



LES
SITES **PAYS CATHARE**



AGUILAR

CASTLE

T O U R G U I D E



AGUILAR CASTLE

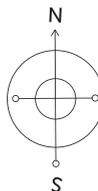
WITH THIS FREE GUIDE, EXPLORE THE BEST OF TUCHAN-AGUILAR: THE AGUILAR CASTLE, THE VILLAGE OF TUCHAN, AND THE BEAUTY OF NATURE. IT INCLUDES ALL OUR FAVOURITE SPOTS...

BUT FOR THE CURIOUS WHO WANT TO SEE AND SHARE EVEN MORE INTERESTING FACTS AND FEATURES, OTHER TOOLS ARE AT YOUR DISPOSAL.



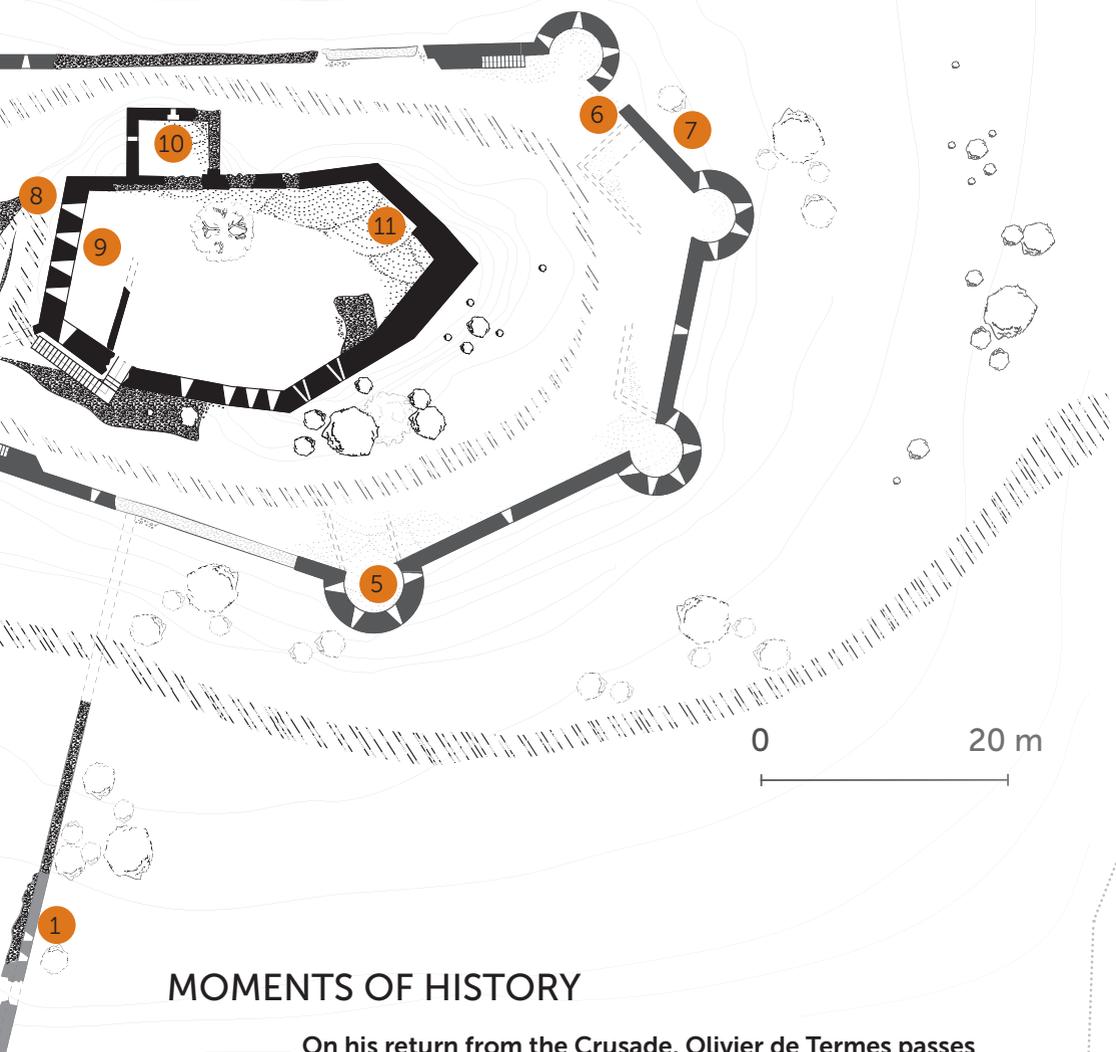
Legend

-  Stonewall remains
-  Stonewall ruins
-  Stonework ceiling features (arches, rib vaulting, etc.)



Plan : ©L.Bayrou/CAML - Graphic adaptation: Le Passe muraille





MOMENTS OF HISTORY

On his return from the Crusade, Olivier de Termes passes Tuchan on the way to his castle. Aguilar has just been given back to him by King Louis IX in recognition of his services in the East. The ancient donjon is coming into sight. He recognises the little chapel overlooking the village terraces which stretch across the hillside right by the castle. The walls that used to shelter the faidit lords under his protection are still standing. But those days are over. Olivier is now the loyal vassal of the King of France and will soon see Aguilar fortified with new structures, making it a fortress on a par with Peyrepertuse and Quéribus...





ON THE WAY UP... 1

HUMBLE VESTIGES

On the road from Tuchan, the “rocher aux aigles” (eagle rock), stands tall and sheer as if to demonstrate its power. Still, the path gently climbs the hillside. At the top, a large stocky tower begins to appear. Below, some older, less imposing stones emerge among the shrub oaks. They are the remains of a gate to the ancient castrum: a group of houses around the castle within an enclosure, now disappearing into the scrubland.

