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VILLEFRANCHE-DE-LAURAGAIS

At the crossroads



The time of the fairs
The creation of new roads and the opening ceremony of the railway path in 1858 opened new economical perspectives. Traders would come from everywhere. There were up to 7 squares in Villefranche dedicated to trade : for cattle, for pigs, for sheeps, for poultry... After the World War II, these fairs lost their importance little by little. Finally, succumb to the temptation of the large amount of restaurants within town that provides all kinds of catering. Choice is yours !



Enjoy yourself !
Enjoy your visit in Villefranche-de-Lauragais to participate to the large amount of organised events in town, or by going at the Cui-Cui Theatre or at the Cinema Bor !
During the summer season, hurry at the local pool to enjoy its playful outside area !

Let's go to the market !
True institution since centuries, the friday morning's market at Gambetta square enables curious people and food lovers to find local specialties and talk under the stalls' shadows.



The golden ages : the pastel then the wheat
After a period of trouble because of the harsh Prince Noir during the XIVth century, the Lauragais knew a true golden age thanks to pastel farming. Villefranche then became a collecting center : all the pastel shells were collected in the tenant farms nearby. Then they were brought to the town's covered market to be sold to traders from Toulouse. Finally, the latters exported them everywhere in Europe.
A bit later, at the beginning of the XVIIth century, thanks to the Canal du Midi, Villefranche became an unmissable trading place for cereals. A granary was built on the city hall's spot where was sold barley, wheat, corn, oat, hemp, flax...

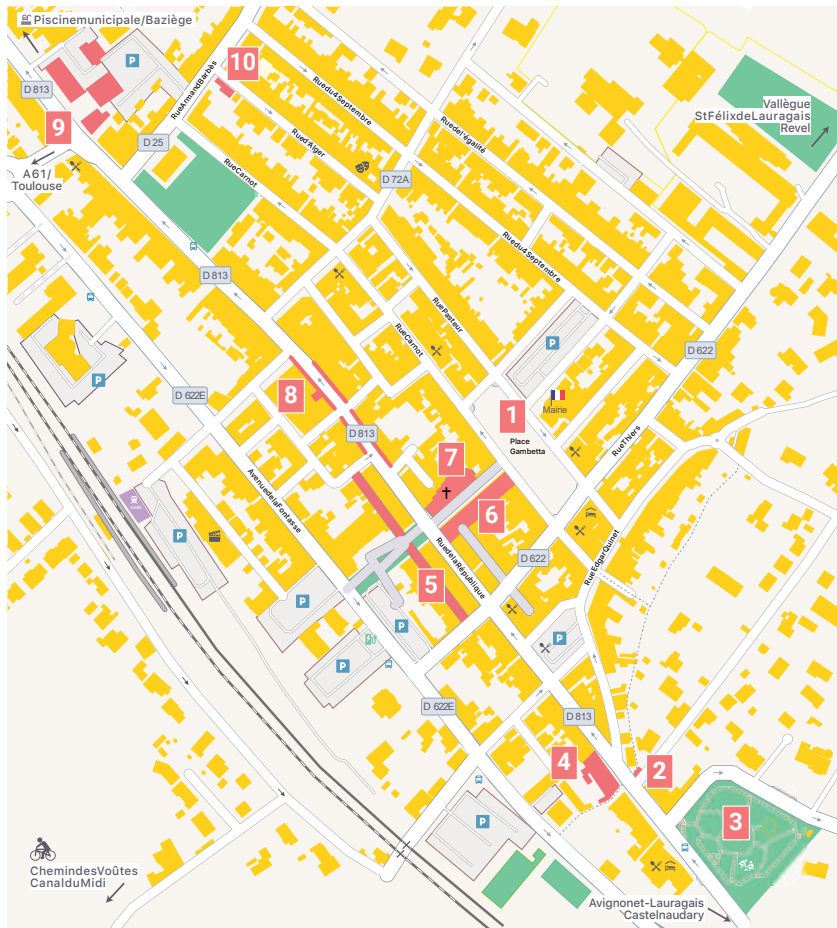
A lookout post in the middle of the forest
Originally, this place was located in the middle of the wide forest of Saint-Rome, it was known as dangerous and unwholesome. Dense and thick, this forest yet was crossed by an important highway, the Via Aquitania (Voie d'Aquitaine). This highway was built by the Romans in the 1st century A.C, it led from Toulouse to Narbonne. A lookout post was then created at this place to secure the traffic.

