

HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



PROVINCIAL FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE

JUNE 2 – 16, 2023

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Experience the beauty, allure, and hospitality of provincial France, at an easy pace and in a unique style. Anchored by stays in vibrant Toulouse and enchanting Paris, the journey features diverse Languedoc, the remote Dordogne, the lovely Loire Valley, and historic Normandy while staying in charming rural inns and small country hotels.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: Level 3

SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, R=Reception, D=Dinner

FRIDAY, JUNE 2

DEPART U.S. FOR TOULOUSE, FRANCE

This evening, depart for Europe and connect with the flight to Toulouse.

SATURDAY, JUNE 3

ARRIVE TOULOUSE

Arrive in Toulouse in the Midi-Pyrénées today and transfer to the hotel to rest and relax, or perhaps to begin exploring the city on your own. The hotel's check-in time is 3:00 p.m., and tonight meet your tour director and fellow travelers for a briefing and dinner together at the hotel.

Overnight: *Crowne Plaza Toulouse (D)*

SUNDAY, JUNE 4

TOULOUSE / CARCASSONNE

This morning, tour medieval Carcassonne, the renowned French hilltop town with the longest city walls in Europe. Located in the Occitanie region of France and overlooking vast green plains that stretch all the way to the Pyrénées, Carcassonne boasts battlements and ramparts dating to the 1st-century Romans. The walled city preserved today is only a fraction of the original design; a vast majority of Carcassonne was reconstructed during the 19th century. However, both the town itself and its canal – Canal du Midi – were recently named UNESCO World Heritage sites.

After returning to Toulouse mid-afternoon, the remainder of the day is at leisure. Lunch and dinner today are on your own.

Overnight: *Crowne Plaza Toulouse (B)*

MONDAY, JUNE 5

TOULOUSE / ALBI / SARLAT

Depart Toulouse for Albi, the historic market town that was home to Belle Époque artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Walk through this medieval town built of pink-hued bricks and

visit the Palais de la Berbie, the ancient fortress housing a museum devoted to the works of Toulouse-Lautrec. Then visit the huge, 13th-century Albi Cathedral, the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Albi and one of the largest brick buildings in the world.

After lunch on your own, board the motorcoach for the three-hour drive to Sarlat-la-Canéda, the capital of the Périgord Noir nestled in the heart of the Dordogne Valley. The town of Sarlat itself is a medieval gem, with more registered historic sites than anywhere else in Europe. Many of the streets are pedestrian only, making it perfect for wandering. Well-preserved medieval houses line the narrow streets, which all eventually lead to Sarlat's main square, the lovely Place de la Liberté.

Late this afternoon arrive at the hotel, a short walk from Sarlat's medieval Old Town. Tonight enjoy dinner together at a local restaurant.

Overnight: *Au Grand Hotel de Sarlat (B, D)*

TUESDAY, JUNE 6 SARLAT / LASCAUX IV

Early today, visit the International Center for Cave Art at Lascaux IV. This interactive exhibit recreates, with stunning accuracy, the original Stone Age cave paintings discovered nearby. These prehistoric works of art depicted animals and hunt scenes, and their beauty still shines through some 17,000 years later. Discovered only in 1940 and opened as a tourist attraction in 1948, the original caves were then closed to the public in 1963 to prevent deterioration from the significant number of visitors who flocked to see this extraordinary find.

After lunch at a local restaurant, spend the afternoon on a leisurely cruise along the Dordogne, passing cliff-top castles and fortified medieval towns, fields of sunflowers and rocky outcroppings. Our voyage traces a well-worn historical route; this is the land where Eleanor of Aquitaine ruled in the 12th century. Following the cruise, return to Sarlat, where dinner is on your own tonight.

Overnight: *Au Grand Hotel de Sarlat (B, L)*

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7 SARLAT / ROCAMADOUR

This morning, take a brief walking tour then have free time to explore this charming town at your own pace, perhaps with a walk through the public gardens; a discovery of medieval architecture; a visit to a local museum; or a stop at the local market (if here on a market day).

