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DISCOVERING
NÎMES

La Ville avec un accent
Nîmes

Welcome to Nîmes

Nîmes is 2000 years old and still young. Two thousand years of history and passions. Roman masterpieces, contemporary architecture, gardens laid out in an ancient sanctuary and celebrated by George Sand and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Everything here goes through time with strength and lightness.

The city is mysterious. Its soul is made up of sun and water, pride and reserve, joyfulness and secrecy.

Wander through streets and squares and look around. There will always be surprises: here, crocodiles emerge from the paving stones, there a historic conservation area spreads its lace and over there Roman columns are reflected in sheets of glass. The riches in Nîmes can be seen-forming the stuff that dreams are made of.

Leafing through this document takes you into our history. Let yourself be charmed. Nîmes will give you its most precious stones!



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La Ville avec un accent
Nîmes



The Beginnings: The founding of Nîmes goes back to the sixth century BC. The Volcae Arecomici, a Celtic tribe, settled around a spring, made it a deity and built a sanctuary. In 120 BC, the Volcae, who had a vast territory, accepted the Roman legions without resistance.

The Gallo-Romans: Nîmes became a colony under Latin Law and was ornamented with sumptuous monuments. It reached its peak in the second century AD. Successive invasions and then the arrival of the Visigoths in the fifth century put an end to its prosperity.

The Middle Ages: The city became inward-looking in the eighth century. The population took refuge in the amphitheatre - that had become a fortress. The Roman ramparts were used as a quarry where everyone helped himself to stone. Nîmes woke up from 1000 AD onwards. New city walls were built. Trade started again, thanks to vineyards, olives and sheep farming.

From the Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment: The Wars of Religion were violent in the sixteenth century. Protestants were kept out of public life and turned to trading. Their cloth production was soon exported within Europe and to the Spanish Indies. The city became prosperous and its looks improved.

History of Nîmes

The Nineteenth Century: Thirty years of rapid success placed Nîmes and its silk industry at the European level. But competition from Lyons was fierce. Textile capital was very quickly re-invested in vineyards and a new era of prosperity began. Many private mansions were built near the station.

Today: Nîmes has put leading-edge contemporary art and the treasures from the past side by side for about 20 years. The old districts are being renovated and the city is spreading southward. It entrusts its town planning projects to the greatest international designers. 'Nîmes, the Roman city', is resolutely turned towards the future.



Coat of arms

To understand the origin of the town's coat of arms one has to travel to Egypt. In 31 BC, Octavius defeated Anthony and Cleopatra's fleet in the battle of Actium, and ensured Roman control of the Empire. Caesar Augustus was born. A coin was struck in Nîmes to celebrate the event. On the reverse side was a crocodile chained to a palm tree surmounted by a laurel wreath, symbolizing the conquest of

Egypt. The inscription "Col Nem", the Colony of Nîmes, suggests that victorious legionaries had been granted land near Nîmes. But in fact Nîmes was simply the place where the coin was minted. Over the centuries, the people of Nîmes became attached to these relatively common coins. In 1535 they were authorized by king François 1 to adopt the palm tree and the crocodile as the town's coat of arms. Since then the inhabitants have been extremely proud of their crest.



Redesigned in 1986 by Philippe Starck, it can be found all over the town, even in the bronze studs set in the paving of the old town.

The origins of denim cloth



Nîmes was famous for textile manufacturing in the seventeenth century. Merchants traded mainly in woollen cloth and silk. The range manufactured broadened little by little. Cotton was imported and then indigo, a dye plant grown in Italy that was an economical source of a fine blue colour.

'Serge de Nîmes' was developed, a cloth whose strength was conferred by oblique

weaving with at least two threads. At this time, trading posts were set up all over the world. Nîmes negotiated exports of serge via traders in New-York. Thus 'bleu de Gènes' (Genoan blue) was anglicised phonetically and became 'blue jeans'.

