



48 HOURS IN

Lyon

TASTE · DISCOVER · LINGER

EUROPEAN SERIES

Welcome to Lyon.

Lyon has a habit of getting skipped — sandwiched on the map between Paris and the south of France, treated as a stopover rather than a destination. That's a mistake locals have made peace with, mostly because it keeps the city's bouchons from filling up with tourists who haven't done their homework. This is France's culinary capital by near-universal agreement, a UNESCO World Heritage city built where the Rhône and Saône rivers meet, with two millennia of history layered from Roman ruins to Renaissance silk-merchant passageways to the birthplace of cinema itself.

What Lyon has that no other city on this itinerary has: the traboules, hidden covered passageways once used by silk workers to move goods through the rain, now open for anyone curious enough to duck through an unmarked door; an official certification system for bouchons, the small traditional restaurants serving Lyonnais classics, so you can tell the real thing from the tourist trap; Les Halles de Lyon Paul Bocuse, a covered market where locals actually shop, not a performance for visitors; and a scale — big enough to fill days, small enough to feel manageable alone.

Lyon rewards solo travelers who eat their way through it. Wander the traboules of Vieux Lyon without a fixed plan. Climb to Fourvière for the view. Sit at a bouchon's counter for quenelle and a pichet of Beaujolais. Spend an afternoon in Croix-Rousse's bohemian slopes. This is the itinerary.

DAY ONE

Day One — Vieux Lyon · Traboules · Fourvière Hill

Day One covers the Renaissance old town and the hill above it — traboules, Fourvière Basilica, and a proper bouchon dinner.

MORNING · 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

9:00 AM

Breakfast: Les Cafetiers

36 Rue Ferrandière, near Place Bellecour. Quality coffee and freshly baked goods in the heart of the Presqu'île. €5–15.

10:00 AM

Vieux Lyon & the Traboules

UNESCO-listed Renaissance district. Traboules are hidden covered passageways once used by silk merchants to move goods sheltered from the rain — Cour des Voraces (entered via Place Colbert, Rue St Sébastien, or Rue Imbert-Colombes) is the most striking, with a dramatic open staircase. During the Nazi occupation, Resistance members used these same passages for quick escapes.

INSIDER TIP

Traboules are often unmarked and sit behind ordinary-looking doors — a guided tour on your first pass is genuinely worth it to understand what you're looking for on your own later.

11:30 AM

Lyon Cathedral & Saint-Jean Quarter

The heart of Vieux Lyon — Lyon Cathedral (Cathédrale Saint-Jean-Baptiste), free entry, plus the Musée Miniature et Cinéma for a quirky, less-crowded stop if time allows.

12:30 PM

Funicular to Fourvière

Board at Vieux-Lyon metro station — 3 minutes to the top, same price as a standard metro ticket. Alternatively, a steep 20-minute walk.

AFTERNOON · 1:00 PM – 6:30 PM

1:00 PM

Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière

Free entry. Built 1872–1884 in a striking mix of Romanesque and Byzantine styles, “the hill that prays” overlooking the city. The panoramic view over Lyon and, on clear days, to the Alps, is one of the best solo photo spots in the city.

2:30 PM

Lugdunum Roman Ruins

A short walk further along Fourvière Hill. Two well-preserved Roman amphitheatres, free to wander, rarely crowded — remnants of Lyon's history as Lugdunum, a major Roman settlement.

4:00 PM

Musée des Beaux-Arts

20 Place des Terreaux. €8 entry. Housed in a stunning 17th-century abbey, spanning centuries of European art.

EVENING · 7:00 PM – LATE

7:00 PM

Dinner: A Certified Bouchon

Look for the official “Bouchon Lyonnais” certification plaque — only around 20 restaurants in the city carry it. Quenelle de brochet, salade lyonnaise, andouillette. €25–45.

INSIDER TIP

Skip the bouchons directly on Place Bellecour — the real ones are on side streets, not the tourist-facing main square.

9:00 PM

Sunset Riverside Walk

Walk the Saône riverbank as the city lights come up and reflect on the water — a quiet, contemplative way to close the first day.

DAY TWO

Day Two — Croix-Rousse · Les Halles de Lyon · Presqu'île

Day Two moves to Lyon's bohemian silk-weaving hill, its temple to French gastronomy, and the peninsula between the two rivers.

MORNING · 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

9:00 AM

Breakfast: Le Kitchen Café

Near Parc de la Tête d'Or. Strong vegetarian-friendly breakfast options, pastries, specialty coffee. €10–15.

