

WhatToDoWhen
DIVE INTO
THE ROMAN WORLD





THE PROVINCIA

or the Birth of Provence

“Provincia” is the name the Romans gave to Gallia Narbonensis, a region stretching from the Alps to Narbonne. The word “Provincia” has survived to this day in the word “Provence.” From there, it’s only a short step to say that the Romans were the founders of Provence—a step we’ll take in this new KoiFerKan Guide.

It’s difficult today to relive this ancient period from 2,000 years ago, and yet we’re taking on the challenge. We’ve revisited all the major monuments of ancient Provence that are still visible today.

- 122 B.C.

VIOLENCE – Massilia (Marseille) asks the Romans for help in the face of Celto-Ligurian incursions. The Romans don’t need to be asked twice. They destroy Entremont and found Aquae Sextiae (Aix-en-Provence). The Romans are now firmly established and create the Provincia (Transalpine Gaul).

- 49 B.C.

THE PUNISHMENT – A fatal mistake by Massilia, which backed the wrong side in the war between Julius Caesar and Pompey. Julius Caesar emerged victorious, laid siege to Massilia, and stripped it of its lands (in favor of its rivals, Aralate and Forum Julii (Fréjus)). Rome established a permanent presence in Provence. The Roman way of life was adopted. Roman roads crisscrossed the region (the Domitian, Aurelian, and Agrippa roads). Rivers supplied new Roman colonies (Arelate, Arausio, Narbo, Nemausus, etc.). The Provence you discover today was “shaped” at that time.

+ 286 AD

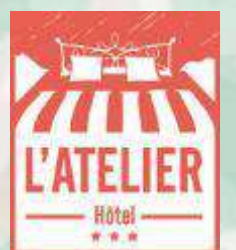
MODERN-DAY PROVENCE TAKES SHAPE—Diocletian divided the Provincia first into two, then into three parts, making the Rhône the administrative boundary. And this still the case today!

WANT TO EXPERIENCE LIFE IN ROMAN TIMES?



1. VASIO (Vaison-la-Romaine) ★★
2. ARAUSIO (Orange) ★★
3. Caesar's Oppidum ★
4. AVENIO (Avignon) ✗
5. Pont du Gard ★★★
6. NEMAUSUS (Nîmes) ★★★
7. GLANUM (St-Rémy-de-Provence) ★
8. Barbegal Aqueduct ★
9. ARELATE (Arles) ★★★
10. AQUAE SEXTIAE (Aix) ✗
11. MASSILIA (Marseille) ✗