In the nineteenth century Levi Strauss, who made clothing for miners and gold prospectors, bought by chance a batch of cloth 'de Nîmes' (that became 'denim' cloth). This first batch bearing the number 501 was to give its name to the most famous trousers in the world.

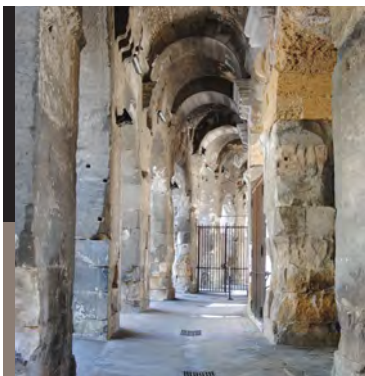
Strong, cheap denim jeans became universal in the USA and soon spread all over the world. They are now a symbol of freedom.



Built at the end of the 1st century AD, the Nîmes amphitheatre is one of the largest in Roman Gaul. It measures about 133m in length and 101m in width. The façade, 21m high, is made up of 2 levels of 60 arcades each. Inside, more than 20,000 spectators were able to watch the hunting and fighting spectacles featuring animals and gladiators.

Amphitheatre

A system of stairways and passages allowed spectators to reach their seats and to leave them easily. Positioned according to social status, they were shaded from the sun by a canopy supported by ropes attached to poles.



The layout of the stepped seating ensures a perfect view of the ring (the arena) from everywhere. After the Roman period, the amphitheatre escaped demolition as it was occupied continuously. It was converted into a fortress in the sixth century and the arcades were walled up. The Viscounts of Nîmes and the Knights of the Arena settled there in the Middle Ages. It then lost its military function in the fourteenth century and

became cluttered with private buildings-houses, workshops and warehouses. The Arena kept its status of district until 1809 when the houses were demolished and the ring cleared. Subsequent restoration work took several years.

Today, the Nîmes amphitheatre is one of the best-preserved in the Roman world and it forms a fine venue for numerous events, including bullfights, conferences, concerts and sports events.

Thanks to audio guides and multimedia areas devoted to gladiators and bullfighting, the visitor is immersed in the fascinating atmosphere of the arena.

Raised up on its high podium, this temple would have dominated the forum of the ancient city. This spacious square, the centre of public life, was surrounded by a portico, traces of which can still be seen: some of the bases of the portico columns are preserved at the site.

Built in the first century AD, the Maison Carrée has had this name since the 16th century. In fact, in old French, any rectangle with 4 right-angles was described as 'carré' or 'square'.

— La Maison Carrée square house —



Dedicated to Caius and Lucius Cesar, the adopted grandsons of the Emperor Augustus, the Maison Carrée is the only fully-preserved temple of the ancient world. It pleases the eye with its harmonious proportions, elegant columns with Corinthian capitals and the finesse of its architectural finish.

In 1992, the Maison Carrée was given a new roof, a faithful reproduction of the original, made up of 'tegulae' - large flat tiles - and 'imbrex' - hand-moulded curved tiles. Opposite the Maison Carrée, the Carre d'Art contemporary art centre offers a very fine view of this roof from its terrace (D4).

Very extensive renovation operations were started in 2006 and completed in 2010. Focus was on façades and floors damaged by frost and pollution. The superb result required nearly 44,000 hours of work by sculptors, stone cutters and other passionate craftsmen.



The Jardins de la fontaine



The Jardins de la Fontaine: In the 18th century, one of the greatest public gardens in Europe was created in Nîmes on the recently discovered ancient site. Keeping to the plan of the ancient shrine, laid out around the spring near the end of the 1st century BC, J-P Mareschal and G. Dardaihon designed a garden in the French style, ornamented with statues and vases in marble or in white pierre de Lens.

The top part of the garden, the Mont Cavalier, was planted in the 19th century. Here, Mediterranean species are predominant - pine, cypress, ilex, boxwood and bay-providing green foliage throughout the year. Area : 106 309 square metres (C3-4).

