

33 SAINTE-GENEVIÈVE LIBRARY

10 place du Panthéon, 75005 Paris, France

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

Opened in 1851, the capital's first purpose-built library is a fantastic space with cast-iron arches and colourful murals just opposite the Panthéon.



Like Berlin and Toronto, Paris is a hotspot for beautiful libraries. As well as the BNF branches, there are the Bibliothèque Mazarine, France's oldest public library; the Bibliothèque Forney, in the 15th-century Hôtel de Sens; the Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, with a ceiling by Eugène Delacroix; and the wood-panelled Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville. But perhaps the most Parisian of all is Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in the Latin Quarter. Artist Marcel Duchamp once worked as a librarian here, while famous readers include Simone de Beauvoir. An entrance lobby decorated with garden murals and marble busts leads to the 80m-long first-floor reading room. There, 60 years before the construction of the Eiffel Tower, renowned architect Henri Labrouste created a fabulous cast-iron roof, two rows of arches supported by 16 columns raised on stone plinths. The library was lit by gas lamps, and metal was chosen over wood due to fire risk. Its symmetrical façade is engraved with the names of scholars and writers, and has been copied around the world, for example at the Boston Public Library. The library is home to 2 million documents, including an extensive Nordic library.

34 L'ANIMU

Voie romaine, 20137 Porto-Vecchio, Corsica, France

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BECAUSE

Nesled among olive trees, this building by Dominique Coulon & Associés symbolises the importance of the local public library in France.



Since the 1980s, France has had an ambitious programme for its 15,500 public libraries, doubling the numbers of users and of documents available, transforming former hospitals and theatres into new cultural hubs, and building contemporary 'médiathèques'. A perfect example can be found here in the south of Corsica, in a building opened in 2021 – the same year that French law defined the library as an 'essential public service' guaranteeing access to culture and information to all citizens. Surrounded by oak and olive trees, the media library was designed by Dominique Coulon & Associés to complement the landscape. It appears to float lightly above ground, its shape informed by the location of every tree and rock on the site, which also includes a garden, shaded terrace and summer bar. Inside there are spaces for meetings and workshops and two reading areas (for children and grown-ups). L'Animu's logo is inspired by the pifanu seashell, an ancient wind instrument, while its 21,000 items include a large Corsican section. The team here organise over 260 events every year and have recently opened a *ludothèque* (toy and board game library).

