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History & heritage
Built on the Via Domitia, Nîmes, already occupied 4,500 years ago, seems to have really been born in the sixth century BC, from a spring in the Jardins de la Fontaine. In the beginning, this source of life encouraged the Celts to settle there and to associate the city with Nemausus, the patron god of the spring.

Then the Romans took over Gaul and the god of the spring whose flow, too irregular to fill their needs, led to the construction of a 50 km aqueduct, including the imposing Pont du Gard, to supply the city with water. During the Gallo-Roman period, Nîmes became a colony under Latin law and was decorated with sumptuous monuments.

The medieval city was organised around the Arènes transformed into a fortress, seat of the feudal power, the Cathedral, symbol of the power of the Church and the Maison Carrée, a Roman temple that became the house of a noble. Trade developed around local products such as grapes, olives and livestock.

In the 16th century, during the Wars of Religion, the Protestants, excluded from public life, turned to commerce. The clothing they produced was exported throughout Europe and to the Spanish Indies. The city became rich and was decorated. Many mansions testify today to the prosperity of this period.

In the Age of Enlightenment, the dilapidated walls were demolished and Louis XV’s architect-engineer, Jacques Philippe Mareschal, designed the Jardins de la Fontaine around the ancient shrine.

In the 19th century, the city became wealthy again owing to the silk industry and the production of wine. The train station, offering a beautiful view of the monumental Fontaine Pradier, was built in 1842 and beautiful buildings such as the Courthouse, churches, the Jules Salles Gallery, cafes and banks gave the city a modern flair.

Today, Nîmes is looking to the future and its history is part of the present. In 1993, the city combined contemporary art with the treasures of the past in the Carré d’Art Jean Bousquet, built by the architect Norman Foster. This bold mix of styles is also found in the work of Philippe Starck, Jean-Michel Wilmotte, Martial Raysse, Kisho Kurokawa, Jean Nouvel, Takis ...

No other city of this size can boast such achievements from such prestigious architects and artists. This theme continues with the construction of the Musée de la Romanité signed by Elisabeth de Portzamparc, which is scheduled to open on June 2, 2018.

A bridge between the ages
Built at the end of the 1st century A.D., the Amphithéâtre of Nîmes is one of the largest and best preserved in the Roman world. This elliptical building measuring 133 m. by 101 m. and 21 m. high on two levels, has almost always fulfilled a festive function. To understand its architecture, we must return to the history of the events that took place there, because it was designed for the combats of gladiators (and animals) that had until then been held in the Forum. Their success thus favoured the appearance of a dedicated place offering good visibility of the gladiator ring.

The Amphithéâtre of Nîmes was built shortly after the Colosseum of Rome, with stone from two quarries near Nîmes. It incorporates the characteristics of the Flavian period: a façade with two levels of arcades, an attic, pilasters and Tuscan-style half-columns. It is the only Amphitheatre which has preserved its attic. Pierced stones were placed at the top for poles on which were hung the velum, canvas canopies designed to provide shade from the sun. The fore-body parts of bulls surmount the arcade, certainly reserved for the magistrates and the Emperor, because they provided access to the best seats.

On another decoration, facing the Courthouse, is a sculpture of a wolf suckling two children, Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome. Inside, there was space for 24,000 spectators to occupy 34 tiers of stands. Five circular galleries, hundreds of stairs and “vomitoires” (corridors leading to the stands) permitted access to the seats without the different social classes meeting, the first tier being reserved for notables.

DID YOU KNOW?
The basement of the Amphithéâtre was equipped with trap doors and hoists to move scenery, fighters or animals in the ring. Today, two galleries with a cruciform layout still remain under the ring.
The Arènes owe their exceptional state of conservation to their use throughout the centuries. In the Middle Ages, they played the role of a fortress, the seat of feudal power embodied by the Viscount of Nîmes and the Knights of the Arena. From the 14th century, they became a residential area (houses, warehouses, churches and château all crowded together).

At the beginning of the 18th century, 700 people still lived there. Cleared of these constructions in 1812, they found again their vocation as buildings for public events and the races held there contributed largely to the art of bullfighting. The first Camargue bull race took place in 1839 and the first bullfight in 1853. Today, the Amphithéâtre, the most visited monument of the city, is a magnificent setting for outdoor shows: historical re-enactments, concerts, performances, bullfights, Camargue bull races...

The restoration of the monument, which was unable to escape the ravages of time, is currently underway.
This Roman temple of the imperial cult was built in the 1st century of our era, in honour of the adopted grandchildren of the Emperor Augustus, Caius and Lucius Caesar, “Princes of Youth”, as evidenced by an inscription on the pediment, deciphered in 1758 by the Nîmes scholar Jean-François Séguier. As the faithful were not allowed to enter the temple, the ceremonies were held outside. The Maison Carrée, surrounded by porticoes and enhanced with a platform, faced another building (probably the curia).

The entire complex constituted the Forum, the economic and administrative heart of the ancient city.

It was one of those so-called “pseudoperipteral” imperial temples, of which there were many in the Roman world. Located in the heart of the ancient Forum, enhanced by its Corinthian capitals and surrounded by a portico of which there are still some traces left, this building, measuring 26 meters long by 15 meters wide and 17 meters high, was originally dedicated to the cult of the Emperor.

The ceiling of the pronaos (vestibule) dates from the beginning of the 19th century; the present door was built in 1824 by two Compagnons du Devoir.

The Maison Carrée owes its exceptional state of preservation to continuous use since the 11th century: alternately a private mansion, a consulate, a stable, a convent ... But it is to Colbert that we owe the ridiculous proposal of dismantling it and rebuilding it in Paris!

