



## PROVENCE ... UNPLUGGED!



- ❖ Does a relaxing week living on a luxurious country estate in Provence appeal to you?
- ❖ Do colourful markets in quaint, historic villages, visits to wonderful vineyards, lunches in restaurants perched on hillsides or cantilevered over rushing streams, gourmet four-course dinners with a local flair and so much more sound tempting?
- ❖ Would you like to walk in the footsteps of Van Gogh, dance on the Pont d'Avignon, wind your way through old Roman towns and explore the ruins of a castle where the troubadours use to sing songs of courtly love in the Middle Ages?

Hélène Buisson and Jim Walker, whose connection to France goes back 20 years, invite you to share their passion for Provence. Stay in a beautiful country home a short distance from Avignon. Enjoy delicious meals with wonderful wines. Visit charming villages, bustling towns and colourful markets, and admire the stunning countryside from the comfort of a private chauffeur-driven minibus. A small group of 10 ensures an intimate, convivial and personal experience.

## YOUR WEEK IN PARADISE

What defines Provence? Stunning scenery, wonderful hilltop villages, lush vineyards, delicious wine tastings, colourful Provençal markets, archaeological sites, cultural events, historical monuments, great shopping, people watching while sipping pastis on a café terrace, and this is only the beginning!



It is also a terrific place to celebrate a special occasion like a landmark birthday, one's retirement, a family reunion or a special anniversary. Great people, sights, scenery, weather, food and wine. There is no other place quite as wonderful as Provence.

- ❖ Your home base will be a fabulous country home near Avignon; no packing, no moving for a whole week.
- ❖ Your days will begin with croissants, breads and brioches fresh from the village bakery.
- ❖ Beginning mid-morning, we will take you on excursions in a luxury Mercedes minibus to fabulous nearby destinations that you are free to explore at your leisure. There will also be visits to absolutely stunning sites and attractions.
- ❖ Lunch will be, in the Provençal manner, a leisurely 2 hour affair in one of many fine restaurants, inviting cafés, shady terraces, bustling patios....
- ❖ Our driver will take us back home in time for the aperitif hour on the vine-covered terrace, and you will enjoy authentic home-cooked Provençal dinners accompanied by specially selected local wines each night.

Hélène and Jim will take care of all the details from the morning croissant run to serving you dinner each night (we also do dishes!). You will, however, have all the privacy you want as we will be staying in an adjoining apartment, leaving you to really make the house YOUR home.

*"Wow, what an experience! Avignon and its environs have so much to offer; sunshine, warm experiences, history and of course food and wine. And the details are all taken care of from A to Z. O! France made it a trip to remember. So much so, we returned a second time!"*

*Ron and Christine, New Canaan, Ct*

*Ambience! That's the key to a great start to a holiday. And the Bastide delivers – in spades. From the beautiful rooms to the truly grand Provence style kitchen. We dined in the kitchen – 12 of us – and we ate in the dining room as well. Of course we swam in the afternoon, and the lucky ones spent some time in a hammock before having a glass or two before dinner. A walk after dinner. We loved it – did it twice.*

*Robert, Montreal, Québec*

## YOUR O! FRANCE HOME



Bastide Saint-Albergati is a spacious 18th-century country home located in the heart of Provence near Avignon, within a half hour drive to many famous sites. The home is filled with paintings, antiques, and books but has a relaxed convivial feel. The setting is tranquil, with over 6 acres of surrounding gardens including a huge pool and a canal running under the bastide! A large shaded terrace overlooking the garden provides the perfect setting for aperitifs at the end of the day and the large country-style kitchen with fireplace is the site of many memorable traditional Provençal dinners.

The house has an interesting history – Originally an 18th century monk's retreat, it became a silkworm farm, a paper mill, and finally, the country manor we find today.



