

MEDITERRANEAN IN-DEPTH

September 19 - October 9, 2018



BY TRAIN

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INTRODUCTION

Our tour of the Mediterranean visits Spain, France and Italy, starting in Barcelona and ending up in Rome, including major cultural centers, tranquil small villages and lush natural landscapes. This in-depth look at the journey provides a detailed description of the many exciting activities we will enjoy.

BARCELONA: We start out with four nights in one of the world's most-beloved destinations, famous for the architecture of Gaudi and so much more. We will be in Barcelona during the Merce Festival, featuring dozens of free music, dance and cultural performances throughout town.

CARCASSONNE: With its medieval castle up on the hill, this amazing fortified town is completely preserved. Our hotel is located within the walls of the village, which is just one-quarter mile long with two main lanes and several side lanes, so you can easily wander, looking at the shops and going to the museum.

AVIGNON: With many ancient and medieval sights to see, this 2,000-year-old city is a good home base for touring the Provençal region. Avignon is a treasure house of palaces, museums and meandering lanes, surrounded by a fortified wall. While the Old Town has many ancient buildings you will enjoy, it also has lots of modern shops in a comfortable pedestrian zone where you don't get bothered by any automobile traffic or any trucks, buses or scooters.

Daytrips: We stay four nights and take day-trips to nearby towns of Arles, Aix, St-Remy and Marseille, including a visit to Pont du Gard, the ancient Roman aqueduct bridge.

NICE: the queen of the French Riviera, Nice makes an exceptionally rich place to make our home base for four nights, with a charming Old Town, vibrant downtown and the world-famous palm-lined promenade along the beach. You will love strolling along little pedestrian lanes in the heart of town past art galleries, shops, small restaurants, and quiet neighborhoods.

Daytips: visiting beautiful, nearby towns on day-trips by train and bus, including Cannes, Antibes, St-Paul, Vence, Villefranche and the tiny nation of Monaco.

ITALIAN RIVIERA: From the French Riviera we continue by train along the beautiful coastline to the Italian Riviera, where we visit Portofino and the little villages of the Cinque Terre. Our home base for three days will be the pretty coastal town of Santa Margherita, which has a strategic location in the midst of this region. We shall travel by train and boat to visit the quaint towns along the coastline. For those who enjoy walking there are some perfect paths along the scenic shores with views in all directions, or you can just sit at a café and relax.

ROME: Finally, we travel by train a few hours further south to the capital of Italy, the great city of Rome, where we stay for three nights taking in the many sights, including the Colosseum, Vatican, Pantheon, pedestrian lanes of historic center, Spanish Steps and Trevi Fountain.

Starting in Barcelona



Hotel Colon
Plaza Catedral



BARCELONA

Along the Mediterranean shore of eastern Spain lies Barcelona, one of the great cities of Europe to put high on your list of places to see. Although its sprawling metropolitan area is home to 4.2 million residents, you can easily see the main attractions of this country's second-largest city in just a few days by walking through its square-mile historic center. And be sure to see Barcelona's most famous building, Sagrada Familia, the fantasy church designed by that eccentric architectural genius, Gaudi.

We planned this itinerary specifically to be in Barcelona during the Mercè Festival, which is a major cultural extravaganza featuring dozens of music and dance performances throughout the center of town for the four days we are here. These events are all free and lots of fun. The festival, held in honor of Mare de Deu de La Mercè, the Patron Saint of Barcelona, officially first took place in 1902, bids goodbye to the summer with a bang and welcomes in the cooler months of autumn. There are hundreds of activities that will be occurring in the Mercè Festival happening all over town. The streets will be filled with events, parades, fire runs and people!

The Mercè Festival is one of the biggest outdoor entertainment events in Europe. Take your pick of music, dance, acrobatics, food kiosks, street musicians, art exhibits, and so much more. We will have the chance to catch many performances, along with seeing the main sights of Barcelona as described here.

It would be smart to spend most of your time in and around the old section of town, called the Barri Gotic, or Gothic Quarter, a giant pedestrian zone surviving from ancient days. Barcelona has a large number of historic sites, museums, shops and tourist destinations, but the best attraction for many visitors will simply be this large pedestrian district. It is perhaps the most extensive automobile-free district in Europe (except for Venice, which has no roads at all). Of course, Barcelona has plenty of cars, trucks and buses on the busy main streets, but it is easy to get away from them.



Indeed, one of the most enjoyable activities in Barcelona is simply taking a walk through the many narrow lanes,



away from the traffic. They wander, bend and curve like the maze of a travel mystery that leads to the overwhelming question: what's coming up next? Remember to look left and right as you pass the smaller alleys intersecting with the main lanes. You don't need to walk down every one, but they are worth a glance, and some might tempt you to probe their depths. It really is a lot of fun.

This pattern of narrow streets has survived for 2,000 years, ever since the city was established by the Romans, who built a wall around what would later

become the Gothic Quarter. Some of the street pattern we see today was actually established way back then by those clever Romans. Their clustered town surrounded by the wall became what is the heart of today's Gothic Quarter. Earlier, around 500 B.C., the Phoenicians and Carthaginians created a harbor for merchants in the area. During the Middle Ages the basic urban design was preserved and somehow, in the modern period, this Gothic Quarter was ignored and neglected while the rest of the city developed around it, preserving the center

by default. In recent decades the city realized what a treasure they had with this intact medieval core and have done a great job renewing it to create the city's main attraction.



Many of Barcelona's 35,000 stores are packed into this pedestrian zone -- small, independent boutiques in the traditional European manner, much different from the American system of identical shops in every mall. Barcelona's retail zone continues north from the Gothic Quarter along what is called the 5KM Shopping Line, a 3-mile corridor extending along trendy boulevards, especially Passeig Gracia. This more modern zone was developed from the late 19th century in the Modernista style. Also called "modernisma," it is a richly-decorated version of Art Nouveau architecture that developed in

Barcelona as a means of expressing the Catalan identity.

Barcelona is a bicultural city, with influences of Spain and Catalunya mixed together freely, adding to the allure of this exotic place. Catalan culture rose here in the 9th century and thrived during the next eight centuries in the independent kingdom of Catalunya. Its native language is surprisingly not a pure Spanish, but Catalan, a mixture of French and Spanish which follows its own rules. Barcelona has always had close ties with the rest of Europe -- for example, while most of Spain was occupied by Moslems during the Middle Ages, this region was not, but was allied with the Franks. These historic differences are flourishing today in Barcelona's exotic mix of cultures and styles, after being repressed by Franco's dictatorship which outlawed the local language and many customs.

It's not too much of a stretch to say the residents consider themselves Catalan first and Spanish second, although hardly anyone is pushing for independence anymore. Four TV stations broadcast exclusively in Catalan and most street signs are also in the native language. Enough shop and restaurant workers speak a tiny bit of English for the visitor to get by just fine.

Barcelona is such a cosmopolitan city that it has attracted a lot of foreign immigrants to come and live here, the main group coming, not surprisingly, from South America, especially from Ecuador and Peru, which together account for nearly one-third of all immigrants. Of course Barcelona is a very popular city for tourists, especially with its convenient location near the border with France, along the beautiful Mediterranean, and its many wonderful attractions as you will discover during your visit. Population of the city is 1.7 million, with 4 million in the broader metropolitan area, but most attractions are concentrated in one square mile of the historic center, making this an easy city to explore.

DAY ONE



Afternoon arrival and rest at hotel, then orientation walking tour of the historic center of town. We found the Hotel Colon to be an excellent hotel. It is a four-star property facing the cathedral right in the heart of the Gothic Quarter a few blocks over from Rambla, and we'll describe that later when we are walking in that vicinity.

Begin in the main square, Plaça de Catalunya -- a patch of greenery, with trees, lawns, fountains and benches, and flanked by two large department stores, El Corte Ingles and FNAC. Bar-

celona's modern shopping district is just north, and the Old Town is just south. Catalunya is a transit hub, with several metro and commuter trains underneath, major bus stops all around, and nine streets leading into it.

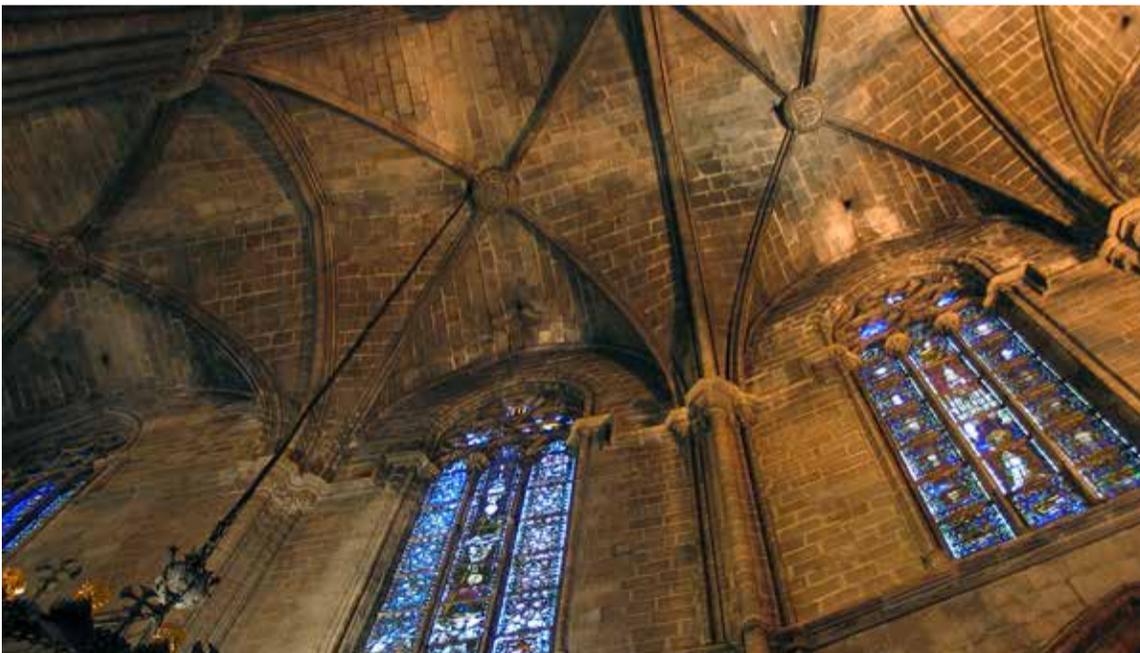
RAMBLA



Stroll from Catalunya along the famous Rambla, a broad pedestrian promenade extending from the southwest corner of the square and continuing for ? of a mile to the waterfront and column in honor of Columbus. The Rambla is Barcelona at its best, day and night, so plan to come back to this stretch many times during your visit. The Rambla is always busy with people walking past its flower shops, newsstands, bars, cafes and is alive with activity throughout the day and night, making this one of the top venues for strolling in all of Europe.

All but one of the lanes extending from the east side of the Rambla into the Old Town are for pedestrians only, so take the plunge. Rather than walking the full length of the Rambla straight to the waterfront this first time, detour into the Gothic Quarter and explore the gold mine of little lanes. Half the fun of this experience is just wandering and getting a little lost, although it always helps to have a map and general itinerary for guidance. Some of the main sights you want to be sure you cover are outlined here, but the network of walking paths is so continuous and compact you could follow your own instincts and have a good time exploring it.

An excellent place to turn east from La Rambla is the pedestrian lane called Carrer de la Portaferrissa, lined with fascinating shops and old buildings. It leads to a small but strategic intersection where you will probably end up at numerous times in your wanderings because the three directions of this unassuming triangle take you to major destinations: the cathedral; Plaça dei Pi; and l'Angel shopping street.



CATHEDRAL

Naturally, in the center of the oldest section you are going to find a gothic cathedral, the pattern of many ancient European towns. Catedral de Seu was first built in the 13th through 15th centuries in the traditional gothic style, with a soaring nave, pointed arches, tall columns, 28 side chapels .

The spectacular cloister is home to a flock of noisy geese with an attitude. Nobody knows where the geese came

from but they have been here for centuries and are said to represent purity, fitting right in with the atmosphere of this wonderful church. Take a ride up the elevator and venture onto the roof for a stunning view across the center of town, which helps orient you for the walks to come. This prime location atop a low hill was the earlier home of a Roman temple and then a 6th century church, so it's no wonder the narrow lanes immediately adjacent are dense with historic structures and small plazas.



Standing in front of the cathedral on Placa de la Seu, you are flanked by two medieval structures: the former Pia Almoina on the left, which had been a monks' residence and almshouse for the poor and is open now as the Diocesan Museum with medieval religious treasures and changing exhibits, and on the right, the fascinating Archdeacon's Palace, Casa de l'Ardiaca, worthy of closer examination.

From the outside you can see the Archdeacon's Palace with three towers which were part of the original Roman fortified wall. Walk around to the entrance and notice the elaborate mail box next to the entrance, with an incised carving of flying birds and a turtle, symbolizing how fast the mail should travel but how slowly it actually moves. This also refers to the wheels of justice, for legal offices were here in the 19th century. Walk into the patio to enjoy the quiet, cloister atmosphere complete with arcaded columns around the central fountain and noble palm tree in the center. You are free to enter the building lobby and admire the beautifully-preserved Roman wall that stands inside.

Naturally the cathedral is in the heart of the Old Town, so there are lovely strolls to be enjoyed all around it day and night. Many shops and restaurants are clustered in the nearby blocks, with lots of people out for a stroll and probably several sidewalk musicians providing entertainment.

ROYAL PALACE

One block east you will find the former home of kings and queens, the Palau Reial or Royal Palace, now a history museum, the Museu d'Historia de la Ciutat. In 1493 Columbus reported his great discovery to Ferdinand and Isabella in the palace's spectacular Banqueting Hall, "Salo del Tinell," whose roof is formed by the largest medieval stone arches in Europe. Several other halls and chambers exhibit period paintings, furnishings, weapons, altars and artifacts.



Don't leave the museum yet because a more ancient world waits for you below street level. The elevator is a time machine whose button says '-2,000 years' rather than 'basement,' and brings you 30 feet down to the original Roman streets where you can see foundations of buildings that once were houses, wineries, bakeries, leather factories and fortified towers. Smooth paving of the streets and sewers attest to the Roman engineering skills which created the world's most sophisticated cities in those days of long ago. If you don't want to pay to go inside you can peek in a few windows to see in bit of the underground remains, and visit the gift shop to look at pictures of the site and buy souvenirs.

Roman ruins are also visible at street level just around the corner on Carrer de Paradis, in a little patio where four Corinthian columns still stand from the temple of Augustus from the first century, and traces of the Roman wall can be seen a few blocks away along Carrer Tapineria.

For another taste of history you might visit the Museum Frederic Mares, on the cathedral side of the Royal Palace on Carrer dels Comtes, or at least walk into its magnificent patio surrounded by a loggia arcade. This private museum contains religious sculpture from the Romanesque through the Renaissance, along with household items from the late 19th century.

PLAÇA DE SANT JAUME

The principal Roman street intersection in the underground museum is the same approximate location today of a major plaza above, Sant Jaume, where the City Hall and regional Catalan parliament, Palau de la Generalitat, face each other. This was originally the site of the ancient Roman forum, which was the center of their ancient town. Two thousand years later this is still a major



center of activity, with nine streets leading from the plaza, each worthy of exploration on foot. The main Tourist Information Office is also here, providing helpful free advice, maps, brochures, assistance in booking accommodations and entertainment suggestions. On Sunday afternoons the plaza is filled with locals dancing the graceful Sardana, a thousand-year-old Catalan celebration, and most other times of each day and night, music of all kinds will captivate you in the streets of this central part of town. The many people walking about make a good audience for the buskers, who rely on tips for their income. When you hear some decent sounds be sure to stop a while and tune in to the magical ambience. And don't forget to drop a few coins.

Carrer de Ferran is the main road running through Sant Jaume, and while some cars are allowed, the street is mostly for pedestrians and is the busiest street of the entire Gothic Quarter, with many shops and restaurants along both sides and numerous side alleys extending out to form one of the town's best networks of lanes to explore. This area can provide an excellent focus for the next major portion of your walking tour. Then, come back again at night, for this neighborhood is filled with throngs drawn to the many restaurants and the small shops which stay open until 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. (they close in the afternoon for siesta).



NETWORK OF ALLEYS

This dense labyrinth of attractive alleys is bracketed by another major pedestrian lane that also passes through Placa de Sant Jaume and runs roughly parallel to Carrer de Ferran, extending from Rambla, where it is called Carrer de la Boqueria, then continuing for a mile all the way across the district, changing names eight times as it winds to the Palace of Justice, making another great route to explore, enhanced by detours into various side alleys and little plazas. Rather than attempting to walk the full length of this

eight-part street in one pass you might find it more convenient to focus first on the network of lanes between Jaume and Rambla, then cover the other half extending into the Ribera district tomorrow.

Nearly every little lane is worth exploring in the broad area bounded by Sant Jaume and the Rambla, and between Carrer Portferrissa and Placa Reial, an area filled with bustling shopping lanes, small plazas, a major gothic church, picturesque fountains, innumerable eateries and a constant stream of locals passing by, all within a manageable, quarter-square-mile package. Because of this concentration of attractions, you could easily meander through this section by turning this way and that, depending on what direction looks best at each corner, which could give you a totally satisfying experience. To methodically cover it from one end to the other without missing anything, you could try the following more organized route, then maybe once you have covered the territory, dive back in again for a rediscovery, perhaps in the evening when it takes on a different character, filled with people shopping and heading for dinner.

After exploring Placa de Sant Jaume and nearby lanes, take Carrer de Sant Honorat, the street on the parliament's left side, which soon leads under a fancy pedestrian bridge, built in 1928 neogothic style, connecting the parliament with the palace of the Catalan president. After the bridge turn left past the Church of St. Sever, whose elaborate baroque altar can be seen through the glass of the locked front doors. You cannot go in normally, but you are always welcome to stand outside the glass doors and have a look inside at the beautiful gold altar.



Passing the deluxe, boutique Neri Hotel, take the first right into the small plaza of St. Felip Neri and drop anchor for a moment here to soak up the peaceful atmosphere, which contrasts with a violent role this space played during the 1930s Civil War when it was scene of executions and skirmishes. Notice all the holes on the church façade blasted by bullets and bombs during that turbulent time, preserved as a memorial.

The church of St. Felip Neri is one of the only significant baroque buildings in Barcelona because during the 16th and 17th centuries very little development was going on in this city. It was the period of colonial conquest of the New World which saw great economic growth, where Spain was plundering a lot of the gold and other riches of the Americas, bringing back important crops like sugar and tobacco, but for political reasons this wealth was all directed towards Castille in the central and southern parts of Spain centered around the port of Seville -- not to Barcelona, which fell into a long period of economic decline as a result. Queen Isabella was supporting her home territory of Castille to the exclusion of the Catalan area, which suffered as a result. This is a major reason why we have such a well-preserved gothic town to enjoy today, since little construction has taken place since the Middle Ages in this central part of town. It has seen very few changes, so we are blessed today with this intact medieval pattern.



From Placa Neri walk a short block over to Carrer de Banys Nous, a former site of the Roman wall and now a busy shopping lane worthy of an extended stroll up and down its 300-yard length between Placa Nova and Carrer de Ferran. Next, make your way another block over to the gothic church of Santa Maria del Pi and its enchanting little plazas. This is another one of the great spaces of Barcelona that has it all: benches to rest, outdoor cafes, shops, statues, three interconnected little plazas, other major attractions within a few blocks, and anchored by this most impressive church with the world's largest round gothic stained glass window. The impressive church interior features a high ceiling with gothic vaulting and many stained glass windows all around, but otherwise simple décor as it was burned out during the Civil War.

At night the three little plazas are lively with people sitting at cafes or simply walking through on the six little lanes that intersect here. The side plaza of St. J. Oriol is especially busy with its popular Taller de Tapas restaurant and nearby Meson Jesus, a simple restaurant with Catalan cuisine.

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ROYAL SQUARE

Now you might zigzag through the alley nexus including the main routes of Boqueria and Ferran, the row of lanes between them, and then arrive at the grand plaza of Placa Reial, the Royal Square built in the 19th century, surrounded by magnificent arcades on all side anchored by a grand fountain in the center. Most notable among the restaurants here is a phenomenon called Quinze nitz, where people line up for over an hour to get in for dinner, attracted by the low prices, high quality and skyrocketing fame. One way to beat the line is come for late lunch, arriving just before 3:00pm to catch their last seating. (Or you could eat at their other restaurant, La Dolce Herminia, which is as good and less crowded, located one half-mile away at 27 Magdalenes, near via Laietana. It also gets busy, so arrive for dinner by 8:00pm or make a reservation.)



Another busy street two blocks from Placa Reial towards St. Jaume is Carrer d'Avinyo, which is a pleasure to

stroll during the day or at night. Take this, vard along the water's edge.

DAY TWO

Early-birds will find that most of the city does not open until well after breakfast, except for the huge food market along the Rambla, the Mercat de la Boqueria. This busy food hall comes to life very early, starting from 6:00am when the first merchants arrive and a few coffee counters open inside the hall and just outside along the Rambla, making this about the only place in town available for a pre-dawn caffeine fix, if you happen to wake early and want to get a head-start on the day.



Even if you are not an early-bird, don't need any food and have no interest in architectural history, simply walking through this market is an adventure for your senses, passing row after row of perfectly displayed fruits and vegetables arranged by workers who really care about visual impact, color and aesthetics, while at the same time you are immersed in the bustling atmosphere of busy shoppers and merchants calling out their specials in booming Spanish tones to grab your attention. Odors fill the air with a constantly changing palette as you walk from cheese to fish and on to the fruits and veggies. So you are getting sight, sound, color, motion, aroma and taste, for an experience not to be missed.

Mercat de la Boqieria is fully up and running by 7:00am and stays open throughout the day, making this a great place to hang out for a while, watch the colorful action, get a coffee and maybe pick up some snacks for your busy day ahead. Several small counters offer excellent, quick meals and a chance to rub elbows with some talkative locals. Eating at a simple café like this is a refreshing contrast to the long wait for table service in a typical restaurant, because everything happens immediately in front of your eyes when you sit on that stool, especially when they are not crowded.



While most of the market's products are meant to be brought home and cooked, the intrepid traveler can certainly find fruits, nuts, cheese, breads, sweets and other great items for snacking during the day that will cost less and be more convenient than meals purchased in a restaurant. There is a lot to be said for munching on simple foods pulled out of your pocket while walking along sight-seeing, and so far, no medical reports have suggested there is anything unhealthy about eating while you walk. Of course you are going to want to sit down

and enjoy some great meals but not necessarily every time you get hungry, especially outside normal meal hours when your appetite and slumping energy level call for some attention.

Housed in an old-fashioned steel and glass structure first built in mid-19th century with an elaborate steel facade in the Modernista style of one century ago, the Mercat de la Boqueria resembles other great food halls once found in Europe's major cities, nearly all of which have been torn down or converted into shopping malls. In many ways these food hall structures were the first truly modern buildings to incorporate the engineering technique of glass walls held together by steel frames which has subsequently dominated urban architecture.

The continued existence of this venerable structure is another fine example of the intact preservation of Barcelona's historic center. Its archaic glass and steel design looks like something out of an old movie but the market continues to play an important role in the modern daily lives of shoppers getting their daily fix of fresh, healthy foods. Most shops of the Gothic Quarter have sleek, ultra-contemporary interiors behind their old facades,

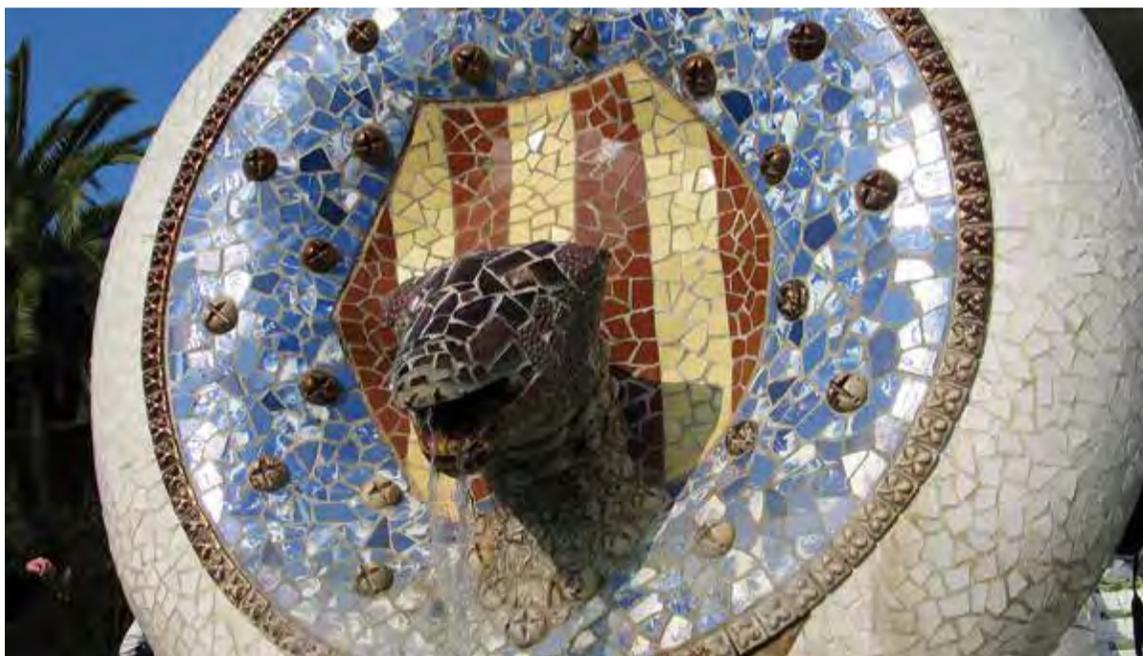
unlike Mercat de la Boqueria, where you step into the 19th century.

You might explore the market early in the morning before breakfast and then head back to your hotel for your morning meal, especially when staying at our Hotel Colon, conveniently-located on one of the main squares of town facing the cathedral. They have a lovely breakfast buffet with eggs, bacon, all kinds of fruits, cereals, juices and so on, which provides a nice chance to relax and fuel up for the busy day ahead.

PARC GUELL

After breakfast, begin your pursuit of architectural masterpieces created by Antoni Gaudi (1852-1926), Barcelona's most famous architect. A good strategy is to start at Parc Guell, a whimsical whirl of colored ceramics, sculptures, sinuous benches, weird buildings, bizarre pavilions and curved paths winding through a lush garden setting, with a view across the city from its hill-top perch.

The park's structures are curved in a mélange of fairy-tale shapes covered with mosaics of broken tiles in a style called "trencadis." Most of these tiles are brightly colored creating dazzling surfaces on the benches and columns, while other tiles are earth-brown fragments covering various pavilions and structures that look like they have grown out of the ground. Craftsmen worked under Gaudi's direction to create these amazing mosaics by smashing porcelain plates and pottery into little pieces then arranging them like a jigsaw puzzle. Some sculptures are similarly covered, especially the salamander fountain on the divided staircase that leads up to the 86-column Hypostyle Hall. There is usually a small crowd waiting in turn to be photographed next to the bizarre salamander.



Gaudi was the city's most famous architect, best known for his still-unfinished Sagrada Familia church which is also worth seeing but is not as pleasing as this park. He lived from 1852 to 1926 and designed Parc Guell at the beginning of the 20th century as part of a large housing project that never got built. Instead we are left with this much more interesting and valuable 37-acre park that is one of the city's most popular attractions. Its main section consists of a broad terrace rimmed with benches and steps leading down to the front gate, which is flanked by two small Hansel and

Gretel-inspired huts topped with ice cream sundae-shaped roofs. These small areas get very crowded, making it difficult to properly appreciate this premium destination, so your best strategy is to arrive when the park opens at 10:00 a.m. in order to see the colorful sights without a thousand other tourists getting in your way.

Parc Guell is too far from the center to comfortably reach by walking but you can get there in 30 minutes by public transportation, preferably bus number 24 heading in the Carmel direction, which conveniently drops you off right next to the upper level of the park. You can catch the bus from major downtown locales including Placa Catalunya and along the Passeig de Gracia. Alternatively, the metro could bring you to the general vicinity, but requires much more walking than the bus. If you prefer rail, take the metro Green Line L3 and get off at the Lesseps or Vallcarca stations and tackle a 20-minute walk, with the last portion leading up a steep hill and then into the park along a pleasant winding path through the woods. Some of that uphill climb is alleviated by outdoor escalators running alongside the road, but overall you'll find it easier to take the bus. The same bus route

will take you back to downtown after the visit.

Gaudi lived on the property in one of the two houses that were actually constructed here. His home has been converted into a small museum of his memorabilia, for the die-hard fans. However there is not all that much in the way of attractions inside the house. They display some of the odd-shaped furniture designed by Gaudi, and visitors can enter his study, bedroom, living room and other parts of the house. There is an admission charge and the visit will take time, so you might find it unnecessary to enter this little museum, but you can certainly admire the outside of the house and garden for free, and it is conveniently located near the exit for the bus stop.



It only takes 30 minutes to see the park from top to bottom, but you might linger in the gift shop and get something to eat at one of two snack bars. The food and seating is a bit better at the lower café near the front gates, but the sandwich counter up above on the main terrace has a pleasant outdoor ambience, with a strangely entertaining way of ordering food in which you tell the clerk your sandwich choice and he barks back “five minutes” without taking your name or giving you a number, but all works out well in the end. This is not great food,

but it’s a simple, inexpensive sandwich on a long, hard roll, and if you are hungry it is conveniently located in this beautiful setting which could hit the spot.

After your visit, exit the east side of the park and walk a block to the public bus stop on the park side of the street to catch a 10-minute ride bringing you close to Gaudi’s monumental masterpiece, Sagrada Familia. It is a mildly entertaining ride, taking you through some typical, non-touristic local streets, and delivers you to a convenient bus stop.

Upon exiting the bus walk along three wide blocks of Avinguda Gaudi towards the looming towers of the church. Another diversion might beckon first, however, with a two-block walk in the opposite direction to the beautiful Hospital de la Santa Creu, a gothic complex begun in 1401 containing a cloister, schools, churches, library, hospital, patios and park, listed together as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

SAGRADA FAMILIA

The number one attraction of Barcelona is undoubtedly Sagrada Familia. This unfinished church is a whimsical, steel-beamed mountain growing out of the landscape, a creature of the imaginative mind of Gaudi, who died while it was still under construction, run down by a tram in a tragic accident. Barcelonans have been working on the church for a century, and at this rate will probably continue for another century. There are still various political arguments about how to get the work done and how to pay for it, but Sagrada Familia is open to the public.



You can ride an elevator most of the way up one of the towers and walk a bit further to the top. From here you gain quite a view of the construction site as well as vistas across the city – a panorama of the skyline of Barcelona and some details of the towers of Sagrada Familia itself. However, there is not much of a skyline vista to see in this part of town, except for the general layout and one outstanding building, an odd round tower looking like a big, glass pickle, like the “Gherkin” in London.

Scale-model exhibits on the ground floor help you envision what the final product will look like. You can

also watch the workers as they create sculptures, carve decorative architectural details and do the heavy construction on this busy site, with hard-hat laborers bustling around the site. It's really a busy, productive area.

Alternatively, you could save time and money by just looking at this heaping pile from the outside, which gives the main impression anyway, and don't bother paying the admission fee. Much of the building is a hectic, noisy construction site, so unless you really want the view from a tower, you are not missing much by skipping the interior visit. Of course, those with a genuine interest in this famous site will enjoy walking through it, admiring the beautiful stained glass windows and forest of tall columns finished in many different styles.



Such a strange building is not everyone's cup of tea, but it has become a symbol of Barcelona, so you might as well come have a look. Fortunately, there is a metro stop here so we can easily get back to the center of town.



WATERFRONT

You could easily spend the rest of this first afternoon along the waterfront, visiting two major museums and Europe's largest aquarium containing 8,000 fish. Strolling along this open, sunny area is a dramatic contrast to the more constricted lanes of the Old Town. Palm trees, outdoor restaurants with views of the Port Vell marina, wide busy streets, and a mix of modern and older buildings make this a refreshing change of pace. Leave the rest of the Old Town for tomorrow and the next day.

Nautical buffs will surely enjoy the naval history museum, Museu Maritim, housed in the original shipyard structure that partly dates back to the 13th century. Just the building alone is worth seeing, for it is one of Europe's largest medieval, secular buildings. Centerpiece of the collection is the 200-foot-long reconstruction of an oar-powered galley, the warship manned by 400 sailors that was used in the crucial Battle of Lepanto which defeated the aggressive Turks in 1571, keeping the Moslems out of Christian Europe. Many other ships and displays of daily life in previous centuries could keep you captivated for hours.

The other large waterfront museum is the Museum d'Historia de Catalunya, which offers "a stroll through history" from the Stone Age through modern times in a huge, restored, brick warehouse. Four floors of exhibits take you on a multimedia journey covering the Bronze Age, Romans, early Christians, coming of the Visigoths, 19th century industrialization, and present times.

Barcelona comes to life in the evening more enthusiastically than during the day, so don't stop exploring when the sun goes down. Shops generally remain open until at least 8:00pm, although most shut down for siesta in mid-afternoon for several hours, making evening an ideal time for wandering the narrow alleys. Respectable restaurants don't open until 7:30 or 8:00pm, which is a bit late for some travelers but is the way of life throughout the country. Tapa bars and snack shops open earlier if you need a nibble, but save your real appetite for a bit later. Instead of sitting indoors eating during twilight you might find greater enjoyment by strolling during this magical time in streets filled with locals, illuminated by a special mix of light that combines the golden glow of evening with colored incandescent and fluorescent city lights. It is best to adjust your life-cycle rhythm to the local schedule and participate in the passing parade.

DAY THREE

There is much more to see in the downtown center -- visits which could have been made earlier if you don't have the added luxury of a third day. Spreading out the walks this way provides the pleasure of absorbing the sights at a relaxed pace while leaving time for unplanned detours.



Start out once again at Plaça de Catalunya and walk north a few blocks along Passeig de Gracia to appreciate some of the great Modernista buildings along this major boulevard, including another masterpiece by Gaudí, Casa Batlló, with curvaceous lines that seem organic, growing like a plant out of the ground, or considered by some to look like bones. The architecture is also considered a metaphor that portrays the legend of St. George slaying the dragon, evidenced by the building's roof contoured like dragon's skin, and the interior stairway

banister shaped like a dragon's spine. Two blocks further north you will find Gaudí's other famous apartment house, the Casa Mila, also called "La Pedrera," which means "stone quarry" because of the large amount of rock it took for construction. This is a former apartment house now owned by a bank and open to the public as a museum, and is still partly occupied as a private residence.

You are in a modern section of town called Eixample, a 19th century enlargement of Barcelona with many trendy boutiques, sidewalk cafes, art galleries and wonderful architecture -- so if this is your style, wander and browse for a while.

Lovers of modern art would enjoy a visit to the MACBA Museum of Contemporary Art, housed in a dramatic, all-white 1995 building designed by Richard Meier, located in the Raval district on the west side of the Rambla, a pleasant five-minute walk from Plaça de Catalunya along the pedestrian Carrer d'Elizabets. When satisfied, plunge again into the Gothic Quarter.



BARRI GOTIC REVISITED

This will be another adventure of walking through more pedestrian lanes, crossing scenic plazas, perhaps visiting an art museum and seeing places not previously covered in this huge Gothic Quarter, as well as back-tracking later in the day to some of your favorite haunts.

Cross from the east corner of Plaça de Catalunya, near the Tourist Information Office, to Portal de l'Angel, one of the widest and busiest pedestrian shopping streets in town, lined with department stores and specialty boutiques, and packed with shoppers all day and into the night. In fact this street is so prominent that you have probably already discovered it earlier on your own and will end up returning here many times during the visit. Often there are outdoor craft markets set up along this mall, and El Corte Ingles, Spain's biggest department store, has a major branch here to supplement its larger flagship back at Plaça de Catalunya.

Portal de l'Angel is generally filled with friendly shoppers, making this an ideal place for people-watching and perhaps striking up a conversation if you feel so bold. A universal ice-breaking topic is asking someone for tips on eating or shopping. Just don't try and stop anyone who is in a hurry. This street is such a major destination that you would enjoy walking up and down its full length, exploring beyond each end and looking all around, then

doubling back to the beginning of l'Angel to continue your journey.

Attractive side lanes branch off from l'Angel in both directions, leading to more shops and restaurants that are certainly worth exploring. Some fascinating hybrid shop/restaurants resembling a deli with wine bar can be found in this central area, such as La Pineda, at 16 Carrer del Pi, the lower extension of l'Angel. This cozy little tapa bar sells meats, cheeses, salads, packaged foods and beverages to go, or for consumption on the spot where you can enjoy the friendly, casual atmosphere of a neighborhood gathering place for locals, standing at the tiny bar or sitting at one of the few tables. It's the kind of friendly mixed-use hangout for socializing that we don't see much of in America.



Vegetarians can usually find something to eat in regular restaurants, but there is a major vegetarian self-service buffet called Self Naturista around the corner on Carrer de Santa Anna, which is another fascinating street with many shops, bakeries, small hotels and a steady stream of people passing by.



The Angel promenade is just a few blocks long and leads directly into the heart of the Gothic Quarter. Turn left on Carrer Comtal and walk a few blocks to Palau de la Musica Catalana. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is a major music hall built in the late 19th century encrusted with statues of musicians and mythological characters in the Modernista style, a Barcelona interpretation of the Art Nouveau style that expresses the distinct Catalan identity through architecture. The Palau is busy as an active venue for the performing arts, with events staged here every week, and you can also pay to go inside for a guided tour during the day.

SANT PERE

If you would care to veer away from the tourist path for a taste of an ordinary working-class neighborhood with a medieval atmosphere, continue east a few blocks through the district of Sant Pere, traversed by three parallel streets, all named St Pere but ending with different suffixes: mes Alt, Mitja and mes Baix. Narrow, pedestrian alleys interconnect them creating a delightful maze of ancient lanes in which to wander.

The neighborhood is named for the former convent monastery of St Pere, an ancient church on the small plaza of St. Pere. The church's dark interior features 10th century Corinthian columns, a 12th century dome and Byzantine barrel vaulting. As you walk along you will see the locals going about their business, shopping, talking, hanging out and skating by. Small grocery shops spill out onto the sidewalk with stands for fresh produce,



next to alluring bakeries that will tempt you with their sweet delights. This is a quiet part of town that enjoys a slow pace of life in a world of its own. Exit this district along Basses de St. Pere, which leads to Carrer dels Corders, one of the main thoroughfares through the area.

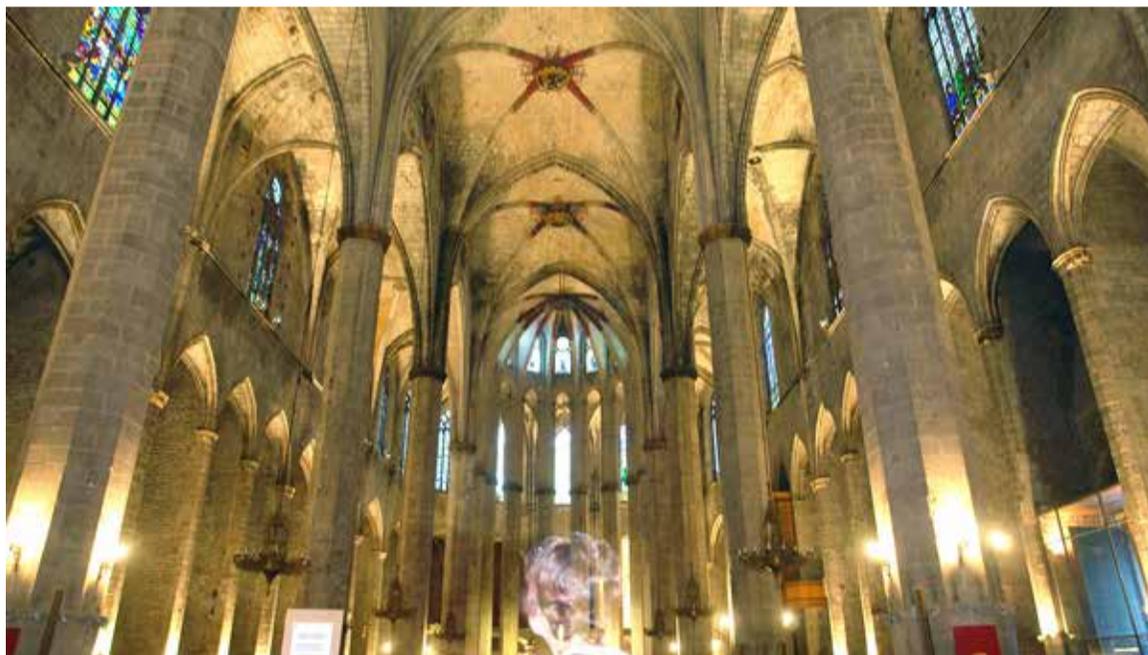
Alternatively, if you are pressed for time you could skip that extended walk and head directly south from the music hall through a neighborhood of narrow pedestrian lanes, arriving in three blocks at the newly-renovated Mercat de Santa Caterina, with its swooping, colorful roof sheltering typical food stalls and a few small restaurants. Continue one block south to Carrer dels Corders, a main pedestrian lane worth strolling up and down, making note of the narrow, residential, side alleys with their colorful laundry hanging up above.

LA RIBERA

Entering the section of old Barcelona referred to as La Ribera, turn from Carrer dels Corders into the major walkway of Carrer Montcada, which changes names a few times and basically takes you through the center of this historic zone. This was an area of deluxe palaces of rich merchants back in the 14th and 15th centuries and many of these buildings still stand today, adapted to new uses, such as the Picasso Museum.

Love him or not, Picasso was the major artist of the 20th century and lived in Barcelona during his formative years from ages 14 through 23 when his career and fame really got started. Then he left Spain, especially because of his distaste for the dictatorship of Franco, when he moved on to Paris and other parts of France where his genius continued to flourish. Founded after his death, this is the most popular museum in town, with one of the world's largest Picasso collections spread through what had been five separate mansions now seamlessly joined. If you don't want to pay for the museum admission, at least have a look at the series of interconnected courtyards, and you are always welcome to visit the gift shop.

Continue south along Carrer Montcada, with some diversions through the numerous side streets that honeycomb this most historic neighborhood, with many little shops tucked away. When you get hungry, it pays to look carefully for the little restaurants hidden away in side alleys. Perversely, it seems the most popular eateries are trying hard to not draw any further attention to themselves and don't post signs, menus or addresses. A good example is Nou Cellar, tucked away between Carrer de la Princesa and Barra de Ferro just west of the Picasso Museum, offering Catalan specialties, good service and reasonable prices.



After lunch, head for the large gothic church, Santa Maria del Mar, with its massive interior second only to the cathedral in size. The church is really impressive, consisting of a huge nave with soaring ceiling supported on pointed arches, and brilliant stained glass. This was all built during the medieval period, in the 13th and 14th centuries, so the architectural form is pure gothic. There is no influence or embellishment here from the later period of the Renaissance, nor was it built upon an earlier foundation in the Romanesque style of thick walls, low ceiling and small windows.

Behind is the tree-lined promenade of Passeig del Born with several short shopping streets extending a few blocks south. This neighborhood was the center of town back in the Middle Ages, functioning as the financial marketplace, major gathering spot, execution grounds, and general place to be. Today it is experiencing a rebirth, with many trendy shops and cafes thriving in the blocks around the church. A major park with the public zoo, Parc de la Ciutadella, is about one half-mile further east.

Notice the beautiful small plaza in front of the church of Santa Maria del Mar. It is busy during the day as well as at night with the shops and cafes around it, and the people walking through. This is a major pedestrian thoroughfare connecting different parts of the old section of town, so there are always plenty of people to see.

When exiting this zone, follow the nice shopping street, Carrer de l'Argenteria, which extends 200 yards from the front of Santa Maria del Mar back into the center of the historic district.

MONTJUIC

If there is time remaining this afternoon consider visiting the hill of Montjuic, an enclave of museums, parks and Olympic remains, flanked on the lower edge by old neighborhoods. You can reach it by walking from Placa de Espanya, or taking a cable-car ride, either from the funicular station at Avda Miramar or directly from Barceloneta at Passeig de Joan de Borbo.

You could actually spend an entire day here, so if a fourth day is possible in your itinerary, this district alone would be good reason to extend the visit. Foremost among the museums is MNAC, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya in the Palau Nacional, with a vast collection of Catalan fine art spanning the centuries from the Romanesque through modern times. The other great collection on the hill, is the Fundacio Joan Miro, especially for fans of this great abstract artist. Modern architect fans would appreciate seeing the iconic Mies Van der Rohe pavilion, left over from the 1929 International Exhibition. This simple glass and steel structure is considered by many to be the first modern building, introducing the dominant architectural style cities have followed ever since.

A collection of replica Spanish buildings arranged into an artificial village might seem an unlikely place to end your visit to such an authentic ancient city, but you will undoubtedly find that Poble Espanyol is a completely delightful experience: 117 examples of traditional Spanish architecture representing the whole country are arrayed along dozens of tiny lanes and open plazas, with many restaurants, shops and craft displays along with great entertainment in the streets and nightclubs, including an excellent flamenco show. This fascinating collection was created as a temporary display for the 1929 world's fair, then retained due to its fantastic popularity which has continued ever since with further enhancements, making this one of the most popular spots in Barcelona. Seventy years of graceful aging have given it that patina of authentic old age.

When done with Montjuic you can walk back to the center of town by passing through the historic neighborhood of Poble Sec, a formerly-poor district that is becoming increasingly hip, with cafes, galleries and more sights to see. From here it is an easy stroll or taxi ride back to your hotel.



