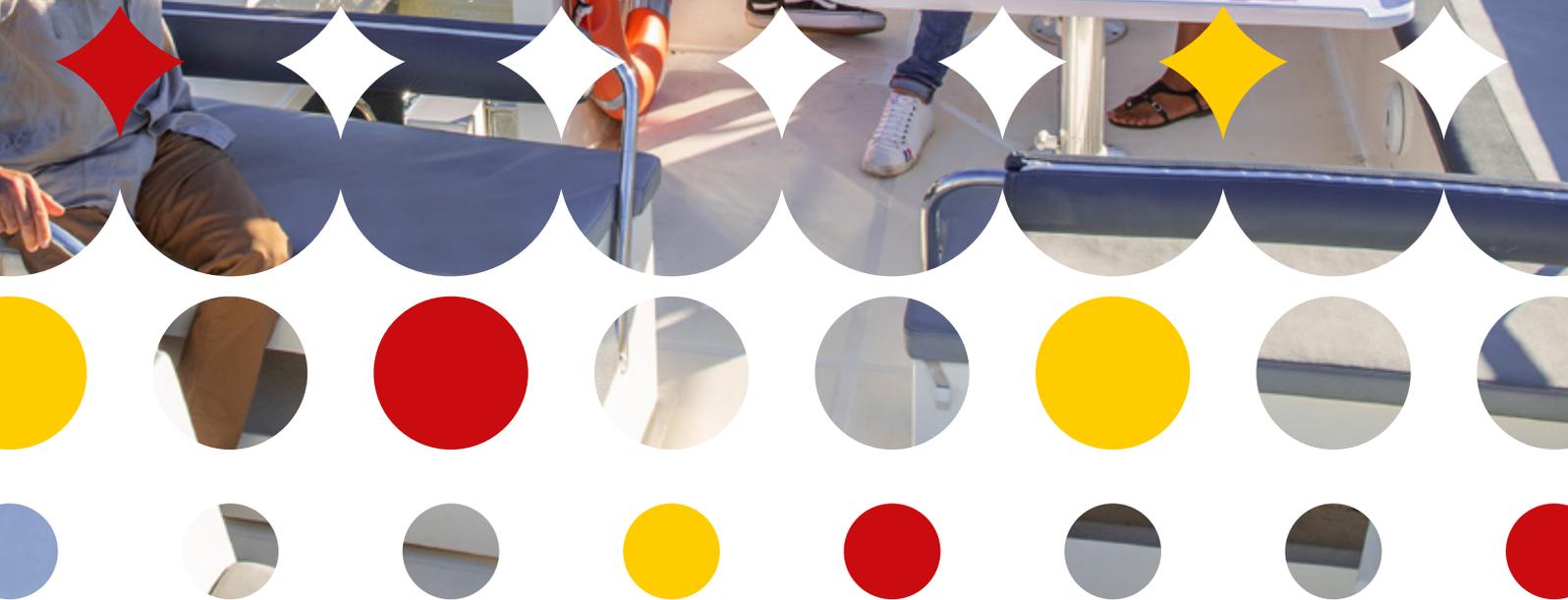
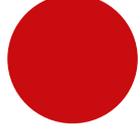


Press Pack

The canal du Midi

History along the waterside







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



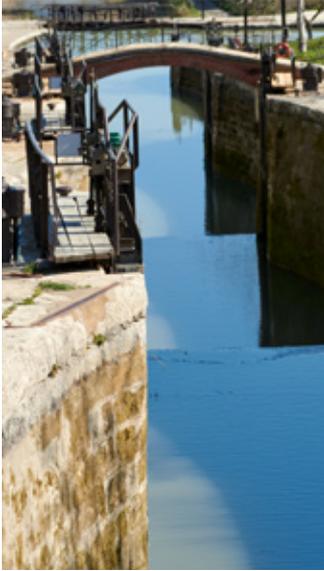
28 THERMAL SPA CENTRES



220 KILOMETRES OF MEDITERRANEAN COASTLINE



MORE THAN 50 MARINAS



With its 328 works of art and a unique landscape shaped by man, the canal du Midi is a true gem boasting an outstanding natural and built heritage. The technical feat of its excavation in the 17th century is, in itself, a remarkable civil engineering achievement. This is why it has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1996. A genuine link between the lands it passes through, the canal bears witness to successive eras and leaves an astonishingly diverse legacy of intangible heritage. Discover the history of the canal du Midi through anecdotes and by visiting and experiencing the must-see sites along the waterside!