Le Temple de Diane

This is the most romantic, but also the most enigmatic, monument in Nîmes. Although we can be certain that it was associated with the imperial temple, its exact role is not known.



Tour Magne



Visible from a distance, it indicated the presence of the city and of the Imperial temple located at the foot of the hill around the spring. It was the highest and most prestigious tower of the Roman town. Octagonal in form, it was then composed of 3 levels on top of a pedestal. Today, the top storey has disappeared and it rises to a height of about 32m. From the top, the view over Nîmes is remarkable. You can see Mount Ventoux, the Alpilles, the Vistre floodplain and the garrigue. A panel shows Nîmes in the Roman period (C3).

The gates of the Roman town

Porte Auguste and Porte de France are the only gates of the Augustan enclosure remaining visible, dating from 16-15BC.

Porte Auguste (or Porte d'Arles) was one of the main gates of the ancient town. Coming from Beaucaire, the Via Domitia crossed the town via this gate to continue towards Spain. Porte Auguste is today made up of two central arcades, intended for vehicles to pass through, with two smaller side arcades for pedestrians. Originally, the fortified gate was flanked by two towers. Their positions are indicated by floor pavings. The gate is decorated with Corinthian pilasters, niches and with bull motifs. (E4).



Porte de France (or Porte d'Espagne). It has a single arcade with semi-circular arches topped with a blind gallery decorated with Tuscan pilasters. In ancient times, it was flanked by two semi-circular towers. (DE4).

The Castellum

An extremely rare vestige of the Roman world (this is one of two still in this condition, the other being in Pompeii) the Castellum is the point of arrival in Nîmes of the 50-kilometre aqueduct built between 40 and 60 AD to bring water from Eure spring near Uzès. From this circular tank (5.90 m in diameter, 1.40 m deep) carved into the rock, lead pipes carried the water to the monuments, the public fountains and the different parts of the city. (D3)

The Pont du Gard

Built in the first century AD, the Pont du Gard is undoubtedly the most spectacular structure of the whole aqueduct, and is Unesco World Heritage listed. In order to get cross the Gardon river valley, the Roman constructors erected a bridge of an exceptional scale: 275m long, 48m high (the highest in the Roman world) composed of three levels of arcades. In a completely re-designed 165-hectare site, visitors are invited to understand this exceptional heritage at various discovery facilities-an interactive museum tracing the history of the Pont du Gard, a film shown on a giant screen, an instructive play area for children 5-12 years old and several guided visits.



A former Jesuit College, the building now houses two museums and a magnificent listed chapel. Together with the Jules Salles Gallery, it forms 'the Jesuit quadrilateral'.

Jesuits Chapel

This building, a Jesuit college chapel, built at the end of the 17th century with particularly pleasing proportions, is listed as an historic monument. Restored in 1985, the Jesuits Chapel today houses temporary exhibitions and cultural events (E4).



Archeological Museum

This building, formerly a Jesuit college, now houses two museums and a magnificent listed 17th century chapel.

Established in a former Jesuit college, the Archaeological Museum presents collections of items originating locally or within the region, from the iron age and from the Gallo-Roman era. As well as a great number of objects from daily life, sigillated pottery, bronze dishes, lights, familiar objects associated with costume ornamentation, with clothing or with practice of a range of skilled trades or crafts, the Museum owns a very impressive collection of Latin inscriptions and Roman glassware (E4).

**13 bis bd Amiral Courbet - Tel: +33 (0)4 66 76 74 80 - Fax: +33 (0)4 66 76 74 94
e-mail: musee.archeo@ville-nimes.fr**

Museum of Natural History

Founded in 1895, the 'Museum de Nîmes', classed as the sixth in France for the richness of the collections, is one of only two such museums in the Languedoc-Roussillon region.

It houses collections covering all fields of natural history and some aspects of human sciences. While awaiting complete renovation, only three sections are open to the public: prehistory, 1930s ethnography and zoology (E4). Temporary exhibition with life-size exhibits in Galerie Jules Salles from April to October.

