

ITALY WITH FRIENDS "FRANCE & ITALY" ADVENTURE
May 18 – 31, 2020
(Itinerary is subject to change and variations with and/or without notice.)

Day 0 - Depart USA - Sunday, May 17, 2020

Remember you will arrive in Europe the day after you depart the USA. You will need to book your air travel so that you arrive in Marseille Airport (MRS) on Monday, May 18, 2020. I will be providing a pickup service at the Marseille airport at 2PM, then driving to our overnight destination of St. Remy-de-Provence. If you plan to arrive by train from Paris, you can arrive at the Avignon TGV Station for pickup as well. (Those pick-up times to be decided later.)

Day 1 - Arrival Day - Benvenue! Welcome to Provence – Monday, May 18, 2020

Welcome to France and Saint Remy-de-Provence, our home base for our daily adventures. Sassy and sophisticated, St.-Remy is undoubtedly one of the most delightful towns in all of Provence. Encircled by a boulevard of plane trees, the center of town is filled with fine old buildings, pretty squares, plant filled alleyways, and cooling fountains. This small village was the birthplace to Nostradamus and a setting for many of Van Gogh's works of art. There was also once a thriving Roman city near St.-Remy called Glanum. The Hotel du Soleil, our home for the next 4 nights, has the feel of a simple, country inn, but is an easy walk into town. There is a very inviting pool for your use. The location of St.-Remy is perfect for exploring Provence and you will enjoy exciting day trips.

After time to settle in, we will walk into town passing chic boutiques, culinary shops and wonderful restaurants. After some time for exploration, we will enjoy a delicious welcome dinner together.
(D) Light

Day 2 - The Beautiful Hill Towns of Le Luberon – Tuesday, May 19, 2020

This morning we start out early for our excursion into the Luberon Valley, a picturesque region of mountains, forests and vineyards. It is filled with "I could live here" villages, ancient castles and abbeys. We will spend the day joy riding along curving roads and exploring villages like Gordes and Roussillon, both listed as "one of the most beautiful villages of France". We will spend some serious camera and cafe time in the red ochre village of Roussillon. This village sits on the world's largest known ochre deposit. We will take a little hike through the Ochre Canyon. The richly colored paths leading through this canyon of bright red, orange and yellow cliffs are amazing. We will enjoy lunch together.

We will also make a quick stop to see the Roman built Julien Bridge, a testament to Roman engineering and the importance of this rural area 2000 years ago. It's the only surviving bridge on what was the main road from northern Italy to the Provinces, the primary route used by Roman armies. The 215-foot-long bridge was under construction from 27 B.C. to A. D.14. Amazingly, the bridge survives today, having outlived Roman marches, hundreds of floods, and decades of car traffic. Back in St. Remy, you will have the evening free. Perhaps you might spend it lounging poolside with a glass of rose'. (B) (L) Moderate

Day 3 – Gifts and Treasures of Provence – Wednesday, May 20, 2020

Delicious food and wine, two of the wonderful gifts of Provence. This region has some of the most beautiful and lively village markets in France and St. Remy has one of the best. You can find a wide array of items from food to clothing to household goods. It can be a lot of fun to get there very early in the morning and watch them set up. Oh, the smells! Many of the vendors display their goods like works of art. You will have time today to enjoy this little slice of Provencal life and perhaps find a few treasures of your own.

Later in the afternoon we will head out for a bit of exploration. Surely, some of Provence's most important treasures were the hundreds of paintings created by the master Vincent Van Gogh. The whole area around St. Remy and Arles was this troubles artist's studio for several years. Located just

outside of St. Remy is the St. Paul Monastery and Hospital. Here Vincent spent the year between 1889 – 1890. This was after cutting off one of his ears during an argument with fellow artist, Gauguin. There is a reconstruction of his room where he painted some of his most famous works, including *Irises* and *The Starry Night*. It is a very surreal experience to walk past some of the exact spots where Vincent created over 150 paintings during this period. Several are some of his most famous and are highly treasured throughout the world today.

