

# GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC

L'INCROYABLE AVENTURE SOUTERRAINE



PRESS KIT

# A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF THE EARTH WHERE AMAZEMENT AND HISTORY AWAIT

“

The Gouffre de Padirac has been open to the public for almost a century and a half.

All thanks to the curiosity of one man and the vision and the temerity of his comrades.

In 1889, accompanied by a handful of explorers, Edouard-Alfred Martel used a rope to descend into the Puits de Padirac. At the bottom of this telescopic chasm with just a single piece of blue sky on its horizon, the brave explorer fell in love with this outstanding work of nature. From that point on, it became his mission to share his discovery with as many people as possible.

A chance meeting with my ancestor—the visionary Irish entrepreneur George Beamish—made this dream a reality and led to the founding of the company Puits de Padirac.

For the last 25 years, with the help of a team of passionate professionals, I have dedicated my career to preserving this exceptional natural monument and perpetuating a tradition of hospitality at this icon of French tourism.

Today, the adventure awaiting at the Gouffre de Padirac captures the hearts of more than 530,000 visitors every year. Its popularity has continued to grow ever since it first opened to the public in 1898.

103 metres beneath the ground, the Gouffre de Padirac is a quintessential example of the treasures of the underground world, and home not only to a monumental well but also to a cave filled with jaw-dropping concretions, a river hidden in the belly of the Earth, and a lake floating beneath a majestic high-ceilinged vault...

Embark on journey of indescribable beauty that will leave you forever changed! Legend says the Devil had his part to play in creating this cave, but, when seen up close, it becomes clear this could only be the work of Heaven!

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**LAETITIA DE MÉNIBUS-GRAVIER**  
PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIÉTÉ  
D'EXPLOITATIONS SPÉLÉOLOGIQUES  
DE PADIRAC





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**1889**  
EXPLORATION BY  
EDOUARD-ALFRED MARTEL



**42 km**  
OF CHARTED NETWORKS



**94 m**  
HIGH VAULT



MAXIMUM  
CAPACITY

**8,000**  
VISITORS PER DAY



**1.5 hrs**  
TOUR LENGTH



**537,000**  
VISITORS IN 2024,  
A NEW RECORD!



**304**  
DIRECT AND INDIRECT JOBS  
CREATED EVERY YEAR\*



**150**  
SEASONAL WORKERS  
49 EQUIVALENT  
FULL-TIME WORKERS\*



**60%**  
OF VISITORS TO THE REGION  
COME PRIMARILY TO SEE  
THE PADIRAC CAVE\*



**3**  
STARS IN THE MICHELIN  
GREEN GUIDE

# THE GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC, KEY FIGURES

\*2017 PROTOURISME SURVEY

# THE GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC, A QUINTESSENTIAL TREASURE OF THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

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## A NATURAL CAVE OF JAW-DROPPING DIMENSIONS

The adventure begins with a 75 m descent into a luscious natural chasm 33 metres in diameter, either via the 207 Eiffel-inspired steps or via the panoramic lift, before then continuing deeper into the galleries 103 m beneath the ground. This is the start of your odyssey into the belly of the Earth.

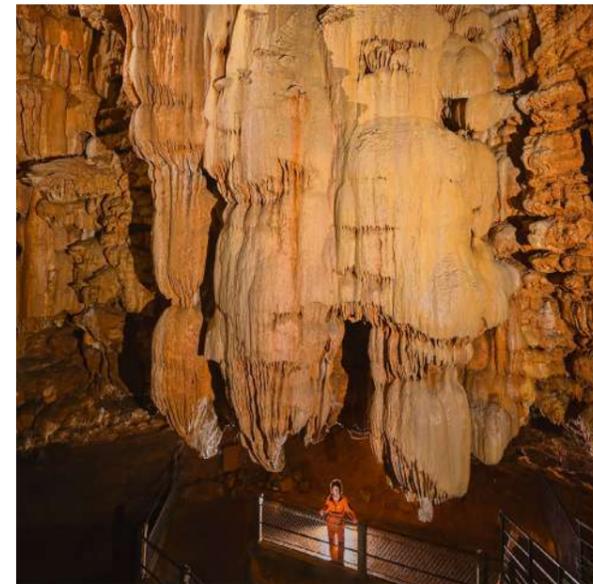
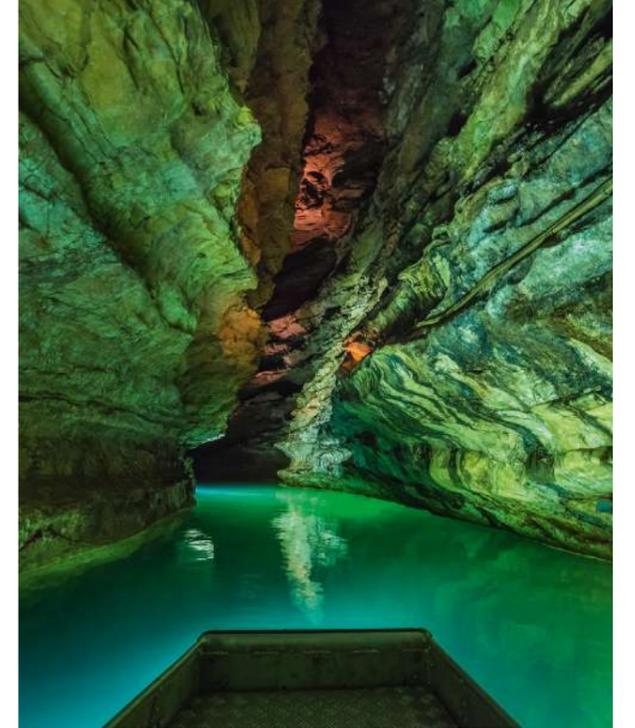
## 42 KM OF GALLERIES, 1 KM OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The Gouffre de Padirac's geological mysteries and weaving galleries have always fascinated speleologists. Along several hundred metres of foot and boat paths, through majestic and mysterious landscapes, visitors explore part of the 42 km of rocky galleries that have been sculpted and polished by millennia of erosion.



