



Town of Art and History
Come and wander through the streets of this

Let us tell you the story of
Millau



The shape of a city

The town which was created during the Middle Ages on an alluvial plain on the banks of the Tarn, furthered its development at the foot of three plateaux, as though under siege from them.

La Graufesenque

Condatomagos, or “Market of the confluence” in Gaulish, was an important production site for Samian pottery during the 1st and 2nd centuries, established on a Gaulish sanctuary. It can be seen today at the archaeological site of La Graufesenque, situated at the confluence of the Tarn and Dourbie rivers and at the foot of the limestone plateaux, the *causses*. The Roman road which crosses part of the *causses* between the Massif Central mountain range and Languedoc, connects Rodez, the capital of the Ruthenians with Saint-Thibéry, where it joins up with the Via Domitia. *Condatomagos* therefore had the advantage of being an ideal location for massive exportation of Samian pottery throughout the Roman world.

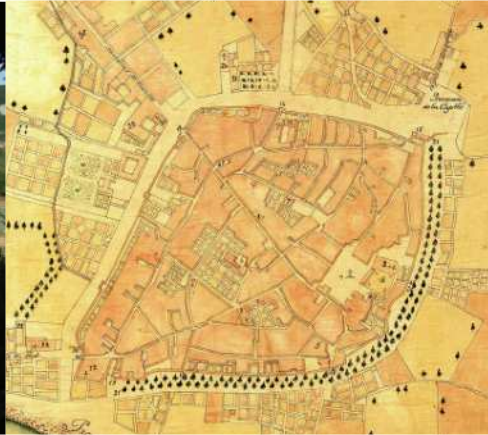
The birth of the mediaeval town

The town of Millau appeared during the course of the 11th and 12th centuries, completely unaware of the previous occupation. *Amilhau* was built up on the right bank of the Tarn, in one of its winding curves, around the formation of the monastery and church of Notre-Dame de l'Espinasse, consecrated in 1095 by the pope Urban II. South-west of the town can be found the bridge which has spanned the Tarn since the 12th century and which was one of very few crossing points. It encouraged trade and turned Millau into a hub for the southern road system, as well as an important toll collection point for the Knights Templar who acquired its rights the following century.

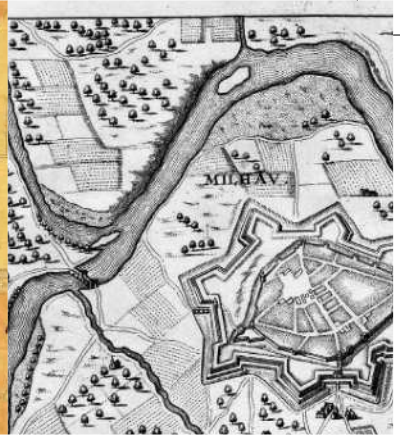
In the centre of the town, the palace of Alfonso II of Aragon and its tower clearly illustrated the sovereignty of the kings of Aragon from the end of the 12th century over the development of the market town beneath it. The wealth of the mediaeval houses bear witness to this. The mendicant orders of Dominicans, Cordeliers, Saccites, Poor Clares and Carmelites, who were indicative of this importance, started to appear. All of them, with the exception of the Dominicans, settled outside the fortifications. From the start of the 13th century, these town walls comprised eight fortified gates connected by an outer wall and, together with the ditch, they protected the town, giving it its current shape.



The La Graufesenque archaeological site, discovered at the start of the 19th century, contains religious and handicraft remains dating back to Gaulish and Roman times.



This extract from an anonymous 18th-century map shows how the influence of the mediaeval town was limited by the ditch and the wall which was replaced by the boulevards.



The map of Millau drawn up by Tassin around 1620 was never realised. It nonetheless shows the final stages of the fortification of the town at the time of the Wars of Religion.



Trudaine's atlas shows that as late as the 18th century, only the faubourgs of the hôtel de Sambucy de Sorgue were built outside the town's mediaeval limits.

At the start of the 20th century, the quays of the Tarn were still being used for drying animal hides.

The viaduct constructed by Norman Foster and Michel Virlogeux between 2001 and 2004, provides a crossing of the Tarn between the Causse Rouge and the Causse du Larzac, connecting Paris to Barcelona via the A75.

