

'Real' South of France Tours

Intimate Guided Tours of the Languedoc's Best Kept Secrets



Exclusive tours limited to 6 people



Award winning accommodation



Fabulous French food & wine



Authentic local experiences



Leisurely paced itineraries



"The perfect base for exploring the region and making some lifelong memories in this stunning part of the world!"

Reuben P, Singapore

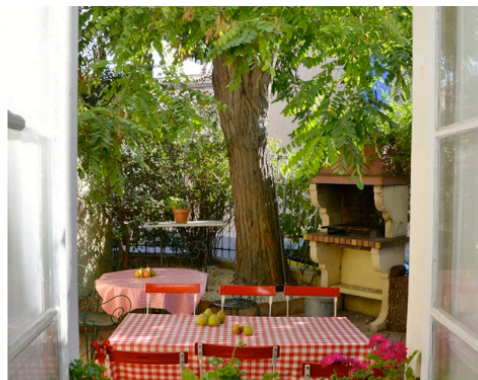
ITINERARY

DAY I Arrival...

This afternoon you will be picked up from Narbonne train station or Carcassonne train station or airport (other pickups by arrangement).

You will check-in to the award winning B & B which has been ranked in the top 25 in France!

Sleep on deep sumptuous mattresses with the finest 100% cotton linen usually only found in luxury hotels. All the contemporary en-suite bathrooms have luxurious pure cotton bath towels and beautiful organic bathroom products.



This evening you will join us for our welcome dinner...

DAY 2

Tour of Plus Beau village Lagrasse

After breakfast we head off to the Corbières wine region where we visit the spectacular pink roofed village of Lagrasse. We take a walking tour through the village which is nestled on the banks of the River Orbieu, surrounded by the vine and scrub covered Corbières hills.



Listed as one of France's plus beaux (most beautiful) villages, two of the highlights of the village are the still working Abbey and the medieval bridges over the river Orbieu, although the villages narrow alleyways with timber-framed houses are also very attractive and the remains of the original walls can still be seen.

Today we have a lovingly prepared lunch made with local produce in a medieval village house. Following lunch, a leisurely drive back through some of the villages of the stunning Corbières and Minervois wine regions.

This afternoon there is time for a rest before we have a fun and informative tapas and wine tasting evening presented by one of our local wine masters.

DAY 3

Narbonne & Fontfroide Abbey

Following breakfast our first stop is Narbonne where we will explore the beautiful Cathédral de St-Just and the Archbishops Palace and even see a slice of the Via Domitia, the first Roman road built in the region linking Italy and Spain. The picturesque Canal de la Robine runs right through the centre of the city.

Just before lunch we visit the famous covered food market called Les Halles, which is open every morning of the year.



We have time to enjoy the sights and smells of the market before enjoying a tapas style lunch with one of the local wine producers.

Mid afternoon we head to arguably the most beautiful abbey in our region and our personal favourite, Fontfroide Abbey which is a fully preserved former Cistercian monastery built in the 12th Century.



The Abbey is situated in 2 hectares of restored terraced gardens from the 16th Century including one of the largest rose gardens in southern France. We tour the abbey and gardens before heading back to Sainte-Hélène to relax before dinner at a local restaurant.

DAY 4

Olonzac market and cooking class on the Canal du Midi – a foodies delight!

This morning we will visit the lively Olonzac market which is the largest in the region and only a couple of minutes walk from your front door! There are plenty of stalls to sample and buy the fantastic variety of local produce – wine, cheese, meats, honey, olives and olive oil – as well as everything else you would expect to find at a great market!



After the market, for those interested, it's time to cook some Classic French food in a hands-on cookery class. The Classic French cooking classes are relaxed, fun and not too technical!

You may be a skilled cook who wants to be completely “hands-on” or someone who just likes to sit back, watch and learn; or you can choose to stay longer at the market and join the group after the class to share the fabulous lunch that has been prepared.

