

ITINERARY

Vive la France with a Touch of Spain!

Saturday 15 September

Arrival Paris

A warm welcome awaits us in Paris where our Tour Manager will meet us on arrival at our centrally located hotel. The remainder of the day is at leisure to relax and use as we wish. This evening we are invited to a welcome dinner followed by an introductory tour of Paris, 'The City of Lights', which will include a reserved entrance to ascend the Eiffel Tower. (D)

Sunday 16 September

Paris – Versailles excursion

Today we'll enjoy the opulence of the Palace of Versailles. Our local guide will show us through the splendid interior of this lasting monument to the extravagance of the Bourbon kings and afterwards there will be ample time to admire the magnificent gardens. The rest of the day is at leisure in Paris. How about some energetic can-can at one of the famous Parisian cabarets? (B)

Monday 17 September

Paris – Giverny excursion

A short drive from Paris brings us to Monet's evocative Gardens at Giverny. The art historian guide will escort us through one of the best known and loved gardens in the world. Back in Paris the sightseeing opportunities are endless. Enjoy at your own pace. (B)

Tuesday 18 September

Paris

Enjoy the morning at leisure prior to boarding Avalon Creativity on the River Seine, to commence our "Grand France" river cruise. This evening we will meet our crew at a welcome reception, prior to dinner. (B,D)

Wednesday 19 September

Paris

We have seen the famous Paris sights by night. Today our included city sightseeing will show us the magnificent Notre Dame Cathedral, the unique Louvre Museum with its glass pyramid contrasting with its ancient architecture, the commemorative Arc de Triomphe, Opera, Madeleine, Champs Elysees, and again the Eiffel Tower, a structural miracle of its age. Step out after dinner to enjoy the colourful nightlife. (B,L,D)

Thursday 20 September

Paris - Conflans

Time to set sail. Enjoy a relaxing morning on the Sky Deck as we cruise gently down the River Seine, passing through suburban Paris. This afternoon, after docking at Conflans, we get to choose. We can either join an excursion to Auvers-sur-Oise, the quaint little town where Vincent Van Gogh lived and died, or Napoleon and Josephine's Chateau de Malmaison. Requiring extensive renovations, this large country estate was purchased by Josephine Bonaparte in 1799 while Napoleon was fighting in Egypt. It was her aim to make it "the most beautiful and curious garden in Europe, a model of good cultivation." (B,L,D)

Friday 21 September

Vernon

This morning we are off to visit Bizy Castle with its magnificent courtyard. The Chateau de Bizy was created during the 19th century in its current form, copied from a Roman palace. Relax on board this afternoon or take your pick of a number of optional excursions on offer. (B,L,D)

Saturday 22 September

Rouen

Rouen is the capital of Upper Normandy, perhaps best known for its connection to Joan of Arc, who lived, was imprisoned, and burned at the stake in the marketplace of this town in 1431. This morning we will join a guided walk through the medieval quarter with its half-timbered, glazed-tile houses, and the Gros Horloge, an intricate Astronomical Clock. The splendid gothic Cathedral was once the tallest building in the world and the subject of a series of Claude Monet's paintings. (B,L,D)

Sunday 23 September

Rouen

Choose between an included excursion to the historic Normandy landing beaches with poignant sites such as Omaha Beach, the Pointe du Hoc monument, and the American Cemetery or a "Taste of Normandy" for a more in-

depth look at this picturesque agricultural region, of which Calvados, famous for apple brandy and cider, is a part. (B,L,D)

Monday 24 September

Les Andelys

The most dramatic sight along the Seine is the imposing Chateau Gaillard at Les Andelys. Built by England's King Richard the Lionheart in 1196, the chateau is truly a masterpiece of medieval military architecture. As always, have your camera handy! (B,L,D)

Tuesday 25 September

Paris (disembarkation) Beaune, Chalon sur Saone

Time to bid farewell to the crew of the Avalon Creativity and head south into Burgundy. Beaune owes its wealth to the production, aging, and selling of fine wines. Its most famous historical site, the Hotel-Dieu charity hospital, houses Van der Weyden's painting of the Last Judgement and is one of France's architectural highlights. We will enjoy a tasting of Burgundy wines before continuing to Chalon-sur-Saone, where we'll board the Avalon Scenery. Once again, before dinner, we'll meet the crew at a welcome reception. (B,D)

Wednesday 26 September

Chalon sur Saone, Tournus, Macon

We are free to explore the Nicephore Niepce photography museum in Chalon sur Saone this morning. Then enjoy free time in Tournus this afternoon. The cloister of St. Philibert or the Burgundy Museum's folklore collection, located in an old family mansion, is worth a visit. Later, we will cruise on to Macon. A choice of optional excursions, including a visit to a wine cellar, will be offered. (B,L,D)

