

VAL D'ESCREINS NATURE RESERVE



Explore our slice of Canada in Vars. This nature reserve is home to a wide variety of mountain fauna and flora. Walks along the banks of the Rif Bel, barbecues, family outings or sporting hikes will make your time in Val d'Escreins one to remember.

Information available on-site and at Tourist Information.



BASSE-RUA HAMLET:

The village's population began to decline in the mid-19th century. A fire broke out in 1916 during the Great War. The village was left deserted. The chapel was restored in 1982 using traditional methods and materials.



THE FONT SANCTE ORATORY AND SPRING:

Legend has it that a goatherd led her herd into the Font Sancte valley. She had to go back down to the bottom of the valley to fetch water. One of her goats regularly strayed from the herd. The goatherd followed it and discovered a beautiful spring of clear water nearby. She asked to be buried in the valley so the miracle would never be forgotten. The spring was named Font Sancte. An unmissable walk in Val d'Escreins!
Duration: 4.5 hr round trip



SENTIER DES ARBRES REMARQUABLES:

Play hide-and-seek behind a dozen trees that are hundreds of years old along the way!
Duration: 3 hr

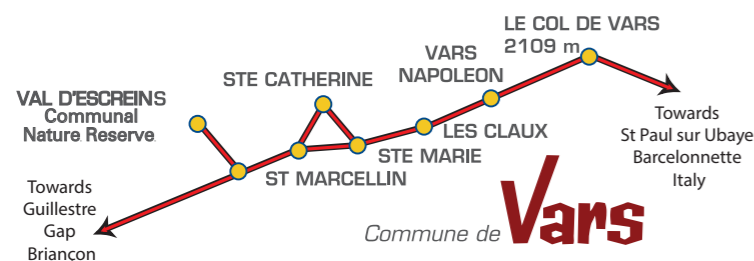
SMILE, YOU'RE BEING WATCHED!



Ask for Val d'Escreins brochures at Tourist Information or at Val d'Escreins visitor centre. (visitor centre open daily in July and August)



Pick up a book about our region's history to find out more about Vars. Information at Tourist Information



VARS, RECOGNISED BY FRANCE'S "VILLES ET VILLAGES FLEURIS":
This accreditation recognises the work of local authorities to improve their area. It's the French equivalent of the UK's "Britain in Bloom". It celebrates the role of plants in landscaping, protecting the environment, natural resources and biodiversity, promoting France's botanical heritage, reclaiming town centres, attracting tourists and getting locals involved in campaigns.

