

Press Release

Occitanie: a rugby heartland







Occitanie

Sud de France



FRANCE'S SECOND-BIGGEST REGION,

13 'departments' in an area bigger than Ireland



8 SITES INSCRIBED ON UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE LIST

the Canal du Midi, Gavarnie - Mont Perdu, Way of St James, the Episcopal City of Albi, the Causses and the Cévennes, the Pont du Gard, the Historic Fortified City of Carcassonne, the Fortifications of Vauban (Villefranche-de-Conflent and Mont-Louis)



2 NATIONAL PARKS



1 MARINE NATURE PARK



8 REGIONAL NATURE PARKS



44 WINTER SPORTS RESORTS



41 TOP OCCITANIE SITES

Agde-Pézenas, Aigues-Mortes - Camargue Gardoise - Saint Gilles, Albi - Vallée du Tarn, Ariège médiévale : Foix - Mirepoix - Montsegur, Ariège préhistorique : Niaux - Tarascon - Mas d'Azil, Armagnac - Abbaye et Cités, Auch, Aux sources du Canal du Midi (Sorèze, Revel, Saint Ferréol), Bastides et Gorges de l'Aveyron (Villefranche de Rouergue, Najac, St Antonin, Caylus, Villeneuve d'Aveyron), Canal du Midi - Béziers, Carcassonne et les Citadelles du vertige, Cévennes, Cirque de Gavarnie - Cauterêts - Pont d'Espagne, Cirque de Navacelles - Lodève, Collioure en Côte Vermeille, Conques, Cordes et cités médiévales, Gorges de l'Hérault - Gorges du Tarn, Gorges de la Jonte - Causses & Vallées Cévenoles, Grand Figeac, vallée du Lot et du Célé, La Grande-Motte, Le Grand Montauban, Lourdes, Luchon, Marciac, Massif du Canigò, Massif du Néouvielle-Vallée d'Aure et du Luron, Mende coeur de Lozère, Millau-Roquefort (regroupement de deux candidatures), Moissac, Montpellier, Narbonne Méditerranée, Nîmes - Pont du Gard - Uzès, Perpignan Méditerranée, Pic du Midi, Rocamadour Vallée de la Dordogne, Rodez, Saint-Bertrand de Comminges, Valcabrière, Sète, Toulouse, Vallée du Lot, Cahors, Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, Puy-l'Evêque



28 THERMAL SPA CENTRES



220 KILOMETRES OF MEDITERRANEAN COASTLINE



MORE THAN 50 MARINAS



In the Southern French region of Occitanie, rugby is more than just a sport; it is a genuine manifestation of regional culture, whose values and the enthusiasm it generates have been permeating its towns and villages for over 100 years. An unbridled passion for rugby pervades the entire region, embodied in its cuisine, its way of life, its sense of tolerance, its welcoming atmosphere, its festivities and its predilection for exchange and sharing.

Blessed with highly talented rugby players (The Toulouse scrum half Antoine Dupont has been named World Rugby Men's 15s Player of the Year 2021) and internationally renowned professional clubs, Occitanie is more than ready to stage the Rugby World Cup, which will be held in France from 8 September to 28 October 2023. Toulouse, the undisputed capital of French rugby, will host five World Cup games – a golden opportunity to see the very best players of the teams who will grace the Stade Toulousain field (New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa and Japan). So, until then, welcome to Occitanie, the rugby heartland par excellence.

Carole DELGA

Former Minister
President of the Occitanie /
Pyrenees-Mediterranee Region



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4th France's fourth biggest tourist region



with
15.9 billion
euros visitor spending



and
96 500
paid tourism jobs



or
10%
of regional GDP

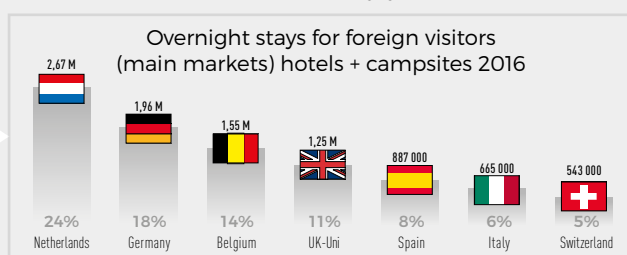


1st
region for
French tourists



3rd
region for
overseas tourists

30 million
visitors every year



1st The highest accommodation capacity in France



with
3.3 million
beds



nearly
26.3 million
nights at open-air accommodation sites
(highest rank in France)



16.3 million
hotel nights
(4th highest in France)



1st France's most popular thermal spa destination



drawing
188,000
spa users



around
1/3
of the national spa market

The culture of rugby in Occitanie



OCCITANIE: THE RUGBY REGION

History

Although invented in 1823 by a student at Rugby School, rugby did not make its way over the Channel until the end of the 19th century, with the game first gaining popularity in Paris before the entire South-West became wholly infatuated with the sport. This sport undoubtedly earned its stripes in Occitanie through its alignment with the regional philosophy, expressed via its way of life and distinct character: a delicate balance between pride and hospitality, togetherness and a party spirit, and power and respect for others.

