



ARQUES

CASTLE

T O U R G U I D E



ARQUES CASTLE

SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS



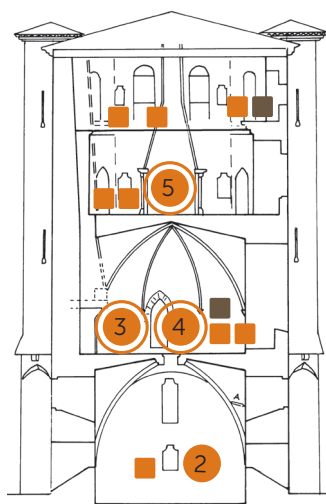
Fire

fire: If the fire is outside the château, remain inside the château and wait for the emergency services to arrive.



accident

Accident or other event posing a danger: dial 112 to contact the emergency services



CROSS-SECTION OF THE KEEP




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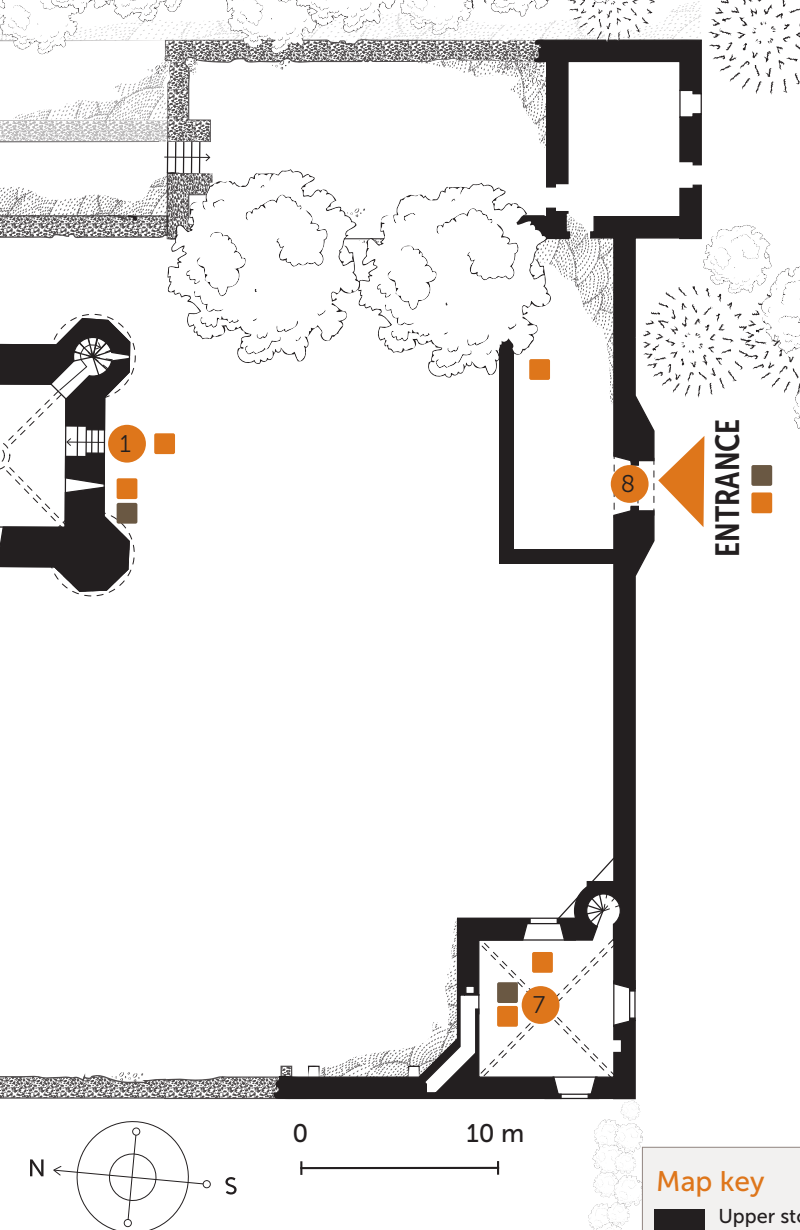
Cathar Country - the guide



