



Monet Gardens, Giverney



Chateau de Vaux le Vicomte

Sunday, October 6 Paris

Arrive at Charles de Galle Airport and meet your private driver in the Arrivals Hall to transfer to the Hotel Brighton, located in the oldest neighborhood of Paris, the 1st arrondissement. Settle in to your room and then take a stroll through the Tuileries Gardens, the oldest park in Paris with a history that dates back to the 17th century, just steps from your hotel. In the evening, gather with your friends in the hotel's chic bar for appetizers and a champagne toast to France!

Hotel Brighton (4 nights) www.paris-hotel-brighton.com/en

Monday, October 7 Paris

In the morning, meet your private guide for a half-day walking tour of the historical heart of Paris, from Notre Dame Cathedral to the Champs Elysee, considered one of the world's most beautiful avenues. Along the way, visit historical sites in this neighborhood founded by the Romans. Included in the walking tour is a stop at the Orangerie Museum, located in the Tuileries Gardens. Drenched by natural light, this museum is the closest you'll come to stepping into an Impressionist painting. At the end of the walking tour, the day is at your leisure. Follow the Champs Elysee to the Arche de Triumphe, stopping for lunch at an outdoor café, or walk across the bridge and visit the Musee d'Orsay, a fabulous museum dedicated to impressionist artists. In the evening, board your private boat for a leisurely cruise on the Seine River, enjoying the magic of Paris at night, dining on a sumptuous feast, and ending with a surprising sight! (B, D)

Tuesday, October 8 Paris – Giverney – Paris

After an early breakfast, meet your driver-guide for the hour drive to Giverney, home of France's most renowned impressionist painter, Claude Monet. Wander in and out of brilliant flower beds, gentle ponds, and shady arbors that inspired this master. Monet was not just a brilliant painter, but also a gifted gardener. By the end of his life, the garden was just as much a work of art as the paintings. Wander the village of Giverney, a pleasing sight in itself, with flowery lanes home to a few souvenir shops, art galleries and cafés. Stop for lunch or refreshment before returning to Paris to spend the rest of the day relaxing or visiting sights such as the Louvre or the Eiffel Tower. (B)

Wednesday, October 9 Paris – Vaux Le Vicomte – Paris

This morning, meet your driver-guide for the 45-minute drive to Vaux Le Vicomte, a castle that is the epitome of 17th century elegance and was the inspiration for Versailles. The chateau has been restored to its original splendor, filled with splendid tapestries, carpets, and art objects. The gardens are almost as spectacular as the chateau. The carefully calculated geometry of the flowerbeds and alleyways makes this a study in harmony. Enjoy a gourmet picnic lunch in the gardens before returning to Paris to enjoy the rest of the day at your leisure. (B, L)



Chartres



Loire Valley

Thursday, October 10 Paris – Chartres – Amboise

Depart Paris for the lovely Loire Valley, long a refuge for France's royalty and home to a thousand castles and palaces. Today, the Valley is carpeted with fertile vineyards and gardens, crisscrossed by rivers and laced with rolling hills. On the way to your chateau for 3 nights, stop at the city of Chartres to visit the stunning Cathedral and its inspiring stain-glassed windows. Wander through the medieval cobbled streets of the Old Town. After exploring Chartres, continue on to the Chateau de Perreux, a genuine private castle turned into a boutique hotel and your home for the next three nights. Enjoy the rural peacefulness of the chateau located within 1 mile of the characteristic village of Amboise. Settle into your charming room and stroll the expansive gardens. In the evening, join your friends for a casual dinner of wine and appetizers in the Chateau's gardens. (B, D)

