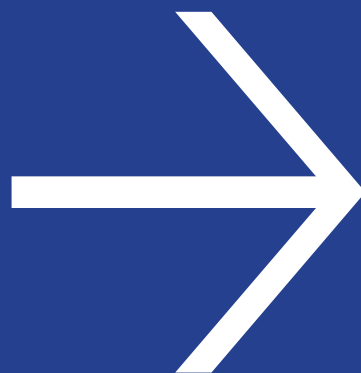


FRANCE

2019-20



PARIS
BREST
DIJON
NICE
ANGERS
MONACO
NANTES
METZ
LYON
REIMS
LILLE
TOULOUSE
NÎMES
RENNES
STRASBOURG
MARSEILLE
AMIENS
BORDEAUX

MONTPELLIER
SAINT-ÉTIENNE



FRANCE 2019-20

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Previously regarded as the fifth of the five big leagues, **France** is now more of a major force thanks to unprecedented investment in two previously underachieving clubs, **Paris Saint-Germain** and **Monaco**.

Factor in the major modernisations, rebuilds and new builds for Euro 2016, and the game in France can no longer be considered second-fiddle.

Even **St-Étienne**, the great French side of the 1970s are back in Europe. Their predecessors as European pioneers, **Stade de Reims**, from the earliest days of the European Cup, returned to the top flight in 2012 after more than three decades.

All cities are essentially one-club affairs, flagships whose local rivalries are regional, grudges harking back to Carolingian times. This means, in turn, that a top-tier groundhop involves a trek – unlike across the border in Spain or Italy, there are no cross-city derbies or staggered fixtures over a weekend. The last other Parisian club to play top-flight football was Racing in 1990.

The solitary French winners of Europe's premier trophy, **Marseille**, have the kind of mass fan culture seen in Naples, pure tribalism.

Diagonally opposite on the map, football in Brittany – a proudly Celtic region with its own language, bagpipes

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The digital travel guide for football fans, **liberoguide.com** is the most up-to-date resource, city-by-city, club-by-club, to the game across Europe and North America. Using only original photos and first-hand research, taken and undertaken over seven seasons, **liberoguide.com** has been put together to enhance every football weekend and Euro night experience. From airport to arena, downtown sports bar to hotel, **liberoguide.com** helps you get the best out of your visit to football's furthest corners and showcase stadiums.

and cola soda drink – has been enjoying a spell in the top-flight spotlight, with newly promoted **Brest** joining **Rennes** and **Nantes**. Recently relegated yet still buoyant Lorient and Guingamp may well rejoin them.

Due south, rugby still holds sway in a swathe stretching between the football hubs of **Bordeaux** and **Montpellier**. The oval-ball code attracts higher gates in **Toulouse**, for example.



In the country's second city of **Lyon**, however, rugby takes a back seat, or rather an old stadium, the **Gerland**, whereas **Olympique Lyonnais**, seven-time consecutive Ligue 1 winners in the early 2000s, bask in the mainly self-owned **Groupama Arena**, all 59,000 seats of it.

The French national team, world champions in 2018, play prime fixtures at the 80,000-capacity **Stade de France**. Also stage for the finals of the two main cup competitions, the Coupe de France and the Coupe de la Ligue, this showcase arena still hovers head and shoulders above the identikit stadia being built all over Europe. ➔

FRANCE 2019-20

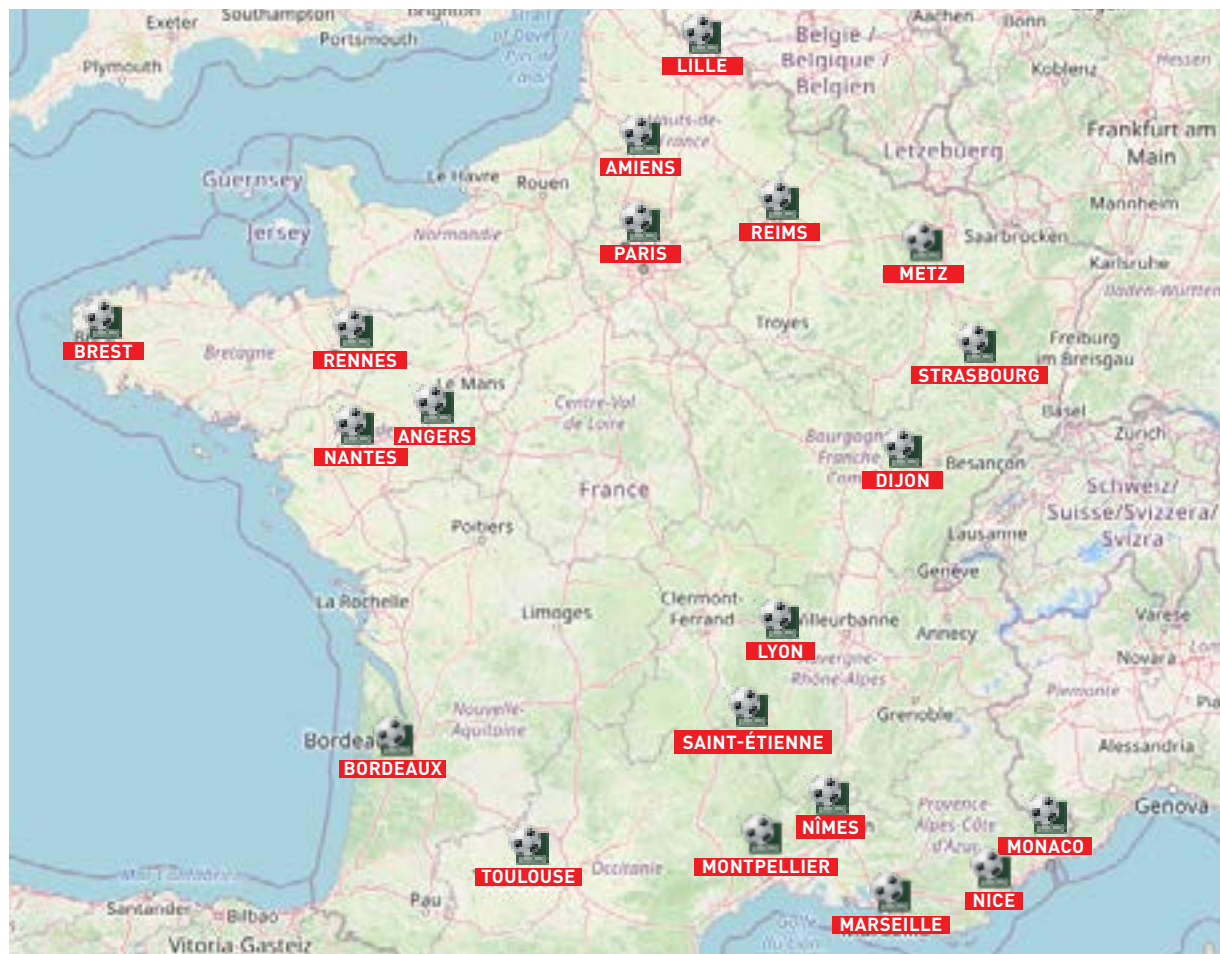
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Station to stadium

The main **budget airlines** fly to and around France. National carrier **Air France** (airfrance.com/en) also offers economy fares for inland flights, after taking over its own low-cost subsidiary, **HOP!**

Paris Gare du Nord is around 2hrs 15min from **London St Pancras** by **Eurostar** (eurostar.com/rw-en) via **Lille**. Seasonal services go straight to the **French Alps**, and non-stop ones south to **Lyon**, **Avignon** and **Marseille**.

Changing trains in Paris is otherwise easy by **métro**, for the main stations of **Gares de Lyon** (for the Mediterranean), **d'Austerlitz** (the south-west), **de l'Est** (the east), **Montparnasse** (the west) and **St-**



Lazare (Normandy and the west). From Gare du Nord, trains head north and north-west.

Find train information and discounts for advance downloadable tickets at **SNCF** (sncf.com/en), with bookings via **OUI** (en.oui.sncf/en). Paper tickets issued at station offices must be validated in puncher machines near/on platforms. Beware, also, that strikes are commonplace.

Cross-country coaches are a recent introduction – the main one, **OUIBUS** (ouibus.com) became **BlaBlaBus** in 2019. Online booking and e-tickets are the norm, ID required upon boarding.

Motorways, *autoroutes*, have tollgates, *péages* – take a ticket as you enter, pay with cash (change given) or card as you leave. No **vignette** is required. Calculate your route/cost at **Autoroutes** (autoroutes.fr). N roads are free if slower.

Many French cities have an efficient **transport network**, invariably a swish **tramway**.

Tables & trophies

The **French league system** runs from the top two professional divisions to the lowest district level.

Top-flight **Ligue 1** consists of 20 teams, who play each other home and away. The top three qualify for the **Champions League group stage**, the fourth, the **Europa League group stage**. Fifth or even sixth may also qualify depending on who wins either/both of the two cups.

The bottom two swap with the top two of 20-team **Ligue 2**. 18th-placed finishers play off over two legs with the Ligue 2 winner of its promotional play-offs. These involve a one-off match between the fourth-placed Ligue 2 finisher and the fifth, then another between the third-placed side and that winner – always at the ground of the higher-placed club. If necessary, like when **Lens** overcame **Paris FC** in 2019, extra-time and penalties decide. Lens then lost over two legs to **Dijon**, the 18th-placed Ligue 1 finisher, who maintained top-tier status for 2019-20.

The bottom two of Ligue 2 swap directly with the top two of the next level down, the semi-professional, third-flight, 18-team **Championnat** →



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National. Team 18 in Ligue 2 plays off over two legs with the third-placed CN finisher. The bottom four of the Championnat National drop straight down to the **National 2**.

This fourth tier is divided into four regional divisions, A to D, reserve sides of some Ligue 1 clubs competing with top amateur ones. Each group winner goes up – reserve sides cannot be promoted but can be relegated.

The bottom 12 across the four groups go down to the **National 3**, usually three from each but bankruptcies and late reprieves can and do occur.

This fifth tier comprises 168 clubs, categorised by region into 12 groups (A-M) of 14. Each winner goes up (including reserve sides), and the bottom three, usually, go down to Regional 1. This sixth tier then devolves into three more by region before departmental level takes over. This descends three or four more tiers, even, in rare cases, to level 17.

The French Cup, la **Coupe de France**, is venerable and prestigious. It is also unusual as it involves clubs from overseas territories such as Guadeloupe and Martinique in the Caribbean, French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Réunion in the Indian Ocean.

Ties are decided on the day, by extra-time and penalties if need be.



Of the 14 rounds, the first seven are structured by region. Once professional clubs enter, those drawn against opposition two levels below must play the tie away – in 2018, third-tier **Les Herbiers VF** made the final, which takes place at the Stade de France in early May. The cup winners go through to the **Europa League group stage**.

The League Cup, **Coupe de la Ligue**, is for professional clubs in the top three leagues. Games, including April's final at the Stade de France, are one-tie only,

decided by extra-time and penalties if needed. The winners enter the **Europa League second qualifying round**.

Season's dealings

The Ligue 1 season starts early-to-mid August and finishes in mid May. Ligue 2 starts a week earlier. Both have a winter break, for around three weeks, just before Christmas into the second week of January.

The classic slot for Ligue 1 is 8pm on Saturday. You can also expect a game at

8.30pm on Friday, 5pm on Saturday and two or three on Sunday, generally 2pm, 5pm and 9pm. Timings are set around a month ahead.

The main slot for Ligue 2 is 8pm on Friday. Games are usually scheduled for 2pm on Saturday and 8.30pm Monday.

Entry level

Most clubs have online sales – look for the *billetterie* option on websites. Tickets are also often distributed in club shops and the *guichet* windows at the stadium



in the run-up to the match and before kick-off.

With average Ligue 1 gates just above 20,000, few games sell out. The exceptions are Marseille, Paris St-Germain and the visits of either around the country.

Ticket agencies such as **France Billet** (francebillet.com), **Fnac** (fnacspectacles.com), **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr/en/index), and hypermarket chains **Carrefour** (en.spectacles.carrefour.fr) and **Auchan** (billetterie.auchan.fr), also distribute. Not all websites are English-friendly and some only accept payment by cards issued from French banks.

The cheapest places are behind the goal, the *virages*. The main stand is the *tribune principale*, the best seats in the *tribune d'honneur* or *présidentielle*. The lower tier is *inférieur*, upper *supérieur*.

Tickets are reasonably affordable, usually around €12-15 behind the goal, a decent seat along the sideline (*tribune latérale*) around €25-30. **L3**



FRANCE 2019-20 Paris

www.liberoguide.com/paris



Paris

The World Cup, the European Championship and the European Cup were devised in the boardrooms of **Paris**, which has played host to many finals.

The most memorable have involved France itself, the European Championship win of 1984 starring Michel Platini and the World Cup win of 1998 starring Zinedine Zidane. The venue for 1984, the **Parc des Princes**, and the arena built for 1998, the **Stade de France**, are international stages worthy of any great occasion.

Each hosted matches for the finals of Euro 2016, overshadowed by issues of security after the terrible events of November 2015. The tragedy occurred just as the domestic club game was going through a significant and seriously funded revival.



Football in the French capital has changed completely due to the huge financial injection by the Qatar Investment Authority in **Paris Saint-Germain**, crowned champions four seasons times running, then again in 2018 and 2019. Based at the Parc des Princes, until 2013 PSG had only claimed two titles in over 40 years.

Before Neymar arrived for €222 million in 2017 and Kylian Mbappé for €180 million a year later, the signing of Zlatan Ibrahimović and David Beckham during

the 2012-13 campaign put PSG onto a level they had never known before. All failed to bring PSG closer to Europe's premier prize.

On the city's southern outskirts, **Paris FC** are based at the **Stade Charléty**, by the T3 tram stop of the same name, close to the Cité Universitaire. Losing on penalties in the 2019 play-offs for Ligue 1 promotion, Paris FC would have provided the French capital with two clubs in the top tier for the first time since the heady days of the mid 1980s.

Back then, the storied Racing Club groundshared the Parc des Princes with PSG and had World Cup stars in their ranks.

Now way down in the league pyramid, **Racing Club**, the epitome of the pre-war Parisian game, were founded in 1882. As **Racing Colombes 92**, the club was taken over by former film producer, Patrick Norbert, and plays in the fifth-tier National 3, along with the reserve sides of PSG and Paris FC. This venerable institution

is still based at Colombes. Site of the national stadium before the Parc des Princes was built, Colombes – now called **Stade Olympique Yves-du-Manoir** – also staged the 1938 World Cup Final.

These days, Racing actually play in the 1,000-capacity **Stade Lucien-Choire** in the same sports complex, easily accessed via suburban station **Gare du Stade**, built for the 1924 Olympics. From Gare Saint-Lazare, take Transilien suburban line J (direction Gisors) for four stops and 15min.

Now challenging to leave the third-tier National 1 after finishing bottom of Ligue 2 in 2019, **Red Star** are another revered club, formed by Jules Rimet, the man behind the World Cup. It's not only about heritage – Red Star attract a left-leaning cult following along the lines of Clapton FC and Dulwich Hamlets.

Red Star play at the **Stade Bauer** in St-Ouen, just outside the Périphérique ring road north of Paris. Unveiled in 1909, it staged three games for the 1924 Olympics, including Egypt's shock 3-0 win over Hungary. The stadium is being proposed as a potential venue for the 2024 Olympics – a century after Hungary's historic defeat.

Bearings

Paris has two **airports**: **Charles-de-Gaulle** and **Orly**. CDG is 25km (16 miles) north-east of the city centre. ➔



FRANCE 2019-20 Paris

www.liberoguide.com/paris



The RER (suburban rail) line B takes 25 minutes to reach the Gare du Nord, the main train station and terminus for **Eurostar** services from London. RER trains (single €9.10) run every 15 minutes. A taxi to town should cost about €50.

Orly is 13km (8 miles) south of town. The Orlyval shuttle links with Antony on the RER B line (€10.90 including onward journey to town). A taxi to town should cost about €35.

Some budget airlines use **Beauvais airport**, 85km (46 miles) north of Paris,

linked by buses (€15.90 online/€17) to Porte Maillot (journey time 1hr 15mins).

City transport in Paris consists of the famous métro, RER lines, buses and trams. A single ticket is €1.80, a carnet of ten €14.10 and a Mobilis day pass €7 for zones 1 and 2 (including the Stade de France). **G7 taxis** (+33 1 41 27 66 99) can be booked online and accept credit cards.

Bed

Reservations can be made at **Paris Info** (en.parisinfo.com).

For the Stade de France, the four-star **Suite Novotel** is directly opposite, on restaurant-lined rue Jules-Rimet. Rooms are quickly booked for big games, rugby too. There is also an **ibis** on two sides of the stadium: **Sud** and, one star up, **Ouest**, plus a bottom-of-the-range **Formule 1** option nearby.

For the Parc des Princes, the nearest lodging is the elegant **Molitor**, halfway between the north end of the stadium and tennis mecca Roland-Garros. A classy swimming pool opened by Johnny Weissmuller in 1929, it was converted into a 124-room/suite luxury lodging



with high-end restaurant, sauna and, of course, pool.

Cheaper options surround Porte de St-Cloud métro station. On the boulevard of the same name, the three-star **Hôtel Murat** offers doubles for under €100. The nearby **Holiday Inn Paris-Auteuil** is a step up in price but not that much dearer, while rooms at the modest **Hôtel**

À l'Orée du Parc (+33 1 47 43 15 07) across avenue de Versailles can be had for around €100, depending if you wish en-suite or not.

Equally convenient for the Parc, across the confusing tangle of roundabout and off-streets, the **Radisson Blu Paris-Boulogne** on avenue Edouard Vaillant has a gym, quality restaurant and terrace, and lounge bar. Practically alongside, the **ibis Styles Paris 16 Boulogne** offers upper-economy lodging.

Handy for the Eurostar terminus and transport to the Stade de France, hotels of varying quality ring the Gare du Nord. In the Accor group are the **ibis Styles Gare du Nord TGV Hotel** and the four-star **Mercure Paris Paris Gare du Nord La Fayette**.

For views of the city's most famous landmark, the **Pullman Paris Eiffel Tower Hotel** is a 430-room four-star while the nearby **Mercure Paris Centre Eiffel Tower Hotel** offers renovated mid-range comfort.

