

Self drive holidays

SD06 Sceneries of Provence

8-day & 7-night tour

Itinerary

Day 1 - Avignon, visit of the town

Avignon was already an important town during the XII century thanks to the Benezet Bridge, which allowed the crossing of the river. Along with the Popes



arrivals during the XVI century, it became a second Rome. The Palais des Papes, is the biggest gothic palace in Europe and the famous Pont Benezet - which was swept away by the floods several times- are both ranked among the UNESCO World Heritage sites. The town harbors many monuments, numerous churches, magnificent plazas, the Saint Louis Cloister, fortifications, quaint alleys, private hotels and last but not least, districts such as the 'Teinturiers' (Cleaners) which are a must to visit. *Lodging and breakfast in Avignon*

Day 2 – Dentelles de Montmirail and Mont Ventoux

Scenic tour in the Dentelles de Montmirail, the first sign of the Alps in the Rhone River's valley. These low altitude hills, covered by Mediterranean flora, aromatic plants, green oaks, Alep pine trees, are dominated by a white limestone crest, finely sculpted by the erosion conferring their name as 'Dentelles' –Laces-

You shall discover **Baumes de Venise**, famous for its sweet wines - **Le Barroux**, dominated by its imposing Renaissance castle - **La Roque Alric** nested on a mountain peak - **Lafare** and the Roman chapel of Saint Christopher - **Suzette**, a quaint little village facing the Provence region's giant: **Mount Ventoux** and **Malaucène**, a small city surrounding a Calvary erected on the ruins of an ancient castle. From there you shall start climbing towards **Mount Ventoux** on the road, bordered by larches and beech trees, to reach Mount Serein before coming to Mount Ventoux after few sharp bends in a rock desert. The panorama is breathtaking and shall not let you down with a view spreading from the Mediterranean Sea to the high summits of the Alps, if not all the way to the Pyrenees Mountains. You shall come back down by the south side. The ledged road crosses rock fields of a surprising whiteness. You shall pass by the col des Tempêtes (pass) to go down towards Chalet Reynard, a small ski resort and the picturesque village of **Bédoin**. On the road past Malaucène, you shall then climb up to **Crestet**, a beautiful medieval village perched on crests. From the terrace of the castle, you may take a last look at Mount Ventoux before going back down and go to your hotel.

Day 3 – Ardèche gorges, Pont du Gard and Nîmes

From Orange you will head to Pont St Esprit and Vallon Pont d'Arc where you will reach the Ardeche river hurtling down the Cévennes montains and rushing into mighty gorges. After admiring the Pont d'Arc (Arch bridge) a gigantic natural stone arch spanning the river, you will follow a scenic road with numerous viewpoints at regular intervals. For 35 km, the gorges plunge, double back on themselves, loop, sinking and slicing through the limestone plateau. Some cliffs of the canyon rise 300 meters (1000 feet) straight up. An amazing ride!

The **Pont du Gard** is the most beautiful edifice and the most important of the aqueduct, which used to take water from sources of the Eure River to the castellum in Nîmes for over 50 kms. It is the tallest aqueduct bridge in the Roman world with its 49-meter high and its three levels of archway.

Nîmes was built thanks to a source, the Fontaine source that was deificated by the first inhabitants five centuries before the arrival of the Roman. You will visit the arenas, very well preserved – La Maison Carrée, a magnificent temple - The Fountain Garden located at the bottom of a hill - The Mount Cavalier, overlooked by the Magne Tower. The garden is host to the Diana's Temple, a delicate edifice which true function remains unknown. Further down the Castellum was the arrival of the famous aqueduct, which, passed over the Pont du Gard.

Day 5 – Alpilles tour, visit of Les Baux and St rémy de Provence

You shall drive along the Rhone river to **Tarascon**, city of the legends and stories. The chateau Rene stands proudly on the Rhone bank and is one of the most beautiful medieval castles in France. Close to the chateau, the Collegiate Church Ste Martha, built in the 12th and 13th centuries, houses the relics of the Saint. Then you will head towards the Alpilles mountains. From a distance, the whiteness of its arid and ragged caps contrasting against the azure blue sky gives the illusion of a large, looming mountain. You shall make a stop in **Fontvieille** and go up towards the Alphonse Daudet's windmill (famous French writer), which is erected, on a magnificent site from where you shall have a marvelous view of the Alpilles Mountains. The road meanders through vineyards and olive tree fields before reaching the **Baux de Provence**, a rocky fortress overlooking the valley. This city of the Princes of the Baux, abandoned during the XVIII century, was restored during the XX century. Do not leave without a visit of the quaint village and its alleys, the chapel of the White Penitents, the Saint Vincent church and the fortifications of the castle. You shall then cross the Alpilles Mountains to discover the antique city of **Glanum**, which, during centuries, was an important commercial center on the Avignon road at the bottom of the Alpilles. Only the center of town was to be unearthed. You shall admire the **Antiques**: the Arc de Triomphe, and the Mausoleum. Further down, on the road to Saint Remy, you shall make a halt to visit the Saint Paul of Mausole's monastery where Van Gogh resided and which church and cloister are remarkable. **St Remy of Provence**, its hotels and quaint residences, its shadowed plazas with their fountains and its quaint alleys will charm you without a doubt.