Castrum - the game

   audetourisme
payscathare.org

Plan : ©J.-P. Cazes - Graphic adaptation: Le Passe Muraille
Cross-section of the keep: Dominique Dieltiens



Map key

- Upper stonework
- Lower stonework, in ruins
- Roof stonework (beams, cross-ribs, etc.)
- 1 Ground floor
- 1 Upstairs (circled figure)
- Station for the Cathar Country app
- Station for the Castrum app



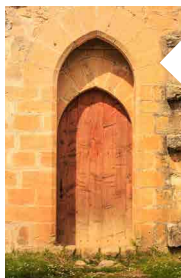
ATTACK/DEFENCE

The keep, with its 4 tall, corner towers, looks like it is perched on stilts. Although at first glance, with its elegant yellow sandstone, it looks welcoming and hospitable it is, in fact, a very effective defensive building.

The Entrance... 1

24 m high, a ground floor and 3 upper floors, around one hundred openings and a small door, oddly located on the upper level. Its presence is quite a mystery. What is it doing there? Has it been standing like this for centuries, waiting for some adjoining structure that was never built? That is one theory.

+ Further information



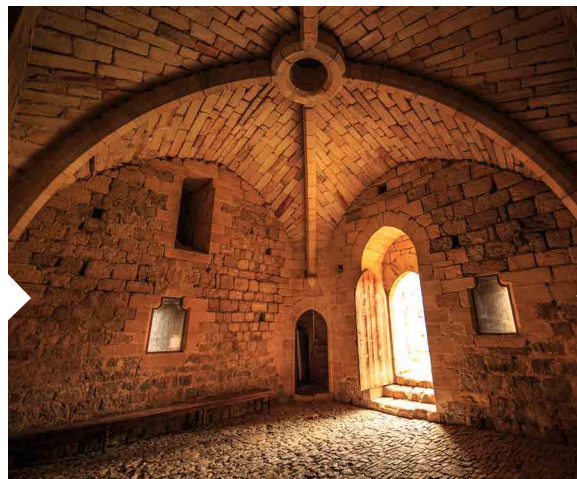
The gate of the keep is typical of the design favoured by the King's architects, signalling an evolution in defensive architecture. In this model, the gate becomes an offensive tool, with the walls playing an active role: thus a door, with the addition of a murder hole, provides not just a means of defence but also attack.

Sounding the alarm 2

During the Middle Ages, this lovely, vaulted room, with its uneven floor, and annular key stone, housed the provisions: grains, salted meat, wines etc. Today it is a refuge for some very valuable but, sadly, endangered animals. Bats. There are 3 species here: Geoffrey's bat, the greater horseshoe bat and the pipistrelle bat.

👁 More to see

Shut the door a moment, sit down and keep quiet. You might hear some sudden crackling and, when your eyes become accustomed to the dark, you may be lucky enough to see some of the bats in flight.



+ Further information

Like many other phenomena, the threat to bats raises an alarm about the destructive nature of our actions and habits. Here, at last, they have a found quiet, safe shelter. The keep offers a great opportunity to get up close to these extremely useful creatures - an experience that you're sure to love.

Times had changed 3

Around 1280, Gilles de Voisins, the Seigneur of Arques, decided to build a castle which was then completed some 30 years later by his son Gilles, nicknamed "Gilet" by his subjects. The Inquisition was still raging but for Gilles, the grandson of a crusader, the Cathars were no longer a cause for concern. The world had changed. Seigneurial power was now demonstrated through aesthetics and comfort.

