



COUR DES LOGES/G PICOUT; A RICO, MP/ DREAMTIME/JACQUES LEONE/JC DORTMANN/MPM

This," says my driver, sweeping his arms around with a flourish, "is my Lyon." How very romantic, I thought – how very French. In what other country would your airport pick-up take a detour to share his favourite vista, as impressive as it is?

From here, up on high at ancient Fourvière Hill, the city escapes to the east, with Renaissance architecture trickling down to the Saône. The terracotta rooftops begin to disperse past the Rhône, consumed by the harsh 1960s blocks of commercial

hub Part-Dieu, while to the south, the old industrial district on the peninsula is being transformed into an architecturally advanced eco-centre known as Confluence. It is here, where the two rivers converge, that the economic ambitions of France's second largest city are taking hold.

"Confluence will create a new centre – beautiful and sustainable," Lyon's mayor, Gérard Collomb, proclaimed in London last summer. The plan, set in motion when ground broke in 2003, is to mould a hub of innovation where cutting-edge research and development can thrive

in the "Field", a dedicated space at the peninsula's tip.

It will be Lyon's first city-centre hub, following the success of clusters such as Technology Park, Chemistry Valley, Gerland Biopole and Bioparc in greater Lyon. Once complete in 2020, the 150-hectare site will double the size of the centre. Renovated warehouses and modernist structures have sprung up already in the old freight port and petrochemical zone – the former sugar factory, La Sucrière, is now an exhibition space that hosted a mind-boggling collection for the Biennale de Lyon last year.



Artist's impression of Confluence

Lyon's quest

France's second city is on a mission – to become one of the world's premier centres for research and innovation. **Liat Clark** reports



The project has garnered attention from across the globe, with the New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organisation – a Japanese government agency with a €2 billion budget for developing energy solutions – setting its sights on Confluence. The model city will house a smart grid and a fleet of electric solar-powered vehicles for a car-sharing scheme.

The buzz around the new district has prompted relocation announcements from Euronews, builders Eiffage Construction and Banque de France, but it is the scientific innovators that the city wants to attract. "Lyon is at the forefront of the collaboration between research and industry," Collomb tells me. "That is not so natural in France, but here we are creating strong links between universities, researchers and companies."

In 2010, Aderly – Lyon's economic development agency – helped ten companies from the clean tech sector, 15 renewable energy firms

and ten life science organisations to set up. For a city that has been home to Renault Trucks' international headquarters for more than a century, this is quite a transformation, and it's one that Lyon – which introduced a free bike system before even Paris or London – is evidently proud of.

"I suppose, in the next year, we will become one of the most important centres for clean tech and among the five great places for biotech and life sciences," Collomb says – and with Australian "innovation agency" 2thinknow ranking Lyon the eighth most innovative city in 2011, this may be more than mere posturing. For a European second city to be ranked alongside such power players as San Francisco, Toronto and New York is impressive – not to mention that France repeatedly places sixth in the

'Confluence will create a sustainable new centre'



Lyon station and airport



Orange Cube, Confluence



Sofitel

WHERE TO STAY SOFITEL LYON BELLECOUR

This 164-room, five-star hotel is located on the peninsula around the corner from Place Bellecour, the city's largest square. All rooms have free wifi, while Prestige suites have living rooms and free minibars. Le Silk brasserie serves Lyonnais, Asian and Italian fare, while the top-floor Michelin-starred Les Trois Dômes provides panoramic views of the city's rooftops. There are eight meeting spaces, including a ballroom that holds 350 people theatre-style.

■ 20 quai Gailleton; tel +33 472 412 020; sofitel.com

■ Rooms from €197



Collège hotel

COLLEGE HOTEL

This boutique property on the edge of the old town has a school theme. The 39 rooms are decked out in white with industrial lights, old school books and

free wifi. There is a bar and roof terrace, and the Library and Classroom meeting spaces host 25 and 50 delegates respectively. Fridges on all floors offer free soft drinks.

■ 5 Place Saint-Paul; tel +33 472 100 505; college-hotel.com

■ Rooms from €125

LE ROYAL HOTEL

Part of Accor's M Gallery brand, this 74-room hotel is at the corner of Place Bellecour. It has a homely feel, with Toile de Jouy print wallpaper and a breakfast room where guests help themselves to freshly baked goods laid out on wooden boards. Guestrooms are dotted with antiques and have free wifi, safes, minibars, robes and slippers. Tower suites provide views of two squares from their turrets, and there is a restaurant and bar.

