



Walking tour #4

Right Bank Tour

Right Bank Tour of Bordeaux

While the Bordeaux neighbourhoods on the left bank of the river Garonne may claim to be the city's historic centre of gravity, some of the most interesting sights in Bordeaux lie across the historic Pont de Pierre bridge, from curious architectural endeavours to fascinating botanic gardens. This tour will guide you through the streets and lanes of the right-bank La Bastide quarter, and will let you uncover some of its many hidden wonders!

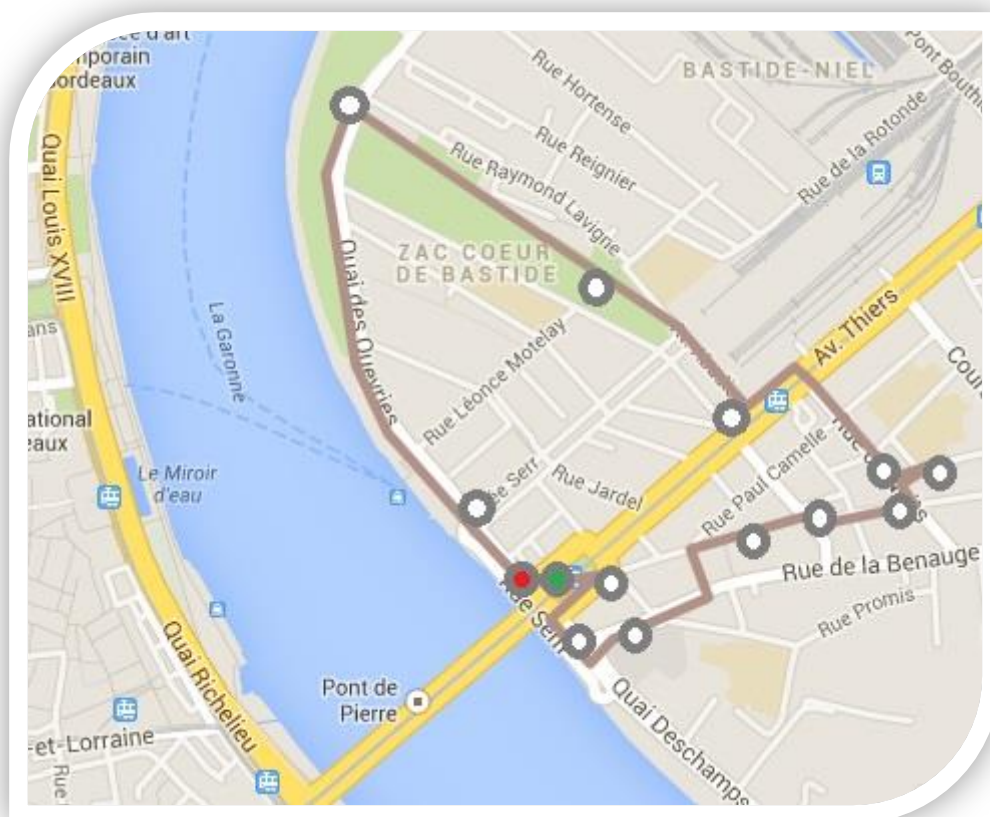
Sights

1. **Place Stalingrad**
2. **Théâtre Alcazar**
3. **Pont de Pierre and the left-bank skyline**
4. **Caserne des Pompiers de la Benauge**
5. **Crèche de la Bastide**
6. **Dr Le Chabrely statue and École Montaud**
7. **Maison Cantonale**
8. **19th-century bains douches public showering facilities**
9. **20th-century bains douches public showering facilities**
10. **Église Sainte-Marie**
11. **Botanic Gardens**
12. **Toussaint Louverture statue**
13. **Former Gare d'Orléans**

