



Discovering Provence With the French Riviera

Assuredly part of France, but altogether Provençal, the beloved region nestled between the Rhone and the Mediterranean has seduced visitors since Roman times – as it will you. Our small group travels from hill towns to the Camargue plains, medieval villages and on to the storied French Riviera on this journey par excellence.

With an Post-Tour Extension: The French Riviera – On Your Own

Itinerary

Created on Feb 14, 2024

Discovering Provence

Day-by-Day Itinerary

DAY 1: Depart U.S. for Marseille, France

DAY 2: Arrive Marseille/Aix-en-Provence

We arrive in Marseille and transfer to the Provençal town of Aix-en-Provence (“Aix”). Tonight, we meet our Odysseys Unlimited Tour Director and fellow travelers at a briefing about the journey ahead, followed by a welcome dinner at our hotel.

Accommodations: Renaissance Aix-en-Provence Hotel

Meals: Dinner

DAY 3: Aix-en-Provence

We discover this lovely university town today, known for the beautiful Cours-Mirabeau, the plane tree-lined main boulevard bordered by stately homes and the many elegant Roman fountains decorating city squares. On our walking tour, we admire Aix’s rich architectural heritage and the “Vieille Ville” (Old Town). After a guided visit to the Atelier Cézanne, the studio where artist Paul Cézanne worked from 1902 to 1906, we have free time to explore as we wish. Late afternoon we leave for a wine tasting then dinner at a local restaurant.

Accommodations: Renaissance Aix-en-Provence Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Aix-en-Provence/Roussillon/Lourmarin

Today’s excursion to the beloved Luberon region of charming hilltop villages overlooking vineyards and orchards reveals Provence in all its storied beauty. We first visit the town of Roussillon, perched atop a striking ochre ridge surrounded by vivid green pine trees. After exploring this historic town, we continue on to Lourmarin, set amidst vineyards, olive groves, and almond trees, and considered “one of the most beautiful villages in France.” After lunch together at a local restaurant, we tour the landmark Renaissance castle and stroll the narrow winding streets lined with restored Mediterranean houses, boutiques, cafés, and restaurants. Late this afternoon, we return to Aix, where the evening is free for dinner on our own.

Accommodations: Renaissance Aix-en-Provence Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5: Aix-en-Provence/Arles/Pont du Gard/Avignon

This morning we travel to Arles, once part of Roman Gaul then a cradle of Christianity and, more recently, where van Gogh painted. We see much of that history on our tour here, which includes a visit to the Roman Amphitheater, a UNESCO site dating to 90 CE and preserved virtually intact. Then we continue on towards Avignon, stopping at Pont du Gard, the 1st-century Roman aqueduct whose three tiers of arches span the Gardon River. Late this afternoon, we reach Avignon and our hotel, where we dine together tonight.

Accommodations: Novotel Avignon Centre

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6: Avignon

This morning, we encounter the ancient Roman city that was the capital of Christendom in the Middle Ages. We visit Avignon's historic city center (a UNESCO site), with its cathedral, medieval Saint-Bénézet Bridge, and the Palais des Papes (Papal Palace), one of the world's largest and most important Gothic structures. We tour the palace, where seven successive popes lived during the 14th century. Then we have free time to explore on our own before tonight's small group highlight as we join a local chef for a Provençal cooking class followed by dinner.

Accommodations: Novotel Avignon Centre

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Avignon/Les-Baux-de-Provence/Saint-Rémy-de-Provence

We set out this morning for Les Baux, a gem of a medieval village perched atop a rock spur. Our first stop: the Carrières de Lumières multimedia/art exhibition set in a former stone quarry. Then we explore Les Baux itself, considered another of the country's most beautiful villages, with its restored ancient houses, Renaissance-era façades, historic monuments, and stone citadel. We then continue on to the picturesque village of Saint Rémy, in the heart of the Alpilles where, between May of 1889 and May of 1890, Vincent van Gogh painted *Starry Night*, among other of his most acclaimed paintings. We enjoy lunch together at a local restaurant before visiting the Romanesque jewel of St-Paul de Mausole, the former monastery turned asylum where van Gogh was confined after severing his ear. We return to Avignon late this afternoon; dinner tonight is on our own.

Accommodations: Novotel Avignon Centre

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 8: Avignon/Aigues-Mortes/Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer

As we approach Aigues-Mortes this morning, we see the rose-hued *salins* (salt marshes) that produce the famed *Camarguais* salt. In town, we take a walking tour that features the entrance to the medieval city walls and ramparts. After time for lunch on our own here, we continue on to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, capital of the Camargue region of vast plains, wetlands, lakes, and lagoons. A UNESCO Biosphere Reserve at 360 square miles, the Camargue is known for unique breeds of white horses and bulls, its pink flamingos, and as a staging point for thousands of migratory birds. We dine tonight at our hotel

Accommodations: Vila de la Mar

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 9: Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer

Our exploration of the Camargue begins with a visit to a *manade*, a traditional ranch where *gardians* (cowboys) raise bulls both for meat and to perform in local arenas. We learn about the traditional way of life as we tour the *manade*, watch the *gardians* manage their herds while on horseback, and enjoy a lunch of local specialties. Then we head to the Pont de Gau ornithological reserve in the heart of the Camargue Regional Natural Park. We're likely to see the pink flamingos for which the park is known, as well as species of heron, birds of prey, and seasonal migratory birds.

Accommodations: Vila de la Mar

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 10: Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer/Saint-Paul-de-Vence/Nice

We're bound today for the Cote d'Azur, the fabled French Riviera. Mid-day we reach Saint-Paul-de-Vence, the beautiful medieval hilltop village once home to many prominent artists, including Marc Chagall. After a walking tour together, we're free to explore as we wish. Then we continue on to Nice, capital of the French Riviera, arriving late this afternoon.

Accommodations: Hôtel le Grimaldi

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 11: Nice

This morning's sightseeing begins with spectacular views of Nice and its prized setting along the Baie des Anges from atop Colline du Château (Castle Hill), once a citadel and now a park. We stroll along the iconic seaside boulevard, Promenade des Anglais; explore "Vieux Nice" (Old Nice), with its colorful pastel buildings; and visit the historic Marché aux Fleurs (flower market). Tonight, we celebrate our adventure over a farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

Accommodations: Hôtel le Grimaldi

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 12: Depart for U.S.

Today we depart for the Nice airport for our return flights to the U.S.

Meals: Breakfast

PLEASE NOTE

This trip involves considerable walking up hills or stairs, and on uneven or cobblestone streets. You should be in good physical condition to enjoy the tour to its fullest.

This tour itinerary was generated for Discovering Provence on Feb 14, 2024. Please visit the Discovering Provence page at <https://www.odysseys-unlimited.com/tours/europe/discovering-provence/> for the latest and most accurate information.