



MEJDI TOURS

ART AND CULTURE EXPERIENCE IN PROVENCE AND LANGUADOC

ITINERARY:

Day 1 - Saturday: Arrival into Avignon and welcome dinner.

Travelers will be picked up from Marseille Provence Airport (MRS) and taken to Hotel L'Europe in the ancient centre of Avignon. The bright and cozy five star Hotel L'Europe is adjacent to Avignon's medieval ramparts at the very point where they are nearest to the Rhone river, and only a few blocks away from La Fourchette, a beloved local brasserie, where we shall have our welcome dinner.

Dinner with the group

Night at Hotel L'Europe, Avignon

Day 2 - Sunday, Introduction to Provence and country crafts: L'isle sur la Sorgue, villages of the Liberian

Whether lyrical or epic, flight of fancy or documentary, art is born out of the day to day experience. To explore the art of southern France, we first must understand its lifestyle, and no day is better than a Sunday. Sundays are market days in the charming town of L'isle sur la Sorgue, famous for its water mills and its biannual antiques fair. The market stretches through the alleyways of the old town and offers everything from fresh mushrooms and tapenade to old armoires.

East of the town rises the famous mountain range of Luberon, famously featured in Peter Mayle's book "A Year in Provence", it is quintessential Provence: a tapestry of forests, vineyard and small villages. We will stop for lunch near the sweet pond at the quiet village of Cucuron, and visit the castle gardens of Lauris, with their grand view to the valley of the Durance river and unique selection of dye-making plants. Before returning to Avignon, we will take an afternoon walk among the vineyards and rocky bluffs and explore the rich flora and fauna of Mediterranean France.

Dinner on your own

Night at Hotel L'Europe, Avignon.

Day 3 - Monday, Architecture: Avignon, St. Remy, Nimes, Le Pont du Gard

Any city, country or region we visit first presents itself as a collection of structures. It only makes sense, therefore, that we shall begin our exploration of the arts with Architecture.

In the morning we shall visit Avignon's Papal Palace, one of the grandest and most fabled medieval structures in all of Europe, which was the seat of the Holy See during the 14th century.

The second half of the day will be devoted to Classical architecture. South of the city, and at the foot of the Alpilles hill range, is the town of St. Remy de Provence, We will stop there for lunch and admire the arch of Glanum and the Mausoleum of the Julii, one of the world's best preserved Roman Mausoleums. We will continue across the Rhone to view the Post du Gard, a beautifully situated and perfectly preserved Roman aqueduct, and an icon of southern France, and conclude in the City of Nimes, where a local professor of Architecture will walk us through wonders of modern and ancient structures, discussing the city's classical treasures and it's modern challenges.

Dinner on your own

Night at Hotel L'Europe, Avignon.

Day 4 - Tuesday, The Culinary Arts: Avignon, Chateauneuf du Pape

Every good meal begins with a stroll through the market. At Avignon's "Les Halles", the famous enclosed market in the very heart of the city, we will be greeted by a local chef, who will guide us through the shopping experience, then lead us to an atelier, where we shall prepare our own lunch from the finest and most exciting ingredients, following provencal traditions.

North of the city is the Rhone Valley's finest wine country. The village of Chateauneuf du Pape served as the Pope's retreat during their century-long sojourn in Avignon. The intense, hearty reds produced by its vineyards, sometimes featuring more than a dozen grape varieties, have remained legendary ever since. We will travel up to the village for a winery visit and an experience of local olive oil making. Tonight's dinner will be served at one of the region's top rated restaurants.

Dinner with group

Night at Hotel L'Europe, Avignon

Day 5 - Wednesday, Music: Les Saintes Maries de la Mer, Sette, Montpellier

The marshes of the Camargue have been a site of pilgrimage for the Roma people of France and Spain for centuries. In the morning we will venture there and drive on small roads where flamingos will likely be sited to the country of Mad de Calabrun, for a morning snack, the sound of Gypsy guitars and the story of a lively and fascinating tradition.

Sette, a beautiful city of canals situated further west along the coast, was the hometown of great French troubadour George Brassens. We will visit the beach in which he asked to be buried, in order to "spend death on vacation", hear the story of Brassens and of French chanson in general, and enjoy a seafood lunch by the piers. Then it's on to city of Montpellier, which is currently home to a local folk revival. Following free time to explore the bubbling old town, we shall conclude our musical adventure by meeting the young people who preserve southern France's traditional rhythms, and get a dance lesson too.

Dinner on your own

Night at Hotel L'Europe, Avignon

Day 6 - Thursday, Painting: Arles, Aix en Provence

The light of Provence drew the greatest painters of the 19th century here. Impressionists were first to head south, but Provence is most strongly touched by the brush of two post impressionists. We will begin the day in Arles, Vincent Van Gogh's town of choice, hear of his life and witness some of the famous sites he depicted in his paintings.

Aix en Provence was the home of Paul Cezanne, ancestor of Cubism. We will head into the city to visit his atelier, and hear a bit about contemporary art in Aix from a local artist. Finally, in the gentle light of evening, we will greet his muse: Mount St. Victoire, which Cezanne depicted in over 80 masterpieces. Our hotel for the final few nights of the journey will be a country lodge set in the great wood of the St. Victoria range.

Dinner with group

Night at Le Lodge St. Victoire

Day 7 - Friday, Poetry and Prose: Valensol, Le Gorge du Verdun

Literature is best discussed where words can be heard, and so our day of letters is also our day of nature. We will travel east, into the mysterious deep forests of Var, to speak of writers who revered nature and the people who live amidst it: Jean Giono, great novelist of high Provence, Marcel Pagnol who told heart breaking and powerful tales of peasant life, and Frederic Mistral, poet laureate, poet, philologist and proponent of Provence's dying language.

Our exploration of literature will take place among the lavender fields of Valensol and on the steep slopes leading to the gorge of the Verdun, perhaps Europe's most spectacular canyon. There, amidst great beauty, we will hear precious words written about nature and of the people who live in it.

Dinner with group

Night at Le Lodge St, Victoire

Day 8 - Saturday, Cultural Fusion: Marseille

Marseille, France's second largest city, situated on the blue Mediterranean only twenty minutes south of Mt. St. Victoire's green slopes, offers many delights. For us it will be a perfect place to contrast the provencal cultural world we explored: from food, to music to painting, with at least two very different worlds, one: the urbanised-globalised experience of a big city, the other: the cultural richness brought by the North African population.

We will spend the full day in the city, exploring its gallery scene, its historical shops, the Arab market and the beautiful old port. We will enjoy the famous Bouillabaise fish soup for lunch and couscous for dinner, concluding the voyage in the most vibrant and exciting of settings.

Dinner with Group

Night at Le Lodge St. Victoire

Day 9 - Sunday, Departure Transfer to Marseille Provence airport