

PROVENCE AND TUSCANY TO UMBRIA

17 WONDERFUL DAYS – PARIS TO ROME



IMAGINE... A totally unique tour specifically designed to capture the essence and vibrancy of four very evocative regions of France and Italy - Provence, the Cote d'Azur, Tuscany and Umbria. Each one littered with wonderfully preserved cities and villages, incredible scenic drives and a proud heritage of culture, food and wine. To do them justice we have arranged to have four night stays in both the Provence and Tuscany regions, plus three night stays on the Cote d'Azur and amongst the hills of Umbria. Yes, we spend ample time in the major cities... but then come with us as we seek out other sights such as Arles, Les Beaux in France and San Gimignano, glorious Lucca and Orte in Italy. Join us in Tuscany for a food, wine and olive oil tasting at Fattoria di Poggio and in Umbria to taste salami in the medieval village of Bevagna. Now that's hard to take!



(©MDLF/Cédric Heisly)

DAY 1 PARIS

Your tour commences this evening with a welcome drink before dinner in your first class hotel. This is an ideal chance to meet your Tour Manager and fellow travellers. (D)

Your Paris hotel – Marriott Rive Gauche

DAY 2 VILLENEUVE LES AVIGNON IN PROVENCE

Today we catch the TGV high speed train south to Avignon in the region of Provence – the land of old peasant villages surrounded by rich, purple lavender fields and vineyards. Arriving just over three hours later, we board our coach and drive north to see the beautifully preserved Pont du Gard - an imposing 2,000 year old Roman aqueduct which was built with giant stones weighing up to six tonnes. In a beautiful setting, this remarkable structure spans 200 metres between the craggy hillsides of the River Gard. We then travel to Villeneuve les Avignon, a charming medieval town on the opposite bank of the Rhone from Avignon city. Over 600 years ago, after the fortification and the Abbey Saint André were built, Villeneuve became the residence of the popes and cardinals of the Papal Court wishing to escape from the hustle and bustle of the crowded centre of Avignon city. We stay here for the next four nights. (B, D)

Your Feature Hotel in Provence - La Magnaneraie

This excellent four star hotel is located 800 metres from the historic centre of Villeneuve. The hotel boasts 32 stylish bedrooms, peaceful lounges, a delightful garden complete with a 'gourmand' restaurant and a shady dining terrace. A perfect place to stay four nights whilst exploring the region of Provence. To really appreciate this feature hotel go to <http://www.hostellerie-la-magnaneraie.com>

DAY 3 VILLENEUVE LES AVIGNON IN PROVENCE

This morning we have arranged for a local guide to join us for a fascinating walking tour of Avignon. This city has a grand central square with numerous side streets and alleys full of colourful cafes and shops. A highlight will be your tour through the 600 year old Palais des Popes, once the grand residence of the exiled Roman Catholic Popes. Your afternoon will be free in this wonderful town on the banks of the River Rhone. (B)

DAY 4 VILLENEUVE LES AVIGNON IN PROVENCE

This morning we journey to the crumbling castle and once deserted village of Les Baux to discover the craft shops and cafes scattered through the ruins. Set on the craggy hillside, this rejuvenated town is an extraordinary sight. Next stop will be spent nearby amongst the terracotta roofs and ochre walls of Arles with its Roman ruins and giant amphitheatre. On our return route



Palais des Popes, Avignon





Provence

(© MDLF/Michel Angot)

home we also make an afternoon stop to explore the old town of Tarascon on the River Rhone, with its 13th century chateau. This evening we have included a return transfer to Avignon. (B)

DAY 5 VILLENEUVE LES AVIGNON IN PROVENCE

First stop today will be on the mouth of the Rhone River in the bustling city of Marseilles. In the old port we will board a boat to take us to the tiny island of 'If' to visit the foreboding Château d'If - best known as the horrendous jail in Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The sixteenth-century castle and its cells are incredibly well preserved, and the views back towards Marseille are fantastic. Returning to the city we will have time at leisure. The Vieux-Port (old harbour) is an ideal place to settle into one of the delightful bistros and enjoy a genuine, steaming seafood Bouillabaisse. In the afternoon we stop in Aix en Provence on the Cours Mirabeau, a tree-lined avenue of cafés and fountains, flanked by elegant 17th- and 18th-century houses. (B)