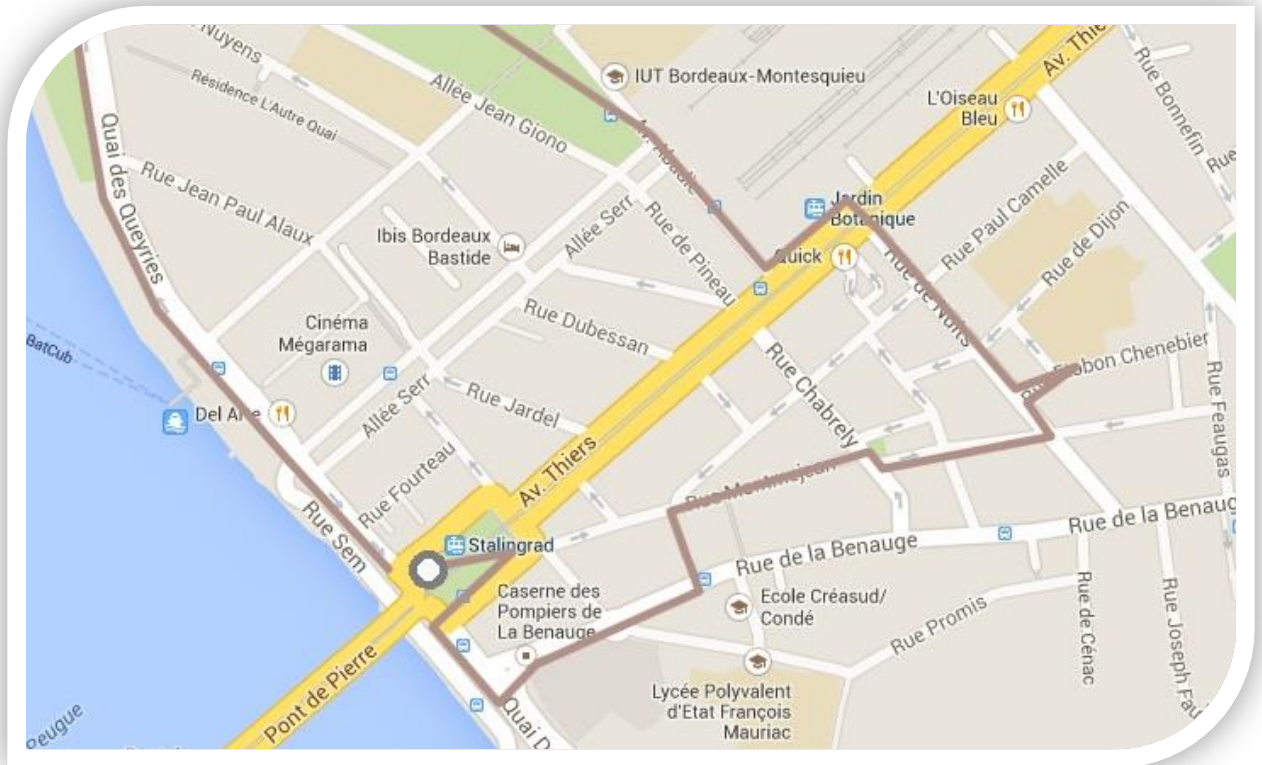
Itinerary

Start: Place Stalingrad (Tram line A, “Stalingrad” stop)

Distance: 3.5 kilometres



Sight #1: Place Stalingrad



The most striking feature of this square, which was aptly known as “Place du Pont” until 1946, is the large blue lion conceived by the French artist Xavier Veilhan (born 1963).