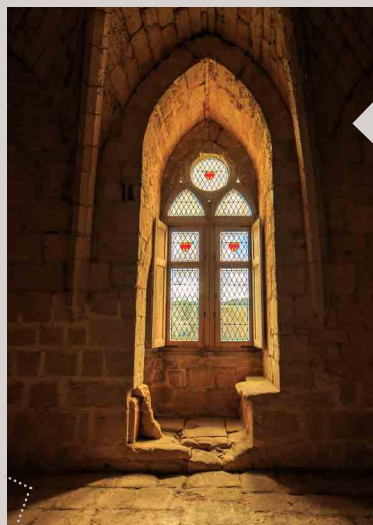
THE VOISINS, COME FROM AFAR

Olivier de Termes, who made peace with the King of France, sold the Arques seigneurial estate to Pierre de Voisins. Pierre was a companion of Simon de Montfort, leader of the Crusaders who, in the early 13th century, at the behest of the Pope, swept over the Languedoc to eliminate the heretical Cathars. The Voisins settled in this quiet valley, redolent of Ile-de-France. They remained seigneurs of the estate until the 16th century.



👁 More to see

Even with a roaring fire, how - with this hole in the floor - could this vast fireplace manage to heat up the room? The hole connects with the ceiling on the ground floor. Was it used to bring up the food? Perhaps. But the hole would still have to be closed to shut out the cold.

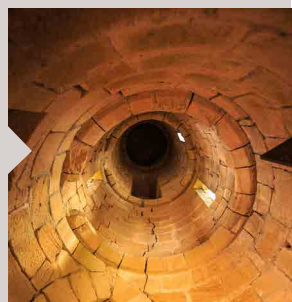


👁 More to see

A lovely window seat overlooking the countryside and village. This is a lovely place to sit and dream, protected by two watchtowers, accessed via small, hidden passageways. Stationed in these turrets, the soldiers would not have encroached on the life of their master...

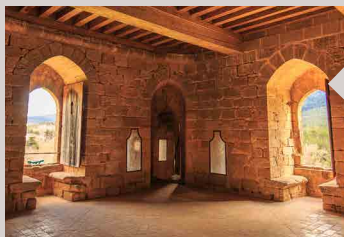
+ Further information

To left of the window, you'll see the entrance to the turret, and if you look upwards, you'll be able to see the entire structure of the building: Its staggered openings and 3 upper floors that you can easily imagine covered with boards. Soldiers kept watch on the upper floors...



Who lived there? 4

Soldiers would eat, sleep and play here, just above their master. Straw was used to soften the ground. A fireplace and chimney flue on the floor below helped keep them warm in winter. They would sit and chat, facing each other, on the seats near the window, all the while keeping watch over their surroundings. At this height, nothing could reach them...



👁 More to see

The walls of this room have cut off corners. Each opens on to one of the turrets which, in addition to serving a defensive function, also helped strengthen the structure of this slender keep.

👁 More to see

All castles suffered from the same problem: cold draughts. To stop the draughts, you had to stagger the openings: here, for example, a bevelled door prevents the staircase from opening directly onto the room.



Do you see anything coming? 5

From this room, with its forty odd openings, soldiers could spot any external movement, and target their enemies from all directions. They were ready to repel any attack: the Black Prince who plundered Carcassonne and, the looters who roamed the region would have to watch out... But they steered clear and a relative peace reigned here during the 14th and 15th centuries.

More to see

The keystone, in other words the central stone, on one of the doors has dropped. It looks like it's going to fall. This shifting of position, which you can see, to varying degrees, throughout the keep, in addition to cracks, was probably caused by an earthquake.

The old keep stood firm

In 1575, the Wars of Religion were raging. The village of Arques was burned, set alight by the Protestants, who then attacked the castle where the inhabitants took refuge. To no avail: the keep provided very effective protection. The Protestants gave up...

Further information

But why attack Arques which up until then had been a small and rather tranquil seigneurial estate? Because it had passed into the hands of the Dukes of Joyeuse, powerful defenders of the Catholic cause, who commanded the Languedoc army. Which meant that their land then became a target.

