

Gardens of France

Discover the most beautiful gardens of France
on a spectacular 10-day tour from Provence to Paris
- staying in Nice, Aix-en-Provence, Uzes, Lyon & Paris

Day 1: Your Adventure Begins

Your French adventure begins today with an overnight flight to Europe, connecting to Nice. All flights will be on scheduled services of major international airlines, such as Air France, Lufthansa, or United Airlines.

Day 2: Bonjour Provence - Nice & the Villa Ephrussi Rothschild

Following a late morning arrival into Nice, you'll be met by your Global Explorers tour leader who will escort you to your centrally-located hotel where you'll have time to check-in & freshen-up before lunch.

This afternoon our expert tour leader will introduce you to the Cote d'Azur as you begin your sightseeing with a visit to the *Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild*, in nearby St. Jean-Cap-Ferrat, one of the French Riviera's most exclusive enclaves.

The Villa, a treasure trove of art built by one of the daughters of the wealthy Rothschild family, is famed for its nine themed gardens which contains statuary from churches, monasteries & palaces, as well as over 100 varieties of rose.

Later this afternoon your first day's sightseeing will end with a short walking tour of Nice's historic Old Town & its colorful Cours Saleya, Nice's main market square since the Middle Ages & still home to flower & produce markets.

Dinner this evening is in a typical local restaurant in the heart of Nice.

Day 3: Jardin de la Pomme d'Ambre & Aix-en-Provence

We depart Nice today, traveling west along the Mediterranean towards Aix-en-Provence.

Our first stop this morning will be at the *Jardin de la Pomme d'Ambre* (Garden of the Amber Apple), a beautiful small garden showcasing the native flora of the Cote d'Azur.

Later we'll arrive in Aix-en-Provence, an attractive & relaxed university town that was the birthplace & home of artist Paul Cezanne who captured the local landscape in his paintings.

Aix will be our base for two nights & this afternoon you will be introduced to the old city on an introductory tour before enjoying a group dinner in the city center this evening.

Day 4: A Restored Estate - Chateau Val Joanis

We begin today with a relaxed morning to enjoy the delights of Aix-en-Provence, first visiting the daily market that is considered the best in Provence.

The rest of the morning is free for you to explore the Old Town at your leisure before we rendezvous after lunch.

This afternoon we travel a short distance out of Aix to the nearby *Chateau Val Joanis*. An historic estate that had fallen into disrepair, Chateau Val Joanis was purchased in 1977 & the long process of restoration began, including replanting vineyards that dated back to Roman times. The terraced gardens were laid out in the 1980s, combining practical vegetable & herb plantings with decorative elements that include plants from around the Mediterranean - Italian roses, Greek plane trees, Portuguese laurels & more. After visiting the gardens we'll enjoy a private tasting of the chateau's wines. Later we return to Aix, with time to relax before this evening's dinner.

Day 5: Avignon, French City of Popes

This morning we bid farewell to Aix & travel to another of Provence's beautiful & famed towns, Avignon.

During the 14th century, following a split in the Catholic church, Avignon was home to a series of rival Popes, making it one of the most important cities in Europe at that time. We'll take a guided walking tour of the compact center, then visit the *Palais des Papes*, the Popes' Palace. Afterwards enjoy time to explore further, to shop, or perhaps just to relax in one of Avignon's cafes & enjoy a leisurely lunch.

Later this afternoon we will visit the nearby *Abbaye de Saint Andre*, located just across the Rhone river from Avignon.

Situated within the formidable walls of the 14th century Fort Saint Andre, the abbey dates back even further, to the 10th century. Though only ruins of the abbey itself exist, its 16th century Italianate gardens have been fully restored & are renowned as some of the most beautiful in France, with spectacular views of Avignon.

Our base tonight will be the small & 'untouristy' Provencal city of Uzes, just an hour from Avignon, where we will enjoy a one-night stay & group dinner.

Day 6: Market Day in Uzes - A Slice of Small town France

Today is market day in Uzes, a great opportunity to experience this most authentic of local French traditions. Your tour leader will escort you on a relaxed walk through the market, explaining the sights & sounds around you before you are free to spend the morning exploring the market & surrounding town at your own pace.

Departure from Uzes will be after lunch today, as we leave Provence & journey north into the Burgundy region.

Our destination today is Lyon, one of France's most compelling cities & a fabulous stop for gourmets, where we will check-in for a two-night stay.

Lyon is considered the home of French cuisine, so dinner tonight will be in a local *bouchon*, a traditional Lyonnais restaurant.

Day 7: Lyon in Depth

This morning we will discover the city of Lyon in the company of our expert local guide, walking the medieval streets & riding the funicular up Fourviere Hill - as well as offering great views over the city, it will take us to the Basilique Notre-Dame de Fourviere, a fortress-like church above the city.

Although Lyon is a large & bustling city, this afternoon you'll discover one of its peaceful hidden havens as you visit the privately-owned garden of *Le Bonne Maison*, 'The Good House'.

Recognized as another of France's most remarkable gardens, *Le Bonne Maison* is the creation of Frenchwoman Odile Masquelier, who returned to her childhood home in 1966 & has since transformed its grounds, with a particular dedication to ancient varieties of roses (over 800 varieties are now featured).

Dinner tonight will be in another of Lyon's fantastic traditional eateries.

Day 8: Versailles - Europe's

Departing Lyon this morning we drive north as we make our way towards Paris, France's wonderful capital city.

But first there's time to visit Versailles, the magnificent summer home of France's royalty set in vast gardens & woodland.

After viewing the interior (& learning how the king & his court lived) explore the pristine grounds which include the famous fountains & Marie Antoinette's 'Little Hamlet' where the queen played farm!

Later this afternoon we'll drive into Paris & check-in for a two-night stay.

After dinner discover why Paris is known as 'The City of Lights', as we take a nighttime cruise on the River Seine to enjoy the city at night.

Day 9: Paris in Depth

A panoramic city tour of Paris this morning, led by a knowledgeable local guide will familiarize you with the 'City of Lights'. During your tour you'll see all the most famous sights of the city (the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, the Champs Elysses, & many more), as well as visiting Notre Dame Cathedral. With our interest in gardens & plants, we'll be sure to include stops at the city's flower market & *Tuileries* gardens too!

With so much to see in Paris, this afternoon has been left free for you to explore France's wonderful capital city at your leisure. But don't worry - your tour leader will be on hand to help you plan your afternoon, whether you want to browse the bookstores of the Left Bank, shop in the stores of the Grand Avenues, or visit one of the city's great museums & art galleries.

This evening, our last together in France, we'll rendezvous once more for a farewell dinner.

Day 10: Travel home

Sadly your French vacation comes to an end today, as we transfer to Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport for your flight home, arriving in the USA later today.