



Provence, France

COMPANION.

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Trip Overview

Nestled in the heart of southern France, Provence is a region that embodies slowing down to appreciate the good life. The area is known for its rolling lavender fields, sun-soaked vineyards, and picturesque villages. It's a sensory escape that feels like stepping into an impressionist painting.

One of the best parts of this region is its diversity. Explore the dramatic landscapes of the Calanques and Luberon, discover the region's rich and ancient Roman heritage with sites like the Pont du Gard and the amphitheater in Arles, or simply bask in the sun-soaked landscapes that inspired the great works of Van Gogh, Matisse, Cézanne, Renoir, and others. There's truly something for everyone in Provence.

Don't be surprised if you find yourself wanting to stay longer, Provence just has that *je ne sais quoi*.

WHERE TO BASE

Arles
or
Aix-en-Provence

HOW LONG TO STAY

Give yourself at least six days to truly soak it up

PHYSICALITY OF LOCATION

Walking in the villages, sometimes up steep hills

GO FOR THE

Food, shopping, and slower pace of life

DON'T MISS

Antique shopping in L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue

PREPARE FOR

The temperamental Mistral winds

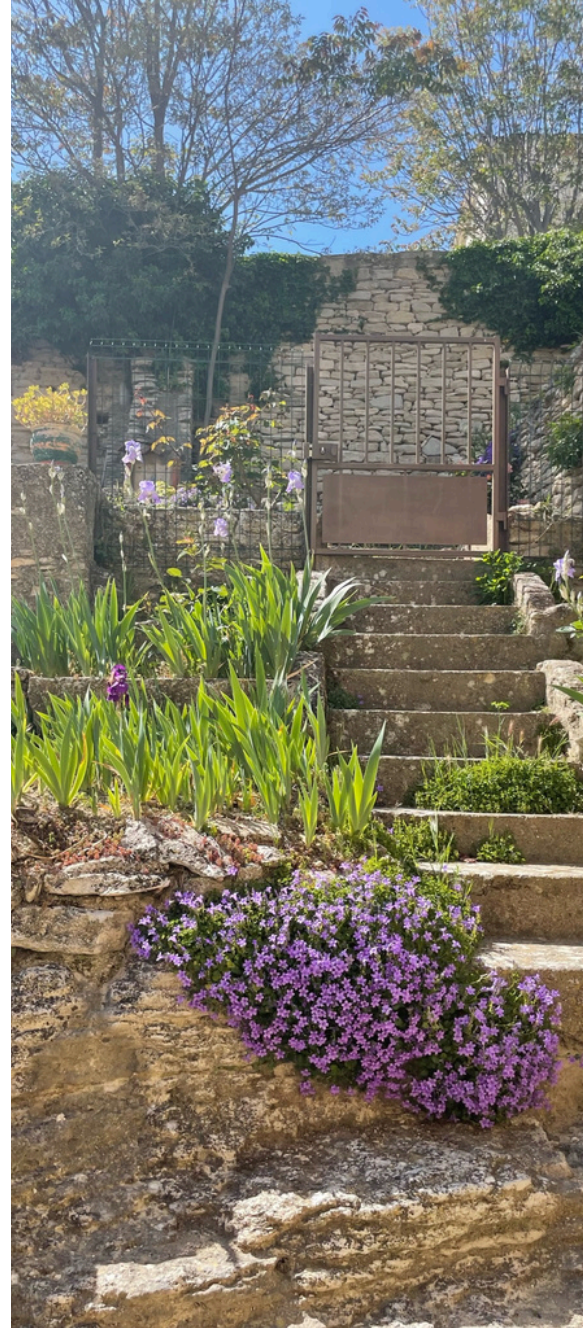
When to Visit

Carefully consider what you want to see when you visit Provence. If you absolutely want to see the lavender fields in bloom you have a short window of time to visit, as they only in bloom for a few weeks in June and July.

However, coming in June and July will mean a hot and crowded vacation. This region is reacting strongly to climate change and summers are becoming hotter and drier. If you are coming in the summer, make sure to build in time for rest throughout the day and bring bug spray.

While I personally prefer visiting in the Spring (April and May), this time of year does put your trip at the mercy of the famous Mistral winds. These winds begin in the winter and can bring a sharp, cold air to the region throughout early spring.

