

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 Baux, Cannes and St Tropez in France and San Gimignano, Florence, Siena and glorious Lucca in Italy. Join us as we enjoy a dinner cruise on the Rhone River, explore the Cinque Terre and Assisi, and in Tuscany sample wine and olive oil at Fattoria di Poggio. Now that's hard to take!



(© MDLF/Cédric Helsly)

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 Magnaneria. 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 www.hostellerie-la-magnaneria.com

DAY 3 VILLENEUVE LES AVIGNON IN PROVENCE

This morning we have included a half day excursion to 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'). We return to Avignon city for lunchtime. We have also included a ride on the 'Petit Train' of Avignon. This versatile 'Little Train' will take you on a panoramic tour with commentary around the streets, squares and sights of the city.

Afterwards we have included entrance (headsets included) to the 600 year old Palais des Popes, once the grand residence of the exiled Roman Catholic Popes. The rest of the afternoon and evening are free to explore this historic town on the banks of the River Rhone, with its grand central square with numerous side streets and alleys full of colourful cafes and shops. You have time to find that perfect French restaurant for your dinner, and later we will transfer you back to our hotel. (B)



Provence, Avignon





Portovenere, La Spezia

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 cafés 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 home, we also make an afternoon stop to explore the old town of Tarascon, on the Rhone River, with its 13th century chateau. This evening we have included a relaxing dinner cruise on the Rhone River to experience panoramic views of Avignon, illuminated by night. (B, D)

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 16th 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

There is nothing like a day on the Azur Coast! Driving down to the Cote d'Azur we enjoy a leisurely lunch break in world famous St Tropez. After the second world war this quaint fishing village developed into a 'must stay' chic resort frequented by millionaires, the jet set and of course Brigitte Bardot. Later we continue to Nice, nicknamed the 'Queen of the Riviera', where we stay the next three nights. Dinner tonight is in a local restaurant a short walk from the hotel. (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

First stop this morning is in the extravagant sea side resort of Cannes. Time to explore the old port town and 'La Croisette' - the seafront promenade

lined with palm trees, up market boutiques, cafes and grand hotels. Around lunchtime, 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 there is an artist colony along with galleries and shops. The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure in Nice. This evening we have also 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

Your day is entirely free in the elegant resort town of Nice. Take time to stroll and shop amongst the winding streets and perhaps enjoy lunch in one of the attractive seaside restaurants. Nice also boasts a number of art museums. Make sure you visit the wonderful fresh food, local produce and flower markets which are amongst the best in France! They are literally on the doorstep of your hotel. (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)

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

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)



DAY 11 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. Dinner is included in your hotel. (B, D)

DAY 12 MONTECATINI TERME IN TUSCANY

Our first stop today is 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. Later we visit Fattoria di Poggio, a farmhouse in the Tuscan Hills, and enjoy a tasting of a wide variety of local wines, olive oils, grappa, Vin Santo plus locally produced breads, salami and sun dried tomatoes. Your afternoon is at leisure in Pisa with its famous Leaning Tower, Cathedral and Baptistery in the magnificent Piazza dei Miracoli. As a highlight this evening we will enjoy 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 Assisi at your own pace. On our return journey to Spoleto, we make an afternoon stop to enjoy the wonderful sights of the medieval hilltop town of Spello. (B)

DAY 15 SPOLETO IN UMBRIA

We have left the entire day at leisure for you to relax and enjoy the numerous sights of Spoleto. There is so much to see and enjoy in this ancient Umbrian town. This architectural time capsule spreads down from Mount Sant'Elia towards the valley below, and boasts remnants of civilization going back to early Roman times. Your hotel is wonderfully located, with all the sights and attractions, such as the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta and Piazza del Mercato, on the site of the old Roma Forum, within easy walking distance. Perhaps take a walk and follow the pathway around the town looping across an old viaduct in the countryside. This is the real Italy! Tonight we have arranged a special 'Farewell to Umbria' dinner with local wines, in your hotel. (B, D)

DAY 16 ROME

We arrive into Rome late morning. After lunchtime at leisure, we have included a guided afternoon walking tour around the ruins of the Forum Romana and a visit to the mighty Colosseum. After checking into our central city hotel, we will enjoy a farewell dinner 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)

Please note: In this tour we visit a number of medieval hilltop towns which may have some steep, uneven cobbled stone streets. Additionally some larger cities only provide coach passenger drop off points 15 minutes or so walk from the old town centres. Please note: this need to walk from coach drop off points in some Italian towns and cities is common to ALL Tour Operators. People with walking difficulties or limitations should consider this before booking.

Compare the Albatross Difference

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Albatross gives you more...

Highlights

- Stay 4 nights in delightful Provence and visit the Pont du Gard and Avignon's grand Palais des Papes
- Explore the hilltop town of Gordes in the Luberon, historical Les Baux, the Roman ruins at Arles, Aix-en-Provence, Marseilles and the island of 'If'
- Enjoy an evening dinner cruise on the Rhone River
- Relax over 3 nights in elegant Nice and explore the Cote D'Azur from Bardot's St Tropez and Cannes to Monte-Carlo
- Spend 4 nights in Tuscany in the spa town of Montecatini Terme and visit Florence and the Uffizi Gallery, Pisa, the medieval cities of Lucca, Siena and the fairytale 'town of towers' San Gimignano, and taste wine and olive oil in a Tuscan farmhouse
- Savour a 'Chianti dinner' at Villa Pasquini
- Take in the scenic villages of the famous Cinque Terre
- Relax over 3 nights in Spoleto in the Umbrian Hills, and visit Assisi
- Enjoy a special 'Farewell to Umbria' dinner
- Visit the ancient Roman Forum and Colosseum in Rome

Inclusions

- All the sightseeing, scenic drives and excursions (as per the itinerary)
- Fully escorted by our experienced Tour Manager
- First class air-conditioned touring coach
- End of tour tips to Tour Manager, drivers and local guides
- 16 nights selected accommodation as described
- Porterage (1 bag per person)
- Buffet breakfasts daily
- 10 dinners including welcome and farewell dinners, River Rhone dinner cruise, Chianti dinner at Villa Pasquini in Tuscany, 'Farewell to Umbria' dinner
- TGV train Paris to Avignon (2nd class)
- Local guides – Florence, Assisi, Rome
- Entrances: Papal Palace Avignon, Chateau d'If, Uffizi Gallery, Roman Forum and Colosseum
- Boat ride to the island of 'If', Petit Train ride Avignon, Cinque Terre excursion, Fattoria di Poggio Farmhouse food, wine and olive oil tasting
- Quietvox personal audio system whilst on tour

Tour Price

17 days only **\$5,879** pp twin share
Single supplement \$1,289 (land only prices)

Special 2011 Departures

6 May; 26 May; 2 July; 8 September; 23 September

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Duomo, Florence