



# Treasures of Southwest France

## September 13 - 25, 2014



**Saturday, September 13th.** Departure from St. Louis Airport. **Overnight: Plane**

**Sunday, September 14th.** Morning arrival in Paris or London, where you transfer to the onward flight to Toulouse. On arrival at Toulouse Airport, you will be met for the short drive to our hotel, the fabulous Chateau de Camon. After time to unpack and rest up from the overnight flight, there will be an orientation meeting. This evening we'll enjoy a private welcome dinner in the abbey's Cloister dining-room. **(D) Overnight: Camon**

**Monday, September 15th.** 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 Montségur. The ruined castle, set high on a rocky crag, was the final refuge of the persecuted Cathars. In 1244 the 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. **(B) Overnight: Camon**

**Tuesday, September 16th.** Today, weather permitting, we'll head up into the high Pyrenees just across the border into Spain. First we'll visit the charming town of Camprodon with its fortified bridge and romantic town square and then on to the tiny mountain village of Queralbs. Here we will have lunch in a fonda (local inn) and pay a visit to the church with its 11th-century fresco of Christ in Judgement. This afternoon we wend our way back down, descending through Aix-les-Termes and back to Camon. Tonight, we'll dine at the Château, always delicious and beautifully presented by master chef Tom. **(B, D) Overnight: Camon**

**Wednesday, September 17th.** Leaving Camon this morning, our first stop will be at Limoux, a wine region famed for its Blanquette - similar to champagne but a lot cheaper! We'll stop at a local vineyard for a tasting this morning. We continue 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 - or not. After time for lunch in the village we continue on to the Chateau de Peyrepertuse, one of the ancient Cathar strongholds that once dotted the region. A short drive from here brings us to our hotel in Collioure, where dinner awaits us in the Michelin-starred restaurant. **(B, D) Overnight: Collioure**

**Thursday, September 18th.** Collioure has always been a source of inspiration for artists. Writers, poets, singers and painters fell under Collioure's charm. That is also why Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Dufy, Chagall, Marquet, and many others set up their easels here and immortalized the small Catalan harbor in their works. With approximately thirty galleries and many artists from the entire world, Collioure still is the "City of Painters" and today is free to discover why. **(B) Overnight: Collioure**

**Friday, September 19th.** Leaving Collioure this morning, we travel north up the Mediterranean coast to visit the Abbaye Sainte-Marie de Fontfroide, a former Cistercian monastery, founded in 1093. Then we turn inland, roughly following the course of the Canal du Midi. 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 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. Next there will be time to visit the inner fortress, Chateau Comtal, and wander the narrow alleys. A short drive from here brings us to our hotel in the center of the regional capital of Toulouse. The evening is free to sample a local restaurant. **(B) Overnight: Toulouse**

**Saturday, September 20th.** Heading north from Toulouse, our first stop today will be Albi, a classic red brick-and-tile Languedoc town where Cathars, 12th century Catholic heretics, were infamously burned at the stake. In Albi we'll visit the Musée Toulouse-Lautrec and one of the most startlingly original cathedrals of the Middle Ages. From our mid-afternoon return to Toulouse, time is your own for shopping or sightseeing—perhaps pay a visit to St Sernin, one of the most influential Romanesque abbeys in Europe—in this vibrant, Mediterranean-influenced city. We return to our hotel for a farewell dinner. **(B, D) Overnight: Toulouse**

**Sunday, September 21st.** Morning transfer to Toulouse Airport for short flight to Paris. On arrival at Paris Orly Airport, you will transfer to your central Paris hotel. The afternoon is free to begin exploring the neighborhood and dinner is included this evening. After we've eaten we'll take a stroll down to the river and take a boat ride on the Seine to see Paris illuminated at night. **(B, D) Overnight: Paris**

**Monday, September 22nd.** This morning a panoramic tour of the city with a local guide introduces the major monuments - the Louvre, Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, Les Invalides, the Arc de Triomphe, and the many lovely bridges across the Seine - and provides an overview of the history of the "City of Light." The tour will end in Montmartre. The afternoon and evening are free. **(B) Overnight: Paris**



Carcassonne

**Tuesday, September 23rd.** Leaving Paris, we drive to Giverny to experience Monet's garden paradise, where he lived for 43 years. Water gardens, bridges, roses—all create breathtakingly gorgeous tableaux recognizable as some of the most famous paintings in the world. With time to visit the gardens and house, we return to Paris for a free evening. **(B) Overnight: Paris**

**Wednesday, September 24th.** A day in Paris at your leisure. We'll gather for dinner at a local restaurant near our hotel. **(B, D) Overnight: Paris**

**Thursday, September 25th.** Morning transfer to Paris, Charles de Gaulle Airport for returning flights to the U.S. **(B) Overnight: Home**