Handy for the pubs of the 6th arrondissement, the **Hôtel de Nesle** is that rare combination of charming and affordable.

Beer

Paris has a bar on every corner. The main chain in town is the Anglo, sport-centric **Frogpubs** with eight



FRANCE 2019-20 Paris

www.liberoguide.com/paris



branches in town. The oldest, in place for 25 years, the **Frog & Rosbif**, is on rue St-Denis. The busiest, in the student quarter of St-Germain on rue Princesse, is the **Frog & Princess**. Each has 2am closing three nights of the week.

The pub-like Irish-themed **Corcoran's** has eight operations around Paris, including Bastille, St Michel and Sacré-Coeur. **O'Sullivan's**, havens for post-work drinks, pub grub and TV sports, has three outlets in prominent spots, one by **Grands Boulevards métro**.

For something with more character, close to place de Clichy métro, the wood-panelled and flag-ceilinged **Harp Bar**, attracts supporters on away trips and Racing 92 rugby fans.

The 6th arrondissement, between the Jardin du Luxembourg and the Seine, is dotted with expat-friendly pubs. On



rue des Quatre-Vents, **The Moose Bar** shows Premier League games as well as North American sports, with the whole gamut of *poutines*, the Québec version of chips-and-gravy, on the menu.

Nearby, three steps from the Frog & Princess on rue Princesse, the **Little Temple Bar** promises 'all games live' while on the other side of Odéon, **The Mazet** (61-63 rue St-André-des-Arts) shows matches but beware of the enthusiastic bouncers.



For a taste of 1950s' Paris, **Le 10 Bar** near Odéon has changed little since Johnny Hallyday's heyday.

Closer to the river on rue de Nevers, **The Highlander** has four screens upstairs and two down, with Scottish ales and 80 types of whisky on offer at the bar.

Across in the 5th, on rue Frédéric Sauton, 'bar sportif and pub anglais' **The Long Hop**, as does **The Bombardier** on place du Panthéon, with a dozen sister Anglo-friendly operations in Bordeaux, Toulouse and Montpellier.

Just over the Seine in the 4th, either side of St-Paul métro, Scottish-run **The Pure Malt** and the **Auld Alliance** put football to the fore, backdropped by tartan.

Tourists swarm around **St-Michel**. There, happy hour at 4pm on **rue de la Huchette** sees a frenzy of activity, bar staff trying to tempt in punters with promises of cheap (€5!) pints.

Paris is also full of **PMU betting bars**, some revamped and turned into contemporary hangouts. **Le Longchamp** (9 rue du Faubourg-Montmartre), close

to the Grands Boulevards, is a classic example of the original genre. It stands diagonally opposite the former offices of *L'Équipe* and *France Football*, where the European Cup was conceived in smoky editorial offices.

Shop

Proud French sportswear legend **Le Coq Sportif** has eight stores across Paris, the flagship one on the corner of boulevard St-Germain and rue de Seine. Worn by Fontaine in 58, Rocheteau in 76 and Maradona in 86, this classic brand sees Le Coq shops get hectic on sales day mornings. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 Stade de France

www.lib eroguide.com/stade-de-france



Stade de France

The **Stade de France** is the country's national stadium, built for the 1998 World Cup. Its more recent showcase finals, Euro 2016 saw this groundbreaking arena stage seven games, including the opener and final.

Holding 80,000, the Stade embodies the ambition of four key architects to revive the northern suburbs. The major and most expensive feature is the signature elliptical roof, held up by 18 steel masts

and appearing to float over the body of the stadium. 'Heavier than the Eiffel Tower and longer than the Champs-Élysées,' as the guides like to say on the stadium tour.

The total cost came in at just under €300 million – about a third of the new Wembley a few years later.

Transport

Two RER stations, La Plaine-Stade de France (line B) and **Stade de France-Saint-Denis** (line D) are both one stop from Gare du Nord (12 minutes) but

require a ticket (€2.50) beyond zone 1. The stations stand either side of the main Autoroute du Nord – RER B is closer to the ground. Note that the day pass Mobilis (€7) for Paris also covers this part of zone 2.

From the **Gare du Nord**, for RER B, follow the aeroplane icons signposted in the RER area – trains for the Stade also serve Charles de Gaulle-Roissy Airport. The signs lead you down to adjoining platforms 41 and 43. Check the departure board that La Plaine-Stade de France is illuminated.



Tickets

Le Stade comprises four, three-tiered stands, Nord and Sud behind each goal. Est is closest to the RER B station, Ouest to RER D.

Purchasing **online** (stade-france.com/en/tickets) is the norm. Tickets cannot be picked up on the day but must be printed out.

For France internationals against lesser opposition, tickets are as cheap as €15 in the upper tier ('Haut') of the Nord or Sud ends. A decent spot ('Inter') in the Est stand is €45/€40, closer to the pitch €75/€70. Prices rise at least €10 for better opposition.

Tours & museum

For **English-language tours** (1hr, €15 for adults, €10 under-18s and free for under 5s), enter through Porte H. Highlights include the changing room, lined with French shirts past and present, its resin floor and smooth wooden benches a design upon which



Michel Platini himself advised. The four-room **museum** gives a detailed look at how the Stade was built.

Bars

Bars line **avenue Jules Rimet** on the east side of the stadium nearest the main entrance.

The first is **Le Rendez-Vous**, a classic corner brasserie with tasteful decorative nods to rugby and football. Nearby is **La 3ème Mi-Temps**, a friendly, two-floor venue with TV sport. Both offer full menus and offers at lunchtime, as does the more prosaic **Le France** at No.33, the standard brasserie set between them.

Towards the RER stations, along avenue du Stade de France and adjoining place des Droits de l'Homme, the **Café Gaspard** and **Café Balthazar** are stylish spots for a pre-match apéritif. At the RER B station, **Pizzeria PIU** has plenty of space to serve its wood-fired pizzas. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 Paris Saint-Germain

www.lib eroguide.com/paris-saint-germain

Paris Saint-Germain

Champions four seasons running until 2016, title-winners again in 2018 and 2019, **Paris Saint-Germain** (en.psg.fr) have changed the French game forever. Before the arrival of the Qatar Investment Authority in 2011, PSG not only hadn't won a title since 1994 – the Ligue they competed in was way behind the other big four.

Back in 1970, local football lovers donated funds for a club to be formed by joining forces with Saint-Germain-en-Laye, who had just won promotion to the second division.

Paris Saint-Germain won promotion just as the **Parc des Princes** was rebuilt. After French victory at Euro 84, football became fashionable, PSG spent heavily on stars, achieving cup wins and a first league title in 1986.

After sport-savvy Nasser Al-Khelaifi stepped in to buy the club, PSG struggled until the arrival of David Beckham gained them entry to the higher echelons of the global football circus.

The purchase of Neymar for €222 million and Kylian Mbappé for €180 million then highlighted the extent of Qatari backing – PSG are, essentially, a state-sponsored club.



The **Parc des Princes** was renovated for Euro 2016, and being expanded for the 2024 Olympics.

The ground is divided into a lower red section and upper blue. The hardest home fans, the Kop, occupy the lower Boulogne end nearest Porte de St-Cloud métro. Opposite, the Auteuil end is also PSG. Away fans occupy the corner between Auteuil and the Présidentielle, accessed from rue Claude Ferrère. Neutrals are best placed in the Tribune Paris.

Transport

On **métro line 9, Porte de Saint-Cloud** métro station is a short walk. As you



stroll up avenue des Parc des Princes, the Tribune Paris is to your left. Line 9 calls at Franklin D Roosevelt and Trocadéro near the Eiffel Tower.

Tickets

There are **no sales** at the ground. Tickets for PSG league games are sold **online** (billetterie.psg.fr/uk/footpro) weeks in advance. Seats at either end start around €35, with prices around the ground averaging at €40–€50. Prime spots can be astronomical, €100 or way more.

Shops

The **Megastore Paris Saint-Germain** is on the corner of rue Claude-Farrère

and rue du Commandant-Guilbaud, facing the main reception. There's another outlet on the **Champs-Élysées** (No.27), and branches at **Galleries Lafayette, Bercy Village** and **Paris Charles-de-Gaulle Airport**, Roissy 2C, by C87-88.

There's also a **match-day kiosk** on the south, métro station side of the ground.

Bars

The classic PSG bar is **Aux Trois Obus** (120 rue Michel-Ange), by Porte de St-Cloud métro. Although now gentrified with arty images of sporting

action, this classic café still features its signature back mirror of the Parc des Princes.

Right on the roundabout, the **Indiana** serves burgers and Belgian beers, with pavement tables to watch Paris go by. Across the roundabout on main route de la Reine, classic **Bistrot de la Reine** has sport on a large TV and Warsteiner on draught.

With a sun-catching terrace facing the Parc, **Les Deux Stades** (41 ave du Général Serrail) is a timeless table-football bar, perennially the best choice for a pre-match drink. **LE**



FRANCE 2019-20 Amiens

www.liberoguide.com/amiens



Amiens

In May 2017, two remarkable events occurred. First, Emmanuel Macron, then little-known, became French president. Days later, an even lesser-known football club from his home town of **Amiens** reached Ligue 1 after 116 years.

Promotion proved harder than presidency, a 96th-minute winner pushing les Licornes over the line.

A unicorn seems an apt nickname for **Amiens SC** – who play at the modern **Stade de la Licorne** west of town.

Football was first played south of town, at the Parc Jean-Rostand, later used by the British for manoeuvres during World War I – the Somme flows nearby. Amiens then moved to the Stade Moulouguet, abandoned in 1999.

For the two Ligue 1 campaigns since 2017, the Unicorn Stadium has been pushed to its capacity – only 12,000.

Bearings

The nearest airport is budget **Beauvais Tillé** 68km (42 miles) south. From Terminal 1, **Keolis bus No.42** runs 6-12 times a day to **Amiens bus station** (€11.20, 25min journey time).

From Paris Gare du Nord – linked with the **Eurostar** and **Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport** 135km (84 miles) from Amiens – a **train** runs every 2-3hrs to **Amiens** (€15), 1hr 10-20min away. Eurostar passengers may also use **Lille**, journey time to Amiens and ticket price the same.



Amiens **bus** and **train stations** are by the city centre, but across town from the stadium. **Ametis** run four Nemo electric bus lines and outer bus routes (single €1.40, day pass €4.30), plus a free city-centre shuttle.

Amiens taxis (+33 3 22 91 30 03) offer airport transfers.

Bed

Visit Amiens (visit-amiens.com) has a **hotel database**.

The nearest hotel to the stadium, **La Chambre d'Amiens** is a modern three-star set in parkland the other side of Mégacité. Also close, by the station of the same name, **Le Saint-Roch** offers

six comfortable rooms and a decent restaurant.


Either side of the main station in town, the **Campanile** and **Holiday Inn Express** offer similar, wallet-friendly experiences. Nearby, **Le Carlton** is more old-school, its Art-Deco exterior a local landmark.

Further down rue Noyon into town, the elegant **Grand Hôtel de l'Univers** dates back to Jules Verne, his house a short walk away.

Beer

The bar hub overlooks the Somme in the old **Quartier Saint-Leu**. The terraces of lively **Le Living**, **Baobar**, **Couleur Café**, **le Retroviseur Watson** and **Au Fût et à mesure** meld into one another to create a pleasant evening buzz. Just along the waterfront, the **English Pub Amiens** offers pool, table football and live match action.

The other side of the cathedral on rue des Chaudronniers, **Le Charleston** is easily the best bar in town, its TVs tuned to football, its walls dedicated to Cantona, Celtic and a collection of match tickets, its corner given over to live music, its pub food unpretentiously satisfying, and its welcome, most of all, warm.

There's a big screen and cathedral-facing terrace at **Les III Maillets** on place Notre-Dame while standard-issue **Tower's Pub** opposite the station also shows matches. 



FRANCE 2019-20 Amiens SC

www.lib eroguide.com/amiens-sc



Amiens SC

When bets were being made on who would go up from Ligue 2 in 2016-17, **Amiens SC** (amiensfootball.com) trailed behind a number of teams – and that was during stoppage time in the last game of the season.

Then, as the clock at Reims showed 96 minutes, Emmanuel Bourgaud reversed 116 years of history with one shot, winning the game, pushing Amiens from sixth place to second, and ensuring back-to-back promotions to Ligue 1.

Thereafter, the **Stade de la Licorne** has been buzzing, its 12,000 capacity near packed every game for two top-flight campaigns. Mercurial coach Christophe Pélissier was lured to Lorient before the 2019-20 season but Amiens should now have the experience to steer clear of danger.

Still looking contemporary thanks to its transparent roof, the 20-year-old 'Unicorn Stadium' is nothing if not



intimate, the fans up close to the pitch. Apart sectors A and B in a corner of the Tribune Sud allocated to visiting supporters, all spectators are locals, livelier ones in the Tribune Nord, higher-paying ones in sideline Tribune Est and top-dollar merchants in Tribune Ouest.

Transport

With buses pretty infrequent to/from the nearest stop of **Mégacité** – the **No.7** to/

from the Gare du Nord (20min) is hourly, and only until 8pm – it's little wonder that the **free shuttle bus** (navette gratuite) from the station (quai D) is oversubscribed. It also takes 35min. Walking from town, via barely used **Gare St-Roch station**, would be just as quick.

Tickets

Nearly all tickets are sold **online**, either from the **club** (billetterie.

amiensfootball.com) or agencies such as **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr) and **fnac** (fnacspectacles.com). There are **ticket offices** at the stadium – check with corentin.le-deunff@amiensfootball.com for **match-day availability**.

Prices are categorised by seat position (1-6, from an average of €30 in the balcony down to €17.50 behind the goals) and by opposition, PSG, Lyon and

Marseille being Gala (and impossible to get), the rest being Premium or Championnat.

Shop

Amiens SC settled on black and white fairly recently, and remain unconvinced, judging by the grey/white tiger stripey affair selected as a first kit for 2019-20, with red-and-blue touches harking back to the 1990s. It's a mess but available from the modest match-day tent by the ticket offices. Tiger stripes in black and grey – the away top – hardly makes amends for such fashion faux pas.

Bars

If you're walking from St-Roch station, you can't miss the age-old **Tartarin**, **Hotel St-Roch** and **Bar du Zenith** nearby, all timelessly French, the first two offering a traditional menu, the latter unchanged since Johnny Hallyday's heyday. Leave plenty of time to reach the stadium, a good 15min walk away.

Nearer the ground, just past La Chambre d'Amiens hotel (*see above*), the **bmb leisure centre** at 10 rue Colbert comprises a bowling alley with a bar attached where Pelforth flows on draught.

At the stadium, the **Bodega** marquee by the reception area fills with supporters on match days – more often than not, these are VIPs rather than random punters. **L@**



FRANCE 2019-20 Angers

www.liberoguide.com/angers



Angers

Home of Cointreau, **Angers** is enjoying a football revival, flagship club **Angers SCO** taking Paris Saint-Germain close to extra-time in the French Cup final of 2017.

Les Scolistes celebrate their centenary year of 2019 by starting a fifth consecutive season in the top tier. The last time SCO showed this consistency

was back in the early 1970s, when they even made a fleeting European appearance.

In between, this pretty medieval town near the Loire, the gateway to north-west France, let nearest rivals Nantes take the limelight.

The current revival coincided with the death of Raymond Kopa, the former Real Madrid star who started out here. More than 1,000 filled Angers Cathedral

for Kopa's funeral in 2017. SCO's **stadium** took his name soon after.

Bearings

The nearest main airport is **Nantes Atlantique** 100km (62 miles away). A **shuttle bus** runs to **Nantes station** every 20-30min, tickets €9, journey time 20min. **Taxis Nantes** (+33 2 40 69 22 22) should charge around €30.

Frequent **trains to Angers Saint-Laud** take 40min and cost around €10



online. From **Paris-Montparnasse**, the journey to Angers takes 1hr 45min, advance singles €14.

Saint-Laud is south of the city centre a 10-15min walk away. The **one-line tram** runs via the station and town but not the stadium. Local buses are also run by **irigo** on the same **ticket system** of €1.40/€1.50 on board, valid 60min. A 24hr pass is €4.

Âllo Angers Taxis (+33 2 41 87 65 00) offer airport transfers.

Bed

Destination Angers has a **hotel database** and **booking service**.

Although there are no lodgings near the stadium, the contemporary three-star **Hôtel de l'Europe** stands by the bus route on rue Châteaugontier, near pre-match pub, Matt Murphy's.

Closer to town, the **Hôtel des Lices** has an LCD TV in each room, a bar and

a sushi restaurant. Don't be put off by the name – it's on rue des Lices.

Near the park of the same name, the **Hôtel du Mail** offers a boutique stay in a historic property. Alongside on rue David, the equally venerable **Maison Bossoreil** pre-dates the French Revolution, its five rooms in the €100 range.

Close to the historic sights, the **ibis Centre Château** on rue de la Poissonnerie provides sufficient comfort and convenience.

Beer

Pubs and bars are dotted around the city's historic centre. A vortex of drinking spots where **rue Bressigny** meets **boulevard du Maréchal Foch** is also handy pre- and post-match as the bus runs nearby.

On boulevard Carnot, **Le James Joyce** offers match-watching, a decent menu and a terrace. On pretty place Louis Imbach nearby, live music awaits at **Le Welsh**.

For a pleasant beer on the terrace in the heart of town, **Le Pub du Ralliement** stands on the square of the same name, with a screen inside. There's TV sport on three ultra HD screens at **Le Joker's Pub** on rue Saint-Laud, another live music.

Le Dublin's on rue Saint-Georges provides fine dining rather than frantic drinking. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 Angers SCO

www.liberoguide.com/angers-sco

Angers SCO

First club of French legend Raymond Kopa after whom their stadium is named, **Angers SCO** (angers-sco.fr/en) celebrated their centenary in 2019 with a fifth straight season in the top flight, and ninth consecutive campaign under coach Stéphane Moulin.

Moulin led Angers back to Ligue 1 and to the French Cup final in 2017, when a sterling performance by the SCO defence held out the billionaires of Paris Saint-Germain until a fluky own goal in the 92nd minute.

Renamed the **Stade Raymond Kopa**, the main municipal stadium leased to SCO Angers dates back over a century.

Modernisation came in the 1990s, since which giant video screens and an artificial pitch have all been installed.

