



# Massif Central

POP 1.34 MILLION

## Includes ➔

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## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Maki Nova (p559)
- ➔ La Golmotte (p550)
- ➔ Les Caudalies (p546)
- ➔ Chez Laurette (p552)
- ➔ Le Sisisi (p542)

## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Le Chastel Montaigu (p551)
- ➔ Auberge d'Aijean (p552)
- ➔ Hôtel Saluces (p553)
- ➔ Hôtel Notre Dame (p548)
- ➔ Le Moulin Ferme-Auberge (p560)

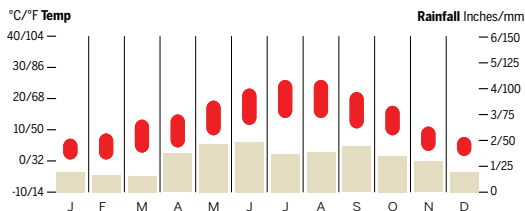
## Why Go?

In one of the wildest, emptiest and least-known corners of France, the Massif Central, you can feel nature's heavy machinery at work. Below ground, hot volcanic springs bubble up to supply Vichy and Volvic with their famous mineral waters, while high in the mountains trickling streams join forces to form three of France's mightiest rivers: the Dordogne, the Allier and the Loire.

The Massif Central and surrounding Auvergne region remains deeply traditional. Reliant on agriculture and cattle farming, it shelters the country's largest area of protected landscape with two huge regional parks: the Parc Naturel Régional des Volcans d'Auvergne and its neighbour, the Parc Naturel Régional Livradois-Forez. On-tap outdoor activities include heady hiking trails, plunging ski slopes, paragliding off shapely volcanic summits, and setting off on an age-old pilgrimage – sustained by some of the halest, heartiest food in France.

## When to Go

### Clermont-Ferrand



**Jun** Experience the region's hiking trails in their full springtime splendour.

**Dec–Mar** Max out on winter sports at Le Mont-Dore or catch Clermont-Ferrand's short-film festival.

**Aug** See sacred *Vierges Noires* (Black Madonnas) paraded on Assumption Day.



## Massif Central Highlights

- 1 Scaling the panoramic summit of **Puy de Dôme** (p547) on foot or the cog railway
- 2 Swooning over pastures and rugged volcanic scenery around **Salers** (p553)
- 3 Marvelling at the Michelin brothers' influence at the Michelin museum in **Clermont-Ferrand** (p539)
- 4 Schussing down slopes or riding the century-old funicular to mountaintop trails in **Le Mont-Dore** (p548)
- 5 Watching artisans at work at Musée de la Coutellerie in **Thiers** (p554)
- 6 Meeting the cows who make one of France's most famous AOC cheeses at **St-Nectaire** (p551)
- 7 Climbing the staircase to the cave chapel of St-Michel d'Aiguilhe, atop a pinnacle in **Le Puy-en-Velay** (p555)
- 8 Soaking up the mineral-rich spa waters in belle époque **Vichy** (p543)
- 9 Exploring an Auvergnat village's proud WWII Resistance history in **Le-Chambon-sur-Lignon** (p560)