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2014 Provence and the South of France

DAY 1 Sat 28 June Paris After arriving in Paris check in at the **Grand Hotel DeChampaigne** 17 Rue Jean Lantier 75001 Paris from 1400 on. You may choose to relax in the hotel or do some sightseeing in the capital of France - one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. We are staying for 1 night at the Grand Hotel Dechampaigne in Paris. Tonight we will have a welcome dinner on the Left Bank **D**

DAY 2 Sun 29 June TGV to Avignon At 1237 we will board a TGV train at Gare de Lyon for the 3 hour journey south to **Provence**. The train will take us through a number of departments of France. We will be travelling First Class. We can take a picnic lunch or eat in the dining car. On arrival we will collect our vehicles and drive to **le Petit Luberon**. We are staying at Le Clos de la Glycine in Roussillon for 2 nights. **B**

DAY 3 Mon 30 June Le Petit Luberon WALK 1 OPPEDE LE VIEUX 6km GRADE 2 After a late breakfast in Roussillon we will set out on this relatively easy, short walk to **Oppede Le Vieux**, a largely abandoned village on the slopes of le Petit Luberon, a low range of limestone mountains. After lunch we will visit the nearby towns of **Menerbes** and **Bonnieux**, the latter featured in Ridley Scott's 2006 film "**A Good Year**", starring Russell Crowe, based on Peter Mayle's book "**A Year in Provence**". **B**



Chateau Gramazie



Lavender - Provence



Pont du Gard

DAY 4 Tue 1 July Gordes WALK 2 ROUSSILLON – GORDES 8km GRADE 3 In the heart of Provence, is picturesque **Roussillon**. The **RED VILLAGE** is famous for the ochreous earth, the building blocks of the town. Before setting off on today's walk you can follow the 45 min **Sentier des Ocres** through the spectacular formations or just relax in the village. Walk 2 leads from Roussillon, across a valley full of lavender fields and vineyards before climbing up to the spectacular town of **Gordes**. After lunch we may visit the nearby 12th Century Cistercian **Abbaye Notre Dame de Senanque** and the **Village des Bories**, a mysterious and fascinating collection of Bronze Age stone huts. We will then travel to **Arles**. We are staying at Mas de la Chapelle in Arles for 3 nights. **B D**

DAY 5 Wed 2 July Arles and Avignon This morning we will drive northwest to **Avignon**, the major urban centre of Provence. For 70 years in the 14th Century the Roman Catholic papacy was situated in the city. Pope Clement V built the magnificent **Palais des Papes**, now the world's largest Gothic palace. We will be doing an audio guide of the palace. There is much to see in Avignon including the **Pont d'Avignon** on the **Rhone**, the **Place du Palais** and the medieval city walls and **Old City**. After lunch we will return to **Arles** which you can explore at your leisure. **B**

DAY 6 Thu 3 July Cassis This morning will be set aside to further explore **Arles**, which contains some of the finest **Roman ruins** in France. The state of the art **Musee de l'Arles Antique** provides a wealth of information before discovering sites such as the **Roman Arena**, used nowadays for bullfights and concerts, the **Roman Theatre**, the **Forum** and the **Baths of Constantine**. After lunch we will drive south to **Cassis**, a fishing village on the **Mediterranean** coast. Here we will take boat trip along the coastline, dotted with spectacular inlets. **B**

DAY 7 Fri 4 July Languedoc Heading west from Arles we will visit the historic city of **Nimes**. On the way we will visit the **Pont du Gard**, an impressive Roman engineering achievement. Nimes is very interesting with charming shops and cafes alongside more Roman ruins, including a magnificent **Arena** and the amazing **Temple of Diana**, and the narrow streets of the old medieval town. It will be a perfect place for lunch. In the afternoon we will drive south, leaving Provence, into **Languedoc**. We will be travelling via Narbonne and Carcassonne to an 18th Century chateau, the Chateau Gramazie in the village of the same name, and/or the Chateau de Villereglan, where we will stay for 3 nights. **B D**

DAY 8 Sat 5 July Gramazie WALK 3 FANJEAUX 6 km GRADE 2/3 Gramazie lies in the foothills of the **Pyrenees Orientales** and the rich soils of these gently rolling farmlands produce some of the finest wines in France. Today we will walk through these fertile hills with vines on one side and sunflowers on the other. Our walk starts in the small town of **Fanjeaux** and ends in a tiny village, 6km to the southeast, following the **GR7**, one of the many long distance paths in France. For lunch we will head to **Mirepoix**, a charming town with an authentic medieval centre. **B**

