From Carcassonne to Lyon: a train ride through France's countryside

TGV: The French bullet train

France's relationship to trains goes way back as France was very fast in building railways throughout its entire territory in the 19th Century.

The french bullet trains have been transporting passengers since 1981 at a usual speed of 200 miles per hour. Without passengers, it can go as fast as 350 miles per hour.

French TGVs (Trains à Grande Vitesse) are the safest in the world. They are usually on time, clean and rather affordable. There is no way to travel faster through France.

French people use them a lot and are proud of them.

DOS AND DON'TS

As they are popular, TGVs tend to fill up. It is expected of each and everyone of the passengers to keep calm and French people tend to behave when in a train. Phone calls are not allowed in the carriages.

Usually TGVs are surprisingly quiet and peaceful and most passengers nap or daydream as the landscape rolls past before their eyes.

You will find a bathroom at one end of the corridor. A little sign above the door will show a white or red light depending on occupation.

It is allowed to eat in the TGV.

STOPS

-Carcassonne

-Narbonne

-Béziers

-Sète

-Montpellier

-Nimes

-Valence

-Lyon

NARBONNE

Narbonne is a medium sized town in the heart of the Occitania region, only 9 miles away from the Mediterranean Sea.

It was the first roman colony settled in France and became a very important commercial hub earning the nickname “the second Rome”.

Wine has been and still is the main industry in the region.

Narbonne has a cathedral but Narbonne’s main religion is practiced on a field with an oval balloon.

BEZIERS

Also located on the canal du midi, Béziers dates from 575 BC and has been in the middle of the biggest wine production region of France since then.

During the middle ages, Béziers was a Languedoc stronghold of Catharism, which the Catholic Church condemned as heretical and which Catholic forces exterminated in the Albigensian Crusade.

Nowadays hosting a population of 80 thousand people, the charm of this underrated city lies in its quieter pace of life.

That is except for its renowned bullfighting festival for 5 days in late August that attracts up to 1 million visitors every year.

SETE

“The Venice of Languedoc” earns its name for its network of canals connecting the Mediterranean Sea and l’étang de Thau (Thau’s pond).

Because of its particular natural conditions, this hidden gem of 40 thousand inhabitants has mussel and oyster fields, protected wildlife, and a water jousting festival every year. It even has its own dialect.

You can also catch a ferry to Morocco from here.

It is also the birthplace of Georges Brassens, one of France’s most renown singers from the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s and therefore, every French person knows about Sète.

MONTPELLIER

Montpellier is one of France’s biggest cities, as well as the largest growing ones for the past 25 years, there are about 800 thousand inhabitants within its suburbs.

Montpellier has a lot to offer: elegant architecture, beautiful nature around, the oldest botanical garden in the country (from the end of the 16th Century) and the best climate in France (less than 30 days of rain per year).

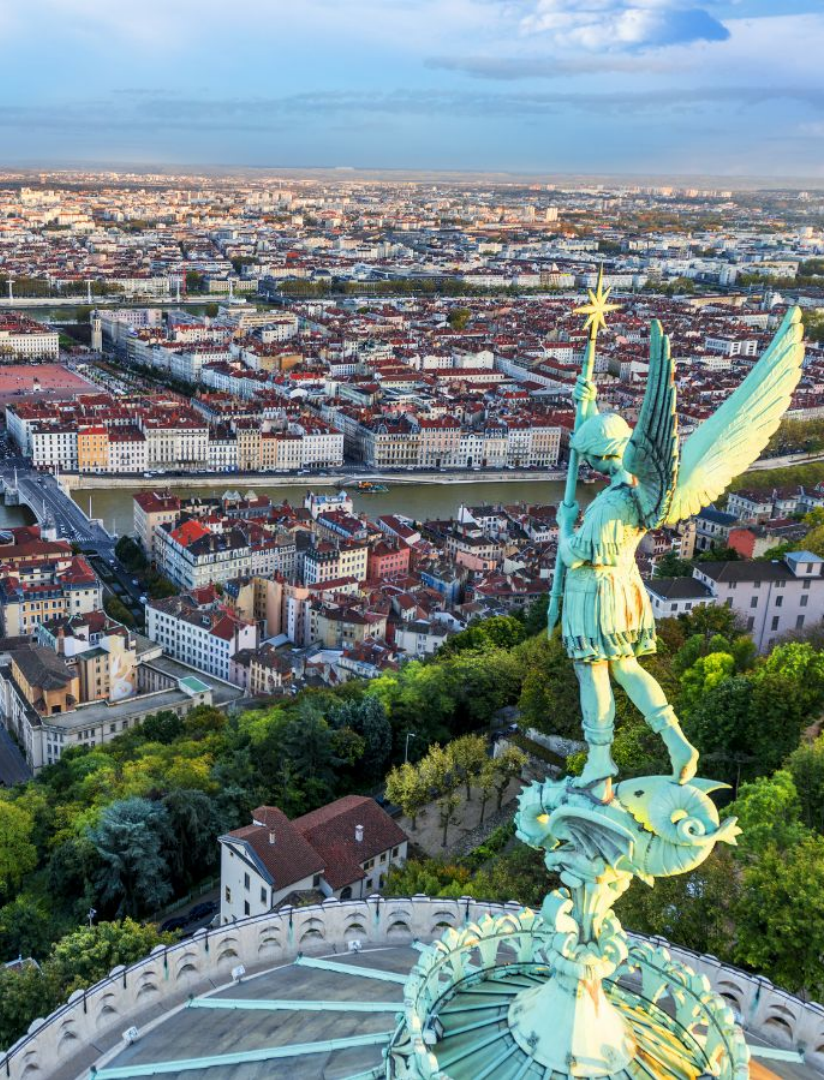
Its famous colourful tramways were designed by Christian Lacroix and will take you smoothly anywhere around here.

VALENCE

Mid-sized town with little over 60 thousand inhabitants, it is nicknamed “the door to the south of France”.

During the roman era, Valence was the 2nd largest crossroads after Lyon.

Nowadays apart from tourism, Valence lives off agriculture, metallurgy, engineering and electronics.



LYON

France’s 3rd largest city after Paris and Marseille, Lyon benefits from its central position on the French territory.

It was the capital of the Gauls during the roman era and became a major economic hub during the Renaissance.

2000+ years old, Lyon’s older districts are inscribed on the UNESCO World heritage list.

But the main reason we go there is because the city is recognised as the country’s capital of gastronomy.