Nearby is the ancient Roman city of Glanum, once an important Roman market town located on the trade route from Italy to Spain. Although in ruins today, it was once filled with grand villas and temples, a basilica, a forum, a wooden dam, aqueducts, and more. The remarkable Roman monuments known as Les Antiques, which consist of a well-preserved mausoleum and triumphal arch erected around 30 AD are stunning.

For dinner we will visit the beautiful Chateau d' Estoublon. This country wine estate is the perfect example of what you would expect a French chateau to be. There is even an estate chapel with beautiful stained-glass windows. It is the kind of place that makes you want to just sit and relax for hours with a delicious glass of wine. (B) (D) Light

Day 4 - Vineyards of the Popes – Thursday, May 21, 2020

Today we travel north into the lovely wine region near Chateauneuf-du-Pape. This pretty little hilltop village is crowned with a ruined chateau that is fun to visit. Vines have been cultivated here since the days of the Avignon papacy. The unusual landscape of stony soil provides the perfect conditions to make one of Provence's most important wines. We will stop into one of the oldest wine caves in the town for a bit of wine tasting. We will then enjoy lunch at the beautiful Chateau Fines Roches. The setting high on a hill amid lush vineyards is just spectacular. Located in the heart of the prestigious vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, this castle built in the late 19th century was inhabited by the Marquis de Baroncelli and frequented by many Provencal poets.

After lunch there will be time for some shopping at the famous artisan chocolatier Bernard Castelain. Be ready to enjoy some of the finest chocolates in France. You will find it very hard to walk away from "chocolate heaven" without several tasty souvenirs. You will have this last evening free to enjoy St. Remy as you like. (B) (L) Moderate

Day 5 - Les Baux-de-Provence, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the Stunning Cote D' Azure – Friday, May 22, 2020

This morning we will drive through the Alpilles mountains on our way to visit one of the most popular and most beautiful sites in Provence. The spectacularly situated Les Baux-de-Provence, is perched high above rocky outcrops that tumble into the deep valley of hell, the Val d' Enfer. It has a history dating back 5000 years, claiming a descent from Balthazar, one of the three kings who attended Christ's Nativity. They even used the star of Bethlehem as their coat of arms. Today the ancient castle ruins dominate the upper, old or dying town, but the lower medieval village, filled with cute boutiques, is a Provencal dream come true for shoppers. You will have time to enjoy every nook and cranny of this precious village which conjures up images of knights, and troubadours singing flowery verses to aristocratic ladies of the court. You can also visit the Castle Ruins (The "Dead City") and tour the chateau and ramparts, perhaps even participate in a medieval catapult demonstration.

Then we change gears a bit as we say adieu to the slower paced region of Provence. We will hit the busy Autoroute for our drive to another famous area in France, the Cote d' Azur or the French Riviera. This is truly the home and playground of the rich and famous and has been for centuries. This area stretches along the blue coastline from St. Tropez to the Italian border near Menton. Hiding in a tiny cove along this route you will also find Monaco, one of the tiniest countries in the world. The vibrant Riviera city of Nice will be your home for the next two nights. We will settle into our hotel and discover this big-city highlights of the French Riviera. We will take an orientation walk to acquaint you with all the important spots in town. We will then dine together in the lively Old Town Nice. (B) (D) Moderate

Day 6 - Fun on the French Riviera – Saturday, May 23, 2020

You will have the entire day to enjoy Nice and the surrounding Riviera as you like. There is so much to see in this area, so you will have many choices. You can visit the wonderful art-filled museums in Nice dedicated to Matisse and Chagall. You might wish to lounge along the beach and enjoy the good life. Not far inland are wonderful villages like St. Paul de Vence and Vence. A day visiting Monaco and lovely Monte Carlo would be delightful. The famous film town of Cannes is a train ride away. If you want perfume, then a visit to Grasse is a must. The perched Eze Village is wonderful. There are many tour companies that offer day trips to all these locations. You could even take a city bike tour.

