

Les Brunes, Bozouls – chateau B&B near Rodez airport and the Lot Valley

recommended by Gillian Thornton



Les Brunes, Bozouls © Gillian Thornton

Surrounded by unspoilt countryside just 30 minutes from Rodez airport, Les Brunes is a delightful base for exploring the picturesque Lot Valley around Espalion and Conques, as well as the Aubrac plateau.

Drive up the quiet lane to Les Brunes and you don't get the full impact of this delightful, historic property until owner Monique Philipponat-David opens the wooden doorway in the high stone wall. But leave your vehicle on the broad grass verge, step through the door into the hidden garden, and you get your first full view of this imposing stone house with its round tower and slate roof.

Monique's grandparents bought the 18th century property in 1904 and it subsequently passed to her aunt and father before coming to her. Since 2000, Monique has been sympathetically restoring its impressive rooms with the help of local craftsmen in order to maintain the original character whilst introducing 21st century comforts.

There are five beautiful bedrooms, all different and accessed up the broad spiral staircase inside the tower. Prices for 2011 prices range from 92-135€ per double room in low season, 102-145€ in high season (July, August and

holiday weekends).

I slept in Les Coussoles, smallest of the five but still spacious enough for two armchairs, a chest of drawers and wicker blanket box. From the bedroom, I looked over a field to the tiny hamlet beyond, whilst the window of the shower room was tucked behind the curve of the tower, overlooking the front gate and garden. Monique is keen to promote local crafts and the twin tablets of soap on the basin came from the Savonnerie Artisanale de Conques, a gorgeous spot classified as one of the Most Beautiful Villages in France and a stopping off place for pilgrims on the Compostella trail.

There were more local products included in Monique's substantial Continental breakfast, included in the room price and taken at a communal kitchen table in front of the vast stone fire place. Everything is sourced locally, from honey to fruit juice, and both bread and jams are home-made.

Monique doesn't offer evening meals, but there are a number of local restaurants to try, including Le Belvédère in nearby Bouzouls. Chef Guillaume Viala gained his first Michelin star here in March 2010 and serves imaginative, delicate fare in a pretty dining room overlooking the edge of Bouzouls' horseshoe-shaped gorge. The 4-course 'Nature' menu is just 35€ (May 2011) and a 3-course lunch, 20€.

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