With the expansion of the Tribune Saint Léonard, ongoing until 2021, capacity will reach 19,000-plus. Until then, it remains at 17,000, with parts of the ground off-limits at certain times.

Press and VIPs are currently hosted in the sideline Jean Bouin Stand opposite. Home fans gather in sectors A-E in Tribune Coubertin by the boulevard of the same name, with away fans allocated the end sector nearest Tribune Saint Léonard, through accès 5.



Transport

The stadium is about 1.5km east of Angers train station, along rue Saint-Léonard. The most direct bus, **No.12** (not Sun), runs from **Lorraine**, at the square of the same name. The **No.9** (not Sun) sets off from **Paul Bert** closer to the station. Six stops away is **Coubertin**, 5min from the stadium. The only Sunday service is the infrequent **No.12b** between Lorraine and the stadium.

Tickets

Tickets are distributed 15 days before each game at the **two club shops** (58 promenade de la Baumette, by the club HQ south-west of town, 12 rue Chaperonnière, by the cathedral) and through **France Billet** (francebillet.com) and **ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr). The club also sells **online** (billetterie.angers-sco.fr).

The **ticket windows** at the ground open 90min before kick-off.



With the Tribune Saint Léonard out of commission, the best seats (Tribune Jean Bouin Centrale, €25) might sell out for attractive fixtures – otherwise, availability is rarely a problem. The cheapest seats (€6.50) are the lower tier of the Tribune Coubertin home end, with places in the Tribune Colombier opposite starting at €9. Nearer to the penalty areas, a seat in the sideline Tribune Jean Bouin is €17.50.

Shops

Black-and-white souvenirs and centenary retro tops in white are sold at the **two club shops** at 58

promenade de la Baumette and 12 rue Chaperonnière.

Bars

Even though the stadium has long been in place, there are no bars or cafés in the immediate vicinity. The best pre-match options would be **Matt Murphy's**, near the junction of boulevard du Maréchal Foch and rue Célestin Port, and **Le Falstaff** alongside at rue Bressigny 11. Each is about a 10min walk to the ground. Matt Murphy's, lined with sports tops, has late opening hours, TV match action



and filling Québec *poutine* dishes. Student-friendly Falstaff also runs late (closed Sun), screens sport and serves pitchers of beer. **L9**



FRANCE 2019-20 Bordeaux

www.liberoguide.com/bordeaux

Bordeaux

Home of the **Girondins**, dominant force in France in the 1980s, **Bordeaux** is a one-club city in the mould of main rivals Toulouse and Marseille.

The six-time title winners switched stadiums in 2015, leaving the **Lescure**, opened for the 1938 World Cup and revamped for 1998, for the **Nouveau Stade Bordeaux**, built for Euro 2016.

In the oval-ball heartland of south-west France, a significant expat community has many sports pubs in town to choose from.

It was an English family, in fact, who owned the land, formerly vineyards, on which the original stadium was built. Its maritime decorative touches reflected the city's history.

The Nouveau Stade, now named after its sponsor **Matmut Atlantique**, stands at Bordeaux-Lac north of town.

Bearings

Bordeaux Airport is 12km (7.5 miles) west of town. From Gate 7, Hall B, **bus Liane 1** (every 10-20min, single €1.70, valid 1hr) takes 40min to reach **St-Jean station** via **Mérignac Centre** (15min), where a change onto **Tramway A** brings you closer to the centre.



The **30' Direct bus** (every 30min-1hr, €8) runs direct to **St-Jean station** (journey time 30min), on the same **Tramway C** line as the stadium up north. Airport-to-stadium takes as long using Tramway A via Mérignac Centre, changing at Porte Bourgogne or Hôtel de Ville then Quinconces.

Taxi Bordeaux (+33 5 29 10 25) should charge around €30 from airport to town.

TBM oversee four tramlines (A-D) and buses. A **single** is €1.70 (valid 1hr),

day pass (Ticket 24 heures) €5, sold at machines – validate on board for each journey.

Bed

The **Bordeaux tourist office** (Bordeaux-tourism.co.uk) has a room-booking service.

Chain hotels surround the Nouveau Stade, including the **Novotel Bordeaux Lac**, which has its own pool, as has the **Pullman Bordeaux Lac Hotel**. At the more affordable end of the scale are the **ibis budget**



Bordeaux Le Lac and the **Mercure Bordeaux Lac**.

Also in the same complex is the three-star **Hotel Apollonia Bordeaux Lac**, with free secure parking.

In town, and in the same family for four generations, the **Hotel de Normandie** sits by focal Quinconces while the landmark **InterContinental Bordeaux – Le Grand Hôtel** overlooks place de la Comédie.

Wallet-friendly **Hôtel Stars** on rue de Tauzia has a maritime theme that extends to its cabin-sized rooms, one tram stop from the train station.

Beer

A football town and rugby hub, Bordeaux has plenty of bars for sport-watching. Even the elegant **Grand Café** on place Gambetta puts up a large screen outside on big-game nights.

The square to head for, though, is place de la Victoire, where sport-friendly **Pub Saint Aubin** has a large terrace and long happy hours. Across the square, the **Grizzly Pub** shows matches, serves cocktails and stages DJs.

The riverbank is lined with drinking options, including the **Charles Dickens**, the Bordeaux branch of nationwide expat chain **Frog & Rosbif** and **Sweeney Todd's**, home of big-screen action and fry-up breakfasts.

Other pub options include **Casey's** and, almost next door on rue Judaïque, **Sherlock Holmes**, both sport haunts. **LB**



FRANCE 2019-20 Girondins de Bordeaux

www.liberoguide.com/girondins-de-bordeaux

Girondins de Bordeaux

When Zinedine Zidane kicked off the inaugural match at the **Nouveau Stade Bordeaux**, now renamed the **Matmut Atlantique**, in 2015, he brought an end to eight decades of history. His former club, **Girondins de Bordeaux** (girondins.com/en), had been based at the **Stade Chaban-Delmas** since it was adapted for the World Cup of 1938.

The inverted chevron on their shirts a symbol of class, the **Girondins** reigned supreme in France in the 1980s and made a European final a decade later.

While achievement on the pitch has waned, the **Matmut Atlantique** has continued to impress.

Holding 42,000 people, the €168-million arena was created by Herzog & de Meuron, also responsible for the Tate Modern in London. Surrounded by signature poles representing the woodland beyond this commercial zone north of Bordeaux, the stadium comprises four stands, away fans allocated sectors 50 and 51 between the north end and east stand. If demand requires, visiting supporters can also be placed in sectors 58 and 59 in the middle of the north end.



Transport

The stadium is a short walk from the northern terminus of **tramline C, Parc des Expositions Stade Matmut-Atlantique**, 12 stops from central Quinconces. A **free shuttle bus** also runs on match days from **Brandenburg**, on **tramline B**.

Tickets

Tickets are available **online** at direct-billetterie.girondins.com/fr/billetterie from 15 days before each match. **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr), incorporating the **Auchan** (billetterie.auchan.fr) network, also distribute.

To purchase in person, advance tickets are sold at the **club shop** (Mon-Sat 10am-7pm) in town at rue Sainte-Catherine 77.

The **ticket windows** at the **stadium** open on match days, 3hrs before kick-off.

Prices range from €15 behind the goals, around €32-€42 along the



sidelines in either the Tribunes Est or Ouest, to €50-plus for the best seats, in eight categories. For Europa League fixtures, prices start at €18 and increase by around €3.

Shops

The club has **two outlets**, one at the **stadium**, one in **town** at rue Sainte-Catherine 77, diagonally opposite Fnac in the retail hub.

On the home south side of the Matmut Atlantique, by avenue de la Jallère, the vast **Galerie Girondins** (Tue-

Sat 10am-7pm, match days) sells all things Bordeaux. Look out for Giresse-era **vintage shirts** with the iconic OPEL advertising, current first and second kits in navy/white and white/navy, both the with the reversed chevron, of course, and branded sets of pétanque boules. Pop-up stalls and kiosks are also set up around the Fan Zone and stadium on match days.

Bars

On match days, a family-friendly **Fan Zone** operates alongside the Tribune

Ouest from around 2-3hrs before kick-off, with live music, games, food trucks and lashings of Carlsberg beer. Food and drink outlets also line level 3 of the stadium.

By the club shop, the **Brasserie St Once** serves traditional regional cuisine every weekday lunchtime and on match days, when you should **reserve** (+33 5 56 29 56 28). Note the photo montage of classic Girondins moments across one wall. The shaded patio is a pleasant retreat during the week. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 Brest

www.liberoguide.com/brest



Brest

Stuck out on the far north-western tip of France, the harbour city of **Brest** is as close to Dublin as it is to Paris. Its football club, **Stade Brestois 29**, were formed in 1950 – the '29' refers to its national *département* number – from a merger of five smaller clubs.

The far east of town was where Abbot Cozanet sited the original **Stade de l'Américaine** in 1922, later rebuilt and

renamed after Brest mayor Francis Le Blé.

Stade Francis-Lé Blé saw Harry Kane score a brace in driving rain here in 2014, for England U-21 against France. Brest were then a second-tier side, taking six seasons to get back to Ligue 1 in 2019.

Bearings

Brest-Bretagne Airport is 10km (6.5 miles) north-east of town. A **shuttle bus** runs to **Porte de Guipavas**, the

nearest stop on **tramway A** that calls at **Place de Strasbourg** by the stadium, and **Liberté** in town. A **ticket** (€1.60, pay on board) is valid for 1hr, including further travel on the **bibus** network of buses, tramway and cable car. A **day pass** is €4.

The **train** from **Paris-Montparnasse** takes just under 4hrs. **Brest station** is a 10min walk into town but a steep trek up rue Jean-Jaurès to the stadium, served by tramway.

Taxi Brestois (+33 2 98 801 801) charge €26 from airport to town.

Bed

Brest Tourisme (brest-metropole-tourisme.fr) has a **hotel database**.

Near the stadium, **Appart'City** is a standard chain three-star. One tram stop towards town on rue Jean-Jaurès, the **Kyriad** is similar in style and standard. Just off Jean-Jaurès, **L'Amirauté** is a notch above, its restaurant likewise. In the same local group, the four-star **Oceania Brest Centre** on rue de Siam follows the same maritime theme with its Nautilus restaurant. Nearby, **Oceania le Continental** retains its pre-war Art-Deco style.

One block away on rue de Lyon, the **Kelig** epitomises comfortable affordability, run by a friendly local – and convenient for Brest station.

The other side of Jardin Kennedy, equally handy for the train, the mid-range **Vauban** underwent a million-euro overhaul with no loss of external style. Alongside, the **Mercure Brest Centre** offers upper mid-range comfort, the **Abalys** is a neat two-star and, alongside, the **Citotel Brest Centre Gare** provides sea views at reasonable prices.

Beer

Bars near the **Pont de Recouvrance**, **Offside Bay**, **Casa Havana** and sport-friendly **tir na n'og**, all offer terrace views.

Round the marina side, affable Irish pub **McGuigan's** also has a terrace, nearby pub/restaurant **Les 4 Vents** overlooks the waterfront, while the lovely **Café des Mouettes** further along is an elegant yet unpretentious bar of carved wood, maritime knick-knacks and TV football. Its sun-catching terrace gazes over the harbour. Behind, the **Tara Inn** hosts authentic Irish music and shows sport.

Near the Siam tram stop in town, the **Blind Piper** and **Le Tudor** are popular haunts. One stop up at Liberté, the terrace at **La Petite Poésie** throngs with locals.

Nearby, **Pub Hamilton** is great for TV sport. Near the station, **Le Cap Horn** offers a convivial welcome. **LB**



FRANCE 2019-20 Stade Brestois 29

www.lib eroguide.com/stade-brestois-29

Stade Brestois 29

Promoted in 2019, **Stade Brestois 29** (sb29.bzh) are the flagship club of the Breton port of **Brest**, whose star players have included David Ginola and Franck Ribéry.

After the short-lived big-name era, the reformed Stade Brestois 29 climbed back up the league ladder.

Home of Brest football for nearly a century, the **Stade Francis-Le Blé** is the smallest of the 20 Ligue 1 grounds in 2019-20. Holding 15,000 and still looking defiantly old-school despite an overhaul in 2010, this compact stadium consists of three roofed stands and one uncovered end. This is divided, a third given over to 700 visiting supporters in sectors 5-6 nearest the Tribune Foucauld exposed to the wind and rain blowing in off the Atlantic.

Brest fans are in the Kop, the south end Tribune Quimper. Red-and-white flags are also flown from the seats in the sideline Tribune Crédit Mutuel Arkéa, completely rebuilt in 2010. Sector 1 nearest the home end is a Kop all of its own. The Foucauld opposite houses press and VIPs.

Transport

The stadium is an easy glide up from town on tramway A, alighting at **Place de Strasbourg**, five stops up from focal



Liberté. Head up to the roundabout, then veer right down rue de Quimper – the stadium is 2min ahead on the left.

Tickets

Advance tickets are sold at the **club shop in town** at 7 rue Jean-Jaurès, at **Le Penalty** bar opposite the ground, **online** (billetterie.sb29.bzh) through the **club** and regular networks **France Billet** (francebillet.com) and **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr).

On match days, the **stadium ticket offices** open 1hr 15min before kick-off but availability isn't a given – check with the club on +33 2 98 02 20 30.

Prices fall into four categories of match and nine areas of the ground. An average price in the sideline Tribune Foucauld is €40-€50, going as low as €20. If there are any places in the home end, Quimper, these run at €15-€28. The Brittany Ferries end (€9-€25)

leaves you open to the elements – and it does rain in Brest.

Shop

At 7 rue Jean-Jaurès, the **Stade Brestois 29 Boutique Officielle** is awash with red and white – although away tops for 2019-20 are either black or white, with a different sponsor to the home kits. Other artefacts display the fearsome flag-bearing mascot Zef le Pirate.



Bars

Before the Place de Strasbourg tram stop, the **Bar éc** (short for Écossais, Scottish) at 243 rue Jean-Jaurès is a great little spot, music-savvy, fun and football-focused. At Portuguese-run **Le Gulf Stream** diagonally opposite, you can play Benfica v Porto at table football or do battle at pool.

On rue de Quimper, the **Relais Celton** specialises in traditional cuisine – reserve a table on match days.

Its terrace facing the home Quimper end, wonderful **Le Penalty** screens live games, sells match tickets and its U-shaped bar counter allows many to be served pdq. The décor is a framed pictorial history of Brest in shirt, scarf and fanzine form. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 **Dijon**

www.liberoguide.com/dijon

Dijon

Synonymous with mustard, **Dijon** nonetheless went for red when the current flagship club was formed in 1998 – although previous iterations showed splashes of yellow on their badge. The owl logo also worn by les Rouges represents the lucky charm statue on the city's Notre-Dame Church. Fortune smiled when **DFCO** squeaked past Lens in the relegation play-off in 2018-19.

DFCO – Dijon Football Côte-d'Or, referring to this historic part of Burgundy, deep in wine country – are based at a municipal ground in parkland east of town. The former Parc des Sports underwent a six-year staggered overhaul only completed in 2017. The **Stade Gaston-Gérard** was rebranded after a city mayor whose name lives on in the form of a mustard-flavoured chicken dish his wife created.

With no running track, the SGG is now purely dedicated to football. Given its DFCO's shaky top-flight status and the stadium's footnote in sports history – Sergei Bubka broke a world pole-vaulting record here in 1992 – the lengthy rebuild was not without its critics.

Bearings

Lyon Airport is 225km (140 miles) away, with an infrequent but direct

Flixbus (global.flixbus.com) connection. From **Paris**, two trains run to **Dijon-Ville**, the pricier **TGV** (1hr 40min) from **Gare de Lyon** and the **regional TER** (3hrs) from **Bercy**, online fare around €35.

Dijon-Ville station is a shortish walk from the centre, the stadium the other side of town by tramway. The local **Divia network** comprises this two-line tramway, buses and a free city-centre shuttle bus. **Tickets** are €1.40 (valid 1hr, validate each journey), €1.70 on board, 24hr passes €4.20.

Taxis Dijon (+33 3 80 41 41 12) are 24hrs.

Bed

Destination Dijon (en.destinationdijon.com) has a hotel database.

The nearest hotel to the stadium is the mid-range chain **Campanile-Congrès Clemenceau**, in no-man's land between town and outskirts at 16 avenue Raymond Poincaré. On the east of town, the simple, convenient two-star **République** sits by the tramway stop of the same name, four from the stadium.

Closer to town on rue Verrerie, **Le Jacquemart** dates back to the 1700s but offers contemporary three-star comfort. On the same street, upscale **Maison des Ducs** had its 15th-century property fully renovated in June 2019, its furnishings lavish.



Of the many hotels by the station, the **Kyriad Dijon Gare** offers an indoor pool, gym and sauna.

Beer

Bars line the streets – rues Berbissey and Crébillon – south of the historic centre. Aussie-themed **Byron Bay** has a TV and tropical cocktails, **Barbarian's** is bland but sport-focused down to its pool table, the **Crock Odil Café** shows games on a big, flat-screen TV.

It's worth trekking across town to find the **St Nicholas** on rue Jean-

Jacques Rousseau for its artisanal beers (Jenlain on draught!), jukebox and big TV. The sounds are geared to the bar's rock/biker fraternity but its heart is in the right place. The same could be said about the **BamJam Café** on rue Auguste Comte nearby, music-savvy, slightly alternative and quite wonderful on its night. The terrace is another big draw.

Bars also surround the market, including the food-and-football focused **Mac Callaghan**, its terrace overlooking the urban bustle of rue Bannelier. **LG**





FRANCE 2019-20 **Dijon FCO**

www.liberoguide.com/dijon-fco

Dijon FCO

Football in Dijon dates back to 1903 but the local professional game is a modern construct, the result of the merger between Cercle Football Dijonnais and Dijon Football Club in 1998, and the promotion of the newly formed **Dijon Football Côte-d'Or** (dfco.fr) to Ligue 2 six years later.

Coach Rudi Garcia, later of Roma and Marseille, then almost continued his winning streak with a second promotion for DFCO but when it did come, it came under ex-Sunderland defender Patrice Carteron in 2011 – and too soon. Dijon only lasted one season. A second stint in Ligue 1 has been equally fragile, goalkeeping errors by visitors Lens allowing les Rouges to save face and status with a relegation play-off win in 2019.

Ligue 2 is probably Dijon's natural habitat – but, obviously, Rouges fans probably don't see it that way.

