

Self drive holidays

SD05 Roman and medieval Provence

8-day & 7-night tour

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival in Avignon and 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, each one more remarkable than the other: 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 on the other bank of the Rhône River and Avignon

A taxi shall take you to **Villeneuve les Avignon** in the morning. 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 are 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 (named Livrés), churches and covenants 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.

Day 3 – Carpentras and Vaison la Romaine

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. Visit of **Vaison-La-Romaine**, Roman ruins from the Puymin and Villasse districts, the ruins of the Roman theater and the famous bridge. You may also see Notre Dame of Nazareth Cathedral and its cloister, the Saint Quentin chapel as well as the Medieval town dominated by its imposing castle perched upon a rocky headland.

Day 4 – Orange, Uzés and the Pont du Gard

You will reach **Orange** by passing through vineyards and picturesque wine-producing villages as Rasteau, Cairanne or Ste Cécile les Vignes. Today, the town is mainly renowned for its antic monuments such as the Arc de Triomphe and its antic theater, one of the best preserved of the Roman Empire era. You cannot afford not to visit the old town and the Cathedral Notre Dame of Nazareth. You shall then cross the brush land to reach **Uzés**. 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. 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.

Day 5 – Beaucaire, Tarascon, Nîmes, Aigues-Mortes and Camargue

Beaucaire knew three golden ages that make the city you see today. The fortified castle, partly destroyed at Richelieu time, towered the old town with its luxurious hotels and prestigious monuments. You shall cross over the Rhone to reach **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. 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 fabrics. You shall arrive at **Nîmes**. The town 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. From Nîmes, 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 **Arles**, the capital of the Camargue region.

Day 6 – Visit of Arles

An ancient residence to the Celts, colonized by the Greeks, **Arles** became Roman by Cesar's grace when he installed veterans from his legions back in 46 BC. That started the golden age of the Little Rome from Gaul, which became later on a big religious center at the beginning of Christianity. Battled and bruised from invasions during the Middle Age, the town was resuscitated during the XII century and the splendor of its medieval monuments are testimonies of its liveliness and richness in those times. During the XVII and XVIII, numerous private hotels were built. They may be seen in the quaint center of town where many classified monuments are regrouped, an inheritance of 2000 years of a rich past. Since 1981, the ensemble of the Roman and Latin monuments is classified among the UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Day 7 – Historic and religious sites in Alpilles

Day starts with the visit of the **Montmajour Abbey**. 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. Its cloister, dating from the XII century, is one of the most beautiful of the Provence region. **Acqueducts and flour mill at Barbegal**. Built in the first centuries, these acqueducts carry water to Arles and to a roman water-powered factory, sole unit known in the Roman world. 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. At the bottom of the Alpilles is nested the tiny and beautiful **St Gabriel chapel**, a Provence Romanesque masterpiece. 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 and restored during the XX century. You will visit 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 unearthed. You shall admire the **Antiques**: the Arc de Triomphe, an entry to the town, which symbolizes the victory of Rome against the Gaul and, the Mausoleum, the only Roman mortuary monument of its kind in Europe.

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 8 – Luberon and abbeys

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 will visit **Apt**, typical Provencal city with streets shaded by venerable plane trees, small squares and its fountains, the lanes around the St Anne cathedral. You shall take the direction of the Luberon mountain and pass the **Pont Julien** (bridge), built by the Romans during the year 3 BC. You shall cross the **Combe de Lourmarin** where the Aigue Brun River carved narrow gorges with steep inner walls. For centuries, this only passage was protected by the **Fort of Buoux** built atop a rocky peak. You will go through **Lourmarin**, pleasant village topped by its castle. You shall cross the Durance river to reach the **Abbey of Silvacane**. This monastery was 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 cloistered buildings dating from the XIII and XIV centuries. The cloister was abandoned during the XV century after pillages and poor harvest.

Tour ends at Avignon or Aix en Provence

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.

Prestige self drive tour SD05-P – 4 or 5-star hotels and palaces

Luxe Self drive tour SD05-L – 4-star hotels or chateaus

Comfort Self drive tour SD05-C – 3-star hotels

Standard Self drive holidays Standard SD05-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)

From Aix, you can catch TGV trains or go to the Marseille airport located at about 30 minutes.

Other services

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