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The Place to Business: Marseille for Association Congresses

— NOVEMBER 2026 —

Marseille Takes Its Seat

Back in the ICCA top 100 and third in France, the city is turning a decade of reinvention into a place on the international congress map.

Ask a congress organiser what they want from a host city and the answer often goes beyond a list of square meters. It is a place that gives delegates a reason to travel, that is easy to reach and comfortable to stay in, and that still feels like somewhere once the programme ends. Since it was European Capital of Culture in 2013, Marseille has been assembling exactly that: new venues, new hotels, a waterfront rebuilt around the Mucem, and a reputation that has moved from leisure destination to serious option for international associations.

The latest proof arrived in May. In 2025, Aix-Marseille hosted 29 international association congresses, up from 24 the year before. In a ranking of 4,728 cities worldwide, that brought the destination back into the ICCA top 100, at 95th place, third among French cities and up ten places in Europe, to 53rd. It is the first external confirmation of what the

local industry has been saying: the investment is working.

Maxime Tissot, general manager of Marseille Tourist Office, Leisure and Convention Bureau, credits people before projects. *"This progression rewards the constant commitment of our team and the mobilisation of our hundred or so partners,"* he says. *"It shows that Aix-Marseille Provence has all the assets needed to host the biggest international congresses."*

A decade of reinvention

None of this happened overnight. European Capital of Culture in 2013 gave the city the Mucem and a new relationship with its waterfront, and Euro 2016, the 2023 Rugby World Cup and the Olympic flame's arrival in 2024 added international exposure. According to Marseille Tourist Office, the number of events hosted has tripled in ten years, and business tourism now drives 43% of overnight stays.

The latest figures, which exclude trade fairs, show 1,179 events in 2025, 173,309 participants and an estimated €169 million in economic impact, split evenly between corporate meetings and congresses. Activity has settled back at its 2023 level, which stood 17% above 2019.

The Marseille experience

Then there is the quality that is harder to measure and harder to fake. In January, insurer InsureandGo analysed more than 1.3 million Google Maps reviews across 144 cities. Marseille came out first in Europe and 12th worldwide, with a score of 51.5 out of 100. It is a review-mining exercise, not a scientific survey, but it describes a city lived in rather than staged.

The bureau says everyone it welcomes on educational trips and site inspections is pleasantly surprised: by the kindness and helpfulness of the people, the good humour, the smiles, and then the light and the Mediterranean running



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along the city. After a site visit for the 2027 conference of the International Papillomavirus Society, Kenes Group wrote to the bureau: *“Marseille is a hidden gem. We loved the beautiful scenery, the welcoming people, and the incredible food.”* The message went on: *“At the end of the day, our industry is about people, not just four walls to run sessions.”*

The setting does some of the work too: 57 kilometres of coastline, around 300 days of sunshine a year and the Calanques, the only peri-urban national park in Europe. Marseille has also just been named French Capital of Biodiversity 2026 by the Ministry of Ecological Transition and the French Biodiversity Office, which recognised its work on marine, forest, river and urban nature, from the artificial reefs of the Prado bay to seagrass protection.

Easy to reach, ready to host

The practicalities have kept pace. Marseille Provence airport is, according to Marseille Tourist Office, the only French airport outside the

capital with a direct link to Asia, through its Marseille–Shanghai route. From 5 June 2027, United Airlines will add a daily nonstop service from New York/Newark. By rail, Saint-Charles station is three hours from Paris by TGV, with direct services to Lille, Brussels, Strasbourg and Spain.

On the ground, the city offers 140 hotels and 10,680 rooms, 49% of them Green Key certified, and three congress venues in the centre: Marseille Chanot, the Palais du Pharo and the World Trade Center Marseille Provence. Aix-Marseille Université, the largest francophone university

in the world, is strong in health, neuroscience, immunology, energy, marine science, data and AI, the fields that generate international association congresses.

That is the thinking behind the new campaign, The Place to Business, which the Convention Bureau has just started to roll out. It brings together Marseille's positioning, its latest success and the congresses now on the calendar, with more than 20 events of 1,000 or more participants in 2026, among them Euromaritime, BioFIT MedFIT and MEDigIT, and the Sofmer congress, and more in the years to come.

