

WALKING TOUR CITY CENTRE

AUCH



«ALL BEAUTY IS FOUNDED ON THE LAWS OF
NATURAL FORMS. A TOWN'S ARCHITECTURE
SHOULD MOVE PEOPLE, NOT SIMPLY PROVIDE A
SERVICE FOR MAN'S PHYSICAL NEEDS.»

John Ruskin, Lectures on architecture and painting, 1854.



VILLES
& PAYS
D'ART &
D'HISTOIRE

Museum of the Americas – Auch

It houses a fabulous collection of Pre-Columbian art – the 2nd largest in France after the Quai Branly Museum – as well as sumptuous Egyptian, Gallo-Roman, Medieval collections, fine arts, sculpture, and also traces the traditions of Gascony.

Open from February to December

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www.ameriques-auch.fr

The Claude Desbons esplanade

The broadwalk along the banks of the Gers River has been laid out, lined with trees and lit for all to enjoy. It is accessible to all and offers magnificent views of the historic city's architecture. The Ortholan Garden (with playground) and Couloumé Park (with 250 different species of trees and a playing field) are close by. Go on the promenade Michel Combe to complete the 11 km long walk.

The museum of the cathedral's treasures

This museum has 230 sacred artifacts (statues, textiles, silverware ...), presented through a modern and interactive scenography.

Open daily from June to September from 10 am to 1 pm and 2 to 6 pm.

If this brief description has whet your appetite and you're curious to find out more, feel free to ask for the heritage events programme and scheduled, accompanied guided tours. If you are travelling in a group, the Pays d'art et d'histoire and Tourist Office can customize excursions to suit your needs.

Test the app "Explore Auch"

Set off on an adventure in Auch's lanes and help Baptistou find his goose... on the way you'll meet a king, a mapmaker, a musketeer and... Free from Android and Apple stores. The Auch Tourist Office will lend you tablets and headphones

Information

Tourist Office

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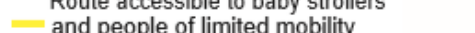
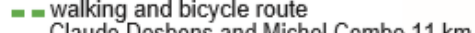


Chemin de Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle en France
inscrit sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial en 1990



Come and explore The Capital of Gascony ! Seat of the archbishopric, Auch had been important since Gallo-Roman times. By yourself or with friends, follow your own route through the exceptional heritage.

1. Sainte-Marie Cathedral
2. Salinis Square
3. Armagnac Tower - The museum of the cathedral treasures
4. Monumental Staircase
5. Arton Gate
6. The pouterles
7. House of Henri IV
8. Salluste-du-Bartas Square
9. Prefecture
10. 15th-century house
11. Dessoles Street
12. Saint-Orens Church
13. Roman Tower
14. Libération Square
15. City Hall
16. D'Étigny esplanade
17. The former Intendant's Hall
18. The former Cordeliers Convent
19. The old Grain Market

-  Route accessible to baby strollers and people of limited mobility
-  walking and bicycle route Claude Desbons and Michel Combe 11 km





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1. Sainte-Marie's Cathedral

Construction work commenced in 1489 on the site of the former Romanesque cathedral and was completed in 1680. It is considered to be one of the last Gothic cathedrals to have been built in France. The façade (16th-17th centuries) showcases the different architectural styles (Gothic, Renaissance and classical) to best effect. Its masterpieces are to be found inside – **18 stained glass windows** by Arnaut de Moles (16th century), the **113 choir stalls** sculpted in oak (16th century) and the **great organ** built by Jean de Joyeuse (17th century). Since 1998 the cathedral has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list of Routes of Santiago de Compostela in France.

2. Salinis Square

The square was named after the archbishop who had it landscaped in the 19th century on the site of the former cathedral canons' living quarters. Prefect Féart and Archbishop Salinis, who were keen to open up the city to the Gers valley, had the approaches to the cathedral cleared in the 1860s. The canons' accommodation was demolished and the stones salvaged to raise the level of the square and construct a monumental staircase. **A polygonal tower** (15th-16th centuries) on the corner of Fabre-d'Églantine Street, **the old chapter house*** (13th century), the ecclesiastical court* (14th century), and the **tower known as Armagnac Tower** are all that remain of this self-contained living area. Apart from the polygonal tower, these buildings have been redeveloped to house and display almost 200 objects and ancient and precious relics and ornaments that were in the cathedral.



