

# 48 HOURS

## MARSEILLE

Say bonjour to France's second city, writes Mary Novakovich

**M**arseille might be the ugly duckling of French city breaks, but it's on its way to becoming a swan. Long overshadowed by the romance of Paris or the celebrity chic of Cannes, and with a somewhat rough-and-ready reputation, it's never been top of the list of must-visit cities.

Now, though, things are changing: the cosmopolitan Provençal capital became easier to get to last spring when Eurostar launched its year-round direct fast train from St Pancras. Within about six hours of leaving London, holidaymakers can be sitting at a Vieux Port cafe or soaking up the sun on one of Marseille's beaches.

Thanks to its stint as European City of Culture in 2013, Marseille also received a much-needed clean-up, including banishing most of the traffic that had been choking the port area. Imaginatively designed museums

and galleries sprang up, and the old Joliette docks where cruise ships arrive, north of the port, has been turned into a revitalised cultural and gastro hub.

That doesn't mean Marseille's rougher edges have been smoothed over – the city is as vibrant and exciting as ever, with the bonus of a buzzing restaurant scene and some of the best and freshest seafood in France.

### ▶ DAY ONE

**09.00:** Start the morning in the Vieux Port, where Norman Foster's giant mirrored sunshade, l'Ombrière, gives a fun perspective on the space. At this time of the morning, the boisterous fish market is in full swing.

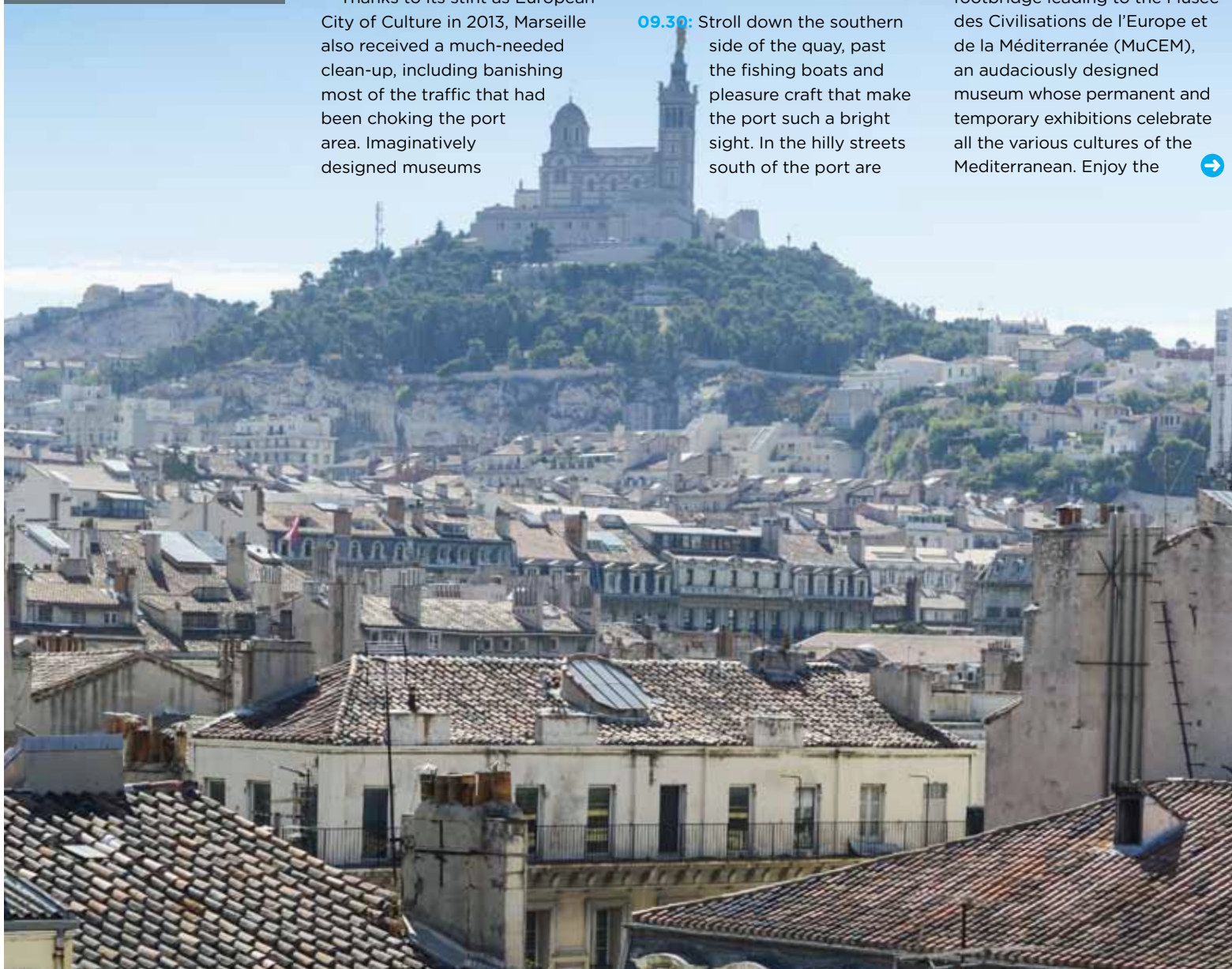
**09.30:** Stroll down the southern side of the quay, past the fishing boats and pleasure craft that make the port such a bright sight. In the hilly streets south of the port are

some of the city's latest trendy cafes, including Bar de la Relève on rue d'Endoume. You can pop into Le Marché Saint-Victor for a coffee and a trawl round the food stalls in this mini market.

