



Essential France: Provence to Paris

We explore regional gems and cosmopolitan cities alike in this essential – and alluring – discovery of La Belle France. As our small group travels from Provence to Lyon, Burgundy to Paris, we bask in the history and art, culture and cuisine that mark these cherished spots.

With an Post-Tour Extension: Paris – On Your Own

Itinerary

Created on Mar 19, 2024

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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 Aix-en-Provence (“Aix”). This evening we meet our Odysseys 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

Today we discover this lovely “City of Fountains” on a walking tour, admiring Aix’s rich architectural heritage and the “Vielle Ville” (Old Town). After a guided visit to the Atelier Cézanne, where artist Paul Cézanne worked from 1902 to 1906, we have lunch at a local restaurant. The remainder of the day is free to enjoy Aix as we wish and for dinner on our own.

Accommodations: Renaissance Aix-en-Provence Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 4: Aix-en-Provence/Lex Baux/Saint-Rémy-de-Provence/Nîmes

En route to Nîmes today, we first visit Les Baux, a gem of a medieval village perched atop a rock spur. Here we see the Carrières de Lumière immersive multimedia art and music exhibit set in a former stone quarry. Then we explore Les Baux itself, considered one of the country’s most beautiful villages, with its restored ancient houses, Renaissance-era façades, historic monuments, and stone citadel. We continue on to Saint Rémy, where we enjoy lunch together before visiting the Romanesque jewel of St-Paul de Mausole, the monastery where artist Vincent Van Gogh was confined after severing his ear. Late afternoon we reach Nîmes, where we dine together tonight.

Accommodations: Maison Albar – L’Imperator

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5: Nîmes/Arles

After a morning walking tour of this “most Roman city outside of Italy,” we visit Arles, once part of Roman Gaul then a clarion of Christianity, and more recently, where Van Gogh and Cézanne painted. We encounter the city’s rich history on our walking tour, which includes a visit to the two-tiered Roman Amphitheater, a UNESCO site dating to 90 CE and preserved virtually intact; and Place du Forum, setting for Van Gogh’s painting “Café du Nuit.” Then we have free time for lunch on our own before we return to Nîmes. Dinner tonight is on our own.

Accommodations: Maison Albar – L’Imperator

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Nîmes/Avignon

This morning is free for independent exploration in this city known for its monuments to its Roman heyday, including the 2,000-year-old Nîmes Arena; the perfectly preserved Maison Carrée, inspiration for La Madeleine in Paris; and the Tour Magne, the only remaining tower of the original city walls. This afternoon we depart for Avignon, capital of Christendom in the Middle Ages. Here we visit the historic city center with its 12th-century Romanesque Cathedral; the remains of the Saint-Bénézet Bridge; and the *Palais des Papes* (Papal Palace), one of the world's most important Gothic structures and where the Avignon popes lived during the 14th century. Tonight: a small group highlight as we join a local chef for a Provençal cooking class followed by dinner.

Accommodations: Maison Albar – L'Imperator

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Nîmes/Pont du Gard/Lyon

Heading north this morning, we stop at Pont du Gard, the 1st-century Roman aqueduct whose three graceful tiers of arches span the Gardon River. Then we travel on to Lyon, France's third largest city set at the confluence of the Rhône and Saône rivers. We dine tonight at a local restaurant in this region famed for its gastronomy.

Accommodations: Hôtel Carlton Lyon

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 8: Lyon

Today's tour begins at the beloved Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière, overlooking riverside Lyon from its hilltop perch. Next: the ruins of the Gallo-Roman theater, built in 15 BCE and still in use today. We then visit Vieux Lyon, the city's well-preserved Renaissance district, followed by a look at some of Lyon's jaw-dropping – and renowned – *trompe l'oeil* street art. The remainder of the day is free for independent exploration before we dine tonight at a local restaurant.

Accommodations: Hôtel Carlton Lyon

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 9: Lyon/Annecy

We set out today for the French Alpine town of Annecy on the shores of its namesake lake. Streetside canals and the Thiou River run through the picturesque Old Town, which we discover on a walking tour along the narrow lanes flanked by pastel-colored houses. We visit the town's vibrant market then enjoy a cruise on Lake Annecy, fed by the pristine waters of the surrounding Alps.

Accommodations: Hôtel Carlton Lyon

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 10: Lyon/Pérouges/Dole/Dijon

Our first stop today is in medieval hilltop Pérouges, another of France's most beautiful villages with its cobblestone streets and byways lined with half-timbered houses. Next, we visit untouristed Dole, boasting a well-preserved historic center and where we enjoy a walking tour. After time for lunch on our own, we tour the one-time home of scientist Louis Pasteur. Then we continue on to Dijon and our hotel, where we dine together tonight.

Accommodations: Grand Hôtel La Cloche – MGallery

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 11: Dijon/Beaune/Route des Grands Crus

This morning we travel to Beaune, gateway to the Burgundy wine region. We take a leisurely walking tour of this walled town then visit the renowned Hôtel Dieu Museum, part of the Hospices de Beaune complex. One of the finest surviving Renaissance buildings in France, the museum is home to the Beaune Altarpiece (often called "The Last Supper"). We then embark on a tour highlight: the journey along the Route des Grands Crus, Burgundy's fabled trail through the vineyards and villages comprising one of France's most treasured wine regions. We have the opportunity to sample some area vintages as we stop for lunch and at a local winery before we return to Dijon late this afternoon.

Accommodations: Grand Hôtel La Cloche – MGallery

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 12: Dijon

Known for its rich history and culture – and of course, its wine and namesake mustard – Dijon boasts a prized architectural heritage ranging from Gothic to Art Deco, which we see on today's tour of the Burgundian capital. Following our tour, we're free to explore as we wish. Tonight, we visit a local restaurant for dinner together.

Accommodations: Grand Hôtel La Cloche – MGallery

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 13: Dijon/Chablis/Paris

En route to Paris today, we stop in Chablis, renowned for its signature dry white wines. We enjoy a walking tour of the medieval village and visit the 13th-century Collégiale Saint-Martin church. Then we have time on our own for lunch and to explore as we wish, maybe visiting one of wineries in the town center. Mid-afternoon we travel on to Paris, where an orientation tour takes us past many of the city's highlights. Dinner tonight is on our own in this city of fine cuisine.

Accommodations: Hôtel Edouard 7

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 14: Paris

This morning we visit the Opéra Garnier, the opulent theater that stands as a symbol of the city (and as the setting for *The Phantom of the Opera*). If Opéra Garnier is not available, we'll tour the Musée Rodin, dedicated to the works of sculptor Auguste Rodin. Our afternoon is free for independent exploration; tonight we celebrate our Gallic sojourn over a farewell dinner.

Accommodations: Hôtel Edouard 7

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 15: Depart for U.S.

We transfer to the airport this morning for our return flight to the U.S.

Meals: Breakfast

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