The faubourgs

From the middle of the 13th century, three faubourgs developed outside the walls, close to the fortifications: "Ouliers" faubourg to the north, beyond rue de la Capelle, one of the town's major shopping streets, near the Saccite convent; Barry faubourg to the west, at the junction with the Ayrolle gate on the way to Rodez; Bridge faubourg to the southwest beside the Carmelite convent, leading to the old bridge. These were demolished along with the monasteries during the Wars of Religion so as to prevent them from sheltering attackers, but today's faubourgs which form part of the modern town, contain the remains of the early constructions.

Period of transformations

The first attempt at opening the town outside the walls came in the third quarter of the 17th century: in 1661 the Consuls rearranged the Capelle esplanade to the north of the town, extending the previous area occupied by the Poor Clares. It wasn't until the 18th century that the intendant, Charles Lescaopier, transformed the ditches into promenades, one of which was planted with trees and fitted with benches. He completed the layout of the Place de la Capelle by erecting a supporting wall. The road network was then improved, thereby opening up the town. The French Revolution completed the destruction of the monasteries and their churches, bringing a definitive change to the urban perspective.

An industrial town

As corollaries of sheep-rearing, glove-making and tawing, which took place on an industrial scale from the middle of the 19th century, elevated Millau to the rank of glove-making capital in the years 1900-1914. As major activities, they left their mark on the urban landscape. Brickwork chimneys sprang up along the riverbanks, marking the taweries which required large volumes of water and where sheep hides were transformed into skins. Glove factories, on the other hand, spread out wherever there was light. Glove-makers also worked at home, and could be made out sometimes only from the alignment of their upstairs bay windows.

Taweries, dyeing factories and glove factories that were often separated, were now brought together, forming large industrial centres, enhancing supervision of the production line, from the reception of raw hides through to the selling of the gloves. The factories therefore occupied vast areas shaped according to requirements. The large converted roof spaces known as sèches and used for drying hides gradually replaced the graves by the riverside, where animal skins were still being laid out to dry at the start of the 19th century. Town planning regulations and modern-day esthetic requirements have pushed these factories out of the town which today continues its luxury glove activity.

The town through the centuries

From the year 1000, the first viscounts of Millau possessed a large domain which enabled them to be ranked among the important aristocratic families of the South.

A mediaeval creation

Millau is situated beside an ancient transhumance route where the Roman road crosses the river Tarn. However, the first seat of power known, Notre Dame church, was only built as late as 1070. It belonged to the Saint-Victor monastery in Marseilles ever since it had been handed over to them by Béranger, Viscount of Millau, together with the land required for building a convent. His brothers Bernard and Richard were responsible for this handover. They were abbots of Saint-Victor, highly important figures and major developers of lands belonging to their abbey. They opened the Rouergue up to the Benedictine Order and this is the period that marked the start of the town's development.

Domination of royal Aragonese power

Through an inheritance in 1162, Millau came under Aragonese rule. King Alfonso II of Aragon was one of the wealthiest feudal lords in Occitania. Amid warfare for supremacy of the South, he erected a palace on the main street, marking the domination of his lands which bordered lands belonging to his rival, the count of Toulouse. At the same time, he conferred on the city its charter of customs, which gave rise to the consulate, the basis of the municipal organisation. And when he granted Millau the seal and the banner, this gave the town its legal and moral personality. The construction of the bridge in the middle of the 12th century strengthened Millau's dynamism and the town flourished.

A market town

Between the 11th and 13th centuries, Millau continued to develop, coming under the royal domain in 1271, and the bourgeois merchants became increasingly powerful. Despite the Hundred Years War, the famines and the Black Death of the 14th century which caused the population to decline, the town continued to play a major commercial role. It reintegrated the Kingdom of France in the 15th century and prospered thanks to its position as a crossroads between Languedoc, Auvergne, Gascony and Lyonnais: fruit, salt, cauldrons and sheets were traded at the town-fairs, as well as products from the agropastoral activity on the surrounding causses, such as livestock, hides, wool and animal hides.



The hilltop sites around the present-day town were fortified during the Iron Age, especially at the Puech d'Andan and at La Granède where Celtic dwellings developed.



The moulded Samian pottery produced at Condatomagus between the 1st and 3rd centuries A.D. were manufactured using techniques imported from Italy.



This mediaeval house at 55 rue Peyrollerie may have lost its gemel windows and decorative cordon but it has kept its large shop arcades on the ground floor.



The seal of the Consuls of Millau, in 1352, shows a griffon, the symbol of the Consulate, along with an inscription: "sig[illu]mcons[ul]um" (seal of the Consuls of Millau).