The most predictable time to visit is September and October. The days are still warm, the vineyards are harvesting, and the olive trees are full of fruit. Crowds are thinner and you'll be able to secure shoulder season rates for hotels and attractions. Most of the Parisians have gone back to school and work, so the towns will be quieter with a more local vibe.



BEST TIME TO VISIT

Spring and Autumn

WEATHER EXPECTATION

Provence gets around 300 days of sunshine per year. In the Spring the Mistral winds can bring very windy days, but you'll find hot days arrive as early as April!

Villages to visit *at a glance*

Provence is famous for its tiny picturesque villages scattered across the region.

Each town has its own story and charm, and together they offer the perfect blend of history, shopping, culture, art, and timeless beauty.

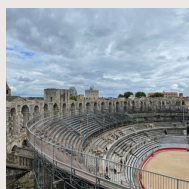
As you wander their cobblestone streets, you'll discover centuries-old architecture, sun-dappled squares, and an irresistible sense of tranquility.

But the best part is that these villages are still alive with the rhythms of daily life. No matter where you go, the villages of Provence invite you to slow down, soak in their beauty, and embrace the region's magic.



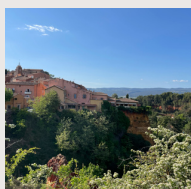
Gordes

A tiny town that packs a big punch. It is storybook-worthy. Stop for a drink on the Airelles Hotel terrace overlooking the valley below.



Arles

A lively town full of locals. It's small enough to easily navigate, but offers world-class dining and shopping. Many famous Van Gogh sites are here!



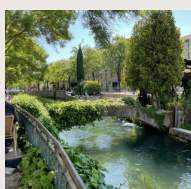
Roussillon

Famous for its ochre deposits, this town is reminiscent of Tuscany. A heavily visited spot by many tourists.



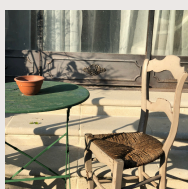
St.-Remy de Provence

Enjoy a stroll through the clean, manicured village and stop in to the ritzy shops and restaurants.



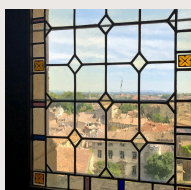
L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue

An antique shopper's dream come true. This is where your favorite design stores source their French market finds.



Ménerbes

A tiny town with incredible art galleries. Not a lot of food or activity options, but it's a feast for the eyes.



Avignon

One of the bigger cities in the region, you'll find all the offerings of a major city, but with a fun student population vibe.



Aix-en-Provence

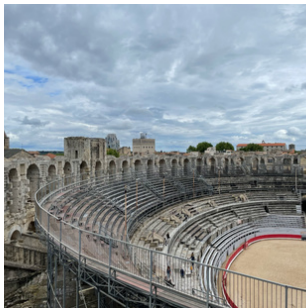
A dreamy fashionable city with great food, shopping, and activities. Centrally located with good rail access.

My Provençal Itinerary

Explore Provence over a minimum of six days. If you have time, stay an extra few days to really soak in the magic.

DAY ONE

Arriving in Arles



The Arles amphitheater

I suggest basing in Arles for a more authentic Provençal experience at a slightly lower cost. However, Aix-en-Provence or Avignon are also great, centrally located cities to base in.

To get to any of these towns you'll fly into the Marseille airport. Getting to Arles via the local train from the Marseille airport can be tricky, so give yourself plenty of time between landing and making it to the station, and don't be afraid to ask for directions from airport staff, just remember to use a polite "bonjour", "s'il vous plaît", and "merci" when asking.

If you prefer, you can take a taxi or private transfer, but it will cost up to €150. Personally, I think the cost is worth it, because trying to figure out public transport after a transatlantic flight is exhausting.

DAY TWO

Arles



Arles

Start the morning with a self-guided walking tour of the sites that inspired Van Gogh's most famous paintings. The town has prominent signage highlighting each spot, so they're easy to find. You can also get a [free map](#) provided by the city. Then, meander up to the ancient Roman amphitheater and theater, over to the ancient baths of Constantine, and the church of Saint-Trophime.

Let yourself get lost in the winding streets of Arles. You never know what you'll find! The town is full of great shops that offer unique and locally made goods.

DAY THREE

The Carmargue + Olive Oil Tasting



The Carmague

Did you know there are flamingos near Provence? The Camargue is a national park that hosts a rather large natural population of flamingos. Either rent a car or hire a driver to spend the morning at the national park. If you're interested, the Camargue is near beach towns and the mouth of the Rhône river and it's easy to pop over for a visit.