👁 More to see

With each footstep, the landscape opens up to reveal the strategic location of the Aguilar Castle. The Tautavel tower is the first to indicate that Catalonia is nearby.

In the Middle Ages, this tower was in Aragon territory. Known as the *Tour del Far*, or tower of fire, it was a means of communication.

A few more steps and there in the distance, beyond the Tautavel and Força Réal towers, the Pyrenees stand between France and Spain, as they have stood since the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659. The plain gradually widens. Deep within the vineyard, Paziols faces Tuchan at the foot of Mount Tauch. The roads part. One goes to Narbonne, another heads for Estagel, Perpignan and Catalonia, while a third crosses the Corbières mountain range on its way to Carcassonne.

+ Further information

Here, Roussillon almost encroaches on Corbières. Indeed, the vineyard huts and irrigation canals, the pink houses and the Tuchan church tower, give the impression that this is Catalan country. But no, this is definitely Occitan land!

The bell tower and ironwork terrace have even been mockingly given the nickname of “iron cage”...

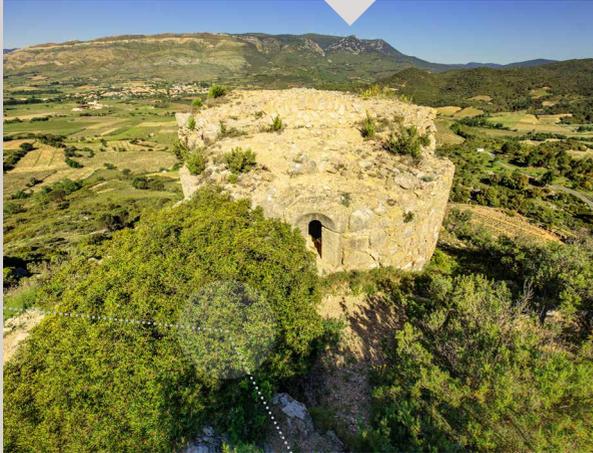


THE ROAD TO THE MINES

The road known here as the “road to the mines” heads towards Lagrasse, through the Corbières mountains. Not far from Tuchan stands the Termes Castle, the family home of Olivier de Termes, the 13th century lord of Aguilar. This ancient family owes its power to substantial subsoil resources. With its iron, silver and copper deposits, the Corbières subsoil was exploited from Antiquity to the 20th century. A hiking itinerary from Palairac invites you to explore this mining history.