3 4

The **war memorial** – a work by the prolific Gers sculptor Antonin Carlès (1851-1919), many of whose works are exhibited at the Jacobins Museum in Auch – stands in the centre of the square. The **Salinis College** was founded in 1543 on the South side of the square and was run by Jesuits from 1590 to 1762. The main quadrangle was built in the 18th century.

3. Armagnac Tower

It might come as a surprise, but the 40-metre high Armagnac Tower never belonged to the Counts of Armagnac! It was built in the 14th century as a prison and attests to the archbishops' legal powers in the Middle Ages. Under the Ancien Régime, the tower was used to store the cathedral chapter's archives in the absence of prisoners, and was subsequently reconverted into a prison under the Reign of Terror in the Gers (1793) and during the 2 December 1851 coup staged by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte. Each of the 7 storeys of the upper part comprises a cell and only the top one is open on all cardinal points.

4. Monumental staircase

Circulation in the city changed with its completion in 1863, as the split staircase (374 steps in all) linked the top and lower parts of town that are separated by a 35-metre drop. It was partly built using material salvaged from the old chapter house that made way for Salinis Square. The use of poor quality frost-riven stone hastened its deterioration. After a number of successive restorations, the City embarked on a vast refurbishment project in 2009, whose final phase will end in 2017.



4

Since 1992, the **Observatoire du temps**, a contemporary cast-iron sculpture by the Catalan artist Jaume Plensa, has been a feature of the top landing. The raised text calls to mind the Bible's references to the Flood and calls to mind the disastrous flooding that scarred the city in 1977.

The second part of the work, the **Impossible Shelter**, is at the end of the footbridge on the opposite bank by St Peter's church (18th century), whose bullseye marks the level of the high water mark reached during the 1977 flooding. Originally, the artist called his work Auch, but the local population conferred ownership on it by giving the works their current titles.

The lower landing offers fabulous views of the Gers Valley and the façade of the old **Pasteur hospital** (18th century). In Gallo-Roman times, the lower bank was populated by the city dedicated to Emperor Augustus... Augusta Auscorum.

The following landing features a bronze **statue** by Firmin Michelet dated 1931 that bears the effigy of the most famous of all Gascons, Charles de Batz (circa 1615-1673), more commonly known as **d'Artagnan**, the captain of the King's musketeers, born in Castelmoré Château, Lupiac, a village not far from Auch.

5. Arton Gate

The former inner gate of the city (light fortifications), opened onto the ramparts area and probably dates back to the 14th or 15th century. It is topped by the half-timbered and brick gatekeeper's house.



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6. The pouterles (from rue de la Convention)

The pouterles (their name no doubt derives from a corruption of the French word poterne*) are typical of Auch. They linked the river, which flowed closer at the time, to the city's fortified gates. In the Middle Ages, they enabled the citizens to get in their water supplies and offered the advantage of being defensive. There are five of these steep, and stepped lanes in Auch – pouterle de l'Est, pouterle de Paris, the couloumats*, the oumettos* and the old pouterle, the broadest lane and the only one to have lost its steps.

7. The house of Henri IV (22, rue Espagne)

As tradition has it, the future King Henri IV stayed there with Queen Margot and Catherine de' Medici in 1578. You can enter a corridor by the door (open) that leads to an inner court with an impressive stone and wood staircase that is well worth the visit.

8. Salluste-du-Bartas Square

There has been a library in the former **Carmelite* convent** (17th century) since 1846. The centre of the square features the **bust of Guillaume de Salluste**, lord of Bartas, a 16th-century writer and poet, sculpted by Victor Maziès in 1890.

9. Prefecture (Prefect-Claude-Érignac Square)

This former archbishops' residence was completed between 1750 and 1770 on the site of the medieval **archbishop's palace**. Since 1800 the building has housed the Gers prefecture (open for visits on European Heritage Days).



7



10. 15th-century house (1, Dessoles Street)

This skilled tradesman's house was wrongly named "Fedel House", after the owner who traded there at the turn of the 20th century. He handed it over to the City of Auch as an example of **medieval urban architecture**. Originally it was arranged as a ground-floor shop with living accommodation on the upper floors. The walls of the three storeys were half-timbered, each level being in a different style and all of which have brick infill. Half-timbering was used from the Middle Ages through to the 19th century, offering the advantage of being cheap, sound, solid, durable and lightweight. The house still has a limestone corbel arch, which is typical of half-timber work. This made for space saving in the upper floors (the ground floor area is smaller than that of the upper floor) while leaving a wide enough passage for the street on the ground floor. Furthermore, the owner gained financially from this type of structure as tax was levied on the basis of the ground area.

