

Languedoc-Roussillon

HIGHLIGHTS

- Taking in all 360-degree of views from **Mont Aigoual** (p279)
- Imagining how the little Ardèche and Tarn Rivers could have carved the spectacular **Gorges de l'Ardèche** (p275) and **Gorges du Tarn** (p278)
- Wondering where all the people have gone in the quiet villages and untouristed roads of **Haut-Languedoc** (p279)

TERRAIN

Flat and low-lying near the coast, rising through foothills to the mountains of the Cévennes and the eastern Pyrenees.

Telephone Code – 04

www.sunfrance.com

Languedoc-Roussillon is a three-eyed hybrid, cobbled together in the 1980s by the merging of two historic regions.

Bas-Languedoc (Lower Languedoc), land of bullfighting, rugby and robust red wines, looks towards the more sedate Provence.

Deeper inland, **Haut-Languedoc** (Upper Languedoc) is quite distinct from the sunny lowlands. A continuation of the Massif Central, this sparsely populated mountainous terrain shares trekking, mountain pasture, forests and hearty cuisine with Auvergne, to its north. Within the greater wilderness, the small towns of Mende, Florac, Alès and Millau are oases. The Parc National des Cévennes has long been the refuge of exiles and is criss-crossed by ancient trails. Trekking country too are the bare limestone plateaux of the Grands Causses, sliced through by deep canyons such as the Gorges du Tarn, perfect for a day's canoeing.

Roussillon, abutting the Pyrenees, gives more than a glance over the frontier to Spanish Catalonia, with which it shares a common language and culture.

The region today comprises the five *départements* (administrative divisions) of Lozère, Gard, Hérault, Pyrénées-Orientales and Aude.



HISTORY

Languedoc was settled as early as 450,000 BC. The name comes from *langue d'oc*, a language closely related to Catalan. Invasions by Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Visigoths and Moors preceded Frankish control in about the 8th century AD. The Albigensian Crusade, launched to suppress the heretical Cathars in 1208, led to Languedoc's annexation by the French kingdom.

Roussillon, also inhabited since prehistoric times and invaded by the same cast of characters, came under control of Catalonia-Aragon in 1172. When the Catalans revolted against Madrid in 1640, France's King Louis XIII and his infamous Cardinal Richelieu came to their 'aid'. In 1659 the Treaty of the

Pyrenees defined the border between Spain and France, and Roussillon, still sometimes called French Catalonia by indignant locals, became French.

ENVIRONMENT

Languedoc has two distinct areas: the lower plains, known as Bas Languedoc, and the rugged, mountainous Haut (Upper) Languedoc to the north.

On the plains are the cities and agricultural heartland. Ancient, sun-baked Nîmes marks the eastern boundary with Provence. Away from the coast, ruined castles crown rocky outcrops. Countless vineyards make Languedoc a prime wine region of France.

Upper Languedoc's isolation attracts the