Nice has so much to offer. There is great shopping at the Nice Etoile shopping mall and at Galleries Lafayette, France's premier department store. The Old Town has Cours Saleya with its flower and vegetable market. There are also some great candy shops in the old town. Everything is close and there are several modes of public transportation that you can use to explore the city. There is also a hop-on-hop-off bus that really makes it easy for sightseeing in town. This will be your last night in France so do not miss the chance to savor all you can of this unforgettable country. (B)

Day 7 - Benvenuto! - Welcome to Italy and the Langhe Hills – Sunday, May 24, 2020

This morning we say a final farewell to France and are off to visit Bella Italia! Our first destination is the region of Piedmont. We will take time to visit some of the famous wine villages in the area known as the Langhe hills. La Morra and Barolo are both picturesque villages serving up some of the most famous wines in the hills. They are designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site as well. This area is not only famous for its wines but is also known as a the "gourmet corner" of the country with its white truffles, mushrooms and hazelnuts. They are also very proud of their salami, cheese and artisan bread.

The views from both La Morra and Barolo are amazing. There will be time for some wine tasting in La Morra. We will settle in for the night at the lovely country hotel Tota Virginia. The magnificent view of Serralunga d'Alba from your balcony will bring tears to your eyes. We will enjoy a dinner of the local cuisine with some of that famous Langhe Hill's wine. (B) (D) Moderate

Day 8 – Next, Let's Go Under the Tuscan Sun – Monday, May 25, 2020

Today, we continue our adventures in Italy as we head south to the region of Tuscany. We will pass close to Genoa, hometown of Christopher Columbus. The Italian Riviera is not far away. Our focus, however, is the magical region of Tuscany, certainly one of the most famous places in the world. Tuscany is one of those places that you will never forget. You will want to return again and again. Believe me, I am always happy when I am in Tuscany. Our first stop will be a visit to the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It is one of the most popular sights in all of Italy. So today, you will get to see it up close. Pisa sits near the coast on the Arno River. The Field of Miracles complex includes the leaning bell tower, a beautiful cathedral and a very interesting cemetery. We will take time to enjoy them all.

Then we will head to Lucca, Italy's most impressive fortress city, encircled by well-preserved Renaissance walls. Lucca boasts a beautiful historic center of cobblestoned streets lined with ornate churches, cute cafes, and pretty shops. There are many towers and one even with a tree on top. You will see many people riding bicycles on the garden like walls surrounding the old town. We will settle in for the night and enjoy our first Tuscan dinner together. (B) (D) Light

Day 9 - The Fortress City of Lucca - Tuesday, May 26, 2020

Wake up smiling - you're in Tuscany! The opportunities are endless in this wine and food fantasyland. We will begin our sightseeing this morning with the "Delectable" tour. While walking through the historic center of Lucca to admire its artistic and historic monuments, we will also visit small, traditional shops that feature local food products. To tempt the eye and palate, there will be

the aroma of freshly baked focaccia topped with the olive oil of Lucca, a piece of "cecina", a thin type of pizza made from locally grown chick-peas, and other delicacies such as buccellato (sweet raisin bread), and cheeses and cold-cuts from the Garfagnana area, all washed down by a glass of good Tuscan wine chosen from the best wineries of the territory.

You will then have free time for your own pursuits. Lucca is easy to enjoy, and you will have plenty of time to explore. You might want to ride a bicycle or take a walk on the walls surrounding the old town. This would be a good time to climb that tower with the tree on top. (B) (L) Moderate

Day 10 – The Hills of Chianti and Castello da Verrazzano – Wednesday, May 27, 2020

This morning we say farewell to Lucca and travel deeper into the region of Tuscany. Our first stop will be at the American Military Cemetery located just outside of Florence. It is one of two American Military Cemeteries located in Italy. The compelling sight of endless rows of white marble crosses recalls the heroism of the young Americans who fought so valiantly to free Italy from the grips of fascism during World War II. The 1940's may seem very long ago, but during WWII this area, as well as many areas of Italy, was terribly ravaged by the fighting. I feel it is an honor and our duty to take time to pay our respects to these brave soldiers.

