

Provence & Beyond

Ann and Amanda's Culinary Tour 2010 Itinerary

Saturday Day 1

Pick up at 3pm at Avignon TGV station in the main arrivals hall. Drive half an hour to the village of St. Maximin to our home for the next two weeks, an 18th Century stone maison of great French charm. Settle in and get to know your home.

Welcome cocktail party by the pool in the walled garden. Sip Amanda's Beaujolais Soup, a combination of French Champagne, Cointreau and a secret ingredient.

After one glass, you'll feel friendly.

Gala dinner with Maurice, a dashing Frenchman entertaining on piano accordion.

Sunday Day 2

Wake to a beautiful Provencal morning and sit on the terrace overlooking the pool for breakfast of fruit, yogurt, croissants, baguette and preserves. This will be your breakfast routine every morning for the next two weeks.

Over breakfast Maurice – he's multi-skilled – will give us a beginner's French class. You will have enough words by the end of breakfast to greet French people and ask a couple of polite questions. The French love it when you try and speak their language.

Drive to flea market in nearby countryside. You might have to rummage through a lot of junk to find some treasures but you'll enjoy the atmosphere. (One of our previous guests found Lacroix jewellery for just a few euros – valued at hundreds!)

Back to the maison for lunch of goat cheese salad – a Provence specialty, prepared by Amanda with some information from Amanda about specialty cheeses of the area.

Dinner in the walled garden prepared by chef Françoise – she makes a rabbit in mustard cream sauce to die for. (There may be some colourful local characters joining us for this special evening dinner.)

Monday, Day 3

Maurice to give another French lesson over breakfast.

Visit nearby Roussillon and Gordes – two iconic Provence towns. Roussillon is famous for its red ochre quarry and national park. After we walk through the red ochre hills (an easy walk) we will explore the picturesque village. Artists love Roussillon for its colours and light.

Then to Gordes, a stunning, a village, perched on the southern edge of the high Plateau de Vaucluse. The stone buildings are built against the base of the cliffs and on the rocks above. Their beige stone glows orange in the morning sun. The view from the village across fields and forests to the Montagne du Luberon is stunning.

Enjoy lunch on your own today – oodles of baguette and ice-cream shops.

Dinner at Maison de Maitresse with local chef from the village. Details finalised close to commencement of the tour.

Tuesday, Day 4

A quieter day has been planned after the big day of touring yesterday.

Ann to give a beginner's travel writing class to those who would like it over breakfast, and Maurice to brush everyone up on their French.

Enjoy a typical Provencal lunch by the pool prepared by chef Luce- could be a nicoise salad, her famous tarts and always...because we are in France, plenty of beautiful cheeses and baguettes.

Afternoon at leisure. Suggest a good book by the pool in a shady spot, or a wander around the village.

Dinner in the walled garden prepared by chef Francoise. She might do her frogs' leg special tonight as entrée. Musical entertainment by Maurice.

Wednesday Day 5

Review French lessons and travel notes over breakfast if you wish.

Today we visit the nearby medieval town of Uzès to enjoy the Wednesday markets.

Uzès is one of the most evocative villages in the South of France, rich in history with marvellous architecture. The Farmers' Market is famous throughout the area. Uzès is also known for its 400+ shops selling everything from art and craft to home wares and fresh produce.

We will lunch together at the restaurant Terrior situated right in the market square. While we eat local specialties (try the croque monsieur or the foie gras or the brandade) we'll drink local pink wine and watch the market wind down. This lunch is a highlight

Afternoon at leisure.

Dinner and cooking demonstration (probably by Yaan, a local from the next village. He does a beautiful slow cooked lamb dish). Confirmation of chef's name closer to the commencement of tour.

Thursday Day 6

After a lazy breakfast we might spend a fun hour reviewing travel notes...if you wish to.

Today we will tour to the famous Les Baux Des Provence, a picturesque village steeped in history perched high on a hill crowned by castle ruins. We will drive through incredible landscape to get there; you will marvel at the rock formations. The views from the castle ruins will sap your breath.

Lunch on your own in the village and shopping – there are countless baguette shops and small cafes.

