

A glimpse at the seasons of the Livradois, Auvergne



Le Bourg, St. Alyre d'Arlanc, Puy de Dome, 63220 France

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There are many small hamlets and villages within walking distance. The town of Arlanc with its monday morning market is just a seven miles drive through the scenic gorges of the Dore and offers a recreational watersports centre as well as a "Garden for the Earth" attraction.

North of Arlanc, a few minutes drive along the Dore Valley, lies the town of Ambert with many interesting souvenir and handicrafts shops offering a relaxed and informal glimpse of Auvergnat lifestyle. Ambert market every thursday morning fills the cobbled streets of the old town all around the "Ronde Mairie", a circular building that houses the town council.

To the south, the monastic town of La Chaise Dieu with its imposing 13th C Benedictine abbey atop a forested plateau at 3,500ft hosts spring and summer music festivals and is a major tourist attraction.

Continuing south, for a display of religious and historical importance, the city of Le Puy en Velay is less than an hours drive. A focus point along the pilgrim trails, it presents visitors with an amazing panorama combining its strange volcanic geology with man's creativity.

For the serious shopper, the towns of Issoire and Brioude are about a 45 minute drive to the west, down to the Allier Valley quite near to the main north/south A75 motorway that connects Clermont-Ferrand to the mediterranean. Issoire is called the town of flowers, its streets are filled with colourful displays all through the spring, summer and autumn months.

In the summer months, from Ambert to La Chaise Dieu, a scenic railway known as the Train of Discovery carries visitors up into the mountains, through the gorges of the Dore and over spectacular viaducts allowing the region to be seen from a different perspective.



Compliments LCO-France St Alyre d'Arlanc, Puy de Dome, 63220 , France

In the heart of France lies a sleepy village, 3000ft up in the Auvergne mountains. It is surrounded by the the Livradois-Forez National Park, a quarter million acres of spectacularly unspoilt natural beauty. In the spring, the fields are full of wildflowers and the birch and beech trees contrast spectacularly with the pines.



The Department of the Puy de Dome offers forest walks, sleepy villages, quiet, almost traffic-free lanes and rolling countryside.

The four pictures above were taken within a four mile radius of LCO-France and show nature at its best, all are within easy walking distance. Along the trails you can see an array of wildlife such as rabbits, hares, deer, butterflies and birds.



In the summer months this idyllic setting offers a break from the stresses of city life. Village fetes create an aura of festivity and the altitude and surrounding pine forests offer an invigorating climate, warm in the day, while refreshingly cool at night.

European research has shown that such an environment presents an effective means to increase the brain's mental receptors ability to assimilate knowledge, productivity and creativity as well as stimulate new ideas.



Hors riding and cycling are popular sports here, as there are many picturesque villages in the Department where you might stumble across 12th century churches and chapels that once sheltered the pilgrims following in the trails of Apostle James the Greater, on his journey across France to the mountains of northern Spain.



The autumn is the season for the wild mushrooms for which the Department is renowned. Its cepes and chanterelles can be found in market places all over Europe.



Wild raspberries, delicious woodland strawberries and blueberries grow profusely along woodland paths and almost everywhere throughout the countryside. The rich smells of cepes drying in the autumn sun add a never to be forgotten fragrance in every village and tiny hamlet.

Winter here is a sparkling season, often starting with a white christmas, then ranging from crisp sunny days, to blisteringly cold nights and not for the fainthearted. These pictures were taken in winter 2005 – an unusually severe winter, the worst for 12 years. Up to 3ft deep snow on the ground from xmas through to April.