- ✗ No notable Roman monuments worth the trip
- ★ Roman Monument(s) to Visit

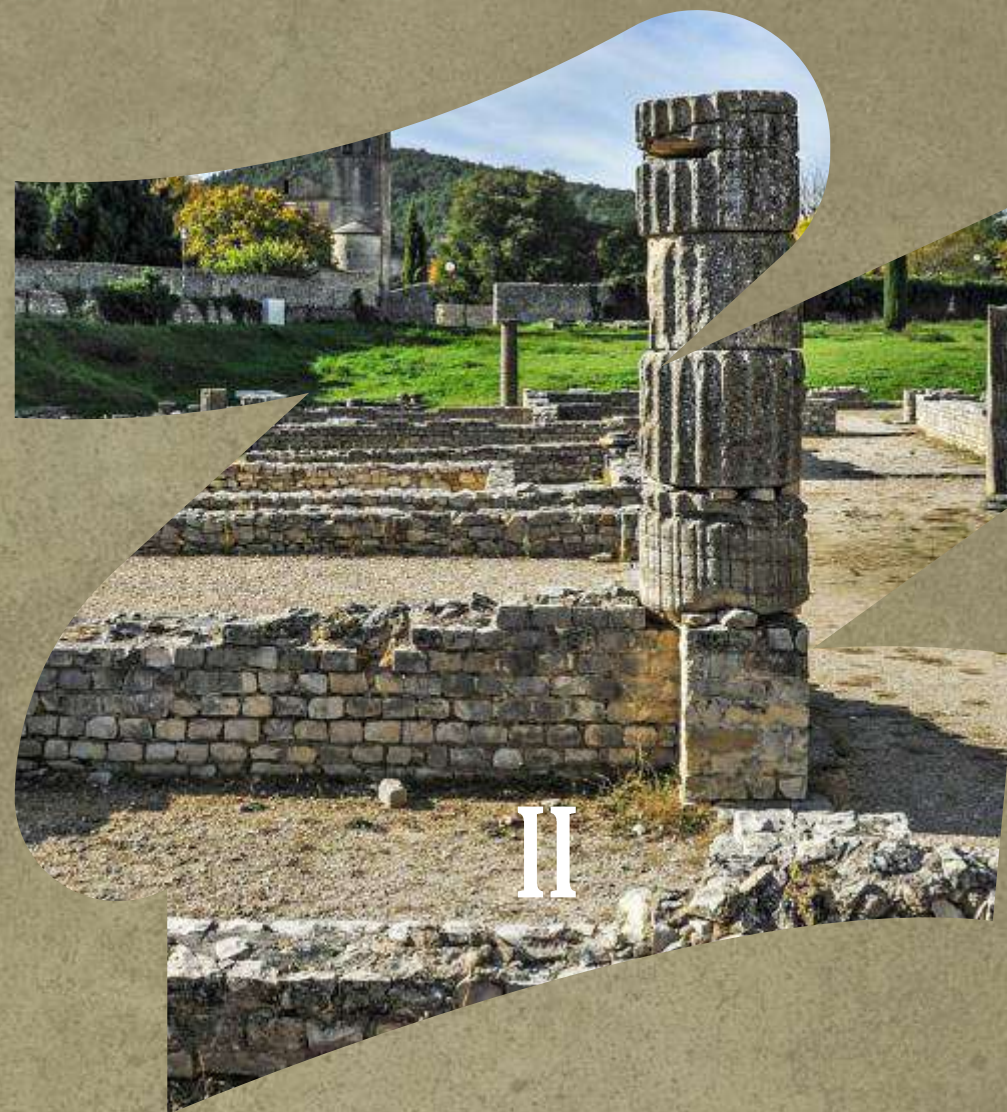




I

I. The Roman Bridge (1st century AD)

This 2,000-year-old bridge is a marvel that everyone can admire at the entrance to the city. And why not take a dip at its base?



II

II. La Villasse (1st century AD)

These are the ruins (though you'll need a bit of imagination) of the main square, featuring a forum, a thermal bath complex, lavish houses, and shops.



