

FRANCE

# Lavender in Provence

A Guided Walking Adventure





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## Travel Style

As a Guided Adventure, this trip is one of our signature travel experiences and has been designed to let you leave all your cares behind—from 24/7 guides and accommodations to meals, transportation, and local wine or beer with dinner, you are assured an exceptional active-travel group adventure.

And, with our **optional Flight + Tour Combo and Aix-en-Provence Pre-Tour Extension** to complement this destination, we take care of all the travel to simplify the journey. Refer to the attached itinerary for more details.



## Overview

Experience the allure of Provence with lavender in bloom—from landscapes that inspired the Impressionists to world-renowned wineries and exquisite cuisine. From the meeting point in Aix-en-Provence, set off for famed Châteauneuf-du-Pape where you walk in the sun-drenched vineyards, learn first-hand about the concept of *terroir*, and visit the estate château for a tasting. In medieval Vaison-la-Romaine, explore the vibrant outdoor market, then along the slopes of Mont Ventoux, walk through oak forests and terraced fields before enjoying an afternoon *café* on the summit. Another day takes you to the high plateaus where lavender fields roll for miles, and then on to a distillery of this intense flower. In the Luberon region, discover the hilltop town of Gordes before enjoying a *table d'hôte* lunch in a shaded garden. No trip to Provence would be complete without a game of *pétanque* in the square and encounters with local farmers and cheese-makers. Immerse yourself in the Provençal *art de vivre* at intimate inns with exclusive dining rooms featuring regional delicacies—Picodon goat cheese, *fougasse* (flatbread), or marinated lamb—with a local vintage, of course.





# Daily Itinerary

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## DAY 1

Meeting in Aix-en-Provence. Châteauneuf-du-Pape loop walk; 5 miles, easy to moderate, 300-ft. elevation gain and loss. Domaine visit and wine tasting

Your exploration of Provence begins in Aix-en-Provence. After meeting your guide(s) and fellow travelers, you set off for the town of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, source of the renowned wine of the same name, about an hour drive. Literally translating as the “new castle of the pope,” this was the site of the pope’s summer retreat when the seat of the papacy was moved to Avignon from Rome in the 14th century. From the hilltop town, views extend over the Rhône Valley, the thousands of acres of vines originally brought here during the papal period, Avignon, and Mont Ventoux, providing an excellent visual introduction to the week’s itinerary. Your walk is on undulating farming tracks used only by the locals to work the surrounding vineyards, and trails linking two estates, each with a different character.

Later this afternoon, you make your way to one of the 55 producers of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation, where you stop for a tour and tasting to learn more about its cultivation and classification. You finally arrive in the medieval town of Mazan, your home for the next three nights. A welcome aperitif awaits

on the outdoor terrace, perhaps a chilled pastis, the anise-flavored drink of the South of France, accompanied by locally grown olives.

Dinner is a medley of Provençal cuisine, flavored by a true Mediterranean blend of olive oil, *herbes de Provence*, and tomatoes.



### Château de Mazan, Mazan

This former residence of the Marquis de Sade turned four-star hotel features 30 elegant rooms, an enchanting garden, and a stone swimming pool. The property perfectly highlights the castle's ancient architecture such as 19th-century tile, a massive staircase and fireplace, and an original library, while offering a warm family welcome and modern amenities.

## DAY 2

Vaison-la-Romaine market. Mont Ventoux walk; 4 miles, easy to moderate, 300-ft. elevation gain

This morning you transfer to the picturesque town of Vaison-la-Romaine, in the foothills of Mont Ventoux, Provence's highest mountain at over 6,200 feet, and a perennial stage on the Tour de France. Mont Ventoux is not as high as the Alps or the Pyrenees, but it stands alone in an otherwise flat Rhône Valley, soaring above the plains. Today is market day in Vaison: merchant stalls take over the town and offer the fresh bounty of the nearby farms and hillsides, seasonal fruits and vegetables, as well as local specialties such as truffles, lavender honey, and olive tapenades. Here there is time for you to explore on your own and choose local delicacies for your independent picnic lunch—perhaps a bit of Picodon goat cheese and a fragrant olive *fougasse*, a flat loaf similar to focaccia. You will eat your picnic lunch during this afternoon's walk.