After lunch on your own, this afternoon tour the Dordogne, an area of lush valley and woodland punctuated by tiny villages dating to medieval times. Of all the beautiful vistas encountered today, perhaps the most impressive is the setting of Rocamadour, perched atop a cliff set in a canyon. The town's history is nearly as interesting as its location; after the discovery in 1166 of a perfectly preserved body believed to be that of Saint Amadour, Rocamadour became an important pilgrimage site. Adding to the town's religious significance is a 12th-century Black Madonna that resides in the Chapelle Notre Dame. Enjoy a guided walking tour of Rocamadour and then return to Sarlat mid-afternoon before dining at a local restaurant this evening.

Overnight: *Au Grand Hotel de Sarlat (B, D)*

THURSDAY, JUNE 8 SARLAT / LE DORAT / SAUMUR

This morning, depart for the 3½-hour journey to the Loire Valley, stopping in the small market town of Le Dorat for lunch at a local restaurant. Following lunch, embark on another 3½-hour coach ride to Saumur, a town of cobblestone streets and half-timbered houses. Upon arrival, take an orientation stroll of this bustling town set along the banks of the Loire River. Enjoy dinner on your own tonight.

Overnight: *Hôtel Anne d'Anjou (B, L)*

FRIDAY, JUNE 9 SAUMUR

This morning, enjoy a visit to a local winery, where you have a chance to learn a bit about the wine-making process before taking part in a wine tasting. Return to the hotel midday for an afternoon at leisure to explore and enjoy Saumur at your own pace. Options include a walk-through Saumur's Old Town, rich with 12th-century architecture; or a visit to the Saumur Cavalry Museum, which traces the history of the French Cavalry from 1445 onward. A small force of 800 cavalry school "cadets of Saumur" became legendary for their heroic stand in June 1940, repulsing 10,000 superiorly equipped Nazi soldiers for two days. For those with equestrian interests, France's national Riding School is located in Saumur with guided tours available. Tonight, gather for dinner together at the hotel.

Overnight: *Hôtel Anne d'Anjou (B, D)*

SATURDAY, JUNE 10 SAUMUR / CHENONCEAUX

Travel today to the land of chateaux, riverbanks bursting with grapes on the vine, valleys filled with the scent of flowers, imposing Renaissance palaces, Romanesque abbeys, and some of the loveliest wild scenery in all of France. In addition, there's enough history here to satisfy the most avid aficionado, as the Loire Valley was also home to Joan of Arc and the site of many great battles between the English and the French. Today visit one of the most impressive chateaux of them all: Chenonceau (in the town of Chenonceaux), which boasts a particularly unusual history for its time, in that it was women who oversaw its construction. The architect was chosen by Catherine Briçonnet whose husband first purchased the site in 1513; further development was overseen by Diane de Poitiers, mistress of Henri II, as well as by his famous wife, Catherine de Médicis. Priceless tapestries and paintings hang on the chateau's walls, making it one of the most elegant residences in the nation. Lunch today is at a local restaurant. Return to the hotel this afternoon, and dinner tonight is on your

own – an excellent opportunity to sample fine French cuisine.

Overnight: *Hôtel Anne d'Anjou (B, L)*

SUNDAY, JUNE 11 SAUMUR / MONT-ST-MICHEL / CRÉPON

This morning board a motorcoach for the four-hour drive to the most visited site in France after Paris. Mont-St-Michel once was known as the Mount in Peril from the Sea, so named for the number of pilgrims who vanished in the quicksand or drowned trying to reach this rocky outpost. This magnificent Gothic abbey sits in one of the world's most dramatic locations, atop a mound of rock that at one time would become completely surrounded by the sea at high tide; now, because of excessive silt, water rarely submerges the surrounding flats. It's a destination that inspires both awe and wonder.

Tour the 13th-century Abbey (please note that this entails an uphill walk and a significant number of steps), which was described by French author Guy de Maupassant as "the most wonderful Gothic dwelling made for God on this earth ... a gigantic granite jewel." The Abbey boasts a history equal to its setting: it was constructed over a 500-year period, from 1017 to 1521, of granite hauled stone by stone from Brittany.

Over the years, the church, choir, nave, and tower have all collapsed and been rebuilt. The complex of buildings includes a cloister, Knight's Hall, Refectory, Guest Hall, and cellars that once hosted a large religious community. Lunch today is on your own in the town of Mont-St-Michel before boarding the motorcoach for the 2 ½-hour journey to Normandy and our lodgings in rural Crépon, where we dine tonight.