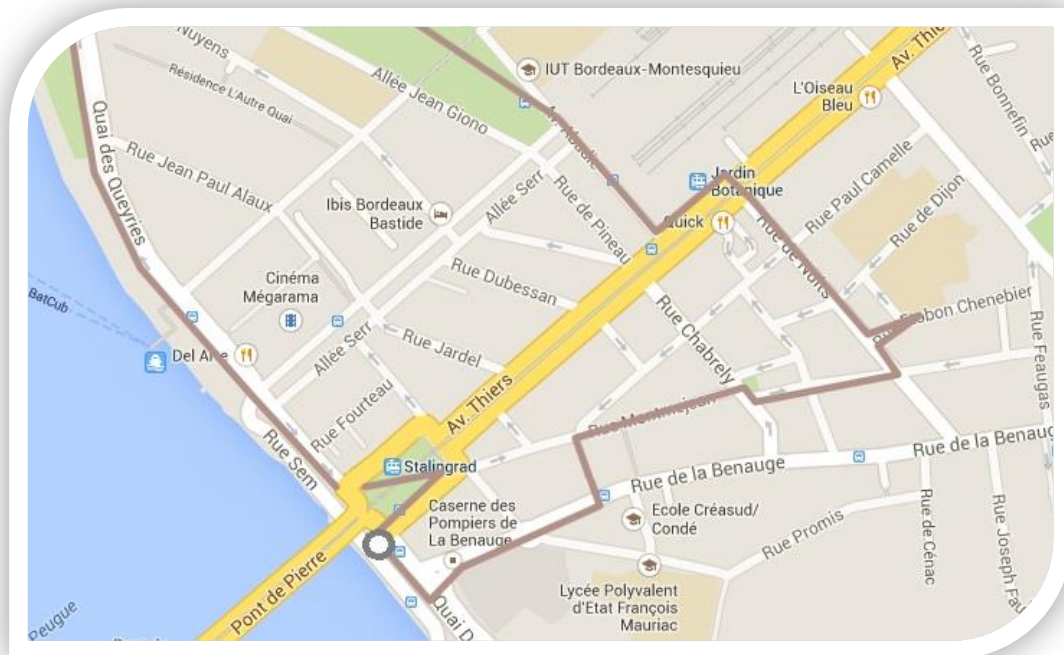
It has been in position since 2005 and has become one of the symbols of the renewal of this district, which was for many years regarded as the black sheep of the Bordeaux neighbourhoods. Now the lion proudly looks back across the Pont de Pierre towards the city centre! The plinth-less statue, made from composite materials (polystyrene, polyester resin on a metallic frame), is very much of its times: computer software played a large part in getting the geometrically-challenging volumes just right! In designing this piece, the artist was inspired to reinterpret the works produced by Frédéric Bartholdi on display elsewhere in France: Paris (Place Denfert-Rochereau) and Belfort.



Place Stalingrad is also home to one of the six Wallace Fountains dotted around Bordeaux. These distinctive cast-iron public drinking fountains are more readily associated with Paris – they had originally been dreamt up and financed by the philanthropist Sir Richard Wallace in the latter years of the 19th century.

The main road leading away from Place Stalingrad is Avenue Thiers, which has been one of the main routes into Bordeaux since 1826. The avenue was overhauled between 2000 and 2004.

Sight #3: Pont de Pierre and the left-bank skyline



From this vantage point opposite the former Hôtel Sainte Marie, you can take in one of the finest views of Bordeaux!

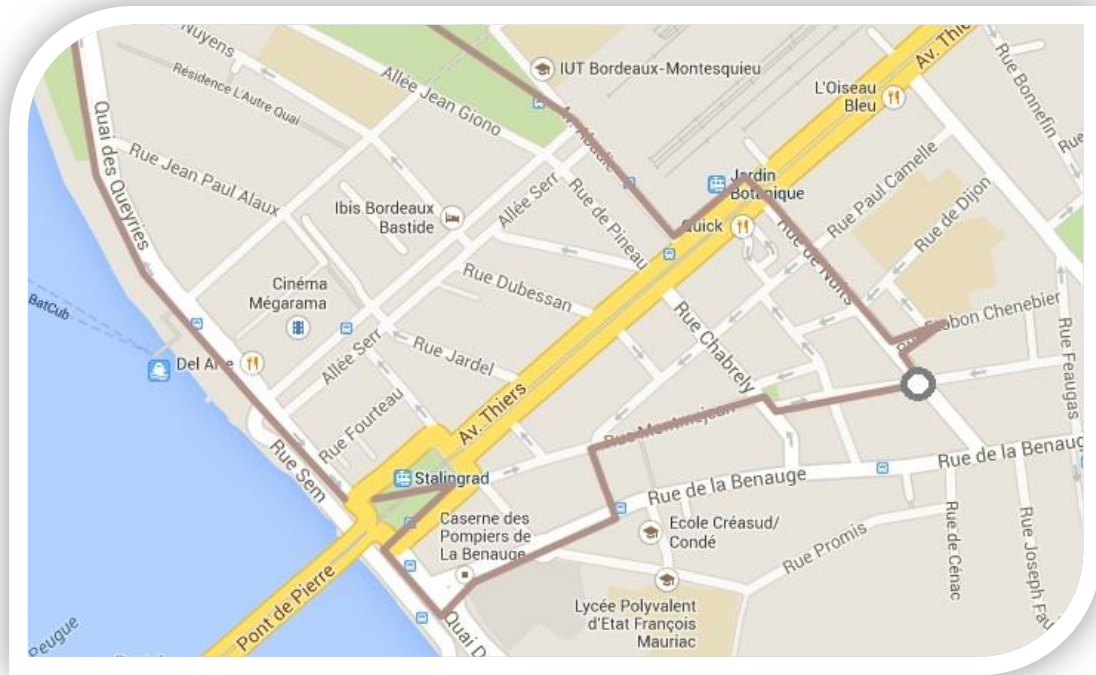
The Pont de Pierre bridge over the Garonne was the sole means of crossing the river within the city from its completion in 1822 until the Pont St Jean and Pont d'Aquitaine were opened in 1965 and 1967 respectively. Its construction had been commissioned by Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, and medallions celebrating his rule feature on each flank while the number of arches (17) echoes the number of letters in his name.