## YOUR O! FRANCE HOSTS



Hélène Buisson and Jim Walker have visited France annually for 20 years, fallen in love with all things Provençal, made fabulous friends in the region and are currently importing wonderful wines from passionate artisan vintners in the South of France via Arthur's Cellar Wine Club ([www.arthursellers.com](http://www.arthursellers.com)). Hélène's French roots and Jim's invaluable wine knowledge along with their many friends and contacts will ensure that you have a unique, very special, up close and personal view of Provence.

## THE O! FRANCE GUEST



**You will be a delighted O! FRANCE guest if you:**

- ❖ Want to experience, and not just visit Provence
- ❖ Enjoy settling into your own luxurious home for a week
- ❖ Are interested in history, architecture, art, culture
- ❖ Admit being an avowed foodie (lots of local specialties - lamb, goat cheeses, eggplant, olives, etc.)
- ❖ Love wine (we import wines from Southern France and have many stories and discoveries to share)
- ❖ Take pleasure in walking around and exploring on your own
- ❖ Like sharing experiences with a small like-minded group
- ❖ Prefer being casual and relaxed (no dress-up affairs!)
- ❖ Are enthusiastic, curious, sociable, flexible and own walking shoes!

## O! FRANCE ITINERARY

This itinerary has been designed to give you an overview of five distinct areas of



Provence, all within a one hour drive from our home base. We have not included lunches and most attractions to allow maximum flexibility. We have however included admission to some must-sees: the Pope's Palace in Avignon, the Château des Baux, the Arena in Nîmes and the Theatre in Orange, three of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Not all of you will want to visit every attraction, you might want to eat on your own time in a small café, or join your friends in a renowned restaurant – the choice is yours.

You will be on your own in the towns and villages if you wish, but we will always be there to give you guidance and recommendations. You may also elect to take a day off and stay at the bastide, napping in a hammock by the canal, relaxing in the sun on the terrace or around the pool, or reading a good book in the summer living room with the large doors open to the garden. The choice is yours.

### Itinerary Highlights

#### Saturday

Arrival and pick up at Avignon TGV Station.

A quiet day to settle in - exploring the bastide and the grounds, enjoying Provençal aperitifs and an informal buffet dinner. For those who have just arrived in France, this is a great way to start your vacation ... relaxing and unwinding.

#### Sunday

We will visit the famous, colourful food and antique market at nearby L'Isle sur la Sorgue. L'Isle sur la Sorgue is one of those places in Provence that one has to see. It is called the "Venice of the Comtat" because here the clear green waters of the river Sorgue divide into five branches that form a series of islands. Walking along the canals you will notice how they run between the narrow ancient streets. There are little bridges to cross and great water wheels to look at with mossy blades turning in the river.



Lunch is in Fontaine de Vaucluse, where the Sorgue river originates (they never have found out where the water actually comes from. Jacques Cousteau tried – they even sent down a robot – but to no avail). Built at the foot of steep cliffs, the village is dominated by the ruins of a 14<sup>th</sup> Century castle perched atop a rocky outcrop.



We will dine at Restaurant Philip where the terrace is cantilevered over the river, the food is great, the trout and ducks do battle over your breadcrumbs, and, apparently the men's loo has a fabulous view!

Explore this tiny village, visit the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Provençal-Romanesque church and a paper mill which has been producing handmade paper since the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. There, you can purchase beautiful stationary, prints and old maps. There is a museum dedicated to the Resistance as this was a hotbed of resistance fighters during the Second World War. Sadly, the mayor at the time earned himself a one-way ticket to Buchenwald for having protected them.



Leisurely drive back to the house for rest, rosé on the terrace, and a wonderful Provençal welcome dinner prepared by Béatrice.

## Monday

Mid-morning departure for Avignon; This is a beautiful medieval walled city with its famous Pont d'Avignon and the Palace of the Popes. One of the largest buildings of its time (2.6 acres) the palace is a veritable fortress where nine popes ruled the Roman Catholic world from 1309 to 1403. There is also a very worthwhile and quite comprehensive tour of the old town in a mini-train, leaving from the main square off the palace. Find a café on the Place de l'Horloge for lunch and watch the ever changing street theatre and spend the rest of the day exploring Avignon at your leisure before returning to the Bastide.