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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

History

Designed in the 17th century by the engineer Pierre-Paul Riquet at Louis XIV's request and inaugurated in 1681, the canal du Midi runs for 240 kilometres and connects Toulouse to Sète, on the shores of the Mediterranean. An exceptional work of art, considered to be the largest construction site at the time (thousands of workers at work for 14 years), the canal du Midi opened a prosperous page in the history of river trade in the south of France by allowing goods, wheat in particular, to pass from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic without going around the Iberian Peninsula since the Garonne was then navigable downstream from Toulouse to Bordeaux. Nowadays, with the canal de Garonne, cruise ships no longer sail on the river to Langon (on the outskirts of Bordeaux).



Top 10 canal du Midi experiences

 A BIKE RIDE ALONG THE CANAL	 WATCHING A BOAT PASS THROUGH THE FONSERANES LOCKS	 THE CITY OF CARCASSONNE FIREWORKS DISPLAY ON 14TH JULY	 HAVING LUNCH IN A LOCK HOUSE
 A CRUISE ON THE CANAL	 THE CASSOULET FESTIVAL IN CASTELNAUDARY	 STOPOVER IN SÈTE OR THE WATER JOUSTING TOURNAMENT DURING THE FESTIVAL OF SAINT LOUIS IN SÈTE	 SLEEPING IN A FLOATING GUEST ROOM
 ENTERING THE DEPTHS OF THE ST-FERRÉOL RESERVOIR	 GOING TO A CONVIVENCIA CONCERT		

A gentle trip along the canal by bike or boat



Timeless, away from the hustle, the canal du Midi is a magnificent waterway shaded by ancient trees and punctuated by locks adorned with flowers, spectacular structures, cities of art and picturesque villages. It is perfect for a spot of slow tourism, either taking the cycle path that runs along it or during a cruise for a few hours or even several days.

BY BIKE

Which type of bike?

A mountain bike or a crossover bike.

How many days?

5 - 7 stages over the entire route between Toulouse and Sète (add 2 days for the canal de Garonne from Valence d'Agen to Toulouse).

What time of year?

April to October (opt for mid-season).

Where to rent a bike?

<https://en.canaldes2mersavelo.com/>

Where to have lunch?

In one of the lock houses that have been converted into restaurants.

Where to stay?

Choose accommodation with the "Accueil Vélo" label (committed to providing accommodation for cycling tourists).

What people say

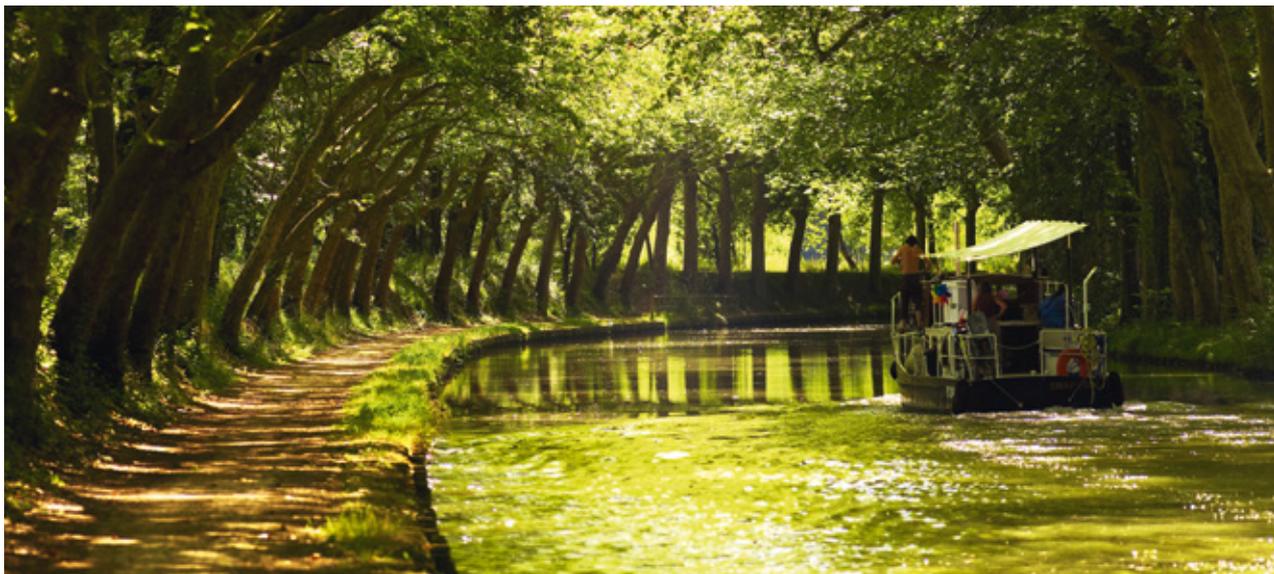
"The canal du Midi by bike? A destination that will appeal to everyone... sporty people, not so sporty people, families, people with babies (in a special child trailer) and even older people".
Mariode, blogger