This painting which can be dated back to the end of the 18th century shows the Hôtel Sambucy-de-Sorgue, the Capuchin convent as well as the avenue which replaced the ditches which previously had surrounded the town.



Faced with competition from countries with cheap labour, the glove and tawing industries fell into decline from 1975. Today these industrial sites have left room for new town planning projects.

A Protestant stronghold

Calvinism appeared in Rouergue around 1558. Public figures were the first to be won over, along with labourers, textile workers, builders, coppersmiths, gunsmiths and drapers who frequented the Languedoc fairs where Reformation ideas were exchanged. The town very quickly became a Calvinist bastion and during the 1570s most of the population of Millau converted to Protestantism. The mediaeval fortifications that had fallen into disrepair were reinforced following the first confrontations in 1562, turning the town into one of the main Protestant strongholds amid a staunchly Catholic territory.

In 1562, the faubourgs were burned down and the churches were either razed or transformed. The bell-tower of Notre-Dame collapsed, leaving the population without a bell and a clock. A book from the period described it as: "a most calamitous time". The town was in a practically permanent state of warfare and this continuous mobilisation brought about impoverishment and decline. Subsequent to the Edict of Alès of 1629, the Protestants gave up their strongholds. Religious orders reappeared and Protestants either abjured or went into exile. Entire families left for Germany, Switzerland or England, depriving Millau of what were its most dynamic forces in arts and crafts and commerce.

18th century renewal

At the end of the 18th century, France had been won over by the spirit of the Enlightenment and by the ideas of freedom and progress. The Edict of Toleration of 1778 awarded freedom of cult and recognition of the reformed religion, which allowed the Protestants to return. They brought with them know-how which was the basis for the tawing and glove industries which rekindled the local economy. In 1774 there were about twenty tanners, leather workers and leather finishers. A decade later, the main players in the French animal-hide business, who were from Grenoble, were already alarmed to see the Millau tawing industry exporting part of its production outside the kingdom.

The capital of the glove industry

At the start of the 20th century, more than 1,500,000 pairs of gloves were being made a year by 2,700 glove-makers, 1,200 men and 1,500 women. Many of them worked from home, not only in Millau but in the surrounding villages, for the major manufacturers such as Buscarlet, Guibert, Jonquet or Lauret, who stood out amid countless craftsmen, leather workers, dyers and glovers. They created a veritable leather industry which brought about the movement of mutual benefit companies as well as bringing the local economy to its peak. Before the 1939-1945 war, the Millau glove industry was supplying not only the whole of Europe, but also the United States, Argentina and Australia.

From one place to another

Overlooked by the tower of the kings of Aragon, Millau boasts a variety of architectural references that illustrate the richness of its history down through the centuries.

Notre-Dame de l'Espinasse Church

The Romanesque church was probably built at the end of the 11th century, northwest of the town. It had a chevet with angled wall sections with arches leaning on the buttress walls. This style continued all along the nave, which itself was flanked by two bell towers. After the Wars of Religion, the upper parts were rebuilt and the church was covered with a single vault, thereby freeing up a vast interior space. Three hundred years later, the Coronation of the Virgin was painted on the quarter-sphere vault of the apse. By means of this Christian representation, the painting serves as a reminder of the trades and craftsmen in the leather and glove industry, which were the source of the town's prosperity.

The palace of the kings of Aragon

This tower forms the remains of the palace mentioned in 1172. It represented the sovereignty of the king of Aragon, boasting elaborate sophistication and brought together what was the cutting edge know-how of that time. It is quadrangular shaped and has three vaulted storeys. It was fitted with sinks, cupboards, latrines and bay windows inserted into the thickness of its walls, beneath its arcades. Spiral staircases, built into the corners, served the upper floors. In 1613 a polygonal tower was built on top of it, replacing the bell tower in Notre-Dame church and supported the bell and the clock. The square tower later served as a prison between 1629 and 1825, causing refurbishments which modified the openings.

Mediaeval houses

Many houses have retained elements from the 13th and 14th centuries, revealing a mediaeval town with southern influences. Most of them can be made out from their street fronts which open up on the ground floor with large shop arcades. The upper floor which was sometimes marked with a decorative cordon, received daylight through crossed and gemel semicircular arched windows, ornamented with capitals with leafed or crowned head motifs, which were sometimes used again on the fronts. Large arched doors or topped with pointed arches opening onto corridors were also a sign of courtyard houses surrounded with feeder galleries, a feature which remained during the following centuries.