Expanded to its current 15,460 capacity after a two-stage rebuild stretching over a decade, the **Stade Gaston-Gérard** is a sea of red when les Rouges stride out, les Téméraires ('Reckless!') fans in the Tribune Rougeot behind the north goal, Lingon's Boys in the Tribune Dijon Céréales unwavering their huge banner behind the south goal. Visiting



supporters are placed in the two sectors of the Tribune Ouest/DORAS nearest the south goal, A/B.

Transport

From just outside **Dijon-Ville**, veering right as you leave the station, **tramway No.1** runs every 10-15min to **Parc des Sports** (9 stops, 15min) by the stadium, skirting the city centre.

Tickets

Most sales are **online**, either through the **club** (billetterie-dfco.fr) or agencies such as **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr) and **Fnac** (fnacspectacles.com).

To buy in person, the club HQ and training ground at the **Stade des Poussots** (9 rue Ernest Champeaux, Mon-Fri 9am-noon, 2pm-6pm) south-east of town also distributes. It's

on the **No.12 bus** route from Dijon station. Check dijonfootpro@dfco.fr for availability – also concerning match days, when the windows by the main entrance will sell any remaining tickets.

Depending on the opposition, it's around €15-€20 behind the goals, though availability will be very limited, and €30-€40 for a place in the sideline Tribunes Est and Ouest.



Shop

The **DFCO Store** (Tue-Fri, Sun 9am-noon, 2pm-6pm, Sat 10am-5pm, match days) is located behind the Tribune Est/Caisse d'Epargne BFC on rue du Stade, proffering the usual range of owl-branded shirts, scarves and souvenirs – no mustard, though.

Bars

The only thing resembling a bar near the ground is **La Brasserie Ace** at the **Tennis Club Dijon** by the tramway stop, with regular dishes, wine and beer, and a bar open until the evening (except Sun). Table football, too.

At the ground, outlets operate on a **cashless card system** – download the app from dfco.fr/cashless. The main kiosk at the ground is behind the Tribune Nord/Rougeot, with regular beer sold by the 25cl and, in winter, hot chestnuts. If you're lucky, there'll be snails, too. **LO**



FRANCE 2019-20 Lille

www.liberoguide.com/lille

Lille

The Eurostar hub of **Lille** by the Belgian border is home to one of the most successful French clubs in recent years – and a sleek stadium, the **Stade Pierre-Mauroy**, a Euro 2016 venue.

In 2018-19, 2011 title-winners **LOSC** qualified for the Champions League for the first time in five years.

Olympique Lillois were formed in 1902 at the Café Bellevue on Lille's main square and played at the Stade Victor-Boucquoy on avenue de Dunkerque.

It staged one game at the 1938 World Cup, Hungary's 2-0 win over Switzerland before Olympique amalgamated with Iris Club, and then, in 1944, Fives, to create Lille Olympique Sporting Club.

In 1975, LOSC moved into the Grimonprez-Jooris, near the old ground and the childhood home of locally born Général de Gaulle. Lille's debut Champions League campaign in 2001 was then moved to Lens, local rivals in the Derby du Nord, whose modern stadium had co-hosted the 1998 World Cup.

Debate raged in Lille for a decade before the Stade Pierre-Mauroy shifted the city's football hub from



the grey terraced streets north of the centre, little changed since de Gaulle's day, to the eastern suburb of Villeneuve d'Ascq, a contemporary complex of science and technology.

Bearings

Lille is linked to London St Pancras by frequent **Eurostar**, journey time 1hr 30min. Trains come into **Lille Europe**, near the other main station of **Lille-Flandres**, close to town. SNCF trains from **Paris Gare du Nord** (1hr) come into either station.

Lille Airport is 7km (4.5 miles) south of the city centre. An **hourly shuttle** (€8) runs to the **Euralille** centre between the two stations, journey time 20 mins.

Centrale Taxi Lille (+33 6 20 53 40 04) charge around €25 into town, credit cards accepted.

Budget hub **Charleroi** 122km (76 miles) away in Belgium is served by direct **flixbus** (flixbus.com/en) to



Lille stations (€5), journey time 1hr 30min.

Local transport run by **ilévia** consists of two métro lines, two tramlines and buses. A single ticket (valid 1hr) is €1.65, a day pass €4.90. An evening-only Pass Soirée, valid from 7pm, is €2.30.

Bed

Lille Tourist Office offers a **hotel-booking service** and weekend packages.

By the Stade Pierre-Mauroy, on main boulevard de Tournai, the **Park Inn**

by **Radisson Lille Grand Stade** is the classiest (and priciest) of three options. Next door, the **B&B Hôtel Lille Grand Stade** is functional and affordable.

Also nearby, near the Cité Scientifique metro station, the **Ascotel** is a neat three-star.

By the station of the same name, mid-range **Lille Europe** is convenient. Just behind stands the business-friendly **Novotel Suites Gare Lille Europe Hotel** while the nearby **Crowne Plaza Lille-Euralille** offers a gym and restaurant.

Beer

Bars are well stocked with Belgian beers, best sought along **rue Masséna** and offshoots. **Magnum** (No.55-57) attracts a local crowd while **Shooter's** (No.23-25) also offers televised match action, amid decorative Americana. A few doorways along, **Temple's Bar** (No.20) and the **Barberousse** (No.40) provide variety.

For pubs, try **O'Scotland** and **L'Irlandais** on rue de Solférino. By the station, local chain **Les 3 Brasseurs** brews its own beer. **LE**



FRANCE 2019-20 LOSC Lille

www.liberoguide.com/losc-lille

LOSC Lille

Champions League competitors in 2019-20 for the seventh season, **Lille Olympique Sporting Club** (losc.fr) are based at one of the biggest club grounds in France. Double winners with a young Eden Hazard in 2011, in 2019 Lille finished runners-up behind the billionaires of Paris Saint-Germain but above the likes of Lyon and Marseille.

Renamed in honour of the recently departed mayor behind the project, the **Stade Pierre-Mauroy** was opened in 2012.

Lined on one side by hotels and restaurants, the stadium is an energy-saving arena of just over 50,000 capacity. Quickly adapted into a smaller concert venue, the stadium is laid out in two main tiers for LOSC games.

North (gates C-E) along main boulevard de Tournai and South Stands (I-L) are behind each goal, East (F-H) and West (M, N, A, B) the sidelines. Away fans are allocated a sector between gates H and I, in the south-east corner of the stadium.

Transport

Three métro stops serve the stadium, though none are right next door. The one named after the stadium, **4 Cantons Grand Stade**, at the end of the **yellow**



M1 line, is actually the furthest away, a leafy 12min walk through the university complex.

On the same line, one stop nearer to town, **Cité Scientifique Pr Gabillard** is in the same wooded complex and slightly closer. Two stops away, seven from Gare Lille Flandres, **Villeneuve d'Ascq Hôtel de Ville** gives access to the bars nearby and adjoining shopping centre. The stadium is less than 10min away.

Tickets

Tickets are sold at the **billetterie** (Wed & Fri 2pm-7pm, match days) by Gate C on the boulevard de Tournai and at other ticket offices on each corner three hours before kick-off.

The **LOSC shop** in town (68 rue de Béthune, Mon 2pm-7pm, Tue-Sat 10.30am-7pm) sells tickets, as does the club's **English-language online service** at billetterie.losc.fr/uk.

Agencies such as **france billet** (francebillet.com), **billetnet** (billetnet.fr), and hypermarket chains **Carrefour** (en.spectacles.carrefour.fr) and **Auchan** (billetterie.auchan.fr), also distribute.

Prices begin at under €20 behind the goals, rising to around €50 for a decent seat on the sidelines, depending on the opposition. Unless PSG are in town, availability is not an issue.



Shops

LOSC have a large **outlet** (not Mon/Sun) at the stadium by Gate F near the hotels and restaurants and a **two-floor store** (68 rue de Béthune, not Sun) in town. While red and blue are still the club's signature colours, the away strip for 2019-20 is a rather dramatic yellow, the third kit some kind of spider's web arrangement on white.

Bars

Of the row of establishments at Les Terrasses on the boulevard de Tournai side of the stadium, northern French chain **Beers & Co** stocks a range of Belgian brews on draught and by the bottle.

Of the restaurants alongside it, **Sohourbanfood** offers international fare, **Paradis 221** sushi and sashimi, while **The Factory** shows matches on a big screen.

A row of fast-food outlets can be found at the south end of the stadium nearest the university complex. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 Lyon

www.liberoguide.com/lyon

Lyon

France's second city pushes Paris pretty close to be the nation's football capital. Champions seven years running until 2008, flagship club **Olympique Lyonnais** (ol.fr/en) have never finished out of the top five this century.

'OL' are based at the **Parc Olympique Lyonnais**, a contemporary complex centrepieced by the **Groupama Stadium**, host of six matches for Euro 2016. It went on to stage the 2018 Europa League Final and the semi-finals and final of the 2019 Women's World Cup.

This is the empire, in Décines-Charpieu, 12km east of Lyon, that long-term club president Jean-Michel Aulas has built, along with a top-class academy that has produced and profited from the nurturing of Alexandre Lacazette and Karim Benzema.

Bearings

Lyon Airport is 20km (13 miles) south-east of the city centre, connected by **rhônexpress** train (€16.30, every 15mins, every 30min after 9pm, last service midnight, 30mins journey time).

The rhônexpress runs to **Lyon Part-Dieu**, the main train station east of the city centre, via **Vaulx-en-Velin La Soie**, linked by tramway to the stadium you pass on the way.

A taxi into town should cost around €50-€60. Local firms include **Lyon Taxis** (+33 4 69 96 90 69) and **Taxi Lyonnais** (+33 4 78 26 81 81).

Local transport TCL consists of a four-line metro, five-line tramway system and buses.

Tickets are €1.90 (€2.20 on board), €6.20 for **24hrs**, to be validated on board for each journey. Look out for **TCL sales points** across town, including Part-Dieu and Bellecour.

Bed

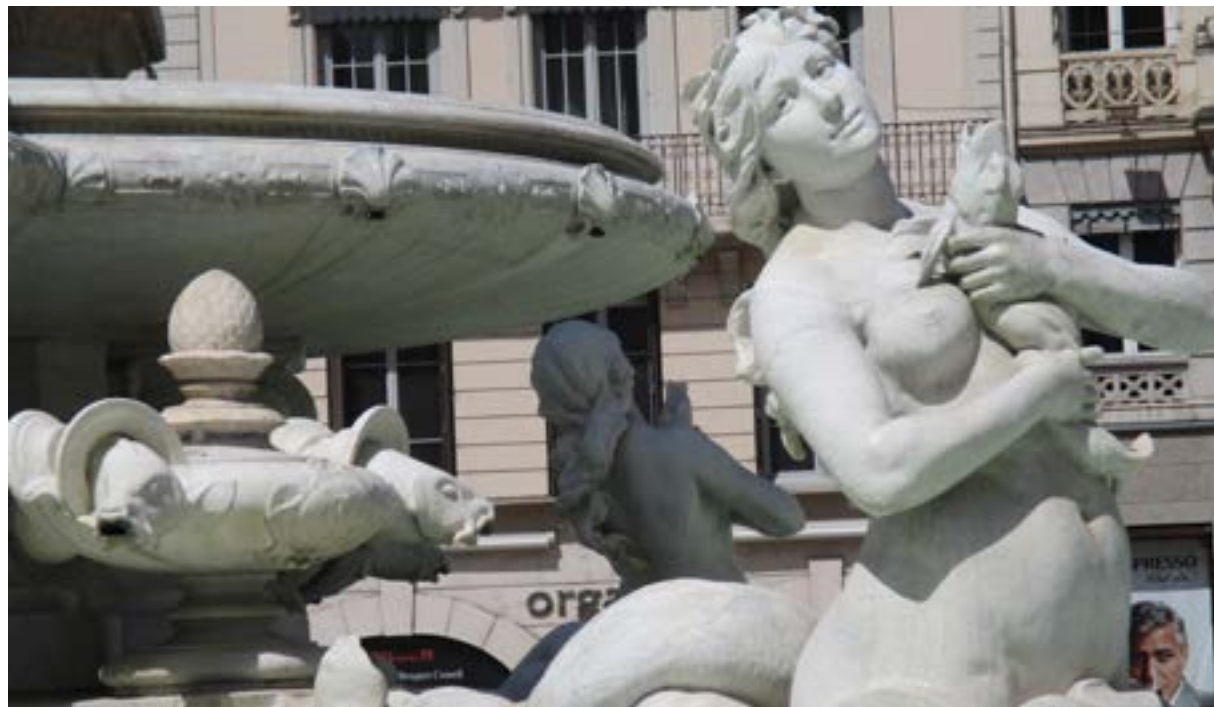
The local **tourist office** (en-lyon-france.com) on place Bellecour has a **hotel reservation** service.

Right by the stadium, the recently opened **KOPSTER** offers mid-range, contemporary comfort and a handy pre-match bar and restaurant. The local **Lavorel** group snapped it up while it was still being built, post-Euro 2016.

Across Rodeo Est A-road, the affordable, standard **B&B Hôtel Lyon Grand Stade Meyzieu** on rue de la République.

Just around the roundabout, the **Aka Lodge Lyon Est** is another relative newbie, offering two-star chain accommodation since 2017.

Another hub of chain hotels is clustered by Part-Dieu station. Within



one building on the same side of the station as the Rhône Express airport tram is an **ibis Budget**, an **ibis Styles** and a **Mercure** – with a **Campanile** behind them.

Beer

Bouchons and **Bocuse** not bars and beer bring tourists to Lyon, but pubs cluster between St-Paul and Vieux Lyon stations, and the river. On facing waterfront corners, the **Wallace Bar** on rue Octavio Mey and **Elephant & Castle** on quai de Bondy are pleasantly busy

during happy hour – the E&C goes big on Sunday lunches, Eagle beers and TV football.

Round the corner on place St-Paul, **Baràgones** is a lively bar once attached to the **Collège Hotel** – OL and big-match screenings complement an exotic cocktail selection.

Further down the riverfront, on rue St Georges, behind the church and footbridge of the same name, **Johnny's Kitchen** and **Johnny Walsh's**



complement each other perfectly, one great for superior daytime dishes and chatty evening beers, the other springing to life after midnight. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 Olympique Lyonnais

www.liberoguide.com/olympique-lyonnais

Olympique Lyonnais

Back in the Champions League for 2019-20, **Olympique Lyonnais** (ol.fr/en) surrendered domestic dominance to Paris Saint-Germain but gained an impressive new stadium. The **Groupama Stadium** aka **Parc Olympique Lyonnais** sits out in Décines-Charpieu, 12km east of Lyon.

Crowds in this three-tiered arena often surpass 55,000, home fans behind each goal creating a cauldron of noise that bounces off the photovoltaic roof, the match-long call-and-response chants led by the hard-core Bad Gones supporters in the Virage Nord.

A corner of the Virage Sud is allocated to visiting supporters, for major games sections 428-431 of the upper tier, accessed through gates Q and R. Smaller groups will be placed in the lower tier, sections 124-125, same gates.

Transport

For 2.5hrs before kick-off and 1hr after the final whistle, shuttle trams serve the stadium. Look out for the **red N** ('Navette Tramway') sign near **Part-Dieu station** (exit on the Rhône Express side). Journey time 25min.

Regular transport is provided by **tramway 3** from **Part-Dieu** (Rhône Express side; every 10-30min) to



Décines Grand Large (journey time 20min).

Signs for the Parc lead you down rue Francisco Ferrer to a roundabout, where you turn left. Allow 10min from the tramway stop.

Tickets & shop

With a stadium capacity of 59,000 and gates surpassing 55,000, availability is at a premium.

Online, billetterie.ol.fr and agencies **Fnac** (fnacspectacles.com), **Carrefour**

(en.spectacles.carrefour.fr) and **Auchan** (billetterie.auchan.fr) distribute, along with outlets of **Digitick** (digitick.com), such as **Boul'dingue** in town at 8 rue du Palais de Justice.

Tickets are sold at the **two club shops**, behind the Tribune Nord and in town at 104-106 rue Edouard Herriot near Bellecour métro, open Mon-Sat 10am-7pm, stadium also Sun (10am-6pm) and match days.

Prices start around €30 in the upper tiers and €50 in the lower.

For English-language enquiries, use **contact form** ol.fr/en/football-club/contact-us.

Tours & museum

There are two kinds of **stadium tour** – **Mini** (1hr 45min, €15/discounts €8) by the pitch and **Classic** (2hr 15min, €23/€11), including the dressing rooms and dug-out. Both incorporate the **club museum**, which can be visited individually (€10/€5 5-16s), opening hours Wed, Fri, Sat 10am-7pm, Sun 10am-6pm/school holidays Tue-Sat 10am-7pm, Sun 10am-6pm. **English-**



language stadium tours (€19) are available Wed-Fri, 11.30am.

Bars

Just behind the Tribune Nord on avenue Jean-Jaurès, friendly, affordable **Le Couëron** has been run by Véronique and Jean-Jacques Mirzoian for 35 years. On match days, a makeshift outdoor bar creates pre-game atmosphere. Even closer to the stadium here, the **KOPSTER Hotel** adapts its menu for match days. Reservations are preferred – kopsterhotel.com/en.

On level 2 of the Tribune Nord, the **Brasserie des Lumières** operates by VIP package (billetterie.ol.fr) only on match days, and standard reservations on non-match lunchtimes (+33 4 72 10 00 00, Mon-Sat, noon-2pm). Mounted TV screens may distract diners from Jérôme Bernigaud's gastronomic inventions – you're in the culinary capital of France.

Payment at kiosks within the ground is by cashless rechargeable **MYOL card** (myol.fr), €2 from OL Stores or vendors. Outside, cash is fine. **LB**



FRANCE 2019-20 Marseille

www.liberoguide.com/marseille



Marseille

The regenerated, cosmopolitan port of **Marseille** is home to the only French club to truly hold a city in its grip: **Olympique Marseille**, known by all as l'OM.

Whereas much of southern France is in thrall to rugby, Marseille is firmly *foot*. It is personified by its flagship club and their supporters. OM once dominated the league and became the only French club to win the European Cup.

No arena in France can provide the kind of atmosphere generated at the fiery **Stade Vélodrome**. Backdropped by the beautiful hills of Provence, this 67,000-capacity venue has the passionate colour of Spain, Italy or Greece.