Discover online: [sources-canal-du-midi](https://sources-canal-du-midi.com/) 

Did you know?

- Several organisations provide luggage transfer services so that you can travel lighter.
<http://bagafrance.com>
www.cyrpeo.com
<https://en.francevelotourisme.com/>
- You can return to your starting point by regional train with your bike at no extra charge.
<https://m.ter.sncf.com/occitanie>
- Specialist tour operators offer "turnkey" bike tours.
www.larebenne.com/fr/english
www.purelypyrenees.com/cycling-holidays.html





What people say

"The canal du Midi in a houseboat without a licence? Before leaving, an instructor from the rental company taught me how to steer the boat in 15/20 minutes and explained how to pass through the locks. I left the port, went straight ahead for 300 metres, did a U-turn and moored the boat.

Piece of cake!
Marie-Laure (blogger)



BY BOAT

Taking a sightseeing cruise (for an hour and a half or several days), renting an electric boat to steer yourself or, for a longer period, staying on a houseboat without a licence: messing about on the best river tourism route in Europe is a unique experience not to be missed.

Sightseeing cruises, with or without a meal, depending on the duration, depart from the main canal du Midi sites such as Toulouse, Castelnaudary, Carcassonne, Le Somail, Béziers and Sète (and on the canal de Garonne from Montech and Moissac).

How?

For a cruise lasting several days, several options are available:

- Enjoy the services on board a hotel boat with a crew

Discover online:
[peniche-blackmountain](#) 

Discover online:
[peniche-haricot-noir](#) 

or

- Be independent and steer your houseboat yourself without a licence, after a short introduction to navigation.

When?

Late March to early November.

At what speed?

6 km an hour on average.

Length of cruise?

From 2 days to a week



Must-see visits along the canal du Midi



The canal is a marvel in itself, with its many structures, while on both sides of the waterway you will enjoy unspoilt scenery, towns brimming with heritage and colourful villages with a Mediterranean atmosphere.

TOULOUSE, THE PINK CITY

The European Capital of Aeronautics and Space (Envol des Pionniers, Airbus assembly plants, Cité de l'Espace, Aéroscopia) and home to the Halle de la Machine, has some outstanding heritage. Here you can admire the Capitole, the Basilica of Saint-Sernin, the Jacobin convent, Saint-Etienne Cathedral and beautiful Renaissance mansions, including the Hôtel d'Assézat which is home to the Bemberg Foundation (Collection of paintings by Bonnard, Toulouse Lautrec, Modigliani, Picasso, etc.).

THE LAURAGAIS, LAND OF WOAD

With its fields of wheat and sunflowers punctuated by pink brick villages and their curious church bell gables, so typical of this region, the Lauragais is a fertile land where woad used to grow, a plant used as a dye and which made Toulouse very wealthy in the sixteenth century.

Discover online: [sources-canal-du-midi](https://sources-canal-du-midi.com) 

Did you know?

In Toulouse, where it starts at the Ponts Jumeaux (Twin Bridges), the canal du Midi is connected to the Garonne by the canal de Brienne and to the canal de Garonne which runs towards the Atlantic Ocean.

Discover online: [Toulouse](#) 





You can stop off at Port-Lauragais to enjoy the (free) permanent exhibition on the canal du Midi, discover the Seuil de Naurouze, where water from the Black Mountain supplies the canal du Midi towards the Atlantic Ocean on one side and on the other towards the Mediterranean Sea, carry on to Castelnaudary, whose remarkable basin is the largest port on the

canal and then move on to Bram, a curious medieval village with circular streets surrounding its beautiful 13th century church.