**marchesaintvictor.fr**

**10.30:** Head back to the Vieux Port and catch the little foot ferry that shuttles across the water. The northern quayside eventually leads to the imposing 17th-century Fort Saint-Jean, accessed via a footbridge at the top of a wide stone staircase. Take in the panoramic views of the Mediterranean from the fort's gardens.

**11.00:** The fort has another footbridge leading to the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM), an audaciously designed museum whose permanent and temporary exhibitions celebrate all the various cultures of the Mediterranean. Enjoy the



PICTURES: ATOUT FRANCE/CEDRIC HELSIX, FRANCOIS-XAVIER PREVOT, ROBERT PALOMBA; EDWIGE LAMY; FOSTER + PARTNERS/NIGEL YOUNG; P TERRAZ



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## DESTINATIONS MARSEILLE ITALY & FRANCE



### WHERE TO STAY: MARSEILLE

#### SAVE

The new three-star **Alex Hotel** is handy for holidaymakers travelling via Eurostar, as it's right by the main St-Charles railway station. It's a cut above the usual station hotel, though, with airy modern rooms and a little courtyard garden where breakfast is served on warm days. Doubles from €98, room only.  
[alex-hotel.fr](http://alex-hotel.fr)

#### SPEND

**Casa Honoré** used to be a printworks, but this laid-back B&B in Rue Sainte now features stylish rooms inspired by the Fifties and the Seventies. All rooms overlook the charming courtyard garden, which is graced by a pool, a rare treat in central Marseille. Doubles from €150, including breakfast.  
[casahonore.com](http://casahonore.com)

#### SPLURGE

The five-star **InterContinental Hotel Dieu** is in one of Marseille's most historic buildings, an 18th-century landmark on the edge of Le Panier. Sumptuous contemporary rooms have excellent views of the Vieux Port, and the Clarins Spa, indoor pool and fine-dining restaurant add to the luxurious mood. Doubles from €204, room-only.  
[marseille.intercontinental.com](http://marseille.intercontinental.com)



➔ views from the museum's roof terrace before taking the covered outdoor staircase that slinks around the building.  
[mucem.org](http://mucem.org)

**13.00:** Carry on along the Quai de la Tourette to see how the Joliette docks district has been transformed. Tucked into old warehouses and the former vaults of the Cathédrale de la Major are numerous restaurants and shops - with more to come. Grab a table outside Les Halles de la Major, a larger version of Le Marché de Saint-Victor, which combines restaurants with food stalls, including a fresh-fish counter and a deli.  
[leshallesdelamajor.com](http://leshallesdelamajor.com)

**14.30:** Take a post-lunch wander through the atmospheric streets of Le Panier, which start to

climb behind the Cathédrale de la Major. It's Marseille's oldest district, full of cobbled streets, colourful shops and quirky galleries and workshops. For another cultural fix, pop into Vieille Charité, a 17th-century former almshouse that now has several museums, a cinema and a cultural centre within its graceful interior.  
[vieille-charite-marseille.com](http://vieille-charite-marseille.com)

