Welcome to the Grand Site de France of Aven d’Orgnac.

We hope this brochure will help you understand and fully enjoy the guided tour of the Cave.

We wish you a pleasant journey into the depths of Earth and Time!
Cité de la Préhistoire

The Cité de la Préhistoire will bring you back to your roots by reliving 350,000 years of Prehistory based on local ruins, soundscapes, activities, life-size animals and touch screen tablets. The showcases display everyday objects, found in the Ardèche and northern the Gard, while multi-player touch screen tables, multimedia terminals and videos offer a resolutely modern approach which may well revolutionise your vision of archaeology.

The Cave

The tour of the cave lasts an hour and a quarter. Visitors are always accompanied by a guide. The temperature in the cave is 11°C. In order to protect the concretions, it is absolutely forbidden to touch them and flash lights are prohibited. Dogs are not allowed in the cave. The tour is organised in successive stages, descending 120 metres, with a total of 700 steps. You must use the lift to return to the surface.

The cave, the only one to be labelled «Grand Site de France», is part of the most visited and most studied underground sites in France. The site is today a world reference for the study of subterranean climatology.

Entrance chamber - video

A short video introduces visitors to the network of Grands Sites de France, a label attributed to only 14 French sites, which have demonstrated effective ecological management while conserving and showcasing their locations. This video is followed by a documentary explaining the different geological mechanisms behind the formation of the cave over the past 100 million years. The illustrated panel shows the cross-section of the underground network of Aven d’Orgnac. The underground gallery extends for more than 4 kilometres comprising 3 sections: the section developed for the general public, a reserved caving section and a fully protected section where access is prohibited. Scientific studies are conducted to ensure good conservation of the site and help understand the different stages of formation of the cave.
1st platform - Natural entrance

Through an artificial tunnel, including 220 steps, we reach the upper chamber. On the ceiling, the only natural entrance to the cave can be observed, 40 metres high. This was the entrance, called an «aven» - or sinkhole - used by the discoverers to access the cave, led by caver Robert de Joly, on the 19 of August 1935. They had been guided to the entrance by villagers who knew the aven and called it «Bertras». This aven had been used as a dump for dead animals and no-one had ever dared explore it. This is a cave whose entrance is an aven and this vertical entrance prevented prehistoric men from accessing the site. This major underground site has many assets: aesthetic, geological, speleological, scientific, etc. The mound under the Aven is called a talus cone.

2nd platform - Joly Chamber

From here, we have an overview of the first chamber, the Joly chamber. It measures 125 metres long and 90 metres wide. About 6 million years ago, the deepest part of the cave was occupied by water which hollowed out a gallery in the limestone. There are several types of concretions, like the well-known stalagmites, which develop up from the ground, and stalactites, which develop down from the ceiling.

Their evolution is extremely slow: approximately few millimetres to few centimetres per century. The stalagmites in front of us are called «piles of plates» due to their shape. They are only found under the highest ceilings and close to the entrance areas. Their specific shape is caused by a violent split in the drop of water at the top of the stalagmite.

3rd platform - The Pine Cone

Next to the «stacks of plates» are different forms of stalagmites, called «palm trees». Among these, the 11-metre high «pine cone» has become the symbol of Orgnac. «Palm trees» have formed under high ceilings, but with perhaps a stronger water flow. To the left, a few metres in front of the wall, a curtain of stalactites has joined stalagmites located below to form the «organ pipes». In the centre stands the funeral urn of Robert de Joly, the discoverer of the cave. To the left is the departure towards the caving galleries. Outings are regularly organised here, and visitors in good physical conditions can discover other wonderful landscapes, every day of the year, on booking.
4th platform - Chaos Chamber  -70m
From here you can imagine the pathway of the first explorers wearing simple acetylene lamps mounted on helmets from the natural entrance.

Let’s return to the formation of the cave. As you saw in the film presentation, it is an underground river that hollowed out the galleries. This river flowed 130 metres underground. Back lighting reveals the drops of water falling onto a beautiful stalagmite in the chamber.

5th platform - Draperies  -100m
If drops of water remain long enough on the ceiling before falling, they deposit calcite and form stalactites. If they stream down a sloping wall, they deposit calcite that is stacked to form draperies. These are translucent because they are very thin. This calcite, which forms draperies, is naturally white and transparent. Ochre to brown shades are due to pigments transported by water and trapped in the concretions: they consist of clays, iron oxides and organic matter. Underground life exists, and various species of bats, insects such as beetles, crustaceans, and more are present here, often through adaptation to their environment.

6th platform - The Red Chamber  -120m
Here, as the gallery has not collapsed, we find evidence of the ancient history of the cave: the arches are in place and magnificient marks of corrosion are visible on the walls. The colossal pillars that stand in front of us were formed once the water had evacuated. The sixth platform gives you the opportunity to enjoy the magical atmosphere of the cave through an original show created by two composers: the Cleophas brothers.

Thank you for your visit. We hope you enjoyed your time in the Aven d’Orgnac. Once you have taken the lift up to the surface, do not miss the Cité de la Préhistoire where you will find out about the life of the first inhabitants of our region from - 350,000 years to 500 years ago.