

# Visit Saillans

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## • History •

Welcome to Saillans! With the Vercors Mountain to the North, the Provence to the South, ideally settled on the banks of the Drôme River – one of the last free running rivers in Europe – the village has a truly privileged location, at the feet of the “Roche”, its guardian mountain. The valley, running East to West, allows for bright and sunny days, in any season, summer or winter.

Swimming and sun-bathing, canoeing, hill walking, mountain-biking, or sight-seeing, are just some of the numerous outdoor and cultural activities on offer. Its climate is particularly pleasant, thanks to its location, where the hills and mountains form a gateway to the Diois region (upstream). A local thermal wind often blows in the morning, called the “Solaure”.

Saillans sits at 853 feet altitude, along a strategic itinerary through the Alps, from Valence in the Rhône Valley, to the Mont Genève Pass, the most accessible route into Italy. This area has been inhabited by Modern Man since 6 000 B.C. In the 2nd century B.C. the valley becomes a passage to the Gauls which is crucial for the Roman légions. In those days, the entire Drôme Valley was home to a Celtic nation: the Voconces. The Romans had to ally with the Voconces, and build vital staging posts, like Darentiaca, on the Saillans territory. The inscribed slab which you can see in front of the Tourist Office dates from that period. Gallic families were already producing wine, and later created the famous “Clairette” grape variety. During the Barbarian Invasions, families got together and built a village, close to a well called “Saliens”

In the 9th century a Priory was established, and “Saillans” slowly developed into a town, with its walls and gates. In the 16th century, the Wars of Religion were most destructive. And in the 18th century the inhabitants actively took part in the Revolution. Great prosperity came with the silk industry, starting in the 17th century. The silk legacy is still visible today, with many mulberry trees, the layout of houses and the old silk farms, the former factory and workers’ buildings, and the canal. In 1900, the town had a population of 1728, with 400 factory workers, 13 bars, 4 hotels... But the industry declined early in the 20th century, the factory closed in 1968, leaving only 850 inhabitants. It took some time for Saillans to resurrect and thrive once again. Today it has a population of 1 050.

At present, Saillans’ main activities concern the vine and tourism. The village asserts its rich heritage and natural assets. You are welcome to explore its “viols”, quiet and narrow streets, protected by its medieval walls. Take time to study its old stones, and discover its hidden treasures. You will be quickly seduced by its authentic charm and relaxed pace of life.



Original view over Saillans looking through a natural arch, part of a rock called “La Laveuse”, at the top of the Saou Mountain.

Light and shadow patterns in the tunnel.

Old painted mural sign advertising the “Clairette”.

## • Architecture •

Saillans consists mainly of humble and intertwined dwellings, using every available space within its ancient protective walls; except larger buildings such as Saint Géraud’s Church, some rich but old medieval houses, very few walled gardens, the Town Hall, and the former silk factory.



Stones from the river bed, reused ancient blocks, and quarried stone are the most common building materials. Roofs are covered with Roman tiles, and rimmed with rows of traditional “gênoises”. There are many engraved and carved lintels, stating the date when the house was built or renovated. You will also notice many old doorways and flying buttresses across the narrow streets.

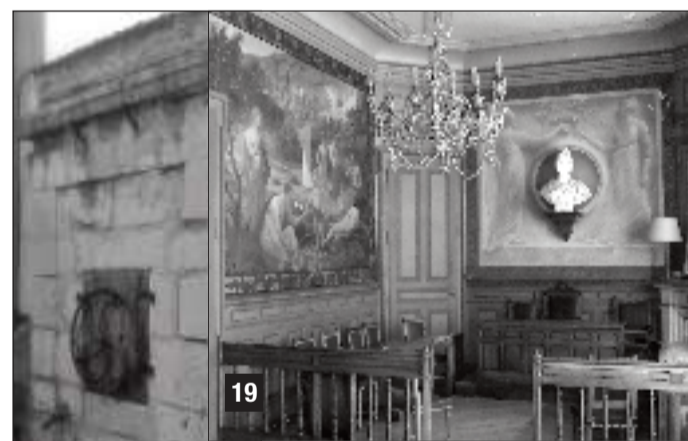
The houses are functional, with wine cellars underground, shops or stables at ground level, living quarters on the first floor, bedrooms on the upper floors, and the attic would be used for silkworm breeding or to store hay. Today, the inhabitants often live on the upper floors, after converting the attic, to catch as much sun as they can. Close to the bridge over the River Drôme, the streets were raised and are now at first floor level.

## • Geology •

The natural beauty of the landscape surrounding Saillans entices you to stop and contemplate. That happens all the time! Its Natural History goes back to the Jurassic and the Cretaceous Period, during the Age of Reptiles. Later, during the Oligocene Period, 30 million years ago, the African and European plates collide, and the Alps start rising. This great upheaval gives the extraordinary variety of mineral layers. Surrounded by hills and mountains, the village has four gateways, the main ones being East and West. Some features will catch your eye: ridges, gorges, transverse valleys, mineral layers and eroded rocks. Natural Monuments will focus your attention, like the “Trois Becs”, the highest peaks in the area, sitting like a crown on a limestone massif. Or the “Laveuse” Rock, the gorges of Saint Moirans and Rieussec, and the Saou forest in a high perched syncline.

Our Tourist Office hosts will be happy to inform you on the many walking itineraries and viewing points around Saillans.

## • Places of interest •



Narrow alleyways and back streets in medieval Saillans, locally called “viols”, where one can notice largestones acting as wheel guards for carts, and cut out wall corners to allow the hub and load to turn in tight corners.

< Small bell-turret and cross of the former town’s hospital, housed in the Convent of the Trinitarian Sisters who looked after it.

Old engraved lintel above a doorway in “Rue de l’Hôpital” street.

Bust of M. Faure

Bust of Barnave

Minister for Public Education Maurice FAURE

“Most French citizens have little or no geographical and historical knowledge of their birthplace. It is most unfortunate, as there are great advantages in knowing the singularities and features of your native land, its resources, its customs, its regional language and local dialects, the inhabitants’ traditions, their folk tales and proverbs, the part it played throughout History, and the most distinguished citizens who were born and lived there...”

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