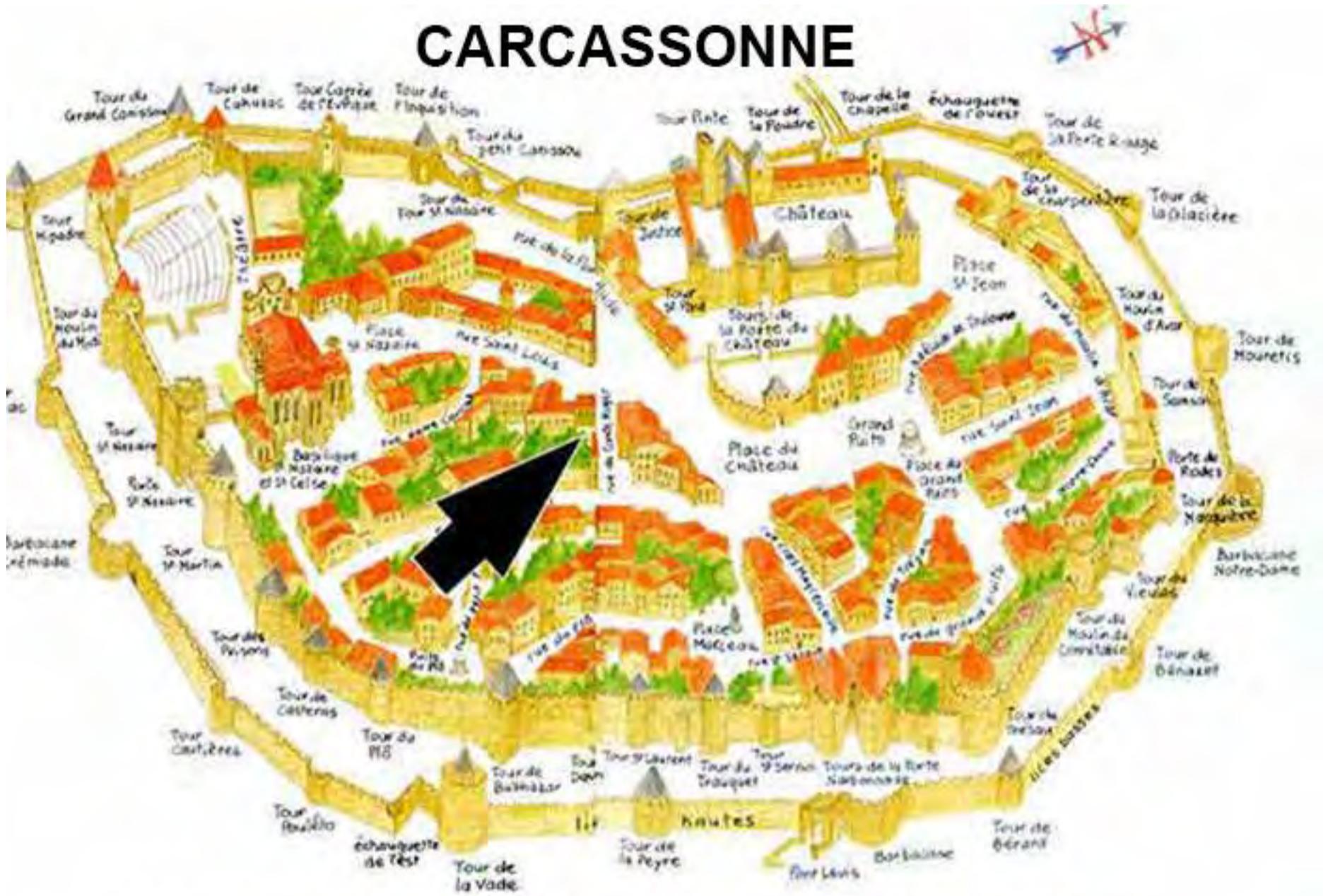
DAY FOUR

Entirely devoted to participating in the Mercé Festival, with nearly one hundred different entertainment events happening all over town. Take your pick of music, dance, acrobatics, food tents, street musicians, art exhibits, and so much more, and all these street events are free. One of the biggest cultural festivals in Europe. It has been going on all week so we will also make time in the previous days to catch some additional performances.



CARCASSONNE

CARCASSONNE



Carcassonne: Hotel Best Western le Donjon, 2 rue du Comte Roger





Carcassonne is one of the world's most magical places, a double-walled medieval city with a forest of towers rising tall and pointed -- almost too perfect, but it is very real.



This largest medieval fortress in France consists of a concentric circle of two outer stone walls with 53 towers and barbicans to prevent attack, surrounding a well-preserved village. There's something about castles like this that appeals to the kid in all of us and really fires up the romance of the past.

One of the most rewarding activities is strolling about on the narrow cobblestone lanes within the walled village, where no cars are allowed. It's not a large town by any means, just one-quarter mile long (500 meters), so it's easy to walk within the walled area and see nearly everything in a day. Two main lanes and several side lanes make up the entire plan, and yet there is enough to keep you amused, admiring the historic buildings, looking at the shops and going to the museum inside the castle.

Actually the whole village functions as a large castle, with the double layer of walls running all the way around it. The fortress was built on top of a hill, with some cliffs around offering natural supplements to the defensive walls.

The Count's Castle is the "keep" or strong house in the center of the village, and is open as a fascinating museum of history. It's believed that this castle was first built from about the year 1130, which puts it deep into the Middle Ages, and then it was occupied for hundreds of years as the stronghold at the center of this amazing village.

Carcassonne was occupied by a ruling lord until the 15th century. There are still 100 residents today, mostly the descendants of many generations of families who have been living here for centuries.

You pay a small admission charge for the tour inside the castle and along the walls. The Arcade Room of the

castle has a Gothic window frame as well as architectural fragments of columns. The next room was called the Round Room because of the barrel-vaulted ceiling. It has a 16th century crucifix and original wall mural that dates back to the 12th century depicting a battle between the Christians and Muslims -- part of the ongoing struggle in this part of Europe in the Middle Ages. The next room over is called the Romanesque Room with a washbasin in the middle that dates back to the 12th century. All around there are coffins, stone sarcophagi depicting some Christian iconography, and more architectural fragments. The original stone framing of the windows and doorframes are visible there. There's a wonderful model of the castle itself showing the extent of the wall around the village.



We're also going to take a walk around the outside of the walls in the level space between the inner and outer walls. It functioned something like a moat, although it never had water, to further reinforce the protective barrier keeping out potential invaders.

From the top of the wall you gain a good perspective looking down into the fortified village at the parapets and roofs, and looking outside the walls you see extensive vineyards around this hilltop village, producing some of the excellent wines of the Languedoc. There is also

a lovely view looking out on the newer side of town down below that we shall walk to later. The spectacular wall is the defining monument of the city, created by the medieval defenders of the town. You get the feeling that somehow you are back in the Middle Ages when these walls were built, in the 12th and 13th centuries.

One of the most beautiful parts of the outer castle walls is the embattlement that connects the inner wall with the outer wall, with two beautiful Gothic arches that join it all together a magnificent ensemble, located on the west side between the Castle and the Aude Gate.

The wall has many towers, which had a variety of functions -- but mostly of course it was for defense, with armed soldiers inside with their bows and arrows. There are usually four floors inside each tower with slits in the tower walls so that they would be protected while firing their arrows at the enemy attackers.

The outer wall is more than 1600 meters in length, the inner one 1200 meters. The whole of the north part was built by the Visigoths on the ruins of Roman fortifications, which are still visible at several points. There are only two entrances, the Porte de l'Aude, to the west, beyond the fortress, and the Porte Narbonnaise, to the east.

The oldest building within the walls is the Basilica of St. Nazaire and St. Celse, one of the most exquisitely beautiful churches in the south of France. It had been a cathedral at the time it was built in the 11th century. The style of



this church is Romanesque with later Gothic elements added, including the nave, with its pointed arches, and the spectacular stained-glass windows in the apse and grand rose-windows in the transepts.

It has a fine Romanesque nave that was consecrated by Pope Urban II in 1096, with its west end designed for defense, after the customary manner in the south. It is supported by massive piers, alternately round and square. Its towers are solid masses of heavy stone; instead of spires, there are crenellations; instead of graceful flying buttresses at the sides, there are solid supports on the firm sidewalls, the true old Romanesque.

The nave, in the Romanesque style of the 12th cent., with Gothic side-chapels, is heavy and massive when contrasted with the transept and the choir, both of which are splendid erections of the 14th century.



NEW TOWN

When you're visiting Carcassonne you want to be sure to leave the confines of the medieval village up on the hill and come down into the new town, called the Bastide, which is charming in itself and offers the best view looking back up the hill at the citadel. You cross the river on the old, pedestrian bridge. There are some little side canals that branch off from the river at this point as well and there is a small part of the town down below the ramparts of the castle that's a connection between the new town and the old town which provide additional lovely views.

We will take a stroll down into the modern section of Carcassonne, an easy 15-minute walk on flat land just below the hill, and this too is a fascinating place to explore. A pedestrian mall, Rue Georges Clemenceau, runs for a mile through the center lined with shops and cafes, with branching side streets containing many more stores and sights.

King Louis -- St. Louis -- who is considered one of the greatest heroes in the nation's past, built this modern part of town back in the 13th century. This lower town became even more important than the fortified village in the following couple hundred years, as the economic center of the region. They were noted for production of fabric back in the 13th through 15th centuries, and then the main focus shifted to production of wine. There are a lot of vineyards in the area which produce wonderful grapes, and there was also farming for wheat, vegetables and dairy.

The Canal du Midi was built through here in the late 17th century and runs for a couple of hundred miles, part of a system that connects the Mediterranean with the Atlantic Ocean. With the Canal du Midi Carcassonne became even more important as a trading center. The canal and castle are both UNESCO World Heritage sites.

There was a fortified wall around the new town also, but it was pulled down back in the 18th century when they had no further worries about invasion due to the stability of the nation under Louis XIV.



The LowerTown, which is well built and regularly laid out, is encircled by green and shady boulevards. A long street beginning opposite the station, beyond the Canal du Midi, traverses the whole town, passing the Place aux Herbes in the center. The Place aux Herbes to which the Rue du Port leads from St. Vincent, is planted with fine plane-trees and contains a marble Fountain of the 18th century with a figure of Neptune, by Baratta.

One gate from the original wall has been preserved, which leads to the Art Deco town hall. Gardens and parks have replaced the wall, which make a lovely walk as we head back up towards the hill, stopping for the fabulous twilight view of the citadel, ablaze with spotlights and the sunset sky.

Early evening is also an excellent time to explore the fortified village, enjoying the special combination light from the twilight sky and street lights shining on the cobbled walkways. Several excellent restaurants in the old village offer tempting local cuisine to finish off your night. And just enjoy stroll the cafés and restaurants will be open and you can have a meal or have a drink it's all perfectly safe to be strolling whether it's late in the evening or early in the morning it's really a magical time because there are fewer people around.

Our hotel is located within the ancient walls of Carcassonne, one of the few accommodations in such a special position. This makes it so convenient for us to stroll in the evening and morning hours. Carcassonne certainly ranks right up there among the world's top sites.



BRIEF HISTORY

The hill has been occupied by people for at least 2,500 years. The Romans occupied this land in 122 B.C. when they conquered the south of France, and set up a fortified town on the hilltop and built the first walls. The place commanded one of the great roads into Spain, critical to maintaining control of the region. They occupied the area right up until the collapse of their civilization, in the late 400s. The main part of the lower courses of the northern wall dates from Roman times.

With the departure of Rome, the Visigoths took over and they occupied Carcassonne from 460 until 725 A.D. The Romans officially ceded Septimania to the Visigothic king Theodoric who had held Carcassonne since 453; he built more fortifications at Carcassonne, which was a frontier post on the northern marches. Most of the Visigoth towers that are still erect are seated upon Roman foundations which appear to have been formed hastily, probably at the moment of the Frankish invasion. The Visigoth creators of these solid defenses held Carcassonne and the neighboring country, in which they had established their kingdom of Septimania, till the year 713, during which Carcassonne was a place of major importance. They were expelled by the Moors of Spain, who ushered in a lackluster four centuries, of which no traces remain. They had come up from Africa and already occupied Spain and were moving into southern Europe, but did not get much beyond Carcassonne. These Saracens, as they were called, were pushed out by the Franks, the ancestors of today's French.

Carcassonne reached another climax in the 11th - 13th centuries, when it was ruled by a series of viscounts, the Trencavels. Carcassonne became famous in its role in the Albigensian Crusades, when the city was a stronghold of Occitan Cathars, who were Christians but considered heretics by the Church in Rome. In August 1209 the crusading army of the Papal Legate, Abbot Arnaut Amalric, forced its citizens to surrender. Raymond-Roger de Trencavel was imprisoned while negotiating his city's surrender, and died in mysterious circumstances three months later in his own dungeon. Simon De Montfort was appointed the new viscount.



Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, the cruel and remorseless right hand of the Pope, flooded this fair region with enemy blood in a rampant campaign of death and destruction. Pope Innocent the Third had actually recalled the Crusaders from the Holy Land to turn their arms against their own kindred, with Simon de Montfort as its military leader. Heretics at home, he held, were more dangerous than infidels abroad. De Montfort was killed in 1218 by a stone flung from the walls of Toulouse, which he had been besieging for nine months.

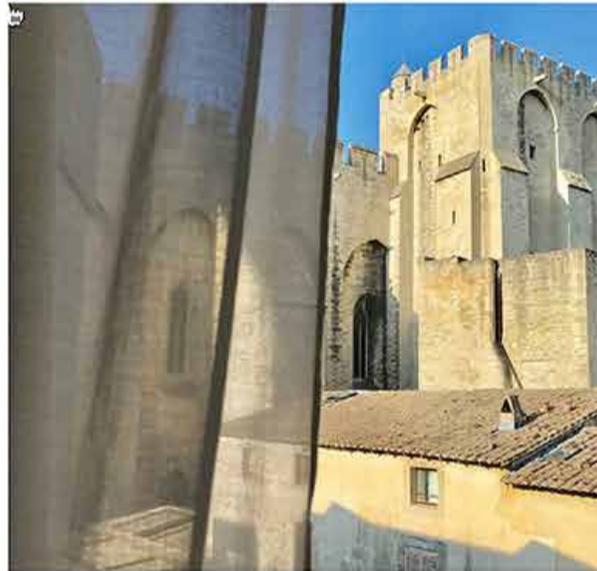
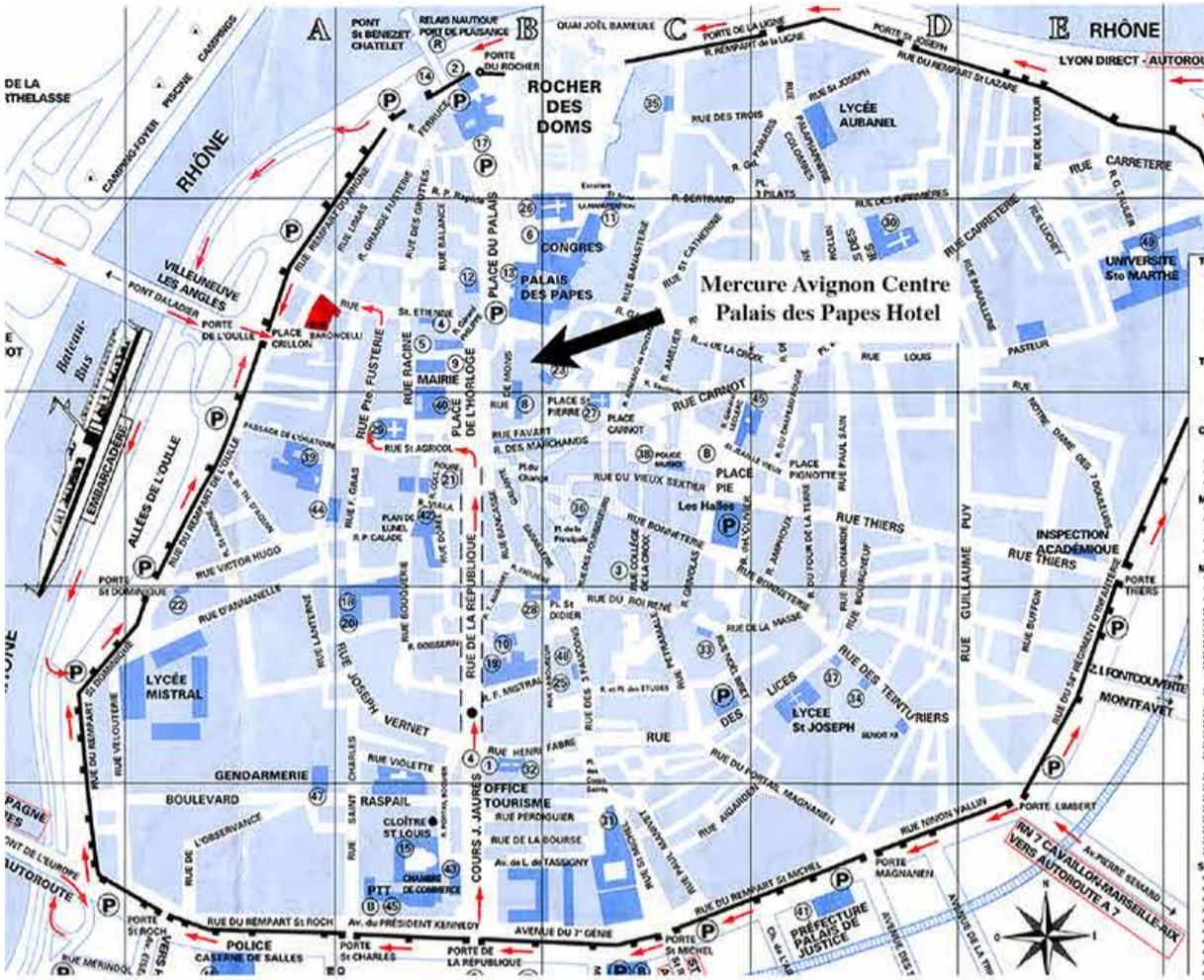
Following that, Saint Louis and Philip the Bold, in the thirteenth century, multiplied the defenses of Carcassonne, which was one of the bulwarks of their kingdom on the Spanish quarter; and from this time forth, being regarded as impregnable, the place had nothing to fear. It was not even attacked; and when, in 1355, Edward the Black Prince marched into it, the inhabitants had opened the gates to the conqueror before whom all Languedoc was prostrate.

In 1659, the Treaty of the Pyrenees transferred the border province of Roussillon to France, and Carcassonne's military significance was reduced. Fortifications were abandoned, and the city became the manufacturing center of Languedoc, concentrated on the woolen textile industry and wine production. It remained so until the Ottoman market collapsed at the end of the eighteenth century, thereafter reverting to a country town. It was forgotten and left to decay. In mid 19th century it was so run down the government decided to demolish the entire town, but preservationists rose up to its defense and the village was spared. It was then renewed in 1850-1879 by Viollet-le-Duc, who considered them the most complete and the most formidable example in Europe of fortifications of the 6th - 13th centuries.



AVIGNON

AVIGNON

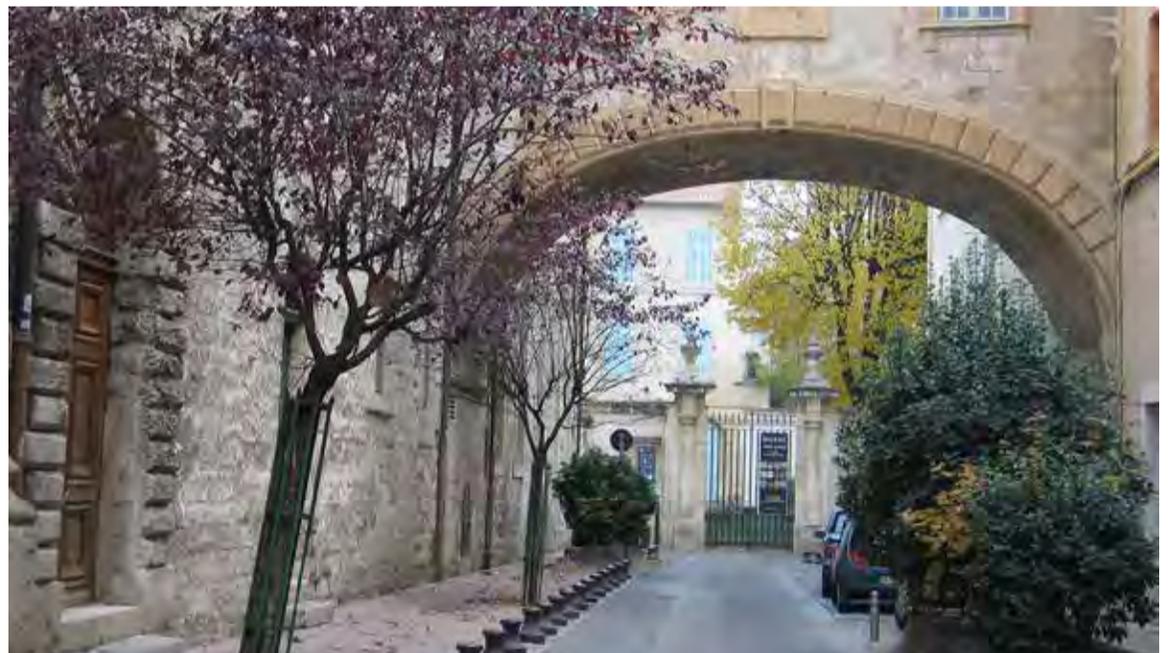




Home to seven popes during the 14th century and one of the most beautiful cities in France today, Avignon, the main city of Provence, is a treasure house of palaces, museums and meandering lanes, surrounded by an old fortified wall that protected the town from bandits and invaders during the Middle Ages and later helped preserve the historic center for us to enjoy today. You will find a delightful Old Town filled with historic sites and modern shops all linked together in a large network of pedestrian streets ideal for strolling.

Avignon makes the perfect home base for visiting the attractive nearby cities and sites of Arles, Aix, Marseilles, Pont du Gard, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence and Les Baux, with easy bus and rail connections for independent travel, along with a variety of tour operators to take you on day-trips. Many hotel choices in a variety of prices will take good care of you, and restaurants on nearly every corner will keep you well fed.

Ideally you should stay in Avignon four days in order to see the many sites within and beyond, which can then be enjoyed with a relaxed pace enabling you to juggle around the itinerary suggested here to suit your preferences. For those with more or less time the schedule can be adjusted to accommodate your plans. Alternatively, several nearby towns, especially Aix and Arles would make good overnight destinations, but the hassles of relocation and packing/unpacking reinforce the value of centrally located Avignon as an ideal place to stay, unless you really have a lot of time to spend in this region.



To simplify a big picture, Avignon can be roughly divided into five zones for your exploration: 1) the main street, République; 2&3) shopping streets to the west and east of République; 4) two main squares, Place de l'Horloge and Place du Palais; and 5) Palace of the Popes. In this outline we cover all of it in one full day, leaving three days for travel in the surroundings, but more likely, you will be re-visiting various parts in Avignon throughout your visit to appreciate the historic sites and neighborhoods in more detail both day and night.



Avignon lays claim to several UNESCO World Heritage sites, especially the great Palace of the Popes which was gradually enlarged into an imposing fortification during the 60-year papal residency and is now an excellent museum open to the public. This palace is the largest Gothic building in all of Europe and the most important single site of your visit.

In 1309 the pope departed crime-ridden Rome for political and security reasons and six papal successors, all of them French, remained in Avignon until 1377

-- the city's golden period during which great mansions were built and the wall was constructed around the town for protection. This was a time of wild growth, with massive wealth flowing into the church coffers, which resulted not only in continued enlargement of the palace, but construction of much of the Old Town we see today, creating the prime reasons for your visit.

DAY ONE:

Place de l'Horloge

Avignon's historic center can easily be seen on foot in one day, for it is a compact zone about one kilometer wide and long. Begin your orientation at the main square in the center of town, the Place de l'Horloge surrounded by City Hall, restaurants, bars and shops with a colorful carousel in the middle. Our hotel is located 1/2 block from this central plaza. Excavations have shown this has always been the center of town, starting from the earliest beginnings when ancient Phoceans established the first settlement 2,500 years ago. It was renamed the "Clock Square" after the first public clock was installed in the new City Hall tower in 1471. This remained a smaller plaza until expansions in the 16th and 17th centuries. The original tower remains but the Hôtel de Ville was rebuilt in 1862 in neoclassical style. Public spectacles here included the guillotine during the Revolution, and construction of the Municipal Theater in 1823, adorned with statues of Corneille and Moliere.

If you got an early start you probably just had breakfast at your hotel, but consider another coffee at an outdoor table to soak in the delightful ambience, with people walking by, beautiful buildings all around and a lovely, tree-shaded park environment throughout the square. Perhaps identify possible restaurants for lunch or dinner later on. Of course, there are other dining places in town a bit less tourist oriented than those in this main square, but locals eat here too, and the advantages of dining in Place de l'Horloge at a choice outdoor table are the central location and atmosphere offering hundreds of outdoor restaurants seats during mild weather. You'll notice several nice hotels on the square, especially the Mercure (our hotel) offering convenient, attractive accommodations.

In the Place the principal building is the City Hall, Hôtel de Ville, built in 1862, which has a tower constructed in 1353-63 (best seen from the back), with a clock, giving its name to this "Clock Plaza." Adjacent is the modern Opera Theatre. Major routes lead out from this square in all directions, so you will be returning and walking through it again several times in your visit. Avignon's main shopping areas on three sides of this place are best saved for later because you want to see the adjacent major square one block north, the Place du Palais, containing the city's most historic site, The Palace of the Popes.





PLACE DU PALAIS

Looming above like a man-made mountain with walls 150 feet high, the Palais des Papes looks like an austere fortress, majestic but bleak, with a plain facade running along the east side of the square. In order to gain a wide-ranging overview of the rest of the city, admire the massive exterior for now but don't plunge inside the vast structure at the start of your visit. You'll want to look around town then come back later, perhaps tomorrow afternoon, for an enjoyable interior visit, which will take at least

one hour or two if you read the many explanations that accompany the exhibits. However if you are unfortunately pressed for time, go in now, as described later in the chapter.

Facing the palace is a grand building, L'Hôtel des Monnaies, formerly The Papal Mint where money was made and kept, elaborately decorated with sculpture on the façade in vivid contrast to the blank palace wall. This mansion, now a music conservatory not open to the public, is a rare French example of Italian Baroque architecture, built in 1619 for a nephew of Pope Paul V, Cardinal Scipione Borghese, of a noble Roman family that controlled the finances of much of Italy. Similar to their Palazzo Borghese in Rome, this is an impressive structure designed to provide all the comforts while showing off wealth and power.

As you walk through this vast cobblestone square gazing at the wonders all around, be careful to watch out for the payment underfoot because sometimes there is a small hole or a rock sticking up you might trip on.

Just beyond the palace towers the Cathédral Notre Dame des Doms, the town's major surviving Romanesque structure and another UNESCO World Heritage Site. Built on a high point of the city believed to have been site of a pre-Roman village, the present building dates to the 12th century but the first church probably stood on this spot in the 4th century. Destroyed by the Saracens in 731, it was rebuilt in 1111 and expanded in later centuries, finally topped off in 1859 by the gilded statue of Mary atop the spire.

During the 14th century this became the world's most important church, home to seven different popes. The interior nave is entirely encircled by a Renaissance gallery with rich marble balustrades from one end of the choir to the other. The apse was added in 1671. Significant art works include various frescoes, statues, ornamented side chapels, and a highlight, the Tomb of Pope John XXII, a masterpiece of 14th century flamboyant Gothic.

On the northern end of Palace Square stands the fortress-like Petit Palais, first built in 1318 as a mansion in the medieval style with fortified turrets, crenelated walls, Gothic pointed arches and an open interior courtyard. Now an art museum, it houses a collection of 300 medieval paintings, and the masterpiece of Botticelli's *Madonna and Child*. Simply walking through this delightful mansion is even more thrilling than the paintings on the wall, once home to Julius II before he became pope. Julius was the famous Pope who hired Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling and was also a great warrior leader pope, who expanded the powers of the Vatican throughout Europe.



Walk a few minutes north from the Place du Palais into a lovely public park called Roche des Doms, resting on the top of a small hill overlooking the Old Town. This park is a hideaway that you don't notice when you're at the Palace of the Popes or in the plaza in front, but the entrance is right next to the Cathédral. There are no

escalators, no elevators so you've got to do it on your own power, but it's an easy walk up the gentle switchback ramps through a lush garden.



From the top you are rewarded with beautiful views across the rooftops of the city and along the majestic Rhône River. You'll also spot the romantic castle of St. Andre in the distance and the famous half-bridge, St-Bénézet. Notice the Park of the Dome also has a beautiful pond with ducks, fountains and a statue in the middle with tree-shaded benches all around – a lovely ensemble. The park is a great place for families to hang out - kids can pedal around in rented vehicles - even a little toy horse and buggy with foot pedals.

Look for the cotton candy saleslady, dishing up sweet treats for the kids.

It is easy to walk down from here back down that same little zigzag ramp or a staircase beyond. For the easy exit from the park, retrace your steps back down to Place du Palais. If you really must have a better look at the St-Bénézet Bridge, take the more strenuous route from the north end of the park, down a steep staircase to the river, then along Quai de la Ligne, which provides fine views of the fortified wall, but be advised, this will add 800 meters and 30 minutes to your already-busy walk.

Avignon's legendary Pont St- Bénézet, yet another UNESCO World Heritage Site, was built across the River Rhône in 1177 through 1185 under the direction of St-Bénézet. This bridge, which stood for only 100 years, was 2952 ft. long and 13 wide, on 19 arches, of which four still remain. It was often restored but it's been in ruins since 1669. On one of the piers of the bridge stands the Chapel of St-Bénézet, rebuilt in the early 13th century with a second upper apse added in 1513. Don't bother paying admission to walk on the bridge, since you can see it well from the river bank, unless you want to dance on it as in the famous 15th-century children's song: "Sur le Pont d'Avignon, L'on y danse, l'on y danse" "On the bridge of Avignon, We all dance there, we all dance there"



This was the only bridge across the lower Rhône River when built, connecting the kingdoms of France and Germany, and thereby turning Avignon into an important trading center. Even though it only goes halfway across the river now, because it was broken down and collapsed in earlier centuries, and not fully repaired, the bridge makes a great sight. You'll find that it's rewarding to admire the view from different directions: look at it from one side, look at it from above, look at it from below, look at it from the other side. To get back into the town, enter the Porte du Rhône gate through the town wall then follow signs along Rue Ferruce and Rue de la Balance that lead you back to Place du Palais and then to Place de l'Horloge.

THE OLD TOWN

Start out once again from Place de l'Horloge. Stand at the south edge of the plaza and take a look down the main street of town, the Rue de la République, truly a grand boulevard with wide sidewalks, many shops, department stores, fast foods, fine dining and lots of people. This is a fine street you will come back to many times during your visit, but unless you are compelled by its attractions now, save it for later and instead, begin exploring the charming little side lanes of town.



Throw yourself into the vast network of pedestrian shopping streets that make up a good chunk of the Old Town center and offer some of the nicest walking, with various historic sites sprinkled into the mix. Avignon's Old Town is a charming neighborhood of shopping lanes, narrow residential streets and little back alleys, perfect for strolling. Some of these routes are exclusively for pedestrians, especially in the shopping center just southeast of Place de l'Horloge. The curved shape of these streets will keep you guessing what's around the bend, or which museum or monument is

coming up next. Streets are level but not straight, riddled with little plazas, fountains, trees, some benches, and numerous cafes. While this neighborhood is very old, the shops and galleries are up-to-date with modern interiors and contemporary European items for sale.

There are many possible routes that we shall cover, but an excellent place to start is from the southwest corner of Place de l'Horloge at the small junction called Place du Change, from which several pedestrian lanes radiate. During the 14th century this was a busy location for moneychangers, who dealt in coins, ingots and gems, a combination of bank and pawnshop, along with a foreign exchange service for travelers coming to town. Deals were made, duels were fought and houses knocked down to make room for more horse carriages, making this a lively downtown intersection, which it still is today.

This zone just to the east of Rue de la République is the heart and soul of Avignon, the great gathering place for strolling, people-watching, snacking and great shopping among hundreds of small stores packed into this friendly little neighborhood. It is a small area only 200 meters long and wide with a dozen walking lanes that twist and turn, keeping you wondering where you are, so it might seem vast and disorienting, but you can't get too lost in this retail paradise.

Town planners have created "human scale" here at its very best, with buildings just a few stories high, providing plenty of air, light and sufficient room to walk without getting run over by a car or truck. Bordering streets with cars are also quiet, with good sidewalks, more shops, cafes, and little traffic, so the friendly zone extends further out about 600 meters from Place de l'Horloge, giving you plenty of room to explore. Main pedestrian lanes here are: Change, Marchand, Principaale, Fourbisseurs, Vieux Sextier, Tremoulet, Rappe, Rouge, Bonneterie, Galante, all marked with cross-hatch lines on the map.



Now is a good time to wander and cut loose in this little district that you will hopefully have time to return to later, because the scene gets even better in late afternoon, like the passeggiata in Italy, with locals strolling, shopping, seeing their friends, having a bite, having a drink, getting ready for dinner. Consider this a 30-minute reconnaissance walking a circuit along the main pedestrian lanes of Marchands, Rappe and Galante, returning where you began at Place du Change to continue your expedition. The pedestrian zone is conveniently framed by three historic sites: St. Pierre on the north, St. Didier on the south, and the waterwheels of Rue Teinturiers to the east, all of which act like a boundary for the next part of your walk.



church is most famous for are the solid wooden doors in front, with a lovely statue of the Madonna and Child above the doorway. The exterior is especially impressive with its flamboyant Gothic style and the carved stone tracery of the stone ribs completed in 1524. According to legends, the first church was built here in the 7th century but destroyed during Saracen invasions, in the turbulent times of frequent attacks by Goths, Franks, Muslims and barbarian bandits.

Walk east through Place Jerusalem past the Synagogue, which had been center of the Jewish ghetto, one more block to Place Pie, a large, tree-lined square surrounded by quaint buildings and cafes. This could easily be overlooked by a casual visitor because it's not really on lists of places to visit or prominent in postcard shots, but you will see that it is a very lovely spot. The origins of Place Pie go back about 500 years when it was an area of housing that was pulled down in 1562 to open up free area for a very busy outdoor food market.

Place Pie (say "pee") is not named for the large round pastry, or a place to relieve yourself, but after Pope Pie (Pius) VI, an Italian pope who reigned during the Revolution when most church property was nationalized. Victim of bad timing, he was then arrested by Napoleon and forced to sign a treaty in 1797 turning over papal territories, including Avignon and much of Italy to France. The pope was buried in St Peter's in Rome where he is commemorated with a statue by Canova, although his heart remains entombed in Valence, France, where he died in captivity in 1799 after a reign of 25 years, fourth-longest in church history.



On the south side notice the large green Les Halles, a modern food market hall that was built in 1970s ugly modern, with an interesting living green wall on the outside that hides the modern, brutalist style. Originally this was a smaller market created in the 1800s as a metal shed at first which then grew larger and was demolished to make way for this multi-story monster with a parking garage on top. Fortunately this is about the only bland building in the Old Town, but it does serve a good purpose with 40 food stalls, true ambassadors of local

produce: fruit, vegetables, herbs and spices, olive oil and other cookery specialties in a typical atmosphere of authentic Provence, open from 6am daily except Monday.

Cut through the indoor food market to see for yourself, maybe grab a bite, and emerge out the back door on the south end at Rue Bonneterie, which in a few blocks east, turns into one of the most picturesque streets in town, Rue des Teinturiers, the "street of the tinters."

Several ancient water wheels on this cobbled lane are still turning, pushed along by a quaint little, tree-lined canal. The wheels were once used to provide power for the manufacturing and dyeing of textiles and

printing and a few other industrial applications at the beginning of the Industrial Age. This has become a recently renovated trendy street, with cafes, boutiques and a small theater, a mere ten-minute walk from the town center.

You might want to come back again for another look at twilight when it takes on a different atmosphere. And, of course, that's when the restaurants will be really coming to life. This street is the kind of place you just want to drop anchor for a while and hang out, sit down on a bench, lean up against the wall, relax, and watch these water wheels. Of course, the wheels are no longer functioning to power any equipment obviously in this modern age. They're here mostly as historical landmarks and for your entertainment, so take advantage.



It becomes very hypnotic to just stand watching these wheels go round and round.

Stroll back towards the town center along Rue des Lices. Notice the large four-story building with the arcaded windows and tree-shaded courtyard in front, called the Aumône Générale. The history of the building is fascinating and reflects a range of very different uses over the centuries. It started life as a poor house in 1592, and separate sections were established for men and women - divided by a chapel - presumably to reinforce moral conduct and prevent fraternization. There was even a section called 'The Galley' which was set aside for Avignon's 'fallen' women. The U-shaped ensemble of buildings, with its four superposed arcaded galleries, went up between 1669 and 1778. In the 19th century, it was converted into a 'travellers' barracks' and in 1890, transformed its purpose yet again to house the Ecole des Beaux Arts. In 1998, it was sold by the city, and has since been converted into private and very desirable apartments in the heart of the city. Ironically the building evolved from a poorhouse which catered to the destitute into extremely upmarket bijou apartments. This is not a mainstream tourist attraction by any means, yet is appealing on many levels -- the sort of 'second division' attraction you might enjoy discovering.



Rue des Lices passes one of the most charming little plazas in town, the Place des Corps Saint, with its burbling fountain and there's a picturesque little church of the Celestines, and there's a bar of the same name. There's a lively array of café tables that are spread out here in fair weather. Several small restaurants around the square are perfect for lunch and even better at dinner-time, so be sure to make a note of location and come back for a lovely meal or two. Easy to find, the is just one block east of the Tourist Information Office on

the main Rue de la République, coming up soon in our itinerary, but not quite yet.

On the north end, Place des Corps Saint becomes Rue des Trois Faucons, another one of the charming shopping streets of Avignon. Some automobiles, yes, but a narrow road with wide sidewalks, outdoor cafes and an excellent variety of small shops – an ideal street for strolling. This leads a few blocks north to another important church worth visiting: ancient Collegiate church of St. Didier, one of the largest Gothic churches in Provence, with a very tall hexagonal bell tower with harmonious proportions, visible from blocks away. St. Didier was originally built in 1008 and then rebuilt much larger in 1358 due to the presence of the popes. You will find it contains charming arcades and a small Gothic pulpit in stone. In the first chapel on right is one of the first Renaissance carvings in France, a relief in marble representing Christ bearing his cross, executed by Francesco Laurana in 1478 at the request of King Rene. Opposite, over second arch, 36 feet above the floor, is a

stone pulpit with a sculptured pendant. The grave of St. Bénézet (builder of the bridge) is under a plain slab in the middle of the nave, in front of the high altar. Most of the art and furnishings were looted during the Revolution, but it is surely worth a few minutes to absorb this very old, large interior space.

Exit the front door of the church and turn left on Rue Théodore Aubanel which quickly brings you to the mid-point of Avignon's main Rue de la République, with an attractive fountain and small, decorated obelisk at the intersection.

You have finally reached the heart of town! Our route so far has intentionally avoided this main street, which is one of the great streets of France -- but in order to show you all the small back lanes that make Avignon so special.

Rue de la République is a wide, straight road that was cut through in the mid-1800s through what had been typical narrow winding twisted medieval streets of Avignon that you still find throughout the rest of the historic center. It is a Grand Boulevard with lovely wide sidewalks, terrific department stores, restaurants, fast food, fine cuisine, wine shops, clothing stores. It is the retail downtown center of Avignon, especially wonderful on Saturday afternoons when it is closed to traffic and become a giant pedestrian mall. In the evening after 8 PM the Rue de la République is the busiest place in town, when most of the stores in the little side lanes have closed down.



There had been plans to build a train down the middle of this boulevard but the public protested and the newly-elected mayor and council cancelled the tram. Under a revised plan the city will construct a single 6km line outside the ramparts, from the train station to a suburb. The government will build a Bus Rapid Transit line instead of a longer tramway, with the idea that cheaper construction cost will make it easier to carry out plans to make mass transit free within the city. This shift is good news for travelers because it will preserve the human scale

and peaceful character of this main road, Rue de la République.

Walk south two blocks towards the Tourist Information Office, but along the way look down Rue Frédéric Mistral, a short lane that passes under a picturesque arch that connects two historic buildings. The street's name honors one of the great literary and culture heroes of Provence, Frédéric Mistral, a writer who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1904, and was a great advocate for the independence of Provence. He went to college in Nimes with further studies in Aix, lived in Marseille, Casis and his presence is felt in Avignon, also with the



school named after him.

A major art museum, the Musée Angladon, is at the end of Rue Mistral, with paintings from the 19th and 20th centuries including masterpieces by Degas, Manet, Sisley, Van Gogh (the only one in Provence), Cézanne, Picasso and Modigliani, among others. This former private mansion of the Angladon family also exhibits furnishings, drawings and several period rooms upstairs, including an artist's studio, a Chinese room and a Renaissance room. On this same corner at 27 Rue de la République is Le Musée Lapidaire, which displays sculpture from ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt inside the chapel of a former Jesuit church. The front door is usually open so you can stand and peek in at the stone carvings and decorative arts before deciding whether to pay for a closer look, probably not.

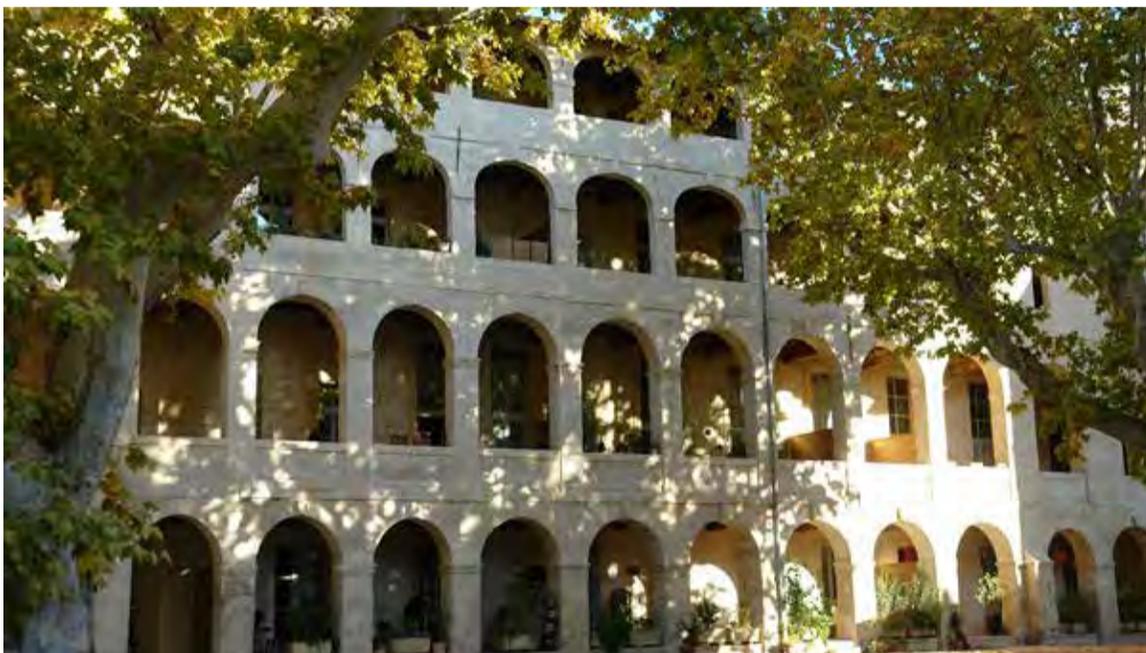
Be sure to visit the Tourist Information Office and get their free "Welcome to Avignon" brochure with descriptions of the major sites and a useful map that provides four walking routes to follow while you are exploring the city (although the routes we are providing are better). The tourist bureau has put colored arrows on the sidewalks coordinated with the map to keep you on track. To help plan excursions out of town, you can also find train and bus schedules at this office, along with a handful of brochures about packaged day-trips and any other information you might need from the helpful staff. You could also get a personal guide for walking tour of Avignon, and any other information you might need, along with hotel information.

Rue de la République leads from the main train station 700 meters straight through town to the Place de l'Horloge, lined by a lovely tree tunnel at the lower end. There are some restaurants and fast food choices along this broad artery, including a very good food emporium in the basement of the major department store, Carfours.

There are just a few more beautiful streets to see before you have finished with your main walking tour of Avignon. From the Tourist Office, depart Rue de la République and walk along Rue Joseph

Vernet, the second-most important street in town, perhaps the prettiest street in town, lined with lovely shops, galleries and restaurants. The shops stay open throughout the day, although some close in the midafternoon for a brief siesta - we're still in the south of Europe, after all.

If you came along on today's schedule, it is now late afternoon when the lighting is a delightful mix of soft sunshine and shop lights, enhancing the romantic atmosphere of Rue Joseph Vernet. Never mind the cars driving by, it is a pleasure to have a leisurely stroll along the full length of this special street. This street is really at its best late in the day and early evening when you have that magical combination of streetlights, shop fronts, busy people out walking and lingering twilight in the sky.



One of Avignon's major art museums, Le Musée Calvet, is located in the lower section of Rue Joseph Vernet. The museum is set in a magnificent 18th-century mansion with collections of fine art and decorative pieces from the 15th through 20th centuries. There are many excellent paintings representing most of the important periods of art history, but it doesn't have a lot of paintings by any single artist -- usually each great painter is represented by one example.

A popular masterpiece is a large canvas by Jan Bruegel the Elder, a typi-

cal detailed picture featuring a busy village scene with a hundred activities going on. On the ground floor of the museum you'll find some Roman antiquities including a statue of a Gallic chief and mutilated statue of a Gallic warrior with shield, and a headless figure of Venus. There are some modern French sculptures and modern paintings, and a small room containing votive altars. There are Attic tomb reliefs, Egyptian antiquities, medieval and Renaissance sculptures, and many from buildings in the environs.

There are statues of apostles heads in marble, gilded stone, Gothic tombs, St. Helena and the Virgin with Angels, a chimneypiece, tombs, paintings, fragments, prayer books, religious relics and all sorts of beautiful visuals. And there are some early artists of Avignon – there's a portrait of Charles the Bold, there's Adoration of the Shepherds. And you'll also find paintings from the 19th century by Gericault, Corot, enameled metals, ivories, Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities, and the list goes on in this lovely Musée Calvet.

Continue north on Vernet until you reach Rue St. Agricole, which offers a delightfully similar environment of pleasant shops and leads to the main square of town, the Place de l'Horloge. This little stretch is one of the most pleasant couple of blocks in town. Notice how they have iron posts to protect the pedestrians from the automobiles because this little street is open to traffic and yet remains very safe because of the design. There's a rich variety of kinds of shops here -- one of the favorites streets for just browsing along Rue St. Agricole, up and down, a street that connects two



of the most important parts of town, Vernet and l'Horloge. Don't neglect the upper several blocks of Rue Joseph Vernet, which are as beautiful and offer many more shops for browsing. It ends up at Place Crillon.

If you have been following this entire walking route the only major site left to see is the Palace of the Popes, which was viewed from the outside at the beginning of the walk. Hopefully you've had a chance to rest up and are now ready to tackle this very rewarding site, which will take some effort to conquer with its many rooms and staircases. Last entry is one hour before closing, but it takes about two hours for a proper visit, or longer if you read all the signs and watch the videos, and sometimes sit to absorb this historic atmosphere, so don't go in too late in the day. Admission hours are quite extended, so it should be easy for you to fit in this visit during our four days in Avignon: September-October 9am-7pm.



PALACE OF THE POPES

This palace is the world's largest Gothic building and one of the best examples of the International Gothic architectural style, making it the most interesting and important site to visit in Avignon. Constructed over 600 years ago, this remarkable palace ranks among the 10 most-popular sites in all of France with nearly 700,000 visitors per year, so you can understand why it is really worthwhile to pay admission and go inside. During the 14th century it was world headquarters for the Catholic Church,

making this the most important center of power in Europe for a brief period. The grand palace had 15,000 square meters of covered living space, equivalent to 4 large Gothic cathédrales. Avignon became a city of priests with churches, chapels, convents, monasteries and religious offices, yet joyously voluptuous, a moving pageant of luxurious banquets, beautiful women, ecclesiastical romps, saints and sinners -- planned for worldly profit and carried out with many sordid compromises, in the tradition of Roman popes.