The qualified chef (Heather) shows you timeless methods and gives you useful skills and simple tips that help you to create classic French cuisine with a modern twist! You learn to adapt each dish to suit the produce available and share tips on traditional techniques such as curing and preserving.



The recipes are adapted to suit the season and today's busy lifestyle – it's all about preparation in advance! What you will do in each class:

SEASONAL STARTERS – perhaps using the asparagus, artichokes, heirloom tomatoes or melons freshly picked from the fields around us.

MAIN COURSES – prepare and trim locally sourced duck, French cuts of meat or fish and shellfish sourced from the Mediterranean.

CLASSIC SAUCES – perfect classic French sauces and accompaniments for each course adapting them to bring out the seasonal flavours.

TIMELESS DESSERTS – classic French desserts are given a modern twist with simple yet stylish presentation.

THEN ENJOY – relax in the peace of the canal-side gardens and enjoy the meal that you have prepared accompanied by expertly paired local wine.

Back to the bed & breakfast for a much earned rest. Dinner at your leisure...

DAY 5

UNESCO listed La Cité of Carcassonne & Canal du Midi

This morning we visit the world renowned UNESCO listed La Cité, the old walled town of Carcassonne which is the largest medieval fortress in Europe. It has picturesque cobblestoned streets and houses, the beautiful Basilica of St Nazaire, and ramparts containing 52 towers – all of which we will explore. We also view it from afar so you see the full grandeur of this imposing site.



Lunch today is a gourmet picnic by the river Aude with La Cité as our backdrop.

In the late afternoon we enjoy a leisurely boat ride on the UNESCO listed Canal du Midi.



Rest and dinner at a local restaurant...

DAY 6

Roman Vineyards Tour

Close to the city of Narbonne is one of the most highly regarded wine regions in the south of France. Its called La Clape and it took its name from the old Occitan word for pile of stones 'clapas'. They have been growing vines here for millennia and the wines were highly prized by the Romans who transported them back to Rome to be enjoyed there too. It was once an island, but by Roman times the waters had receded and it was linked to the mainland as it is now. The massif of La Clape is exceptionally dry, breezy and is one of the sunniest areas in southern France and this intense Languedoc climate helps to produce the exceptional wines we will learn about and taste on this wine tour.



The vineyard tour begins with a visit to one of the finest wineries in the region where we will taste both red and white wines. The white wines include an ancient grape called Bourboulenc which nearly disappeared but here is nurtured and blended with other varietals to produce some of the finest white wines in the south of France. After this visit we will head for the old circulade town of Gruissan to see the amazing landscape of the salt pans and learn how the salt is harvested.

Lunch is a fabulous sea food feast, including the delicious oysters farmed here and fresh fish baked in salt (an alternative menu is available if

preferred). Afterwards you will have time to visit the salt museum and learn more about the history of the salt pans and the harvesting of the different grades of salt.



Our second vineyard experience is also on La Clape but this time on a different terroir on the opposite side of the Massif de la Clape. Here they make an interesting range of La Clape wines plus AOP Languedoc which makes for a superb contrast to the morning visit.

Dinner at your leisure...

DAY 7

Plus beau village of Minerve and Olive Tour

This morning we visit Minerve which is probably the most well known village in the Minervois. It sits high above the confluence of two large river gorges, the Cesse and the Brian (pronounced bree-on!) and is primarily known as being the site of one of the first Cathar strongholds held siege by the Crusaders. It is also another of France's plus beaux (most beautiful) villages.



Today lunch is at the renowned restaurant Relais Chantovent in Minerve overlooking the Brian Gorge.



Next we tour one of the best olive producers in France. We learn how the olives are grown and harvested and made into oil with particular emphasis on local varieties including the premium olive variety called Lucques. You have the opportunity to taste their wonderful olives and oils and enjoy browsing their speciality shop.

Time for a well earned rest after a fabulous 7 days before we have our farewell dinner.

DAY 8

Farewell...

After breakfast we say farewell to our new found friends as we drop you off to continue your travels...

For more information please contact:
Travel Designers on (09) 358 2220
info@traveldesigners.co.nz