The regional sport par excellence, rugby brings together all generations, all social classes, families and friends in Occitanie's smallest villages every Sunday. Rugby is more than just a competition, with every match paving the way for unforgettable post-match exchanges and celebrations between winners and losers over a few friendly drinks, during the famous "third time."

A few rugby stats about a rugby-mad region!

With more than 70,000 registered players (328,000 in total in France) at almost 400 clubs, Occitanie is home to France's top regional rugby union league.

Did you know?

1. In Occitanie, the regional passion for rugby is passed down through the generations: in rugby-mad families, the game remains an ongoing tradition, with a desire for babies to grasp hold of the oval-shaped ball in their cribs.
2. Fabien GALTHIE, the current head coach of the French national rugby union team, is an Occitanie boy, having been born in Cahors near Toulouse.

In addition, more than 20,000 young people take up the sport in the region each year, which houses hundreds of rugby academies.

In Occitanie, France's sportiest region (more than 77.6% of its inhabitants practise a sporting activity), rugby is one of the three most played sports, alongside football and tennis.

Occitanie is home to more professional clubs playing at the elite level than any other French region, with four teams in the Top 14 (first division) and five teams in Pro D2 (second division).

TOP 14 TEAMS (2021-2022 SEASON)

Stade toulousain
Castres Olympique
Montpellier Hérault Rugby

PRO D2 TEAMS (2021-2022 SEASON)

USAP (Perpignan)
AS Béziers - Hérault
US Carcassonne
US Montauban
Colomiers Rugby

Rugby: a sport for all

The particularly open and accepting nature of rugby players, and of many of Occitanie's residents in general, creates a conducive environment for people to practise their favourite sport free from discrimination.

WOMEN'S RUGBY: Three clubs play in Elite 1 (first division), while two teams ply their trade in Elite 2 (second division). Stade Toulousain's Gaëlle Hermet was captain of the French rugby team during the 2018 edition of the Women's Six Nations.

Thanks to the great results recorded by regional clubs and their growing media coverage, the number of registered female players has sky-rocketed, with more than 80 women's teams in the region.

ELITE1 TEAMS (2021-2022- SEASON)

Montpellier Hérault Rugby
Stade toulousain
Blagnac Rugby

ELITE2 TEAMS (2021-2022- SEASON)

USAP (Perpignan)
RC Narbonne
Stado TPR (Tarbes)



Rugby league: the other type of rugby in Occitanie

More exclusive than rugby union, there are 13 players on each team in a rugby league match. There are 50,000 registered rugby league players in France, most of which are based in Occitanie, especially around Toulouse, Carcassonne and Perpignan. Rugby league is a very popular sport in England, Australia and New Zealand. Both based in Occitanie, France has two professional rugby league teams, Catalan Dragons of Perpignan and Toulouse Olympique XIII, who play domestically in the English Super League, as well as in international tournaments.



www.to13.com



www.catalansdragons.com/en



Did you know?

The Montpellier Hérault Rugby Club women's team have been crowned Champions of France six times since 2013.





MIXED RUGBY CAMPS (boys and girls) from a very young age. Occitanie holds rugby-themed camps for children aged 7 and over, encouraging children to have fun and get involved in the sport from an early age.

THE "GAY-FRIENDLY" TEAMS TOU'WIN (TOULOUSE) AND LOS VALENTS (MONTPELLIER) are all about inclusiveness and tolerance, fully embracing differences in sexual orientation through the game of rugby. Toulouse hosts a rugby tournament dubbed "Les Ovalies" ("The Ovalites") every year, pitting gay-friendly teams against each other from across France and Europe.

WHEELCHAIR RUGBY is a parasport derived from rugby union, specially designed for people with motor disabilities. Particularly popular in Toulouse and Montpellier, this game is played in a wheelchair.

What people say about rugby

The writer Raymon ABELLIO claims that "rugby is better at the foot of the Pyrenees than anywhere else in the world, in a land of fire that's well suited to it."

According to Bernard LAPORTE, the ex-head coach of the French national team, the former Sports Minister and the current President of the French Rugby Federation, "Occitanie is proud and honoured to host the World Cup, because everyone lives and breathes rugby here."



