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## France's Paradise of the Senses: Lyon, France



*Old Lyon, Courtesy Tristan Deschamps*

*Lyon-France's 'second city'-warms heart, soul and senses with Italian-tinged dolce vita stemming from its Renaissance roots. Indagare contributor Ceil Miller-Bouchet reports.*

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“Less complicated than [Paris](#), more discreet than [Bordeaux](#). It’s an easy life here in Lyon, and you can walk or bike everywhere.” The words of a Lyon-based interior decorator friend resonated as I came upon a solitary painter one morning, en route for a *brioche praliné*, one of the many unexpected treats I discovered recently in France’s second largest city, which also happens to be its culinary heartland.

For now, Lyon remains somewhat of an untapped destination, but that will certainly change in July 2019 with the launch of the Cité de la Gastronomie: a vast experiential paean to French culinary arts and heritage that will draw international travelers to Lyon, just as the Cité du Vin (dedicated to wine) did to Bordeaux. Also, a five-star

Intercontinental Hotel will open next to the Cité de la Gastronomie early next year, providing a much-needed addition to Lyon's somewhat provincial hotel scene. Both newcomers will be located within the gorgeously restored and repurposed 17<sup>th</sup>-century Grand Hôtel-Dieu complex, which was one of Europe's leading hospitals from its founding in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to its closing in 2010.



Saint Jean Cathedral, courtesy Julia Bidault

Lyon has long been beloved by culinary travelers for its world-renowned humble home cooking establishments and a slew of *Michelin*-starred restaurants (this is the hometown of Paul Bocuse and Daniel Boulud, after all). But Lyon is also an emerging hub of interior and fashion design and should be on the radar of decorative arts aficionados and art history lovers. Plus, the town is less than an hour's flight or a two-hour train ride from Paris, making it an ideal destination for families seeking an authentic and slower paced taste of France.

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## Where to Stay



### Mi Hotels

Lyon's top hotels—each with spectacular views over the city—are all found in the airy Fourvière hill neighborhood. With a wildflower garden, indoor pool, spacious, serene rooms and attached private terraces, newcomer Villa Maia (opened in 2017, designed by Jean-Michel Wilmotte and decorated by Jacques Grange) is the best choice for travelers seeking a chic, understated vibe. It also ideal for those planning to dine at the adjoining *Michelin*-star restaurant, Christian Têtedoie.

Another notable newcomer, in a stylishly restored 19<sup>th</sup>-century convent, the [Fourvière Hôtel](#) is a good choice for those who prefer a more casual atmosphere with an authentic sense of place. Contemporary design meets historic influences throughout, exemplified by a stunning reception area in the convent's former chapel and a hip neo-bistro restaurant in the former cloister, which has three distinctive sculptures by Brazilian artist Pablo Reinoso. A small spa and heated garden lap pool compensate for the somewhat monastic rooms with blond oak floors and white linens. Five-star baroque style Relais & Châteaux hotel [Villa Florentine](#) could use a refresh, but the pool area was redone in 2017 and is spectacular.

For more independent travelers looking to immerse themselves in local life, [Mi Hotels](#) is

a new group of freshly renovated, comfortable apartment-style suites in two 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings located in central Lyon's elegant Bellecour neighborhood. Local designers were tapped to furnish the stylish suites, each one with unique décor (not to mention a small kitchenette stocked with drinks and local treats).

The 12-room boutique hotel, **La Tour Rose**, in a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Italian mansion is one to watch. Set to launch in 2019, this property provides on-call concierges and guests receive a special code in advance (there is no check-in desk) and let themselves in via a keypad by each door.

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## Where to Shop



Rue de la Republique, courtesy Brice Robert

Lyon's world-renowned luxury silk industry, the toast of Europe from the Renaissance through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is a source of the city's roots in quality craftsmanship that translates today into home décor and, increasingly, fashion. Plus, with the country's second-largest flea market just outside of town, the vintage shops are definitely the most accessible in France. There's a fun "thrill of the hunt" shopping atmosphere in Lyon because of the vast range of local designers and cute boutiques. The best shops

are within two easily walkable neighborhoods: posh Bellecour, where the silk merchants settled during the the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and hip Croix-Rousse, once home to the city's weavers.