DAY 9 Sun 6 July Carcassonne This morning we are off to nearby **Limoux**, a market town famous for its flea market held on the first Sunday of each month – **TODAY!** There is a lively café culture in Limoux and we will have lunch here. 30km to the north lies UNESCO World Heritage listed **Carcassonne**. We will have all afternoon to visit the wonderfully restored medieval city before having dinner in either the old or new town. **B**

DAY 10 Mon 7 July Bagneres de Luchon All too soon we will have to leave to travel further into the Pyrenees. We will be passing through the Upper Garonne region. Our lunch stop will be **Saint Bertrand de Comminges**, an ancient village with a UNESCO World Heritage listed Cathedral. Nearby is **Bagneres de Luchon**, a stylish spa town. We will stay at Villa Florida or Pavillon Sevigne in Luchon for 2 nights. **B**

DAY 11 Tue 8 July Bagneres de Luchon WALK 4 HOSPICE DE FRANCE 5 km GRADE 2 or PORT DE VENASQUE 14 km GRADE 4 We have the option of an easy or hard walk today. Both will start from the **Hospice de France**, 10 km up the valley from Luchon where there is a café and visitor centre. The easy walk will follow tracks through cool forests and sub-alpine meadows. The views of the surrounding peaks are stunning. **The hard option involves a steep and challenging trek (71 switchbacks) up to a refuge where you can get food and drink. It involves crossing creeks and may involve some walking on snow and ice. From the refuge another steep track leads up to the "Port", a narrow pass into Spain. From this vantage point there is a breathtaking panorama of the Pyrenees, including its highest peak, Pic d' Aneto. We will then retrace our steps back down to the Hospice de France. This option is for experienced and very fit walkers only.** **B**

DAY 12 Wed 9 July **Le Tour de France** Leaving Luchon we will drive over the route followed by the famous cycle race, crossing three cols (passes) including the highest in the French Pyrenees – **the Col du Tourmalet**. The alpine scenery will delight as you follow in the cycle tracks of **Cadel Evans** and **Stuart O'Grady**. We will stop for lunch at **La Mongie**, a ski resort. Here we can take one of the highlights of the tour: a cable ride to the summit of the **Pic du Midi**. There is an observatory, gift shop and café on the top with panoramic views in all directions. We then drive over Tourmalet and descend through Bareges to **Luz Saint Sauveur**. We are staying at Hotel Les Tempeliers in Luz St Sauveur_ for 3 nights. **B**

DAY 13 Thu 10 July **Cirque de Gavarnie** **WALK 5 CIRQUE DE GAVARNIE 8 km GRADE 2/3 + WALK 6 TROUMOUSE 4 km GRADE 2** The Cirque de Gavarnie is the highest cirque in Europe and also on the **UNESCO World Heritage** list. We drive to the village of Gavarnie and there is a relatively easy walk to the cirque, with only a small hill at the end to test you out. However the glorious view makes it all worthwhile. Once back in Gavarnie we will drive to the largest cirque in Europe – **the Cirque de Troumouse**. On the way we will stop in the village of **Heas** for a traditional 'garbure' lunch. Once at the cirque we can wander at will through this natural amphitheatre on easy paths. **B L**

DAY 14 Fri 11 July **Luz Saint Sauveur** **WALK 7 LAC DE GAUBE 5 km GRADE 2/3** The morning will be given over to exploring the twin towns of Luz and St Sauveur. There is an **11th Century Knights Templar church** right in front of our hotel, a ruined castle above Luz and in St Saveur you can find the **Pont Napoleon** and the nearby spa. We will then drive to **Cauteret**, another spa town, to begin Walk 7. It starts with a chairlift ride and then a level walk to the beautiful lake. There is a café here and it is possible to see, **Vignemale**, the highest peak in the French Pyrenees. We return via the cable car or there is a Grade 3 path leading back to the car park. On one of the evenings in Luz we can visit one of the world's major pilgrimage sites – **LOURDES**. No matter what your religious belief you are likely to find this an unforgettable experience **B**