## A SPELLBINDING RIVER

Follow the gentle directions of our boat guides who will help your boat and prepare for a journey along the peaceful River Plane. Sail along the translucent waters between thousand-year-old walls hollowed out through the ages. Here, all that disturbs the silence of the depths are the sounds of the small drops of water trickling down the walls of the Grande Pendeloque before disappearing into the Lac de la Pluie. A truly sublime experience!



## DELVE INTO THE HEART OF GEOLOGICAL HISTORY

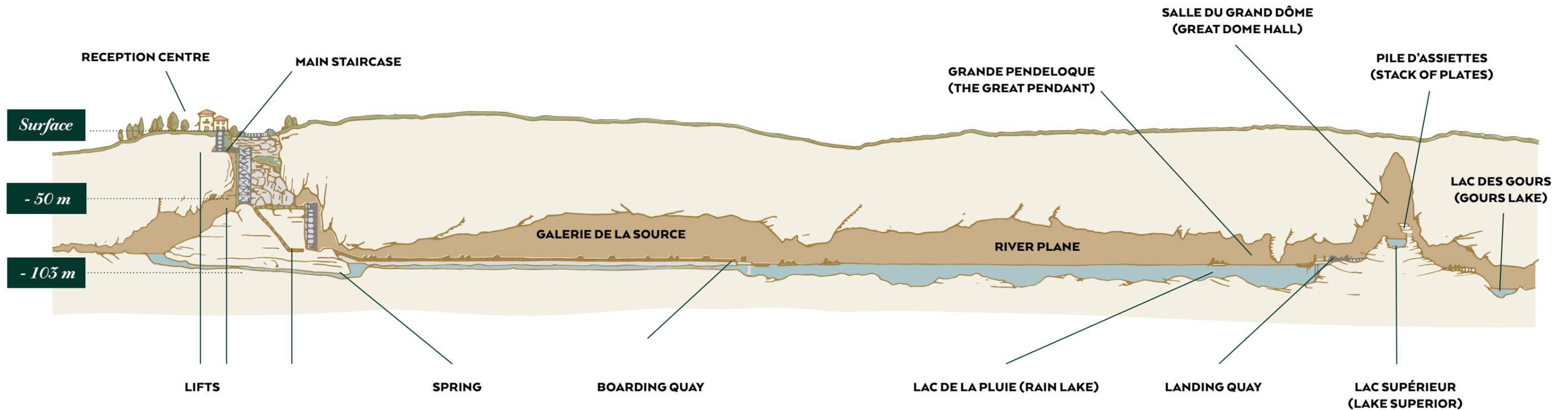
Return to the Quarternary Period, when rainwater infiltrations formed cracks in the immense limestone plateau of the **Causses du Quercy**. Chemical and mechanical erosion then led to the continual formation of galleries and geomorphological structures resembling limestone flowers, alabaster stoups, stacks of plates, fabric, lace, and stalagmites and stalactites, such as the 75 m long **Grande Colonne**.

## AN ICONIC STALAGMITE

La Pile d'Assiettes (Stack of Plates) is an icon of the Gouffre de Padirac. It was formed by drops of water flattening the rock dozens of metres below and causing them to release limestone several centimetres around the point of impact. A mass of calcite crystals, La Pile d'Assiettes is a karstic wonder formed over several centuries.



# EXPLORING THE GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC



Exploration of the **Gouffre de Padirac** begins by descending either via the lifts or via the 207 steps. At a depth of 103 metres, the visit continues into the **Galerie de la Source**, whose rocky walls have been polished by centuries of erosion.

A few hundred metres further, visitors arrive at the boarding quay, where they will be welcomed by our passionate boat guides. From there, glide along the **River Plane** for over 500 metres, before arriving at the impressive **Lac de la Pluie**, home to the **Grande Pendeloque**, a majestic stalactite 60 m high.

After disembarking in a rocky cavern, the adventure continues into the Gouffre's most beautiful chambers. Following a narrow passage along the **Grande Colonne**, a monumental calcite structure 75 m high, the tour then arrives at the **Lac des Gours**. Here, the calcite has created beautifully twisting dams and stunning reflective pools.

After climbing a hundred steps, finally visitors arrive at the **Grand Dome Hall**, an underground cathedral 94 metres high calmly presided over by the famous **Pile d'Assiettes** (Stack of Plates), an unshakable witness to the passing of time that seems almost to have been placed purposefully on top of **Lac Supérieur**. This is the last stage in this breath-taking journey.



