



Provence Trip Notes **May 13 – 27, 2014**

We had never spent sufficient time in Provence so when I signed up for this hiking trip, Tom decided to go along and rent an apartment in Avignon for the few days prior. For the hiking trip, like in the Amalfi and Cinque Terre trips, he does his own thing during the day and then meets up with the group for dinner and the hotel. Perfect!

You'll note that I was much more enthused about Avignon than the Provence hiking trip which was a bit much of an eating extravaganza. Provence is for Type B persons who like to nap and think about their lunch pre nap and then their dinner post nap. But Avignon – now that's a good destination.

Pictures left mostly to Tom and his photo shows. See www.Tomskoi.com or direct at <http://www.photoshow.com/watch/Ww6hQ8DA> for Avignon and <http://www.photoshow.com/watch/PF7BS6IB> for Provence.

Avignon Tourist

From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avignon> - Avignon (in classical norm or Avignoun in Mistralian norm) is a French commune in southeastern France in the department of the Vaucluse bordered by the left bank of the Rhône river. Of the 90,194 inhabitants of the city (as of 2011), about 12,000 live in the ancient town centre surrounded by its medieval ramparts. Between 1309 and 1377 during the Avignon Papacy, seven successive popes resided in Avignon. The town was sold to the papacy by Countess Jeanne of Provence in 1348. Papal control persisted until 1791 when during the French Revolution it became part of France. The town is now the capital of the Vaucluse department and one of the few French cities to have preserved its ramparts. The historic centre, which includes the Palais des Papes, the cathedral and the Saint-Bénézet Bridge, was classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1995. The Festival d'Avignon is an important arts festival that is held in the city in July.



Le Pont d'Avignon

View over the Rhône River to North-East with the Pont Saint-Bénézet or "Pont d'Avignon" at left. Avignon is commemorated by the French song, "Sur le Pont d'Avignon" ("On the bridge of Avignon"), which describes folk dancing. The song dates from the mid-19th century when Adolphe Adam included it in the Opéra comique *Le Sourd ou l'Auberge Pleine* which was first performed in Paris in 1853. The opera was an adaptation of the 1790 comedy by Desforges.

The bridge of the song is the Saint Bénézet bridge, over the Rhône River, of which only four arches (out of the initial 22) now remain. A bridge across the Rhone was built between 1171 and 1185, with a length of some 900 m (2950 ft), but was destroyed during the siege of Avignon by Louis VIII of France in 1226. It was rebuilt but suffered frequent collapses during floods and had to



be continually repaired. Several arches were already missing (and spanned by wooden sections) before the remainder was abandoned in 1669.

Palace of the Popes - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palais_des_Papes - One of the largest and most important medieval Gothic buildings in Europe. One time fortress and palace, the papal residence was the seat of Western Christianity during the 14th century. Six papal conclaves were held in the Palais. The popes departed Avignon in 1377, returning to Rome, but this prompted the Papal Schism during which time the antipopes Clement VII and Benedict XIII made Avignon their home until 1403.

My first stories out of Avignon

We left early afternoon of Tuesday and it took until Thursday midday before I thought the trip was worth it. It was a long trip and I didn't do so well on it. Though Tom did and he arrived in Europe with no headache and no repercussions and I'm surprised he didn't say to me that maybe I should have hydrated more. Smile.

Flight: We had flown to Europe on a bit of a circuitous route to Paris through Düsseldorf so that we could get one of the tickets on miles. First mistake. The second was booking a direct train out of Paris about 4 to 5 hours after we landed so we would be sure that we didn't miss the one just as we landed. We looked at the line for train ticket changes and decided that we would just hibernate in the Sheraton airport bar and wait.

Airport food: In particular that in the Sheraton lounge, is outlandishly priced. Can you imagine a €26 hamburger? So for something under €50 we had a bit of food, a beer and a coffee. I had hoped we could get into an airline lounge instead but you have to go through security in order to get that Bennie.

Tom's comment was something that I would certainly agree with and that is that the German security force is not the kindest and leave quite a bit to be desired.

Long train ride seemed even longer: By the time we got on the train for our three and a half hour ride I was next to brain-dead. The body had long given up when I couldn't sleep on either plane ride despite lie flat seats and lots of booze. Tom slept for much of the trip which was a good thing because he needed all his energies for his rental car negotiation of which he is famous for. I've learned to just stand back and wait the 45 minutes or so that it takes and be glad that he appreciates that luxury car he ends up with. But this was again a Citroen, French made, and their luxury is different than ours and he had to go back to the office to ask questions that were rather important such as how to start the car. (The Key fob: the whole thing had to go into a mysterious opening in the dashboard.).

Fortunately the young landlord had warned us that the streets we had to come down to get to our house would be very, very tiny. We were still rather concerned that we were driving on pedestrian or bicycle lanes only. Avignon has some of the narrowest and curviest streets that I can remember ever seeing. It also has some very kind people who are most willing to give directions. We would see that kindness later in an amusing story yet to be told.

So there was this young man in the middle of the street which I would call an alleyway waving us down and it was Francis the apartment manager who I suspect is close to the landlord. (He has thrown parties in the garden.). I was delighted to see that Francis is like those good-looking professional boys we see so much of in San Francisco. (He is Resident Manager of the local 5-star hotel.) That always bodes well for an apartment or home.



