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COLORS OF PROVENCE

Trip Summary

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hiking in all the small mountain ranges of Provence: the Alpilles, Luberon, Dentelles de Montmirail, and Mont Ventoux
- Experiencing the light of Provence, which has drawn artists and photographers forever
- Savoring the cheeses, fresh fruits, vegetables, breads and pastries, red wines and olive oils
- Visiting tiny villages perched on rocky cliffs and walking through landscape dotted with cypress trees
- Enjoying harvest time, great weather and fewer crowds.

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TRIP AT A GLANCE

Location:	Avignon, France
Activities:	Hiking
Arrive:	At 6:00 p.m. at our hotel in Avignon, France on Day 1
Depart:	Any time after breakfast on the last day

Trip Overview

Provence is surely one of France's most fabled regions. Flanked by the Alps to the north, Italy to the east, and the Mediterranean to the south, Provence is known for the incredible diversity that exists within its borders, its rich human and natural history, and its sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and utter charm. On this trip we will introduce you to all the fascination that Provence has to offer: the ancient settlement of Avignon, the tiny perched villages of the Luberon, the craggy limestone of the Alpilles, and Mont Ventoux, an inspiration for Van Gogh (and us!). We will combine scenic hikes with visits to village markets, stays at French inns, a little culture, and a chance to sample all the fantastic tastes of the south of France. Maximum group size: 12

Rating

This trip is designed for women who want to combine hiking off the beaten track in the Provence countryside, with exploring local culture, visits to some of their unique and different villages, and savoring fresh cuisine. There is significant elevation gain on several days and paths can be rocky at times. Participants can usually opt out of the day and spend the day on their own. In order to do all of the hikes listed here, women should be in good physical condition and able to hike for three to five hours a day. Being able to keep a fast pace is not necessary; there will be time for photography, admiring views, and savoring amazing picnic lunches. **Rating:** 1 2 **[3]** 4 5

What's Included

- A local Provencal guide and an AGC guide (If there are fewer than 8 on the trip, there will not be an AGC guide)
- Eight nights double occupancy accommodation with en suite bathrooms
- All meals from dinner the first night through breakfast the last day, with the exception of one lunch
- All activities on the itinerary
- All transportation from the time you arrive at our hotel in Avignon to the time you leave

Not included: Transportation to and from our hotel in Avignon, alcoholic beverages (wine is included with dinner on a couple of nights), one lunch, optional activities, travel insurance and guide gratuities.

OUR ITINERARY

Below is the itinerary we have planned 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

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

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 follow 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 des Alpilles or similar (B, L, D)

DAY 3

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 du Alpilles (B, L, D)

DAY 4

Now that we've learned something about typical Provencal picnic fare, we'll start the day with a visit to the St Remy market where we can pick out our food for today's picnic lunch. It will be hard to decide between all the delicious and tempting options from dozens of stalls selling countless gourmet delights. 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

Today is one of options! If you want a down day to just relax, there is no more beautiful setting than our inn. If you'd like to do something in the morning, spend it exploring the 3,000-year-old Buoux Fort, rich in history and surprises. It's an easy hike from the hotel and we'll explore the ruins of many different civilizations that sought refuge atop this rocky crag that has sheer cliffs on all sides and outstanding views. From Medieval ramparts and churches to Roman silos and watchtowers, and even Celto-Ligurian ruins, the site is fascinating. After a picnic lunch you can choose to return to the inn for a relaxing afternoon or to continue hiking. For those who want more hiking, we'll climb up to the rounded crest of the Luberon mountains. Carpeted in thyme and in wildflowers, the crest offers views out to the chain of the Alps in the north and even to the Mediterranean Sea in the south.

Hiking: 2 - 5.5 hours, 3.7 - 8.8 miles. Elevation gain: 650 - 2,100 feet. Overnight: Auberge des Seguins (B, L, D)

DAY 6

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

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 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

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

Sadly, your trip ends after breakfast. (B)

ADDITIONAL TRIP INFORMATION

Getting There

The best way to travel to Avignon is to fly to Paris (CDG) or to Marseille (MRS) and then take the train. Typically there are 5 trips daily from Paris and the train to Avignon takes a little over 3 hours. You can take the train from either the Paris Airport station, if you are going directly to Avignon, or the downtown Paris Gare Lyon Station if you are spending time in Paris first. The TGV trains stop at Avignon TGV; from here you can either take a taxi (about 30 euros) or transfer to the local station, Avignon Centre Station (AVN). The AVN station is about a 10-minute walk to the hotel. You can also get a taxi to the hotel. The taxi queue will be in front of the train station.

If you fly into Marseille, there is a free shuttle from the airport to the train station. The train takes about 60 minutes and goes directly to Avignon Center.

Note: Check this website for the current schedule: <http://www.raileurope.com/index.html>. Please be careful when reserving your train tickets to choose your final destination as either Avignon TGV or Avignon Center station. Tickets can sell out and are more expensive closer to departure so you may want to get them as soon as you buy your air tickets.

If you would like assistance with airfare, we recommend contacting our AirDesk Partner, [Exito Travel](#). Start by submitting this [form](#). Just fill in your dates and destinations, including any additional notes about preferred carriers, class of service, possible stopovers, etc., and an agent will typically respond via email within a few hours. If you prefer to call, the number is 800-655-4053; be sure to tell them you are traveling with Adventures in Good Company.

Please note: Most of the international airlines are in-network for Exito, so they do not charge extra for their services (and often have access to discounted rates). When necessary, processing fees out-of-network carriers are minimal at around \$35-\$50 per ticket.

Accommodations

We'll be staying at 3 star hotels in Avignon, Saint Remy de Provence, and Vaison la Romaine. In Buoux we'll stay in a country inn (see the itinerary for the specific hotels).

Travel Insurance

We recommend that you purchase a travel protection plan to help protect you and your travel investment against the unexpected. For your convenience, we offer travel protection through Travelex Insurance Services. For more information on the available plans or to enroll, visit www.travelexinsurance.com or call 1-800-228-9792 and reference location number 06-0331.

Travelex Insurance Services, Inc CA Agency License #0D10209. All products listed are underwritten by, Berkshire Hathaway Specialty Insurance Company, NAIC #22276.

CANCELLATION POLICY

Cancellation charges reflect the many expenses Adventures in Good Company cannot recover if you cancel, even if you must do so due to illness, injury, or personal emergencies. These fees are not meant to be punitive. The charges made reflect the expenses Adventures in Good Company has incurred in administering your reservation and planning for your participation. We recognize that the majority of those who cancel their reservations do so out of necessity. Please note that we do not make any refunds for any unused portion of your trip, not arriving, arriving late, or leaving the trip early.

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