In the heart of the Bellecour neighborhood, Rue August Comte has emerged as Lyon's decorative arts and lifestyle shopping artery. Since many of the shops are only open between 2-7 p.m., these delightful few blocks are best explored after lunch (perhaps at **Maison Hand**, for vegan *cuisine du marché* in the boutique's cozy side salon or **Café Arsène**, on Rue Vaubecour, for light neo-bistro fare on the adorable terrace). Among the many quality shops, highlights include **Maison Hand**, with contemporary home furnishings and pottery inspired by the owners' love of global craft traditions; **ArtClub**, for a vintage clothes and accessories; **Maison Combier**, a treasure trove of silk chiffon scarves in a rainbow of hues designed by Philée d'Astre; **Tinsels**, a new Lyon-based fashion brand with simply cut modern French casual pieces made from regionally produced fabrics; and **Galerie du Désordre**, owned by master vintage curator Serge Rosenzweig, who sourced décor for Anthropologie stores before opening his own shop last year. Do not miss **Galerie Nathalie Rives**, tucked away on nearby Place Gailleton. The colorful boutique delights with a mix of mid-century designer pieces, vintage home accessories and new pieces by the vivacious Rives, who is one of the city's rising design stars.



Banks-of-the-Saône, courtesy Tristan Deschamps

Young creatives are also making their mark in the Croix-Rousse quarter, with its urban, hipster vibe. Two notable local jewelry designers are on Rue du Romarin: **Madame des Feuillants**, a boudoir-style boutique showcasing romantic handcrafted pieces inspired by the Second Empire period; and **Mila Marin**, where delicate contemporary pieces accented by small gemstones share a space with **Heley**, an oh-so-French lingerie and swimsuit brand. **Sophie Guyot** is a source for gorgeous scarves, pleated dresses and silk accessories. And the **Village des Créateurs**, where 30 emerging designers have showroom-boutiques in the restored 19<sup>th</sup>-century arcades of passage Thiaffiat, is worth a visit.

France's second-largest flea market, Lyon's weekly **Puces du Canal**, attracts shop owners, stylists and interior designers from throughout France who arrive early on Saturday mornings for the best finds from among the over 600 vendors (they ship internationally).

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## Dining



Old Lyon, courtesy Marie Perrin

It's nearly impossible to have a bad meal in Lyon, where eating well is basically a city

pastime. Most everyone will vouch for their favorite family-owned restaurant, be it a “*bouchon*” (the humble old-school bistro famous for *andouillette* sausages and other variations on animal innards so beloved by the French) or neo-bistro, which translates to a lighter, farm-to-table twist on traditional favorites. And, at present count, the city has accumulated a total of 25 *Michelin* stars. Dining options stem from the tradition of ‘Les Mères,’ or intrepid female cooks, called “mothers” who founded Lyon’s famous gastronomic restaurants after World War I and trained the next generation of chefs, including native sons Paul Bocuse and Daniel Boulud.

Chef Christian Têtedoie’s small gastronomic empire adjoining the posh Villa Maïa hotel on Fourvière hill is a one-stop culinary destination. His eponymous *Michelin*-starred restaurant is a study in haute gastronomy with a panoramic view over the city, enjoyed by luminaries such as Emmanuel Macron when he met with the Italian foreign minister last year. On the terrace just below, his neo-bistro, **Phosphore**, has the same view, with a casual, shared-table vibe. In warmer months, there’s a buzzy rooftop tapas-style bar, **La Terrace d’Antiquaille**, as well. On Place Bellecour, the Paul Bocuse Culinary Institute offers a traditional prix-fixe dinner experience which is nice, especially for families, because of the open kitchen and pastry area. There is a full cooking school upstairs.

Among the hundreds of casual old-school *bouchons*, **Les Adrets** and **Chez Chabert**, in the Old Town, are fine choices for the wide range of typical Lyonnais specialties too numerous to list. Mr. Gabriel, a sweet and chic new restaurant near the new Hôtel Dieu complex, is an updated version of the traditional family-owned *bouchon*, owned by a father-son team (in the kitchen and serving, respectively). Reserve in advance (and polish off your French); this under-the-radar spot is popular with locals because of its ‘from scratch’ honest home cooking.



Old Lyon, courtesy Marie Perrin

The **Café Gadagne**, atop the Musée Gadagne in the Old Town, is a darling (if very casual) ‘country in the city’ spot for an outdoor brunch, lunch or aperitif in the summer. It’s located beside by the pocket-sized public park (which is a great stop for families) and next to an ancient fountain burbling from the century-old ramparts covered with grapevines.