The polygonal chevet of the church and its northern elevation, next to which can be seen the chapels which were added, and then destroyed, in the 19th and 20th centuries.



The tower of the kings of Aragon viewed from the south, on top of which sits the polygonal tower, was a symbol of the domination of the kings of Aragon towards the end of the 12th century.



Detail from a 13th century capital, the century of the covered arcades around Place Foch, and which shows a crowned figure.



The sitting room of the hôtel de Sambucy-de-Sorgue is completely ornamented with stucco and paintings.



The staircase of the hôtel de Pegayrolles with its wrought iron balustrade, characteristic of the 18th century in Millau.



The present-day theatre of la Maison du Peuple, a site commemorating the town's labour history, was built in 1903. It comprised the Labour Exchange, the Mutual Insurance building and the Popular University.

Place Maréchal-Foch

Millau's main square, which has been mentioned since the Middle Ages and called the place Mage, developed from the front of the Notre-Dame church and Benedictine monastery. Quadrangular in shape, with a street feeding into each of its four corners, two of which are shopping streets, it is surrounded by covered passages marked out by a series of columns. These "covers" were refurbished in the 17th century and they conserve capitals from the second half of the 13th century. The hôtel de Pégayrolles and the old priory were its eastern confines. All that is left of this priory today is the Notre-Dame church, the cloister and monastic buildings having been replaced by the corn exchange which was built in 1836.

The 17th and 18th century townhouses

With the return to peace boosting private orders, Millau's chateau owner, Jacques de Tauriac, acquired the house adjoining the tower of the kings of Aragon. He replaced it with a townhouse, called hôtel de Tauriac, ornamented with triangular pediments and fitted with a continuous banister, thereby sparking off a new style, especially in rue Droite. 40 years later, around 1671, Duschène, the king's Councilor and land-tax collector for Millau, introduced another new method by building his courtyard residence outside the fortifications. He called it the hôtel de Sambucy-de-Sorgue, a sumptuously decorated townhouse. This courtyard townhouse was to serve as a model in 1738 for the construction of the hôtel de Pégayrolles.

The Ayrolle wash house

The construction of the wash house started in 1749 following a decision from the king's council. It was built at the edge of the old ditches which had recently been filled in and transformed into an avenue. Its role was both to provide the inhabitants with all the modern facilities and to enhance the look of the town which was gradually opening up. Its layout is traditional, opening with a U-shaped portico, on top of which sit balustrades and an impediment with the town's coat of arms. The inscriptions to the glory of the king were hammered out in 1793. Inside, a U-shaped pool occupies the entire space. Water was supplied from the Vézoubies source which provided the washer women with water that was softer and not as cold as the Tarn water.

The metal-framed covered market

The covered market which was completed in 1898 replaced the old corn exchange on Place Foch which had been built sixty years earlier. It was built on the site of the old courthouse in the centre of the town and could now be accessed via new, broader streets. It is Baltard style, combining cast iron, glass, brick and iron. Its polygonal shape comprises a raised central nave and side aisles containing the two main entrances. Its metallic structure combines lightness and brightness, opening up vast interior spaces. This was a sign of the economic rationale of that period, which was also decisive in the choice of its location.

Flavour and know-how

In an exceptional setting that is nonetheless subjected to a harsh climate, man has managed, ever since prehistoric times, to make the most of the natural resources.

Limestone

Millau offers a vast natural expanse, spread out over three causses (or plateaux), the Causse Noir to the east, the Causse Rouge to the west and the Causse du Larzac to the south. They form limestone plateaux ranging in altitude from 600m to 800m. Surrounded by cliffs, they are austere and arid, comprising dry grass and pastures scattered with box trees and juniper and sometimes have a desert-like aspect. Rainwater seeps in through the cracks and dissolves the rock, leaving the surface with a shortage of water on a daily basis.

In spite of these constraints, the landscape is dotted with villages, hamlets and isolated farms.

Houses, farms, cabins and walls – they are all made of limestone rock, the principal material in local architecture. It is collected on the surface, pulled out from the soil, extracted from building sites or a neighbouring quarry and carved rather grossly. It is used for building walls and vaults or, when cut into slabs, it forms lauzes (“flat stone” in Occitan) for roofs and fregeals (“flagstones” in Occitan) for floors. A “caussenard style” therefore developed which, over and above the use of the material, can be distinguished in buildings that appear closed in on themselves, with scarcely any openings, sometimes bringing together houses and farms under a single roof.