Late morning, your marketing complete, a short drive takes you to the paths of Mont Ventoux at the ski resort of Mont Serein, where you stroll with awe-inspiring views of the snow-capped Alps and the chance to see wild mountain goats (chamois). You picnic among the larch trees and wildflowers before transferring to the summit itself, where you enjoy an afternoon *café* at a restaurant that has been run by the same family for three generations, with spectacular views of the Rhône Valley and the Mediterranean Sea. On your way

down the southern slopes of Ventoux, you visit a family-run fruit and vegetable farm, where you walk through the greenhouses and taste produce right from the source, with sun-kissed melons and ripe tomatoes. Back in your home for the night, you may sip an aperitif by the poolside, before reconvening for dinner at a local restaurant.

### **Château de Mazan, Mazan**

#### **DAY 3**

Sault, 4 miles, easy to moderate, 300-ft. elevation gain and loss. Wine and cheese evening

It's a little-known fact that lavender—at least in its true medicinal form—is not actually a native Mediterranean plant, so it doesn't grow widely throughout Provence, at least not at lower elevations. That is why your itinerary takes you to the village of Sault this morning—at an elevation of around 2,400 feet; it is located on the high plateaus where the lavender fields are in full bloom. Today's walk circles the lavender fields, and you have an opportunity to learn everything there is to know about the precious flower. The route joins a botanical path, lined with fragrant lavender plantations, along the foothills of Mont Ventoux. You stop for free time and a leisurely lunch on your own in the village of Sault before a visit to a working lavender distillery.

This evening a special treat is in store: a wine and cheese evening hosted by a master cheese-maker, where you learn about some of France's more than 365 cheeses and discover how best to pair them with local wines. And of course, the best way to learn is by tasting, as you dine tonight on artisan cheeses that feature on the menus of the region's best restaurants.

### **Château de Mazan, Mazan**

## DAY 4

Gordes and Robion, 5 miles, easy to moderate, 300-ft. elevation gain. Lavender distillery visit. Transfer to Forcalquier

This morning, you transfer from Mazan and over the Monts du Vaucluse mountains to the village of Gordes. Perched almost impossibly over the



Calavon Valley, with its golden-stone homes rising in concentric circles up to its imposing Renaissance castle, Gordes is probably the most jaw-dropping hill-top village in Provence. You take the time to stroll through the village, among the labyrinth of cobbled streets, and admire it from its lesser-trodden paths. After, and possibly making a stop at Gordes' centuries-old café, you head to the Luberon Mountains and the village of Robion, nestled against the abrupt limestone slopes. A *table d'hôte* lunch is served at a local home, cooked by your host and enjoyed in her garden, under the canopy of majestic cedar trees while she shares her home and recipes passed down from grandmother to grandchild.

This afternoon you visit a family-run lavender distillery above the village of Apt and have a private tour of the operations, learning more about the delicate purple flowers and watching the distillery in action.

In the late afternoon, you continue on just over a half hour to the village of Forcalquier, near the vast plateaus of lavender, for a three-night stay. Your hotel is idyllically set in a landscape of rolling hills. After settling in and perhaps a dip in the pool, you enjoy a light dinner *al fresco* at your hotel.

### **Bastide Saint Georges Hôtel & Spa, Forcalquier**

Perched high on a hill overlooking the Luberon Natural Park of Provence, this stylish four-star hotel stretches over extensive grounds. Featuring spacious rooms and common spaces blending Provencal décor, exposed beams and stone, with contemporary comfort and design, also on the premises are an inviting swimming pool and spa and terraced lounge area.



## DAY 5

Saint Michel l'Observatoire, 6 miles, easy to moderate, 150-ft. elevation gain. Goat farm visit

Today, a short drive brings you to the sleepy village of Saint Michel l'Observatoire, which sits at 1,800 feet amid the *garrigue* vegetation of aromatic herbs and sparse oak and pine. The air is

so pure and the skies so clear that a center for astronomy was built here in the 1930s, giving the sleepy village its name. You stroll along the timeless paths in a landscape of rolling hills, and in a Provence far from the beaten track, with wafts of thyme and winter savory on the cool breezes.

