

Weekend away

TOULOUSE

Find art, architecture and eats well worth ditching the Paris crowds for, says Picture Director **ALAN GITTOS**

LOOK PRETTY IN PINK

Toulouse is brimming with culture, history and fashion, and the best way to dive deep into it all is on foot. Wander in and out of galleries, boutiques, wine bars and cafes, feeling the creative energy of the Pink City - so called due to the distinctive rose-brick colour of many of its buildings. Centrally located Le Grand Balcon Hotel is the perfect base from which to explore. We loved the mash-up of old-world glamour meets modern decor - and the moreish pastries at breakfast! A double room costs from £82 per night (Grandbalconhotel.com).

SHOP FOR TREASURE

Browse upmarket boutiques near the eccentric Cathédrale Saint-Étienne, then trawl the cool vintage stores in the bohemian Les Carmes district. Second-hand shopping here is next level, with barely worn clothes flooding in from not only France but nearby Italy and Spain, too. Look for the market outside the Basilica of St Sernin on Saturday mornings, or head to Rue Peyrolières for vintage treasures from shops such as Le Grenier d'Anais (Legrenierdanais.fr). For quirky gifts, including pretty hand-poured candles, from £12, hit Kaqoty & Les Squaws.

JOURNEY TO SPACE

Family-friendly science museum Quai Des Savoirs features interactive exhibitions on everything from

groundbreaking discoveries to critical thinking. Tickets cost £6 for adults, £3 for kids under seven (Quaidessavoirs.fr). Outer-space fans shouldn't miss Cité De l'Espace's awe-inspiring planetarium shows, huge rockets and a life-size model of a Russian space station. There are great free workshops for kids, too. Tickets cost from £13.50 (Cite-espace.com). At museum Les Abattoirs you'll find artworks by Picasso, Duchamp and more on display. Tickets cost £7.50 for adults, £5 for over 13s and younger kids go free (Lesabattoirs.org).

DINE OUT

Nestled deep in France's rugged southwest, Toulouse is just minutes from the verdant fields and vineyards that supply its outstanding seasonal produce. Take a tour of food market Marché Victor Hugo with an expert guide from Taste of Toulouse, £64 per person (Tasteoftoulouse.com). You'll navigate the labyrinth of vendors, building your own lunch of charcuterie, cheeses, pastries and wines. Warning: you will be too full to walk anywhere afterwards! French

fine dining at an affordable price is the Holy Grail on offer at Hotel La Cour Des Consuls, where at brunch you can feast on buffet-style dishes prepared in its Michelin-starred kitchen, for £42 (Cite-hotels.com/en/etablissements/hotel-cour-des-consuls.html). For something more traditional, La Gourmandine serves up classics such as steak tartare, £20, and lamb confit, £17 (La-gourmandine.fr).

PAINT THE TOWN

Toulouse has been a haven for street artists since the late '80s, and you'll find eye-popping graffiti everywhere, but particularly in the Arnaud Bernard quarter, heavily influenced by New York hip-hop culture. Book a two-hour guided tour, £12 per person, through the Tourist Office to learn more about the scene and the artists who made the city their canvas (Toulouse-visit.com/tourist-office). **F**

FYI

The Couvent Des Jacobins, burial place of famous philosopher St

Thomas Aquinas, is a glorious former medieval monastery with a tranquil courtyard to enjoy (Jacobins. toulouse.fr).

Plan your trip at Toulouse-visit.com.



Photography: Getty Images, Jessica Hammer/Taste of Toulouse, Alamy



From top left: you'll take to Toulouse like a duck to water; indulge at La Gourmandine; 50 shades of Toulouse pink; bed in at Le Grand Balcon; Cité De l'Espace is a space odyssey; Alan and wife Vivienne had an un-brie-lievable time at Marché Victor Hugo