Ewes

Up on the causses, ewes and pastures look after each other: the pastures feed the herds of sheep which, under the shepherds’ watchful eye, prevent weeds from growing and give the landscape its characteristic flora and fauna of steppe-like grass. Only ewes or goats can feed on these unrewarding lands. Sheep transhumance here dates back to the Middle Ages, and probably earlier, on the drailles or the Roman road leading from the Languedoc to the Massif Central. At the same time, sheep-breeding soon became one of the mainstays of the local economy.



Les Cades Farm is built around a yard comprising a house and two long vaulted sheepfolds, one of which contains a bakehouse with a limestone lauze roof.



Ewe-breeding is one of the main features of the economic activity up on the causses overlooking Millau.



In the Jonquet factory, one of Millau's main leatherware factories, the entire production line was controlled, from the reception of the raw hides through to the selling of the gloves.



Two workers polishing the skin side of the hide to give it the desired velvety texture.

The Causse glove-manufacturing workshop, in a building designed by the architect Wilmotte, is in an industrial area undergoing total renewal, and which conserves the remains of a factory chimney.

Setting the gloves upon an iron, also known as a “warm hand”.

Agropastoralism

The order of the Knights Templar was established on the Causse du Larzac around 1140 thanks to the Counts of Barcelona, viscounts of Millau. In this territory which practically became their own domain, they developed economic activities linked to the local conditions. They grew cereals, but concentrated mainly on breeding ewes, which were at first reared for their wool, since cloth factories represented important business in Millau. Gradually however, this activity branched out into milk production, tanning and leather-work. These created a new outlet in the town for sheep-breeding and tawing became the prime industry from the 16th and 17th centuries.

Tawing

Tawing, which has existed in Millau since the middle of the 15th century, is a procedure which turns sheepskin into leather, especially by steeping in alum pools. What had been the principal activity during the Ancien Régime became more intensive during the 18th century as a result of the Protestants’ return from exile. At the end of the 18th century, the hides were used mostly for supplying glove factories in Grenoble or were exported to Germany and England. The activity later tended to focus on France and on Millau, where the glove-making industry was responsible for its major expansion at the start of the 20th century.

Glove-making

Glove-making in Millau had initially been a spin-off from the tawing industry, but really began to take off in the 1750s. It flourished thanks to Antoine Guy, a native of Millau who, after serving his apprenticeship as a glove-maker in Grenoble, introduced new cutting and manufacturing techniques to his native town. But it wasn’t until the 19th century and the expansion of the Roquefort industry that glove-making became the main activity in Millau. It progressed even more at the start of the 20th century thanks to ladies’ fashion, new industrial and commercial techniques as well as the luxury sector, where it is still a major player today.

Roquefort[®] cheese

Roquefort cheese, which has been known since the Middle Ages, is ripened in the caves set in the rock overhanging the village of Roquefort. In the 20th century, the Larzac breed of sheep was replaced by the “Lacaune” ewe, a much better milk producer. Cheese production thus became an industrial process, just like the leather industry to which it was very closely attached. Ripening countries established dairies and created homogeneous cheese production. Roquefort[®] cheese rapidly gained an international reputation and in 1925 became the first cheese to be awarded the Protected Designation of Origin. Today, 170 million litres of milk contribute to the production of 19,000 tonnes of cheeses...



The Historic Centre

- 1 Notre-Dame de l'Espinasse church, 12th-17th centuries
- 2 Corn Exchange, today's Paul Bert school, 19th century
- 3 Hôtel de Pégayrolles, today's Millau & Grands Causses Museum, 18th century
- 4 Hôtel Sambucy-de-Miers, 17th century
- 5 "Chicken and Fox" Hôtel, 1st half of the 17th century
- 6 Covered passage
- 7 Merchants' Table and cobbled street
- 8 House, 1st half 15th century
- 9 House, 1st half 15th century
- 10 House, 14th century
- 11 House, 15th-16th century
- 12 Hôtel, 18th century
- 13 Mage Fountain, Middle ages
- 14 Maison du Peuple, early 20th century
- 15 Hôtel, 17th century
- 16 16th-17th century Hôtel, also known as the "Renaissance House"
- 17 House, 12th-14th century
- 18 Hôtel de Galy, 12th-13th-14th century house (Millau Grands Causses Tourist Office)
- 19 Hôtel de Tauriac, 17th century
- 20 Tower of the kings of Aragon and belfry, 12th-17th century
- 21 Les Halles, metal-framed covered market, 20th century
- 22 Gothic gate
- 23 Half-timbered house, 16th-17th century
- 24 House, 14th century
- 25 St Martin's church, 18th century
- 26 House, 13th century (remains of gemel arched window)

