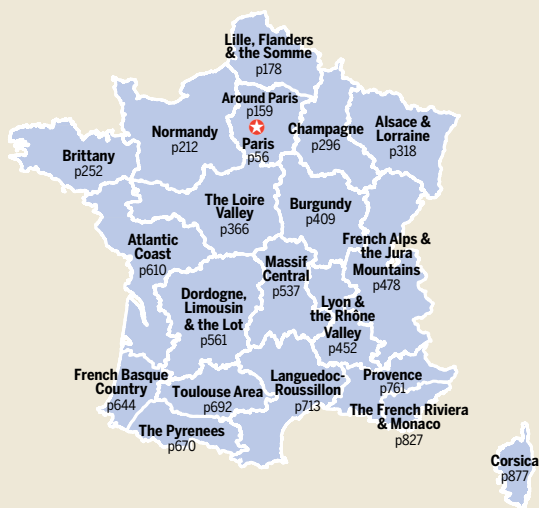




France



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Itineraries



10
DAYS

Essential France

No place screams 'France!' more than **Paris**. Spend two days in the capital, allowing time for cafe lounging, long bistro lunches and romantic strolls along the Seine and Canal St-Martin. Day three, enjoy Renaissance royalty at **Château de Chambord** and **Château de Chenonceau** in the Loire Valley. Or spend two days in Normandy instead, marvelling at **Rouen's** Notre Dame cathedral, the **Bayeux** tapestry, sea-splashed **Mont St-Michel** and – should modern history be your passion – the **D-Day** landing beaches.

Day five, zoom south to view some of the world's most precious cave art in the **Vézère Valley**, Dordogne. Key sites are around the towns of Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil and Montignac. Or consider Sarlat-la-Canéda, showcase to some of France's best medieval architecture, as a base. Day seven experience 12 hours in **Bordeaux** – overnight in a B&B in the old wine-merchant quarter and enrol in a wine-tasting course at the Maison du Vin de Bordeaux. Next day it's a three-hour drive to the walled city of **Carcassonne**, Roman **Nîmes** and the **Pont du Gard**. Finish on the French Riviera with a casino flutter in Grace Kelly's **Monaco**, a portside aperitif in Brigitte Bardot's **St-Tropez** and a stroll around Matisse's **Nice**.



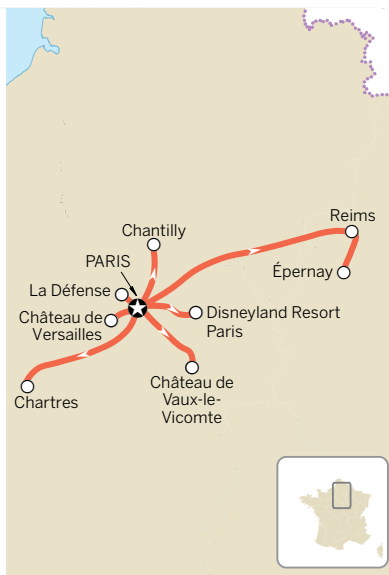
The Channel to the Med

Step off the boat in **Calais** and be seduced by 40km of cliffs, sand dunes and windy beaches on the spectacular **Côte d'Opale**. Speed southwest, taking in a fish lunch in **Dieppe**, a sensational cathedral visit in **Rouen**, or a picturesque cliffside picnic in **Étretat** en route to your overnight stop: your choice of the pretty Normandy seaside resorts of **Honfleur**, **Deauville** or **Trouville**. Spend two days here exploring: a boat trip beneath the gargantuan and breathtaking Pont de Normandie, shopping for fresh fish and seafood at Trouville's waterfront Poissonnerie, and hobnobbing with Parisians on Deauville's chic star-studded boardwalk are essentials.

Devote day three to Normandy's **D-Day landing beaches**. Start with the Mémorial – Un Musée pour la Paix in **Caen**, the best single museum devoted to the Battle of Normandy and a must-see, then follow a westward arc along the beach-laced coast, taking in the caisson-strewn sands at **Arromanches**, gun installations at **Longues-sur-Mer**, and the now-serene 7km-long stretch of 'bloody **Omaha**'. Come dusk, rejuvenate spent emotions over fresh scallops and *calvados* (apple-flavoured brandy). Or, if art is more your cup of tea, skip the beaches and go for the stunning representation of 11th-century warfare embroidered across 70m of tapestry in **Bayeux**.

