



Limouxin TOURISME



Peregrinations Couiza - Montazels
Travel trough the centuries

A bit of history...

Couiza, close to the river **Aude** and **Salz**, attracted the attention of the Romans early in history. The surrounding heights were preferred over muddy river shores of the **Salz**. The place called “des Oliviers” was occupied from the 1st to the 3rd centuries BC, testified by the discovery of two **Gallo-Roman coins**. First, Couiza became a part of the **Roman roads** from Razès to Corbières. These roads have been used until the Middle-Ages.



During the **Carolingian period**, the village was built gradually and the parish church of St John the Baptist was founded between the 9th and 10th centuries. In the feudal time Couiza was a small village under the authority of the earls of Razès, then the **Carcassonne's** Viscount of the Trencavel dynasty.

As a result of the crusade against the **Cathars**, Couiza became property of the French knight **Pierre de Voisins**, who also owned the villages of **Rennes-le-Château**, **Coustaussa**, **Arques** and **Antugnac**. After the peace treaty in 1258, a sharp increase of the population could be noticed. The De Voisins supported the settlement of new inhabitants.

In the second half of the 14th century, the plague and the hundred-year war caused a major population decline.

The beginning of the 16th century was marked by a noticeable economic recovery. In 1518, Françoise, the last heir of the de Voisins, married Viscount Jean de Joyeuse. The couple decided to build his new residence in Couiza. The construction was entrusted to sculptor and architect Nicolas Bachelier. Nowadays, the magnificent Renaissance castle is the heritage pearl of the municipality.

In the 16th century, during the religious wars, the lands of the Barony of Arques and Couiza were sacked. De Joyeuse supported actively the Catholic League, and organized the fight against the Huguenots. The current church was built in the 17th century, under the episcopate of Nicolas Pavillon, bishop of Alet-les-Bains. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the progressive industrialization of the Aude valley promoted the development of Couiza. The population never ceased to increase, reaching 1132 inhabitants by the end of the 19th century. In the same period, Mr. Guinot created a hat-making factory, which soon had shipped thousands of felt hats all over the world.



Even if the area seems to have been used since prehistory, the occupation of **Montazels** goes back to Roman times. The origin of its name comes probably from the Latin word « *monticellus* » for little mound.

The medieval history of **Montazels** is very difficult to recreate due to the lack of historical sources. The first mention of the Saint Cecilia church goes back to the 11th century. This early church was built near the old road from **Couiza** to **Antugnac**. Nearby, during the 12th century the first castle was constructed. Some ruins are still remaining. The village has been developed around these two buildings.

After the crusade against **the Cathars**, **Montazels** became the property of Jean de Rivière, the Lord of the neighboring villages: **Conilhac and Roquetaillade**.

During the Religion Wars, **Montazels** was destroyed, but the village was soon rebuilt and at the end of the 16th century, counted 61 houses and one mill.

In the second half of the 17th century, the current owner, François de Calmes, extended the castle, which caused the destruction of the first church and changed the appearance of the village. The new church was finished in 1678. In 1785, the parish priest Jean Bernard Carles build a **three dolphin fountain** on the small square. Today the **fountain du Griffoul** gives a unique atmosphere to the village.

The construction of the railway between Quillan and Carcassonne had led to a strong development of the culture of the vineyard.

1. Departure from the Tourist Office

2. The Ducs de Joyeuse Castle

Like the **traditional feudal castle**, the one of Couiza is organized around a **rectangular courtyard** and **thick circular towers** were built on each of its four angles. **The external appearance is still medieval.** All four façades made of one-meter-thick walls have no windows at street level. The **four circular towers** are particularly sturdy with a **thickness of two meters** and are pierced with loopholes adapted to the use of firearms. The inner courtyard is built in a **very fine sandstone** that fortunately contrasts with the **external military architecture.** Everything there reminds the **bright Renaissance architecture.** The castle was ranked in 1913. **Nowadays, the Castle is a 4 stars hotel-restaurant.**