After the walk, you visit and picnic at a family-run goat farm that produces the prized Banon goat cheese. The delicate cheeses are individually wrapped in chestnut leaves and taste of the *herbes de Provence* upon which the goats graze.

In the evening, back in Forcalquier, you enjoy dinner at a local bistro.

### Bastide Saint Georges Hôtel & Spa, Forcalquier

## DAY 6

Valensole Plateau, 6 miles, easy to moderate, 450-ft. elevation gain

Today, after croissants and *café au lait* at your hotel, you transfer across the Durance River to the Valensole Plateau, where the lavender fields stretch out seemingly infinitely to the horizon—a giant sea of light purple here in the “valley of the sun.” Up until the early 20th century, the more than 300 square miles of land making up the plateau around the village of Valensole was covered in almond orchards; now it is almost entirely dedicated to lavender production. Your walk plunges you into the fields of lavender, overlooking the surrounding hillsides and valleys, all the while accompanied by lavender-scented breezes. You choose an ideal picnic spot before proceeding to a family-run lavender distillery. Here, you learn the difference between true *lavande* and *lavandin*, and their respective medicinal virtues and commercial uses. Returning to your hotel in the later afternoon, there is time to relax with a drink before gathering for a festive farewell dinner at a favorite local restaurant.



## **Bastide Saint Georges Hôtel & Spa, Forcalquier**

### **DAY 7**

Departure from Forcalquier

After breakfast, the trip comes to a close with a drive just over an hour to Avignon, where you can continue your explorations in Provence or depart for other destinations in France.

## ITINERARY CHANGES

Please bear in mind that this is a typical itinerary, and the actual activities, sites, and accommodations may vary due to season, special events, weather, or transportation schedules. We reserve the right to alter the itinerary, since tour arrangements are made up to a year in advance and unforeseen circumstances may arise that mandate change. Itinerary changes are made to improve the tour and your experience.

## RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Country Walkers is a leader in active travel with responsible tourism an integral part of our core values. Our tours reflect our dedication to best travel practices—and to the preservation of indigenous cultures and the environment. Country Walkers has made a donation on behalf of every traveler to the CW Travelers Fund, which supports designated projects in the communities and habitats in which we travel. We invite you to learn more about our efforts and initiatives for giving back.

**Heard it on the Grapevine:** Châteauneuf-du-Pape—for true wine aficionados, this appellation is enough to make one's eyes light up. Among these world-famous vineyards, you learn the true meaning of *terroir*, where the type of soil, weather conditions, grapes, and winemaking savoir faire all contribute to a distinctive wine. On your tour, you visit a local wine producer who explains about the cultivation of grapes and the classification of wines. You also learn the traditional ways of producing wines in the region and how present-day vintners struggle with new standards and competition from around the world. Walking among the grapes, you also discover the differences between family wineries (following traditional practices and recipes handed down from generation to generation) and mass producers. Naturally, a trip to this region would be incomplete without a private tasting of the legendary wine.

# Tour Itinerary Overview

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## TOUR MEETING POINT AND TIME

**Hôtel Aquabella, Aix-en-Provence, France, 9:30 a.m.**

2 Rue Des Etuves

13100 Aix-en-Provence

Tel 00 33 442 991 500

Email [info-aquabella@partouche.com](mailto:info-aquabella@partouche.com)

[www.aquabella.fr](http://www.aquabella.fr)

## NIGHTS 1, 2, & 3

### Château de Mazan

Mazan, France

Tel 00 33 490 696 261

Email [reservation@chateaudemazan.com](mailto:reservation@chateaudemazan.com)

[chateaudemazan.com](http://chateaudemazan.com)

Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

## NIGHTS 4, 5, & 6

### La Bastide Saint Georges

Forcalquier, France

Tel 00 33 492 757 280

Email [info@bastidesaintgeorges.com](mailto:info@bastidesaintgeorges.com)

[bastidesaintgeorges.com](http://bastidesaintgeorges.com)

Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

## TOUR DEPARTURE POINTS AND TIMES

- **Hôtel Cloître St-Louis, Avignon, France, 11:00 a.m.**
- **Avignon TGV train station, Avignon, France, 11:30 a.m.**

## **EMERGENCY CONTACT**

### **One Call International**

Email [mail@oncallinternational.com](mailto:mail@oncallinternational.com)

### **If communicating from within the US**

Text 603.945.0103

Tel 800.555.9095

### **If calling from outside the US**

Tel 603.894.4710

When calling from outside the USA, you will need to dial the access code for the country you are calling from (a complete list of access codes, provided by AT&T, can be found on the Country Walkers website under Travel Tips and Travel Resources).

