

ITALY WITH FRIENDS SOUTHERN FRANCE SOJOURN

May 4 - 15, 2020

(*Itinerary is subject to change and variations with and/or without notice. *)

DAY 0 – DEPART USA – Sunday, May 3, 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– BENVENUE! WELCOME TO PROVENCE – Monday, May 4, 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 6 nights, has the feel of a simple, country inn, but is an easy walk into town. The location of St. Remy is perfect for exploring Provence and you will enjoy exciting day trips. Unlike many IWF's tours, you will stay in one spot for most of our time in Provence.

After time to settle in, we will meet for a welcome drink and orientation followed by a short walk into town. After some time for exploration passing chic boutiques, cute culinary shops and numerous restaurants, we will enjoy a delicious welcome dinner together. (D) Light

DAY 2 - Hill Towns of Le Luberon – Tuesday, May 5, 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 at one of the colorful cafes.

We will also make a 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 the local rose'. (B) (L) Moderate

Day 3 - Gifts and Treasures of Provence – Wednesday, May 6, 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 the entire day to enjoy this little slice of Provencal life and perhaps find a few treasures of your own. (B)

Day 4 – Historic Provence - Pont du Gard – Thursday, May 7, 2020

We will begin our day with a drive through the countryside crossing the Rhone River at Tarascon with its grandiose Chateau du Roi Rene sitting high on its banks. This sleepy village is picture perfect and it has a twin across the river. Beaucaire is another lovely riverside village and has a castle of its own.

Today's highlight is a visit to one of this area's most important historical sights, the remarkable **Pont du Gard**, built by the Romans in 19 BC as part of a 30-mile canal to supply water to the nearby town of Nimes. This enormous 3-tiered aqueduct rises as much as 160 feet above the Gardon valley and was in use through the ninth century. It was the tallest bridge the Romans ever built. Today it is a UNESCO World Heritage site. We will take time to explore the area, take a walk across the bridge and visit the interesting museum. We will also enjoy lunch together at the restaurant Les Terrasses which has a stunning backdrop, the Pont du Gard!

Later, we will stop for a visit at the **Abbey de Montmajour**. It was founded in the 10th century by Benedictine monks and is today a remarkable example of Romanesque architecture. Once back in St. Remy, we will have a "picnic" dinner. (B) (L) (D) Strenuous

Day 5 – Vineyards of the Popes – Friday, May 8, 2020

Today, we will 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 tasting. We will then enjoy lunch at the beautiful Chateau Fines Roches. The setting high on a hill amid lush vineyards is just spectacular.

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. We will return to St. Remy for a quiet evening. (B) (L) Light

Day 6 – Roman Provence in Arles – Saturday, May 9, 2020

Today we will visit **Arles**, referred to as the "soul of Provence". This town filled with narrow streets, Romanesque churches and Roman ruins is impressive. Arles sealed its good fortune in the 1st century B. C. when it sided with Julius Caesar and became the designated "first city" of Provence. This led to the construction of temples, baths, the amphitheater, theatre and circus. Its location on the Rhone River made it the perfect place to build the first bridge on the Roman route to Spain. We will take time for a walking tour of town with visits to many of these Roman ruins.

We will also visit inside the Ancient History Museum with models of most of the important Roman structures in Arles. I think you will find them very interesting. The Museum's marble bust of Julius Caesar is one of the few sculpted during his lifetime. The most important treasure of the museum is the Roman boat discovered in the nearby Rhone River. After almost 2000 years it was raised and reassembled and is now the highlight of the museum.

The city of Arles has a connection to the famous artist Vincent Van Gogh, and you can see many of the scenes that eventually became "works of art". You will see where Van Gogh lived and painted and even get to see the "bright yellow cafe", the subject of one of his most famous works in Arles.

Back in St. Remy, we will visit the St. Paul Monastery and Hospital, another home to Van Gogh where 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 he created over 150 paintings during this period. Several are some of his most famous and are highly treasured throughout the world today. Later, we will walk into St. Remy one last time to enjoy dinner together. (B) (D) Moderate

Day 7 – Provencal Treasures – Sunday, May 10, 2020

After breakfast we will say farewell to lovely St. Remy. 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, with the powerful lords of the region 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 congers 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. The views from this vantage point are amazing. You can see all the way to the city of Marseille and the Mediterranean.