Bearings

Aéroport Marseille-Provence is 27 km (17 miles) north-west from town, linked by **shuttle bus L91** (every 15-20min, journey time 40min, €10/€10.90 + 1 onward journey, under-25s €7, return €16/€17.40 +2 onward journeys) to **St-Charles**

station. There's a **ticket office** (cash/cards) just outside Arrivals. If closed, pay on board. From town, buy your ticket from window No.1 of **St-Charles bus terminus** beside the train station.

A **taxi** (+33 4 91 02 20 20) into town should cost €50.

The **train** from **Paris Gare de Lyon** takes 3hr 20min, **advance single** around €45. St-Charles, a 10-15min walk downhill into town, is the crossing point of the two-line **metro system**, within a network of buses and tramway lines run by **rtm**. You'll need



the metro or bus for the stadium. A **single ticket** is €1.70, a **24hr pass** €5.20, **72hr** €10.80.

Bed

Marseille Office du Tourisme (marseille-tourisme.com/en) has a hotel-booking service.

At the stadium, the **AC Marseille Prado Velodrome** offers four-star comfort and a Med-focused restaurant, while the two-star, upper-budget chain **B&B Marseille Prado Vélodrome** provides several sports channels in its 162 rooms.

Also convenient for the Vélodrome on avenue du Prado, the **Adagio Access Marseille Prado Périer** offers affordable apartment-style units with hotel accoutrements.

The Vieux Port is surrounded by hotels, such as the classic **Alizé**,

above the Brasserie OM. Nearby **Escale Oceania** and **Grand Hotel Beauvau** also provide views of the Vieux Port.

Around the harbour, the **Belle-Vue** echoes pre-war Marseille while **New Hotel le Quai** was fully renovated and renamed in 2019.

By the station, you'll find a **Holiday Inn Express** and a few cheapies on the right-hand side as you walk down the stairs. These include the **Hôtel Terminus St-Charles**, the former Beaulieu.

Beer

The **Vieux Port** is the place to be, particularly the stretch of quai de Rive Neuve around the timeless **Bar de la Marine** (No.15), backdrop for the Colin Firth proposal scene in *Love Actually*. **Shamrock** next door goes big on sport, while **O'Malley's** (No.9) and **Queen Victoria** alongside bask in huge, harbour-front terraces.

Round the corner, the **Little Temple Bar** (7 rue de la Paix) is more about drinking than posing by the waterfront.

Back on the Vieux Port, don't miss the **Brasserie du Port OM Café**, its terrace perfectly sited on quai des Belges, without the sports-bar feel or Olympique-themed décor it used to have. **LB**



FRANCE 2019-20 Olympique Marseille

www.lib eroguide.com/olympique-marseille

Olympique Marseille

The only French club to win the Champions League, backed by a huge, passionate fan base, **Olympique Marseille** (om.fr/en) are re-established as contenders, two decades after the dominant early 1990s. A title win in 2010 was followed by a Europa League final in 2018.

Formed in 1899, Olympique Marseille, universally known as l'OM, these pioneers in the French game moved to the **Stade Vélodrome** in 1937.

Built for the 1938 World Cup, successfully staging another 60 years later, this former cycling arena was expanded for Euro 2016. The **Orange Vélodrome** now holds 67,000, the biggest in the French league.

The open bowls behind each goal are the Virages Sud, and Nord de Peretti, named after a fan leader.

Rising up along each sideline are the 22,000-capacity Ganay Stand and, rebuilt for Euro 2016, 16,000-capacity Jean-Bouin. Away fans are allocated a far corner of the Ganay at the Virage Nord end, lower tiers P, Q, sometimes also middle tiers N, O, depending on demand.



Transport

The Vélodrome is by the **Rond Pont du Prado** métro station on line 2. The next stop, **Sainte-Marguerite/Dromel**, behind the stadium, allows easier access to the Ganay Stand and Virage Sud.

Tickets

With capacity at 67,000, there should be availability for all games. The club distributes **online** (billetterie.om.fr/uk) and through its **ticket offices** at the stadium. The ones behind the Tribune

Jean-Bouin operate from 10am the day before the game and on match day itself, and behind the Tribune Ganay from 5.30pm for a regular Saturday-evening fixture.

You'll be paying €40-€60 in the sideline Ganay or Jean-Bouin Stands, the Virages Nord and Sud usually sold out.

Shops

The club have **three stores**, the downtown one right on main drag **La Canebière** (No.44), the **stadium** one

near the hotels on boulevard Michelet, and way out east of town at the mall, **La Sablière**.

Tours

Tours (€18) from gate 18 are a casual stroll around a mural of OM history, the trophy cabinet, the dressing rooms and pitch.

Bars

There's plenty of lively drinking around the Stade Vélodrome, on and off busy boulevard Michelet. Opposite Rond Pont



du Prado métro station, the **Brasserie du Stade** puts focus on food most of the week but turns into a busy pre-match bar, with a terrace. Next door, **Le Negresko** has a front terrace and TV inside.

In the gleaming retail centre alongside the Vélodrome, **Factory & Co** is the local branch of this France-wide, NYC-inspired chain, all bagels, burgers and cheesecake, plus bottled Bud and Corona. Past the ground, **Le Fair Play** is mobbed by OM fans on match days, particularly the terrace. Inside, a bar counter features an ever-flowing tap of Bières des Cigales from nearby Avignon. Round the corner on boulevard Ganay, **Le Black Stone** ticks the right boxes, big-screen football action, quality pub grub, house beer and a strong live-music element. Open from 5pm, happy hour generously set until 8pm.



FRANCE 2019-20 Metz

www.liberoguide.com/metz



Metz

Metz, capital of Lorraine, stands at the crossroads of France and Germany. Its football club, **FC Metz**, promoted in 2019, proudly bear the Cross of Lorraine – the symbol of Free France in World War II.

In 1967, young industrialist and former national motocross champion Carlo Molinari took over as president. Metz gained immediate promotion to the top flight – and stayed there. After Molinari's return

in 1983, Metz twice won the cup, and became league runners-up in 1998. Molinari stayed in office until 2009, a presidency that took in five decades.

During that time, Anderlecht, Newcastle and Red Star Belgrade all came to Metz, though a 4-1 win over Terry Venables' Barcelona at the Nou Camp was the stand-out European night for les Granats in their prime.

Metz is also known for its academy producing the likes of Robert Pirès, Louis Saha and Emmanuel Adebayor.

Bearings

Lorraine Airport is 19km (12 miles) south of Metz. A **shuttle bus** (€8, journey time 30min) links with Metz station (Centre Pompidou side).

Taxis Metz (+33 3 87 56 91 92) charge a whopping €44 into town.

The fastest **train** from **Paris-Est** is 1hr 25min, advance tickets €25. Metz station is a 10min walk south of the centre. The stadium is about the same distance west.

City transport consists of buses and a two-line swift-bus network, METTIS, run by **Le Met'**. A ticket is €1.70, a day pass €4, from machines at main stations.

Bed

Tourisme Metz (tourisme-metz.com/en) has a **database of hotels** and current availability.

The only lodging close to the stadium is the most unusual – a 38-metre-long canal boat, the **Péniche Alclair**, B&B for two €85 for two.

Towards the train station at 5 avenue Ney, **La Citadelle** is a stylish four-star with a Michelin-praised restaurant.

In town, street-side rooms at three-star **Hôtel de la Cathédrale** on place de Chambre overlook the church.

On rue des Clercs, the **Grand Hôtel de Metz** occupies an 18th-century house. On rue Dupont des Loges, the **Hôtel du Centre** offers no-frills lodging near shops and restaurants.

By the station, the **Alérion** is a two-star opposite while the **Cécil** on nearby rue Pasteur is slightly classier, as is the **Escorial** alongside.

Beer

Amos beer, Moselle wines and schnapps are the local tipples served in downtown Metz. By the cathedral, the **Irish Pub** shows matches, as do the **Shannon** and nearby **Shamrock** on avenue Robert Schuman, also a major DJ and live-music venue.

Locals also frequent the **Eurofoot Café** by Notre-Dame Church, offering TV football, table football and pool.

Central **place Saint-Jacques** is lined with terrace bars, some which screen football. The **Bar Saint-Jacques** (No.10) is one, which sets up a huge screen outdoors for big summer tournaments. Nearby **place Saint-Louis** is also dotted with terrace bars, including **Vivian's Pub Fairy** at No.15, TV sport a speciality.

For beers, nationwide chain **Les BerThom** on rue du Palais has one of the best selections in town, along with a lively atmosphere and savvy staff. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 FC Metz

www.lib eroguide.com/fc-metz

FC Metz

Returning to Ligue 1 in 2019, **FC Metz** (fcmetz.com) have only once honed in on a league title, losing to Lens on goal difference in 1998.

Star of that campaign, Robert Pirès, is one of many nurtured at Metz. Louis Saha and Emmanuel Adebayor also ran out for Les Grenats.

Flagship club of Lorraine, Metz joined Ligue 1 shortly after being formed in 1932 – but only picked up after former motocross champion Carlo Molinari took over as president in 1967.

Under old boys Henryk Kasprczak then Marcel Husson, Metz notched French Cup victories in 1984 and 1988. Their most remarkable exploit came in October 1984. Trailing Barcelona 4-2 after the first leg at home, and 1-0 in the Nou Camp, Metz hit four goals to knock out the Catalans.

The **Stade Saint-Symphorien**, set on the island of the same name, opened in the 1920s. France have played three internationals here, one against Luxembourg, who have also used the Saint-Symphorien as a home ground.

An expansion project tied to Euro 2016 was pushed back when Metz missed out on co-hosting. The club recently knocked down the Tribune Sud/Moselle,



reducing capacity to 20,000 until the work is completed later in 2020.

The stadium otherwise comprises three stands, Tribune Nord along the other sideline, two-tiered Est and three-tiered Ouest behind each goal. Away fans are allocated sectors P and Q in the Tribune Est.

Transport

Bus No.11 (every 30min, 1hr Sun) runs from rue François de Curel opposite Metz station to **Palais Sports** (direction Félix Maréchal, journey time 12min), via

central République. Station and stadium are south of town, about a 15-20min walk from each other.

Tickets

Tickets go on sale a month in advance. The **Fédération des Commerçants** (closed Mon/Sun) at 3 avenue Robert Schuman/République and the **club shop** (not Sun, match days) distribute over the counter.

You can buy online through **billetterie-fcmetz.com**, **france billet** (francebillet.com), **fnac** (fnacspectacles.com),

Ticketmaster (ticketmaster.fr), and chains **Carrefour** (en.spectacles.carrefour.fr) and **Auchan** (billetterie.auchan.fr).

On match days, the ticket windows open 3hrs before kick-off – a €3 levy is charged. It's otherwise €20 in the Tribunes Est or Ouest behind the goals, €40-€50 in the Tribune Nord.

Shop

Even Grayou the mascot dragon sports the cross of Lorraine at the **Boutique FC Metz** by the Tribune Nord.



Bars

Before you reach the island, the **Café Le Nancy** (1 bis avenue de Lattre de Tassigny) is Metz-friendly despite the name – note the paintings in the main window.

The place for pre-match drinks is the **Brasserie du Stade** (2 rue du Stade) tucked in from the riverbank near the stadium, its walls covered in Metz memorabilia, its regulars veterans of many a campaign.

The club restaurant behind the Tribune Nord, the **Sport Palace**, soon to be gentrified as the bistro-like Tifo, operates as members-only on match days. Supporters congregate between **Le Palais du Kebab** and **Le Sandwich du Supporteur** by the river. Reserve for Tifo, open to everyone Tue-Fri lunchtimes and for away-match screenings, on +33 87 22 79 85. **LE**



FRANCE 2019-20 Monaco

www.libero guide.com/monaco

Monaco

The tiny principality of **Monaco** is a footballing anomaly. A minuscule city-state squeezed between France, Italy and the Med, this tax haven earns its riches from high-rolling recreation.

After casinos came Formula One, the Monte Carlo Rally, and... **AS Monaco**. Formed in the roaring twenties around the same time as the first Grand Prix, the club started in the amateur divisions of the Provence-Côte d'Azur region.

They now star in the French League while the **national team** takes on the likes of fellow castaways The Vatican, the Isle of Man and Tibet. The club plays at the prestigious **Stade Louis II**, the Monagasques at the **Stade des Moneghetti**, over the border in Beausoleil, France.

Not that you notice when you cross the border. Walk five steps from the nine arches of the **Stade Louis II** to the Riviera Marriott for a pre-match cocktail and you're in France. On the Monaco side, Fontvieille was built on land reclaimed from the sea in the 1970s. Most of the stadium complex, differing levels of sports halls and event areas, is underground.

Bearings

Nice Airport Express bus No.110 runs from each terminal every 30min daily



to **Monaco place d'Armes** (journey time 40min, single €22, return €33).

The train from **Nice-Riquier** goes to **Monaco-Monte Carlo** (20min, €3.50), a series of platforms and exit levels. A machine at the station dispenses tickets (€1.50/€2 on board, €5 day pass).

Taxis Monaco (+377 93 15 01 01) offer a 24-hour local service.

Bed

Visit Monaco (visitmonaco.com/us) has a **hotel database**. Facing the stadium, overlooking Cap d'Ail harbour, the **Marriott Riviera Hotel** is unsurprisingly upscale, with a gym and pools indoor and out. Just along the harbour, **Le Quai des Princes** has a panoramic pool. Also close, the **Columbus Monte-Carlo** is a favourite with Grand Prix drivers – it was first owned by David Coulthard. Note, again, the rooftop pool.

Close to the action around the Port de Monaco, **Port Palace** provides boutique comfort, harbour views and a spa.



Affordable two- and three-stars sit just over the border in France, a short walk downhill into Monaco. The **Boéri** on boulevard du Général Leclerc offers doubles at €110-€120.

Bars

There's plenty of scope for fun in this sportsmen's playground. Monaco even has its own beer, sold at the **Brasserie de Monaco** ('The Place to Beer'), on quai

Albert 1er. Nearby, **Jack** has a match-winning, water-view terrace and TV sports.

Diagonally across the Port de Monaco, **Stars 'N' Bars** beckons sports fans with framed F1 iconography and TV screens.

The **Monte Carlo Bar**, where boulevard Charles III meets avenue Prince-Pierre, sports rows of framed shirts.

McCarthy's Pub is Monaco's Irish bar, on rue du Portier near the Japanese Garden. Near the station, **Slammer's** gets lively on big-match nights.

Over in Fontvieille, along quai Jean-Charles Rey, the Anglo **Ship and Castle** is all roast dinners, TV Prem and fish & chips. Alongside, **Gerhard's Cafe** offers Bavarian Paulaner, TV action and the lovely buzz of a lived-in drinkery. **L9**



FRANCE 2019-20 AS Monaco

www.liberoguide.com/as-monaco



AS Monaco

French champions in 2017, **AS Monaco** (asmonaco.com/en) required a Russian billionaire and young French talent to get to the top.

Champions League runners-up in 2004, Monaco were facing third-flight football when Dmitri Rybolovlev bought 66% of the club from the ruling Grimaldis.

Until then, Monaco had been a family business. Formed by a fusion of local

sporting associations in 1924, Monaco abandoned amateur status in 1933, soon moving into the inventive **Stade Louis II** in Fontvieille.

A stylish feat of engineering by Cap d'Ail harbour where Monaco meets France, the **Stade Louis II** is set beside the original Louis II, also named after the prince who ruled either side of World War II.

The stadium occupies only three hectares – the central part of Trafalgar Square covers one – so architect

Henri Pottier was forced to find savvy solutions to Monaco's space problems.

Set on several storeys of car park, offices, a sports hall and Olympic-sized pool, the pitch is surrounded by roofed stands on three sides, each containing floodlights. On the open, harbour side, nine arches lend the stadium with its signature look.

Surrounded by a running track – the Louis II stages major athletics meets as well as UEFA Super Cup finals – the stadium can hold 18,500. Given that



the population of Monaco is only 10,000 more than this, full houses are rare.

Away fans are generally allocated the arches end, Populaires, opposite the home end, the Pesages. Prince Albert II and his VIP guests are accommodated in the Tribune d'Honneur.

Transport

At **Monaco-Monte Carlo** station, the series of exit levels lead you either up to Boulevard de Belgique and **bus No.5** (to the left as you exit at street level) or down to Port Boulevard Albert Ier and **bus No.6** – both heading for **Fontvieille** (every 10min, 10min journey time).

Tickets

Prices range from €60 in the Tribune d'Honneur to €30 in the facing stand ('Premières') and €20 in the Secondes alongside. Seats behind the goals in the Pesages and Populaires are around €10-€15.

The club authorises online sales through its **own website** (billetterie.asmonaco.com/en).

Contact the club at billetterie@asmonaco.com or **phone** +377 92 05 37 54. There's a **match-day ticket office** behind the main stand.

Shop

The **Boutique Officielle AS Monaco** lined with red-and-white gear can be found at the Jardins d'Apoline, 1 promenade Honoré II, a 7-8min walk from the stadium.

Tours

French-language **stadium visits** (€5.20, cash only) take place Wed-Sun. A smart official leads the tour around the various sports facilities – a royal box in every one – and onto the pitch itself.

Bars

Pre-match options line Cap d'Ail harbour near the stadium. Closest is the **Bolinas restaurant**, part of the **Marriott Riviera** hotel, with a terrace overlooking the yachts.

Alongside, the **Dock's Café** enjoys the same waterfront view, its menu reasonably priced considering the location. Round a little further, **Les Oliviers** is a friendly spot, its refreshing lack of pretence a welcome relief.

At the stadium, **La Pizza du Stade** sits behind the home end. **LB**



FRANCE 2019-20 Montpellier

www.liberoguide.com/montpellier

Montpellier

The French champions of 2012 represent the dynamic southern metropolis of **Montpellier**, just the other side of Provence in Languedoc-Roussillon. Under the singular ownership of corpulent entrepreneur Louis Nicollin, **Montpellier HSC** jumped from obscurity to gain regional funding and hire star players such as Eric Cantona, Laurent Blanc and Carlos Valderrama.

Under Nicollin, the club moved from the municipal Stade Richter to La Mosson, or La Paillade after the surrounding district in the north-western outskirts. Nicollin, mayor Georges Frêche and Hérault Council agreed that the club should promote the city and the region – and change their name to **Montpellier Hérault Sport Club**.

