



DISCOVER VAR

*La corniche de
l'Estérel*

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ABBAYE DU THORONET

The abbey is the most visited site in the Var. It belongs to a trio of three Cisterian abbeys in Provence known affectionately as nos trois petites sœurs provençales, 'our three little Provençal sisters'; the other two are Senanque and Silvacane. The site was discovered by monks who came from Tourtour in search of water in 1146. According to the rule of Saint Benoît, they lived in a state of humility and poverty, balancing work with prayer. The Cisterian monks worked in silence, with their hands, cultivating vines and olive trees. In the 14th century, the rules began to soften and the abbey began to open up to the world. Numbers dwindled. During the French Revolution, the monks were driven away, the abbey was abandoned and its stones put into service by villagers, who used them to build houses with. Prosper Mérimée saved the abbey by informing the architect of historic monuments. The decline was checked and restoration began. Some buildings had been completely destroyed: the kitchen, scriptorium and the monks' refectory. Fortunately, the church, cloister, chapter house, cellar and dormitory were still intact.



Le cloître de l'abbaye du Thoronet

The church, shaped like a Latin cross with a nave, has exceptional acoustics designed to optimise the sound of the human voice and the resonance of Gregorian chants. Sound is transmitted from one extremity to the other with no loss or distortion. The abbey is the finest specimen of Roman Provençal architecture at its peak. This is evident in the harmony of its proportions, the balance of its massive structure and the perfection of the stonemasonry. The trapezoid shape of the cloister provoked many questions. Was it simply designed to fit the lie of the land, or is there symbolism and esoteric significance in the layout? In the cloister's interior garden is the lavorium, a hexagonal stone basin fed by sixteen beaks, where the monks used to wash.

ABBAYE DU THORONET

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Open 1st April – 30th September, 10am – 6:30pm.
Closed between 12pm – 2pm on Sundays. From 1st October – 31st March, closed between 10am – 1pm and 2pm – 5pm on Sundays. Commentated or free guided tours. Free for under-18s. Adults €6.50, 18-25s €4.50.

BASILIQUE ROYALE SAINTE-MARIE-MADELEINE, SAINT-MAXIMIN

The Comte de Provence and the King of Naples, Charles II, ordered this basilica to be built in 1295. The construction spanned several centuries, and even when it came to an end in 1530 the massive building was not complete; the basilica has no gate or tower. The shrine containing the remains of Saint Mary Magdalene instantly became a popular frequented place of pilgrimage (at the time, Saint-Maximin was a major stop-off point on the Saint-Jacques de Compostelle pilgrimage). The basilica contains an apse, two apsidioles, a large nave and sixteen lateral chapels. The nave is 29 metres high and 82 metres long. It is gothic in style, which makes it unique in Provence where Roman style is dominant; significantly, it has no triforium, the small balcony which was traditionally cut into the stone between the arches and the high windows all around the nave. The huge organ, the work of Jean-Marie Isnard, has an exceptionally melodic richness. It has no fewer than 43 keys, four keyboards and 2962 pipes. The organ was spared



Mouillages - Île de Porquerolles

destruction during the Revolution thanks to Lucien Bonaparte, orator of the Jacobin Club, who used it to play the Marseillaise – then a revolutionary political song. The crypt is an ancient Christian vault dating from the 4th century, where the remains of Saint Maximin, Saint Sidoine, Saint Marcelle and Saint Suzanne lie in their sarcophagi. The basilica is home to beautiful furnishings, including a magnificent sculpted wooden chair dating from 1756 and an altarpiece by Antoine Ronzen from 1520 which depicts the Passion of Christ in 16 tableaux and also features the oldest view known of the Palais des Papes d'Avignon. The 17th-century choir stalls are also magnificent.

ILE DE PORQUEROLLES

Porquerolles is the largest of the Hyères islands, which lie just off the coast. It is a 1250-hectare petit paradis, 7 kilometres long and 2.5 kilometres wide. It is best to visit outside of the summer season to

appreciate its full beauty. The north coast is the most welcoming, with its many sandy beaches lined with pine forests and scrubland where broom, heather, myrtle and strawberry trees grow. The south-east coast is more abrupt and jagged, while the interior is little inhabited. It is easy to see the whole island on foot or bike. In 1971, the French state purchased a large part of the island, preventing it from falling prey to the concrete spread that has claimed much of the coastline. The state endowed the island to the Port-Cros national park. The Conservatoire botanique de Porquerolles has been preserving Mediterranean flora there since 1979. Thanks to the island's sanitary isolation, it retains collections of genetic fruit resources that have been kept away from pathogenic agents which ravage fruit trees. Today, the village of Porquerolles is almost a hamlet, comprising a few hotels and restaurants, fishermen's houses around Place d'Armes and a tiny pleasure harbour.

BUREAU D'INFORMATION DE PORQUEROLLES

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