Chateau de Perreux (3 nights) www.chateaudeperreux.fr

Friday, October 11 Amboise

This morning, enjoy a leisurely breakfast before joining your driver-guide for a half-day guided tour of Amboise, a real Renaissance town on the banks of the Loire River in the center of extensive vineyards. Begin at the rocky spur above the town to explore the Chateau d'Amboise, a medieval castle rebuilt in 1492, the first in France to reflect the Italian Renaissance. Next, visit the Chateau du Clos Luce, where Leonardo da Vinci lived the last three years of his life as engineer, architect, and painter to France's Renaissance king, Francois I. At the end of the tour, enjoy a leisurely lunch along the Loire River. Spend the rest of the day at your leisure, shopping in Amboise, taking a walk along the river and vineyards, relaxing at the hotel. In the evening, enjoy an elegant castle dining experience with a Michelin star at nearby Chateau de Pray. (B, D)

Saturday, October 12 Amboise

Rise early this morning for an optional, unforgettable hot air balloon ride over the Loire Valley (45/90 minutes; \$200/\$300 pp). Sail serenely over chateaux, canals, vineyards, Romanesque churches, and villages. Balloons don't go over 3,000 feet and usually fly much lower than that, so you get a bird's-eye view of the Loire Valley's sublime landscapes. In the late morning, visit the Marc Bredif Winery in the nearby town of Vouray, famous for its sparkling wines. At this winery, you'll find a top-quality selection of Vouray wines and red wines from Chinon and Bourgueil. Tour the 10th century cellars dug into the hillside, and enjoy tastings paired with local food products. (B, L)



Cognac



St. Emili3n

Sunday, October 13 Amboise – Cognac – St. Emili3n

This morning, depart the Loire Valley for another famed wine region, the Dordogne Valley in the Bordeaux region. On the way, stop at the village of Cognac for a “Secret of the Cellars” tour of the Chateau Royal de Cognac exploring the renaissance rooms and the King’s apartment, ending in the heart of the cellars with tastings of different cognacs. Wander the cobblestone streets of this medieval village and enjoy a casual lunch before continuing on your journey to St. Emili3n. Surrounded by vineyards, the village of St. Emili3n sits on a ridge overlooking the Dordogne Valley. After settling into your room, stroll the hotel’s tranquil gardens and vineyards. Steps from the hotel, enter the lovely village of St. Emili3n, one of France’s most charming towns. In the evening, gather with your friends for a light meal of local wine and hors d’oeuvres. (B, D)

Hotel Au Logis des Remparts (3 nights) www.logisdesremparts.com

Monday, October 14 St. Emili3n

In the late morning, meet your guide for a tour of St. Emili3n and the surrounding vineyards. Stroll the ancient alleyways lined with centuries-old limestone buildings, half-timbered homes from the Renaissance era, and pleasant cobblestoned plazas. They’ve been making wine in St. Emili3n for more than 1,800 years – making it the oldest wine producer in the Bordeaux region. Blending cabernet franc and merlot grapes, St. Emili3n wines are the most robust in Bordeaux. Enjoy a local wine tasting experience, ending with lunch at your choice of one of the appealing caf3s lining the picture-perfect square, Place du Marche. In the evening, meet your friends for a special dinner at a restaurant in the village. (B, D)

Tuesday, October 15 St. Emili3n – Dordogne River Valley – St. Emili3n

Spend the day following the Dordogne Scenic Loop with your private driver-guide. The joys of the Dordogne Valley include rock-sculpted villages, prehistoric cave paintings, formidable castles, fertile farms, and magnificent vistas. La Roque-Gageac, a one-street town stretching along the Dordogne River is an essential stop and a strong contender for the “cutest town in France”. After enjoying a traditional lunch in the village, take a 1-hour, round-trip boat ride on the Dordogne River from La Roque to Chateau de Castelnaud and return. The wooden boat is modeled after boats called *gabarres*, originally built here to take prized oak barrels filled with local wine down to Bordeaux. Return to St. Emili3n in the late afternoon to leisurely enjoy the remainder of the day. (B, L)