No trip to Tuscany would be complete without a visit to a local winery. We will visit one of the oldest in the Chianti area, the 11th Century **Castello Verrazzano**. The hilltop location of this estate and winery is just spectacular. The countryside surrounding Verrazzano is dotted with castles, vineyards and olive groves and is truly magnificent. You will enjoy a guided tour of the castle grounds and ancient ageing cellars, followed by a feast of homemade Tuscan favorites accompanied by a range of delicious wines made by the Verrazzano winery. You will have the opportunity to learn the art of wine making and wine tasting in this relaxed and amusing setting.

Then we are off to Castellina in Chianti, a typical Chianti village. Palazzo Squarcialupi, an old family palazzo that is now a lovely hotel, will be our home for the next 3 nights. You will have stunning views over this area filled with forests, olive groves and perfectly manicured vineyards. The village is small, but it is fun to explore. It is one of my favorites in Italy. Do not miss a walk through the Via delle Volte, a covered street that runs under the town. There are some wonderful shops in this small town, especially for Tuscan art and photographs. This was an ancient Etruscan city over 3000 years ago and there are some tombs just outside of town.

You will have the evening free to relax a bit and enjoy those fantastic views from the hotel terrace, or perhaps lounge by the pool. You might want to check out the small hotel spa. (B) (L) Light

Day 11 - San Gimignano, a Tuscan Treasure – Thursday, May 28, 2020

Today we will explore one of the most beautiful medieval hill towns in Tuscany. San Gimignano is always a favorite stop on my tours. The skyline of this village with its many towers standing tall has been called the "Medieval Manhattan". You will have time for lunch or to enjoy all the many things to do in San Gimignano. You may want to climb the Torre Grande, the highest tower in San Gimignano that affords expansive views over the surrounding countryside. There are several Torture Museums in town, yes, I did say torture museums, and they are supposedly very good.

Beware, there are some of the best artisan shops right down the street. This has always been an important trading center. It was on the famous Via Francigena: the most traveled of the medieval roads that pilgrims traveled to Rome. From the 8th Century, it was the route through France that linked Canterbury Cathedral in England and Rome, the heart of Christianity. Today you will find locally owned shops selling ceramics, soaps, alabaster, olive wood items, leather goods, etc.

We will return to Castellina for the evening. Dinner tonight is right across the street from the hotel at Il Fondaccio. You may think that you have tasted great pizza before but wait until you taste the wood-oven baked pizza here. Be ready to eat a whole pizza by yourself! (B) (D) Moderate

Day 12 - Vino and Views - Brunello Country - Friday, May 29, 2020

Today will be a wonderful day of sightseeing and experiencing every true Italian's love, food and wine. We will travel into another famous wine region of Tuscany, Brunello country. The Brunello di Montalcino is one of the most famous, and most expensive, wines to come out of Tuscany. In the late 19th century, the Biondi Santi family created this fine, dark red wine, called it "the brunette". Home of the Brunello is Montalcino. You will see Montalcino standing proud in the distance long before we reach its ancient walls.

Not far from Montalcino, in one of the loveliest settings in Tuscany, is the Monastery of Sant' Antimo. One of the finest Romanesque churches in Tuscany, it originally formed part of a 9th century Benedictine monastery founded, according to legend, by Charlemagne himself. The present building begun in 1118 AD is exquisite, with its elegant tower and rounded apses. An important monastic community once flourished here, and there are still some monks about.

The nearby countryside is littered with wineries producing the Brunello di Montalcino and its younger cousin, the Rosso di Montalcino. We will have the opportunity to taste this "nectar of the Gods" at one of the most popular wine estates in the area, Castello Banfi. Long recognized for excellence in wine making and hospitality, the vineyard estate offers a range of activities. We will stop into the enoteca/wine bar for an aperitivo. You can purchase local products and other items associated with the wine culture in this shop. We will then enjoy a traditional Tuscan meal at the Taverna Banfi. Our multi-course lunch will be accompanied by Banfi estate wines. This will be a meal of true Italian indulgence and the presentation is just lovely. After lunch there will be time to enjoy the beautiful setting of Castello Banfi and to visit its renown Glass Museum.

