

# Le Puy en Velay

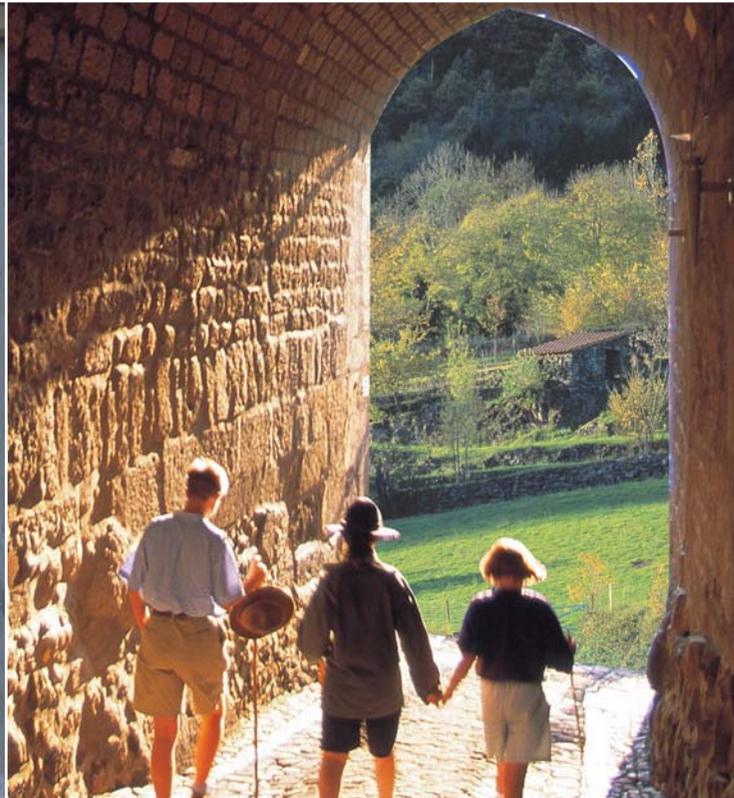


*Historical visit*



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# Historical town visit of Le Puy-en-Velay

Starting at the place du Breuil, cross the boulevard du Breuil, go down rue Porte-Aiguière and stop at number 16 where you can see where the former town wall once stood. It was built in the 13th century and demolished in 1782. The main roads of the modern town (boulevard Carnot, boulevard Saint-Louis, boulevard du Breuil, boulevard Maréchal-Fayolle and the faubourg Saint-Jean) follow the lines of the former ramparts.

## 1 PLACE DU MARTOURET

From the late Latin "martoretum", cemetery; this name has popularly taken on the meaning of "the square of the martyrs" because the site was reserved for public executions; it was also here on 8th June 1794 that the original miraculous statue of the Black Virgin was set on fire and destroyed.

Throughout the French Revolution the guillotine stood permanently on this site from 30th March 1793. From this date until January 1795, 41 executions took place.

On the left-hand side of the square stands **the town hall**. 2 This building was completed in 1766, designed by the architect Portal in Louis XV style, with a classical façade. It was built on the site of the former "consulate" (the "consuls" were the former town-councillors), and was destroyed on several occasions by violent fires (in 1817 and 1964).



## 3 PLACE DU CLAUZEL

In the Occitan language, the term "clauzel" meant a small courtyard. The site used to be a cemetery for the burial of paupers from the Hôtel Dieu. It ceased to be used for this purpose in 1654. The local flea market is now held here on Saturday mornings.

## 4 RUE COURRERIE

(formerly known as the street of Curriers). At number 6, a Renaissance house faces the street with three arches decorated with grotesques. Notice the inner courtyard and tower dating from 1571. At number 8, check out the 16th century façade.

## 5 PLACE DU PLOT

In 1548 the consuls set up a pillory on the square for drunkards, so that passers-by could laugh at them.

The fountain, known as the "Bidoire", is the oldest in the town, installed in 1246. The dolphins and eagles decorating it probably date from the 15th century. From the 10th century to the beginning of the 19th century the church of St Pierre du Monastier stood on the east side of the square.



On Saturday mornings the picturesque weekly market is held here. They sell a particularly tasty local cheese covered with hundreds of micro-organisms (artisons) which ensure its distinct quality.

Farm cheese from the Velay is mentioned in the "Larousse des fromages".

The place du Plot is the starting point for pilgrimages to **Santiago de Compostela** (The via podiensis GR65).