In the unlikely event you are unable to connect by phone with One Call, or the region you are calling from does not have an access code, you should speak with a live international operator and ask them to place a collect call to 800.555.9095 or 603.894.4710.

## **TRAVEL INSURANCE**

We offer guests the opportunity to purchase a Travel Protection Plan. Please contact us for details.



# Tour Facts at a Glance

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## TOUR LENGTH (WITHOUT FLIGHT PACKAGE)

7 days, 6 nights

## DEPARTURE DATES AND PRICE

Please refer to our website for the most current list of departure dates, scheduled group tour and private tour prices.

## MEETING POINT AND TIME

Hôtel Aquabella, Aix-en-Provence, France, 9:30 a.m.

## DEPARTURE POINTS AND TIMES

- Hôtel Cloître St-Louis, Avignon, France 11:00 a.m.
- Avignon TGV train station, Avignon, France, 11:30 a.m.

## ACTIVITY LEVEL

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 4 to 6 miles per day and limited options. There are daily ascents and descents up to 450 feet, with some steep sections. Trails are exposed or through oak and pine forests, sometimes on rugged hills dotted with Mediterranean herbs and shrubs, terraced farmland, and hillside vineyards. The terrain includes mostly single-track trails with loose stones or gravel, and some dirt roads, rocky wooded paths, and ancient ruins with uneven stone steps.\* The itinerary balances invigorating walks in the countryside with stops at outdoor picnic sites, and explorations of a market, a wine estate, or village cafés, to ensure a full immersion in the Provençal *art de vivre*. It's important to be aware of the heat during the dates this tour is offered. Lavender only blooms in Provence from mid-June to mid-July. Temperatures at this time can be very warm, from high 70s to low 90s, with very bright sunlight, which can increase the perceived activity level. *\*walking sticks are highly recommended*

## **INCLUSIONS**

- » Two expert, local guides (for groups of 8 or more), with you 24/7
- » All meals except for two lunches; local wine or beer included with dinners
- » All accommodations while on tour
- » Transportation from the meeting point to the departure point
- » Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary
- » Destination information (weather, visa requirements, etc.) and other travel assistance available 24/7 provided by One Call International
- » The unbeatable and cumulative experience of the Country Walkers staff

## **LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN**

Prior to your adventure you will be asked to sign a Passenger Participation Agreement and you will receive:

- » Luggage tags
- » List of travel companions and guide biographies

## **GRATUITIES**

Gratuities for all hotels, meals, and services that are included in your tour price will be paid by Country Walkers. Should you wish to tip your Country Walkers guide(s), the standard in the industry ranges from \$10 to \$15 per person, per day (or \$20 to \$30 per couple, per day), and can be paid in USD or local currency.

# Traveling To and From Your Tour

If you are interested in reserving the **optional Flight + Tour Combo** and **pre- or post-tour extensions**, please refer to the attached itinerary for more details.

## TOUR MEETING POINT AND TIME

**Hôtel Aquabella, Aix-en-Provence, France, 9:30 a.m.**

Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

## MOST CONVENIENT AIRPORT

Marseille Provence Airport (MRS), Marignane  
**[marseille-airport.com](http://marseille-airport.com)**

## GETTING TO THE MEETING POINT

**From Marseille Provence Airport (MRS), Marignane:**

From the Marseille Provence Airport ([marseille-airport.com](http://marseille-airport.com)), you can travel to the tour meeting point via a 30-minute bus ride to the Aix-en-Provence bus station and a short taxi ride (5 minutes). A bus departs from the Marseille Provence Airport bus station's platform 1 (near Halls 1, 3, and 4) for Aix-en-Provence: take the bus five stops (30 minutes) to Aix-en-Provence bus station ("gare routiere"). The bus ticket (~9 euros) can be purchased on the bus or at the airport bus ticket desk ([www.aixenbus.fr/](http://www.aixenbus.fr/)). Taxis are available at the Aix-en-Provence bus station for the 5-minute ride to Hotel Aquabella (~10 euros).