■ 20 Place Bellecour; tel +33 478 375 731; lyonhotel-leroyal.com

■ Rooms from €220

HOTEL DE LA CITE

Located in the Cité International complex, a ten-minute drive from the centre, this four-star, 164-room hotel is ideal for delegates attending the congress centre next door. There is a bar, restaurant, 12 conference rooms and two meeting rooms that can be joined to host 80 people theatre-style. All guestrooms have minibars and free wifi.

■ **22 Quai Charles de Gaulle; tel +33 478 178 686; concorde-hotels.com**

■ **Rooms from €152**



VILLA FLORENTINE

Providing some of the best views of the old town, this Relais and Châteaux hotel is set on Fourvière Hill. Formally a convent, some parts date back to the 16th century. Frescos and traditional silks line the walls and there are 28 spacious rooms and suites – about half of them have terraces and all have free wifi. There is a restaurant, a spa, a fitness centre, an outdoor pool and four meeting rooms, the largest holding 45 people.

■ **25 Montée Saint-Barthélémy; tel +33 472 565 656; villaflorentine.com**

■ **Rooms from €255**

COUR DES LOGES

An old town property made up of four Renaissance buildings, Cour des Loges is a Small Luxury Hotels of the World member. The 61 rooms boast everything from mezzanines with sunken tubs to antique headboards. Les Loges is a fine-dining restaurant, and there is also a brasserie. The spa has two treatment rooms, a gym and a pool. The hotel can host a reception for up to 190 delegates. Visit businessstraveller.com/tried-and-tested for a full review.

■ **6 Rue du Boeuf; tel +33 472 774 444; courdesloges.com**

■ **Rooms from €252**



world for patents filed. In 2010 the government also announced the *grand emprunt national*, a €35 billion loan to be invested in education, research and innovation.

As a result, pioneers in myriad fields are being drawn here. “We were considering locations in Korea, Paris and Marseilles,” Colin McGuckin, president and director of the Cell Therapy Research Institute in Lyon, tells me at the Michelin-starred Rue Le Bec restaurant in Confluence.

“Then we came to Lyon, and Aderly was incredibly helpful. It helped us to find a building, and the local hospital helped us to find patients.” McGuckin left Newcastle University for Lyon in 2008, largely because of France’s greater support for stem cell research.

Lyon is, historically, a hospital city – the imposing L’Hôtel Dieu, which will reopen as an Intercontinental property in 2015, was one of Europe’s first

hospitals. Its pharmaceuticals industry is ranked eighth in the world for sales, and there are 10,000 researchers and 510 public and private laboratories. Organisations based here include the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research, Bill Gates’ Vaccine Fund and the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Set in French wine country, the city was traditionally a meeting point for merchants, and it is no different today. The TGV can bring clients from Geneva in one hour 45 minutes, from Paris in two and London or Zurich in five. Easyjet opened a base here in 2008, and Finnair is set to launch a new Lyon-Helsinki route this month.

“In 2010 we carried 300,000 business people in and out of Lyon,” says François Bacchetta, Easyjet’s



general manager in France. “It creates opportunities for the region, especially for SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises]. It’s an easy place to do business.”

While greater Lyon has 1.3 million residents, the centre is home to only 480,000, giving it the feel of a large town. Surrounded by mountains, the old town is a UNESCO World Heritage site and has the second-

‘You can have a good job and a good quality of life’

largest concentration of Renaissance architecture in Europe. Speak to locals and they will boast that it is the country’s gastronomic capital – taste the rich, buttery cuisine and you will not argue with them. Acclaimed chef Daniel Boulud is one culinary master to have come out of the city.

“Every year in France a survey asks 30- to 35-year-old Parisians where they want to live,” says François Gaillard, chief executive of Lyon’s tourist office and convention bureau. “In 2010, they said Lyon. You can have a good job and a good quality of life. It’s one hour to the biggest ski resort in France, and two and a half hours to the Mediterranean.”

Beyond the old town, you sometimes have to look harder for beauty. But it is there, if not in Part-Dieu’s food halls, where locals pile in to sample fresh delicacies, then along the Saône and Rhône, where art, food, flower or book markets line the banks each day. Join the Lyonnais for a weekend mid-morning ritual of fresh oysters by the river, admire the views back to Fourvière and the hillside silk merchant quarter of La Croix-Rousse, and you will wonder why Paris gets all the headlines.

■ [Visit OnlyLyon.org](http://Visit.OnlyLyon.org)