In the **rue St Gilles**, you are at **the starting point for the "voie Régordane"** for pilgrims going to St Gilles du Gard.

## 6 RUE PANNESSAC

(formerly the rue du Commerce des Grains). There are still many houses dating from the 15th to the 18th centuries here. Number 16 still has a 15th century corbelled tower overlooking the **rue Philibert** 7 .

## 7 bis RUE CHAMARLENC

At n° 18 you can find the headquarters of the former Cornards fraternity. Take a look at the two masks.

## 8 RUE CHENEBOUTERIE

(formerly the street of the hemp merchants)

At number 6 you can see the house of a 16th century spice seller. It is known as the house of the "cagaire" due to the amusing scatological sculpture on its façade.

Other houses merit closer attention, i.e. numbers 10, 12, 14 and 17, and number 9, which dates from 1592 and is the birthplace of Marshall Fayolle. He was a General at the end of the First World War; he commanded the French army in Italy in 1917 and participated in the victory of the French front line in the decisive attack of 1918.

From the rue Chênebouterie we set off up the picturesque steep streets on the fifteen-centuries-old pilgrimage to the Virgin of Le Puy-en-Velay, up to Mount Anis. Still today, after the gathering of faithful worshippers and pilgrims in the place du Plot, this is the starting point for the deeply moving annual torchlight procession on 14th August at 8.45 pm.

## 9 RUE RAPHAEL

Once occupied by middle-class families and leading citizens of the town. At number 38 you can see a video on bobbin lace-making at **The Bobbin Lace Teaching Centre**, and also visit an exhibition of antique and contemporary lace. At number 56 a Renaissance façade, with small Corinthian columns, supports on the first floor a frieze decorated with masks of the sun and the moon.



## 10 PLACE DES TABLES

Maison Breymand (15th and 16th century). The windows on the façade show the change from gothic style on the first floor to Renaissance on the second and third floors.

**The so-called "choriste" fountain :** in the 15th century the fountain was dedicated to the memory of a young chorister who sang religious songs in the streets in this area of Le Puy at Christmas time. Until 1803, the fountain stood in the **rue des Farges 11** (formerly the blacksmiths' and ironmongers' area).

## 12 RUE DES TABLES

This street is called the "street of tables" simply because on religious holidays traders from the town used to set up here their "tables" selling religious objects to pilgrims.

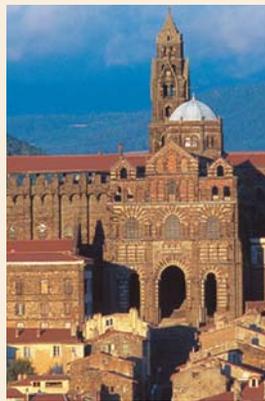
## 13 RUE BECELIEVRE

Viscount Becdelièvre was the founder of the museum at Le Puy. The house of the Coquery dates from the 15th century. It is also worth noticing the entrances of numbers 5, 7 and 12. Then cross in front of the former General Hospital, which is now the "Hôtel du Département", remarkably well restored by the architect Jean-Michel Vilmothte. Just a few steps on, you will see the former **porte Gouteyron 14**, which already existed in 1295, and through which you can see the Aiguilhe rock and the chapel of St Michael.

## 15 THE CATHEDRAL

(A UNESCO World Heritage site)

The rue des Tables leads to the foot of the main steps up to the Cathedral (134 steps). From its origins until our own day, pilgrimage to Notre-Dame du Puy has contributed to the development and prosperity of the town. The Cathedral is Romanesque in style, but shows various influences especially Byzantine ones.



Under the main entrance, check out the "portes de cèdre" (the 12th century cedar doors) and the internal staircase (sometimes open in summer) the first steps of which can be seen under the nave. The choir area of the cathedral is built directly on the rock, but when the cathedral had to be enlarged in the 11th and 12th centuries in order to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims, four additional bays were audaciously built over the void in order to compensate for the difference in level of 17 metres. Several impressive pillars hold up the high arches.

### IN THE CATHEDRAL DON'T MISS :

#### ● THE FEVER STONE

(or stone of apparitions). During the first centuries of the Christian era, in Roman times, the Virgin appeared on Mount Anis. This flat volcanic stone has since been known as the "Fever Stone" because of miraculous healing associated with it.

