

FRANCE

Travel • Food & Wine • Culture • Holidays

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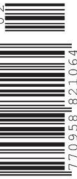
YEARS
OF DIOR

How the designer
took inspiration from
Normandy and put
Paris on the
map

Burgundy *riches*

Trace the region's
Gallo-Roman heritage
on a stroll in Autun

£4.99



ALPINE APPETITE

Swap the slopes for the dining scene in Megève

CURIOSITY CORNER

The making of Marie Tussaud and her models

SIP AND STAY

A Saint-Émilion château estate in a class of its own

VISIT VALENCE

Capital of Drôme and gateway to the south



Take a stroll

Charming scenery and beautiful vistas





AUTUN

Paola Westbeek traces Burgundy's rich Gallo-Roman heritage on a trip to Saône-et-Loire

The history of Autun, located in the south of Burgundy's Parc Régional du Morvan, begins in 15 BC when Roman Emperor Augustus founded Augustodunum as a replacement for Bibracte, a Gallic city crowning Mont Beuvray. The Aedui, as its people were called, were happy to leave behind the cold, mountainous air in exchange for their new and modern capital where *thermae* and other luxuries awaited. Fortunately, Autun's Gallo-Roman origins are still evident on the outskirts of the town and well worth exploring before heading for a stroll through the pleasant centre.

Ancient ramparts

I am in awe as I gaze up at the ruins of the Temple of Janus, situated approximately two kilometres northwest of the *centre-ville* and listed as a Monument Historique since 1840. Today, the two remaining walls tower at 24 metres amidst a vast patch of land. "Archaeological research has shown that people lived where we are now standing," says Thibault Breuillé, director of Autun's tourism office.

"This was a wealthy quarter,

and aerial photography even revealed traces of an ancient Roman theatre in a nearby field." There is a theatre to the east of town (known to have been the largest in the Roman world) which can still be admired today. In its heyday, it seated 20,000 spectators. "The fact that Autun once had two theatres is unique," Breuillé points out. "Back then, only Rome had two theatres."

The exact origins of the Temple of Janus remain a mystery, yet there is still something otherworldly about the location. Perhaps it's the Morvan's verdant hills in the distance, or the peaceful atmosphere that inspires a moment of contemplation.

A little under 2km east is Porte d'Arroux, part of Autun's ancient ramparts. Dating back to the 1st century, it is one of the two remaining gates (there used to be four). Cars pass through the large, arched passageways (originally built for chariots) and the smaller ones are still used by pedestrians.

The other gate, Porte Saint-André, was once part of the Via Agrippa, a network of roads constructed by the Romans. The gate was partially restored in the 19th century by architect Viollet-le-Duc.

PHOTOS: BLUEJAYPHOTO / GETTY IMAGES



DID YOU KNOW
Autun is twinned with Stevenage in Hertfordshire, UK

From Rolin to Napoléon

In the town's medieval quarter we stop by Musée Rolin, named after Nicolas Rolin who was born there in 1376. Rolin was chancellor to the Duke of Burgundy and an important figure in the region's history. In 1443, he established the famous L'Hôtel-Dieu in Beaune, situated about an hour east of Autun. Rolin's former mansion has housed the town's museum since 1880, but major renovations will soon start.

"Within a period of five years, Musée Rolin will expand into the neighbouring circular prison (a historic monument dating to the 19th century) and the former Palais de Justice," Breuillé mentions. Judging from the sketch of what the completed project will look like, it will definitely become a highlight of Autun.

The Cathédrale Saint-Lazare, opposite the museum,

is the jewel of Autun. It was built starting in 1120 as a pilgrimage site for the relics of Lazarus, and it also holds the relics of Saint-Vincent, patron saint of winemakers. The Romanesque cathedral with Gothic elements is famous for its magnificent sculptures and exquisite tympanum depicting The Last Judgement, executed by Gislebertus, one of the most renowned sculptors.