In 1280, the King Philippe le Bel wrote a tradition charter in which he allows economical privileges to the city and guarantees of individual freedom and security for its inhabitants.
This is how the name of the city was found : it is a free city, because its inhabitants were freed from some taxes.

Though in the XIIIth century, the count of Toulouse, Alphonse de Poitiers decided to create a city in the lowlands : this is how the bastide of Villefranche was born in 1252. The purpose of this foundation was to clear the forest and rehame a growing population, that was often victim of destructions and looting caused during the crusade against the Cathars (1209-1229).



The creation of a count that became royal
Around the year 1000, some fortified villages like Gardouch, Avignonet, Montesquieu, developed on the heights, dominating the « Voie d'Aquitaine »



1 Gambetta square

It is around this square that this city was developed since its birth. Originally smaller, it has always been a merchandise trading area. During the Middle-Ages, this square was certainly bordered by wood galleries under which were found bungalows, small shops.

This square had been totally reorganised in 1875.



2 Tabernoles square

A long time ago, Villefranche was surrounded by ramparts and closed by two tall fortified doors located on each side of the current Rue de la République. This district called «tabernoles» (wine traders) was located outside the fortified town : it was tied to Renneville until 1864.

3 The public garden

What a fate for this peaceful place ! Located outside the walls, it was the old town's cemetery, and later a market area for sheeps, before it welcomes strollers and children for fun or relaxing break .



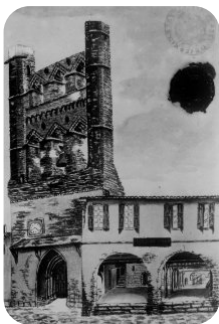
4 The old school

This big building was the town's old school. Boys and girls had a separated entries. A hospital owned by Sisters, as well as a boarding school occupied this building.

5 Rue des Prêtres or "Cantou merdous "

This narrow street was a firewall in the heart of the medieval bastide. Its situation set back from the main road allowed him to play an important role for the city : the one of an open-air sewer ! It is at this very moment that the Occitan surname « Cantou Merdou » started to be used.

Nowadays, it is still possible to see many small bridges that step over the old alley and enable people to go from a house to another without going out in the street !



6 The trader's covered market

It was called this way because of the seed covered market that was located at the spot of the current city hall (destroyed in the 70s). It occupies the place of an old squared plan covered market, right next to the church, used for pastel trading.

The current covered market was built in 1858 when Villefranche's trading knew its golden age thanks to the opening of the railway : traders came from all around Lauragais to sell products necessary in daily life.

7 The church of Notre-Dame de l'Assomption

This church was built at the end of the XIIIth century due to the request of Jeanne de Toulouse's, the daughter of the famous Count of Toulouse Raymond VII and wife of Alphonse de Poitiers, brother of the futur king Saint Louis.

The impressive tower-bell-wall, surrounded by its two turrets and pierced by six carillon bays, is noticeable among all ! The building was largely reshuffled and grew in 1865 to welcome all the believers and erase the stigmas of the Hundred Year War and the Wars of religion.



Before entering, you will notice the mermaid sculpted at the top of the door. Unusual, isn't it ? The fact that it is on the entrance doorway of a church loads it with a deep symbolic : when he goes in the edifice, by the west, the believer leaves the Death and the Sin behind him. Inside, there are stained glasses from toulouse's house Gesta, as well as a nice sandrock Trinity from the XVIth century in the first chapel on the left when entering.



8 La rue de la République

One of the oldest houses of Villefranche-de-Lauragais is located in this street, it would date back to 1634 ! A bit further can be found the old city hall, and right in front of it, a nice facade with statues inspired from Aniquity .

By continuing, there are some elegant houses with friezes ornamented facades and terra cotta mouldings, fake pillars, or even timber framings. A true blending of types known under the name of eclecticism in architecture.

At the end of the street, major road since the Middle-Age, enjoy your stop at the Charles de Gaulle square and observe the Art Deco buildings of the old Baths Showers, That now constitutes the local library.



9 The administrative city

Since 1800, the town becomes subprefecture of Haute-Garonne and equips itself with many buildings including a police station, a prison and a courthouse. This distinction ended in 1926.

10 The Sainte Germaine chapel

In 1854, a cholera epidemic caused the death of 143 000 people in France. The disease touched a vast majority of Lauragais' towns, but Villefranche's inhabitants were relatively spared. This chapel was built in 1860 in tribute to Sainte Germaine, saint leader of the weak and the sick to thank her for her protection against the disease.