

# Along the Lavender Route through Haute Provence

## July is the most beautiful month

**„Lavender is the soul of Haute Provence. Whether one renches It from the Drôme, the Dauphine or the Var, this region offers its deserted expanses covered with violets and a feast of perfumes.“ J. Giono, Provençer.**

**J. Giono/Provence**



Sheltered by the heights of Mont Ventoux to the west, the Montagne de Lure to the east, and the Luberon range in the south, far from bustling towns and highways, Haute Provence is tranquil, secret and bare but certainly not barren. To fully understand this region, the visitor must carefully use each of his senses.

The narrow, deserted roads that crisscross the highlands of Provence are hemmed in by stately green oaks and seem to urge the traveler to linger a while, to deviate from his course and indulge his appetite or discover the superb countryside. Where it is not farmed, the land is often poor and has a chalky-white aspect. Here, in the midst of a deserted plateau, the linden or the sweet chestnut tree proudly oversees its territory. Nearby, an isolated farmstead rises. Beside it, in a glory of mauves and pinks, lies a flowerbed of clary sage, and further on, in the hollow of a turn, a blaze of copper-blue hyssops.

Lavender has been cultivated since the 1920s, and it has left the rocky plains where it grew abundantly in the wild

alongside thyme, savory and other aromatic plants. The lavender fields of today undulate like waves on a violet sea set against the deep blue skies of summer. Green would almost seem to be banished from the horizon or, where it appears, it takes on a somber hue like that of the dark smoke that filters out from the boilers of smoldering distilleries nearby.

### **Mechanical vibrations everywhere**

Indeed, it is only when one descends into the hollow of a valley, where a traditional distillery is at work, that the acrid odor of burning tires mingled with that of a lavender-perfumed vat provides a glimpse of the region's time-honored traditions. Amidst this hive of activity, mechanical vibrations, the scent of everlasting flowers, sage, lavender,



hyssop and the wind rustling through the leaves of micocoulier trees, the hum of crickets in the oaks, the earthen colored streets and pathways, and the repetitive, laborious sound of reaping machines blend and interfuse to the delight of the senses.

It is in this region of Haute Provence, where villages lie within walking distance of each other, where they take on the ochre aspect of the Provençal soil and bear the marks of the passage of time when viewed from afar, that one should visit the "Route de la Lavande", a looping excursion covering 90 kilometers (54 miles) in a relaxing 2 or 3 days, during the month of July.

### **Stops along the way:**

#### **Montbrun-Les-Bains**

Curled around the abrupt southern slope of a hill, Montbrun is a typically picturesque Provençal village. Its ancient houses and the terraces follow the form



of the slope and, from its narrow, restored streets, dominated by the ruins of a 16th century castle, the visitor is greeted with a beautiful view of Mont Ventoux.

#### **Aurel**

Coming from Montbrun, the ideal time to arrive at Aurel is at the end of the afternoon. This medieval village lies on a rocky spur overhanging the Nesque Valley, where its river draws its source. After a restful pause at the village



fountain, another stop, just a half-mile away on the road to Sault and offering a superb view of Aurel behind the lavender fields, is highly recommended.

#### **Sault**

The former capital of the country, this village dominates the valley that bears its name. From the roadside terrace, a vista of lavender and clary sage fields

opens up before the eyes while the villages charms — with its old town-houses and local museum offer plenty of distractions.

St. Christol

Aside from its lavender fields, St. Christol is home to a 12th century Roman church that is classified as an historical monument.

### **Simiane La Rotonde**

One of the most beautiful Provençal villages, rising vertically and crowned by the rotunda of a 12th century castle tower that overlooks the many lavender fields lying at its feet. From the covered market there is a nice view of the surrounding distilleries.

### **Banon**

Like many villages in the region, Banon is built on a rocky spur overhanging the valley. From the church square, one can make out the Montagne de Lure beyond the tiled roofs of the village. Just a mile out of town, on the D.950 road at Notre Dame des Anges, is a perfect spot for picnicking.

### **Revest-du-Bion**

Revest-du-Bion is a tiny village built on a plateau 950 meters (3,135 feet) above sea-level. It offers a beautiful view over the lavender fields to Mont Ventoux, which is only rivaled by the panorama of legendary Montagne de Lure at Le Pasdu-Redortier, a bit out of the way on the D.18 road.

### **Ferrassières**

Ferrassières is a small village located in the heart of the lavender fields and built around a medieval church honoring St. Julien.

Lavendel- und Salbeifelder. Sault hat den Charme schöner Häuser bewahrt und besitzt ein Heimatmuseum und ein Fremdenverkehrsamt.