Thursday 27 September

Beaujolais region, Lyon

Enjoy a leisurely morning cruising on the Rhone. Lyon is France's second-largest city and its gastronomic capital. Founded by the Romans in 43 BC, the city's prosperity dates back to the 16th century and is due to commercial, industrial, and banking activities. Roman remains, many excellent museums, and much renaissance architecture will delight. Survey the city from Fourviere Hill and explore the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its maze of medieval alleyways, Place des Terreaux, and the beautiful Place Bellecour. Beaujolais is the wine of the region and wine connoisseurs will know that the grapes must be hand picked. Tradition dictates that the "Beaujolais Nouveau" is tasted for the first time on the third Thursday of November each year. (B,L,D)

Friday 28 September

Lyon

We have a free day in this fascinating city so continue to explore at your leisure. If you care to rise early, a visit to the local produce market will delight. Our Cruise Director will suggest many things for us to do. (B,L,D)

Saturday 29 September

Tournon, Tain L'Hermitage, Viviers

The twin cities of Tournon and Tain, nestled amongst vineyards, between the River Rhone and the granite slopes of the Hermitage will be our morning destination. Charming Viviers developed around its Romanesque Cathedral. The Old Town has an appealing mix of Christian, Roman, and medieval influences; wonderful places to explore. (B,L,D)

Sunday 30 September

Avignon

Avignon, also referred to as the "City of Popes," was the centre of the Catholic Church in the 14th century. It is dominated by the grandiose Palace of the Popes. Optional outings to Pont du Gard or to the famed wine cellars of Chateauneuf-du-Pape are available for us to enjoy this afternoon. (B,L,D)

Monday 1 October

Arles, Armargue, Port St Louis

Arles is the capital of the Provence and was once known as the "Little Rome of Gaul." We will see the church of St. Trophime; "Les Alyscamps," the remains of the Gallo-Roman burial road; and visit the Roman Amphitheater. We will depart from Arles before dinner and enjoy tranquil scenes of the Camargue Regional Nature Park area as we cruise to Port St. Louis in the Rhone delta. (B,L,D)

Tuesday 2 October

Port St Louis (disembarkation) Cote D'Azur

Time to farewell our crew before boarding our motor coach for our journey along the magnificent Cote d'Azur. Also known as the French Riviera, the Cote d'Azur stretches along France's Mediterranean coast from Toulon to the Italian border. Enjoy the magnificent scenery. (B)

Wednesday 3 October**Monaco, Cap Ferrat, Cannes**

Today we will farewell our cruising friends and welcome back our pre cruise Tour Manager. We will transfer to our hotel in Cannes on the French Riviera. En route we'll stop in St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat to visit the jewel that is the Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild. Later our route will pass by Nice and around the Bay of Angels.

Proposed accommodation: 2 nights Hotel Le Canberra (or similar)

Thursday 4 October**Cannes, St Paul de Vence excursion**

A lovely scenic day today as you drive the coastal road along the Cote d'Azur and then continue into the hinterland to the charming hill-top village of St-Paul-de-Vence, so beloved of artists living in the area. The remainder of the day is at leisure. (B)

Friday 5 October**Cannes, Aigues-Mortes, Montpellier (two nights)**

Your drive today will take the road past the Massif Des Maures and into Provence. There'll be a pause at historic Aigues-Mortes on the edge of the Camargue. It's from this medieval town that Louis IX set out on the Crusades to the Holy Lands. (B)

Proposed accommodation: 2 nights Hotel Crowne Plaza Corum (or similar)

Saturday 6 October**Montpellier - sightseeing**

A day spent meeting the locals and exploring the town. (B)

Sunday 7 October**Montpellier, Carcassonne, Barcelona (three nights)**

Our first stop today will be in the picture book walled city of Carcassonne. Here you'll be able to wander through narrow lanes dating back to the time of the Middle-Ages. Later you'll cross into the Spanish region of Catalonia and then, after a short drive, arrive in its capital, Barcelona. (B)

Proposed accommodation: Hotel Olivia Plaza (or similar)

Monday 8 October**Barcelona - sightseeing**

Today our local guide will introduce us to the many delights of Spain's most cosmopolitan city. Included in our sightseeing will be the Old Gothic Quarter, the Montjuic area, Picasso's Museum and, of course, Europe's most unconventional church, Gaudi's Sagrada Familia. Afterwards you'll have ample time to discover the many other delights of lively Barcelona. (B)

Tuesday 9 October**Barcelona, Costa Brava excursion**

Our excursion from Barcelona will take us north along the wild Costa Brava to discover some of the beautiful inlets which conceal picturesque harbours and quaint fishing villages. Later we'll journey inland to the local grape producing area to visit a 'cava' (sparkling wine) producer to sample one or two of the recent vintages. Tonight will be a treat as we enjoy our farewell dinner and colourful flamenco show. (BD)

Wednesday 10 October**Barcelona**

Time to transfer to Barcelona International Airport for flights home or onward to further exciting destinations. (B)