Guaranteed small group of no more than 24 Smithsonian guests per departure

FRANCE THROUGH THE AGES

15 days from $6,196 total price from Boston, New York ($5,495 air & land inclusive plus $701 airline taxes and departure fees)

Discover the richness of French culture, the breadth of its history, and the beauty of its artistic and architectural treasures on this comprehensive journey. From Toulouse to Normandy, you'll experience the beauty and hospitality of provincial France and stay in charming rural inns, an 18th-century mansion, and delightful hotels.

Your Small Group Tour Highlights

Explore the market town of Albi, including the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum ... Enjoy an exclusive visit to Château des Milandes, former residence of Josephine Baker ... Tour the Fontevraud Abbey, site of the original graves of King Henry II of England and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine ... Visit Château Clos Lucé, where Leonardo da Vinci spent his final years ... Tour the caves at Lascaux II to view replications of the prehistoric cave art ... Discover Monet's gardens at Giverny ... Enjoy a day in Paris...

Your Day-by-Day Tour Itinerary

Day 1: Depart the U.S. for Toulouse, France

Day 2: Arrive Toulouse  Upon arrival, enjoy the afternoon at leisure, then gather for a welcome dinner and a briefing about the journey ahead. (D)

Day 3: Toulouse and Carcassonne  Travel to Carcassonne to tour this quintessential medieval town with the longest city walls in Europe. Sitting atop a hill overlooking vast green plains that stretch all the way to the Pyrénées, Carcassonne boasts battlements and ramparts dating to the 1st-century Romans. Return to Toulouse for an afternoon at leisure. (B)

Day 4: Albi and Sarlat  Hometown of Belle Époque artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, the historic market town of Albi was built with rose-colored bricks that cast a warm glow over the city's medieval streets and ramparts. Tour the town, including the Palais de la Berbie, an ancient fortress that houses a museum devoted to the works of Toulouse-Lautrec. After visiting the huge 13th-century Cathédrale Ste-Cécile, continue to the rugged unspoiled countryside of the Périgord region and the Dordogne Valley. Travel to Sarlat-la-Canéda, one of France's prettiest villages and one of Europe's best preserved medieval gems, with more registered historic sites than anywhere else on the continent. (B,D)

Day 5: Sarlat and Lascaux II  This morning, tour the Caves at Lascaux II, a fascinating reproduction of the original prehistoric cave and paintings. After lunch at a charming local inn, visit Château des Milandes, the former residence of Josephine Baker, before returning to Sarlat. Dinner is at the hotel tonight. (B,L,D)

Day 6: Sarlat and Rocamadour  After a morning at leisure to explore this charming town at your own pace, travel to Rocamadour, a revered pilgrimage site and medieval village whose three tiers cling almost impossibly to a sheer limestone cliff. Enjoy a walking tour and lunch on your own here, then take a leisurely cruise along the Dordogne River, life-blood of this fertile region and redolent with history. As you pass cliff-top castles and fortified medieval towns, the history of Aquitaine truly comes to mind, particularly the 12th-century reign of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Return to Sarlat for a walking tour of this charming town. (B,D)

Day 7: Le Dorat and Saumur  Leave the rugged, unspoiled countryside of the Dordogne region and travel north to the beautiful Loire Valley. Stop in the busy market town of Le Dorat for a typical country lunch at a local restaurant. From here travel to Saumur and your hotel, a converted 18th-century mansion on the banks of the Loire River. (B,L)

Explore the Dordogne’s authentic countryside of ancient castles, medieval villages, grand chateaux, and Roman ruins.
Day 8: Saumur  This morning is at leisure to explore this charming town, situated on the banks of the Loire River. This afternoon visit Fontevraud Abbey, the original resting place of Eleanor of Aquitaine, Henry II, and Richard the Lion Heart.  (B,D)

Day 9: Saumur and Chenonceaux  Here in the châteaux region England battled for control of France, Joan of Arc triumphed, and a great opulence reigned during the 16th century. Originally built as fortresses to keep intruders out, the Loire Valley’s grand châteaux now welcome visitors from around the world. Today, tour the Renaissance masterpiece of Chenonceau, considered one of the most romantic châteaux of all. After lunch at La Cave in Montlouis, visit the Château Clos Lucé where Leonardo da Vinci spent his final years.  (B,L)

Day 10: Mont-St-Michel and Crépon  Travel to historic Normandy and make your way to the pilgrimage site of Mont-St-Michel, Normandy’s famed Gothic abbey that sits atop a 264-foot high rock formation at the edge of the sea. With a history equal to its dramatic setting, the abbey was constructed between 1017-1521. Over the centuries it was a hotbed of French nationalism and religion, and recently monks have returned here to live and work. After a guided tour, enjoy some free time for lunch and exploring on your own. Early this evening, arrive in Crépon at your rustic 13th-century restored farmhouse where you’ll dine tonight on fresh regional fare.  (B,D)

Day 11: Crépon, Bayeux, Caen  Miraculously, medieval Bayeux was spared from wartime bombing and was the first town to be liberated during the Battle of Normandy. Visit the city’s highlight – the Tapestry Museum, home to the 1,000-year-old Bayeux Tapestry depicting the exploits of William the Conqueror. Travel north to commemorate World War II at the British Cemetery, then continue to Caen to visit the Memorial Museum devoted to “history for peace.” Time permitting, you may visit Arranmance late this afternoon.  (B,D)

Day 12: D-Day Landing Beaches  A poignant, inspiring day features the sites where Allied forces overcame overwhelming odds to alter the course of World War II. Visit Pointe du Hoc, where American Rangers scaled towering cliffs to establish a beachhead; Utah Beach; and Ste-Mère-Eglise, where the 82nd Airborne Division successfully parachuted on June 5, 1944. End the day at the American Cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach.  (B,L,D)

Day 13: Honfleur, Giverny, Paris  As you head to Paris today, visit the picturesque port town of Honfleur. Continue to the village of Giverny and the home and gardens of Impressionist artist Claude Monet. Walk amid his gardens with the familiar lily pond and Japanese footbridge of his paintings, and see his home, now restored to its original design. Arrive late this afternoon in Paris.  (B)

Day 14: Paris  During a city tour, view sites that bear historic and artistic significance. The afternoon is free to explore the French capital on your own. Tonight gather for a farewell dinner.  (B,D)

Day 15: Depart for the U.S.  This morning depart for the airport and your flights to the U.S.  (B)

Smithsonian Experts

John Sweets is professor emeritus of European history, with special expertise in French history and World War II. He has taught at the University of Kansas, the Université de Franche-Comté, Besançon (France), and other universities. John has authored and edited many works on France. He will lead the May and September 8 departures.

Arthur Kaplan taught French language, literature, and civilization at Mills College in Oakland, California. He received his B.A. in French linguistics from Cornell University and his M.A. in French from the University of California, Berkeley. Awarded a Fulbright Scholarship, Arthur spent two years in Paris on a university fellowship doing research on Victor Hugo and Romantic opera. He will lead the October departure. The other departures will be led by comparable experts.

Your Tour Price Includes

• Round-trip air transportation from listed cities
• 13 nights accommodations in Superior First Class, First Class, and unrated hotels
• 26 meals: 13 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 9 dinners
• Extensive sightseeing as described, including all entrance fees
• Services of a professional Tour Director
• Lectures by Smithsonian Expert
• Private motorcoach transportation throughout your trip
• Luggage handling for one bag per person
• Gratuities for Tour Director, local guides, dining room servers, airport and hotel porters, and all drivers

“France through the Ages was a feast for the body, mind, and soul!”
— David & Elaine B.

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