

The Hidden Gem of France

WIN
A BREAK IN THE
FRENCH
ARDENNES

Question: What's the least well-known and under-explored corner of France?

Answer: The French Ardennes, on the northernmost tip of central France. A hidden gem of a place. And one of the best places to head for if you're in search of the "real" France.

But don't think that means it's somehow backward. Because The French Ardennes these days isn't at all slow in coming forward!

Let's take Hotel Dormeur du Val, in the region's capital of Charleville, as an example.

It's chic. Boutique. And Magnifique! And it's completely unlike any other hotel you're ever likely to stay in. Where else would you find half a bedside lamp embedded into the walls? Or a reception desk doubling-up as a showcase for 3 pristine Italian scooters?

But don't be fooled. For all of its eccentric ways, this 4-star hotel within such easy walking distance of the railway station is one of the most relaxing places to stay after taking the high speed rail journey from London St Pancras on Eurostar and the French TGV.

Charleville itself is equally mischievous. Boasting the Place Ducale - one of the finest town squares you're ever likely to have the pleasure of strolling through and enjoying a cup of coffee in - it is also a centre for Puppets and Marionettes, or "Les Petits Comédiens" as the locals like to call them.

And every 2 years it's the venue for one of the greatest festivals of street theatre you're likely to see: The World Puppet Festival. The next one being in September, 2011.



FACTS ABOUT THE FRENCH ARDENNES

- ◆ Charleville, the capital is also a world capital for puppets and marionettes.
- ◆ The speciality of the area is Tarte au Sucre - pastries, filled with a rich egg and sugar mixture and caramelised on top.
- ◆ The region has inspired story-tellers for centuries; and the place is allegedly populated by "pie-pie-van-vans" who lead you astray at night in the forest, and by "nutons" who work all night long repairing your shoes and saucepans.
- ◆ The wild boar is the symbol of the French Ardennes.
- ◆ The French Ardennes benefitted from the introduction of high speed TGV train services from Paris in 2007.



Photo: R. Mass

PREVIOUS PAGE: Making the most of the kilometres of "voies vertes"
INSET: The Maginot Line; travel instyle on Eurostar and TGV

ABOVE: Château Sedan - the largest fortified castle in Europe

RIGHT: The languid River Meuse at Monthermé

BELOW: Woinc - the French Ardennes' giant wild boar!



Few people know that The French Ardennes is also 'home' to the largest fortified castle in Europe. Fewer still have heard that it's now possible to stay within the walls of Sedan Fort, in *Hotellerie du Chateau Fort* in Sedan. Another 4-star hotel, it's the ideal place to check into if you want to take one of the self-guided audio tours of the castle.

... the largest fortified castle in Europe.

And what else might you be tempted to do while you're in The French Ardennes? The top tip of the moment is to head for the south of the region, and an attraction that still goes by the name of Nocturnia. Because here, you will find the wonderfully enduring Wolf Park, where 2 males and one female are gradually settling in to their new surroundings.

Visit it by day, and you can climb to the top of viewing platforms and get to see the wolves up-close and personal. Visit by night and once every month you can be privileged enough to join one of the night tours, during which you'll hear the howl of the wolves, and see them under the spotlights of the guides.

It's a magical and memorable experience, and one which really shouldn't be missed.

It's no surprise to discover that animals have a



very special part to play in The French Ardennes. The thickly wooded forests of the Ardennes are idyllic places for walks, but also a natural habitat for so much wildlife.

One thing you're unlikely to see are the Wild Boar. But one thing you WILL see if you happen to approach Charleville from the south by road is the world's largest boar. Sculptured in metal, it's the French Ardennes' equivalent of The Angel of the North.

Tell your friends about it when you return home, and they might think you've had a few glasses too many of the famous Ardennes beer. Tell them all about the Hotel Dormeur du Val, and they'll be convinced you have!



Would you like to know MORE?

FRENCH ARDENNES
www.ardennes.com

BEST WESTERN HOTEL LE DORMEUR DU VAL
 32 Bis, Rue de la Gravière, 08000 Charleville-Mézières
 Call: 33 (0)3 24 420 430
www.dormeur.fr

RAIL EUROPE
 Call: 0844 848 4070
www.raileurope.co.uk



ABOVE: Hotel Le Dormeur du Val

LEFT: La Place Ducale in Charleville is one of finest town squares you'll see

THE EASY WAY TO ENJOY YOUR PRIZE BREAK

THIS 2-NIGHT BREAK FOR 2 IN THE FRENCH ARDENNES IS A BREEZE TO TAKE

- ◆ Get yourself to London St Pancras Station - maybe splash out on a night in a London hotel to make your break longer
- ◆ Your Rail Europe ticket will take you from London to Charleville-Mézières
- ◆ Board the Eurostar at St Pancras and enjoy a relaxed and exciting journey to Paris Gard du Nord
- ◆ Take the 10 minutes signposted walk to Paris Gare de l'Est
- ◆ Take the TGV to Charleville-Mézières, (it will all be on your Rail Europe ticket)
- ◆ Walk from the station to the hotel
- ◆ ... and now relax!

Competition

This fantastic prize break includes return rail travel from London to Charleville-Mézières with Rail Europe followed by 2 nights accommodation at the Hotel Le Dormeur Du Val. The break is subject to availability and must be taken before March 2011.

To enter the competition, unravel these anagrams of words from this piece. Each has a rogue letter which you must place in the boxes to reveal the answer.

DAN PREENS	<input type="text"/>
RUMOURED	<input type="text"/>
RIP PALE EURO	<input type="text"/>
APRICOT NUN	<input type="text"/>
OUR EASTER	<input type="text"/>
A CUTE HAT	<input type="text"/>
CHILLER VALES	<input type="text"/>