DAY 15 Sat 12 July **Basque Country** Leaving Luz we will pass Lourdes on the way to **Pau**, one of the most interesting cities in southwest France. Some say this is the most English of French cities (the Duke of Wellington's army was stationed here) with the first golf course and first race track in France. There is an interesting chateau and many fine shops and even a tea room or two – a good place for lunch. Then we will be heading south through the Basque speaking region towards **St Jean-Pied-de-Port**, where we will stay at Hotel Ramuntcho for 1 night. **B**

DAY 16 Sun 13 July **"The Way"** **WALK 8 CAMINO DE SANTIAGO 27 km GRADE 4** The Camino de Santiago (**Chemin St Jacques** in French) is a pilgrims' road leading to the city of **Santiago de Compostella** in Spain. The major crossing point through the Pyrenees is at St-Jean-Pied-de-Port. The walk, while quite long, has few steep grades on its way to **Roncesvalles**, in Spain. **IT IS WELL WITHIN THE CAPABILITY OF REGULAR WALKERS** and is an experience not to be missed. The path follows roads and well defined tracks and there are likely to be a number of pilgrims setting out on the 1100km trek. For those who don't wish to do this walk, we will organise a shorter and easier alternative walk. **WALK 8A PAYS BASQUE 5 km GRADE 2** At the end of the day we will all meet up in Roncesvalles and stay at La Posada for 1 night. **B D**



Market Day in Luz St Sauveur



Camino de Santiago



Lac de Gaube

DAY 17 Mon 14 July **Biarritz** After our short stay in Spain we will head back into France and on to Biarritz on the Atlantic coast. Biarritz is the premier seaside resort town in southwest France with the best surfing beaches in Europe. On the way we will visit La Rhune and take an antique cog train to the summit for another spectacular Pyrenean view. We will have a end of tour lunch at Basque restaurant. In Biarritz we are staying at Hotel de l'Ocean in Biarritz for 2 nights. **B L**

DAY 18 Tue 15 July **Biarritz** **WALK 9 GRAND PLAGÉ 5 km GRADE 2** This morning we will take a stroll along the main seafront in Biarritz. It starts at the lighthouse on the high headland and passes France's second-oldest golf course and the Russian Orthodox Church, built for visiting 19th Century nobility, with its glorious blue dome. The famous old promenade along the **Grande Plage** leads past the **Casino Barriere**, with a fine art deco ceiling and floor, the peaceful old square Place Ste-Eugenie and the Museum of the Sea, with its handsome facade and shark-feeding sessions. On to **Fishermen's Port**, built by Emperor Napoleon, and the Rock of the Virgin. The statue of Madonna, set up to keep local fishermen safe, is over a bridge designed by Gustave Eiffel. You will have the rest of the day to explore. You may decide to have a swim or browse through the shops. Why not have a hot chocolate, the local specialty, in the **Hotel du Palais**, one of the last great luxury hotels in Europe? **B**

DAY 19 Wed 16 July **Paris** An early start to travel to Biarritz airport. A short flight to **Paris ORLY** and then transfer to our hotel. We will stay 2 nights in Grand Hotel DeChampaigne in Paris, on the Left Bank, close to the **Luxembourg Gardens** and Saint-Germain. We should be at our hotel by early afternoon with plenty of time to explore the Left Bank. A **2 day L'OPENTOP tour pass** is included **B**

DAY 20 Thu 17 July **Paris** The city is yours to explore, In easy reach of the hotel are the MUSEE ORSAY, the EIFFEL TOWER, NOTRE DAME and the LOUVRE. We are right in the centre of the cinema district and there are cafes and restaurants all around. An optional **WALKING TOUR OF MONTMARTRE** is included. **B**

DAY 21 Fri 18 July **Tour ends in Paris 1000**

NB B = breakfast L = lunch D = dinner

INCLUSIONS

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| • 20 nights accommodation | Breakfast every day + 4 dinners and 2 lunches |
| • the services of qualified English speaking guides and drivers | Travel by minibus |
| • TGV train from Paris to Avignon | Air travel from Biarritz to Paris |
| • Nine guided walks | Comprehensive day notes |
| • ENTRY FEES | Sentier des Ocres, Abbaye de Senanque, Village des Bories, Nimes Arena, Pont du Gard, St Bertrand de Comminges Palais de Papes, Avignon |
| • TOURS | Boat trip in Cassis Pic du Midi cable car Lac de Gaube chairlift La Rhune petit train |
| • PARIS | 2 day L'OpenTop tour in Paris Walking tour of Montmartre |

28 Jun - 18 Jul 2014