The exterior of the palace looks rather foreboding, expressing a primitive feeling of tremendous strength with the fortified walls looking more like a castle than a palace. The fortress had some analogy with the contemporaneous Moorish palace of the Alhambra in that it stood outwardly grim and strong, while within it was a shrine of exquisite and luxurious art, power, decadence and revelry. There was one banquet after another, continuous festivities and enjoyment for the popes and friends. It became a place of richness and beauty, the walls glowing with azure and gold. A legion of Gallic sculptors and Italian painters lavished their art on the embellishment of the palace. The indolent voluptuousness, worldly splendor and indulgences of the debauched clergy was notorious throughout Christendom.

After the French Revolution the church lost control, and it was then used as a gloomy prison and army barracks in the 18th and 19th centuries, furniture stripped, religion erased, statues smashed and walls whitewashed. It was opened to the public as a museum in the early 20th century but the interior remained barren and uninviting, robbed of its earlier beauty. If you had visited this palace even 30 years ago the rooms were quite empty and boring, but in recent decades the government has made tremendous improvements by creating exciting new exhibits in every room, converting this into a world-class historic exhibition.



Although the original furniture is gone, the massive structure is original, with cavernous rooms offering dozens of informative displays explaining the history. Just experiencing these authentic ancient rooms and courtyards would provide a rewarding visit, but your experience is greatly enhanced by numerous state-of-the-art displays including seven videos, restored frescoes, period furnishings, sculptures, oil paintings, hundreds of artifacts, armaments, 3-D models, computer graphics, costumes, tapestries, jewelry, religious items, historic photos, special exhibits, kitchens, audio guides and detailed written descriptions. There is a lot on offer, with 25 rooms open to the public on various levels connected by steep staircases, and yet the displays do not overwhelm or obscure the building itself so you can fully appreciate the original architecture. It's such a time warp you might expect a knight in armor to charge on horseback through the courtyard and up the ramp madly waving an axe.



Upon entering your first sight will be the vast outdoor courtyard, the Cour d'Honneur, surrounded by the massive palace walls reaching 100 feet high. From the arcaded right side of this first courtyard you can enter the most impressive room, the Hall of the Audience, a huge space 150 feet long, 50 feet wide, with a 34 feet-high Gothic vaulted ceiling and massive stone pillars. This famous space could hold as many as 600 people, functioning as a banquet setting, Inquisition chamber, all-purpose room and reception hall to impress guests. Papal

conclaves were convened there for electing new popes, like the Sistine Chapel today. For half a century it held the chief law court of Christendom. The chamber is divided into two naves by five clustered pillars, from which the elegant ribs of the vaulted roof spread. It was once adorned with sumptuous Italian frescoes of which only 19 Old Testament figures and a sibyl alone remain in the southeast wall. It was probably in this hall that Clement VI received St. Catherine of Sienna, who played a major role several popes later in convincing Pope Gregory to return to Rome in 1377.

A staircase ascends to the Grande Chapelle directly above, with the same grand dimensions. The extraordinary plan of placing these two lofty chambers one above the other was a daring feat of building construction. The Chapel has no pillars, being one great nave, its 65 feet-high vault springing from engaged clustered columns that run up the walls between the windows, supported by the staircase and a large flying buttress outside the palace's south end.

Adjacent, in the Tour St-Laurent, was a robing-room. The Tour de la Garde-Robe contains a room on the 3rd floor with frescoes (hunting and fishing), probably by Italian artists (2nd half of the 14th century). The adjoining Tour des Anges contained the treasury, the bedroom of Benedict XII, and the library, then Europe's largest with 4,000 volumes. The Tour St-Jean contains two little chapels, one above the other. The lower, that of John the Baptist, has remains of frescoes (Italian; 14th cent.); the upper is adorned with scenes from the life of St. Martial by Matteo Giovanetti of Viterbo.



Next, to the west, is a wing of the Consistoire and the large dining-hall, the Grand Tinel, the longest room in the palace with a soaring ceiling. The kitchen is at one end with a high pyramidal chimney vault, called the Tour Strapade, which imparts a mysterious look, and perhaps led to its being incorrectly regarded as the chamber of torture and hall of execution of the Inquisitors. Adjoining is the Glacière, into whose underground cellars, now built up, the democrats of 1791 flung the bodies of 60 men and women they had murdered. At the northeast end, is the Tour de Trouillas, tallest and stoutest of the keeps of the mighty fortress, 175 feet high as compared with the 150 feet of the Tour de la Campana, and its walls fifteen feet thick. Nearby, enter the Salle d'Armes, with mural paintings by Simone Memmi of Siena.

Ascending higher the grand staircase, we pass on the left the small window for the Spies, and then go along a narrow lobby tunneled in the wall, to a succession of large halls, the Galerie de Conclave, the Salle des Gardes, the Salle de Réception, and then enter the Tour St. Jean, containing the Chapelle du Saint-Office.



As one wanders through the open courtyards, chambers, passages, prisons, and chapels of the fortress palace, you realize this was a town within a town, a refuge of irresistible strength with a fascinating history. It may seem confusing but there are good signs with walking routes that will keep you organized and informed as you proceed.

It's really worth walking up to the rooftop observation deck for spectacular views of the palace and out across the rooftops of the old historic center of Avignon. The view in the other direction takes in

the scene of the Petit Palais which is now an art museum, and the Roche du Dome, a beautiful park where you can walk uphill to get a nice view looking out over the Rhône River. To find this viewpoint just follow the signs for the terrace café, walking up several flights of steps and along a rooftop fortified row. And if you are there in the summer the café will be open so you can relax and have a drink while you're enjoying the view.

One design element especially noticeable from this rooftop is the entire absence of symmetry in the building complex, such as is generally aimed at in the case of the large palaces or halls of the late Gothic and Renaissance periods. Its plan follows the irregular shape of the rock upon which it is founded. Here the various blocks of building are simply placed where they are required, and the different levels and irregularities of the ground are

built upon in the most natural and convenient manner, creating a delightfully varied appearance, impressive from every point of view.

This great Palace was constructed at the beginning of the 14th century to house the pope who had relocated here from the Vatican. Of course popes had lived in Rome for more than the first thousand years of the church, but in 1305 a Frenchman, Clement the Fifth, was elected pope and he did not want to leave France. For various political and security reasons he established his papacy in Avignon and six more popes served from Avignon, all of them French, until 1377 when the papacy returned to Rome.

Gregory XI, the last of the French Popes, returned to Rome, but with his death the “Great Schism” followed resulting in two popes competing for control. Clement VII, in Avignon, was recognized by France, Spain, Portugal, Scotland, Sicily, and Cyprus, while Pope Urban VI, in Rome, was supported by Italy, Austria, and England.

After Clement VII, a second Anti-pope not recognized by Rome was installed, the insidious Benedict XIII, who proceeded to lead a life of such shocking decadence, anti-Semitism and scandal that the Church could endure it no longer, and Charles V sent soldiers to evict him from the palace. Benedict defended his position with such fierce determination he destroyed one of the arches of the Pont St. Bénézet to cut off the approaches from the river. After a five-year siege and fierce fighting that destroyed hundreds of houses and killed four



thousand inhabitants, the King’s troops stormed the fortress, but the Anti-pope saved himself by means of secret passages and staircases leading to a vault in which he got to the river and escaped across the Rhone, seeking refuge under the protection of the King of Spain in his native country, hanging on obstinately with his hollow claims until death at 90. Those two Anti-Popes occupied Avignon from 1379 to 1403, including a brief period at the end in which three different popes all claimed the throne in 1409 due to the Council of Pisa -- chaotic times for the church and an ignominious end to the history of popes in Avignon. The palace home to bishops and papal officials for another 400 years during which Avignon prospered as a thriving mercantile city.

Although construction took place in phases during 1335-1355 the various structures are unified as one large and cohesive space, filled with harmony and grand Gothic features of ribbed vaulting, massive thick walls and high windows. Construction began as a palace in 1252 well before the popes ever arrived. Major construction commenced on this magnificent assemblage by Pope John XXII, followed by Pope Benedict 12th who built up what is today called the Old Palace on the north end of the site.



A few years later Clement VI became the greatest builder, expanding it to create what is now known as the New Palace on the south side containing the Hall of the Audience and the Grand Chapel. Not a major builder, Clement VI used the wealth of the church to purchase Avignon from the Queen of Naples in 1347, effectively creating a sovereign city-state that remained property of the Vatican until united with France in 1791 following the Revolution.

As you conclude your visit it is possible to walk out the front gates, but the suggested route naturally brings you to the gift shop and wine store at the rear exit. If you chose for some reason not to tour inside the palace you can still freely enter the gift shop and

have a quick peek at the main courtyard and Hall of the Audience, with toilets available. However there are so many wonderful sights to see inside the Palace it is highly recommend that you pay the admission and visit all the rooms, which you will find very worthwhile.

After visiting the palace, it is best to exit the palace back door, through the wine bar and gift shop, into the old neighborhood where ancient Romans first established their town 2,000 years ago in order to see the simple Roman ruins on the right side of the small square, Place de l'Amirande. Avignon became a thriving colony under the Romans but retains hardly a trace of their buildings except for the remnant of a small arch and paving. Even before the Romans, Greeks were here and simpler prehistoric peoples lived in the area thousands of years earlier.



The streets beyond the Roman site, behind the palace towards the east side, are quiet, residential back alleys with few shops or sites of historic interest, only for energetic types who just want to keep walking. Most are better off returning towards the town center along an ancient lane adjacent to the palace, Rue Peyrollerie, dramatically carved into the bedrock, like walking through a natural canyon. Look above to see the massive flying buttress that holds up the wall of the Audience Hall where you began the palace visit.



There is one more museum for art-lovers to consider visiting, the Musée Calvet d'Avignon, containing a valuable collection of treasures with 500 paintings, many statues, classical antiquities and decorative arts, located at 65 rue Joseph Vernet, a lovely street passed earlier in the walk that you would enjoy seeing again. Paintings in the great hall are by Albano, Bassano, Bourdon, Canaletto, A. Carracci, Caravaggio, David, Gericault, Holbein, Poussin, Ruysdael, Veronese, and Zurbaran. The marble busts of Horace and Carle are by Thorwaldsen. In the center of an inner room, contain-

ing the medals and engravings, is the famous ivory crucifixion, 27 inches long, of one piece, a masterpiece of the sculptor Guillermin in 1659. It is said that Canova stood in ecstasy over this delicate achievement in art.

In the outer court, and in the rooms and passages on the ground floor, are Roman altars, monuments, milestones, amphorae, and 170 Latin inscriptions, found in the neighborhood, but chiefly from Orange and Vaison. Among the sculptures in relief, one represents a Roman chariot drawn by two horses with their hoofs shod. There are 27 Greek inscriptions, 3d or 4th century. The statuary and sculpture of the Middle



Ages and the Renaissance have been gathered principally from the suppressed churches and convents. The most noticeable are the mausoleums of Pope Urbain V, of Cardinals Lagrange and Brancas, and of Marshal Palice. white marble. Upstairs is a valuable collection of Roman glass and bronzes, and 20,000 coins and medals, including a complete set of the seals and medals of the Popes during their residence at Avignon, and the seal used by the Inquisition while here.



Having seen all of Avignon in this organized route, you would surely enjoy cutting loose and wandering back over these streets and discovering the hidden little passageways that abound in this old town. Walking in the early evening is one of the best ways to appreciate this special place – shops are open until 8:00pm and many locals are out enjoying the scene. It's very safe to walk around in these little streets in the evening. Of course you want to take normal precautions –don't walk around with lots of money, but you don't have to worry.

There are many fine restaurants to choose from for an excellent dinner, but maybe you have been too busy sightseeing all day and you are just too tired. For something quick and simple to eat there are snack shops, sandwich shops, pizza, and a helpful department store, Carfour, that has a nice food department in the basement where you can get bread and cheese, bottle of wine and take some snacks back to your room.



In the morning you might get up before breakfast and take a stroll. Sure, why not? There is a special lighting, there

are not many people out at this hour at about 6:30 or 7 o'clock in the morning, and yet it feels like you can have the city almost to yourself. It certainly is a good way to escape the crowds, if that's your interest. Take a sunrise stroll in these little back streets, return to your hotel breakfast and get ready for another big day.



We stay four nights in Avignon to provide time for the many sights in town and the wonderful nearby cities described in the following chapters.

Marseille has the largest population in France, and strolling along this fine street makes it seem like you are in a smaller version of Paris. The sidewalks are wide, a tram runs down the middle, shops and cafés line both sides, scooters glide by, lots of people are out strolling, trees provide greenery, four-story buildings create a human scale, and you are gliding along slightly downhill.

Several side streets that are mostly for pedestrians and lined with more shops offer tempting detours, especially rues de Rome, d'Aubagne, Saint-Ferréol, and Paradis. You can easily walk up one for a few blocks, then cross over to the next and return to La Canabière, zigzagging your way along.

How could this get much better? Yes. It gets even better when you reach the waterfront end of La Canabière at the vast marina, and with more major streets peeling off in various directions. This total walk from the train station to waterfront is only 1,000 meters, which takes 15 minutes at normal walking speed, but probably longer because you want to stop and detour along the way, adding another 15 minutes at least.



The Tourist Office is at 11, la Canabière, offering maps and information. They have an excellent free brochure with a walking tour map of the Old Town that we are heading for soon. This is all available as free downloads on their excellent web site, <http://www.marseille-tourisme.com/> Across the street you'll see the impressive neoclassical facade of the Bourse, which houses the Chamber of Commerce, established in 1599, the oldest in France. Take a quick peek inside to appreciate the large rotunda and impressive interior – maybe one of their regular

exhibits is happening. One block behind that on Cours Belunce is downtown's main shopping mall, the Centre Bourse, with a Galeries Lafayette, FNAC, and several dozen typical shops. Then continue to the waterfront, one block away.

The old port and neighborhoods around it are the most interesting parts of Marseille for the visitor. It is a wonderful marina, about 80 acres in size with 2,000 pleasure boats -- sailboats, big yachts, fishing boats, excursion and motor craft. In season you can get boat rides to view the famous Calanques, picturesque rocky coves, along the coastline. The tranquility of this "Vieux Port" has been protected because cruise and cargo ships around the bend in a different harbor, busiest in the nation.

Capital of Provence, with metropolitan population of 1.3 million, Marseille was historically the most important trade center of France and for 2,500 years this Old Port is where all the action took place. Walk along the right side of the marina on the Quai du Port, passing many attractive sidewalk restaurants that might tempt you back later. Views of the boats tied up on both sides of the basin to 50 long piers are quite lovely. Total length of this marina section is only 600 meters, very easy and enjoyable.

Just before reaching the end of the marina, cross the street at the traffic light, and continue on Quai du Port another short block, then walk up two levels of the stone St-Laurent steps to a terrace where you will get the best view of Marseille. At the edge of this terrace you'll enjoy a grand vista of the marina and the two forts from the 17th century, Saint-Jean and Saint-Nicolas, guarding each side of the harbor mouth.

Continue along the terrace to a black metal pedestrian bridge that leads to the more terraces and the spectacular



Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations. Opened here in 2013, this bold modern building built on reclaimed land in the harbor is dedicated to Mediterranean civilization, past and present. Called MuCEM (in French: Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée), the building is a cube of 15,000 square meters surrounded by a latticework shell of fiber reinforced concrete, houses exhibits on two different levels, with a café on the roof and a cluster of gourmet restaurants inside supervised by Michelin 3-star chef, Gérald Passadat. One million artifacts make up the permanent collection, with continuous special exhibits as well, representing dozens of cultures. This bold architecture was designed by Rudy Ricciotti in collaboration with the architect Roland Carta.



OLD TOWN

The Old Town, called Le Panier, extends out from the museum, but was totally rebuilt after World War II because the occupying German army systematically demolished nearly the entire old section to root out resistance fighters.

After the war this zone was rebuilt in the old style with the narrow lanes, but frankly it is still a bit scruffy, with lots of graffiti scrawled on beat-up old buildings -- which makes it all the more interesting as a neighborhood in transition, becoming a newly-hip, authentic, bohemian

space, away from the tourist crowd.

The urban explorer will enjoy various pedestrian lanes here and picturesque staircase streets, with a scatter of neighborhood shops and cafés. There is peaceful and quiet atmosphere in this Old Town, which seems quite safe to walk through during the daytime. Shoppers will appreciate the little boutiques and craft stores selling handmade goods made in the area -- ceramics, jewelry, artsy items at reasonable prices.

Upon plunging into the Old Town from the museum terrace, you will be assisted by a helpful red line that has been painted directly on the sidewalk to guide your way so that you don't get lost. This is cleverly matched by a red line on the free map provided by the Tourist Office. However, you might be tempted to deviate from suggested routes and explore whatever lane, staircase or plaza looks good. For example Place de Lenche is not on the red line but makes a good starting point, easily reached from the museum terrace along busy Rue St-Laurent. On a nice day Place de Lenche is filled with outdoor restaurant tables, making it one of those normal-but-special places for the visitor.



On the other hand if you want to see the cathedral, a giant neo-Byzantine edifice constructed in the late 19th century, exit the other corner of Place de Lenche on Rue de la Cathedral. A contrary option for time-constricted walkers who just want the minimal shortcut out of this Old Town, is depart Place de Lenche from the northwest corner on Montée des Accoules then walk up the staircase and straight across five blocks, coming out by Rue Caisserie, then turn right, back to the harbor, all in 10 minutes. However that quick getaway will deprive you of several

characteristic narrow lanes, which most hardy travelers enjoy. For best results through the scenic Old Town, get back on the suggested red line by departing Place de Lenche along narrow, delightful Rue de l'Évêché for two blocks to Place des Cantons, then to Rue de Petit Puits, Rue du Panier (which gives its name to this district), and connects with Rue de Moulins, a picturesque staircase street leading into a quiet residential plaza. At this point you can find a direct route out along Montée des Accoules downhill, down, down, down towards the port, ending up at Place Jules Verne and Hôtel de Ville by the marina. This will require a little bit of up and down, after all this neighborhood is on a hill, but just follow the lanes and you'll easily find your way back to the marina.



You'll now be walking along the waterfront promenade lined with a dozen cafés and restaurants fronting the harbor. At the end of the quay there is another lovely street you might enjoy a short stroll along, the busy Rue de la République, a major boulevard designed by Haussmann with wide sidewalks and shops for blocks. If interested, walk up one side four blocks to the round Place Sadi-Carnot, where the tram joins in, turn around and walk back the other way, returning to the port.

A pleasant and comfortable section of the waterfront is across the marina on the south side, with a series of broad avenues, plazas, pedestrian streets and many restaurants. Walk past the top of the port on Quai de la Fraternité to Cours J. Ballard and explore the four blocks leading from here along the waterfront to Place aux Huiles, with side lanes for pedestrians only. Running through the middle is a classic pedestrian street, Rue Saint-Saëns, leading to Place Thiars. The city's largest outdoor plaza is one block inland with many outdoor restaurants, Cours Honoré d'Estienne d'Orves, in an open space that was created in the 1980s after community activists successfully pressured the government to demolish a huge multi-level parking lot and put the cars underground.

Obviously there's a lot more to see in Marseille but we've just been doing a little reconnaissance, a little walk through some of the main highlights. It is one of the most visited cities in all of France, with 4 million annual tourists, so there are many more things to see. For example there are a dozen museums, hilltop viewpoints, modern architectural landmarks, bouillabaisse, tourist tram, bicycle tours, old churches, wine tastings, etc. However, our stroll through the center has shown you the real heart of the city in all its authentic diversity.

You could easily walk back from the Old Port to the train station, which is just 800 meters slightly uphill from this part of town, but instead, try the metro, with a convenient entrance across the street from the marina. It's very easy to get around on this underground train – just a couple of stops from the harbor to the station. It's the only metro station on record with a big fish tank, which has been here for many years -- the fish are doing quite nicely. It's a good diversion to check them out while waiting for the next train, which arrives in a few minutes.



When you get out of the metro at the St-Charles Station it's easy to find your way -- just follow the signs. Everything is very clean, safe and well lit, and they have big escalators. The metro is deep underground so don't climb up the steep staircase outside the building, even if you walked here – go inside and take the escalators. It just takes a few minutes to arrive in the central station platform area.

They have done an incredible job of rebuilding and expanding and modernizing this train station in recent years.

It seems to have doubled in size and become an indoor shopping mall and entertainment center. You might even see musicians – how nice to have a piano available for the public. Anybody can just sit down and start playing.

We are continuing our journey to Aix, described in next chapter.



HISTORY

People have lived in the Marseilles area at least from 20,000 B.C. as shown by early cave paintings of that date. Recognized as the oldest town in France and one of the oldest in Europe, Marseille was founded about 600 B.C. by Phoceans, a Greek culture from the coast of Turkey who named it Massilia. This seafaring society established many coastal towns along the Mediterranean, including Nice, Antibes, La Ciotat, and St-Gilles, and they explored part of the coasts of Africa, but Massilia was their

most important.

Ages passed, and other Greek settlers arrived, bringing with them corn, wine, and olive trees, and the people of Massilia became expert in the manufacture of jewelry and the first soap in the world, according to Pliny.

With increasing Roman influence by the 5th century B.C. Marseille became an important trading center with goods brought by ships across the Mediterranean and transferred to the Rhone River for delivery north into Gaul. Romans constructed a town but the spirit and population base of the founding Greeks kept those ancient cultural traditions alive.

Massilia invoked the aid of Rome but retained her independence until, having sided with Pompey in the Civil War, it was besieged and captured by Julius Caesar in 49 B.C. and yet maintained its status as a free city, with a diminished importance.

After the fall of Rome the town was sacked by the Visigoths and the Burgundians and destroyed by the Saracens, but recovering from these disasters it became part of the Kingdom of Arles, governed by a viscount and bishop. In 1218 it became independent, but then conquered by Charles of Anjou about 1250, it fell under the sway of the Counts of Provence. It was sacked by Aragon in 1423 who ruled over it until annexation to France in 1482.

On several other occasions the citizens showed their independent spirit, as in refusing to recognize Henri IV until 1596, and also joining the War of the Fronde, which attempted to prevent the absolute power of the monarchy. It was therefore deprived of its privileges by Louis XIV in 1660, who invaded and built the two forts we see today at the mouth of the harbor to subjugate the locals.

Marseille became the main Mediterranean port for France during the 18th century, with continued economic growth. The prosperity of Marseille as a seaport was greatly increased by the conquest of Algiers (1830), defeat of the Barbary pirates and the construction of the Suez Canal (1869).

During the 20th century Marseille became known for its extensive organized crime networks. After WWII, much of the city was rebuilt during the 1950s. From the 1950s onward, the city served as an entrance port for over a million immigrants to France. In 1962, there was a large influx from the newly independent Algeria, including around 150,000 returned Algerian settlers. Many immigrants have stayed and given the city a French-African quarter with a large market.

Currently, Marseille is a major French center for trade and industry, with excellent roads, seaport and airport. Marseille Provence Airport, is the fourth largest in France. Marseille was recently named the most dynamic of France's large cities, with 7,200 companies created in the city since 2000.





AIX-EN-PROVENCE

Aix-en-Provence is one of the prettiest towns in all of France, so lovely that various French surveys have named it the most desirable city in which to live and retire, due to its special ambience and beauty. The modest population of just 150,000 residents gives it a small-town charm, yet Aix is big enough to provide all the necessities and comforts of urban living. Nearly 30 percent are university students, lending an air of youthful energy, culture and enthusiasm, plus you'll always find budget places to eat when

there are so many young people around. Aix marks the spot for shopping, wandering and eating.

It is easy to visit Aix on a daytrip from Avignon on the high-speed TGV train, which also makes it convenient to include Marseille later in the same day. All three cities are connected by one TGV train line, with brief travel times of 20 or 30 minutes between each place, although you will have bus transfers to the TGV stations adding another ten minutes (details below). Avignon is the large city we use as the ideal home base for visiting Provence, because you can easily get around by train to surrounding cities.

Upon arrival in Aix at the TGV station you take a convenient shuttle bus into town, then walk 5 minutes (400 meters) from the bus station into the center along Avenue des Belges. Upon arriving at the big traffic circle, take a short detour to the Tourist Information Office, by turning left into Les Allées Provençales, a dazzling modern shopping mall that will already tempt you with 45 stores. The friendly and efficient Tourist Information Office has an excellent free map of the city and other brochures. The staff speaks English and can answer your questions, provide sightseeing tips, suggest restaurants or hotels and point you in the right direction.

It is always helpful to do some research, especially if you are only in town for a few hours on a day-trip, with limited time that you don't want to squander by getting lost or going the wrong way. However, while it is good to develop a plan for your visit and locate the various attractions and pedestrian lanes on a map to make sure you find the right neighborhoods, you also want to leave time for the aimless wander, follow your nose and stroll about casually, turning here or there depending on which twist looks good at the moment. The Old Town is small enough you will not get lost for long, yet has so much to explore you will want to spend at least half a day here. This mystery of discovery is always a big part of the travel adventure.

WALKING ROUTE

Begin at the giant fountain called La Rotonde, the largest of Aix's fountains, 32 meters wide and 12 meters high, set in the middle of the hectic traffic circle with cars swirling all about at one end of Cours Mirabeau, the main street of town. Things will get more peaceful soon in the pedestrian zone once you leave this busy Place Général de Gaulle. On top of the fountain are three large statues representing justice, agriculture, and fine arts, while 12 bronze lions along with swans, angels and dolphins surround the cast iron basin.



What would Aix-en-Provence be without its fountains? There are 40 public fountains that refresh the city giving it a softness and grace, many of which you will find in your walks.

Proceed along, Cours Mirabeau, the tree-lined boulevard that was established in 1651 and is sometimes considered the most attractive boulevard in all France: lined with shops, outdoor cafés and restaurants in all price ranges along a wide sidewalk with magnificent plane trees forming a canopy towering overhead.

A signature site of town are three moss-covered fountains in the middle of the street, first the “fountain of the nine canons”, then “mossy fountain” from which flows warm thermal water nourishing the green moss, and at the end of the boulevard the fountain of Good King René, designed in 1819.



The Cours makes a classic place to sit at one of its 14 cafés or on a bench and while away some time. It's a great spot for people watching, whether it's sunny or cloudy, warm or cold, any season, it doesn't matter, it's always a busy place. The Cours' most famous café is Les Deux Garçons, at number 53.

Cours Mirabeau is a wide boulevard that does allow cars but even here, most of the roadway consists of wide sidewalks, with only two central lanes for a small amount of motor traffic, primarily for small public buses and service vehicles. The historic Old Town, called “Le Vieil Aix,” is on the north side of the Cours, one of the world's loveliest pedestrian zones, an idyllic urban landscape of pretty, low-rise buildings three and four centuries old, criss-crossed by a maze of tranquil pedestrian lanes lined with shops and cafés.



LITTLE LANES

When finished strolling along Cours Mirabeau, enter the magic of the Old Town through one of the various side streets. Aix has one of France's best collections of narrow lanes for a pleasant stroll, something like a miniature, old-fashioned Paris without the noise, crowds or congestion. This lovely neighborhood is a curving grid of more than 30 streets that are all entertaining to walk along.

This is French living and urban planning at its best, with fountains, benches, trees, shops and cafés always around.

The map from the Tourist Information Office shows the main part of the Old Town with the streets that are good for exploring lined in green, which is nearly every street! To narrow things down a bit and offer a navigating sequence, we suggest specific routes offering you the choice to follow our directions or toss them aside and just wander. Your personal route might be determined by spontaneous decisions made at each corner, looking one way and the next to see which looks best. It can be helpful to follow a plan and keep track of where you are going in order to see as many sights as possible without getting lost, and not wander beyond the center to less interesting fringes. Walking these narrow lanes will be delightful no matter where you go, and within a few hours you can easily experience most of it.

Leaving the markets out the south end of Place de Verdun, walk along Rue Marius Reynaud two blocks west to Place Saint-Honoré, a typical small plaza with a fountain in the middle and five different named streets feeding into it, each worth a glance. If you had skipped the open markets and are coming directly from Cours Mirabeau you could walk a block up Rue Fabrot or Rue Clemenceau to get here. Continue west on the same street,



now called Rue Espariat, for another block to Place d'Albertas, a small square enclosed by mansions with Baroque facades dating back to 1745, and a cast iron fountain in the center. You are now in position to walk north along the main pedestrian lane that winds through the heart and soul of the Old Town, now called Rue Aude, soon changing names to Foch. Those eager to purchase souvenirs, clothing, foods, jewelry, art, postcards, perfumes, crafts, antiques and fabrics will have abundant choices on this street, although strolling and looking are probably more important for most travelers than actual shopping. It is The Great Street of town for people watching and absorbing Aix at its best.



You will soon arrive at the main and prettiest square, Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, with City Hall, café tables in the middle and shops along two sides. Drop anchor for a while at a terrace café to absorb the grand sights all around: the baroque city hall's columns and triangular pediment define the square, punctuated by the tall Clock Tower and a Roman column in the center, sheltered under a generous sprinkle of trees and livened by a constant parade of people passing through this central crossroad.

The Clock Tower was built in 1510 as a bell tower, with clock added in 1661, and it became the symbol of local power in the city, looming over City Hall. There are four wooden figures which appear on the hour and represent the seasons. The arch at the base of the wall is a remnant of the fortified wall that once surrounded the town, and when you later go through the arch it can lead you along pedestrian streets in three different directions.

The neoclassical grain market on Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, now a post office, completes the scene with a matching pediment of sculpted, allegorical figures. The fountain is considered the geographic center of the city and was designed by Georges Vallon in 1755 and sculpted by Jean Chastel Pancras in 1789.



Take a right at the north end of the plaza and walk east on Rue Paul Bert to reach a typical street in the heart of town, Rue Boulegon, just one block long yet fascinating in its own right. There's

a slight curve to it, arousing curiosity about what lies beyond, luring you further along. This is just outside the pedestrian zone but even here it is very quiet. Some cars are allowed, but they need special permits to park in the area, so it retains that smooth ambience, which is so attractive that native son Paul Cézanne, one of the world's great artists, chose to live his final years here on Rue Boulegon.

Place des Trois Ormeaux is one of the prettier little plazas and can be glimpsed in an easy four-block circular detour from Rue Boulegon. Walk south two blocks on the rather uninteresting Rue de Matheron, arriving in a few minutes at the charming Place des Trois Ormeaux, a fountain in the middle with an octagonal basin and shops around. Rue Jaubert is a nice lane leading west from here to another central square, Place Richelme, the site of a small, daily produce and flower market.

The next major destination is three blocks further, reached in a different route by walking along Rue des Marseillais then turning right on Rue de la Verrerie to the Forum des Cardeurs, Aix's largest square. Its pastel façades surround the large central plaza, creating a distinctly Provençal atmosphere, enhanced by a row of outdoor restaurants.



Cardeurs is often frequented by university students and the local yuppie crowd out for lunch, so it's a prime spot to have a meal. There are several outdoor restaurants with awnings stretched along the side of the square, and a very nice preferred cluster of eateries bunched at the east end, with reasonable prices and delicious foods. You will be tempted by an enormous variety of meals in all price ranges throughout Aix, from the simple take-out sandwiches to the highest quality haute cuisine. You can't walk a minute without seeing more food, and Cardeurs

is one of your better dining bets.

Place des Cardeurs used to be just a wide street running through the city, as were many of today's pedestrian lanes. Fifty years ago there were cars running through sections like this, but now it has been converted into this wonderful broad plaza, with a similar ambience as Italy. After all, we are in the South of France, and there is a definite Mediterranean twist that is a little different than most other French towns.



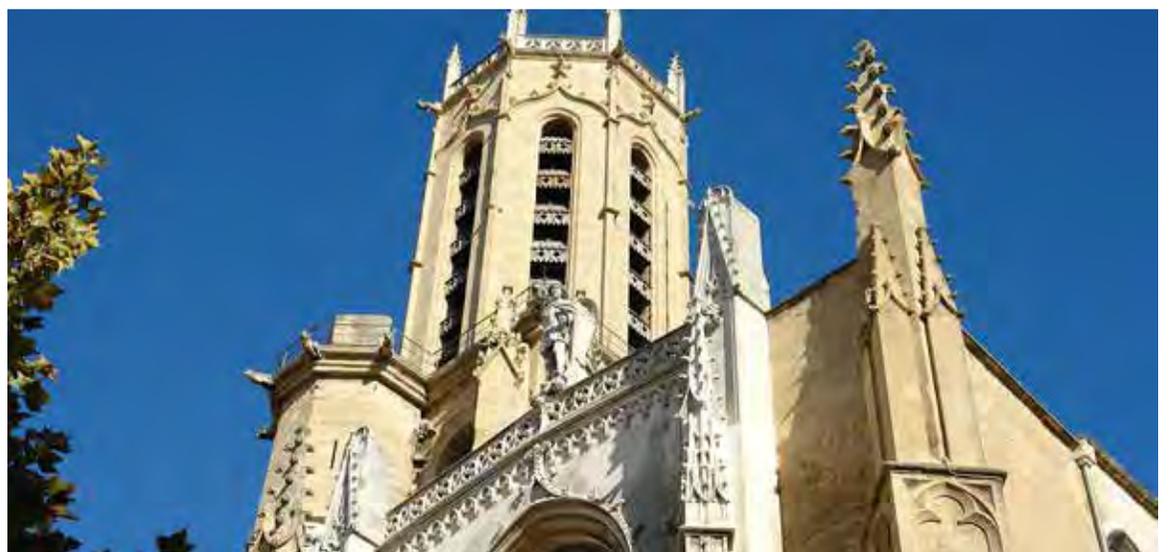
For an extra walking bonus from the plaza you could walk past the restaurants of Cardeurs to the west end, take a left on Rue Lieutaud for one block, arriving at Rue des Cordeliers, another one of the major streets of the zone. Here you might be tempted to stroll back and forth to take in the many lovely shops, eventually looping back east to the main square, Place de l'Hôtel de Ville. This diversion offers guaranteed fun.

That main pedestrian lane continues north from Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, changing names now to Rue Gaston de Saporta, another beautiful segment in the center of

town, just a few blocks long and connecting the two most important places, City Hall Square with the Cathedral. This is a complete street, the perfect pedestrian lane with little shops offering postcards and souvenirs, ice cream, sandwiches and clusters of the university buildings, often with students out front between classes.

We now reach the northern limit of our suggested walking tour, the ancient Cathédrale St-Sauveur, a church of very early origin that dates in its present form from the 11th century: the choir is from 1285, one aisle was added in the 14th century, and another in the 17th century. In English we call it St. Savior Cathedral. It is an architectural patchwork that has survived the centuries. Built according to legend on the site of a pagan temple, it was constantly revised and unites three naves of three different styles -- the Romanesque, Gothic, and Baroque.

As you enter, to the right is the 6th century, octagonal Baptistery, rebuilt in 1577. It contains eight antique columns, six in green marble and two in granite, said to be from the earlier Roman Temple of Apollo on this site. A few unformed fragments of the great Temple of Apollo remain in the walls of Saint-Sauveur. Aix was the earliest Roman settlement in Gaul, the Aquæ Sextiæ of Baths, Temples, Theatres, and great wealth.



It is a well-arranged display where the evolution of Provençal architecture may be completely followed. No-where in Provence can be found richer Gothic details. This is one of the largest Cathedrals of the province, and the buildings which form the ecclesiastical group include baptistry, Cloister, church, and archbishop's Palace of many epochs and styles. The central nave, whose whole length is so little broken by entrances to the side aisles, seems almost solidly enclosed by its massive walls. St. Savior also hosts the altarpiece painting of the Burning Bush, a masterpiece of the 15th century.

The beautiful façade is one of the most charming portals of Provençal Gothic. Decorated buttresses stand on either side of a large, shallow recess which has a high and pointed arch, and in the center, a slim pier divides the entrance-way into two parts, symbolizing the final division of the Blessed and Damned. The Tower, 210 ft. high, dates from 1323, but the work dragged along with many periods of absolute idleness, until 1880, when it was finally completed.



You'll find a lot to see in front of the cathedral in addition to the beautiful façade, such as a picturesque sidewalk café, a great spot to sit and take a break, have a drink and enjoy the scenery. The pedestrian lane passes right by the café. Just in front of the cathedral is the main university, which has been here for centuries. You might notice students out front on a class break – it's a popular place for young people to hang out. In front is a bust of Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580-1637), a patron of letters, art, and science, who lived in Aix.

Devoted fans of Paul Cézanne will want to visit the artist's studio, which is preserved just as he left it in 1906 at the end of his long, productive life. Located about 800 meters north of the Cathedral, at 9 avenue Paul Cézanne, it does not have any paintings by the artist, but his brushes, furniture, desk, hat and wine bottle are still there. A self-guided walk In The Footsteps of Cézanne is also available, passing by 34 sites in town where he spent time (www.cezanne-en-provence.com). Cézanne never got proper recognition from his townsfolk even though he lived and painted here for nearly his entire life, and as a result, none of his paintings were displayed in town until recent years. The Granet Museum, Aix's most important art museum, does now have 10 Cézannes, mostly minor works except a version of his famous "Bathers" and many works by other important artists. It is located three blocks south of the Cours at Place Saint Jean de Malte in a noble building that once housed the school Cézanne attended.

After finishing with this north part of town and the Cathedral, backtrack, choosing some alternative routes heading south to wander through. You will probably run into some street musicians at some point, so stop and listen for a few minutes and look around at the people, building details, shop fronts and sidewalk action while absorbing the general vibe. All too often in the rush of traveling you come upon sidewalk musicians, take it for granted and don't even stop. But it's usually worth a moment to listen -- and they don't mind if you stop right in front and get real close: that's why they are there, and they would appreciate a little gratuity in return, of course.

As you wander south consider another bonus: walk on that same main lane you came up on, Saporta for a few blocks to Foch, then turn tight at Rue Bedaride for a couple blocks to Rue Aumone Vielle, where a right turn brings you to the charming little Place Ramus, with a couple of tempting restaurants. Continue along turning left on Rue Aumone Vielle to one of the most charming plazas,



Place des Tanneurs, with the usual fountain, café, restaurant and shops. Two delightful streets lead from this plaza and you have to pick one or the other or walk back and forth to experience both: Rue des Tanneurs and Rue de la Couronne, which ends in yet another gorgeous plaza, Place des Augustines. Both streets end up back at Rue Espariat, among the best streets of Aix. This town is too much!

Turning west on Rue Espariat would bring you in one block back to the big fountain where you began, Place de la Rotonde, and from there is it a 5-minute walk back to the bus station for your departure.

Or, if you have any energy and time left and want a final bonus, take a walk on the south side of the Cours through what is called the Mazarin district. This rectangular grid, five blocks long and wide, has a series of attractive mansions that are now divided into private apartments, along with a significant art museum, Musée Granet, exhibiting a broad range from prehistory up through Aix's most famous native son, Paul Cézanne.



Walk along the Cours to Rue du 4 Septembre and walk three blocks to a whimsical fountain with four dolphins and an obelisk sits in the middle of Place Dauphin, the central crossroads of this neighborhood. The Fountain of the Four Dolphins is one of the oldest fountains in Aix, sculpted in 1667 by Jean-Claude Rambot. It represents four smiling dolphins, each with a different expression, around a pyramid that was originally crowned by a statue of St Michel and was successively replaced by a lily, a Maltese cross and a pinecone.

From here it is an easy walk back on the Cours towards the Place de la Rotonde where you first arrived, and continue on down Avenue des Belges to the bus station for your shuttle bus to the TGV station for the ride back to Avignon.

ART of WALKING

As you wander through Aix you might sometimes find yourself going in circles, a bit lost, which is part of the charm of exploring a place for the first time. Don't be dismayed if you are walking along a lane for the second or third time, in an opposite direction – you will always notice new things. That is actually a good technique for exploring those intriguing streets that are fun but don't connect with anything, leading nowhere -- so just enjoy it as a little round-trip and walk back the same way. It's a fact that we only absorb a small fraction of the sights and stimuli around us, so a second and third visit down the same attractive lane can be quite entertaining. Be sure to also look up above those mesmerizing shop fronts to appreciate the beautiful architecture, much of which dates back to the Baroque 17th century, the third largest such collection in France.



It was the French back in the 19th century who perfected the art of walking for sheer pleasure. They called it the flaneur, the aimless wanderer where you're just walking along, alert to your surroundings, observing things, interesting, even unimportant details, not so much worried about your destination, but enjoying the journey. This art of walking, or flaneur, was well described by a 19th century French writer named Victor Fournel, who asks us: "have you reflected on everything contained in the term flaneur, this most enchanting word which is revered by the poets? Go on infinite investigations through the streets and promenades, drift along with your nose in the wind with both hands in your pocket, with an umbrella under your arm, and an open-minded spirit. Walk

along with serendipity without pondering where, and without hurrying. Stop in front of stores to regard their images, at street corners to read their signs, by the book stands to touch and smell. Give yourself over, captivated and enraptured with all your senses and all your mind to the spectacle.” The 19th century Parisians elevated walking to a fine art.

While some of the most-charming lanes are pedestrian-only, many streets do have an automobile lane down the middle allowing some motorized access, but they drive slowly and you hardly see vehicles driving through this restricted historic area. There are protected sidewalks for pedestrians with many people casually walking in the middle of the narrow roads, keeping an ear open for oncoming traffic. Even the public buses are very tiny for just a few passengers, electric powered, providing excellent, quiet service. It is all very safe and delightful with a relaxed atmosphere throughout town.



It is a fascinating place to explore on foot, with never a dull moment and very few boring blank walls. The buildings are human scale, no higher than five stories throughout the Old Town, arranged together in a medium-density that creates urban vitality, with shops and cafés lined up along most of the lanes. This automobile-restricted zone is only about one half-mile across, so you can see most of it in a few hours, but it feels larger because the lanes are narrow and winding in a pleasant tangle, and offers enough variety that you might be tempted to spend the entire day exploring.



Throughout this central historic district you'll find an interesting mixture of restaurants, shops, a few offices and apartments upstairs. This blend of live, work and play creates an ambience that modern city planners are striving to re-create and yet here it just sort of happened naturally, evolving in place over the centuries. There might not have been specific our scientific urban plan to create it, the town just grew this way, which has kept the central part of the city alive and thriving. The world needs to learn from and re-create this human-

istic way of living, as we rebuild our decaying inner cities and build new towns from scratch.

This is a much different lifestyle than American suburbia where you have to drive to everything, and you might be living an hour away from work. There is nothing in walking distance of where you live except a few more houses, which might have some charms: you've got a big house and a yard lordling over your own little kingdom. There is a quietude and comfortable isolation about that life, but in the European towns you have a much more sociable and convivial atmosphere, and this compact urban life is better for the global environment.

Aix was founded by the ancient Romans more than 2000 years ago, and originally called Agux Sextix. It was the oldest Roman colony in Gaul, and owed its Latin name jointly to the thermal waters and the consul's Sextius Calvinus by whom it was colonized in the year 123 BC. 20 years later, the Roman general, Marius, defeated the Pentanes in the vicinity, but of course little now remains of those ancient monuments which embellished Aix before the barbaric invasions. From these invasions Aix recovered slowly and then became the capital of Provence with a refined court, where the Provençal language was fostered.

Aix was annexed to the French crown in 1481, and in 1536 it was taken by Charles V of Spain, who proclaimed himself king of Arles and Provence, but had to evacuate two months later. During the next couple of centuries

Aix, suffered from a variety of religious wars, but it survived in came through as one of the shining jewels of Provence.

That's a brief look at Aix. It's an amazing place to visit, but you don't need to spend more than a day to see it, so if you are staying in nearby Avignon or Arles, it is not worth re-locating from your comfortable hotel to spend the night in Aix. Or vice versa, if you choose Aix as your home base, day-trips from here to nearby cities will do just fine, Including a look at the big city of Marseille, second largest in France.



We started out with a rather outrageous claim, that the French consider Aix to be the most desirable city in the country in which to live. Specifically, if they could retire anywhere in France, they would choose Aix and I do believe in today's program we have proven their case. It's a beautiful town.

The setting is magnificent because you've got open countryside all around it. You're in the South of France, which means the climate is going to be wonderful all year round. It's going to be mild in the summer and very pleasant in the winter. Aix never gets bitter cold. Rarely would it get hot.

So you really have the best of all worlds. It's a sophisticated urban place, and yet it's a small city, so you've got all the amenities: the walking distance, you've got a shop on the corner you got the café around the bend. there's a bar, there are restaurants, outdoor plazas, fountains, beautiful boulevards, wonderful colors of the buildings, tree-lined streets -- what more could you possibly ask for? There's a mix here in population of University kids, there's older folks, there's working people, there's some immigrant vitality. You've got train stations that will take you to some nearby places that are wonderful, such as Arles and Marseille, you've got the entire Cote d'Azur you are just an hour or two away. And you're in Provence. This is the good life.

Don't tell anybody else, but we have found one of the most beautiful towns in the world.



ARLES

One of the best day-trips from Avignon is to the beautiful city of Arles, easily reached by direct train in just 17 minutes from the convenient Avignon Centre station. The rail station in Arles is also close to the Old Town, about a 400 meter walk to the entrance, and another 400 meters to the first major site, the Roman amphitheater. The old town of Arles is comfortably small, 8 blocks by 6 blocks (1000 meters by 600 meters), so it's easy to see the central

area on foot. For a modest-sized community of 50,000, Arles has plenty of attractions yet retains a friendly, small-town atmosphere. You might consider staying overnight and spend a few days here, using it as a base for travelling out to St-Remy and Les Baux by bus, about a 50-minute ride, and

Arles is most famous for its connections with Vincent Van Gogh, who spent one of his final years here creating 200 paintings and 100 drawings, one of the most productive periods in all of art history. Two of the most important historic buildings in the south of France are also here: that ancient Roman arena, 2000 years old, and a me-

dieval 1000-year-old church, St-Trophime. This was an important Roman town founded by Julius Caesar about 2000 years ago and now is one of the most charming places in all of Europe to visit.

Along with the compelling history, a major appeal is found in the lovely pedestrian promenades, landmark buildings, museums and tranquil plazas, all of which make Arles another one of Europe's must-see destinations.

Much of the town center was constructed during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and has been beautifully maintained, still functioning as apartments and modern shops. Built largely from stone, they seem immortal. Most of the medieval wall around the town is intact, enclosing the space and still protecting it from undue modernization. Nothing much seems to have happened to disturb these old buildings, so the historic center looks as it did centuries ago, except along the noisy, modern face of Arles on the broad Boulevard des Lices, bordering the south edge of the old section, with busy traffic, broad sidewalks, outdoor cafes and a world-class Saturday market.