Porte de Bourgogne, the arch visible opposite, was built between 1750 and 1755. Its function was purely decorative, unlike some older structures elsewhere in Bordeaux which were actual gates into the city. It was part of Marquis de Tourny's vision for Bordeaux which consisted of tree-lined promenades and squares featuring arches such as this one (others include Porte Dijeaux and Porte d'Aquitaine).

The St Michel belfry tops out at 114 metres and is the tallest building in south-western France. It was originally built between 1472 and 1492, although it had to be restored in the 1860s, having been damaged successively by a lightning strike in the 16th century and by an earthquake in the 17th century. The belfry is a separate structure to the church itself, a flamboyant gothic design that was registered as world heritage by UNESCO in 1998.

Sight #7: Maison Cantonale



No, you haven't suddenly arrived in the Netherlands or Bavaria! This unusual art nouveau building, designed by the Bordeaux architect Cyprien Alfred-Duprat, was completed in 1925 and completely overhauled between 2001 and 2006. It is home to the local annex of the city hall, or "Mairie de Quartier", a library, a police station, a court of justice and a conference hall.

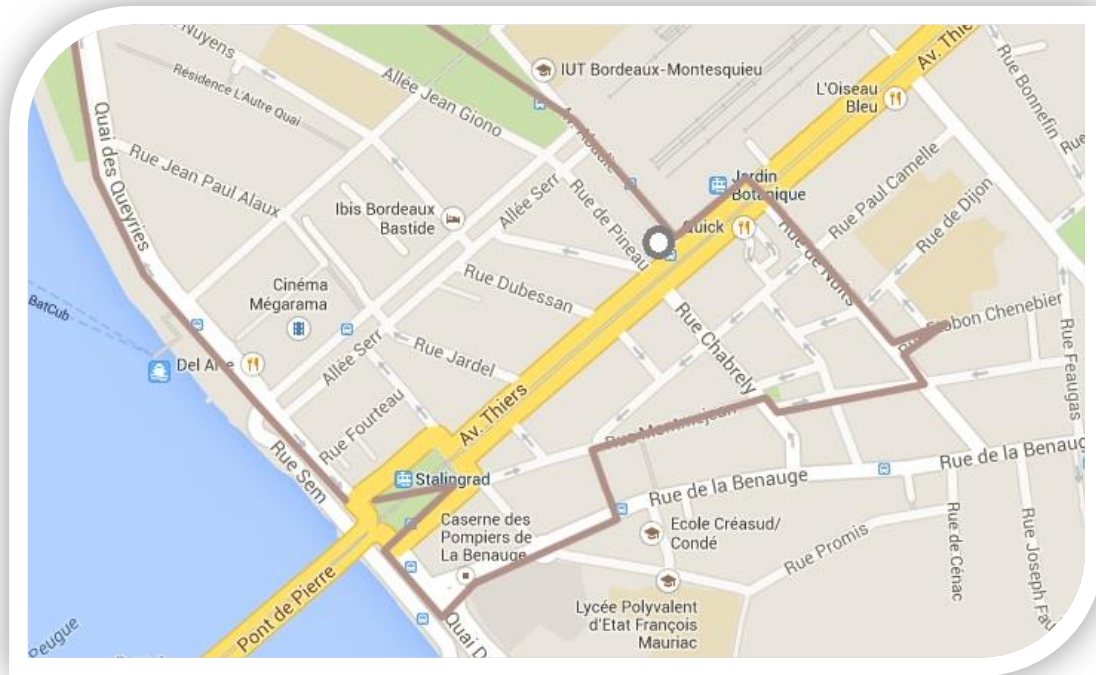


If you look carefully there are lots of ornate details to pick out, the most visible of which are the Latin inscriptions above the main entrance: Lex, Pax, Jus (Law, Peace, Justice).