A once in a lifetime opportunity: the presentation of the Bouclier de Brennus trophy at le Capitole

Le Bouclier de Brennus trophy is awarded each year to the French league winners in mid-June. Whenever Toulouse wins this trophy, the whole city is draped in the Stade Toulousain colours: red and black. The most iconic moment during this time of immense joy and celebration is the day after the title triumph, when the players cross the city in a procession and present the trophy to a jubilant crowd from the balcony of Le Capitole, Toulouse City Hall.



WHERE TO GO FOR A GREAT RUGBY EXPERIENCE?

Watch a live rugby match at one of the region's greatest rugby stadiums

STADE ERNEST WALLON, TOULOUSE. Watching the 20-times French champions and four-times European champions Stade Toulousain live at Stade Ernest Wallon is an incredible experience.

STADE AIMÉ GIRAL, PERPIGNAN. Contact USA Perpignan (USAP) directly for a guided tour of the stadium and to see what goes on behind the scenes at the club. You could also go on a package weekend break ("magic Catalan weekends"), which includes cultural visits, fine dining excursions and wine tours in Perpignan, as well as a VIP matchday experience organised by the incoming agency Evaz-jo Roussillon Voyages.

STADE RAOUL BARRIÈRE, BÉZIERS. Association Sportive Biterroise Hérault (ASBH) is the third-most decorated club in French rugby history, having won 11 French league titles. The atmosphere at Béziers' rugby ground is incredible. You can even enjoy the game over a spot of fine dining from the "Côté Vestiaire" Brasserie, a restaurant directly overlooking the pitch unlike most stadium eateries in France.



There is also the GGL Stadium in Montpellier (formerly known as Stade Yves-du-Manoir), Stade Pierre Fabre in Castres, Stade de Sapiac in Montauban, and Parc des Sports et de l'Amitié in Narbonne.

Where to watch matches and join in with post-match celebrations away from stadiums?

The former international rugby star René CRABOS believes that "rugby isn't played over two halves, but three, entailing pre-match fervour, in-game bravery and post-match fraternity".

Big games are shown on giant screens across the region's main rugby cities (Place du Capitole, Toulouse, and the square outside Montpellier City Hall), where large crowds can safely enjoy the action together, while other rugby enthusiasts prefer to watch the game from the comfort of the region's rugby bars, taking in their equally typical rugby-like atmosphere.

Our best rugby bars:

TOULOUSE

City centre:

- **Le Haka Corner** - 47 boulevard Lascrosses

This rugby bar/museum in the Compans-Caffarelli district is co-managed by the ex-New Zealand rugby star Byron Kelleher. This celebratory establishment is a Toulousain three-halves paradise, boasting an impressive collection of framed shirts (shirts worn by Jonny Wilkinson, many international rugby stars, and, most notably, some of the greatest players to have ever put on the All Blacks jersey).

- **The Danu** - 9 rue du pont Guilhemery

Founded by the former Irish international Trevor Brenna, The Danu is now Toulouse's no. 1 sports bar, with a whopping eight screens. You will also see the odd Stade Toulousain player pop in.

There is also:

- **Le London Town Pub** - 14 Rue des prêtres

Located in Toulouse's dynamic city centre, the London Town pub is the ideal setting for all your outings, where you can savour the finest traditional English beer and watch live football and rugby matches on any of its three screens.

- **Le Ministère** - 14 Rue Peyrolières

- **Le Tommy's Café** - 52 Bd Lazare Carnot

... and all the bars in Place St-Pierre, a particularly lively student partying hub on matchday evenings.

- **Le Rouge et Noir** - 3 Rue du Pont Saint Pierre

Named after the colours of the local rugby team, Stade Toulousain, this bar is an unavoidable attraction in the Stade-Cyprien district, with walls and ceilings brimming with the shirts, crests, flags, scarves and pennants of rugby clubs from across the world.





A stone's throw away from Stade Ernest Wallon

- **La Brasserie du Stade toulousain** - 114 rue des troènes

In a stylish and cosy environment wholly dedicated to Toulousain rugby, this brasserie is the perfect place to enjoy rugby matches on the stadium's doorstep. You can also hire the building or one of its lounges for business, cocktail and dinner evenings, themed evenings, group and company meals, meetings and private receptions.

ELSEWHERE IN OCCITANIE:

- **O'Brians**, Narbonne's Irish bar, is owned by the Australian and former RC Narbonne star Anthony Hill.

- The Montpellier-based **La Chistera** was founded by the French international François Trinh-Duc.

