

# Self drive holidays

## SD01 Loire and its chateaus

8-day & 7-night tour



## Itinerary

### Day 1 - Loire upriver from Orleans

In this first day you will visit some chateaux and historic monuments upriver from Orleans.

**Gien**, this little town was built atop a hill overlooking the river. It is well renowned for its earthenware factory founded back in 1820 as well as its red-bricked castle harboring the international hunting museum.

**Sully-Sur-Loire** whose castle, with its high towers and deep ditches, beautifully illustrates medieval fortresses. Sully, Grand Minister of King Henri VI - his most renowned owner - redeveloped the park, expanded and restored the edifice. You will then cross over the Loire River to go and visit the **Saint-Benoit-Sur-Loire Basilica**, only few kilometers away. Built to host the relics of Saint Benoit, it is a true testimony of the blossoming of the Roman Art in the Loire valley. You shall make a rest stop to visit the pre-Roman oratory of **Germigny-Les-Pres**, built during Charlemagne's reign around 806. Afterwards, you will make a stop in **Orleans**, one of the oldest towns in France that combines a prestigious environment with a rich past. May we suggest a stroll downtown where you will uncover the main monuments, the Saint Cross Gothic cathedral; the hotel Grosnot, residence to Kings passing by Orleans and the beautiful house of Joan of Arc, main town heroine.

### Day 2 - Castles of Chambord, Cheverny and visit of Blois

True Mecca of the French Renaissance, embodiment of the royal power of François I before Louis XIV, the **Chambord castle** never ceased fascinating its hosts and visitors, today as much as five centuries ago... 440 rooms, 365 fireplaces, 83 stair cases! Amazing madness required by a King who wanted to affirm his power to the powerful ones of Europe! Chambord is the most palatial and the most dazzling castle of the Loire Valley.

After the excessiveness, here comes the refined elegance of the **Cheverny castle** with its classical white stone facade. The chateau - seigniorial mansion built in the mid 1600's - which you may visit, kept its furniture and decoration from the XVII century. It is surrounded by a magnificent English style park harboring the orangery and a kennel hosting a pack of 70 dogs. On the way to Blois, you may stop and visit the **castle of Troussay**. (this small castle from the Renaissance era, housed a museum of remote farming and domestic tools) or the **Beaugard Castle**. The interest of this Renaissance style castle lies in its splendid Galerie des Illustres (this gallery hosts over 300 Kings, Queens and Greats of European Courts' portraits of the era) and in the Cabinet des Grelots (Bells Cabinet), quaint little work cabinet. **Blois**, atop a headland overlooking the Loire River, the castle is a true masterpiece, which reunites around one same courtyard four castles from different eras, four high points of the French architecture.

### Day 3 - Chaumont castle and the town of Amboise

Overlooking the Loire River from atop a cliff, the **Castle of Chaumont** used to be a fortress built during the X century. Demolished by Louis XI in 1465, it was then rebuilt and modified several times in the following centuries. The interiors are richly furnished and decorated. You will continue driving along the Loire to reach the **pagoda of Chanteloup** on the outskirts of Amboise. This Chinese style construction of a pure Louis XVI style was erected in 1775 and offers atop its 44 meters an imposing view of the Loire valley and the Amboise forest. It is the last testimony of the Duke of Choiseul's famous castle, destroyed in 1823. You shall go to Amboise and visit the town starting by the **Clos Lucé castle**. This beautiful white and pink stone construction was the last home of Leonardo Da Vinci. You will discover the privacy of a Renaissance style furnished mansion. Traverse this ancient town and its numerous alleys bordered by vintage houses and you will reach the Loire riverbank and its castle. Erected during the XV and XVI centuries, at the request of Charles VIII and François I, the **Amboise Castle** was the first regal mansion under the French Renaissance therefore hosting an exceptional furniture collection. Overlooking Amboise, the gardens offer one of the most beautiful landscapes of the Loire River. The Town Hall Museum is housed by an ancient mansion built during late 1500's.

### Day 4 - Chenonceau castle and the old town of Tours

Erected on the Cher River, atop an old windmill's foundation, the **Chenonceau castle** is a true illustration of the Renaissance era's architecture. A ladies castle according to French history since they supervised its construction embellished it and saved it from the French Revolution's damages. The castle is surrounded by a magnificent park and some beautiful French style gardens. It hosts a marvelous collection of vintage furniture from the Renaissance era, tapestries dating from the XVI and XVII centuries as well as some vintage master pieces.

**Tours** is a town of art and history. This ancient Gallo-Roman capital became Saint Martin's town during the IV century when the inhabitants begged him to be their bishop. Tours is best visited on foot. It is the perfect place to stroll along alleys and small parks, around the **Place Plumereau** bordered by beautiful wooden houses, or in the cathedral district, which has begun construction in the XIII century and was not finished before the XVI century. You may visit the cloister Psalette which is located right next to it and the castle whose tower Tour de Guise is the only remains from the XIII century. Tours possesses beautiful museum: the Beaux Arts museum located in the ancient bishop or the archeological museum of Touraine region located in the beautiful **Hôtel Gouin** – true masterpiece from the Renaissance era.