**LE GOUFFRE  
DE PADIRAC,  
130 YEARS  
OF HUMAN  
ENDEAVOUR**



# A CAVE IN CONSTANT EVOLUTION

1889

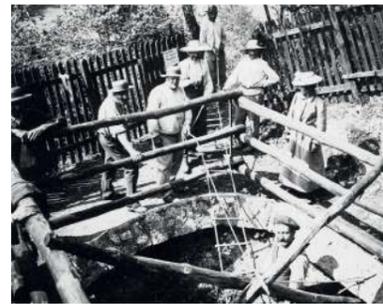
9-10 JULY



Equipped with heavy ladders, ropes and candles, **Edouard-Alfred Martel**, a trained lawyer, descends into the abyss known to locals at the time as **The Devil's Hole**.

1898

APRIL



Work begins to create the **Gouffre de Padirac** visitor trail.

1898

1 NOVEMBRE



A first! The **Gouffre de Padirac** opens to the public for the very first time.

1899



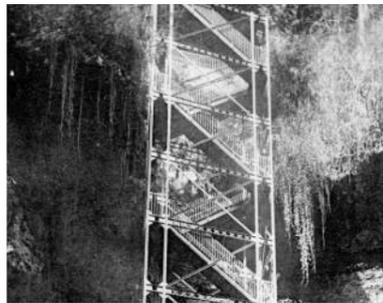
A new record! The **Gouffre de Padirac** receives over 6,000 visitors in a single year.

1901



In 1901, electricity is installed under the direction of the engineer **Roumazeilles**. In 1906, the **Gouffre de Padirac** is equipped with its own power station.

1930



The developments continue! Construction work continues with installation of the **first lift** to take visitors down to the cave.

1938



**Edouard-Alfred Martel**, the founder of modern speleology, dies aged 79. Martel explored over 1,000 caves, published a huge number of works and scientific articles and travelled the world.

1939



"**Nouveau Padirac**" is launched! Under the impetus of **William Beamish**, who had correctly identified the growing demand for leisure activities. Visitor numbers at the **Gouffre** reach 100,000 per year.

2005



**Laetitia de Ménibus-Gravier** takes over as the company director. She represents the **fifth generation** to run the family business.

2012



The **Gouffre de Padirac** holds its first exhibition, **Sculptural Bronze and Monumental Mineral**, presenting 11 sculptures from **Isabelle Thiltgès** along the visitor trail.

2019



The 130th anniversary of the site's discovery! The **Gouffre de Padirac** celebrates the anniversary with a comprehensive **retrospective of photographer Robert Doisneau** spanning the entire site.

2023



The **Gouffre de Padirac** undergoes a vibrant cultural revival, opening a **bookshop café**, launching the photo exhibition "**The faces of Exploration**" from Editions Guérin-Paulsen, and holding a walking concert with Irish singer **Kaz Hawkins**.

2024



537,000 visitors – a new record!

2025



The immersive theatre piece "**Journey to the centre of the Earth, in search of Axel Lidenbrock**" is a huge success at the **Gouffre de Padirac**, transforming one kilometre of paths into an underground stage. The show continues in 2025.



The future of the **Gouffre de Padirac**

Work will soon begin on an **ambitious project** to renovate and extend existing visitor infrastructure under the guidance of a world-renowned architect.

# ÉDOUARD-ALFRED MARTEL, BENEFACTOR OF HUMANITY

A major geological curiosity, the **Gouffre de Padirac** was first explored in 1889 by **Edouard-Alfred Martel**. The founding father of **modern speleology** and a pioneer of underground exploration and conservation, Martel's discoveries and work led him to earn the well-deserved title of "**Benefactor of Humanity**".

On **9 July 1889**, Martel and his team journeyed to the centre of the Earth using a **75 m** cable and equipped only with candles, hemp ropes and rope ladders. No sooner had their feet touched the ground, however, the adventure was brought to a halt just a dozen steps later, obstructed by the rising water levels in what would come to be known as **the River Plane**. The team was forced to turn back for the first time and leave **the Devil's Hole**. The next day at dawn, unwilling to abandon the adventure so hastily, **Martel** descended once again, this time equipped with a magnesium lamp and a small boat, and was able to discover the breathtaking wonders of the rocky caves...

## 1889



Overwhelmed by the beauty of the exceptional natural setting, he immediately knew that his discovery had to be shared with the whole world... This ambition was soon to be made possible by a chance encounter, when **George Beamish**, an Irishman from a large family of brewers, came across documents left by **Martel** in the back of a hackney cab describing details of his plans to develop the Padirac Cave. Fascinated by the discovery, he immediately got in contact with the explorer. Together, in 1899, they founded the **Société du Puits de Padirac**, with the aim of "developing access to and tours of the Puits de Padirac caves, chasm and river".

## 1898

Sadly, **Beamish** would never see his dream come to life and he passed away before the site opened. It was his son **William Beamish** who contributed to the rise and touristic development of the **Gouffre de Padirac**. This intergenerational commitment continues today, with the baton passing in 2005 to his great granddaughter **Laetitia de Ménibus-Gravier**, the fifth generation to helm the company. Her arrival marked a turning point in the cave's history with her determination to restore the image and appeal of this geological wonder.

