Auvergne

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Why Go?
The land-locked Auvergne is a mosaic of volcanic cones, hilltop villages and bucolic farmland, at the centre of France’s Massif Central mountain range. Two great green lungs of protected land extend across this sparsely populated region: to the west, the Parc Naturel Régional des Volcans d’Auvergne is puckered with slumbering volcanoes and winter sports hubs; to the east lies the wilder, wooded Parc Naturel Régional Livradois-Forez. Tumbling between the two is the Allier River, which bisects the colourful Pays d’Issoire and carves out rafting country in the Gorges de l’Allier. East of here, petrified lava plumes tower over pilgrimage town Le Puy-en-Velay.

Cultural splendours range from Romanesque churches to treasured regional cuisine, including five Appellation d’Origine Protégée (AOP) cheeses, world-famous Le Puy lentils, and Salers beef. Mirroring the region’s rough charisma, meals are hearty, simple and utterly free of pretension – you won’t be able to resist digging in.

When to Go
Clermont-Ferrand

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May & Jun Hike in spring splendour along the Stevenson Trail or in Parc des Volcans d’Auvergne.
Jan & Feb Max out on winter sports near Le Mont-Dore.
Jul-Sep After cheese trails, camping and rafting, join the fray at Le Puy-en-Velay’s medieval carnival.
Auvergne Highlights

1. **Panoramique des Dômes** (p544) Trundling up to volcanic views on a cog railway
2. **Clermont-Ferrand** (p537) Admiring fountains, black stone architecture and cosmopolitan nightlife
3. **Chapelle St-Michel d’Aiguilhe** (p551) Panting up to remarkable views at this cave chapel near Le Puy-en-Velay
4. **Vichy** (p538) Sliding into thermal waters after a day belle-époque buildings
5. **Pays d’Issoire** (p542) Overloading your senses with churches and gastronomy
6. **Cheese Trail** (p547) Driving between dairy farms to buy cheese right at the source
7. **Le Mont-Dôre** (p546) Pounding pistes or hiking hills around this grand spa town
8. **Musée de la Coutellerie** (p550) Watching artisans at work in this knife-making capital
9. **Gorges de l’Allier** (p556) Rafting between jewel-like villages
10. **Riom** (p537) Exploring the historic nucleus of a former regional capital