Given all of Lyon’s culinary delights, travelers on a tight schedule will be happy to learn of a small gourmet grocery in the Old Town, called **Le Sirop de la Rue**, whose genial owner has amassed most every sweet and savory regional specialty in a one-stop shop. And if you want to picnic, he will prepare a basket for you, including the famous brioche-encased sausages, with a bit of advance notice.

**Related:** [Paris Restaurant Guide](#)

## Culture/Museums



Old Lyon, Courtesy Tristan Deschamps

Lyon's world-renowned textile museum and research center (inside a lovely 18<sup>th</sup>-century mansion) is a highlight of any sojourn and, for textile and design aficionados, a reason in itself to visit the city. Many of the world's haute-couture and haute prôte-a-porter designers still find inspiration among the museum's extensive collection, which includes over 30,000 silk pieces. Of course, the museum is a repository for every Hermès silk scarf ever produced (the scarves are still produced outside of town). Only two of the city's hundreds of original silk producers are still in business, thanks to commissions from Versailles and interior decorators who work with local artisans like Atelier Jouffre on luxury projects around the world. The atmospheric **Museum of Decorative Arts**, with one of France's best collections of period décor, is next door. It can be visited with the same ticket.

In Old Lyon, the **Musée Gadagne**, located in adjoining Renaissance-era mansions, is two well-curated museums in one with excellent English explanations. The history section is worthwhile both for its displays and for the serene, beautifully restored Renaissance-era rooms and original spiral staircase. Families and theater buffs will want to linger in the second part of the museum, devoted to the history of the Guignol puppet theater—starring the impish Guignol—which originated in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Lyon and is a typically French tradition. Families (or children at heart) might want to take in a performance (in French only, but the simple slapstick plots make shows easy to follow) at either La Maison de Guignol in the Old Town or at the **Guignol Theater** in a local

park.

With a quirky ‘cabinet de curiosité’ atmosphere in a Renaissance-era mansion, the warren of rooms at the Musée Miniature et Cinéma makes for a low-key family-friendly outing. Visitors explore the owner’s private collection of vintage movie sets and props (including from *Star Wars* and *Jurassic Park*) and doll house-like miniatures.

## From an Insider



Mi Hotels

After high-flying careers in tech and marketing, respectively, best friends Nathalie Grynbaum and Stéphanie Marquez had a powerful vision on how they wanted to travel. So they decided to launch their own company, [MiHotel](#), in 2013. They call it “l’hôtel autrement” or “another kind of hotel” because it’s a discreet, stylish, tech-enabled hybrid for independent-minded travelers and families. The formula marries the comfort and concierge service of a luxury hotel with the freedom of a high-design rental apartment, all of which are located in Lyon’s poshest neighborhoods. Here, they share their insider tips on the best of their city.

### **Why Lyon, why now?**

In Lyon, you can live like a local, even if you’re a visitor. In fact, Lyon was awarded

'Europe's Leading City Break Destination' at the World Travel Awards organization in 2016. With the launch of the Cité de la Gastronomie center next summer, even more travelers are going to discover the easy *mélange* of French lifestyle, culture, shopping and cuisine that makes Lyon so special.

### **What should every visitor do when visiting Lyon for the first time?**

Explore the Old Town's renaissance-era lanes and enclosed passages, called *traboules*, take in the city view from the basilica atop La Fourvière hill, and, above all, eat! Lyon is definitely the heartland of French culinary *art de vivre*.

### **What are your favorite restaurants?**

**Les Apothicaires, Chez Thomas, La Haut sur la Colline** and **L'Atelier du Square**. Our favorite bakery is **Chez Jeannine** et **Suzanne**, for a homemade pastry or even a casual lunch.

### **What defines Lyon style? What are some of your favorite shops?**

Lyon is a very elegant, classic city, with a touch of Italian *fantasie*. We love **Chez Nyack**, for unique European clothing brands with bohemian spirit (Sessun, from Marseille, Mascob, from Spain and 1984, from London). Also, **Hyggelig**, for home décor and **Le Passage Thiaffait** with all the young local creators.

### **What is your favorite secret spot in Lyon?**

**La Tour Rose**, a boutique hotel-restaurant in a renaissance-era mansion. It's a secret spot because, from the outside, you can't imagine the magical interior courtyard or building facades, with their stone arches. We are excited because we are renovating the 14 hotel suites with Lyon's 'it' interior designer, Nathalie Rives, and re-opening the hotel in early 2019, along with an intimate food hall featuring the best of local cuisine in the former restaurant area.

**Related:** [Shopping Guide: The Marais](#)

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