Looking back from the Maison Cantonale and turning anti-clockwise, you will spot a currently disused town-house on the corner, which until recently was a pocket theatre and home to a drama troupe (more of which shortly) and, diagonally opposite, the grand entrance to what used to be the local fire station. The ground-floor quarters has become a club and meeting point for senior citizens.

You will by now be on Rue Nuits, which is not named after night-time pursuits, but rather in reference to a place called Nuits-Saint-Georges in Burgundy (central France) which was the scene of a December 1870 battle (also regarded as the second of the three "battles of Dijon"), part of the Franco-Prussian war. Many locals fought in the battle, many returned home seriously injured, while others never came home...

Sight #10: Église Sainte-Marie



This 19th-century church was funded by the influential Cardinal Donnet (1795-1882) and designed by Paul Abadie (1812-1884). If the curved, almost dome-like top of the steeple looks familiar, this may be because it reminds you of the famous Sacré-Coeur church in the Montmartre district of Paris, which was another of Abadie's achievements.

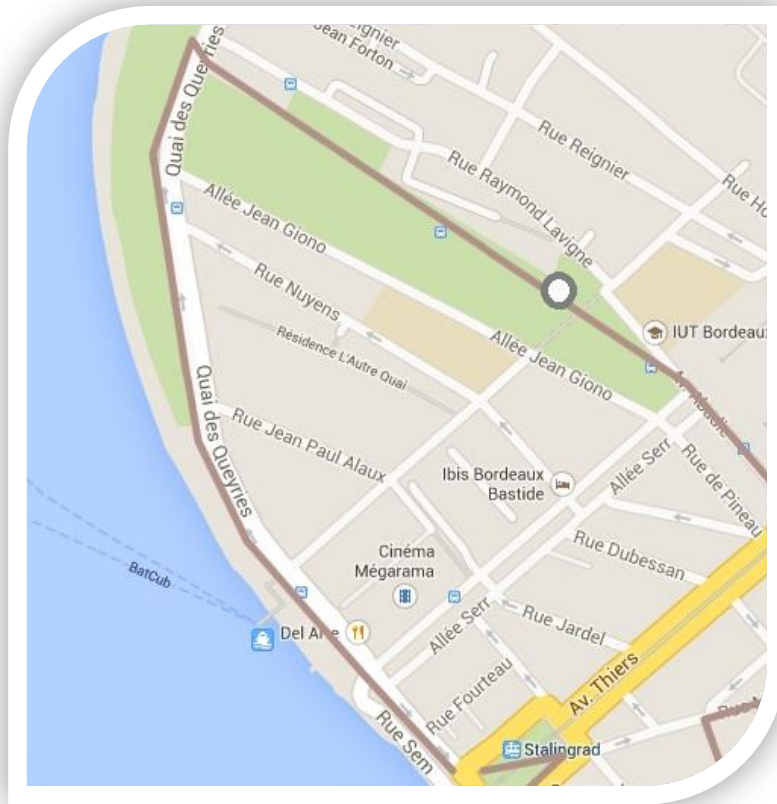


Throughout the construction phase, the architect had a number of structural issues to contend with due to the poor quality of the soil (which also explains why the belfries of St Michel church and St André cathedral are separate structures from their accompanying churches). Much of the inner structure, such as the ceiling, is made of wood rather than stone. This has recently been restored.

Behind the church, a communal allotment called “Ech’eau jardins” has been installed. This is as much a meeting point as a peaceful setting for plants, fruit and vegetables to grow and develop... in recycled wine barrels!

