

SD13 Self drive holiday – The Alsace

11-day & 10-night tour from North to South of Alsace

Itinerary

Day 1 – arrive in Strasbourg late afternoon.

Dissected from North to South by waterways like the Rhine and the Ill, criss-crossed from East to West by truly ancient roads, merchant trade developed very early on the fertile Alsace plain, bringing with it new ideas and trends. Strasbourg, with a port and a bridge across the Rhine, prospered by making full use of these assets. The way the town looks today is built on 2,000 years of history. Since the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance



period, a real golden age for the city during which architectural works of art flourished, to more recent periods that gave the town classic palaces and Art Nouveau houses, Strasbourg is made up of a mostly well preserved patrimony that you will discover during your strolls.

Day 2 - Visit Strasbourg

Old Strasbourg, a vast urban area contained within the two arms of the Ill river, abounds with a wealth of exceptional architectural gems and has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. It also boasts the Gothic cathedral with its astronomical clock, and the churches of St Thomas, St Pierre le Vieux (St Peter the Old), St Pierre le Jeune (St Peter the Young) and St Etienne. There is also the Musée de l'Œuvre Notre-Dame (Museum of fine and decorative arts), the Covered Bridges and the Palais Rohan (Rohan Palace). Throughout your walk, you will discover an impressive collection of buildings, half-timbered houses and also the riverbanks, bridges, squares and narrow streets, steeped in history and culture. We have several walking circuits through the old town to suggest, that will enable you to discover, at your own pace over these two days, the town's main monuments and its great museums, while being able to make the most of the fun-filled atmosphere in the traditional 'Winstubs' (Wine Rooms) and Brasseries.

Day 3 – Northern Alsace

Northern Alsace differs from the rest of the Alsace region in many ways. Among other reasons, the immense Haguenau forest in its centre and its border position explain this originality at the meeting point of various influences between France and Germania. Châteaux, religious buildings, battlefields and in particular the Maginot Line are living traces of a rich past that will interest current history lovers. The first stop on this circuit will be **Haguenau**, a town nestled into an immense area of forest. The town houses several museums and magnificent monuments like the Halle aux Houblons (Hops Hall). Crossing splendid, small villages that saw tough, bloody fighting during the 1870 war (numerous memorials along the roads serve as a reminder of this difficult time), you will reach **Lembach** and the **Fleckenstein fortress**. A few kilometres from there is the lime kiln, a fortified component of the **Maginot Line**. Its construction began in 1930 and it was designed to prevent German troops invading France... You will pass through the **Cleeburg and Steinseltz vineyards**, known for their pinot blanc and pinot gris, before reaching Wissenbourg. Protected by ramparts, the old town contains very old houses like the Maison du Sel (Salt House) and an imposing Gothic church.

You will travel back towards Strasbourg through the villages of **Seebach** and **Hunsprach**, wonderful, typically Alsatian villages in which several houses have exposed beams. You will stop in **Betsdorf** and **Soufflenheim** to visit pottery and ceramics workshops that are keeping alive a thousand-year-old tradition. Finally you will reach the banks of the Rhine. You will follow the river back to Strasbourg

Day 4 – the wine route from Marlenheim to Obernai

In the morning, you will continue visiting the beautiful city of Strasbourg that, as well as its magnificent buildings, has extremely beautiful parks and fascinating museums like the Musée Alsacien (Alsatian Museum) and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (Museum of Decorative Arts).

In the afternoon, you will discover the wine route from Marlenheim to Obernai

From Strasbourg, you will travel to **Marlenheim**, a renowned centre of winemaking. You will pass through the villages of **Westhoffen**, also known for its cherries, **Molsheim**, **Rosheim**, a charming medieval village at the foot of Mount St. Odile, and Boersch with its fortified gates. Finally you will reach Obernai, a small, but seriously charming, town and the birthplace of St. Odile, patron saint of Alsace.

Day 5 - Mount St. Odile and the Vosges peaks.

