

Self drive holidays

SD03 the Loire valley

13-day & 12-night tour



Itinerary

Day 1 - Loire River between Briare and Gien

Your first stop in Loire valley will be to visit the **chateau de la Bussière**. Remarkable example of the 17th French architecture, the Château de La Bussière sits in the middle of a 6 ha lake within a Le Nôtre designed park. It houses an interesting collection devoted to fish and fishing. Outstanding 18C kitchen garden. **Briare**, a picturesque town along the Loire river. Its romano-byzantine mosaics church, its enamel porcelain buttons museum and the majestic **pont-canal**, aqueduct built by Eiffel made the town famous. **St Brisson sur Loire**, former medieval fortress turned into a residence in the 16C. **Gien**, attractive little town dominated by the chateau that houses a museum of hunting and falconry. Don't miss the St Jeanne d'Arc church with a 15th C tower and the famous ceramic factory founded in 1821.

Day 2 - from Sully sur Loire to Orleans

Sully sur Loire, encircled with still watery moats, this medieval fortress was raised in 1395 on a site which used to supervise one of the Loire's crossings, since Antiquity. Its most illustrious owner, Maximilien de Bethune, first duke of Sully and senior minister of King Henri IV, re-laid out the grounds, restored and extended the castle. **St-Benoît-sur-Loire** is famed for its great Benedictine abbey, the origins of which go back to the 7th C. The large Romanesque church, one of the finest in France, was built between 1067 and 1218. The outstanding feature of the church is the porch tower with its richly carved capitals. The small church of **Germiny des Prés** incorporates part of an older building, the oratory dating back to the 9thC. You will admire the unique gold and silver mosaic on the dome of the Eastern chapel discovered by accident in the 19thC. The castle of **Chateaufort sur Loire** was seen in the XVIIth Century like a little Versailles with his French gardens but has been razed in French Revolution. You will visit the Loire navy museum housed in the Castle's stables.

Day - from Orléans to Blois

You will spend time visiting **Meung sur Loire**, agreeable small walled medieval town strolling along the lanes lined with little streams. You will be surprised by this 12th and 13th C chateau which has an austere medieval face and the other side, dating back to 17th C. facing the park. Until the 18th C. it was the Episcopal residence of the Bishops of Orleans. The imposing **basilica of Cléry St André** stands in the middle of a tiny town as a wondrously bright example of late Gothic architecture and houses the tombs of King Louis XI and his wife. The medieval little town of **Beaugency** lies on the right bank of the Loire. The church of Notre-Dame (12th C) originally belonged to an abbey. The triangular Tour St-Firmin is all that remains of a church built in the 16th C. Northwest of the Château Dunois that houses the Regional Museum, is the old part of the town, with a number of handsome buildings - the Maison des Templiers, the 17th C Town Hall and the Tour de l'Horloge (Clock-Tower), once part of the town's circuit of walls. Built in 1520 the **chateau of Talcy** remains faithful to the local architecture. A well, outbuildings with winepress and dovecote, and a garden converted into a conservation orchard emphasise the agricultural nature of the estate. The house still has its 18th century furnishings. You will then return to the Loire river bank to visit the **Ménars Castle**, beautiful building from the XVII century which once was the domain of **Madame de Pompadour**, King XV's mistress. The visit of the apartments will enable you to admire the fine decoration and the rich furnishing from the XVII and XVIII centuries.

Day 4 - Chateaux of Chambord, Cheverny, Troussay and Beaugency

Dreamt of by Francois 1, credited to Leonardo da Vinci, **the chateau of Chambord** is a peak of French Renaissance art. The building works begun in 1519 were completed by Louis XIV in 1685. Its brilliant architecture is the image of the power of French monarchy in Europe. The interior apartments display a lavish décor most renowned for its double revolution staircase. Dedicated to hunting from the start, Chambord is surrounded by a huge forest domain of 1000 ha. Ranking among the most beautiful of Loire castles, **Cheverny** was put up in the early 17C by Count Henri Hurault after plans inspired by those of the Luxembourg gardens. Its Bourré white stone façade in the purest Louis XIII style is decked out with imitation-antique statues. It houses an outstanding collection of furnishings, tapestries and painting masterpieces. The little Renaissance **Castle of Troussay** dating back to the 15C-16C, houses in the picturesque outbuildings, a museum of antique agricultural and household artifacts that evokes the little domain of the Sologne region's past. The highlights of the **chateau of Beaugency** are the richly decorated portrait gallery, its walls entirely paneled with 327 paintings of European kings, queens and great nobles and the famous cabinet des grelots (Belles chamber) a wonderful small paneled room by Scibec de Carpi, the monarch's cabinetmaker