A taxi from Marseille Provence Airport to the Hotel Aquabella costs approximately 60 euros (time: just under 30 minutes).

## PRE-TOUR ACCOMMODATIONS

If you are not reserving our optional Flight + Tour Combo, you may wish to stay at the Hôtel Aquabella, our meeting-point hotel, for the night prior to your tour. To make a reservation, please contact the hotel directly. Ideally situated in the Old Town of Aix-en-Provence, this four-star hotel offers spacious bright rooms and an indoor swimming pool and spa.

## **Hôtel Aquabella**

2 Rue Des Etuves  
13100 Aix-en-Provence  
Tel 00 33 442 991 500  
Email [info-aquabella@partouche.com](mailto:info-aquabella@partouche.com)  
[www.aquabella.fr](http://www.aquabella.fr)

Double room rates start at approximately 150 euros (depending on the room category), including breakfast.

## **DELAYS AND LATE ARRIVALS**

If you are delayed or miss the scheduled group meeting for any reason, we kindly request that you contact our emergency assistance provider, One Call International. This service is available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week to assist you with any type of travel delay. Please refer to the Emergency Contact details on your Tour Itinerary Overview page for One Call International contact details.

## **DEPARTURE POINTS AND TIMES**

- **Hôtel Cloître St-Louis, Avignon, France 11:00 a.m.**
- **Avignon TGV train station, Avignon, France, 11:30 a.m.**

You may travel from Avignon to your next destination in two ways:

- » Train from either Avignon's city-center or its TGV train stations;
- » Taxi or Train to the Marseille Provence Airport.

Because most flights to the U.S. are scheduled in the morning, it will likely not be possible for you to arrive at the Marseille Provence Airport early enough to depart to the U.S. on the last day of the tour. Please contact your airline directly for specific check-in requirements. If your travel plans require an early departure, a transfer from the last hotel on tour to the Marseille Provence Airport takes approximately 1 hour 15 minutes and costs approximately 200 euros.

Getting from Avignon center to the Marseille Provence Airport:

- » Taxi: about a one-hour drive; 200 euros.
- » Train: 1 hour 30 minutes; 20 euros (get off at Vitrolles Aeroport and take the free 5-minute airport shuttle bus to airport terminal).



For further rail information, including reservations, schedules, and up-to-date fares, please call Rail Europe at 877.257.2887 or consult their website: [raileurope.com](http://raileurope.com). Or you may consult the French rail website: [voyages-sncf.com](http://voyages-sncf.com). We recommend making train reservations in advance for major train routes. Reservations are required for all TGV trains.

If you are not reserving our optional Flight + Tour Combo, you may wish to stay at the departure point hotel, the Hôtel Cloître St-Louis after the tour.

### **Hôtel Cloître St-Louis**

20 rue Portail Boquier  
84000 Avignon  
Tel 00 33 490 27 55 55  
Fax 00 33 490 82 24 01  
Email [hotel@cloitre-saint-louis.com](mailto:hotel@cloitre-saint-louis.com)  
[cloitre-saint-louis.com](http://cloitre-saint-louis.com)

Double room rates start at approximately 225 euros (depending on the room category), including breakfast.

An alternate hotel that you may reserve on your own is the Avignon Grand Hotel, close to the Hôtel Cloître St-Louis. Ideally located at the foot of the city ramparts, it has 122 spacious rooms. Please contact them directly for a reservation.

### **Avignon Grand Hotel**

34 Boulevard Saint Roch  
84000 Avignon  
Tel 00 33 490 80 98 09  
Fax 00 33 490 80 98 10  
Email [reservationagh@cloitre-saint-louis.com](mailto:reservationagh@cloitre-saint-louis.com)  
[thegrandhotelavignon.com](http://thegrandhotelavignon.com)

Double room rates start at approximately 225 euros (depending on the room category), including breakfast.

