

# Touring holidays of France

*Expressions*



## From the Auvergne to Languedoc fly-drive holiday



## From the Auvergne to Languedoc: natural lands of volcanic domes, gorges and fortresses fly-drive holiday

9 NIGHTS / 10 DAYS

Auvergne

Cahors

Tarn

Carcassonne

Montpellier



This 9-night fly-drive touring holiday takes you from the Auvergne with its volcanic domes and remote farmland, through the deep river valleys of the Lot and the Tarn, each containing gems of little villages and towns of cultural interest, exploring the produce of the land, be it the local wine of Gaillac and Minervois or the cheeses, truffles and chestnuts, to the fortress-city of Carcassonne and then to Montpellier in Languedoc. Your touring holiday starts in Lyon, where you collect your hire-car and drive for about two hours to your first stop at Bort-l'Etang. You have two nights here to explore the Auvergne perhaps venturing further into the Livradois-Foréz natural park where you can hike, visit artisan producers or witness miles of natural landscape. Clermont-Ferrand is also an excursion possibility from here. Then you continue passing the volcanic domes the Auvergne is famous for, to head south to the deep river valley of the Lot and the Quercy natural park. Visit local markets, vineyards and the heritage site of Cahors. From the Lot you visit the Tarn, another river valley famous for its vineyards at Gaillac, perched villages such as Cordes-sur-Ciel and Castelnaud-de-Montmirail. Nearby Albi was the home of Toulouse-Lautrec. South of Albi you enter the land of the Cathars of which the ruined fortified castles are witness today, to reach the magnificent city of Carcassonne where you spend two nights. You have a full day to explore the region around Carcassonne perhaps along the Canal du Midi or into the Corbières vineyards to the south. On your last journey from Carcassonne to Montpellier, through the natural park of the Haut-Languedoc you see yet more gorges, hill-top villages, vines and olives, little towns and villages full of fascinating historical associations. Your final stop is near the capital of Languedoc, Montpellier, a lively city that is modern yet with well-preserved historic monuments and buildings. You return to London by air from Montpellier.

## PRICES

**From £1,925 per person**

Based on double occupancy.

## DATES

This fly-drive holiday can be arranged for any departure date subject to availability.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Scheduled flight with British Airways from London to Lyon, Montpellier to London
- Hire of a group B car for the duration of the holiday
- 2 nights' bed and breakfast in a Traditional double room at the Château de Codignat in Bort-l'Étang, near Clermont-Ferrand
- 2 nights' bed and breakfast in a Classic double room at Chateau de Mercues near Cahors
- 2 nights' bed and breakfast in a Confort double room at the Château des Salettes in Cahuzac-sur-Vère, near Gaillac
- 2 nights' bed and breakfast in a Classic double room at the Hotel de la Cite in Carcassonne
- 1 night's bed and breakfast in a Deluxe double room at the Domaine de Verchant, near Montpellier
- 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

FRFD07



Lot valley

### Day one Lyon to Bort-l'Étang

You arrive in the city of Lyon, collect your hire-car and drive west towards Clermont-Ferrand through the Parc Naturel Regional Livradois-Forez, on the edge of which you spend two nights.

### Days two in the Regional Park of the Livradois-Forez

The regional park of the Livradois-Forez is one of the largest nature parks of France, situated on the eastern side of the Auvergne, it encompasses an astonishing variety of landscapes and scenery, with volcanic peaks, deep valleys, forests, marsh and agricultural land. There are numerous walking tracks, historic monuments and castles, local museums and artisan producers (wooden items, knives, enamel). Clermont-Ferrand sits just 40 minutes northwest and is perfect for a cultural day trip. Surrounded by dormant volcanoes, the buildings that line the streets of this city are built from black lava stone which gives Clermont-Ferrand an atmospheric and unusual look. The city holds a large total of 50 fountains and statues, such as the statue of Vercingetorix who led the Gauls to victory against Julius Caesar in 52BC, that act as centrepieces in the numerous squares. Architectural highlights include the Cathédrale Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption, a gothic tour de force with towering black spires, and the Notre-Dame-du-Port basilica, with its beautiful mosaic details. Gastronomy is paramount in Auvergne culture, from the speciality cheeses, such as Cantal, Saint-Nectaire, Fourme d'Ambert, Bleu d'Auvergne, and Salers, to the cured meats sourced from the Salers