## Tuesday

Morning in Les Baux; Les Baux is a restored village located 245 m up on a rocky plateau. Although it is the second most popular tourist site in France (Mont St-Michel is the first), it is worth a visit (early in the day before the hoards arrive). The village itself is very pretty, albeit touristy, but once you get to the top, the real action begins, as you explore the ruins of the citadel, its defenses, and the original 12th-century town. Even though the town was



destroyed in 1632, the parts of it that remain partially intact are fascinating. There is also a collection of full-scale siege engines, reconstructed from the original plans. In its day, Les Baux was an important regional power centre; even in ruins, the ancient fortress is incredibly impressive.

Our driver will then drop us off a few minutes away, after a lovely incredibly scenic drive through the Alpilles, (little Alps) at the edge of the beautiful town of Saint-Rémy de Provence. There, you will see what is thought to be two of the best preserved Roman monuments in existence: les Antiques, a triumphal arch supposedly celebrating the Roman conquest of Marseille, and a mausoleum thought to commemorate two grandsons of Augustus.



The arch would have been a familiar sight to Vincent Van Gogh, who in 1889 requested that he be put under medical care for several months. The hospital chosen by his friends was in the old monastery St-Paul-de-Mausole, a hundred metres or so east of Les Antiques; it remains a psychiatric clinic today. Although the regime was more prison than hospital, Van Gogh was allowed to wander out around the Alpilles and painted prolifically during his twelve-month stay. The clinic can be visited, and for 3€, we found it a worthwhile tour.



Then, you will be given a map for a self-guided tour of the Van Gogh route, which will lead you to the town of St-Rémy. For those who want to skip the Van Gogh walk, simply walk to the town via the main road (20 minutes at most). You are now free to explore St-Rémy.

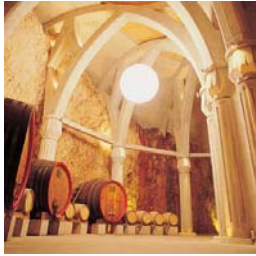
Saint-Rémy is one of the "must-sees" in Provence. Surrounded by lush green perfumed valleys, its ancient streets are lined with beautifully restored old houses... you will soon be seduced by Saint-Rémy's charm! While strolling through the narrow winding streets you will discover fantastic old fountains, shady squares, picturesque restaurants and elegant boutiques. Saint-Rémy is an artist's town, and you will find numerous art galleries.



Nostradamus, the famous French physician/astrologer, was born here in 1503. In 1922, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas found Saint-Rémy after "wandering around everywhere a bit," as Ms. Stein wrote to Cocteau.

There is something for everyone in Saint-Rémy. Linger in a bistro for lunch. Mid-afternoon, our driver will take us to nearby Château Romanin by way of one of the most beautiful roads in Provence with its canopy of plane trees. Château Romanin is one of our producers, a biodynamic winery located right in the Alpilles, on the site of the ruins of a castle where the troubadours used to sing their songs of courtly love in the Middle Ages.





The winery is carved into the mountain, and has a stunning “cathedral” where their best wines are stored. Well worth a visit and a tasting to find out more about biodynamic farming, a method of organic farming that is regarded by some proponents as the first modern ecological farming system. Back to the bastide for a well-deserved rest before dinner.

## Wednesday

Today will be more of a driving day. We will travel along scenic roads to the Lubéron area, and will start our visit with a quick stop at the Pont Julien, a Roman bridge that is over 2000 years old. It was the way the Romans entered Gaul. Then we arrive in Bonnieux, a lovely hilltop town where we can stretch our legs and walk through the old streets and passages. Bonnieux was the summer home of the popes when they were in Avignon.



Next, a stop at Château de l’Isolette, one of our wineries, to sample some of their fabulous wines. The winery is run by Laure Pinatel-Gilles, and the estate has been in Laure’s family since 1647! On to Roussillon, a distinctive colourful town with multi-coloured ochre cliffs, lunch in a restaurant with a beautiful view (or a café on the main square if you wish). In the village, there is a walk through the Sentier des Ochres, a natural park of jagged cliffs of ochre that is about 35 minutes long and worth it. Great way to work off lunch.