Day 5 - Blois

In the center of Blois is the spacious Place Victor-Hugo, with the 17th century **church of St-Vincent** and the **Pavillon d'Anne de Bretagne**, set against the majestic backdrop of the Château with its loggias and galleries and oriel windows. **The Château**, built in stages between the 13th and the 17th century, reflects changing architectural styles over five centuries. It is laid out around a large central courtyard, partly open only on the southeast side. The **St-Louis Cathedral** stands on high ground in the old town. There was a church on this site in early Christian times which was rebuilt and altered in the 12th, 15th and 16th centuries. The church was destroyed in the 17th C, apart from the apse, the tower and the west front, and was then rebuilt. The crypt dates from the 10th and 11th centuries. Near the cathedral is the 18th century Ancien Evêché, the former Bishop's Palace, now the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall). There are fine views from the adjoining gardens. You may visit the modern church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Trinité and the former Benedictine church of St-Nicolas (12th and 13th C). Blois is also the perfect place for sauntering, with its ancient districts begging for you to visit either by foot or aboard a horse carriage. Discover the many private hotels or stroll along the Loire River before ending this perfect day at one of the many lively cafés during the summer season.

Day 6 - châteaux de Fougères, Chaumont sur Loire et de Chenonceau

A small fortified castle built in the second half of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th, **the chateau of Fougères** with its machicolated entrance curtain, fortified postern and keep, is the perfect example of the art of rural building. Dominating the Loire valley in a strategic position, the **château of Chaumont** was rebuilt in the late 15th and early 16th century by the Amboise family. The building works were completed by Diane de Poitiers who arrived just nine years after Catherine de Medicis bought the chateau. At the end of the 19th century, the princes of Broglie luxuriously refurbished the chateau, transformed the landscape park into a fashionable English style and built the remarkable stables. Built on the river Cher, **the chateau of Chenonceau**, Chateau des Dames as recorded in the French history books, is one of the finest in Loire valley. The lovely surroundings, the formal garden and the park surrounding it add to the impression of delicate grace emanating from the castle. Chenonceau is not only remarkable for its architecture and history but also for the fine quality of its collections as can be seen from the inside visit: Renaissance furniture, a vast ensemble of 16th and 17th century's tapestries and a great number of masterpieces.

Day 7 - Amboise

Built in the 15th and 16th centuries, this royal **Amboise chateau** introduced the Italian style to the Loire Valley. A historical place, any gathering will be warm due to the presence of an exceptional collection of gothic and Renaissance furniture. After visiting the royal residence, walk through beautiful panoramic gardens planted with Mediterranean plants. In St-Hubert's chapel, the tomb of Leonardo da Vinci has recently been elegantly restored.

Southeast of the Château is the **manor house of Clos-Lucé**, in which Leonardo da Vinci spent his last years. In the basement are models of machines and machinery constructed on the basis of his drawings. From the cellar of Clos-Lucé an underground passage once ran to the Château of Amboise, 500 meters away. In the lower town is the 16th century Town Hall, which houses a small museum. Opposite it is the 15th century church of St-Florentin, with a Renaissance steeple. The church of St-Denis, on the outskirts of the town of Amboise to the southeast, is a fine example of Romanesque architecture with Angevin features. It has finely decorated capitals and contains the marble tomb (16th century) with what is said to be a likeness of "la belle Babou", a mistress of Francois I. In the Amboise forest, a former hunting reserve of the French kings to the south of the town, is the 44m/144ft high **Pagode de Chanteloup**, a charming "chinoiserie pagoda" built in the late 18th century - all that remains of a large Baroque Château which was built in 1715 but later demolished and used as rubble.