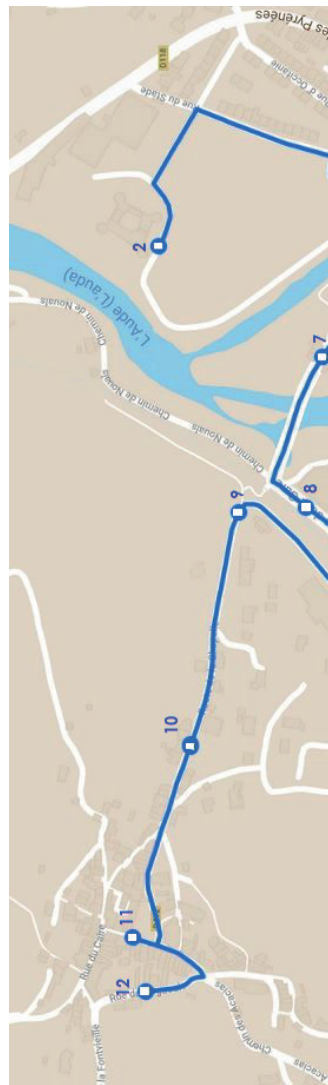
3. The riversides of the Salz

Several saltwater streams give birth to Salz. They run from the **saliferous ground** at the top of a small valley, close to **Sougraigne, Bugarach Mountain** and **Rennes-les-Bains.** Enlarged by the **Blanque River running from Bugarach,** then by the **Rialsesse from the Col du Paradis** and the **forest of Arques,** the Salz feeds into the Aude River, in Couiza. The 26th of September 1992, the tragic floods had destroyed and damaged about four hundred homes in Couiza. Since then, the rehabilitation and development works were completed.

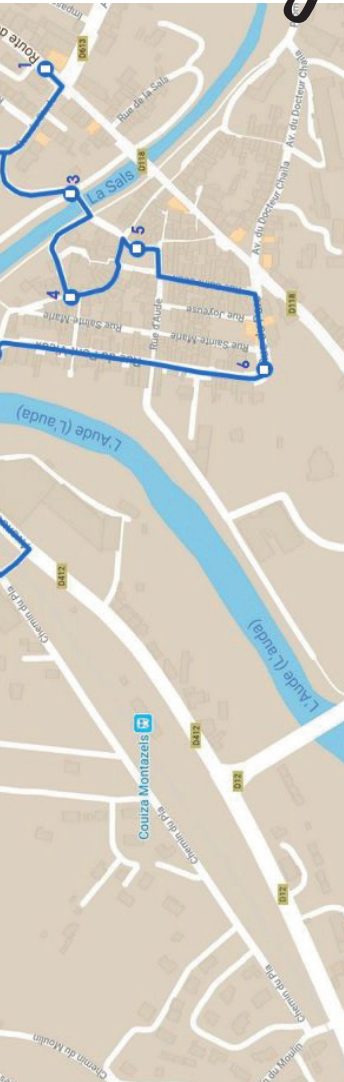
4. Saint John the Baptist's church

The actual church was built on an ancient building which goes back to the 9th century. On December 30th, 1855, a report highlighted the importance of the reconstruction and extension of the church. Actually, the reconstruction was so important that almost all the church was taken to pieces then rebuilt. The stones came from the quarry of **Alet** and **Rennes les Bains.** **Couiza's church is a perfect example of the typical architecture presents in the area from Limoux to Quillan.**

Visit of



the city



8. Hat factory

It was **from 1830** and mostly **in 1878**, with the arrival of the railway, that the **hat industry would know an important rise** in the area. During the Golden Age, up to **600 workers** were working at the Montazels great factory and **produced 5000 hats** and **6000 cones** each day. **Some big names in fashion ordered there like the Maisons Lanvin and Balenciaga for the haute couture.** Unfortunately, hats were less and less worn or not at all because of an unknown fact at the time: trends. The last French hat factory closed its doors on March 2018.

7. Le Pont vieux

The existence of a first bridge **in Couiza** was confirmed by an inheritance made in 1280. The lords of Couiza were receiving a tax on goods traveling between Catalogne and Toulouse. During the 17th century, the **marquis of Arques and Couiza, Claude Hyacinthe of Rébé**, organized some works of adjustment. Thanks to him, the village owns a beautiful cofferdam made of cut stones that protects efficiently from the spate of the Aude. **The village also owns him the reconstruction of the “Pont sur Aude” also called “Pont de Montazels” in 1682.** This bridge was raised and its wooden deck was replaced by arches made of cut stones.

6. Edouard Pech Park

In 2011, the municipality decided to revive the names of **former mayors** who are nowadays dead and who had an impact during their time for their commitment to their town. **Edouard Pech**, born in 1903 and died in 1992, was the mayor of Couiza two times, just after the end of the WW2 and then from 1952 to 1959. **The municipal park bears his name.**

5. Denis Square

In the 60^s, the municipality wanted to extend the former square of the town hall and at the same time to commemorate the two men from Couiza by sealing a slab with their name on the wall of their house. **They were great members of the resistance in Lyon from 1942 to 1945.** Their name was **Denis Eugene** and **Denis Henri, father and son.** They died during their deportation after they were denounced. **In honor of these men, the new square was named “Denis Square”.**

9. The Oratory

The Notre Dame du Mont Carmel's Oratory was built by the inhabitants of Montazels in 1834 to thank the Holy Virgin for protecting the village from a cholera epidemic that occurred in 1832-1833 **in the region of Couiza**.