MARSEILLE IN FIGURES

- 95th worldwide in the ICCA ranking, 3rd among French cities, 53rd in Europe
- 29 international association congresses (24 in 2024)
- 1,179 events, 173,309 participants, 421,291 congress days
- 140 hotels and 10,680 rooms, 49% Green Key certified
- 3 congress venues in the city centre

Case Study

IPVS in Marseille: A Congress With a Mission

HPV-related diseases take more than half a million lives a year, many of them preventable by vaccination, yet uptake in France remains low. In October 2027 the International Papillomavirus Society (IPVS) brings its congress to Marseille Chanot, and intends to leave the city more than science: the legacy programme that began in Scotland in 2024. Executive Director Coralie Deguerville and Campaign Officer Chris Amsinger explain how.

IPVS last met in France in Paris in 2002. What made the society choose Marseille for 2027, beyond the venue and the dates?

Marseille is a vibrant city with wonderful cuisine and cultural attractions but also a charming Provence flair – making it a really attractive destination for IPVS 2027. It's also well situated, in proximity to active medical and scientific research institutions across Europe.

We received a competitive offer from the venue, Marseille Chanot. Indeed, financial criteria remain a priority for conference destination selection. Between the Marseille Convention Bureau and Marseille Chanot teams, we are convinced that we have strong partners to work with us on this conference edition in France.

Also, the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination uptake is low in France, putting lives at risk. HPV-related diseases take over half a million lives each year world-wide. No one should be dying from cancers we can prevent with a safe and effective vaccine. We have lots of work to do locally to raise awareness of HPV and protect the lives of the French population.

There's a clear willingness from the Society an impact beyond the sessions. What has that looked like in earlier host cities, and what do you ask of a destination?

Let's look at the context. IPVS is the global authority on HPV, uniting scientists, clinicians, medical researchers, public health experts, policymakers and patient advocates for the prevention of HPV-related cancer and other diseases. IPVS is the global center of research, education and awareness aimed at preventing 6 cancers. With over 1,600 members, our mission is to contribute to the elimination of HPV-related diseases.



Velodrome, Chanot

HPV is a common virus. It affects over 80% of the world population, often without any symptoms, and can lead to cancer (and other diseases) affecting women and men. Yet public awareness of HPV remains critically low. This is tragic because HPV-related cancer is preventable, through vaccination, screening and timely treatment.

One of the society’s core activities is raising public awareness and understanding of HPV as the first step toward preventing HPV-related diseases. This is the bedrock of IPVS legacy initiatives. We begin long before and continue long after the actual conference in October.

The model of IPVS legacy activity began in Scotland in 2024 and was made possible through the Best Cities’ Seed Fund grant we were very fortunate to receive. Through working with dedicated local teams passionate about creating change, we improve public awareness of HPV, strengthen educational resources and build ongoing partnerships (based on shared objectives) with local and national health authorities.

The results have become a replicable model for conference legacy that continues to serve communities in Scotland (IPVS 2024), Thailand (IPVS 2025) and Greece (IPVS 2026) to this day. Examples of specific legacy activities for previous conference locations include : social media awareness campaign using local influencers, high school educational modules, student awareness & outreach through pop-up events, adverts in school intranet, large billboards in public transport, adverts in pharmacies, press conferences, media coverage, webinars for health professionals, public event on the stigma of HPV, etc.

What would success look like in Marseille? How would you measure its impact on residents and not only on the scientific community?

The French legacy team is bursting with promising ideas to raise awareness of HPV, address misinformation around the

HPV vaccine, and drive HPV vaccination levels upward, both regionally and at the national level.

A year ahead of IPVS 2027, this team is already exploring ways to grab public attention and get people motivated to get themselves and their loved ones vaccinated against HPV. One measure of success will be actual shots in arms in Marseille and hopefully beyond.

Further, if the seeds can be sown to increase public understanding and confidence in HPV vaccination, that’s a success to be harvested over time. Also, convincing the local authorities to prioritize the HPV agenda and influencing national or regional policies and processes would be a tremendous achievement.

If another association wanted to turn its congress into a public health legacy, what would you tell them exactly?

We feel like we are learning more each year about the recipe for success. First, legacy looks different in each country. We have learned not to come with a pre-set agenda. We share what we have done in previous years as possible inspiration and then listen to the priorities of the local team and the conditions and context in that country. We make a plan together to work on activities that address those priorities. This leads to strong partnerships that continue long after the conference.

Another asset is to be fortunate enough to have influential local team members with strong networks to get things done. It is also very beneficial when the convention bureau shares our vision for change. The extraordinary support and commitment of the Aix Marseille Provence Convention Bureau, which is a member of the Legacy Committee, is invaluable in connecting us with local stakeholders and getting local authorities and institutions on board.