### Day 5 - Castles of Villandry, Langeais, Azay le Rideau and Ussé

You will leave Tours by the riverbanks, first the Loire river's then the Cher's, in order to reach **Villandry** The chateau was erected around 1536 and is the last of the big castles built on the Loire riverbanks during the Renaissance era. The present day gardens which are in complete harmony with the Renaissance architecture of the chateau are now the castle's source of renown.

After driving along the Loire you will cross an isolated bridge in order to reach **Langeais**, one of the oldest towns in the Touraine region, which is overlooked by its imposing castle. The later was built at the request of Louis XI, on the site of an ancient fortress which was destroyed during the 'Hundred Years War' and which the square donjon is the only remains. Nowadays, the castle is home to a beautiful Renaissance style furniture collection retracing the seigniorial life of the XV century and Renaissance era. Built on an island in the middle of the Indre River, the **Azay-Le-Rideau castle** was erected during François I's reign by a rich financier. It is one of the dwellings combining French castle charm to the Italian palaces' grace. You will then follow the Indre and Loire River's banks to come across **Ussé** where you may visit Sleeping Beauty's castle since it is said to have inspired Charles Perrault. Located on the edge of the Chinon forest, overlooking the Loire and Indre valleys, this castle seduces with its many roofs, small steeples, dormers and fire places which detach it from its green surroundings.

### Day 6 - Chinon, the Abbey of Fontevraud and Montreuil-Bellay

Let the day start by a quaint visit of **Chinon**, an ancient medieval city that is home to numerous remains from its rich past. Located atop a hillside overlooking the Vienne River, the castle spreads over 400 meters. True illustration of the Military art of the Middle Age, it is the product of additions and modifications spreading from the X to the XV century. This historical city has held on to ancient houses and few churches, which you may discover while strolling through its alleys. From Chinon, you will follow the Vienne River and visit **Candes Saint Martin**, a quaint village at the crossing point of Vienne and Loire River. There you may see a magnificent church dating from the XII and XIII centuries, built on the spot where Saint Martin passed away. You will then continue you stroll along the riverbank to admire the **Montsoreau castle**, an ancient stronghold built on the Loire riverbanks and modified during the XV century. You will go up to the **Abbey of Fontevraud**. It is among the vastest monastical ensembles of the Christian world. Founded in 1101 by Robert of Arbrissel, it quickly became famous by welcoming religious communities from different horizons, which, were placed under the authority of an abbess. Each community had its own covenant.

The abbey houses the remains of first Plantagenet, kings of England. You may visit the abbey, cloisters of Saint Mary and Saint Benoit, the dining hall as well as the kitchens (magnificent building). You will then reach **Montreuil Bellay**, quaint little town bordering the Thouet River and surrounding by fortifications which is still standing for the most part. There you may visit the lofty fortified castle built during the XI century: 650-meter long fortifications and 13 towers demonstrate the powerful defensiveness of this site! Later on, during the Renaissance era, its owners ordered the building of the 'new castle', an elegant mansion combining comfort with the Italian palaces style.

### Day7 - Saumur, church of Cunault, castles of Brissac, Serrant and Plessis-Bourré

**Saumur** is a beautiful town with a magnificent chateau overlooking the river Loire. It is one of the rare chateaux that displays 14th century architecture, what came at the end of the Middle Ages and before the Renaissance. In the 16th century, when the castle became a Protestant stronghold, the palace was fortified with buttresses and the like. The town still has old buildings dating back to the Middle Ages and two attractive churches, St Pierre and N.D. de Nantilly. You will then follow the Loire River's banks and reach **Cunault**. There you will enjoy the visit of the church, which used to belong to an abbey founded in 847. You will be amazed by the height and scale of the pillar of this Romanesque church. You will then continue along the Loire and reach Saint Remy La Varenne before arriving in **Brissac**. This castle will also surprise you by its height, sitting enthroned in the middle of a beautiful park, enjoying the shadow of magnificent cedars. Let yourself enjoy the richness of its furniture and tapestries. You will pass by the 'corniche angevine', road carved out of the cliff. From that point you will get an impressive view of the Loire and its quaint villages. After crossing the river you will visit the **castle of Serrant**. This sumptuous mansion, surrounded by moats, was built between the XVI and XVII centuries. The inside of the castle is richly furnished and is home to a library holding over 10 000 books.

End your day with the visit of the **Castle of the Plessis Bourré**. Surrounded by large ditch, and built in the late 1400's, it announced the Renaissance style by its comfort and art de vivre. The seigniorial quarters are richly furnished.

### Day 8 - Angers

The town spreads on both side of the Maine region and holds a very rich architectural patrimony. The **Angers castle** is set atop a rocky headland, ancient Gallo-Roman site, overlooking the Maine. In 1230, the young Saint Louis required the erection of a massive fortress of 25 000m<sup>2</sup> around the county palace, including 17 towers and two entries. Starting 1360, the Anjou dynasty had new buildings erected within the fortress : the Royal Sojourn, the Châtelet.