Day four and the iconic, postcard-perfect **Mont St-Michel** and its beautiful sandy bay beckons – hiking barefoot across the sands here is an exhilarating experience. End the week in Brittany with a flop in an old-fashioned beach tent in **Dinard** and a bracing stroll on spectacular headlands around **Camaret-sur-Mer**.

Week two begins with a long drive south to chic **La Rochelle** for a lavish seafood feast. Spend a night here, continuing the gourmet theme as you wend your way south through Médoc wine country to **Bordeaux**. Next morning, stop in 'ville rose' **Toulouse** and/or **Carcassonne** before hitting the Med. The **Camargue** – a wetland of flamingos, horses and incredible bird life – is a unique patch of coast to explore and Van Gogh thought so too. Follow in his footsteps around **Arles**, breaking for a gastronomic lunch at L'Atelier or La Chassagnette before continuing on to gritty **Marseille**.

1
WEEK

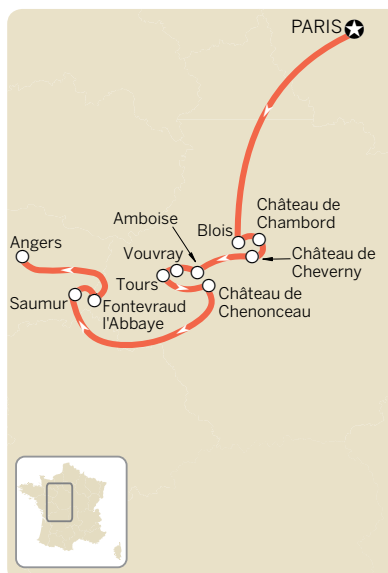
Brittany to Bordeaux

For an exhilarating dose of Breton culture, Atlantic sea air and outstanding wine full of southern sun, there is no better trip than this. It starts fresh off the boat in **St-Malo**, a walled city with sturdy Vauban ramparts that beg exploration at sunset. Linger at least a day in this gritty port. Walk across at low tide to Île du Grand Bé and lap up great views atop a 14th-century tower in pretty St-Servan. Motor along the **Côte d'Émeraude** the next day, stopping in **Dinard** en route to **Roscoff** 200km west. Devote day four to discovering Brittany's famous cider in **Argol** on the **Presqu'île de Crozon**, megaliths around **Carnac**, and a turreted medieval castle in **Josselin**. Push south next along the Atlantic coast, stopping in **Nantes** if you like big cities (and riding mechanical elephants), or continuing to the peaceful waterways of Green Venice, aka the **Marais Poitevin**. **Bordeaux** is your final destination for day six, from where a bevy of Bordeaux wine-tasting trips tempt. End the journey on a high atop Europe's highest sand dune, **Dune du Pilat**, near oyster-famed Arcachon.