- **L'Arena Bar, Les Halles Vauban** and **Le Bar La Rotonde** in Perpignan.

RUGBY FASHION: CLUB SHOPS, HANDICRAFTS AND SHIRT COLLECTIONS

Club shops

The ultimate rugby experience must be rounded off with an engraved rugby souvenir. All professional clubs in the region have opened specialised shops, where supporters can continue to indulge in their passion by sporting their team's colours. These shops sell polos, shorts, shoes, scarves, flags and everything else you could possibly need to be a top fan.

TOULOUSE: Stade Toulousain has three shops where you can buy official club merchandise and flaunt its red and black colours:

- Toulouse Blagnac International Airport
 - Stade Ernest Wallon
 - City centre (75 Rue Alsace Lorraine)
- <https://boutique.stadetoulousain.fr>



(C)2010kumamoto pref.kumamon



MONTPELLIER: The Montpellier club shop can be found at the CGL stadium

www.montpellier-rugby.com/boutique

CASTRES: The Castres club shop is located at 19 Rue Frédéric Thomas

<https://castres-olympique.com/boutique/>

PERPIGNAN: USAP has two shops in Perpignan: one at Stade Aimé Giral and one in the city centre at Quai Vauban.

CUSTOMISED T-SHIRTS

The Narbonne-based designer Stéphanie Marinese makes unique, rugby-themed clothing. Her most notable creations are a collection of "femme de rugbyman" ("rugby player's wife") T-shirts sold under the brand "15 août" (15 August).

www.15aoutofficiel.com



You can also purchase a Catalan Dragons of Perpignan rugby league shirt at the Galeries Lafayette department store or Stade Gilbert Brutus.

<https://boutique.usap.fr/>

BÉZIERS: The Association Sportive Biterroise Hérault (ASBH) shop on Rue du 4 Septembre in Béziers is home to the "camelou" (the word for "camel" in the local dialect), the club's mascot and the town's totemic animal since at least the 4th century.

www.asbh.net/boutique

MONTAUBAN: also has a club shop at 188 Rue Léo Lagrange, while Carcassonne has two: one at 32 Rue Antoine Marty, and one at the stadium on matchdays. <http://shop.usmsapiac.fr>



Craftspeople specialised in rugby products

RUGBY BALLS MADE FROM FINE WOOD

The master artisanal cabinetmaker Pierre Armengaud uses all kinds of fine wood derived mostly from sustainable sources. In 2004, Pierre Armengaud set himself apart by making "wooden rugby balls" and personalised sports trophies. Located at the Moulin de la Jalousie in Belpéch, Aude department, Armengaud's workshop is open to the public. It is the only nationally recognised business to specialise in this particular themed market.

FOR FOODIES

A traditional chocolate shop close to Toulouse sells real-sized chocolate rugby balls. You can even see how chocolate is made during a live demonstration.

www.chocolaterie-larra.fr





The unique and remarkable blend of cabaret and rugby

At Moulin des Roches, a famous cabaret hall close to Toulouse, the leading showgirl and her dancers flaunting feather-draped dresses stand alongside rugby's greats. It was Alex Borret, the former owner of the Noé bar/restaurant, who founded this establishment, creating the ideal setting for an unforgettable third time in a rugby heartland. A true rugby fanatic, Alex has built up a collection of almost 1000 rugby shirts. Following his death in 2009, Alex's children decided to keep their father's memory going by donating **this unique collection, by European standards**, to Moulin des Roches, which now proudly displays his shirts.

EX-PRO PROFILES: WHAT ARE FORMER RUGBY STARS UP TO THESE DAYS?

Whether they hail from the region or have decided to settle in Occitanie after retiring from professional rugby, it is often surprising to discover the career paths chosen by ex-pros. By meeting ex-players, you not only find out about their new lives and share their greatest rugby memories with them, but also continue your shared passion for the game.



Did you know?

In 2019, the Paris-based rugby club Racing 92 entrusted L'Atelier Tuffery, France's oldest jeans manufacturer, with the task of creating a denim fabric trouser line for its players to wear away from the stadium. Coincidentally, this company was founded in 1892, the year that Racing 92 won the inaugural French domestic rugby championship.

www.ateliertuffery.com

From rugby boots to meals

Many ex-pros have opened restaurants, such as Gilles BELZONS (nicknamed "Bébelle" ["Mr Chaos"]), Gilles BOURGUIGNON and Franck TOURNAIRE in Narbonne, the GALLETIER cousins in Montpellier, and Christian CONSTANT in Paris, Toulouse et Montech.

