

Aix en Provence

Aix-en-Provence is a city in Provence, a region in the south of France.

<http://www.aixenprovencetourism.com/uk/>

Understand

Aix-en-Provence (usually simply called Aix) is a small, classically Provençal town, famous for being home to Cezanne; the addition of the TGV (high-speed train) station has brought lots of vacationers from the north, and Aix has turned into a shopping town with high variety and representation considering its small size. Three universities and several French-language schools for international students produce a very strong student presence.

Aix has always been a rich city. There is a high contrast between Marseille (only 30 km and half an hour away). Whereas Marseille is one the poorest French cities (but still a unique and not to be missed town), Aix is perhaps one the richest ! People seeking for budget or popular places should continue to Marseille... Still, Aix has a lot to offer. It is a quiet, clean and comfortable city. The city center is mostly pedestrian and, though it is quite small (you can cross the center in 15 minutes by foot), offers long hours of nice walks. As in all Provençal towns, the city center consists of narrows streets, lined with interesting buildings from 17th century hotels to paved plazas.

Get in

By plane

Fly into Marseille or Nice. Marseille is nearer (just south), but budget airlines such as EasyJet prefer Nice. There is a navette (shuttle bus) that can take you from the airport to the bus station near the center of town.

By train

Aix has both a TGV and a regular station and is well connected both to the Paris - Marseille line and (via Marseille) to the Genoa - Nice - Barcelona line. The same shuttle that runs from the airport to Aix also services the Aix TGV station.

By car

If you come from anywhere up north you will most likely use the A7 motorway (*Route du Soleil*) that runs from Lyon to Marseille (whether you come from Switzerland or from the UK via Paris). At exit 27, take A8 (*La Provençale*) to Aix. From Spain, you'll take A9

(*La Languedocienne*), then turn onto A54 through the city of Arles (you might consider stopping there), then turn onto A7 and A8 respectively, as described above. From Italy, just take A8 passing Nice and all the posh Côte d'Azur resorts.

Avoiding toll roads can be slow but highly pleasurable, many of the *routes nationales* offer wonderful scenery that motorways can't deliver (save maybe some parts of the A8 east of Nice).

Parking in Aix can be quite difficult. There is at least one free car park but allow plenty of time to find a space (and the spaces can be quite tight to get into!).

Get around

Aix is a fairly small city and can be easily navigated by foot. The bus system is also very efficient and has numerous stops within the city as well as connecting Aix with nearby villages, towns, and Marseille. The city bus also runs to Carrefour Les Milles, a large shopping center. Discounted tickets for frequent bus users can be purchased at the main bus station, as well as bus schedules. The ticket office also sells discounted multi-pack tickets for the bus from Aix to Marseille and the new TGV station (located between the two cities).

See

Aix is famous for its fountains. The largest and most famous is on the Cours Mirabeau, the main avenue through town, as well as a moss-covered fountain, which draws its water from a hot spring.

Along with searching out the dozens of fountains sprawled around the city, Aix is known for its architecture. The varied and often intricate doors are a key feature, as well as the bell towers. The bell towers throughout Aix-en-Provence, and Provence more generally, are made of wrought iron. This allows the strong winds of the Mistral to flow straight through them, since the force of the winds would destroy solid stone.

The city market runs multiple days a week, but the largest and most colorful is the Saturday market which includes a flower market at the Place de l'Hotel de Ville and the main food market is at Place Richelme.

Do

Aix is a very quiet town, but if you really want to there can be many things to do. The more modern activities include bowling, billiards, pubs, etc. But my personal favorite is renting a velo (bike) for 10 euros for five hours and ride around Aix. This is a very good way to see the town that is outside the center. You can find many interesting places and buildings that you wouldn't have seen other wise. Be careful riding in the center ville, since it is very crowded most of the time.

There is also a bus that leaves off the rotunda headed for St. Victoire and you get there in ten minutes. Pack a lunch and put comfortable shoes on to do a nature walk or to climb the mountain. At the top there is a monastery where you can stay over night, make sure to bring fire wood.

Buy

Aix has many major fashion boutiques, as well as a plethora of small clothing stores, perfumeries, and touristy souvenir shops.

Eat

Aix has an incredible number of restaurants compared to its small size. Most of them are gathered in a small area in the old city, between Place des Cardeurs and the Rotunda (Cours Mirabeau). Restaurants and bars on the Cours Mirabeau tend to be more expensive though, while some might be considered tourist traps, others are amongst the best places to eat in the city. La Authentique is an excellent burger place in that area (walk past the Hermés boutique when heading towards the fountain, make a left at a wide open space, and it's the 3rd shop).

Emile Bec, which has five locations in Aix-en-Provence, is an excellent bakery.

Budget

"**Chez Charlotte**" on rue des Bernardines is a very good restaurant very famous for locals. It proposes simple and reasonably cheap French food in a friendly atmosphere. Around 15 euros for a usual menu.

If you really want to eat like a local and save a couple of euros the best place to eat is the many corner restaurants that offer Doner Kebabs. For four euros you get a "sandwich" wrapped in a gallet or you can get it in circular bread that includes lettuce, tomatoes, onion, meat, French fries and be sure to ask for sauce blanche. This is very delicious and cheap. There are many restaurants that do their Kebabs differently so be sure to try

Aix en Provence is home to the Erasmus student's food of choice. Pizza Capri located at the top of the Cours Mirabeau is perhaps the best pizza you will ever eat.

Drink

Like restaurants there are plenty of bars, pubs, night-clubs, etc... in Aix. A nice and relatively cheap place to have a drink is the Bar de La Mairie on Place de la Mairie.

Stay Safe

Aix is a safe city to visit, but crime does occur there. As with all French cities, tourists in Aix should be especially conscious of the risk of pickpockets and theft. Be aware of your surroundings. Do not leave valuables within view in parked cars. Exercise increased caution at night, and use the taxis that leave from the Rotonda fountain if you are returning to the outlying neighborhoods late in the evening. Avoid public parks after dark.

Do not wear shorts or a baseball cap - that is how you are known to be American. Otherwise, you'll be fine.

For more info see: www.wikipedia.org

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