



AllWays Traveller

Toulouse, France

[www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)

## A city that will really put you in the pink

**Toulouse, a city on the banks of the River Garonne in the South-West of France, is known as *Ville Rose*, the 'pink city'.**

This is because of the red brick buildings that dominate the historic Vieux Quartier (old quarter).

France's fourth biggest city has also been a major university town since the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and, today, its 90,000 students gives Toulouse a youthful vibrancy.

With Barcelona far nearer than Paris, Toulouse also embraces a Spanish influence.

During the months from early Spring into late Autumn, Toulouse becomes an outdoor city.

Cafés, restaurants and tapas bars throughout the Vieux Quartier spill onto their terraces to be entertained by street performers.

Although Toulouse is a large city, its 'visitor heart' is attractively compact, and offers a great destination for a relaxed city break.

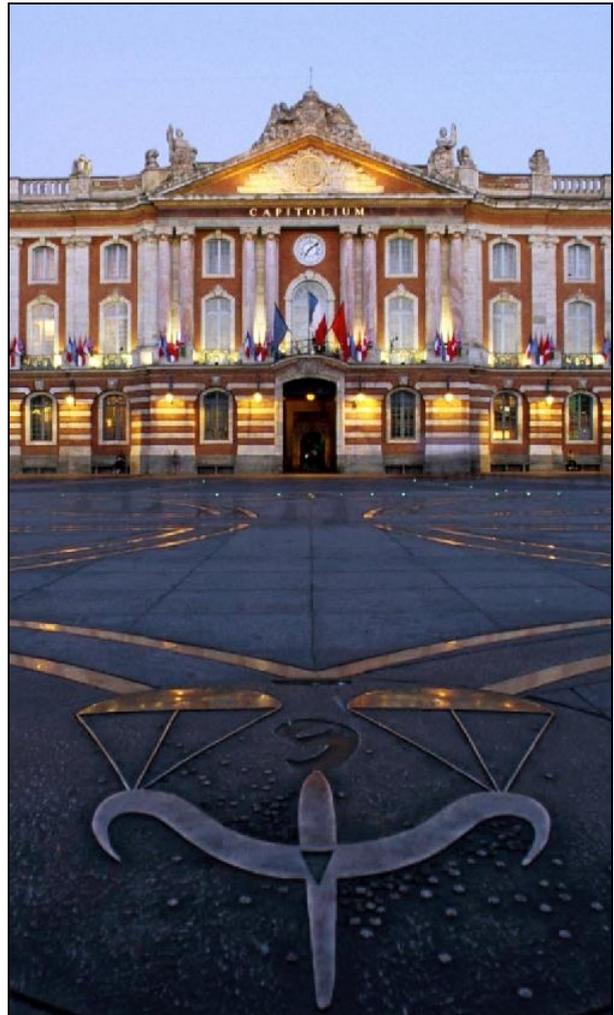
Toulouse is undergoing a major refurbishment, which will greatly enhance a visit from 2012.

### Ashley Gibbins

Managing Editor  
**AllWays traveller**

### The Canal du Midi

Toulouse is also a starting point for the Canal du Midi, which connects the Garonne River to the Étang de Thau on the Mediterranean, and is a draw for river cruising enthusiasts and those enjoying canoeing and fishing or strolling and cycling its towpaths.



[www.uk.toulouse-tourisme.com](http://www.uk.toulouse-tourisme.com)



## An independent view of Toulouse

# Joie de vivre in La Ville Rose

by Ashley Gibbins



Before visiting the *Ville Rose* or 'pink city' I knew of Toulouse as a European space industry hub and the headquarters of Airbus.

And as a rugby fan, I had long been excited by the flair-filled, fast running game played by the Toulouse team.

But as a short break destination? Well Toulouse offered little by way of perception.

Visiting the city for the first time was, therefore, a case of 'fingers crossed'.

Happily, they were unfurled almost immediately and the whole of my time in Toulouse was an enjoyable one.

Toulouse has long had much to offer the visitor, we just did not know this. And, with a major facelift of the historic centre nearing completion, it is going to become an ever more attractive visitor option.

### A real joie de vivre here

The first thing to say about Toulouse, and stating the absolute obvious, is that this is a French city – the country's fourth largest.



And so the French *joie de vivre* – the zest for life or joy of living - in fact the joy of being French flows through the city.

And the Mediterranean climate Toulouse enjoys is ideal for life in the open air.

This is a place to get onto the streets, into the parks, along the river banks and canal towpaths or at the many sidewalk cafes, bars and restaurants.

## While in Toulouse

### Get your bearings

#### The Place du Capitole



The *Place du Capitole* should be the first place to visit and then used as the main compass bearing.

Developed in the 19th century, this is the very heart of Toulouse.

Careful redesigning in recent years has created a pedestrian square that retains a genuine historic elegance.

The Capitole building itself, with its grand, neo-classical, façade and eight pink marble columns, is now the home of the Town Hall and the Théâtre National du Capitole.