Following a further apparition, the first church was built about 430 AD on the site indicated by the Virgin, which was also the site of a pagan sanctuary. Christian pilgrimages began from this time. With Chartres, Le Puy-en-Velay is the oldest sanctuary dedicated to Mary in Christian Gaul.

At the time of the **first Crusade** in 1095 the Bishop of Le Puy, Adhémar de Monteil, was the legate of Pope Urban II. It is considered that he made popular the "Salve Regina", which St Bernard would later refer to as the Le Puy antiphony.

#### The importance of religious festivals

Religious festivals always represent high points in the liturgical year. Every Maundy Thursday, after the evening Mass commemorating the Last Supper, the White Penitents follow the Way of the Cross through the old town, meditating as they go, in memory of Christ's passion. On the evening of the 31st May, the feast of the Visitation, a torchlight procession walks up to the top of the Corneille Rock. These nocturnal pilgrims pay tribute to the charity of the Virgin Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth. Lights will shine out again in the night of 14th August; on the eve of the feast of the Assumption, many people go up from the lower town to the sanctuary. The feast of the Assumption on 15th August culminates in the afternoon procession when the statue of the Black Virgin is

carried through the town. Many other religious festivals are the occasion for processions, the most important certainly being the Jubilee. This occurs when 25th March, the feast of the Annunciation, coincides with Good Friday, so that the Incarnation coincides with the Redemption.

The last Jubilees was in 2005 and the next one will take place in 2016.

#### ● NOTRE-DAME DU PUY : THE BLACK VIRGIN

The statue (17th century) which now stands on the high altar comes from the former chapel of St. Maurice du Refuge. It was crowned by the Bishop of Le Puy on behalf of Pope Pius IX on 8th June 1856, the anniversary of the destruction of the previous effigy which was burned by the ultra-revolutionary groups of Louis Guyardin (representative of the Convention in Haute-Loire) on 8th June 1794. The 8th June was Whitsun Day, but under the Revolution was known as Supreme Being Day. The origin of the statue is not known; many hypothesis have been suggested. This statue was made of cedar. We only have a few representations of this Black Virgin from a drawing made in 1777, ordered by the geologist Faugeas de St-Fons. But Le Puy cathedral already had a statue of the Virgin long before the reign of Louis IX because its presence is noted from the 10th century onwards and, according to some authors, it could have served as a model for the first Virgins in Majesty of Auvergne.



#### ALSO WORTH SEEING :

#### ● FRESCOES AND PAINTINGS

In the north transept : "Holy women at the tomb", "The martyrdom of St Catherine of Alexandria" and on the upper level "The Archangel Michael", 5.55 metres high.



### ● THE PLAGUE IN LE PUY

There were 10,000 victims, as indicated by the local painter, Jean Solvain, in the painting representing the procession of 1630 entitled "Le voeu de la peste". Don't miss the sculptures in wood by Pierre Vaneau (1653-94) : The Assumption, the Martyrdom of St. Andrew, the pulpit and the organ case (17th century). Notice in the third and fourth bays the two cupolas with supporting arches (squinches).

### ● LIBERAL ARTS

This wall-painting was discovered under a thick layer of whitewash in the Chapel of Relics in 1850 by the writer, Prosper Mérimée, author of "Colomba" and "Carmen". He was authorised by the public authorities to carry out research on historical monuments. This painting is a masterpiece from the end of the 15th century and is strongly influenced by Flemish art. Grammar, Logic (Aristotle), Rhetoric (Cicero) and Music are represented.

### ● THE SACRISTY

In the Sacristy there is a head of Christ from the 15th century, also photographic documentation on the bible of Théodulfe, a priceless item from the Treasury of the cathedral of Le Puy and a rare manuscript from the Carolingian period. Théodulfe (750 - 821), bishop of Orleans, is thought to have presented his bible to the cathedral at Le Puy in the course of a pilgrimage he made here in about 798.

### 16 THE CHAPEL OF PENITENTS

This chapel, which was established in 1584, is still open for worship. It is a "small museum" with magnificent paintings and sculptures.

It has a remarkable Renaissance coffered ceiling with a central design showing the Assumption of the Virgin.

During the revolution the chapel was saved from desecration by the butchers' guild. Each year, butchers hold a service in memory of this event. On the eve of Maundy Thursday a procession of White Penitents carrying the instruments of the Passion is held in the streets of the upper town.