Worth a visit: 8 kilometres from Castelnaudary, Saint-Papoul Abbey has some superb Romanesque capitals in its 14th century cloister.

<https://en.castelnaudary-tourisme.com>

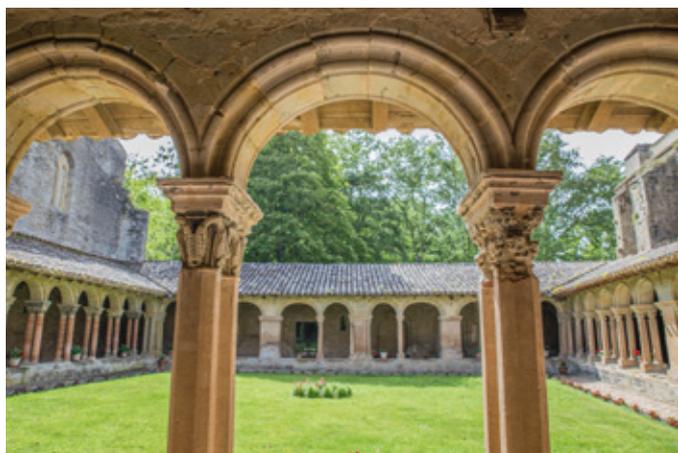


A few kilometres from the Seuil de Naurouze, the St-Ferréol Reservoir is the oldest dam in Europe. It was built between 1667 and 1672 to regulate the flow of water to the canal du Midi. This lake is now popular with holidaymakers who love its beautiful green setting and its magnificent romantic garden (waterfall and spray fountain), at the foot of the barrier.

The "Reservoir", a museum depicting the history of the canal and its water supply, has been built there. It is even possible, during a guided tour, to go inside the dam through a tunnel for a most unusual experience.

Discover online :

[the-reservoir-museum-of-canal-du-midi](https://www.reservoir-museum-of-canal-du-midi.com) 





CARCASSONNE

The medieval city of Carcassonne, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is world-renowned for its fortifications. This impressive fortress is still inhabited and, with its 3 km of walls and its 52 towers, is the largest in Europe. A tour of the Count's castle and the ramparts is a must.

Discover online: [Carcassonne](#) 



On the outskirts of the city stands the Château de Pennautier, known as the "mini Versailles of Languedoc". It has guest rooms for a timeless stay in stunning surroundings amidst the vineyards.

Discover online: [Château Pennautier](#) 

THE MINERVOIS REGION

To the east of Carcassonne begins the Minervois region, an area of vineyards, pine forests and charming villages. There is Trèbes with its canal bridge for crossing the Orbier River, La Redorte whose houses are perched above the canal, Homps and its lovely marina, but above all Minerve, one of the "most beautiful villages in France" and a centre of Catharism.

Discover online: [La Redorte](#) 

THE AREA AROUND NARBONNE

Le Somail, the perfect picture-postcard of the canal du Midi, was created by Pierre-Paul Riquet as a night stopover for post boats and is an adorable village whose old bridge over the canal is topped by a chapel lapped by the water. The Tourist Office is housed in an old building beside the canal and has two multimedia rooms where you can learn all about the history of the canal du Midi and the canal de la Robine.

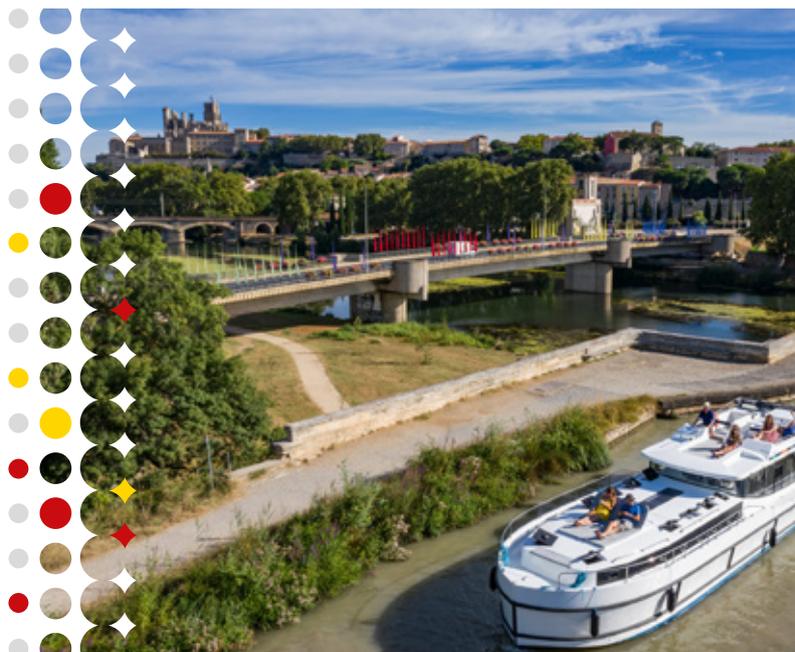
Narbonne is joined to the canal du Midi by a connecting canal that then extends to the sea through the lakes, by the canal de la Robine (also listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site). Lined with umbrella pines, these canals are great places for walks.

