

The beautiful Saint-Cirq Lapopie

# It's got the Lot

Nick Harding explores a region of south-west France offering both gastronomic and cultural delights



It's amazing that we get any kind of welcome here, really. It was the Hundred Years' War that saw the English doing their best to plunder this area. Now we're a nation of peace-lovers (largely), instead bringing our caravans or motorhomes and pitching as friends. Welcome to the Lot and Lot-et-Garonne departments of France.

It's absolutely beautiful here in this south-westerly region, and, like a lot of France beyond Normandy and Brittany,

it's not as out-of-reach as you might expect. Whether you go by caravan or motorhome, at least one stopover is advised – head for Paris and pick up the A20 is the general advice.

If you'll excuse the pun, there's lots in Lot to remind you that this is true, rural France. Area highlights really are too many to mention, but plan for visits to the prehistoric Pech Merle cave, the absolutely awesome cliff-top town of Saint-Cirq Lapopie, any Cahors vineyard (try Château Saint-Sernin, for starters),

Bonaguil Castle and the medieval villages of Penne d'Agenais and Pujols.

Also in the area is the rather wonderful water lily nursery, Jardin des Nénuphars Latour-Marliac, that proved such an inspiration for the artist, Claude Monet. Now that is something a bit different.

The local food is to die for, too, and I'd still argue the restaurants are exceptionally good value for money (as are the markets). Foie gras is just one of the specialities of the area. Indeed, duck features heavily on most menus. The ideal accompaniment to



Monflanquin

“Pech Merle is intriguing, slightly spooky and just the place when the weather's too hot”



Try the wines at Château Saint-Sernin...

all this is the 'black wine' of Cahors (as I found out, all in the name of research...). Prefer a brew? I never found it, but Ratz is the locally-produced beer.

Cahors is in fact the capital of the Lot department. It's well worth a wander around – you can't beat a bit of bustle and the sights and smells of the spices, cheeses, meats, vegetables, fruits and fish at the market every Wednesday and Saturday morning are something else, even by French standards.

Back to the Pech Merle cave in Cabrerets. A 50-minute tour simply isn't enough here... and you'll come away with more questions than answers. The paintings of woolly mammoth, horses, reindeer and humans on the walls here date from around 25,000 BC. It's intriguing, slightly spooky and just the place to visit when the weather's too hot. The chambers are open nearly all year, but you might want to make a reservation during the busiest period from July to August when visitors are limited to 700 each day.

Meanwhile, Saint-Cirq Lapopie is classified as one of 'Les Plus Beaux Villages Du France' (the most beautiful villages in France). Officially, there are some 156 of them, but Saint-Cirq Lapopie certainly deserves its designation. Set on a hillside, the village looks right down on the River Lot itself. A boat trip is yet another highly-rewarding, peaceful experience.

Talking of peaceful, I visited in early September when the kids had gone back to school and the four campsites I stayed at were slipping back into 'relax' mode. ■



...then buy

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Legend has it that the devil was tricked into helping build Cahors' 14th-century bridge

## INFORMATION

### SITES

A choice of sites in the region can be found in the Club's 2012/2013 *Caravan Europe: Guide to Sites and Touring in France*, priced £8.99 to members (non-members £14.50) plus £2.50 postage and packaging. Order your copy at [caravanclub.co.uk/caravaneurope](http://caravanclub.co.uk/caravaneurope) or by calling 01342 327410. Sites to consider:

- **Camping de la Plage**, Porte Roques, 46330 Saint-Cirq Lapopie (p500). Call 0033 5 65 30 29 51 or see [campingplage.com](http://campingplage.com)
- **Rivière de Cabessut**, Rue de la Rivière, 46000 Cahors (p215). Call 0033 5 65 30 06 30 or see [cabessut.com](http://cabessut.com)

A number of sites in the Lot region are featured in the Club's 2012 *Ultimate Guide to Continental Caravanning*, all of which have been inspected and are bookable through the Club's Travel Service (contact details below).

### TRAVEL/TOURISM

- **Ferry and sites bookings via the Club** – for site and ferry details and to make bookings call 01342 316101 or see [caravanclub.co.uk](http://caravanclub.co.uk)
- **Lot tourism** – [valdegaronne.com/tourisme/](http://valdegaronne.com/tourisme/) - english, [tourisme-lot.com](http://tourisme-lot.com)