



« Unusual churches » tour / 65 km

- 1. Ahun :** The tour starts at Ahun with its church and crypt. The latter which was the original village church, was erected in the Xth century, on top of a Pagan temple. It houses relics of the gravestone of St Sylvain, the patron saint of Ahun.
The new church was built on its top in the XIIIth century. Its remarkable Norman chevet is characterized by its arched vaults. Inside, you will see a nice Roman stoup, a limestone Piétra from the XVth century and in the choir, baroque woodcarvings from the XVIIth century.
- Take the D13 for 1.5 km towards Moutier d'Ahun and park on the right at the entrance to the village.
- 2. Moutier d'Ahun :** The church belonged to the old benedictine monastery (Moutier) erected by Boson II, the count of the Marche, in 997. After some turbulent periods which ended in the partial destruction of the buildings, the monastic complex came back to life at the beginning of the XVth century when a clunisian community set up there. They restored and decorated the place and they had a wonderful set of baroque woodwork carved by Simon Bauer.
- Drive towards Aubusson. Turn left onto the D942. Cross Lavaveix-les-Mines, after the hamlet of "Les Bregères", turn right towards St Martial le Mont.
- 3. St Martial le Mont:** The church was built on a height (400 m) overlooking the river Creuse valley. The church was built between the 13th and the beginning of the 14th centuries and some vestiges of fortifications remain. Do not miss the remarkable leather hanging known as an antependium inside the church. It was made in Italy in the XVth century and it represents St Martial, the first bishop of the Limousin region.
- Follow the road to Ars.
- 4. Ars:** The recently restored church (12th, 13th and 14th centuries) houses a contemporary ornamental bracket known as "chemin de gloire" tapestry that was woven on Aubusson's looms. Do not miss the wonderful modillons which support the cornice.
- Turn right onto the D55 and follow the D55A on your left. Turn left onto the D32 and cross the village of La Borne until you find a chapel (in the commune of St Michel de Veisse).
- 5. La Borne:** The lord of La Borne had this chapel erected to give thanks for having escaped from a bog. The exterior of this flamboyant gothic style chapel is ornately decorated.
The chapel is particularly famous for its impressive stained - glass window: the tree of Jesse (Jesus 'family tree) dating from 1522. Do not miss the double-sided Calvary at the entrance.

Get back to the D17 and turn left for St Sulpice les Champs. In the village, at the junction, turn right towards Ahun then turn left towards Le Donzeil. Once there, turn right and join the D13. At the village of Le Sec, turn left, then turn right towards Sous-Parsat.

6. Sous Parsat: The church is a major and unmissable site. It was rebuilt in the XIXth century after a fire. At the end of the 1980's, Gabriel Chabrat, a painter, who was seduced by the immensity of the empty space started to create frescos and stained - glass windows. They represent scenes inspired by the Bible, using primary colors and exaggerated forms. A guide is on sale at the restaurant L'auberge de Camille and at the tourist information office.

Go through the village passing the restaurant and the town hall and turn right. At Mareilles, turn right and drive towards Chercheuloug. Turn right and stay on the D60. Turn left towards La Conche, and follow the road to Maisonnisses.

7. Maisonnisses: The church dating back to the XIIIth century is an old commandery of the Order of Malta, built on a crypt where colonies of bats take refuge. A funeral statue, found in a field in 1830, has been moved back to its initial funeral recess. If you have a look around, you will notice plenty of faces staring at you.

Follow the D50, turn right towards Ahun. Follow this road until you get to the junction of the D13 where you turn right for Ahun.

Some other religious curiosities to discover :

- * **Pontarion's** massive church (B3) which houses a wonderful painting from the XVth century called "L'Adoration des Bergers". Its particularity is its floor composed of 32 sepulchres and more than 300 souls! Pontarion's priests, lords or simple masons are buried there!
- * The fortified church at **St Hilaire la Plaine** (D1) and its surprising watch turrets where one can imagine the rampart walkway on machicolations running along the wall.
- * The old commandery at **Chamberaud** (D2), with cross-ribbed oak vaults from the XVth century, its sun dials and keystones from elsewhere reused in the walls.
- * The odd sculpted stones dotted around **Mazeirat's** church's walls (C1).
- * The statue representing St Anne's relatives, in **Chavanat's** church (C4). Her daughters and grandchildren form a real genealogy.
- * XVth century paintings and amusing "cultots" inside **Vidalat's** church (C4) and sculpted brackets on the exterior.

The wow tour" / 63 km"

1. Pontarion: The "Espace pêche et nature" (Fishing and Nature) at Pontarion is the starting point of this tour.

Have a walk on the banks of the River Thaurion and take time to enjoy the local flora and the water-related heritage: wells, a duck pond or a communal laundry place....

At the château, turn right then turn left towards Ahun. At the end of the village, turn right (D13) still towards Ahun. Take a little road on your right towards Puychaumeix and then Pradeix.

2. This set of three ponds by the roadside gives wonderful vistas reminding us of the colours of the Limousin region and the Creuse department: blue for water, green for nature.

At St Hilaire le Château, turn left (DA3). Stop at Pont Péril's carpark.

3. Set off on foot from the carpark and follow the path on your left to the Norman bridge supported by a single semicircular arch, which used to be on an old Roman road linking the Berry and the Bas Limousin. It is made of huge granite blocks and in places the marks left by the stonemasons' double-headed hammers can be seen. The River Gosne which runs here, used to be famous for its numerous trout.

Then walk through Le Montell Bardoux and follow the road to Le Puy du Chalar.

4. Take a break and let yourself be charmed by this bucolic atmosphere... two little medieval bridges cross the river. The first one used to go to a priory that no longer exists. The second one was a toll-bridge.

In fact, these two bridges are copies of the previous one, at the Pont Péril.

Follow the road on your left, drive through Nouallaguet where you must stop to admire the impressive Sully lime-tree which is the name given to all lime trees of this size. After going through the village, turn left towards La Chapelle Saint Martial and go as far as the church.

5. La Chapelle Saint Martial: This immense lake of about 60 hectares dates back to the XIVth century! The bourg of La Chapelle Saint Martial is typical of the Creuse with its houses made by local stonemasons. Another several hundred years old Sully lime-tree stands here as well as a sculpted granite lion based on the legend of Saint Martial, the first bishop of Limousin.

After the cemetery, turn right towards Sarden.

6. By the side of this little road, a thousand fields of dandelions that bloom in spring are edged by low dry-stone walls which delimit the plots. The place known as "La chaise" (the chair) refers to the small agricultural parcels that were numerous here.