La Paillade then staged six matches for the 1998 World Cup, a PR triumph. Close to the popular beach at Palavas, Montpellier proved a willing and convivial host.

Bearings

The **Aéroport Montpellier Méditerranée** is 7km (4.5 miles) south-east of town.

Airport Shuttle No.620 (€1.60/€2.60 with tramway ticket) runs every 30min to **Montpellier Gare Sud de France**



(10min) and **boulevard de l'Aéroport** (25min) in town.

The main train station is **St-Roch**, 3hr 30min from **Paris Gare de Lyon** (advance discount €45). Some trains also link directly with Barcelona and Madrid. Near the centre, St-Roch is served by four of the five tramway lines, plus city buses, overseen by **TaM**. A **single ticket** is €1.60, valid 1hr, changes permitted, a **day pass** €4.30, valid 24hr from initial stamping.

Montpellier Taxi Bleu du Midi (+33 4 67 03 20 00) charge €25-€35 between airport and town.

Bed

The **Tourist Office** (montpellier-france.com) has a **hotel database** and **click-through booking**.

The only hotel within easy reach of the stadium is the renovated two-star **Abelia** (70 route de Lodève), near Celleneuve tramway.



Convenient for the airport bus and city centre, the **Novotel Suites Montpellier** on avenue du Pirée also offers an outdoor pool. Nearby, the **Mercure Montpellier Centre Antigone** ticks most four-star boxes.

By the Georges Frêche-Hôtel de Ville tramway stop, the **Courtyard Montpellier** provides a heated outdoor pool between May and September.

Near the main square, the **Grand Hôtel du Midi** has charm, character and 44 rooms still bright from a 2015 renovation.

Facing the station, the **Best Western Comédie Saint Roch** provides convenient three-star comfort, alongside the affordable, 12-room **St-Roch**.

Beer

Among the twisting, narrow streets of the old centre, spic and span **O'Carolan's** sits by St Anne's Church while, in pretty place Saint-Côme, stands the pub-like **Fitzpatrick's**. Close by, a worthy candidate for best place in town, the **Bar le Saint-Roch** (22 rue du Petit St-Jean) is a bohemian warren of retro Americana

and MHSC worship – note the match tickets behind the bar, regulars focused on the live sports action. If Saint-Roch is screening rugby, **The Beehive** opposite should be broadcasting the Prem game you're looking for. Decent music policy too.

Another hub, with a more business-like, post-work feel, stretches along the waterfront behind place de l'Europe, where **O'Sullivan's** screens matches in its pub-like interior and adjacent lounge/cocktail bar. Beside it, **Café Oz** runs along similar lines. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 Montpellier HSC

www.liberoguide.com/montpellier-hsc

Montpellier HSC

First-time champions in 2012, **Montpellier HSC** (mhscfoot.com) lost their controversial president in 2017, Louis 'Loulou' Nicollin dying on his 74th birthday. The corpulent football obsessive collapsed at a Michelin-star restaurant, surrounded by friends.

Since then, with his son Laurent in charge, Montpellier have thrived, just missing out on Europe in 2018 and 2019.

It was Nicollin senior who engineered the rise from the amateur division to the top flight. Offered financial support, the local club became MHSC in 1989, blue-and-orange flagship for the regional council. Big names such as Carlos Valderrama were brought in and MHSC have pretty much stayed with the elite since.

Built in 1972, the **Stade de la Mosson** was a surprise choice for a 1998 World Cup venue, its previous capacity doubled to host six games. Set on the north-western outskirts of town, it accommodates 22,000 spectators in two, two-tiered ends, the Heidelberg and the Mosson, and multi-tiered seating in the Tribune d'Honneur and Tribune Présidentielle along each sideline, with the corners also used.

There are separately named seating areas in each of these stands – the

Étang de Thau houses the MHSC ultras in the Heidelberg, the Corbières awaits away fans in the other end.

Transport

Stade de la Mosson has its own stop on blue **tramway line 1**, one before the terminus of Mosson. If you're coming from St-Roch station, it might be quicker to take shorter green line 3, also stopping at Mosson, and make an easy change one stop up from there. Allow at least 30 minutes from the centre. Match ticket-holders ride for free.

From the tramway, walk past low-rent housing, halal butchers and fast-food outlets – the stadium is ahead to the right on avenue de Heidelberg. Allow seven minutes.

Tickets

The club has an **online booking service** (billetterie.mhscfoot.com) to be picked up from the 'Reservation Internet' window at the **ticket office** on avenue Heidelberg. Tickets are also sold over the counter at the **club shop** (see below) at the Odysseum centre, end of blue tramline 1 and at the **Boutique Hurley** sports shop (Tue-Sat 10am-7pm), 11 rue de la Loge, near Comédie tramway in town.

A decent seat over the halfway line (around €25) in the Cevennes along the sideline should be handy for the neutral, away fans are placed in a sector of the Corbières in the Mosson end.



Shops

The main **club shop** (Mon-Sat 10am-7pm) is across town at the **Odysseum** by the tramway terminus of the same name on blue line 1.

Beachwear includes branded flip-flops for the seaside at Palavas. Tickets are also sold.

A match-day mobile **outlet** operates at the stadium on avenue de Heidelberg.

Bars

There's no bar in the vicinity, the basic but evergreen **Brasserie de la Mosson** at 72 avenue de Louisville replaced by pizza joint **Mozzarel'Art**. It also sells tacos and burgers, but no booze.

Most gather at the outdoor beer-and-snack stalls set up on **avenue de Heidelberg**, behind the Tribune d'Honneur, with a real party atmosphere in good weather. **LO**





FRANCE 2019-20 Nantes

www.libero guide.com/nantes



Nantes

The pretty Loire-side regional capital of **Nantes** has produced some of the greatest players in the game.

Nantes has been represented by **FC Nantes** since 1943. This is where stars such as Marcel Desailly and Didier Deschamps have come through the ranks. Though without any silverware since 2001, Les Canaris are back in the top flight, promotion achieved in 2013.

Opened for Euro 84, the **Stade de la Beaujoire**, its elegant curves sweeping over the nearby Erdre river, brought international focus to the north-west France.

A Platini hat-trick against Belgium, six games at France 98 and a rugby World Cup were all witnessed here – though the region lost out for Euro 2016.

Bearings

Nantes Atlantique Airport is 8km (five miles) south-west of town, connected

by **shuttle bus** (every 20min, 30min Sun) that takes 20min to reach focal **place du Commerce** and **Nantes station**. Tickets are €9, valid for 1hr on trams, buses and boats (Navibus). A **single ticket** is otherwise €1.70 from machines/€2 on board, a 24hr pass €5.80.

The **train** from **Paris Montparnasse** takes 2hr 15min, **advance singles** €25. The stadium is north-east of town, the train station a 10min walk or two tram stops to the city centre.



Taxi Nantes (+33 2 40 69 22 22) charge about €35 from airport to town.

Bed

Nantes Tourisme (nantes-tourisme.com/en) provides a **room-booking service**.

Near the stadium, the neat, affordable **Beaujoire** has its own restaurant and cheaper weekend rates. Across the Périphérique, the three-star **Brit Hotel Nantes Beaujoire-L'Amandine** offers equal comfort while alongside, the **Résidence CERISE Nantes La Beaujoire** consists of small studios, hired by the night or the week.

In the centre, around place Royale, the **Mercure Grand Hôtel** shares four-star status with its **Centre Passage Pommeraye** stablemate the other side of the square.

Near the castle, classy **L'Hôtel** offers gastronomic packages while the

Hôtel du Château has lodgings on the modest side.

Near the station, the **Hôtel de Bourgogne** feels old-school, the **Hôtel de la Gare** is similar in age and style, the **Astoria** claims three-star status in the same price bracket while the **Terminus** is slightly cheaper, its rooms more boxy. The **ibis Styles Nantes Centre** adds colour provided by local artists. Proximity to the station means an easy tram hop to the stadium.

Beer

Terrace bars line the pedestrianised stretch by the tram stops for Commerce and Bouffay. **Café Pop**, **Le Poulp**, **Le Bouffay** and **le bar bleu** create a convivial buzz.

Streets either side are dotted with bars. On rue Kévégan the lived-in **DeDannan Celtic Pub** is where to come for serious drinking, **Big Ben** doesn't overdo the Brit theme, while the **Green Sheep** attracts quiet chat.

The **Live Bar** by the castle puts music first, **Shaft** on rue des Petites Écuries attracts a younger crowd, and on rue Bouffay, long-established **Le Rabelais** offers 29 draught beers and match transmissions.

This tangle of streets is where you find Irish bars **John McByrne** and **John McByrne**, under the same name and management by rue de la Juiverie. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 FC Nantes

www.liberoguide.com/fc-nantes



FC Nantes

So often at the forefront of the modern French game, **FC Nantes** (fcnantes.com) have won regular titles throughout their post-war history.

1998 World Cup winners Didier Deschamps, Marcel Desailly and Christian Karembeu were formed at club academy La Jonelière, on the opposite bank of the river Erdre to the stadium built for Euro 84, **La Beaujoire**.

Criticised for its lack of atmosphere compared to its city-centre predecessor, the Stade Marcel Saupin, the Beaujoire was also unpopular because of its location, beyond the ring road north of Nantes.

Its design, by Berdje Agopyan, was groundbreaking for the time, the stadium's curving roof a world away from the old-school Saupin. Agopyan and team went on to create more daring sporting arenas, the Multisports Palace of Paris-Bercy and a skating complex



in Strasbourg but the Beaujoire was conceived when most French stadia were still crammed into city centres.

Even today, the stadium (renamed Beaujoire-Louis Fonteneau after a long-term club president) still echoes this sense of wide open space. An initial capacity of 52,000, 32,000 seated, was reduced to 38,000 all-seated for France 98.

Home fans have always gathered in the Tribune Loire behind the goal,

another group later in the Tribune Erdre opposite. The Jules Verne and Océane stands, divided into two tiers, overlook the sidelines.

Away supporters are allocated a corner between the Erdre and Océane stands.

Transport

The **Beaujoire** has its **own tram stop**, a terminus of one branch of the **No.1 line**. **Ranzay**, the terminus of the other branch, is also close. Both are directly linked to Nantes station, **Gare Nord**.

Trams take around 15mins from the Gare SNCF Nord stop to either branch, and there are trams to either terminus every 6-12mins.

Tickets

Online distribution is taken care of by the club (store.fcnantes.com/billetterie) and networks **France Billet** (francebillet.com), **Fnac** (fnacspectacles.com) and **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr). Over-the-counter sales take place at the Beaujoire **club shop** (Tue-Fri 1pm-7pm, Sat 10am-noon, 2pm-6pm).

On match days, **ticket offices** at the stadium open for business from 90min before kick-off.

Prices start at around €20 and run to €50, depending on the opposition. The cheapest seats are in the (home) Loire and Erdre behind the goals, the most family-friendly in the Océane and priciest in the Jules Verne.

Shop

Training tops, umbrellas and pompom hats in bright yellow and green are stocked at the **Boutique Officielle FC Nantes** (Tue-Fri 1pm-7pm, Sat 10am-noon, 2pm-6pm, match days) by the main entrance at the stadium. There's also a shirt-printing service.

Bars

The most popular meeting place is **Bar La Beaujoire** (1 rue de la Petite Baratte), by Haluchère tram stop, an easy hop to the stadium. Set on a prominent corner, it shows TV matches and faithfully keeps a league ladder updated.

Many locals park their cars at **La Belle Équipe 1877**, a lovely waterside restaurant over the river, part of La Jonelière training complex.

At the stadium, the **Restaurant du Stade** overlooking the pitch opens to the public on weekday lunchtimes (noon-2pm), and operates reservation-only evenings and weekends.



FRANCE 2019-20 Nice

www.lib eroguide.com/nice

Nice

Host of the Euro 2016 draw and home to the **Allianz Riviera** built for the tournament, **Nice** is set on re-establishing itself at the forefront of the French game. Ignored for the 1938 and 1998 World Cups in favour of Antibes and Montpellier, Nice witnessed four games at the Euro 2016 finals, including Iceland's shock 2-1 win over England.

Flagship club **OGC Nice** achieved their strongest league finish for four decades in 2016-17. The Chinese-American consortium behind this success then gave way to UK petro-billionaire Jim Ratcliffe, now the majority owner and a tax exile in Monaco next door.

The move to the Allianz Riviera, north-west of the city at Saint-Isidore, saw 7,000 fans bid farewell to the Stade du Ray, walking en masse from place Masséna for its last match in September 2013.

The city is still imbued with a grass-roots football culture, red-and-black scarves in bars declaring 'Allez Nissa La Bella' ('Go Beautiful Nice'). It's not a spirit Ratcliffe will see much of around Monaco.

Bearings

The **Aéroport Nice Côte d'Azur** is 6.5km (four miles) south-west of the city. **Tram No.2 (blue)** from Terminals 1 and 2



takes 25-30min to reach city-centre hub Jean-Médecin, where **red line No.1** links with **Gare Thiers/Nice-Ville**, the main train station.

To go from the airport to the stadium, **tram No.3 (green)** runs direct to **Stade**. Buy tickets from machines at stops (single €1.50, day pass €5, ten-journey multi €10), credit cards accepted.

Taxis Nice (+33 610 821 171) charge around €35 from airport to town or to the stadium.

Bed

Nice Tourisme (en.nicetourisme.com) runs an **online booking service**.

Near the Allianz Riviera, four-star **Servotel** offers an outdoor pool and Le Joseph restaurant. Across avenue Vérola, two-star **Kyriad Nice-Stade** is a convenient chain with weekend deals.

In town, seafront four-star **Beau Rivage** combines contemporary style with timeless class – plus the longest private beach on the Riviera. Nearby

Le Méridien basks in its prestigious address of 1 promenade des Anglais, with pools indoor and out, a rooftop restaurant and a private beach, too.

Near the Jean-Médecin tram stop on rue Emma et Philippe Tiranty, the **Hôtel du Petit Louvre** is cheap, comfortable and convenient.

Further up Jean-Médecin by the station, the **Hôtel 64 Nice** is more boutiquey than the down-at-heel competition nearby.



Beer

Bars line **cours Saleya** and streets nearby in **Vieux-Nice**. On rue Droite, expat-friendly pubs include the **Snug & Cellar** and **Paddy's**, near the **King's Pub** on rue de la Préfecture.

Prominent **Akathor** on cours Saleya provides live music and big-screen sport. A few doors down, **Ma Nolan's** has TV sport and a terrace overlooking Nice bustle. Another branch sits by the Old Port. Just up from there on rue Cassini, **Beer District** offers 16 global brews on tap and match action.

At the top of rue Droite, family-run **Le Sauveur** is a classic OGCN hang-out. Among the Nice paraphernalia are messages of praise to the *pan bagnat*, a tuna bap, which is to Provence what the pastry is to Cornwall. **LE**



FRANCE 2019-20 OGC Nice

www.liberoguide.com/ogc-nice



OGC Nice

Based at the new-build **Allianz Riviera**, **OGC Nice** (ogcnice.com/en) have attracted two waves of foreign ownership to push the club back among the elite.

Olympique Gymnaste Club de Nice, 'Le Gym', were founder members of the French professional league in 1932.

Venue for Euro 2016, the **Allianz Riviera** was created by Jean-Michel Wilmotte at a cost of €245 million.

On the edge of the Préalpes d'Azur Natural Park, the arena sits in Eco-Valley, the recyclable translucent roofing letting in natural light but allowing the sound to reverberate around a stadium of relatively modest 36,000 capacity. The famous Viking thunder clap was in full roar here when Iceland overcame England 2-1 at Euro 2016.



The home end is the Populaire Sud. Away fans are allocated the north-east corner of the opposite goal, Tribune du Ray, by the sideline Tribune Garibaldi, sectors C1-3, access gate C. The press box is in Tribune Ségurane opposite the Garibaldi.

Transport

The Allianz Riviera has its own stop on new **tram line 3** from each terminal of the airport. On match nights, from 2hrs before kick-off, services leave **Jean-**

Médecin in town every 12min, for **Stade**. After the final whistle, every 4min for up to 1hr, services set off back to Jean-Médecin. After an hour, they resume their normal route down to the airport.

A pleasant jaunt from town is the little Provence train from quaint **Nice-Sud station** (near place Général-de-Gaulle) to **St Isidore** (€1.80, journey time 10-15min). From there, steep stone stairs lead to the **Brasserie Les 4 Coins** below, then straight down avenue

Verola – turn left for the stadium. It's an easy 10-15min stroll.

Tickets

Tickets are distributed **online** from the **club** (billetterie.ogcnice.com), **Fnac** (fnacspectacles.com), **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr), and **Carrefour** (en.spectacles.carrefour.fr).

The **main stadium ticket office** behind gate G by Accès Sud usually opens during the week (Wed, Fri, Sat 10am-6pm) but

check first – billetterie@ogcnice.com, +33 4 93 84 05 43 (Mon-Fri 9am-6pm). On match days, windows open 2-3hrs before kick-off. Availability is rarely a problem.

Prices are set at around €15 behind each goal (Populaire Sud or Ray). In the pricier sideline Ségurane or Garibaldi, it's €31 for the cheapest seats, €51 the most expensive.

Shops

OGC Nice Store sits on place Masséna behind the Fontaine du Soleil in town. There's also a **match-day store** at the parvis Sud-Est near the Memphis restaurant, open 3hrs before kick-off.

Bars

Down from St-Isidore station, **Brasserie Les 4 Coins** (436 avenue Sainte-Marguerite) is a terrace spot with bar/betting shop attached.

Behind the Tribune du Ray, the **Café des Aiglons** is part of the **Musée National du Sport**, with its own entrance to the left through the main doors. It's a red-and-black treasure trove of shirts, scarves and match tickets through the ages – with a bar attached.

Near the club shop, the family-friendly **Memphis Nice** is done out like an American diner, serving Samuel Adams and Liberty Anchor Ale along with Heineken on draught. The upstairs floor leads to an outdoor terrace in the shadow of the stadium. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 Nîmes

www.liberoguide.com/nimes



Nîmes

Deep in the fiery south, bullfighting hub **Nîmes** should be a crazy hotbed of football. Flagship club **Nîmes Olympique** were Eric Cantona's last employers before they sold him to Leeds for under £1 million.