I think this is called an apartment as it is in a large building but it is larger than most homes. It is a restored mansion or palatial palace from the 1800s and it has a total of 250 sq m, a private garden of 500 sq m (750 sq meters = 8100 sq feet) and a huge veranda that I'm calling a glassed in sunroom. Note that we think we have a fine apartment if it is at least 100 sq m. There is a dining room, a lounge with 3-D huge screen television and stereo, fully equipped kitchen including multiple types of coffeemakers, three bedrooms, three full bathrooms, laundry, an office with a computer, and this rare private garage. All just stunningly restored but all modernized.



The Garden and Sun Room where we live most of the time and where it's both air conditioned and heated.



Restored wood and plaster paneling with decorative molding on walls and ceiling in both the living room, complete with leather sofas, and in the formal dining room. Who would use a formal dining room? Maybe whoever purchased the dish set and wine glasses for about 30 people. I didn't show the Grand piano in the bedroom, nor the huge bathrooms with walk in showers, double sinks and heated towel racks. But those pictures are shown on the website below. The private garage isn't shown but is considered a luxury in European historical cities.

Pictures by the owner: www.vrbo.com/440912 and his description: *In the heart of the historical center of Avignon, nestled behind the impressive Popes' Palace, this roomy apartment is located on the ground floor of a restored mansion back from 1850s. The very close surrounding is very quiet and the main monuments, museums and restaurants are within a walking distance. It is a perfect base to explore, day by day, the various*

facets of Provence .The apartment has a total of 250m², a private garden of 500m², a big veranda with a large dining table. There is a dining room, with a table for 6 persons and in the veranda a summer dining room (air-conditioned and warmed). There is a lounge, with sofas leather and fabrics, television cabled, chained stereo. The kitchen is fully equipped as follows: Refrigerator (American type), dish washer, Oven, Microwave, Kitchenware, Flatware and dishes. There are 3 bedrooms dispatched as follows: First room, equipped with a king size bed, television, private bathroom with bathtub, shower and toilet. Second room, equipped with a king size bed, a piano, a television, private bathroom with bathtub, shower and toilet. Third room, equipped with a single bed, private bathroom with bathtub and toilet. Separate laundry, Private garage, free WiFi in the entire apartment, Small room with a computer.

Superwoman? NO!

Now me, I did not feel like superwoman, I felt like I had accomplished more than a marathon. But Tom was so well that he was anxious to go walking and especially to find a restaurant and have a big meal and that he did, dragging me along saying oh yes I'm okay. Forget that we had been up over 30 hours. I would say that he probably lucked out because one of his favorite meals is foie gras and he got a huge chunk of it and ate it all. As well as pomme dauphinoise.

Grocery shopping had to happen and it did no matter the lack of superwoman status, as how can one live without breakfast when they wake up.

After the sleep of the dead, I was almost able and willing to go out but not until after noon. We did a mini tour of the city which can't take very long as it is so small. We live near to the papal palace where the popes resided in the 1300s. We walked along some of the ramparts, and through the historical portion of the city where cars are not allowed, and down many little tiny streets with lots of ancient cobblestones and walls of rough rock hewed out to form narrow passageways that they called streets.

History

While Avignon is known as the city of the popes and their huge palace which covers almost 4 acres, it equally should be known for being a hilltop town on the edge of the River Rhone. In July the city fills up with huge numbers for the festival of the theatre. This festival is sometimes compared to the pageants of the middle ages.

Avignon is also thought to be the main city in Provence, or the gateway to the vineyards, most noted for Chateauneuf du Pape. The region is said to be composed of some 7000 different vineyards. It is some of these vineyards that I will be visiting for my hike of seven days and where Tom will meet up with me in the evenings for dinner and the hotel.

Across the River from Avignon, and seemingly a part of the city, is Villeneuve. It is the place where the 13 Cardinals used their riches, heaven knows where they got these riches, to build glorious and extravagant estates. One was turned into a home for Monks and well worth the visit. The little city is a delight, as are the restaurants and main square.

Weather in The Windy City

The city also puts Chicago to shame for being the Windy City. There were said to be gusts of 50 mph and I would think that was the least of it. It has continued for both of our days and I don't know that it is going to let up as we have heard that Avignon is known for being windy. Fortunately the temperature is quite pleasant in the upper 60s.

From Wikipedia: *The city is often subject to windy weather; the strongest wind is the mistral. A medieval Latin proverb is somewhat exaggerated: Avenie ventosa, sine vento venenosa, cum vento fastidiosa (Windy Avignon, pest-ridden when there is no wind, wind-pestered when there is).*

My story(ies) about the friendly French

I know, everyone thinks the French are aloof if not downright rude. While yes we have seen such, in most cases they are not and we have plenty more good stories than bad. The best may have just occurred. Coming into town and pulling over with our map we even had someone knock on the car window to ask if they could help. We have been standing on street corners looking at maps and had people offer to help and even say to come along and they will guide us to our destination. Last night after switching a wrong button and managing to turn off all the electricity of the house, we were in deep doozy. With the electricity off our email Wi-Fi didn't work, nor could we figure out how to call our landlord. We couldn't get out the garage electric door nor could we leave the front door because it opened working with an electric button code. So Tom stopped a passerby in her car and asked if she would telephone to our landlord. Unable to reach him, she asked to come see the circuit breakers. Still unable to figure it out, she inquired of cars that were backed up waiting and thus involved in the problem. Another car owner suggested a different circuit breaker and sure enough we were back in business. We suspect some of them are still talking about the crazy Americans and even about the huge house.