This city has a rich architectural heritage and is classified as a "City of Art and History", with the largest episcopal complex in France after the Palais des Papes in Avignon. Its prestigious Roman past can still be seen at the horreum, an underground warehouse, and now at the Narbo Via Museum, entirely dedicated to the Roman antiquity of the city of Narbo Martius (the Latin name of Narbonne). A visit to Narbonne would not be complete without exploring the Cistercian Abbey of Fontfroide, an architectural gem set among the forests.

Between Le Somail and Narbonne, Amphoralis, the museum of Gallo-Roman potters, is another must-see attraction.

Discover online: [Narbonne Roman holidays](#) 





THE AREA AROUND BÉZIERS

Béziers, a historic city of Catharism, is also the birthplace of Pierre-Paul Riquet, the ingenious designer of the canal du Midi (see below).

Here you can admire Saint-Nazaire Cathedral built on a promontory overlooking the Orb. On the outskirts of Béziers and a few kilometres to the west, the canal du Midi has three remarkable structures to visit: the Locks of Fonsérannes, the canal Bridge over the Orb and the Malpas Tunnel (see Page 13).

At Nissan-lez-Ensérune, the Oppidum d'Ensérune is an exciting archaeological site, the remains of a remarkably well-preserved pre-Roman city.

Discover online: [canal du Midi - Béziers](#) ↗

Pierre Paul Riquet

Born in Béziers in 1609, he was the brilliant designer of the canal du Midi, his life's work. He died in Toulouse, where he was buried in Saint-Etienne Cathedral in 1680, one year before the work was completed.

Many sites around the canal du Midi evoke his presence today:

- In Toulouse, his 1st house can be seen at 1, Place Salengro while a monumental effigy of him has been erected at the top of the Allées Jean-Jaurès, surprisingly with his back to the canal and his bust sits in the Salle des Illustres at the Capitole (City Hall).
- Another statue, unveiled in 1838, is in the middle of the Allées Paul-Riquet in Béziers.
- The Château de Bonrepos-Riquet, 20 km east of Toulouse, is one of the properties he lived in: it was there that he designed the entire water flow mechanism, using a model of the canal rebuilt in the castle grounds. This site is open to visitors.

Discover online: [canal-du-midi](#) ↗

- At the Seuil de Naurouze, an obelisk and a memorial honour his work while in the marketplace at Revel, a plaque identifies a house where he also lived.

- Between Homps and Le Somail (Aude), the Château de Paraza, where he lived while the canal was being built, is today a renowned wine estate where you can stay in luxurious guest rooms.

www.chateau-de-paraza.com/en/





AGDE, A CITY BUILT ON A VOLCANO!

An ancient Greek city on the banks of the Orb, Agde is worth a visit to take a look at its beautiful private mansions and its fortress-like cathedral built from basalt. Everything here is black! We should point out that the city is built on a volcano!

At Cap d'Agde, the nearby seaside resort, you should make sure you visit the Museum of Ephèbe and underwater archaeology, famous for its splendid Greek statue found in the waters of the Hérault River that flows through Agde.

www.en.capdagde.com/

SÈTE AND THE THAU LAKE

At the foot of Mont Saint-Clair, an ancient island now attached to the land, and alongside the Thau lake, Sète is the final stage of the canal du Midi. Called "the little Venice of Languedoc", this bustling port city (1st fishing port in the French Mediterranean) will charm you with its canals, its Museum of Contemporary Art and its maze of alleyways climbing the slopes of Mont Saint-Clair with its stunning view of the city and the lagoon.

