



# PRESS KIT

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2020 - Ardèche



# Preface

I have tested dozens of bike routes over the last ten years, but the Dolce Via stands out. The terrain in the Ardèche is rugged with steep slopes – the kind that many leisure cyclists would be reluctant to tackle. However, the Dolce Via cycle route follows a former railway built at a time when the steam locomotives could not handle steep gradients – so the climbs are not so difficult. Part of the line is still used by a small steam train. Train and bike form a nice combination here against a backdrop of fabulous views, wooded hills, fast-running rivers and tiny villages, as you cycle along a kind of elongated balcony high above rushing water. Add in the delicious smells, the atmosphere, and the food and wine of the south of France and you have a route that indeed evokes *la dolce vita*.

The route is almost completely traffic-free, and cyclists can enjoy the peace and space. Amenities such as benches and picnic tables invite you to take a seat.

Everything is arranged to perfection, including the Accueil Vélo (“cyclists welcome” accommodation). Plus points include the connection with the ViaRhôna and the Ardèche steam train. The route has clearly been developed with cyclists in mind, and is a model for similar routes under development. The Ardèche can rightly be proud of La Dolce Via!

*Bert Sitters*

Journalist,  
President of the “Cycling Route 2020” jury in Utrecht

## Contents



General  
presentation p.4



History of La  
Dolce Via p.6



Management  
p.8



*A desire to  
discover p.10*



*Testimonials  
p.12*



*Holiday ideas  
p.14*



*Cycling route of  
the year 2020 p.15*



*Figures  
p.16*



*Practical  
p.18*



*Contact  
p.20*



# The Dolce Via

in figures

01

7 itineraries

90 km

40  
geocaches

Gradients from  
0.7 to 3.1%





Seven itineraries to discover the Dolce Via:

1/ La Voulte-sur-Rhône ⇄ Les Ollières-sur-Ëyrieux (20 km)

2/ Les Ollières-sur-Ëyrieux ⇄ Pont de Chervil (14 km)

3/ Pont de Chervil ⇄ Le Cheylard (14 km)

4/ Le Cheylard ⇄ Saint-Martin-de-Valamas (8 km)

5/ Saint-Martin-de-Valamas ⇄ Saint-Agrève (12 km)

6/ Le Cheylard ⇄ Les Nonières (7 km)

7/ Les Nonières ⇄ Lamastre (17 km)

The Dolce Via is a cycling and walking route that follows the course of the river, taking in the Ëyrieux and the Doux valleys. From the hillsides overlooking the spectacular Ëyrieux valley to the riverside section by the slow-moving Sumène that flows into the Doux, this is a trail that can be enjoyed by walkers and cyclists of all ages and abilities, with friends or family, as a getaway for two or even on a solo trip. And there are plenty of hidden gems to be discovered not far from the route!





It was in 1886 that the railway company of the Ardèche, the Compagnie des Chemins de Fer Départementaux, began the incredibly ambitious project of building a railway between La Voulte and Le Cheylard. Despite the extremely high construction costs, the line was inaugurated on Thursday, 10 September 1891. The trains were made up of compartmented carriages for passengers, a technological advance that enabled the inhabitants of Le Cheylard to travel to Valence in under three hours, compared with eight previously, and to Lyon in under six hours. The average speed rarely exceeded 20km/h, yet problems frequently occurred on this line: a derailment in 1891 following a mudslide at Saint-Sauveur-de-Montagut, breakdowns and poor rail quality are some examples.

In 1898, it was decided to build the second network, from Le Cheylard to Saint-Agrève, and work began the following year.

This section must have been hugely challenging: the difference in altitude and the large number of ravines and gorges in the area of Les Boutières required the construction of several tunnels, viaducts and huge cuttings. In 1903, the first train from Le Cheylard entered the station at Saint-Agrève.

