

Touring holidays of France

Expressions



Tarn, Languedoc and Provence fly-drive holiday



www.expressionsholidays.co.uk
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Tarn, Languedoc and Provence fly-drive holiday

12 NIGHTS / 13 DAYS

Tarn

Carcassonne

Montpellier

Luberon in Provence



This 12-night fly-drive touring holiday is a leisurely exploration of the southern French lands of the Tarn, Languedoc and Provence. You stay for three nights in four different places, giving you chance to investigate each area but also time to explore and pursue your interests as you drive from place to place, stopping off along the way and following scenic country routes. Your touring holiday starts in Toulouse, where you collect your hire-car and then drive along the valley of the River Tarn to your first stop north of Albi and Gaillac. There is plenty of time to explore the gentle landscape here and find out about local artisan food producers. Sugared almonds, biscuits and chocolate are a speciality of the region. There is time, too, to visit the historic town of Albi. From the Tarn you drive south into the land of the Cathars and the region of Languedoc to the great, citadel-city of Carcassonne. Again, with three nights here there is time to explore the narrow streets, the castle and the ramparts of this mighty mediaeval fortress-town from your hotel built into the ramparts themselves, as well as to venture into the dramatic, craggy landscape to the south, where you can see and visit the remains of majestic Cathar castles. You then cross the regional natural park of the Haut-Languedoc, with the Minervois and then the Herault vineyards and home to startlingly attractive hill towns such as Minerve and Saint-Guilhem-le-Desert. Your destination after this scenic journey is Montpellier, capital of the Languedoc and a bright city, modern and historic at the same time. After your three nights in Montpellier you journey across the flat, marshlands of the Camargue into Provence and home to some of the best loved scenery, villages and landscapes of the south of France. In one day between Montpellier and your destination, Bonnieux, you pass through three natural regional parks: the Camargue, les Alpilles and the Luberon. Your stay in the Luberon opens up vistas of lavender and sunflowers, olives and vines, more hill-villages and ancient waters. All around are the vivid associations with Van Gogh and Cezanne. You return from Marseille to London. The driving times we mention are valid if you take the fastest, most direct route, but you should venture off and enjoy the journey.

PRICES

From **£2,870 per person**

Based on two people sharing a double or twin room.

DATES

This fly-drive holiday can be arranged for any departure date subject to availability.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Scheduled flight with British Airways from London to Toulouse and Marseille to London
- Hire of a group B car for the duration of the holiday
- 3 nights' bed and breakfast in a Confort double room at the Château des Salettes in Cahuzac-sur-Vère, near Gaillac
- 3 nights' bed and breakfast in a Classic double room at the Hotel de la Cite in Carcassonne
- 3 nights' bed and breakfast in a Deluxe double room at the Domaine de Verchant near Montpellier
- 3 nights' bed and breakfast in a Charme room at the Domaine de Capelongue in Bonnieux
- Concierge service and Expressions Holidays regional helpful hints

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Early check-in or late check-out at any hotels (although we can arrange this on request at additional cost)
- Any other services not mentioned above, such as transfers and meals except breakfast at hotels
- Personal holiday insurance. This is essential and cover should be in place from when you book the holiday.
- Local tourist tax, usually between Euros 1 and 3 per person per night, and payable locally to the hotel

TOUR CODE

FRFD10



Gaillac area

Day one Toulouse to the Tarn

You arrive at Toulouse and collect your hire-car and then it is just an hour's drive by motorway to your base in the Tarn at Cahuzac-sur-Vère. However, depending on the arrival time of your flight, we recommend that you take a slower route to your overnight stop, by leaving the motorway to join the route of the River Tarn at Mezens. Follow the road along the river through the picturesque, red-brick town of Rabastens, a traditional stopping point on the route to Santiago de Compostela and home to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Notre-dame du Bourg church. There are magnificent townhouses built by the merchants who would trade in wine and dye. Soon there is the start of the Gaillac vineyards and then you reach your destination. You stay at Cahuzac-sur-Vère for three nights.

Days two and three in the Tarn

You have two full days to explore this fascinating region, and a little off-the-beaten track of the normal tourist routes of France. The small commune of Cahuzac-sur-Vère is the quintessential rural French settlement, with its narrow winding streets and blond stone buildings, picturesque central square and war monument. The houses of the Cahuzacois cluster around the Catholic church of the same name as the commune, giving it a very mediaeval appearance. Stretching out on each side, however, is a landscape rich in exciting opportunities to explore. Montauban, less than an hour northwest of Cahuzac-sur-Vère is the second oldest of the bastides of

