

Below is the proposed itinerary for the trip. As is true on any adventure travel trip, plans for any specific day may be modified due to weather considerations, unforeseen circumstances, new opportunities, and group interests.

**DAY 1**

**Arrive Avignon. Introductions and Welcome Dinner**

We meet in Avignon at our hotel at 6:00 p.m. to start our Provencal adventure! We'll share a welcome and introductions, looking out over the town of Avignon. Avignon, home to seven successive popes from 1309 to 1377, is one of the few French cities where the original ramparts are still largely intact. We then go out to enjoy the first of many delicious dinners at a local restaurant. We'll spend tonight in Avignon in the heart of the walled city.

Overnight: Palais des Papes (D)

**DAY 2**

**Avignon tour, transfer to St Remy, hike in Alpilles**

This morning we will take a short tour around historic Avignon, pointing out the Pope's Palace, the marketplace, and other treasures hidden within the 14th century ramparts as we learn how the city has grown. We then transfer by taxi from Avignon to Saint Remy de Provence (20 minutes) where we will be staying for the next two nights. Our walk this afternoon takes us on a loop trail starting at the asylum where Van Gogh stayed for a year. Climbing high up to a ridge in the Alpilles, we have a splendid view of Saint Remy and the valley it sits in. Upon finishing the hike, you'll have an option to visit the asylum (6 euros and highly recommended for anyone interested in Van Gogh) and/or the Roman ruins of Glanum (8 euros), one of the better reconstructed sites. Whether you do both or neither, you will folloe the Van Gogh path, a sprinkling of enamel reproductions of the paintings he did while in Saint Remy and facing the very countryside that inspired his works, on the road back to the hotel. Dinner is in town.

Hiking: 3 hours, 5 miles. Elevation gain: 1,050 feet. Overnight Hotel Gounod or similar (B, L, D)

**DAY 3**

**Alpilles hike and visit Les Baux de Provence**

Leaving the hotel by foot we climb up into the Alpilles, literally "baby Alps", an isolated mountain of craggy limestone in an otherwise flat Rhone Valley. We walk on a broad path along the crest, in a countryside of surreal limestone formations. The views extend above the olive groves and throughout the flatlands of the Camargue, often to the Mediterranean Sea. To the north we'll notice the monolithic Pope's Palace and all the mountain ranges that will be our playground over our week's adventure, with the ever-imposing Mont Ventoux as the backdrop. We follow the scenic ridgeline and enjoy a gourmet picnic before dipping down to the village of Les Baux de Provence. There will be some free time this afternoon and you'll have an option to visit an amazing multimedia presentation in an old limestone quarry (13 euros) or to explore Les Baux. Listed among the most beautiful villages in France, Les Baux is set defiantly above the plains, a few-dozen homes perched atop the craggy limestone. We'll return to Saint Remy for dinner and our second night.

Hiking: 3.5 hours, 6 miles. Elevation gain: 950 feet. Overnight: Hotel Gounod (B, L, D)

**DAY 4**

**Hike from Bonnieux through the Luberon to Auberge des Seguins**

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Now that we've learned something about typical Provencal picnic fare, we'll be able to pick up our own fare. Stopping at the many shops, we can pick out food for our lunch today. It will be hard to decide between all the delicious and tempting options from all of the shops around St. Remy. A morning transfer (1 hour by taxi) takes us into the heart of the Luberon mountains, setting of Peter Mayle's "A Year in Provence", and home to some of the most stunning villages and scenery in Provence. We begin our walk in one of those stunning villages: Bonnieux. After exploring its labyrinth of cobbled streets and admiring the views from its 12th century church, we set off on the trails. We follow old-stone walls through oak forests and admire centuries-old stone huts. Crossing the hollow that divides the Luberon in two distinct mountains we walk high above a lavender plantation before descending down into the valley where an old chateau has been repurposed as an environmental learning center. The final stretch finds us walking atop the cliffs above the Aiguebrun river. Soon from high above we spot our hotel: the Auberge des Seguins, as far off the beaten track as you can get, hidden in the heart of the Luberon mountains. Set at the crossroads of the most beautiful walking paths in the Luberon, Les Seguins will be our home for the next two nights.