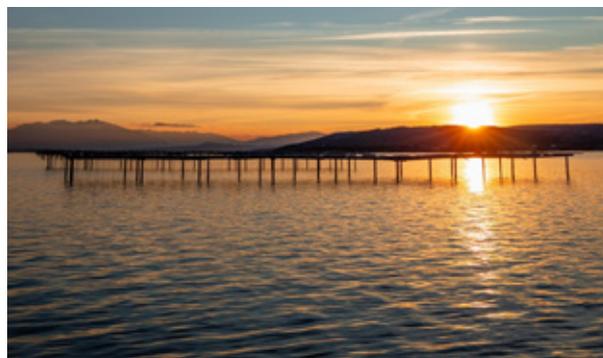
<https://en.tourisme-sete.com/>

To the east of Sète, another canal connects to the Rhône and from there the entire European river network.



Did you know?

Due to its geological peculiarity, Agde was nicknamed the "black pearl of the Mediterranean" by Marco Polo.



The structures along the canal

64 locks, 55 aqueducts, 7 canal bridges spanning rivers and 126 humpback bridges over the canal were built along its 250 km... in all nearly 350 structures! It really did warrant being listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site!

The 9 Locks of Fonsérannes, at the western entrance of Béziers, allow boats to rise or descend an impressive 21.5 metres over a distance of 312 metres. Completely restored in 2019, they are the canal du Midi's major structure. The canal bridge over the Orb takes the canal across the river to continue its course towards Sète.

The Malpas Tunnel is 173 metres in length and a great achievement: it was the first time that a tunnel had been dug under a "mountain". Incidentally, Colbert, King Louis XIV's comptroller general of finance, refused to allow this tunnel to be dug, but Pierre-Paul Riquet had it dug nevertheless without his knowledge.



Did you know?

Among the 64 locks to be discovered, one of them, the Agde Lock, is notable for its shape. All of them are oval except for this one, which is round!

To be sampled along the way



TOP QUALITY WINE

Occitania is the biggest wine region in France. From Carcassonne to Sète, the canal du Midi passes through a "sea of vines" and many cellars are open to visitors.

Grouped together under the appellation "Wines of Languedoc", local productions include the wines of Corbières, Minervois and St-Chinian as well as Picpoul de Pinet and the wines of La Clape, to name just the most well-known ones.



FAVOURITES:

The "Maison des vins du Minervois" in Homps, alongside the canal

Discover online:
[Maison des vins du Minervois](#)

CASSOULET WARS

Be it with or without duck, this simmered dish made with white beans and pork sausage is the must-have dish of the region. Carcassonne, Castelnaudary and Toulouse all claim that they invented it and each of these cities has proclaimed itself the "cassoulet capital"!



Did you know?

At the end of each summer in Castelnaudary, the traditional cassoulet festival takes place, an unmissable event that attracts thousands of visitors from France and elsewhere.



Did you know?

The favourite Vermouth of James Bond, the famous Agent 007, is produced by the Maison Noilly-Pratin Marseillan, on the edge of the Thau lake. You must stop by to try it and discover all the secrets of how it is produced.

Discover online : [Maison Noilly-Prat](#)



UNUSUAL

At Mas Saint-Puelles, you can visit the Not Pottery where they make 'cassoles', the earthenware dish used to cook cassoulet in the oven.

Discover online : [Poterie Not](#)



TYPICAL MEDITERRANEAN PRODUCTS

The Mediterranean climate is perfect for growing olives. Lucques olives are a local variety of olive which thrives in Occitania. You'll be able to visit the oil mill and the Oulibo cooperative in Bize-Minervois to learn more about this delicious olive shaped like a crescent moon.

www.loulibo.com/?lang=en

As you get nearer the sea, you'll be able to sample, on the waterfront, the delicious oysters from the Thau lake produced by the lagoon's many oyster farmers, accompanied by a lovely glass of Picpoul de Pinet, the local white wine.

Do you know about Sète 'tielles'?

These deliciously spicy octopus pies are the unmissable speciality of Sète.

Discover online: [the famous tielle](#) 



Must-see events

Along the canal or in the towns the canal runs through, there are many traditional festivals and events organised throughout the year. Focus on the most spectacular:

Festival Convivencia: From Toulouse to Sète, a canal boat transformed into a sailing stage offers musical stopovers along the canal du Midi. This free festival takes place every summer, in July.