« CHEZ BÉBELLE »

Emblazoned with the nickname of its owner, this restaurant tells the kind of family story we all like to hear in the heart of one of France's most beautiful indoor markets.

Les Halles is an institution in its own right in Narbonne. This colourful, aroma-packed and bustling market embodies the nature of the town and its inhabitants, and is now home to a bar and grill owned by Gilles and his family (three generations of rugby players), an eatery adorned with rugby shirts that prepares all its meals using only market produce, which is chopped and grilled before your very own eyes. "Bébelle" puts on a show for all his punters,



announcing your orders over a megaphone to the artisan butchers in Les Halles, while also catching flying pieces of securely wrapped-up food like a true flanker!

This form of service has been emulated elsewhere in Halles du Lez, Montpellier, where Gilles has opened another bar and grill in partnership with the cousins **Kélian and Guillaume GALETIER**, former stars of Club Montpellier Hérault Rugby and current owners of a more classic restaurant, "La Maison Bébelles," a renovated old monastery opposite Halles de Narbonne. www.chez-bebelle.fr

The Narbonne-born former international rugby player and current head coach of Carcassonne, **Franck TOURNAIRE**, now owns the Narbonne-based restaurant "Chez Jo," an establishment ubiquitously known for its delectable meat dishes. <http://chezfrancknarbonne.fr/>

Likewise, the Michelin-star chef at the Parisian restaurant "Le Violon d'Ingres," and former US Montauban star, **CHRISTIAN CONSTANT**, now runs six restaurants, including two in Occitanie. He often reminds people "that a kitchen is like a rugby team. There is no such thing as a leader and the rest. Everyone must pull together to ensure progress." Revel in the remarkable backdrop at Brasseries Le Bibent, Place du Capitole, Toulouse, or enjoy the peaceful atmosphere at Bistrot Constant in Montech.

GILLES BOURGUIGNON, from playing for France to producing one of "Occitanie's greatest treasures". The 1980s Narbonne cult hero Gilles BOURGUIGNON is now the fine owner of several bakeries in Narbonne and the surrounding area. His range of biscuits sold under the brand name "Trésors d'Occitanie" (meaning "Occitanie's greatest treasures") are exported as far as the Middle-East, especially his "crosetas" in the form of the Occitan cross, the official symbol of the Occitanie region.

<https://lefournildegilles.fr/produit/las-crosetas/>

From rugby to vineyards

GÉRARD BERTRAND, has found great success in wine production and tourism.

Born on 27th January 1965 in Narbonne, where he first started playing rugby, before ending his career as captain of the Parisian side Stade français, Gérard Bertrand assumed ownership of the family wine estate following his father's death in 1995, fully dedicating himself to winemaking ever since. Gérard Bertrand has built a large winemaking group under his own name, promoting Languedoc wines, both domestically and internationally, through its sales to 150 countries. In just 30 years, his estate has grown from 60 to 750 hectares, two thirds of which is biodynamically cultivated. He is now diversifying his offer, capitalising on the possibilities on wine tourism, with a hotel complex featuring a gourmet restaurant idyllically positioned between his vineyards and the sea, where he holds a jazz festival every summer.

www.chateau-hospitalet.com/en

www.gerard-bertrand.com



Did you know?

The Château l'Hospitalet grand vin AOP La Clape 2017 vintage was named the "Best Red Wine in the World" at the International Wine Challenge (IWC), the world's most prestigious wine competition, which annually recognises the most notable wines and wine growers for a particular vintage.





Now based in Gaillac, the former Stade Toulousain star **Yannick JAUZION** has also pursued a career in winemaking after hanging up his boots, associating his name with the Aligança label, while the ex-Rodez, Castres and Montpellier player **Sébastien GALTIER** produces exquisite organic wines on his Mas des Colibris estate.

www.trinquéfougasse.com/domaine/mas-des-colibris

Meanwhile, other ex-pros have pursued more artistic careers such as **Vincent MOSCATO** (trained in Gaillac, then Albi, two cities in the Tarn department), who now has people howling with laughter at his stand-up comedy gigs.

The Toulouse-born **Jean-Pierre RIVES** creates monumental sculptures (one of these can be seen at his restaurant, "la Centrale," in Toulouse,» which is only open in the summer), while the Béziers-born, and ex-Stade Toulousain star, **Cédric SOULETTE**, creates works of arts inspired by the cockerel, the national symbol of France.

www.stanart.fr

In addition, the Argentine, and former Stade Toulousain player, **Omar HASAN**, has embarked upon a career as a baritone, performing in operas and with his trio "Café Tango."