### 17 THE CLOISTERS

Listed as an historic monument and constructed at the same time as the Cathedral (11th - 12th

century), they are amongst the most beautiful in Europe. Visit the museum of religious arts in the salle des Etats du Velay and the fresco of the crucifixion in the chapter house (early 13th century).

Emile Male, historian and academician, stated that the arches of these cloisters could be compared to those of the mosque of Cordoba



because of their different coloured stones alternating in the same joyful style.

### 18 BAPTISTRY OF ST. JOHN

The entrance and the lions are inspired by Lombard Art.

Head back down the rue Saint-Georges, and make a quick stop at the **Place du For** 19 to admire the view over the town. On the right, the façade of the Bishop's Palace and Porche du For (12th century) with openwork arches, capitals and the oldest stones in the cathedral complex. The tympanum and lintel of the so-called "papal door" are reminiscent of the Roman style of the architect of the first building, Scutarius, who became bishop of Le Puy and was later canonised.

Inside, notice the lintel from the former pagan temple. It bears an inscription giving the names of a divinity whose worship must have been celebrated on Mount Anis, and also that of an emperor deified by the Romans : Adidon and Augustus.

Coming back to the **rue Saint-Georges**, you pass the chapel of the Seminary.

The Seminary of Le Puy and that of St-Sulpice in Paris were founded by Abbot Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657), Abbot of Pébrac. The venerable mother Agnès Galland, born in Le Puy (1602-1634), a mystical Dominican,

provided the spiritual inspiration for these designs. Her shrine is in Langeac in the convent of St Catherine of Siena. She was beatified in Rome on 20th November 1994 by Pope John Paul II.

We now reach

### 20 RUE CARDINAL DE POLIGNAC

Opposite the chapel of the Anne-Marie Martel school.

Anne-Marie Martel (1664-1673), born in Le Puy, founded the congregation of the "Dames de l'Instruction" in 1668 and the "Béates", who helped the sick and organised village assemblies in the Velay to teach catechism and lace-making. Meeting in "couviges" (from the Latin "cum vicinis" : "with the neighbours"), up to 130,000 lace-makers lived in the Haute-Loire in the middle of the 19th century.

The even numbers of this street include a succession of houses that are among the most splendid in the upper town. Number 8, the former "hôtel" of the Polignac family from 1611 to the Revolution, has a 15th century tower overlooking an inner courtyard. Cardinal Melchior de Polignac (1661-1741) was Archbishop of Auch, French ambassador to Poland and representative of the King in Rome and Holland. In 1713 he negotiated the treaty of Utrecht giving Philippe V (grandson of Louis XIV) the right to the throne of Spain. A writer and member of the "Académie des Sciences" and the "Académie des inscriptions et des belles lettres", the Cardinal was elected to Bossuet's seat in the "Académie Française".

### 21 RUE ROCHETAILLADE

("carved in the rock") Romanesque façades, particularly at number 7, the oldest house in the town (13th century).

### RUE DU BOUILLON

The name refers to the charity founded in Le Puy by St-Jean-François-Régis, to help poor families by delivering meals to them. Today the Emmaüs community takes in the homeless for the night.



## 22 PLACE DE LA PLATRIERE

(the former plaster quarry). Here you can see the site of the birthplace of the writer Jules Vallès, and the former Chapel of the Visitation, which was built between 1652 and 1655, and where the Companions of Jehu were judged at the end of the Revolution. The Companions of Jehu hunted down the Jacobins from January to June 1795 in the Lyons area. Of 114 who were accused, 111 were acquitted. Three were condemned to death in March 1799, but the sentences were never carried out, the prisoners having escaped thanks to local contacts.

**Jules Vallès (1832-1885)** was a member of the Paris Commune in 1871. He escaped from the execution of the Communards against the "mur des fédérés" in the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris and took refuge in London. He returned to Paris after the amnesty in 1883, relaunched his newspaper "Le cri du peuple" and finished his autobiographical trilogy - "Jacques Vingtras", ("L'Enfant", "Le Bachelier" and "L'Insurgé").

## 23 PIERRE-CARDINAL CENTRE RUE JULES-VALLES

These buildings have been remarkably well restored and are today the place where the local associations meet and also house the cultural centre, the conference centre and the youth hostel.