We will then return to Castellina for our final evening in our "little slice of heaven". (B) (L) Light

Day 13 - Florence, Birthplace of the Renaissance - Saturday, May 30, 2020

Today, we will say farewell to the lovely and peaceful Tuscan countryside. We will drive into the frenzy of Firenze, Florence in Italian. We will make a stop at Piazzale Michelangelo so that you can see the beautiful panorama of the city with the Arno River running through. The huge red dome of the Florence Duomo is definitely the focal point of the skyline.

We will jump right into the Renaissance with a walking tour of the main sights of Florence including the Duomo, Baptistery, with its famous bronze doors, followed by a walk through the medieval streets of Florence. You will then visit the sculpture studded Piazza Signoria, pass the massive Uffizi Gallery and end at the oldest bridge in Florence, the Ponte Vecchio. Florence is known as an outdoor museum and you will have time to enjoy all the sculpture, art, and architecture that surrounds you. You will also have some free time for a museum visit or shopping. Later in the evening, we will meet for one last time to sit down and enjoy our farewell meal together. We will have plenty to toast after all the amazing places that we have traveled on our trek through France and Italy. Sante e' Salute! (B) (D) Moderate

Day 14 - Arrivederci Italia! - Sunday, May 31, 2020

Sadly, it is time to say "arrivederci" or even "au revoir". Parting will be such sweet sorrow, but I know you will take along wonderful memories of time spent experiencing the wonders spanning the two countries of France and Italy with new friends. (B)

(Included meals are designated each day with (B) for breakfast, (L) for lunch, and (D) for dinner.)

THE FOLLOWING IS INCLUDED IN YOUR ITALY WITH FRIENDS TOUR:

- 13 nights' accommodation in 3-4 star, centrally located hotels with private bath or shower.
- Many meals included: 13 breakfasts (B), 5 lunches (L), 7 dinners (D). Wine, water, tea and coffee provided at all included meals on this particular tour.
- All ground transportation in France and Italy during tour.
- Includes pick-up and transfer to hotel in St. Remy from Marseille airport or Avignon TGV station. (Does not include transportation to the airport or train station in Florence.)
- Guided sightseeing and entrance fees to select sights, wineries and museums as described in itinerary.
- Local VAT taxes and government fees, gas, highway tolls and parking fees.
- Pre-tour visit with helpful travel information.
- Plenty of memories to last a lifetime.
- Surprises along the way.

NOT INCLUDED IN TOUR:

- Does not include airfare.
- Does not include transportation to airport or train station in Florence.
- Does not include alcoholic beverages other than wine (ie. beer, cocktails), or non-alcoholic drinks (soft drinks, etc.) at included meals.
- Does not include personal expenses such as laundry, mini-bar, or extra transportation in tour towns.
- Does not include travel insurance.
- Does not include city tax required in each hotel. Can range from 1 – 6 Euro per person per night.

FRANCE & ITALY ADVENTURE - 2020 - LAND ONLY TOUR PRICE:

Tour begins in St. Remy, France and ends in Florence, Italy; tour is for 14 days and 13 nights.

The total cost per person is **\$4199** with double occupancy. (Includes taxes, fees, and Euro exchange rate adjustment.)

Single occupancy supplement is **\$1200**.

A **\$500 non-refundable** deposit per person will hold your place on the tour. Tours are limited in size. (Usually only 8 people). Payment is accepted by check, or credit card through PayPal. (3% fee domestically if using PayPal) Your deposit is credited against the total tour cost. Final payment is required no later than **60** days prior to departure.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:

Prepare for a physically demanding tour. (Although this tour does not have the physical demands that many of the Italy tours have.) Age is not a concern so long as you are physically fit, a very good walker at an energetic pace, and able to stand for extended periods of time and climb lots of hills and stairs. All the above could be done in all sorts of weather and temperatures. You are required to load and unload your bags into the van, and to carry your bag to your room. This sometimes could be a short distance from the hotel. Most days our sightseeing will cover anywhere from 2-8 miles of walking, sometimes over uneven surfaces.