

Espéraza

(for the Dinosaur, Hat, and Honey Museums)

In the year 813 a priory was created here, called *Ecclesia Sanctae Mariae de Asparazanus*. Located on a tight bend of the Aude in the period when the Haute Aude was being opened and developed,



Espéraza grew in the time of the Visigots (5th century) and the Carolingiens (6th century). Over a thousand years after those days of growth, in 1878, the railway arrived in Espéraza and the felt hat industry boomed. The inhabitants of the region had returned from Silésie (Poland) at the end of the 18th century, where they had been captive, bringing back with them the expertise of wool felt, and hence hats.

At its height the industry employed about 3000 people in 14 factories, and was the second largest producer of hats in the world. The industry went into decline in the 1950's and one of the factories was converted to a hat museum, where all the old machines can be seen. The hat museum is part of the museum complex and one ticket includes entry to all three, including the honey museum.



Today. The town is best known for the Dinosaur Museum, established in 1992, it is the first museum in Europe to be dedicated exclusively to dinosaurs. Fossils were first discovered in Aude in 1877, however it wasn't until 1989 that the interest in dinosaur fossils really started.



Following the discovery of another large dinosaur fossil in Campagne-sur-Aude, a request was made to undertake an other excavation and over just 10 days in July 1989, dozens of dinosaur fossils were discovered at the Bellevue site. Since then literally thousands of fossils have been discovered in the Aude. The most exciting find was in August 2001, by Eva Morvan, a geology student at the University of Rennes who was involved in the dig. She uncovered some dinosaur ribs and vertebrae that were anatomically connected. Three weeks later, the team

identified the specimen as a sauropod dinosaur (*Ampelosaurus ATAC*), quickly named it "Eva" Since then skull bones have also been discovered, making Eva the most complete dinosaur skeleton ever found in France.

Should you need any more reason's to visit this lovely town, let me just point out that it's Sunday Market, is renowned for being one of the best and diverse in the

region. With fresh produce, arts and crafts , and new age alternatives, to tempt you. *Espérazza*

Distance; 11 Km, Time; 19 minutes

