TOUR CODE

FR7

ADVENTURESABROAD

THE HEART OF FRANCE

Paris, Normandy, Brittany & the Loire Valley

11 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Paris*

Today we arrive in Paris and transfer to our hotel.

Overnight in Paris. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Paris: Ile de la Cite & Latin Quarter*

Paris is today one of the world's leading business and cultural centres, and its influences in politics, education, entertainment, media, fashion, science, and the arts all contribute to its status as one of the world's major global cities. Paris is considered one of the greenest and most liveable cities in Europe.

We'll begin where Paris did, on the Ile de la Cite. Your Tour Leader and guide will lead a walking tour of the city's early history, including visits to a pair of the world's most significant medieval Gothic churches: the legendary Notre-Dame Cathedral and the exquisite Sainte-Chapelle. Then we'll take a stroll through the bohemian Latin Quarter.

With your 2-Day Paris Museum Pass, your afternoon will be free to be inspired by Monet at the recently renovated Orangerie, admire modern art at the Pompidou, or take a stroll along the Champs-Elysees.

Overnight in Paris. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Paris: The Louvre*

This morning we visit the Louvre. This colossus on the Seine, born in 1200 as a fortress and transformed over the centuries from Gothic mass to renaissance palace, served as the royal residence in the 16th and 17th centuries. Today its 200 galleries cover some 40 acres; to view all 297,000 items in the collection it would be necessary to walk some 13 km (8 miles).

In addition to the Mona Lisa, Venus de Milo, and the Winged Victory of Samothrace, the Louvre has many delights that are easily overlooked -- Vermeer's Lace Maker and Holbein's Portrait of Erasmus, for instance; not to mention Van der Weyden's Braque Triptych, Ingres' Turkish Bath, Durer's Self Portrait, Cranach's naked and red-hatted Venus, and the exquisite 4,000 year old Egyptian woodcarving known as the Handmaiden of the Dead.

The afternoon is free. You may remain at the Louvre, do some shopping, visit other museums, or just stroll around and soak up this beautiful city.

Overnight in Paris. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Paris - Rouen - Honfleur - Caen*

This morning we depart Paris by bus and travel to Normandy and the old city of Rouen, where we explore the Cathedral with the tombs of Rollo and his son, William Longsword. The abbey church of St-Ouen is also worth a visit, and it is interesting to see the adjoining copy of the Danish Jelling Runic Stone. This was presented to the city in 1911 by Brewer Jacobsen of the Carlsberg Brewery in Copenhagen at the millennium celebrations of the city's foundation in 911 "when Rouen was known as the Danish City." We ought also to think of Joan of Arc, who was burnt at the stake in the Old Market in 1431.

Our next stop is Honfleur, known for its old, beautiful picturesque port, characterized by its houses with slate-covered frontages, painted many times by artists, including in particular Gustave Courbet, Eugene Boudin, Claude Monet and Johan Jongkind, forming the ecole de Honfleur (Honfleur school), which contributed to the appearance of the Impressionist movement.

After a lunch break in Honfleur, we continue to Caen, known for its historical buildings built during the reign of William the Conqueror who was buried here, and for the Battle for Caen -- heavy fighting that took place in and around Caen during the Battle of Normandy in 1944, destroying much of the town.

Overnight in Caen. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Caen: Bayeux & the Landing Beaches*

We depart for Bayeux, a small historical town which was spared the destruction that pervaded the area during the last year of World War Two. The town is home to the hugely famous Bayeux Tapestry which tells a visual story of William the Conquerer's Norman invasion of England in 1066. The 70 metre-long (230 feet) tapestry was made about a decade after the invasion, in 1077. It is truly a remarkable sight.

In the afternoon we concentrate on the other great invasion associated with this area: D-Day. The Battle of Normandy took place along the coast very near to Bayeux beginning on 6th June 1944. We will visit one of the portable "Mulberry Harbours" at Arromanches. These enormous floating harbours were transported across the Channel from England and were a crucial element in the Allied supply link in Normandy, allowing larges quantities of supplies to be unloaded when no proper harbour was available to the Allies.

From Arromanches we continue to Omaha Beach, the sight of American landings where the American 1st Infantry Division suffered huge casualties. We will visit the graceful, haunting American Military Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, as well as the Canadian Military Cemetery at Beny-sur-Mer, along with the site of Canadian landings at Juno Beach. During two and a half months of fighting, the Allies lost 37,000 soldiers in the area with a further 175,000 injured. The Germans suffered similar casualties.