We would later have a multitude of these special kind stories of strangers stopping and offering to help us and even lead us to our next destination. So that's our Avignon story (so far) and we're sticking to it.

From Tom to Pat and Randy: *Hard to believe but yes, that's the apartment - 250 square meters plus a lovely garden of 500 square meters, all ours for six days. What a place and everything is pretty much within walking distance. We did about 120 miles today and are now luxuriating and having a drink before going out for a 9 or so dinner. Re: Last night and temporary loss of electric in the whole place. Good thing I speak a little French as I stopped a car on our one narrow lane street which ended up blocking two other cars, then one of the cars came up with the solution, I flipped the right circuit breaker (had to use an umbrella to reach it) and voila!*

I fixed dinner in last night of a ham, emmenthal, sautéed onions along with some Chateaufort du Pape Village. We have a Nespresso maker and lots of pods - much used and appreciated. All the comforts of home. The manager and our contact is the resident manager of a ritzy hotel. Very helpful and efficient.

We even have a garage with automatic door! Almost unheard of. (Not to mention the Grand Piano in the bedroom.)

Avignon is noted as the city of wind and boy that describes it. Steady at about 30 with gusts to 50. Tough to keep our hats on.

Ipod dock and I'm listening to my music from my iPad - Julio Iglesias at the moment. Due to the nature of the huge sun room facing the garden, very nice acoustics.

If it gets any better I don't think I can stand it.

The hike – that's what I came for?

I'd venture to say that the Avignon experience was the best of the trip. Nothing wrong with Provence but I did find myself grumpy many days. Here's notes home --

The Last Hiking Day of Provence - With a need to get these gripes out of my system, I'll later go back and fill in the positives later. (See notes in paren.)

- Upgraded hotel rooms cost a lot but give little. They are still small rooms, little to no plug ins and little to no bathroom counter space. Imagine no plug in in the bathroom and none within 12 feet of a mirror despite supposed modernization. Quaint but unimpressive. (Tom had arranged for the best the hotel had to offer. Thank heavens.)



- WiFi is everywhere? Not so in Provence. To get it you're likely to have to give your name, cell number, address, and sometimes even your email password. No way! Very frustrating to be kicked off continually too.
- The Opal 9-passenger vans were miserable transport and no larger than an American car. The roads are narrow and curvey and make me sick. (Probably the roads wouldn't have accommodated any more of a bus. Tom once sat in traffic for 30 minutes while a bus tried to negotiate an impossibly tight curve on an impossibly narrow road.)
- Tours ought NOT have 16-18 people. Too many for dinner. Too many to string out on the trail. (Good thing we had two guides and they did do the best they could with such a large group. Plus the group gelled quite well.)
- Picnics after a long hike should not be without a toilet or a bush or a tree. Some of us have weak bladders compounded by drinking lots of coffee in the morning.
- Hikers with one allergy after another ought to stay home or eat what works. (Some were good about it; some made it a big deal. Some had to have every single course customized.)
- Provence can be boring and is as much for Type B folks and those who like to lay around in hammocks between meals. (That's my story and I'm sticking to it.)
- Why would anyone want a second house in Provence where handymen also take naps between eating one big meal after another.
- To get to Provence takes a flight to Paris (maybe thru Dusseldorf or Frankfurt – we did both) then a 3-4 hour train to Avignon then a rental car to a place where roads look like bicycle paths. Landed you still have jet lag to deal with. Yet many of our hikers dreamed of a place in Provence. Are they crazy?
- Every drive takes longer than expected. One “big” hour to the airport? Take two!
- Food got boring quickly. I started dreaming of some chicken instead of the dribbles of fish-based nouvelle cuisine wrapped in pretentious and silly clear plastic and tied up in a bow. Not even real parchment paper like papiette is meant to be. Foam of Roquefort with a drop of Muscadet in a parfait glass for a course? Please! Give me a slice of real Roquefort. And lavender belongs in the bath not on my creme broule.
- Herbs that cure everything? I was beginning to buy the idea until I learned about the 8th disease that thyme or marjoram or lavender might cure and then suddenly I remembered Snake Oil. (And yet, if one believes . . . like Southern Baptist revivals, the mind can do wonders.)
- So I learned to play boules. I could watch corn grow just as readily. Or as happily. This is what they have for entertainment in Provence. I did it. The promise of a drink of pastis during the game made it palpable.

Pictures by the tour leaders – I'll save the space and wait for Tom's photo show.



The hike's itinerary – as provided by Country Walkers:

Monday - Châteauneuf-du-Pape loop walk and domain visit and wine tasting. Your walking exploration of Provence begins in Avignon. Shortly after meeting your guide(s), you set off for the nearby town of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, source of the renowned wine of the same name. Literally translating as the “new castle of the pope,” this was to be the site of the pope’s summer retreat when the seat of the papacy was moved to Avignon from Rome in the 14th century. From the hilltop town, views extend over thousands of acres of vines, originally brought here during the papal period, as well as over the Rhône Valley, Avignon, and Mont Ventoux, providing an excellent visual introduction to the week’s itinerary. Your walk is on undulating farming tracks used only by the locals to work the surrounding vineyards, and trails linking two estates, each with a different character. Later this afternoon, you make your way to one of the 55 producers of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation, where you stop for a tour to learn more about its cultivation and classification. You finally arrive in the

medieval town of Mazan, your home for the next three nights. A welcome aperitif awaits on the outdoor terrace, perhaps a chilled pastis, the anise-flavored drink of the South of France, accompanied by locally grown olives.