After lunch, head to a nearby olive farm where you can sample and compare different oils. We recommend Moulin Castelas. In France, you must ask for a tasting, or une dégustation. There are many different oil flavors to sample. This is a very well-known producer and once you see the label, you'll soon see it at most restaurants in the region.

DAY FOUR

L'isle-sur-la-Sorgue, Gordes, Roussillon, Ménerbes

If you have time and want to move slower, I would divide this into two days, but spend at least one day exploring the region's villages.



L'isle-sur-la-Sorgue

Start in L'isle-sur-la-Sorgue. It feels like a real life fairytale village and is the premier destination for antiques in Provence. And while there are many permanent antique markets, there are additional weekly markets in the morning on Thursday and Sunday (the Sunday market is antique-specific). Truthfully, you could spend an entire day in this village, so if antiquing is a priority, definitely give it a full day.

Gordes is a smaller village, but it packs a big punch. The views are breathtaking and the village itself is adorable. Pop into the five star Airelles hotel and ask if there's availability to take a coffee on the terrace - you won't regret it.



Ménerbes

Roussillon is famous for its deposits of ochre and is a popular tourist attraction. It feels like the most crowded village because huge groups come through the tiny narrow streets, so it can be overwhelming. While it's beautiful, and visually very different from everything else in the region, If I were to cut one town from this list, it would be Roussillon.

And finally, we have Ménerbes. This village is oozing with charm and sophistication. While there aren't many restaurants or shops, there is an incredible array of art galleries. End the day with an afternoon visit to the galleries and dinner overlooking the valley.

DAY FIVE

Vineyard and Winery Tour

While in Provence, you'll be near some of the most prestigious vineyards in the world.



A winery in Gigondas

This region is home to the best rosé and is famous for the wines produced in Gigondas, Vacqueyras, and Chateauneuf-du-Pape, among others.

My suggestion is to hire a guide for the day, and we cannot recommend Céline at [Le Vin La Bouche](#) highly enough. As one of the first women trained as a sommelier in France, her tours are personal, educational, and fun. Plus, she can secure tastings at vineyards that are normally off-limits to visitors.

DAY SIX

Saint-Remy-de-Provence and Avignon

From Arles, head out towards Saint-Remy-de-Provence. This town primarily offers shopping (a little higher end than what you'll find in Arles or other villages) and a great Wednesday market. While we found this village to be almost a little too perfect, the charm is undeniable.

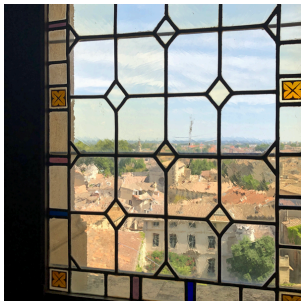


Saint-Remy-de-Provence

If you're interested, there is a great local cooking class offered in Saint-Remy-de-Provence offered through [La Cuisine Provençale](#) led by an American expat and her French partner. There are a few nearby Van Gogh sites, but they're a bit underwhelming and can be seen quickly.

From Saint-Remy-de-Provence, begin your drive up to Avignon.

On your way to Avignon you can pass Le Chateau du Bois. If you're not visiting during the lavender bloom but still want a taste of the experience, this museum and shop offers a great glimpse into the lavender production of the area.