Primary strategy for sightseeing is simply stroll up and down the main lanes to catch their different moods during the day and night. Theoretically one could cover the entire pedestrian zone in 30 minutes because the actual length of road set aside exclusively for pedestrians is only a half-mile; however there are many other small lanes and plazas with great charm and very little traffic that are fun to explore. You could spend two or three days here and enjoy



the different museums, historic sites, the cafés around the squares in the restaurants, but this chapter will assume you are fitting all of the sights into one day, which can be easily done. Arrive after breakfast, walk all day, take in a museum, stay for dinner, and then take a train back to your home base in Avignon.

WALKING ROUTE

Upon arrival stroll south a few minutes from the train station to the big traffic circle and continue to the wall of Arles on the other side. Enter the town gateway into Rue de la Cavalerie, which leads in four blocks to Arles' most spectacular site, the Roman Amphitheater -- total distance about 800 meters from the train station.

On the way in you pass through Place Voltaire, a charming spot with its little tree-shaded square in the center surrounded by lovely old buildings. It's more of a local place than a tourist spot, even though there are a couple of hotels nearby, so you really feel like more of a resident rather than a visitor when in Place Voltaire, especially in the morning calm. A couple of cafés and small food shops are open, but nothing much else is happening. There are several nice little two-star hotels located around the plaza in this part of town with reasonable rates, including Gaughin and Mirador.



ROMAN SITES

The arena, called Les Arènes d'Arles, is about 2000 years old, one of seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites in town. With a capacity of 23,000 people, it is a smaller version of Rome's Colosseum, which was completed about ten years earlier. Amazingly, the Arena is still in use today for concerts, bullfights and other festivities, but no longer for gladiator battles or chariot

aces. It is built of large blocks of stone without mortar, 136 meters long and 107 wide, surrounded by a double wall 21 meters high, each with two stages of 60 arches, the lower Doric, the upper Corinthian. From around the arena rise 43 levels of stone seats. The external walls are massively, ruggedly complete, and the vaulted corridors seem as solid as the day they were built.



In the 8th century the amphitheater was converted into a fortress, three of whose towers are still standing. Later it was converted into a fortified village with 200 apartments built within, but they were removed in the 1820s and the arena was restored to its original condition. It opens for public visits at 9:00 (10:00 in the winter), but just seeing the outside is quite a thrill. It is the great sight in Arles. Next to the arena you'll notice an outdoor theater, which is a modern re-construction of the Roman building created here 2,000 years ago for Emperor Augustus,

originally 105 meters in its greatest diameter. There is little left because from the 5th century onwards it was used as a quarry for the building of churches and the cloister of St-Trophime. On the stage once rose a colonnade, of which two marble columns remain. The grooves for the lowering of the curtain are still visible. The theater was richly decorated, and many works of art found here are now in the local museum. The Venus of Arles, now one of the Louvre's treasures, was unearthed here in 1651. Only a few broken columns are original but the design is based on authentic Roman plans, and modern performances are presented regularly.

Henry James was impressed: "The Roman theater at Arles seemed to me one of the most charming and touching ruins I had ever beheld; I took a particular fancy to it. It is less than a skeleton...for it consists only of half a dozen bones. The way in which every seat commanded the stage is a lesson to the architects of our epoch, as also the immense size of the place is a proof of extraordinary power of voice on the part of the Roman actors."



MAIN SQUARE

From the Arena, walk two blocks down the Rue de la Calade to the center of the Old Town, the Place de la République, which contains City Hall, the main church, an obelisk centerpiece with fountain, and is flanked by shopping lanes. The monolith obelisk, 49 feet high, was hewn by the Romans from the quarries of Esterel. It stood originally in the Circus at the southwest corner of the town, of which no vestiges remain.



Primary attraction of this Place de la République is the former cathedral, Église St-Trophime, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the richest and most majestic church in all Provence. It has a fantastic series of Byzantine sculptures dating back to the 12th centuries around the door

on the façade that have been recently restored to their pristine beauty. Various scenes from the Bible are depicted, in particular, the Last Judgment, with Christ in the top center, on the left, good souls who are being sent to heaven, and on the right side, not so lucky, bad folks pulled to hell by gargoyles. The apostles are along the row below Christ, surrounded by symbols of the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Other scenes include the Annunciation, Baptism of Christ and Adoration of the Magi.

The church is a mix of Romanesque and Gothic, from the 12th-century right up through 1500. There was an earlier church on the same site dating back to the 5th century and a Roman temple before that. According to legend, Trophimus of Arles became the first Bishop of the area, and this church was subsequently named after him. He became St. Trophime and his relics were installed in the new Cathedral here around the year 1152. It's believed that the apse and transept of the church were built first and the nave and bell tower were added later in the 12th century.

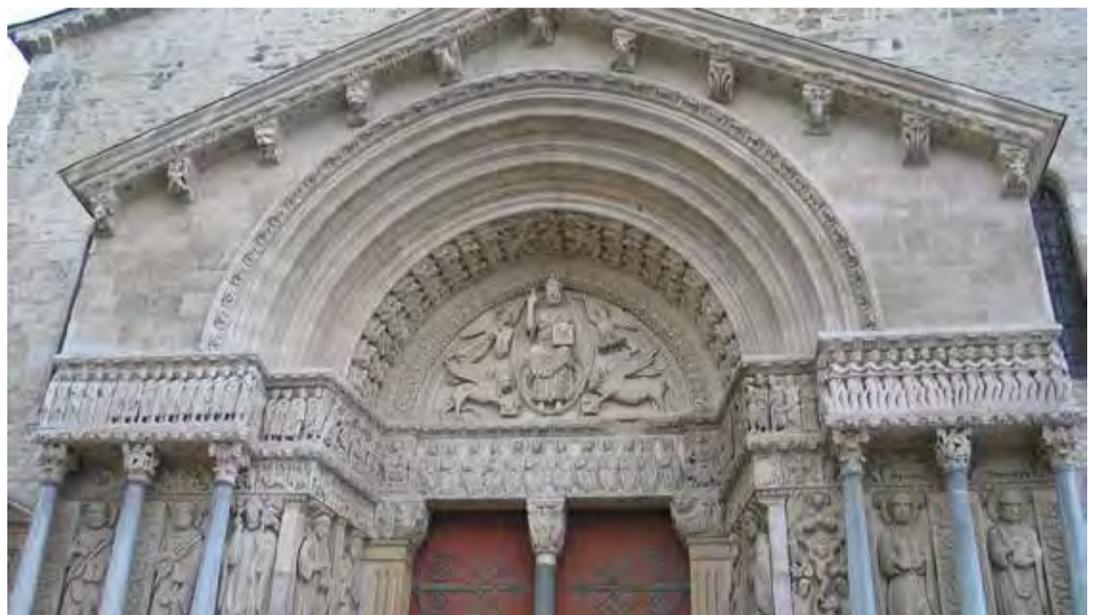


The interior is mostly Gothic, while the ambulatory is late Gothic - you can see the curvatures in the stone, like a flame, called flamboyant Gothic. The beautiful chapel was added in the 15th century, so construction of the church went on for about 400 years, and yet the different styles blend beautifully together showing evolutionary progress from the early Romanesque to the late Gothic.

Typical of the Romanesque style, the walls are quite thick and solid with small windows high up in the nave above the level of the aisles. During the nearly

thousand-year history of this building there have been many subsequent revisions, with works of art installed during the Renaissance and later, producing a rich mix of paintings, tapestries, sculptures, stained glass and various reliquaries. There are magnificent architectural details on the top of the columns and distributed throughout the church. Several side chapels are decorated in the Baroque style from the 17th century, displaying large oil paintings with elaborate, gilded wooden frames. The baptismal font of this remarkable building is a sarcophagus, an ancient Roman tomb.

Be sure to visit the Cloister of St-Trophime, tucked away next door to the right of the church, well worth the small admission charge. It is easy to overlook because there is only a small sign at the door, which leads into a courtyard with entrance at the rear. You might not even know it's here unless you studied up a little bit in guidebooks or heard about it somehow. This cloister is like an open-air museum with architecture and sculpture spanning a 300-year period: Gothic pointed arches on one side, and older, Romanesque barrel-vaulting on the other side. The open court in the center is surrounded by beautiful columns, each with different, detailed stone carvings on their capitals, and corner columns especially noted for their realistic, gothic statues representing various saints. It's a calm and peaceful place making this a rewarding site to visit.



This is generally considered to be the most important cloister in all of Provence. It is rare to find a cloister such as this one that is so intricately decorated and which represents such a long period of architectural evolution, from Romanesque through the Gothic. The top of each column is a uniquely carved capital and several of the

columns are impressive works of art in themselves, especially the corner columns, St. Paul the most spectacular of all, and there are some other scenes of daily life carved into the galleries of the cloisters. There is a meditative and prayerful atmosphere in such a cloister. This had been at one time a residence of the clergy, with nuns and priests associated with the church living upstairs in a space now used for various kinds of exhibits.



The other main building on Place de la République is City Hall, built in 1675 according to plans by the famous architect, Jules Hardouin-Mansart, who left his mark all over Paris. They have a public lobby with beautiful architecture dating back to the Renaissance, with peculiar vaulting of the vestibule. On the landing of the first floor is a cast of the Venus of Arles.

This location has been the center of town for millennia, and part of the ancient Roman Forum is still preserved today underground in the Cryptoporticus Museum of

Arles. You walk downstairs from the City Hall lobby and trip back 2,000 years into a dark, dank, eerie series of barrel-vaulted tunnels, with water dripping from the stone roof, fragments of statues and buildings lying around on the floor, and shallow side chambers leading to mysterious dead-ends.

You can walk through three double, parallel tunnels arranged in the form of a U, supported by fifty piers. They provided a foundation for the main structure of the forum above and it's believed they were used for grain storage or perhaps to hold slaves. Towards the end of the Roman Empire shops were built, opening on the outer side. It's a little spooky down there but definitely quite fascinating and worth a visit. Emerging back above ground to fresh air and daylight, welcome back to the 21st century, stepping into the bustling streets, ready for another stroll.



Walk along Arles' other main pedestrian lane, Rue de l'Hôtel de Ville, lined with attractive shops, one of the very best lanes in town for exploring, so take your time and go all the way. A network of appealing cross-streets will lure you to probe up and down, including Rue des Suisses and the small lanes leading out from Place Saint-Roch, a prime neighborhood for the random wander.



OPTIONAL DETOURS

Here you are close to the small ruins of the ancient Roman Baths of Constantine, just two blocks north on Rue du Grand Prieuré. Built in the 4th century, it is believed to be part of a much larger Roman palace built for Constantine, who spent considerable time here and made Arles capital of the western part of the Empire, extending through France and Spain. Not terribly impressive today, only a small building remains but

it shows clear sign of Roman architecture with red bricks and vaulted arches. You can appreciate it quickly from the outside, saving time and money, while enjoying a majestic view of the Rhône River from the embankment.

Another cultural site nearby on Rue du Docteur Fanton is the Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles, a museum opened in 2014 dedicated to showcasing Van Gogh's artistic heritage, but unfortunately they do not own any paintings by the artist. Only for eager fans, the foundation hosts temporary exhibits by contemporary artists that generally establish some connection with the legacy of Van Gogh, and perhaps if you're lucky, an original oil by the master on loan from elsewhere. Ironically and sadly, there are no paintings by him in Arles. The two houses he lived in during 1888-1889 were destroyed by American bombing in WWII. Unfortunately, very little is left of any buildings or associations with the artist, but the walk soon brings you to a few reminders of his presence.



PLACE DU FORUM

When satisfied, find your way back south on Rue des Arenes or other little connecting lanes a few blocks to Place du Forum, one of the charming plazas in town. Formerly the main plaza of the ancient Romans, which extended from here back towards City Hall a few blocks away, Place du Forum has one of the only four-star hotels in Arles, the Grand Hôtel Nord Pinus, top choice in town.

The Place du Forum is best known today for the café depicted in "Café Terrace at Night" by

Van Gogh, which is now called Le Café Van Gogh, a fine place for a drink -- just like sitting in a van Gogh painting. The Place can be lively if you're lucky: puppies frolic, kids play, fashions parade by, musicians earn some coins and neighbors catch up on the day's gossip. That distinguished gentleman cast in bronze is none other than Frédéric Mistral (1830-1914), most noted and only Nobel Prize-winning writer of Arles.

RUE DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE

Walk from Place du Forum west for a few blocks along Rue la Liberté, which becomes Rue Jouvène, to the intersection at a lovely plaza with Rue de la République, The Best Walking Street of Town -- shops, cafes, people, no cars, this is it! Only about 300 meters long, it is worth walking the full length, perhaps back and forth twice to really absorb it. Just don't get here in the afternoon when all the shops are closed for siesta -- the custom throughout the south of Europe. If you are town at twilight, this would be the best place to enjoy that special time of day.

A unique local item you'll see for sale in many of the shops are the Santons, whimsical little statues of Provence, usually carved in wood and vividly depicting colorful people dressed in native folk costumes. These small figurines are especially prevalent in late fall leading up to the Christmas season, when they play a big role in the decorations. From mid-November through mid-January there are special exhibits of these very collectible items. Provençal fabrics are also popular -- the colorful cotton material printed in the region around Arles using those characteristic pastel colors, the yellows, greens and oranges, depicting



natural motives of olives and herbs, blended in flowing geometric patterns.

A museum of folk crafts and art might catch your eye midway along Rue de la République, the Museon Arlaten, established one century ago by the famed local poet Mistral and featuring a collection of clothing, furnishings, artifacts, wood carvings and scenes from daily life that are spread through 30 rooms.



One of the more interesting and poignant sites is the hospital where Van Gogh stayed, the Hotel de Dieux, located one block south of Rue de la République along Rue President Wilson, which sometimes has a little street market in its plaza. The hospital continued functioning until the 1970s, when it was converted into the vast culture center called Espace Van Gogh. Resembling a peaceful cloister, the two-story building surrounds a central garden with arcades all around the ground floor containing shops and cafes, with temporary exhibit space upstairs.

Van Gogh was kept here briefly twice after slicing his ear, and did capture it in the “Garden of the Hospital in Arles.” He lived in Arles from February 1888 through May 1889 but local residents finally grew irritated by his increasingly erratic behavior and petitioned for him to be exiled, whereupon he moved out to the hospital in St Remy, never to return. Those 200 paintings he created here are probably worth \$10 billion today, but not only did he get no respect, he was tossed out of town! You can feel for him while absorbing the vibes at the Espace.

This really does complete the main walking tour highlights of Arles, but there are more wonderful things to explore if you have time, including more little lanes, a major market, and the most important museum of ancient Rome in all of Provence.

STREET MARKET

It would be smart to arrange your visit to Arles for a Saturday morning when the big market is happening on the south edge of the Old Town along the big Boulevard des Lices. Fine-tune this itinerary if you are here on Saturday so that you arrive at the market at least by noon, modifying the route if necessary. For example, if you left Avignon after breakfast you will have plenty of time for all the previous walks and then head to the market. Stop at the Tourist Information Office a few blocks along on the south side of Lices for maps and brochures. Helpful agents can tell you about attractions, and if you are staying overnight, they can find accommodations.

Every sizable Europe town has a street market, but this is one of the biggest in all of France, 2 kilometers long! There all sorts of food -- cheeses, breads, roasted chicken, pastries, fruits and vegetables – plus everything you could imagine, including clothing, accessories, bric-a-brac, old junk, hardware, jewelry, and great people watching. They’ve also got souvenirs for sale, such as always-popular T-shirts.

The French love their cheeses, much of which is not pasteurized, but fresh with full flavor. Sometimes you’ll get a free sample. You will also see goats on display by proud owners happy to show them off – the source of much of this cheese. Olives are the heart of the Mediterranean cuisine and come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, colors and textures, and many different kinds of olive oils and tapenades to go with it. A short note about market etiquette: don’t touch the food directly, but instead point to it and the vendor will hand it over to you.



If you get tired of just looking at food, keep walking east along the street which turns into a variety market selling clothing, furniture, hardware, knives, pots, pans and all sorts of things down the lane under the trees, so keep walking and keep looking. You'll see a few pieces of furniture for sale, but if you're looking for the antique market you've got to come on the 1st Wednesday of the month, with a specialty in regional antiques. If not here on Saturday, the much smaller daily veggie market around the corner on Boulevard Emile Combes is worth taking a look.

While at this southeast part of town be sure to admire the original Roman wall, where Boulevard Lices meets Emile Combes, anchored by the large Tour des Mourgues fortified tower rising high above the corner. A little further along the wall on Emile Combes brings you to part of the 2,000 year-old aqueduct that brought fresh water from the Alpilles mountains, which entered town through a hole in the wall marked with a sign: "Aqueduc Gallo-Romain." (more about aqueducts and history below)



MORE LITTLE LANES

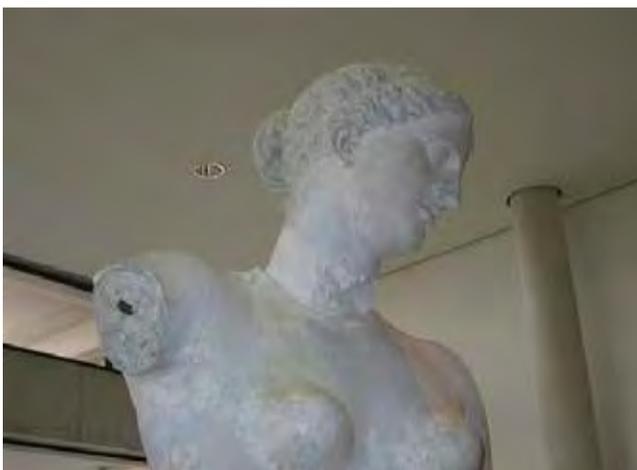
If you have time, you are now in position for a wander through more of the quaint little back lanes of Arles, which you can reach via a staircase just beyond that aqueduct, leading you into Place de la Redoute. There are a few shops and restaurants in the neighborhood, which is a typical residential area in the old town. You'll probably see cats and dogs walking around, kids playing, moms strolling. It's a very friendly and safe neighborhood, off the beaten tourist track.

This is just kind of an aimless stroll where you can simply walk along, enjoying the peace and quiet through little lanes of the residential district a couple of blocks away from the shopping streets.

Take an interesting stroll through Place de la Major, perhaps peek into Église Notre Dame, and then continue through more quiet residential streets. Rue de la Madeleine leads into a small maze of alleys lined by homes, not especially exciting but very local.

From here you can circle back around the Roman amphitheater and take a turn along narrow Rue des Arenès, reached by a short staircase. Just take a look down this charming old narrow lane, which leads in four blocks to the Place du Forum, but is strictly residential without any shops, so you don't really need to walk on it.

Now you are faced with a big choice: leave town, having successfully seen all the main sites of town, or push on to an archaeological museum one mile away. Leaving town is quite easy from the Arena, going out the way you came in, walking back to the train station in 10 minutes.



MUSEUM OF ANCIENT ARLES

On the other hand, if you are a big fan of Roman antiquities (old broken statues, mosaics, bronze tools, and little models of machines), you would truly enjoy the excellent museum of archaeology, the best collection in Provence. However, because it is one mile away from the arena on lanes you have already seen, it might be better to find a taxi to take you there by calling 04 90 96 90 03 or looking for one at the Arena.

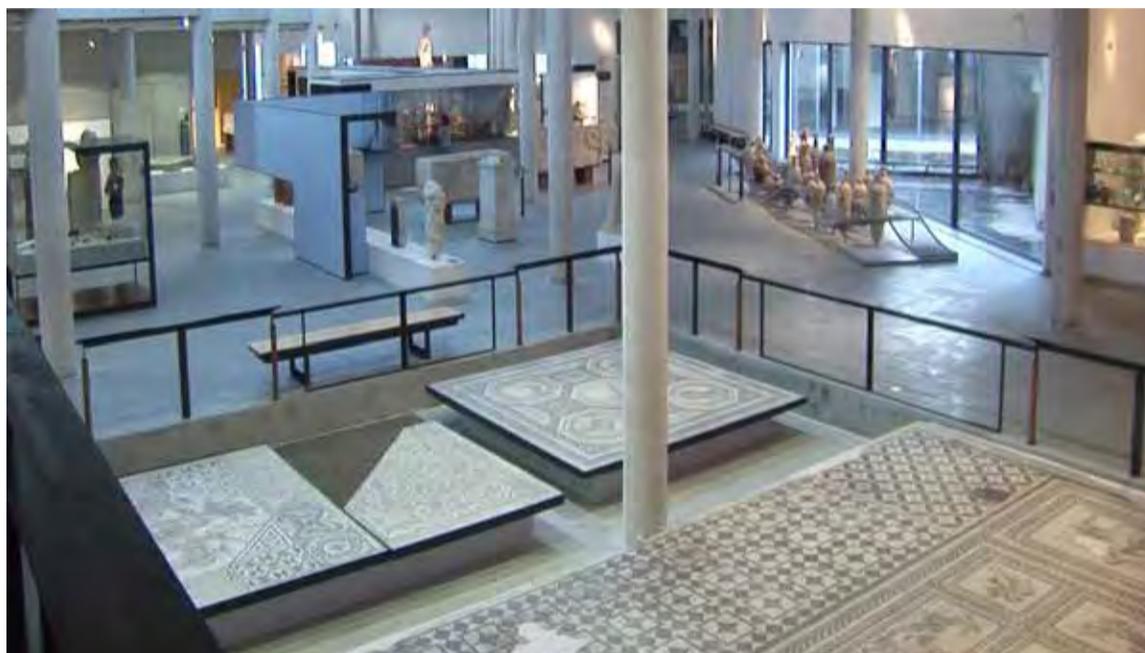
Another option for those who had definitely planned on seeing this museum is begin your visit by taking a taxi to it upon first arriving at the train station, where taxis can usually be found. In that case, see the

museum first, then stroll into town and adapt these walking directions to suit your purpose. With that sequence you don't have to walk all the way to the museum through town and then walk all the way back to the station, which is a big workout – but Arles is always fascinating to walk through.

This extremely interesting museum awaits beyond the southwest end of town, about a 15-minute from the center through a quiet neighborhood – for lovers of antiquity, it is definitely worth your time. Walking directions now depend on where you are coming from, where you last left the previous walk. Assuming you are coming from the Arena you could walk along Rue des Arènes, and keep going as it changes names at Place du Forum to Liberté and then to Jouvène, connecting to Place Antonelle. Then stroll along the short Rue du Porcelet, which soon becomes Rue de la Roquette, leading you through a residential area with a scattering of local shops and restaurants. Upon reaching the wide street, Boulevard Georges Clémenceau, turn right and pass under the viaduct by the river, which then leads directly to a new building housing the ancient remains.

Called the Musée de l'Arles Antique, it primarily displays treasures from the Roman period of Arles with an excellent layout in a large building that opened in 1995 and has been recently expanded. There are rows of marble sarcophagi, or tombs, of the Romans and early Christians, richly decorated with sculpture depicting religious scenes and daily life.

Elevated platforms enable you to look down on the large collection of mosaic floors from Roman homes that reveal brilliant scenes created with tiny pieces of colored stones depicting sea creatures, the zodiac, nereids, the four seasons and realistic human portraits. A lady riding a ball is called Europa -- interesting that even 2000 years ago they talked about Europa or Europe.



A large, impressive 3-D model of Arles in ancient Roman times shows how the city covered today's entire historic center and demonstrates how sophisticated the buildings and urban plan were. The arena model shows how little it has changed over the millennia.

Also on display are original glass works, tools, gold jewelry, small statues, and a nice lineup of busts of the various emperors, along with simpler artifacts dating back to the Stone Age. There are other statues here depicting emperors, goddesses, soldiers and various sea creatures.



Romans were truly amazing inventors and the world's most impressive engineers at that time, 2000 years ago. Illustrating this are little models of Roman engineering feats, including bridges across the river, the busy commercial harbor, apartment houses and the arena. These dramatic displays remind us that Arles was one of the largest economic centers in the Roman Empire, with an extensive urban core. Even then it was so valued as a place to stay that many Roman soldiers retired here and are buried in the Alyscamps cemetery in the south part of

town. In Roman times Arles was surrounded by graveyards, including one situated along the Via Aurelia which later became known as Les Alyscamps. This cemetery subsequently became important when the Christian martyr Saint Genest and the first bishops of Arles were buried there. Alyscamps might be attractive for major fans of ancient Rome, but the dozens of sarcophagi here should be enough to satisfy that interest.

Off-season is a great time to be here to avoid the summer congestion. In September the weather can be very pleasant with comfortable temperatures in the 50s and 60s, ideal for travel. During this off-season the town and sites are less crowded, but all the shops and attractions are open.

HISTORY

People have been living in the region for hundreds of thousand years, going back to Neanderthal times and earlier because of its ideal climate and varied resources. The first historical records indicate a village was founded about 800 BC by Ligurians native to the area. Then came the Phoceans, an early Greek culture that settled the entire coastline from Marseilles to Monaco in 7th century BC. Greek society grew and prospered for several centuries until Romans took control in 123 BC as part of their conquest of Gaul.



Arles was a rival with the larger city of Marseilles, then called Massalia, but during the Civil War between Julius Caesar and Pompey in the first century, the Massalians made the mistake of siding with Pompey, who lost the war. Marseille was stripped of all of its power and Caesar moved everything to Arles, which had been building ships to help in his war efforts. Arles then became a retirement community for the Roman army, which had its base here, further adding to its prestige and economy. Soldiers put in their 20 years of service and then enjoyed a retirement paid for by the government. Caesar further rewarded Arles in 49BC by making it the capital of southern Gaul and Emperor Augustus



Arles continued growing with construction of the amphitheater, fortified walls, theater, baths, palaces, triumphal arch and many homes. Romans dug a canal connecting Arles with the Mediterranean, constructed a floating bridge across the Rhône, and built aqueducts to bring fresh water from the surrounding mountains. Aqueducts also irrigated farmlands and delivered water to an amazing waterwheel complex used for grinding grain into flour. Romans had frequently

used waterpower elsewhere in the empire for turning industrial wheels, but never on such scale as the Barbegal aqueduct and mill, which consisted of 16 watermills on a steep hill, with aqueduct-delivered water flowing from one wheel to the next, grinding an estimated 4.5 tons of flour daily for several centuries. A major aqueduct also came into the city through a hole in the base of the fortified wall, still visible along Boulevard Emile Combes.



Constantine, who often resided here, built a stone bridge to connect the town with the commercial quarter on the 'right bank'. The ramparts and walls rising from the public gardens and the Boulevard des Aliscamps are chiefly the work of the Emperor Constantine, who came to Arles with his family and mother, Saint Helena. The population at that period is said to have numbered 100,000. Christianity was probably taught here by Trophimus, a disciple of St. Paul.

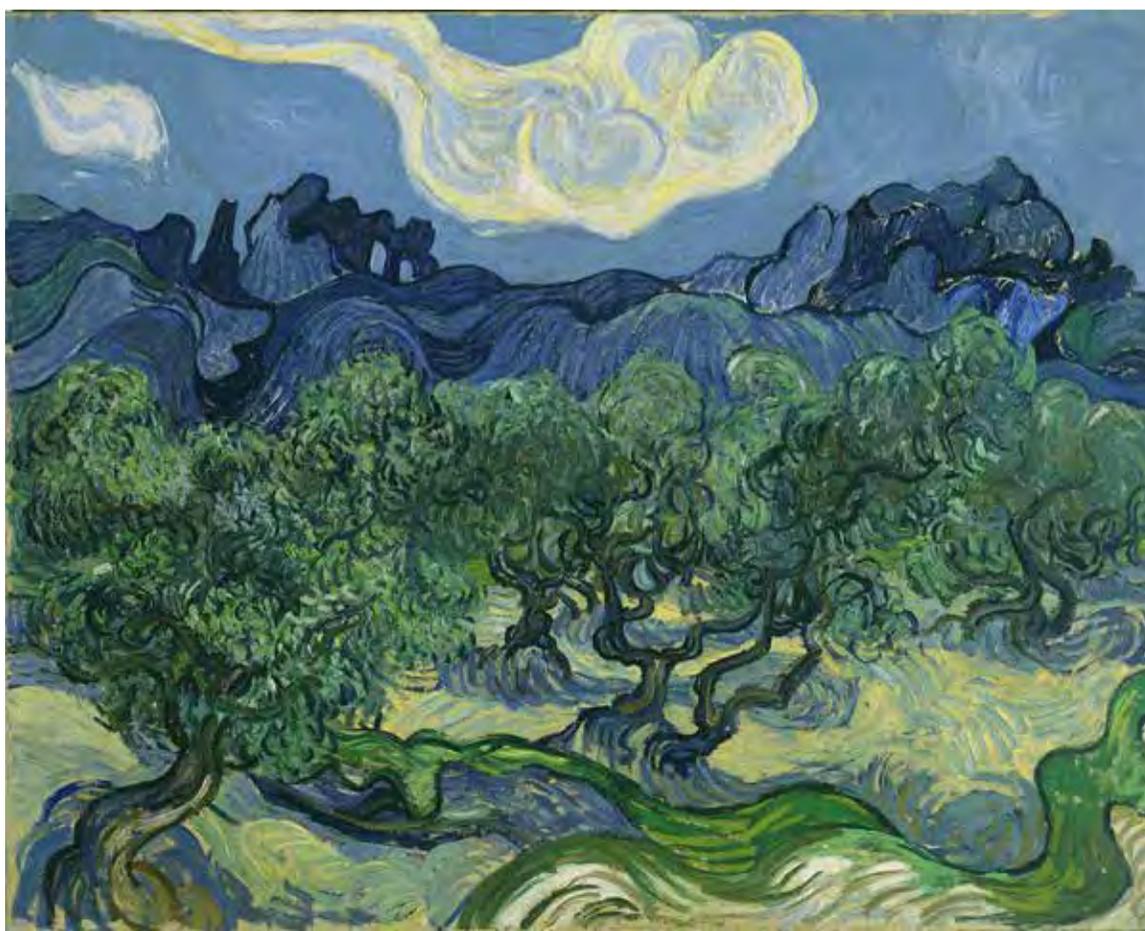
With the fall of Rome, Arles suffered a cruel decline when the Visigoths invaded in 480, followed by the Saracens, who remained until about A.D. 700. The town regained independence for a time after the barbaric invasions. In 879 it became the capital of a kingdom, which in the 11th century embraced the whole region between the Rhine, the Saône, the Rhône, the Mediterranean, and the Alps, and formed part of the Germanic empire. In 1150-1251 Arles was an independent republic. As UNESCO describes it, "Successively a territory of the Empire and a possession of the Counts of Provence, Arles was one of the most attractive cities of the Mediterranean world during the Middle Ages. Travelers from many countries described its monuments with enthusiasm."

Then the Franks came in and the French took over, making it regional capital of Provence and beyond into parts of Burgundy, the most important city in this whole area. This continued for several hundred years until about the 1450s -- 1500s. Submitting at length to Charles d'Anjou, it shared the fortunes of Provence, which was annexed to France in 1481.

For various reasons the power shifted elsewhere and Arles became somewhat of a backwater and nothing much happened. And as a result, throughout the next couple of centuries there was very little reconstruction, leaving us in this well-preserved historic town.



The next major event was arrival of Van Gogh in 1888 and he lived here for 15 months, creating 200 paintings and 100 drawings. That was his peak period of creativity, near the end of his life. He then moved to St. Remy where he stayed in the hospital, and then he went up back up north near Paris, where he later died. His brother Theo was an art dealer in Paris, and kept him going with a small allowance even he couldn't sell any paintings. Imagine, his paintings now sell for up to a hundred million dollars, but he never sold one during his life.





PONT DU GARD

The Roman aqueduct of Pont du Gard is one of the greatest sights in all of ancient history -- the tallest bridge and second highest structure the Romans ever built, after the Colosseum in Rome, which is only 2 meters higher. Not only is the Pont an astonishing engineering feat, but it has come down to us as one of the most important works of art of the ancient world, a miracle in stone inherited from antiquity, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985. It is one of only six sites in the country labelled by the government as a "Grand Site of France" and is in France's top-five visitor attractions.

Pont du Gard is part of an ancient canal about 50 kilometers in length, built mostly on or beneath the ground to carry water to Nimes, which was a major Roman city. When an aqueduct came across a river valley it had to be raised as a bridge spanning the chasm in order to keep a relatively level course for the water. There were no pressurized pipes in ancient times, so water could not possibly flow down one side of a valley and then back up the other side.

The Romans constructed this bridge across the Gardon River valley in the 1st century with such precision that it spanned 360 meters but only drops a mere 2.5 centimeters, for a gradient of 1 in 3,000. A similar gradation was found throughout the entire 50 km canal length, which descended only 17 meters in total. This provided just the right speed to keep huge amounts of water flowing without stagnating, up to 44 million daily gallons, while not going too quickly and damaging the system.



Three levels of arches hold up the water channel that runs across the top, at a maximum height of 49 meters. The tallest arch that Roman engineers ever built is on the lowest level, soaring 25 meters in height.

Roman buildings relied heavily on the arch, for many interior spaces were differing variations of this critical feature: large rooms were often made with barrel-vaulted ceilings, really a series of arches connected together, and an arch could also be spun around on its

axis to form a dome, another important Roman innovation. Amazingly, the bridge construction was done without the use of mortar or clamps. The stones were cut so perfectly that they were held together only by friction and gravity. Paradoxically, a huge stone structure held together this way can better withstand an earthquake than if it relied on mortar to bind it together, because everything has to fit so tightly and be in such balance that the structure achieves a stable internal strength.

The water channel on top was the only part of the bridge using with mortar and concrete, to make it waterproof. The interior surface of the water channel was covered with special stucco composed in part of shards of pottery and tile, and then plastered with a slippery mixture of olives, lime, pork grease and figs to help water flow smoothly.



During its many years of use the aqueduct had to be carefully maintained by the ancient Romans, because plants grow inside and calcite accretions from minerals in the water build up on the limestone channel. Constant work was necessary to scrape it off and keep the water flowing.

This huge structure is made from an enormous volume of local limestone quarried along the riverbank 600 meters away. In total the rock weighs 50,000 tons with a volume of 21,000 cubic meters, equal in amount to the

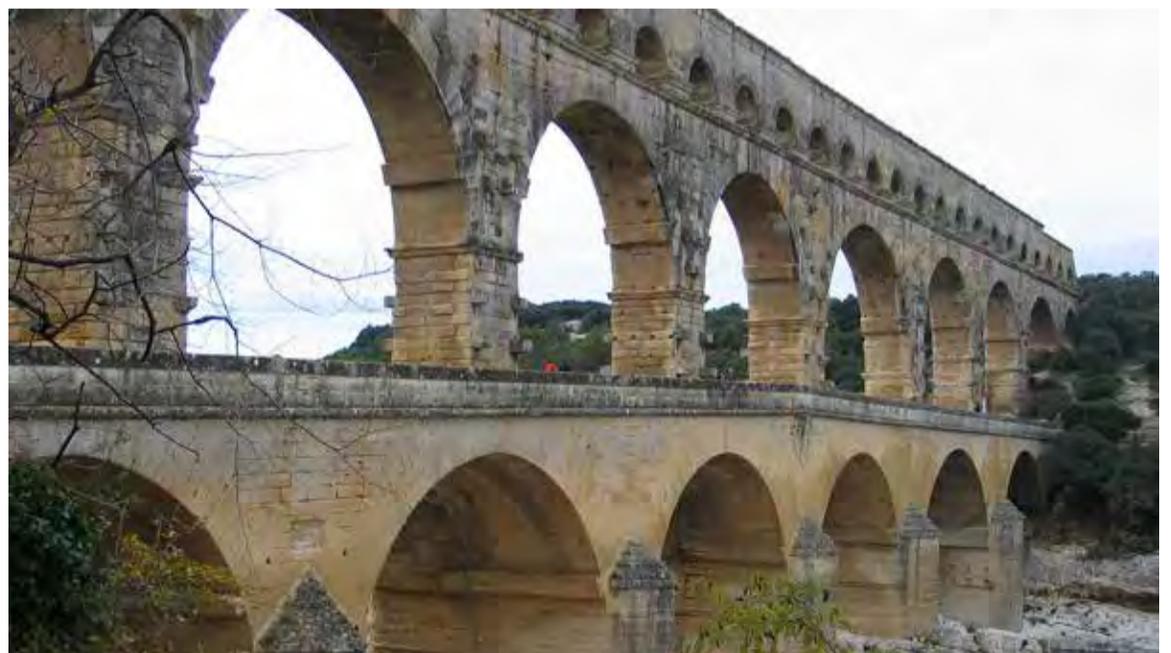
Eiffel Tower, if you would imagine, filled in solid with stone. They actually extracted about six times more rock from the quarry than they needed, with the excess used to build smaller bridges and culvert supports elsewhere in this long aqueduct system.

You might wonder, how could those ancients could lift so much stone up from the valley bottom, 150 feet high in the air? These are very big rocks, some weighing 6 tons. No problem for those ancient Roman engineers, who were very experienced with block and tackle, pulleys, ropes, cranes, gears and wheels. A human-powered treadmill wheel would have done some of the heavy lifting. Scaffoldings were built upon stones jutting out from the structure still noticeable today.

Most of the length of this aqueduct was built underground, which was constructed by digging a trench, then lining that with stones, covering it with stone slabs and then sealing it with earth on top to create a stable subterranean pipeline. A few of the sections of the aqueduct were tunneled by drilling right through solid rock. Such skills and manpower enabled them to build the entire 50 km aqueduct in about 20 years.

Curiously, the water source in the spring and the city of Nîmes are only 12 miles apart, but the aqueduct is 31 miles because it takes a winding course to match the contours of the landscape. They estimate that it took about 27 hours for the water to flow along the entire course.

In typical ostentatious Roman style, the aqueduct probably supplied way more water than they needed, in order to deliver water to their fountains and public baths, and into homes of the upper class. Nîmes was a great Roman center and a retirement area for the very successful soldiers from the Roman armies, so they had to take very good care of them.



Perhaps the Pont du Gard was best described by the writer Henry James, who visited Pont du Gard in

1884 and commented: “unspeakably imposing...the hugeness, the solidity, the unexpectedness, the monumental rectitude of the whole thing leave you nothing to say...and make you stand gazing. You simply feel that it is noble and perfect, that it has the quality of greatness... a kind of manly beauty, that of an object constructed not to please but to serve, and impressive simply from the scale on which it carries out this intention...The Pont du Gard is one of the three or four deepest impressions (the Romans) have left.”

Remember Stendhal’s Syndrome? (dizziness and collapse when confronting great art) That author visited and fell victim himself: “my soul is thrown into a deep and prolonged sense of astonishment. The Coliseum in Rome never saw me plunge so deeply into such a state of reverie.”



Water kept flowing through the aqueduct for nearly 600 years, but after the collapse of the Roman Empire and later barbarian invasions, it began to fall apart. Pont du Gard remained standing and was strong enough for it to be used as a bridge for another thousand years. In the mid 18th century a new bridge was constructed connected to the arches of the lower level, wide enough for carriages to pass. This functioned as a toll-bridge, and with further stabilizing, it was used by automobiles in the 20th century. That added bridge is now

only by pedestrians and provides access for visitors to reach the other side of the river.

WALKING ROUTE

After coming all this way to the great monument of Pont du Gard, you want to fully enjoy the various vistas for a complete appreciation.

Start at the excellent visitor center where you can get the free map that shows the various paths and viewpoints. You can also pick up an audio guide at the center, browse in the shops, use the restrooms, have a snack and look at the large posterboards that display walking routes in detail. There is also a museum with models, multimedia screens and reconstructions to explain the sites.

Walk the paved path to the bridge where you will soon be awed by the sight, but don’t just stop at the first viewpoint, because it gets better and better.

There are three different routes you can follow. Upon arriving at the bridge you’ll see a sign-posted path leading uphill to the right, which is worth climbing for a fine vista. You can then walk down to the river’s edge on the right (west) side, continuing along the dirt path to get far enough away from the enormous bridge for a good angle. This is an excellent perspective, especially if it is a sunny day with no wind, when you will see a nice reflection of the arches mirrored in the water. There are better viewpoints on the other side of the river, so don’t quit yet.

Stroll across the bridge, then up a well-marked hillside path to gain access to the aqueduct’s upper level where you can walk along the path and have a birds-eye view of the upper level. It is possible to stand in one end of the water channel and look through the gate along this upper pipeline. The water channel was originally covered, like all aqueducts, but today is partly open to the elements. Here on top you acquire further respect for the amazing engineering skill that created this marvel.



Exiting the aqueduct channel, walk back down slope, then along the stream on the sunny southwest side of the structure in order to reach the best view. Keep walking along the river on the sunny side of the bridge for a few hundred yards to get the most superb view looking back toward the soaring masterpiece. There is a paved path you can follow, but if the viewing conditions are good, with mid-day or afternoon sunshine and little or no wind, you will need to leave the path and walk down to the waterline to find the perfect angle. It is a bit slippery, rocky and muddy but don't be dismayed.

Here you will have a complete mirror reflection of the bridge in the river's smooth surface, which will be one of the most beautiful sights you have ever seen. Three levels of soaring golden arches above, and again repeated upside down below...unbelievable. It is one of those jaw-drop, heart-attack moments. Of course you have to snap your photos, which will be award-winners, but don't forget to put the camera away and just look in awe and wonder. Soak it up for as long as you can.

You cannot see this full reflection from the paved path, so you are confronted with this opportunity to put in a little extra effort for a Big Bang payoff. On the paved path, oooh what a nice view, but down in the mud, it will enter your top-ten ever sightings. Of the 2 million annual visitors only a fraction get this angle.

The majestic natural setting enhances the scene in a perfect way, for you are surrounded by the tree-covered valley with major river running through, lined by a varied embankment of rocks, sand and foliage. Aside from the majestic bridge, there is no sign of civilization anywhere, and the only sound is that of flowing water.

Let this be another lesson for you on the value of extra effort.

TRANSPORTATION

The easiest way to get here from Avignon is on a guided day-tour in a van, as we shall do on our tour, with an itinerary that also includes St-Remy and Les Baux as we describe here -- a highly recommended way to spend a day. The advantage of a private van tour is no worries about schedule, assistance of a local guide, and you take in more destinations.



SAINT-RÉMY-DE-PROVENCE

Saint-Rémy-de-Provence is the archetypal Provencal village. While it may not have spectacular monuments or ancient ruins in the village, it has a special charm of its own, definitely worth visiting -- and there are two famous historic sites outside town, the hospital where Van Gogh spent his final, most-productive year, and Glanum, a Roman ruin, described below.

The historic center of St-Rémy village is quite small, several blocks long and wide, 250 meters on each side, but contains charming nooks and crannies. St-Rémy's Old Town used to be surrounded by a circular wall, which has been replaced by modern busy streets, but the effect of a sheltered refuge remains, with many structures going back to the 15th and 16th centuries. These narrow lanes and alleys in the heart of the Old Town are charming as could be.

Entering from any angle will bring you to the center in a few minutes, but perhaps the "front door" is the town's main street, Rue Carnot, on left side of the big church of Collégiale Saint-Martin, whose interior is said to be a smaller copy of Rome's St. Peter.

Rue Carnot leads in two blocks to the most picturesque square of town, Place Favier, surrounded by ancient, ivy-covered buildings, some going back to the 14th and 15th centuries. The entire village has charm but this square is extra special, with the small castle tower



rising above, old stone walls all around and a multi-level fountain on the end. In warm weather a café sets up tables on the square adding another touch of delight.

Adjacent to Place Favier, through a cobbled alley spanned by an ancient arch, is the Hôtel de Sade, still owned by the family of the Marquis de Sade who had ancestral connections with this town. The medieval atmosphere of this stone lane is complemented by the small Musée des Alpilles in a former Renaissance mansion, Hôtel Mistral de Mondragon, with original inner courtyard encircled by galleries featuring archaeology and ethnology.

You don't really need to walk along Rue du Parage just north of Place Favier unless you have time for a stroll in the simple residential neighborhood on this end of the village. It does present a contrast if you get a block off the main street here in these quiet little residential lanes with people living in apartments at ground level and upstairs. The old stone buildings are low rise with medium density as they had been throughout most medieval villages in Europe, remaining the same over these many centuries. This is a tricked out tourist town in some ways, and in others it's a quiet Provençal village.

Then head for the little retail "downtown" by walking another block east along Rue Carnot to reach three main shopping lanes of Rue Gilles, Jaume Roux and Lucien Estrine, all converging at little Place Joseph Hilaire. One could easily wander up and down for an hour in this heart of St-Remy, with lovely shops and a quiet pedestrian atmosphere, featuring dozens of stores in surprising variety for such small village center.

One specialty of Provence is handmade pottery, with yellow and green theme colors, gaily displayed in many shop windows. You'll often find the craftsmen running their own shops, giving you a chance to talk with them and do a little bargaining. Pottery is a little hard to bring home, but you might get a small piece and pack it carefully. Local fabrics also display those same green and yellow pastels, with various attractive floral and botanic themes -- an easy gift to bring home.

There are lovely cheese shops, bakeries and little restaurants of course. One fromagerie had 12 different kinds of goat cheese, so you might buy variety for a picnic, with fruit, bread and...of course, wine from separate nearby shops. Other popular local items to admire in the little shops and galleries are the soaps, fragrances and potpourri. They even have a small Museum of Aroma, for this entire region grows countless flowers for the perfume industry.

One block further along Rue Carnot brings you to another town landmark, a statue, fountain and street dedicated to local hero Nostrodamus, the most famous person from St-Rémy. He was quite the scholar and reputedly could see the future, although none of his prophecies were ever proven true. Born in a house several blocks away, he left for Avignon as a teenager to begin his education and career.

City Hall is a block south on Place Jules Pélissier, the other main square, which sometimes has a few market stands selling local olives, breads and cheeses. Rue Lafayette in front of City Hall has more shops, and narrow Rue de la Commune is especially nice, extending 100 meters south from here with a lineup of traditional shop fronts ending at the picturesque, arched, gateway of Portail Saint-Pauline, a remnant of the old encircling wall.

