

France: Provence & St. Rémy

Tour-Only Itinerary

Spring breezes carry the scent of sage, rosemary, and wild thyme as you climb along a ridgeline, and radiant sunlight warms your face. A patchwork of olive groves and vineyards stretches far across the valley below, while further up the trail, Les Baux's medieval buildings peek out from chalky white hillsides dotted with cypresses and red poppies. Exploring southern France's most beautiful villages, each walk prompts the same question: What could possibly be more picturesque? The vibrant Van Gogh landscapes surrounding St. Rémy? The fragrant lavender fields outside Sénanque Abbey? The ochre-hued contours and red cliffs etched into the dramatic landscapes of the Luberon massif? Every day, this walking tour in Provence finds new ways to delight your senses.



Highlights

- Follow the ridgeline of the windswept Alpilles on a walk with awe-inspiring 360-degree views before stopping in the medieval village of Les Baux-de-Provence for lunch.
- Stay in delightful, local accommodations imbued with Provençal charm, where friendly owners greet you with warm hospitality and a glass of wine.
- Rub elbows with locals as you explore the colorful stalls of open-air markets in quaint towns like St. Rémy, Gordes, and Bonnieux.
- Gain a deeper appreciation for the work of Vincent Van Gogh, as you visit the sites where he created some of his most iconic paintings.
- Explore the red-hued Ochre Trail, a rich landscape of soaring cliffs and finger-like rock formations

once mined for its pigments.

On all Self-Guided Adventures you can count on ...



A local representative available 24/7.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Detailed maps & route notes featuring turn-by-turn directions and places of interest.



Experts to handle all the details, including moving your luggage between hotels while you're out exploring.



Scheduled taxi transfers to bring you to and from each day's walks.



Access to a Self-Guided Flight Concierge—ask our knowledgeable team to find flights that sync with your planned trip.



Delicious meals—many are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Self-Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 6 to 8 miles per day and limited options. There are daily ascents and descents—with some steep sections—up to 1,000 feet. Walks are through oak and pine forests, rugged hills dotted with Mediterranean herbs and shrubs, terraced farmland, and hillside vineyards. The terrain includes single-track trails, mostly cobbled

but also loose stones or gravel. The terrain also includes farming tracks, some dirt roads, and occasionally a paved country road. This diverse itinerary combines both the Alpilles and the Luberon mountain ranges, passing scenes painted by Van Gogh as well as golden hilltop villages, with plenty of time for trailside picnics and to explore archaeological sites or markets. Remember: preparation is the key to ensuring your tour readiness; the more you walk or participate in aerobic exercise prior to your trip, the more you will enjoy your experience!

DAY 1

Your France: Provence & St. Rémy tour begins

You are met in Avignon and transported about 25 minutes to the classic southern French town of Saint-Rémy-de-Provence at the foot of the Alpilles Mountains. Renaissance mansions, restored homes, and historic buildings line the winding streets of the town, which has the distinction of being the birthplace of Nostradamus. With scenery that inspired many a great artist—most notably Vincent Van Gogh—Saint-Rémy-de-Provence is a blend of natural beauty and Provençal life with its cobblestone streets, old fountains, and sidewalk cafés. It is also home to a legendary open-air Wednesday market, with vendors selling fresh vegetables, bread, wine, olive oils, herbs, spices, and much more from stalls throughout the curving alleys and shady squares of the old town. Relax with an apéritif of chilled pastis (the local anise-flavored liqueur) at your accommodation, beneath the shade of the fig trees your hotel is named for. Dinner tonight is a short walk away at a local restaurant.

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2

Van Gogh loop

6.2 miles, easy to moderate, 800-ft. elevation gain and loss. Additional optional detour: 5 miles, challenging, 1,000-ft. elevation gain and loss

Today you follow the Van Gogh trail through the landscape that inspired the artist. Along your walk, you'll find replicas of paintings displayed beside the very scenes that inspired them. Viewing Van Gogh's works beside the Trinquetaille Bridge, the Rhone Waterfront, and the Hospital Garden, you'll see how these everyday settings appeared in the artist's eyes. Next, explore the ancient Roman ruins of Glanum. Once a

powerful city, Glanum's most important monuments include an imposing triumphal arch and a mausoleum. At one time Glanum was a religious compound with many temples, and today several ornate pillars remain. Perhaps as a continuation of your Van Gogh tour, you'll make a visit to the Saint-Paul de Mausole, a former monastery now a psychiatric hospital where Van Gogh spent his final year. During a tour you can view the room where Van Gogh stayed during his time at the institution. Afterward, follow a winding botanical path up a gradual trail to the crest of the Alpilles Mountains. Aromatic herbs and wildflowers carpet the hills as the views extend far into the horizon—a perfect setting for a picnic lunch. Upon your return to St. Rémy, the rest of the day is at your leisure.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3

Saint-Rémy-de-Provence to Les Baux-de-Provence. Travel to Gordes

6.2 miles, easy to moderate, 900-ft. elevation gain and 350-ft. elevation loss

Today, once again, you leave St. Rémy on foot ascending the Alpilles, but this time you'll take a different path to the top. Follow a rolling trail along the ridge to awe-inspiring 360-degree views, which continue as the path gently undulates toward the fortified medieval village of Les Baux-de-Provence, set atop a rocky perch. Here, you'll stop to eat lunch (before 2:00 p.m. if you opt for one of the many restaurants in town), and then take some time to explore the village itself, one of the official "most beautiful villages of France." Enjoy spectacular views from the Chateau des Baux fortress, an area atop a high, rocky pinnacle dotted with the ruins of castle walls. You may opt to visit the exciting Carrières de Lumières museum, famed for its unique, all-encompassing audio-visual shows. A one-hour afternoon drive takes you to the Luberon Mountains and the village of Gordes, your home for the next two nights, and classified as another one of the "most beautiful villages of France." After settling in at your hotel, stroll into town for dinner on your own.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4