Likewise, **Daniel HERRERO**, an eccentric character from Puisseguier near Béziers, has written ten rugby books and now works as a business coach, adviser and speaker. He is also an ambassador at the International Federation for Human rights. A giant fresco with an effigy of Daniel Herrero has been painted onto a wall at the entrance to his native village.



Some ex-pros have also sought a career in politics, such as **Didier CODORNIU**, the current Vice-President of the Occitanie region, and **Bernard LAPORTE**, the former Sports Minister and current President of the French Rugby Union Federation.

RUGBY IS LIFE: BEACH RUGBY, WATER RUGBY, RUGBY FESTIVALS, ETC.

You don't have to attend live rugby games with your family and friends to get your rugby fix; this sport is everywhere, with many rugby-themed activities and events throughout the region.



In Occitanie, efforts are purely focused on democratising this sport by increasing its appeal and bringing people together: fun forms of the game have already been created in **beach rugby** and **water rugby**, and a rugby festival is held every year in Toulouse.

Beach rugby

Beach rugby is a team sport derived from rugby union and rugby league. It is typically played on the beach, or at the very least on sand, if this is not possible. This sport pits two teams of five against each other and is designed to be more fun and accessible than standard forms of rugby, since its rules are easier to understand and apply, differences in technical ability are of little importance and the game is suitable for both experienced and novice players.

Beach rugby is played all the way along the Mediterranean coast, more specifically in Valras-Plage and Gruissan in the Aude department, which holds a highly renowned tournament every July – Gruissan Beach Rugby – under the initiative of



Didier CODORNIU ("Le Petit Prince" ["The Small Prince"]), the former French international rugby star.

This tournament is open to all, with youth, mixed and women's teams all locking horns on the sand, helping to raise the profile of the game in all its forms and at all levels of achievement.

www.gruissan-mediterranee.com/decouvrir/nos-grands-evenements/beach-rugby/

Water rugby: a tournament like no other in the world

Water rugby is a fun form of the game played on a floating platform measuring 40 metres long and 35 metres wide. There are five players on each time, matches are 20 minutes long and you must jump in the water to score a try, making for an incredible atmosphere. This tournament has been held every year since 2019 on the Garonne River in Toulouse, attracting some of the biggest names in French rugby, such as Cédric Heymans, Emile N'tamack, Imanol Harinordoquy, Christophe Dominici, Dimitri Yachivili, Vincent Clerc and Yannick Jauzion.

<http://tournoides6stations.com/ete/en/>

Le Fest'oval: the biggest rugby festival

Toulouse's Place du Capitole turns into a rugby pitch every June to commemorate the Top14 final, allowing people to share their passion and embrace the culture surrounding the emblematic sport of rugby in the "rugby capital," which is proud to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023.

MICE: FROM RUGBY TO BUSINESS TOURISM

The stadium suites of Occitanie's professional clubs are ideal for business events, such as incentives and seminars, especially Stade Ernest Wallon in

Toulouse, whose Stade Toulousain Brasserie and other spaces are suitable for private functions.

<http://usmsapiac.fr>

www.mice-occitanie.fr/fr/fiche/poi/beziers-congres-beziers_TFOArticle_82928/

Sporting personnel at Stade Toulousain also run "team-building" (strengthening team spirit and cohesion to improve collective performance) and rugby initiation sessions for businesses.



RUGBY-THEMED ACCOMMODATION

Stop at the home of one of the world's best rugby players

Stay at the Barthas family estate near Castelnau-Magnoac, Hautes-Pyrénées, the home of French international scrum half, and World Rugby Men's 15s Player of the Year 2021, Antoine Dupont. Run by the Dupont family over five generations, people flock to the Barthas estate restaurant from far and wide to taste its braised duck breast served in a casserole dish. The fully renovated "Domaine de Barthas - métairie Dupont" can be hired for events, seminars and weddings, with two large rooms holding up to 300 people, accommodation for up to 49 people, a swimming pool and, unsurprisingly, rugby courses.

Hôtel Ibis Style, Castelnaudary (Aude): a rugby shrine

The businessman, and former RC Narbonne star, Guy Spanghero, opened a three-star hotel with his brothers in 2021. Located just 30 minutes away from Toulouse, Spanghero's hotel is wholly dedicated to rugby; it even has its own rugby-themed pub and restaurant: Twickenham Pub. A collector of international rugby shirts worn by the best players from all nations, Guy Spanghero has lined the walls of the hotel's rooms, corridors and pub with 180 shirts, some of which are more than 50 years old. His bar and restaurant is also imbued with the cosy feel of a traditional pub. Other facilities at the hotel include a sports hall, spa and a heated swimming pool. Its 69 rooms have also been customised with the world of rugby in mind.