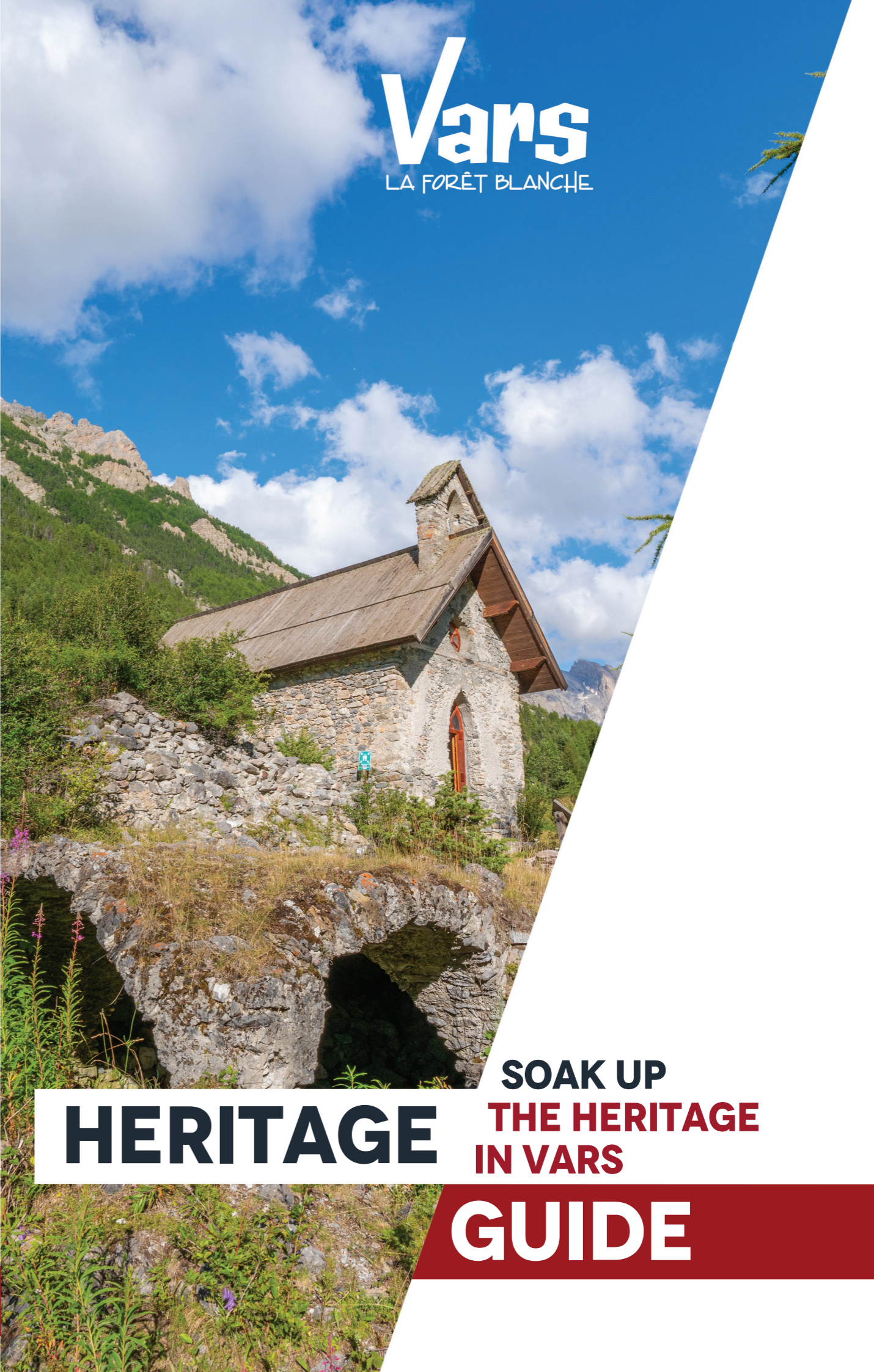
PATRIMOINE HAUTES-ALPES Download the "Patrimoine Hautes-Alpes" app
There are 5 articles about Vars heritage available free of charge.

Village tours available.
Opening times: See weekly event schedule or vars.com

Credits : Scalphoto / Thibaut Blais / Alpes Photographie / R. Morel - Conception : Syllys Design

Vars

LA FORÊT BLANCHE



SOAK UP THE HERITAGE IN VARS

HERITAGE GUIDE

VARs TOURIST INFORMATION

Vars les Claux
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*A person in charge of making artificial snow are called a «Nivoculteur» or «Snowmaker».
The shepherd's guard dog is a «patou».
The current world ski speed record (2023) is 255.50km/h



[VARs.COM](http://vars.com)

VARS / LES CLAUX

A POTTED HISTORY...
The first ski lifts were built on Peynier in Sainte-Marie in 1937. The Les Claux ski resort was founded in the 60s. The traditional architecture in the resort brings both heritage and economic development together. It is a great way to bring Vars to the outside world.

Vars is helping to boost tourism in the Hautes-Alpes without sacrificing its farming industry. In summer, you'll come across flocks of sheep watched over by the shepherd and his guard dog.

*The guard dog keeping an eye on the flocks has a special name here. What is it? **

COL DE VARS

Altitude: 2109m. It links the Hautes-Alpes and Alpes de Haute-Provence. The Tour de France cyclists have been riding on it since 1922. It's also one of the most famous mountain passes on the "Route des Grandes Alpes".



! Watch the marmots as they soak up the early morning or early evening sunshine.

LAC DE CHABRIÈRES

It's the perfect lake and hill reserve to make artificial snow and is surrounded by flowers in summer.



*Do you know what we call someone who makes snow? **

! Soak up the peace and quiet as you relax or fish on the banks of Lac Napoléon.

REFUGE NAPOLÉON

There are six refuges, each of them built in recognition of the welcome Napoleon I received when he returned from Elba.

The Col de Vars refuge was built in 1856 during the reign of Napoleon III.

CABANE DE CHABRIÈRES

At the foot of the legendary speed ski run, shepherds called this hut home during the summer in the last century.

It was restored in 2016 by the local council with the help of the Vars au Fil du Temps association.

*Do you know the current record for speed skiing? **

VARS / SAINTE-CATHERINE

Sainte-Catherine, known as "La Fortune" for its exceptional sunshine, is the former local granary.

The village architecture is true to mountain traditions.

Grab your maps, sunglasses and hiking boots and set off on a trip back in time:



WASHHOUSE

Women met regularly at the village washhouse which became a social hub whilst they did their laundry.