## 2005



# A PIONEERING COMPANY AND BEACON OF FRENCH TOURISM

For more than 130 years, the Société d'Exploitation du Gouffre de Padirac has worked to promote, develop and preserve this exceptional site. The incredible adventure is detailed in Tristan Gaston-Breton's book *Les Secrets du Gouffre de Padirac* published by Albin Michel in June 2024.

Pioneering underground tourism, the company immediately stood out for its **innovative spirit**, notably reflected in the installation of **avant-garde** infrastructure, including electricity in 1901, the use of reinforced concrete for the underground passages in the 1920s, and the installation of the Gouffre's first lift in 1930.

Having survived two world wars, the business once again began to struggle in the 1970s. It was only in 2005, with the arrival **Laetitia de Ménibus-Gravier** at the helm, that the Gouffre de Padirac was able once again to prosper. Under **Ménibus-Gravier's** impetus, the business was completely restructured and the site restored to its former glory. It was

now a site dedicated to knowledge and discovery, combining a thirst for **culture** and **exploration**. Ever since, visitor numbers to the Gouffre de Padirac have continued to rise and the site has become **France's** top landmark for **underground natural heritage**. This popularity also results in part from its eclectic cultural programme that includes exhibitions, concerts and immersive events designed around bold, innovative experiences.

And that's just the beginning! Work will soon begin on an **ambitious project** to **renovate and extend** the site's existing visitor infrastructure under the guidance of a world-renowned architect.





## THE GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC, A KEY CONTRIBUTOR TO THE REGION'S ECONOMY

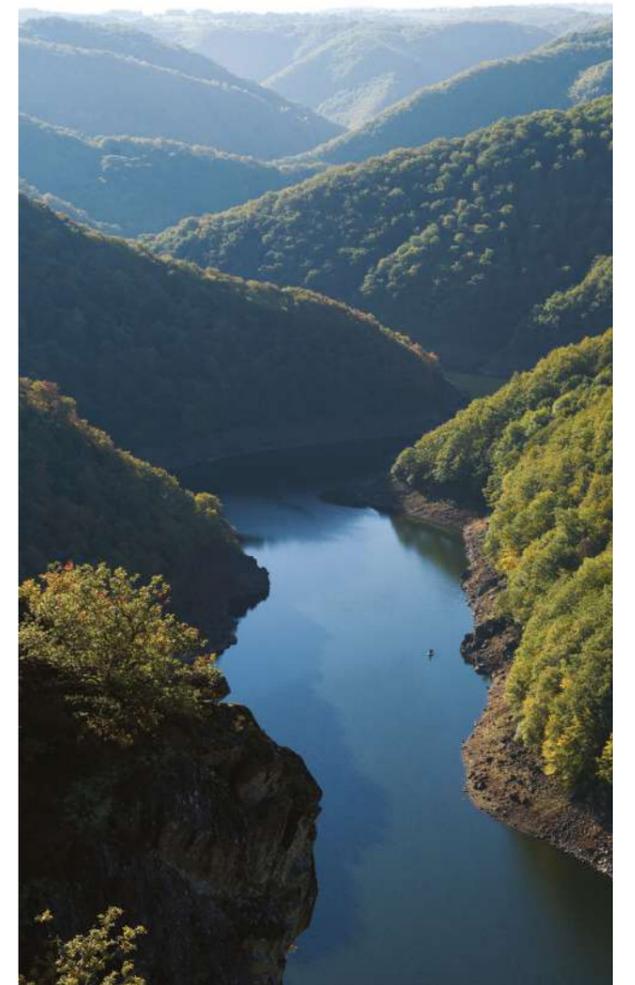
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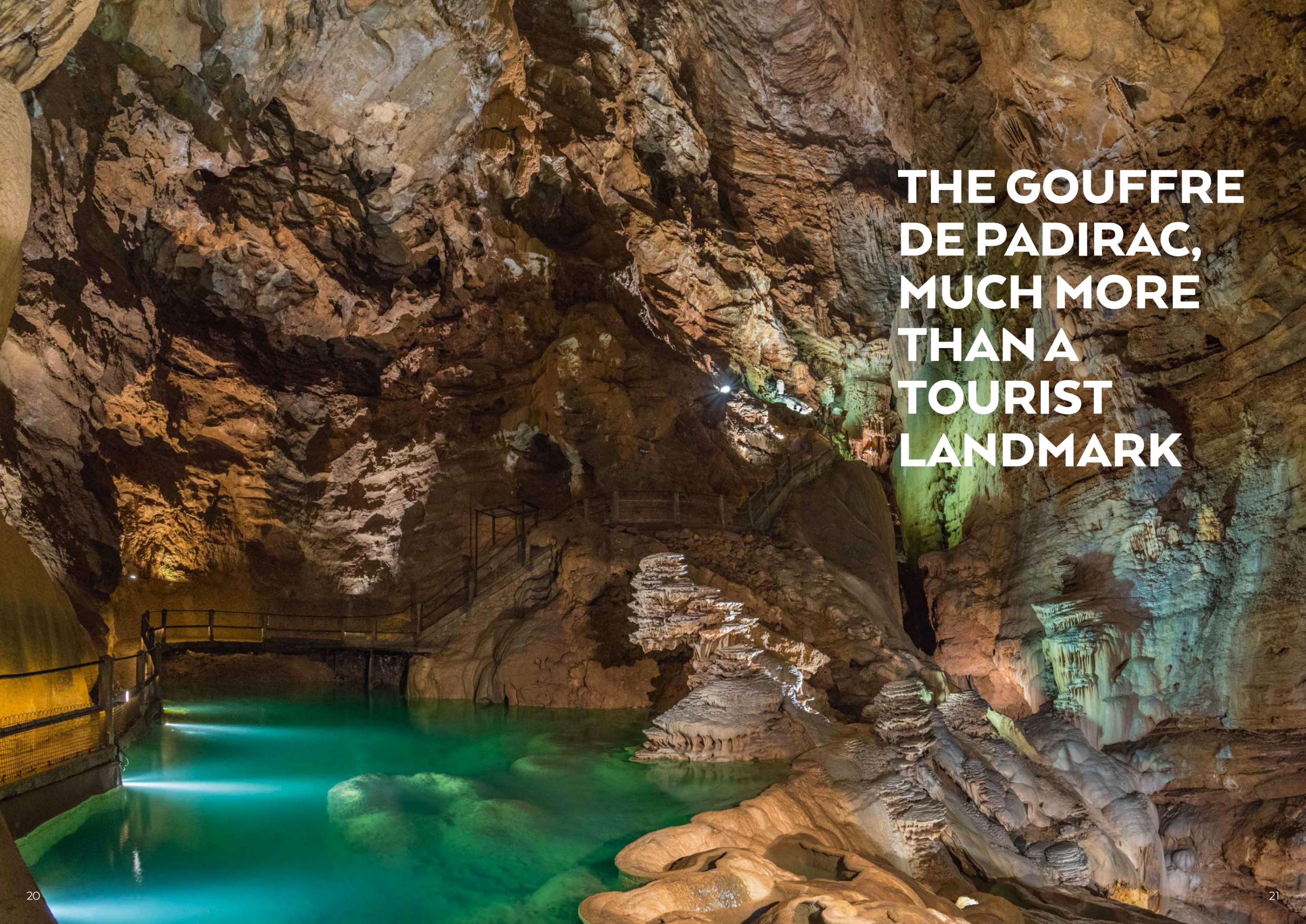
The Gouffre de Padirac's appeal is reflected in its economic impact on the region, both in terms of revenue and employment.