That would bring you out onto Boulevard Victor Hugo, part of the busy ring road en-

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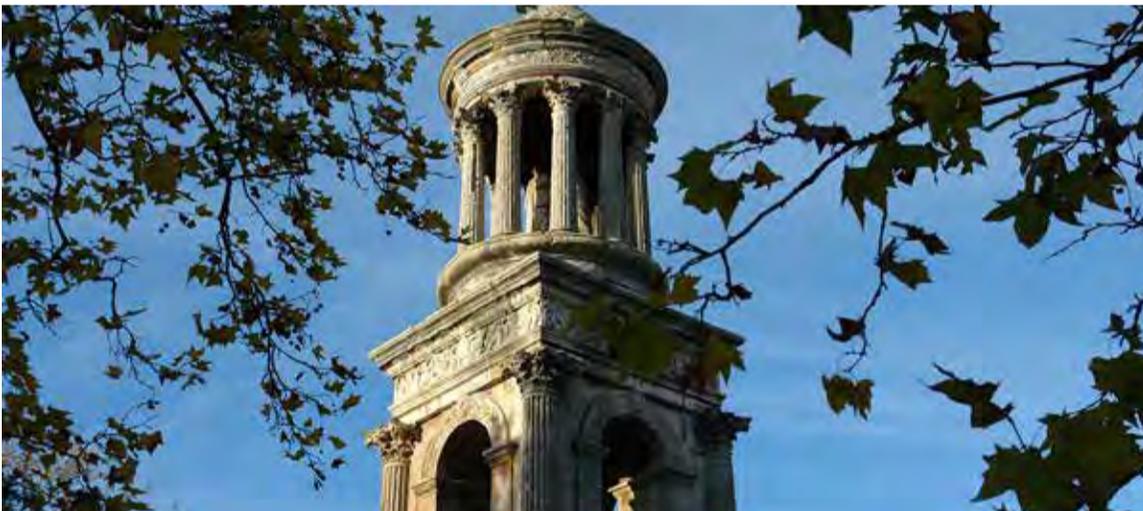
circling the Old Town. Free maps, brochures and toilet are available another block south at the Tourist Information Office at Place Jean Jaurès. Boulevard Victor Hugo is a wide tree-lined street with plenty of traffic, many parking spaces, more shops and restaurants. It leads around to where you began, at Place de la République, a big parking lot and market site.



After visiting the village there are two more stops to make: the Roman ruins of Glanum and Van Gogh's hospital, the Saint-Paul de Mausole Asylum, both just a few minute's drive. You can see portions for free, but pay an admission charge to go inside. There is a discount pass covering four attractions at full price for the first, then half-price for the others, including these two sites and the Alpilles and (modern art) Estrine museums in town.

St-Rémy is perhaps most famous as the place where Vincent Van Gogh was confined in an asylum towards the end of his life. Van Gogh was brought to the hospital in 1889 for recuperation after he sliced his ear and was having episodes of despair and hallucination while living in nearby Arles. He stayed at the hospital and found enough stability to walk in the gardens and surrounding countryside and create 150 paintings -- undoubtedly the greatest one-year outpouring of masterpieces in art history, worth one billion dollars today. Of course we know the tragic story...he never sold a painting and died soon after in poverty, unknown.

St-Rémy is perhaps most famous as the place where Vincent Van Gogh was



About a mile from Saint-Rémy are two monuments of the earliest Roman time, memorials of the skill of hands whose work was finished two thousand years ago. The smaller monument is a specimen of a triumphal arch, much damaged, but what remains is more beautiful in its proportions and simplicity than many of the larger triumphal arches found in Provence. The other monument, the tomb of the Julii, is a mausoleum of exquisite symmetry and distinction.

Here, at the foot of the Alpines, lay the Roman town of Glanum, destroyed by the Visigoths in 480.

One relic of it is a well-proportioned Triumphal Arch, with sculptured coffered vaulting. The archivolt is enriched with a garland of leaves and fruit; and right and left are reliefs representing captives.

Close by is a mausoleum, one of the best preserved of the Roman era, called the "Tomb of the Julii", from the inscription on the architrave. It is 60 ft. high and consists of three stories: on the bottom, a square base; in the middle, porticos; on top, ten columns holding up a small round temple.

The pedestal sculpture on the north side represents a cavalry fight; the south, hunting for wild boar; the west, a combat between infantry in the Trojan War; and the east, an Amazon celebrating a dead enemy.

The second story is a square portico, which has four niches and is enriched with fluted columns at each corner. On top, the entablature is embellished with moldings and ornament and surmounted by a small circular turret, or tholos, with ten fluted Corinthian columns, in-



side of which are two statues lacking heads, representing the parents of Sextus and Marius, of the family of the Julii, for whom this mausoleum was erected. The conical roof is decorated with carved fish scales, traditional for Roman mausoleums.

There is no charge to see these monuments, but there are also extensive ruins of the Roman town that have been uncovered in recent decades and do have an admission charge. This impressive site reaches further back in time to the Celtic-Ligurian tribes who settled here before 600 BC, and later Greeks arriving in the 2nd century BC, with the Romans landing in 125 BC, conquering the local tribes, destroying their city and building a new town in Roman style. Under Julius Caesar and Augustus many classical structures were built including a forum, temples, basilica, residences, baths, dams and aqueducts, whose ruins are visible today inside the historic park. At the end of your trip through the south of France, you might look back upon these brief hours in St-Rémy as some of the most enjoyable of the whole experience.

We enjoy this included day-trip with a local travel company from your home-base in Avignon that also brings us to Pont du Gard and Les Baux, with a guide providing explanations and doing all the driving.



LES BAUX-DE-PROVENCE

The ancient stone village of Les Baux-de-Provence is a remarkable sight, dramatically perched 750 feet high on a rocky plateau with a history dating to the Middle Ages, and a prehistoric Celtic settlement going back thousands of years. Les Baux was once a powerful medieval castle that controlled vast territories, including 79 villages throughout Provence, but is now a tiny quaint ruin. Charming as could

be, this cozy hill-top hamlet is a major tourist attraction with 1.5 million annual visitors, making it the second most-popular site in the region after the Pope's Palace in Avignon. This tells you 1) it is very worthwhile, 2) but can get uncomfortably crowded unless you take preventive action, like visiting in the off-season, or arriving early or late in the day.

The plateau was naturally easy to defend due to vertical cliffs all around, and was further built up with stone walls and castle as protection from invasion by Franks, Catalans, Saracens and marauding bandits of the chaotic Middle Ages. The medieval village was built up from the 10th century and by the peak of occupation during the 1300s and early 1400s nearly 3,000 people lived in this small space. Les Baux continued thriving for another century with a grand palace at the highest point. The castle was attacked and destroyed in the 1600s by Cardinal Richelieu, leaving us with dramatic ruins, with some parts of the Château still standing.



Major restorations in mid-20th century brought it back to life and have created a lovely historic experience, complete with museum, shops and restaurants. You would enjoy walking through the well-preserved village along narrow, cobbled pedestrian lanes lined with original stone buildings, leading right back into the Middle Ages. The houses are partly scooped out of the rock, and partly constructed. Whole chambers, kitchens, cellars are veritable caverns. You will not get lost because there is only

one main pedestrian lane about 300 meters long on this rocky route, with a few side alleys leading to viewpoints. The slight uphill slope is easy to negotiate and this slant enhances the drama of being in this exceptional place. Frankly, you really don't need much guidebook help in this smallest of Provençal destinations – just follow your nose and wander about, but it is still beneficial to learn some history and get a few navigating tips. If in a rush you could walk back and forth through the entire village in half an hour, but you'll also want to spend at least 45 minutes visiting the fortress ruins, plus time for shopping and snacking. There are two sections to visit in Les Baux -- the free village, with its pedestrian lanes, shops, restaurants and old buildings, and the paid attraction, which is very worthwhile, because of the vast outdoor site of the citadel fortress on the plateau, where you can see remains of the old buildings and palace along with various artifacts in a very dramatic hilltop setting with commanding views for many miles all around, providing an outdoor excitement that alone is worth the price of admission.

When you first walk in the front entrance of the village you will find a Tourist Information Office on the left side of the lane, which offers a free map, brochures and helpful information about shops and restaurants. Better yet, before you even start your vacation, visit the websites for the town and castle and download their free apps from the AppStore and Google Play (listed below). The Château app includes extensive audio tours, photos, maps and fun interactive activities.



In front of the Tourist Information office you will see a large bauxite boulder on display, because the stone in these hills contains a lot of that valuable mineral. In the 1820s this became an important area to mine for bauxite in order to produce aluminum, and so the precious new material was named after this location where they first found it. Later, you could visit Carrières de Lumières, an abandoned bauxite and limestone quarry 800 meters away, which has been transformed into a multimedia art theater with 70 video projectors casting images of famous paintings and places onto walls and floors of the artificial caves, immersing spectators in a colorful 3D world.

Once you are in the village the main joy is simply walking along and appreciating these very old stone buildings, most of which date back 500 years to the Renaissance. The French government did considerable renovations in mid-20th century under direction of the Minister of Culture, André Malraux, to restore these historic structures to their original appearance. The village had been falling apart but is now in beautiful condition, with no graffiti or trash, and offers many attractions for the visitor -- not only history, but shopping, panoramic vistas, and a variety of eating choices: snacks, sandwiches, drinks, crepes, or fine dining. The little crêperie is perfect because it's right on the main lane, making them fresh on the griddle to order – how about ham and mushrooms and cheese – makes a delightful lunch that you can eat while walking along – divine finger food.



You are going to find a lot of attractive shops with a great variety of products at competitive prices. Among the traditional items for sale you'll see the Provençal fabrics in characteristic pastels: yellows, oranges and greens with local designs including olive tree motifs, so important to this area. Another easy to pack item is potpourri – one of the specialties of Provence made with flowers that grow in

the south of France. This is a famous perfume district so the potpourri is local, making great little gifts. And of course there are always the T-shirt, cooking apron, refrigerator magnet, little models of the town, or anything that says Les Baux on it. Take a look around in these shops and you're bound to find something you've never seen at home, making a unique gift. We found that the prices here were just about the same as in the bigger cities in Provence, so when you see an attractive deal, don't hesitate thinking you'll get a better price later. First rule of travel shopping is grab it right now.

Navigating the town is quite easy with only a handful of little lanes to deal with. Keep going straight on what is obviously the main route, called somewhat optimistically the Grand Rue. In about 200 meters it reaches a fork where you can turn right to Rue Neuve that will bring you, via Rue de l'Église to the best panoramic viewpoint of town, looking west on a cluster of houses below and in the distance to the rocky low mountains of the Alpilles, a dramatic landscape of barren limestone patched with pine and cypress greenery. Get a good look and take lots of photos because this is your only view, unless you pay admission to the Château up ahead, which we highly recommend.

This lookout is next to the main church of Saint-Vincent, built between the 12th and 16th centuries, mostly in the Romanesque style, and partly carved into the bedrock in the "troglodyte" style. Quite small, as expected in such a tiny village, the building is square and has a nave with two aisles. There is also a tiny Penitents' Chapel across the square with modern murals inside, and public toilets to the right of the church.

At the far end of the main lane, a few minutes away, you'll find the ticket office for the Château, the Musée d'Histoire et d'Archéologie des Baux-de-Provence, a vast outdoor collection of ancient sites. By all means go into the office where you can have a look at the exhibits – a small model of the town is quite fascinating, and you'll be tempted to pay the 8 euro admission to go out onto the plateau and see the rest of the site, which is definitely worth visiting. You have come



all this way and made it to the end of the road, by all means you should carry on to see this magnificent outdoor site with its wind-swept plateau and lofty castle ruins perched on the highest point.

They call it Château des Baux-de-Provence, but don't expect to see a big mansion or palace, because there is no complete building left out here, and yet, the ruins are fascinating. The fortress, which had resisted many a siege, was of almost monolithic construction; its ramparts, towers, staircases, banqueting halls carved out of the rocks and built up with tall stone walls. They made clever use of the natural foundations enhanced by elaborate construction, creating one of the most fantastic castles that ever existed.



This feudal Court of Baux was famous for its high level of culture, chivalry and merrymaking, with formal etiquette and endless entertainment from singing troubadours, the seat of a famous Court of Love. Nowadays it's mostly in ruins but you can imagine the grandeur they once enjoyed.

You'll see several reproductions of medieval siege machines

– huge full-scale models that are in working order, including a battering ram which is a reconstruction of an instrument that would not have done much good in attacking this village, because it is so high on the cliff. A full-sized trébuchet sling is ready for action, largest in France, like those used during the Middle Ages for the siege of villages. The sling could send two hundred pounds of rocks flying 200 yards through the air with devastating impact. From April through September weekends, costumed guides demonstrate various crafts and weapons. Stroll through the shattered ruins of what had been the inner fortress that controlled the surroundings for 100 miles. Not many walls are left standing here, more like bones and foundations, so use your imagination and learn some history from the free audio guide that comes with your entrance ticket. Notice several caves were carved into the limestone to create additional living space. The citadel has a steep staircase you can climb up, but not for the faint of heart or those afraid of heights. At its top you have a nice view of extensive olive groves reaching to the distant Alpilles Mountains, from Aix to Arles on a clear day.

A vast, barren plain extends 200 meters south end of the plateau, flat, empty and windy, which it might not seem alluring, but walking across it to the precipice can be thrilling when you reach the edge. Views across the vast landscape reach to the glimmering Mediterranean, making a majestic spot for a picnic along this white limestone fringe, if you don't get blown over by the mistral. However there is no food available for sale inside the castle grounds, so you might want to bring your own supplies. It seems very peaceful now, but centuries of violent history saw battles rage back and forth, with attacks from Barcelona in the Catalan area of what is now Spain to the west, and various invasions from the Eastern side, and Saracens coming up from Africa.



After you've completed the visit you can walk back through town again to get out to the main entrance. Even if you've walked up in one direction it's always nice to observe as you walk back in the other direction – you're going to see new things each time.

Walking back down the main Grand Rue past the shops is probably the most interesting route, but you might try a scenic alternate along Rue de la Calade, with more views across the valley. This leads to Place Louis Jou where you'll find the free Musée des Santons, exhibiting a collection of the little folk-art figurines so characteristic of Provence, with added items from Naples.

Upon departure we stop for an overview of Les Baux from the hilltop on the other side of the valley, which gives you the best perspective on this eagle-nest city, a good way to wrap up your visit before returning to Avignon in our private van.



That completes our four-day visit to Avignon, filled with outstanding day-trips while also enjoying the special beauties of Avignon, with its vast pedestrian zone, historic character and easy access to nearby towns. Nice is our next destination, for four nights.

NICE



**Nice: Hotel Beau Rivage
22 rue St. Francois de Paule**





The south coast of France along the sunny Mediterranean Sea is one of the world's most beautiful destinations, dotted with colorful seaside towns and inland villages perfect for discovering on foot. Artists, movie stars, jet-setters, backpackers, billionaires and millions of ordinary tourists are drawn here by the sweet appeal of this paradise-by-the-sea.

Nestled in southeastern Provence, this 50-mile stretch of Mediterranean coast is called the Côte d'Azur by Europeans, or the French Riviera by Americans. The lovely towns along this shore can be easily visited without the hassles of driving a rented car, thanks to the excellent network of trains and public buses that connect all the main places. Compact town centers offer ideal walking conditions for viewing many fine sights. You could happily spend a week or two by simply slowing down the pace, but four days can provide a very satisfying visit. This book explains exactly how to get around and what to see. The environs are beautiful and its situation and variety of hotel accommodations makes Nice an admirable center from which to explore the Côte d'Azur in both directions and perhaps undertake some expeditions up into the mountains behind.

Nice is a year-round destination, especially busy from May through August when it is warm and crowded, but just as lovely during the spring and fall, cooler and with fewer visitors. The most popular season is summertime when the beaches are packed with sun-worshipping nubile bods, but we schedule our visit during the off-season instead to avoid the crowds and enjoy the cooler weather.

Europeans crave that brief summer sunshine -- so we work around their schedule and come in late September when the weather is still wonderful with daytime

temperatures in the 50-60s, no crowds in sight, and more room in the restaurants. With a population of about 1 million it's the 2nd largest French city along the shores of the Mediterranean after Marseille. During summer the towns throughout this region will be very crowded, creating an entirely different experience that we avoid.





DAY ONE: NICE

This largest city along the Côte d'Azur makes an ideal home-base for seeing all the sights: it is one of the most beautiful places; offers a large number of restaurants in all ranges; and is centrally located with excellent rail and bus services. The nearby towns of Cannes, Antibes, Vence, St-Paul-de-Vence, Grasse, and the neighboring nation of Monaco, all easily reached within one hour by train or bus from Nice. We arrive by train at the great, old-fashioned train station, and take taxis to our hotel

down by the seaside, the best location.

We stay four days in Nice, the queen of the Riviera, because it is so beautiful and also makes a very good home base for exploring this scenic and picturesque region. Nice is just 30 minutes by train from Cannes and Antibes. We will lead you through those towns as well and take you to the smaller villages of Vence and St Paul, and then to Monaco, world's smallest and richest country with its casino at Monte Carlo. There are many wonderful sights to see in Nice and also in the nearby towns along the Côte d'Azur.

Nice is divided into numerous neighborhoods, but the visitor can focus on four main areas on this first day: the beachfront, Old Town, modern shopping district and main hotel section. The most famous image of Nice is the broad, ocean-front boulevard, Promenade des Anglais, framed with the blue Mediterranean along one side and a long row of elegant hotels on the other.

Your first day itinerary can include the beachfront, the old town, the modern shopping district and the main hotel section. Perhaps the first thing you'll want to do after getting settled at your hotel is head down to the waterfront to the beautiful beach, admire the views, enjoy a stroll and snap some pictures.

The long and broad beach is especially lovely on a sunny day. The beach itself is lined with hotels and apartment buildings for about 2 miles -- it's not exactly a fine sand beach, but more of a pebble beach. The most famous image of Nice

is that broad oceanfront boulevard, framed with the blue Mediterranean along one side, the long row of elegant hotels and apartments on the other, so one of your highlight moments is just sit on a bench gazing out across the beach to the beautiful blue sea.

The water is quite clean and you will probably see people fishing from the shore. If you are here in the off-season, nobody will be swimming or even sunbathing, but just enjoying the sunshine and the sights all around.

One of the greatest waterfront strolls to be found anywhere is this Promenade des Anglais. It's a broad, pedestrian, paved area running right alongside the beach with beautiful views out to the blue sea on one side and the grand old buildings lining the street on the other. It's been the main center of attraction in Nice for the past 150 years ever since visitors have been streaming in.

It was first started back in the 1860s, 1870s when Nice began to be attracting visitors from the north of Europe and it has continued as one of the great walkways of Europe. Walk along that palm-fringed, waterfront promenade, passing some of the deluxe hotels, including the Negresco, the supreme, 5-star deluxe landmark, and famous for its Le Chantecler restaurant, earning two stars in the Michelin Guide. There are also moderately-priced lodgings, about 100 good choices, in the main hotel section between the beach and the train station, an



area about 20 blocks along the shore and 10 blocks inland, with Boulevard Victor Hugo running through the center.

At the East End the Promenade changes name to Quai des États-Unis, the United States of America. Across the street you'll also notice the backside of the opera house, a great old theater, the Opera Nice Côte d'Azur. The first opera here opened in 1776 and this building was created a century later. A block further notice the lovely memorial in Greek revival style, built to thank the United States for their help back in 1918 ending World War I.

Just behind that memorial, a block inland from the water, you'll find the Cours Saleya, one of the great outdoor food markets and picturesque spots of Europe. This broad plaza features fresh produce and flowers in the many stalls, some of which are open into the early evening, except on Mondays when it becomes a market for antiques and some other used goods peddled by colorful vendors. They've got a whole variety of furniture, there's clothing, jewelry, the usual, the bric-a-brac, the old books, antiques, electrical items, you've got old cameras. While you might not buy anything it's fun just to look around, enjoy the people and check out the hundreds and thousands of items on sale.



The Cours Saleya is surrounded by inviting cafés that are open from morning till night, so you can stop for a break if you like or just take a walk on by and check it out for later. You might even find something here that you want to purchase -- it could be something authentic from the region.

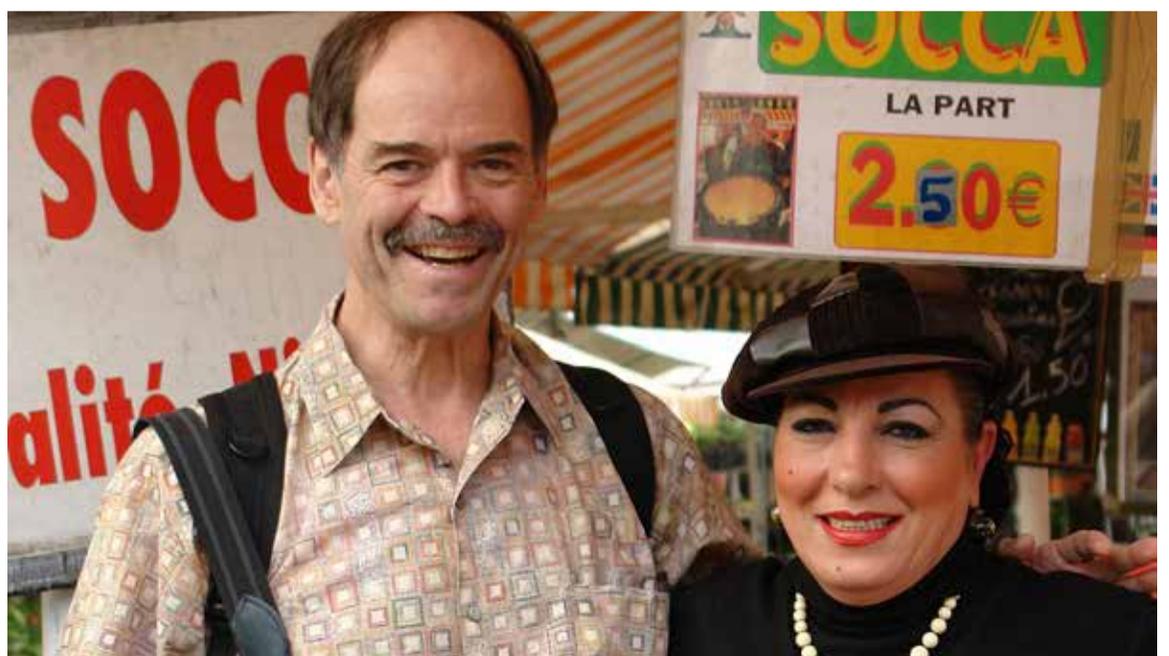
There are always the flowers to enjoy, even if you are merely looking and sniffing. The flower shops are one of the most interesting features of Nice -- bouquets composed of the most exquisite flowers of every size and description

from tiny buttonholed sprays to masses of blossoms 2 feet in diameter. Flowers are so important to Provence, not just for decoration at home, but as industrial agriculture because of the perfume industry. Grasse is the capital of fragrance, as you can discover a few days later in this visit.

Well of course it's a food market so there are lots of other eating options here at the Cours. You'll find bread and cheese and of course always lots of fresh fruits, ingredients for an instant picnic.

It's nice to take a little time to sit down and relax at a café for a drink and a rest and some people-watching. Instead of being in a constant rush while you're traveling stop and take a look at the passing scene. Chocolate lovers should look for the famous store Maison Auer in its landmark Belle Époque building at the West End. This chocolatier has thrived since 1820. Of course olives are essential to the cuisine of Provence so it's only natural you're going to find a shop selling olives and olive oil and balsamic vinegars of all kinds - a great variety here.

You would really enjoy a taste of socca, one of the great foods of the South of France and Chez Therese is the most famous place to find it. Socca is like a crepe, a flatbread. This humble bite is one of the specialties of Provence, but oh so delicious in its many variations. Also found in the Ligurian area of Italy where it is called farinata, this simple food is made from chickpea flour and olive oil. After being formed into a flat cake and cooked on a cast iron pan more than a meter in diameter, the socca is seasoned generously with black pepper and eaten while hot with the fingers. Yummm.



Of course olives are essential to the cuisine of Provence so it's only natural you're going to find a shop selling olives and olive oil and balsamic vinegar's of all kinds -- a great variety here.

France is a wine country. There's no question that France produces the best wine in the world. They also produce casual drinkable wines, and in the case of the Beaujolais nouveau it's an annual event on the third Thursday of November every year -- the official release of Beaujolais nouveau, a fresh young wine. It is in the bottle eight weeks after it's been harvested so it's very young and it's kind about pink purple color.

The church facing the Cours is the Chapel of the Misericordia, or the Chapel of Mercy. It's built in the Italian Baroque style constructed between 1750 and 1770 by some architects from Torino nearby. It has a very elaborate Baroque interior.

You can even buy some original paintings directly from the artist depicting the scenes all around you that will go nicely with the photographs that you're taking. The most famous artist who lived in Nice, Henri Matisse, lived right here at the Cours in the yellow building at the far end of the plaza. He had a great view out his window that he depicted in many paintings. He moved to a larger mansion now converted to the Matisse Museum, described later. Matisse lived in and around Nice for his last 37 years about which he said "I couldn't believe how lucky I was."



OLD TOWN

Just inland from the Cours Saleya you'll find the Old Town of Nice, a major highlight of the city. Visitors love wandering through these narrow pedestrian lanes lined with historic buildings, shops, restaurants, bars, small plazas with fountains and statues, a church here and there -- it's just a great spot to explore and hang out.

The Old Town of Nice has a special charm you do not find in the rest of the city, so you really want to focus much of your time in this fascinating pedestrian zone on the east end of the waterfront

between Quai des États-Unis and Boulevard Jean Jaures.

Take a detailed look at the Old Town this first day but be sure to walk through again in the early evening when it is most beguiling. This compact pedestrian zone is small enough you can explore by simply wandering, using the main lanes as jump-off points of reference. While strolling look up and down the side alleys and see what catches your eye, turning left or right as the fancy catches you. You can always use a map or street signs up on the buildings as your directional aids to help you get around here but don't worry about getting lost, you will find your way very easily. If lost, what better excuse could you have to strike up a conversation with a local than asking for directions?

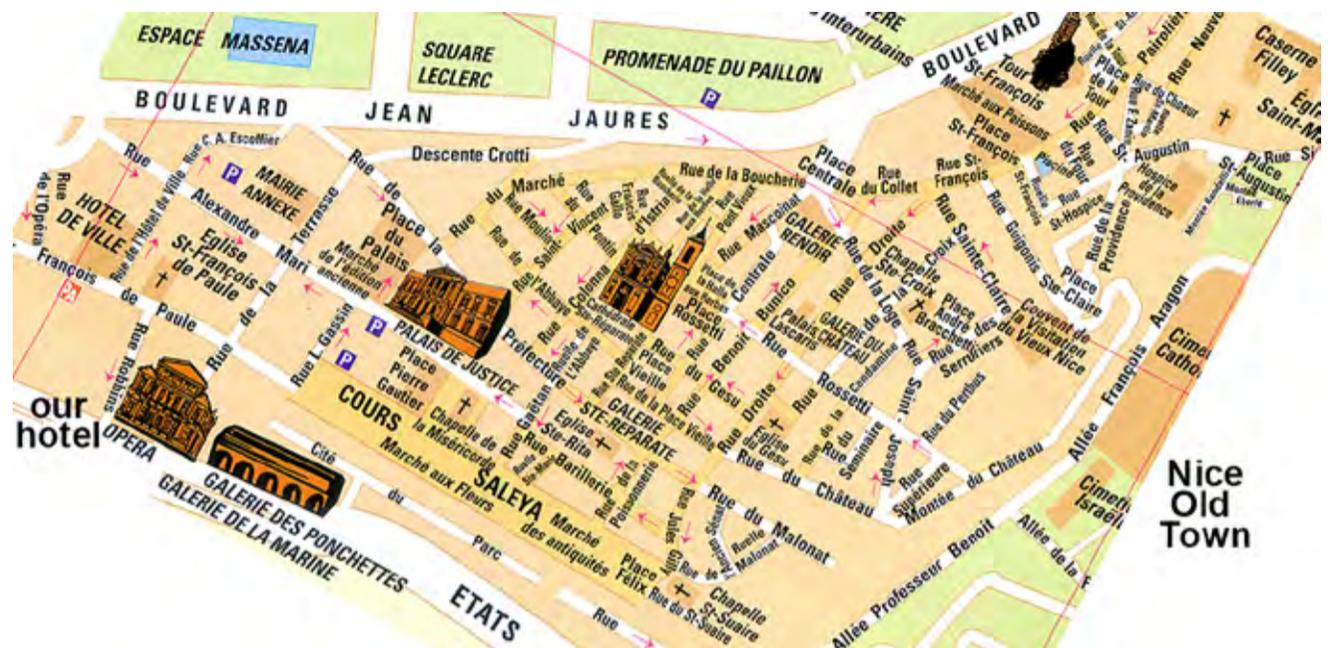
While we are visiting many charming towns in this trip, the old town of Nice is something very special -- not so much because of historic monuments or great churches or important single buildings, but just the total atmosphere, the environment, the simple walking lanes, the shops, the waterfront setting, a rich history of many cultures living together over a long time,



and the people. There are actual locals living here, there are kids out playing, the residents are upstairs looking down from their windows and you really get a feeling of community here, of authenticity, especially in the off-season when it's not too crowded with tourists walking through the lanes -- that helps quite a bit.

Called the "Vieux Nice," the Old Town is home to art galleries, little shops, small restaurants, bars and cafes, making it the perfect spot for strolling. In the off-season the character of Vieux Nice is quite peaceful with not many people and no cars, but in the summer it gets very crowded.

The old town maze of narrow lanes occupies a triangular slice about 300 yards long on each side, so this old town is not a huge area that you're going to get lost in, but you'd be surprised at how big it seems as you're walking around because of all the little lanes and alleys that somehow connect and interconnect. There are several main lanes which curve around the perimeter encircling the Old Town, with many smaller lanes and plazas crisscrossing throughout the center, so you can walk all around the periphery while feeling free to wander back and forth in the little side lanes. You might end up walking around in circles a little bit, part of the fun, which makes it seem much bigger than it really is.



On the map you'll see suggested easy routes that take you right through and around the heart of the old town, pointing out a nice way to navigate through this labyrinth navigating in and around the main highlights. You could do this in one hour if that's all the time you've got, or better yet, spend a day or two exploring the nooks and crannies.

There is a beauty in this old town of just simply walking, so it really deserves to be front and center when you come to visit Nice. These narrow old lanes are often overlooked in guidebooks or historical memoirs or even dismissed as a place that's dark, narrow and congested, but it's what makes the city so very special, along with the beachfront of course, that marvelous white broad beach and the promenade down by the Mediterranean Sea. The modern downtown certainly is lovely and we'll lead you there as well in the visit, but these little back lanes and waterfront are what make Nice something special.



As you enter the old town from the end of the Cours Saleya one of the first streets you'll come to is the very atmospheric Rue de la Poissonnerie, home to the typical shops and restaurants that you'll find throughout the old town. Continue along one of the main lanes, Rue Droite, lined with cute shops and art galleries. There are some fine typical examples of staircase streets that branch off from Rue Droite, such as Rue Molinaro, along with several more parallel lanes that go up the hill. They are regular streets down on the flatland, and when you go up higher and steeper there are

no cars, a few scooters perhaps, motorcycles and bicycles, but largely you enter a pedestrian zone on the lower hillside of Nice down below the Château, a typical residential neighborhood. It's interesting to see here the working population at home - comfortable affordable housing in the middle of the city. Another steep lane, Rue du Château, and several others. These lanes are among the most picturesque streets in town but don't worry, you don't have to climb them.

And if you don't feel like walking you can take the little tourist mini-train on a route that will bring you through the Old Town and then up onto the hill for a view, but of course you know, walking is better.

Most of the shops in the old town are independent and unique. You've got boutiques, crafts, arts, all kinds of great browsing to do -- so different than modern shopping malls.

You'll find souvenir shops with the typical Provençal items, especially the colorful fabrics and the pottery. There's also plenty of food in the convenience stores, or in the cookie boutique.

We especially enjoyed the local cuisine of the casual restaurant, Créperie Breton. They specialize in crêpes and socca and salads, and that's really all you need for a very nice lunch. And the friendly couple running the place really made us feel welcome. They are the owners -- the cook, waitress and the food was delicious. You might be surprised at the variety of crêpes on offer and that socca.

You will be wandering this way and that as you meander through the old town but you'll come back to Rue Droite which goes like a straight line through the middle of the old town. It's a good axis to get your bearings, to go out to the left, go to the right and then come back to this central spine.

The Palais Lascaris, at 15 rue Droite, is the largest civil Baroque building in the old town and the region. It perpetuates the reputation of Charles Emmanuel the second, who was Duke of Savoy, considered one of the principal families of Nice nobility of the 17th century.



The palace was influenced by the Genoese Baroque and unites a set of 17th-century embellishments and some changes from the 18th century.

Le Palais Lascaris encloses two small courtyards on which arched bays open up a monumental staircase. The lobby is free and open to the public, certainly worth a look at the attractive wall and ceiling frescoes. If you like to go inside the small museum there is an admission charge and you will find exhibits of 17th and 18th century arts and crafts featuring ceramics, decorative and religious arts and furniture from the Baroque era as well as an exceptional collection of ancient musical instruments.

Along the lane and throughout town you'll find souvenir shops with the typical Provençal items, especially the colorful fabrics and the pottery. There are also lots of temptations in the small food stores -- go for the cookies. A few hundred years ago this was already a very old part of town and had become somewhat rundown and dilapidated and it's really just in recent decades it has come back to life again.



At the end of Droite you run into the main lane that runs along the north edge of the old town. Curiously, it changes names five times in less than 1 mile: Marché, Boucherie, Centrale, Collet, François, Pairolière. This is perhaps the best pedestrian route of the Old Town. It just meanders-- there's a little bit of a curve here and there as it changes names. You'll see cafés, tourist shops, local shops and people out walking along it, especially at twilight -- the perfect time. Shops are open in the evening with plenty of people out. This of course is a very safe neighborhood, a family kind of place. Of course there are no cars allowed in these narrow pedestrian lanes but you'll run into the odd moped, so keep your ears open.

As you leave the end of Rue Droite turn left on Rue du Collet which soon changes name to Rue de la Boucherie where it forms a delightful intersection at Place Centrale. Each city has essential focal points where the action happens, and this corner, fittingly called Place Centrale, is a perfect example. Appreciate this special junction for a moment, where several pedestrian lanes come together: Rue Droite, Rue Sainte and Rue Françoise all merging in this wonderful little spot surrounded by cafés, shops and people. This is one of those moments where it's nice to stop for several minutes and simply look around watching the endless parade of people passing by, action at the busy sidewalk restaurants, pastel color of the attractive buildings with the residences above, sounds of people talking, stimulating smells wafting out from kitchens and vibrant life all around. Better yet, drop anchor at the sidewalk cafe for a drink or snack and observe the passing scene.



Place Central is a simple affair -- you've got a casual restaurant that sells socca and other Niçoise specialties. There's a café on the other side, there's a little food market here, you can buy some gadgets and gizmos. The fresh produce market is fun. You can shop for some clothing, all in an arm's reach from this central place. It is a vortex where people gather, an outdoor living room of the old town. It's not a particular highlight you're going to find posted high in ordinary guidebooks, but this is truly one of those special little places.

Any of the five lanes leading out from this point are worth a stroll, but to continue along the suggested route, walk along Rue de la Boucherie, which changes name again to Rue du Marche, soon reaching the main gathering place, Place de Palais, which retains an Italian feeling that once permeated the town. Up until 100 years ago Nice really was more Italy than France, controlled by the Dukes of Savoy of Northern Italy, and while joined to France in 1860, still displays a strong cultural blend in features such as its unique language, le Niçoise or Nis-sart, a hybrid of French and Italian which cannot be understood by anyone outside of Provence.

Place du Palais enjoys a typical European atmosphere -- fountains in the middle, several sidewalk restaurants and a big chunk of neoclassical architecture looming large on one side, the Palais de Justice. This courthouse square might seem an unlikely social hub, but it's one of the largest open areas in the Old Town and so naturally you'll find many people here, especially in the evening.

It's got French sidewalk restaurant serving crêpes and wine, and the neoclassical courthouse looking like a Greek temple. It is definitely worth visiting in the daytime when it's quite busy, and then again in the evening when it's even more busy. This Justice Square with the courthouse looming above has got very popular restaurants all around it and in the nearby lanes. It draws a lot of people. Quite close to Place Rossetti, it just takes a few minutes to walk over here from practically anywhere in the old town. The social life here at the Place du Palais de Justice is even busier at night than during the day -- in fact so popular that at 9 PM many of these bars raise their prices, so you might want to get in and have your drinks by 8-8:30 and then settle in for dinner somewhere.



Several interesting streets can lead you out from here on further adventures, such as to Place Rossetti, the other main gathering place in the Old Town, easily reached in seven short blocks along Rue de la Préfecture and Rue Sainte Réparate.



Place Rossetti is accented by its Italian-styled Baroque church, Cathédrale Sainte-Réparate, the cathedral of Nice. It's beautiful with brilliant colors in the Baroque styles. It was built during the second half of the 17th century, a time when this area was more Italian than French. The interior of the church has 10 chapels with a floor plan in the Latin cross that was based somewhat on the church of Santa Susana in Rome. Typical of the Italian Baroque, it's highly decorated with many paintings and architectural flourishes. At twilight the beauty of the building is at its best. In fact any-

where you go at twilight it's a wonderful experience. This plaza is a popular gathering spot surrounded by bars and restaurants with Italian-style architecture as you find throughout the old town. Because of its central location with so many roads going through you'll probably return here a few times during your visit. Do come back in the evening when the action picks up.

From here you would enjoy a stroll along its namesake, Rue Rossetti, another picturesque lane which steeply rises up the hillside changing character as it goes. At the far end some its sidewalks are staircases with a narrow one-lane road down the middle, lined with apartments and local folks hanging out.

These little streets are among the most interesting walking routes that you'll find anywhere in the south of France. This neighborhood is quite lively because people live here. Most of the upper floors in the old town are residential apartments with full-time residence and that gives it a real home quality. You see the life in the streets here is what modern major urban centers are trying to re-create, trying to strive for -- real streets with real people living out their daily lives, and it's on a human scale because you don't have skyscrapers, you don't have massive structures all around. It is people and their homes and their playgrounds in the street.

As you walk along through the narrow pedestrian lanes there is not really a lot of history or analysis to bother with -- it's mostly about visuals, the enjoyment of seeing shops, the people, the old buildings, the architecture. Several hundred years ago nearly everybody lived in the old town -- that really was Nice itself.

There was a little bit of population up on the hill, a little bit around the bend over at the harbor, a few houses scattered of course up in the hillsides in the interior but one could imagine 90% of the population was clustered right here in what is now the old town a couple of hundred



years ago. A few hundred years ago this was already a very old part of town and had become somewhat run-down and dilapidated and it's really just in the past century it's come back to life again. (More history at the end of this chapter).

Note that our route occasionally has you walking in circles because that is the reality of navigating through this old town and part of the fun because you are seeing the same places over again from different angles at various times of the day and night, which makes this little zone seem much bigger than it really is.



Early evening is a magical time to be out strolling of course with the twilight and the shop lights -- very safe, very friendly, a lovely place to stroll. At dusk you'll enjoy the colorful combination of light from the evening sky with the street lamps and the ambient glow from the shop windows -- it mixes in a beautiful way to produce those saturated dark blue skies and orange lights which look lovely and make special photos -- sometimes digital cameras pick up richer deep colors than the eye can notice.

It's very safe walking around in the evening in this old town area, especially on the main lanes where you've got the shops, you've got the people. Everybody's out and about, as long as you're out there a reasonable hour from twilight right on up through the end of dinner. Here in the old town you've got that ambient lighting on the buildings and shops. You would find it rewarding to visit the same places daytime and nighttime -- it gives you that complete experience.

In the evening the old town is alive, the shops stay open until nine PM, some of them even later, especially in this tourist area. Of course the hour of sunset varies considerably during the year, for example in December it gets dark at 5 PM and in the middle of June it gets dark at 9:30 PM. Either way you're sure to enjoy an evening stroll. Many shops do close in the afternoon for siesta, after all we are in the south of Europe and they follow that traditional custom, so it might not be best to stroll here between 1 PM and 3 PM -- a lot of the shutters are down, but they'll be reopening at three or 4 o'clock. You'll find that a majority of the shops do stay open throughout the day.

And there are plenty of art galleries along the way. You might even get a chance to meet the artist -- usually they're inside the shop and maybe doing a little bit of painting. It is like The Streetside Museum of Contemporary Art. This is art that's very much up to date -- it was just created yesterday.

This ambience shares a lot of the Italian heritage of Nice, after all remember up until 100 years ago this really was more Italy than France and so it has that wonderful Italian character.

Perhaps there will be time to continue your explorations of Nice this first afternoon, or more likely tomorrow, with a visit to one or two of the town's fine museums, if you are an art fan. There's a wonderful Matisse Museum in a park slightly away from the center of town, which you can reach by public bus or taxi. Matisse lived in the city of Nice for many years and created some of his finest paintings here. You might be able to visualize some of those scenes that were painted from his room looking out onto the beautiful blue sea, with the bright colors of the south of France and Provence.



Matisse and his heirs donated the founding starter collection to the museum from 1953. The museum contains dozens of original paintings by Matisse and hundreds of other works are drawings and paper cutouts, there are sculptures and engravings and other objects, making it a wonderful place to visit.

Matisse first visited Nice in 1917, staying at the Hotel Beau Rivage, which by coincidence is the same hotel we have happily been using in our group visits. He moved here in 1918 and remained until 1954.

In front of the museum they're often playing pétanque, or boule. The idea is to get your ball near the little red ball and to knock the other balls as far away as possible. It is the national sport of France, especially here in the south, rivaling only perhaps football, or as we say soccer. It's believed that some variation of this

game has been played for several thousand years and you can see why -- it's a casual friendly game providing a chance to socialize and have a little fun. There are different variations of it. The bocce is the Italian game and pétanque is the French version, a little more vigorous, with players running up to throw the ball.



Next to the Matisse Museum are some major Roman ruins: a small amphitheater, housing foundations, and a small Archaeology Museum that remind us the Romans had a major presence here 2,000 years ago. Our modern word Provence comes from this first Roman province. The actual measurements of the amphitheater are about 210 feet in length and 165 feet wide. But the amphitheater was probably not built for games in which wild animals were fought and killed, because it seems the floor of the amphitheater was a little too shallow for that and these beasts would be able to get out and into the stands. The amphitheater probably served for gladiatorial combats, dancing, gymnastics and various other kinds of Roman entertainment.

The scanty Roman remains found in Nice today bear evidence to the grandeur which the city must have attained back in those ancient Roman days. The walls of the amphitheater prove by their dimensions that an audience of about four thousand people could be seated inside, which shows the population of the city was probably about twenty thousand. Quite an accomplishment for that time period, 2000 years ago.

Several other Nice museums will compete for your attention: the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Asian Arts Museum, Fine Arts Museum, Museum of Natural History, and the Chagall Museum with the world's largest collection of the artist's works.

When it comes time for dinner, there are hundreds of choices ranging from cheap pizza up to Michel 2-star perfection at Le Chantecler in the Hotel Negresco, a truly memorable experience. In-between you can find many wonderful restaurants specializing in Provençal regional cuisine, featuring local seafoods, fresh vegetables and elaborate salads, with influences from Italy, France, Spain and northern Africa. You are familiar with salad Niçoise, with the hearty tunafish and olives and all sorts of mixed greens included, but you'll discover there is much more to local cuisine.



DAY TWO:

(Morning day-trip to Cannes and Antibes, described in following chapters). Late afternoon explore downtown Nice after returning from Antibes.

Having seen the Old Town and beach in your first day, you will also want to explore Nice's modern downtown stretching 12 blocks from Place Massena north to the train station, packed with many busy boutiques and anchored at the lower end by the large department store, Galleries Lafayette. We shall visit it later in the afternoon when shops are open and people are all around.

The new tram running the length of downtown's main street, Avenue Jean Médecin, has absolutely transformed the modern center of Nice into a marvelous pedestrian friendly zone. Riding along on this new tram is a very smooth experience - the tracks are still quite level so you have a nice view of downtown passing by as you look out the windows. The tram is convenient because it's right at street level so it's easy to just walk right on, and there are stops every few blocks, so it's easy to catch. Trams like this have become quite popular once again in Europe, it's the rebirth of an old idea. A lot of money has been spent by the government to upgrade and improve the city with the new tram, the new parks, really enhancing the quality of life.



It's really quite wonderful to see how this main street has been transformed in recent years by the tram. All the automobiles have been removed, except service vehicles. Sidewalks widened. Now it's a great place for pedestrians and bicycles and people, and the tram running down the middle. When locals are referring to the street they don't even call it Avenue Jean Médecin. They just say the Avenue because it's by far the primary shopping street of Nice.

Formerly this main street was busy with thousands of automobiles and trucks

that are now prohibited. Instead we have a transit mall with broad sidewalks along both sides where people can comfortably walk, shop, eat and drink at an outdoor cafe, ride a bicycle, people-watch and generally hang out. A major shopping mall, Nicetoile, occupies two blocks across the street from the church, and offers 100 shops in a very stylish setting. Of course you'll also find restaurants bars and cafés inside Nicetoile. It's wonderful that this modern multilevel shopping mall is right in the heart of downtown so it complements the existing street-level retail rather than luring people outside of the city. Contrast the busy modern interior of the mall with the relatively empty Basilica of Notre Dame across the street, the largest church in Nice, completed in 1868 in the Gothic style -- but it's not the cathedral, which is in the old town.



A major new park has been developed one block south of Place Massena that will surely delight you with its fountains, green lawns, benches, café kiosks and lively scene. Called Promenade du Paillon, this visionary new public space forms a long green recreation area extending for 20 blocks, attracting hundreds of appreciative park-users night and day.

The park is 1.2 km in length and it's a result of nearly 10 years of urban redevelopment in the heart of Nice. They ripped down an old bus station, they

remove various other buildings and they put in this beautiful park with the mirrored, reflecting fountain -- it's kind of a trick fountain, you can walk through it if you dare. It covers over 3000 square meters with the beautiful trees and green lawns all around it, cafe services.

It's a great place for the families, and it's open from early in the morning till late at night -- very safe, clean, sufficient staff around, public facilities, and always plenty of people enjoying themselves. It's really a sterling example of urban renewal. It's a great place for families to come out after work, before dinner, enjoying the playground facilities.

The park is right next to Place Massena, a great hub of the city straddling between the old town and the new town, at the lower end of Avenue Jean Médecin, and adjacent to it are beautiful arcades sheltering the sidewalks lined with more shops.

The Italian style architecture of these arcades, with their red ocher construction, harkens back to the days a century ago when Nice was more Italian than French. From here it's only a 2-minute walk south to the beach, or turn around and plunge back into the downtown shopping arena.

It is easy continue into the shopping heart of town from here -- it just takes a couple minutes, and you're walking along the beautiful arcaded street toward the lower end of the Avenue, with more shops tucked away in the arcades -- especially that great department store Galeries Lafayette, the largest department store chain

in France. The entertaining shop called Pylones was founded in France in 1985 as a gift shop with a variety of colorful and animated objects and innovative designs, and it's been a big hit. You see it now in just about every city in France.



On the west side of Place Massena are several more pedestrian streets for shopping and eating: Rue Massena and the more upscale Rue Paradis, with luxury shops like Cartier, Armani, Louis Vuitton and Hermes. What do you desire? Shoes, scarves, designer clothes, olive oil, wine, cheese, records, guide books, perfumes, soaps, lotions, kitchen utensils, local foods and all the usual souvenirs are here. You will be able to find anything you need in this central zone.