THE SAINTE-ANNE CHAPEL ²

Today, the Sainte Anne Chapel seems strangely isolated. In the 13th century, it stood within the castrum enclosure. It is a moving site. This tiny chapel, measuring five metres by four, welcomes visitors in the cool air of its nave covered with a pointed-arch roof. In the apse, a simple window allows in the light as well as the branches of a broom. The altar has two niches: the Epistle side on the right (south), and the Gospel side on the left (north).

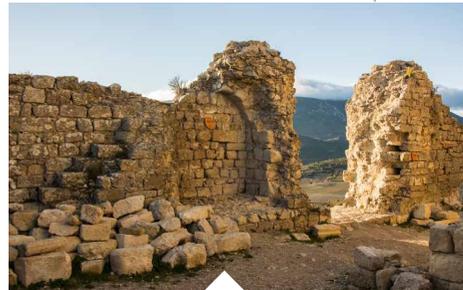


As you leave the chapel, the landscape strikes you, like the lively “Cers” winds that are frequent here. Howling as it hits the walls just below the platform, the wind reminds us that this hill culminates at 296 metres. Yet it is dwarfed by Mount Tauch, blocking out the sky behind Tuchan, at an elevation of 917 metres...

ROYAL FORTIFICATION ³

DEFENCE BY ATTACK

At Aguilar, the master masons of the King of France implemented what is known as Philipian military architecture, after King Philippe Auguste who, at the end of the 12th century, launched an innovating principle: active defence. The enclosure wall is no longer just a shield. It now includes towers and arrow slits...



The gate ⁴

Although it has disappeared, it is highlighted by its very absence. The empty gap between the two posts indicates the width of the gate. Two holes in the left-hand wall give an idea of the size of the door bars they accommodated when the gates were closed. A groove on the bottom right-hand side indicates where the portcullis used to slide... This robust gateway was probably protected further by a trap and a gatehouse.



THE TOWERS

These towers are semi-circular: or “open at the throat” as they are often described. Their design makes them more than a defence structure, they also trap the assailants. Defenders can shoot through the arrow slits placed at an optimum angle by the King’s engineers. And if the attackers still succeed in taking the tower, they find themselves exposed to attack from the defenders hiding in the bailey or the outer wall...

👁 More to see 5

Inside the towers, brackets are fixed to the wall. These are corbels, intended to support structures such as wooden flooring. The corbels in the tower near the postern are placed at head height, with clearly visible notches to hold the timber.



+ Further information 6

The postern is a small, hidden gate that sometimes comes in handy, so it is well protected. To run for help or return after a night attack, the postern allows discreet movement!

Curtain walls

Curtain walls, the walls between two towers, become shorter and shorter at the end of the 12th century. Dividing the wall into sections limits access to the rampart walk, since access to one section no longer exposes the entire fortress. Here and there, steps are built into the wall, including a few that are still visible near the towers beyond the postern.

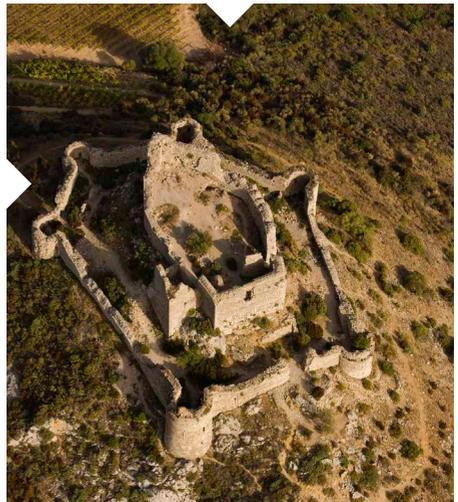


+ Further information

Aguilar’s defences are soon to be rendered obsolete with the arrival of 15th century artillery. The fortress is, after all, rather inefficient. It is taken several times by the Spaniards who raid French territory again and again. In 1495, Henrique de Guzman, the Lieutenant General of Roussillon, takes Aguilar and succeeds in getting as far as Lagrasse. The fortress is again under Spanish rule in 1525 and in 1541. Well before the signature of the Treaty of the Pyrenees establishes the border in 1659, Aguilar is already left in abandon.