DAY 6 NICE ON THE COTE D'AZUR

Today we take the inland route to Nice. First stop will be in Gordes, standing on the edge of the plateau of Vaucluse. Its houses of white and grey stone, with beautiful old doorways, rise up in a spiral around the rock on which the village is set. At the very top are the church and castle which face out onto the hills of the Luberon (made famous by Peter Mayle's book 'A year in Provence'). Next, we follow one of Europe's greatest scenic drives down the stunning Gorges du Verdon. Commencing in Vinon the winding road hugs magnificent cliffs and gorges passing through numerous small dusty towns and age old defensive villages. We will spend lunchtime in the delightful town of Moustier Sainte Marie. Set in the curve of a rocky cliff, the "crown" of the village is the star, of one of the Knights of the Crusades, which is suspended high across the valley by a forged-iron chain, fastened into solid rock on each side of the gorge. Descending down to the Cote D'Azur we arrive in Nice, the 'Queen of the Riviera', where we stay the next three nights in the old town. Dinner tonight is in a local restaurant. (B, D)

Your Nice Hotel – Hotel Massena

This superior tourist class hotel has been selected not for its style or quality but for its fantastic location in the absolute heart of Nice's old town and right by the wonderful fresh food and flower markets.

DAY 7 NICE ON THE COTE D'AZUR

Your morning is entirely free in the elegant resort town of Nice. Make sure you visit the wonderful covered fresh food and local produce markets nearby, one of the best in France! In the afternoon we drive in to the foothills of the Alpes Maritimes to the old town of St Paul de Vence with its imposing ramparts overlooking the Provençal countryside. Inspired by the stylish town and its wonderful natural light, a host of famous painters flocked here in the early 20th century to found art schools. Later, film directors and movie stars followed and now it bursts with its artist colony and shops. We also stop at Grasse and tour through a perfumery factory. This evening we have included an excursion to Monaco. Following the scenic drive along the 'Moyenne Corniche' to the city of Monte Carlo we will see the Royal Palace and famous Casino, before time at leisure for dinner. (B)

DAY 8 NICE ON THE COTE D'AZUR

There is nothing like a day on the Azur Coast! A leisurely start as we make a morning visit to explore 'Bardots' St Tropez. Later we follow the twisting scenic road that hugs the coast through exclusive resort towns such as Sainte Raphael to extravagant Cannes. Arriving around lunchtime, your afternoon will be spent exploring the old port town and 'La Croisette' - the seafront promenade lined with palm trees and grand boutiques. This evening is at leisure in Nice. (B)

DAY 9 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

Bidding adieu to France, we enter Italy and arrive mid afternoon in the elegant Tuscan spa town of Montecatini Terme which was once a favourite 'cure resort' of the crowned heads of state from all over Europe. We will spend the next four nights here. (B, D)



Vineyard, Chianti

Your Hotel in Tuscany – La Torretta Hotel

This friendly, family run 4 star hotel is located in the heart of Montecatini Terme and close to all attractions.

DAY 10 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

Our first stop today is the town of Pisa with its famous Leaning Tower, Duomo, Baptistery and Cathedral in the magnificent Piazza dei Miracoli. Lunchtime will be at leisure in one of the most typically 'Tuscan' towns in the area, Lucca - a medieval walled city, filled with palaces, churches, ancient houses and the former home of Puccini, where he wrote Turandot. Walk on top of the city walls for the very best city views or visit Piazza San Michele and stroll along the shops of Borgo Giannotti. This afternoon we will visit Fattoria di Poggio, a farmhouse in the Tuscan Hills, to enjoy an extensive tasting of a wide variety of local wines, olive oils, grappa, Vin Santo plus locally produced breads, salami and sun dried tomatoes. (B)

DAY 11 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

Today is dedicated to nearby 'Firenze' (Florence). We catch a train to swiftly reach the city centre where a local guide will bring to life this truly beautiful city which is otherwise known as the 'Cradle of the Renaissance'. We will visit the Duomo and take in the magnificent statues in the Piazza della Signoria. Your tour ends inside the famous Uffizi Gallery, one of the world's greatest collections of Italian, Florentine and Renaissance art. Your afternoon is entirely free to enjoy Florence at your own pace. Espresso Coffee on Piazza Santa Croce where Michelangelo is buried? A gelato whilst strolling across the Ponte Vecchio? Don't forget the excellent shopping. (B, D)