Don't overlook the lovely pedestrian zone in the newer part of Nice along rue d'France, which used to be the main street of the city about 100 years ago and it's still one of the most important streets. Fortunately it has been converted into a pedestrian mall with a lot of shops, restaurants and there are some affordable hotels scattered along the street, which will lead you right back towards Place Massena. It runs parallel to the shore about four blocks inland, wonderful day and night. Nearby Boulevard Victor Hugo is a main road with many affordable hotels that cuts right through the central area.

The east side of downtown is also interesting place to walk around, a busy commercial area -- no pedestrian zones but with lively streets and shops everywhere, sidewalk cafés, views back at Notre Dame. It's a hustle bustle neighborhood -- again, not that many tourists here, but you should come over and take a look, just a few blocks east of the main avenue. As you walk along you get a view of the national theater, a large modern building, and other side streets that wind around, making this another worthwhile place to explore.

Evening Activity: Château

One of the greatest evening activities is a waterfront stroll along the promenade for sunset views and then up the Castle Hill, Le château de Nice, for a spectacular view looking down over the town and the harbor.

To get this view you walk along the east end of the waterfront promenade on the Quai des États-Unis, and at the end you'll find a rocky outcrop terrace with a commanding view looking back along the pebbly beach of Nice. The view gets even



more spectacular when you go up to the top of Castle Hill or as they call it the Château.

The easiest way to get up to the top of this hill is take the elevator. You pay a small fee, it's about one euro, and it's well worth it -- otherwise you've got to walk up a huge staircase, the equivalent of going up over 100 m high, so it's really way up in the sky. You don't want to walk if you can avoid it, so take the elevator, it's quick and simple, especially late in the day -- there is no crowd, there's no line and you come out on top and start enjoying the view.

Right away you're looking down on the old town into the Cours Saleya immediately below -- you'll see the booths getting ready for the next morning's market. You can walk up a little higher, so keep walking when you get up to the top. They even have a waterfall -- it's an artificial waterfall that was put here in the 1830's to help attract the tourist nobility from England and the rest of France to come on down and visit Nice.



While you're up on the hill enjoying the town view be sure to walk through the lovely green park to the other side of the hill for the harbor view. Looking down from that east side of the hill you see the small boat harbor called Port Lympia and the distant Cape Denise.

This Castle Hill was the site of some of the earliest settlements in the area, pioneered in prehistory by residents who lived up here for self-defense. Ligurians, who were the first inhabitants of Nice, had their dwellings up on the rock of the castle, and later it's probable that the earliest Greek settlers lived there. But

as society became more settled people began spreading down onto the plain and the old hill town became a mere fortress to be used in time of need -- and a fortress it remained, developing as centuries followed each other, into a great and impregnable castle.

If you have the patience or the proper timing to stick around for the late sunset, it reaches a visual peak. This is really grand with the lights blazing down below, the golden sunset off in the horizon, and makes for one of those travel moments that you will just never forget. When done you can take that same elevator ride back down again, timing it so that you get down before the elevator shuts for the evening -- or you could walk down. It's not as hard as walking up but so much easier to just simply ride the elevator.



This completes our look at the most important places to visit in Nice, and next we shall take you on day-trips to various wonderful nearby towns. But before leaving Nice, a brief historical summary.

HISTORY

The human occupation of Nice, as you might imagine, is very long and tangled up with a lot of warfare and many different tribes of people coming through, because Nice has always been on a frontier, an attractive place with balmy climate and rich soils inland. Even today it's close to Italy, and facing the Mediterranean it's really a frontier with the north coast of Africa as well. This proximity has always been a blessing and curse: for thousands of years it's been a crossroads.

Rich in time-honored cities and in golden legends of the past, the story of Nice and its countryside goes far back into prehistory with likely occupation over 50,000 years ago. Well-documented sites several hundred miles north in the Dordogne suggest this coast had similar ancient populations.

The Riviera first enters into the actual historical period about six centuries before the birth of Christ, with a group called the Phoceans, who came ultimately from Greece, on the shores of Ionia. They were living along the shores of the Mediterranean and were battling with the Persians, and ended up over in this part of what is now the Riviera. At the beginning, Nice was built along the seashore, but being attacked by various tribes -- Ligurian tribes who lived up in the mountains -- forced these inhabitants of the new little village to move up on top of the rock where they could more easily defend themselves.

In very early times the Ligurians, who were the first inhabitants of Nice expanded their dwellings upon the rock of the castle, and later it's probable that the earliest Greek settlers lived there. But as times became more settled they began spreading again down onto the plain and the old hilltown became a mere fortress to be

used in time of need. And a fortress it remained, developing as centuries followed each other into a great and impregnable castle, which later decomposed over time and today there is absolutely nothing left of the original castle upon the Castle Rock.

Later, the Riviera first enters into the actual historical period about six centuries before the birth of Christ, with a group called the Phoenicians, who came ultimately from Greece. They were living along the shores of the Mediterranean and were battling with the Persians, and ended up in this part of what is now the Riviera, settled already in Marseille to the west by about the 3rd or 4th century BC. This Greek culture is perhaps what gave Nice its current name because the word Nike is the Greek word for victory, which was based on one of the battles they fought to occupy the area.



It was the Greeks of Antibes who first summoned the Roman Legions to their assistance in 237 B.C., and the district was very tempting to the Romans, so this first expedition was followed by others from Rome, and they soon took root, and the Romans became the dominant force. These early Greek settlers of Nice were also harassed by the native Ligurian tribes and so in 154 BC these Greeks appealed to ancient Rome to intervene and help them out. This is what brought Rome into the picture and they stayed and occupied the area for the next 500

years. The Mediterranean coast was declared a Roman province, which occurred in the reign of Augustus about 2000 years ago. By about the 4th century A.D. with the decline of the Roman Empire, Christianity became well-established and then by the early Middle Ages, the Nice area attained some commercial importance.

With the collapse of Rome, Nice shared the fortune of other towns of the northern Mediterranean coast and it was conquered by the Goths after the Romans left. Theodoric leading an army of 80,000 Visigoths brought desolation into this country. Later there were invasions by the Lombards, then Franks, and Saracens.



Throughout this historic period the Catalan culture, reaching from Spain to Italy, became firmly established, as shown by the special language shared even today throughout this region. Rulers come and go, Goths, Savoy, France, Spain, propelled by armed invasion and elite rule, but the base population remains the same – in this case a people sharing a common language and identity of Catalonia. In Spain this Catalan culture and pride remains, but France was more thorough in establishing a unified national identity, especially under the long powerful rule of Louis XIV. Today some

trace of the ancient language survives among the elderly, and street signs are dual language, but the younger generations are pure French.

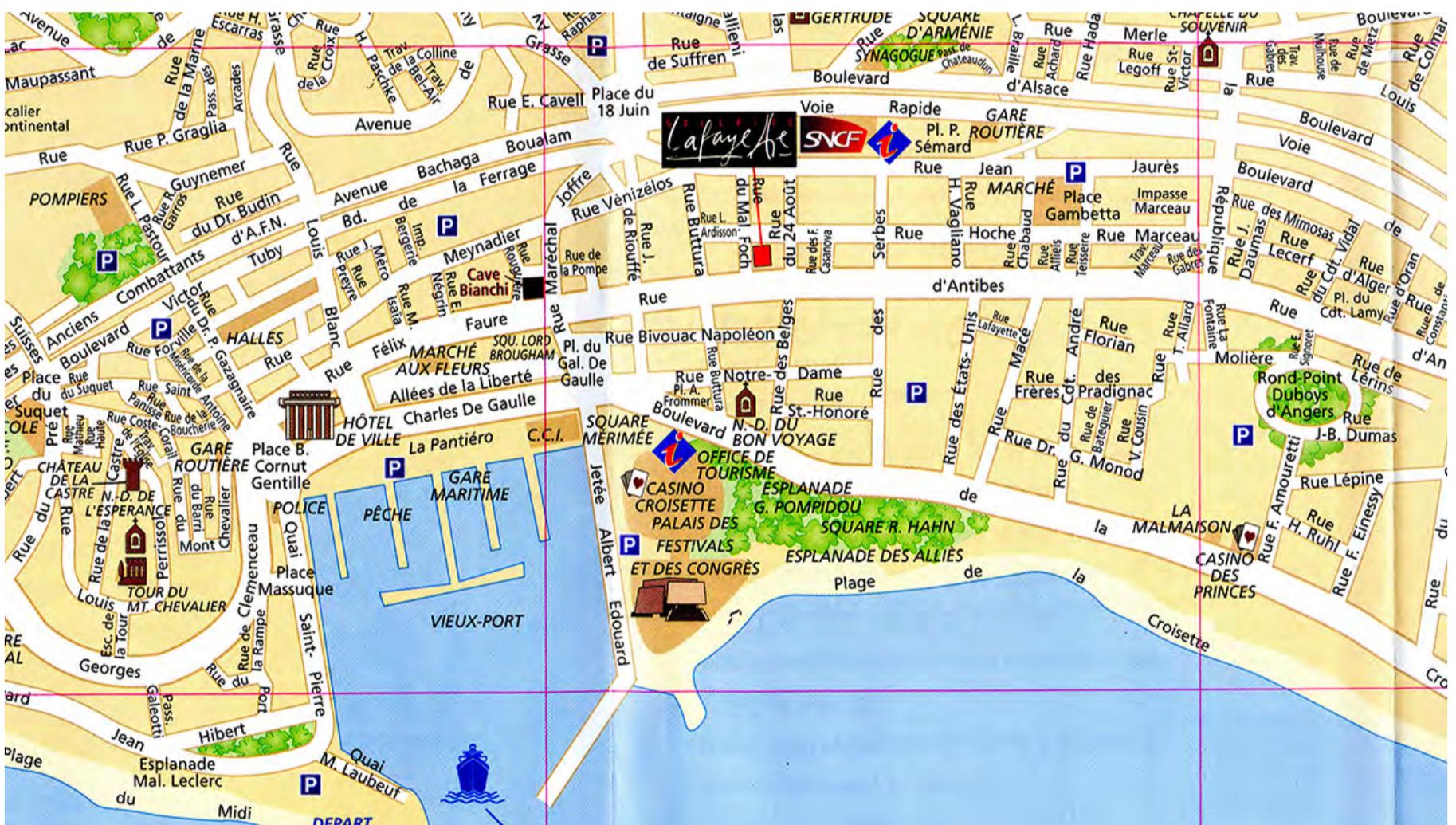
In 1388 Nice placed itself into the hands of the princes and dukes of Savoy, an area in the north of Italy, and from then it was a frequent victim in the contests of France with the Empire of Savoy, and the rulers of northern Italy for the possession of Provence. Like all border cities it was a bone of contention between France and Italy sometimes belonging to the Dukes of Savoy, sometimes to the Kings of France. But the sympathies of the Nicois were far more Italian than French, and most of the history of Nice is connected with the efforts made by the inhabitants to defend themselves against France.

In 1543 during the wars of Francis I and Charles V of Spain it was besieged by the French assisted by Turkish fleet and the first assault was repulsed. The Turks bombarded the castle with their cannons, but just in time, the ships of the Duke of Savoy came sailing over the blue waters and the Turks made off with all speed back to Constantinople. However, the city was eventually taken and sacked.

And then the French captured Nice again in 1600, and in 1691, and 1696. These were troubled times for the natives of Nice. And in 1705 the Duke of Berwick led a siege and the country of Nice changed masters once again.

The peace of Aix-la-Chapelle restored Nice again briefly to the House of Savoy who were then the Kings of Sardinia. The French Revolution of 1789 affected Nice for a variety of reasons and ended up by making it part of France. In 1792 Nice was occupied and annexed to the French Republic, but in 1814 it reverted once again back to Sardinia, re-united to the fortunes of the House of Savoy, bringing back a strong Italian influence to the area. One important Italian connection then was the 1807 birth in Nice of Giuseppe Garibaldi, who went on to lead the battles which first unified Italy as a nation. So Nice remained Italian for close to half a century, when further political developments brought about its return to France, under Napoleon III. The treaty made on March 24th, 1860, by which the Kings of Sardinia renounced their protectorate over the town of Nice, was ratified by a popular vote of the inhabitants on June 14th, when 25,773 voted for the annexation, against 160 who opposed annexation to France and so it carried by a near-unanimous vote. In 1860 it was re-assigned by this treaty along with Savoy to France. It's been French ever since. It was a complicated, twisted historical tale.

At the same time, in 1860, construction of the railroad was completed and the beginnings of the tourism boom started. Travelers could now arrive easily from all over Europe and Nice took off as one of the great centers of tourism, given a big boost by the development of gambling in the Casino of nearby Monaco, another great destination in our visit on day three, but for now we are off to Cannes and Antibes.



CANNES

While staying in Nice as our home base, we explore more of the beautiful French Riviera. We'll start the morning with a 30-minute train ride along the coast to reach Cannes and Antibes, which will be coming to life by the time we get there. Take the tram to the Nice rail station, then later on your return to Nice, walk from the station through the downtown to properly experience it, as described previously. It's an easy trip from Nice to Cannes, 40 km distance, and they have got a couple of trains every hour. The Cannes train station is right in town so in a few minutes walking you'll reach the pedestrian zone.

The compact size and layout of Cannes consists of three adjacent neighborhoods, which makes it very easy to navigate on foot, so touring strategies can be summed up in a nutshell: Old town; beachfront; Old Town; down-

town pedestrian and shopping lanes. Alternatively, you might consider skipping the uphill walk to the small Old Town if you have already seen enough other villages with their old pedestrian lanes.

Upon leaving the train station you are facing interesting streets no matter which way you turn. If you want to get to the beach right away, walk straight out from the station for five blocks along Marseille Marseille des Serbes, also a lovely commercial road. Mid-way note that beautiful shopping street, Rue d'Antibes, which you can explore later. After 300 meters you will arrive in five minutes at Boulevard de la Croisette, one of the world's great waterfront promenades, lined with luxury hotels and high-end shops on one side and private sandy beaches along the shore.

Alternatively, if the beach can wait a little while, you could take a right outside the station and walk two blocks over to Rue Meynadier, a pedestrian shopping lane that extends for 600 meters to the Old Town. Of course there are plenty of souvenir shops and a variety of merchandise for sale all over Cannes. We will get you back to this lovely pedestrian lane later in the chapter but for now you would probably rather get down to the waterfront, the beautiful highlight of Cannes that makes this town so unique.



Depending on the season, there may or may not be very much beach action. Cannes is one place that it might be more exciting to visit in the summer when the beaches are quite busy, but in the off-season it is not so crowded or hot. If seeing those nubile, exposed bodies is important, you would be better off visiting here in the summertime despite the crowds and astronomical prices.

The main boulevard, la Croisette, is lined with large fancy hotels starting with the Majestic to the right, at that first corner with Serbes where you just arrived. The Majestic is one of the grandest of the hotels. The lobby is open to the public, so go in, have a look around the Egyptian-themed lounges, sit down, relax, use the facilities, maybe have a snack at the café. Of course the Majestic Hotel is very highly rated, for example on Trip Advisor, people love it – it got 306 excellent ratings out of 606 reviews, a very good record. You would find it also can be affordable in the off-season -- you might find a room for under \$300.



Walking east from there will take you along the main seven blocks of the boulevard's luxury row including the usual boutiques catering to the upper .01% who come here and buy ever more jewelry and fancy scarves as they flaunt their extravagant lifestyle at Hermes, Bulgari, Louis Vuitton, Harry Winston, Valentino, Ferragamo, Dior, Chanel, etc. After a few blocks you reach three top hotels, the Grand, Marriott and Carlton. This is one of the great sections of the city that you just absolutely must come and spend time at. Notice the

real estate office offering simple apartments for €10 million, a little reminder of where you are.

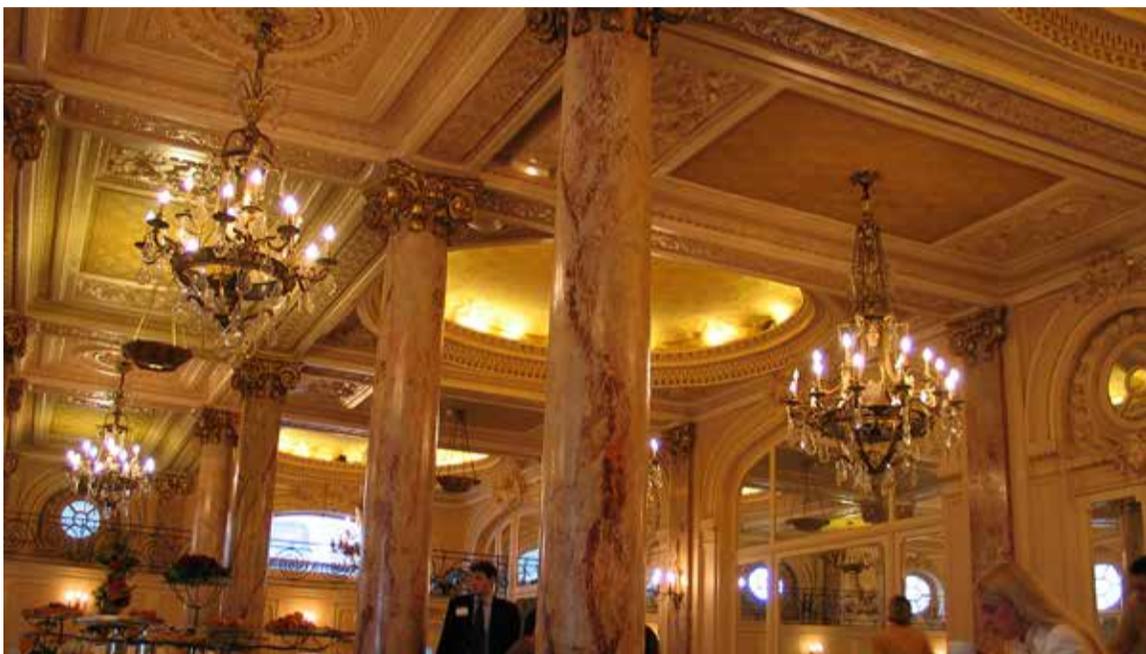
It's a fine neighborhood for walking but if you don't have the time or energy, or you're just feeling a little lazy you can ride around in one of those little tourist trains that run along the main streets and continue uphill to the Old Town for an easy tour while sitting down.

Perhaps the most spectacular hotel lobby along the strip is at the Marriott with a huge atrium. It used to be the Noga Hilton and the Marriott has taken it over and done a fabulous job.

Further along, the Carlton Hotel is generally considered the grande dame of Cannes – one of the most elegant resorts along the Riviera, a magnificent structure one century old but sparkling like new. You might be pleasantly surprised at how affordable it could be in the wintertime, in the off-season – even in November. If you come in the late fall, early spring you could probably get a room here for under \$300, but double that in the busy summer season. Obviously during the film festival it would be unaffordable to just about everybody except the film industry types.

The baroque dining salon dates to 1911 with original décor intact, and the elegant lobby also features a lovely lounge. The Carlton is on the waterfront with the beach across the street and, of course, another row of high-end shops out front.

Have a peek at the high life exemplified in these extraordinary hotel palaces. Nobody will stop you from walking through their fancy lobbies, use the facilities and perhaps pause for some refreshments. The hotels really don't mind if you come in, behave yourself and have a look around – they welcome you as a future customer, so feel free to take a look. You might just be freeloading, walking along from one hotel to the next, dropping into the lobbies and departing to the next hotel, but don't feel guilty – you are saving lots of money. There are a variety of less expensive hotels away from the beach.



For your return walk, cross over to the waterfront side of the Croisette and stroll along the famous Promenade, with views of the beach and a long, landscaped park with benches, fountains, statues and wonderful greenery. Notice the sweet sculpture of a lion and her cubs — a reminder about a major convention that happens in Cannes every year -- the Lions International Festival of Creativity which celebrates those working in advertising, communications and related fields.

This path will lead you west towards the huge Festival Hall, site of the Cannes International Film Festival and many other conventions. Cannes is perhaps the best-known town along the French Riviera because of that festival, the most highly regarded film festival in the world. It takes place every year during the last 2 weeks of May, which is a great time to be here, but you will have big trouble finding a room in Cannes at that time. You could stay at one of the nearby towns and shuttle in by train or bus and that way take part in the excitement, get to see some of the stars and some of the great festivities happening.

The sidewalks all around the festival hall are dimpled with many impressions from the big stars – their handprints and footprints and signatures. They flock here during the festival to show off and promote their latest flicks. Everybody comes to Cannes for the festival, and it's a big buying market for the television industry as well, it's not just for the movies.

Naturally there is a casino here, on the other side of the festival hall, along with the very helpful Office of Tourism where you can drop in and pick up free maps and brochures, get sightseeing tips from the friendly staff, sign up for tours, and find a hotel if you're looking.

Next door there is a large marina in Le Vieux Port on the west end of the waterfront, loaded with mega-yachts, and offering a fine view towards the adjacent Old Town up on the hill.

By this point you have seen the main highlight of Cannes -- the gorgeous waterfront, with its shops, hotels, beach and parks. If you are in a rush you could depart, but there are more fine sights to enjoy, especially downtown with a mix of pedestrian and elegant shopping streets, and perhaps the Old Town up on the hill.



A moment of truth has arrived – should you climb that hill to the Old Town? If you have already seen plenty of old pedestrian zones on your journey this hill might not add much of interest, but if you have a little energy, you could enjoy it and you would get a nice view from the top.



You do have to look for the Old Town because it is easily missed by those hesitant to walk uphill or those who don't have a map, or for those who just don't notice it – but don't be dissuaded. Called Le Suquet, this simple neighborhood is a welcome counterpoint to the ostentatious display of wealth down below.

It just takes about 30 minutes round-trip for a little stroll through old Cannes. The Old Town's pedestrian zone gently rises from the west end of the marina via staircases and the upward sloping path-

way of Rue Saint-Antoine which becomes Rue du Suquet, a narrow, pedestrian lane that winds up the hill with homes, shops and cafés along it.

Once you've made it to the top of the hill you get your reward — the view looking back across the boat harbor to the beaches, elegant hotels, Festival Hall and the rolling hillsides in the far landscape — it's beautiful.

The "Quartier du Suquet" at the top of the hill is a pleasant neighborhood with a few restaurants, ice cream shops, always a creperie nearby and sidewalk cafes. The Old Town is up on the hill of Mt. Chevallier, 147 feet high. Typical of the early villages along the Riviera, its first existence was because of the rocky hill. You can see the Church of Notre Dame from the 17th century and above that, the church of St. Anne from the 13th century -- the oldest buildings in Cannes.

Then you come back down the same lane into the modern town. Walking downhill is much easier than walking up, especially if you find that quick speed and delicate balance, leaning slightly forward where you can almost float down. Alternatively if you don't want to walk up the hill you could take the petite train. It's called the "Train du Cinema" offering a half hour tour that you can catch from downtown.



After that enjoyable short stroll you've arrived back in the main commercial part of town, connecting from downhill Rue Saint-Antoine to Rue Meynadier, a picturesque shopping lane for pedestrians only that extends for about 600 meters towards the train station. Although Cannes is one of the most legendary of towns along the Riviera, an area famous for luxury and high society, this busy shopping lane is surprisingly down-to-earth, with normal prices and a friendly atmosphere. Meynadier is the main pedestrian street of Cannes, with automobile-free short cross streets.

You could easily end up back at the train station in 10 minutes following this route, but don't do that -- there is one more superb shopping street, perhaps the best of all, waiting to be explored: on the west end called Rue Félix Faure, and in the east, Rue d'Antibes. This is a deluxe road extending about 12 blocks with a lovely mix of expensive and affordable shops, and tempting restaurants on adjacent side streets. The design is brilliant, with wide sidewalks and just one lane for automobiles, with a low speed limit – very peaceful, extremely nice. Even if you are not a shopper, the ambience of this place will delight you, and the people-watching is superb, with jet-setters and glamor dolls all around. It is like is like a human-scale Rodeo Drive but down-to-earth, with many normal shops as well as upscale, something for everybody.



It's a great street and yet you might easily miss it in your visit to Cannes because it's not that famous waterfront boulevard with the great hotels and the Film Festival Hall, and it's a bit apart from the old town – so be sure to look for this street because you'll enjoy taking a stroll here. It's an easy two block walk from here back to the train station where you can continue your journey. That wraps up this visit to Cannes. A half-hour train ride brings you back along the beautiful coastline to your home base in Nice.

HISTORY of CANNES

We are accustomed to think of Cannes as modern, but it is in reality a place of great antiquity. Although the early history of Cannes is obscure, the area was in all likelihood first settled by the primitive Ligurian people several thousand years ago. Subsequently Greek sailors arrived and established themselves as merchants and traders throughout the region. And then according to legend the Ligurian natives had annoyed the Greek settlers and traders on the coast, and the Greeks complained to Rome about the ill-humor and rough deeds of these Ligurians. The Romans sent an army led by Consul Quintus Opimius to aid the Greek merchants and obtained a victory over the Ligurian tribes in 155 B.C. The Romans subdued the natives without much trouble, and then gave this settlement they called Aegitna to the citizens of Marseille.

Rebuilt under the name of Castrum Marcellinum (Château Marcellin), from the relics of a martyr of that name supposed to have been brought there from Africa, it was twice destroyed by the Saracens in the eighth and tenth centuries. Sometime around the tenth century it became a fief of the powerful Abbey of the Lerins, to which the whole of the adjacent country had gradually become subject. On the slopes of the castle hill and round the harbor at its base were erected the houses of the ancient town, approached by steep and narrow alleys.



Repopulated by a colony from Genoa, one of the Counts of Provence called it Castrum Francum, or Château Franc, on account of the freedom from taxation which he conferred upon it. Its modern name of Cannes was derived from the long reeds or "cannes" which formerly grew in immense abundance in the marshy grounds around, and imparted a peculiar appearance to the landscape.

After a time the patron lady of Cannes — according to the legend — appeared one day to a young peasant girl watching her flocks in the meadows by the sea, and sent her to inform the inhabitants of the village on the rock

that they might leave the security of their elevated fortress and build their houses on the plain round about, and she would protect them from their enemies. This supernatural permission was speedily taken advantage of by the cramped inhabitants, and the margin of the small harbor and the eastern slope of the hill were soon covered with their squalid houses; this quarter of the town receiving the name of Suquet, the main street forming part of the famous Corniche Road extending from Marseille to Genoa along the coast.



Early Cannes was perched, after the manner of most ancient Provençal towns and villages, on the top of an isolated rock called Mont Chevalier, and had little to show besides a few narrow steep streets, quaint gables, old arches and doorways crowding round an ancient castle, with a church on the highest point. The summit of the hill is crowned with the only buildings in Cannes having any claim to antiquity. These consist of the “Tour du Chevalier,” the ancient Church of St Anne (formerly the chapel of the castle), and the more modern parish church of the

seventeenth century, the church of Notre-Dame-d’Esperance, the whole being surrounded with the remains of walls, towers, and bastions of various periods, enclosing open spaces and courtyards, and presenting a very varied and picturesque ensemble.

The “Tour du Chevalier” is a structure of peculiar interest, being the first we have met with of a series of similar towers which were erected in the eleventh and twelfth centuries for the defense of the towns and churches of this district. These towers are generally square in plan and have walls built with courses of square dressed stones, having the faces left rough. The square tower of the castle—which is popularly termed Saracenic, but was actually built in the eleventh century and was admirably adapted as a place of safety in troubled times, having its door high up, accessible only by a ladder. Of the original structures the only one besides the tower now remaining is the church of St Anne, which, according to the Abbe Allier, was erected towards the end of the twelfth century. This church forms an example of the simple style of Cistercian architecture, which, as already remarked, was largely adopted in Provence—especially in many of the smaller churches. In these we find the Cistercian plainness combined with the plan of a simple nave without aisles, terminated with an apse at the east end. The Church of St Anne, although erected in connection with the castle, also served originally as the Town Church. It is of the same simple type as Thoronet, but on a much smaller scale. The plan consists of one long nave, 87 feet in length by 20 feet wide, with a round apse at the east end; and it has no aisles. Not until 1788, the year before the Revolution, did the town become free from its religious masters.

The modern culture of Cannes as a resort developed in the 1830s thanks to the British who started coming down to the Riviera and enjoying the mild climate. The ‘second founder’ of Cannes was Lord Brougham, Lord Chancellor of England, who on his way to Nice in 1834, was prevented from crossing the then Italian frontier on account of cholera. Charmed by the beauty and salubrity of Cannes he took up his abode there, built a villa which he named after his daughter Eleonore Louise, and died there in 1868. Cannes, thus brought into notice with English society, developed from the small fishing village into a town of fine residences and splendid hotels extending for about four miles along the coast, finally evolving into the favorite and fashionable resort of today.





ANTIBES

The wonderful seaside town of Antibes in the south of France is nestled along the shores of Provence. A comprehensive stroll through the village of Antibes only takes a couple of hours, wandering through the quiet lanes of the pedestrian zone of the Old Town of Antibes. It is perfect for a stroll about for an hour or two, maybe sit at a café, grab some lunch. It's such a small town, we don't need to spend the night here, but instead use Nice for the home base, just 20 km away from Antibes, with very

frequent train service. You have easy access from the Nice train station to many points along the coastline and to get from Nice to Antibes by train only takes about 20 minutes, so that's very convenient. The trains run two or three times every hour, so it's never a long wait. The seats are comfortable and as long as you're avoiding rush hour, they are generally not crowded, and there's beautiful scenery out the window as well.

Antibes is a significant town, so many trains do stop here. Upon arriving you'll see the Antibes train station is adjacent to the center, leaving just a short 10-minute walk to get into the village proper. The Old Town of Antibes is a small area, just several hundred meters long and wide, but wonderful to explore and riddled with dozens of tiny lanes.

Three hours is a reasonable schedule for a good look, including a snack or two along the way, allowing us enough time because this special village deserves a close look. It's a fascinating place with a great history that goes back two and a half thousand years at least (summarized below). Your energy here is primarily spent walking through the little lanes, into the markets, along the shoreline, appreciating the old buildings and the people, mostly local residents.

The efficient route described here leads along the waterfront, into the original historic settlement, through little lanes to the main market, then the central square, down a lovely shopping pedestrian lane, and finally back through the little lanes again — in a circuit you can modify if you wish to meander and see things two or three times in some cases, then back out to the train station.

Walk straight out of the train station two blocks along Avenue de la Libération to the marina. Typical of most wealthy Riviera coastal towns, the marina is filled with beautiful yachts — sailboats and motorboats, some moored here permanently, others just passing through. In the distance you see a fortress, Fort Carré, a 16th-century star-shaped fort built on the site of earlier fortifications. It was designed by Vauban, Louis XIV's celebrated engineer, who built or re-structured 130 strongholds throughout France during his 53-year career. Napoleon was briefly imprisoned here during the French Revolution. The fort looks like an island from here, but it's on a peninsula.



Continue on Avenue de Verdun along the length of the medieval Curtain Wall past the marina where you see an arched gate in the city wall with cars driving through. At this point you have 3 alternate routes depending on your energy, time and interests: short route directly into the Old Town; or slightly longer, continuing to seashore; or with added detour along the seawall, as explained here.

The shortest route is through the gate on Rue Aubernon and directly into the Old Town. In this case when

you get inside the walls of the Old Town you'll find some automobile traffic on a few streets with cars going slowly by, so keep walking and within a couple more blocks you will reach the pedestrian-only zone.

For a slightly longer and more scenic route, don't go through that big gate but instead keep walking another block past it along the shoreline to gain lovely waterfront views, and then enter through a quieter side path into the Old Town. Perhaps while at the shore take a left for a short round-trip detour out along the seawall towards Bastion St-Jaume for a close-up look at the modern sculpture and excellent views back across the marina.



Continuing around the bend on the right side to the ramparts, Rampe des Saleurs (named for fishermen who used to salt their catch here), which leads to an observation sidewalk for a nice view looking out on the sea. Antibes was once a fortified village like most of the other towns in the south of France, with the original wall running along the shore, and with these ramparts, it still seems like a medieval fortified town. Just beyond the bend in the road, now called Promenade de l'Amiral de Grasse, walk through any of several paths between the buildings leading into the pedestrian zone.

You are now in the oldest part of Antibes, a charming residential neighborhood around Place du Révély with two main pedestrian lanes, Rue de l'Horloge and Rue du Saint-Esprit, either of which will bring you to the former Cathedral and the old Grimaldi Palace that is now the Picasso Museum, with more peaceful residential pedestrian lanes beyond. Notice the arches in several side alleys linking the buildings together to help support each other as if holding hands.

The Church of the Immaculate Conception is of the oldest buildings in town, a medieval church first built from the 12th century. It's believed to be on the site of a much earlier Greek temple and perhaps some stones from the ancient Romans were used in its construction. The two adjacent medieval towers are believed to stand on Roman foundation stones.

Until the 1200s when the bishop moved for safety to Grasse, the church had been the regional Cathedral, and therefore is highly decorated inside with artworks from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, with Romanesque style architecture in the interior reflecting medieval heritage. It's a beautiful place to stop in, sit down, have a rest, cool off a bit and enjoy the scenic surroundings.

There is no admission charge to the church and it's open throughout the day plus there are comfortable benches. With the beautiful paintings and sculpture it's like an art museum and for the religious visitor a great place to say a prayer.

The large Picasso Museum is next door in the Grimaldi Palace, where the artist lived in 1946 and had a studio that's now incorporated into the museum. Antibes was famous as a home for artists in the 20th century, Picasso in particular, who spent most of his later life in various homes in Provence. Picasso donated 22 of his paintings to the museum, which also has works by other important artists of the modern movement. There are a handful of other museums and many art galleries in Antibes as well.

This Grimaldi Castle was first inhabited in 1385 by that noble family from Monaco, the Grimaldis, who actually ruled over a very large area here along the shores of Provence and inland. It's believed that earlier, this locale was the Greek center of an ancient city about 2 1/2 thousand years ago. Antibes was first founded by the Greeks and then later built up by the Romans, and this little neighborhood was their center.



You will reach the busy part of the Old Town with its shops and beautiful squares in just a little while, but first it's nice to start out in these quiet little residential alleys – old bricks covered with colorful ivy with a domestic feeling to this initial neighborhood. You'll walk by some open shop doors and you're welcome to have a peek inside – notice a carpenter workshop, fascinating with all his tools. This is a charming neighborhood, very quiet and it's a pedestrian zone even for the houses, so these people walk to get to their house. It's rewarding to get off the beaten track now and then to see how people live in the non-touristic residential areas.

There are several nice but less important residential blocks straight beyond the Picasso Museum you could venture into now, for example have a peek down Rue du Bateau just beyond the museum. Venture into the center of town two blocks away either along Rue Sade or Rue George Clemenceau, two of the main pedestrian shopping lanes.

At the center of the Old Town you will find the Place Nationale. It is the destination to drop anchor if you want to sit down and have a drink or nice meal at one of the many restaurants around the square. It's always a prime spot to watch people, make the rendezvous, hang out for a while, sit down, rest and recharge. The Old Town is immediately all around it – within four blocks you've got most of the prime sights in easy reach. These few blocks in the center are really some of the sweetest in the entire Riviera. Because Place Nationale is in the middle of the Old Town you'll find that a variety of fascinating streets lead off from it in all directions -- some of them are quite narrow just for pedestrians and others are bit wider such as the Rue de la République.



One of the nicest pedestrian streets you'll find in the center is Rue James Close, just a block from Place Nationale. This narrow pedestrian route is lined with boutiques and restaurants that are so cute you just might want to drop anchor at a sidewalk café and sample the local grinds such as socca. One of the regional food treats the south of France. Socca is a like a crêpe and yet it's made from chickpea flour, so it's really hearty and tasty, good for you, a nutritious snack. It's not junk food by any means and it's really differ-

ent than the standard crêpe, which is made from wheat flour. This is really quite a special thing. Of course you can have different toppings on it or just have it plain -- there so much flavor in the chickpea you don't need any special toppings, you don't need any sugar or jam or anything, just plain socca is really a satisfying treat. It's especially found in the Ligurian area, anywhere from Nice around the coastline into Italy and down to Pisa.

This old Rue James Close is kind of a forerunner of today's modern shopping malls – these streets have always been too narrow for cars so it has been a pedestrian zone from the beginning. Walking along on Rue James Close almost feels like strolling through an outdoor museum -- the shop fronts are so interesting. You don't find the big chain stores here, they're all little boutiques with antiques, clothing, furnishings and artworks.

You can eat well and inexpensively with a takeout sandwich from one of the small convenience stores here: sit down on a step and watch the people walk past from your own little sidewalk perch. Even in expensive towns along the French Riviera you can always find a takeout sandwich place and get an inexpensive meal that is going to cost a modest amount and get a soft drink to go with it, find a place to sit and enjoy very inexpensive meal. Of course you do want to have some good foods on



your travels as well but often at lunch you're just moving along, you don't have a lot of time and you just want to grab something quick and simple.

By now you're beginning to get the picture of the good life in Europe. It's walking, it's the promenade, it's the cafés, the pastry shops, it's the food markets. It's all the things not found in most American places unfortunately. That experience of just walking around, seeing your friends, having a chat, having a coffee, is a big part of life here.

If you continue a few blocks further along Rue James Close, which becomes Rue des Revennes, turn left at the end then right and you will reach a peaceful residential neighborhood of narrow pedestrian alleys where you might get a little lost, off the beaten path, including Rue Castelet, Safranier and Tourraque. These narrow lanes are lined with stone homes packed in tightly together with rows of potted plants providing a little breather to make up for their lack of gardens. It's quite easy to find this small residential neighborhood, but frankly it's not a terribly exciting place to visit. I enjoyed it for the quiet diversion, but wouldn't put it at the top of the list of things to see in Antibes. If you've got at least three hours to look around the town, you will certainly have time for this little detour. You could just take 15 minutes for this kind of a wander – it's fun to see how the locals live.

It's easy to find your way out of this small residential neighborhood because in just a few blocks you will return to the small commercial district of the Old Town, with the beautiful streets lined with the shops and cafés. Take Rue des Bains back to James Close and carry on. Another nice intersecting lane is Rue de Fersen, with the expected shops and cafes. By now they'll look familiar but there are a whole number of streets that you might not have seen yet, so just go wander around some more and even if you're going down the same street again it'll look different the 2nd or 3rd time around. As you wander along you are going to enjoy these little lanes and occasional buildings overhead forming tunnels to lure you along. Eventually you will find your way back to the main square, Place Nationale.

The main pedestrian shopping street of town, Rue de la République, runs along one side of the central square. It is busier, a little bit more modern than the narrow lanes of the Old Town, with lots of great shops and more eateries. The street is always lively with pedestrians, mostly locals out for a stroll and the odd scooter but there are no cars allowed. You can see how the sense of community and relations gets well established in a small town like Antibes with these extended families and friends running into each other on the walkways.



When done with your visit to Antibes it's easy to find the train station if that's how you are departing, but you don't have to walk back exactly the way you came along the marina. You can do an interesting stroll in less than 15 minutes from Place Nationale over to Place Gen. de Gaulle and then you turn right and walk five blocks along Avenue Robert Soleau back to the train station. It's quite easy and there are things to see along this route, which brings you into the modern part of Antibes.

That wraps up our visit to Antibes. You can see it's one of the great towns of the French Riviera. It will be a long day but efficient using Nice as your home base, because both of these cities are to the west of Nice and clustered relatively close to each other. The train will bring you back to Nice in a return of the way you came. Train service along the Riviera is really fantastic – on the main line the trains usually come every 15 to 25 minutes depending on time of day and it just takes 25 minutes to go from Antibes back to Nice by train.

It takes less than half hour to get from Antibes back to Nice and for the most part it's a scenic ride along the shoreline offering beautiful views of the blue Mediterranean. You'll find that staying in Nice is a perfect solution for seeing the Riviera because there are many hotels in Nice, there's a lot to see in Nice, and it's so easy to get around by train and also by public bus. This way you can see the little towns and villages of the Riviera very easily.

The Nice train station is right in town and within a few blocks walk you are on the main boulevard of Nice, so you don't waste any time.



HISTORY:

The Antibes area has been controlled for thousands of years by many different competing cultures that imposed their own political, cultural and trading systems for the control of Mediterranean commerce. Most likely there were pre-historic hunter-gatherers 30,000 years ago, then early fishermen and farmers who lived in this area for thousands of years. The written history begins about 2 1/2 years ago starting with a group called the Phocaeans, an ancient Greek culture that developed on the western

shore of Turkey. They were the first Greeks to make long sea-voyages and came to Antibes and Nice from Marseille while establishing trading settlements throughout much of the Mediterranean.

The favorable position of Antibes marked it long ago as a suitable site for an important town, located on an indentation of the coast, forming a secure harbor. On the one side is a rocky promontory jutting out a considerable distance into the sea, called the Cape of Antibes. On the other side is a succession of smaller and shorter promontories, which shape out the shore into little semicircular bays perfectly sheltered from the mistral. The views of the town from the seacoast are charming. Surrounded on the land side with its great stone walls, and protected on the south by its rocky seacoast, with the snowy mountains forming a background, and the bright blue of the Mediterranean in the foreground, a finer picture can hardly be imagined.

Since the days of the Greeks, Antibes has been a frontier fortress. Ruins of the fortifications of succeeding centuries show that the town has always been on the same site, on the coast east of the Cape, looking towards Nice. This seaport has had an almost uninterrupted existence since the fourth or fifth century before Christ, when it was founded by a Greek colony either from Nice or Marseilles. The Greek wanderers from antiquity found on these western shores natural features which characterized their own native land -- the same picturesque mountain scenery, fertile valleys, fine climate, and varied coast-lines of sharp projections and deep recesses. After establishing a colony at Masilia, the modern Marseilles, they proceeded from there to found Nice and Antibes. The ancient name of Antibes was, Antipolis, which indicates that it was over against Nice, the city, and that it was founded after Nice. They constructed here in Antibes a frontier fortress to protect them from the aggressive Ligurian tribes of Genoa to the east.

Proof of its early Greek origin has been established with the discovery of some stones inscribed with archaic Greek characters. Of course hardly any traces remain of the Greek town.

The only relics of the ancient Roman city are two ancient towers in the center of its modern town, one of them standing just in the front of the former cathedral, and used as a belfry, and the other tower forms part of an adjoining official building.

These oldest existing structures stand on the highest point of the rock facing the sea. The two towers at Antibes are of peculiar interest -- one of the towers is in connection with an old palace which doubtless occupies the site of the ancient castle, being on the summit of the rock, and suitably placed for keeping a look-out seawards. The other tower is close to the cathedral and is still connected with it by a covered way on the first floor. These two towers are in the style of those of the Mont du Chevalier at Cannes. The church is very simple in design, and seems to have been originally similar to that of the city of Vence, but since greatly altered and a new front added in the seventeenth century.



There can be no doubt that in the time of the Romans the town had aqueducts, baths, theatres, you know, features typical of a Roman city with its many public edifices. It was, indeed, famous for the beauty of its monuments. It possessed a highly efficient school of navigation. Traces of Roman graves are still occasionally found, as well as carved stones, inscriptions, mosaics, and coins. It was formerly the headquarters of the army during the Roman occupation.

The later history of the town of Antibes is a very stirring one. It was destroyed by the Goths in 473, that was part of the fall of Rome in which the entire Roman Empire fell apart, conquered largely by the Goth invaders. And it shared the same fate at the hands of the Lombards a hundred years later in 578. The Saracens held possession of it for many years during the seventh century. They were the Muslim invaders from northern Africa and the East.

In early Christian times Antibes became the seat of a bishop, but being greatly exposed to the attacks of the Saracen Corsairs and others from whom it suffered severely, the bishop was removed in the year 1243 and re-located for security purposes over to the town of Grasse. There were originally four bishoprics in this part of the Riviera: Nice, Antibes (afterwards Grasse), Vence, and Frejus.

In 1524 Antibes was taken by the Constable Bourbon, the French influence, and in 1536 it was sacked by Charles V of Spain. As a frontier town Antibes was greatly damaged during these wars between Francis I. and Charles V. of Spain, being frequently attacked and pillaged. Its ancient buildings have thus been almost entirely demolished, either by the direct effects of war or in the construction of the fortifications, so that scarcely a trace of that early occupation remains.



The present fortifications were erected about the time of Francois premier, and of Henry of Navarre, and afterwards greatly improved by Vauban under Louis XIV. Their erection had the beneficial effect of draining the marshy ground and rendering the air healthy. Its fortifications and the fortress of Fort Carré, on the graceful hill to the north side of the entrance of the harbor, built by Vauban in 1691, are still remarkably strong and well-preserved. These fortifications occupied a prominent place in the military movements of the French Revolution.

Napoleon was for some time a prisoner in Fort Carré, and his mother resided near it in a small house. The town was surrounded by walls and on three sides by the sea, strongly fortified in the style of the seventeenth century, of which it is a fine example. The Duke of Savoy seized Antibes in 1707, and forty years later it was bombarded by the English, and in 1813 by the Austrians. You can see it's such a desirable piece of land everybody was fighting over it. Before Nice was annexed by France, this was the frontier line of France, which accounts for its being still so strongly fortified. The remains of a theatre and other ancient buildings attest to its former importance.

Only after Napoleon III seized the district of Nice as part payment for French intervention in the Italian war of liberation was that familiar term "French Riviera" gradually extended to include the coast as far west as Antibes. What was added to France under Napoleon III then lost its previous Italian character. People here had been speaking Italian and largely identifying with the main Italian society, but after Napoleon the Third everything switched to French...it took a while.

In summary, Antibes was so desirable it was captured in turn by Greeks, Romans, Carthaginians, Gauls, Teutonics, Franks, Saracens, Spanish and then Italians. The area experienced a strong Italian culture for hundreds of years, then finally, the French took firm control. And yet throughout all these millennia of changing political rule, it may be that the people, the basic population, did not change much and adhered to their ancestral southern French/Spanish Catalan culture with whom they shared a common culture and language, until the dominance of Louis XIV stamped the French imprint upon the society. The ongoing tradition of international invasions is now carried on by millions of tourists flocking annually to these lovely shores.

On day three in Nice we take excursions to the nearby attractions of Monaco, St-Paul and Vence.



MONACO

Monaco is the world's most deluxe country, a land of glitz, glamour and extreme jet-set lifestyles, yet you can see it without spending very much. You could walk from one end of the country to the other in an hour, because it is only three-quarters of a square mile in size (2 square kilometers), making it the world's second smallest country after the Vatican. Easy to see in one day, Monaco about three times the size of The Mall in Washington, or half that of New York's Central Park. It's also the

world's most densely populated country, yet they have developed with such intelligence that it is also one of the most pleasant countries, with a quality of life double that of neighboring France, and the world's longest life expectancy at 90 years – it's good to have endless money and the best medical facilities.

World's richest nation, with record-busting per-capita wealth and \$200,000 average income, and the most expensive property, but the good news is you can visit Monaco on a shoestring, enjoying a day-trip from Nice while spending practically nothing, as we suggest here with economical bus rides and free walks to the palace, Casino, marina and many beautiful sights. Or splurge a bit, buy a bus pass, eat a nice meal, have a drink, gamble, enjoy the good life in this amazing little country.