III

III. Puymin and its ancient theater (1st century AD)

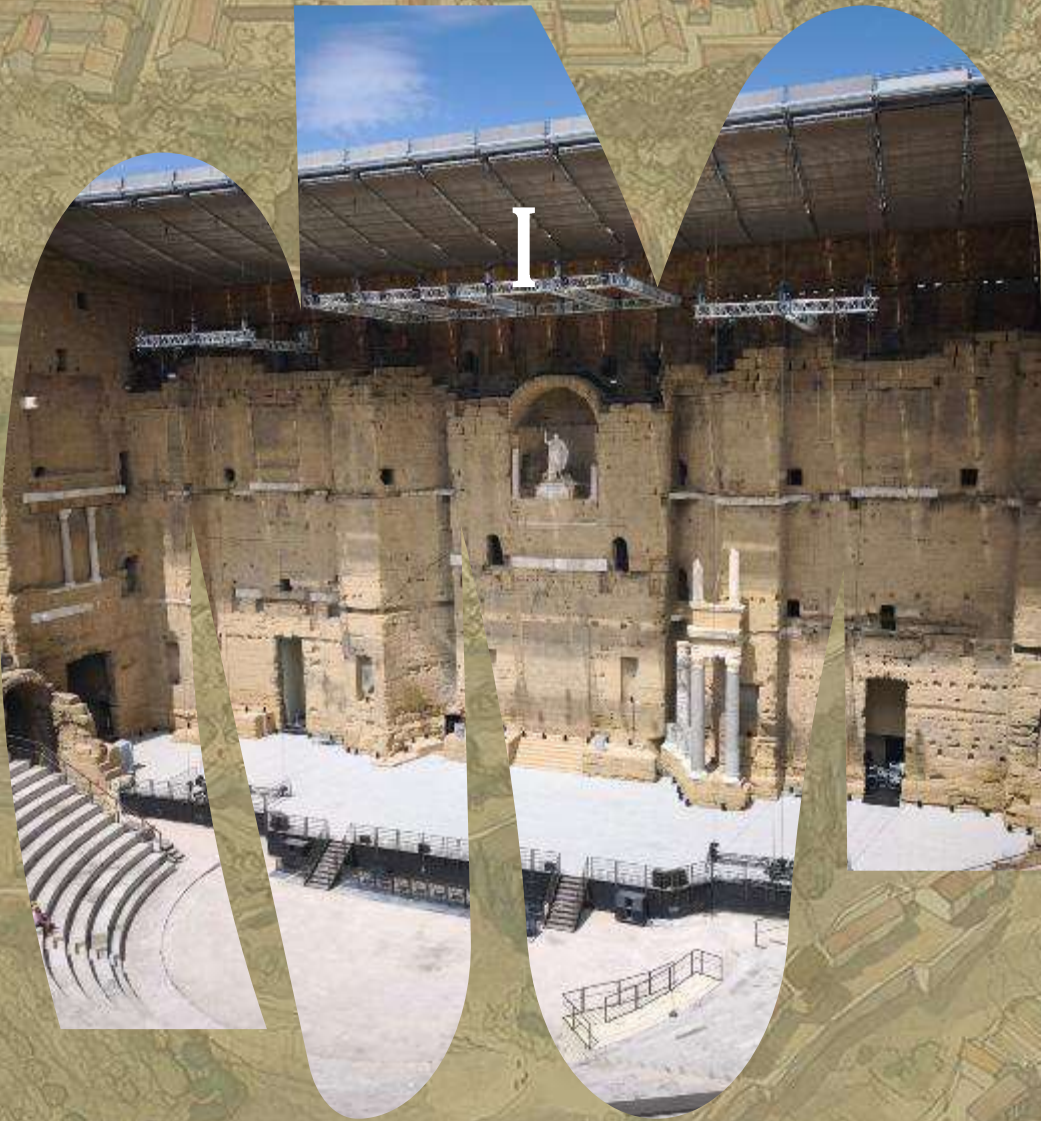
This is the neighborhood of wealthy families and beautiful mansions. The ancient theater and the sanctuary bear witness to a bygone era of grandeur.

1. VASIO ★★ (VAISON-LA-ROMAINE)

Welcome to one of the wealthiest Roman cities in the Provincia. Inhabited by the Voconces in the 1st century (a Celtic people), the city became a federated city of Rome (rather than a colony) and, as a result, a prosperous center of merchants and artisans. This is the world you can discover during a visit to Vasio.

2. ARAUSIO (ORANGE) ★★

Arausio became a Roman colony in 35 B.C. As with Arelate (Arles), veterans of the war were rewarded and granted plots of land. This facilitated and accelerated the colonization process.



I. Ancient Theater (1st century B.C.)

This is THE monument to visit, if only for the beauty of the site, which is greatly enhanced by the exceptional preservation of its stage wall. The audio guide and 3D animated film take you back 2,000 years. There are also a few rooms dedicated to workshops, which children love.



II. Triumphal Arch (1st century B.C.)

No guided tour is needed—you'll easily spot it on your way out of the city at the northern exit. It's very photogenic, so park wherever you can—it's worth it! It's incredibly well-preserved and commemorates the exploits of the veterans of the Second Legion.

3. OPPIDUM OF CAESAR★

2 easy hikes to explore Roman heritage:

Caesar's Oppidum

Originally a fortified Gallic oppidum, the site became a thriving community under Roman rule (basilica, forum, dwellings, streets, workshops, etc.). During this lovely, easy 1.5-hour/4-km walk, you'll see the remains of these Roman buildings. The view is spectacular. Starting point: Camp de César parking lot in Laudun L'Ardoise. Follow the loop trail.