View of Avignon from the Palace of the Popes

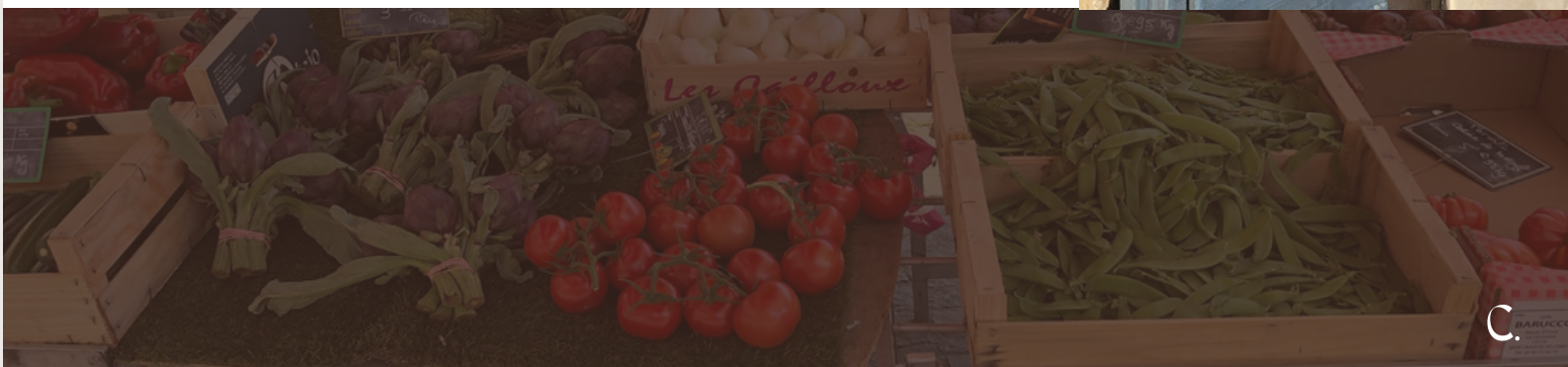
Once in Avignon you'll immediately feel a change in the air. This medieval town is home to a university and is pulsing with energy from the younger population.

The main attractions here are: The Palace of the Popes, the Bridge of Avignon, and the permanent Les Halles food market. There are also a couple of fine arts museums, and a very lively nighttime experience at Place Pie. Be sure to try and take afternoon tea at La Mirande hotel for a relaxing respite from the day.

Can't-Miss Highlights

Provence is a feast for the senses. But between exploring, shopping, and eating be sure you don't miss these highlights!

- ✓ See the flamingos at the Camargue
- ✓ Taste a Chateauneuf-du-Pape wine at the source
- ✓ Shop for antiques in L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue
- ✓ Walk in Van Gogh's footsteps in Arles
- ✓ Taste local Provençal dishes
- ✓ Compare local olive oils in an olive grove
- ✓ Visit the ancient Roman amphitheater in Arles
- ✓ Sip rosé overlooking the Luberon
- ✓ Smell the different types of lavender
- ✓ Take tea at La Mirande in Avignon
- ✓ Visit a weekly local market (or two or three)
- ✓ Watch the sunset over the Luberon valley



Where to Stay

If you're planning to rely on public transportation (which I would not recommend, see the "Getting Around" section) then your choice of base is limited to Arles, Avignon, or Aix-en-Provence. And even then, you will be relying on infrequent bus service. If you have your own car, then the choice of where to base becomes personal preference.

Personally, I like to base in Arles. I think this city offers an authentic Provençal experience without being overrun by tourists. Yes, many groups come to see the places that inspired Van Gogh, but by afternoon the streets are blissfully quiet and the true spirit of the city is awake.

There are plenty of great restaurants to choose from, everything is easily walkable, and there are enough activities that you won't get bored. If you prefer a ritzier experience, then you may want to base in Aix-en-Provence, where you'll still find everything you need, just with a bit more polish and posh than in Arles.

Below are some of our favorite places to stay, but truthfully the region is filled with wonderful accommodations across all budget ranges. If you don't see your perfect fit below, don't be afraid to research on your own!

HOTEL SUGGESTIONS

Le Nord Pinus Arles \$\$\$

This historic hotel once housed famous guests like Winston Churchill and Ingrid Bergman. It sits opposite The Yellow House that inspired the Van Gogh painting and opens onto a lively square. The rooms were renovated in 2024 and the staff is wonderfully helpful.

Airelles, La Bastide Gordes \$\$\$\$

The Airelles La Bastide Gordes is a splurge, but if you can pull it off it's worth it. The hotel sits on the cliff of Gordes overlooking the Luberon valley below. The property is pristine and effortlessly balances modern amenities with old-world charm.

La Mirande Avignon \$\$\$\$

You'll feel like royalty staying here. The property is secluded within an 18th century palace in Avignon. The hotel is also known for its Michelin-starred restaurant and cooking school. The gardens are dreamy and the location is perfectly central to the city's attractions.

Airbnb Aix-en-Provence \$

In my experience, Airbnb offers a fantastic selection of properties in Aix-en-Provence, and I prefer these lodgings to any of the hotels that are in the old town itself. Something about renting an apartment here makes it feel like you're a part of the city - not just a visitor passing through.

La Maison Sur La Sorgue L'isle-sur-la-Sorgue \$\$\$

Conveniently located in the middle of L'isle-sur-la-Sorgue, this hotel offers a serene getaway. The rooms are moody and cozy and the staff is always standing by to help you whenever you need it.