But affluent, dynamic Montpellier surpassed Nîmes long ago, co-hosting the World Cup of 1998 and winning the French League in 2012.

During 25 long seasons, Nîmes Olympique, les Crocodiles, were in the second tier and often lower. Promotion eventually came in 2018 but crowds at the **Stade des Costières**, the functional municipal stadium on the southern outskirts of town, rarely tested its 18,500 capacity the following top-flight season.

Bearings

The nearest main airport is **Montpellier**, 53km [33 miles] away. **Shuttle bus No.620** runs every 30min

to **Montpellier Sud** station (25min journey time, €1.60, pay on board). **Tramway No.1** (€2.60 combined ticket from the airport) then runs to **St-Roch**, Montpellier's other station.

Nîmes-Centre is a short walk south of the city centre. As of 2019, most trains from **Paris Gare de Lyon** and **Montpellier Sud** use the new **Nîmes Pont du Gard** station 14km (six miles) east of town. Local trains then run to Nîmes-Centre (8min journey time) in town.



For now, trains will also run from Montpellier St-Roch to Nîmes-Centre.

Public transport comprises **Tango! buses** that run from the walkable historic centre to the outskirts, including the stadium.

Rechargeable tickets are sold from machines at stops and drivers (not the T1). The first costs €1.60, then it's €1.30 per journey in any direction, valid for 1hr.

Taxi Grès (+33 6 16 400 902) offer a range of airport transfers.

Bed

Nîmes Tourisme (nimes-tourisme.com) has a **database of accommodation**.

For the stadium, try central **Apart'City Confort** at boulevard de Bruxelles 1, near the T2 stop for transport there, four-star lodgings with a 24-hour reception. Its sister operation, **Apart'City**

Nîmes is closer at allée de l'Amérique Latine 364.


Convenient for the Arena and bar zone, the **Novotel Atria** on boulevard de Prague has its own restaurant, while the independent **Hôtel des Tuileries** at 22 rue Roussy provides local craft beer in its bar, and a large double bed in each of its 11 rooms. At the other end of rue Roussy on place du Château, the **Central Hôtel** offers affordable comfort.

Across the Arena, the **Hôtel de l'Amphithéâtre** has been created from two lodgings dating back 300 years.

Exiting the train station, the renovated two-star **Abalone** lies ahead. Doubles start at €60.

Beer

The broad pavements of **boulevard Victor Hugo** provide ample space for screens and drinkers at the string of bars between rue Corneille and rue Gergonne. Top picks are **Bar Le Victor Hugo** and **Bar Joe**, unofficial headquarters of the Nîmes supporters' club, an official ticket outlet and a cracking bar. Round the corner from the Victor Hugo, the **Big Ben Bar**, down narrow rue Maubet, has TVs outside for atmospheric match-watching.

Around **place Gabriel Péri**, another cluster of bars includes **O'Flaherty's** and the slightly down-at-heel but football-loving **London Tavern**. 



FRANCE 2019-20 Nîmes Olympique

www.liberoguide.com/nimes-olympique

Nîmes Olympique

Their crocodile logo echoing glory days more than half a century ago, **Nîmes Olympique** (nimes-olympique.com) have spent longer out of the top division than playing in it.

Les Crocodiles returned to Ligue 1 in 2018 after a 25-year absence. Queues stretched around the block for tickets for the decisive visit of Gazélec Ajaccio but in truth, Nîmes have long been overshadowed by their more ambitious and successful regional rivals, Montpellier.

Built by the municipality in 1989, the **Stade des Costières** was sold to club owner Rani Assaf 30 years later, in the summer of 2019, with the intention of knocking it down and rebuilding it by 2024.

In between, the stylishly blocky exterior designed by Vittorio Gregotti, responsible for the rebuild of the Luigi Ferraris in Genoa around the same time, remains in place. Surrounding a football pitch with no running track in between, apart from a brief, star-studded season in the early 1990s, the Stade des Costières, named after the wine terroir created by the Romans, would accommodate modest gates until 2018.

Today, average attendances hover around 13,000-14,000, the stadium



capacity 18,500. Two stands are covered, the main Tribune Nord and livelier Sud opposite. The home end is the Pesage Est, away supporters are allocated around 900 seats in the Tribune Ouest nearest the Tribune Nord.

Transport

The stadium is on the southern outskirts of Nîmes, too far to walk from the city centre or from **Nîmes-Centre rail station**. **Bus line T1** (every 7-10min) circles the Old Town, calling at focal **Arènes** and **Esplanade Feuchères** near the station, then heads south to the **Costières/Parnasse** stop by the ground. Allow 10-15min from town. Travel is free for match-ticket holders. The alternative is **bus No.7** (every 20min) from **Gare Feuchères**, which takes longer to reach the same stadium stop.

Tickets

Tickets are sold **online** through the **club** (web.digitick.com) or the usual nationwide channels such as



Ticketmaster (ticketmaster.fr) and **Fnac** (fnacspectacles.com).

In person, you could try **Bar Joe** (44 boulevard Victor Hugo) in town or, on match days, the **stadium ticket windows** – call +33 4 66 64 66 64 to check availability.

Home fans fill places behind either goal – priced at around €15 – so you'll be paying around €25 for a seat in the Tribune Est or Ouest.

Shop

The match day-only **club shop** at the stadium stocks the standard range of crocodile-branded merchandise – away tops are a white/red reverse of the home shirts.

Bars

The location where a ring road meets a business park barely inspires but **Les 3 Brasseurs** on Ancienne Route de Générac is a fine pre-match option. Friendly owner

and staff, decent house beers and quality food overcome the fact that this is a nationwide chain – tables are set facing sports screens big and small.

Opposite the main gates on avenue de la Bouvine, **Brasserie de l'Annexe** and **Pizza Papa** are fairly upscale eateries with sun-catching terraces – happy to serve sedate pre-/post-match meals, though perhaps not pints to raucous football fans. **LB**



FRANCE 2019-20 Reims

www.libero guide.com/reims

Reims

Centre of the Champagne region, **Reims** is home to venerable **Stade de Reims**, twice European Cup finalists in its inaugural days, and now back in top flight.

Their beginnings are linked to the champagne industry. Founded as the sporting club of Pommery & Greno, the football team first played in gold shirts and green shorts, as if depicting a bottle of bubbly.

The Parc Pommery itself was created by company owner, the Marquis Melchior de Polignac, for workers to enjoy after a day underground. De Polignac later helped establish the Winter Olympics.

Parc Pommery merged with local rivals Sporting Club rémois to form Stade de Reims in 1931. The club badge featured a bottle of champagne on top of a football.

Reims was considered prominent enough to stage one match for the 1938 World Cup, later finalists Hungary's 6-0 thumping of the Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia) in front of 9,000 people.

Changing the SdR kit to red with white sleeves, sporting director Henri Germain hired Albert Batteux as coach, and players such as Raymond Kopa



and Just Fontaine. Title-winners six times, Reims then faded, along with Germain.

In 1991-92, Reims went into liquidation. Re-emerging as Stade de Reims Champagne, the new club struggled until the renamed Stade de Reims regained the top flight in 2012 after an absence of 33 years.

Bearings

From **Paris Gare de l'Est**, trains to **Reims Gare Centre** (€15-€30) take

50min, the station just north of town. The stadium is 1.5km south, across the canal.

Reims public transport consists of two tramlines and buses. Single tickets (€1.60) are valid for 1hr, €2.80 for two, €4.10 for 24hr.

For a **taxi**, call +33 3 26 47 05 05.

Bed

Reims Tourism (reims-tourism.com) has an online booking service.

By the stadium, **CIS de Champagne** is usually hired out for seminars but is also available to individuals.

The more conventional **Mercure Reims Centre Cathédrale** sits across the canal. Alongside, the **Campanile Reims Centre-Cathédrale** is a similar mid-range chain, as is the **Ibis Styles Reims Centre Cathédrale** by the bridge.

Right in town, the **Victoria** (1 rue Buirette) has seen better days but is undeniably cheap, while alongside, the



four-star **Hôtel de la Paix** has a pool, gym and sauna.

Opposite the station, the **Continental** had a complete overhaul in 2018, its gym, restaurant and 50 swish rooms an impressive addition to the city's hotel stock.

Beer

You'll find terrace bars and cafés along pleasant, pedestrianised **place Drouet d'Erlon**, including **Mr Fogg's**, the former **Sherlock**, where TV football is screened. The **Glue Pot** (No.49) offers a Brit-friendly menu plus televised sports. Equally food-oriented **l'édito** (No.80) shows big-screen action amid framed SdR shirts.

In similar vein, **le georges** (32 place du Forum) regularly broadcasts live sport, with a pleasant terrace to boot.

Overlooking Reims Cathedral, **Le Parvis** (2 rue Rockefeller) is one of several spots for sampling champagne. The other side of the church, **Le Gueuleton**, the former **Cardinale** (1 place Martyrs de la Résistance), specialises in wine. **LB**



FRANCE 2019-20 Stade de Reims

www.liberoguide.com/stade-de-reims



Stade de Reims

The name of **Stade de Reims** (stade-de-reims.com) resonates in the French game. Under coach Albert Batteux, Reims won six titles in 13 years and made two European Cup finals.

But it is only recently that Reims have recovered from bankruptcy in 1992. Promotion in 2012 saw Reims in the top flight after 33 years.

Stade de Reims were formed in 1931, when the Sporting Club of the Pommery

champagne company merged with Sporting Club rémois. Moving into the municipal velodrome, site of today's **Stade Auguste-Delaune**, Reims used champagne money to attract the best talent.

Entering the stadium today, completely rebuilt for 2008-09, it's hard to imagine the great Reims side of the 1950s playing here.

Named after a French Résistance hero, the Auguste-Delaune was where Kopa, Jonquet and Fontaine created the Reims legend – though big European

nights took place at the Parc des Princes.

Half a century later, architect Michel Rémon conceived a 22,000-capacity ground, *à l'anglaise*. Four sturdy stands hug the pitch, topped in contrast by a light roof and signature toothbrush floodlights.

Fittingly, its record attendance of 20,300 was set for the visit of Monaco in 2012 that sealed promotion – then broken a fortnight later for the celebratory final match that season, 20,600 for Reims-Lens.



Each two-tiered stand carries the name of a Reims hero from the golden era. The Robert Jonquet and Albert Batteux stands behind each goal accommodate Reims ultras, with visiting supporters (gate D) allocated sections 10, 29 and 30 between Batteux and the Francis Méano Stand along one sideline. Opposite, the main Henri Germain Stand along chaussée Bocquaine houses VIPs and press.

Transport

The stadium is across the canal, 10-15min walk from the cathedral. **Bus No.2** (every 8-12min) sets off from the station via town – it's seven stops to **Bocquaine** by the stadium.

Tickets

Tickets are sold at **club shops** in town (1 rue Chanzy, Tue-Fri 2pm-7pm) and at the stadium (Wed-Sat 10am-noon, 2pm-6pm), as well as outlets of the **Ticketmaster** (Auchan, Leclerc)

and **France Billet** (Fnac, Carrefour) networks.

The club distributes online through billetterie.stade-de-reims.com.

On **match days**, the ticket windows open at 2pm, or 10am for games at 3pm.

The four match categories are classic, gala, prestige and PSG. 'Classic' **prices** average €15 in the lower and upper levels in the Batteux and Jonquet Stands behind the goals, €25-€30 for the sideline Germain and Méano Stands.

Shops

At the **club shop** by the cathedral at 1 rue Chanzy (Tue-Fri 2pm-7pm) and behind the **Henri Germain Stand** on chaussée Bocquaine (Wed-Sat 10am-noon, 2pm-6pm, match days), first kits of Arsenal-style red and white, and second tops in blue, should be available.

Bars

Venues dot the city side of the canal, the most football-friendly being party-centric, late-opening **Le Kilberry** (182 rue de Vesle), with live music and ten draught beers. Nearby brasserie **Le Stalingrad** across the square is another option.

To mix with football types, albeit older men hunched over betting slips, green-fronted corner bar **Le National** (1 rue du Colonel Fabien) is closer to the ground. **LE**



FRANCE 2019-20 Rennes

www.liberoguide.com/rennes



Rennes

Capital of Brittany, **Rennes** is one of the football powerhouses of the north west. Home of 2019 French Cup winners **Stade Rennais**, Rennes challenges the historic capital of Nantes for regional superiority in the Brittany Derby – even though its rivals officially left the region in 1956.

With Lorient and Guingamp recently prominent, the term 'Derby de la Bretagne' is a somewhat convoluted term these days – but the classic face-off is between the two fiery fan cultures of Rennes and Nantes.

Or rather flag-off. Nantes supporters wave the Breton colours of black and white along with their own yellow and green in a bid to show themselves as the true bearers of Breton tradition. Rennes fans wield the stripes and ermine spots of Brittany's Gwenn-ha-du flag while also revelling in their Celtic heritage.



In attempt to out-Breton the enemy, Stade Rennais' **Roazhon Celtic Kop** unfurled the largest Gwenn-ha-du flag ever made at a game in 1994-95.

Bearings

Rennes-St-Jacques airport is 6km (four miles) from town. The **No.57 bus** runs every 20-30min daily to **République** (journey time 20min, €1.50 on board), the hub of the city's one-line métro and extensive bus network run by the same

company, **STAR**. A €1.50 single ticket is valid for the bus and métro, a one-day pass is €4, two days €8.

By **train**, Rennes is 2hr-2hr 15min from Paris-Montparnasse, single tickets around €40. **Rennes station** is just south of the city centre, around a 10-15min walk or two métro stops to République.

A **taxi** (+33 2 99 30 79 79) from the airport to town should cost €16-€20.

Bed

Tourisme Rennes (tourisme-rennes.com/en) has an **online booking option** through selecting individual hotels.

Selling itself on its proximity to the stadium, the **Brithotel du Stade** is a modern mid-range lodging whose rack rates actually drop at weekends. Just over 1km from Roazhon Park on rue de Lorient, it

wouldn't be too convenient for a night out in Rennes.

Actually closer to Roazhon Park, and on the city side of rue de Lorient, **Le Lorient Hotel** is a cheaper two-star, though reception only operates at certain times.

Several hotels cluster around the train station. **Le Sévigné** is a bright and refurbished three-star while more basic **Le Bretagne** is now part of the Citotel chain. Another is **Le Florin**, clean, affordable and with half-board deals.

Beer

Narrow, pedestrianised **rue St-Michel** (aka rue de la Soif) is lined with bars, nearly all quiet if not closed by day. The **Madison Bar** has drinks deals to keep punters happy.

Guarding the entrance to St-Michel, its terrace set on a little square, the lovely **Bar du Champ Jacquet** has a TV screen inside and booths for communal imbibing.

Rue St-Georges offers party-centric **St Georges** and the football-focused **Golden Gate**.

Naturally, Rennes is not short of Irish bars: prominent **O'Connell's** opened for World Cup 1998 and is still busy, right on place du Parlement de Bretagne, while **Kilkenny's Pub** is tucked away on rue du Vau Saint-Germain, rugby fans happy to find it. **LE**



FRANCE 2019-20 Stade Rennais

www.lib eroguide.com/stade-rennais

Stade Rennais

Spearheading a classic period for Breton football, **Stade Rennais** (staderennais.com) won the French Cup in dramatic fashion in 2019. Trailing Paris Saint-Germain 2-0 in a downpour at the Stade de France, Rennes pulled the score back to 2-2. Roared on by 30,000 Bretons, Les Rouge et Noir then won the penalty shoot-out.

The side led by former reserve team coach Julien Stéphan had already beaten Arsenal in the Europa League. Now Rennes have automatic entry to the group stage of the same competition in 2019-20.

Backing them is a fervent Breton/Celtic fan culture. Regular Breton derbies against Nantes, Lorient and Guingamp – with Brest lined up for 2019-20 – have kept a buzz around **Roazhon Park**, the club's home since 1912.

Set on the north bank of the Vilaine, the ground has served Stade Rennais from the early days of the Breton League to the visits of Atlético Madrid and Celtic in the Europa League.

In the early 2000s, incoming owner François Pinault funded a modernisation, bringing capacity close to its current all-seated 30,000.



Stade Rennais ultras gather at each end, the Roazhon Celtic Kop in the Tribune Mordelles (aka Ouest-France), the Red Black Roazhon in the Tribune Ville de Rennes nearest town, separated off from visiting supporters in sector Z.

The club shop and restaurant are set behind the Tribune Lorient (aka Super U) facing the Tribune Vilaine (aka Crédit Mutuel de Bretagne) nearest the river.

Transport

From city-centre **République**, stop E on the other side of the road from the grand Palais du Commerce, **bus No.11** runs every 15-30min to **Stade Rennais** (direction ZI Ouest). Journey time is 10-15min. The service also runs from Rennes station.

Tickets

Ticket offices stand either side of the club shop on rue de Lorient, usually open match day only. The club offers **online sales** (billetterie.staderennais.com), usually up to 2-3 weeks in advance.



Prices are set at €14-€20 behind the goals in the Tribunes Ouest-France and Ville de Rennes, rising to €35 and up to €50 for the best seats on the sidelines, in the Super U and Crédit Mutuel de Bretagne. Unless it's a Breton derby or PSG/Marseille, availability shouldn't be a problem.

Shop

The spacious **Boutique Officielle** (closed Sun/Mon) stands behind the Tribune Super U. Among the red-and-black merchandise, Astérix-type comic

books feature Rennes players as the superheroes.

Bars

Along rue de Lorient, classic **L'Équipe** (No.80) is decked out in Breton-derby splashes from *Ouest France* and backdropped by the barman's impressive collection of sardine cans, sent in by holidaying regulars as postcards.

Further up, the **Football Bar** (No.110) displays a history of Stade Rennais,

and scarves and flags of visiting teams, Celtic included.

Opposite the ground, **Café des Sports-Chez Marco** (No.132) keeps its league table updated.

Behind Tribune Super U, **Leon Le Couchon** is tastefully decorated with a framed history of Stade Rennais. It opens weekday lunchtimes, when it does a daily menu, and for match nights, when you should reserve (+33 2 99 14 43 76). **LE**



FRANCE 2019-20 Saint-Étienne

www.liberoguide.com/saint-etienne

Saint-Étienne

The most romantic name in French club football represents the industrial and transport hub of **Saint-Étienne**. Forever linked with the great side of the 1970s, **AS St-Étienne**, and the epic 1998 World Cup clash between England and Argentina, this revamped art destination staged another major tournament in 2016.