Places you must see in the flagship rugby cities of Occitanie



TOULOUSE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

Dubbed the "Pink City" because of the orange-pinkish bricks used for many of its buildings, **Toulouse** is the capital of the Occitanie region and the birthplace of the European aeronautical and



space industries (home to Airbus and Arianespace). Revel in its rich and fully-pedestrianised historic centre, most notably featuring the famous Place du Capitole, the Basilica of Saint-Sernin and the Jacobin Monastery, prepare to be amazed by the performance machines at Halle de la Machine, and relive the history of the aeronautical industry by visiting the Aeroscopia Museum; "l'Envol des pionniers," the birthplace of airmail services; or even, Airbus' assembly lines.

www.toulouse-visit.com

www.halledelamachine.fr/en

Accommodation

- Stay at the 5-star **la Cour des Consuls-Exupéry**, a building dating back to the 17th century, while you explore Toulouse.

www.cite-hotels.com/en/etablissements/hotel-cour-des-consuls.html

- The 5-star **Hôtel du Grand Balcon** is the former residence of the highly successful commercial pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

<https://grandbalconhotel.com/en/>



Less than an hour's drive from Toulouse

The Historic Fortified City of Carcassonne, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is an unmissable sight to behold. Its Bastille Day fireworks display on the 14 July is one of the most spectacular in the world. Dubbed the "Versailles of Languedoc," the nearby Pennautier Châteaux also worth a visit, where you can taste the wines of the Maison Lorgeril estate, a multi-award-winning establishment in the French wine tourism industry.

<https://www.lorgeril.wine/en/history-and-architecture/>

The red city of **Albi** is renowned for its cathedral, Sainte-Cécile, the largest brick-built monument in the world, as well as the Toulouse Lautrec Museum, which pays tribute to the famous Belle Époque (Beautiful Age) painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who was born in the city in 1864.

www.albi-tourisme.fr/en

Castres, another rugby town, is known for its Goya Museum and the delightful old houses along the river, which give the place a Florence-like feel.

www.tourisme-castresmazamet.com

Montauban, houses a museum dedicated to two famous artists: the painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle. You must also see the stunning cloister of the nearby Moissac Abbey, a site awarded UNESCO World Heritage Site status for its position along the Route of Santiago de Compostela.

Less than a two-hour's drive from Toulouse

Go for a ride in the **Pic du Midi** cable car along its highly impressive suspended passageway and marvel at the spectacular view of the Pyrenees 3000 metres above





sea level. If you are enthused by preserved natural sites, **the Pyrenees National Park** and its romantic landscapes will undoubtedly leave you astonished, especially **the Cirque de Gavarnie**, a true natural wonder. You may also wish to revel in the joys of an unrivalled spiritual experience at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, the most visited pilgrimage site in France, by taking part in the famous torchlight procession.

<https://en.lourdes-infotourisme.com>

Accommodation

Stay at the highest hotel in Europe on the Pic du Midi summit.

<http://picdumidi.com/?lang=en>

Cahors et la vallée du Lot : enjoy a peaceful river cruise along the Lot, taking in the remarkable landscapes of one of France's most beautiful valleys and discovering the châteaux and quintessential



villages along its banks on the way to **Saint-Cirq-Lapopie**, one of France's most picturesque villages and a hotspot for Japanese tourists.

Wine enthusiasts will also be able to savour the famous "black" Cahors-Malbec during a tasting session at Château de Mercuès, one of the most highly reputable wine estates in the Lot Valley and a multi-award-winning establishment in the French wine tourism industry.

Accommodation

The 4-star **Château de Mercuès** is a Relais & Châteaux hotel overlooking the Lot Valley.

<https://chateaudemercues.com/en/>

La Gascogne: the birthplace of Musketeer D'Artagnan.

Named after France's oldest eau-de-vie, the D'Armagnac wine-growing region extends across La Gascogne, the "French Tuscany," a land lined with an array of distinguished châteaux and villages, and duck farms (for foie gras production), against the backdrop of a sea of hills and enchanting dells.



Accommodation

Stay in a 4-star hotel, more specifically, a reconverted, breath-taking former monastery overlooking picturesque vineyards.

<https://lemonasteredesaintmont.com>

Stay at the 5-star **Villa Toscane** in Mariac, a village renowned for its international Jazz festival.