After the French Revolution, it became the headquarters of the first Prefecture of Gard and the Departmental Archives before inaugurating the creation of museums in Nîmes in 1823.

DID YOU KNOW?
This building is called the Maison Carrée because the word rectangle did not exist yet at the time of its construction. Rectangles were called “long squares” and thus it has kept this name.
The square was re-designed in 1993 by Norman Foster, the architect of the Carré d’Art Jean Bousquet, in order to create a spatial unit between the two buildings. Between 2006 and 2010, it underwent major restoration work that focused on the façades and floors deteriorated by frost and pollution. The aim has been to respect the spirit of the construction through the use of ancient materials and innovative techniques for a discreet and efficient restoration.

The restoration required 44,000 working hours, 96 blocks of stone and a cost of €3.5 million. Since March 2014, the film «Nemausus, the birth of Nîmes» is screened continuously every day.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1785, Thomas Jefferson (who would become President of the United States in 1801), then the American Ambassador in Paris, received a letter from the Directors of the Virginia Public Buildings asking him to provide them with plans for the construction of the Virginia Capitol. Jefferson immediately chose the Maison Carrée as a model, entrusted the plans to a French architect, Charles Louis Clérisseau, which was then modified and sent to Richmond. For Jefferson, the Maison Carrée was the most beautiful architectural model left by Antiquity. Oddly enough, Thomas Jefferson knew the Maison Carrée only through a few drawings and only really contemplated it in 1787 during a trip to Nîmes and the South of France.
Visible for miles, it signalled the presence of the city and the imperial temple located at the foot of the hill, around the spring.

The only remaining tower of the Roman walls, it was the tallest and most beautiful tower in the ancient city. Indeed, Nîmes had one of the largest enclosures in Roman Gaul; its perimeter 7 km long enclosed an area of 220 ha. Provided with 10 gates and protected by 80 towers, the rampart had a dual purpose of defence and prestige. Today, the upper floor has disappeared and at 32 meters, it dominates the Jardins de la Fontaine. From the top, the view of Nîmes is remarkable.

Near the Tour Magne, the pines are bent over by the force of the Mistral wind from the North and oaks and pines make up most of the vegetation on the hill, giving it the air of an Italian garden.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1601, Michel de Notre-Dame, known as Nostradamus, predicted that a gardener would one day find a treasure in the Tour Magne. Learning this, François Traucat, a gardener in Nîmes, sent a letter to King Henry IV to request the right to search the tower. The King accepted on condition that the gardener finance the work and give him part of the treasure. The gardener dug out the tower and searched for the treasure but found nothing. Thus weakened, the top section of the Tour Magne then crumbled.
Laid out around the spring, the cradle of the Roman city, the Jardins de la Fontaine are among the leading public gardens in Europe. The layout was arranged in the 18th century, under Louis XV, on the ancient site.

These «French» gardens of 15 ha are adorned with statues, balusters, benches and vases made of marble or white stone from Lens. In the lower part of the gardens, the lime trees reign, while in the upper part (Mount Cavalier), dominated by the imposing Tour Magne (formerly a Gallo-Roman tower) built in the 19th century, Mediterranean species dominate the whole year. The creation of these gardens began in 1745, at the request of the King of France, Louis XV. Jacques Philippe Mareschal (the King’s Engineer and Director of the fortifications of the provinces of LANGUEDOC) was the designer. Esprit Dardailhon, then his son Pierre Dardailhon, supervised the site. Mareschal’s ambition was to highlight the spring and the ancient ruins in a composition inspired by French gardens.

In the early 19th century, Augustin Cavalier, Mayor of Nîmes, implemented the plan for the hill and gave it its name. The vegetation is composed of different species, such as Aleppo pines, Holm oaks, cypresses, olive trees, arbutus trees, Judas trees... These trees have foliage all year round, clothing the hill in multiple and subtle tones of green.

Walkways were made, enabling strollers to discover, among other things, the “grotto”, created in 1890, “the rock garden”, a clever mix of rocks and Mediterranean plants typical of the mid-19th century, and the “mazet garden” with its cypresses, its arbour and lawn bowling green, characteristic of the way of life in the scrublands of the early 20th century.

Paths were laid out through the laurel undergrowth that was neatly trimmed to form masses of greenery under the trees.

This «Remarkable Garden» certified by the Ministry of Culture is a peaceful haven in which to wander.

DID YOU KNOW?
In the upper part of the gardens, in the cedar clearing, there is an aze-role hawthorn tree that Louis XIV particularly liked for its jelly and which he had planted in the King’s kitchen garden at Versailles.
This is the most romantic monument but also the most enigmatic of Nîmes. Definitely associated with the imperial cult, we do not know its exact function. This building is the only monument remaining from the ancient sanctuary.

It probably had two functions: that of a library and a hall for worship related to the celebrations of the imperial cult. Admire the large vault above, the rhythm of the niches along the walls and the finesse of some of the sculpted panels at the back of the hall. From the 10th to the 16th century, this “Temple of the Fountain” was a chapel for a congregation of Benedictine monks who then abandoned it during the Wars of Religion.

The Castellum Aquae (water basin) was the terminal for the aqueduct in Nîmes. Indeed, the Romans were able to bring to Nîmes water from the source of the River Eure, near Uzès, owing to a 50-km aqueduct, of which the Pont du Gard remains the major work that is universally admired. Water thus emptied into the Castellum and from this circular reservoir (5.90 m in diameter and 1.40 m deep) carved in the stone, pipes brought water to monuments and public fountains and supplied the different neighbourhoods of the city.