# Information & Policies

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## **GUARANTEED DEPARTURES**

Country Walkers guarantees the departure of every tour\*—no exceptions and no disappointments! From the moment you make your deposit, you can start preparing for your adventure. We take care of all the details to ensure a seamless, small-group experience (with an average of 6 or 7 guests per guide). For best availability, reserve your trip today! *\*except in cases of force majeure*

## **RESERVATIONS**

Reservations for this tour may be made by calling 800.464.9255. We can confirm your reservation with a deposit of \$350 per person. Final tour cost is due 90 days prior to tour departure date. As arrangements are confirmed at least a year in advance, the price is subject to change.

## **GUEST RESPONSIBILITIES**

Each guest has the responsibility to select a trip appropriate to his/her abilities and interests and to prepare for the trip by carefully reading the confirmation materials. To join this trip, you must be in good health and capable of completing activities as described in the day-to-day itinerary. Our in-house experts welcome the opportunity to discuss the tour in more detail. In order to meet your needs, we ask that you please share any relevant physical limitations or health conditions when you make your reservation.

## **CANCELLATION POLICY**

Cancellations received 91 days or more prior to the tour start date will incur a loss of \$150; cancellations received between 90 and 61 days prior to the tour start date incur a loss of 25 percent of the tour price; there are no refunds within 60 days of the tour start date. Up to 91 days prior to departure, you may transfer your reservation, depending on availability, from one departure to another in the same calendar year at no cost\*. Please notify us in writing.

*\*One transfer per year; afterwards a modest per person transfer fee will apply. Please note that tours with seasonal prices may involve a higher price.*

# France at a Glance

## ENTRY REQUIREMENTS



**U.S. citizens:** Passports are required and must be valid for at least 3 months beyond the dates of travel. Visas are not required for stays of up to 90 days. For more information, see

[travel.state.gov/travel](http://travel.state.gov/travel)

## CURRENCY

France uses the euro (EUR). For up-to-date exchange rates, see [oanda.com](http://oanda.com)

## TIME ZONE

France is in the Central European Time Zone, Eastern Standard Time plus 6 hours. For more information on worldwide time zones, see

[worldtimezone.com](http://worldtimezone.com)

### Travel Tip

- Have a variety of options to start your trip: ATM card(s), credit card(s), some dollars to exchange, and some euros in small denominations.
- Contact your credit-card company for details on fees and card use when traveling.

## PHONE & INTERNET



France country code: +33

Cell phone coverage throughout France is extensive, but cannot be guaranteed to be accessible on all American mobile carriers or to function at all times while on the trail or in remote areas. For more information regarding international phone use, please refer to [countrywalkers.com/phones](http://countrywalkers.com/phones).

Internet access is generally very good in towns and villages; however, it is not guaranteed at all of the hotels used on the tour. For more details regarding Wi-Fi availability, please refer to the Tour Itinerary Overview.

## LANGUAGE

The official language of France is French.

While knowledge of the local language is not necessary, you may want to learn some fun and useful phrases; see [bbc.co.uk/languages/French](http://bbc.co.uk/languages/French) or the enclosed Reading Guide for a suggested phrase book.

## ELECTRICITY

### Travel Tip

- Bringing your own hair dryer or other electrical device? You'll need a travel converter, available at most hardware, travel, or consumer electronic stores.
- For laptops or an electronic device with a dual voltage switch, you'll need the adapter plug but not a converter.

Alternating current of 230V and 50Hz is used in France. Plugs have either two round pins and a hole, or just two round pins. For a full listing of electrical outlets worldwide, see [electricaloutlet.org](http://electricaloutlet.org)

## WEATHER

France has a range of climates, and—depending on the region—spring, summer, and fall are ideal for an active vacation.

Provence, in southern France, has a pleasant Mediterranean climate with daytime temperatures in the 70s during tour dates. Normandy and Brittany, on

the northwest coasts, can have pleasant weather in the 50s to low 70s, and evenings in the 50s with occasional rain showers. In the French Alps, mornings and evenings can be around freezing in the morning and evening, especially at higher elevations, with daytime temperatures rising into the 70s and even low 80s.

