



What to Do in Ardèche? Our Must-See Attractions for a First Visit

By Floriane

In our opinion, the Ardèche is one of the most beautiful departments in France, and we always enjoy returning there. With its charming villages, turquoise rivers, impressive cliffs, and numerous outdoor activities, the department has something to appeal to both families and nature lovers alike.

On your first visit, it can sometimes be hard to choose from all the options. To help you plan your trip, here are **our must-do activities in the Ardèche**, along with some practical tips for avoiding the crowds, choosing the right times, and getting the most out of each stop.

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Admire the famous Pont d'Arc

You can't visit the Ardèche without stopping at the **Pont d'Arc**, located 5 minutes from the village of Vallon Pont d'Arc. This **immense natural arch, carved out by the river**, has become the symbol of the department. It's also one of the most popular attractions, especially in July and August.

□ To get the most out of the site, we recommend **arriving early in the morning**, ideally before 9 a.m. The light is softer, parking spots are still available, and the atmosphere is much more pleasant. At the end of the day, the site also becomes a bit quieter, but traffic can still be heavy during peak season.

The Pont d'Arc also marks the entrance **to the famous Ardèche Gorges**. Even if you don't go canoeing, there are several overlooks where you can admire the cliffs and the river's meanders.

When planning a trip to the region, we also recommend checking out [Campings.com's vacation rentals in the Vivarais](#), which are ideally located for exploring the **main tourist attractions** while enjoying a natural setting.

Parking: about 3€ per hour - Free parking after 7:30 p.m. - Bus from Vallon Pont d'Arc.

Canoeing Down the Ardèche Gorges

This is undoubtedly **the region's most iconic** activity. A trip down the Ardèche Gorges offers a chance to discover spectacular landscapes that are often inaccessible by road.

Depending on your skill level and the time you have available, there are several routes to choose from, ranging from just a few kilometers to the full two-day descent. If this is your first time or if you're traveling with your family, it's best to choose a short or intermediate route so you can enjoy the experience without getting too tired. Here are the four routes available:

- Zone 1: Through the surrounding villages, about 20 km
- Zone 2: The 13-km descent
- Zone 3: The mini-run, about 7 km (with a few rapids, but accessible to everyone)

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- Zone 4: The Historic Descent (part of which is in the nature reserve), approximately 25 km

In the summer, we recommend that you make your reservation several days in advance and opt for early morning departures.

☐ Be sure to bring plenty of water, water shoes, sunscreen, a hat, and a waterproof bag to protect your phone, camera, and important documents.

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Visit the Chauvet 2 Cave

Chauvet 2 Cave is one of the attractions we highly recommend visiting in the Ardèche. Although the original cave is not open to the public for conservation reasons (as is also the case with the [Lascaux Cave in the Dordogne](#)), its replica allows visitors to experience the famous prehistoric paintings in a truly immersive setting.

At first, we thought it was just a simple replica, but the quality of the sets, lighting, and explanations makes the tour very interesting. It's also a good option when it's very hot outside or when the weather isn't so great.

□ During the summer, it's best to book your tickets in advance on the official [Grotte Chauvet 2](#) website, especially if you're traveling with children or during school breaks.

Discover Balazuc, one of the most beautiful villages in the Ardèche

Of all the villages in the Ardèche, Balazuc remains one of our favorites. Perched on a cliffside above the Ardèche River, this medieval village offers a truly picture-perfect setting.

We love getting lost in its cobblestone streets, walking through the arched passageways, climbing up to the lookout points, and taking the time to admire the old stone buildings. Balazuc is, in fact, one of the most beautiful villages in France, and you'll quickly understand why once you arrive.

The morning is still the best time to visit. The streets are quieter, it's not as hot, and the light is perfect for photos. After your visit, we recommend taking a break at one of the village's small cafés before heading back down to the river.

Swimming in the rivers of the Ardèche

The Ardèche is the perfect destination for those who love swimming in natural waters. Of course, the beaches around the Pont d'Arc are very well known, but they can quickly get crowded during peak season.

If you're looking for a slightly quieter atmosphere, we recommend checking out the Ibie Valley or the beaches upstream from Vogüé. The water there is often calm, the setting is very pleasant, and the atmosphere is more peaceful.

□ In the summer, arrive before 11 a.m. to easily find a spot in the shade. Also, be sure to bring water shoes, as the pebbles can quickly become uncomfortable, especially with kids.

Take the Ardèche Gorges Scenic Route

Even if you don't go canoeing, the Ardèche Gorges are well worth exploring by car. The scenic route features several impressive overlooks, offering bird's-eye views of the river and the cliffs.

The Serre de Tourre lookout is one of the best known, but we recommend planning several stops. Each viewpoint offers a different perspective on the gorges.

To avoid the hottest part of the day, it's best to take this route in the late afternoon. The light turns golden, the temperatures drop, and the views are even more beautiful. This is exactly the kind of route to include on a road trip through France.

□ Find all the information here about [the Belvédère Route](#).

Hiking in the Cirque de Gens

Among the other must-see attractions in the Ardèche, we recommend heading up to the Cirque de Gens. Located near the village of Chauzon, this natural site offers some of the most beautiful panoramic views in the department. From the cliffs, the view looks down onto a vast meander of the Ardèche River, surrounded by rocky cliffs and Mediterranean vegetation.

The most popular loop is about 7 km long with 200 m of elevation gain. Plan on a hike of between 2 and 2.5 hours, depending on your pace and the number of photo breaks, as there are many scenic viewpoints along the trail.

We recommend setting out early in the morning or late in the day, especially in the

summer. Much of the trail is exposed to the sun, and temperatures can rise quickly. Be sure to bring plenty of water and sturdy hiking shoes.

To plan your hike, you can view the detailed route here: [Cirque de Gens Hike](#).

Our tips for enjoying the Ardèche without getting caught up in the crowds

The Ardèche is very crowded in the summer, but following a few simple tips can help you enjoy your stay much more peacefully.

- Visit the most famous sites early in the morning or late in the day.
- Book popular activities such as canoeing or a visit to the Chauvet 2 Cave in advance.
- Avoid traveling around Vallon-Pont-d'Arc during the middle of the day in high season.
- Be sure to bring appropriate footwear for the cobblestone villages and for swimming in the river.
- Always keep water in the car, especially in July and August.
- Don't try to see everything: it's better to enjoy a few places than to rush around all day.

If you're still wondering what to do in the Ardèche on your first visit, we think these must-see attractions are an excellent place to start.

Feel free to drop us a **line** below to let us know if you're planning this trip, to drop 5 stars, to **ask** any questions you may have here or on [our Instagram](#) we'll get back to you with great pleasure!

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