southern France, founded in 1144AD. It was voted a French City of Art and History, with a city centre characterised by its towering castle, impressive bridge, and boulevards. Wine-tasting opportunities are available at the Domaine de Montels and the Mas des Anges, if you would like to sample the wine of the area. Alternatively, Montauban is known for its other culinary specialities, such as sugared almonds and biscuits with jam, not to mention the fabulous produce of its chocolatiers. Also nearby is Albi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and bursting with the remarkable history of France. The most immediate point of interest in this small town is its red-brick mediaeval cathedral, St. Cecilia's. Witness how its imposing exterior blends into the delicate wood and stone decoration of its interior. Adorning the whole western wall are extensive murals depicting the Last Judgement. Just next door, the Bishop's palace houses the Toulouse Lautrec museum, dedicated to the works of the post-impressionistic iconographer Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. From outside the cathedral, you can make your way west to the square which overlooks the River Tarn or pass the museum to walk across the thousand-year-old Old Bridge. Albi retains the look and feel of its traditional way of life. Visit the hill-top town of Cordes-sur-Ciel and take the time to wander down the streets of one of the most spectacular villages.

Day four Tarn to Carcassonne

You drive through the wine-town of Gaillac today, heading for Castres, on the banks of the River Agout. There are interesting

part-timbered, overhanging houses here that used to belong to the tanners and dyers of the town. There is also the Goya museum, located in a former episcopal palace. Outside the palace are magnificent parterres designed by Le Notre. South of Castres you cross into the Parc naturel regional du Haut Languedoc and then enter Cathar country. North of Carcassonne it's worth taking a detour to visit the chateaux at Lastours, where there are four Cathar castles. You stay in Carcassonne, within the town walls, for three nights.

Days five and six in Carcassonne

You have a full day in Carcassonne. There is time to explore the city itself and perhaps to venture outside. The Gallo-Roman upper town of Carcassonne is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and historically of great significance in France. Walk along the city walls, past the castle's amphitheatre, the basilica, and its 53 watchtowers, before making your way into the 12th century Château Comtal to view its archaeological exhibits and tour its inner ramparts. The lower Carcassonne town subverts its title as a city, instead offering a peaceful, somewhat sleepy atmosphere, with a central square that holds a weekly market and several cafés. From Place Carnot, walk further out into the town centre to discover the quaint individual stores that sell unique gifts, or La Ferme, which sells fine food and wines. For a stunning experience of the region's châteaux, drive south to the Cathar Castles that pepper the dramatic landscape and guard its deep valleys, particularly the Château de Peyrepertuse. The Canal du Midi is perfect for a long afternoon stroll or book a boat trip one afternoon to intensify the atmosphere of Carcassonne from the water. Beyond the walls of La Cité lie the wine regions of Minervois, to the north, and Corbières, to the south. If wine-tasting appeals, head into one of the many châteaux dotted around the countryside of these two regions. The Château Canet is the perfect spot to try some of the Muscat wines so typical of the Minervois region, as well as the olives from its three olive groves. Château Rives-Blanques in Céprie produces wines made available all over the world that you are encouraged by your warm hosts to taste on your visit. The less visited area of Saint Chinian, situated at the foothills of the Black Mountains and in the Parc Naturel Regional du Haut Languedoc, is worth a visit, known as it is for high quality produce; perhaps stop off at the Château de Combebelles.



Carcassonne

Day seven Carcassonne to Montpellier

Your route today should take you north-east first to the town of Minerve and the Minervois wine producing region, a patchwork landscape of small vineyards and olive trees dotted with pretty villages. This is at the southern end of the Parc naturel regional du Haut Languedoc which you then cross following a scenic route through wooded hills and valleys, with the road twisting and turning as it follows the course of the River Orb, in the direction of Clermont-l'Herault. Near Clermont-l'Herault, surrounded by rolling hills of vines and olives, is the strange-sounding place of Manufacture Royale, which was where royal sheets were made in the village of Villeneuve in the 18th century. To the north is the 'Grand Site' of the Lac Salagou and a short distance beyond Clermont-l'Herault is the astonishing village of Saint-Guilhem-le-Desert, designated as one of the most beautiful villages in France. This village is at the heart of the Herault valley with its deep gorges, olive trees and vines. Continue to your overnight stop on the outskirts of Montpellier, where you stay for three nights.

Days eight and nine in Montpellier

You have two full days in Montpellier with time to visit both the city itself, the coast nearby and other sites in the area. Montpellier has mediaeval streets and wide boulevards, modern tram lines designed by Christian Lacroix, an Arc de Triomphe and a statue of Louis XIV on horseback, a Roman aqueduct

and Place de la Comedie, beautiful private mansions and the Musee Fabre. Within reach in under an hour from Montpellier is the city of Nimes where you can find stunningly preserved Roman architecture, including the famous aqueduct, the Arena of Nimes, a double tiered amphitheatre still used as a venue today and the Maison Carrée, built in white limestone and estimated to be around 2000 years old. A little further north is the Roman aqueduct, the Pont du Gard.