For up-to-date forecasts, see [qwikcast.com](http://qwikcast.com). For historical average temperatures and rainfall, see [qwikcast.weatherbase.com](http://qwikcast.weatherbase.com)

## FOOD & DRINK

French cuisine has great regional variation and, thus, is based on fresh and local ingredients from each area. In France's northern tier, the rich butter- and cream-based classics originated—and the creamy cow's milk cheeses of Normandy such as camembert. Fresh seafood, especially oysters, is served in Brittany. In the Alps, hearty mountain fare includes cheese fondue and grilled raclette cheese over steamed potatoes. The cuisine of southern France is quintessentially Mediterranean, with olive oil, herbs, fresh vegetables, and goat cheeses. Common to all regions, of course, are crusty breads, buttery croissants, and exquisite desserts, from fine pastries to rustic fruit tarts.

A meal in France—lunch or dinner—typically consists of three courses, starting with an *entrée* (appetizer), followed by a *plat principal* (main dish), and finishing with a dessert or cheese plate. First brought to Narbonne in the south by the Romans, the wines of France mirror the variation and excellence of its cuisine.





Menus feature a region's local wines, as well as those from other regions. For example, In Provence, red Rhône or rosé wines pair perfectly with the cuisine. In Normandy and Brittany, local hard cider is served with crepes and Calvados, apple brandy, as an after-dinner *digestif*.

## LIFE IN FRANCE

### Shopping and banking hours

Shops and stores are generally open Monday to Saturday between 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., and from 2 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.; department stores and supermarkets are open all day from 9:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Open-air markets vary by day of the week in towns and villages and generally operate from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Banks are open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday (in Paris they are open all day).

### Meal times

Breakfast is served at hotels from 7 to 10-10:30 a.m. In restaurants, lunch is served (almost exclusively) from noon to 2 p.m. (at other times, you'll have to get a sandwich) and dinner is served from 7:30 to 10 p.m.

### Tipping

Gratuities in restaurants and bars are included in the total bill (*service compris*); however it is customary to leave 5 to 10 percent of the total, or to round up the total. Taxi drivers are tipped 10 to 15 percent of the total. For luggage assistance, a tip of 1.50 euros per bag is appropriate.



## TRAVEL RESOURCES

National French tourist board official site  
[us.france.fr](http://us.france.fr)

### Public holidays

To assist in travel planning, it may be helpful to be aware of French public holidays, visit the French tourist board's website:

[us.france.fr/en/information/french-public-and-school-holidays](http://us.france.fr/en/information/french-public-and-school-holidays).

### Travel Tip

Be aware that you have to validate your train ticket by “punching” it before boarding, using a small machine located on the way to the train platform, which stamps the time and date on it.

## TRAVEL IN FRANCE

### Trains

**SNCF:** [sncf.com/en](http://sncf.com/en), France’s national train company.

**Rail Europe:** [raileurope.com](http://raileurope.com) or 800.622.8600: a U.S.-based company that provides schedules, reservations, and ticketing for all European train networks (their multi-day/-week/-month passes in one country or combinations of countries may be an economical and convenient choice for European train travel.)

### Other local transportation

Direct flights from the U.S. are only available to Paris, Nice, and Lyon, but reaching any destination is easy thanks to France’s excellent rail network. Regional bus lines and internal flights (which are never more than 1½ hours) are also widely available. For information on French airports, visit [www.aeroport.fr](http://www.aeroport.fr) (in French only). Taxis are available at all major airports, train stations, and in smaller towns, and can be reserved in advance (your hotel can usually provide assistance). Most major car rental agencies are available at French airports and train stations. For more information, go to [us.france.fr/en/about-france/renting-car-and-driving-france](http://us.france.fr/en/about-france/renting-car-and-driving-france).

## FRENCH WINE AT A GLANCE

Each wine of France has a particular grape varietal linked to its *terroir*—the combination of local climate and soil conditions. Here is an overview of France’s main wine-producing regions: Alsace, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, Loire, Provence, and the Rhône Valley.