**13 bis bd Amiral Courbet Tel: +33 (0)4 66 76 73 45 - Fax: +33 (0)4 66 76 73 46
e-mail: museum@ville-nimes.fr**

Museum of Fine arts

Two monumental statues of Henri Bouchard stand on either side of the stairs taking you into the museum. Constructed in 1907, it was refurbished in 1986-87 by the architect Jean Michel Wilmotte. The central section of the Atrium, on the ground-floor, is occupied by a very large Roman mosaic, showing the "marriage of Admetus". This was discovered in the central market. The museum is the second largest Languedoc museum, in terms of the number of items and the quality of the works that it preserves: French, Flemish and Dutch paintings, Italian pieces from the 16th and 17th centuries, a remarkable collection of French paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries (D5).



Rue Cité Foulc - Tel: +33 (0)4 66 67 38 21
- Fax: +33 (0)4 66 21 29 97
e-mail: musee.beauxarts@ville-nimes.fr

Contemporary Art Museum

The Carré d'Art collection totals nearly 400 works providing a panorama of creative work from the 1960s until today. Emerging artists and French movements in art such as Supports-Surfaces and Nouveau Réalisme and important foreign artists (Richter, Polke, Kosuth, Walid Raad and Dan Voh) are particularly well represented.

The museum holds three temporary exhibitions of international stature every year and also shows specific projects in a Project Room.

The reception service can organise visits and activities for everybody. A documentation centre is available. (D4)

Carré d'Art - 16 Place de la Maison Carrée - Tél. : +33 (0)4 66 76 35 70

Fax. : +33 (0)4 66 76 35 85

e-mail : info@carreartmusee.com - <http://carreartmusee.nimes.fr>

Bullfighting Museum

Just a stone's throw from the Amphitheatre, the Bullfighting Museum, is a unique institution in France. The museum offers the public a chance to discover a culture that is still active, a rich and varied heritage that has survived throughout Antiquity. Here, works of Art and everyday objects bring to mind both regional and international traditions. The Bullfighting Museum is open from the Pentecost Feria to the end of October (D4).

6 rue Alexandre Ducros

Tel: +33 (0)4 66 36 83 77 - Fax: +33 (0)4 66 21 09 58

e-mail: musee.taureau@ville-nimes.fr



Museum of Old Nîmes



Housed in the former bishop's palace built in the late seventeenth century, the 'Museum of Old Nîmes' possesses collections illustrating life in Nîmes since the end of the Middle Ages. Exhibits range from the everyday to the extraordinary, cloth manufactured by the Nîmes textile industry and a room is devoted to 'serge de Nîmes' and jeans. Visitors to the theme exhibitions and the standing collection thus enjoy a trip back in time (D4).

Place aux Herbes - Tél : +33 (0)4 66 76 73 70 - Fax : +33 (0)4 66 76 73 71
e-mail : musee.vieux-nimes@ville-nimes.fr

The Cathedral

Consecrated in 1096, the cathedral of Notre Dame and Saint Castor has been modified on many occasions over the centuries. The upper frieze is considered to be a major example of Romanesque sculpture in the South of France. The motifs of the pediment and the cornice - acanthus leaves and lions' heads - were inspired by the Maison Carrée (D4).



Planetarium

A circular room with 65 seats, the planetarium presents, on its vaulted ceiling, the spectacle of the sky observed by the darkness of night. The planets, the moon and the sun make their movements across the starry heavens. Their individual movements may be accelerated or stopped in order to observe and understand the cycles of the seasons, of phases of the moon and of eclipses, of polar rotation, etc (J7).

Planétarium de Nîmes - Mont Duplan

Avenue Peladan - Tel: +33 (0)4 66 67 60 94 - Fax: +33 (0)4 66 21 17 76



Nemausus I

Architect: Jean Nouvel - 1987 - Large and 'ship-like' in steel and glass, these two long buildings proclaim their priorities: more space, comfort and light in each of the 114 social housing units. The building received a '20th-Century Heritage' award in 2008. Route d'Arles (F5).