Overnight: *Manoir de Mathan (B, D)*

MONDAY, JUNE 12 **CRÉPON / BAYEUX / CAEN**

The first town to be liberated during the Battle of Normandy, and miraculously spared wartime bombing, medieval Bayeux is the focus of today's touring. Begin at the Tapestry Museum and the world-famous Bayeux Tapestry depicting the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. Embroidered nine centuries ago, it is truly a masterpiece; one which has lost very little of its color intensity or impact over the years. Later move on to Caen, just 15 minutes away, where tour the moving Memorial of Caen, a museum devoted to "history for peace" built with funds and materials from Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Germany, the former Czechoslovakia, the former USSR, and France. Then if the schedule permits, stop in Arromanches for a stroll along the harbor front. Here look out at the English Channel and still see the remains of the "Mulberry," code name for the artificial harbor built there by the Allies. Considered one of history's greatest military engineering achievements, this harbor facilitated the landing of some 2.5 million men and 500,000 vehicles for the Allied invasion of Normandy. Late this afternoon return to Crépon and enjoy dinner together this evening.

Overnight: *Manoir de Mathan (B, D)*

TUESDAY, JUNE 13 **D-DAY LANDING BEACHES**

A poignant, inspiring day is in store as we travel to the very places where Allied forces overcame overwhelming odds to alter the course of World War II. Visit Pointe du Hoc, one of the most celebrated World War II sites of all, where American Rangers scaled towering cliffs to establish a beachhead; renowned Utah Beach; and Ste-Mère-Église, where the 82nd Airborne Division successfully parachuted on the night of June 5, 1944, and where tour the evocative Airborne Museum. Many may still remember the church steeple from which U.S. paratrooper John Steele dangled during the fighting when his parachute got caught, and which now has a

model soldier and parachute permanently affixed to the roof.

And as a tribute to our American war heroes, end the day with a moving visit to the American Cemetery in Colleville overlooking Omaha Beach. In this tranquil setting, row upon row of white crosses and Stars of David honor the nearly 10,000 soldiers buried here. Return to the hotel late this afternoon and dine together this evening.

Overnight: *Manoir de Mathan (B, L, D)*

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14 **CRÉPON / GIVERNY / PARIS**

This morning, visit the village of Giverny, which contains the home and gardens of Impressionist painter Claude Monet, who lived here from 1883 until his death in 1926. See the familiar lily pond and Japanese footbridge made famous through his paintings and visit the studio in which he created his huge water lily canvases. The gardens are kept just as the artist left them, and the house has been restored to Monet's original designs. Then, travel to Paris. After settling in at the hotel, the remainder of the day is free to begin exploring the "City of Light". Lunch and dinner are on your own today, the latter in this city famed for its gastronomy.

Overnight: *Hotel Château Frontenac (B)*

THURSDAY, JUNE 15 **PARIS**

Today see the highlights of romantic Paris on a half-day city tour, which includes an inside visit to the magnificent Louvre. Home to priceless works of art including the bold Winged Victory, Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, and the lovely Venus de Milo, the Louvre is one of the world's most revered museums. If the Louvre is unavailable, visit the breathtaking Musée d'Orsay. This former railway station now contains the largest collection of Impressionist and post-Impressionist paintings in the world, including works by Monet, Manet, Degas, Renoir, and Cézanne to name a few. In addition, pass the Eiffel Tower

and Champs Élysées, among other well-known sites in this grand city.

The tour ends after the museum visit early this afternoon. Then there is free time to continue exploring the museum on your own. The afternoon is also free for exploring more of Paris, perhaps to visit some of its other fine museums such as the Musée d'Art Moderne; Musée de l'Orangerie, home of works by Monet, Picasso, and Matisse; or the Musée Rodin, specializing in the work of the great sculptor. Tonight gather with your fellow travelers at a local restaurant for a farewell dinner.

Overnight: *Hotel Château Frontenac (B, D)*

FRIDAY, JUNE 16

PARIS / DEPART FOR U.S.

Early this morning, depart Paris for the flight to the United States. (B)