Further information

In 1518 Jean de Joyeuse, who was then Captain of Narbonne, married Françoise de Voisins, the last representative of the bloodline. And so Arques became the property of a family whose star was in the ascendant. The couple built a more fashionable castle, in Couiza, on the banks of the Aude. Later, Anne de Joyeuse became a favourite of Henri III. Thus Arques passed into the hands of one of the most noble bloodlines ... a family that had many enemies!

A JOYEUSE LEGEND

One day, when out boar hunting, Charlemagne lost his sword, Joyeuse. A soldier found it for him. Charlemagne rewarded him with land and gave him permission to marry one of his favourite subjects. And so the Joyeuse bloodline came into being...

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE 6

A ROYAL SIGNATURE

The precision and quality of the construction, the presence of defensive elements such as fishtail or rectangular-based arrow slits, murder holes over doors, and ostentatious features such as the bossed stones at the top of the keep... all suggest that the architects who worked here were the same architects responsible for remodelling Carcassonne and its 5 royal "sons": Peyrepertuse, Quéribus, Aguilar, Termes, Puilaurens.

More to see


The keep was surrounded by a curtain wall, similar to the walls that are still visible next to the castle entrance. Evidence of these walls can be seen on the ground, as well as - on the village side - a vast room with a fireplace adjoining another wall that appears to be part of the castle's old chapel.

Further information

The construction of Arques Castle marked the beginning of a new style of architecture. The purely military, feudal-style castle, gave way to more comfortable, residential castles. The king's craftsmen and architects introduced a new style to the region - a style, first developed in the North and Ile-de-France that would soon become popular along the Loire.





 More to see

The base of the tower-residence is protected by a drainage channel. A low-ceilinged room was probably used to store provisions and wine, within easy reach of the family.

THE TOWER-LIVING QUARTERS 7

A FAMILY HOME

The Tower/Living quarters at the south-west corner of the castle looks like a quiet place where you can live peacefully, without fear of threat from the outside world. A small door leads to the private latrines. There is a well-proportioned fireplace with plenty of room for storage. The light enters via a twin bay with refined, trefoil arches, where you can sit comfortably and enjoy the sun's gentle caress. Adorning the spring of the vaulted arches are carved faces, redolent of the sculptures in the Musicians' Room at Puivert. It's not hard to imagine a summer evening enlivened by songs of courtly love (*"fin'amor"*).



 More to see

When building his castle, Gilles de Voisins chose a location away from the village. Was he worried about the residents? Did he want to break with the "encastellation" movement, previously very popular in the south, where villages were grouped around fortresses? The fact remains that Arques castle looks very different from the other vertiginous castles in Corbières with their unforgiving exterior.

THE CASTLE GATE 8

EXIT THIS WAY

The castle gate was enough to deter any would-be attacker. Its monumental size hints at an effective system of defence. Thanks to the huge murder hole over the entrance, a soldier operating the door, perched on the platform behind the wall, would have been able to break the head of any attacker. And if this didn't succeed, any would-be intruder would then have to negotiate an enclosed passage and second door before gaining access to the courtyard.

 Further information

The castle, which stands on a slight incline, guarded an essential route linking Narbonne and the coast, in the east to the Upper Aude Valley in the West. This route also intersected with another pathway, from Carcassonne in the North to Fenouillèdes in the South.

 More to see

When you turn back to face the gate, you'll see the Les Voisins family's coat-of-arms adorning the pediment.



ARQUES LE VILLAGE

THE VILLAGE

The village of Arques, nestled in a lush valley, is built from Alet sandstone, characterised by its subtle, shimmering colours. Around the village, tall forests and almost barren, red soil give way to hills ...



