

## C106-ECO Alpilles of Provence



The chalky chain of the Alpilles stands in the heart of Provence. 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. On the left banks of the Rhone, to the north of Tarascon, the small mountain is little more than a block of steep hills covered with aromatic plants and arboreal valleys. Man has always appreciated these splendid sites, leaving behind many architectural testimonies which you will discover throughout this historically rich tour. With each step you will relive the Provence of Mistral and Daudet. You will keep with you always the wonderful memories of the charming villages, their shady public squares and refreshing fountains whose running waters seem to sing a song; the revitalizing walks filled with fragrances and color; passage through orchards,

vineyards, fields of olive trees; and the oil mills and the satisfying Provencal life.

### Itinerary

**Day 1** - Arrival at ARLES. This town, located in the heart of the Provence, is the gateway to the Camargue. Arles is a town rich with two thousand years of history. It is appreciated for its Roman and Medieval monuments, some of which – including the amphitheatre, the Alyscamps, Saint Trophime Cloister, and the beautiful portal of the Saint Trophime Church – are designated by UNESCO as world heritage monuments. Stroll through this city of art and history and discover all these monuments and more - *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

**Day 2** - Tour of ARLES and its surroundings (15 km). You will leave Arles along the former Via Aurelia, a roman way, to discover Les Alyscamps, one of the most beautiful Christian burial sites. This romantic path lined with sarcophagi, is all the remains of the vast cemetery that surrounded the city between the 3rd B.C. and the 13th centuries. You continue walking through the plains and along the canals that were so often painted by Van Gogh, a long-time resident of the city. These canals



are used to evacuate water of this wet and marshy area converted to-day in huge ricefields. Back to Arles. Spend your evening wandering the narrow street of Arles, and discovering the art in the city's architecture - *Lodging and breakfast in the same 2-star hotel*

**Day 3** - ARLES – FONTVIEILLE (14 km) You will walk across Arles and leave the city heading to the Abbey of Montmajour. This Benedictine abbey was built in the 12th century on a rocky spur in the midst of marshy land that has since dried up and been turned into rice fields. In the 18th century, after a period of decadence, monks added new, magnificent buildings, but they were sold as national property during the Revolution. Today, only the 12th century buildings – the Church of Notre-Dame and the cloister, one of the most beautiful in

Provence – have been restored. After the visit, you will to Fontvieille through the plain. The small city center is ancient and charming and spotted by old wells - *Half-board accommodation in a 2-star hotel*

**Day 4** - : FONTVIEILLE – MAUSSANE LES ALPILLES (20 km). You will begin the walk climbing towards the famous Alphonse Daudet windmill, which gives a lovely view of the Alpilles landscape and the Montmajour Abbey. The hike continues through the Alpilles to the ruins of the Aqueducts of Barbegal. The Romans built these aqueducts on the slope of the cliff and used them as hydraulic mills for processing food. You will continue across the Alpilles and through the olive trees to the typical Provencal village of Maussane-les-Alpilles.

*Half-board accommodation in a 2-star hotel*

**Day 5** - MAUSSANE – SAINT REMY DE PROVENCE (20 km). You will walk through the vineyards and olive trees to Les Baux de Provence, a stone fortress that dominates the whole of the valley. This old village, abandoned in the 18th century, was restored to life in the 20th century by those who bought the old houses and mansions that had been left behind. Take the time to stroll through the narrow streets, admire Saint Vincent's church, Penitents Blancs Chapel and the château. There is a

breathtaking panorama from the keep of the château over the Crau Plain and Camargue. You will leave the village by way of the Val d'Enfer, a narrow valley cut out of the plateau and framed by abrupt cliffs, and walk through the Alpilles towards the Lake Peirrou to enter into the city limits of Saint Remy. This city will call to you to walk along its narrow streets, to gaze upon the lovely hotels and residences, and to sit beside the fountains of its shaded squares - *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

**Day 6** EYGALIERES – ST REMY DE PROVENCE (20 km). Transfer by taxi to the Saint Sixte Chapel, just outside the charming village of Eygalières, from which rises a square-shaped keep, all that remains of an ancient château. Surrounded by olive trees and the Alpilles as backdrop, Eygalieres is one of the most beautiful villages in Provence and has attracted painters and photographers for years. You will follow the Alpilles range and climb the mountain along the Vallorgue Pass and the Pas de l'Aigle to reach the Caume Plateau. The landscape is beautiful ! The white peaks ( no more than 350-400 meters in height ) stand out in contrast to the deep blue sky. The environment is wild, rocky and covered with a few small Mediterranean bushes that fragrance the air. You will follow the downward slope of the Vallon de Saint Clerg to the ancient city of Glanum. For many centuries this city was an important commercial center on the road to Avignon. Today, only the city center has been modernized. You will see traces of the past, among them the Arc de Triomphe, the door to the city that stands as a symbol of Rome's victory over La Gaule and Le Mausolée. You will end the day in homage to Van Gogh, visiting the monastery of Saint Paul de Mausole where Van Gogh was housed for one year and completed numerous paintings.

*Lodging and breakfast in the same 2-star hotel*

**Day 7** - ST REMY – TARASCON (26 km). Through the olive trees and vineyards you will head to the canal des Alpines and walk along it for several kilometers. Then you penetrate into the Alpilles mountains walking up a narrow valley to reach a forest track running on the crests and leading you to the Saint Gabriel chapel, a beautiful Romanesque building at the foot of Alpilles. You continue your way through the rice fields and along canals to Tarascon dominated by the massive medieval chateau of King René - *Half-board accommodation in a 2-star hotel*

**Day 8** - TARASCON. Tour ends after breakfast. Before leaving Tarascon, we recommend you visit the feudal castle which is one of the best preserved in France and was the former residence of René d'Anjou, count of Provence. You can also visit the Cordeliers cloister, the Sainte Marthe church, the town hall styled in the manner of Louis XIII, the archways of the Rue des Halles, and the famous Tissus Solerado museum.

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## Season

From end of March to end of October. **No walks in summertime (06/20 to 09/15) due to maximum fire risks**

## Including

- ✓ 3 nights with accommodation in 2-star hotels on half-board basis
- ✓ 4 nights with accommodation in 2-star hotel on night and breakfast basis
- ✓ Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- ✓ A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) and detailed route notes describing the trail.
- ✓ A daily itinerary together with information about facilities and places of interest along the trail.
- ✓ Emergency assistance.

*Visa fees - transportation fees to and from the walk area - Insurance (strongly recommended on all trips) - Transfers except those mentioned above – Drinks – Entrance fees -Additional meals - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls,... are not included*

## Getting there and away

*By plane* : to Marseille airport and train to Arles or to Nîmes airport from London (Luton), Liverpool, East Midlands, Bruxelles (Ryanair) and taxi to Arles

*By train* : direct TGV trains to Arles from Paris or with a connection at Avignon or Nîmes. Return trip from Tarascon to Avignon or Marseille by train

*By car* : A7 motorway from Paris and then A9 motorway (la Languedocienne) you leave at Nîmes. Continue to Arles along the A54 motorway.

*Where to park* : toll guarded car parks at Arles. Return by train from Tarascon to Arles (10 minutes journey)

## Walk difficulty

Grade 3 – walks of between 5 and 8 hours a day with ascents up to 700 m. Some hiking experience is advisable. A reasonable level of fitness and some stamina are required for these walks. You may cover long distances in remote countryside and the terrain will be rough underfoot. In mountainous areas you will encounter some sustained ascents and descents