Walking: about 5 hours, 8.3 miles. Elevation gain: 1,250 feet. Overnight: Auberge des Seguins (B, D)

## DAY 5

### Aiguebrun Valley & Buoux Fortress

A day of history and beautiful landscapes awaits us today as we walk from the Buoux Gorge to Sivergues. A tiny village of 39 inhabitants, Sivergues is located deep in the Luberon hills, snuggled up on a cliff overhanging the Aiguebrun valley. After exploring, we walk back along the Aiguebrun river bed, the only permanent river of the Luberon Mountains, where you'll find a large stone basin with very clear water which served as a reservoir for the region's drinking water. Back at the Auberge, we'll enjoy our picnic. In the afternoon you can choose to relax or go for another hike to the splendid hilltop ruins of Buoux Fort, which served as a refuge for the local population during the Wars of Religion. In 1660, King Louis the 14th ordered the fort's destruction. In the grounds of the Fort you can discover pieces of the rampart and walls of the chapel.

Morning hike: about 2.5 hours, 3.7 miles, 490 ft elevation gain. Optional afternoon hike and fort visit: 1.8 miles, 330 ft elevation gain. Overnight: Auberge des Seguins (B, L, D)

## DAY 6

### Transfer to Rhone Valley, walk in the Dentelles de Montmirail to Vaison La Romaine

A morning transfer (1 hour, 15 minutes) takes us out of the Luberon and towards the Rhone Valley. We begin our walk above the vines, set beside the Dentelles de Montmirail mountain range. "Dentelle" means lacework, attributed to these sharp, teeth-like limestone formations that soar above the Rhone Valley, creating improbable designs. We walk through a pure "garrigue", vegetation of sparse brush on the austere limestone to reach the town of Vaison la Romaine, our home for the next two nights. Vaison has three distinct faces: Roman, harboring France's largest archeological site; medieval: a pristine group of centuries-old homes set protected above the Ouvèze river up to its castle ruins; and modern: bustling cafes and restaurants set around the refurbished main square. The three facets mix harmoniously and offer many treasures to explore.

Hiking: 4 hours, 6.5 miles. Elevation gain: 830 feet. Overnight: La Fete en Provence or similar (B, L, D)

## DAY 7

### Transfer to Seguret, walk to Gigondas, wine tasting

A short morning transfer takes us to the village of Seguret. With its narrow-cobbled streets with old fountains and washbasins, Seguret's beauty remains timeless and authentic and definitely off the tourist-radar. We walk on tracks and country lanes above and through the vines of the Rhone valley. We enter the lands of Gigondas, world-renowned for their powerful red wines. Our path leads us directly below the imposing limestone cliffs of the Dentelles de Montmirail, set above the gnarled vines. We end up in the heart of the village of Gigondas, the second largest wine-growing area in the world (second only to Bordeaux, also in France) so it's only

and up in the heart of the village of Vaison, the second largest wine growing area in the world (second only to Bordeaux, the Provence is the 3rd only). It's appropriate that we end our hiking with a wine tasting at one of the wineries. Back in Vaison we trade a traditional dinner for a special experience on the terrace of our hotel, overlooking the main square. It just so happens that the nation's best cheese shop is in Vaison, along with some pretty great wines too. We add some other goodies in the mix for a memorable evening of wines and cheeses and laughter.

Walking: about 4 hours, 7 miles. Elevation gain: 1,000 feet. Overnight: La Fete en Provence or similar. (B, L, D)

**DAY 8**

Climb Mont Ventoux, return to Avignon

Have we saved the best for last? Only you can decide. A morning transfer (50 minutes) takes us to the upper slopes of Mont Ventoux, the mountain that has loomed in the distance the entire week. We quickly trade Mediterranean forest for spruce and fir, beginning our walk at the sometimes-ski-resort of Mont Serein. The fir and spruce give way to larch, then mountain pine, and then no trees at all: a bare-limestone-otherworldly-moonscape shared only by the mountain goats robust enough to brave the steep slopes. As we near the summit we'll encounter alpine and even arctic flowers and what is arguably one of the best panoramas on earth. Though Ventoux is not nearly as high as its Alpine neighbors, it's a mountain set on its own. The views extend to the entire chain of Alps to the north, and to the vast and open Rhone Valley to the south, often as far as the Mediterranean Sea. We'll have a celebratory lunch at the summit before returning to Avignon. You'll have time to stroll through town before we enjoy one last dinner together.

Note: More than any other hike, this one is weather dependent. If the mistral is blowing, we'll hike a lower section of the mountain.

Hiking: 3 hours, 4 miles. Elevation gain: 1,600 feet. Overnight: Palais des Papes (B, L, D)

**DAY 9**

Departure Day

Sadly, your trip ends after breakfast. (B)