In Carcassonne, put the 14th of July (the French National Holiday) in your diaries so that you can marvel at "the burning of the City", one of the most fantastic firework displays in France which attracts hundreds of thousands of spectators in





the evening. Throughout July if not, the Théâtre de la Cité serves as an idyllic setting for the renowned Carcassonne Festival which features international music stars on its programme every year.

<https://festivaldecarcassonne.fr/en>

In Sète, where the trip ends, you simply must go to the Jazz à Sète Festival and the Saint Louis Festival in summer or, every other year at Easter, the largest gathering of old sailing ships in the Mediterranean: Escale à Sète.

Discover online : [Escale à Sète](#) 



Unusual spots to slow down along the canal



As the canal du Midi's commercial activity has disappeared in favour of pleasure boating, many canal boats, old buildings or lock houses have been restored and converted into self-catering holiday homes, guest houses, heritage sites, restaurants or cultural venues. Selection of the best conversions:

Where to eat, have tea and buy specialities

In a lock house converted into a restaurant:

- at Le Vélo Sentimental, opposite Toulouse central station, a haven of peace amidst the hustle and bustle of the city.
www.maisonduvelotoulouse.com/en/dine/



- along the water, the guinguettes (Toulouse).

www.toulouse-visit.com/guinguettes

- at L'Ecluse du Castanet, only 12 km from Toulouse.

- at L'Estanquet (Gardouch), a lovely retro bistro restaurant with the air of a riverside café.

On a canal boat

- at the "Le Tamata" grocery barge (Le Somail): a boat converted into a floating grocery store where you can both buy and sample a selection of regional products.

- at La Maison de la Violette (Toulouse) where you can enjoy a violet tea, the emblematic flower of the "Pink City", and discover the entire range of violet-based products.

www.lamaisondelaviolette.com/en/

- at Le Capharnarhum: a rum bar on one of the most colourful canal boats, moored in Béziers not far from the 9 Locks of Fonsérannes.

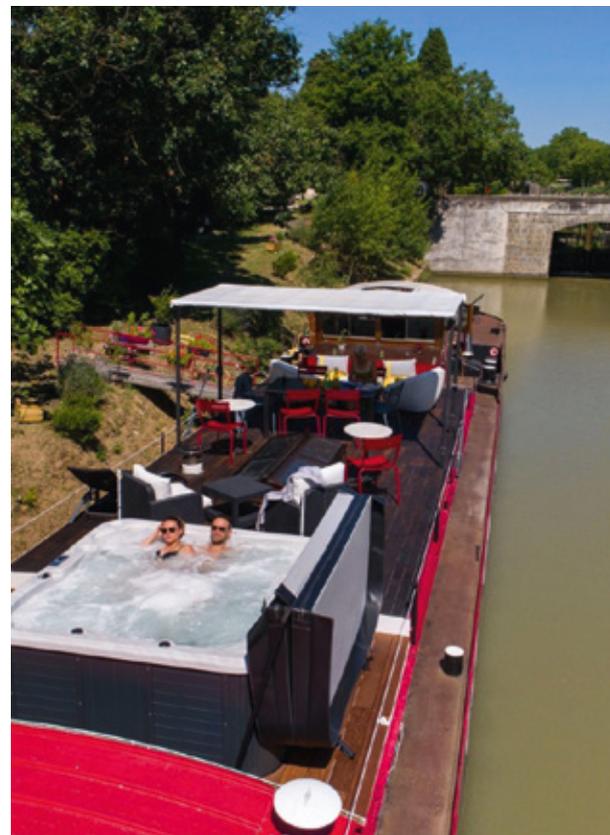
- at "Le Fox-troc", a river herbalist store (and alternative grocery store), between Le Somail and Colombiers, which operates on the principle of free prices, exchange and barter!

Where to stay

- on the Péniche Amboise houseboat (Toulouse), 4 guest rooms with a jacuzzi and terrace.

www.peniche-amboise.com

- on the Péniche Mirage houseboat in Carcassonne (www.mirage-hotes.fr/en/), the Soleiado houseboat in Ramonville (<http://peniche-soleiado.com>), or the L'Appart des Angès houseboat in Cers (www.appartdesanges.com/crbst_10.html), a gay-friendly houseboat.



Where to go for entertainment, culture and well-being

- to La Maison Nougaro on the Sanctanox canal boat (Toulouse) – a convivial heritage site that pays tribute to Claude Nougaro, the most famous Toulouse singer of all (1929 – 2004).