DAY 12 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

A delightful day is planned as we explore the famous Cinque Terre. The name means 'five lands' and comes from the five unspoilt fishing villages that cling to the cliffs, overlooking the sea. We have arranged a coastal boat ride for you to admire the spectacular scenery and almost inaccessible fishing villages, with visits to Porto Venere, Vernazza and Monterosso. Our return journey back to La Spezia is by train through the tunnels and cliffs

above. As a highlight this evening we have arranged a 'Chianti dinner' at Villa Pasquini. Set among the green hills of the Valdinievole, the Villa maintains all the original and warm atmosphere of the summer residence of the noble family of the Pasquinis. (B, D)

DAY 13 SPOLETO IN UMBRIA

We make the short drive across Tuscany to the fairytale 'town of towers' San Gimignano, famous for its 13th and 14th century Tuscan towers. Exploring the pedestrian walkways of this hilltop town is an absolute delight. Lunchtime will be spent in the beautifully preserved streets of medieval Siena amongst the great sights such as the Gothic Town Hall and the Piazza del Campo, scene of the famous Palio horse race. Next we wind up to the hills of Umbria and the wonderful walled town of Spoleto where we stay the next three nights. Medieval Spoleto is easily explored on foot. There are numerous Romanesque churches and cobbled stone alleyways with character shops, bars and trattorias. (B, D)

Your Umbrian Feature Hotel – Hotel Dei Duchi

This unpretentious, family run hotel is located literally just outside the old city walls and is known locally for its cuisine. The dining area has wide panoramic views of the stunning Umbrian countryside. The hotel has the dual benefit of being a 'town' hotel but at the same time giving the feeling as if you are in the middle of the countryside - so you have the best of both worlds. Perfect for those after dinner strolls into the medieval centre to enjoy a gelato or nightcap in a local café!

DAY 14 SPOLETO IN UMBRIA

We spend this morning in the nearby beautiful Umbrian city of Assisi. Badly damaged by earthquakes in 1997 the city, dominated by two medieval castles, undertook a remarkable programme of restoration which soon brought it back to all its glory. On arrival in Assisi we are joined by a lay Franciscan Monk for a guided tour of the Basilica of St Francis with its magnificent frescoes. Afterwards there is time for you to explore at your own pace. This afternoon is at leisure in Spoleto. Perhaps take a walk on the lovely pathway around the town looping across an old viaduct in the countryside. This is the real Italy! (B, D)

DAY 15 SPOLETO IN UMBRIA

A very relaxing day is planned. This morning we take a trip to the medieval village of Bevagna. Here we will visit the famous Da Tagliavento salami shop to see how salami is made. This afternoon on our way back to Spoleto, we will stretch our legs in the hilltop town of Spello. (B)

DAY 16 ROME

We will make a stop this morning in the charming hill top town of Orte before arriving in Rome for lunchtime. We have included a local guide to take us on an afternoon walking tour around the sights of the Forum Romana and we also visit inside the mighty Colosseum. After checking into our central city hotel, we will enjoy a special farewell meal in a local restaurant. (B, D)

Your Rome Hotel – Hotel Massimo D’Azeglio

DAY 17 ROME

Sadly your tour ends this morning after breakfast. (B)

Features and Inclusions

- Smaller group sizes – maximum 30 passengers
- No optional excursions lists or hidden, later charged extras
- All the sightseeing, scenic drives and excursions described in the itinerary
- Fully escorted by our experienced Tour Manager
- Local guides – Avignon, Florence, Assisi, Rome
- First Class air-conditioned touring coach
- End of Tour tips to Tour Manager, driver and guides
- 16 nights selected accommodation as described
- Hotel portorage (1 bag per person)
- Buffet breakfasts daily
- 9 Dinners including Welcome and Farewell dinners, Chianti dinner at Villa Pasquini in Tuscany
- TGV train Paris to Avignon (2nd class)
- Entrances: Papal Palace Avignon, Chateau d’If, visit to a French perfume factory, Uffizi Gallery, Colosseum
- Boat ride to the Island of If, Cinque Terre excursion, Fattoria di Poggio Farmhouse food, wine and olive oil tasting

Special 2010 departures

20 May, 3 July, 12 August, 9 September

AUD\$ **6,289**

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Duomo, Florence