Saint Jean de Luz



San Sebastián

Wednesday, October 16 St. Emilion – St. Jean de Luz – San Sebastián

Depart St. Emili3n for San Sebasti3n in Spain Basque Country. Enroute, stop in Saint Jean de Luz, a France Basque fishing port that lies at the mouth of the Nivelle River, opening on to the Bay of Biscay with the Pyr3n3es Mountains in the background. Stroll the gracefully curving stretch of white sand, stopping for lunch at a local restaurant serving seafood recently plucked from the sea. Wander the village's narrow streets flanked by old houses. Continue on to San Sebasti3n and check into your sea-view room at the Lasala Plaza Hotel, located on the Bay of Biscay in the historical center of the city. The evening is at your leisure to stroll the neighborhood and sample pinxtos, Basque tapas. (B)

Lasala Plaza Hotel (4 nights) www.lasalaplazahotel.com

Thursday, October 17 San Sebasti3n

In the late morning, meet your private guide for a half-day tour of the city's historical highlights, beginning at your hotel in the Old Town and ending at the top of Mount Igueldo, where you'll find the most amazing views of the city. In between, you'll visit the main hallmarks of the city: the beaches, the palace built for royal summers at the end of the 19th century, the French-influenced modernist buildings, and the Old Town – the historical and gastronomic epicenter of San Sebastian. You'll also experience a tutorial on ordering and eating traditional Basque pinxtos. The remainder of the day is at your leisure to enjoy the beach and take a walk along the ocean. (B, L)

Friday, October 18 San Sebasti3n – Bilbao – San Sebasti3n

After a leisurely breakfast, meet your private driver and guide for a full-day tour exploring the Basque Country beyond San Sebastian. First stop is Bilbao, where your guide will lead you on a tour of the unique Guggenheim Museum, followed by a stroll through Old Town and along the riverbank. Next, enter a hidden art gallery where you will be immersed in avant-garde art while enjoying a fabulous meal with the owners. On the way back to San Sebasti3n in the late afternoon, visit a local winery in the Basque village of Guetaria and enjoy a glass of Txacoli. (B, L)

Saturday, October 19 San Sebasti3n

The day is at your leisure to relax on the beach or shop for souvenirs. In the late afternoon, take a taxi and then a short boat ride to Pasai Donibane, a fairytale-like Basque fishing village. Dine at one of the most historic Basque restaurants, Casa C3mara, owned by the same family since the 19th century – a perfect way to celebrate our amazing trip through France and the Basque Country. (B, D)

Sunday, October 20 San Sebastian – Bilbao – USA

Depart San Sebastian for the airport in Bilbao for your flight home. Or, continue your journey taking a short flight from San Sebasti3n to Madrid.

14 night / 15-day tour: \$5,950 per person

Includes:

Services of a professional French guide throughout the tour;
accommodations in 4*+ hotels, daily breakfast + additional meals as stated in the itinerary;
All transfers, guides, gratuities, and entry fees as stated in the itinerary

Not included:

gratuities for hotel baggage handlers and housekeepers;
Optional meals, gratuities, transfers, and entry fees not included in the itinerary
International airfare, Pre- and Post-Tour extensions

Tour Extensions

Paris Pre-Tour

Hotel Brighton (about \$400/ room/ night)

Arrive in Paris 3 – 5 days early. Suggested activities:

- Full-day trip to the Normandy Beaches and Museum
- Guided visit to a local market and cooking class
- Guided or self-guided tour of the Louvres Museum
- Ascend the Eiffel Tower and dine in the Tower's restaurant
- Pack French deli food for a picnic lunch at the Tower's park
- Visit a neighborhood not on the itinerary for a self-guided tour
- Dine at traditional Parisian restaurants
- Browse the shops and lounge at an outdoor café



Madrid Post-Tour

Hotel Paseo del Prado (about \$300/ room/ night)

Take a short flight from San Sebastian to Madrid and stay for 3 – 5 days.
Suggested activities:

- Guided or self-guided tour of the Prado Museum
- Tour of Royal Madrid: Royal Palace, Plaza Mayor, etc.
- Visit a family winery for a full-day experience touring the vineyards, tastings, and lunch
- Full-day trip to the historical city of Toledo
- Evening Tapas “crawl”

