



Promoting the Massif Central on a European scale through the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

One possible regret to be had about the recently-concluded Massif Central Convention is that it did not at all take into account the cultural and heritage aspect of the Massif Central.

Culture is a huge source of attraction for a region that claims to be dynamic and welcoming. The Massif Central exists because its inhabitants share values, identities, and therefore a strong communal culture, and notably a welcoming culture that is developing through tourism.

It is notably through culture and tourism that the Massif Central would be able to open itself even more to Europe. There are already several cultural routes certified by the Council of Europe that run through the Massif Central: the first of these being the **Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Ways**, of which Puy-en-Velay is one of the most important points of departure. One could also note the **Ceramic Route** with Limoges in Haute-Vienne (Limousin), the **Route of Cluniac Sites** with Cluny in Saône-et-Loire (Bourgogne) and Souvigny in Allier (Auvergne), the **Sites of the Casadéens** with La Chaise-Dieu in Puy-de-Dôme (Auvergne) and the **Route of Historic Thermal Towns**, notably with Vichy, Châtel-Guyon, La Bourbule, Le Mont-Dore and Royat-Chamalières in Puy-de-Dôme (Auvergne). Other routes are in the process of being certified by the Council of Europe or the process of reorientation, such as the **Ways of Saint Michael** (with Aiguilhe), the **Stevenson Trail**, and the **Route of Saint Martin**. **Transromanica**, which is based around Romanesque art, will also take its place.

The Massif Central thus has the chance to promote its region, in cultural and tourist terms, on a European scale, supporting itself on these already-structured routes. Furthermore, there are opportunities for the Massif Central and its component Regions, since today the **European Commission has discovered skills to coordinate cross-border actions**, and a framework plan for European tourism has been adopted by the Ministers for Tourism of the 27 member countries. **The Cultural Routes have also been acknowledged as a key factor in the development of new forms of tourism economy throughout Europe.**

In the framework of the promotion of the Massif Central's resources, it is essential to reaffirm the importance of developing, in terms of tourism and heritage, the thermal spas that are part of the active network of the Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif Central. It is also essential to insist upon the development of an important resource that the Massif Central has at its disposal: the thermo-mineral water that is of course utilised for therapeutic ends in the health sector, for well-being and hobbies in the tourism sector, and which must also be developed as a geothermic energy resource.

All operators of the 18 thermal spas towns of the Massif Central, coordinated and organised through the Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif Central network, are continuing, in cooperation with the Massif Central DATAR (inter-ministerial delegation for regional development and attraction), to discuss and act in order to **create bridges between all the various cultural routes**, all the while searching to find **similar examples of regional or inter-regional collaborations in Europe** in order to **develop a common methodological approach** that would be based upon **the publication and diffusion of a collection of best practices.**