You will discover **Ottrott** and its two châteaux before climbing up towards **Mount St. Odile**, a mountain steeped in history and drama. You will be stunned by the pagan wall, an enigmatic enclosure built by the Celts that stretches more than 10kms around the summit of this mountain. You will visit the monastery founded by St. Odile at the end of the 7th century. Then you will travel back down towards **Hohwald**, a holiday destination where numerous European celebrities have stayed. Crossing the forest and the Kreuzweg and Charbonnière passes, you will reach the Vosges summits and the **Champ du Feu** (Field of Fire), a vast prairie and peat bog. From the observation tower, you can enjoy an immense view over the Vosges, the Alsace plain and the Black Forest. You will continue this tour by climbing up to the **Neuntelstein peak** then travel back down the charming Bruche valley, passing Struthof, a former Nazi concentration camp. You will climb up once more towards the **Grendelbruch Signal** and the ruins of the Guirbaden fortress before reaching **Klingenthal**, a town once famous for its knives.

Day 6 – The wine route from Obernai to Ribeauvillé

This day will see you on a tour through vineyards to discover charming, picturesque villages. Your first stop will be **Barr**, a superb village clinging to the hillside, with a magnificently preserved historic centre containing a great number of half-timbered houses. You will wend your way through **Mittelbergheim's** narrow streets to discover Renaissance houses, the old presses and fountains of this village, listed as one of the most beautiful in France. The town of **Andlau** grew up around an abbey, against a backdrop of vines and forests, and boasts a magnificent architectural heritage. You will pass through **Itterswiller**, where the main street is bordered with beautiful houses decked with abundant floral displays. You will visit **Dambach** and its historic centre, where the ramparts and fortified gates have been preserved, before climbing up to the St. Sébastien chapel where you can make the most of the view across the vineyards and the Alsace plain. In **Scherwiller**, dominated by the ruined **Ortenbourg fortress** built on a rocky spur, you will meander along the Aubach river bordered with beautiful half-timbered houses. **Chatenois** will surprise you with its fortified cemetery, its bell tower with bartizans and its famous Tour des Sorcières (Witches' Tower)! Then you will reach **Ribeauvillé** nestled at the foot of the Taennchel range. This wine-producing town has retained its medieval charm and is a great place to stay. You will walk through the picturesque narrow streets in the old town, discovering the magnificent half-timbered houses and old fountains.

Day 7 – The châteaux of Ribeauvillé and the Haut-Koenigsbourg

This morning we suggest a walk to discover the three châteaux that protected the town and from which you can enjoy magnificent views over Ribeauvillé, the Vosges and Alsace. Then you will head out for a drive that will lead you through the **Bergenbach valley** and the charming village of **Thannenkirch** to the **Château of Haut-Koenigsbourg**. This magnificent château, a key element of Alsatian patrimony, has witnessed tumultuous European history. It was restored by the German emperor Wilhem II at the beginning of the 20th century and is a great way to discover the architecture, furniture and daily routines of life in a 15th century Alsatian mountain fortress. You will travel back down towards the plain across the vineyards and visit the winemaking villages of **Kintzheim**, well worth a stop for its beautiful houses, the Montagne des Singes (monkey park) and its château which stages birds of prey displays, **St. Hyppolite**, with its floral fountains and 14th and 15th century Gothic church, and **Bergheim**, an old fortified town that has retain part of its medieval ramparts and still has a grand old lime tree planted in 1300 close to the Porte Haute (Top Gate). You will arrive back in Ribeauvillé at the end of the day.

Day 8 – The wine route from Ribeauvillé to Colmar

You will leave Ribeauvillé for **Hunawihir**, a picturesque village nestled in the hollow of a small valley that houses a 15th and 16th century church in the middle of a fortified cemetery. Via Zellenberg, you will reach **Riquevihar**, the pearl of the vineyards, which, spared by wars, looks today as it did in the 16th century. You will discover several half-timbered houses enclosed inside the ramparts. You will cross the **Mittelwihir** and **Benwihir** vineyards, extremely well known for their Gewurtztraminer and Riesling, to reach **Kuntzheim**. This charming village ringed by ramparts has beautiful houses and an old château that houses a Musée du Vignoble et des Vins d'Alsace (museum of winemaking and Alsace wines). The road will lead you to **Kaysersberg**, dominated by the ruins of the imperial château. The town has kept a medieval feel with its many Renaissance houses, the St. Croix church and the fortified Weiss bridge. Then you will discover **Ammerschwihir** reputed for its famous Kaefferkopf vintage. The village suffered greatly during the 1944 bombings but still has a few beautiful architectural elements and was rebuilt in a purely traditional Alsatian style. The charming village of **Nidermorschwihir** has retained a few beautiful houses with oriel windows and wooden balconies and an original 13th century twisted clock tower. The road winds through the vineyards to reach **Turckheim** where you will walk through the walled historic centre. This little town has retained an ancestral custom: every evening from May to October, the night watchman does his rounds and sings at the corner of every street! Finally, you will go through **Wintzenheim**, a welcoming winemaking town, before reaching Colmar.