<http://lavillatoscane-marciac.fr>

Marvel at the wonders of the luxurious **Soulages Museum in Rodez**, an area to the North-East of Toulouse. This museum is exclusively dedicated to Pierre Soulages, the most dearly cherished





living French artist/painter. The Abbey Church of Sainte-Foye lies several miles away from Rodez in the village of Conques, where you can see the magnificent stained-glass windows made by the very own Pierre Soulages.

<https://musee-soulages.rodezagglo.fr/en>

MONTPELLIER AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

Montpellier stuns its visitors with its daring architecture and its fully pedestrianised historic centre. Stroll through the Peyrou Gardens in Place de la Comédie, traversing the rich old town brimming with unique 17th and 18th century hotels. You may also wish to visit the incredible Fabre Museum, the Montpellier Fine Arts Museum and the brand-new **contemporary art museum, MoCo**, before basking in the delight of **l'Arbre blanc (The White Tree)**, a futuristic tower block designed by the Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto.

<https://www.montpellier-france.com/>

Accommodation

To feel the ultimate sense of well-being beside the Mediterranean, stay at one of two 5-star hotels: **Hôtel Plage Palace** or **Hôtel Plage Art**

<https://plagepalace.com/en/>

Less than an hour's drive from Montpellier

Nîmes and the Pont du Gard: 2000 years of history inherited from the Romans.





Dubbed the "French Rome," Nîmes boasts a spectacular array of **Roman amphitheatres**, undoubtedly preserved better than any others on Earth. Broaden your knowledge of the Antiquity at **Musée de la Romanité (The Museum of Roman Civilisation)** and marvel at the breath-taking panoramic view of the old town from its roof terrace. Just a few miles from Nîmes, **the Pont du Gard**, a manifestation of Roman architectural brilliance, is one of the most visited sites in France.

Accommodation

Stay at the newly reopened, 5-star and **legendary Hôtel Imperator**, following in the footsteps of many illustrious names, such as Ava Gardner and Ernest Hemingway.

www.maison-albar-hotels-l-imperator.com/en/



Béziers et Narbonne

These two historic rugby towns are full of unheralded treasures.

Proudly overlooked by Saint-Nazaire Cathedral, Béziers is traversed by the 150-mile long **canal du Midi**, most notably by the highly impressive flighted **Fonseranes locks**.

Accommodation

Stay at **Domaine Tarbouriech**, a luxurious vine-swept hotel estate bordering the Étang de Thau, the largest of a series of lagoons running along the Southern French coast from the Rhône River to the Pyrenees foothills, where you will find a health club specialised in "ostreotherapy," unique and innovative oyster-based treatment methods.

www.domaine-tarbouriech.com



Meanwhile, **Narbonne** is home to **the Archbishop's Palace**, the second-most spectacular and impressive palace in France after the Papal Palace in Avignon. You must also see **the Frontfroide Abbey**, a stunning Cistercian monastery dating back to the 12th century and hidden within a forest-filled landscape, and visit **Gruissan**, a fishing village surrounded by salt marshes.

www.narbonne-tourisme.com

Less than a two-hour's drive from Montpellier

Perpignan

The gateway to Spain and a proud Catalan City, Perpignan always gives a warm welcome to its guests, especially on rugby matchdays. Bask in the delight of this wonderful city and its incredible atmosphere by savouring the tantalisingly tasty "tapas," a Catalan speciality, at **Halles Vauban**, revelling in the treasures of the old town (**le Castillet, an ancient fortification and city gate; the cathedral; the Palace of the Kings of Majorca, etc.**) and ambling through the streets of **Collioure**, an authentic fishing port town of outstanding natural and architectural beauty, serving as a source of inspiration for the great Fauvist artists.

www.perpignantourisme.com/gb

www.visitcollioure.co.uk

Accommodation

Stay at **Domaine Riberach**, a former winery offering unique accommodation – authentic wine vats reconverted into luxurious 4-star hotel rooms – and a Michelin-star restaurant in the renovated old wine cellar.

www.riberach.com/en/



The Millau Viaduct, the Roquefort Caves and the Tarn Gorges *

A proud representation of French civil engineering, the incredible dimensions of the **Millau Viaduct** are impossible to ignore; its central pillar is taller than the Eiffel Tower. Overlooked by this enormous construction, the town of **Millau** is famous for its luxury glove-making workshops, treasured by highly renowned fashion houses such as Chanel.

You may also wish to indulge yourself in **Roquefort**, the king of French cheeses matured in nearby natural caves, and marvel at the wonders of the Tarn Gorges, one of France's most striking canyons.



*These major attractions fall within the boundaries of the Causses, gorge-gauged limestone plateaus, and the Cévennes mountain range, distinguished for their spectacular landscapes.







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