In 20 years, visitor numbers have increased by almost 60%, composed primarily of French visitors, as well as visitors from abroad. This popularity benefits the entire region. More than 60% of visitors come to the region primarily to see the Gouffre de Padirac, and for every euro spent at the Gouffre, three more euros are spent locally (source: 2017 Protourisme Survey).

Additionally, every year, the Gouffre de Padirac creates 304 direct, indirect and induced jobs, with 150 staff employed directly by the Société d'Exploitation du Gouffre (49 full-time equivalent). The same trend can be seen regionally, with every full-time job created at the Gouffre de Padirac generating six equivalent full-time jobs in the region.

This economic impact can be explained in large part by the increase in activity in other tourism sectors: 22% of visitors choose to stay in a hotel, versus 19% in campsites, mainly during the peak season, with an average stay lasting 6.5 nights. The phenomenon of the Gouffre de Padirac is impressive at every level!



A large, dimly lit cave with a green pool of water and rock formations. The cave walls are rugged and brown, with some areas illuminated by green and blue lights. A metal walkway with railings is visible on the left side of the cave. The water in the pool is a vibrant green color, and there are some rock formations in the water. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and ancient.

**THE GOUFFRE  
DE PADIRAC,  
MUCH MORE  
THAN A  
TOURIST  
LANDMARK**

# THE GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC, AN ADVENTURE OF LEARNING AND DISCOVERY

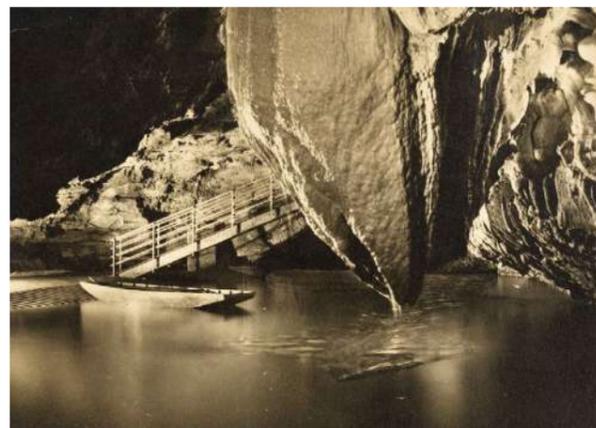
## OUTREACH WORKSHOPS TO COMPLEMENT YOUR VISIT



Since 2017, our scientific and cultural outreach team has offered **fun** and **educational workshops** inviting kids and teenagers to take on the role of a curious scientist. The workshop “Caves, chasms and abysses, where chemistry meets geology” gives participants the chance to become apprentice chemists, discovering the processes that led to the creation of these caves. A second workshop, “Formation of the Gouffre de Padirac’s karstic network”, uses educational material to recreate the geological events that sculpted this incredible site and facilitate an empirical understanding of its evolution over the millennia. To complement the school curriculum, teachers and students can also draw on a **series of fun worksheets** organized into five areas of learning suitable for every level.

