

# 36 hours in...*Mo*

**M**ontpellier is, at any time, the most seductive city in the French south – elegant, cultured and tolerant, with Mediterranean blood coursing through its veins and dynamism to spare. Lacking industry, the place has majored on brains and bravura. World-class architects are forever adding showpieces. The trams – designed latterly by Christian Lacroix as moving tableaux – have been called “the sexiest in the world”. It takes some city to make trams sexy.

In autumn, the light will likely still be unfiltered, the sun warm enough for sitting out on the Comédie, France’s most graceful central square (do pack a cardigan). Behind, the medieval squeeze of the old town scurries with a sense of conspiracy in which everyone can join. Before you rise some of the country’s most enviable contemporary developments. The sea is a 50-minute cycle ride.

Indoors, the Musée Fabre has a cracking Caravaggio-inspired show that ends this Sunday ([museefabre.com](http://museefabre.com)). The orchestral season is truffled with highlights ([orchestre-montpellier.com](http://orchestre-montpellier.com)). And Les Internationales de la Guitare festival runs from September 29 until October 20 ([internationales.delaguitare.com](http://internationales.delaguitare.com)). Bars throb to all sounds, and restaurants cram in everyone – tots and grandparents will still be out at midnight. “The problem,” says a Montpellieraine friend, sheepishly, “is that we have everything.” The problem is, she’s right.

## Where to stay

**Special treat:** Bang in the centre of the old town, the Baudon-de-Mauny (1) (1 Rue de la Carbonnerie; 0033 467 022177; [baudondemauny.com](http://baudondemauny.com)) has the discreet charm of the *haute bourgeoisie*. Its eight rooms date to the 18th century, with added 21st-century chic. Doubles from £138, two nights minimum.

**Mid-range:** It is impossible to be closer to the Comédie, Montpellier’s nerve centre, than at the New Hotel du Midi (2) (22 Boulevard Victor Hugo; 0033 467 926961).

There’s wacky décor, a warm welcome and very decent rooms. Doubles from £83.

**On a budget:** The Hotel-du-Parc (8 Rue Achille-Bégé; 0033 467 411649; [www.hotelduparc-montpellier.com](http://www.hotelduparc-montpellier.com)) is a little mansion maintained with care and no insane lust to make contemporary design statements. Less than a 10-minute tram ride from the centre, it has a terrace, gardens and friendly staff. Doubles from £49.

## On arrival 6pm

Amble to the Comédie (3) and take a table, perhaps at the Café Riche. The waiter will be offhand – his forebears have been juicing Montpellier’s great and good for 120 years – but there’s no better place to take in the square’s lightly worn grandeur. When he becomes too annoying, leave for the Café de l’Esplanade (4) on the Esplanade, with its promenades and trees.

## 7.30pm

Move to the Place Jean Jaurès (5). Colonised by cafés with terraces, this is *apéritif* central. Bag a chair where you can and order a *pastis* – old-hat among the hip but a sight cheaper than a mojito.

## 8.30pm

The car-free historic centre bristles with bars, bistros and family-run restaurants. I’d just wander until one takes your fancy. My present favourite is Saveurs et Sens (6) (55 Rue Cabanel; 0033 499 616204; [www.saveursetsens.fr](http://www.saveursetsens.fr)), an unobtrusive little spot run with inventiveness and warmth by young Anthony and Angélique. Try the red mullet. At £21 for three courses, I doubt you’ll feel hard-done-by.

## 11pm

Stroll to the tranquil Place Canourgue (7) and have a glass at Le Comptoir de l’Arc. The more boisterous might like Le Bec de Jazz, a cramped music bar in a sweaty side-street (9 Rue Gagne-Petit) or, sweeter and more raucous yet, Le Rockstore, which puts on live rock music (20 Rue de Verdun).



Comédie square’s lightly worn



Hotels



Restaurants