Monaco has a very long history, summarized down below, but in a nutshell, it has been a sovereign nation since 1861 when it gained independence from France. Within the nation of Monaco there are four main sections: Monte Carlo (with the famous casino), Monaco-Ville, (the Old Town and Palace), La Condamine (marina and downtown shopping) and Fontvieille (recent land-fill residential zone). Famous for gambling, high-end shopping and museums, our main focus here is navigating nearly the entire country in one day with walking tours through lovely neighborhoods.



We are presenting an innovative itinerary that gives you various choices of long, medium or short routes, or very, very short, just the casino. We'll play it by ear and decide by consensus as we walk along. Monaco has so many interesting sites to discover that you would do well to allocate at least one full day and come along on our maximum tour, Plan A.

GETTING HERE:

We start out from the city of Nice, just 30 minutes away by bus. As emphasized throughout the book, Nice makes the perfect home base for exploring Monaco

and the Cote d'Azur. You can easily get to Monaco by bus, or one could take the train, each with certain advantages, but overall the bus is better.

BUS:

For only 1.5 euro, bus number 100 transports you from Nice to Monaco on a beautiful 45-minute ride along the shoreline, offering one of the great bargains of Europe -- an international trip with scenery, which also provides the friendly traveller an opportunity to meet some locals on board and score a few travel tips – they usually enjoy helping. If you want to strike up that conversation on the bus, ride standing and look for a willing passenger. You can buy a bus ticket from the driver or a machine at the Nice bus stop, but it is better to purchase the special Ticket Azur, for the same low price from the Lignes d'Azur boutiques near the train station, or on Blvd.

Jean Jaures on the edge of the Old Town, a few blocks before Place Garibaldi, where you catch the bus on Rue Catherine Segurane. With this Ticket Azur you can make one transfer in Monaco onto the local bus (if within 2 ? hours of starting time), saving 2 euro. If you plan to spend a full day exploring Monaco and don't want to do all the free walking we suggest here, it is worth purchasing the one-day bus pass from the local bus driver, but if you are only here to see the casino and palace, then just use your free transfer and walk.

Arriving from Nice by bus, you will cross no physical evidence of an international border but you enter the country after passing a green traffic circle, just before a tunnel appears on your right.

The first bus stop is Place d'Armes for the Old Town and Palace.

The Ideal Route to see Monaco in one day:

1. Bus from Nice to Place d'Armes
2. Free transfer to local bus up to Monaco-Ville (The Rock)
3. Walk through The Rock (Old Town and Palace)
4. Walk down the Rampe Major (or ride bus) to Rue Grimaldi
5. Explore La Condamine shopping area
6. Take bus to Monte Carlo
7. Enjoy gardens, Casino and shopping areas
8. Bus back to Nice.



Some visitors want to see everything, while others would like to see a lot of good stuff without killing themselves, and many speedsters want just a few highlights. To make it clear we occasionally refer here to plans A, B and C, long to short itineraries. A complete itinerary is presented as the ideal goal, Plan A, and then various short cuts are included along with a few bonus extensions.

Plan A thoroughly covers the nation by starting near the west end and walking to the other end, about 2 miles, with some meandering, eating, gambling and shopping along the way, helped out by a couple of bus rides, which will add up to at least 6 miles if you go for the whole program. However, many travellers are only interested in Plan B, the Casino and Palace, so in that case we could just follow steps 1 and 2 then take the city bus to the Casino, which can all be done in a couple of hours.

Monaco is worth taking the time to see properly. Although Monaco is a small place it can be confusing and tiring to get around, especially considering all those hills you might be forced to climb if you don't find some of the 33 public elevators and escalators. Follow our route, modified to suit your preferences, and you will have no problems.

Monaco-Ville up on The Rock:

Exit the bus from Nice at the first stop, Place d'Armes and transfer to local bus number 1 or 2 for the ride to the top of The Rock. Get off the bus at the Place de la Visitation stop, Monaco-Ville, an obvious wide plaza at the end of the line where the bus turns around.

As you explore the Old Town take your time and enjoy the various diversions:



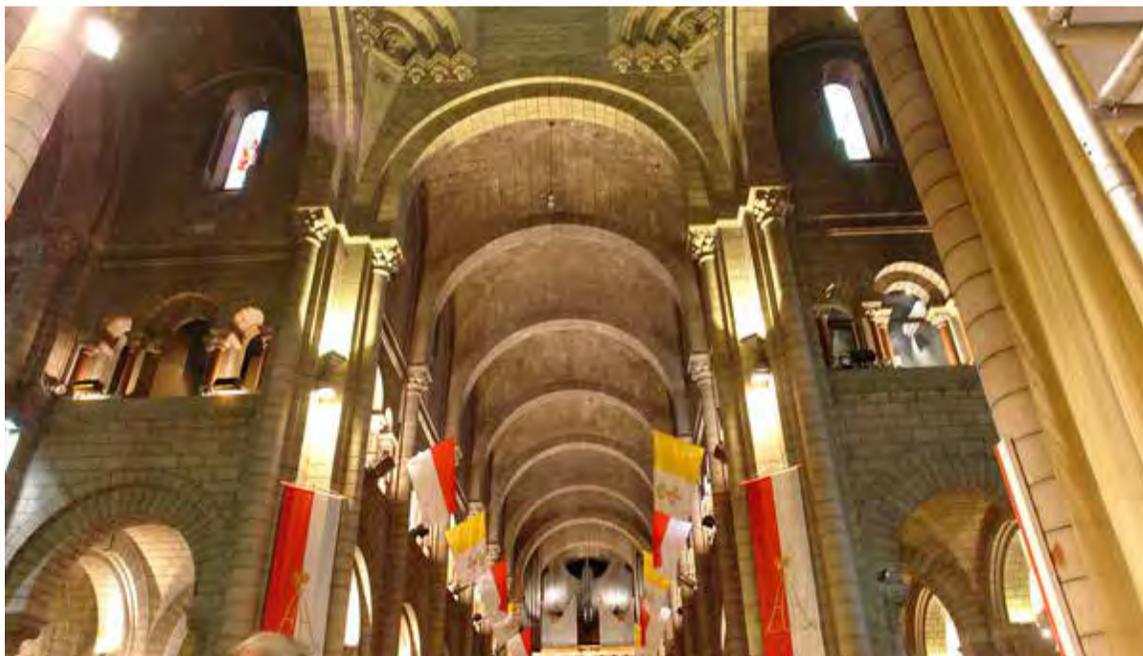
narrow pedestrian lanes, breathtaking views, numerous souvenir shops, restaurants, ice cream, the Cathedral, Palace and general feeling of medieval antiquity. This is where Monaco first began, back in the 1300s and 1400s up on this little hilltop which provided a natural defense against marauding pirates and attacking enemies, as described in the detailed history down below.

However your enjoyment in these narrow lanes is going to be tempered by when you are here. Mid-summer, mid-day, this would be tour group hell, mobbed by thousands of lemmings following their leader.

On the other hand having planned your holiday for the off-season as described here, you will be able to peacefully enjoy these picturesque lanes, and almost imagine stepping back four centuries. In the off-season the Old Town is just as attractive, with its ancient walls and buildings, as any of the other rock villages of the Riviera.



The Old Town consists of three main pedestrian lanes, rue Basse, rue Comte Félix Gastaldi and rue Emile de Loth, with small connecting side alleys and several other streets in a small space just 400 meters long, and 150 meters wide. Two blocks from the bus stop you arrive at Place de la Marie where those three pedestrian lanes come together. Choose the left fork, Gastaldi, and walk a couple blocks to the cathedral, which you first see from the back end.



The Cathedral of St. Nicholas is a grand neo-Romanesque church that was designed and completed in 1897, built on the site of a much older church. It is quite large for such a small town, 75 yards long, and at the transepts 32 yards. The shafts of the columns in the choir are monoliths.

The burial chapel of the royalty here includes the tomb of Princess Grace, the beautiful American actress, married Prince Rainier in 1956, then retired from acting and became Princess of Monaco until her death in 1982. Grace Kelly suffered a stroke while driving her car and lost control and crashed. It was a great tragedy, a great loss. She was named as one of the top female stars of the American cinema by the American Film Institute, and was certainly one of the most glamorous ladies in memory.

After appreciating the cathedral be sure to walk a few paces in front of it for the view looking down on the newest part of Monaco towards Fontvielle. About 20% of Monaco, including Fontvielle, was built on landfill like this. Here we have a mix of residential, sports complex and marina that makes a beautiful sight.

The panorama terrace is slightly hidden but easy to find if you're looking for it, only a few steps down. Return past the Cathedral and the Palace of Justice on Rue de l'Eglise, the lane in-between, continuing two blocks through the pedestrian network to Rue Comte Felix Gastaldi, and turn left towards the palace.

Obviously these lanes are so narrow they are not for cars, but for pedestrians only and they make for a nice romantic stroll. This is also a residential neighborhood as well, not just for the tourists, but very much for the locals. There is affordable food as well -- you can find budget sandwiches for 3 euro, not the tastiest meal but a pretty good deal -- or sit at a café and watch the other tourists going by.



In three blocks you'll arrive at Palace Square, the main attraction of The Rock because of the stupendous views, one of the great vistas of the world looking out across the building-covered hills of Monaco and that wonderful yacht basin filled with boats. Frequent cruise ships tie up at the massive breakwater on the right. You can see nearly the entire country, along with France and Italy in the distance, three nations in one selfie – yes, the perfect place for snapping a dozen photos. You'll find that this terrace is a fun place to hang out. Notice the café on the terrace, a lovely spot for

refreshment with a history going back more than a century, like everything else up here on the Rock, a charming place at which to sit, sheltered beneath palms and oleanders.

From here you vividly see how densely packed this city is – not only the world's most-dense country, but twice as dense as number two, Singapore. Yet it is not the most-densely populated city in the world. There are many cities in Asia and elsewhere much more-densely populated. For example, population density of Monaco is 17,000 per square kilometer, but a few examples: the most-crowded is Dhaka, Bangladesh, at 45,000; Manila, 43,000; Mumbai, 31,000; Hong Kong, 24,000; Paris, 20,000.

Looking at the mass of concrete you might think this is too much, but it's comfortable, very well designed, making full use of the limited available land with deluxe apartments that are the world's most expensive overall. In these tight quarters, many rooftops are utilized, such as a school with an AstroTurf soccer playground. They manage things amazingly well, perhaps serving as a model for the other big cities of the world, showing how to grow and how to plan your city.

Of course this Place du Palais also offers a perfect view of the Palace, the 19th-century royal residence built on the site of the original fortress dating back at least 700 years. The Palace was once a Genoese Castle built in the 13th century, and then later enlarged by the Grimaldi's in 1630 and decorated in the Renaissance style. If you are here mid-day you can catch the uber-touristic and crowded Changing of the Guards at 11:55am. On the right side you can see the piles of cannonballs from the invasions of Louis XIV, with crenelated fortified walls behind. In the summer season you could visit inside the Palace, but there is not much to see.

The palace is the official royal residence of Monaco. The walls which surround the palace gardens date from 1552 to 1560, while the fortifications that surmount the Rampe belong to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The sumptuous apartments with their interesting paintings and elaborate interiors are open to the public.

Albert the 2nd is the reigning monarch of Monaco having succeeded his father, Rainier III, in 2005. Albert is one of the richest monarchs in Europe, estimated worth at about \$1 billion, although he doesn't own the palace. The prince got married in 2011 to Charlene, the Princess of Monaco. She was a South African commoner but an Olympic swimmer and world-class beauty, mother to the royal twins, Gabriella and Jacques.



Next we walk 400 meters back through the cobbled lanes of the Old Town on a different lane, Rue Basse, to the bus stop, and get on either bus 1 or 2, which takes us to the Monte Carlo stop near the Tourist Information Office and Casino Gardens.

CONDAMINE

For those ambitious travelers wanting to see everything, Condamine, the downtown shopping area and marina, is worthwhile, offering a neighborhood geared more for locals than tourists. You can reach Condamine from Place du Palais quite easily either by taking the same city bus back down, or better yet, walk down the Rampe Major, which exits from the right side of the Place du Palais. Descending along this 16th century staircase-ramp only takes ten minutes, passing through a lush park and coming out at Place d'Armes, a market square at the beginning of Condamine. This place could be a good place to eat, maybe at the affordable Truffle Gourmet, and certainly to have a look around the open-air and covered portions, open every morning except Monday.

From here you can take a nice walk in the Condamine shopping area containing 200 boutiques, along Rue Grimaldi, a major retail street that connects in two blocks to the car-free zone of Rue Princess Caroline and a few other pedestrian lanes. Reasonably-priced restaurants, cafes and pizzerias can be found here, making this a good place for lunch to satisfy the huge appetite you already worked up.

You can quickly get a feel of Condamine by walking these few blocks. The buildings are in great shape, the stores are elegant, no vacant shops, no graffiti, no trash, the paving on sidewalks and streets is perfect, something like a Disneyland but this is for real.

The easiest way to your next destination, the Casino and Monte Carlo, is walk to the end of Rue P Caroline, turn left on the waterfront Boulevard Albert 1er, to the nearby stop for bus 1, 2 or 6 for a 5-minute ride directly there.



MONTE CARLO

You have now arrived at the most elegant shopping area, the Golden Square, Carré d'Or, framed by Avenue Monte Carlo, Place du Casino, Avenue des Beaux-Arts and Alleees Lumieres, where Hermes, Christian Dior, Gucci, Bulgari, Cartier and Prada all are on display, and a few blocks away, the fabled Monte Carlo Casino.

Beautiful gardens in front of the Casino, the Jardins de la petit Afrique, abound in lush greenery, exquisite fountains, walkways, ducks in a pond, benches, amazing landscaping -- they have done a magnificent job with all this money. There is perhaps not a garden in the world so glorious, yet at the same time so purely artificial, in keeping with the man-made character of the entire nation. Even the trees are exotic. The oaks and chestnuts and umbrella pines of Provence are too common for this rich paradise, and as for the sacred olive, one would scarcely expect it to flourish so near the Casino. The gardens are full of rare palms, rubber trees, giant cactus, wonderful foreign shrubs, and the flowers are such as only millionaires can grow in perfection, created by that touch of gold. To look inside the Casino costs 10 euro, after 2pm when it opens, plus another 20 euro if you want to enter the roulette area, open after 4pm, but the magnificent view from outside is free. Dress codes prohibit shorts or slippers ("Correct dress mandatory"), and the inner sanctum requires a jacket, which you can rent, and you need to show a passport.

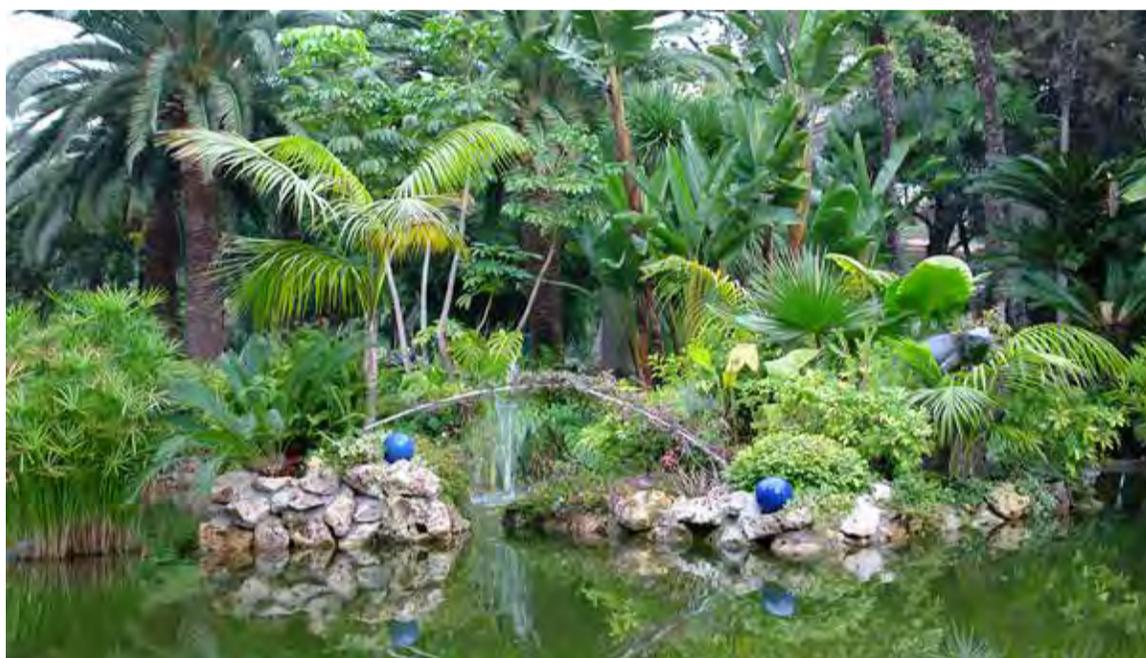
Europe's first casino was opened here in 1856 in a desperate effort to save the bankrupt economy of Monaco, which was considered Europe's poorest country. Started by Charles III, after whom Monte Carlo ("Mount Charles") is named, the casino soon did its magic and the country came back to life. Arrival of the first train in 1868 really opened things up, and ten years later the casino was rebuilt in the Belle Époque style by Charles Garnier, architect of the Paris Opera. It has grown and expanded ever since.



The principal façade fronts on the town at Place du Casino while the south façade overlooks the sea. The entrance of the casino is between two towers with domes of colored tiles, and flanked by statues of the Seine and the Mediterranean. The south façade has three arcades with Venetian mosaics and two slender towers, and niches at the side with statues representing music and dance.

Next door is the Hôtel du Paris, one of the world's most deluxe five-star hotels that is so exclusive you are not even allowed inside unless you are a guest or look like a zillionaire. That would be a great place to celebrate your visit, inside the hotel complete with dinner at their Michelin three-star Louis XV restaurant run by Alain Ducasse, perhaps the world's most famous chef -- but a couple might spend \$1,000 on the unforgettable meal, including a mushroom salad at 86 euro or tasting menus at 230 or 310 euro per person, plus wine.

Across the square the less-formal Café de Paris welcomes everyone, and their casino has no entry fee or dress code. The brasserie boasts they are "the most popular venue for a rendezvous in Monaco -- a warm welcome in a decor featuring Belle Époque style windows, recalling the old Parisian bistros... an ideal place for lunch or dinner in the heart of Monte-Carlo, right on the legendary Place du Casino." TripAdvisor has 1,600 reviews giving it 3.5 out of 5 stars, with only 5% disappointed. Another lush extension of the gardens is behind, enhanced by contemporary sculptures.



Walk through these casino gardens one block over to a lovely shopping mall, part of the Hôtel Métropole complex, the most-deluxe, ultra-modern shopping center in the middle of Monte Carlo. This highly-recommended, extremely expensive, marble-clad mall is multilevel, with 80 different shops and six places to eat including some reasonable sandwiches, and a restaurant and café run by Joël Robuchon.. It is a great place for people-watching because the mall is like a village center for the locals, a sophisticated urban downtown for those gilded privileged folks who

reside in this fantasy land, by far the most modern and luxurious of all the shopping arcades in not just the Principality but along the entire Côte d'Azur as well.

If you wish to end your visit here, the stop for bus 100 to Nice is in front of the Allées Lumières shopping mall at the top of the Casino gardens where Avenue de la Costa joins with Avenue des Moulins. Or if going home by rail, you can take a local bus number 1 or 2 from the Casino area at Square Beaumarchais, in front of the Hotel Hermitage, easily reached from Place de Casino with a one-block walk west along beautiful Avenue des Beaux-Arts, another superb shopping street.



MORE WALKING

Plan A, if we decide to keep strolling along elegant shopping streets and want to see another beautiful part of the country, continues another block inland to Boulevard des Moulins, which is lined on both sides with upscale stores – a beautiful promenade with wide sidewalks and just two lanes of traffic. After walking along it for 500 meters, this upscale retail street ends one block from Monaco's sandy beach and convention center, the Grimaldi Forum. One branch of the Musée National is also here, with tempo-

rary cultural exhibits about contemporary themes.

When finished this walk we are finally done with the main itinerary and can easily depart Monaco by catching bus 100 from this same Place de Moulins, back to Nice. This is a sweet exit strategy because you have covered the country from left to right with no backtracking, and you are boarding the bus on the far edge of Monaco with plenty of seats available at this end, but as the bus continues into the center many workers will board for their commute home to Nice. If you board at rush hour on the west end at Place d'Armes where you arrived in the morning, you will probably be standing for 50 minutes back to Nice, unless the bus is full -- then it won't even pick you up. Four buses run hourly during the morning and evening rush hours. The last bus departs Monaco at 8:22pm. That completes your absolutely action-packed day in Monaco!!

Some fun facts and a little history:

ESCALATORS

There are 33 free escalators, elevators and moving sidewalks, including these seven main inclined lifts which provide public transport:

between the Place des Moulins and the beaches

between the Princess Grace Hospital Centre and the Exotic Garden

between the Port Hercules harbor and the Avenue de la Costa

between the Place Str Dévôte and the area of Moneghetti

between the terraces of the Casino and the Boulevard Louis II

between the Avenue des Citronniers and the Avenue Grande-Bretagne

between the highway and the Boulevard Larvotto

POPULATION

There only 36,000 residents of Monaco. Of this resident population: 21% are native citizens, called Monégasque; 28% French; 19% Italian, most of the rest a mix from Europe; 1% American. While French is the main language, you'll get by easily speaking English and Italian is also widely spoken here. Life expectancy is 94 for women and 86 for men, the world's longest.

The land area of 2 square kilometers is about three times the size of The Mall in Washington, or half that of New York's Central Park.



ECONOMY

Not only does Monaco have the world's wealthiest people with the highest per capita income – it has got the most millionaires and billionaires per capita. Perhaps related, it also has the most police per capita and per area and practically no crime. It has a busy economy with 1200 retail stores and 400 wholesalers. There are about 50,000 jobs in Monaco for the 80,000 daytime population, so you can see this is a hard-working society of people.

There is no income tax for any resident in Monaco, except for French citizens, who pay income tax to France. However this is by no means a tax-free country, because everyone pays a 20% VAT on all goods and services, and there is a 33% tax on business profits earned outside of Monaco.

You might think that most government revenues are gained from the casino and related gambling ventures, but actually gambling represents only 3% of the nation's GDP. Half of the government's income is derived from the VAT, which is a tax on sales and commercial transactions. But the economy is primarily geared toward finance, commerce, and tourism. Low taxes have drawn many foreign companies to Monaco and account for around 75% of the \$5.748 billion annual GDP income. The country does not offer tax havens or shelters to foreign corporations hoping to avoid paying taxes in their home countries, although they continue to face international pressure to abandon banking secrecy laws and help combat tax evasion. Of course banking is very important

-- they've got 36 banks. Tourism accounts for close to 15% of the annual revenue. The overnight visitors totaled 300,000 per year, staying in any of the 15 different hotels.

Of course Monaco has some of the best tourist accommodation facilities in the world. Ultra-high-class hotels in the five-star category are the Hermitage, Hôtel de Paris, Métropole Monte Carlo, and Monte Carlo Beach Hotel. You can also find budget hotels and there are even a couple of two star hotels.

Health and medicine is also a significant part of the economy here, with a major hospital and research facilities and other health providers, so this is a great place to come for medical care, especially to The Princess Grace Hospital Center.

According to our CIA: Monaco's reliance on tourism and banking for its economic growth has left it vulnerable to a downturn in France and other European economies which are the principality's main trade partners. In 2009, Monaco's GDP fell by 11.5% as the euro-zone crisis precipitated a sharp drop in tourism and retail activity and home sales. A modest recovery ensued in 2010 with GDP growth of 2.5%, but Monaco's economic prospects remain clouded in uncertainty tied to future euro-zone growth. Weak economic growth also has deteriorated public finances as the principality recorded a budget deficit of 1.3% of GDP in 2012. The state retains monopolies in a number of sectors, including tobacco, the telephone network, and the postal service. Living standards are among the world's highest.



POLITICS

Monaco is a constitutional monarchy under the Grimaldi family, which has been in power for over 700 years, Europe's oldest royal dynasty. Prince Albert the Second of Monaco is the leader and his government runs the country in consensus with two elected assemblies: the National Council with 24 members elected by universal suffrage, and there's also the Communal Council under the leadership of the mayor, with 15 members who are elected directly by the population. The Prince holds a great deal of power,

more than just a figurehead like other European royals, and yet the government structure rules along with the Prince.

Under his father, Prince Rainier III, the ruler held much more centralized power, but in 1962, a new constitution was adopted that created a dispersed government with many councils and ministers sharing power: Council of State; Minister of State; Economic and Social Council; Council of Government; Department of the Interior, along with departments of finance and economy, and so on. It is really quite a formal and effective government system.

Monaco became independent from France in 1861, and today it is a sovereign nation represented in the United Nations. It is not a member of the European Union, but the euro is the official currency. The nation is surrounded by France and there is a military arrangement where it is defended by France.

Monaco is quite active on the international scene with consulates in 72 different countries, and within Monaco, there are 65 countries that have embassies, along with 75 nations with consular offices, so this is by no means a small, isolated place.

HISTORY

The isolated promontory of Monaco has been inhabited from the remotest antiquity, with Paleolithic remains dating back 400,000 years, perhaps left by Homo erectus 300,000 years before modern humans arrived in Europe. This southern coastline has always been an attractive environment for the comfortable life.

The written history of Monaco runs back for many centuries. During the 6th-century B.C. Phocaeans from Massalia (modern day Marseille) built a temple to Hercules here and founded the colony of Monoikos, which means an "isolated home". The name of the colony is connected with local veneration of the Roman god Hercules, who

was said to have constructed the ancient path that passed through the region from Spain to Italy. Even now there remains an admiration of Hercules: the largest port is named Port Hercule.

At the dawn of history we find Hecatceus, of Miletus, who lived five hundred years before Christ, mentioning it as one of the chief towns of the Ligurians, who were the first settled tribes to live in the area, stretching all the way from Italy to Marseilles. During the Carthaginian war its inhabitants took the side of Hannibal against the Romans, and afterwards of Caesar against Pompey.

Projecting as it does into the sea, it offered such a good shelter that Monaco became known as a port in Roman days. It was from this unpretentious haven that Cesar Augustus embarked for Genoa on his way back to Rome after his victories in southern Gaul.

Following downfall of the Roman Empire, control of the area passed back and forth between the Goths, Lombards and Franks, with constant struggles that left the area nearly depopulated.

After the death of Charlemagne, the scattered Ligurian villages along these shores were constantly pillaged and destroyed by the Saracens, who in 814 took possession of the heights from which they descended from their mountain castles to ravage the coastal region. The Saracens held it continuously until the tenth century, when the Count of Arles expelled them. Then for a time it was a lawless rendezvous for pirates.



In 1191 the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI granted Monaco to the wealthy and prosperous town of Genoa. His gift was coupled with the requirement that a fortress be built on Monaco to serve the Emperor in his wars with Marseilles and other towns in the region. Erection of the fort in the year 1215 on the site of the present palace marks the traditional founding date of Monaco. Outside the fort, rudiments of a town appeared as the first huts and houses of Monaco. Therefore, the town has already passed its 900th anniversary.

From 1270-1340 the citadel of Monaco served as a refuge alternately to Guelfs represented by the Grimaldi, and to Ghibellines under the guidance of the Spinola. Each party twice besieged the other within its walls, and each was twice defeated by its opponents. On the Christmas Eve, however, of 1306, while all the inhabitants were celebrating their solemn midnight mass, Francois Grimaldi contrived to enter Monaco disguised as a Franciscan monk, knocked on the palace door and then cut the throats of the sentinels to let in his accomplices, capturing the fortress. From this period Monaco has remained in the hands of the Grimaldi, united under one government. The Grimaldi coat of arms still celebrates this devious attack, proudly displaying a monk holding a drawn sword. Francois was succeeded by a cousin, Rainier I, whose son Charles I is considered the real founder of the nation, which expanded greatly in size under him, controlling land to Menton in the east while exerting economic influences beyond Antibes in the west.

By 1489 Monaco was recognized by France as an independent country, although within 30 years Spain had claimed this rich land, followed by temporary conquests of French and Italian forces. Sovereignty was again regained in 1641 through a treaty with France. For the next three centuries Monaco was not a wealthy land, and derived a meager subsistence from vineyards, olive-woods, and patches of corn, cultivated with much effort on the scanty soil of the mountain slopes around. From their fortress on the promontory the Grimaldi organized the Monégasques to levy tolls on passing ships. Italy was not a united country. France had not yet extended her frontiers to the Riviera. This little corner of the Mediterranean escaped the juggernaut of developing political unity that crushed the life out of a dozen other feudal robber states.

With the French Revolution, the land and all its possessions were seized by the rebels, who imprisoned the royal family and sold off all their property. After things settled down with the fall of Napoleon, the principality of Monaco was given back to the Matignon-Grimaldi, but as a protectorate of the Kingdom of Sardinia, which retained control until 1860. After thirty-three years of oppression, the lands to the east, Menton and Roquebrune

rebelled (March 2, 1848), and placed themselves under the protection of Italy and the Prince of Savoy, enjoying nine years of liberty, until they were induced, in 1860, to vote for annexation to France at the time of the cession of Nice. A treaty with France followed in 1861 that took away 95% of the territory of Monaco, assuring sovereignty but reducing the land to its present borders. At this time Monaco was still a poor place, where the Prince and his subjects had to maintain themselves from the produce of a few small vineyards and orchards scattered over patches of scanty soil on the slopes of the mountains.

Everything changed in 1863 with the construction of the Monte Carlo Casino, followed by opening of the railroad in 1868, leading directly into an economic boom based on gambling and the resort life that has continued ever since. The principality's mild climate, splendid scenery, hotels and gambling facilities have made Monaco world famous as a tourist and recreation center. With the modernizations of the 20th century the economy diversified and the government transformed from absolute monarchy to a democracy, resulting in the amazing little nation we see today.



VILLEFRANCHE

On our way back to Nice let's visit the coastal village of Villefranche. It does not take more than one hour and can be quite worthwhile. Villefranche is small and often overlooked because so many other nearby glamorous destinations tempt visitors astray, but the pretty pastel-colored buildings lined up along the waterfront promenade in front of the yacht harbor make a brief stop here most enjoyable.

The bus stops in Villefranche on Avenue Albert 1st in the middle of the newer part of town at a busy intersection, Villefranche-Octroi. There is no need to explore this upper section of town, which is just a small cluster of shops and restaurants like any other, because you want to get into the Old Town section and the special waterfront down below, a ten-minute walk through lovely pedestrian lanes, downhill all the way. Tiny Villefranche has a population just 6,000, so you won't get lost or spend too much time on this fun little stroll.

We take the lane which leads to the waterfront down a staircase street, Rue de l'Église, which leads directly down through the Old Town and to the picturesque harbor shore. We are walking downhill so it is a very easy stroll.

Before reaching bottom, the steps will deliver you through a small pedestrian maze of alleys, with shops, art galleries and cafés scattered around. It's one of those magical tangle of lanes you love to see when traveling, so don't just march in a straight line downhill to the harbor, but enjoy the several attractive side routes along the way as you descend. These offshoots are level and easy to navigate, especially Rue du Poilu, the main pedestrian lane extending for several interesting blocks.

One block further downhill, notice the arcaded street, Rue Obscure, a historic landmark that looks more like a tunnel than a lane. Five parallel pedestrian lanes making up this neighborhood, linked together by staircase streets, creating a wonderful maze for you to explore.

If you plunged straight down through the old town to the waterfront it might only take 5 minutes but you would be



missing out on those fun diversions, so take your time, do some window-shopping, check out the cross streets and appreciate this special place.

You soon arrive at the picturesque boat harbor along the water's edge, lined with a row of outdoor restaurants and pastel-colored buildings. The main activity is just walking along the quay past restaurants, bars and little shops, with a few other people out for a stroll. The town is full of small shops, mostly expensive and catering for the tourist trade but also plenty offering the usual services for the permanent population. Prices here are rather high, so you would find better shopping deals back in Nice, but if you see something special, go for it.

One of the special features of this promenade is that the buildings are right at the waterfront with no big road in between, creating a rare ambience. There is a small, cobblestoned service road but restricted to local delivery traffic, resulting in a peaceful pedestrian promenade with the yacht basin on one side and a row of bars and restaurants on the other.

It's such a small place that the entire waterfront of the Old Town is only 200 meters long, which you can easily walk in a few minutes. Of course you will be stopping as you go to soak up the views and maybe take a break at the attractive eateries. Cruise ships drop anchor in the bay and shuttle their travelers by tender to the small dock at the south end of the waterfront.

One can easily see this entire routine in an hour and then move along.

For departure, we can either catch a train or bus to continue the journey back to Nice. The train station is only another 300 meters further along a pleasant waterfront promenade, an easy, level stroll which also brings you towards the beach, just beyond the staircase leading up to the train platform.

The beach is not a fine sand, but much better than the smooth stones that make up Nice's beaches.

The train is very attractive, especially with 3 departures every hour, so you don't have to worry about a schedule - just hop on and go.

Because the town is quite small there are very few tourists clogging up the quaint, waterfront, although when a cruise ship pulls in during the high season, the beach and narrow lanes do get very busy. Ironically, most cruisers disembark their ships and jump into a tour bus to Nice or Monaco, skipping Villefranche which is right under their noses, because they don't have much time and want to get to the Big Star attractions.



Villefranche is part of the urban community of Nice Côte d'Azur, a suburb of the Nice metropolitan area. Villefranche's bay is notable for reaching a significant depth of 95 m (320 ft) only a short distance from shore, forming one of the deepest natural harbors of any port in the Mediterranean Sea, providing safe anchorage for large ships.

In prehistoric times, Celto-ligurian tribes roamed the area and established farming communities on the surrounding hills. The Greeks and later the Romans used the natural harbor as a stopover en route

to the Greek settlements around the Western Mediterranean. The old harbor of la Darse dates back to the 17th century, but during the 18th century, the city lost some of its maritime importance to the new harbor built in Nice but remained a military and naval base until 1959.

We continue back to Nice. Next day we enjoy another daytrip, to Vence and St-Paul-de-Vence.



VENCE

This small picturesque village with its historic pedestrian zone makes a nice bonus on our way to see St-Paul-de-Vence. Much of the medieval still survives in Vence, with a maze of narrow streets crowded with houses of great age.

It's an easy one-hour bus ride from Nice, with departures of bus number 400 every half-hour in the morning. You probably would not come all this distance just to see little Vence, but it makes a good day's outing when combined with a vis-

it to the more important, more popular, St-Paul-de-Vence, 3 miles away (5 km). Best to visit Vence first, then back-track one stop to St-Paul, which requires extra time to see and is especially lovely late in the day.

Vence is not only small, but flat – not a hill town, yet 1,065 feet above sea level – so it makes for cool, easy walking. Vence is a dreamy place, quieter than those other tourist towns, but it can get busy during summer afternoons with busloads of tourists streaming through, so as always, we recommend the off-season.

It only costs 1 1/2 euro for the bus ticket from Nice, one of Europe's great bargains. There is no train service to Vence, so bus is the only choice if you're coming by public transportation. It is possible to come partway from Nice by train and transfer to bus in Cagnes, but that is less convenient. Taking the bus is a nice way to meet some locals – just say “bonjour” and see where the conversation takes you, perhaps pick up a few travel tips or restaurant suggestions. The bus trip ends at a big traffic circle, then you walk about 500 meters on Avenue de la Resistance to the Tourist Information office at Place du Grand Jardin, for maps, brochures and friendly staff who can answer your questions.



Vence is a small village, roughly circular in shape, just 300 meters across, the size of six football fields, so you can easily see it in a few hours on foot. You really cannot get lost when you're inside the Old Town, but you might get a little disoriented by the curving foot paths, so it helps to consult a map. There are also 27 information signs posted in the village explaining the history of various sites. Keep in mind there is one primary route and several plazas -- feel free to wander along the main lane and deviate down the little side alleys, then come on back to the main lane – it's interesting whether you are coming or going.

As usual in a small Provencal village, the main attractions are the pedestrian lanes lined with historic old buildings harboring shops, cafes and restaurants. Little plazas and fountains liven up the space, and the central church, Provence's smallest cathedral, is a medieval delight. Vence is one of those rare medieval towns in France that still has its wall all the way around, not freestanding, but incorporated into the backside of buildings. Any time you have a wall around a medieval village you may hope to find a well-preserved historic site, like Vence. This Old Town was entirely surrounded by ramparts built in the 13th and 14th centuries, and before that a moat protected the south side with water from a Roman aqueduct. Within and about the ramparts rose the town, like a castle of stone, elliptical in shape.

We suggest here a route through little lanes bringing you through most of the village in one hour without back-

tracking, but you can easily double that time with stops along the way. Or, just plunge in and take whatever direction looks good, making up a route as you go along -- always fun, but you might duplicate steps, waste time and miss some sites.



As you walk into the old town through the main Peyra Gate the setting changes from modern to tranquil, embraced by an atmosphere of old cobbled lanes, fountains and plazas. Somehow it's modern with all of the latest conveniences and yet at the same time you're looking back into some deep history. This Place du Peyra, renovated in 2005, had once been a bustling market and place for people to gather and socialize, and is now "front door" to the Old Town.

The main commercial lane runs through this square, and if you are in a hurry like

most visitors and only want to see the Cathedral, turn right on Rue du Marché, then first left to the central plaza -- but a better route circles the town in a meandering zigzag, seeing its many wonderful sites. The little lanes that we suggest are kind of off the beaten track, quite interesting and worth a look.

After entering Place du Peyra, turn left and walk a block along Rue du Portail Lévis, with nice shops. At the end note the ancient gate on your left, the Portail Levis, one of three gates of the ancient Roman road.

Turn right on Rue de la Coste for one block, then right again on Rue de la Place Vielle, following the signs towards the Cathedral. Now turn left on Rue de l'Evêché, then right at Passage Cahours, through medieval arcades leading to the main square, Place Clemenceau, with City Hall and the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Nativity. This Passage Cahours has columns and arches supporting an upper covered walkway, which connected the bishop's palace and Cathedral so his holiness had direct access, from the 14th century.

Vence Cathedral is the smallest in Provence if not all of France. The first church was built in the 4th century on the foundations of an ancient Roman temple -- two stones outside the door date back to third-century Roman times. The current building took shape in the 11th and 12th centuries in the Romanesque style. The cathedral is 110 ft. long, 68 ft wide, and about 70 high, with a tall battlemented tower dating back to the tenth-century château fort, a remnant of those grim medieval days when even churches were places of defense. The interior is striking: double aisles, simple nave lined by massive columns with tiers of semicircular arches, a choir with richly carved oak stalls, a fourth-century sarcophagus for altar, and a font and lectern of the Italian Renaissance. Its bishops were illustrious men, most of whom are buried in the cathedral.



Quite remarkably, this old, small building has an original mosaic mural in the baptistery by Mark Chagall, one of the great artists of the 20th century, who lived nearby, depicting "Moses saved from the waters." This mosaic radiates a special glow, with side light streaming onto these colorful stones vividly illustrating flowers, fruits, the sun, a rainbow, angels and a newborn Moses being baptized. Next to it is a charming bulletin board of photographs of babies that have been baptized in the cathedral, showing this is still very much an active church.

City Hall is next to the Cathedral in the usual pattern forming the main square of a typical European town, with church, civic building, shops and open space, clustered in the center of town. There was a castle here in the 13th century for the Lords of Vence.



e, Place Surian, with a few restaurants, of the plaza continue left at the fork along to Porte du Signadour, a watchman's one gateway onto busy Avenue Marcellin

You have arrived at a lovely plaza, Place Antony Mars, with a fountain, pizzeria and art gallery. This square was first laid out in 1431, with a fountain built in 1439 for those residents outside the walls. From here you get a revealing look at the outside curve of the Old Town, where you see houses that used the town wall for foundations or are themselves rem-

nants of the wall, but before 1840 was a solid fortified wall. From the 15th century the inhabitants were allowed to build their homes against the wall, on condition they had an iron grill on their windows.

Turn right exiting the gate and walk along the avenue, heading west, for one block, getting a feel for this nice section of the modern town, with more shops, the bustling heart of downtown Vence. Walking along the busy avenue gives you a view of the new town of Vence which is also attractive. You'll find small hotels and restaurants and various shops here.

Turn right into the next gate, Porte du Pontis, returning back in time and place to a quieter space. Now turn left on Rue du Marché for the best and final leg of your journey, along a narrow pedestrian shopping street with the best variety yet. Now it has lovely shops but a century ago was only residential, with some kitchens and stables. Enjoy these final minutes because in two short blocks you are back where you began, at Place du Peyra, ready to exit this ancient town.

Of course if you want to extend the visit there are other tiny side alleys to see and the main lanes to revisit from different directions. You'll notice on our map dotted lines in red, which are the secondary lanes, mostly residential, we skipped in the main walking tour, but each one has points of interest you could enjoy.

As is frequently the case in modern Europe, you are walking along ancient paths that have been patiently restored through massive recent construction

which disturbed previous visitors, but you don't even realize that previous chaos, so be appreciative of all that noisy, dirty work which is now finished. The town is a polished gem, very clean and well-maintained, enhanced by landscaping of floral displays, open leafy plazas and hundreds of trees in a wide variety.

Several options might tempt art fans, including Château de Villeneuve, a fortified 17th century mansion displaying changing exhibits of modern art, in the Fondation Emile Hughes, located just outside the Peyra Gate at Place de Frêne (notice the enormous 500-year-old ash tree). You might also enjoy a ten-minute walk to Matisse's Rosary Chapel with famous architecture and stained glass by the artist who considered it his masterpiece.

Otherwise the visit is done and we will be next heading to St Paul, so give yourself 10 minutes to reach the bus stop, having already checked the schedules so you arrive just before the bus, which only comes hourly in mid-day, and continue on to St-Paul-du-Vence.



VENCE HISTORY

Within the walls of the town there is much to attract those interested in ancient history. Vence was occupied in turn by the Phoenicians, Phoceans, Ligurians, Romans and Gauls. We know from Ptolemy that it was the capital of a primitive Ligurian tribe called the Nerusii at a very early period. They had a series of forts built from massive stone blocks without cement, crowning the tops of the nearby high hills, which they fled to for refuge when attacked by the Roman legions.

Eventually the town was conquered by the Romans who established on this secluded spot an imperial city, Ventium, which speedily gained great importance as a central supply depot for the army. It was one of the eight principal cities of the province of the Maritime Alps, and possessed a forum, an aqueduct carrying to it the delicious water of the Lubiana, two temples dedicated to Mars and to Cybele, many splendid palaces; and included among its inhabitants many persons of high rank, besides a large body of priests and magistrates.



But only behind the cathedral is there any remnant of imperial Rome. A granite column supporting an arch, and reliefs and inscriptions built in the north wall of the cathedral, are all that's left.

At the beginning of the Christian era it was connected by a splendid road, a branch of the old Via Julia Augusta, with Cimies, Vado, and the southern Italian routes, along which extensive traffic was carried. Fragments of this road have been found in different places between Vence and Cimies, consisting of large slabs of pavement with layers of masonry on either side, and ruined tombs, which, according to the custom of the Romans, lined both sides of the public ways. During the Middle Ages Vence was a stronghold of the Holy Roman Empire. Because of its inland remote location it played but a minor part in later turmoil which disrupted the rest of Provence. High on her hill, she was too difficult of access to suffer greatly from marauding foes, and hidden from the sea, she did not attract the Mediterranean pirates. When Antibes and Nice were sacked, her little ledge of rock was safe; and people crowded thick and fast behind her walls.



The old town was entirely surrounded by ramparts built in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Large portions of the old walls and ramparts, with massive square towers of the eleventh century next the gates, still remain, and testify to its former strength and importance. These early days were a time of growth for the little city, and she prospered in her Medievalism as

a prominent and influential center. Here were arts and occupations, burghers and charters, riches and liberties. The Knights Templars, too, invested the place with romance of the Middle Ages, for the ruins of one of their castles may be seen perched half-way up the mighty precipice of the Rocher Blanc. Much of the medieval still survives in Vence, as in other hill towns of the Riviera.



SAINT-PAUL DE VENCE

Saint-Paul de Vence in the South of France is one of the prettiest medieval villages in all of Europe, a very special town, but with two personalities: delightful and not crowded during the off-season, but totally different in the summer when it is loved too much, with big crowds squeezing into the narrow lanes. Each year it gets 2 1/2 million visitors, so it can get quite crowded, especially during the busy season from May through September. Like much of the Cote d'Azur, it is much better to

visit between November and April, when the weather is fine and the crowds are still at home. Off-season tranquility is especially important in a small jewel of a town like this which is vulnerable to over-crowding due to its narrow pedestrian lanes, unlike larger towns such as Cannes and Antibes which can more easily handle crowds.

St-Paul is a fortified walled village of stone structures that date back to the 15th and 16th centuries, with some of the best preservation you will ever see. It had fallen apart in recent centuries and by the early 20th century it was quite dilapidated, but it has been fixed up like new – largely because the art industry has moved in. There are 50 art galleries here of the highest quality, along with various shops, restaurants, a couple of small hotels, and several hundred local residents. While the many art galleries exhibit beautiful paintings and sculpture, the main aesthetic attraction here is the town itself. Of all the little towns in the book, St Paul is the one place you should not miss.

The town is easy to visit because it is only 300 meters long by 100 meters wide, and fairly level except for a few staircases, so it's effortless to walk around and see the entire place. You could spend several hours wandering through this medieval maze and be endlessly fascinated. The village is so enchanting you should walk through during the daytime and then again in the early evening with the glorious lighting mixture of twilight sky and illuminated shop interiors casting their glow. In between you could eat, or make a visit to the nearby museum of modern art, the superb Maitt Foundation.



While the ancient stones buildings are the main attraction, the cobblestone paving of St Paul is a major work of art in itself, a perfectly composed mosaic of smooth pebbles in endless patterns and harmonious colors, so be sure to look down and admire as you stroll along. If you are especially lucky there will be a brief drizzle to make the cobblestones glisten. Of course the entire village within the walls is all pedestrianized – no cars allowed except the occasional service vehicle. You will get a mild workout as you walk gentle upslopes, downslopes and short staircases, but nothing too steep.

ARRIVING

St Paul is easily reached on bus 400, just 10 minutes from Vence. When approaching on the main road you get a fine view of St Paul surrounded with its massive walls, standing on a detached promontory, with steep terraced slopes descending into the valley below. The bus then drops you off in front and in two minutes you walk through a little park into the village, or alternatively, ring the bus bell on first sight of the village to get off



one stop early in order to enjoy a supreme view of the citadel from the road, then walk five minutes to reach the town.

Like walking into a movie set, yet truly authentic, the dramatic entrance is via the main gate in the massive fortified wall, and then through the inner gate vaulted passage, beneath a tower with a channel for the portcullis grating which dropped down to keep the enemy out. Fortunately no such barriers remain and you easily arrive inside the town.