## THE PADIRACOTHEQUE’S OPEN SOURCE ARCHIVES

To share the history of this extraordinary site, the **Société d’Exploitation du Gouffre** has designed a special online platform home to more than **130 years** of records. This constantly developing resource offers professionals, students and history enthusiasts privileged access to **unique historical and cultural heritage**, brought to life through a rich collection of photographs, sketches, postcards, plans and posters. A priceless treasure that pays witness to the fascinating epic taking place at this iconic site over the years.



## “C’EST PAS SORCIER!” EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

In collaboration with **L’Esprit Sorcier**, founded by Frédéric Courant, a former presenter of the famous French web series “C’est pas sorcier”, the Gouffre de Padirac has designed **educational videos** to enable children and adults of all ages to learn more about this incredible natural site and its history. This content offers a fun and educational way to prepare for your visit in advance.



## ORIGINAL AND EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTS

The Gouffre de Padirac’s spirit of adventure is also found in the creation of high-quality products produced in **partnership** with **renowned designers** and **publishing houses**. These collaborations have led to an exciting collection of works and products inspired by the cave’s history. Each piece is designed to awaken your curiosity and prolong your visitor experience.

## EXPLORE THE BOOKSHOP CAFÉ

Since 2023, visitors to the Gouffre de Padirac have been able to enjoy lunch surrounded by books and immersed in extraordinary stories at the Auberge du Gouffre’s bookshop café.

Travellers passing through for just one day will discover a **comprehensive selection** of exciting works dedicated to **adventure** and **landmark discoveries**.



## LARGE-SCALE CULTURAL EVENTS

Since 2005, the Gouffre de Padirac has combined nature and culture in a bold and original programme, offering visitors unforgettable, immersive experiences.

Even more than an exceptional natural site, the cave is transformed into **the stage of unique events** that resonate far beyond its ancient walls. Walking concerts, exhibitions, immersive shows and more... Each event is an invitation to explore and a reflection of the pioneering spirit that has pervaded the cave since its discovery.



# A PROACTIVE MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY

## TEAMS DEDICATED TO THE LIFE OF THE CAVE

At the heart of the Gouffre de Padirac's success lies the commitment of its staff, who work tirelessly to offer every visitor a unique and memorable experience. Rooted in the values of authenticity, sharing and preservation, the site favours local recruitment combined with talent from all over France. Every year, the 28 permanent staff are bolstered by a team of 150 driven ambassadors excited to share the riches of this outstanding natural heritage. Comprehensive training for every role ensures the Gouffre de Padirac's teams are equipped with all they need to turn every visit into an unforgettable journey.



## GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC BOAT GUIDE, A JOB LIKE NO OTHER

The Gouffre de Padirac offers a unique professional experience, with a wide range of roles in an exceptional setting.

Often compared to gondoliers, our boat guides play a key role in exploring this underground universe. Their specialized internal training enables them to share geological and historic knowledge of the site as they take visitors on a journey along the river 103 metres below the ground. These ambassadors of the Gouffre also offer themed tours (VIP tours, explorer evenings) and take part in unique immersive shows --- truly timeless one-off experiences.



## SUPPORTING LOCAL LIFE AND FRENCH PRODUCTION

Reflecting our commitment to authenticity and local community, the Gouffre de Padirac gives the French terroir pride of place in its catering options and stores. The Auberge du Gouffre restaurant promotes regional flavours, local ingredients and home-made cuisine, and the Kiosque delicatessen offers a refined selection of artisanal products enriched by partnerships with a local beekeeper and wine-maker.

The souvenirs shop also offers creations designed and made in France, guaranteeing both quality and tradition.

## COMMUNITY COMMITMENTS

Conscious of the human and social challenges faced by all members of the community today, the Gouffre de Padirac actively supports several associations working to safeguard health and foster inclusion, including Vaincre la Maladie des Os de Verre, Partage Handicap 09 and Mécénat Chirurgie Cardiaque.

This support reflects the values of solidarity and responsibility that underpin the business and which are shared by our teams, who regularly take part in actions.



## SPONSORSHIP THAT ENCOURAGES THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Since 2020, the Gouffre de Padirac has supported skipper Maxime Sorel and the association Vaincre la Mucoviscidose, which provides support to patients and families affected by cystic fibrosis. This sponsorship helps promote the pioneering mindset of courage, exploration and determination. From the depths of the Earth to the vast immensity of the oceans and the summits of the highest peaks, the same spirit of adventure drives all those who continually push the boundaries of what is possible. Inspiration that the Société d'Exploitation hopes to share with its teams and visitors.





**THE GOUFFRE  
DE PADIRAC,  
PROTECTING  
A NATURAL  
WONDER**

# A UNIQUE NATURAL SITE THAT DEMANDS PRESERVATION

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## A FASCINATING AND ESSENTIAL WATER CYCLE

Water is locked in an endless **cycle**. It shapes both visible and invisible landscapes.