It is a rare example of a Roman water basin that is still intact and, with the Castellum of Pompeii in Italy, one of the last remaining examples of this type still preserved in the world.
The façades of many mansions of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries have preserved the Roman pillars and Corinthian capitals, as well as the triangular and circular pediments inspired by the Temple de Diane, the little romantic temple located in the Jardins de la Fontaine. You just have to look up to see the gargoyles and monster heads in the city-centre that seem to come from another era.

A real policy of safeguarding and enhancing the ancient centre of Nîmes and its cultural and historical heritage has now been put in place. Thus, the creation and delimitation of a Protected Area (Remarkable Heritage Site) for the historic heart of the city was made official by Ministerial Decree in March 1985. On an area of 41 ha, it covers the old city surrounded by its boulevards, known as the “Ecusson”.

The aim was to revitalise the old city-centre through renovation and rehabilitation. A Safeguarding and Development Plan (PSMV) has been validated, including in particular the indication of buildings protected under the legislation on Historic Monuments. Soon the Remarkable Heritage Site should expand from 41 ha to 109 ha, including the Jardins de la Fontaine.

DID YOU KNOW?
Jean Nicot was born in Nîmes in 1530, probably in his father’s house on the site of the Pharmacy at the Place de l’Horloge. He left Nîmes for Paris, where he worked as an archivist for the King and, in 1559, Henry II sent him to Lisbon as the Ambassador for France. It was in Portugal that he learned about the seeds of the petun, a plant from America, later known as tobacco. It is said that when he returned to France he presented it to the Queen. Transformed into powder, it was used to treat migraines. On her advice, Catherine de Medici used it to treat her son, Francis II. It was in these circumstances that tobacco was given the name “d’Herbe à la Reine” (“Queen’s herb”). The botanists of the Court gave it the scientific name nicotiana tabacum, and nicotine became the learned name of one of its components.
“This city, which some people like to call French Rome because of the beauty of its ancient monuments, is also, like Geneva, a Protestant Rome, a metropolis of Huguenot spirituality,” declared André CHAMSON of the French Academy.

Nîmes is a city deeply marked by the Protestant footprint and a look at its past explains it. This past still remains in the habits and practices that permeate the daily life of part of the population. In 1561, on Calvin’s instructions, Pastor Mauget, who had come from Geneva, set up the Reformed Christian Church in Nîmes.

Henry IV, by signing the Edict of Nantes, thus opened an era of peace, but his assassination called everything into question. The Catholic authorities reacted and, in September 1562, the troops of the Governor of Provence were driven into the Rhone River. This victory was followed by the infamous St. Michael’s Day in 1567, known as Michelade, during which many notable Catholics and clergymen were massacred, thus assuring the Protestants the monopoly of power over the city. During the French Wars of Religion, an agreement was drawn up between the Catholics and the Protestants, which was maintained in spite of the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre in 1572.

In 1598, the Edict of Nantes put an end to the Wars of Religion, granted freedom of conscience and worship to the Reformed Church, but also imposed the restoration of Catholic worship. This agreement, which lasted twenty years, allowed Nîmes to develop its wool industry and its silk industry.
In July 1629, Louis XIII entered Nîmes and published the “Alès Edict of Grace”: a new series of civil wars followed and the Jesuits were granted half of the chairs of the college that until then were fully occupied by the Protestants. From 1679, measures of exclusion began: public offices, certain professions and trades were prohibited to Protestants. The Edict of Fontainebleau, in October 1685, revoked the Edict of Nantes: Protestantism no longer existed legally, their churches were destroyed, no trace of the Protestant heritage from the 16th to the 18th century remains. They can only be restored from memory!

For over a century, from 1685 to 1787, Protestants lived in hiding, a period marked by the rebellion of the Camisards, then by the so-called Resistance of the Desert (the Assembly of the Desert is still held every year in Mialet, in the Cévennes mountains and the nearby Musée du Désert is a witness to the history of Protestantism). For the members of the Resistance, punishment was terrible: men were sent to the galleys, women to prison (Marie Durand remained a prisoner in the Tower of Constance in Aigues-Mortes for 38 years).

The Declaration of Human Rights, in August 1789, brought religious freedom. A pastor’s son, Rabaut Saint-Etienne, actively participated in drafting it and it is indeed to him that we owe Article X of the Declaration concerning the freedom of worship and opinion. Elected representative to the Estates General (he took part in the famous oath of the Jeu de Paume) in March 1789, Rabaut made a superb speech on the theme of tolerance and was immortalised by the painter David. After the Revolution, Protestantism resumed its march forward.
Facing the temple of ancient art and designed by the renowned British architect Norman Foster, the Carré d’Art Jean Bousquet is a temple of contemporary art. With its sober glass façade, this superb building features a library of several thousand books, a sound library, a media library and the Museum of Contemporary Art of the city since 1993.

An imposing contemporary signature in the city-centre similar to the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, it rises harmoniously in the area around the Maison Carrée, formerly the centre of the Roman Forum.

The Museum’s collections consist of nearly 480 works and magnificent exhibitions are organised to give a broad idea of Contemporary Art from 1960 to the present day. This includes artistic movements from the South of France and all of Europe. The displays of the collections, renewed each year, permit an in-depth approach to the great artistic movements.

Today, the Carré d’Art is adapting to the requirements of the 21st century in the respect of its architectural identity. It was redesigned for new uses with a preserved architecture and heritage: an improved reception, optimised services, a building adapted to new digital uses, high energy performance and increased accessibility.