This second network also included the construction of a line between Le Cheylard and Lamastre. Here again, several viaducts had to be built to ascend the valley leading to Les Nonières and then descend to Lamastre. The first train to circulate on this line set off on 11 July 1903. From then on, the station at Le Cheylard became the centre of the network, home to the locomotive maintenance

depot. Besides passenger transport, the trains proved very useful for transporting goods, especially fresh fruit to be sold on local markets, or sent further afield, beyond the confines of the Ardèche. Traffic was reduced, never to recover, as a result of fuel shortages caused by the two World Wars. Then, despite the use of faster and more efficient locotractors and railcars, passenger and goods traffic dwindled continuously in the face of stiff competition from the roads.

On 1 November 1968, by a ministerial decision and after a decade of hesitation, the CFD ceased operation of the Dunières-sur-Loire/La Voulte-sur-Rhône line. The tracks were removed soon after and the disused line ceded to the municipalities.

Until recently, people made use of the line by all means of transport, motorised or otherwise. The absence of safety amenities, suitable surfacing and any form of publicity stood in the way of tourist development, even though pedestrians and cyclists were already frequent users.



## The Dolce Via still has railway connections

Since the footbridge linking the Dolce Via to the ViaRhôna was installed at La Voulte-sur-Rhône in 2018, a popular trip for cyclists combines a ride on the Train de l'Ardèche (a tourist steam train) with a section on the Dolce Via and a return leg along the ViaRhôna. Every day Lamastre station sees numerous cyclists disembark with their bikes from the Mastrou train, ready to set off for a few days' cycling to La Voulte-sur-Rhône. They can then get back on the train at Tournon-Saint-Jean.



From Saint-Agrève, you can now take the Velay Express tourist train to Raucoules and join up with the Via Fluvia, a cycle route being developed to link the Loire to the Rhône. From Raucoules, cyclists can head for either Annonay or Lavoûte-sur-Loire.





## Development plan

The plan to convert the disused railway into a traffic-free route for cyclists and walkers was first discussed in 2001, and renovation work began in 2006. The first section to be completed was that from Saint-Laurent-du-Pape to Saint-Fortunat. Subsequently, under the impulse of the valley local authorities, the following sections were developed: Saint-Vincent-de-Durfort to Chalencon, Saint-Julien-Labrousse to Le Cheylard, Le Cheylard to Intres, Le Cheylard Lamastre and Intres to Saint-Agrève, as well as the link with the ViaRhôna at La Voulte-sur-Rhône.

## Route committee

In 2014 the La Dolce Via project moved up a gear when the three local authority groupings now in charge of the initiative – Val’Eyrieux, Pays de Lamastre and Privas Centre Ardèche – set up a route committee. This committee coordinates the input of the different stakeholders involved in the Dolce Via and also ensures that the different objectives are carried out in such a way as to provide a global tourism offer.

## Technical committee

Alongside the route committee, a technical committee, made up of technicians from the three local authority groupings, implements the action plan and coordinates the development plan. This committee meets monthly.









## Information boards

The information boards are a new feature – fourteen of them were installed along the Dolce Via early in 2020: two in the Lamastre local authority area, six in the Val’Eyrieux area and six in the Privas area. The boards engage visitors and tell them about the history of the former railway and other points of interest such as the terraced hillsides, engineering infrastructure and former industrial buildings. This initiative was launched in 2018 by the route committee in collaboration with the Monts d’Ardèche Regional Nature Park. It is the result of an idea that was discussed some years previously but could not be developed at the time. Designed in part by the route committee’s technical team (Régis Soubeyrand, Céline Clair and Charlotte Descaillot), it is an example of “slow tourism”, where visitors are encouraged to take the time to discover a destination and soak up the scenery through which they travel.

Each panel features photographs, a search game for children, a description of the key historical and geographical points of interest, and a summary in English.



Another good reason for exploring the Dolce Via and discovering the landscapes is that there are more than forty geocaches hidden along the route. Geocaching is great fun and very easy to do, whether you are already an enthusiast or want to try it out as a new family activity. You can find the coordinates of the 42 geocaches on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com).