Day 6 - Luberon and perched villages

You shall leave Saint Remy for **Fontaine de Vaucluse**. This city is famous for its Fountain, mysterious hole where the Sorgue River springs, as well as for the humanist and poet Petrarque who lived there for many years. You shall then follow the first foothills of the Mounts of Vaucluse. The road leads you to the glen of the Senancole where the **Senanque Abbey** is nestled. Austerity and esthetic are the main characteristics to this Cistercian abbey, which witnessed many ordeals but always managed to preserve the majority of its buildings of Roman origins (XII and XIII centuries). Your way shall then take you to **Gordes**, which spreads out from the slopes of a cliff. You shall discover this quaint Provencal village while strolling down its pebbled alleys. Through the vine and orchard covered plain, you shall reach **Roussillon**. Built upon a rocky peak, this ochre facade village is surrounded by quarries and ochre cliffs. You shall enjoy strolling through quaint alleys surrounding the belfry and church before discovering the breathtaking ochre cliffs of the '**Chaussée des Géants**'. You shall then take the direction of the **Colorado of Rustrel**, a vast quarry site where ochre was once extracted. The exploitation combined with the erosion created a succession of peaks, steep cliffs, galleries and earth pillars all of flamboyant colors ranging from bright yellow to blood red. Many marked trails allow you to visit the ochre massif. You shall take the direction of the Petit Luberon mountain through winding, narrow roads to discover some quaint villages such as **Maubec**, **Oppede-le-Vieux**, **Menerbes**, **Lacoste** and **Bonnieux**, perched along the mountain. You shall cross the **Combe de Lourmarin** where the Aigue Brun River carved narrow gorges with steep inner walls before arriving in **Lourmarin**. There you shall discover its narrow alleys bordered by vintage houses leading to its castle built atop a hill.

Day 7 - Aix en Provence, Saint Victoire and Saint Baume Mountains

From Lourmarin, you shall cross the Durance River and may visit of the **Abbey of Silvacane**, built in XI century on a deserted stretch land covered by swamps. You will continue your way to **Aix en Provence**. The city is a history book in itself thanks to the Oppidum of Entremont occupied during the Roman era, the new district Sextius Mirabeau, the earls' town and the numerous private hotels of the Mazarin district... The ancient capital of the Provence region is proud to share its three-millennium old patrimony with you. May we recommend you visit the famous Mirabeau courtyard and its fountains, the medieval town surrounding the Saint Sauveur cathedral and its numerous shadowed plazas which give Aix its quaint ambiance. You shall leave town in the afternoon to follow the path of the **Saint Victory Mountain**, crowned by the Provence region cross, to reach **Vauvenargues** and its castle. You shall then continue towards the quaint village of **Puylobier** before coming across **Trets**, an ancient city that kept its fortifications. You shall then cross over the Regagnas Mountain to reach Saint Zachary before coming across **Nans-les-Pins**, which is overlooked upon, by the ruins of a castle and an old fortified village.

You shall then reach the Hostellerie at the bottom of the **Saint Baume Mountain**, a true white limestone fortress erected at more than 1000 meters of altitude and overlooking a beautiful forest, a sacred site during the Gaul era. Near the summit, you shall discover a cave carved by erosion. It is said that it was once haven to Saint Marie Madeleine, which is why it became an important pilgrimage site. No less than 8 Popes and 18 monarchs climbed up this trail... The road along the Saint Baume Massif crosses over the Espigoulier mountain pass before going back down to an almost barren landscape towards the glen of Saint Pons. This green haven harbors ruins of an ancient Cistercian abbey. Finally, you shall reach **Gemenos**, a quaint village, which was built upon the last foothills of the Saint Baume Mountain.