10:00 AM

La Croix-Rousse

"The hill that works" — historically the center of Lyon's 18th-century silk trade, now the city's most bohemian district. Independent shops, art studios, murals, and more traboules to explore. Don't miss the Mur des Canuts, one of the largest painted murals in Europe.

INSIDER TIP

If it's Tuesday, Friday, or Sunday morning, the market along Boulevard de la Croix-Rousse is one of the best in the city.

11:30 AM

Musée d'Art Contemporain (optional)

For contemporary art lovers, a strong collection with rotating exhibitions and enough space to view work at a genuinely unhurried, solo pace.

AFTERNOON · 1:00 PM – 6:00 PM

1:00 PM

Lunch: Les Halles de Lyon Paul Bocuse

Covered food market named after Lyon's most famous chef — cheese, charcuterie, pastry, and oyster bars, where locals actually shop rather than a tourist-trap market. Some stalls start closing around 1pm, but plenty stay open until early afternoon.

2:30 PM

Parc de la Tête d'Or

One of France's largest urban parks — lake, zoo, botanical gardens. A natural place to slow down, especially on a Sunday when many shops and restaurants are closed elsewhere in the city.

4:30 PM

Presqu'île Wander

The "almost island" between the Rhône and Saône — a maze of historic streets and independent shops. Pralus (Rue de Brest) for the original Praluline brioche, a Lyon specialty worth the trip. Closed Sundays.

EVENING · 7:00 PM – LATE

7:00 PM

Dinner: Le Musée or La Mère Jean

Both classic bouchons serving Lyonnais staples in a convivial, communal-table atmosphere well-suited to solo diners. €25–40.

9:00 PM

Final Night: Riverboat Bar (Péniche)

Moored along the Rhône's east bank — Lyon's floating party-boat bars offer a lively, low-pressure way to close the trip, with the option to hop between a few in one evening.

WHERE TO EAT

Lyon's Table

RESTAURANT	NEIGHBOURHOOD	PRICE
Certified Bouchon Lyonnais (various)	Side streets, city-wide	€25–45
Les Halles de Lyon Paul Bocuse	Part-Dieu	€10–30 (market stalls)
Le Musée	Vieux Lyon	€25–40
La Mère Jean	Presqu'île	€30–50
Les Cafetiers	Near Place Bellecour	€5–15
Le Kitchen Café	Near Parc de la Tête d'Or	€10–15
Pralus (Praluline brioche)	Rue de Brest, Presqu'île	€5–15

GETTING AROUND

Navigating Lyon

MODE	COST	NOTES
Walking	Free	Vieux Lyon, Presqu'île, and the riverbanks are entirely walkable.
Metro / Tram / Funicular	~€1.90/ride	Extensive network; a day pass runs ~€6. Metro runs until 2am Fri/Sat.
Rhône Express (airport)	~€16 one-way	Direct tram link from Lyon–Saint Exupéry Airport to Part-Dieu, ~30 min.
Lyon City Card	24/48/72hr options	Unlimited public transit (bus, tram, metro, funicular) plus museum entries and a guided Vieux Lyon tour.
Vélo'v (bike share)	Pay-per-use	Popular for covering longer distances between neighborhoods.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Before You Go

TOPIC	DETAILS
Getting There	Lyon–Saint Exupéry Airport, ~25km east of center. Rhône Express tram, ~30 min. TGV from Paris Gare de Lyon, ~2 hours.
Best Time	Spring (April–June) and autumn (September–October): mild weather, fewer crowds, ideal for walking. Summer: warm, average July highs ~28°C. Winter: mild but damp.
Solo Dining	Excellent — bouchon counter seating and communal tables make solo dining a normal, welcomed part of the culture.
Language	French; English widely spoken in central tourist areas, less so outside them.
Useful Apps	TCL (local transit), Google Maps (offline download), SNCF Connect (regional/national trains).

Lyon awaits.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Final Checklist

- Look for the official “Bouchon Lyonnais” certification plaque before choosing a bouchon
- Book a Vieux Lyon traboules guided tour for Day One — unmarked doors are easy to miss solo
- Note that many shops and restaurants close on Sundays — plan Parc de la Tête d'Or or Croix-Rousse for that day
- Use the “Ask for Angela” network (look for “Ici demandez Angela” stickers) if you ever feel unsafe in a bar or shop
- Avoid Rue St. Catherine at night — overhyped and rowdier than better options five minutes away
- Watch bags in Vieux Lyon's narrow lanes and on crowded metro Line D
- Download offline maps before arrival

Your interactive map is one scan away.

All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.

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