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## My Perfect Day in Lyon

by **Martin O'Brien**

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It's Pavlovian. Pure and simple. Say **Lyon**, and I see snug, wooden booths, steamed-up windows and paper squares diamond-draped over red gingham tablecloths. The wine arrives in a pot - that heavy-bottomed glass carafe with a rubber band around its neck for every refill you order - and the food is served in workmanlike proportions, the kind of helpings you'd expect after digging up a road or ploughing a field. An immediate, irresistible response. A perfect day in **Lyon**, for me, revolves around food - not inappropriate in the gastronomic heart of **France** - preferably sometime in winter when caramel coloured leaves skitter along the sidewalks and river mists rise over tree-lined quais to shroud the city streets. It's a grand time to be there because the snap makes you walk fast and gets the blood pumping. Which is a good feeling. Nothing summery or slothful. It also helps work up an appetite.

Morning, in any city it's good to start with a view, somewhere to get your bearings. There are those who'll recommend the belevedere at the Basilique Notre-Dame de Fourviere, the place Rouville or rue des Fantasques but for my money it has to be the terrace of the sumptuous Villa Florentine on Montee Saint-Barthelemy, taking my coffee, brioche praline and perhaps a guilty 'calva' perched above the rosy, pantiled roofs of Vieux **Lyon**. These ochre-ish, umber-ish teetering, turretted buildings comprise one of the most remarkable Renaissance districts anywhere in Europe, real history on the hoof, an extraordinary abundance of princely palaces and merchant mansions, tunnelled with an echoing warren of stone-vaulted medieval passageways called 'traboules' that link one street to another.

But, on my perfect day there's another destination I have in mind, somewhere best approached in the early hours, across the Soane and the Rhone at whose confluence this city lies. I'm headed for Les Halles de la Part-Dieu on the corner of rue Garibaldi and cours Lafayette, a vast concrete cathedral devoted to all things edible and some, by the look of them, not so edible. Here, for me, are the real treasures of the city and its surroundings: fat-veined cuts of Charolais beef, puckered blankets of creamy tripe and tubs of jellied brawn, those celebrated poulets de Bresse with their heads tucked sleepily under their wings, marble slabs of gold-scaled carp and pike from the Dombes lakeland, feathery, furry pelmets of dead-eyed game, straw-plattered local cheeses and everywhere those grossly swollen, tightly corseted saucissons de Lyons. For me there's no better way to get the juices flowing than a stroll through **Lyon's** larder.

Lunch, but where to go, which particular table to take in this city of



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In the UK Martin has written for Condé Nast Traveller, The Daily Mail, Mail on Sunday, Elle and Time; in Australia for Vogue, Playboy and Mode and in the US Four Seasons Magazine, European Travel & Life and British Living & Style. His photo-stories have also appeared in Conde Nast Traveller and Vogue.

He has published two books: 60 Years of Travel in Vogue (1980) and All The Girls (1982), described by Auberon Waugh as "a classic among travel books."

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tables? My advice, come lunchtime, is look for a wheatsheaf painted beside a door and find yourself a bouchon, the traditional Lyonnais bistro named after the straw plugs once used as bottle-stoppers. Here the food is prix fixe and plentiful - a bowl of pumpkin soup or a plate of local charcuterie, a roti de porc or pav de boeuf served with pommes Lyonnais the colour of old ivory, finished off with a round of St Marcellin affin washed down with a rough little local rouge served in the obligatory pot. On my perfect day you'll find me at Chez Sylvain on rue Tapin, La Meuniere on rue Neuve or Raymond Fulchiron's venerable Caf des Fdrations on rue du Major-Martin with its football team photos and club pennants, those steamed-up windows, red-chequered tablecloths and bustling, smokey hum.

Afternoon, with something to walk off, there's no shortage of suitable digestifs. I could climb the Croix-Rousse hill where Lyon's 30,000 silk weavers (or canuts) worked their nineteenth-century looms to a deafening 'bistanclac-bistanclac' soundtrack, snacking on a bag of salty roast chestnuts or the roadside crepes called matefaim for which this district is also celebrated. Or I could head for the Muse des Beaux-Arts, accommodated in an old Benedictine convent on place des Terreaux, stepping cautiously past Daniel Buren's timed waterspouts to search out two thousand years of foodie still lifes. More likely though I'll set off south for a self-indulgent stroll down the length of Presqu'île, the aptly-name peninsula that separates the two rivers, to rue de la Charit and the Muse Historiques des Tissus and the Muse des Arts Decoratifs. Unlike the Beaux-Arts they're conveniently compact and accessible - one ticket for both, a steal. From here it's an easy amble past the tantalising, dream-on antique shops of rue Auguste-Comte where any retail therapy is likely to entail a mortgage over the grand expanse of place Bellecour where they play Albinoni adagios in the underground car park and back across the Soane to the cobbles and stone quais of Vieux Lyon.

Evening, with a night sky looming over the distant alps and sliding across the Dauphin plain, it's that rock and a hard place again. What to choose? Where to go? A night at the opera back in Presqu'île under the barrel-vaulted glass roof of Jean Nouvel's stunning new opera house? Or, since it's my perfect day, trust to the elements on a stone seat for an open-air concert in the smaller of Lyon's two Roman amphitheatres, the spot where this city started out more than two thousand years ago? A communard, a glass of the local beaujolais mixed with cr' me de cassis, aids the decision-making and I opt for those open spaces. And then, you guessed it, dinner. A little more formal this time, a little more elevated to suit the evening's entertainment - La Mere Brazier on rue Royale perhaps, or Lon de Lyon on rue Pleney, or Pierre Orsi on place Klber or, further afield, Alain Chapel at Mionnay, Paul Bocuse at Collonges-au-Mont d'Or or the spoiling tables of Chateau de Bagnols. In the end, though, it's a familiar, anticipatory wander along rue du Boeuf where Philippe Chavent's La Tour Rose is waiting to seduce and delight with an oyster soup sprinkled with caviar, quennelles soft as shaving foam, illicitly pink magrets and steaming beignets souffles fourrés aux cerises. And I don't even have to wear a tie. Call me a philistine, but I can't imagine a more perfect day.

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