Photo credits:

© Ville de Millau, Région Midi-Pyrénées ; Pierre Plattier, Philippe Poitou, all photos except those listed below. © Archives Municipales, Millau : p. 2, n°2, 3 © Archives nationales, Paris, Maps and plans department, F/14/8489 : p. 1 ; p. 3, n°1. © Musée de Millau et des Grands Causses : p. 2, n°1 ; p. 4, n°2 ; p. 9, n°3
 Author of texts and iconographic research Françoise Galés. Architecture & Heritage Dept, Town of Art & History.

- 27 Upright of the old doorway of the Dominican church, 17th century
- 28 Temple, 19th century
- 29 Old gate of the Dominican convent, 17th century
- 30 Townhouse, 13th century, also known as "Porte du Voultre"
- 31 Half-timbered house, 16th-17th century
- 32 House, 13th century (remains of a gemel half-arched window)
- 33 Old hospital, known as "Hôtel Dieu", 19th century
- 34 Old Bridge, 12th century
- 35 Ayrolle wash-house, 18th century
- 36 Hôtel Sambucy-de-Sorgue, 17th century

Contemporary Architecture

- 37 St Francis' Church, 19th century
- 38 Millau Town Hall (old Villa Bank), late 19th century
- 39 Old Guibert Tawery, now Causse Glove Manufacturers, late 19th century
- 40 Old Alric Tawery, mid 20th century
- 41 Old Deruy Factory, 20th century
- 42 Old Very Big Tawery (start-up "nursery" for companies), 20th century
- 43 Courthouse, 1st half 20th century

Parks and Garden

- 44 Square Ramondenc, 20th century
- 45 Garden of the hôtel Sambucy-de-Sorgue, 17th century
- 46 André Malraux Park, 2nd half 19th century
- 47 Parc de la Victoire (War memorial monuments), 1st half 20th century

P Car-park



Millau is part of the national network of Towns and Regions of Art and History

The Architecture and Heritage Management Division of the French Ministry of Culture and Communication awards the Towns and Regions of Art and History to local authorities who look after their heritage. They guarantee not only the proficiency of the heritage guides and presenters, but also the quality of their work. From ancient ruins to 21st century architecture, the Towns and Regions group serve to highlight heritage in its diversity. Today a network of 164 towns and regions offer you their know-how throughout France.

Near Millau

Towns of Rouergue, Figeac, Grand Auch, Grand Rodez, Moissac, Montauban, Pyrénées Cathares, The Aure and Louron Valleys, The Dordogne Lotoise Valley, Pézenas Region, Lodève, and Mende and Lot in Gévaudan have all been awarded the Towns and Regions of Art and History label.

Let us tell you the story of Millau, a Town of Art and History...

...accompanied by a French Ministry of Culture certified tour-guide

If you want to broaden your knowledge of the town, Millau, a Town of Art and History, offers you guided visits on set dates with a French Ministry of Culture certified tour-guide. The guide will welcome you and give you some insight into understanding things like the scale of a square or the development of the town through its various quarters. The guide is there for you, so don't hesitate to ask questions !

The Culture department of the Town of Art and History coordinates the cultural activities in Millau, Town of Art and History. It organises events all year long for locals, visitors and school-groups. It remains at your disposal for all sorts of projects.

Reservations

If you are in a group

Millau offers you visits throughout the year upon reservation. Information from the Tourist Office.

Millau Grands Causses Tourist Office

Tél : 033 (0)5 65 60 02 42

1 place du beffroi F-12100 Millau

contact@ot-millau.fr - www.millau-viaduc-tourisme.fr

Activities for children

Millau and Grands Causses Museum

Tél : 033 (0)5 65 59 45 94

Service Éducatif du Musée et du site de La Graufesenque,

Place Foch - F-12100 Millau

service.educatif.millau@orange.fr - www.musecdemillau.fr

Information

Culture Department – Town of Art and History

Hôtel de Ville

Tél : 033 (0)5 65 59 50 38

17 avenue de la République

F-12100 Millau

patrimoine.culture@millau.fr - www.millau.fr