After visiting the landing sights and cemeteries we return to Caen.

Overnight in Caen. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Caen: Chateau de Caen - Mont-St-Michel - St-Malo*

Before leaving Caen, we visit the massive, fortified Chateau de Caen, begun in 1060 by William the Conqueror. We walk on its ramparts and visit the Chapel of St George. There are two Romanesque abbeys built by William the Conquerer -- the Abbaye aux Hommes, and the Abbaye aux Dames, both of which we will visit.

We then travel the short distance to Mont-St-Michel. Who would not recognize an image of Mont-St-Michel? Along

with the Eiffel Tower, it must be one of the most famous sights in all France. At the very highest of tides, Mont-St-Michel is completely surrounded by the sea, joined to the mainland by a causeway. Celtic mythology tells us that this place was one of the acqueous tombs to which the souls of the dead were sent. The first structure, a simple oratory, was built here in the 8th century by the Bishop of Avranches. Mont-St-Michel became an important centre of learning in the 10th and 11th centuries under Benedictine monks. It has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979.

We climb the steps to the top of the Grande Rue in order to visit the Abbey. Then we take an atmospheric walking tour of the narrow, winding pedestrian-only streets of Mont-St-Michel.

We continue the short distance to Saint-Malo, "a crown of stone above the waves", wrote Gustave Flaubert. The glass-blue clarity of the water, the coastline indented with rocky inlets, the backdrop of heather and bracken covered cliffs which demonstrate in a glaze of green why the French called this area the "Emerald Coast".

Overnight in Saint-Malo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *St-Malo - Loire Valley*

This morning we visit St-Malo. Located at the mouth of the Rance River, its walled city is renowned. St-Malo was a crucial base for 17th and 18th merchant ships, as well as privateer vessels. In August 1944, German forces destroyed about 80% of St-Malo's old city. Remarkably, like Warsaw in Poland, it has all been completely and lovingly rebuilt in its original style. We talk a walk on the city ramparts.

We'll continue to The Loire Valley, as French as France gets. Famous for its natural beauty, magnificent chateaux and picturesque towns, the Loire Valley is rich in history and culture. It is said to be where the purest French is spoken and the land of simple French home cooking.

This afternoon we visit Chateau Chenonceau, located on the Cher River. In 1513, Thomas Bohier razed the castle-keep and the fortified mill of the Marques family only keeping the dungeon. It is sad that he never managed to see the finished castle and was completed by his wife and son. It later became crown property.

Overnight in the Loire Valley. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Loire Valley*

More exploration of the Loire Valley area today, including visit a to Chateau de Villandry, which boasts the most beautiful formal gardens in all of France. We visit the town of Amboise as well as the nearby manor house of Le Clos Luce. Here we will see a collection of working scale models of some of Leonardo da Vinci's inventions. Leonardo spent the last years of his life here, under the patronage of the French king, Francois I, from 1516 until his death in 1519.

This afternoon we'll take a break from chateaux and enjoy the other beautiful thing for which the valley is famous: wine. The length of the river, and the varied soils and climate of the valley, make the Loire Valley home to definitive expressions of some of the world's most popular wine grapes (including Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc and Cabernet Franc), as well as some that are grown nowhere else. The vineyards of the Loire Valley are divided into five distinct regions, each with its own characteristic wines and varietals. We will visit one of the region's leading estates for a tour and tasting.

Overnight in the Loire Valley. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Loire - Chateau de Chambord - Bourges*

This morning we visit the unforgettable and splendid Chateau de Chambord, used by the kings of France as a hunting lodge. It was built by Francois I in 1519. A two day horse-carriage ride from Paris at the time, the king spent only a little over month in total here during the course of his 32 year reign. The famous double-helix staircase has been attributed to Leonardo da Vinci.

We continue to the town of Bourges, where we'll take a walking tour along rows of medieval half-timbered houses, and then into the immense Cathedrale St-Etienne to see some of France's most remarkable and original stained glass.

Overnight in Bourges. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Bourges - Chateau de Guedelon - Paris*

En route to Paris, we make an interesting stop at Chateau de Guedelon, a medieval construction project located in Treigny. The object of the project is to build a castle using only the techniques and materials used in the Middle Ages. When completed in the 2020s, it should be an authentic recreation of a 13th century medieval castle. In order to fully investigate the technology required in the past, the project is using only period construction techniques, tools, and costumes. Materials, including wood and stone, are all obtained locally.

We continue to Paris with free time until our farewell dinner.

Overnight in Paris. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Departure*

Departure from Paris.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.