**The Tapestry of Apocalypse**, monumental tapestry and decor to princes, ordered in 1375 by Louis I of Anjou, is a testimony of this brilliant era. Of a spatial, clear and pleasant composition, it illustrates the text of the Apocalypse in 6 pieces and 74 frames alternating red and blue backdrops. This tapestry –of which remains 103 meters - may be seen in the Angers castle where a space has been created for this sole purpose.

You may devote your afternoon to the ancient town and its numerous buildings, including the **Saint Maurice cathedral**. This cathedral was built during the XII century and is the first building to show signs of the Angevine Gothic style with its beautiful stained glass windows

End of the tour in late afternoon.

## More details and tips

**The car** - You can do this tour with your own car or with a rental car (not included in the price).

We can get a rental car for you (Please contact us)

**Hotels** - On this tour, we suggest you to stay in hotels of different categories.

You will find below the list of hotels we work with, subject to availability at time of booking.

### Prestige Self drive holidays SD01-P – 4 or 5-star hotels

Day 1 – Romorantin - Grand hôtel du Lion d'Or 4\* (<http://www.hotel-liondor-romorantin.fr/>)

Day 2 – Onzain – Domaine des Hauts de Loire 4\* (<http://www.domainehautsloire.com/>)

Day 3 – Amboise –Le Choiseul 4\* (<http://www.grandesetapes.com/chateau-hotel-choiseul-amboise>)

Day 4 – Rochecorbon – Les Hautes Roches 4\* (<http://www.leshautsroches.com/>)

Day 5 & 6 – Chinon – Le château de Marçay 4\* (<http://www.chateaudemarçay.com/>)

Day – Angers –Château de Noirieux 4\* (<http://www.chateaudenoirieux.com/>)

## Luxe Self drive holidays SD01-L – 4-star hotels

Day 1 – Orléans – l’Hôtel d’Arc (<http://www.hoteldarc.fr/>)

Day 2 – Blois – Hôtel Mercure (<http://www.mercure.com/fr/hotel-1621-hotel-mercure-blois-centre>)

Day 3 – Amboise – Le manoir des Minimes (<http://www.manoirlesminimes.com/>)

Day 4 – Tours – Château Balmont (<http://www.chateaubelmont.com/>)

Day 5 – Fontevraud – Le Prieuré (<http://www.fontevraud.fr/>)

Day 6 – Saumur – Hôtel Saint Pierre (<http://www.saintpierresaumur.com/>)

Day 7 – Angers – Château des Briottières (<http://www.briottieres.com/>)

## Comfort Self drive holidays SD01-C – 3-star hotels

Day 1 – Orléans – l’Hôtel d’Orléans (<http://www.hotel-orleans-centre.com/>)

Day 2 – Blois – Hôtel Ibis (<http://www.accorhotels.com/fr/hotel-0920-ibis-blois-centre-chateau>)

Day 3 – Amboise - Le Vinci Loire Valley (<http://www.vinciloirevalley.com/>)

Day 4 – Tours – Mercure Tours Nord (<http://www.mercure.com/fr/hotel-1572-hotel-mercure-tours-nord>)

Day 5 – Fontevraud – Hostellerie de la Croix Blanche (<http://www.hotel-croixblanche.com/>)

Day 6 – Saumur – Hôtel Adagio (<http://www.bestwestern.fr/fr/hotel-Saumur,Best-Western-Adagio,93527>)

Day 7 – Angers – Hôtel du Mail (<http://www.hoteldumail.fr/>)

**Standard Self drive holidays Standard SD01-ST** – accommodations in 2-star family-run hotels handpicked for you and very often listed in Tourist French guides as Red Michelin or Gault et Millau guides

## Price includes

- 7 nights on B&B basis in hotels handpicked by us among the best.
- Parking fees if the hotel has one (only for Prestige and Luxe tours)
- The detailed road book with the GPS waypoints of the main landmarks, villages, attractions and hotels. It also contains maps of cities you will explore. (see below for more details)
- IGN maps of the area (scale 1 cm = 1 km)
- Green Michelin guide (tour guide) of the region
- Emergency phone number available 24/24 and 7/7

## Not including

- trip to the departure city of the self-drive tour
- Lunches and dinners (except if written in the tour description)
- Entrances fees to the different tourist sites
- Personal expenses...

## Starting and ending cities of tours

Tours start and end in cities or airports where you can easily pick up or return a rental car.

Tours start in the morning of the first day, often with a visit to the city. We recommend you to arrive the day before in the afternoon to better recover from your trip from home.

Tours end in the late afternoon in the last city or airport.

We can book a room for you for the night before or for the last day.

## Getting from and away

**By car** - Take the A6 motorway (Paris-Lyon) from Paris. Continue on A77 motorway after Nemours. Exit 19 and go along D940 to Gien.

**By train** – Direct trains from Paris Bercy to Gien (5 or 6 trains a day, about 1.30 hours’ journey) Only one car rental agency in Gien (Europcar)

**By plane** – the nearest international airport is Paris Charles de Gaulle where you will rent a car to drive to Gien (about 2 hours)

You can drop off rental car in Angers. TGV trains (fast trains) from Angers to Paris

## Other services

On request we can offer this tour with accommodation in charming B&B (manors, private chateaux, stylish villas...)