A SAMPLE OF UPCOMING CONGRESSES IN MARSEILLE

December 2026	BioFIT MedFIT et MEDigIT 2026 (2,500 delegates)	Marseille Chanot
June 2027	45 th Euroheat and Power Congress (500 delegates)	Marseille Chanot
September 2027	19 th European Society of Minimally Invasive Neurological Therapy - ESMINT Conference (1,200 delegates)	Palais du Pharo
May 2028	13 th EORNA Congress 2028 (900 delegates)	Marseille Chanot

CONGRESS CENTRES

- Marseille Chanot Convention Centre
- World Trade Center Marseille Provence
- Palais du Pharo – International Congress Centre

HOTEL FACILITIES

- Crowne Plaza Marseille le Dôme
- Ruby Lilou Hotel
- Golden Tulip Marseille Euromed
- NH Collection
- InterContinental Marseille Hotel Dieu
- Sofitel Marseille Vieux-Port
- Radisson Blu, Marseille Vieux-Port
- nhow Marseille
- Hotel Villa M
- AC by Marriott Prado vélodrome

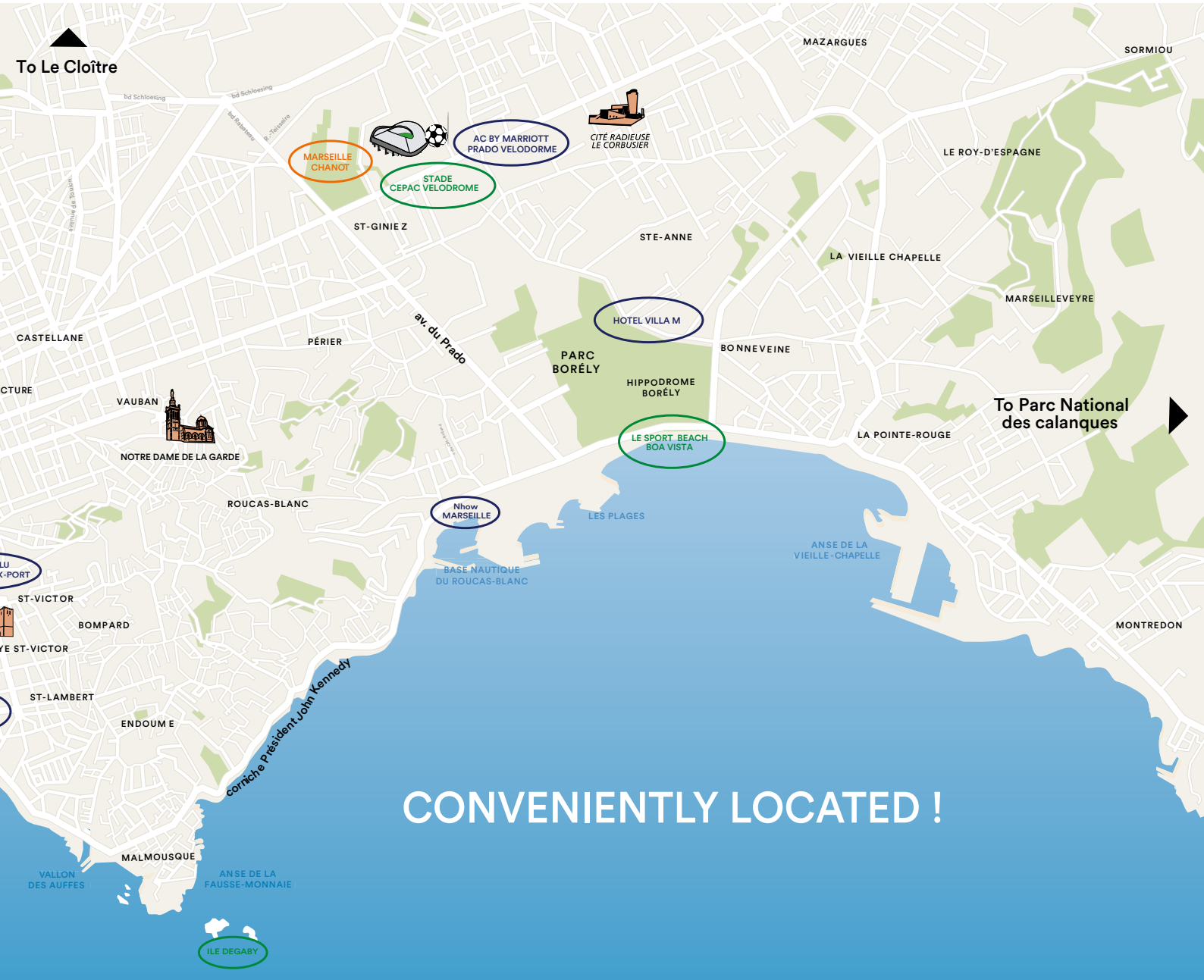
VENUES

- Sky Center La Marseillaise
- Casa Delauze
- Maison Yellow
- Palais de la Bourse
- Mucem
- Musée Regards de Provence
- Le Sport Beach - Boa Vista
- Le Silo
- Cepac vélodrome
- Friche Belle de Mai
- Cosquer Méditerranée
- Le Cloître
- Ile Degaby

Marseille



Congress Centres Hotels and Venues



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Three Venues, One City

From a palace built for an emperor to a tower designed by Jean Nouvel, Marseille's congress venues share a harbour and a skyline, and very little else. That is the point.



Palais du Pharo

©VDM

If you ask a planner to describe a congress center, the inventory is usually the same: an auditorium, breakout rooms, a foyer, space for the exhibition. Marseille's three main venues have all of it. What separates them is the answer each gives to the following question: what should a congress feel like when it's hosted in those venues?

A palace above the old port

The Palais du Pharo answers with history. Architect Hector Lefuel built it in the mid-19th century as a seaside retreat, a gift from the city of Marseille to Napoleon III, who never lived there.

Today it is an international conference centre, and the palace has kept its character: two historic lounges, vaulted galleries, and a terrace that looks straight over the Vieux-Port.

Plenaries run in the 900-seat auditorium, but the lounges and the terrace are the natural places for the welcome reception, the coffee break that turns into a conversation, the first evening drink with a stunning view of the harbour in the background.

A site becoming a park

Marseille Chanot answers with energy, and right now with transformation. This is the city's big working venue, a Palais des Congrès and a cluster of exhibition halls next to the Stade Vélodrome, handling more than 200 events and a million visitors a year. Its meeting rooms are named after the calanques, Callelongue, Les Goudes, Sormiou, a small reminder of where delegates are.