This **cycle** begins with evaporation from the seas and oceans. Cooled by the atmosphere, it then condenses, forming clouds that fall onto the ground as rain. Part of this water flows into rivers and another **seeps** into cracks in the ground feeding underground reservoirs. From here, over thousands of years, these slow streams sculpt **underground galleries** like the Gouffre de Padirac. Here, 103 metres beneath the earth, water continues its journey for 20 km before emerging at the **Fontaine Saint-Georges** karstic spring, followed by **Dordogne** and finally the **Atlantic Ocean**. A natural illustration of the water cycle close enough to touch!



## A REFUGE OF BIODIVERSITY

The **Gouffre de Padirac** is also home to a host of wildlife. More than eight species of **bat**, three of which are endangered, have chosen the cave as their home. But it is in the underground river that the most surprising fauna are found, including the **Niphargus**, a small, white, blind, cave-dwelling prawn, and the **Bythinelle de Padirac**, a 3 mm freshwater snail endemic to the **Gouffre de Padirac**. Preserving this biodiversity is a key concern for the teams at the site.

## PRESERVING THE NATURAL EQUILIBRIUM FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

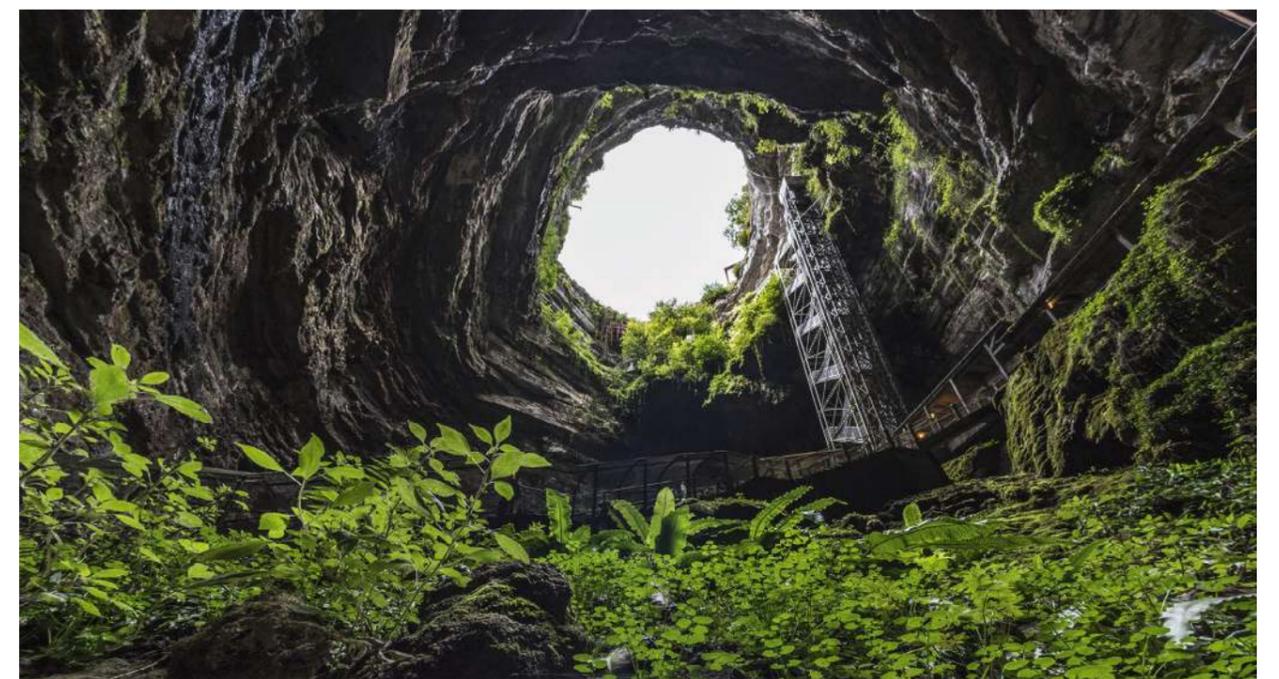
Situated in the heart of the Lot region of France, the **Gouffre de Padirac** is a unique natural setting. In this rural landscape, the fields surrounding the site are primarily dedicated to agriculture.

It is vital that the site's exceptional character continues to be preserved for future generations. To this end, the **Société d'Exploitation** has implemented a number of protective measures. The rock walls are **carefully monitored** by specialized partners (design offices and geologists). A water-quality assessment protocol is also in place, with samples collected on a regular basis.

Additionally, we ensure that all products used on site are completely neutral for the environment.

The **Gouffre de Padirac Société d'Exploitation** remains vigilant and takes care to ensure that only speleological expeditions for scientific purposes are permitted at the site.

This proactive management represents a major investment and is essential to ensuring the future and preservation of this unique location.





