

# Self drive holidays SD04 the Provence

15-day & 14-night tour



## Itinerary

### Day 1 - Arrival in 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.

### Day 2 - Visit of Villeneuve les Avignon and Avignon

In the morning a taxi shall take you to Villeneuve les Avignon located on the other bank of the Rhone river. Founded around the Abbey of Saint Andre and built during the X century atop Mont Adaon, the town was located at the frontiers of the French Kingdom and was a strategic site. Philippe Le Bel ordered the building of a fortress which only remains is the Donjon (Tower Philippe Le Bel). During the Papacy stay in Avignon, the town became residence to Popes, Cardinals and Prelates of the pontifical court. They erected fortified palaces or livrés, churches and monasteries such as La Chartreuse du Val de Bénédiction (Charterhouse) or the collegiate church of Notre Dame. You shall reach Avignon on foot to better admire the Benezet Bridge. You shall then continue to visit Avignon, its quaint districts and numerous museums. the Petit Palais (Italians and Provençal paintings dating from the XIII to the XVI centuries), the Calvet Museum...

### Day 3 - Carpentras, the wine-growing villages of the Dentelles of Montmirail

Visit of the ancient town of **Carpentras**. This city has always been a place for trade and flourished when the region became property of the Papacy. Once surrounded by fortifications, unfortunately destroyed during the XIX century, it is home to the Saint Siffrein Cathedral, a southern gothic masterpiece, numerous palaces, churches as well as the oldest synagogue in France. You shall then go round the **Dentelles of Montmirail**, the first sign of the Alps in the Rhone River's valley. These low altitude hills (from 500 to 735 meters), covered by Mediterranean flora - aromatic plants, green oaks, Alep pine trees - are dominated by a limestone crest, finely sculpted by the erosion conferring their name as white stone 'Dentelles' -Laces- You shall then discover **Baumes de Venise**, famous for its sweet wines - **Vacqueras**, perched atop a hill and which kept part of its Medieval fortification - **Gigondas**, set in its fortifications on the side of the hill - **Sablet**, built upon a hill top and which concentric streets mount towards the church atop the village and **Seguret**, a magnificent Medieval village nested on the hill side.

## Day 4 - Mount Ventoux and the Dentelles' perched villages

You shall reach **Malaucene** in early morning and start climbing towards **Mount Ventoux**. You shall then make a stop by the source of Groseau which gushes at a cliff's foot, near a chapel, the remains of a Benedictine abbey. After your pause, you shall get back 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 Tempest mountain pass to go down towards Chalet Reynard, a small ski resort. Then, you shall enter the massif of the Dentelles de Montmirail. That is where you shall discover - **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 burg surrounding a Calvary erected on the ruins of an ancient castle. 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 5 - visit of Vaison la Romaine and Orange

Start your day by visiting **Vaison-La-Romaine**, where four towns developed on Vaison's site. On the right bank the new town was built over the Roman town and on the left bank, the medieval city was built upon an ancient Celtic fortress. There you shall visit the Roman ruins from the Puymin and Villasse districts, the ruins of the Roman theater and the famous bridge which resisted many violent floods of the Ouvèze river. You may also see the Notre Dame of Nazareth Cathedral and its cloister, the Saint Quentin chapel and the Medieval town dominated by its imposing castle perched upon a rocky headland. You will reach **Orange** by passing through vineyards. Orange is mainly renowned for its antic monuments - the Arc de Triomphe and the antic theater, one of the best preserved of the Roman Empire era. You cannot afford not to visit the old town, the home to a rich architectural patrimony among which is the Cathedral Notre Dame of Nazareth and the Saint Florent Church.

## Day 6 – Pont du Gard, Uzès and Nîmes

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 km. It is the tallest aqueduct bridge in the Roman world with its 49-meter high and its three levels of archway.

You shall then cross the brush land to reach **Uzès**. You just must visit this Medieval city which lost its fortifications but preserved its charm with the help of the Duché – a feudal castle remarkably preserved even though it evolved during centuries; the Fenestrelle Tower, the only remain of the Roman cathedral destroyed during religion wars and its numerous alleys and private hotels. **Nîmes** was built thanks to a source, the Fontaine source that was deified 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 7 - Discovery of the Camargue and Arles