Dinner is a medley of Provençal cuisine, flavored by a true Mediterranean blend of olive oil, herbes de Provence, and tomatoes.

Hotel was a former residence of the Marquis de Sade turned four-star hotel, featuring 30 elegant rooms, a lovely garden, and a stone swimming pool. The property perfectly highlights the castle's ancient features such as 19th-century tile, a massive staircase and fireplace, and an original library, while offering a warm family welcome and modern amenities.

Tuesday - Vaison-la-Romaine market. Séguret loop. This morning you transfer to the picturesque town of Vaison-la-Romaine. Today is market day in Vaison: outdoor markets are set up in the small squares throughout the town. They offer the fresh bounty of the nearby farms and hillsides, seasonal fruits and vegetables, as well as local specialties such as truffles, lavender honey, and olive tapenades. Here there is time for you to explore on your own and choose local delicacies for your independent picnic lunch—perhaps a bit of Picodon goat cheese and a fragrant olive fougasse, a flat loaf similar to focaccia. You will eat your picnic lunch during this afternoon's walk. Late morning, your marketing complete, a short drive takes you to the start of the afternoon's walk in the sleepy town of Sablet. Your walk takes you along quiet tracks to Séguret, a medieval village perched in the hills. Séguret is synonymous with the red wine grown in the shadow of the low chain of mountains known as the Dentelles de Montmirail, named for their lace-like profile. Among its yellow stone buildings are the medieval castle and several ancient gates. Here a very special activity takes place: a wine specialist joins you and guides you through a wine tasting. The aim of the encounter is to discover wines and understand some of the reasons why each wine tastes different by following the life of each wine from the vineyard to the bottle. Olivier (the wine expert) explains the exclusive concept of terroir and demonstrates, in a fun and accessible way, how different terroir, grape varieties, vine-growing, and winemaking methods determine the characteristics and quality of the wines that you taste. After this amazing experience, you continue on with the walk, which climbs through the hillside vineyards and Aleppo pines, opening onto dramatic views, and descends on equally rugged trails, back into the valley.

Wednesday - Château de Le Barroux loop walk. Fortified with excellent coffee and buttery croissants with jams, you begin the morning's outing with a drive to the town of Le Barroux. The walk starts at the fortified castle that dominates the town, offering splendid views of the surrounding plains and Mont Ventoux. You follow a rocky path up and down through vineyards and pine forest before reaching the charming hamlet of La Roque-Alric, with a population of only a few dozen inhabitants. Steep narrow lanes lead to the church and the highest point of the peaceful village, which feels almost like a private estate. This is a part of Provence that few tourists reach, other than the handful of travelers who venture off the beaten track. You walk through the undulating hills at the foot of Mont Ventoux, Provence's highest mountain, its bare limestone peak soaring 7,000 feet above an otherwise flat Rhône Valley. Old farmhouses and dilapidated stone huts dot a countryside blanketed by olive groves, vines, and fruit orchards, while thousand-year-old medieval villages remain on their rocky platforms.

This evening, dinner may feature delicately prepared fish or seafood, followed by lamb flavored with the same herbs that dotted the path of today's walk.

Thursday - Transfer to the Luberon region. Abbaye de Sénanque to Gordes. Today, you move south to the Luberon region of Provence. The landscape is comprised of the Petit Luberon and Grand Luberon mountain ranges and ridge-top medieval villages contrasting with open plains, creating a

mosaic of subtle shades of earth and stone, cultivated fields, orchards, and open meadows. Begin in the majestic village of Gordes, listed as one of the “Plus Beaux Villages de France” - (“The Most Beautiful Villages in France”). There are 152 such villages in France, chosen for their beauty, authenticity, and ambiance. Here, as the day unfolds, there is time to explore Gordes, which is perched on a rocky spur. It has always been a strategic military site and the current castle, Renaissance in style, dates from the 15th century. The adjoining church was first built in the 12th century and later restored in the 18th century. During the Wars of Religion, Gordes successfully withstood a siege by the Baron des Adrets, and it was a center of leather, wool, and silk industries in the 17th and 18th centuries, including weaving, carding and tanning. In 1887, part of the village was destroyed by an earthquake, which tended to hasten the already declining local industries. From Gordes we head south through the heart of the Provençal countryside and reach the sleepy village of Saint Pantaléon, whose timeless auberge restaurant awaits us for lunch in a setting that seemingly winds the calendar back several decades. After lunch you traverse farming tracks and ochre sands to reach the perched village of Goult, huddled as a tiny labyrinth of cobbled streets above the Calavon Valley. Enjoy a café in a scenic square before a transfer to Lourmarin, the location of your welcoming inn for the next three nights.

This pretty hotel is set in the heart of the Luberon region and has an authentically Provençal atmosphere. It has 28 unique rooms, and you will be charmed by its quiet location, large outdoor swimming pool, tennis court, and huge terrace, which has a beautiful view.