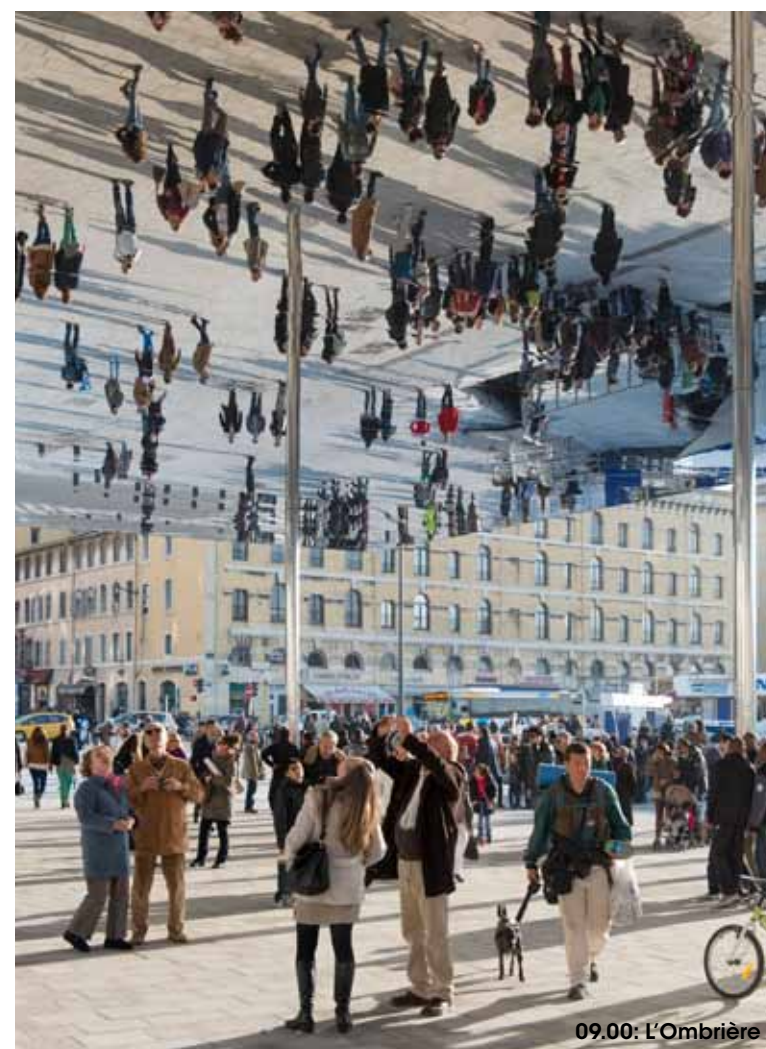
**15.30:** Head back to the Vieux Port where, from March to September, an hourly water shuttle (the 'batobus') goes to the sandy beach at Pointe Rouge. After September you'll have to make do with the bus, but it's worth the effort to chill out on this crescent-shaped beach, which is less frenetic than some of those closer to the city, such as Prado and Catalans.

**20.00:** Check out the bars in Cours Julien, a funky district west of the port, before dinner in the enchanting courtyard garden of La Cantinetta. It's worth booking ahead to sample the superior Italian cuisine.

#### DAY TWO

**09.00:** If the weather is behaving itself, hop on the boat that leaves from the Vieux Port to the Frioul archipelago. It's only a 20-minute journey to Château d'If, the forbidding 16th-century fortress and prison that was the setting for Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*.  
[frioul-if-express.com](http://frioul-if-express.com)

**10.00:** Those staying on dry land can take the number 60 bus (or face a steep half-mile hike) to Marseille's highest point, where Notre Dame de la Garde lords ➔



09.00: L'Ombrière



09.30: Vieux Port



13.00: Cathédrale de la Major

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→ it over the city. La Bonne Mère, as the church is nicknamed, is a shimmering vision of gold and neo-Byzantine opulence and is regarded as Marseille's emblem.

[notredamedelagarde.com](http://notredamedelagarde.com)

**12.00:** Take a relaxed amble through seven hectares of ornamental 19th-century gardens at Parc Longchamp. At its entrance stand the enormous fountain and columns of the Palais Longchamp monument, which houses the natural history museum and the fine art gallery.

[museum-marseille.org](http://museum-marseille.org)

[musee-des-beaux-arts.marseille.fr](http://musee-des-beaux-arts.marseille.fr)

**13.00:** Try some of Marseille's best seafood at La Boîte à Sardine, a manic little restaurant and fishmonger at

the top of La Canebière, the long boulevard that stretches west of the port. It's open only at lunchtime, and its selection of fresh fish includes unusual creatures such as sea urchins and sea anemones.

[laboiteasardine.com](http://laboiteasardine.com)

**14.00:** Browse vintage shops in the colourful graffiti-covered streets of Cours Julien. One of the additions to the Joliette docks area is Les Terrasses du Port, a large shopping centre with a rooftop bar. It's only open Thursday to Saturday from 6pm and Sunday from 2.30pm, but the views are fantastic.

[lesterrassesduport.com](http://lesterrassesduport.com)

**20.00:** Seafood lovers can't leave Marseille without an authentic experience of eating bouillabaisse,

the classic French dish that is widely accepted to have been invented here. This rich fish stew has been mucked about with so much that a group of chefs in Marseille went so far as to set up a charter outlining exactly what goes into it. Two of the best places to indulge in this expensive dish are Le Miramar in the Vieux Port and L'Épuisette overlooking the fishing port of Vallon des Auffes, south of the Plages des Catalans.

[lemiramar.fr](http://lemiramar.fr)

[l-epuisette.fr](http://l-epuisette.fr)

**22.00:** End the evening with a drink at one of the trendy bars along Rue Sainte. La Part des Anges at No 33 is a convivial place run by three wine aficionados who really know their stuff.

[lapartdesanges.com](http://lapartdesanges.com) 



## DO

Hire an electric bike to make light work of the city's hills. E.Bike Tours Marseille runs small group tours with visits to the Calanques National Park. [ebiketours.fr](http://ebiketours.fr)

## DON'T

Try to see everything on foot. There's a lot of ground to cover in Marseille, so take advantage of the metro, tram and bus networks, which are all easy to navigate.



10.00: La Bonne Mère



14.00: Cours Julien



22.00: La Part des Anges