Camargue is an immense swampland more or less salty located within the Rhône river delta. During the centuries, man tried to manage floods and raging waters by designing landscapes while leaving way to rugged land. The later became paradise to bulls, white horses from the Camargue region as well as migrant birds such as pink flamingo - symbol of the Camargue region. You shall cross the **Petite Camargue** to reach **Aigues-Mortes**, a medieval city built among ponds and swampland. French King Louis IX bought this land back from monks in 1240 to set up a port, a departure point of two crusades. You shall be able to admire the fortifications, the Porte de la Garderette as well as the Constance Tower, a true example of the military architecture from the XIII century. You shall walk along the Salins (salty lands) and the high salt mountains to reach **Les Saintes Maries de la Mer**, lost between the Mediterranean Sea and the ponds. From afar, you shall see its fortified church, which used to protect villagers from enemy attacks and the home to the remains of the saints. You shall then cross rice fields to reach and visit **Arles**, the capital of the Camargue region. You will discover all the facets of this city - the Roman Arles, with its amphitheater (arenas), its antique theater, the Crypto portico, the Roman Thermal Baths from Constantin, a remain of the Roman Circus. - the religious Arles, with the **Alyscamps** (beginning of the Arles way , one of the four roads leading to Santiago de Compostella) and the numerous religious edifices among which the church and the Saint Trophime Cloister, masterpiece from the Roman Provence - The Classical Arles with its mayor's office and its numerous private hotels of Renaissance or Baroque style. Since 1981, the ensemble of the Roman and Latin monuments is classified among the UNESCO World Heritage sites.

## Day 8 – Alpilles tour, visit of Les Baux and St rémy de Provence

You may visit the **Montmajour Abbey** on the way. Built on a rock in the middle of swampland, which have now been dried and turned into rice fields, this Benedictine abbey has always been transformed and embellished. It is a true anthology of Provençal Roman art. Its cloister, dating from the XII century, is one of the most beautiful of the Provence region. 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 9 - Luberon and Ocre's 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 Provençal 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.

## Day 10- Perched villages in Luberon

You shall take the direction of the mountain of the Luberon region and pass the **Pont Julien** (bridge), built by the Romans during the year 3 BC. You shall then reach **Robion** and **Taillades**, a quaint village dominated by its castle, which fortifications and houses were built atop quarries. You shall go up the Petit Luberon Mountain through a winding, narrow and steep road that shall allow you to enjoy great views of the Luberon plain and the Vaucluse mounts. Then, you shall continue with the discovery of 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. The **Fort of Buoux** then protected the only passage for centuries, the Combe until the XVI century. The later was built atop a rocky peak. You shall follow the Grand Luberon to reach two quaint villages - **Vaugines** and **Cucuron** - before arriving in **Lourmarin**. There you shall discover its narrow alleys bordered by vintage houses leading to its castle built atop a hill.

## Day 11 - Abbey of Silvacane and Aix en Provence

From Lourmarin, you shall cross the Durance River and visit of the **Abbey of Silvacane**, built in 1144 on a deserted stretch land covered by swamps. The pure Roman style church was built between 1175 and 1230, its cloister and the monastery buildings dating from the XIII and XIV centuries. It offers architecture in perfect harmony with the rules lauded by Saint Benedict and the order of Citeaux: simple if not austere, rigorous, practical and deprived of any ornament possibly distracting monks in prayer. **Aix-en-Provence** 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.



## Day 12 - Saint Victoire and Saint Baume Mountains

You shall leave town in the morning to follow the path of the **Saint Victory Mountain**, crowned by the Provence region cross, to reach **Vauvenargue** 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 continue by a round about way to visit **Saint Maximim-La-Sainte-Baume**, its basilica, the royal covenant and its cloister. 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 the later 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 13 - 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.

## Day 14 – Visit of Marseille

May we suggest you take the boat to visit the **Frioul Islands** offshore Marseille as well as the If Castle built between 1524 and 1531, at the request of Francois I. Guarding the entrance of the Port of Marseille, it used to protect the harbor from any attack and make sure the town received supplies from the sea. The site is mostly renowned thanks to Alexandre Dumas whose book – *The Count of Monte Cristo* - published in 1844, took place at If Island. After this visit, you shall enjoy a walk or a swim in the **Pomegue or Ratonneau islands**. A dyke has linked these two islands since 1825. Back at the ancient port, you shall enjoy the late afternoon visit to Panier, the oldest district of Marseille, built upon the Roman city. You might also want to climb to Notre Dame de la Garde to take a look at the magnificent view of the town.

## Day 15 - Marseille

May we suggest you do not leave town without enjoying a private tour of the town in a chauffeured car proposed by the Tourism office of Marseille, a good way to discover the main monuments of Marseille. End of the tour.

## 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 SDo4-P** – 4 or 5-star hotels

**Luxe Self drive holidays SDo4-L** – 4-star hotels

**Comfort Self drive holidays SDo4-C** – 3-star hotels

**Standard Self drive holidays Standard SDo4-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

- 14 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...)