## Lots to do

There are plenty of activities on offer within a short distance of the route – you can visit the three “villages de caractère” (a French tourist label), admire the scenery from different viewpoints, or take a dip at one of the bathing spots. In addition to walking and cycling, other sports activities are available along the route – information can be found at the different tourist offices.







“J’ ai fait, avec 2 amis, l’ensemble de la dolce via et retour sur 3 jours les 25, 26 et 27 mai dernier. Ce parcours est une véritable merveille. Le site internet est particulièrement bien fait, précis. Sur le parcours, la signalisation est parfaite ; les bancs et tables pour les pique-nique ou le repos, les toilettes, le mobilier pour tenir les vélos ... tout est prévu pour le plus grand bonheur des cyclistes. J’ai adoré ce parcours !! Merci”

*Evelyne*

«La Dolce Via c’était super. On est parti de Pont de Chervil et on a traversé un tunnel. Les enfants se sont bien amusés. On a fait des vidéos. Il y a des supers beaux paysages avec en plus des ouvrages d’art incroyables !»

*Paul*



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“Ce qui est magnifique sur La Dolce Via c’est le ouvrages d’art que l’on voit depuis Pont de Chervil. C’est la route qui monte à Chalencon. Là on voit des supers travaux qui ont été fait et que l’on de ferait plus maintenant et même on se demande comment ils ont été faits. Je crois qu’à l’époque les ouvriers étaient payés à la pierre taillée.”

*Rémy*

«Les enfants ont pu se promener en toute sécurité. Ils ont pris beaucoup de plaisir. La p’tite pépite ça a été de pouvoir s’arrêter au bord de la rivière, de voir aussi, à des moments, des brebis. On reviendra, c’est sûr !»

*Aurélie*



rouler patrimoine sérénité plaisir facilité agréable nature paisible  
paysage cool sauvage rivière  
tranquillité douce vue super  
sportif beau calme  
famille magnifique  
pittoresque





# 3 holidays ideas

Here are three ideas for a great break on the Dolce Via. Check out the details on the website and plan your trip. Accommodation information can be found in the “Where to stay” section.

## A family-friendly getaway to discover La Dolce Via (2 days/1 night - 56km)

*Set off with all the family along the Dolce Via and discover the beautiful Eyrieux Valley. This 2-day itinerary is suitable for children as well as grown-ups and combines nature observation and cultural activities – without forgetting your essential travelling companion, your bike.*

The itinerary starts at the former station of Les Ollières-sur-Éyrieux where you can leave your car in the car park. The cycle route follows the Eyrieux gorges to Le Cheylard. The return journey on day 2 leaves time for other activities or to just enjoy the scenery.

### 2 days/1 night

<https://www.dolce-via.com/en/prepare-your-stay/holidays-ideas/holiday-idea-1/>

## Welcome to the Ardèche for a six-day car-free trip (6 days/5 nights - 145km)

*Take time to discover the two emblematic valleys of the Ardèche – the Doux and the Eyrieux. This 100%-bike trip at the heart of the Ardèche will be an unforgettable holiday!*

Discover the Doux and the Eyrieux valleys on this 148-km round trip taking in the Train de l'Ardèche, the Dolce Via and the ViaRhôna. Your trip starts at Saint-Jean-de-Muzols where you board the Train de l'Ardèche (tourist steam train) which will take you to Lamastre. From here, cycle to Le Cheylard and continue on the Dolce Via to La Voulte-sur-Rhône. On the last day, join the ViaRhôna to return to Saint-Jean-de-Muzols.

### 6 days/5 nights

<https://www.dolce-via.com/en/prepare-your-stay/holidays-ideas/holiday-idea-3/>

## Nature and the great outdoors along La Dolce Via (3 days/2 nights - 88km)

*Get away from it all on your bike on a fast-paced and 100% nature trip. Set off to conquer the Ardèche plateau on a holiday for two. Discover the grandiose landscapes of the Ardèche and enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the great outdoors!*

Leaving from Le Cheylard, this itinerary takes you to Saint-Agrève (24km) on day 1, returning to Le Cheylard (24 km) on day 2. On day 3, you cycle to Lamastre and back (40km).

