France is famous for its exquisite Renaissance heritage and impressive Gothic churches, but few people know about the treasures hidden high in the mountains in the South.

# 3 Medieval French Castles You Probably Don’t Know About

Most people have heard about the architecture of Paris, but few tourists venture to explore what France really has to offer. And believe me, it is a treasure trove of breathtakingly beautiful masterpieces with a captivating history. That’s why we will share some secret places with you. Well, in fact, they are widely known in France but usually escape the view of the newcomers. Are you ready?

## Cathar castles

Yes, all the castles we are going to mention today are connected with such people as Cathars. But who were they?

In brief, Catharism was a religion opposed to Catholicism in the Middle Ages, specifically – in the XII and XIII centuries. You can find out more about their beliefs [here](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catharism).

As you could have probably guessed, the Pope didn’t like that at all, so the crusade against the Cathars was begun and along with it – the period of their persecution. Sadly, the religion became extinct shortly afterwards and the believers were all burnt – not even surprising when talking about the Inquisition. But during all that horror, the people managed to build or occupy fortresses high in the Pyrenees to hide from their persecutors. And some of them are to be described in our article.

## Châteaux de Lastours

An entity of four castles that do not form a single structure, though. The Châteaux de Lastours are recognized as the center of Cathar opposition as their resistance to the Christian forces began there. They are situated high on a rocky spur above the eponymous village, surrounded by two valleys. All four buildings have a similar structure – built for defense, they have towers and ramparts along with arched windows. They are well preserved, though the smallest one, called Tour Regine, is believed to have been built only after the crusade.

## Cité de Carcassonne

Not far from Toulouse, there is a medieval city of Carcassonne that is truly exceptional. Its famous fortress signified its birth. Constructed in the Gallo-Roman period, it has strongly fortified walls and an impressive number of towers – 52, to be exact. Although it was not built by the Cathars themselves, Cité de Carcassonne became one of the strongholds of the persecuted. It was rebuilt and reconstructed, new walls were added, but can you imagine its grandeur? The grandeur of the edifice that has a 2,500 years old history! Unthinkable and definitely worth visiting, right?

## Château de Montségur

The ruins of Montségur dominate the rocks of Languedoc, southwest from Carcassonne. Also refortified by the Cathars, it is the most interesting castle regarding its history. Firstly, there was a legend about some treasure taken away by the people fleeing from the crusaders. But when the poem about the Holy Grail, written in the same century, was analyzed, Montségur became one of the candidates for the treasury castle. Similarities between the protagonist and an actual owner, as well as the parallel between the meanings of the name, were found. In the book, the name of the fortress was explained as a “secure place”. And guess what? Montségur is translated in the same way!

No doubt, you are totally flabbergasted by what you have just read. Surprisingly, France is not only about Notre-Dame and the Eiffel Tower, it has lots of mysterious places to visit. Just close your eyes and see the mountains with those majestic buildings on their peaks. They have stood there for centuries! And who knows, maybe it is time to climb those summits? Do not hesitate when including them into your travel to-do list.