Abbey de Sénanque loop

6.2 miles, easy to moderate, 800-ft. elevation gain and loss

The paths around Gordes are lined with old stone walls, lone farmhouses, and *bories*—centuries-old

round shepherd's huts constructed from dry stone. Many *bories* were an end to a means for the ancient shepherds and farmers who created them—as they cleared their fields, they repurposed the stones to create a shelter. Follow a path into a valley, and soon you'll come upon the 12th-century Sénanque Abbey, sitting amid some of the very few lavender fields in the area (which are in bloom from late June through July). Founded in 1148, today the abbey is home to Cistercian Monks who tend the lavender fields and also keep honeybees. Enjoy a delicious picnic lunch, admiring the peaceful scenery, and be sure to visit the abbey before your return hike. A somewhat steep climb brings you back to Gordes. Stop along the way and take in stunning vistas of the town and landscape below. Back at your hotel, late-afternoon relaxation may include a refreshing swim before a drink and another delightful dinner.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5

Goult to Bonnieux OR Lacoste to Bonnieux. Travel to Roussillon-en-Provence

7.5 miles, easy to moderate, 1,050-ft. elevation gain and 800-ft. elevation loss OR 3.5 miles, easy to moderate, 750-ft. elevation gain and 200-ft. elevation loss

Today you can choose from two walking options. For the longer option, a short taxi ride brings you to the Calavon Valley and the timeless village of Goult—perhaps the least-known and least-visited of the “most beautiful towns” in the Petit Luberon area. Starting at the town's Romanesque church, medieval lanes lead you to the restored 18th-century Moulin de Jérusalem—one of the few remaining windmills that were strategically placed on the region's ridges to grind grain. With sweeping views of the Calavon Valley below, you make your way past *bories* and farmhouses to the neighboring village of Lacoste, once home to the infamous Marquis de Sade, a shameless hedonist whose free-thinking (and free-living lifestyle) landed him in prison. The Marquis' 11th-century château sits tall above the town and has been recently purchased (and restored) by fashion designer Pierre Cardin. Continue back into the valley (or begin from here if you choose the shorter walking option) through cherry orchards, vineyards, and truffle oak plantations. As you near the village of Bonnieux, the first thing you'll see is its 12th-century church tower peeking out from under a canopy of massive cedar trees. This hillside town boasts superb architecture—evidence of the town's former wealth when it was the residence of bishops. There are many dining options to consider for lunch—some with spectacular views over the valley—before a 15-minute taxi ride delivers you to Roussillon-en-Provence, your home for the next two nights.

Charming and historic, Roussillon is renowned as one of the most beautiful villages in France. It lies within the Natural Regional Park of Luberon, whose three mountain ranges—Lesser Luberon, Greater Luberon and Eastern Luberon—offer a vast network of walking trails. But perhaps this area is best known as the scenic setting of Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence*, which chronicled the author's stay here. Late this afternoon, settle into your hotel with a refreshing swim before stepping out to dinner at one of our recommended local restaurants.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6

The Ocher Trail

0.7 miles, easy, 125-ft. elevation gain and loss OR 0.9 miles, easy, 175-ft. elevation gain and loss

Your final day provides ample opportunity to relax and drink in the stunning beauty of Roussillon-en-Provence, its magnificent red cliffs and gorgeous surroundings a fitting cap to your walking adventure. This honey-hued village stands upon an ochre ridge. The richly colored clay here was heavily mined in the 18th century, its pigment used in textiles. Today, mining is prohibited so that the region's fiery beauty can be preserved. Your walk today follows the *Sentier des Ogres*, or the Ochre Path.

You may choose a 30-minute or 60-minute walk along a marked path through a spectacular landscape sculpted by water, wind and the intrusions of humans from centuries past. Pause as you wish to admire soaring cliffs, finger-like formations pointing skyward and clusters of evergreens. This is unlike any other area you've explored in Provence. Take your time here, perhaps packing a picnic for a scenic lunch amidst the red and golden contours of the park.

There'll also be time today to visit Roussillon's Ochre Museum, located in a former factory once operated by the local Mathieu family. The historic space also serves as a *conservatoire*, or workshop. Browse the village shops for some keepsakes of your visit, linger at a café or restaurant, or relax by the hotel's inviting pool. Dinner is on your own once again.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7

Your France: Provence & St. Rémy tour concludes

You bid farewell to Provence. Transportation back to Avignon is provided after breakfast (approximately one hour).

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

Boutique accommodations	✓
7 meals: 6 breakfasts and 1 dinner	✓
Detailed water- and tear-resistant Route Notes and maps	✓
Orientation meeting with a Country Walkers representative	✓
Local representative available 24/7	✓
Scheduled taxi and luggage transportation (Please note: If unable to walk, it is possible to travel with your luggage from one accommodation to the next; there may be an additional charge.)	✓
Access to Self-Guided Flight Concierge—Ask our knowledgeable team to find flights that sync perfectly with your planned trip.	✓