### 3 days/2 nights

<https://www.dolce-via.com/en/prepare-your-stay/holidays-ideas/holiday-idea-2/>







According to the jury, made up of Bert Sitters, Luc Oteman, Wouter Bazan and Jessica de Korte, the Dolce Via meets all the criteria for cycle route of the year: “A beautiful route through a magnificent landscape with unique views”.

“The route is almost entirely car-free and cyclists can enjoy the peace and open space. Amenities such as benches and picnic tables invite you to take a seat,” said the jury. And according to jury chairman Bert Sitters, investments in the route have clearly been made with cyclists in mind. “La Dolce Via is a model for similar cycle routes under development.”

On Friday 28 February 2020, the Dolce Via was awarded “Cycle route of the year 2020” at the Fiets- & Wandelbeurs bike fair in Utrecht (Netherlands).

In the final phase of the selection, the jury had a choice of four nominees. Sydkustleden (Sweden), EuroVelo 3 (Belgium) and La Vallée du Loir à Vélo (France) also had a chance to win the honorary title.

The jury assessed the four competing routes according to the following criteria: signage, quality, road surface, and originality of the theme.




### Increasing numbers of users

The pedestrian and cyclist counters (at Les Ollières-sur-Éyrieux, Saint-Prix, Saint-Laurent-du-Pape and Saint-Julien-en-Boutières) confirm the overall trend of high visitor numbers in the Ardèche in August.


The number of cyclists using the Dolce Via has been steadily increasing, from around 4,000 in 2010 to more than 50,000 in 2019!

The Dolce Via has become a recognised and highly popular route for nature lovers and cyclists.


#### Saint-Laurent-du-Pape

	2018	2019
	12431	25567


#### Saint-Prix

	2018	2019
	8700	10907

#### Saint-Julien-en-Boutières

	2018	2019
	9106	11150

#### The counter at Les Ollières-sur-Éyrieux

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
	4104	20389	23301	25091	31088	34791	39563	25322	45305	50578



### Website

The La Dolce Via website ([www.dolce-via.com](http://www.dolce-via.com)) went on line in April 2018. Visitors can check out descriptions of the different itineraries, details of the events and activities on offer near the route, find the kind of accommodation and eating-places they are looking for, consult the interactive map and obtain all the practical information they need to plan a perfect trip along the Dolce Via. In 2019, the website had more than 40,000 visitors.



### Social media #LaDolceViaArdeche

The number of subscribers on social networks is also increasing. The Facebook pages have 1085 fans and 1218 subscribers, and the Instagram account has 1006 followers.



@LaDolceViaArdeche



@ladolcevia\_ardeche

la Dolce Via

LES PARCOURS AUTOUR DE LA DOLCE VIA PRÉPARER MON SÉJOUR CARTE INTERACTIVE PRATIQUE

BESOIN D'ÉVASION ?  
BIENVENUE SUR LA DOLCE VIA

En savoir plus

LA DOLCE VIA

90 km de voie douce aménagée et sécurisée, au cœur des paysages préservés et des grands espaces naturels de l'Ardèche.

Accessible depuis la ViaRhôna, à pied, à VTT, VTC ou à cheval, venez vous balader sur cet itinéraire spécialement dédié à la randonnée, et profitez de cet environnement protégé.

IDÉES SÉJOUR

Trouvez votre sortie détente idéale ! 2, 3 ou même 6 jours, nous vous proposons des parcours à faire sur le tracé de La Dolce Via, pendant la période qui vous convient le mieux.

Un séjour à la découverte de La Dolce Via en famille (2 jours/1 nuit - 56km)

Partez en famille sur La Dolce Via et découvrez toutes les richesses de la vallée de l'Eyrieux. Un parcours de 2 jours alliant nature et...