cattle that are intensified with local hazelnuts, bilberries, or chestnuts. Another key ingredient to seek out is the Puy green lentil, central to Petit Salé, a typically Auvergne dish of salted pork belly. The Côtes d'Auvergne wines owe a lot of their success to the volcanic soil attributed to the Chaîne des Puys mountain range. The white wines are produced from the Chardonnay grape, the reds from the Gamay and Pinot Noir grapes, and rosé from Gamay exclusively. To taste the wine of the area, visit the boutique Cave Saint Verry, or visit the wine museum in Aubière to learn more about the process. The Montpeyroux vineyards, situated in one of France's Most Beautiful Villages, are open for public visits.

### Day three Regional Park of the Livradois-Forez to Cahors in the Lot Valley

Today we recommend that you don't follow the most direct route which takes about 3 hours and 30 minutes, but instead, you take time to explore the Parc naturel regional des Volcans d'Auvergne to the south-west of Clermont-Ferrand. It is here that some of the most spectacular domes of dormant volcanoes are to be found. Puy-de-Dôme at 1465m is one of the best-known of the Auvergne's dormant volcanoes and part of the UNESCO-listed Chaîne des Puys. Then head south to Aurillac and then after Figeac you enter the Parc naturel regional des Causses du Quercy, which you drive through to Cahors. Your stop for the next two nights is just to the north of Cahors.

### Day four in the Lot Valley

Surrounded by the River Lot on three sides the picturesque town of Cahors makes for an excellent choice to explore. Make sure to take in the famous Valentré Bridge with its three towers, built in the 14th century and now UNESCO World Heritage listed and visit the cathedral, an impressive building in the centre of the town. Wander down the charming mediaeval streets and relax in the shaded little squares perhaps discovering a quaint café or one of the many secret garden areas. On Wednesday and Saturday mornings enjoy Cahors market which is bursting with local and regional delicacies such as Rocamadour cheeses and Cahors wine, renowned for its dark colouring. If you are staying in July or August, be sure to experience the Cahors festival. The small village of Mercues and its market on Thursday mornings is also well worth a visit. Make the most of the picturesque scenery by visiting as many of these beautiful villages and medieval towns as you can on your short stay in the Lot Valley, including St Cirque-Lapopie and others along the valley of the Lot.

## Day five Lot Valley to Cahuzac-sur-Vère

Today you continue to drive south through the Quercy to the region of the Tarn and your stop in the village of Cahuzac-sur-Vère is set in the heart of the Gaillac vineyards. You stay here for two nights.

## Day six in the Tarn

The small commune of Cahuzac-sur-Vère is the quintessential rural French settlement, with its narrow winding streets and blond stone buildings, picturesque central square and war monument. The houses of the Cahuzacois cluster around the Catholic church of the same name as the commune, giving it a very mediaeval appearance. Stretching out on each side, however, is a landscape rich in exciting opportunities to explore. Montauban, less than an hour northwest of Cahuzac-sur-Vère is the second oldest of the bastides of southern France, founded in 1144AD. It was voted a French City of Art and History, with a city centre characterised by its towering castle, impressive bridge, and boulevards. Wine-tasting opportunities are available at the Domaine de Montels and the Mas des Anges, if you would like to sample the wine of the area. Alternatively, Montauban is known for its other culinary specialities, such as sugared almonds and biscuits with jam, not to mention the fabulous produce of its chocolatiers. Also nearby is Albi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site,



Carcassonne

and bursting with the remarkable history of France. The most immediate point of interest in this small town is its red-brick mediaeval cathedral, St. Cecilia's. Witness how its imposing exterior blends into the delicate wood and stone decoration of its interior. Adorning the whole western wall are extensive murals depicting the Last Judgement. Just next door, the Bishop's palace houses the Toulouse Lautrec museum, dedicated to the works of the post-impressionistic iconographer Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. From outside the cathedral, you can make your way west to the square which overlooks the River Tarn or pass the museum to walk across the thousand-year-old Old Bridge. Albi retains the look and feel of its traditional way of life. Visit the hill-top town of Cordes-sur-Ciel and take the time to wander down the streets of one of the most spectacular villages.