Reopening: April 2018

DID YOU KNOW?
Visitors can also see many other contemporary works while walking around the city. This “Exploded Museum” includes works by Takis, Martial Raysse, Bernard Pagès, Philippe Starck...
The place d’Assas

Formerly the location of the laundry, supplied with water from the Fountain, it was in 1824 that it was named the Place d’Assas. At the end of the eighties, the City of Nîmes entrusted the visual artist Martial Raysse with the task of restructuring this place by highlighting the water running from one end to the other between two monumental human heads representing Nemausa, the spring that gave its name to Nîmes, and Nemausus, the god of this source. In the middle, from a circular central basin, emerge four columns and two hieratic statues. This is a place where sun, water, plants and minerals are perfectly blended and where it’s pleasant to roam on its terraces on summer evenings.

The Bus Shelter

This modern version of the bus shelter was created by Philippe Stark in 1987. Made of dark marble, it sits at the beginning of Avenue Carnot and represents the emblem of the City of Nîmes, a crocodile and a palm tree, the crocodile symbolised by a series of aligned cubes.
The entrance to the city from the South is marked by a hemispherical building created by the Japanese architects Kisho Kurokawa and Mieko Inoue. The structure echoes the shape of the Roman amphitheatre and includes offices and housing.

Designed by the architect Jean Nouvel, who wanted to redefine social housing, this futuristic complex consists of two imposing vessels of aluminium, sheet metal, iron and glass.

The Colosseum

The two parallel buildings are designed to maximise space, comfort and light in each of the 114 social housing units they provide. In 2008, this building received the «Heritage of the 20th century» label and Jean Nouvel’s career was awarded the Pritzker Prize in March 2008.

Nemausus
Famous for its palm tree and crocodile fountain, created in 1987 by the visual artist Martial Raysse, who thus featured the coat of arms of the City (the conquest of Egypt by the troops of Caesar in 31 BC, during the battle of Actium), restaurants and cafes have flourished around this pretty square and its many terraces enable you to enjoy the art of living in Nîmes.

In 1989, the architects Vittorio Gregotti and Marc Chausse chose to create an English stadium for football and rugby where the spectator is very close to the playground. This rectangular stadium, with a capacity of 20,000 seats (including 12,000 covered) includes sports equipment annexes in its four angles. Not far from the Costières Stadium is Parnassus, a sports hall designed by the same architects, which completes the sports complex.
In the heart of the historic centre, nestled against the old Bishopric, the Provost and the Fine Arts School, a stone’s throw from the Cathedral, the Place du Chapitre is organised around a monumental staircase fountain. The square regained its splendour in June 2007 owing to the work of the architects Dominique Pierre and Philippe Ghezzi. Large trees have been preserved on the lower part of the paved square. Built-in ground lighting casts a special colour at night on this setting where people like to dance the tango on summer evenings.
An art of living
A city with Mediterranean accents, Nîmes cultivates the art of living! The city, one of the largest in the South of France, has a typical variety of “scrubland” landscapes and a plain, the Costières Plain, where vineyards extend to the delta of the Rhone River. A city on a human scale, the Roman city has preserved a beautiful quality of life and a pleasant lifestyle! With its brilliant sunshine 300 days a year, it is difficult to resist the call of the café terraces on the squares of the city-centre and along the boulevards.

The cafes opposite the Amphithéâtre, on the square of the Maison Carrée or facing the Cathedral, which evokes the High Middle Ages and the Renaissance, are popular places for moments of relaxation. There, you will meet the students from the School of Fine Arts or the neighbouring Conservatory and people of all ages who, armed with their shopping bags, flock to the nearby covered market, Les Halles.

A place not-to-be-missed, at the corner of the Jardins de la Fontaine and in the shade of large trees, «Le Bosquet», is a paradise on earth for fans of lawn bowling. Summer and winter, when the weather is fine, this little garden is the scene of game parties with the accents of the South, where the people of Nîmes meet every day to perform this typical southern French ritual.
The weekend is the time for the mazet! These small, dry stone houses in which our ancestors loved to relax on Sundays has remained a favourite place for the people of Nîmes. They like to spend their days relaxing there, in the shade of the lilacs, under the arbour and to relax there, playing boules in the calm of the surrounding scrublands. Nowadays, the mazet often becomes the main house and many buildings are mazets that have been «enlarged».
Nîmes has a plant heritage of 365 ha of green areas, ranging from the historic Garden of the Fountain to the Domaine de la Bastide and various squares. In 2014, the city was awarded a fourth flower to the label of “Towns and Villages in Bloom” as a reward for the beautification of the living environment in recent years, including the transformation of the Esplanade or the Allées Jaurès. The city has focused on the development, maintenance and enhancement of green areas. 150,000 plants are produced in municipal nurseries every year to flower and beautify the city. The management of urban trees (manage, protect and maintain them) is also a priority for the City, with a “Tree Charter”, as the tree heritage of Nîmes is significant. A hundred or so plant species populate the urban area (the plane tree and the hackberry tree are predominant). In 2009, the City was presented with the “National Tree Award” for the management of its tree heritage and the care provided to new plantations. Lastly, no less than 54 playgrounds have been set up to meet the need for relaxation and awareness of children, and regulations are in place to govern the different uses in the gardens and enable the best possible coexistence of multiple activities.

