

Rail holidays to France



Avignon and Provence by rail and car



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8 NIGHTS / 9 DAYS

Avignon

Mont Ventoux area

Luberon

Arles



This 8-night touring holiday Avignon and Provence starts and ends by a Eurostar journey from London to Avignon and back. After two nights in the papal city of Avignon to explore, you collect your-hire car to continue your touring holiday of Provence, which involves three more stops, each for two nights. Before going straight to your next stop we recommend making the most of the use of your hire-car and suggest that you head out to the magnificent Roman aqueduct, the Pont-du-Gard, and then north to the town of Orange before dropping back through the wine villages of Gigondas, Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Beaumes-de-Venise and Vacqueyras to Crillon-le-Brave where you spend two nights. Whilst in Crillon-le-Brave explore Mont Ventoux itself (if fit and energetic, it is a demanding cycle route), or the villages such as Caromb that are at the base of the mountain. As you leave Crillon-le-Brave heading for Bonnieux in the Luberon, you pass through the beautiful landscape of olive groves, orchards, lavender bed and sunflower fields, so often associated with Provence. In the Luberon, spend the day relaxing, drinking in the views from the village, visit local markets, explore the Roman bridge in the valley below or drive to nearby Gordes and its Village des Bories. After two nights in the Luberon, you head for Arles but detour en-route to the Alpilles south of Avignon. This is a region where local traditions have been well-preserved and there is the charming Roman town of St Remy de Provence and a mediaeval, pedestrianised hill village of Les Baux de Provence. It is an area rich in literary and artistic associations, made famous by Van Gogh and the writer Alphonse Daudet. Your final two nights are spent in Arles, famous for its well-preserved Roman architecture, as gateway to the marshlands of the Camargue and home to Van Gogh during a very productive period in Provence. You return to London by Eurostar direct from Avignon, subject to seasonality.

PRICES

From £2,150 per person

Based on two people sharing a double or twin room and including standard class rail travel. Supplement for standard premier about £290 per person.

DATES

The direct London to Avignon service operates May to September on certain days each week. At other times, the holiday works with a change of train in Paris or perhaps Lille.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Standard class Eurostar from London to Avignon return (standard premier can be booked at a supplement)
- Hire of a Group B car for 7 days
- 2 nights' bed and breakfast in a Standard room at the Cloitre St Louis, Avignon
- 2 nights' bed and breakfast in a Standard room at Hostellerie de Crillon le Brave in Crillon-le-Brave
- 2 nights' bed and breakfast in a Standard room at Le Domaine de Capelongue, Bonnieux
- 2 nights' bed and breakfast in a Classic room at Hotel Jules Cesar in Arles
- Concierge service and Expressions Holidays regional helpful hints

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Early check-in or late check-out at any hotels (although we can arrange this on request at additional cost)
- Any other services not mentioned above, such as transfers and meals except breakfast at hotels
- Personal holiday insurance. This is essential and cover should be in place from when you book the holiday.
- Local tourist tax, usually between Euros 1 and 3 per person per night, and payable locally to the hotel

TOUR CODE

FTBR01

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

All train times are approximate and may vary depending on travel dates.

Expressions



Day one London to Avignon by Eurostar

This touring holiday of Avignon and Provence whisks you from London St Pancras to Avignon direct by Eurostar. The direct service operates from the beginning of May until mid-September, 3 or 4 times a week. At other times, the holiday can be done with a change in Paris or Lille. The train leaves London at about 07.15 and arrives in Avignon just after 14.00 hrs. You have time to explore Avignon and find a restaurant in the old town for dinner. You spend two nights in Avignon.

Day two in Avignon

You have today at leisure to explore the city of Avignon, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city is set on the banks of the majestic Rhone river and was the seat of the Catholic popes for most of the 14th century, only coming under French rule in 1791. Its centre, which is surrounded by high mediaeval ramparts, houses the imposing Palais des Papes, the largest gothic palace in the world. The old town of Avignon is home to numerous other architectural gems including the 12th century cathedral, the ramparts, and the famous Pont d'Avignon. Hiding amongst the streets are several gardens and in the summer months your visit may coincide with the Avignon Theatre Festival, founded in 1947 and recognised to be one of the greatest in the world. Watch performances of theatre and dance; listen to readings; and indulge in the vibrancy and colour of the event that makes superb use of the city's historical buildings and monuments. Other museums are the Calvet Museum and the Musee du Petit Palais, the Collection Lambert and the Musee Lapidaire.