Start with a stroll along the full length of the village on the main pedestrian lane, Rue Grande, which runs straight through the middle from one end to the other, lined on both sides with old stone buildings. There will be plenty of time to double back and explore the little side lanes and venture into shops and galleries, which are mostly along the main lane.



You never have to worry about getting lost while you're walking around in this village because it is small and very

clearly defined with a wall around it, so you know when you've reached the edge of town. You don't need a map to navigate your way around, so you can relax and wander -- you don't have to be in any great rush even if you only have a couple of hours, which is plenty of time to see the village. It's quite small, but each little lane is worth a close look. If you have a full day you could get that much more out of your visit.

While walking the main street you will be impressed by the preservation of its ancient shops. At almost every step one meets with the wide arch which contained both the door and window of the shop. There are more houses of obvious antiquity in this place than will be seen in any town of its size in Provence.



When you reach the far end of the main lane after a leisurely 30-minute stroll, you exit through another gateway arch and find a staircase that leads onto the wall with a lovely viewing platform where you can see across the distant landscape. From this terrace you can notice how the walls are wider in some places, with an inner walkway, perhaps for archers to stand and shoot at the attackers. The path along the parapet that sentries once patrolled is undisturbed. One almost expects to hear his challenge for the password. The town is as ready to withstand the attack of an army of bowmen or of

halberdiers as it ever was. It might even defy cannon if they were as small and as weak as the old ones that you still see by the main gate. The circle of ramparts, the medieval wall around the town is unbroken. There are still the old gates, the towers, the bastions and the barbicans. St. Paul de Vence offers a vivid realization of the fortified town of the middle ages. It is but little altered and that only superficially. Its fortifications were laid down in 1547 and they are still quite complete.

The small gardens of the adjacent houses slope downhill with dark foliage and golden fruit of their orange groves, forming a beautiful foreground to the lovely views of green rolling hills that are visible off in the distance in every direction. The surrounding countryside offers some lovely nature hikes that you might also enjoy. The tourist information office has brochures describing self-guided walks in the countryside and along the outside of the village for a look at the circuit fortifications of the old wall that runs around town.

The wall extends uninterrupted all the way around the village and dates from the 16th century. It hugs the contours of the rocky spur on which the village stands, forming a 1 kilometer perimeter that has undergone only slight modifications since the 16th century. The ramparts in Saint-Paul de Vence were among the very first bastioned fortifications erected in France to have been designed by a French architect. Back in 1872, the city purchased the bastioned walls of Saint-Paul de Vence. They were declared a Listed Historical Monument in 1945. Today, they are the jewel in the village's historical crown.



At this far end you can walk through an open space between the inside of the wall and the outside of the village, which forms a driveway and small parking lot for the residents. You'll probably see some locals out for a walk, with parked cars here and there and apartments above in the ancient stone buildings. Then you can walk back up through one of the little side alley staircases and that will return you into the center of the village.

Notice there is a four-star deluxe hotel here in the middle of town, Le Saint

Paul, which would be an excellent place to stay if you ever come back and spend the night. However it's not open in the off-season, which is actually the best time to visit Saint-Paul because it is pretty empty from the end of September until April. In the peak of the busy summer season it would be a different experience altogether, with 1000 people wandering these lanes -- you might even have human gridlock, but if you are here in late September it is less crowded, and yet most of the shops and nearly all the art galleries are open.

Your walking route from this point can take off in any direction you like, bearing in mind you will soon be going in little circles, so it doesn't matter which way you go. For now assume you are returning back along the main Rue Grande, where you will soon arrive at the Place de la Grande Fontaine, which stands in the very center of town -- redesigned in the 17th and again in the 19th century. There were several other public wells available in the village, but the Grand Fontaine was certainly the main one. The fountain was designed in a typical Provençal style and has inspired many painters and photographers. This square has always been the busiest spot in the village. From dawn until dusk villagers would come to fetch water, donkeys and mules would drink, and washerwomen would scrub and beat their laundry in the washhouse. That water basin is still there inside the loggia. And the square also hosted the weekly market in the 17th century. The fountain is designed in typical Provençal style and has inspired many painters and photographers.

Continue along the path sloping up to the right of the fountain, heading towards the church and old city hall on a small plaza. In a minute you reach the summit of the town with the church and, close to it, the two great, square towers of the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. The taller of the towers was the belfry of the church, while the other was the tower of the town.

The church, L'église Collégiale, dates from the same era as the towers. The



church is a small but remarkable monument with an interior that is one of the most beautiful in Provence and certainly one of the most interesting. Among its most notable features are a couple of altar screens of exquisitely carved wood, which date from between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. The chapel of St. Clement the Martyr, is a magnificent work of art. It is classified as a national monument. Called the Collegiate Church, the construction stretched about 400 years from the 14th to the 18th century. There's another advantage to visiting this old church -- next to it you'll find public toilets, which really come in handy.

Getting hungry is no problem with the limited but adequate choice of restaurants, ranging from take-out sandwich to sit-down feast. Consider the friendly crêperie in front of the church with a barrel-vaulted interior that's probably about 500 years old. We had a chance to learn the name of the restaurant from the very friendly lady who owns it. "THE is the French name for tea, and we are a tea room", she explained, listing crepes, salad, tarte and soups as specialties. Quite easy to find, it's located on the staircase lane just in front of the church. Typical of nearly all the restaurants and cafés of France, you might see a few dogs inside, welcome as part of daily life here, showing how relaxed and friendly people are.

Even though it's a small village we have a lot more lanes to explore, so keep walking. There is just something very special about narrow, pedestrian, medieval stone lanes -- you are surrounded left and right and front and rear by such interesting visuals gliding by, it makes you want to see it all.

Walk around behind the church along Rue Cassette, which leads you to Rue de l'Allée along the backside of town, which offers a view across the distant hills. Continuing along brings you to another lane with vaulting overhead, rue de l'Étoile. You'll often find the arch motif incorporated into the old stone architecture for interiors as well as gateways.

The characteristic stone arch is not on the main lane, so you do need to walk around and explore even in such a tiny village as St-Paul -- get off the main lane and check out the side streets for more shops and sights. Here you will see a wine cellar doorway on the right leading into La Petite Cave de Saint Paul. It's a 14th-century wine cellar open now for wine tasting and purchase, operated by Frederick Theys, an expert who has traveled the world and brought back some great wines, and who was a sommelier in Paris at the Ritz Hotel and the Hotel George 5th.



While walking around in St-Paul de Vence you cannot help but notice the many attractive art galleries. In fact there are at least 21 art galleries in this little town and in addition there are 26 art studios, or ateliers, which is a major reason visitors flock here, but by now you realize Saint-Paul offers much more than mere art galleries. The town itself is a living, breathing work of art breathing work of art.



The way the official Tourism Information Office describes it: "Modern, contemporary, fringe, naive... on gallery walls in Saint-Paul de Vence, talented artists from all schools rub shoulders with their illustrious peers. The village is an open-air gallery with artists at work in their studios and staging exciting exhibitions. A painting hung in the morning can find a home before evening falls... if it captures the heart of a visitor."

Sometimes as you're walking along you might get lucky and notice an artist inside their studio at work, so go on inside and say hello, maybe have a conversation. They perhaps will tell you something about their work and their style. It's not very often you can stand over the shoulder of artists and watch them work. You could buy a painting, so contemporary it's still wet.

A lot of money is flowing through this little town with so many high-end art galleries everywhere, and fortunately these funds have been put to good use in fixing up and maintaining the physical structure. There is no graffiti, no trash, nothing is broken and everything is sparkling. They keep the place spic and span, so if you want to see an old medieval village that is as clean as today go visit St-Paul in Provence.

There are also a variety of shops for your perusal: 6 craft shops and 20 other shops for gifts, kitchen goods, glass, clothing, ceramics and herbs -- all sorts of things. There's a bakery, a deli, you can buy olive oil, perfumes and even furniture.

Once again observe how the paving on the lanes is precise and beautiful. It's so carefully arranged that the sidewalk looks worthy enough to be exhibited inside the galleries or maybe in the Louvre. The first cobbles were laid on village streets in the 1950s and have been perfected so much they are among the finest that you will

ever see. Of course cobblestone paving is not all that unusual in small European streets. You find all varieties of size and shapes of the cobbles in your travels -- sometimes large flat flagstones, or crude blocks with deep roots, and other cases like here, so precious they're more like a necklace that encircles the town with colored stones.



Don't leave yet! Stay in the village until late afternoon/early evening, and stroll around. Take a walk again through town later in the day enjoying the late afternoon lighting and right on into the evening, which is a really magical time to be here, when the lighting is beguiling and the town is at its most charming. In the evening it takes on a different character altogether, the soft glow of twilight, and it is very quiet, the shops are closed and there are just a few people walking about. It's more tranquil, hardly any visitors, especially now in the off-season

and you really get a chance to take in the physical beauty of St-Paul de Vence.

Why not re-trace all your steps from earlier in the day with this more subdued and magical lighting? This heavenly place deserves another good look. St. Paul, appears so unlike our modern workaday world of hotels, and houses, and railway-stations, and shops, that one can hardly believe that this place is real, and that we are not seeing it in some happy dream. It is very real, however. It has its modern life of births, deaths, and marriages, and its ancient history, dating as far back as the ninth century.

Saint-Paul started life as a fortified village back in the Middle Ages. It's up on a hill and they built a stone wall around it and filled the little village with these stone structures and the stone church, and different little town squares. The architectural interest of the place is immediately apparent. On every hand is evidence of genuine ancient and unaltered work.

The doorways are old and varied in form and almost everyone has a paneled lintel supported by corbels, many of the former containing carved shields and ornaments, and enriched with leaves and scrolls. In St. Paul de Vence will be seen, in almost every street, examples of the little shops of the Middle Ages. Under a wide arch or in a square opening will be found a door approached by a step and by the door a window. Most of these doorways are from the beginning of the sixteenth century, and indicate very early Renaissance work. Others are carved and molded with the double curvature of the late Gothic style, and a few show marks of a simpler and earlier design.

The population of the village and the immediate surroundings is about 3.500 people, most of them living in houses as scattered around in the countryside just outside the walls.

Improvements have of course been made, repairs completed. The town of St. Paul remains a rare relic worthy to be placed entirely inside a museum, for it is a museum specimen, but it's an outdoor museum, a living museum of the very best kind. While there are a few small private garden courtyards tucked away here and there, for the most part the greenery is potted plants, and it's particularly noticeable as you walk along the narrow residential lane – they have their gardens hanging out front in flower pots.



In the 20th century St-Paul was discovered by actors, poets and writers. The 1950s and '60s were the village's Golden Age. Saint-Paul became an amazing film set, hosting French and foreign movie stars drawn to the French Riviera by the Victorine film studios in Nice and by the Cannes Film Festival.

When you take a close look you'll see most of the art for sale is high quality. Another way to expand your visit is to go inside the galleries, take a look inside the shops, talk to some shopkeepers, especially in small place like this with

may be 2 km of lanes altogether, go ahead on inside, walk around – that's why the doors open and they want you to come in, they want your business – even if you just taking a look and then exiting and continuing on your little walk.

There is a friendly and helpful tourist information office in the Old Town at the beginning of Rue Grande, where a guide told the following story: "St-Paul is very famous because before it was a very little village with a lot of artists like Picasso, Chagall. There were French actors, Yves Montand, Simone Signoret. In the village you can find around 50 galleries, workshops and artists and so, a lot of shops of decoration of the house.

The village was built in 11th – 12th centuries for the first fortifications, and after by Françoise Premiere in the 16th century. It's a medieval village. If you want to do a tour of the village you can find the main street where you can find the shops, the galleries, everything. You have the place where they have the big fountain, and also the heart of the village with the church. And also a lot of shops, the pleasant charming streets, yes. About the history of the village, you can find several houses that were from the 12th century. Also for the fortifications, they were built in the 16th century by Françoise Premiere. And St-Paul was a royal city. In the village you can find around three hotels, and there are two very famous hotels. So one with four stars, the name is Le Saint-



Paul, and you can live in the heart of the village. So you have different views on the West side, on the East side. After you have the very, very famous hotel, the name is La Colombe d'Or, and the hotel is very famous because different artists like Chagall, Miro, Picasso lived there before. So on the walls of the hotel you can find the paintings, sculpture of the very famous artists. It's a very charming hotel, yes."

The Tourist Information website has quite a few brochures available for viewing on-line or for downloading as a pdf. And they also list the shops, the galleries, the artist studios and the hotels.

Well it's finally time to depart St-Paul going out through that same medieval gateway through which you entered many centuries ago. It's a double gateway you see for a really strong defensive fortification.



It's easy to find the bus stop, only a short block away – just walk out the main gate, through the little park across the Place DeGaulle, a very famous gaming courtyard where they love to play pétanque, the ballgame called boules elsewhere. The actor Yves Montand was known to spend a lot of time there back in the days when he was around. If you're here in nice weather during you'll probably see several games going on.

We shall keep our eye on the clock and the bus schedules so that we don't have to wait too long at the bus stop -- they

only come about every hour. The only public transportation available is the bus and it's quite convenient. Bus number 400, and the price is very reasonable, only two euro for the bus ticket.

It's an easy ride back to Nice -- it takes about one hour. The bus will take you all the way back into the heart of the city, with some nice scenery along the way. Some views of St-Paul from the distance as you drive by, back to the city of Nice, the best home base for exploring the French Riviera.

The bus is very convenient because it'll take you direct – you don't have to transfer, and it'll bring you to Albert the 1st Park right at Avenue Verdun, a few blocks from our hotel.



Home to rest up after a very busy day. By now you are tired, so get a good rest and be ready for another big day tomorrow, leaving France behind and continuing our journey into Italy, visiting the Italian Riviera and Cinque Terre.

Nice has been an excellent place for us to stay several days and explore the nearby towns, from the comfort and convenience of our Beau Rivage Hotel.

We continue into Italy.



SANTA MARGHERITA



Santa Margarita is a classic town on the waterfront of the Italian Riviera, with arcaded sidewalks, beautiful palm trees and a green park promenade along the beach and marina. The seaside park has a statue in memory of Christopher Columbus, who was from Genoa, just about 20 miles up the coastline.

When you walk a block from the waterfront you discover a charming Old Town atmosphere with pedestrian streets, little piazzas, shops, restaurants and locals out for a stroll. Not many tourists in this town, which therefore has a more authentic Italian feeling. It's a great little town full of light and color with orange and brown pastel buildings nestled right up against the picturesque waterfront.

Our Hotel Laurin is right on the waterfront with a classic view of the marina, filled with sailboats, yachts and fishing boats. It's not often you can stroll out of your hotel's front door and enjoy this sort of a view over a tranquil boat harbor.

Santa Margarita is very convenient for travelers because the international express train service stops right inside the town. The town provides easy access to nearby attractions because it's just 3 miles away from Portofino, main attraction of this coastline, and an easy train ride to Cinque Terre, the string of five little hillside villages we shall visit on our second day here.

This area has quite a history. It started out as two small separate villages and then in 1812 they

were joined together by Napoleon, who named them after himself, Puerto Napoleonic. However, three years later, with the fall of the emperor, that was undone and the city was transferred to the kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia. You do get a real feeling for history here in Santa Margarita, which has quite a few buildings 300 and 400 years old, most notably, the outstanding Baroque church on the main piazza.

There are numerous other attractive towns scattered along these 80 miles of coastline, but you'll find that Santa Margarita is one of the nicest, and so convenient for visiting Portofino and Cinque Terre.



PORTOFINO

Upon arrival and hotel check-in, our first visit is to the crown jewel of the coastline, the village of Portofino. We get there on a wonderful public bus ride along this beautiful winding stretch of road hugging the scenic coastline between Santa Margherita and Portofino, arriving in just 20 minutes. This drive ranks with any in the world for scenic beauty, such as the Amalfi Drive, further south from Sorrento.



This stretch of land, which lies between Apennine Mountains and the Ligurian Sea comprises the region of Liguria and it's also referred to as the Italian Riviera. It's a land of rich green vegetation and multicolored fresco houses, enriched by the cultivation of olives, vines and exotic plants. Now it's a world-famous capital of tourism and you will see why with its wonderful coastal beauty.

This region is very, very popular during the summertime, especially the little village of Portofino, when it gets gridlocked with heavy traffic and wall-to-wall tourists

overwhelming the small space. When we are here in October, in mid-week, it is very quiet, with no crowds.

The bus arrives in the little back streets of Portofino, dropping us off just a few easy blocks from the waterfront, which we reach along pedestrian lanes lined with shops and cafes. When you get your first look at the sheltered cove and pretty buildings of this little village you'll see why it has become world-famous.

Less than one thousand people live in Portofino, and yet the place still seems like a little seaport town rather than a mere fishing hamlet. It's a microcosm, a world unto itself. Many of the villagers live in these colorful houses lining the waterfront. The first story is for shops and restaurants and the upper floors are apartment houses in buildings mostly from the 18th and 19th century. The natural small harbor is a cove sheltered by a lushly overgrown promontory that projects like a giant breakwater into the Gulf of Paradise.



Across this tiny little harbor on the other side at the top of the hill you'll find the Castle of St. George, open to the public every day from 9 to 5, and next to it is the church of St. George. It's an easy stroll up to the Castle on a staircase and paved footpath, carved right out of solid bedrock, quite safe and not very strenuous -- most of this path is quite level.

In a few minutes you arrive at a terrace with the picture-perfect postcard view of Portofino's harbor, colorful buildings, and green hills beyond. This is not to be missed; in fact this view is the reason for our visit. Somehow the overall elements around you fit together in a perfectly harmonious whole, admired by poets and writers and artists for centuries. The Castle was built to defend this area against the Turks a couple of hundred years ago and it still has the residential Castle for caretakers who actually live on the grounds. There are some houses up here on the hillside, but there are no roads at all, so their supplies have to be carried in and out by hand.



Back into the village center you might see some nautical activities: sailors painting their boats, fishermen fixing nets, scuba divers preparing to go out to see. In the summertime the little harbor is filled to gridlock with the yachts of the rich and famous, but now the off-season the locals can work on their little boats.

There are several sidewalk restaurants around the scenic little harbor where you might drop anchor for a snack or drink, but save your main appetite for dinner after our short bus ride back to Santa Margherita, which has a nice

variety of dining in all price ranges, specializing in seafood. Since Santa Margherita is a waterfront harbor town, the fishermen bring their fresh catch every morning and keep the restaurants very well supplied.

CINQUE TERRE

Next morning after breakfast we walk over to the train station to begin our full day adventure exploring several picturesque seaside villages, clinging to the steep hills.

We're going by train from Santa Margherita for a day-trip along the coast of Italy on the Mediterranean shores to Cinque Terre, an amazing cluster of five little villages clinging to seaside hills in the southern-most part of the Italian Riviera. Starting at Monterosso and continuing south we arrive next at Vernazza,



then Manarola and finally Riomaggiore, each about a mile apart with a total population of nearly 6,000. Little hilltop Corniglia requires climbing too many steps, so we skip that one. The towns are connected by hiking trails and by train, so we have our choice. We can do a little gentle hiking to get a feel for the terrain, walking through vineyards and olive groves with a view, but nothing too strenuous. Most of our walking will be within each village, enjoying the leisurely pace and coastal atmosphere of these isolated communities. For those wishing a longer hike there will be a chance at the end to peel off from the group and do it on your own.



Almost inaccessible and sheltered from the outside world for centuries, they flourish as time-capsules of old-fashioned life in a perfect setting: along azure shores, surrounded by lush hills covered with grape vines, olives, cactus, citrus groves and wild greenery. You can travel from one of these towns to the next on foot, by train, or by boat, but not by car -- there are no direct roads connecting Cinque Terre along the steep coastline, helping to preserve them as such unique places on this southern fringe of the Italian Riviera 40 miles below Genoa. These villages can provide us with all the pleasures of merely circulating.



Hiking through the hills past vineyards with enchanting views all around is one of the great attractions, but even more enjoyable for most visitors is simply strolling and relaxing in each village, soaking up the peaceful, old-world ambience where cars and trucks are not allowed. You really don't have to do any hiking at all to enjoy the towns, since frequent train and boat services are available, but walking is such a part of the complete experience that you should try at least a couple of the connecting routes. We are not doing any

lengthy hikes, but can take some optional walks along short sections of the trail to enjoy some of this special experience.

Although isolated, Cinque Terre has been discovered by the enlightened horde and gets quite busy in season. There is a slight admission fee to what is now a national park. Visit between October and March to avoid the crowds and enjoy this special place at its best, or brace yourself to share it with the summer bunch. Off-season travel is especially rewarding in a destination like this which derives so much charm from its small size and quiet atmosphere. Only five miles from one end to the other, we will see most of it in one day.

The hiking trail connecting them passes through terraced vineyards that offer wonderful views for much of the way and is not overly strenuous for the typical traveler. Total trail length is 7 miles, with each section between the towns covered in a comfortable walk averaging 2 hours. The entire trail system could be done in one, long tiring day, but it is best enjoyed in sections over several days. The easiest path is found on the south end, connecting Riomaggiore to Manarola with a level, paved path that takes only 20 minutes. Called the "Via dell' Amore" this lovers' path is the only section where you can walk side-by-side holding hands.



MONTEROSSO

Monterosso on the north end of the chain is largest of the five hamlets and makes a good home base because it has 20 hotels, the only sandy beach, excellent restaurants, and the start of the hiking trail. It is also the only one in which long-distance trains stop, so it is easy to reach by rail service from throughout Europe.

You arrive by train at Monterosso in the newer section built in the 1970s, then walk through a short tunnel into the Old Town. The train goes right by the beaches so it's really accessible and yet you can't drive here very easily. The

road don't connect directly from one village to the next. So they have been protected and sheltered, and they

are just as quaint and charming as could be -- for pedestrians only when you get into the heart of town.

Monterosso has a handful of historic sites, including a Cappucine convent and church, a medieval tower, castle ruins, and WWII bunker, but you are here primarily here to wander the little lanes for a few hours, admire the cluster of picturesque buildings, eat well, and use the town as a springboard for visiting the region.

Of course, for the shoppers, there's always that chance to find the special souvenir or elusive outfit in little, out-of-the-way boutiques that you would never find at home or on the main shopping circuits, so there's something for everybody here in the Cinque Terre.



Their written history goes back 1,000 years, with legends extending to the Roman times and beyond into prehistory. Fishing and farming were always the basic economic activities, with tourism now providing the primary income. The main crop is grapes for the local white wines, which are really quite good and can only be purchased in the area. Locally-produced food is served in the restaurants, especially the fresh seafood, olives, fruits and pasta served with pesto, 'pesto besto' they say, flavored by basil grown upslope.

These towns are not so touristy like a standard visitor area because you can't drive easily through them. Driving from Monterosso to Vernazza would take one hour requiring a long detour up and down the mountain, but just a few minutes by train, or one hour and a half by walking. So, difficult, but this difficulty is good for tourists that they can find a more relaxing place. It is very scenic. Monterosso is a small town, a fishing town, and now, very famous."

VERNAZZA

The next destination down the coast is Vernazza, which we reach in 5 minutes by train. Vernazza may be the most beautiful of all, set perfectly in a tiny valley on the edge of the sea, with colorful homes built one on top of the next and framed by a couple of churches and towers. It's a little bigger than Corniglia and Manarola, and yet it is still very, very small – so small that you could walk from one end to the other in about 10 minutes, but you'll want to slow down



and get into the local pace. There's no rush here. Locals are just hanging out. They are enjoying life as much as the visitors do. The buildings have been standing for many centuries and they're not going anywhere, so take your time, explore the little side alleys, and yes, there are going to be staircases. After all, these are hill-towns, so there are hardly any flat, level surfaces here, but it's easy enough.

In ancient days there were frequent invaders and pirates who would come in from the sea. Now it's all fun and games and very peaceful. There is so little level land that the kids use the beach as their soccer field, and sometimes they use the main pedestrian lane for an extension of the game, so watch out for flying soccer balls as you walk through the streets.

At Vernazza there is one distinctive landmark: a stone tower that was part of the medieval wall that went around the village to protect it from invaders. Climb those many steps up to the tower for a wonderful, panoramic view. You will be snapping away no doubt, capturing nice memories to remind you years hence about what a joy this was, but no picture can equal the visceral thrill of being in such a stimulating place, so don't let that camera get in the way or divert you from fully experiencing the moment. Spend a few minutes just looking.

A stone jetty here forms a bit of a mini-harbor. There were no natural ports in the area, so the residents had to make do and build their own, with the resulting shelter very small. Boats pull in to the dock briefly, just long enough to tie up and let people walk on and off the bouncy gangplank. Still, Vernazza is a nautical place, like all of Cinque Terre. You are within a stone's throw of the water no matter where you stand.



There is another special viewpoint that makes the entire journey worthwhile, walking up the trail on the other side of Vernazza in an easy 10-minute climb, where you reach a ledge looking straight down into the pastel-colored village wrapped around its tiny harbor. This picture-book setting with a spectacular view all around will be a highlight of the tour, and very easy to accomplish.



Another 5-minute train ride brings us to Manarola where we walk through town to the beautiful, azure shores of the Mediterranean. Manarola spills down the hill to the waterfront, its houses packed solidly together in the typical pattern of the region, with terraced hillsides for the grapes up above. They don't have a beach but there is a boat ramp carved into the stone, the most popular spot around for it functions like a beach, packed with sunbathers. The ramp leads to a cove with good swimming, fur-

ther protected by a stone jetty. It's comfortable here -- not a sandy beach or Olympic-size pool but it is sheltered water and makes a great spot to gather, producing a mix of locals and some tourists; passers-by and people who are just spending an hour or so in Manarola and then moving along.

There's no room to put the boats in the water so they are stored up on dry land, on a ramp and along the main street as well. The villagers have covered the stream over, so you don't see it in the middle of town, thereby creating an uninterrupted pedestrian zone. There are quite a few local residents who like to hang out, sit on the bench, chat with their friends and do some people-watching. And the numerous cats also have that same laid-back attitude. In the afternoons most of the shops close by 1:00pm for siesta and then re-open at 3:00 or 4:00pm. Some of the tourist shops selling postcards will stay open, but the other stores in the little side streets are going to be closed. So it is a good time to have lunch. You could pick up picnic supplies or sit in one of the many terrace restaurants here. It's a small place but there is a nice selection of pizzerias and take-out food or of course, the ever-present pasta.

RIOMAGGIORE

The path from Manarola to Riomaggiore is the easy one with a level, paved surface called "lovers' lane," taking just 20 minutes to walk with nice coastal views along the way.





Enchanting, charming Riomaggiore is the grand climax to our survey of Cinque Terre. Here too you see that familiar pattern -- the houses tumbling down the cliffs to the water's edge and a main pedestrian street rising up from the tiny cove, surrounded by terraced homes covering the hillside. It's a surprising mix of urban high density in the midst of a tranquil, rural setting. It is very quiet when you walk down the little side streets, especially in the off-season, like early October when we are here.

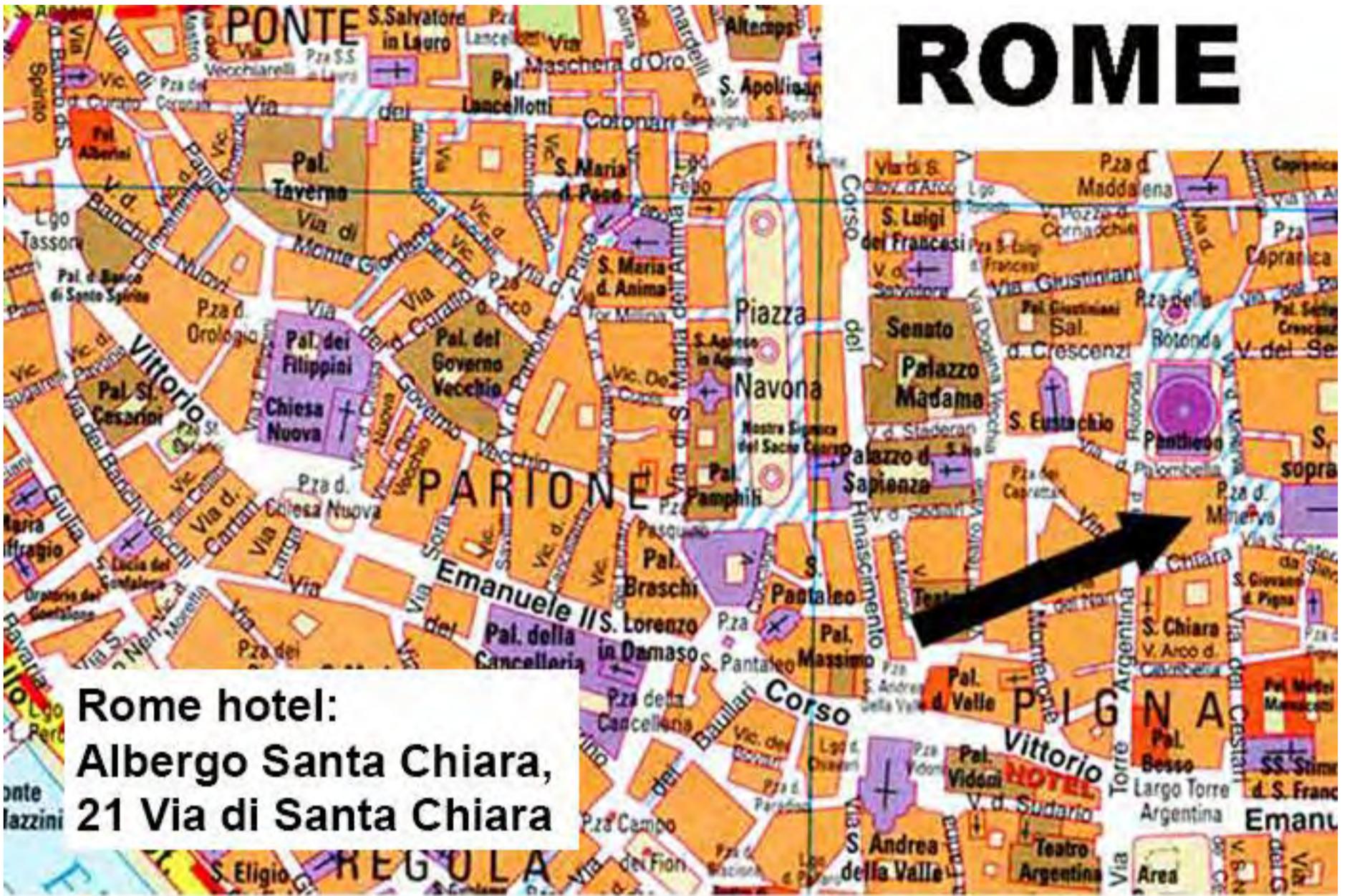
That completes our Cinque Terre visit, so it's time to catch the train back to

Santa Margherita and find some dinner, rest up and get ready for Rome.



ROME

ROME





During three days in Rome we will have ample time to see the major highlights – plus some hidden corners that most tourists never see. Wear comfortable shoes to protect your precious feet, which is crucial to discovering this city. You cannot see much of the real Rome on a standard bus tour, which actually wastes a lot of time getting stuck in traffic -- so you have got to walk to appreciate the incredible art, ancient architecture, the best food, impressive churches, quaint cobbled alleys, unlimited shopping and cozy neighborhoods.

We arrive in Rome in the afternoon transfer to our hotel for check-in and lunch.



PIAZZA NAVONA and PANTHEON

Our first walk brings us into the Piazza Navona, with its picture-postcard perfect St. Agnese Church by Borromini, and the stunning Fountain of the Four Rivers by Bernini -- artists you will encounter several more times in Rome as they were the greatest of Baroque architects and sculptors. This centrally located piazza is considered one of the most beautiful and lively outdoor spaces in the world, and you will probably return here several times, for it is interesting night and day. Originally built as a racetrack by the ancient Roman emperor

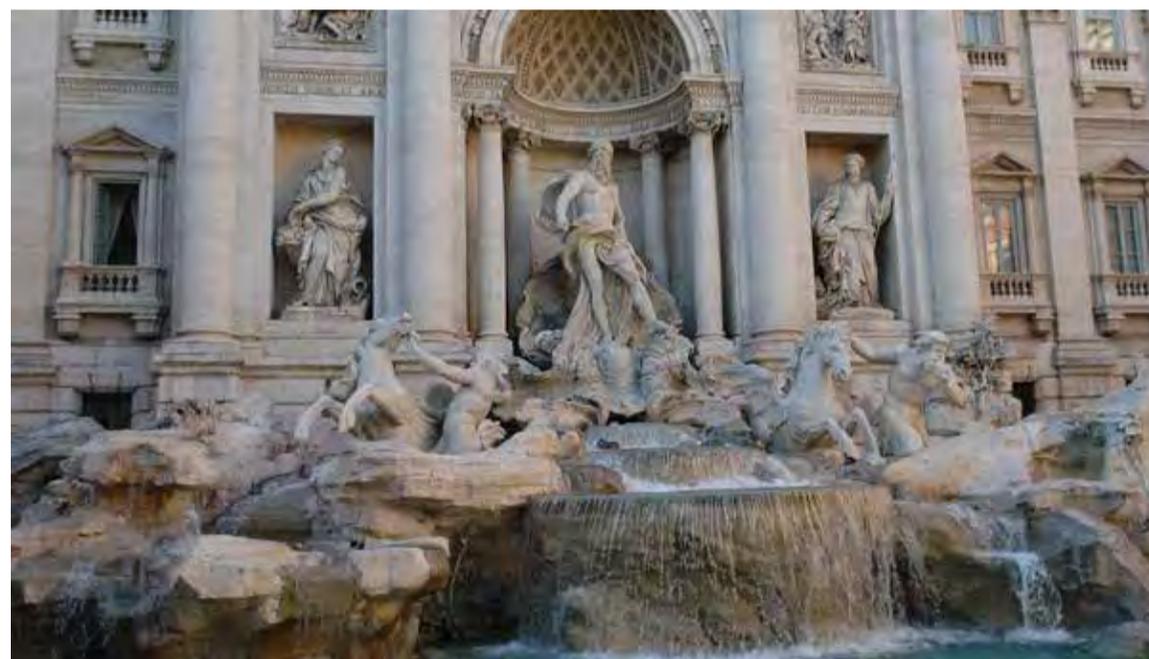
Domitian, it still retains the original oval shape that gives it a unique appearance. Lined with restaurants and palaces, the piazza is enclosed by faded pastel facades all around that produce a rich feeling of antiquity.

From here walk two short blocks to the best-preserved ancient building in Rome -- the Pantheon, a perfect structure, still standing with its great dome intact after one thousand nine hundred years. It was the largest dome in the world until this century, and forms a spherical space that creates a balanced feeling of harmony. Its spherical design takes the shape of a bubble on a barrel where the height of 140 feet is equal to its width, a dome atop the cylindrical base wall. The Pantheon was designed by the emperor Hadrian in A.D. 125 as a temple to all the gods, and has served a variety of historical functions over its many years. It is situated on the Piazza della Rotonda, which has a beautiful fountain in the middle with an Egyptian obelisk.

You are probably ready for refreshments -- perhaps some rich Italian ice cream around the corner at Giulitti's, the city's best gelateria, or an espresso at Tazza D'Oro, or better yet, their famous granita, an icy coffee with whipped cream, a type of rocket fuel energy jolt that keeps you going a few more hours.

Let's walk to another incredible church, St. Ignazio, with its illusionistic ceiling mural painted during the 17th century by the Jesuit priest, Andrea Pozzo. This vivid three-dimensional perspective will shock your eyes with its realistic depiction of the heavens opening above and painted architecture that blends magically with the building so you don't know where one begins and the other ends.

Notice the stage-setting quality of its small piazza in front, where it seems an outdoor opera could begin any moment. This is one of Rome's few building ensembles of rococo design, with graceful curved facades unified in earth-toned colors.



TREVI and SPANISH STEPS

A few blocks away, across the busy Via del Corso, is the spectacular Trevi Fountain, made famous in the movies "Three Coins in the Fountain" and "La Dolce Vita". It is very possibly the world's most beautiful fountain, depicting Neptune, god of the ocean, being pulled through a triumphal arch by wild horses amidst a torrential cascade, heralded by conch blowers. Here you must toss a coin over your shoulder once to come back to Rome, and once again for another wish.

Trevi was built during the 18th century

in a baroque style, but it celebrates the ancient Aqueduct of the Virgin, one of a dozen important waterways that brought water into the city. Two thousand years ago Rome had more fresh water per capita than any modern city, which explains how a million people could live here at the empire's peak -- giving rise to the ancient world's largest city.

We finish our excursion by walking a few more blocks to the Spanish Steps, but along the way look for the Church of St. Andrea delle Fratte to see another combination of great works, the angels inside by Bernini, and the brick dome by Borromini. There is also a peaceful cloister where you'll find a moment's refuge from the busy streets.



The Spanish Steps and adjacent Piazza di Spagna are absolutely bursting with people all the time, attracted here by a special combination of wonderful urban elements. The setting is another painting come to life, with the curvaceous broad staircase elevating your eye to the twin-towered church of Trinita di Monti, accented by an Egyptian obelisk, and equally interesting sights in all other directions. Five excellent shopping

streets emanate from the foot of the steps, creating a 20-block grid of retail heaven where cars are prohibited. The delightful ambience here shows why Rome has no need for modern shopping malls. This is a recurring pattern of pedestrian-only retail zones repeated in most of Europe's major cities, each with their own unique cultural variations. It shows how much we have lost in America by destroying our towns for the sake of uniform drive-in malls.

You might settle in for dinner in any of a dozen fine restaurants in this neighborhood. Some of your best bets include La Rampa, Re Degli Amici, Al 34 and Mario.

After dinner you will have renewed energy to keep walking on a fascinating route back to the hotel, or you could simply take a taxi if this day has caught up with you.

A particularly good spot for some evening browsing here is the Via del Corso, one of the main retail streets of Rome where most shops now stay open all day. We continue walking through the narrow back lanes, alive with many others out for an evening stroll, and after about 45 minutes we reach our hotel where we shall enjoy a good night's sleep.

DAY TWO:

Our schedule will take us to the four most important historic highlights of Rome: the Ancient Forum, the Colosseum, the Vatican Museum and St. Peters.

GHETTO

Start your walk from the Largo Argentina, an unusual collection of four ancient temples right in the middle of the busy city streets, also home to Rome's largest collection of wild cats. The temple complex was only discovered during the 1930s when a construction project un-



covered them. The government wisely chose to protect this site and partly rebuild the temples to give the modern visitor a glimpse below the surface into prehistory. Here you clearly can see that modern Rome is about 30 feet higher than the ancient ground surface, which makes one wonder what other treasures are still buried.

We are now walking into the "Ghetto" neighborhood, which is not a slum but the historic section where Rome's Jews lived in the Middle Ages. It still retains a medieval feeling so typical of the many hidden nooks and crannies of the city. Narrow cobbled alleys lead from one little crooked space to another -- a palace here, a church there. The cutest item is the Fountain of the Turtles, a Renaissance fixture of four life-size naked youths standing on giant seashells in the Piazza Mattei, attached to some legend about a nobleman losing his fortune in a card game but having the fountain built overnight anyway to impress his future father-in-law.

Continuing along in the Ghetto, you could walk past the Portico of Octavia, built by Rome's greatest emperor, Augustus, as a large complex that has now been reduced to a few columns and broken fragments. Next to it is one of the three great restaurants of this neighborhood, Giggeto, the others being Vecchia Roma and Al Pompieri. It's too early to eat now, so make a note for this evening when you are looking for something wonderful to eat. The huge building beyond the Portico that looks like the Colosseum is actually the Theater of Marcellus, also built by Augustus two thousand years ago as an enclosed theater that could hold 13,000 people. Not only is it still standing, the upper floors have been converted to luxury modern apartments for millionaires.



CAPITOLINE and FORUM

Walk up the busy Via Teatro Marcello to the Capitoline Hill, ascending the broad steps to the top for a grand view of three palaces and a classic overview of the forum. This hilltop is reputed to be the site of Rome's first settlement, 2,750 years ago, and has been utilized ever since. Re-designed by Michelangelo to include the equestrian bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius in the center surrounded by neo-classical facades, this piazza is home to the

world's oldest museum, The Capitoline, and the adjacent Conservators Palace. They are the only museums open most evenings until 9:00 p.m., so make note of their schedule and come back later. The best view looking down at the forum is from the right side of the hill, then return to the left side for another view and the route down along a curved narrow road.

At the bottom of the hill you will be facing Trajan's Forum, with its towering column and impressive covered market, two of the most important ruins from antiquity. The Roman Empire reached its maximum size at the beginning of the second century under the emperor Trajan after his conquests over Dacia, today's Romania. This is celebrated by the spiral relief sculpture that wraps around Trajan's Column, depicting his victories in a marble scroll that would stretch for 656 feet if it were unfurled. The huge market was built with the gold captured in the wars.



Most of this forum is gone now, but the one structure you must look at for free from the sidewalk is Trajan's Market, perhaps the world's first multilevel covered shopping mall. A beautiful brick building five stories high, it had 150 stores and offices arranged in a graceful curved brick building that still stands. Many little shops of modern Rome are quite similar to these ancestral spaces. Return across the street and enter the Ancient Forum, which no longer charges an admission fee.

Meander through the ruins of the Imperial Forum, where Romans gathered for business, gossip, politics, and just hanging out. This site is the forerunner of our modern town centers and shopping malls. Walk the smooth paving stones of the Via Sacra from one end to the other, covering a half-mile lined with marble ruins. Three triumphal arches have been standing proudly here for 2,000 years, honoring the emperors Constantine, Titus and Septemius Severus. You could rent the dramatic audiotape tour that will bring these ancient ruins back to life. Inspect the House of the Vestal Virgins, where an ancient flame was miraculously kept constantly burning. The largest building was the Basilica of Constantine and Maxentius, its brick arches and roof soaring 115 feet high, covering an area the size of a football field. Originally used as a courthouse and general gathering place, one third of it is impressively preserved today.

We will skip the Palatine Hill, home to many emperors, for it's a strenuous hike and there is not much left to see up there anyway. Just looking at the Palatine from the Forum is impressive enough -- it was reinforced with so many old brick walls it almost looks like the entire natural hill was man-made. Exit the Forum past the remains of Hadrian's Temple of Venus, said to have been the most beautiful of all, but today just a few stubs of columns.

COLOSSEUM

You are now facing the Colosseum, home of Rome's gladiators and largest building ever constructed by those engineering masters of the ancient world. Admire the grandeur of this massive stadium, the model for all our modern sports arenas. Packed with 50,000 spectators screaming for blood nearly every day for 300 years, it was the place where commoners could be entertained and relieve the tensions of their otherwise difficult lives. Most people lived in crowded appalling conditions, so this stadium played a role in keeping



the public satisfied – at least they were not down on the floor getting eaten by lions! It still stands, despite being looted for centuries as a marble quarry for the many palaces built throughout the city. Your \$7 admission charge includes access to the upper level, so take advantage and climb the steps, then walk all around to gain wonderful views inside and out across the forum, our next target. Be sure to walk on the new wooden ramp that leads through the middle of the arena and provides great views down into the former cages.

VATICAN

Next we are going to the Vatican Museum by taxi. The museum is less crowded in the afternoon, so the wait to get in should be minimal, unlike mornings when you might stand on line for two hours.

We can have a convenient lunch in the Vatican cafeteria, where the prices are reasonable and the food delicious. This break will give us the energy to power through the enormous museum.

We will see the principal highlights: the Belvedere Courtyard with its half-dozen essential statues, especially the Laocoon;

Gallery of the Maps for its astonishing ceiling of painted stucco sculpture and cooling views over the pope's gardens; and Raphael's Rooms where the great genius did his most important murals.

Of course the major single attraction of the Vatican Museum is the Sistine Chapel. Looking up you will see the world's most important painting, summarizing the development of life on earth and mankind's quest for salvation. Take fifteen minutes to absorb the genius of Michelangelo. Then, there is door out the back corner of the Sistine Chapel that will lead us right to St. Peters, which saves walking two miles in the wrong direction.



SAINT PETERS

St. Peters is the most spectacular room ever built! No place else can even come in a close second to this. We will spend one hour admiring the vast noble spaces with 500 statues, 45 altars, subterranean crypts, Michelangelo's dome and Pieta, Bernini's Baladacchino, mosaics, monuments, tombs, marble details and angels everywhere. We leave the Vatican by taxi for the short ride back to the hotel.

This evening, after a brief rest, step out for dinner, Roman style! Trastevere

is one of the best neighborhoods for restaurants, just across the Tiber River. Numerous little trattorias abound in the side streets, and we'll be sure to stop by Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere, facing a fine 12th century church. After dinner we stroll through this colorful neighborhood back across the Tiber River to our hotel next to the Pantheon.

DAY THREE:

We will lead a morning walking tour that will show you "the real Rome", some of the most fascinating and historic neighborhoods in the heart of town within the curve of the Tiber River.

CENTRO STORICO, the historic center

We begin our morning walk at the Palazzo Farnese, one of the most famous renaissance palaces of the city, currently housing the French Embassy. One block away is the Campo dei Fiore, a colorful outdoor fruit and vegetable market that has been in business for three hundred years. Its food stands are very popular with the

local residents, and you will even find some clothing stalls and souvenirs scattered among the local wares. It is a colorful place for candid people pictures and a good spot to pick up some refreshments, but only in the morning, since it closes at noon when all the restaurants open around the square. Come back at night as well, for it is one of the most popular spots for young people to hang out.

Next walk along the charming narrow streets of this neighborhood to experience the center of Renaissance Rome. Amazingly, this is still the heart and soul of Rome, yet few tourists ever see it. You will find streets named Giulia, Giubonari, Pellegrino, and then crossing the busy Vittorio Emmanuele, enter the Chiesa Nuova. Here you can sit and rest while admiring the elaborate decorations in the high baroque style. Next door is the convex facade of Borromini's Oratorio, and behind it look for his Orologia Clock Tower, recently restored.



This path leads you back into the calm historic center of the city, walking along Via dei Banci Nuovi on your way to Ponte S. Angelo, the beautiful bridge across the Tiber lined with Bernini's divine angels. These neighborhoods are saturated with charm and character. You will walk along cobbled pedestrian lanes lined with old brick buildings five stories high, containing little stores and workshops on the ground level, with apartments upstairs in a pattern followed for two thousand years.

Walking in this simple quiet neighborhood will be one of the most interesting experiences of your entire European trip. You will see artisans working in shops unchanged for centuries; fruit and flower stands for the local residents; attractive little restaurants for locals; fountain faces popping out of walls; stray cats prowling the alleys; ivy-covered brick walls 400 years old. Take your time as you wander past the antique shops of Via dei Coronari on your way back to Piazza Navona.

For a much more detailed look at Rome, see our e-book all about Rome called [Rome on Foot](#).

Next morning we fly home. That completes our tour from Barcelona to Rome!