Barbegal Aqueduct

This easy 45-minute/2-km walk takes you to explore the Barbegal Aqueduct, a technological feat of Roman engineering. Two aqueduct bridges were built: one to supply Arelate with water, and the other, constructed later (2nd century AD), powered 16 mills to produce flour (25 metric tons per day). Starting point: A place called Croix de Jousseaud, in Fontvieille. Then follow the loop.



8. BARBEGAL★ AQUEDUCT



5. Pont du Gard ★★★

(1st century AD)

A visit to the Pont du Gard is a must-see in the region for so many reasons:



- First is the incredible beauty of the site. The combination of the “Roman aqueduct and the Gardon River Nature Reserve” is magical. The bridge is incredibly well-preserved. There’s no shortage of scenic viewpoints. Hiking and swimming are both possible.
- The second is the feat of Roman engineering that succeeded in diverting water from the source of the Eure River to Nîmes over a distance of 50 km, with a vertical drop of 12.6 m between the starting point and the end point—a gradient of approximately 25 cm per kilometer. It took 5 years and 1,000 workers to complete.
- The third is the opportunity to explore fascinating educational spaces that help visitors understand this extraordinary structure. There, you’ll find, among other things, a very well-curated museum, a movie theater, and an interactive educational area for children.

6. NEMAUSUS (NÎMES) ★★ ★

Nemausus became a Roman colony in 31 BC. Like other cities, it was settled by veterans (of the Egyptian War) as a reward for their good and loyal service. Along with Arles, it is the most Roman city in Provence! Don't miss the Musée de la Romanité—a true masterpiece.



I. Musée de la Romanité

The best museum in France on the Roman world? I'd say yes. This museum is a gem. Modern, educational, immersive, and enjoyable. One visit won't be enough...



II. Maison Carrée (1st century B.C.)

The only fully preserved temple from the ancient world. Dedicated to Emperor Augustus's two adopted grandsons, it stands in the heart of the city with its perfectly intact Corinthian columns. A film immerses you in the city's origins.



III. Amphitheater (1st century AD)

An exact replica—or nearly so—of the Arles Amphitheater. It was also used for gladiatorial spectacles (accommodating up to 24,000 spectators). It is the best-preserved amphitheater in the Roman world.

Also worth seeing are the Temple of Diana (1st century A.D.) and the Magne Tower (1st century B.C.), in the Jardins de la Fontaine.



I

I. The City of Glanum (1st century B.C.)

This is a city that was completely buried and was unearthed in 1921. Since the city was destroyed by barbarians in the 3rd century A.D., what you see here are the ruins of the city.

7. GLANUM ★ (SAINT-RÉMY-DE-PROVENCE)

II

II. The Mausoleum (1st century A.D.)

This mausoleum is one of the most beautiful in the Roman world still visible today. It was built in honor of the parents of three Roman brothers: Sextius, Lucius, and Marcus. The statues of the parents are inside the Rotunda. Be sure to take a close look at the second floor!

Originally (6th century B.C.), the city was called Glanon, in honor of the Salyens' god, Glan, the god of the depths (to protect the local spring). The Greeks arrived in Massalia and traded with the Salyens. This was the golden age. Then the Romans conquered Provence (2nd century B.C.). Glanon became Glanum. A new Roman city was established, complete with a forum, thermal baths, a fountain, and more.

III. The Municipal Arch (1st century A.D.)

It marks the entrance to the city of Glanum. It is notable for its sculpted decoration and confirms Glanum's Greek influence.

III



9. ARELATE (ARLES)

Arelate became a Roman colony in 49 BC. It benefited from Julius Caesar's support and his victory over Pompey. From that point on, Arelate entered a golden age. That is why, today, it is undoubtedly the city in Provence with the most Roman monuments to visit.



I. Ancient Theater (1st century B.C.)

Let's be honest: the theater has been largely demolished. Nevertheless, the site remains romantic and vibrant, hosting numerous performances in the summer. Just as in Roman times, it is dedicated to cultural performances (for up to 10,000 spectators).



II. Amphitheater or Arena (1st century AD)

Reserved for gladiator shows (up to 21,000 spectators). It's definitely worth a visit!



