

**Thursday, May 1.** Departure from your chosen US gateway city. **Overnight: Plane**

**Friday, May 2.** Your arrival in Barcelona will be met by Discover Europe's representative and you will be escorted to your city-center hotel. The rest of the day is free to unpack, relax and begin exploring the neighborhood. This afternoon your tour guide will conduct an orientation tour. This evening the group will gather for a welcome dinner. **Overnight: Barcelona. (D)**

**Saturday, May 3.** This morning we board our bus for a panoramic sightseeing tour of this vibrant and cosmopolitan city. From the Old City to the ancient harbor, from the chic commercial center (the "Eixample") to world-famous museums, this city is endlessly fascinating. We'll pass by some of Gaudi's greatest buildings and visit the newly-completed Sagrada Familia. We'll end our visit at Montjuic with its remarkable museums. The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya has a splendid collection of medieval paintings, Romanesque frescoes that have been painstakingly removed from village churches and restored, and some of the finest examples of Renaissance and Baroque art. The afternoon is free to explore the Barri Gotic or make your own discoveries-perhaps a visit to the Camp Nou, home of Barcelona Football Club. The evening is free to sample a traditional Catalonian restaurant. **Overnight: Barcelona. (B)**

**Sunday, May 4.** Leaving Barcelona this morning, we drive north, up into the Pyrenees, stopping for lunch (included) in Llívia. We'll have time to visit the 15<sup>th</sup>-century fortified church, which boasts some fine carved-wood sacred images, and the local museum to see the interior of Europe's oldest pharmacy. We continue on through spectacular mountain scenery and across the border into France, right by the tiny mountain country of Andorra. Our destination is the fabulous Abbaye Chateau de Camon, our home for the next five nights. We'll have time to settle in and then enjoy a private welcome dinner in the abbey's Cloister dining-room. **Overnight: Camon. (B, L, D)**

**Monday, May 5.** After a leisurely breakfast on the terrace, overlooking the lovely gardens set against the distant Pyrenean peaks, a three-mile journey will bring us to Mirepoix. There will be time to explore one of France's most exquisite medieval squares and enjoy a coffee at one of the many cafes. Weather permitting, we will have a picnic lunch (included) at the nearby village of Roquefixade where we will be met by a local historian. After lunch, she will lead us on a walk to the medieval castle. On returning to the hotel, there will be time before dinner to relax by the pool, enjoy a cocktail on the terrace or sink into one of the comfy sofas in the reading room with a well earned glass of wine. **Overnight: Camon. (B, L, D)**

**Tuesday, May 6.** Today we get a serious dose of time travel! An 800-metre walk along a subterranean riverbed will take us back to the Magdalenian period (circa 11,000 BC) and to the vast chamber of the Grotte de Niaux. Leaping from the walls of the cave are the most beautiful images of horses, ibex, stags and bison, some still as fresh as the day they were painted. These are among the best prehistoric paintings you will see anywhere in Europe. This afternoon we will head for Montsegur. The ruined castle, set high on a rocky crag, was the final refuge of the persecuted Cathars. In 1244 the Roman Catholic Church carried out one of its worst ever atrocities; 225 Cathars, who refused to recant, were burnt on a communal pyre. There will be time to make the ascent to the castle (30 minutes), for those who enjoy a hike, and for those with nothing to prove, a wonderful respite to take in the views and reflect on the horrors of the past! Before heading home, there will be a stop at the village museum. Tonight a free evening to eat at the hotel or at a local restaurant in nearby Mirepoix. **Overnight: Camon. (B)**

**Wednesday, May 7.** This morning we will cut across the heavenly Ariège countryside to the magical Romanesque abbey of St Hillaire. Then on to Limoux, famed for its Blanquette - similar to champagne but a lot cheaper! There will be free time for shopping in the pretty Place de la République in the heart of the old town before continuing to the fabulous Gayda vineyard where we will be welcomed for a gourmet lunch by Tim Ford (head vintner). Tim will give us a tour of the vineyard and estate, ending with a tasting of their excellent produce in the Vinecole (literally, wine school). After lunch we'll head to the mountain-top village of Rennes-le-Château. A visit to the parish church will either spark or rejuvenate your interest in Dan Brown's mysteries. The church is full of symbols and secret codes which may indicate that Abbé Saunière, the priest from 1885 to 1910, had discovered the lost treasure of Solomon, brought to the region by the Visigoths in the 5th century. The evening is free. **Overnight: Camon. (B, L)**

**Thursday, May 8.** If you had to choose one medieval fortress town to visit before you die, Carcassonne would be it. Restored to perfection, your imagination need only to re-dress your fellow travelers, some in sackcloth, some in doublet and hose, and you're back in the medieval world! We will visit the beautiful St. Nazaire church with some of the loveliest stained glass in France. There will be time to visit the inner fortress, Chateau Comtal, and to wander the narrow alleyways. After time for lunch, we'll return to Camon. Tonight, a final dinner at the Château, always beautifully presented by master chef Tom. **Overnight: Camon. (B, D)**

**Friday, May 9.** Reluctantly we will bid farewell to the abbey this morning and head back to Barcelona. This time we'll take the coast road and make stops in the beautiful seaside village of Cadaques and the historic city of Girona en route. We also may be able to squeeze in a visit to the Dali Museum in Figueres as well. On our return to Barcelona we have our farewell dinner in a local restaurant and stay near the airport to accommodate those with early departures the following morning. **Overnight: Barcelona. (B, D)**

**Saturday, May 10.** Transfer to Barcelona Airport for flights back to the US. **(B)**