**THE DORDOGNE  
VALLEY, UNIQUE  
CULTURAL AND  
HISTORIC HERITAGE**

# THE DORDOGNE VALLEY, A LAND OF HISTORY

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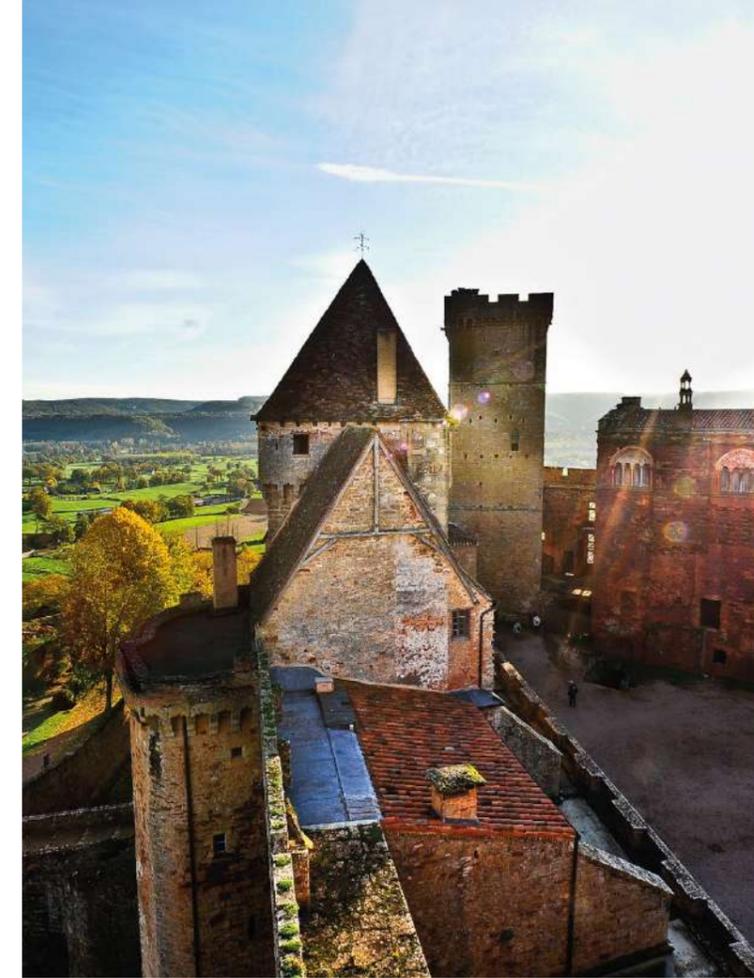


## ROCAMADOUR, AN ANCIENT PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE

Just a few cable's lengths from the **Gouffre de Padirac**, the vertical village of Rocamadour is home to captivating mysteries... Built on successive plateaus overlooking the cliffs of the **Alzou canyon**, this village of **630 residents** is the site of caves decorated with paintings that pay testament to prehistoric lives and, for over a thousand years, has been an important pilgrimage destination. After passing through the **Porte du Figuier**, climb the steps of the **Grand Escalier** to reach the Sanctuaire esplanade and the statue of the **Black Virgin** in the **Chapel of Notre-Dame**, followed by the **stunning Saint-Sauveur Basilica**. A little further, crypts, chapels and châteaux will immerse you in the wonders of this gem of regional heritage.

## A LAND OF CAVE PAINTINGS, CHÂTEAUX AND CLIFFTOP MEDIEVAL VILLAGES

The Dordogne Valley is famous for its châteaux, which will take you on a journey through the ages! From the medieval **Tours de Merle** (12th century) to **Château de Vassinhac** (16th century), the former residence of the famous French writer Colette, and **Château de Castelnaud-Bretenoux** overlooking the **Pays des Quatre Rivières**, the area's historic heritage is seated in an outstanding natural landscape. Visitors can also explore the five villages ranked as the **Most Beautiful Villages in France**, Autoire, Carennac, Loubressac, Collonges-la-Rouge and Curemonte, and the many painted caves and their fairytale universes...



## AN EXCEPTIONAL TERROIR

At a cozy evening meal, in an authentic farmhouse inn, or while strolling through the colourful markets, you will soon discover the region's rich culinary heritage. From **Périgord walnuts** to Quercy's free range lamb and melon, **Rocamadour AOP** goat's cheese, **Glanes wine**, truffles, chestnuts, **Croustillot** and other confit meats, this incredible terroir has a bounty of gastronomic delights to share. After treating your eyes with history and nature, the **Dordogne Valley** will give your taste buds the same VIP treatment!

# PRACTICAL INFORMATION



FREE AUDIOGUIDE WITH EVERY TICKET, AVAILABLE IN 7 LANGUAGES FOR ADULTS & 4 FOR CHILDREN



FOR HYGIENE AND CONSERVATION REASONS, PETS ARE NOT PERMITTED (EXCEPT FOR GUIDE DOGS)



PHOTOGRAPHY IS PROHIBITED ON THE RIVER BUT PERMITTED WITHOUT THE FLASH ON THE REST OF THE TOUR



FREE PARKING NEXT TO THE SITE



TOURS TAKE APPROXIMATELY 1.5 HRS



LAST ADMISSION 1.5 HRS BEFORE CLOSING



VISITOR TRAIL NOT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS WITH REDUCED MOBILITY



BOOKSHOP, GIFTS & SPECIALITY FOODS



RESTAURANT, BOOKSHOP CAFÉ, SNACKS & PICNIC AREAS IN THE PARK

## ONLINE TICKET OFFICE

BOOK ONLINE TO GUARANTEE ADMISSION  
[www.gouffre-de-padirac.com](http://www.gouffre-de-padirac.com)

OPEN EVERY DAY FROM LATE MARCH TO EARLY NOVEMBER



Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards Best of the Best



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