Friday - Lacoste to Bonnieux. This morning begins with a short drive to Lacoste, one of the classic Luberon villages. For a short distance, you wander under white stone arches, along cobbled lanes, past art galleries, and continue along Lacoste’s ancient walls. The rest of the trail winds through a combination of cultivated and wild landscapes. Continuing on past orchards and bories (traditional stone farmers’ huts), the trail culminates at the county seat of Bonnieux, perched high on a hill. With archaeological evidence from as early as the Bronze Age, the first formal settlement here was established by the Romans in the 1st century AD. In the Middle Ages, Bonnieux was raised to higher ground for defensive purposes, and ramparts and superb residences remain, testament to its strategic position in the region. You climb its labyrinth of alleyways and shaded lanes, overlooked by the combination Romanesque and Gothic Église Haute, or “High Church.” Today you may enjoy an independent lunch in one of the local restaurants. Sit on a terrace that has spectacular views over the valley. Alternately, time permitting; there may be time to visit the farmers’ market to select your own local produce for a picnic lunch.

This evening, just a short stroll from our hotel, and nestled against the foot of the Luberon mountain, you visit a working herb farm. Here, you learn about the culinary and medicinal virtues of Paula Marty’s vast gardens, including rosemary, thyme, sage, and lavender. Settling into her cozy farmhouse, you become her guests as she prepares a meal of local dishes using the herbs from her farm.

Saturday - Sivergues loop. After a leisurely breakfast, you transfer to what locals refer to as the “village at the end of the world”—Sivergues, a tiny isolated village that once provided refuge to Protestants fleeing persecution. The name Sivergues comes from “six vierges,” meaning “six virgins.” Legend has it that this tiny hamlet, now home to only 30 inhabitants, was first settled by six virgins and a monk. You can draw your own conclusions as to how the town’s population increased! You pass its lovely 16th century Romanesque chapel before beginning a panoramic walk that offers insight into the history of this region. The fertile Aiguebrun Valley is a canyon that lies below a dramatic limestone cliff. Numerous relics of prehistoric life have been found in this valley, and in early Christian times, Anchorite monks sought shelter in tiny caves carved into the vertical cliff face. This area’s naturally defensive position has been occupied throughout the ages by Ligurians, Romans, Catholics, and Protestants. You stop for lunch at a scenic location on the riverbank.

Your farewell dinner takes place in the hotel restaurant, where you can toast your new friends with a glass of local wine and celebrate the bounty of the region one last time in this wonderfully unique setting. Tonight's menu varies based on the market's offerings, as the chef selects only the freshest ingredients. Regardless of the season, you are sure to top off your meal with a taste of delicious local cheese or a dessert made with sun-drenched fruit.

Tom's photos sent to home friends



Food and more food

I really got tired of food. And when I got home it was confirmed with an extra 3-4 pounds that I'd had much too much food and even more alcohol. So when I read about Soylent I wondered if this might be preferable. And then I wondered if folks remembered the Soylent Green movie. Here's something just the opposite of my week of much too much food.

http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/05/29/technology/personaltech/the-soylent-revolution-will-not-be-pleasurable.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_th_20140529&r=0&referrer=

Next up?

With very little time between trips, I'm next off to a Portugal running trip (I'll walk!) with a bunch of hot shot winning runners and surely they will want to tour more than they want to eat. First Lisbon, then Porto "running" from June 2-16.

The day I arrive home Marie arrives for five days; the day she leaves, Tom and I depart to Italy for a whirlwind tour of Tyrol then onto hiking in the Dolomites, finishing up in Munich.

Itinerary

Tue May 13

4:25pm Depart Newark EWR via Lufthansa LH#409

Wed May 14

6:10am Arrive Dusseldorf DUS for a plane change

7:15am Depart Dusseldorf DUS via Lufthansa LH#3218

8:20am Arrive Paris DeGaulle CDG

1:58pm Train from CDG2 to Avignon TGV

5:07pm Arrive Avignon

Rental Car Avis AVO at Gare TGV Mediterranee (RR)

Apartment: www.vrbo.com/440912 rented for 5 nights

15 rue Armand de Pontmartin, 84000 Avignon, France

Landlord Francis Lacoste at 33 6 26 83 45 18 cell or fralac09@gmail.com

Apartment description: *In the heart of the historical center of Avignon, nested behind the impressive Popes' Palace, this roomy apartment is located on the ground floor of a restored mansion back from 1850s. The very close surrounding is very quiet and the main monuments, museums and restaurants are within a walking distance. It is a perfect base to explore, day by day, the various facets of Provence. The apartment has a total of 250m², a private garden of 500m2, a big veranda with a large dining table. There is a dining room, with a table for 6 persons and in the veranda a summer dining room (air-conditioned and warmed). There is a lounge, with sofas leather and fabrics, television cabled, chained stereo. The kitchen is fully equipped as follows: Refrigerator (American type), dish washer, Oven, Microwave, Kitchenware, Flatware and dishes. There are 3 bedrooms dispatched as follows: First room, equipped with a king size bed, television, private bathroom with bathtub, shower and toilet. Second room, equipped with a king size bed, a piano, a television, private bathroom with bathtub, shower and toilet. Third room, equipped with a single bed, private bathroom with bathtub and toilet. Separate laundry, Private garage, free WiFi in the entire apartment, Small room with a computer.*

Overview from www.CountryWalkers.com - Experience the allure of Provence—from landscapes that inspired van Gogh and the Impressionists to world-renowned wineries and exquisite cuisine. From Avignon, set off for famed Châteauneuf-du-Pape, passing sun-drenched vineyards en route and stopping for a private tasting. As you walk, continue to learn about Côtes du Rhône wines from a specialist who explains the concept of terroir. Moving to the Luberon region, discover the hilltop towns of Gordes, Lacoste, and Bonnieux, and a 12th-century Cistercian abbey. The Dentelles de Montmirail mountain chain boasts an extensive network of trails branching out from the medieval village of Gigondas. In medieval Vaison-la-Romaine, explore a Roman archaeological site or purchase lavender honey at the vibrant outdoor market. With Mont Ventoux as a backdrop, walk through oak forests and terraced fields. No trip to Provence would be complete without a game of pétanque in the square and encounters with local farmers. Immerse yourself in the Provençal art de vivre at intimate inns with exclusive dining rooms featuring regional delicacies—Picodon goat cheese, fougasse (flatbread), or marinated lamb—with a local vintage, of course.