Contemporary architecture

Abribus

Architect: Philippe Starck - 1987 - In dark marble, this creation represents the Nîmes city emblem: the crocodile and the palm tree. Boulevard Carnot (E4) .



Hôtel Rivet

Art College renovated by the architect Ariel Balmassiere - 1987 - Bernard Pagès created the floor-covering in stone and sandstone tiles. Grand Rue (E4).

Place d'Assas

Designed in 1989 by Martial Raysse, this space features moving water that runs from one end to the other, between two monumental heads representing Nemausa, the spring that gave Nîmes its name, and Nemausus, the 'male force' of the town. Martial Raysse is also the creator of the fountain in Place du Marché; this was made in 1987 with the aid of the Tongiani brothers using a version of the iconography of the arms of Nîmes. (D4).

Contemporary architecture

Costières Stadium

Architects: Vittorio Gregotti and Marc Chausse - 1989 - Football and rugby stadium meeting international standards. Capacity: 20,000 including 12,000 covered seats. Gymnasium, spaces for other sports: basketball, volleyball, fencing, combat sports and billiards. Esplanade Sud, Avenue de la Bouvine (E6).

Colisée

Architect: Kisho Kurokawa - 1991 - Block of offices, shops and housing located at the entry into the town and inspired by the Roman amphitheatre. Esplanade Sud (E6).

Carré d'Art

1993 - Architect: Lord Norman Foster. Opposite the temple of Roman art, Carré d'Art is the temple of today's art. Like the Pompidou Centre, it combines in the same place a museum of contemporary art, a library with several thousand volumes, a sound library and a media library. (D4)



16 Place de la Maison Carrée

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The future museum of romanity

The architects Elisabeth and Christian de Porzamparc, winners of the international competition held in 2012, have designed a building worthy of its exceptional site. The future Museum of Romanity will face the Roman amphitheatre, in perfect interaction with the Roman town. In 2017, the fine volume of the building, crossed by a broad internal street, will become the key to understanding Nîmes. Technical and aesthetic innovations are planned.



Nîmes and the surrounding region

The Pont du Gard and the Uzège region

Both tamed and wild, the landscapes of the 'Uzège' are made up of garrigue and stone villages, cypresses and vineyards, calling Tuscany to mind. The Pont du Gard is the spectacular vestige of a masterly Roman aqueduct that wound through the hills of the Uzège to bring water to Nîmes. Uzès, a superb medieval town and the first duchy of France, has a particularly rich conservation area.



Provence

Scents of lavender, savory and honey. Its landscapes are those of Van Gogh and Cézanne. Frederic Mistral and Alphonse Daudet celebrated it. Provence, with its traditions and cicadas, is at the gates of Nîmes and forms part of its soul. It is impossible to come to Nîmes and the surrounding area and miss seeing the treasures to be found in Arles, Villeneuve lez Avignon and Avignon which, with Nîmes, form a tourist area.

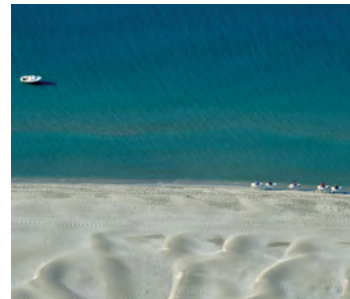
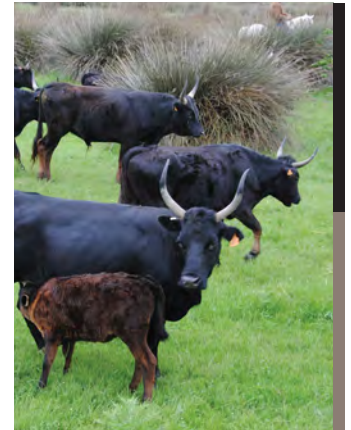


The Cévennes

Grandiose, generous landscapes, chestnut forests, steep gorges and stone houses set into the land - the Cévennes. Both rugged and protective, this difficult country has served as a refuge for outcasts during many periods of history when intolerance was the rule. Visit Sauve, a Medieval village, the potteries where the famous Anduze jars are made, The Bambouseraie, Trabcu caves, the "Musée du desert" at Mialet which traces the history of Protestantism in the Cévennes.