A WALLED TOWN

Arques, together with Saint-Louis et Parahou, is one of the only two fortified towns in Corbières. The status of "bastide" or fortified town was conferred upon the village of Arques by Gilles 1 de Voisins, at the end of the 13th century. He wanted to expand and transform it. This status allowed him to attract new residents who would benefit from the advantageous conditions: clearing new land, grazing herds on waste land, taking wood to build houses

etc...When it came to urban planning, these walled towns followed a highly original model. They could be newly created villages or, as is the case here, an extension of an existing town. The streets in the new district, to the East of the church (just above the town hall) adopted a typical grid system.

THE GAME OF 4 FOUNTAINS

This tag game, which is a variant of the 4 corners game popular in French schools, is played by running from one fountain in the village to another. The fountains mark out a secure area where children can safely play chase.



AN ORGANISED COMMUNITY

Very early on, the residents of Arques were represented by Consuls who were responsible for protecting their interests. In the early 14th century, they obtained permission from the king to organise fairs and markets, and were then exempted from the heaviest seigneurial dues and services, including work on land owned by the Les Voisins family. They were also allowed to hunt ... And so Arques became a lively market town.



THE GRANGER HOUSE

This house is all that remains of the medieval village. The series of arches hint at a house that was probably much larger, almost certainly extending up to the corner of the road. In the 18th century, it was used to house the village oven.

A SUDDEN CHANGE

Around 1315-1320, the skies darkened. The climate changed and torrential rain battered this small corner of paradise. Then the One Hundred Years' War slowed down trade, but worse was still to come: the bubonic plague. It decimated the population and hung around until the 17th century. In the 16th century, the Wars of Religion, in which the Joyeuse, the new seigneurs of Arques played an active role, resulted in the burning of the village.

"LES BANALITÉS"

Under the Ancien Regime, the local Seigneur had to provide and maintain mills, press houses and ovens for the inhabitants. These facilities were called "*banalités*". The use of these facilities was mandatory with payment demanded in exchange for use. After the Revolution, the village oven became the communal oven but then fell out of favour following the introduction of bread ovens to cottages and, later, the setting up of bakeries.



DÉODAT ROCHÉ'S HOUSE

When Déodat Roché (1877-1978) first learned of history of the Cathars, studies about Catharism were still in their infancy. He became very interested in the subject and did much to raise awareness about Medieval history and the identity of our region. From 1956 onwards he organised the L'Estagnol summer camps which were an occasion for meetings, talks but also music and meditation. The museum, set up within his home, retraces the history of the Society for the Study and Remembrance of the Cathars, and its founder. In 2019, his collection was further enriched by a donation and the exhibition was updated. The story continues...

GOOD BREAD

Déodat Roché asked the baker to bake some wholemeal bread for him. An intellectual and spiritual movement was gathering momentum around him. During the 70s, his supporters were already asking for "organic" bread. The baker used flour from the Axat region specifically for this purpose.



OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

The bell tower rises directly from the ground. In fact it is a converted tower that dates back to the 12th century. The murder holes on the first two floors remind us of its original military function. It used to be a Seigneurial tower which was then converted to a bell tower in the 14th century when the church was founded here.

INSIDE THE CHURCH (Ask for the key at the town hall)

Saint-Anne is a small, charming, village church with medieval architecture and 19th and 20th century decorative elements typical of the region: vaulted ceilings, arches, keystones and sculptures, brightly painted with flowers and stars. Next to the baptismal font is a black cart, on which coffins are placed. The wooden staircase, on the other side, leading to the bell tower highlights the resourcefulness of the rural community who collected the wood and built the staircase with their very own hands.

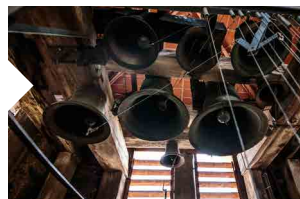


COUNTERWEIGHTS

In a small room adjoining the staircase leading to the bell tower, the clock counterweights hang down into an old shaft. They are driven by a magnificent mechanism installed on the upper floor. There's also a cart counterweight, standing on a pedestal, like a sculpture. When attached to the cart, it helped balance the load, relieving the burden on the draft animals, helping them to pull. This system was particularly invaluable in the mountains.