Day three Avignon to Crillon-le-Brave

Collect your hire-car today, and drive from Avignon the short distance to the foothills of Mont Ventoux and your stop in Crillon-le-Brave. Instead of going directly there, make the most of your car and perhaps head out to the magnificent Pont-du-Gard and then north to Orange before dropping back through the wine villages to Crillon-le-Brave where you spend two nights.

Day four in Crillon-le-Brave

You have a full day to relax and explore this part of the Vaucluse. The base of Mont Ventoux is clustered with small market towns such as Caromb or Carpentras. Less than 45 minutes away lie the tranquil turquoise waters of beautiful Fontaine-de-Vaucluse. Follow the trail of water exquisite in its clarity and colour through the pools and channels created by this subterranean spring, and water that has inspired poets for hundreds of years. Petrarch lived here in the 14th century and his now is now a museum. There is also a museum of the Resistance, a museum of Provençal 'santons', workshops of hand-blown crystal and a mill making paper by hand using 15th century techniques.

Day five Crillon-le-Brave to Bonnieux in the Luberon

Today is a glorious, gentle drive into some of the most beautiful countryside of Provence as you enter the Luberon, a gentle landscape of vineyards, orchards, rolling hills and home to the famous lavender and sunflowers, associated greatly with Provence. Your destination in this region is the village of

Bonnieux, one of the finest in the area, where you spend two nights.

Day six in the Luberon

From the hill-top village of Bonnieux enjoy the views of the Luberon, wander its pretty streets, taste regional specialities in its cafes and restaurants, and visit its baker museum and the famous Roman bridge in the valley below. Just 25 minutes from Bonnieux is one of the finest examples of the famous Provençal lavender fields at the Abbaye de Sénanque, just outside the village of Gordes. The former Cistercian monastery dates from 1148 and now guests can take tours of the church and cloisters and feast their eyes on beautiful fields of lavender beyond (the lavender is usually harvested by the beginning of August and is in bloom from the end of June). For a more in-depth view of the history of lavender in Provence why not visit the Musée de la Lavande in Coustellet. Gordes itself is one of the most beautiful villages in Provence and nearby is the curious Village des Bories, an open-air museum of stone dwellings possibly dating as far back as the Bronze Age.



Arles

Day seven Luberon to Arles

Today you should not take the most direct route between the two places but enjoy a detour through the Alpilles, a chain of limestone mountains, full of lots of natural scenery and displaying an authentic Provence. This is the land of the authors Alphonse Daudet (you can see his mill at Fontvieille) and Frederic Mistral and of Van Gogh who lived in St Remy de Provence. The landscape has the limestone peaks, but pine and oak forests, fields of olive trees and avenues of cypress. Dotted around are farmhouses of ancient drystone. St Remy de Provence is the place to head for first, where three civilisations are represented in a single site at Glanum, then to Les Baux de Provence, a mountain-top village with 22 historic monuments and with outstanding views over the countryside below. From Les Baux you are just 8 km from Fontvieille, a pretty village with ancient houses and where Alphonse Daudet wrote his famous 'Lettres de Mon Moulin'. Arles, your destination for today, is just 7km from here. You stay at Arles for two nights.

Day eight in Arles

Arles is an ancient city on the river Rhone and gateway to the Camargue. Important in Roman times, the amphitheatre is a major landmark of the city today, where plays, concerts and bull fights are held. There is also a Gallo-Roman theatre, an aqueduct, and Roman baths. The city and its surrounds inspired Van Gogh when he lived here for 18 months in 1888-1889. From Arles explore

the nearby marshlands of the Camargue, at the delta of the river Rhone. The Camargue is approximately a third lakes or marshland and home to more than 400 species of birds. Horses and cattle roam the area. It is worth heading for the fortified, walled town of Aigues-Mortes which seemingly rises from the marshes and salt pans of the Camargue, although not officially in Provence as it is in the department of the Gard in Languedoc.

