, Germany or in England where the **Coast-to-Coast** walk is challenging and always popular.

**Contact Outdoor Travel for details on our extensive range of walking holidays or to make a reservation:**

- Call Toll free 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 Fax (03) 57501020
- Email: [info@outdoortravel.com.au](mailto:info@outdoortravel.com.au)
- Web: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au/>
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright, VIC 3741 Australia



**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**