Connections

Meeting Point - Hôtel Cloître St-Louis, Avignon, France, 10:30 a.m.

20 rue Portail Boquier, 84000 Avignon, Tel 011 33 490 27 55 55, Email hotel@cloitre-saint-louis.com
cloitre-saint-louis.com

Departure (End) Points - Hôtel Cloître St-Louis, Avignon, France 11:00 a.m. or Avignon TGV train station, Avignon, France, 11:30 a.m.

Mon May 19 – Day 1 of hike

Châteauneuf-du-Pape loop walk; 7 miles, easy to moderate, 180-ft. elevation gain and loss. Domaine visit and wine tasting

Your walking exploration of Provence begins in Avignon. Shortly after meeting your guide(s), you set off for the nearby town of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, source of the renowned wine of the same name. Literally translating as the “new castle of the pope,” this was to be the site of the pope’s summer retreat when the seat of the papacy was moved to Avignon from Rome in the 14th century. From the hilltop town, views extend over thousands of acres of vines, originally brought here during the papal period, as well as over the Rhône Valley, Avignon, and Mont Ventoux, providing an excellent visual introduction to the week’s itinerary. Your walk is on undulating farming tracks used only by the locals to work the surrounding vineyards, and trails linking two estates, each with a different character. Later this afternoon, you make your way to one of the 55 producers of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation, where you stop for a tour to learn more about its cultivation and classification. You finally arrive in the medieval town of Mazan, your home for the next three nights. A welcome aperitif awaits on the outdoor terrace, perhaps a chilled pastis, the anise-flavored drink of the South of France, accompanied by locally grown olives.

Dinner is a medley of Provençal cuisine, flavored by a true Mediterranean blend of olive oil, herbes de Provence, and tomatoes.

Hotel Château de Mazan, Mazan – 1st of 3 nights

Mazan, France Tele: 011 33 490 696 261 email: reservation@chateaumazan.com
www.chateaudemazan.com includes WiFi.

A former residence of the Marquis de Sade turned four-star hotel, featuring 30 elegant rooms, a lovely garden, and a stone swimming pool. The property perfectly highlights the castle's ancient features such as 19th-century tile, a massive staircase and fireplace, and an original library, while offering a warm family welcome and modern amenities.

Tue May 20 – Day 2 of Hike

Vaison-la-Romaine market. Séguret loop; 6.5 miles, easy to moderate, 720-ft. elevation gain and loss
This morning you transfer to the picturesque town of Vaison-la-Romaine. Today is market day in Vaison: outdoor markets are set up in the small squares throughout the town. They offer the fresh bounty of the nearby farms and hillsides, seasonal fruits and vegetables, as well as local specialties such as truffles, lavender honey, and olive tapenades. Here there is time for you to explore on your own and choose local delicacies for your independent picnic lunch—perhaps a bit of Picodon goat cheese and a fragrant olive fougasse, a flat loaf similar to focaccia. You will eat your picnic lunch during this afternoon’s walk. Late morning, your marketing complete, a short drive takes you to the start of the afternoon’s walk in the sleepy town of Sablet. Your walk takes you along quiet tracks to Séguret, a medieval village perched in the hills. Séguret is synonymous with the red wine grown in the shadow of the low chain of mountains known as the Dentelles de Montmirail, named for their lace-like profile. Among its yellow stone buildings are the medieval castle and several ancient gates. Here a very special activity takes place: a wine specialist joins you and guides you through a wine tasting. The aim of the encounter is to discover wines and understand some of the reasons why each wine tastes different by following the life of each wine from the vineyard to the bottle. Olivier (the wine expert) explains the exclusive concept of terroir and demonstrates, in a fun and accessible way, how different terroir, grape varieties, vine-growing, and winemaking methods determine the characteristics and quality of the wines that you taste. After this amazing experience, you continue on with the walk, which climbs through the hillside vineyards and Aleppo pines, opening onto dramatic views, and descends on equally rugged trails, back into the valley.

Back in your hometown for the night, you may sip an aperitif by the poolside, before dinner on your own.

Hotel Château de Mazan, Mazan – 2nd of 3 nights

Wed May 21 – Day 3 of hike

Château de Le Barroux loop walk; 6 miles, moderate, 980-ft. elevation gain and loss, including a short steep section

Fortified with excellent coffee and buttery croissants with jams, you begin the morning's outing with a drive to the town of Le Barroux. The walk starts at the fortified castle that dominates the town, offering splendid views of the surrounding plains and Mont Ventoux. You follow a rocky path up and down through vineyards and pine forest before reaching the charming hamlet of La Roque-Alric, with a population of only a few dozen inhabitants. Steep narrow lanes lead to the church and the highest point of the peaceful village, which feels almost like a private estate. This is a part of Provence that few tourists reach, other than the handful of travelers who venture off the beaten track. You walk through the undulating hills at the foot of Mont Ventoux, Provence's highest mountain, its bare limestone peak soaring 7,000 feet above an otherwise flat Rhône Valley. Old farmhouses and dilapidated stone huts dot a countryside blanketed by olive groves, vines, and fruit orchards, while thousand-year-old medieval villages remain on their rocky platforms.