Day nine Avignon to London by Eurostar

The direct Eurostar to London from Avignon leaves at 16.00 hrs so you have most of the day to either relax in Arles, or to stop off somewhere on the route back to Avignon. You return your hire-car, and then Eurostar arrives in London just after 22.00 hrs.

GENERAL INFORMATION

this rail holiday is one of several suggested rail holidays we can offer you exactly as it is but also with any alterations you might want including extra nights in one or more places or adding in extra places. All our tours can be extended so that you can include a longer stay in one mountain or lake resort too, perhaps at the end of the itinerary. Do call to discuss the options with our travel consultants.



OUR TOURS

Our rail tours are for individuals travelling on their own or in their own family group. You do not join a group and you are not escorted.

FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Our arrangements are very flexible in that you choose to travel on any day you want, subject to availability of trains and hotels. As mentioned above, additional nights can be added at any point.

EUROSTAR

A rail holiday to France starts with a journey by Eurostar from London St Pancras, Ebbsfleet or Ashford stations in the UK to either Paris Gare du Nord or Lille Europe. In summer months there are direct trains on Saturdays from London St Pancras to Avignon with no change required.

Eurostar offers almost hourly departures every day, allowing you to travel from the centre of London to the centre of Paris on the same train in three hours. Not all trains stop at the Ebbsfleet and Ashford stations in Kent, but parking is plentiful at both stations and it allows you to avoid London.

Check-in is 30 minutes prior to departure, customs formalities are completed before boarding and there is no limit to the amount of baggage that can be taken on board. The Eurostar trains themselves have 8 coaches which are split into Standard Class, Standard Premier and Business Premier as well as 2 cafeterias. Standard Premier customers are served a light cold meal and enjoy a more spacious environment than Standard Class, while Business Premier customers receive a hot meal and unlimited beverages as well as lounge access.

TRAIN TIMES

We have planned our itineraries based on train times that work day by day at the time of planning which can be up to a year before you travel. Usually train times stay more or less the same every day, season by season. The times we have planned will be discussed with you at the time you enquire about the holiday and they are detailed to you in your written holiday quotation. It may be that the timetable changes between the planning of the itinerary and when you come to book but we can always adjust the itinerary to suit the actual train times and any requirements you have for particular times of travel.

FIRST OR SECOND CLASS

We will automatically include travel in second class but lots of our clients do upgrade to first class service. On Eurostar this is called Premier Standard for leisure travellers as it gives you an upgraded on-board service and more spacious seating but without paying for the fully-flexible business tickets. On the TGV trains within France, upgrading to first class gives you more spacious seating with increased legroom. The price of upgrading varies from route to route but is something that is not always proportionately a lot more on the price of the overall holiday, so well-worth considering.

TRANSFERS

Transfers in Paris between stations and from the station to each hotel are not automatically included in the price of the holiday. In Paris most clients choose to take a taxi between the stations rather than go on the Metro but we can arrange a private car with driver to take you in between. This is quite useful if you are a family group that can't fit into one Paris taxi.

OUR PRICES

The sample prices mentioned in this leaflet are generally a 'from' price based on the cheapest season of travel. However, train fares and hotel rates can change (up and down depending on offers), so we give you an accurate price for your holiday when we provide you with a quotation. Our sample prices should be used as an indication of how much a particular combination will cost and to show the differences on average between the hotel categories on offer.

BOOKING CONDITIONS

Our booking conditions apply to all holidays. A copy can be found on our website and a copy is also sent to you with a written quotation and when you make a booking.

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Expressions Holidays offers full financial protection for all holidays you book with us. If your holiday includes a flight, the ATOL (3076) covers the costs of the holiday. If the holiday does not include a flight, it is the ABTOT bond that protects the cost of the holiday. We are also members of AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators) and ABTA.



Expressions Holidays
Lynx House, Pynes Hill, Exeter EX2 5JL

HOW TO BOOK

To make a booking, just phone us on

01392 441250

and we can take you through the details we need and start the booking process.