DID YOU KNOW?
It is now forbidden to smoke in 56 green areas in the city, with parks and playgrounds full of signs saying «Tobacco-free area»
Nîmes also has a natural forest heritage of over 1,000 ha made up of 6 forests. The quality of these sites and their accessibility make them favourite places for walkers and sports fans. A variety of projects have made it easy to get to know the Nîmes scrublands, for which a charter has been developed. The scrublands offer plant formations of an extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna. The forests also have a significant legacy of dry stone buildings, testifying to an old agricultural activity based on sheep herding and the production of olives. The “Charter of the Scrublands” revolves around the objectives of the preservation and enhancement of the territory with regards to the natural and built environment: to understand the scrublands, to respect it, to enhance the heritage, to control urbanisation, to adapt lifestyles and the environment and to preserve the natural areas...

The 3 main forests are the Bois des Espeisses, the Domaine d’Escattes and the Clos Gaillard.

WHERE CAN YOU GO FOR A WALK?
Domaine de la Bastide: a family-oriented sports and leisure complex, with football and rugby fields, a baseball field and paths along the River Vistre or around the lake! At Mont Duplan: another garden in the city-centre in addition to the Jardins de la Fontaine. A shady walk under the pines, playgrounds, activity areas and bowling greens. At Vacquerolles Park: at the gates to the Nîmes Golf Course.
In Nîmes, we renew our commitment to sustainable development every day. Included in the field of sustainable development: energy saving, health, food, the Charter on sustainable construction, responsible consumption, solidarity, environmental protection, living well together and citizenship.

Some examples
- the 1st Auroralia Award in 2013, which rewards cities abroad for installing an outdoor lighting system that reduces the environmental footprint in the most remarkable way possible.
- the Award for Best Cloud Computing in 2012 for Metropolitan Nîmes, which includes IT performance in sustainable development and the design of which, commissioned in 2011, was the first time in France that it was awarded to a public authority.

Nîmes, the internet city @@@@@

The Association of Internet Cities supports as closely as possible the needs of cities and villages towards good citizen use of digital tools. The commitment and enthusiasm of local communities are rewarded by up to five @ at the annual awards of the Internet City Label. In 2014, Nîmes won its fifth @. The Internet City Label is a prestigious label and a reward for the efforts of cities in favour of an Internet in the service of citizenship, civility and civic engagement.

To learn more: www.nimes.fr

The award-winning web documentary on the Nîmes Amphitheatre.
www.arenes-webdoc.nimes.fr

On January 13, 2017, the “Heritage and Innovation” prize was awarded to the City of Nîmes by the Francophone digital platform, Innovation Club & Culture, in the category “Ex situ experiences” for its web documentary on the Arènes of Nîmes. Produced in partnership with the City of Science and Ingénierie, in early 2016 it won over 5 other finalists, including the Rodin Museum, the Museums of Paris and the Jeu de Paume. An organisation attentive to digital innovation in connection with Culture, since 2015, CLIC has been organising this competition that collects the votes of professionals. Nîmes had a majority, winning 21% of the votes in its category. Offering a fun and educational approach, enriched with synthesized images and interviews, this web documentary is for all audiences and can be consulted for free on the city’s website.
Nîmes grew among the scents of the scrublands, the olive trees, the vineyards and chestnut trees. So naturally, cooking has taken its accent from Provence and the strength of Cevennes, enhanced, of course, by a pinch of Camargue salt. Made famous by the chef Durand, codfish “Brandade” remains the most famous dish from Nîmes.

The little pies from Nîmes have a nice, golden crust that conceals a veal and pork stuffing to savour warm or hot.

The secret recipe of Croquant Villaret has not changed since 1775. The most surprising thing about this delightful long golden biscuit is not its mysterious taste but its crunchy consistency. Caladon, which is softer, is made with almonds and honey.

The early ripening of the PGI Nîmes Strawberry makes it the only strawberry in France grown in the ground under shelter. The olive tree is part of the culture of Nîmes. The AOP and AOC Nîmes Olive, the famous «Picholine» with juicy, crisp, sweet flesh, is eaten green.

An appetizer typical of our region, tapenade is made of green or black olives crushed with anchovies and capers. Anchoïade is a puree prepared with anchovies, olive oil and garlic.
DID YOU KNOW?
The former President of the French Republic, Gaston Doumergue (1921-1931), who was born near Nîmes, said that when eating brandade he could hear the cicadas singing in the pines of the Magne Tower.

The tasty beef of the AOC and AOP Camargue Bull comes from animals raised in total freedom in the delta of the Rhône River. The “Gardianne de taureau”, after codfish “Brandade”, is the second most important specialty of Nîmes. The famous AOC and AOP Pélardons (small, refined cheeses made from raw goats’ milk), lamb, Pippin apples and sweet onions come to us from Cevennes. And to accompany these dishes, there is nothing better than a Costières de Nîmes wine or a sparkling Perrier mineral water, the source of which bubbles up a few kilometres from Nîmes.
The sense of celebration
Having fun in Nîmes is second nature! The proof is in these impromptu festivals that spring up throughout the city! One of the main events, the Feria, accentuates all kinds of emotions and leads to a kind of collective folly. The first Feria was held in 1952 in true Spanish style, and even today combines bullfights, Camargue races, concerts, bull running in the streets and many other events.

Renowned throughout Europe, it is the most well-known popular event. Twice a year, thousands of people fill the streets of the city. However, they are not all bull «aficionados». Everyone loves the excitement and the atmosphere that fills the city and brings together music and dance.

Dozens of bodegas (improvised bars) mushroom throughout the city and people gather there to celebrate. The Feria is six days at Pentecost (Whitsun) and three days in September. The festivities roll out in succession, to please all audiences and tastes! You can watch bullfighting in the Arena, abribas and bandidos (bull running in the streets), see the Peñas (bands) wandering, dance the Sevillanas late into the night in the bodegas, eat paella on the boulevards, participate in activities, attend concerts, watch the jousting on the Fountain canal, listen to the Mass in Provençal language in the Cathedral or attend the Pégoulade, the opening parade of Pentecost Festival...