Revamped for Euro 2016, the **Stade Geoffroy-Guichard** also witnessed the return to the European stage of 'Les Verts' after decades of decline and scandal, reviving memories of classic nights against Liverpool and Manchester United.

Geoffroy Guichard was the local entrepreneur behind the Casino supermarket chain, set up in Saint-Étienne. Own-brand goods, loyalty cards, they all started here.

The company started up the sports club in 1912, the football section adopting its green colour scheme and, originally, its name, after World War I.

As a football club, AS St-Étienne are a post-war phenomenon, steered by president Roger Rocher, a former miner. Raising 'Les Verts' to cult status in France, Rocher maintained: 'In football, St-Étienne is the capital, Lyon the suburbs'.



Bearings

The nearest main airport is **Lyon-St-Exupéry** 76km (47 miles) away. **BlaBlaBus** (ouibus.com) and **Flixbus** (global.flixbus.com) offer direct services to **Saint-Étienne** [journey time 1hr 15min, around €10 single online] every 2-3hrs.

Trains from **Paris** require a change at **Lyon**, overall journey time 3hr-3hr 30min to **Saint-Étienne-Châteaueux** (€60 online). The station is linked to the city centre and stadium by tramway, part of the **stas network**, **single tickets**

[changes with buses possible, valid 90min] €1.40.

Radiotaxis St-Étienne (+33 4 77 25 42 42) are a reliable local firm.

Bed

The **Saint-Étienne Tourist Office** (saint-etienne-hors-cadre.fr/en) has a database of hotels and a booking function.

Adjoining the supporters' bar/restaurant of the same name by the stadium, renovated **Le Chaudron Vert** (23 rue

des Trois Glorieuses, +33 4 77 74 23 18) is run by and themed after the club. Simple but comfortable rooms go for €59.

Of the hotels opposite Châteaueux station, renovated three-star **Les Poteaux Carrés** takes its name after the square crossbars of the 1976 European Cup Final. Next door, **Terminus du Forez** has weekend deals and TV football in its restaurant, **la loco**.

In town, two-star design-friendly **Hôtel Continental** on rue François Gillet offers



cheap rooms with shared facilities, as well as mid-range ones. Restored with a panoramic terrace, the **Cheval Noir** stands opposite. Affordable rooms at the **Furania** on rue de la Résistance are en-suite.

Beer

Soggy Bottom along rue de la Résistance stands on the site of an Irish pub of 1998 vintage. **Le Saint Patrick** (44 rue des Martyrs de Vingré) is another option for match-watching. On the same street, the **Café Saint Jacques** provides a roof terrace for sunset sipping. Nearby, **Le Smoking Dog** at 5 rue Georges Dupré beckons with fine beers and live sounds.

By the Hôtel Continental, **L'Elixir** concentrates on match action, Benelux beers and lively sounds, while evening-only **Barberousse** on rue Léon Nautin is where to turn for rum and fun.

Late-opening **Slag Heaps** by Bourse du Travail attracts a slammer-slurping crowd. **LG**



FRANCE 2019-20 AS Saint-Étienne

www.liberoguide.com/as-saint-etienne



AS Saint-Étienne

Record title-winners **AS St-Étienne** (asse.fr/en) dominated French football for ten years, culminating with the European Cup final defeat of 1976. Europa League group-stage competitors for 2019-20, St-Étienne were also out of the limelight for many seasons in between.

A final league title came in 1981, just before the slush-fund scandal that put an ageing Rocher in jail and led to the club's demise.

Yet 'Allez les Verts' remained a familiar chant around French stadiums, an echo of the days of Dominique Rocheteau and Michel Platini.

Modernised for Euro 2016, the **Stade Geoffroy-Guichard** is still Le Chaudron, 'the Cauldron', thanks to its reputation in the 1970s. For Euro 84, three new stands pushed capacity to nearly 50,000.

For France '98, ex-Verts star and World Cup logistics chief Michel Platini insisted on the stadium's inclusion. The north and south terraces were knocked

down, capacity reduced to its current 42,000 and all-seater stands raised in their place. The pitch was also relaid, the perfect canvas for Michael Owen to score his wonder goal for England against Argentina here.

The traditional home end is the Kop Nord, with the Paret Supérieur tier above, mirrored by the Kop Sud with the Snella tier above. Away fans are placed in an area between the Kop Nord and the sideline Pierre Faurand stand. Press, VIP and the best seats are found opposite, the Tribune Officielle.



Transport

The Geoffroy-Guichard has its own **tram stop** on the **T1** and **T2** lines, seven north of the Hôtel de Ville – it's then an 8min walk along rue Claude Odde/boulevard Roger Rocher.

Tickets

With average gates under 30,000, availability only affects the visits of Lyon, Marseille and PSG, and the big European nights. Tickets are sold at the **stadium** (Mon-Fri 9am-6pm, 6hrs before kick-off) and online from the **club website** (billetterie.asse.fr), **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr) and **Fnac** (fnacspectacles.com).

Prices start at €20-€25 in either Kop, with a decent seat on the sidelines going for around €40-€50.

Shop

La Boutique des Verts (Mon-Sat 10am-7pm, match days) by the stadium café is 800 square metres of wall-to-wall green, including little sets of French *boules* and Denis Chaumier's lovely book *Glasgow 1976*.

Museum

The only one of its kind dedicated to a single club in France, **le Musée des Verts** (closed Mon, €7) stands in the south-west corner of the stadium. The museum puts special focus on that fateful European Cup final of 1976, shipping Hampden's square goalposts all the way from Glasgow.

Bars

Stuck out in this industrial zone north of town, the **Chaudron Vert** (23 rue des Trois Glorieuses) opened shortly before the memorable night when Rocheteau's Verts beat Dynamo Kyiv over the road. Green-framed photos show fans and players of the time – these days it's also a handy hotel.

On rue Bergson, the **Café des Abattoirs** (No.137) displays a framed flag and TV while by the club shop, the Casino supermarket runs a self-service restaurant, **À La Bonne Heure**, if you have hungry young mouths to feed pre-match. **LB**



FRANCE 2019-20 Strasbourg

www.liberoguide.com/strasbourg

Strasbourg

The chief city of Alsace walking distance from Germany, **Strasbourg** has experienced different eras and shifting borders, reflected in its football teams and the trophies they challenged for.

Only one, however, is referred to these days as 'Strasbourg'. **Racing Club de Strasbourg Alsace** won the French title in 1979, involving the city's most famous footballing son, Arsène Wenger.

His native tongue Alsatian, his father sent by the Nazis to serve on the Eastern Front, Wenger was the ultimate cosmopolitan, the polyglot who transformed dull Arsenal into a dynamic network of European pedigree.

In 1914, the forerunners of RC Strasbourg took over the pitch vacated by the Germans of FC Frankonia, today the site of the **Stade de la Meinau**.

La Meinau staged the 1938 World Cup and Euro '84. It was here that the Brazilian star Leônidas scored a spectacular hat-trick to help defeat Poland 6-5, one goal the first bicycle kick seen in Europe.

Bearings

Strasbourg Airport is 12km (7.5 miles) south-west of the city. From the terminal, cross the footbridge for **Entzheim-Aérogare**, where trains leave



every 15-20 minutes for **Strasbourg station** (8min journey time). **Tickets** are €2.80, €4.50 with an onward journey.

A **Taxi Strasbourg** (+33 3 88 122 122) into town (€30-€35) can be booked **online** (strasbourg-taxi.fr).

The **train** from **Paris-Est** takes 1hr 45min, **online tickets** €16 in advance.

Strasbourg station is west of the city's historic centre nearby. The **stadium** is south of town, on the **local transport network of trams and buses**. A single ticket is €2, a **24hr Solo Pass** €4.60.

Bed

Visit Strasbourg (visitstrasbourg.fr/en) has a **hotel database**. Hotels abound – but not by the stadium.

Convenient by tram, the upper mid-range **Gutenberg** on rue des Serruriers has comfortable rooms



and contemporary décor. On the same square as the iconic landmark, **Hôtel de la Cathédrale** has a church view, walking distance to the Langstross Grand'Rue stop on tramline A direct to the stadium.

For luxury, the **Régent Petite France** on riverside rue des Moulins offers a top-notch spa and sunbathing terrace.

Over the water, the boutiquey **Dragon** on rue du Dragon fills a brightly coloured 17th-century building done out in

classic Alsatian style. Near the station, the rooms at contemporary **graffalgar** have been painted by local artists.

Beer

Thanks a part-German heritage, decent beer is served around the historic centre and place du Corbeau just over the water.

On the cathedral side of the river, trendy **What the Fox** on rue de la Douane has 16 beers on tap, table football and TVs showing big matches.

On nearby rue du Vieux Marché-aux-

Poissons, **The Dubliners** provides a large pavement terrace, TV football and late opening hours. **Bar Exils** on narrow cobbled rue d'Ail attracts a local crowd with a decent selection of beer and live sport.

Le Cintra place des Etudiants also has live sport on TV and a small terrace.

Just over the river on place d'Austerlitz, smart **Molly Malone's** offers two screens showing big games and a large terrace on a lively square. **LE9**



FRANCE 2019-20 RC Strasbourg

www.libero guide.com/rc-strasbourg

RC Strasbourg

It took ten years, liquidation and three lower divisional titles but **Racing Club de Strasbourg Alsace** (rcstrasbourgal.sace.fr) returned to Ligue 1 in 2017. In a history dating back to 1906, the club have only won one league crown, the landmark triumph of 1979, but a sparse trophy cabinet doesn't begin to reflect a past as colourful as Strasbourg's.

Highlights in recent years include the League Cup win of 2019. Presented by Racing old boy Arsène Wenger, the trophy provided Strasbourg passage to a first European campaign in 14 years.

While the infrastructure around the club changed, the league systems, the cup tournaments, there has been one permanent since the seminal year of 1914: the **Stade de la Meinau**.

La Meinau hosted two matches for Euro 84 but was overlooked for the 1998 World Cup. Strasbourg's recent revival has forced the club to bring La Meinau into the 21st century, organising a €100 million rebuild.

For the time being, while Strasbourg's ultras occupy Tribune Ouest, visiting supporters are allocated the Quart Virage Nord-Est corner of the Tribune Est, by the sideline Tribune Nord. VIPs view the match from the main Tribune Sud.



Transport

The nearest tram stop, located on avenue de Colmar a 5min walk away, is **Krimmeri Stade de la Meinau** on lines **A** and **E**. Both run every 8-10min at weekends until midnight.

Tickets

Of the stadium's 26,000 capacity, 19,000 places are taken up season-ticket holders – and of the 19 home games in 2018-19, 18 were sell-outs.

Advance purchase is essential, either online through the **club**

or agency channels such as **Fnac** (fnacspectacles.com) and **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr), or in person at the **club shops**, at 2 rue du Marché/quai de Paris in **town** and behind the Tribune Ouest at the **stadium**.

Tickets in the Tribunes Ouest and Est (€15) behind the goals are taken by either hard-core fans or families. You'll probably be forking out around €35 for a seat in the sideline Tribune Nord – sectors A/B and E-F/K-L are closest to the corner flags.

For details, email billetterie@rcstrasbourg.eu or phone +33 3 88 44 55 00.

Shops

Strasbourg run two shops, the **Boutique Centre Ville** at 2 rue du Marché/quai de Paris near Homme de Fer tram stop in town, and the **Boutique Stade** behind the home Tribune Ouest.

Along with the replica tops in blue with white trim or the away in white with blue trim, there's a range of stylish T-shirts.



Bars

The **Café Grognon** (2 avenue Léon Dacheux), a 7-8min walk to La Meinau, is popular with Racing fans for pre- and post-game drinks thanks to big TVs, happy hour until 8.30pm and a beer garden.

Just past the railway bridge, **Studio 80** (133 avenue de Colmar) is an '80s-themed karaoke bar, open after 6pm and Racing-friendly.

Where Colmar meets rue de l'Extenwoerth, by the home Tribune Ouest, **La Pizza de Nico** attracts Racing fans with its late-opening hours on match nights, Alsatian flammekueche and bottled beers. It's part of an Alsace-wide chain, hence the regional touch. **LB**



FRANCE 2019-20 Toulouse

www.lib eroguide.com/toulouse



Toulouse

The rugby hub of **Toulouse** is also the home of **Toulouse FC**, whose **Stadium** is used for both codes. Set on an island west of the city centre, 'Le Stadium' was built for the World Cup of 1938 and hosted several games 60 years later, including Romania's last-gasp win over England.

Today's Toulouse FC hark back to the original TFC formed, like Le Stadium, on the eve of the 1938 World Cup.

Le Stadium and surroundings were upgraded and relandscaped to host Euro 2016. Despite lower attendances, TFC ('TéFéCé') continue to use it – as do multi-titled rugby club Stade toulousain for top fixtures.

This imbalance in status – TFC have only one French Cup to their name – points to football's patchwork history here.



Bearings

Toulouse-Blagnac Airport is 7km (four miles) west of town. City transport company **tisséo** runs the tramline, two-line métro and buses. The **T2 tramline** runs every 15min from the airport via **Arènes**, terminating at the **Palais de Justice** nearer the stadium, journey times 20min and 30min respectively.

A single journey is €1.70 (valid 1hr, or 1hr 30min from the airport), a day pass €6.10. There are machines at stations and stops, including the airport. Validate the ticket each time on board the tram/bus or at the metro station, even day passes.

Capitole Taxi (+33 5 34 250 250) charges €20-€25 from the airport to town.

Bed

Toulouse Tourist Office (toulouse-visit.com) runs an online room-booking service.



With Le Stadium on an island, there are few accommodation options nearby. By St-Michel Marcel Langer métro you'll find the **Aparthôtel Lagrange City Toulouse Saint Michel**, comfortable studios for one to six people.

Also on the right bank, near St Michel Bridge, **Le Pier Toulouse Hotel** on boulevard Maréchal Juin has a panoramic view from its upper terrace. One bridge further up, nearer Esquirol métro, the **Hôtel des Beaux-Arts** is an upscale four-star. Just the other side of the bridgehead, the **Garonne** is colourful, modern and affordable.

Right on place du Capitole, the **Grand Hôtel de l'Opéra** is the best address in town, with a spa and hammam to boot. Nearby on rue Romiguières, **Le Grand Balcon** is a historic gem, echoing pre-war Toulouse.

On rue Bayard near the station, the **Hôtel le 30 Étoiles** provides a wallet-friendly but reliable option.

Beer

Toulouse's many pubs ring the city's historic centre. The **Melting Pot Pub** (26 boulevard de Strasbourg) has long been a prime spot for sport-watching – more than 30 years, in fact.

On place du Peyrou, close to Capitole, the late-opening **George & Dragon** offers darts, live music and ales from the **Eagle Brewery** in Bedford. It's run by nationwide **Charles Wells France** group that also oversees **The Danu** (9 rue du Pont Guilhermery) across town, a large pub/restaurant with sport firmly on the menu.

On that side of Toulouse, near Jean-Jaurès is a branch of the countrywide chain **Frog & Rosbif** on rue de l'Industrie, and, at 17 rue Maury nearby, the more rugby-oriented **Wild Rose**. **LE**



FRANCE 2019-20 Toulouse FC

www.lib eroguide.com/toulouse-fc

Toulouse FC

Flagship club of an international aerospace hub, **Toulouse FC** (toulousefc.com) were salvaged by a man who made his fortune in airline catering.

In 2001, **Toulouse**-born Olivier Sadran stepped in to save his home-town club. TFC ('TéFéCé') duly qualified for Europe, including the Champions League in 2007-08.

Since then, though, campaigns have become an unrelenting struggle against relegation.

The **Stadium de Toulouse**, aka 'Le Stadium', overhauled for Euro 2016, has a capacity of 33,000, barely half-filled for most TFC league games.

Built for the 1938 World Cup, Le Stadium was overlooked for Euro 84, though upgraded for France '98. Out went the pillars and roof, in came a natural light and a metallo-textile covering. Late goals by Romania's Dan Petrescu and Holland's Edgar Davids settled vital ties against England and Yugoslavia respectively.

Another €40 million was invested before Euro 2016. The lower part of the stands were knocked down and rebuilt for the four games, including Wales' 3-0 demolition of Russia.



Home fans are housed in the Virage Est, also named after TFC fan Brice Taton who lost his life in Belgrade.

Away fans are usually allocated a sector in the Virage Ouest and/or given a limited number of places in a far end of the Honneur Nord. Neutrals are best accommodated in the Honneur Nord or Sud along the sidelines.

Transport

A stop on **tramway line T1, Croix de Pierre**, is a short walk over the water to

the stadium. It's two stops from Arènes and four from Palais de Justice (both linked with the airport) on the same T1 line.

On match days, **free buses** also shuttle from **Arènes tramway** stop, which links with **red métro line A**, and the city's train station of **Matablau** and bus station alongside.

Empalot and **St-Michel Marcel Langer** stations on **yellow métro line B** are about 10-15min walk from the stadium.

Tickets & shops

Availability is rarely a problem at Toulouse FC. Several agencies distribute online, including **Ticketmaster** (ticketmaster.fr) and **Fnac** (fnacspectacles.com). In town, TFC have an outlet on the top floor of the **MIDICA department store** (Mon-Sat 9.30am-7.30pm) by Esquirol metro.

At Le Stadium, the **Boutique/Billetterie** (Tue, Thur & Fri 11am-3pm, Wed 11am-5pm, non-match Sat 10am-12.30pm, 2pm-6pm) is behind the Honneur Nord by



the main road. It also opens 2hrs before kick-off.

Among the violet replica shirts, Patrick Boudreault's beautifully illustrated history of TFC since 1937 merits investigation.

Ticket prices start at around €12 in the cheapest Virages Haut behind the goals, €15 in the Virages Bas, €20 in the Honneur Sud and €25+ in the Honneur Nord.

Bars

Le Stadium is set in a recreational zone on an island – there are no bars alongside. On match days, **La Bodega** marquee behind the Honneur Sud proffers drinks and snacks.

For a pre-match bar before you get there, by **St-Michel Marcel Langer** metro, **L'Évasion** shows games, hosts DJs and serves craft beer. Opened back in 1990, nearby **Dubliners** (46 avenue Marcel Langer) also screens matches and gets 'em dancing with live music. **LE**