

Normandy & the Loire

Trace the routes of French & world history through Normandy & the Loire Valley on a fabulous 10-day exploration

Day 1: Fly out from USA

Depart home for your overnight flight across the Atlantic to Paris.

Day 2: Bienvenue en France

After an early morning arrival into Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport, we'll board our private motorcoach & begin our journey west.

Our first stop, just 90 minutes from the airport, will be the home & gardens of Claude Monet at Giverny. It was here that the artist created his acclaimed 'Waterlilies' series of paintings & his garden has been preserved as it was when he lived here.

Our lunchtime stop will be the medieval city of Rouen, one of Normandy's unmissable jewels & its largest city. Famous for its half-timbered houses, Rouen is steeped in history from many different rulers including the Romans, Vikings, the Dukes of Normandy, & even the English who put Joan of Arc to death here, burning her at the stake in the city's Place du Vieux Marche. Our visit will include a leisurely walking tour & time for lunch.

Departing Rouen, this afternoon we'll follow the meandering Seine River on the Route des Abbayes, making our way past the ruins of monasteries & chateaux on one of the most memorable routes in France

Finally, we'll arrive in Honfleur, our base for the next two nights, in time to settle-in before our included welcome dinner.

Day 3: Discover Honfleur

A guided morning walking tour of Honfleur will introduce you to Normandy's most picture postcard pretty port today. Highlights will include the harbor & market of this essential stop on any Normandy itinerary.

After yesterday's traveling this afternoon & evening have been left free for you to relax or to enjoy this enchanting town, exploring at your own pace. With plenty of rich local produce, the region's dishes often feature seafood, apples, or cream.

Day 4: Calvados Country & the Bayeux Tapestry

We journey inland this morning to explore the Calvados countryside of Normandy, visiting the historic town of Pont-Audemer which still reveals its antiquity despite being damaged during World War II, & stopping to enjoy a cellar tour & tasting of the typical Normandy apple brandy that shares its name with the region.

This afternoon we arrive in the enchanting old town of Bayeux. Famous for its Tapestry & an ideal location for visiting the D-Day Beaches, it will be our base for three nights.

A group dinner of typical Normandy cuisine is included this evening, but first we'll pay a visit to the famous Bayeux Tapestry. Actually an embroidered linen panel 229 feet long, the 'tapestry' tells the story of the conquest of England by William the Conqueror in 1066AD.

Day 5: Day trip to Mont St. Michel

Today we travel close to the Normandy/Brittany border on a day trip to visit Mont St Michel, a sight that has inspired pilgrims for centuries & is considered a wonder of the Western World. Here our local guide will lead us as we climb the steps for wonderful views out over the bay of Mont St Michel. Later we'll visit inside the Romanesque & Gothic Abbey built so high above the island, before enjoying plenty of free time for lunch & exploring the narrow lanes.

On our return journey to Bayeux we will stop off to visit an escargot farm! Here we'll see how snails are farmed, and we'll have a chance to sample them of course.

Back in Bayeux this evening you will be free to try one of this picturesque towns many good restaurants.

Day 6: The D-Day Beaches

Today is dedicated to visiting the D-Day Beaches (Juno, Omaha, Utah, Gold, Sword) which saw some of the fiercest fighting of World War II .

Throughout the day we will be accompanied by a knowledgeable local guide who will introduce us many of the locations & countryside where Allied troops fought during "The Longest Day".

Amongst the sites visited will be Omaha Beach, the American Cemetery, Pointe du Hoc, Sainte Mere Eglise, & more.

After lunch any of you who wish to may choose to return to Bayeux for a free afternoon of exploring & shopping (advance notice required).

Day 7: South to the Loire

Heading south to the Loire Valley this morning, the longest drive of our tour takes us to today's first visit, the Chateau of Villandry, renowned for its beautifully restored Renaissance gardens.

After our visit & lunch here we'll travel the short distance to the sumptuous chateau & gardens of Chenonceau.

Considered by many to be the most beautiful & fairytale-like of all the Loire chateaux, Chenonceau is known as the 'Chateau of the Ladies' due to the influence in its conception & evolution of six women, most notably the King's mistress & wife, Diane de Poitiers & Catherine de Medici.

Everything about Chenonceau is beautiful, from its tree-lined approach to the chateau itself spanning the river Cher.

We end our day in the nearby village of Chenonceaux, where we check-in for a two night stay & enjoy a group dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 8: Amboise, home of artists & kings

Today we explore the small & charming town of Amboise where the royal chateau stands majestically overlooking the Loire & a nearby manor house was the final abode of Leonardo da Vinci. Visits to both chateaux will be included, where we'll learn how Leonardo came to live here, & which king of France died in the castle after cracking his head on a door jamb!

We'll also enjoy a private wine-tasting here, as the Touraine region is famous not only for its chateaux but also for its wines, cheeses & fruits.

This evening you are free to try one of the excellent local eateries in Chenonceaux.

Day 9: Paris, City of Lights

We travel north to Paris today, making a stop en-route in Chartres, to visit the magnificent cathedral, a Gothic marvel & home to the grandest display of gothic stained glass windows anywhere. Indeed they have given a name to their particular shade of blue: Chartres blue.

Upon arrival we will meet our guide, the highly-respected historian of Chartres Cathedral Malcolm Miller, to explore the Cathedral. Afterwards you'll have time to climb the tower, & take lunch here too before we continue on to Paris.

After checking-in to our overnight hotel in the 'City of Lights', we'll celebrate our final evening with an included farewell dinner & our ever-popular 'Paris By Night' excursion, enjoying unforgettable views of the city from atop the Eiffel Tower & along the Seine on an evening cruise!

Day 10: Au Revoir Paris

Sadly it is time to bid 'Adieu' this morning to those travelers who are returning home today. A morning flight from Paris' Charles de Gaulle will have you home this in Lynchburg this evening. For those extending their trip with our '**Paris Extension**', your exploration of the city continues this morning with a guided city tour, taking in all the most famous sights of this wonderful destination.