Afterwards, we will make a short stop at the beautiful Chateau d' Estoublon. This country wine estate is the perfect example of what you would expect a French estate chateau to be. There is even a chapel that has 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 the estate's wine.

Then we are off to our next overnight destination, the City of Fountains, **Aix-en-Provence**. Aix is one of the most elegant and wonderfully preserved of all French cities. Founded by the Romans in 122 BC, its quaint streets, colorful markets, and beautiful landscapes have lured artists, writers, nobles and visitors just like you for centuries. The main avenue, Cours Mirabeau, is considered one of the most beautiful in Europe. You really do feel like you are in a small version of Paris. We will walk around and learn about its vibrant history, as well as its connection to 20th century artists like Cezanne. Today it is also home to over 40,000 students who attend its renowned university. There will be time to settle into the Grand Hotel Roi Rene, a lovely 4-star hotel situated in the middle of everything. Later, we will sit down for dinner in this historic, one-time capital of Provence. (B) (D) Moderate

Day 8 – Aix-en-Provence – “French Foodie Heaven” – Monday, May 11, 2020

Today you will have a walking tour of Aix with a focus on “food”. This city of art and culture is a real paradise of amazing selections of Provencal food and wine. You will have a “delicious tour” to taste its finest delicacies and learn about its history and secrets. You will cross narrow streets and be amazed wandering in the alleys so filled with history and poetry you can almost hear the troubadours. In the labyrinth of little streets, scattered with dozens of fountains, you will meet craftsmen and try their Provencal specialties. A delicious selection of delights will be tasted along the way!

Afterwards, you will have free time to enjoy this beautiful city to the max! (B) (L) Moderate

Day 9 -Mediterranean Highlights of Southern France – Tuesday, May 12, 2020

This morning we will visit the Mediterranean port-side town of **Cassis**. Here you find an easy-going lifestyle. Cassis is known as "the poor man's St. Tropez". Nearby, you will find the amazing Calanques, narrow inlets created by extensions of cliffs that border the shore. You will have the opportunity to sail into fjord-like translucent waters that are beautiful. Of course, the area is also known for some delicious wines which you can enjoy at one of the outdoor cafes lining the port.

Then we change gears a bit as we leave this 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 three nights. We will settle into our hotel and discover the big-city highlights of the French Riviera. We will dine together in the lively Old Town Nice. (B) (D) Moderate

Day 10 & 11 - Fun on the French Riviera – Wednesday & Thursday, May 13 & 14, 2020

You will have the next 2 days 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. The hotel should have information on all of these.

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 together 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. (B) daily

On Thursday we will meet in the evening to dine together one last time and to toast our adventures in Southern France with a glass of local Rose'. It will surely have been another wonderful time of discovery made with new friends in the fabulous French regions of Provence and the Riviera. (Farewell D)

Day 12 - Au Revoir – Friday, May 15, 2020

Make your way to the Nice airport or train station for your journey home or to other parts of France. Take along wonderful memories of time spent with new friends discovering the South of France. Ciao and Merci.

THE FOLLOWING IS INCLUDED IN YOUR ITALY WITH FRIENDS TOUR:

- 11 nights' accommodation in 3-4 star, centrally located hotels with private bath or shower.
- 21 meals included: 11 breakfasts (B), 4 lunches (L), 6 dinners (D).
(Water, wine, and coffee/tea included with all meals.)
- All ground transportation in France during tour.
- Includes pick-up and transfer to hotel from Marseille airport or Avignon TGV station. (Does not include transportation to the airport or train station in Nice.)
- 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 Nice.
- Does not include remaining meals, alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks at included meals.
- Does not include personal expenses such as internet use, 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.

SOUTH OF FRANCE 2020 - LAND ONLY TOUR PRICE:

Tour begins in St. Remy and ends in Nice; tour is for 12 days and 11 nights.

The total cost per person is **\$3999** with double occupancy. (Includes taxes, fees, and Euro exchange rate adjustment.)

Single occupancy supplement is **\$800**.

A **\$500 non-refundable** deposit will hold your place on the tour. Tours are limited in size. (Usually only 8 people unless I have another driver.) Payment is accepted by check or credit card through PayPal. (5% fee 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.