Nature et grand air sur La Dolce Via (3 jours/2 nuits - 88 km)

Évadez-vous à vélo le temps d'un séjour rythmé et 100% nature. Partez à la conquête du plateau ardéchois pour une escapade au grand air en amoureux.

L'Ardèche vous accueille pour 6 jours sans voiture (6 jours / 5 nuits - 148 km)

Prenez le temps de découvrir les deux vallées emblématiques de l'Ardèche que sont la vallée du Doux et la vallée de l'Eyrieux.

Voir tout

## How to get here



Valence Ville or Valence TGV railway station (rail link between the two stations).



The Dolce Via connects with the ViaRhôna, part of the major European bike route, the Eurovélo17, at La Voulte-sur-Rhône.



### *From Valence TGV station*

Take coach 73 operated by T&ER Auvergne Rhône-Alpes to La Voulte-sur-Rhône, the starting point of the Dolce Via. Get off at the “Mairie” (town hall) stop. You will need to book 48 hours in advance to put bikes in the coach hold: phone +33 (0)4 75 35 69 90

### *From St-Étienne*

Take coach 37 operated by the Haute-Loire coach company to Saint-Agrève. Phone +33 (0)4 71 59 81 78 for details and times

### *From Valence Ville train station*

Line 12, operated by Le Sept coaches, follows the Dolce Via with frequent stops between St-Laurent-du-Pape and Le Cheylard. Phone +33 (0)4 75 29 11 15 to book a space for your bike on the bike rack (April to November)

Line 3+ operated by Le Sept coaches takes you to Tournon-sur-Rhône. From here take line 5 to Lamastre and St-Agrève. Phone +33 (0)4 75 81 09 09 to book a space for your bike on the bike rack (July and August)





## Main access points

La Voulte-Sur-Rhône  
 Lamastre  
 Le Cheylard  
 Les Nonières  
 Les Ollières-sur-Eyrieux  
 Pont de Chervil  
 Saint-Agrève  
 Saint-Martin-de-Valamas

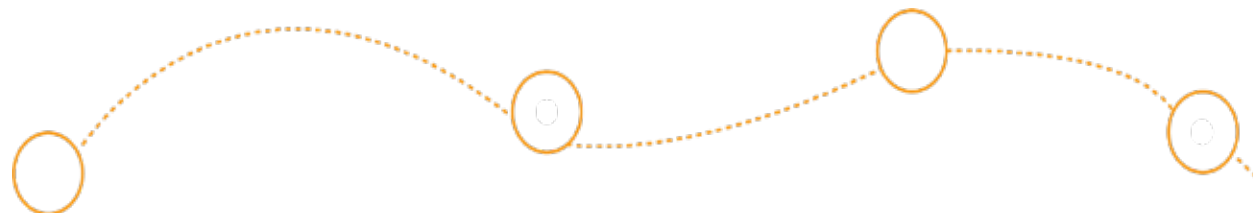




### Communication Dolce Via

Charlotte Descaillot

**07 85 52 86 47** - [contact@dolce-via.com](mailto:contact@dolce-via.com)



### Tourist Office Privas Centre Ardèche

**04 75 20 81 81** - [www.ardeche-buissonniere.fr](http://www.ardeche-buissonniere.fr)

Privas | Les Ollières-sur-Eyrieux | La Voulte-sur-Rhône | Vernoux-en-Vivaraïs



### Tourist Office Pays de Lamastre

**04 75 06 48 99**

[www.pays-lamastre-tourisme.com](http://www.pays-lamastre-tourisme.com)

Lamastre | Désaignes



### Tourist Office Val'Eyrieux

**04 75 64 80 97** - [www.tourisme-valeyrieux.fr](http://www.tourisme-valeyrieux.fr)

Le Cheylard | Saint-Martin-de-Valamas | Saint-Agrève | Saint-Pierreville









www.dolce-via.com



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ARDÈCHE  
BE AMAZED