Region	Grape	Notes
Alsace	Gewürztraminer, Pinot blanc, Pinot gris, and Riesling	Tall, narrow <i>flûte</i> -shaped bottles contain some of the world’s driest Rieslings that pair nicely with seafood, spicy cuisines, and cheeses.
Bordeaux	Cabernet sauvignon, Cabernet franc, and Merlot	Balanced dry reds accompany meat and cheeses, and dry whites with seafood.
Burgundy	Reds are Pinot noir and whites are Chardonnay	Unoaked white (Chablis) pairs with seafood and poultry, and reds with classic beef dishes.
Champagne	Pinot noir, Chardonnay, Pinot meunier	Champagne’s scale of sweetness from less to more is: Brut Natural or Brut Zero, Extra Brut, and Brut. Delicious as an aperitif and with raw oysters, it’s best served between 45 and 48° F, in a <i>flûte</i> , of course!
Loire	Reds: Cabernet franc Whites: Sauvignon blanc, Chenin blanc, Melon de Bourgogne	To accompany seafood, look for whites from Sancerre, Vouvray, and Pouilly-Fumé.
Provence	Reds: Mourvèdre, Grenache, Cinsault, with Cabernet sauvignon and Syrah growing, and Carignan decreasing; White: Grenache blanc, Marsanne, Viognier, Chardonnay	Reds can accompany roasts and grilled dishes. Chilled rosé pairs well with the garlic-based dishes of the region.
Rhône Valley	Grenache, Syrah, and Viognier	Classic red wines, such as the southern Rhône’s Châteauneuf-du-Pape, pair well with grilled dishes, cheese, and fruit.

# Packing List

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## PACKING TIPS

Pack light! Keep in mind there will be times you may have to carry your own luggage short distances, especially before and after your Country Walkers tour. Due to space constraints, we require you to limit your luggage to one medium piece (approximately 18x15x29 inches or 8,000 cu. in.) and one small carry-on, per person. We recommend packing any personal necessities, medications, your hotel itinerary/emergency contact information, your hiking boots (or shoes), and extra clothes in your carry-on luggage in the event that your baggage is delayed. We suggest leaving valuable jewelry at home. A copy of your passport or other important documents should be kept in a separate area of your luggage. Always be alert when carrying a purse, camera, money belt, or backpack in busy cities, airports, and train stations.

## FOOTWEAR

- » Hiking boots or shoes. There are many brands to choose from. Proper fit is crucial, so try on new boots or shoes while wearing socks you plan to use on tour. Be sure to break in new footwear well before your tour begins. By the time you're ready to join your walking tour, you should be able to complete 5-7 miles of walking without discomfort. We require lightweight boots or shoes with proper ankle support and good tread to ensure stability on all types of terrain. Waterproof footwear keeps feet dry in heavy rain and water resistant footwear keeps feet dry in heavy dew. Country Walkers reserves the right to deny participation to any guest not wearing appropriate footwear.
- » Synthetic, moisture-wicking socks (cotton socks are not recommended for walking as they will quickly cause blisters)
- » Blister remedy

## CLOTHING

- » Lightweight, wash-and-wear long pants
- » Long-sleeved, wash-and-wear shirt
- » T-shirts and shorts
- » Polar fleece or light wool pullover (it will keep you warm even when wet)
- » Dinner attire: dress is smart casual

## OUTERWEAR

- » Waterproof rain gear: jacket, pants, hat, or hood
- » Windbreaker with hood (your rain gear may be suitable)
- » Hat with a broad brim or visor

## EQUIPMENT

- » Pack (minimum size of 25L): large enough to carry water, extra clothing, rain gear, and personal items (camera, etc.), and picnic supplies.
- » Waterproof cover for pack
- » Water bottle, canteen, or CamelBak-type water reservoir or hydration pack to carry your own water while walking (equivalent of one liter)
- » Sunblock and lip balm
- » Insect repellent
- » Sunglasses
- » Toilet kit for when facilities are not available on the walks. Include zip-lock baggies, tissues, and moist towelettes, which can be disposed of upon return to the hotel.
- » Personal first-aid kit including any medications you ordinarily take (in their original container)

## OPTIONAL

- » Telescopic walking sticks. (Please note that while telescopic walking sticks are highly recommended for this tour, they are not provided by Country Walkers. Therefore, please plan on bringing your own should you wish to use them.)
- » Binoculars
- » Bathing suit for optional swimming in the hotel pools
- » Camera and charger and/or extra batteries
- » Zip-lock bags (to keep camera and valuables dry)
- » Small notebook and pen
- » Field guides (see enclosed reading list)
- » Folding umbrella
- » Bandana

- » Washcloth (many European hotels do not provide them)
- » Hand sanitizer and/or moist towelettes