En route to the botanic gardens, look out for different landmarks on the skyline: to the right you should be able to make out the tips of the new Bacalan-Bastide bridge (which boasts a lifting centre section) and the 1920s-vintage Grands Moulins de Paris flour-mill, or “minoterie”; to the left, look carefully and you should be able to make out the distinctive shape of Saint-Éloi gate, where the emblematic Grosse Cloche (great bell) is located.

Sight #11: Botanic gardens



These right-bank gardens were conceived in 2002 – nearly 150 years after their left-bank Jardin Public counterparts – by the landscape gardener Catherine Mosbach and the architect Françoise-Hélène Jourda. The gardens, which opened in 2004, feature a number of zones which each reflect a different type of landscape of south-western France.

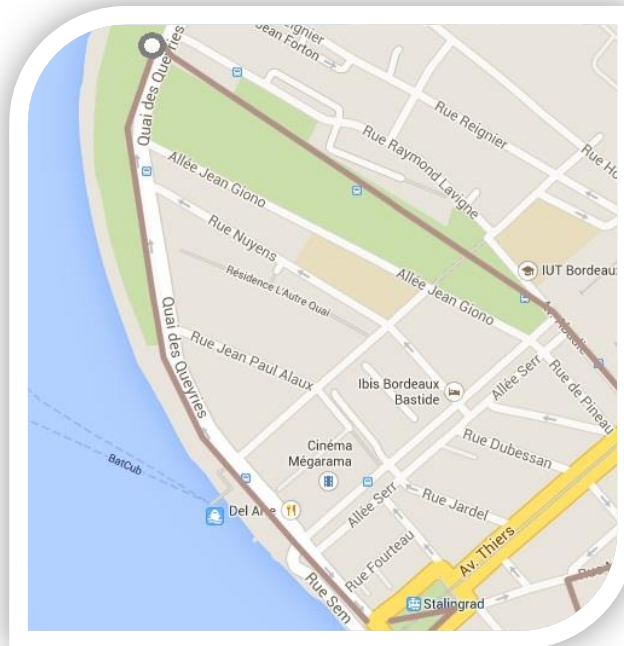


The most impressive features include a wide expanse of water which provides a home for numerous aquatic species, and the glasshouse conservatory (and exhibition centre) where 500 types of Mediterranean plants are kept. The botanic gardens are an eco-friendly development: a 275 cubic-metre underground reservoir stores rainwater which is then utilised in the watering system. Electricity is provided courtesy of solar panels on the roof of the conservatory.

Admission to the gardens and conservatory are free of charge. The gardens are open every day from 8AM until 8PM (winter hours 8AM-6PM); the onsite buildings are open from 11AM until 6PM every day except Mondays and public holidays.

Walk the full length of the gardens, exiting through the gates to the right at the far end. Cross the road to the riverside park.

Sight #12: Toussaint Louverture statue



This statue of Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803), by Haitian artist Ludovic Booz, was donated to the city of Bordeaux by the Republic of Haiti in 2005.

Toussaint Louverture was a slave who led a rebellion in the French colony of Saint-Domingue. When the French abolished slavery in 1793, Toussaint Louverture became an ally of the French army and as a military general drove British and Spanish invaders out of the colony.