RINGING THE BELLS

Housed on the top floor of the bell tower are 17 bells, including 3 which date back to the 15th and 16th centuries. The bells, which have all been baptised, have a godmother and godfather and are called Espérance, Providence, Tolérance, Vigilance etc. Each has its own distinctive tone which can be recognised by the bell ringers. Prévoyance: Fa#, Indulgence: Sol etc.



UNLIKELY BELLRINGERS

In Occitan (or Languedoc), bell-ringers are called "*sonaires*". At the beginning of the 20th century, there were official "*sonaires*", including a woman, Léa Calmont. There were also bell-ringers for special occasions. In 1945, youngsters struck the great bell with a hammer to announce the Liberation. An anxious husband, returning from the inn, only to find his wife missing from bed, would also use the bells to sound the alarm: "*me som perdut la dona!*" (my wife is missing") he would announce in Catalan to the villagers who had hurried to his aid...



IN MEMORIAM

One night in 1941, Ernest slipped into the church, brush and paints in hand. The next day, a large image of Christ, painted directly on to the wall, took pride of place behind the main altar. The painting has a few odd features: Christ has no beard and the right side of his body is pierced rather than the left side with his heart... The truth of the matter is that Ernest was not a Catholic but Jewish. He created this work as a way of thanking the people of Arques for saving him from the Nazis. He signed it under the feet of Christ.

A GOTHIC TREASURE

At the back of the church is a special room, protected by a grill, used for storing precious objects including an exceptional 14th century, polychromatic stone statue of Saint Anne. In her arms she is holding Mary who, in turn, is holding the baby Jesus.



O TEMPORA O MORES

Gilles II de Voisins was Seigneur of Arques in the early 14th century. When he came across Pierre Maury, the shepherd, accompanied by Pierre Authié, a well known Cathar perfect, he would exchange a greeting with them and continue on his way. Later, however, Cathar believers felt unsafe and left Arques to seek refuge in Montaillou...

THE WATER TROUGH

Water flows gently here in Arques, feeding the water trough and the wash house. There's no shortage of water in this valley: there's a spring and a small river, the Rialsesse, which flows down from the Corbières mountains to the Sals, 8 km away. The presence of water, and the geographical location, at the crossroad of East-West and North-South axes, helps explain the town's expansion and development. A development that almost depleted the region of its riches.



COUNTING SHEEP

Sheep farming was an important activity from the Middle Ages onwards. Transhumance routes and connections existed between Corbières and the Pyrenees. Many farmers would come to this protected valley to graze their sheep in winter. In 1807 there were still some 3,000 animals/sheep/ewes in the Arques region...

HOMEcoming

In the late 13th century, some farming families from the Haute-Ariège region came to settle here, attracted by the advantages of a walled town. The crusade against the Albigensians was over and they felt safe here. However, in 1305, two "perfects" were arrested in Limoux. The people of Ariège felt that they were in danger and sent a delegation to the Pope who absolved them. But the Inquisitor at Carcassonne would not give up. So they fled and took refuge around Montaillou...

GASPING FOR AIR

After the Wars of Religion, land clearing began again. The vast forest surrounding Arques attracted gentlemen-glassmakers, who settled here in the 17th century. Their work was silica and wood-intensive. When they had burned and used everything around to heat their furnace, they would build another a little further away, and start all over again. This overexploitation, combined with over-grazing, soon degraded the land to such an extent that even the slightest rainfall would send earth and debris crashing down into the valley.