Where to Eat

Eating in Provence is a slower affair, with lunches taking up to two hours. Don't expect to be in-and-out of a restaurant quickly!

We recommend making reservations ahead of time, even if you're just making them the day before. Most locations only have a few tables available and they do book up.

Chardon

Arles

This small restaurant brings in rotating chefs, so you never know what will be on the menu, but you can be sure it will be made from locally sourced ingredients. When we visited, the menu was entirely vegetarian and delicious. This spot has a younger vibe, and it was full of trendy Arles residents.

Le Galoubet

Arles

An intimate restaurant that offers a wonderful representation of elevated traditional Provençal dishes. There are daily specials with heavy usage of local ingredients. You'll usually find a meat, fish, and veggie dish on the menu, and the desserts are divine. There's a lovely patio and the prices are very reasonable.

Restaurant le Clos Saint Roch

Maussane-les-Alpilles

While you might not be in and out quickly, the food is worth the wait. The dishes feel like a high-end dining experience, but the cost is reasonable. And the desserts are incredible. I would recommend coming for lunch and grabbing a spot on the shaded patio.

Bistrot le 5

Ménerbes

There aren't many options in Ménerbes, but this one is by far the best for the atmosphere and panoramic terrace views. The food is fine, it's not groundbreaking, but it's good enough. If you can, just stop by for drinks and snacks and get a full meal back in the city.

AREV

Aix-en-Provence

This spot is a perfect outdoor dining terrace. You'll find more traditional dishes but also a good selection of pasta, which is a nice break when you need something different to eat. Great service and an idyllic location with reasonable prices.



Dietary Needs

This region offers plenty of vegetable dishes and good seafood options. I found many vegan-specific options included on menus and vegan restaurants in the cities.



Getting Around

You need to rent a car to truly experience Provence. While there is a strong rail network between larger cities, you won't be able to easily access the charming villages without your own car. You can make it work, but it will take you hours to get between each town using public transportation vs. minutes with your own car. Additionally, there are not many taxis and Uber is almost non-existent in the smaller towns.

You don't have to book the smallest car available, but do make sure that you're reserving an automatic if you don't know how to drive manual.

You'll need an international driver's license (which you can get at an AAA location in the U.S.) and make sure the name on the reservation matches the name on the credit card you'll be using to pay.

As with any car rental, it's best to take a video and document any damage upon pickup so that you aren't liable for damages you may not have caused and you'll want to research which car insurance option is best for you.

Driving in this region is very easy. The roads are paved and well maintained, signage is clear, and drivers are generally polite. The signs are all in French, and the speed limit is in kilometers, but even without speaking French we've never had an issue on the road.

In the shoulder seasons, parking is relatively easy. Each town has a public parking lot just outside of the city center. Some are paid, but most are free. If the parking lot is far enough away, the city usually offers a shuttle to take drivers into town. You can find each lot by typing "public parking [city name]" into Google Maps and then selecting where you want to go.

Specifically, if you drive to Avignon I recommend parking in the Parking des Italiens lot and taking the shuttle in. Take it from me, you do not want to drive inside those medieval city walls or park in this city's parking garages.

Tips and Practicalities

1. Do I need to speak French?

You don't need to know French, but speaking a few basic pleasantries will go a long way. Remember that the French are very polite. They always say *bonjour*/hello, *s'il vous plaît*/please, and *merci*/thank you or *merci beaucoup*/thank you very much.

2. Do I need cash?

It's always a good idea to travel with some cash, but it's not necessary to have in this region. Everyone will take credit cards and there are plenty of ATMs.

3. What should I pack and wear?

Provence is much more colorful than Paris. The first time I visited I felt very out of place in my black and grey outfits, so don't be afraid to wear colors and prints. Depending on the time of year you'll probably want linen and layers, because it will likely be hot during the day but chilly at night. And remember to wear sunscreen! Even in shoulder season you'll be in the sunshine all day. And if you're visiting anytime after about April you'll either want to pack bugspray or buy some when you land. The mosquitoes can be intense here.

4. Should I tip?

Tipping is not expected in France and can be insulting in some situations. If you feel your service was truly excellent rounding up a couple of Euros on the bill is appropriate. For guided tours I do like to give a 10% tip if I feel the tour was excellent, but even then it's not expected.