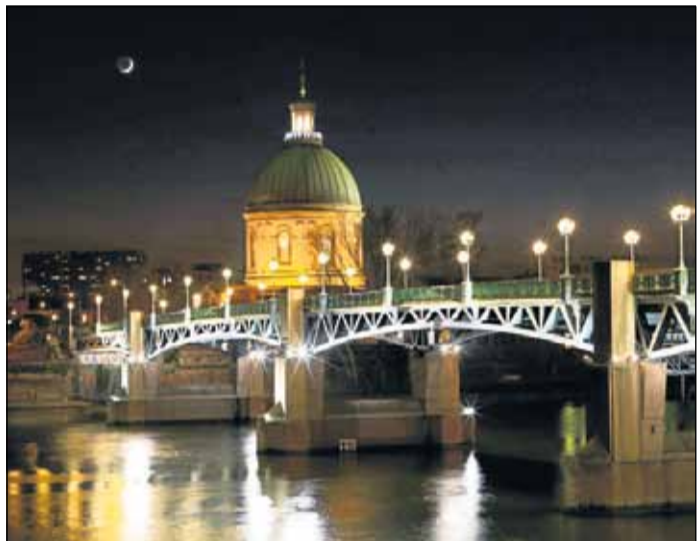




■ The Capitole de Toulouse is the seat of the municipal administration in the city.



■ The bridge over the river Garonne.



■ St Sernin.

Toulouse is by glorious

TOULOUSE is known as La Ville Rose — it's built of red brick which glows as the sun sets, imbuing a rosy glow to its ancient walls.

This is a dynamic but laidback city of 500,000, surrounded by some of France's best scenery.

Standing on a natural crossroads for pilgrims, merchants and waterways, halfway between the Med and the Atlantic, this is the fastest growing city in France.

But the vibe owes as much to Catalonia as France.

The historic city centre has all the attraction of Siena or Florence, while the Airbus industry based here injects an international feel, and also ensures the city is well connected.

Easyjet flies here from Gatwick and Bristol, with connections from both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

With more than 100,000 students

in the city, and many international language schools, the restaurants and nightlife are always buzzing.

No matter what your budget there's a restaurant for you. There are five Michelin star restaurants here, but for something more affordable try the trendy Le J'Go at 16 place Victor Hugo. (tel. 05 61 23 02 03).

Serving fabulous regional specialities such as black pork, it's always buzzing — no wonder with the dish of the day at 11 euros, a legendary chef, a superb collection of local wines and Armagnac, the south-west's spirit of choice.

In summer locals either picnic on the

TRAVEL

with **Katie Wood**



banks of the Garonne River or potter on barges on the Canal du Midi.

Summer is sunny, though in winter you can expect snow and skiing just 70 miles away in the Pyrenees.

CULTURE

Art lovers will delight in this city as Toulouse is home to some superb collections.

Of the 15 on offer my favourite is the Old Toulouse Museum, which tells the city's history and is housed in a 15th-Century townhouse.

The St Sernin Basilica is the largest and most splendid Romanesque church in Christendom and contains relics of more

ringed scenery



■ The Pyrenees.

than 100 saints and six apostles. Listed by Unesco, it's an amazing place on the route to Santiago de Compostela and dates back to the 13th Century.

Place Capitole is the heart of the city. Rimmed by neoclassical brick facades, the square reminds you of the regional sense of identity with the large Occitan cross displayed at its heart.

For a well-priced and charming base try the Hotel St Sernin at 2 rue Saint-Bernard (tel. 05 61 21 73 08 or www.hotelstsernin.com).

Situated opposite the cathedral, the rooms are quiet — they offer a gourmet breakfast and all manner of comforts.

NEARBY

Perhaps the best reason of all to be in Toulouse, though, is where it's located.

Just an hour or two away by train or car, in any direction, is wonderful scenery and a selection of very different cultures.

North is the Lot Valley, the least populated region in France, with rolling hills, twisting rivers, and vineyards. Lovers of Tuscany will delight in the beautiful little town of Albi, about half an hour away.

This is the birthplace of the painter Toulouse-Lautrec and his museum is a highlight of the town.

East, after stopping for a cassoulet (the local speciality) in Castelnaudary, you stumble upon the historic town of Carcassonne. An hour later you're at the Mediterranean so choose your beach.

If you don't want to drive or take the train you can do this route on the Canal du Midi — so you could travel by barge or bicycle.

Three hours' drive west brings you to the Atlantic coast — Biarritz, St Jean de Luz and San Sebastian.

South of Toulouse stand the Pyrenees — and there are the delights of Spain on the other side of the border.

Add to this some of the best food in France and the temptation to holiday in Toulouse is just too strong to resist.

FACTFILE

easyJet flies to Toulouse from Bristol and London Gatwick. Prices one-way start from £25.99 and include all taxes. Visit www.easyJet.com to book.

Alternately Jet2.com fly from Edinburgh with fares from £34.99.

TRAVEL NEWS

■ **SELF-CATERING** properties on offer from Ecosse Unique include Milton Cottage in Upper Knockando, located just down the road from the Cardhu Distillery at Knockando and a short drive from Glen Grant, Glenfiddich and Balvenie.

This typical Highland cottage sleeps two and comes complete with a woodburning stove — an ideal spot to crack open a bottle after a hard day on the trail. A seven-night holiday costs £450 in July and August.

Other whisky trail properties include Corglass Cottage (sleeping two) near Ballindalloch in Strathspey, Lagganvoulin.

Cottage (sleeping five) near Tomintoul in Speyside, along with Knockanbuie Cottage (sleeping six) close to Grantown-on-Spey in Morayshire.

Tel. 01835 822277 or www.unique-cottages.co.uk



■ **EASYJET** has a sale on just now with 750,000 seats available for £35.99 or less.

These prices are available on selected flights from UK Airports for travel between July 15 and September 30.

Sample flights include from Glasgow to Paris (CDG) from £29.99, Faro from £31.99, Alicante from £35.99 and Malaga from £35.99.

From Edinburgh you can fly to Paris from £25.99, Amsterdam from £27.99, Lyon from £29.99 or Lisbon from £35.99.

NEXT WEEK — Bonn