Nîmes may seem quieter the rest of the time, but many other events are held throughout the year, such as summer concerts in the Arena, the Thursday night markets in Nîmes, performances at the theatre, festivals, fairs and exhibitions as well as major sporting events.
Events that are not-to-be-missed

Nîmes Urban Trail  February 2018
The Great Roman Games  April 2018
Cartoon Biennial  May 2018
Pentecost Feria  May 2018
Camargue races  During the Pentecost Feria
«This is not a love song» Festival  June 2018
Nîmes Festival  June & July 2018
«A Film maker in the City» Festival  July 2018
Thursdays in Nîmes  July & August 2018
Grape Harvest Feria  September 2018
Christmas in Nîmes - Theatre of Images  December 2018
International Bow and Arrow Competition  January 2019
Flamenco Festival  January 2019
Biography Festival  January 2019
Curiosities & anecdotes
«Jeans», trousers first adopted by the American pioneers, are worn by everyone today. However, did you know that this famous garment originated from Nîmes?

In the Middle Ages the city exported this cheap and resistant cotton twill fabric across Europe. At the time, it was used for boat sails and tarps. Then clothing was exported to the United States where a Bavarian immigrant called Levi Strauss sold them to those who went to conquer the West. Thus, «Blue Jeans» were born.

Denim comes from “de Nîmes” and “Jeans» from Genoa, the Italian port where the goods transited. It is known that in the 18th century lengths of this cloth (or twill) were purchased in the area unfinished, to be dyed in Nîmes. This was an ordinary product, as precious fabrics were made entirely in Nîmes, which, at the time, was an important dyeing centre. This enabled the development of low cost dye baths, particularly for blue dye and explains the profusion of these blue textiles at low prices.

The cotton twill that Levi Strauss used for the first «Jeans» was originally not intended for clothing but was part of the goods that traders in Nîmes exported to New York along with shawls and silk.

While there is no specific evidence (the Levi Strauss & Co. archives burned down in the fire of San Francisco in 1906), it is believed that as his stock of brown canvas was finished, Levi Strauss asked his brothers in New York for new stock. Was it the chance arrival of a consignment that blue cotton twill from Nîmes was used and gave birth to the «Denim Jeans»?

DID YOU KNOW?
The story of “Jeans” is linked to that of “la bouvine” (Camargue bull traditions)!

When Buffalo Bill came to Europe in the early 20th century, the Marquis de Baroncelli received the Sioux chiefs in Camargue and invited them to an “abrivado” (bull run) and a “ferrade” (branding): these were the earliest exchanges between America and Europe.
To understand the origins of the coat of arms of the city, we must travel to Egypt. In 31 BC, Octavian defeated the fleet of Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium and took over the control of the Roman Empire. Then Octavian received the title of Caesar Augustus. A coin was struck in Nîmes to celebrate the victory. One side shows the profile of the Emperor and his adopted son Agrippa and the other a crocodile tied to a palm tree surmounted by a laurel branch, symbolising the conquest of Egypt. The inscription of Col Nem, meaning the Colony of Nîmes, suggests that the victorious Roman legions received land near Nîmes. In fact, Nîmes was simply the place where the coins were minted. Over the centuries, Nîmes became attached to these coins and, in 1535, were allowed by François 1st to use the palm tree and the crocodile as their coat of arms. Redesigned in 1986 by Philippe Starck, they are found everywhere in Nîmes, even on the paving stone studs in the historic centre.

DID YOU KNOW?

Four naturalised crocodiles adorn the main staircase of the City Hall since 1853, referring to the coat of arms of Nîmes. Their history is known through the caption below the belly of each one, constituting a sort of birth certificate. Deciphering these captions enables us to trace the origins, dates and names of the consuls who approved them: 1597, 1671, 1692 and 1703. These four crocodiles are protected and are listed as Historic Monuments.
New achievements
A new district in the East
The Contemporary Music Scene (SMAC), “Paloma”, an imposing building of 5,000 m², is an alliance of different cultural worlds, equipped with all the latest digital technologies. Paloma has 6 studios, 1 large platform to accommodate theatrical set devices, 1 multi-purpose room with retractable stands and a balcony, 1 patio and 1 housing centre for artists in residence. An open and friendly place to live with vintage furniture, its signage is intended to be humorous and offbeat. It was designed by Jean-Michel Bertreux, from the Tretrac Firm of Architects. Paloma displays strong programming with renowned national and international artists, while maintaining the territorial anchoring of places on a human scale. Why Paloma? This Andalusian name is an invitation to the gentle nature of the urban area of Nîmes with its Roman and Provençal atmospheres. It’s also a song composed by the Spaniard Sebastian Iradier in 1863 and is one of the most widely performed songs in the world, by artists from Luis Mariano to Charlie Parker.

A new district in the South
The train station district, for long a strategic crossroads of the city, was no longer attractive. Cut off from the city-centre by the railroad bridge, the district needed room to grow. The need to expand the centre towards the South predestined the district for a major urban renewal project. Thus was created the ZAC Triangle Station, a train station with a visual and functional transparency and a dual entrance, providing a new relationship between the city-centre and the new district. Added to this were 1 bus station, 2 car parks and 1 taxi rank.