This evening, dinner may feature delicately prepared fish or seafood, followed by lamb flavored with the same herbs that dotted the path of today's walk.

Hotel Château de Mazan, Mazan – 3rd of 3 nights

Thu May 22 – Day 4 of hiking

Transfer to the Luberon region. Abbaye de Sénanque to Gordes; 6 miles, moderate, 920-ft. elevation gain and loss

Today, you move south to the Luberon region of Provence. The landscape is comprised of the Petit Luberon and Grand Luberon mountain ranges and ridge-top medieval villages contrasting with open plains, creating a mosaic of subtle shades of earth and stone, cultivated fields, orchards, and open meadows. Begin in the majestic village of Gordes, listed as one of the "Plus Beaux Villages de France" - ("The Most Beautiful Villages in France"). There are 152 such villages in France, chosen for their beauty, authenticity, and ambiance. Here, as the day unfolds, there is time to explore Gordes, which is perched on a rocky spur. It has always been a strategic military site and the current castle, Renaissance in style, dates from the 15th century. The adjoining church was first built in the 12th century and later restored in the 18th century. During the Wars of Religion, Gordes successfully withstood a siege by the Baron des Adrets, and it was a center of leather, wool, and silk industries in the 17th and 18th centuries, including weaving, carding and tanning. In 1887, part of the village was destroyed by an earthquake, which tended to hasten the already declining local industries. From Gordes we head south through the heart of the Provençal countryside and reach the sleepy village of Saint Pantaléon, whose timeless auberge restaurant awaits us for lunch in a setting that seemingly winds the calendar back several decades. After lunch you traverse farming tracks and ochre sands to reach the perched village of Goult, huddled as a tiny labyrinth of cobbled streets above the Calavon Valley. Enjoy a café in a scenic square before a transfer to Lourmarin, the location of your welcoming inn for the next three nights.

Hotel Le Mas de Guilles, Lourmarin – 1st of 3 nights

Lourmarin, France Tele: 011 33 490 683 055 email: reservation@guilles.com
www.guilles.com with WiFi available

This pretty hotel is set in the heart of the Luberon region and has an authentically Provençal atmosphere. It has 28 unique rooms, and you will be charmed by its quiet location, large outdoor swimming pool, tennis court, and huge terrace, which has a beautiful view.

Fri May 23 – Day 5 of hike

Lacoste to Bonnieux; 3.5 miles, easy to moderate, 760-ft. elevation gain, 200-ft. elevation loss
This morning begins with a short drive to Lacoste, one of the classic Luberon villages. For a short distance, you wander under white stone arches, along cobbled lanes, past art galleries, and continue along Lacoste's ancient walls. The rest of the trail winds through a combination of cultivated and wild landscapes. Continuing on past orchards and bories (traditional stone farmers' huts), the trail culminates at the county seat of Bonnieux, perched high on a hill. With archaeological evidence from as early as the Bronze Age, the first formal settlement here was established by the Romans in the 1st century AD. In the Middle Ages, Bonnieux was raised to higher ground for defensive purposes, and ramparts and superb residences remain, testament to its strategic position in the region. You climb its labyrinth of alleyways and shaded lanes, overlooked by the combination Romanesque and Gothic Église Haute, or "High Church." Today you may enjoy an independent lunch in one of the local restaurants. Sit on a terrace that has spectacular views over the valley. Alternately, time permitting; there may be time to visit the farmers' market to select your own local produce for a picnic lunch.

This evening, just a short stroll from our hotel, and nestled against the foot of the Luberon mountain, you visit a working herb farm. Here, you learn about the culinary and medicinal virtues of Paula Marty's vast gardens, including rosemary, thyme, sage, and lavender. Settling into her cozy farmhouse, you become her guests as she prepares a meal of local dishes using the herbs from her farm.

Hotel Le Mas de Guilles, Lourmarin – 2nd of 3 nights

Sat May 24 – Day 6 of hike

Sivergues loop; 5 miles, easy to moderate, 790-ft. elevation gain and loss
After a leisurely breakfast, you transfer to what locals refer to as the "village at the end of the world"—Sivergues, a tiny isolated village that once provided refuge to Protestants fleeing persecution. The name Sivergues comes from "six vierges," meaning "six virgins." Legend has it that this tiny hamlet, now home to only 30 inhabitants, was first settled by six virgins and a monk. You can draw your own conclusions as to how the town's population increased! You pass its lovely 16th-century Romanesque chapel before beginning a panoramic walk that offers insight into the history of this region. The fertile Aiguebrun Valley is a canyon that lies below a dramatic limestone cliff. Numerous relics of prehistoric life have been found in this valley, and in early Christian times, Anchorite monks sought shelter in tiny caves carved into the vertical cliff face. This area's naturally defensive position has been occupied throughout the ages by Ligurians, Romans, Catholics, and Protestants. You stop for lunch at a scenic location on the riverbank.

Your farewell dinner takes place in the hotel restaurant, where you can toast your new friends with a glass of local wine and celebrate the bounty of the region one last time in this wonderfully unique setting. Tonight's menu varies based on the market's offerings, as the chef selects only the freshest ingredients. Regardless of the season, you are sure to top off your meal with a taste of delicious local cheese or a dessert made with sun-drenched fruit.