In the 18th century the building was a convent of the Sisters of St Mary. In 1792, during the Revolution, it was turned into a barracks before becoming a museum from 1820 to 1851. The building bore the name of Mouton-Duvernet and served as a school from 1920 to 1976. General Mouton-Duvernet, born in Le Puy in 1770, was shot in Lyons in 1816 for joining the Emperor Napoleon 1st on his return from Elba.

The poet and troubadour, Pierre Cardinal (1180-1278) was one of the major literary talents in the Occitan language. He was famous for the critical "sirventes" that he wrote. He lived to be almost a hundred.

## 24 THE CONVENT OF ST CLAIRE

This convent was founded in 1432 by St Colette of Corbie (1381-1447), reformer of the second order of St Francis, the Poor Clares, and by Claua de Rousillon (Viscountess of Polignac).

The chapel is open to the public. The high walls of the convent overlook the picturesque streets of

the area, known as "Pouzarot" 25 (short for "well of the rock").

This is one of the oldest parts of the town. Recently restored, the area has preserved its original charm.



## 26 THE COLLEGE CHURCH

Formerly the chapel of the Jesuit school, it was built in 1605 by Martellange, a Jesuit architect. A beautiful example of baroque architecture, this is the first Jesuit church in France. There are handsome retables in the choir, the first four lateral chapels and the baptistery. Local artists have maintained the beauty of this church throughout the ages :

- the painter Guy François was responsible for the paintings in the choir and in the first two lateral chapels
- the sculptor Pierre Vaneau (1653-1694) was responsible for the pulpit,
- the Jesuit brother André Besqueut for the statue of St Jean-François-Régis (1928),
- the sculptor Philippe Kaepelin for the modern altar (1984).

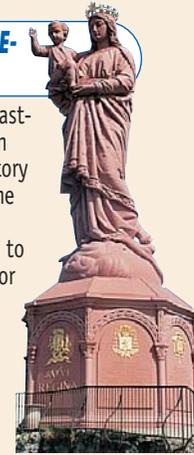
### ST. JEAN-FRANCOIS-REGIS

In 1640 the parliament of Toulouse received a decree from King Louis XIII forbidding the wearing of lace in order to restrict its production - lace-makers were so numerous that it was difficult to find female domestic staff. Jean-François-Régis, who evangelised the Velay and Vivarais, was concerned about the fate of lace-makers, and calmed their fears by predicting the cancellation of the decree. It is even said that he asked the Jesuit missionaries to publicise Le Puy lace on their travels, thereby ensuring its international success. He is still venerated by lace-makers, and became their patron saint following his canonisation in 1737. His patronymic "Régis" is now used as a Christian name. The College church is now the starting

point of the footpath "sur les pas de St-Régis" ("the St Régis route") from Le Puy-en-Velay to La Louvesc (Ardèche).

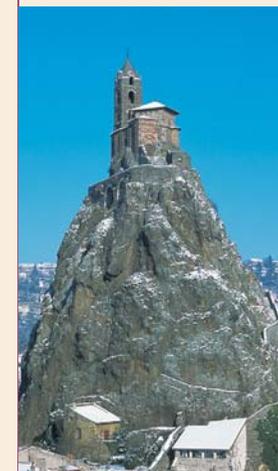
## 27 THE STATUE OF NOTRE-DAME DE FRANCE

On 8th September 1855, the feast-day of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, General Pélissier won victory at the siege of Sebastopol in the Crimean War. In gratitude he advised Bishop Mgr de Morlhon to ask the Emperor Napoleon III for some of the cannons captured from the enemy, in order to make a statue that the diocese of Le Puy wished to dedicate to Notre-Dame de France. Sculpted by Jean-Marie Bonnassieux, the statue is made of cast iron from the 213 canons from Sebastopol. It was inaugurated on 12th September 1860 in the presence of 120,000 pilgrims. The statue is 16 metres high (22.7m with the pedestal) and weighs 835 metric tonnes (110 tonnes for the statue, 680 the stone pedestal and 45 the iron coating).



## 28 AIGUILHE, THE ROCK AND CHAPEL OF ST MICHAEL

The rock, familiarly called "the dyke", is actually the vent of a volcano, laid bare by erosion. The chapel on the top dates back to the 10th century. In 950-951 Gothescalk, Bishop of Le Puy, led the first French pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.



On his return, a chapel dedicated to St Michael was built on the volcanic rock of Aiguilhe. The chapel was finished in 962 and inaugurated on 18th July. Among the treasures found when the altar was restored in 1955 is a magnificent reliquary figure of Christ, probably the work of the 10th century Spanish school.