QUEYRAS CROSSES IN VARS

Every Vars village is home to a Queyras cross. They are adorned with symbols of the Passion. *Detailed information available from Tourist Information.*



SUNDIALS

If you're wandering through the narrow streets of Sainte-Catherine, don't forget to look at the walls of the houses! Some have pretty sundials with original mottoes such as "le temps fait passer l'amour, l'amour fait passer le temps" (time makes love pass, love makes time pass).



FOUNTAINS

Can you find the 5 fountains scattered around the village?



BOUSCATIÈRES

These sheds were popular at the time and used to store fire wood and tools. You may spot a few if you go through the bottom of the village.



VILLAGE BREAD OVEN:

The village bread oven stands on the edge of the village and is integral to Vars heritage. People's main concern in bygone times was providing bread for their families. The village elders light it up again for summer festivities nowadays.

Take a trip back in time and gaze at the traditional old farmhouses.

Each farm had a house and a barn.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The villages were made up of farms until the 19th century. The streets were very narrow. The villagers kept as much space as possible for their vegetable gardens.
- The trusses are made of stone down to the bottom of the framework. Wood being in short supply, the only cladding is on the gable end.
- Bygone flavours popular among locals include crousetons, a Vars classic. Fresh pastry is rolled by hand and served with tomme or blue cheese. Don't leave home without the recipe, available from Tourist Information.

VARS / SAINT-MARCELLIN

The administrative centre was based in the oldest village in Vars, Saint-Marcellin, until 1962. It was then moved to Sainte-Marie.



CHURCH

The hamlet and its church are named after Saint Marcellin, the first bishop of Embrun and evangelist in the region. Construction began in the 15th century. The Duke of Savoie's armies demolished it in 1692 before being rebuilt in the 18th and 19th centuries. The crouching lions carved from Guillore marble are a sight for sore eyes. They supported the pillars of a porch that no longer stands.



SUNDIALS

Look out for sundials on some of the houses. You can read mottoes in French or patois such as «Lou temps passo, passo lou ben» meaning «time flies, spend it well».



CHÂTEAU

Climb up to the castle from the church. An 11th century watchtower ruins stand on this rock. Beacons were used to raise the alarm and protect the crossroads between Durance, Ubaye and Queyras.



PROTESTANT CHURCH

There have been several Protestant churches in Vars. The one in Saint-Marcellin was built in the 19th century. The Protestant church has been used for exhibitions since the ecumenical centre was founded.

There is also a granary and community food box for families in need.



FOUNTAINS

Find the 4 fountains in Saint-Marcellin.

They were built out of wood in the last century. Visit the 5th water point: a standpipe in the downtown Garelle district.

ART IN THE VILLAGE

A large number of wood carvings are on display on the edge of the village: animals, shepherds and a 6m tall skier called Marcellin!

Sit on his skis and admire the scenery!

VARS / SAINTE-MARIE

This is where the first facilities, ski lifts, hotels and sports shops were built to welcome tourists. The village hosted as many as 300 visitors in 1958.

LE LAC DE PEYROL

You can walk to the lake at an altitude of 2150m. Take the opportunity to hire a fishing rod from the musher and stroke the dogs whilst you're there. Go down the Faudon path to Sainte-Marie, the Balcons de Vars to Les Claux or the Grand Vallon trail to Saint-Marcellin.



ECUMENICAL CENTRE

The centre was built in 1970 and is testament to ecumenism in the Hautes-Alpes. Catholic and Protestant services are held here regularly. A pipe organ was installed in 2018.

Keep your eyes peeled for a protected species of common frog by the lake.

The very first ski lift was built on Peynier in 1938. A second section was installed in 1952.

The Bois Noir chair lift has now replaced the two ski lifts in 2021.

SUNDIALS

Look for sundials on the houses.

Read poetic mottoes such as "Compagnon, suis le soleil, il t'indique l'heure" (Friend, follow the sun, it tells you the time).

FOUNTAINS:

There are five fountains dotted all over the village of Sainte-Marie. People used to get together at the fountains. Locals would come here to fetch the water they needed for their homes. Can you find them throughout the village?

DID YOU KNOW?

- Ski instructors used to groom the Peynier piste by skiing down with their students or rolling a 200l drum filled with sand.
- A new pipeline brought running water to every household in 1942.
- A local from Sainte-Marie bought a pair of skis made of ash wood in 1946. He decided to rent them out and set up the first sports shop in Vars.