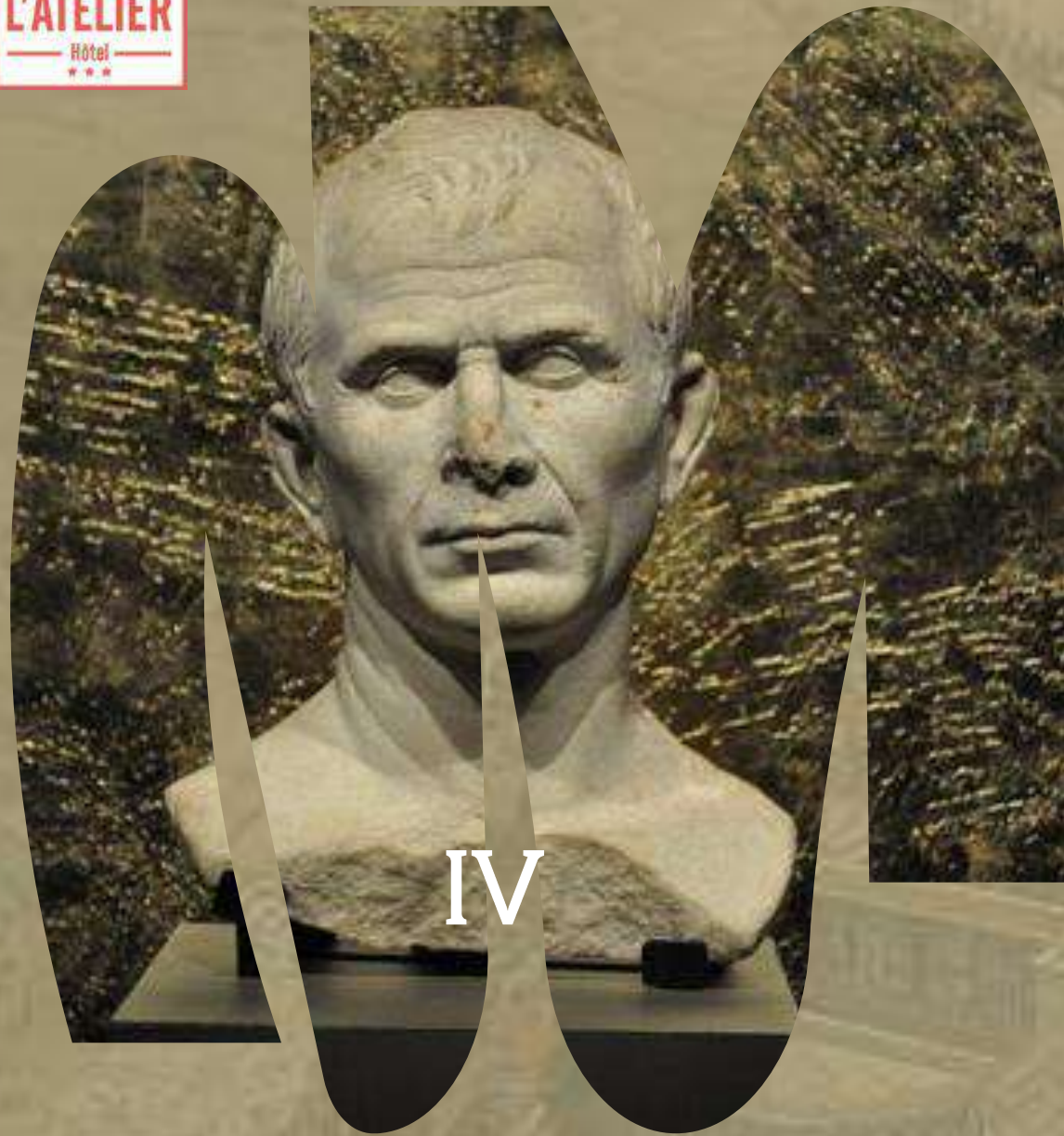
III. Cryptoporticus (1st century B.C.)

A tour I love because it's so unique. These are the underground foundations of the ancient Forum, of which nothing remains.