## 28 bis CHAPEL OF ST CLAIR

Often called the "Temple of Diana", this building may be the former chapel of the hospital of the poor of St Nicholas of Aiguilhe. Note the lintel illustrating the phases of the moon around the sun, and the arcades with a background of diamond-shaped mosaics.

## 29 CROZATIER MUSEUM

The museum is located in the Henri Vinay public garden (called "the Horseshoe" because of its shape). It was built in the middle of the 19th century by the architect Antoine Martin, thanks mainly to a large legacy from Charles Crozatier (1795-1855), who made plaster casts for artists in Paris.

**There are 5 galleries showing the various collections :**

On the ground floor, the Gallo-Roman collection comes mainly from excavations carried out during the 19th century. The most interesting elements were found in the surroundings of the cathedral and come from a building which previously occupied that site.



The stone and sculpture section is mainly mediaeval. It is particularly rich in Romanesque sculptures, most of them from the cathedral or from religious and civil buildings which were destroyed in the 19th century.

The collection of objets d'art has fine examples from the mediaeval and Renaissance periods, including small sculptures and enamels.

The science and technology collection comes from the donation of Alexandre Clair, who was a Parisian engineer specialising in the making of small-scale models for education at the time of the Second Empire.

You can also find some interesting collections about clock-making and the beginnings of the cartoon film with the invention of the

"praxinoscope" by Emile Reynaud in Le Puy-en-Velay in 1877.

On the first floor, the ethnology collections are centred on craftsmanship in Le Puy and the Velay. They illustrate the importance of activities like



bronze work, glassworking, printmaking, nuns' work and of course lace-making.

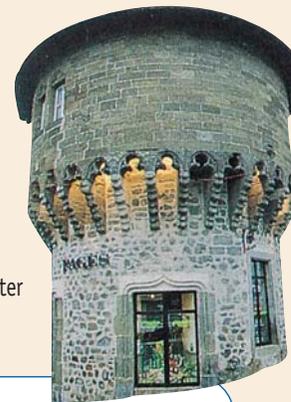
On the second floor the Fine Arts collection is famous for its paintings of the Nordic schools from the 16th to the 18th centuries. A room is devoted to the works of the François brothers and the local school of the 17th century. The 19th century is represented by topographical views of the region and large paintings sent by the French State.

And finally, on the third floor, you discover the natural history collections (zoology, mineralogy, and geology) which constituted the basis of the museum at the beginning of the 19th century. The palaeontology collection consists of a set of fossils from the rich sites of Haute-Loire.

## 30 PANNESSAC TOWER

Formerly the royal entrance to the town (14th century) and partly demolished in 1850 to widen the entrance to the street. The site of the destroyed tower is indicated by cobbles on the pavement. The Emperor Charlemagne and thirteen French kings have made the pilgrimage to Le Puy. In 1254 King Louis IX, returning from the crusades, completed the seal of Le Puy by granting the town the right to add gold fleurs-de-

lys on a blue background to the flying eagle in silver. The last royal visit was that of Francis I in 1533, to fulfil the vow he had made when he was a prisoner in Madrid after his defeat at Pavia (1525).



## 30 bis STATUE OF GENERAL LAFAYETTE

(1757-1834). He was born at the castle of Chavaniac (40 km from Le Puy) and was a hero of American independence and a major figure in the French Revolution.

## 31 CHURCH OF SAINT LAURENT

Since 1221, this has been the church of the order of Preaching Friars founded by St Dominic (1170-1221), who perhaps came to Le Puy in the last year of his life.