What is changing is everything around the halls. Since January, Marseille Chanot has been turning 13,000 m²



of car parks into a planted, permeable esplanade, and an 8,000 m² Mediterranean garden is taking shape on the eastern side of the site, due in February 2027 and linked to the new tramway and the metro. A new cycle path, a palm grove and the Palais des Arts garden were completed late last year. The first reworked spaces opened to visitors at the Foire de Marseille, which closed on 5 October, with the second phase due early 2027.

“Greener, more open to the city and more pleasant to live in, the site is asserting its role as the reference venue for major events in Marseille, while gradually becoming a genuine living space for Marseille’s residents,” says Pierre Arvis, managing director of Marseille events, which runs the site.

In the middle of the city & above the harbour

The World Trade Center Marseille Provence answers with ease. In the city centre, its meeting rooms are bright

and compact, with a terrace garden on the side, and the programme rarely needs to leave the building: a plenary room with full interpretation facilities, a video control room, and a direct access to the 200-room Mercure Centre Marseille Vieux Port. It is the least theatrical of the three, and for an association that wants delegates to get from session to hotel to dinner without a taxi, that is a virtue.

The Sky Center answers with height. It sits in the Tour La Marseillaise, the 135-metre tower by Jean Nouvel, whose green roof terrace is planted with Mediterranean species. The meeting rooms are named after constellations, Orion, Cassiopée, Andromède, and look out over the sea, the port and Notre-Dame de la Garde.

The scale suits boards, workshops and receptions rather than plenaries, and that is exactly the gap it fills: the private, memorable room for the part of a programme that people remember.

CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE PARTNERS

Venue	Main room	Meeting rooms	Exhibition space & Outdoor spaces
Palais du Pharo	Auditorium, 900 seats Plenary, 300 seats	19	1,840 m ² exhibition hall
Marseille Chanot	Auditoria, 1,205 and 426 seats Plenary, up to 3,200 seats	12	Several exhibition halls (50,000 m ²), 500 m ² terrace
World Trade Center Marseille Provence	Plenary, up to 380 seats	10 (2 to 90 people)	400 m ² exhibition and catering area, 250 m ² terrace garden

Check In, Stay Out

Marseille's hotel stock has grown by 60% in ten years, and the newest openings are moving north towards La Joliette.

