



Visit the Lot Valley this winter

If you are looking for quiet family oriented ski resorts, traditional markets, unusual winter activities (dog-sledding, snow shoeing, Nordic sauna, ...) and want to discover this part of France in a different atmosphere, visit the Lot Valley in winter.

The Lot Valley in winter still offers many opportunities and whether you are more of a foody person or like active breaks, you'll find something for you.

Gastronomy :

Throughout winter, markets in Lot and Lot-et-Garonne specialise in **capon** (corn-fattened chicken), **duck**, **goose** and "**foie gras**" **liver**, ready for the festive season. These "fat" markets are in **Villeneuve sur Lot** (Lot et Garonne) every Saturday morning, from October to March or in **Cahors** (Lot) every Saturday morning, mid-November to end of December. To learn more about foie gras, visit the Foie Gras museum in Lot et Garonne (www.souleilles-foiegras.com)

Meanwhile, the market town of **Lalbenque** (Lot), headquarters of the French **truffle** industry, is getting busy. This is where the nationwide price of truffles is set, and where during the winter months there's the largest weekly truffle market in France which attracts both restaurateurs and tourists alike. It started last Tuesday and continues every Tuesday until mid-March (2pm onwards).

Many hotels and restaurants offer truffle-themed breaks that include cookery classes, menus, and even truffle-hunting expeditions with pigs or dogs. The truffles begin life underground in May or June, growing during the summer months thanks to the heavy showers and maturing at the start of Autumn. They're ready to be unearthed by winter, usually sniffed out with the help of a specially trained dog or a pig thanks to their characteristic perfume.

The favourite winter dish in Aveyron is **estofinado** or 'stockfish', made from dried North Atlantic cod that traditionally arrived by boat to Bordeaux. Simmered in water and mixed with mashed potatoes, beaten egg and parsley, it was once a staple winter food but today is served in many gastronomic restaurants, especially near Decazeville.

If you've room for dessert, try **tourtière** – layers of wafer thin pastry topped with slice apples soaked in Armagnac, specialty of Lot et Garonne or **chestnut** dishes in the Chataigneraie (chestnut trees protected area) in Cantal.

Winter activities :

Nordic skiing, downhill skiing, snowshoeing, dog-sledding, geocatching, the Lot Valley in winter offers "alternative living" stays. With more than 500km of signposted slopes, the ski resorts of Le Mas de la Barque, Les Bouviers, Mont Lozère and the Massif de L'Aubrac in Lozere, as well as Saint-Urcize and Pailherols

in Cantal, and Laguiole in Aveyron which is particularly good for families offer you the chance to practice your favourite winter sport in exceptionally beautiful and preserved countryside, across wooded expanses or on the crests along the peaks.

New this winter, **Baby Traineau Park** : in Lozere, at la Baraque des Bouviers, the park offers the opportunity for children 3 – 7 years old to discover the dog-sledding and spend time with the dogs and learn how to drive the sleigh. <http://www.aubracmushing.com>

Snowkite : similar to kite surf, the snow kite consists of sliding on the snow, carried away by a sail. The Col de Bonnecombe on the Aubrac plateau is one of the best spot in France for snowkite. Beginners can practise in a natural protected basin whereas experienced surfers can slide up to 100 kms/h on 18kms long spots. More information on : <http://snowkiteaucoldebonnecombe.blogspot.fr/>

And also unique opportunity to meet bisons and wolves in a natural environment :

European Bisons : naturally found in the wild only in the north of Europe, the European Bison has been reintroduced in La Margeride. Here they live in semi-captivity on over 200 hectares. Visits are made mainly by horse-drawn carriage or by sledge in winter. The trip (around 1 hour) allows the discovery of bisons in their natural habitat. An information space reveals the history of their survival since prehistoric times. <http://www.bisoneurope.com>

The Wolves of Le Gévaudan : more than a hundred wolves (from Canada, Siberia, Mongolia or Poland) live in semi-captivity. On the legendary lands of Gévaudan, these wolves have found safe haven in many wooded hectares of space where you can discover them by taking a guided tour of the park. <http://www.loupsdugevaudan.com>

Finally why not ending up your trip with a **relaxing break** :

Come and discover the benefits of rest, relaxation, well-being, of soothing and cocooning in calming surroundings. Far from the stresses and strains of daily life, the Lot Valley is the dream destination for unwinding and indulging yourself. Countryside spas were born out of the confluence of an exceptionally well-preserved environment and thermal springs whose benefits have always been enjoyed. **La Chalnette** resort on the high plateaux of Aubrac offers fitness holidays with or without hiking trips, as well as thermal spa treatments.

In Lot et Garonne, a Nordic sauna, oriental hammam, Japanese bath... at **Les Thermes de Casteljaloux** Take a veritable Aquatic world tour and try out all the sensations from this new spa complex built on the spring sources for just a few hours and more if you really enjoy it.

Did you know that the hottest spring in Europe is at **Chaudes-Aigues** (Cantal) where the water comes out at 82°. Caleden, the hot spring and thermal therapy Centre has relaxing therapeutic breaks for everyone!

And at **Cransac-Les-Thermes** (Aveyron), they offer therapeutic treatment using hot natural gases, drawn from "la Montagne qui brûle" (burning mountain).

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More details on www.lotvalley.com

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