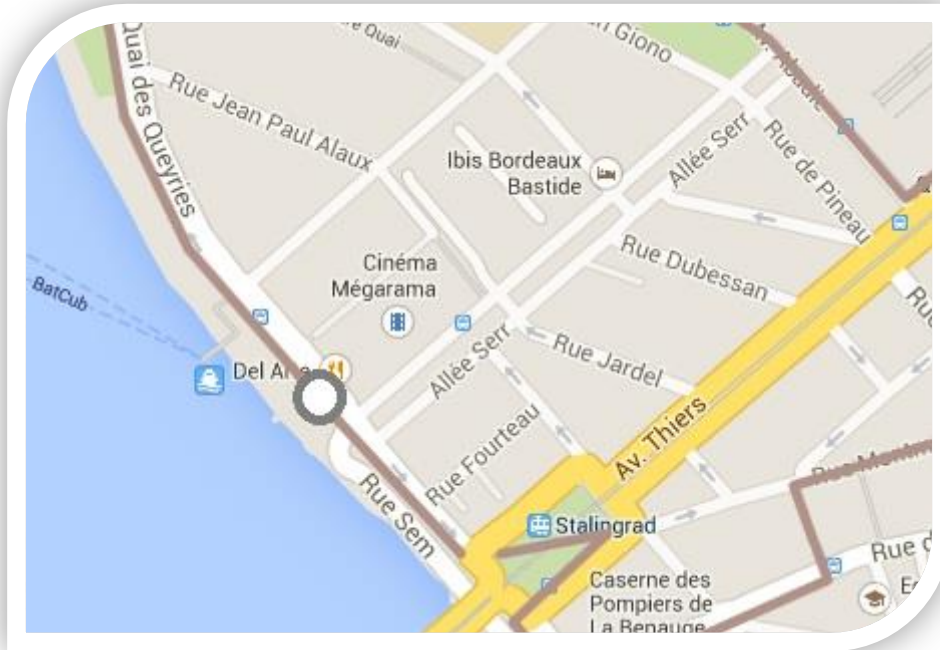


When Napoleon Bonaparte came to power, France reconsidered the decision on slavery. Toussaint Louverture created a separatist constitution but Napoleon sent an expedition to retake the island. Toussaint Louverture was deported to France, where he was imprisoned in the Jura mountains. He died there in 1803. The following year, former slaves proclaimed the independence of Saint-Domingue: Haiti remains the only contemporary nation born of a slave revolt.

The statue is positioned opposite the quay from which ships set sail between 1672 and 1837 on the first legs of 508 triangular slave trade voyages that resulted in 150,000 Africans being deported to the Americas. There are direct ties between Toussaint Louverture and the city. His younger son Isaac, who along with brother Placide had been educated in France, lived, died and is buried in Bordeaux (his final resting place is the Chartreuse cemetery).

Walking along the waterfront, you can successively make out the shipping exchange (Bourse Maritime), Esplanade des Quinconces, Place de la Bourse, the twin spires of Saint-André Cathedral and its belfry, Pey-Berland tower.

Sight #13: Former Gare d'Orléans



What is today the 17-screen Megarama cinema and restaurant complex was formerly the Gare d'Orléans, the first railway station to be built in Bordeaux.

Commissioned by the Compagnie des Chemins de Fer d'Orléans railway company, it was the initial terminus of the Paris-Orléans-Bordeaux line ahead of a railway bridge being built over the Garonne river.



The neo-classical architecture of the building, which was completed in 1853, was the work of the architect M. Darrou in partnership with the engineer Pépin Le Halleur. The last passenger train departed from the station just over 100 years later, in 1955.

The building, registered as a national monument in 1984, is a U-shaped structure typical of stations that are located at the end of a line. The central part of the front façade was topped off by a grand semi-circular window. However, this part of the concourse collapsed in 1950.

Considering it now takes less than three hours for trains to reach Paris (with that figure set to be cut further in the coming years), it is astonishing to think that on July 17th 1853, it took the very first passengers 13 hours and 7 minutes to travel the same distance!

And this is where this walk comes to an end, just a stone's throw away from our initial starting point on Place Stalingrad.



Website Invisible Bordeaux offers an online guide to some of the sights, stories, curios and lesser-known landmarks to be enjoyed in and around Bordeaux, France. The site, which first went live in December 2011, aims to scratch through the surface of the city and its surrounding area, enabling visitors and residents alike to get beyond the traditional postcard-friendly sights... which aren't so bad either!

The website is fed by Tim Pike, an Englishman in France who works in the communications department of a leading aviation electronics company. When not writing he can often be spotted riding a vintage yellow bicycle or strumming a guitar.

The Invisible City concept was first developed by Adam Roberts at Invisible Paris and has also been rolled out by Jan Liebelt at Invisible Lyon. If you too would like to join our small but perfectly-formed network, get in touch!

These walks are also available as interactive guided tours for iPhones via GPSmyCity.com. Recommended real-world guided tours include those provided by the Bordeaux Office de Tourisme and Bordeaux Walking Tours (www.bordeauxwalkingtours.com).



www.invisiblebordeaux.net



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