Day 9 – visit Colmar

Right to this day, this town has been able to preserve its entire architectural wealth from the 13th century, so there are many typical buildings and districts that have been beautifully maintained. Colmar has interesting museums including the famous **Unterlinden museum**. We can suggest a walking tour during which you can discover the most beautiful houses and churches in the old town (the Maison des Arcades, the former customs house, the Maison Pfister, the Maison des Têtes, the St. Martin collegiate, the St. Mathieu church...). Then you will walk through “Little Venice”, the old tanners’ district, its proximity to water meant skins could be treated and washed.

Day 10 – The wine route from Colmar to Thann

From Colmar, you will pass through the village of **Wettolsheim**, dominated by the ruins of the **Hageneck château**, to reach **Eguisheim**, one of the most beautiful villages in Alsace, surrounded by vine-covered hills, crowned with the ruins of several châteaux. You will wend your way through the streets bordered by numerous half-timbered houses, all along the ramparts of the old town or in the central square where the Château of Comtes stands proud. From **Husseren Les Châteaux**, you will climb through the forest to discover the ruins of the fortresses that once protected these villages. Then you will rejoin the wine route to reach **Hattstatt**, a very old village that was once fortified. The jewel of **Gueberschwihir**, which looks out over the village’s main square with its floral fountains and lime trees, is the 12th century Romanesque clock tower. You will stop in Soultz Haut Rhin, a charming small town that prospered around a salt-water source and that has several old houses and a witches’ tower near the ramparts. You can make a detour via the **Notre Dame de Thierenbach**, a Mecca for Christianity in Alsace, to admire its 1723 basilica built in the Baroque Austrian style. Then the route crosses a few villages that suffered greatly during the two great wars, before reaching **Thann**, with the most sumptuous Gothic church in Alsace, the St. Thibaut collegiate and its famous Rangen wine, the southernmost Alsace wine.

Day 11 – return to Strasbourg via the famous Route des Crêtes (Peaks road)

The construction of this strategic road was decided during the First World War in order to safeguard North-South communications between the different valleys. Nowadays, it enables visitors to discover the most beautiful, character-filled landscapes in the Vosges mountain range, the hills, the ‘Ballons’, the famous rounded summits, the lakes, the stubble fields or summer pastures. All along this route, you will find farm-inns where you can taste regional cuisine and homemade cheeses. You will leave Thann early for a magnificent drive to **Cernay**, then climb towards **Vieil Armand**, the name given to the steep summit by soldiers in the 1914-1918 war who fought bloody battles there that claimed more than 30,000 lives. The road climbs, offering superb views.

You will cross the Gazon de Faing (stubble fields) and stop to admire the Lac Vert (green lake), that gets its very special colour from an alga, and the **Forlet lake**. You will make a detour via the Calvaire pass to admire the Black lake and the White lake before reaching the Bonhomme pass where the Route des Crêtes finishes. You will follow an equally charming route towards **St. Marie des Mines** to reach Strasbourg. The route ends in Strasbourg at the end of the day.

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. You will find below the list of hotels we work with, subject to availability at time of booking.

Prestige Self drive tour SD13-P – 4 & 5-star hotels

Luxe self drive tour SD13-L – 4-star hotels

Comfort self drive tour SD13-C – 3 & 4-star hotels or chateaus

Standard Self drive tour SD13-ST – 2-star hotels

Price includes

- 10 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.

Getting from and away

By car – Strasbourg is at the connection of several motorways. Paris-Strasbourg 480 km, about 5 hours by motorway

By train – TGV (high speed trains) from Paris-Gare de l'Est and Strasbourg (2.20 hours)

TGV from Paris CDG airport to Strasbourg with a connection at Marne La Vallée.

By plane – International Strasbourg airport. Regular flights from and to Paris-Orly airport. Rail shuttles between the airport and Strasbourg rail station (Every 15minutes)

Other services

We can book a room for you for the night before or for the last day.

Reservation of rental car

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

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