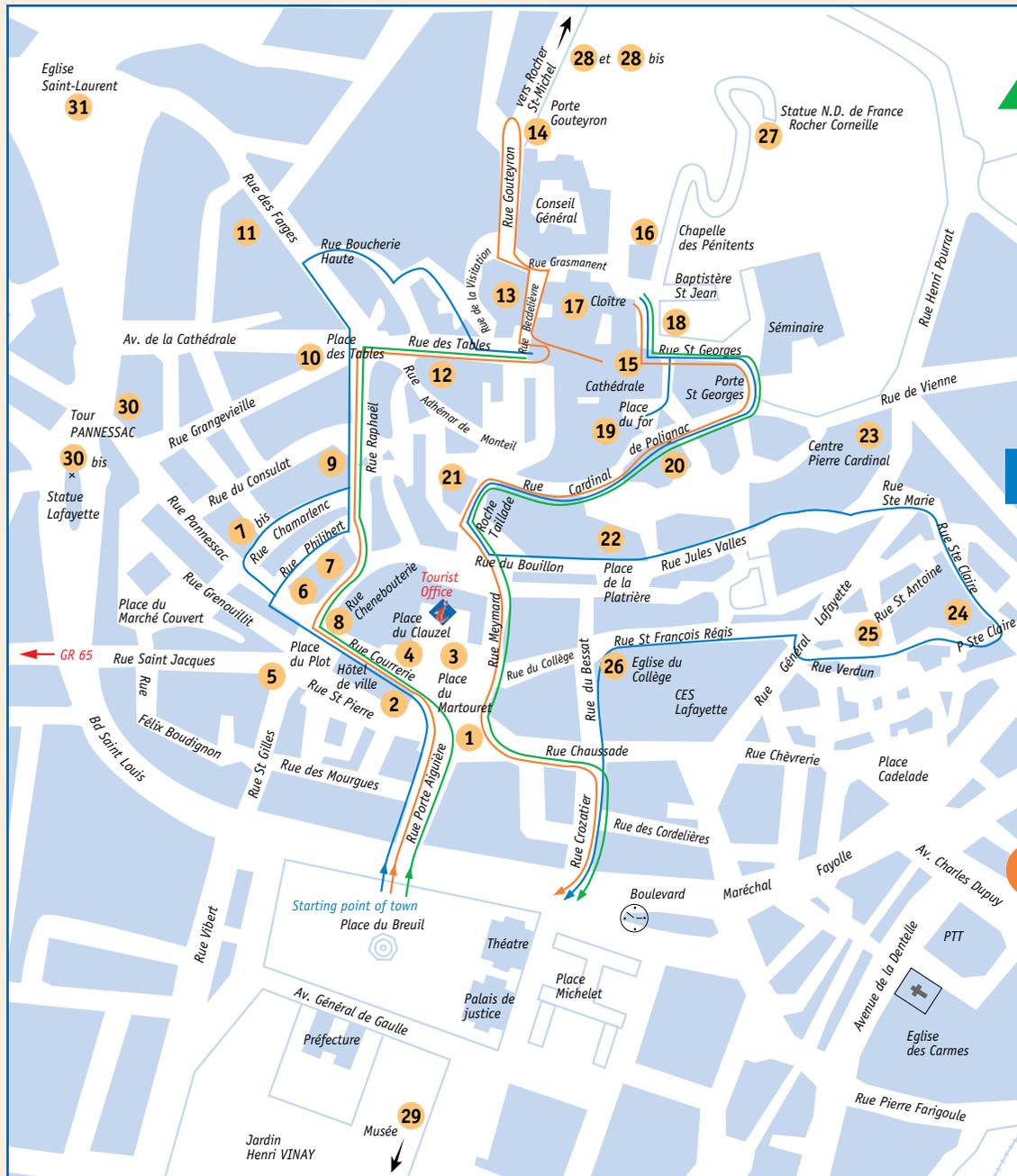
In the choir, on the right, is the recumbent effigy of Constable Bertrand Duguesclin, who died on 13th July 1380, at the siege of Chateauneuf-de-Randon. His body was embalmed in Le Puy and his entrails were buried in the church of St Laurent.

The building was enlarged in the 14th century and remains one of the rare examples of Gothic architecture in the region. The roof collapsed in 1525, the bell tower was destroyed by the Huguenots in 1562, and the roof collapsed once again in 1644.

In 1750, the external buttresses were added.

In 1966 cables were stretched between the pillars to prevent movement. The church was closed to the public on 24th August 1971; consolidation, and then restoration, were to take a long time, and the church was only reopened for worship for the Christmas service in 1988. In addition to the outstanding beauty of the architecture you can admire the perfectly restored 19th century stained glass windows as well as those which have recently been created (the chapel of the Holy Sacrament and the rose window in the façade) magnificent woodwork (pulpit, stalls etc), pictures by Guy François, including the remarkable "Doubting Thomas", and the highly symbolic paving throughout the church.

# Pedestrian and touristic tours



**"Standard tour"**

Itinerary :  
2 hours

**"Grand Tour"**

Itinerary :  
3 hours

**"Le Puy by Night"**

Itinerary :  
2 hours