During the afternoon we visit the Cathedrale d'Images below the village for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Here in a dis-used mine, giant images are played on to the walls to the sounds of magnificent music. Each year, the theme changes, we have seen Venice and Van Gogh images and would you believe, 2010 it is to be themed Australia. It's an extraordinary experience to roam around to the soaring music with the images giant and awesome on the walls. This is something you will never forget.

After a late afternoon rest back at the maison, enjoy dinner in courtyard prepared by Chef Francoise. Musical entertainment.

Friday, Day 7

We visit Avignon today where you will be able to tour at your own leisure. Avignon is famous for the Palais du Pape and other historic sites. It is also known for its fabulous shopping.

Lunch on your own today. Many baguette and small bistros.

Tonight it is dinner with Sebastian. He will bring his entire restaurant experience to Maison de Maitresse. Music, singing and dining. It's to be a big night, so be prepared.

Saturday Day 8

Prepare for the Saturday visit to Uzès markets.

If you thought the Wednesday markets were big, wait until you see them in action today. We will be escorted to the market by local foodie John who will point out all the local produce and introduce us to producers.

John will purchase the fresh produce for our lunch and dinner today.

We stop at a popular local café to eat freshly shucked oysters and a typical matching local wine.

Back at the maison John will prepare and demonstrate his specialty dishes for our lunch. He gives a great demonstration and explanation of local foods and produce and we'll watch him – with a glass of pink wine to hand of course.

Casual dinner on the terrace. Amanda, Geoffrey and Ann will prepare something typically Provençal for you.

Sunday Day 9

Morning is free day.

We can take you to a nearby village if you wish, or you can stay by the pool. We will find something for lunch for anyone who stays at the maison.

Later this afternoon we will visit a typical wine cave to sample local wines and get to know a little more about wine making in France.

Dinner at the local cafe, Table de Julien. This is an unpretentious little local cafe serving the most sublime food. You will love the cave atmosphere and the beautiful French food.

Monday Day 10

We are going to have a spectacular day canoeing down the river Gard to the Pont du Gard – an ancient Roman aqueduct, 2000 years old.

We'll enjoy a gourmet picnic on the banks of the river beneath the Pont du Gard. This will be a lifetime memory for you. The canoeing is simple and non-energetic. We'll have plenty of stops on the way.

We'll brief you more about this in France.

Casual barbecue dinner in the courtyard prepared by Geoffrey

Tuesday Day 11

Review French lessons and travel writing lessons, if you want to.

Lunch in the courtyard – could be a Luce special again or maybe something by neighbour Hester, another Kiwi living in France and famous for her tuna tart.

Free afternoon. We can drop you off in Uzes if you'd like to do more shopping or explore the area.

Dinner with local bon vivant, Michel, tonight. Michel makes stunning paella, wearing his boa and mini skirt! We'll watch him prepare his spectacular dish – pure theatre – and then eat with him. Be prepared for a big night.

Wednesday Day 12

Visit Arles, famous for its amphitheatre. We'll take you to the tourist office to pick up maps and brochures and then board the little tourist train and tour the old city. Then you can explore at your leisure with your maps.

(Note: there is an extra small fee to visit the amphitheatre – but well worth doing.)

Lunch on your own – plenty of baguette shops and cafes.

Tonight we will visit a charming nearby village where a lovely couple Christian and Pierre run a chambre d'hote. We will dine in their magnificent manicured garden – and maybe we will coax Pierre to sing for us. He has a wonderful operatic voice. It is a privilege to go inside a beautiful French home and be hosted.

Thursday Day 13

Feeling quite sad now as it is almost time to go home.

You'll have a free day to rest and ready yourself for a big night tonight. You can be dropped off at a nearby village if you want to.

A light lunch in the courtyard will be available for all those who just want to stay and relax around the pool.

Tonight we will have dinner at the maison with the chefs and new friends we have made over the past two weeks.

Friday Day 14

Goodbye. Tears. Hugs. Farewell.

You will be taken back to Avignon TGV station at 11am.

*Note: While some of the chefs and days/evenings might change, the number of dinners, lunches, cafe visits will not. You have only those few lunches on your own that are not included. And wine is included with all meals...at any time of the day really.