The remaining three sides are lined with restaurants and cafés.

Everything you will want to do is then within easy walking distance and there is also a Metro stop here.

The city's main tourist information centre is located here and a leisurely stroll will take you to :

#### The Saint-Sernin Basilica



The Saint-Sernin Basilica, a brick built Romanesque church that dates from the 11th and 12th centuries.

# A taste of Spain

Toulouse also has a Spanish influence that is long and strong and this rewards the visitor by way of the many tapas bars and restaurants that burst into vibrant life every evening.

To this can be added its university town status and the youthful vibrancy that students bring to a place.

## Compact and attractive



Finally, and although Toulouse in its entirety is a large, sprawling city, the 'visitor district', is compact, attractive and easily enjoyed on foot.

A quick glance at the Toulouse city centre map clearly shows the outline of the old city boundary and this is where one will spend the time.

## A wealth from woad

There has been a settlement here since the Romans exploited the ability to ford the river at this point.

The city grew around this asset over the centuries and flourished during the Middle Ages, when Toulouse became the European centre of the woad industry.

Cornering the market in the blue colouring extracted from the plant helped make Toulouse one of the richest cities of France.

Its merchants were determined to display their wealth and status and did so by building extravagant, towered mansions.

## Toulouse today

Many of these mansions remain and form part of the city's tourist trail which also takes in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century\_Saint-Sernin basilica; the Saint Etienne cathedral; grand Renaissance townhouses and 19th century industrial buildings, now renovated as arts and cultural venues.

The Pont-Neuf, or New (rather than nine) Bridge was built between 1544 and 1626 is another city landmark and the best place to cross the river.

Being lit after dark, and forming an entrance to the tapas bars in the medieval quarter, it is also a very popular evening destination.

As for open spaces, the banks of the Garonne River provide walkways through the city, with the lawned Prarie des Filtres, particularly pleasant. So to the serene towpaths along the Canals du Midi and de Brienne.

The *Jardin Royal* at the Grand Rond is another area offering relaxation within formally landscaped gardens, fountains and ornamental duck ponds.

## Just out of the city

For trips just out of the city, a half-day at the fascinating Cité de l'Espace space theme park is a must.

And for the chance to soak up the sun or get a spa treatment the Calicéo, has outdoor pools and five hot tubs, saunas and steam rooms.

## The Jacobins Convent



The Jacobins Convent which served the Order of Preaching Friars, founded in 1216 by Saint Dominique and remarkable for its two naves built between 1230-1340.

**The Hôtel d'Assézat**, a 15<sup>th</sup> century town mansion built by Nicolas Bachelier for Pierre d'Assézat who made his fortune from woad, a plant used in dyeing.

The building houses the Fondation Bemberg, a private museum with a permanent collection of paintings, bronzes and objets d'art.

## Visit a market

### The Victor Hugo market



The Victor Hugo market, in the square of the same name, has been thriving for 120 years and is known for its gourmet stalls.

Open mornings (except Monday), this is where the best restaurants buy the fresh meat, fish, cheese, fruit and vegetables served for the days lunch and dinner.

[www.marchevictorhugo.fr](http://www.marchevictorhugo.fr)

## A place to stay in Toulouse

### The Novotel Toulouse Centre



The Novotel Toulouse Centre is an excellent, 3\* hotel overlooking the Compans-Caffarelli park with its gloriously landscaped Japanese garden.

The Metro is a five minute stroll through the gardens and the rest of visitor Toulouse less than a 15 minute trip away.

[www.novotel.com](http://www.novotel.com)

### And a special place to eat



Toulouse is a place for taking the time to eat. And so enjoy breakfast coffee and croissants in a pavement bistro, linger over lunch in any number of wonderful French restaurants.

The French still place great emphasis of the lunchtime meals and will serve an extensive menu between 12.00 to 15.00 with last orders at about 14.00.

Afternoon tea is the time to enjoy the city's wonderful cakes and pasteries.

### And in the evening?

In addition to French cuisine, the Spanish influence and fine weather sees dozens of tapas bars serving customers al fresco into the very late evening.

The Capitole is a magnet for tourists although Place St George which is smaller, has in many ways more atmosphere.

And also seek out the winding 'rues' and squares, particularly in the medieval quarter. This is where the locals will eat, where the food will be as good, the welcome warmer and the prices less linked to the tourist 'buck'.

### Restaurant Michel Sarran

For those looking for the absolute best in food, wine, surroundings and service try to get a table at one of the regions finest restaurants.

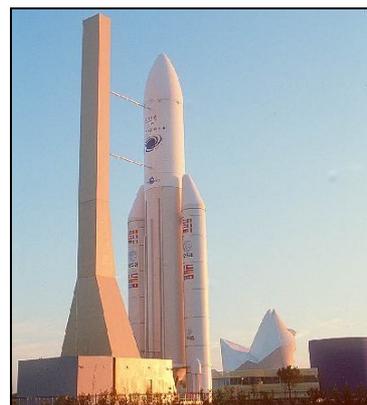
[www.michel-sarran.com](http://www.michel-sarran.com)

### Le Marché des Carmes



Le Marché des Carmes is a smaller version of the Victor Hugo market but equally as enticing.