Adapting to the terrain

Seen from the sky, or simply on a map, the fortress strikes you by the irregular spacing of its towers around the inner enclosure. Three of them are very close to one another, while the other three are spaced further apart. This arrangement, which makes the fortress look a little like a crouched animal ready to pounce, is due to the terrain. The very gentle eastern slope is defended by three towers spaced close together, and, behind them, an overhang reinforcing the outer wall. Like Peyreperouse, the fortress must protect its curtain wall from battle devices, such as trebuchets and catapults, so it is strengthened and reduced, offering less surface area to projectiles. Curtain wall dimensions also depend on the terrain. They are longer and narrower above ravines, and shorter and thicker on gentle slopes.





THE MEMORY OF OLIVIER DE TERMES

Fortified, of course. Modified by the King's engineers, certainly. But this castle perched above the bailey, before belonging to the King of France, was indeed that of the lord, Olivier de Termes. There are still traces of his time here, in the form of more rustic stones that are cut less smoothly, but just as robust.

More to see 8

Five arrow-slits, measuring 1.7 to 1.8 metres in length, watch over the access ramp. This ramp was built in 2016, but on its first bend, there are still a few grassy stones remaining from the medieval one. Schist and three corbels protrude from the wall to the right of the gateway. They indicate that there was a platform at the top of the ramp, with a wooden

structure covered in roofing, of which there are only the schist remains. Schist was probably used for watertightness.



The Logis 9

This is a vast hall. As soon as you cross the threshold, there is a behind-the-scenes view of the arrow slits, which open under semicircular arches, making them decorative. Between the arrow slits, the vault bases are visible. Their upward curve bears witness to the existence of an upper floor, where there are still two large bay windows.



+ Further information 10

The joining square tower was added later. The 3 storey tower houses a tank which stores water collected from the roof and carried in pipes through holes in the walls. One such hole still remains, a circular hole in the wall on the first floor.

The enclosure 11

The small polygonal enclosure gives a feeling of intimacy, and safety. A line of holes in the wall recalls the existence of a wooden structure, like a stable or other building. There is a gaping red sandstone cellar.



LORD OF THE CASTLE

Olivier de Termes is one of the most famous knights of 13th occitan Century. He was an extraordinary figure. In 1210, after the siege of Termes by Simon de Montfort, he lost his father as well as his property. Thus, at the age of 10, he became a *faidit*, a lord stripped of all he had. He went to Aragon, the birthplace of his mother and a place of refuge for many other *faidits* like him, including the future Count of Toulouse, Raimond. He also made friends with the future Jacques I of Aragon. Opposing the King of France, he participated in attempts to reconquer lost territories, and was at Carcassonne during the siege of 1240. So he lived for a while in his castle at Aguilar, but surrendered it in 1241. Then, in 1245, he left for the Crusade. Olivier de Termes became one of the most powerful supporters of the King of France and the Catholic church.

A true crusader. On his return from the East, he retook possession of Aguilar, when Saint Louis returned the castle to him as a gesture of gratitude. However, Olivier wanted to leave again, so he parted with all his belongings to finance a new expedition. Hence, in 1261, he sold Aguilar once and for all, to the French crown...



+ Further information

Faidit ou *faidit*: this Occitan word designates the lords who were stripped of their rights and belongings by the crusaders, during the Albi Crusade.

Pope Innocent III initiated this practice, but the King of France opposed it at first. The Occitan lords were vassals, and nobody but the King could modify their rights. It was a question of authority.