9. ARELATE (ARLES)

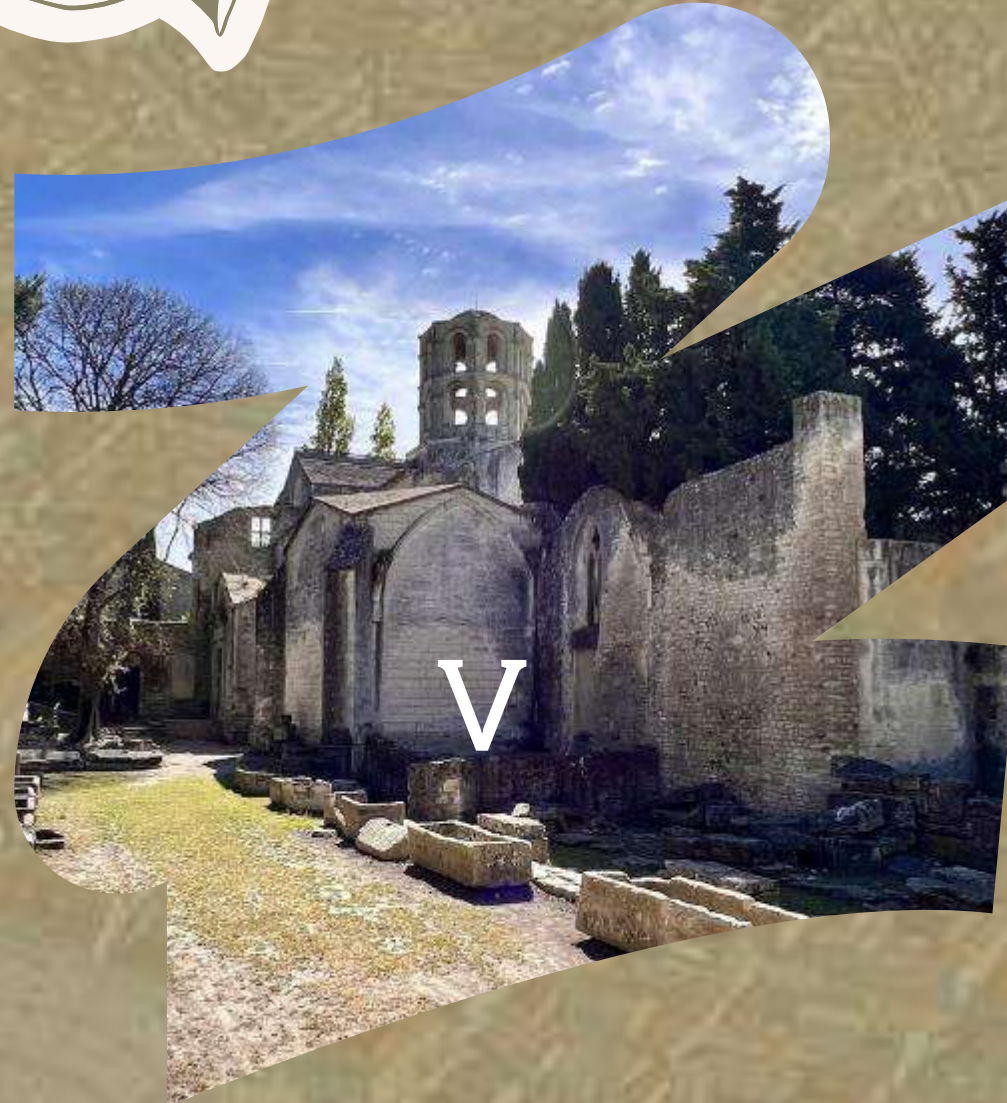
Arelate experienced exceptional growth in the 1st century A.D., thanks to its strategic location at the crossroads of seven trade routes. Wheat, cured meats, olive oil, and wine were the city's main sources of wealth.



IV

Museum of Ancient Arles

A must-see—and, unfortunately, one that's all too often overlooked. This museum is such a pleasure to explore, featuring must-see highlights like the bust of Caesar and an intact flat-bottomed boat recovered from the Rhône in 2004.



V

Alyscamps

A 2,000-year-old Gallo-Roman necropolis, immortalized much later by Van Gogh. It is located outside the city, to separate the dead from the living.



VI

Constantine's Baths (4th century A.D.)

Another unique place to visit, if you have a little more time. The largest in Provence!