

Auvergne Itinerary

July 8-10

The Auvergne, land of the extinct volcanoes of the Massif Central and one of the least populated and least visited areas of France, makes for an easy and not too expensive weekend trip from Paris that combines great hiking and dramatic scenery with a glimpse into rural life and culture and of course hearty eating.

We spent about €26 per person for the weekend, excluding food. We only spent about €4 euros total on gas.

Date	To	Flight/Hotel/Car Details	Cost (*Leone gets €50 credit!)	Comments
Fri, July 8	Clermont Ferrand	<p><i>Train:</i> 18h01 (Gare de Lyon), Train #5979 Arrives Clermont Ferrand 21h25</p> <p><i>Hotel:</i> Le Saint-Joseph 10, rue de Maringues Clermont-Ferrand, 63000 +33473926971 sarl-gatignol@hotelsaintjoseph.fr Booking # 469576991 (#148918110 for single) http://hotelsaintjoseph.fr/ **call to say we're arriving late if after 19h30</p>	<p><i>Train:</i> €127.80 (each, round trip)</p> <p><i>Hotel:</i> €66 for 3 people (+ €39 for single room)</p>	<p>Hotel Le Saint-Joseph is a no frills hotel but priced accordingly. Rooms are spacious, the manager is very friendly and the hotel is conveniently located about half-way between the train station and the old town center (about a 10 min walk from each). I would stay there again.</p> <p>We arrived in Clermont-Ferrand fairly late and wanted to get an early start the next day, but still had time to grab a drink by the main square by the cathedral and explore the pleasant old town a bit.</p>
Sat, July 9		<p><i>Car:</i> Avis - CLERMONT FERRAND GARE 04 73 91 72 94 <i>Hotel:</i> La Closerie de Manou lacloseriedemanou@orange.fr Le Genestoux 63240 le Mont Dore Tel : 04 73 65 26 81 Mobile : 06 08 54 50 16 www.lacloseriedemanou.com</p> <p>La Closerie de Manou is a wonderful little B&B with the look of an English countryside manor. The owner, Françoise Larcher, is a very kind and talkative older woman who knows the area well and lent us a guide book with a few suggestions for walks nearby. When we returned late after dinner, she had left out tea and hot water for us to enjoy before going to bed. The breakfast is wonderful—4 or 5 different types of breads and jams, fresh squeezed orange juice, yogurt, fresh fruit, ham, etc.—and it's included in the price of the room. The rooms are spacious, nicely decorated, and recently renovated. Our room, Gentiane, was particularly cozy but spacious. The only drawback to La Closerie de Manou is that it's in the hamlet of Le Genestoux, but if you don't mind the short drive into town, it is a wonderful place to stay.</p> <p>We had dinner at Le Bougnat (23 rue G. Clemenceau, 63240 Le Mont-Dore, Tel. 04.73.65.28.19, reservations recommended). We had the feeling of being in a Swiss chalet with the wooden benches, low exposed-beam ceilings, large fireplace and lace curtains. At the start of our meal, an elderly woman in traditional dress gave the dining room a short concert of traditional music of the region. The restaurant is a bit pricey for the area but not bad at all by Paris standards—we paid about €34 each for a 4-course meal (yes, the cheese course is a must!) and wine. I would definitely go back.</p>	<p><i>Car:</i> €103.67 <i>Hotel:</i> €85/double room, breakfast included (sent deposit check for €30)</p>	<p>—1st half of driving tour —Hike Puy de Sancy</p> <p>We roughly followed the driving tour (see link below) but as the Tour de France was coming through Le Monte Dore that same day, we opted to get to Le Monte Dore as soon as possible to leave the car off and get on the trail. It's about a 1 hour drive to Le Mont Dore from Clermont Ferrand if you go directly. A few false starts on our hike up Puy de Sancy actually ended up being a lucky break, as we were able to catch the Tour de France as they climbed up the mountain to Col de la Croix St. Robert.</p> <p>We found that the trails around Puy de Sancy are not particularly well marked. My advice is to buy a decent hiking map before starting out. We ended up taking a trail that starts with a set of stairs behind the "Thermes" (thermal baths) in downtown Le Mont Dore and up another set of stairs past the Hotel Le Progres. Go left at the top of these stairs, take a path to the right just before the white gate and then follow the yellow arrows and signs to the Grande Cascade (worth a visit as well—it's on the way). We then followed the ridge towards Sancy and signs for Station Monte Dore where we had left the car. But we did have to ask directions numerous times! The weather can be quite windy at the top (and it was raining for a good part of our hike)—be prepared!</p>

Sun, July 10	--	<p><i>Train: 19h29 – 22h52 (#5990)</i></p> <p><i>A quick word of caution regarding the car rental—Avis is around the back side of the train station and there is no easy or apparent way to drive to the other side of the tracks. Leave extra time for dropping off the car. We came <i>very</i> close to missing our train!</i></p>	<p>—2nd half of driving tour —Visit villages: Montpeyroux, Saint-Floret, Saint Saturnin, Usson —Return to Clermont Ferrand</p> <p><i>On Sunday we took the cable car up Puy de Sancy as the weather and the Tour de France prevented us from summiting the day before. It's a short walk (0.8 km) from the top of the cable car to the summit, but most of the distance is up a steep wooden stairway. We then drove to the charming nearby town of Orcival to see the famous Romanesque Basicila. On our way back to Clermont-Ferrand, we visited two of the Plus Beaux Villages de France, Saint Saturnin and Saint-Floret. Both are pleasant to visit and the drive between them is beautiful—very rural and full of sunflower fields; we spent more time in Saint Saturnin admiring the stone houses and dramatic castle and wishing we had more time to explore some of the hiking trails there.</i></p>
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Auvergne—volcanoes

These are a couple of helpful websites with general information on the region:

<http://www.france-voyage.com/en/>

<http://www.francethisway.com/regions/auvergne.php>

Places to stay: These websites give a number of possibilities for accommodations:

<http://www.sancy.com/>

<http://www.gites-de-france-auvergne.fr/>

Prettiest villages in the Auvergne (according to my bible: <http://www.les-plus-beaux-villages-de-france.org/en/>):

[Arlempdes](#), [Pradelles](#), [Lavaudieu](#), [Charroux](#), [Salers](#), [Tournemire](#), [Blesle](#), [Montpeyroux](#), [Saint-Floret](#), [Saint Saturnin](#), [Usson](#). We only had time to visit Saint Saturnin and Saint-Floret.

Hiking: Puy-de-Dome volcano: <http://www.planetepuydedome.com/discover-the-puy-de-dome/puy-de-dome-volcano-117-2.html>

Puy de Sancy: <http://www.hikingtrailer.com/puy-de-sancy/>

Driving tour: <http://www.sancy.com/circuit/volcans-auvergne>