

C106-ST 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;

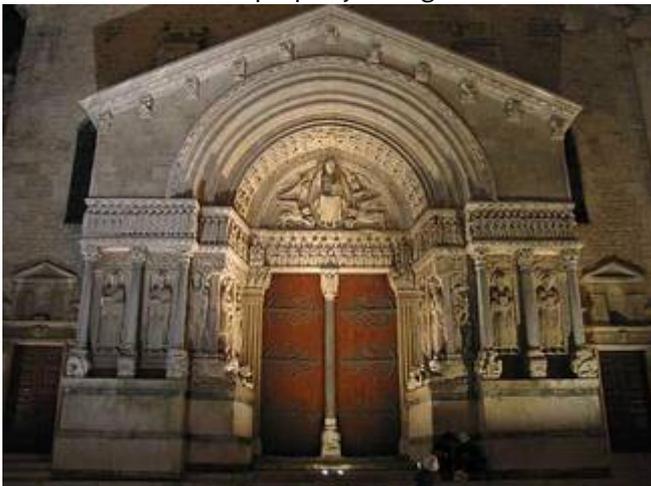
passage through orchards, vineyards, fields of olive trees; and the oil mills and the satisfying Provencal life.

Itinerary

C10607-ST 7-day tour

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 listed 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). Transfer by taxi to the abbey of Saint Pierre de 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 head back to Arles through the plains and along the canals that were so often painted by Van Gogh, a long-time resident of the city. Spend your evening wandering the narrow street of Arles, and discovering the art in the city's architecture - *Lodging and breakfast in the same hotel*



Day 3 - FONTVIEILLE – MAUSSANE LES ALPILLES (20 km). Transfer by taxi to the Saint Gabriel chapel, a beautiful Romanesque building at the foot of Alpilles. You will take off from here through the forest covering this part of the Alpile before reaching Fontvieille. The small city center is ancient and charming and spotted by old wells. You will begin 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 Maussance-les-Alpilles.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel

Day 4 - 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 5 - 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, Eygalières 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 6 - BARBENTANE – TARASCON (20 km). Transfer by taxi to Barbentane. You visit this beautiful village built against the north slope of the Montagnette. Dominated by the Tour Angelica (keep and former castle), it has retained two gates of its 14th century fortified walls (Porte Calendale and Porte Segurier) and a beautifully classical 17th century chateau with Italian style gardens. You will hike across the limestone hills and through the forests, filled with sweet odors, towards the Saint Michel de Frigolet Abbey. Founded in the 12th century, it is renowned for the elixir produced within its walls. The church houses a chapel with lovely gilt panelling. After visiting the abbey, you will continue your walk through the wild hills covered with Mediterranean scrubland towards the Rhone and the entrance of Tarascon near an ancient feudal castle – *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 7 - 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.

C10609-ST 9-day tour

With discovery tour of Tarascon, Villeneuve les Avignon and Avignon

Day 1 - Arrival at ARLES. ..

Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel

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Day 7 - Tour of TARASCON in the morning. Tarascon, city of the legends and stories, is a pleasant city which has a rich cultural heritage. You will not get away to the legend of the Tarasque, an amphibian monster that haunted the banks of the Rhone River, gobbling people. In 48 AD, Ste Martha came from Palestine to Tarascon where she ruled this creature... or the funny adventures of Tartarin, this hero from a well-known book written by Alphonse Daudet. The chateau Rene stands proudly on the Rhone bank and is one of the most beautiful medieval castles in France. Close to the chateau, is the Collegiate Church Ste Martha. Built in the 12th and 13th centuries, it houses the relics of the Saint. You will stroll through the picturesque streets of the city, discovering beautiful mansions, some restored houses and the Souleïado museum that exhibits the famous Provençal fabric in a 14th century mansion in the center of the town. *Early afternoon, a taxi takes you to Villeneuve les Avignon, for a discovering of this city, facing Avignon. Called Bourg St Andre which owes its origin to the Saint Andre abbey founded in the 6th century on the Mont Andaon, the village became a strategic place with the famous St Benezet Bridge (pont d'Avignon).*



The French king Philippe Le Bel gave orders to construct a fortress to command the bridge, connecting the kingdom to the German Empire. Villeneuve became the residence of the Popes, cardinals and prelates of the Papal Court who built “Livrees” (private mansions) and founded convents and churches as the Chartreuse du Val de Benediction, former palace of Innocent VI Pope. Fort St Andre was built in this time to protect all these convents. You continue your walk, crossing the Rhone river to admire the St Benezet Bridge and walking to your hotel. *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel in the medieval Avignon*

Day 8 - Tour of AVIGNON. The city owes its origin to the Doms rock, a rocky hill above the immense plain of the Rhone river. Avignon is already a big city in the 12th century thanks to the bridge over the Rhone River. With the arrival of the Popes in the 14th century, the city became a second Rome. Asylum country, Avignon was flourishing and attracted artists, merchants and bankers. Avignon remained papal property up to the French Revolution. The architecture of Avignon is marked by papal history. Going through any of the seven doors of the superbly preserved walls, you will discover the city of the Popes. The Palace of the Popes, home to the Sovereign Pontiffs in the 14th century, is the largest Gothic palace in Europe. You will visit 25 rooms of this palace including the ceremonial room, chapels, private papal apartments...

Nearby are the museums, the Petit Palais which house an outstanding collection of Italian and Provençal paintings from the late 13th to the early 16th centuries. Not too far away, stands the famous Pont d'Avignon. The palace and the bridge are ranked among UNESCO World Heritage. You will wander about the streets of Avignon, discovering numerous churches, beautiful shaded squares, elegant private mansions, medieval lanes which will charm you. Avignon boasts a lot of interesting museums. A busy tourist day! *Lodging and breakfast in the same hotel*

Day 9 - AVIGNON. End of the tour after breakfast

Season

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

Including

- ✓ C10607-ST tour : 6 nights' accommodation in selected 2-star hotels with 6 breakfasts and 1 dinner
- ✓ C10609-ST tour : 8 nights' accommodation in selected 2-star hotels with 8 breakfasts and 1 dinner
- ✓ Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- ✓ Taxi transfers as written in the description
- ✓ 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