180 DEGREE TURN...

In 1863 an Imperial Decree ordered the reforestation of Aude in this area. They built dry stone structures to help reduce erosion and then planted and managed more trees - a resource essential to both life and industry. Timber rafters, joinery, cardboard ... the demand for wood is high. A series of development plans followed, the most recent of which extend up to 2023, focussing, in addition, on the conservation of species, flora and fauna.



WE CAN BREATHE!

A plant nursery opened in Arques in 1863, giving rise to today's Le Planel Arboretum. Thirteen different species of trees, both softwood and hardwood, populate this forest area. Around Arques, the scent of resin dominates: Laricio Corsican pines, black Austrian pines, Scots pines and Atlas cedars cover 83% of the surface area. And alongside you'll find sessile oaks, holm oaks, beech and ash trees.



NO SLACKING HERE!

They slept side by side, on the ground, on the first floor of the ONF (National Forestry Office) centre in Arques: they were part of a construction project for the unemployed. Between 1936 and 1939, they created a 7 km long forest road through the limestone gorges formed by the Bézis stream..



NEARBY



LE PLANEL ARBORETUM

This is a lovely place to walk and relax. The arboretum features a 7km trail; it's the perfect way for families to explore and discover these rare, majestic trees. Other footpaths criss-cross the forest.

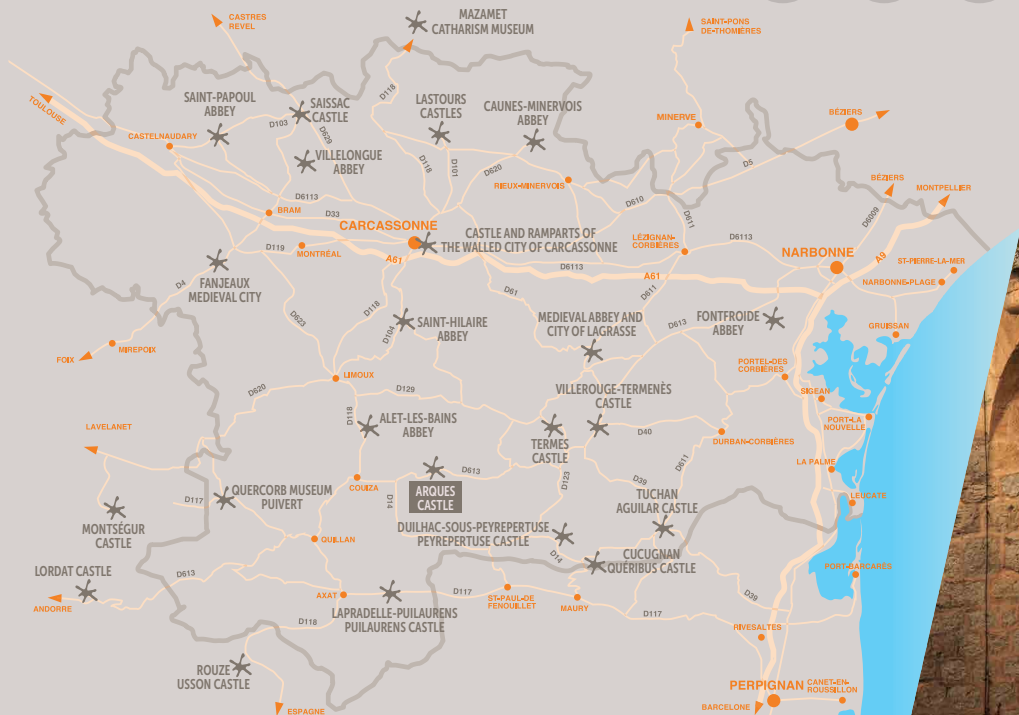


THE LAKE

Picnics, swimming, fishing ... all the pleasures of summer are here for the taking!



PRACTICAL INFORMATION



GOOD PRACTICES

Walking shoes

Pets welcome



SERVICES

TOILETS

Toilets in the castle.



PARKING

Free car parks in the village and at the château.



SHOP

Inside the castle.



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