10. Panorama Rennes-le-Château, Coustaussa, Pech Cardou

First of all, the **Magdala Tower, is the emblematic monument of a little village located on the opposite side of the hill: Rennes-le-Chateau**. At this legendary site, in the end of the 19th century, a countryside vicar had become incredibly wealthy by digging in the old church's crypt.

Then, a mountain outlines the landscape by its rounded shape. **The Pech Cardou**, the little brother of another sacred peak, **the Bugarach that culminates at 795m**. Slightly on the left, **the ruins of Coustaussa castle** are stuck on the slope of a hill. It is a vast medieval set greatly adjusted during the Renaissance, then used as a stone quarry on the 19th century. **Nowadays, the ruins aren't secured for visits and the castle is a private property**.

11. The Fountain of Griffoul

In 1785, the vicar of the parish Jean Bernard Carles decided to ornate the central square with a fountain. To do so, he got funds by donations from his citizens. To provide water to the fountain, he used a fountain located two or three kilometers from the village. **"La fontaine aux trois dauphins" is nowadays the patrimonial emblem of the village**.



12. The Church and the Castle

The actual Saint-Cécile Church, build in 1677-1678, has been restored partly at the end of the 19th century. It replaced a place of worship that was in all likelihood near from the actual castle. The Church has a patrimonial interest because of its homogeneity, its perfect state of preservation, and the originality of its monumental entry with its classical inspiration. The vestige of Montazels castle also has a large patrimonial interest. The well conserved medieval masonry can be dated back to the 12th-13th century. They match with the former medieval castle of Montazels that was built on the XI-12th century, when the actual village was built. The Religions Wars that occurred during the last third of the 16th century and the reconstruction of the castle the next century had considerably changed the appearance of the place. The medieval castrum (the fortified village) and the church had been completely destroyed. Nowadays, the castle is a private property, abandoned and its structure continues to deteriorate.

Personnalités



Anne de Joyeuse, the firstborn of the Guillaume's sons, and who was called Anne of Arques, was born at the end of the year 1560. He first appeared during the reunion of the provincial States of Montpellier, in 1577; he appeared with the name of the baron of Couisan. Introduced two years after his father at the court of the king Henry III, he gained the favors of this prince who lavished him with honor and dignity. In 1581, he was declared duke and peer and obtained the title of Duke of Joyeuse, with the rights of preeminence over the other grand officers of the crown. First Gentleman of the Chamber, soon he obtained the governance of Normandy and

the eminent charge of admiral of France. In 1582, he went in Languedoc to visit his family. The nobility of the province impressed him at Nissan, close to Beziers. Probably, during his visit in the province, he spent some days at the castle of Couiza, because when he was young, he liked to spend time there. In 1587, he was in charge of the royal army during the battle of Coutras against the king of Navarre who will become later on Henry IV. **Anne of Joyeuse pretended to be a prisoner, but he had been uncovered and killed by gun shot.**



Abbot François, Bérénger Saunière, born on April 11, 1852 in Montazels and died on January 22, 1917 in Rennes-le-Château.

This man of cloth was mainly known because he had spent enormous sum of money during his ministry at Rennes-le-Château, but the exact amount, its nature and its origins are still unknown. That personal accumulation of wealth is still closely associated, in collective imagination, to the discovery of some treasure on the very site of the village. This matter begun with rumors of an alleged discovery of valuable objects or scrolls (or even both) during renovation works in the

church of Saint Marie-Madeleine in 1981.

Because of this accumulation of wealth's matter dues to a presumed treasure, adorned by many fictional story, accounts of investigation, and numerous press articles and television reports, from France and other countries, Abbot François and the village of Rennes-le-Château gained an international renown, especially in Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries. **This story inspired Dan Brown in his best-seller's writing "Da Vinci Code".**

Limouxin TOURISME

ICI TOUT DEVIENT EFFERVESCENT

Office de tourisme du Limouxin

7 Avenue du Pont de France - 11300 Limoux
+33 4 68 31 11 82 - tourisme@cc-limouxin.fr
www.tourisme-limoux-in-aude.fr

Bureau d'information touristique de Couiza

17 Route des Pyrénées - 11190 Couiza
+33 4 68 69 69 85

Bureau d'information touristique de Rennes-les-Bains

Rue des Thermes - 11190 Rennes-les-Bains
+33 4 68 69 82 94

