



LYON: EUROPE PERSONIFIED

| FAST FACTS: 1999 | | Similar To |
|------------------------------------|-----------|--|
| Metropolitan Area Population | 1,600,000 | |
| Urban Area Population | 1,349,000 | Marseille, Kansas City, Perth, Manaus, Sendai |
| Urban Land Area: Square Miles | 368 | Sacramento, Berlin, Seoul-Inchon, Belo Horizonte |
| Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers | 954 | |
| Population per Square Mile | 3,700 | Phoenix, Winnipeg, Beilefeld, Melbourne |
| Population per Square Kilometer | 1,400 | |
| *Continuously built up area | | |

14 July 2006

France is the world's culinary capital and Lyon is the culinary capital of France. There is no better place to eat in France or anywhere else.

Lyon is the city that tourists to Europe should put first on their lists after the usual spots, like Paris, London, Berlin, Barcelona and Rome. Lyon is the second largest urban area in France. It is a vibrant place that is making strong economic progress. It long trailed Marseille as France's as France's third urban area, but all of that has changed.

Lyon does not sit in a spectacular location like Sydney or Seattle. It does not have the gargantuan architecture of a New York, Shanghai or Shenzhen. It is not on the front of many European travel guides. But just the same, Lyon has a distinctive character that better represents Europe than the urban areas that get higher tourist volumes.

Lyon sits at the confluence of the Rhone and Soane Rivers. The Rhone rises in Simplon Pass, in the Swiss Alps. The river courses by Brig, where the train can be caught for a trip to the incomparable Matterhorn, then down the Rhone Valley, into Lake Geneva. It emerges at the other end of the elongated end, in the city of Geneva and continues its westward course toward Lyon.

In Lyon, however, the river turns south. When it turns, it is less than 1.5 miles from the southward flowing Soane, and a peninsula is formed between the two rivers. At this point, the peninsula is a large hill, which loses elevation until the peninsula becomes less than one-half mile wide. Approximately one-half of the four mile long peninsula is this narrow portion, which includes most of the historical sites of Lyon.

Lyon has the attractive of uniform building heights through much of the central city. The uniform height is lower than in Paris, but high enough to be interesting. The streets, both on the peninsula and in the city to the west of the Rhone are generally laid out on a grid. They also tend to be wide and lined with trees.

On the east side is the Part Dieu centre, which contains a large enclosed shopping mall and the main railway station. This commercial center is comparatively new and many of the buildings fit quite well into the architecture of Lyon. However, an exception is the Credit Lyonnaise “pencil,” which also houses the Radisson SAS hotel. This tall building, shaped like a pencil, is well known to locals as having the best view of Lyon, principally because this is the only spot in the city that one cannot see the pencil. There is one other design problem in the Part Dieu area, which is that the commercial center blocks walking access for three blocks in an area where there is high pedestrian volumes. There is one vehicle only undercrossing and there is another tram only undercrossing. The latter is frequently used, illegally, by people not wanting to walk through or around the commercial center.

On the other side of the peninsula are steep hills climbing into the suburbs. Roman ruins will be found in this area.

Lyon has the largest mass transit contract in the world. The entire Lyon mass transit system is provided under a competitive contract. With approximately one-tenth the population of Los Angeles, Lyon’s daily transit ridership is approximately the same. The private mass transit operator provides the bus service, trolley-bus (electric bus) service, light rail service and metro (subway) service.

Nonetheless, no-one should think that mass transit is dominant in Lyon. Like all other high-income world urban areas, with the exception of Tokyo-Yokohama, Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto and Hong Kong, the automobile is dominant. The UITP Millennium Cities database places the mass transit market share at less than 10 percent, which would be less than Toronto and Sydney and approximately the same as New York.

Lyon has grown strongly. Its central city, Lyon, includes little more than one-third of the urban area population. Moreover, like virtually all other high-income world inner cities, Lyon has lost approximately one-fifth of its population since 1950. Its population is now approximately 450,000. The city remains very dense, at approximately 25,000 per square mile. Villeurbanne, a suburb immediately to the north of Lyon, adjacent to the Rhone before it turns south, must also be considered a part of the inner city. Villeurbanne has approximately 125,000 residents, with a population density of approximately 20,000 per square mile.

The story is the same in Lyon as it is elsewhere. All of the growth has been in the suburbs. The Lyon urban area is not at all densely populated, with 3,700 persons per square mile. This is more than Portland, but then Phoenix has a higher density than Portland.

The two photographs of the Lyon suburbs are not representative suburban Lyon. There are many, very attractive suburbs, especially in the hills to the west. Our visits to those suburbs were before the initiation of this series and no pictures were taken.

URBAN TOURS BY RENTAL CAR: ABOUT THE SERIES

Urban Tours by Rental Car offers perspectives on urban development obtained by automobile tours through urban areas. Rental cars are not the favored method for visiting cities, especially those outside one's own country. Instead, tourists and urban planners favor packaged tours or local public transport systems. Both are splendid ways for seeing the city as it used to be --- the very reason for most tourist visits. The historical core areas contain monuments, prime government and religious edifices and quaint neighborhoods that are often centuries old. This is particularly important to tourists from the newer urban areas of the American, Canadian or Australian West, where history extends not far before World War II. It is further understandable that few tourists travel thousands of miles to see the newer suburban areas that look very much like home. But most tourists do not profess to be students of the urban area.

For the urban planner interested in understanding the whole urban area, it is not enough to study the core alone, regardless of its architectural attractiveness, romanticism, history or affirmation of an individually preferred life style. No one, regardless of the depth of their education can develop reliable conceptions from an unrepresentative sample, and urban cores are the very essence of unrepresentative samples. Both public transport and packaged tours miss the larger part --- the expanse of sprawling residential and business development that rings virtually all major urban areas. They may be of little interest to many urban planners, but they should be.

Stripping away regional architectural facades, one might as well be in the suburbs of Phoenix, Portland, Perth or Paris. Here, the automobile is king, because no public transport system has been developed that can effectively serve destinations outside the core (at least at a price any society can afford). While public transport market shares are higher in European suburban areas than in the New World, much of the difference is attributable to lower incomes and less automobile access. Indeed, public transport's principal weakness, lack of automobile competitiveness, is itself a contributing factor to the rising motorization occurring from the suburbs of Copenhagen and Nagoya to the suburbs of Lagos and Mumbai. To oversimplify this phenomenon as being a "love affair with the automobile" is the equivalent of saying that Singaporeans or Brazilians have a love affair with air conditioning. Human beings prefer comfort to discomfort and they prefer free time to time over which they have no control.

It is no wonder that tourists return to the United States thinking that all Paris looks like the second arrondissement (less than one percent does) and that urban planners think all of Milan looks like the architectural treasures that surround the Cathedral. In fact, the sprawling suburbs of Europe, Japan, Canada and Connecticut resemble one another in many ways. For any seeking to study the urban area in its entirety --- not just the favored haunts of core-dwelling elites --- there is no alternative to "getting behind the wheel." Thus, "urban tours by rental car."

<http://www.rentalcartours.net>

<http://www.demographia.com>

<http://www.publicpurpose.com>

From City Hall to the West



From City Hall to the West



City Hall



City Hall



East Side



East Side





East Side



Peninsula



Peninsula



Along the Rhone



Exposition Center



Part Dieu



Part Dieu



Pencil, Part Dieu



Pencil, Part Dieu Looking West



Looking East from Hills West of Soane



Suburbs



Suburbs