## Day seven Tarn to Carcassonne

You drive through the wine-town of Gaillac today, heading for Castres, on the banks of the River Agout. There are interesting part-timbered, overhanging houses here that used to belong to the tanners and dyers of the town. There is also the Goya museum, located in a former episcopal palace. Outside the palace are magnificent parterres designed by Le Notre. South of Castres you cross into the Parc naturel regional du Haut Languedoc and then enter Cathar country. North of Carcassonne it's worth taking a detour to visit the chateaux at Lastours, where there are four Cathar castles. You stay in Carcassonne for two nights.

## Day eight in Carcassonne

You have a full day in Carcassonne. There is time to explore the city itself and perhaps to venture outside. The Gallo-Roman upper town of Carcassonne is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and historically of great significance in France. Walk along the city walls, past the castle's amphitheatre, the basilica, and its 53 watchtowers, before making your way into the 12th century Château Comtal to view its archaeological exhibits and tour its inner ramparts. The lower Carcassonne town subverts its title as a city, instead offering a peaceful, somewhat sleepy atmosphere, with a central square that holds a weekly market and several cafés. From Place Carnot, walk further out into the town centre to discover the quaint individual stores that sell unique gifts, or La Ferme, which sells fine food and wines. For a stunning experience of the region's châteaux, drive south to the Cathar Castles that pepper the dramatic landscape and guard its deep valleys, particularly the Château de Peyrepertuse. The Canal du Midi is perfect for a long afternoon stroll or book a boat trip one afternoon to intensify the atmosphere of Carcassonne from the water. Beyond the walls of La Cité lie the wine regions of Minervois, to the north, and Corbières, to the south. If wine-tasting appeals, head into one of the many châteaux dotted around the countryside of these two regions. The Château Canet is the perfect spot to try some of the Muscat wines so typical of the Minervois region, as well as the olives from its three olive groves. Château Rives-Blanques in Céprie produces wines

made available all over the world that you are encouraged by your warm hosts to taste on your visit. The less visited area of Saint Chinian, situated at the foothills of the Black Mountains and in the Parc Naturel Regional du Haut Languedoc, is worth a visit, known as it is for high quality produce; perhaps stop off at the Château de Combebelle.

## Day nine Carcassonne to Montpellier

Your route today should take you north-east first to the town of Minerve and the Minervoise wine producing region, a patchwork landscape of small vineyards and olive trees dotted with pretty villages. This is at the southern end of the Parc naturel regional du Haut Languedoc which you then cross following a scenic route through wooded hills and valleys, with the road twisting and turning as it follows the course of the River Orb, in the direction of Clermont-l'Herault. Near Clermont-l'Herault, surrounded by rolling hills of vines and olives, is the strange-sounding place of Manufacture Royale, which was where royal sheets were made in the village of Villeneuve in the 18th century. To the north is the 'Grand Site' of the Lac Salagou and a short distance beyond Clermont-l'Herault is the astonishing village of Saint-Guilhem-le-Desert, designated as one of the most beautiful villages in France. This village is at the heart of the Herault valley with its deep gorges, olive trees and vines. Continue to your overnight stop on the outskirts of Montpellier, where you stay for one night.

## Day ten Montpellier to London

Depending on the time of your flight back to London, you may have time to explore the city of Montpellier. Montpellier has mediaeval streets and wide boulevards, modern tram lines designed by Christian Lacroix, an Arc de Triomphe and a statue of Louis XIV on horseback, a Roman aqueduct and Place de la Comedie, beautiful private mansions and the Musee Fabre.



Languedoc-Roussillon village



Montpellier

## GENERAL INFORMATION

This tailor-made touring holiday is one of several suggested touring 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 tailor-made touring holidays are suggested itineraries which can be adapted in numerous ways. They can be fly-drive (with flight and hire-car included), self-drive (with ferry or Eurotunnel included with your own car) or rail and hire-car.**

### FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

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

### 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.

The logo for Expressions Holidays, featuring the word "Expressions" in a white, elegant script font on a dark blue rectangular background.

### 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).

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## 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.