When Philippe Auguste finally agreed to participate in the Crusade, he adopted that principle, to the benefit of the French knights.

Aguilar was the refuge of several *faidits* who had shared the same fate as Olivier...

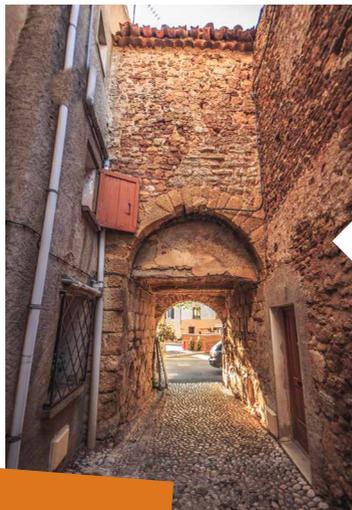
THE VILLAGE OF TUCHAN

Secret gardens, "art nouveau", memories of old practices...

Tuchan has lots to tell the curious browser.

There is a Discovery trail in the village, starting at the Promenade, near the Town Hall. This guide may also accompany your tour.

UNDER THE CHURCH WING



THE FORT

Tuchan grew around the church.

The ecclesiastical enclosure, the bounded area around the church, is a sacred, protected site.

The first records of Tuchan date back to 1215, when the site was a fortress, the fortified centre of the village. It was small with very few dwellings, but was a place of refuge in case of attack. It was surrounded by a moat and had several towers. Today all of that has disappeared but, once inside, it still feels like a secluded space...

THE RANSOM

1525. A troop of Germans and Spaniards attacked and took Aguilar and Tuchan. The people of Tuchan were taken hostage by Charles Quint. Narcisse Villaville, a financier from Perpignan, paid the ransom: 1,000 gold ducats. As tokens, he received the jewels and shrines of the parish church. He only returned these tokens in 1531, in exchange for rights over the communal furnace and sheet production in Tuchan.

THE CHURCH

Down one of the fort's little streets of red sandstone structures tinted with iron oxide, stands the entrance to the parish church.

It replaced the Sainte-Anne Chapel which was destroyed entirely by an Aragon raid in 1543. This 17th century building is of fine baroque style. The altar and blue altarpiece covered in



vines invite contemplation.

They were created by Nicolas Pavillon, the bishop of Alet-les-Bains. In the left-hand chapel, there is a 14th century statue of the Virgin holding her child on her knees.

This is typical of the period, and similar to the chapel in Alet-les-Bains or, on the Catalan side, the chapel of Prades.

NOTRE-DAME DE FASTE

The Virgin and child statue in the parish church comes from Notre-Dame de Faste. Faste, which means luck. The luck of sailors lost in a storm, who saw a glimmer of light on Mount Tauch which guided them back to port. The light came from the chapel which is still visible today. The legend gave its name to the chapel and its Virgin.



A LAND OF PROSPERITY



LA PLACE AUX ÂNES

Adjoining the fort on the opposite side from the church, the “place des ânes” (donkey square) was the busy centre of the village in the Middle Ages. Every December, it was the scene of the great annual agricultural fair. Catalan dealers came to sell donkeys and mules. This is how the Catalans earned their nickname of *bourrous* (Catalan donkeys), which is still used today. The pig and sheep farmers of Aude, on the other hand, were nicknamed *gabatch porc* (pig). Peddlers and merchants selling fabric and utensils also came to this important fair. The three days of business and celebrations which continued up until 1930.

THE OIL MILL

There are significant remains of Tuchan’s oil mill in the “barricade” district. The mill dates from the 16th century, when it belonged to the monks of Fontfroide who entrusted its management to the lords of Padern. This hydraulic mill was in operation until the end of the 19th century, when the olive trees were replaced with grape vines.