The drive home will take us through Gordes, designated one of the most beautiful villages in France. Gordes is a delightful town with houses built into the cliffs. Wander along the very narrow steep streets and admire the stunning panoramic view of the mountains, the forests, and the perched villages of the Lubéron. Home to the bastide for a relaxing aperitif on the terrace.

## Thursday

A splendid day in Orange, a town renowned for its Roman architecture, founded in 35 BC. Its Roman theatre (UNESCO World Heritage Site) is described as the most impressive in Europe, and perhaps in the Roman Empire as a whole. Louis XIV declared it “the finest wall in my kingdom”. At the time, it could hold 10,000 spectators for political events, plays and sporting events. Performances are still held there regularly. The Arc de Triomphe was built by the Romans in 20BC, and it remains the third largest arch in the World.



built by the Romans in



Thursday morning is market day, and the Orange market is particularly lively and colourful. If you wish, you can pick up ingredients and make tonight's dinner! Your overflowing baskets will be taken back to the bastide and you can explore the town at leisure and perhaps we can take a slow route home, with a delightful scenic drive through the Dentelles de Montmirail, mountains that form a circle at the southwest end, between Gigondas, Beaumes-de-Venise and Lafare, making this region part of the Côte de Rhône wine country.



## Friday

Mid-morning visit to Pont du Gard, another UNESCO World Heritage Site, an aqueduct constructed by the Roman Empire (entirely without mortar!), and then on to Nîmes with its 2000 years of history, amazing roman legacy (you can visit the Nîmes arena, the best preserved roman amphitheatre in the world, built in 27 B.C and still used for bullfights), walk through a wonderful pedestrian centre-ville with great shopping (prices tend to be lower here as we are officially in the Languedoc, just West of pricier Provence). This is another day when you can explore at your leisure, sit on a terrace with a glass of rosé and enjoy the wonderful people-watching. Our farewell dinner will be served in the formal dining-room as a grand finale to what will have been an incredible week.



## Saturday

Breakfast and fond farewells. Transportation to the Avignon TGV Station will be arranged.

## O! FRANCE DATES AND PRICES

**Saturday, September 13, 2008 – Saturday, September 20, 2008**

\$2500 - \$2800 based on choice of bedroom, first come, first served

Price includes:

- ❖ Transfers to and from Avignon TGV station
- ❖ Daily transportation to destination in a luxury Mercedes minibus with driver
- ❖ 7 nights accommodation at Bastide Saint-Albergati
- ❖ Welcome champagne and hors d'oeuvres and casual dinner (Provençal cold cuts, pâtés, salads, cheese and fruit) with wine on first night
- ❖ Breakfast, aperitifs with hors d'oeuvres and four course dinners with wine 5 nights

- ❖ Special Market Dinner on Thursday as we will be going to the market in Orange.
- ❖ Admission to the Pope's Palace in Avignon, le Château des Baux in Les Baux, the Arena and Maison Carrée in Nîmes, the Antique Theatre in Orange and the Pont du Gard.
- ❖ Daily housekeeping service (laundry service available at extra charge)
- ❖ Gratuities (driver and housekeeper)
- ❖ Special trip packet with details, tips, recommendations, maps
- ❖ Souvenir album

Not included:

- ❖ Airfare and travel to Avignon TGV station. TGV trains leave from CDG Airport and from Gare de Lyon in Paris. Most guests like to start or end their week in Provence with a few days in Paris.
- ❖ Lunches
- ❖ Admissions to museums, galleries, attractions other than those mentioned above.
- ❖ Telephone calls

Internet is quite inconsistent. Best to think of this as a relaxing, unplugged week!

**(2009 dates will be September 12 to 19 and September 19 to 26)**

For reservations, inquiries, additional details, information on costs, and answers to all your questions, give us a call or send us an email.

Looking very forward to hearing from you,

*Hélène and Jim*

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