

ITALY WITH FRIENDS TOURS
SPOTLIGHT ON SOUTHERN FRANCE & THE FRENCH RIVIERA
October 25 – November 4, 2027

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

Day 0 – Depart USA – Sunday, October 24, 2027

Remember, you will arrive in Europe the day after you depart from the USA. You will need to book your air travel so that you arrive at Marseille Airport (MRS) on Monday, October 25, 2027.

Day 1– Bienvenue! Welcome to France – Monday, October 25, 2027

Welcome to Southern France and Aix-en-Provence, the City of Fountains. Aix (pronounced X) 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 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. We will meet for a welcome drink and orientation followed by a walking tour of this historic, one-time capital of Provence. We will then sit down for our first dinner together. (D) Light

Day 2 – Aix-en-Provence – Elegant and Easy to Love – Tuesday, October 26, 2027

We will start the day out early with a walking tour of Aix with a focus on "food". This city of art and culture is a real paradise of amazing selections of Provençal food and wine. You will enjoy "The Provence Food Tour" to taste Aix's finest delicacies and learn about its history and secrets. A highlight of the tour is the Aix-en-Provence farmers market, one of the oldest in France, dating back over seven centuries! You will be guided through the winding streets of old town, into the farmers' markets and food shops while meeting some of the passionate vendors and rubbing shoulders with locals doing their daily shopping in market. We'll taste seasonal fruits and vegetables and other specialties, both sweet and savory. Fresh pastries, cheese, olives, charcuterie and even a little wine will be among the menu of about a dozen different tastings.

After your "foodie" adventure you will have some free time to enjoy more Aix. You may wish to wander its lovely streets and explore its varied shops. You might want to follow in the footsteps of Paul Cezanne, a hometown legend. (L) (B) Moderate

Day 3 – Les Baux-de-Provence & A Lovely Provençal Village – Wednesday, October 27, 2027

This morning we will say "adieu" to Aix. We are headed 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 Provençal dream come true for shoppers. You will have time to enjoy every nook and cranny of this precious village which congers 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. You will have time for lunch on your own.

We will then drive through the Alpilles mountains on our way to small, but sophisticated, **Saint Rémy-de-Provence**, our home base for the next 5 nights. St. Rémy 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. Rémy called Glanum. The Hotel du Soleil has the feeling of being a simple, country inn, but is an easy walk into town. Unlike many IWF's tours, you will stay in one spot for most of our time in Provence. After some time for exploration passing chic boutiques, cute culinary shops and numerous restaurants, we will enjoy dinner together. (B) (D) Strenuous

Day 4 - Hill Towns of Le Luberon – Thursday, October 28, 2027

This morning we will 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**, another 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. Rémy, you will have the evening free. Perhaps you might spend it lounging poolside with a glass of the local rose'. (B) (L) Strenuous

Day 5 - Roman Provence in Arles – Friday, October 29, 2027

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, an 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 passing 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. 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. You will even get to see the "bright yellow cafe", the subject of one of his most famous works in Arles, *Café Terrace at Night*.

On our way back to St. Rémy, we will stop for a visit to the **Abbey de Montmajour**. It was founded in the 10th century by Benedictine monks and is today a remarkable example of Romanesque architecture. The surrounding fields were a favorite of Van Gogh, who walked here from Arles to paint his famous wheat fields. Tonight we will enjoy a "French Style" Pizza dinner in St. Rémy.

(B) (D) Strenuous

Day 6 – Historic Pont du Gard– Saturday, October 30, 2027

This morning we will take 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, **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 Nîmes is a remarkable sight. 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.

Once back in St. Rémy, You will have time to explore more of St. Remy and perhaps do some shopping. Later, we will enjoy a "picnic" dinner together. (B) (D) Moderate

Day 7 – The Good Life at Le Château d'Estoublon – Sunday, October 31, 2027

Enjoy your morning and soak up that healthy Provencal sun. We will make a short drive to the beautiful **Château d'Estoublon** for our lunch adventure. This country wine estate is the perfect example of what you would expect a French estate chateau to look like. 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.

On the way back to St. Rémy, 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. You will have this last evening free. (B) (L) Light

Day 8 - Mediterranean Highlights of Southern France – Monday, November 1, 2027

This morning we say farewell to lovely St. Rémy. We will then 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 Côte 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 situated right on the "Promenade Des Anglais" one of the most famous avenues of the French Riviera. There will be some time for a walking tour before we dine together in the lively Old Town Nice. (B) (D) Moderate

Day 9 - Fun on the French Riviera – Tuesday, November 2, 2027

You will have today to enjoy Nice 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 want to lounge along the beach and just enjoy "the good life". Not far inland are wonderful villages like St. Paul de Vence and Vence. The famous film town of Cannes is a train ride away. If you want perfume, then a visit to Grasse is a must. There are many tour companies that

offer day trips to all these locations. You could even take a city bike tour or cooking class. The hotel should have information on all of these adventures.

There is also 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 a hop-on-hop-off bus that really makes it easy for sightseeing in town. (B)

Day 10 – Eze, Monaco & Monte Carlo, Oh My! – Wednesday, November 3, 2027

Today will be a wonderful day of exploration along the Côte d’Azur. We will start with a visit to the medieval perched village of **Eze** and discover the perfume of the Fragonard. Then we are off to the Principality of **Monaco**, the second smallest country in the world. There is plenty to see in the “Disney-esque” setting where you can stroll through the old town, discover the Prince’s Palace and explore its neo-Romanesque cathedral where Prince Rainier married Grace Kelly in 1956. You will also see the famous **Monte Carlo** Casino Square, luxury boutiques and even get to drive along a portion of the Monaco Grand Prix circuit.

We will dine together one last time and 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. (B) (D) Moderate

Day 11 - Au Revoir – Thursday, November 4, 2027

Make your way to the Nice (NCE) 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. (B)

THE FOLLOWING IS INCLUDED IN YOUR ITALY WITH FRIENDS TOUR:

- 10 nights' accommodation in 3-4 star, centrally located hotels with private bath or shower.
- 19 meals included: 10 breakfasts (B), 3 lunches (L), 6 dinners (D).
(Water, wine, and coffee/tea included with all meals.)
- All ground transportation in France during tour.
- 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 from the airport or TGV train station in Marseille or to the 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 2027 - LAND ONLY TOUR PRICE:

Tour begins in Aix-en-Provence and ends in Nice; tour is for 11 days and 10 nights.

The total cost per person is **\$4699** with double occupancy. (Includes taxes, fees, and Euro exchange rate adjustment.)

The Single occupancy supplement is **\$850**.

Former IWF's tour members will be entitled to the **\$100** BFF Discount.

A **\$500** non-refundable deposit will hold your place on the tour. Tours are limited in size. Payment is accepted by a personal check or credit card through PayPal or other Cash apps like Zelle or Venmo. (5% fee if using PayPal) Your deposit is credited against the total tour cost. Final payment is required no later than **90** days prior to departure. See www.ItalyWithFriends.com for Terms & Conditions and Registration Forms.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:

Prepare for a physically demanding tour. 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. Plan to get in shape before you head to France.

ACTIVITY & WALKING KEY:

LIGHT = 2-4 miles of mostly level walking (some cobblestones) throughout the day.

MODERATE = 2-6 miles walking throughout the day with some hills and stairs.

STRENUOUS = 2-8 miles walking throughout the day with a lot of hills, stairs, or uneven terrain.

VERY STRENUOUS = Everything above and beyond! Mamma mia!