



Kevin Bonnaud is hiEurope's France correspondent. He reports on new and unknown places for you to discover.

# The Most Beautiful Village of France

By Kevin Bonnaud

*You know what they say about Les Baux (de Provence). It's the most charming village of Provence and beyond. That's an understatement. In Provençal language, its name means "steep place". It sure is with a renowned spur of calcareous rocks where the fortified village was built and carved on in the 10th century. That does not prevent 1.5 million tourists from wandering on the paved and narrow streets every year.*



## The Village

Depending on their mood and interest, visitors may find a shady spot on a lovely tiny square to have a snack while admiring the rocky landscape or watching people around: a young model posing on the steps of an old church, amateur comedians with medieval costumes rehearsing a scene. Foodies will undoubtedly stop by one (or two) gourmet shops to taste all sorts of local treats like Montsegur traditional nougats.

That's the relaxing part. The village has a lot of medieval and renaissance vestiges to feed history buffs and curious minds, including troglodyte houses and private mansions with large mullioned windows. Some of them have been transformed into museums. Art enthusiasts will be impressed by the collection of typical Provence and Neapolitan Christmas figurines known as santons, plus many engravings and paintings made by Yves Brayer, major 20th century figurative artist and master of the School of Paris.



## The Castle

Your friends and relatives will poke fun at you if you skip the castle tour. The ruins of what was once an imposing 13th century fortress overhanging the village is a must-see with its still-standing 35-m high stone

dungeon and three square-based towers embedded with rocks and accessible through stairs. The site, which is on the National Historic Monuments list, covers 7 hectares including a dovecote, a former hospital, two chapels and a series of life-size models of medieval siege weapons displayed around the structure. Visitors can see a 16-m high, 7-ton trebuchet able to catapult stone blocks of 100kg.

Views are panoramic and exceptional: Endless olive groves and vineyards on one side (visiting a local cellar or oil mill may be a plan worth considering). Limestone rocks and caverns of the Val d'Enfer (Valley of Hell) on the other side brilliantly captured by Jean Cocteau in his 1960 movie Testament of Orpheus and depicted by Florentine poet Dante.

## The Artists

The light and colors of Provence and Alpilles sceneries inspired many other artists, starting with Vincent van Gogh who resided not far from here in Arles and Saint-Rémy-de-

Provence. So it's not by accident that this year's light and sound Carrière shows feature the work of the post-impressionist Dutch legend. For visitors, it's a must-do immersive experience within Van Gogh's life. From Starry Night to the Sunflowers series, The Potatoes Eaters or The Bedroom, most of the artist's masterpieces are projected on walls, floors and pillars of the 15-m high monumental limestone quarries. Classical soundtracks multiply the grandiose effect.

Another shorter show features a journey into Japanese art which influenced Van Gogh and art history greatly.



## Tips

### Van Gogh Shows Carrière de Lumière

🕒 Until January 5, 2020

🌐 [www.carrieres-lumieres.com/en/home](http://www.carrieres-lumieres.com/en/home)

#### Direction

Avignon : 35 km / Arles : 20 km / Marseille : 85km