Day 8 - Cassis and Calanques

You shall head to **Cassis**. A quaint fishing port in a nearly closed bay and surrounded by hills covered by vineyards and olive trees. You shall leave your car behind to wonder by the port or stroll along alleys of the quaint village and its small fishermen houses. May we suggest you take a boat out to sea and discover the **Calanques Massif** spreading from Marseille to Cassis. Landscapes are breathtaking. The whiteness of the limestone and the crests detach from the blue sky. The boat enters the massif into these famous **calanques**, some narrow and deep indentations and ancient valleys carved by rivers that no longer exist. Back to Cassis, you shall have lunch on a terrace by the ancient port. Then back to your car and follow the road of the crests on the **Canaille mountain**, which falls into the ocean with its amazing cliffs: the **Soubeyran cliffs**. The highest cliffs in France with 399 meter high at the summit 'grande Tête'. You shall make a stop at one of many panoramic viewpoints to discover the vertiginous peaks. From **La Ciotat**, you shall reach **Marseille**. If you still have time, may we suggest you make a detour to go down towards the **Calanque of Mourgiou**, a true timeless paradise at the end of a long road crossing the massif of the calanques. The tour ends in late afternoon in Marseille

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 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 tour SDo6-P – 4 or 5-star hotels and palaces

Day 1 – Avignon - Hôtel d'Europe 5* (<http://www.heurope.com>)

Day 2 – Rochebroude – Château de Rochebroude 4* (<http://www.chateaubroude.com/>)

Day 3 – Nîmes – Jardins Secrets 5* (<http://www.jardinssecrets.net/>)

Day 4 - Arles - L'Hôtel Particulier 5* (<http://www.hotel-particulier.com/>)

Day 5 – St Rémy de Provence – Hôtel du Vallon de Valrugues 5* (<http://www.vallondevallrugues.com/>)

Day 6 – Bonnieux – La Bastide de Capelongue 4* (<http://www.capelongue.com/>)

Day 7 – Gémenos – Le Relais Magdelaine 4* (<http://www.relais-magdeleine.com/>)

Luxe Self drive tour SDo6-L – 4-star hotels or chateaus

Day 1– Avignon - Hôtel de l'Horloge (<http://www.hotel-avignon-horloge.com/>)

Day 2 – Rochebroude – Château de Rochebroude (<http://www.chateaubroude.com/>)

Day 3 – Nîmes – Novotel Atria (<http://www.novotel.com/fr/hotel-0985-novotel-atria-nimes-centre>)

Day 4 - Arles - Le Jules César 5* (www.hotel-julescesar.fr)

Day 5 – St Rémy de Provence – Château Roussan (<http://www.chateauroussan.com/>)

Day 6 – Lourmarin – Le Moulin (<http://www.moulindehourmarin.com/>)

Day 7 – Gémenos – Le Relais Magdelaine (<http://www.relais-magdeleine.com/>)

Comfort Self drive tour SDo6-C – 3-star hotels

Day 1 – Avignon - Hôtel de l'Horloge 4* (<http://www.hotel-avignon-horloge.com/>)

Day 2 – Orange - Lou Cigaloun (<http://www.hotel-loucigaloun.com/>)

Day 3 – Nîmes – L'Amphithéâtre (<http://www.hoteldelamphitheatre.com/>)

Day 4 - Arles - Le Calendal (<http://www.lecalendal.com/>)

Day 5 – St Rémy de Provence – Hôtel du Soleil (<http://www.hotelsoleil.com/>)

Day 6 – Lourmarin – Le Mas de Guilles (<http://www.guilles.com/>)

Day 7 – Gémenos – Le Relais Magdelaine 4* (<http://www.relais-magdeleine.com/>)

Standard Self drive holidays Standard SD06-ST – accommodation 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/A7 motorway (Paris-Marseille) from Paris to Avignon

By train – 2 rail stations in Avignon

- Avignon TGV train station - Direct TGV to Paris (2h40), Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport, Lille, Nantes, Rouen, Metz, Montpellier, Geneva, Brussels, Lyon, Marne la Vallée, Rennes, Strasbourg and Toulouse - Bus connection to centre city
- Avignon centre city train station - Regional trains, inter-city trains and Paris TGV (3h20), Eurostar Avignon-London in summer.

By plane –

- Avignon Caumont airport –
Direct flights for Paris-Orly west 4 times a day
Flights a week from Southampton and Birmingham from March to October
- International Marseille airport— from the airport, shuttles to Saint Charles rail station (every 20mn) and train to Avignon central station (journey time : 1.15 hours)

Other services

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