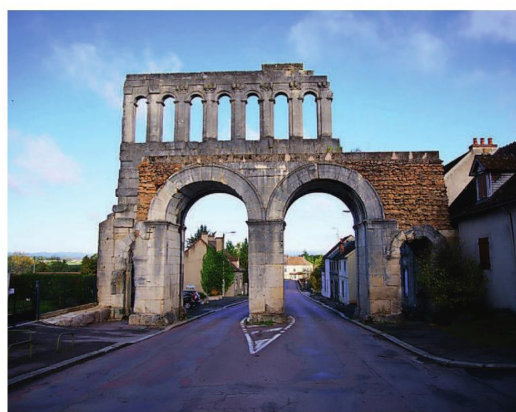
Our tour ends on Place du Champ de Mars where there is a lively coming and going of market-goers and students from Lycée Bonaparte, the former Jesuit college where Napoléon and his brother also studied. The Friday morning market held in front of the Hôtel de Ville is drawing to an end, and restaurants are getting ready to serve *le déjeuner*, which in this part of France, is always a wine-infused celebration. 🍷



Above: The Temple of Janus with the Morvan hills in the distance

Left: Victoire Ganay, owner of Le Cocand

Below: Porte d'Arroux, part of Autun's ancient ramparts



IN THE AREA



To the wine connoisseur, Burgundy is synonymous with the Côte-d'Or. Often referred to as the 'golden slope', the east-facing escarpment produces some of the world's most prestigious wines. Think of big names such as Gevrey-Chambertin and Puligny-Montrachet. These are the giants that have made the region famous. A bottle bearing such a name can be pricey, but if you head further south past the Côte de Beaune into the Saône-et-Loire *département*, you will find the Côte Chalonnaise – a region which is similar to the Côte-d'Or yet produces wines that are significantly more affordable and certainly worth discovering. Its vineyards stretch out over approximately

25 kilometres and are found at altitudes between 220 and 400 kilometres. The two most important grape varieties produced on the region's clay-limestone soils are pinot noir (for red wines) and chardonnay (for white wines). The exception is the Bouzeron *appellation* in the north which produces mainly white wines made almost exclusively from the aligoté grape.

To the northwest of the region, is the Côtes du Couchois covering six *communes* and known for its elegant pinot noirs.

A good way to discover the *appellations* of these relatively underestimated wine districts is to plan a trip that includes some panoramic drives through the vineyards, plenty of tastings and a few visits to regional restaurants.



Above: Vineyards of the Côte Chalonnaise

Francophile

TOURIST INFORMATION:

autun-tourisme.com

Département: Saône-et-Loire (71)



GETTING THERE

By car: Autun is 3 hours 45 minutes southeast of Paris on the A6/N81. Or from Aéroport de Dole, it is a 90-minute drive west to reach Autun.



WHERE TO STAY

Le Cocand

Tel: (FR) 7 58 35 65 96
lecocand.com

Conveniently located next to the cathedral and museum and offering two beautiful gîtes (each accommodating four)

with access to a sunny courtyard. Owner Victoire de Ganay also happens to be a passionate wine expert who hosts fun and informative workshops and events in her handsome vaulted cellar where an authentic stone fireplace and French *chansons* playing softly in the background add to the pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. Gîtes from €85 per night.



WHERE TO EAT

Le Chateaubriant

Tel: (FR) 3 85 52 21 58
lechateaubriant-autun.com

At this cosy and welcoming restaurant, you can indulge in traditional regional cuisine with a fine selection of wines. The 'Formule Bourguignonne' (€23) features the best *oeufs en meurette* (poached eggs in wine sauce) you'll ever taste!



WHERE TO VISIT

On Wednesday and Friday morning, shop for regional specialities

at the lively market held on Place du Champ de Mars. Not to be missed is the annual Foire de la Saint-Ladre which has been taking place every 1 September since medieval times.