### The Cité de l'espace (City of Space)



The Cité de l'espace is a theme park devoted to the conquest of space, with an interactive museum, full scale models of the Ariane 5, Mir space station and Soyuz modules, and a 3D IMAX cinema.

[www.cite-espace.com](http://www.cite-espace.com)

### Calicéo



Calico is the Toulouse water, spa and fitness park.

[www.caliceo.com](http://www.caliceo.com)

## AllWays more Toulouse

### When to go to Toulouse

Spring and Autumn are the two best seasons to visit Toulouse, when the climate allows visitors to enjoy the city in the outdoors to the full.

Summers can be very hot, but the city is quieter with the student population away for the holidays.

A visit during the festive season gives visitors the chance to enjoy the Christmas market, which can compete with the best in Europe.

### How to get there

#### By air

Toulouse-Blagnac international airport is 8 km west of Toulouse.

# easyJet

Easyjet, which flies into Toulouse runs scheduled services on 500 routes between 118 European, North African, and West Asian airports.

[www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)

The best way to get into the city is by the airport Flybus shuttle service.

[www.tisseo.fr](http://www.tisseo.fr)

Taxis are parked outside the arrivals hall on the ground floor of the airport.

#### By rail

Matabiau SNCF railway station is in the city centre.

#### By road

Toulouse has direct motorway connections to the main capitals of Northern and Southern Europe. Getting around

### Where to stay

The Toulouse tourism website has full information on the wide selection of accommodation available.

[www.uk.toulouse-tourisme.com](http://www.uk.toulouse-tourisme.com)

### How to get around

#### On foot

Although Toulouse is a large city, the historical 'old town' area is compact.

All the main visitor areas lie within this area and, as such, this makes it all easily enjoyed on foot.

#### By bike

Velo Toulouse bikes can be hired from 250 docking stations around the city. The first 30 minutes are free and hiring a bike for the day is 5 Euro.

#### The Metro

The clean and efficient, two line (A and B) Metro service runs seven days

a week with trains running every minute or so during peak hours and no more than six minutes off-peak.

#### The free shuttle

Four, free to use, electric shuttle buses run along a six-stop route through the city from Monday to Friday between 9.00 to 19.00.

#### By miniature train

The Toulouse 'miniature train' provides a leisurely tour of the city with commentary.

### Where to eat

Planning in long leisurely lunches and dinners is a must.

Highly recommended are :

#### The Monsier Georges

The Monsier Georges restaurant in Place St Georges has different décor on five floors and outside seating.

[www.monsieurgeorges.fr](http://www.monsieurgeorges.fr)

#### Grand Café de l'Opéra

The Grand Café de l'Opéra, at 1 place du Capitole, is a Parisian style brasserie favoured by locals and visitors alike.

[www.brasserieopera.com](http://www.brasserieopera.com)

#### Restaurant Michel Sarran

For a really special lunch or dinner try to get a table at this restaurant.

[www.michel-sarran.com](http://www.michel-sarran.com)

### What's on

Toulouse has a programme of events and activities to suit its warm climate.

Among these are :

#### Festival Flamenco

May

Performances from the world's finest flamenco artists.

[www.festival-flamenco-toulouse.com](http://www.festival-flamenco-toulouse.com)

#### Toulouse d'été

July and August

Over 100 artists perform jazz, rock, waltz and tango during the evenings.

[www.toulousedete.org](http://www.toulousedete.org)

#### Le Printemps de Septembre

September and October

A free festival dedicated to the visual arts and live shows at venues through Toulouse.

[www.printempsdesseptembre.com](http://www.printempsdesseptembre.com)

#### Le Marché de Noël

December

The Toulouse Christmas market is held in December, at the Place du Capitole in the heart of the city.

### What's to speak

While English is generally understood, the French are a proud nation and speaking at least a smattering of the language will be much appreciated.

### What to spend (and tip)

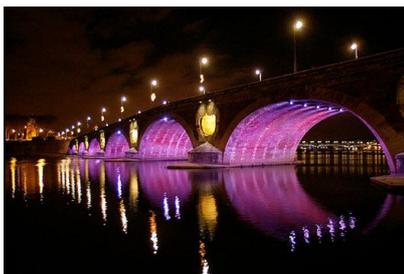
France is in the Euro zone.

Tipping is not mandatory. The French tend to leave odd coins with drinks. A 10% tip with a meal is fine.

### More information

[www.uk.toulouse-tourisme.com](http://www.uk.toulouse-tourisme.com)

## A snapshot of Toulouse



## The International Travel Writers Alliance



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*The International Travel Writers Alliance is the worlds largest association of professional travel writers, editors, broadcasters and photographers.*



## Ashley Gibbins



Ashley is Chief Executive of the International Travel Writers Alliance.