The Avenue Feuchères pedestrian mall, which faces the station and adjoins the Arènes, is the backbone of this development that has created a new hub for local residents, users and travellers. With new housing, public facilities, shops, offices, hotels and commercial activities, the train station district has become the neighbourhood to live in! This urban development project was entrusted to the Société d’Aménagement des Territoires, based in Nîmes. A new multiplex CGR cinema with a floorspace of 7,000 m², which opened in November 2017, offers 10 rooms on two floors as well as a bar and a restaurant.
The Hoche University EcoDistrict
For several years, the City has engaged in an urban planning program to reorient the city-centre to the East. The district is now revealing its new face. Centred on a university campus around the old Gaston Doumergue Hospital, this new environment offers housing, shops and natural areas. The university campus was opened in 2013. The issues of the district are: the reconstruction of the city to the East on 20 ha without using natural or agricultural areas, solutions for the problem of flooding, the development of housing (1,000 housing units, including 25% for social housing and student housing, buildings, a university campus, offices and shops), the preservation of the historic heritage with the transformation of the former hospice into a university and the creation of new modes of green transport, including the proposed extension of the TCSP North-South line. In 2012, Nîmes received the “Golden Marianne of the Republic” for sustainable development and in 2017, the label of “EcoDistrict - Living better together», a label awarded to 14 projects in France.

For more information: www.nimes.fr
DID YOU KNOW?

The Hoche-Sernam project was entrusted to the urban architect Antoine Grumbach, who collaborated with Christian de Portzamparc (the Musée de la Romanité) on the Cours du Val Maubué project in Marne-la-Vallée and in 2012 was entrusted with the study on development strategies for Greater Moscow.

AEF - Arènes Esplanade Feuchères
The forum for the twenty-first century
The entire AEF project was carried out by the urban architect Alain Marguerit and the landscape architects of the «Atelier des Paysages». The goal was to transform the area for pedestrians, improve the living environment and enhance the urban landscape to make it more welcoming for visitors and people from Nîmes.
The first part of the project, inaugurated in 2007, featured the 2000-year-old Amphithéâtre. This urban development based on materials of mineral origin was followed by two other greener phases:
The Esplanade, inaugurated in 2012, includes an urban garden of nearly 1 ha in the heart of the city where the people of Nîmes, tourists and travellers intersect. Café terraces, benches and large lawns have flourished in this historic public garden. Over 24,000 species of plants and 70 trees, shrubs and grasses were planted here, faithfully reflecting the species found in the countryside around Nîmes and nearly 3,000 feet of bamboo cane were arranged on the pergolas and kiosk walls.

Avenue Feuchères remains an important artery for public transport, between the station and the heart of the city. Inaugurated in 2013, more user-friendly and functional for pedestrians, it has expanded the historic centre by creating an urban area of 8 hectares, which offers a modernised living environment and a new entrance to the city worthy of the jewel of heritage that awaits the visitor a few meters away.
At night, the Avenue and the Esplanade light up, showcasing the Roman Amphitheatre.
The Allées Jaurès
Measuring over 60 meters wide over a length of 1.5 km, the Allées Jaurès, considered by some as the Champs-Elysées of Nîmes, are a grand city entrance, with the Jardins de la Fontaine and the Tour Magne in the forefront. Completed in 2013, the metamorphosis of this major thoroughfare was entrusted to Jean-Michel Wilmotte. Inspired by the Ramblas of Barcelona, it is an urban walkway and a new tourist attraction for the city. The mall down the centre is composed of three sections, each centred around a main function.
- North: green areas, fountains, canals and shaded benches that encourage strolling.
- Middle: squares, pergolas, gazebos and facilities. And markets!
- South: children’s playgrounds, bowling greens and areas for leisure and relaxation.
With a cycle path, car parks, cafes, restaurants and shops. This vital artery of the city has become a real living centre and a distinctive district.
The TCSP
A real alternative to the car, the T1 line, or Tango +, circulates since 2012 on the North-South line of the TCSP (Collective Transport in Clean Sites), the pivot of the transport system of Greater Nîmes. Combining comfort, safety and accessibility, this Trambus with 135 seats runs on dedicated lanes to guarantee travel times. With a regular timetable, Tango + connects the exit of the Nîmes Centre motorway to the Arènes in 14 min. Relay car parks enable you to leave your car on the outskirts of the city. This public transport, innovative and environmentally friendly, is unique and its interior decoration in “Denim Jeans» and in local colours means that the Trambus is really «Made in Nîmes!» It is also an ecological asset because its engine has the latest standards for control of air emissions.

At the end of 2016, a new line was inaugurated. It goes around the “Ecusson” in the opposite direction of the car traffic, providing access as close as possible to the city-centre. Upcoming, a third line, which will cross Nîmes from East to West.

For more information: www.nimes.fr
**Lighting up the Jardins de la Fontaine**

Anxious to preserve and enhance its heritage, while providing strollers with a feeling of safety, in 2017, the city installed lighting in the lower part of the Jardins de la Fontaine.

In respect for the environment, the City of Nîmes wished to offer these 18th century gardens, listed as “Remarkable Gardens”, an original nocturnal identity, to make it a pleasant place to walk around and to create a friendly atmosphere.

Centred on the founding spring and its Nymphaeum, the Gardens have many remarkably well preserved Roman monuments and buildings.

This installation of lighting as part of the City Lighting Plan, has transformed the site into a real urban landmark as an extension of the Allées Jáures and asserts its new nocturnal identity.

*Next light-up: Summer 2018*

**The «Flood Protection Plan»**

To protect the city from the high risk of flooding, a comprehensive plan of action has been implemented for over 20 years. The goal of this work programme is to provide flood protection goal for all districts.