The Camargue

A wild land of sea, sand, lagoons and thousands of birds, with herds of wild horses and bulls. Even if man has planted grapes and rice and built a few villages, he lives in the Camargue as a guest of nature. Don't miss Aigues-Mortes, a fortified town built by Louis IX who sailed from there for the crusades, and Saint-Gilles and the abbey church whose triple porch is a masterpiece of southern French Romanesque art.



The Mediterranean coast

The beaches and dunes of golden sand seem infinite. Conservation areas are followed by fishing ports and seaside resorts. Le Grau du Roi is one of the most active Mediterranean fishing ports, and Port Camargue is the largest marina in Europe.



CÉVENNES
ALÈS

CARPENTRAS

LUBÉRON

NÎMES

AVIGNON

ARLES

MONTPELLIER

MARSEILLE

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A walk in old Nîmes

Discover another side of Nîmes by taking a walk in the heart of the conservation area!

Turn left when you leave the Tourist Office and then left into Rue Général Perrier and then left again into Rue du Grand Couvent. You enter 'Ilot Littre', the old dyers' quarter. Don't miss the Petit Temple (👁️), and then walk along Rue du Murier d'Espagne to Nîmes Market (Les Halles de Nîmes). This covered market is open until 1 p.m. every day and the atmosphere and produce are typical of Nîmes. Cross the market and then take Rue des Halles to Place aux Herbes. Opposite, you will see the 'Romanesque House' (👁️). On your left, Notre Dame and Saint Castor's Cathedral (👁️) built in the eleventh century. Leave Place aux Herbes by way of Rue des Marchands. Passage des Marchands is on your right. Keep going. See the pretty medieval house at No. 11 (👁️). No. 17 has a typical Renaissance façade with fluted pilasters, a cornice and a frieze. Turn left along Rue du Chapitre. No. 14 is Hôtel (mansion) de Régis (👁️). At the end of the street, continue along Grand Rue where you will see Hôtel Rivet (👁️) on your right; this is now the School of Fine Arts.

A few paces further, on your left, admire the Jesuits' Chapel (👁️). Continue and take Rue des Greffes on the right as far as the City Hall (Hôtel de Ville) (👁️) built in 1703. Continue straight on. You reach Place du Marché with a magnificent palm tree and a fountain with a crocodile (both emblems of the city) designed by the artists Martial Raysse and Silvio Tongiani. Go under the archway into Rue

Fresque (meaning 'cool' in Occitan). At the Fontaine du Dauphin, take Rue de Bernis to the right. See Hôtel de Bernis at No. 3 (👁️) and Hôtel Boudon at No. 4 (👁️). You then reach Rue de l'Aspic. Go to the left, passing Hôtel Meynier de Salinelles (👁️) at No. 8. Go up to Place de l'Horloge, where Jean Nicot, who imported tobacco to France, was born in 1530. Take Rue de la Madeleine on the right as far as the cathedral.