Hotel Le Mas de Guilles, Lourmarin – 3rd of 3 nights

Sun May 25 – Day 7 of hike

Departure from Lourmarin

After a leisurely breakfast, the trip comes to a close with a one-hour drive to Avignon, where you can make connections for further explorations in Provence or travel to other destinations.

Heard it on the Grapevine: Châteauneuf-du-Pape—for true wine aficionados, this appellation is enough to make one's eyes light up. Among these world-famous vineyards, you learn the true meaning of terroir, where the type of soil, weather conditions, grapes, and winemaking savoir faire contribute to a distinctive wine. On your tour, you visit a local wine producer who explains about the cultivation of grapes and the classification of wines. You also learn the traditional ways of producing wines in the region and how present-day vintners struggle with new standards and competition from around the world. Walking among the grapes, you also discover the differences between family wineries (following traditional practices and recipes handed down from generation to generation) and mass producers. Naturally, a trip to this region would be incomplete without a private tasting of the legendary wine.

Hotel Added one night to Le Mas de Guilles

Mon May 26

Return rental car to Avignon

12:45pm Train Avignon TGV to Paris Aeroport CDG2 TGV
4:03pm Arrive Aeroport CDG2 TGV

Hotel Sheraton Paris Airport Hotel and Conference Center
BP35051 Tremblay en France, Roissy 95716 France Tele 33 1 49197070

Tue May 27

6:30am Depart Paris deGaulle CDG via Lufthansa LH#1053
7:50am Arrive Frankfurt FRA for plane change

11:20am Depart Frankfurt FRA via United UA#969
2:00pm Arrive Newark EWR

Activity Level Notes: This tour is rated easy to moderate, with an average of 5 to 7 miles per day and limited options. There are daily ascents and descents up to 1,000 feet, with some steep sections. Loop walks are through oak and pine forests, rugged hills dotted with Mediterranean herbs and shrubs, terraced farmland, and hillside vineyards. The terrain includes mostly single-track trails with loose stones or gravel, and some dirt roads, rocky wooded paths, and ancient ruins with uneven stone steps.* The itinerary balances invigorating walks in the countryside with stops at outdoor picnic sites, and explorations of a market, a wine estate, or village cafés, to ensure a full immersion in the Provençal art de vivre. Many people travel to Provence to see the lavender in bloom. However, at the time of year our tours operate it will not be in bloom, as this generally happens between the end of June and the end of July.

*walking sticks are highly recommended

Included:

- » Two expert, local guides (for groups of 8 or more), with you 24/7
- » All meals except for two lunches and one dinner; local wine or beer included with dinners
- » All accommodations while on tour
- » Transportation from the meeting point to the departure point
- » Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary
- » Basic travel insurance coverage
- » The unbeatable and cumulative experience of the CW staff

Gratuities for all hotels, meals, and services that are included in your tour price will be paid by CW. Should you wish to tip your CW guide(s), the standard in the industry ranges from \$10 to \$15 per person, per day (or \$20 to \$30 per couple, per day), and can be paid in USD or local currency.

From CDG: Take a direct TGV (high speed) train from the Roissy Charles de Gaulle Airport to the Avignon TGV train station. Upon arrival at the airport, follow the directions to the train station (“gare SNCF” or “Paris par train”) located in Terminal 2 of the airport. The journey from Paris to Avignon takes between 2½ and 3½ hours. Prices can vary greatly depending on how far in advance you purchase your ticket. Be sure to validate your ticket in the little orange machines located on the platform prior to boarding, or you may be assessed a large fine. For the TGV, your ticket will indicate which car your reserved seat is in, so you can wait in the appropriate area based on the chart available on the lane. When making your train reservation, please be sure to select Paris CDG Airport to Avignon TGV (not only Paris to Avignon, which might send you to the wrong station). For further rail information, including reservations, schedules, and up-to-date fares, please call Rail Europe at 877.257.2887 or consult their website: raileurope.com. Or you may consult the French rail website: voyages-sncf.com. We recommend making train reservations in advance for major train routes. Reservations are required for all TGV trains.

If you plan on spending pre-tour time in Paris, you may take the RER B train from the airport to central Paris, which takes approximately 35 minutes, depending on your destination. The B line stops at the Gare du Nord, Châtelet-les-Halles, Saint- Michel, and Denfert-Rochereau, and allows you to connect with the Metro system. You can purchase your ticket for the RER at the SNCF desk of the airport (although the wait can be long) or by using one of the blue automated machines (which accept coins and some cards, but no bills). Trains to Avignon from central Paris depart from the Gare de Lyon train station. For more details on Paris public transportation, including interactive maps, schedules, and a journey planner, visit ratp.fr and click on “Finding your way.” Upon arrival at the Avignon TGV train station, you may take a shuttle for the 15-minute journey to the center of town. Blue buses depart every 20 minutes and cost 1.20 euros. Please be sure to have coins available as the bus driver may not have change for larger bills. The Hôtel Cloître St-Louis, our tour meeting point, is 100 yards from the bus terminal. Getting off the bus and facing the city wall, take a left, and, soon after, another left on Cours Jean Jaurès. Immediately following is a third left that will take you to the entrance of the hotel. If you are arriving by train at the Avignon central train station rather than the TGV station, cross the road toward the city wall and follow the directions above from the bus station, which is directly on your left.