The building adjoining this house is an example of Renaissance architecture and was built in the 16th century entirely out of stone.

11. Dessoles Street

This was the main street in medieval times when it was known as the "camin dret" (straight road in Gascon). It is lined by a number of private 18th-century mansions and now bears the name of Jean-Joseph-Paul-Augustin Dessoles (1767-1828), whose was born in a house on Bazeilles Street, who served as the Chief of Staff of the Republican and Imperial armies.

12. Saint-Orens church (Sénéchal Street)

The church, dedicated to Saint Orens, one of the first bishops of Auch (circa 395 to 446) was built in 1825. It has 3 naves separated by rows of columns. The stained glass windows (50 m² in all spread over 10 windows) are the work of Henri Guérin and were commissioned by the parish in 1969. The highly decorative organ by Émile Poirier and Nicolas Lieberknecht was installed shortly after construction was completed. It bears similarities with another organ they built – that of the Basilica of Notre-Dame la Daurade, Toulouse.

13. Roman Tower (Pénitents-Bleus Street)

This tower, also known as the Caesar Tower or the Pénitents bleus Tower, is a 6th-century structure and the oldest still visible in the city. Its base was constructed using materials that went into the first ramparts system at the end of the Late Roman Empire (4th-5th centuries).

14. Libération Square

Antoine Mégret d'Étigny, who served as the administrator of the Intendancy of Auch from 1751 to 1767 made planning changes to the city to open it up. The **ramparts** were gradually taken down and a **royal square** was laid outside the walls of the medieval city on the former padouen*. The 18th-century constructions (from No. 2 rue de la République to place Salluste-du-Bartas) surrounded the mound on top of which the Counts of Fezensac's **castle**, later occupied by Armagnac was built (it was abandoned in the 15th century).

You can see Le Daroles brasserie mentioned by Stendhal in his novel *Travels in the South of France* (1838) and the Hôtel de France, an 18th-century post house.

15. City hall

D'Étigny commissioned its construction between 1760 and 1770. It houses a stage frame **Italian-style theatre** (the only theatre of the time to have survived to this day in South West France) that still stages performances. The **Gallery of the Illustrious**, formerly the music room, where the portraits of famous Gascons hang, is open to visitors for free during city hall opening hours.

16. D'Étigny Alleys

Around 1760, d'Étigny had the south side retainer wall and stone steps of the main entrance built on the site of a former cemetery. They are 250 metres long. Pierre Vigan sculpted the **administrator's statue** (inaugurated in 1817), which is flanked by 2 stone lions one bearing fasces*, the other bearing scales symbolizing power and justice. The **courthouse** entrance is framed by the statues of Justice and Force.

17. The former Intendant's Hall (Gambetta Street)

Antoine Mégret d'Étigny had it built for his use in 1760. It has seen a succession of different occupants – it was the Gers Council hall during the French Revolution then the Prefecture and courthouse, the Imperial Palace for one day when Napoleon passed through the city in 1808, a hospital during the First World War, and it now accommodates the city's main post **office**.

18. The former Cordeliers* Convent (Camille-Desmoulins Street)

The Franciscans built it outside the walls of the medieval town in the middle of the 13th century. All that remain of this architectural complex are one **cloister** wing, the **chapter house**, the **church** (now L'Italien, a restaurant) and a stone **staircase** emblazoned with the Cordeliers cross (which can be seen in the current Cordeliers Hall).

19. The old Grain Market (Jean-Dours square)

The old Grain Market, which was built on the site of the Cordeliers* Convent gardens between 1837 and 1843 bears witness to the city of Auch's economic importance in the 19th century for grain and wine trading. The building is decorated with caducei* that recall its original purpose – trading. Its internal oak **structural framework** was the work of master carpenter Tournier. The building is now used for cultural and commercial events.

* **chapter house**: meeting place for canons

ecclesiastical court: (near the Armagnac Tower dungeons)

poterne: postern = small side entrance

couloumats: pigeons

oumettos: small elm trees

Carmelites: members of the Order of Carmel.

intendancy: provincial administrative unit run by the intendant, who acted for the king under the Ancien Régime

padouen: common pastureland

fasces: bundle of rods with projecting axe blade carried by lictors in ancient Rome

Cordeliers: clerics of the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans)

caducei: ancient Roman or Greek herald's wand typically with two entwined serpents

Dominicans (or Jacobins): clerics of the Order of Friars Preachers