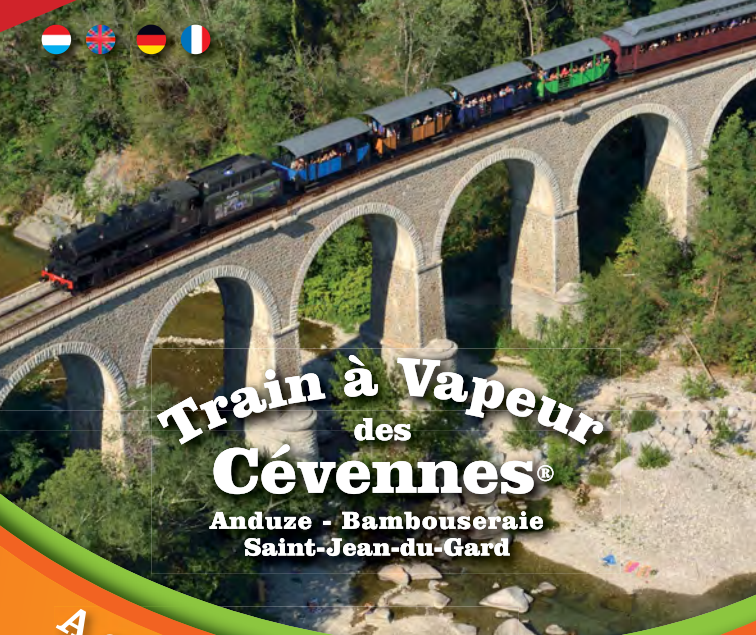


We suggest that you continue your exploration by a visit to the Musée du Vieux Nîmes (Museum of Old Nîmes) next to the cathedral.

👁️ Indicates an information panel on the route of the walk

--- Route on the annexed map D4/E4

Explore historic Nîmes by yourself using an 'Audio-guide' available at the reception desk at the Tourist Office.



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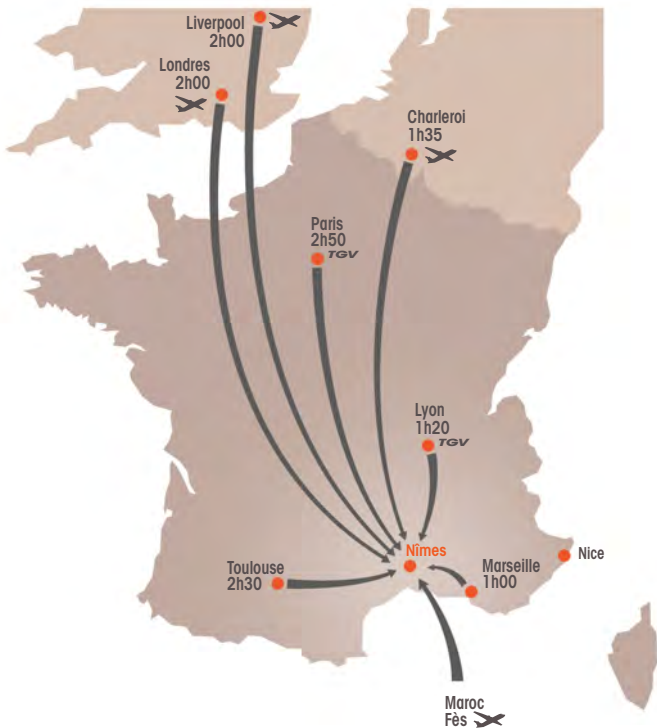
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Access to Nîmes



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Longitude : 4°21'39.11"E

Motorways: A9 - A54

Lyons: 3 hrs
Marseilles: 1 hr 30
Montpellier: 40 mins
Nice and Toulouse: 3 hrs

By train:

Paris: 2 hrs 51 mins - TGV
Lyons: 1 hr 20 mins - TGV
Marseilles: 1 hr

By plane :

4 airports nearby Nîmes: Nîmes, Marseilles, Montpellier, Avignon.

Telephone numbers

Emergency aid.....15
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A few figures

- Population: 150, 000
- Area 16 150 hectares
- Height above sea level: 40 m
- Communauté d'Agglomération Nîmes Métropole (infrastructure syndicate for Nîmes and surrounding urban centres): 27 communes, population 230,000.



NÎMES CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

6 rue Auguste - F - 30020 Nîmes cedex 1
Pavillon de l'Esplanade - Esplanade Charles de Gaulle

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