Day 8 - discovery of Tours, St Come priory and Meslay barn

Tours, town of art and history, 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.

You shall then leave Tours to visit the **Meslay barn**, one of the rare specimens of civil architecture from the XIII century. Designed like a church, you shall be bewildered by the size of its 60-meter long barn and its imposing oak pillars supporting the splendid framework. From its foundation in 1092 until the XIX century, the **Saint Côme Priory** community of canons welcomed pilgrims on the way to Santiago de Compostella. Pierre de Ronsard stayed there few times before becoming prior in 1565. He stayed to his death in 1585. When entering the garden by the stone arch, you will discover the prior's house built in the XV century.

Day 9 - chateaux 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 passing by Savonnière's quaint little village. **Villandry** was erected around 1536 and is the last of the big castles built on the Loire riverbanks during the Renaissance era. The magnificent gardens of the Chateau de Villandry, reminder of the spirit of the gardens of the Renaissance, were restored at the beginning of the 20th Century by Dr. J. Carvallo, the owner since 1906. **Langeais**, one of the oldest towns in the Touraine region, is overlooked by its imposing castle. It 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. The monumental staircase – which concentrates most of this rich décor – is the prestige centerpiece of this architecture. Rich person tapestries and pieces of furniture of XVI, XVII and XVIII centuries decorate the apartments of the castle. 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 10 - Chinon, Candé St Martin, Montsoreau and royal abbey of Fontevraud

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.

Day 11 - chateaus of Rivau, Brézé and Montreuil-Bellay

Start your day with the visit of the **Castle of Rivau**. A historically significant 15th century château, completed with moats, draw bridges, and dramatic fortifications. The site includes 16th century royal stables, barns, historic former winery and a dovecote. Immortalized by Joan of Arc and Rabelais, Le Rivau was first built in the 13th century by the prestigious Beauvau family, related to kings of France. During the Renaissance time, his descendant, François de Beauvau, captain of king François I, constructed the monumental stables in the outbuildings courtyard, that supplied royal stallions. Later the moats were filled in and the west wing was torn down to open the main courtyard to the outside. At the end of the 20th century, Le Rivau, after a ten-year restoration campaign once again found its original splendor, and seems once again to have come from the pages of a book of fairy tales and legends.

Next stop will be to discover an out of the ordinary castle which holds many surprises: the **Castle of Brézé**. Surrounded by 13 meter large and 18 meter deep ditches, this fortified castle has been modified for centuries to become this elegant mansion which can be partially visited (great gallery, bedrooms, kitchens...) But this castle holds another secret: an underground fortress, dug into the freestone underneath the castle. You may travel through the mile long passage to uncover an amazing world! But the amazement and surprise do not end here! The ditch was haven to the villagers during the XVI century and homes were carved in the tender rock. You will discover a whole village with its baker, a silk farm since silk worms were raised, as well as magnificent wine presses and caves. You will then reach **Montreuil Bellay**, quaint little town surrounded by fortifications – which is still standing for the most part – bordering the Thouet River. 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.

Day 12 - Saumur, Cunault church, chateaux of Brissac, Serrant and Le Plessis-Bourré

You will reach **Saumur**, famous for its cavalry school and its wines. The Duke of Anjou ordered the building of a pleasure dwelling during the XIV century, based on a XIII century fortress. With its large windows, its Fleur de Lys ornate crenels, its main staircase with finely worked bays, the castle of Saumur is one of the rare standing examples of the civil princely architecture from late Middle Age. For the horse aficionados, the day shall start at the Cadre Noir of Saumur, a famous National Cavalry School. Guided visits of the school installations, completed by the training of the squires (duration of the visit: 1h30). 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. The monastical church: you will be amazed by the height and scale of the pillar. 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. Continue your stroll toward Chalonnes-Sur-Loire passing 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. Cross the river to 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. When visiting the Guards Hall you will discover one of the first examples of boxed ceilings representing allegories.

Day 13 - 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 000m² 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.

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

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

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

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

Price includes

- 12 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' Dayney) 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...)