Day ten Leave Montpellier and head east towards Bonnieux

Today is an amazing array of scenery and landscapes as you drive from Languedoc into Provence, first through the eerie landscape of the Camargue, stopping perhaps to visit Aigues-Mortes and then Arles, before finding yourself in the dramatic scenery of the Alpilles, south of Avignon. This is the land of the authors Alphonse Daudet and Frederic Mistral and of Van Gogh who lived in St Remy de Provence. The landscape has the limestone peaks, but pine and oak forests, fields of olive trees and avenues of cypress. Dotted around are farmhouse of ancient drystone. Les Baux de Provence, a mountain-top village with 22 historic monuments and with outstanding views over the countryside below and St Remy de Provence are both worth visiting. Just a little further on you reach the beautiful countryside of the Luberon and the village of Bonnieux. You spend three nights here.

Days eleven and twelve in the Luberon

You have two days to explore this beautiful area of Provence. The Luberon is a gentle landscape of vineyards, orchards, rolling hills and home to the famous lavender and sunflowers, associated greatly with Provence. There are plenty of lavender-related visits including to the lavender museum at Coustellet, with its still and lavender cutting displays. Near Gordes is Senanque Abbey, famous for its picturesque lavender beds. There are abundant picturesque hill-top villages, for example Gordes, well-worth exploring as is the nearby Village des Bories. Explore along the Sorgue River and the surrounding countryside by bike or on foot. Local markets take place in the villages every day: Lourmarin and Bonnieux on a Friday, Gordes on a Tuesday and Menerbes on a Thursday, for example. Fontaine-de-Vaucluse has a famous subterranean spring, and its waters have inspired poets for hundreds of years. Petrarch lived here in the 14th century and his house is now a museum. There is also a museum of the Resistance, a museum of Provençal 'santons', workshops of hand-blown crystal and a mill making paper by hand using 15th century techniques.

Day thirteen Luberon to Marseille

Today is the last day of the tour and you need to head to Marseille for your flight to London. However, depending on the time, you may want to visit the delightful city of Aix-en-Provence, overlooked by the Montagne Saint-Victoire, recognisable from the works of Cézanne. Recognised as a cosmopolitan hub of the south of France, the streets of Aix-en-Provence are lined with boutique shops specialising in art, jewellery, and fashion. Fine dining is also an attraction in Aix with exclusive cafés and Michelin-starred restaurants, many on the Cours Mirabeau. Yet, it is the historical heritage of the town that really makes its chic cosmopolitan side come to life. A haven for Paul Cézanne, his 'atelier' is available for viewing, recreating the artistic and productive space in which he used to work. A short walk from the 'atelier' is Les Lauves, the spot from which Cézanne developed his love affair with Montagne Sainte-Victoire. On Saturday mornings there are busy farmers' markets and the Musée du Calisson, where you can learn about the famous sweets. The main art gallery is the Musée Granet in the Mazarin district, full of elegant 17th and 18th century townhouses. Return your hire-car at Marseille at the end of this touring holiday.



The village of Roussillon in Provence



Provence lavender fields

GENERAL INFORMATION

This tailor-made touring holiday is one of several suggested touring holidays we can offer you exactly as it is but also with any alterations you might want including extra nights in one or more places or adding in extra places. All our tours can be extended so that you can include a longer stay in one mountain or lake resort too, perhaps at the end of the itinerary. Do call to discuss the options with our travel consultants.

OUR TOURS

Our tailor-made touring holidays are suggested itineraries which can be adapted in numerous ways. They can be fly-drive (with flight and hire-car included), self-drive (with ferry or Eurotunnel included with your own car) or rail and hire-car.

FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Our arrangements are very flexible in that you choose to travel on any day you want, subject to availability of your chosen transport and hotels. As mentioned above, additional nights can be added at any point.

OUR PRICES

The sample prices mentioned in this leaflet are generally a 'from' price based on the cheapest season of travel. However, train fares and hotel rates can change (up and down depending on offers), so we give you an accurate price for your holiday when we provide you with a quotation. Our sample prices should be used as an indication of how much a particular combination will cost and to show the differences on average between the hotel categories on offer.

The logo for Expressions Holidays, featuring the word "Expressions" in a white, elegant script font on a dark blue rectangular background.

BOOKING CONDITIONS

Our booking conditions apply to all holidays. A copy can be found on our website and a copy is also sent to you with a written quotation and when you make a booking.

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Expressions Holidays offers full financial protection for all holidays you book with us. If your holiday includes a flight, the ATOL (3076) covers the costs of the holiday. If the holiday does not include a flight, it is the ABTOT bond that protects the cost of the holiday. We are also members of AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators).

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HOW TO BOOK

To make a booking, just phone us on

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and we can take you through the details we need and start the booking process.