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The TRAVEL issue

At home and abroad: experience the best in
cuisine, fashion and concierge

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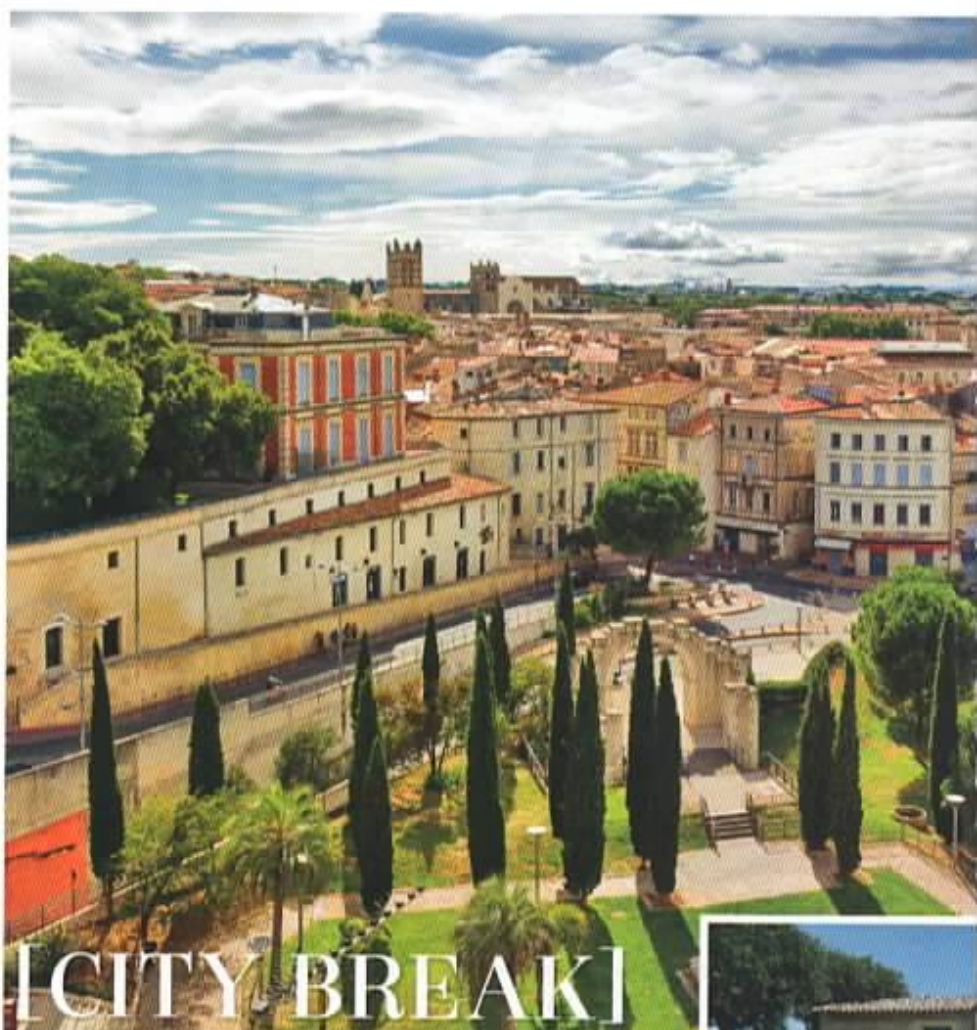
Montpellier is a city that really does have it all. Ancient architecture (the university dates from the 13th century and includes one of the oldest surviving faculties of medicine) harmonises with the city's youthful and vibrant energy. Outside of the central metropolis, rolling vineyards lie waiting to be explored and just a short distance southwards is the Mediterranean coast.

At the centre of the city you'll find the Place de la Comédie: presided over by the famous statue of the Three Graces, it is one of the largest pedestrianised areas in Europe. Known locally as the 'œuf' due to its shape, this buzzing zone is constantly filled with market stalls, musicians and people enjoying an al fresco bite while watching the world go by.

After a morning spent browsing the Place de la Comédie, a venture into the medieval Écusson comes highly recommended. You can forget about maps or phone apps, and let the narrow, winding labyrinth guide you in the direction of hidden treasures and picturesque streetscapes. A real gem in the old town is the basilica of Notre-Dame des Tables; in comparison to the daunting stature of the Cathédrale Saint-Pierre de Montpellier, it is smaller, more intricately detailed and in many ways much more beautiful.

Aside from its excellent reputation in education and research, Montpellier also boasts a colourful art scene. The main draw is the Musée Fabre, however there are a number of other smaller galleries such as the Pavillon Populaire – which is currently exhibiting the photography of Elina Brotherus – and the Galerie d'Art Réno, which celebrates regional artists.

While the old town is a wonderful reminder of Montpellier's history, the areas of Antigone and Port Marianne are an indication of its future. These riverside spots are full of striking examples of modern architecture including the Hôtel de Région designed by Ricardo Bofill, the Nuage by Philippe Starck and the Pierresvives building designed by Zaha Hadid. There's certainly something for everyone. ■



[CITY BREAK]

MONTPELLIER

Home to enchanting architecture and exuding a youthful spirit, the city of Montpellier is the crowd-pleasing capital of Languedoc-Roussillon.

Marianne Dick reports





Where to stay

The idyllic Domaine de Verchant is a peaceful retreat a stone's throw away from the thriving city. The 16th-century old stone château is nestled within 13 hectares of vineyards and is decorated throughout by Raymond Morel. The hotel has recently opened its decadent Verchant Le Spa; a 2,000 square metre haven that offers an indulgent range of treatments developed by Anne Sémonin and Valmont. For a fully immersive experience, the spa also offers The Grand Cru – a treatment that uses elements of the surroundings, including a red grape wrap, and a grape seed and marine salt exfoliation.

domaineeverchant.com

Where to eat

Montpellier offers a fine selection of Michelin-starred restaurants. One of the most spectacular has to be Eric Cellier and Pierre Morel's Maison de la Lozère: where you can dine under 13th-century vaulted ceilings or among lush greenery on the secluded patio. The menu offers a carefully curated range of the region's finest gastronomic exports, and the wine list is of an exceptional standard. If a trip back into town in the evening seems too tiring, however, then the Domaine de Verchant also houses the Restaurant Verchant headed by the Michelin-starred chef Damien Coussseau.

celliermorel.com

Mayfair recommends

In a place that claims 300 sunny days per year, spending an afternoon inside may not be on your list of priorities.

However, the Musée Fabre – a few minutes' walk from the Place de la Comédie – is well worth a visit. With works by its namesake artist François-Xavier Fabre, as well as Peter Paul Rubens and Eugène Delacroix, the gallery also houses a contemporary section, which opened in 2007.

museefabre.fr

SUITCASE ESSENTIALS

#1 Sunglasses, £230,
Prada, selfridges.com



#2 Lipstick, £34,
Sisley, liberty.co.uk



#3 Swimsuit, £265,
Kini,
matchesfashion.com



#4 Trousers, £595,
Roland Mouret,
net-a-porter.com

#5 Shoes, £415,
Aquazzura,
brownsfashion.com