For delegates, a congress does not end when the last session does. It ends in the lobby of a hotel, or at a table someone recommended during the coffee break. Marseille has spent the past decade building for that moment. According to Marseille Tourist Office, capacity has grown by 60% in ten years, to more than 10,600 rooms, and 49% of them carry the Green Key label, which makes Marseille the first Green Key city in its region.

Maxime Tissot, general manager of Marseille Tourist Office, Leisure and Convention Bureau, argues the city's accommodation appeal is as much about scale as about price. *"Marseille offers something rare: an immersive, human-scale experience at a highly competitive cost,"* he says. *"And once delegates are here, everything is close, so logistics stay simple and efficient."*

Anchors on the harbour

The best-known address for a large international meeting sits in a building older than the city's reputation for

congresses. The **InterContinental Marseille – Hotel Dieu** occupies a former hospital whose main building went up from 1753 to designs by Jacques Hardouin-Mansart. Patients left in 1993, the building stood empty after 2006, and the hotel opened in June 2013. Today it offers 194 rooms, a plenary hall for up to 410 people and 14 breakout rooms, so a board can sleep and meet under the same historic roof. The other five-star around the Vieux-Port, **Sofitel Marseille Vieux-Port**, adds another 134 rooms and 6 meeting rooms, nearby the Palais du Pharo Convention Center.

For groups of a few hundred, the four-star tier does the heavy lifting. **Radisson Blu Marseille Vieux-Port**, **NH Collection Marseille**, **nhow Marseille**, **Hotel Villa M**, **Crowne Plaza Marseille le Dôme** and **Golden Tulip Marseille Euromed** all offer between 138 and 210 rooms, and come with conference floors of their own. Hotel Villa M has a plenary room for 450 and 1,000 m² of meeting space. nhow Marseille puts its 150 rooms facing the sea and adds a 322-seat auditorium.





The Green Key label is widespread at this level: in 2026, 97% of five-star rooms and 81% of four-star rooms are certified. Around them sit the larger chains and local brands, from **Mercure** and **Novotel** to **Maisons du Monde Hôtel & Suites Marseille Vieux-Port**, **AC By Marriott** and **New Hotel**.

The new wave

The most recent chapter is about newcomers, and they have different ideas about what a business hotel looks like. **Rocky Pop**, **Soleo Prado** and the **Greet Hotel** opened in 2025 & 2026, the Greet facing the exhibition park at Marseille Chanot.

Ruby Lilou, which opened this autumn, is the clearest signal of where the market is heading. The 237-room hotel at 49 boulevard des Dames, between the Vieux-Port and La Joliette, is the first Ruby in France. Its interiors draw on Provence, with soft tones inspired by lavender fields, sun-bleached stone and the Mediterranean, alongside graphic patterns and bold colours. Rooms take their cue from luxury yacht design, and a 300 m² rooftop terrace looks out over the city and the sea. The hotel also houses Ruby Yani, a coworking space of nearly 1,000 m².

Next comes **OKKO Hotels Marseille Centre La Joliette**, 136 rooms on rue de la République, with a rooftop bar, a restaurant of regional specialities and four meeting rooms, due around the turn of the year. Together, Ruby Lilou and OKKO add 373 rooms to La Joliette, the city's business district.

THREE WAYS TO ADD SOME LOCAL FLAVOUR

The free time between sessions, or once a congress is over, is where a destination either feels like a place or a postcode. Marseille's answer is deliberately hands-on. Through the tourist office's activity platform, the Marseille Convention Bureau's partners and providers offer a wide range of incentive activities, and three of the simplest deserve a place on your list:

Make your own soap. Marseille's savonneries, some more than a century old, still make the city's best-known export by traditional methods. A workshop lets a group try the craft for themselves and leave with a bar of their own.

Play pétanque. Played over an aperitif, the city's favourite game gets a room of strangers talking faster than most icebreakers, and no one needs to be good at it.

Take to the water. With 57 kilometres of coastline, a boat is never far away, whether it is a sailing trip into the calanques, a regatta or a crossing to the Frioul islands and the Château d'If.

More information: <https://www.calameo.com/read/0022434012f0362186e14?mode=normal>

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