HOW THE MILL OPERATED

People brought their olive harvest here, to extract the oil. First, the olives were crushed in a trough by millstones installed vertically on the enormous wooden structure that is still visible today. This produced a paste, which was placed in a kind of beret-shaped basket of one metre in diameter, the *scourtin* (olive oil filter). Hot water was poured over the paste twice, using a different basin each time: this is how the oil was filtered.

WATER AND GARDENS

Tuchan has plenty of water. One of Europe’s biggest aquifers runs under Mount Tauch and the springs are abundant. The Nouyès stream flowing behind the oil mill used to turn the millwheel. A small aqueduct carried water to the mill, creating a waterfall for stronger flow. The gardens in this area are irrigated with water from this stream. A few chairs under a weeping willow in the wild grass form a romantic scene. In another garden, a well-kept vegetable plot displays perfectly straight

THE “COURTALS” (SHEEP SHEDS)

Until the middle of the 20th century, there were numerous sheep in Tuchan. The village shepherd rounded them up every day in the part of the village where the *courtals* stood, before taking them to pasture. The “rue des métiers” (“trade street”) is also in this district, as a reminder of the craftsmen who worked here. Most of them were weavers.



rows of onions waiting to be gathered. Visitors can enjoy an enchanting walk along the low stone walls of these discreet gardens.

LIKE IN PARIS

THE POST OFFICE

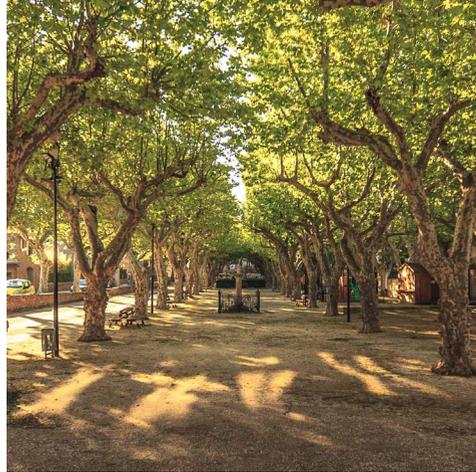
At the end of the 19th century, Tuchan was an important village. There was a gendarmerie and a tax office... but no post office: Mail arrived just twice a week, from Davejean... which was unacceptable to the town council. They took the decision to build a post office at the same as the town hall. At the time, "Art Nouveau" was in fashion. Paris was consulted. The post office architect sent the plans and a local mason and an ironworker carried out the work. As a result, Tuchan post office is now a listed Historic Monument, and a perfect example of the "whiplash" "Art Nouveau" style.

L'ART NOUVEAU

"Art Nouveau" developed at the very beginning of the 20th century, remaining until the 1920s, when it was supplanted by "Art Déco". The post office of Tuchan displays all the typical features of the style. Two gently curving sets of steps face one another in perfect symmetry. All of the ironwork is in arabesque style. The windows are very wide and, under the cornice, there are some beautifully-coloured ceramics.

ALLEYS CHAVANETTE

In front of the post office, there is an immense park, or "Promenade" where inhabitants enjoy the shade of the magnificent plane trees. It has a Parisian feel, inviting strollers to enjoy Tuchan's very own Jardin du Luxembourg. People come here to play "pétanque" (French bowls) and grandmothers rest on the seats watching over children playing or learning to ride bicycles... This recreational space was created in the same period as the post office. There is a "Marianne" bust statue modelled on Brigitte Bardot, and a war memorial featuring a multicoloured statue of a WWI French soldier, as well as a statue of Doctor Chavanette, the man who made all of this possible...



DOCTOR CHAVANETTE

He was a public figure. In the early 20th century, his family owned the Nouvelle Castle estate, which was the area's biggest employer at the time. A public figure, and a sponsor. It was he who donated the land on which the post office, town hall and Promenade are built. Besides the bust, his memory is also present on the façade of the post office where a snake sits discreetly under the lamps, as an allusion to his contribution.





NEARBY



VINGRAU

This small village is known all over the world among climbing enthusiasts. An immense limestone cliff provides them with over 300 climbing routes overlooking the magnificent vineyard landscape.