Long and expensive, it requires a succession of Flood Prevention Action Programmes. Developed by the City of Nîmes and its partners, these programmes have increased the capacity of the six basins in the city.

The first programme, implemented over the period of 2007-2014, followed the Flood Protection Plan that had been set in place after the historic flood of 1988.

In 2014, the City signed with its partners a second Flood Protection Plan (2014 to 2020), to develop preventive measures in terms of knowledge, alerts, a culture of risk and to lead a decisive action plan in the East of the city.

This ambitious vision of flood prevention and protection has enabled the city of Nîmes to become a world reference in the field.

For more news on the projects of the city: www.nimes.fr
Major Projects
The ambition of the City is to strengthen the relationship between the people of the 21st century and its rich Roman past, providing Nîmes, world famous for the quality of its ancient monuments, with a major new Archaeological Museum worthy of its outstanding heritage.

This 9 200 m² museum, facing the Arènes, will be tasked with explaining the ancient heritage of the city and with creating the desire to discover and understand it. Areas will be reserved for the presentation of each site and monument of the current landscape but also the missing sites and monuments such as the Sanctuary of the Fountain, the theatre, the spa...

5000 works out of the 25,000 pieces in the archaeological museum of Nîmes will be presented there, such as the mosaics of Achilles and Pentheus, major pieces discovered during excavations on the site of the Allées Jaurès and not yet on display even today.

This discovery reinforced the mayor’s desire, Mr Jean-Paul Fournier, to create a contemporary museum to present these exceptional works as well as those preserved in the archaeological museum.

The City wanted to promote and transmit this magnificent heritage in a building adapted to the museum requirements and expectations of today’s public.

The enhancement of the collections has been designed through new technologies that will restore the Roman ruins to their ancient context. A very innovative museography will help visitors to place objects, architecture and urban planning in their spatiotemporal context. Designed around a demanding scientific and cultural plan, it is intended that this museum will be one of many.

Designed around a demanding scientific and cultural plan, it is intended that this museum will be one of many. Following an international architectural competition, the winning project was that of Elizabeth de Portzamparc, a French signature from among the greatest names in architecture and urban planning.
The City of Nîmes was built in a remarkable way around and with its Roman monuments. It is this ancient architecture spread over the centuries that gave the city its identity, its personality, its uniqueness, providing it with outstanding universal value.

Under the heading, “Nîmes, from antiquity to the present, the UNESCO application revolves around influences and quotations from ancient times through the centuries, but also addresses the unique adaptation of urban planning to promote ancient monuments. They are both models but also anchor points in the urban space that structures the city. Indeed, Nîmes illustrates twenty centuries of urban history marked by the imprint of Caesar Augustus.

This inscription on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites will enable recognition of the work undertaken by the City of Nîmes for many years to enhance its heritage. It will also be a strong symbol for future generations, who will have the responsibility of continuing the development of the city while drawing from his past. Thus, this inscription would deeply mark the people of Nîmes, in the creation of the identity of the city and its roots. It would also enable them to better share this common good and show the world this exceptional heritage.

Steps:
In 2014, the French scientific committee in charge of assessing the city’s application recognised the outstanding universal value of Roman Nîmes.

In January 2016, the Management Plan was presented to French Properties Committee and in January 2017, the official submission of the application to UNESCO was made by the Ambassador of France. In the autumn of 2017, feedback, comments and recommendations were received from the experts on the application, following its review and site inspection.

One more step on the way to the highly anticipated entry by the people of Nîmes, who are proud of their heritage and identity.

At the beginning of the summer of 2018, its application to the World Heritage Committee will be presented. Meanwhile, the City continues to beautify and restore the prestige to its ancient monuments: after the restoration of the Maison Carrée, it is to the 2000-year-old Roman Amphithéâtre that the city wishes to restore its flamboyance.

For more information: www.nimes.fr
Support the application of Nîmes to UNESCO www.jesoutiensnimes.fr
Location & access
In Southeast France, Nîmes is the capital of the Department of Gard and is part of the Occitan Region. It has a privileged position between the Mediterranean Sea, Camargue, Provence and Cévennes, in the scrubland landscape, between the popular cities of Avignon-Arles-Marseille-Montpellier and a few kilometres from the famous Pont du Gard.

Geographic coordinates:
43°49'59"N 4°21'00"E.

Altitude maximale au nord : 215 mètres (116 mètres en zone urbaine)
et altitude minimale : 21 mètres dans la plaine du Vistre.

Maximum northern elevation: 215 meters (116 meters in urban areas) and minimum altitude: 21 meters in the plain of the River Vistre.

Nîmes has beautiful sunshine throughout the year but often faces the northern Mistral wind with gusts exceeding 100 km/hour. Its location deep in the hills of the scrublands explains its mild climate and relaxed lifestyle.

With over 154,000 inhabitants, Nîmes is the 18th largest city in France. Since 2017, the Urban Community of Metropolitan Nîmes includes 39 municipalities.

Nîmes by motorway:
- A9 and A54
  - 2.5 hrs from Lyon
  - 1.5 hrs from Marseille
  - 40 mins from Montpellier
  - 3 hours from Nice and Toulouse

Nîmes by train:
- 2.5 hours from Paris
- 1.3 hours from Lyon
- 1 hour from Marseille

Nîmes by air:
Nîmes-Alès-Camargue-Cévennes Airport.
Via the Ryanair Company, regular services to London, Brussels (Charleroi), Fez and Marrakech.
Connections to Liverpool.
3 other airports around Nîmes:
  Marseille Provence,
  Montpellier Méditerranée,
  Avignon Provence.
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