MOUNT TAUCH

At an elevation of 917 metres, this haven of biodiversity offers some unforgettable walking itineraries. It can be reached from Tuchan, by car or on foot.



THE ROAD TO PADERN

The road to Paderne, which goes on to Peyrepertuse and Quéribus, offers the breathtaking spectacle of a rocky outcrop above the Verdouze river...



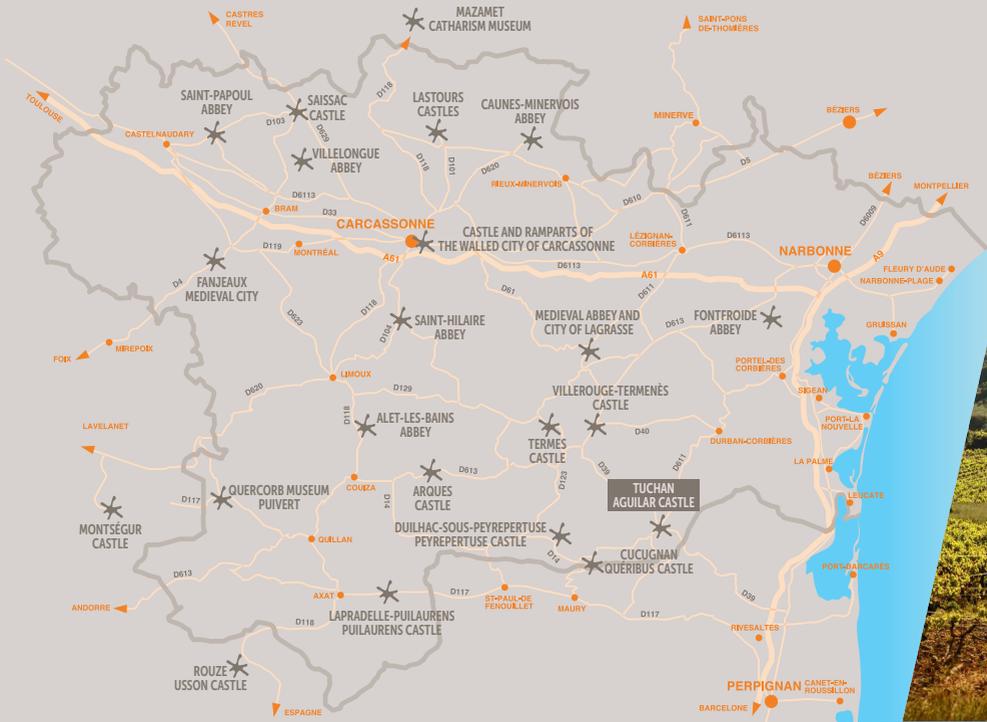
LES
CITADEL-
LES DU
VERTIGE
EN LIGNE POUR
UNESCO

ON THE WAY TO UNESCO!

In the 13th century, at the end of the Crusade against the Albigenses, the power of the King of France was asserted in our newly conquered region. For the first time, a coherent system of defence was set up for the entire territory to face an enemy: Aragon. Peyrepertuse, Puilaurens, Termes, Quéribus, Aguilar, Lastours, and Montségur (Ariège) made up a line of invincible fortresses coordinated by the Seneschal of Carcassonne. A new, central defensive system where the citadel of Carcassonne was the headquarters. A spectacular architectural feat in the city and in these ridge-top castles blending into the rocks. Lastly, totally preserved landscapes and exceptional panoramic views. These are the main arguments put forward in the application for inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

You can support this application at this website citadellesduvertige.aude.fr

PRACTICAL INFORMATION



GOOD PRACTICES



Sturdy walking shoes
Pets welcome

SERVICES



TOILETS
Toilets on the Walk to the village and to the castle.



PARKING
Free parking in the village and castle.
For the motorhomes a reception is envisaged with the castle Wialla.



SHOP
At the reception of the castle.



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