1
WEEK

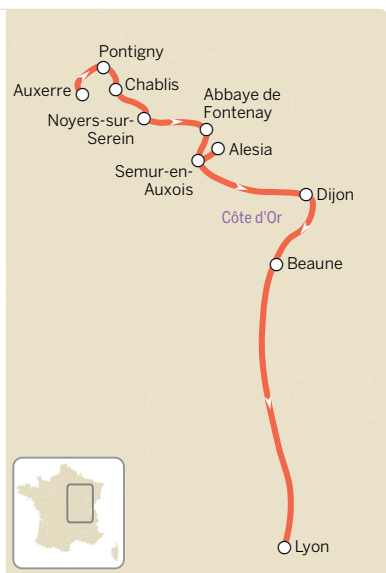
A Week Around Paris

What makes capital city **Paris** even more wonderful is the extraordinary green and un-urban journey of Renaissance châteaux and sparkling wine that unfurls within an hour of the city. **Day one** has to be France's grandest castle, **Château de Versailles**, and its vast gardens. The second day, feast on France's best-preserved medieval basilica and the dazzling blue stained glass in **Chartres**, an easy train ride away. Small-town **Chantilly** is a good spot to combine a laid-back lunch with a Renaissance chateau, formal French gardens and – if you snagged tickets in advance – an enchanting equestrian performance. On the fourth day, catch the train to elegant **Reims** in the heart of the Champagne region. Scale its cathedral for dazzling views before tucking into the serious business of Champagne tasting. Dedicated bubbly aficionados can hop the next day to **Épernay**, France's other great Champagne city. On day six enjoy a lazy start then catch an afternoon fountain show at **Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte**, followed by a candlelit tour of the chateau. End the week with a look at futuristic **La Défense** or, for those with kids, **Disneyland Resort Paris**.

5
DAYS

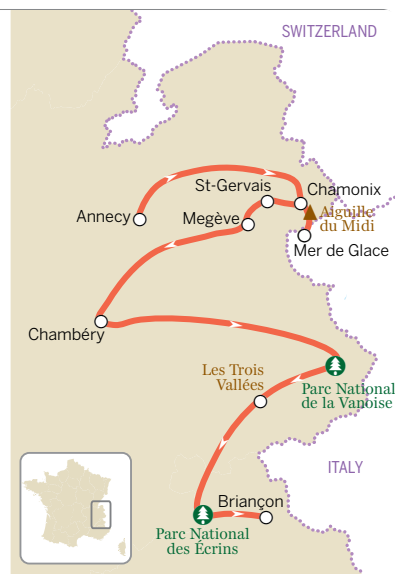
Along the Loire Valley

For five days of aristocratic pomp and architectural splendour within spitting distance of transport hub **Paris**, there is no finer destination than the regal, château-studded Loire Valley. First up is the Unesco-hallmarked city of **Blois**. On day two, make the most of the limited time you have by hooking up with an organised château tour from here: queen of all castles **Château de Chambord** and the charmingly classical **Château de Cheverny**, with its hound-packed kennels, make a great combo. On the third day, continue southwest along France's longest river, the Loire, to **Amboise**, final home of Leonardo da Vinci; and solidly bourgeois **Tours**, from where **Château de Chenonceau**, beautifully strung across the River Cher 34km east, is an easy hop the next morning. If wine is a love, try to build some *dégustation* (tasting) of some local **Vouvray** wines in vineyards east of Tours into your itinerary. End your trip with France's elite riding school in **Saumur** and the movingly simple abbey church **Fontevraud l'Abbaye** – or push on northwest to **Angers** with its black chateau and Apocalypse tapestry. Château de Verrières is a befitting overnight address in this château-rich neck of the woods.

6
DAYS

Burgundy & Beyond

Red-wine lovers can enjoy the fruits of Burgundy with this itinerary, which begins in the Roman river-port of **Auxerre**, 170km southeast of Paris. Explore its ancient abbey, Gothic cathedral and cycle along towpaths in the afternoon. On day two consider an easy bike ride to Burgundy's last surviving example of Cistercian architecture in pretty **Pontigny**, 25km north. Stay overnight or push on to nearby **Chablis**, where bags more bike rides and gentle hikes between Burgundy vineyards await – allow plenty of time here to taste the seven *grands crus* of this well-known wine-making town. Day four, meander south to the picture-postcard village of **Noyers-sur-Serein**, then head east to the breathtaking, Unesco-listed **Abbaye de Fontenay**, before winding up for the night in **Semur-en-Auxois**, 25km south. **Alésia**, where Julius Caesar defeated Gaulish chief Vercingétorix in 52 BC, is not far from here and makes for a fascinating day out. On the last day discover **Dijon** and its beautiful medieval and Renaissance buildings. From here, should you have more time, take a road trip through the wine-making area of **Côte d'Or** to **Beaune**, or south to **Lyon** in the Rhône Valley.



10 DAYS

The South of France

For sun, sea and celebrity action, hit the hot south. Start in **Nice**, star of a coastline that unfurls in a pageant of belle-époque palaces and iconic sands. Drive along the Riviera's trio of legendary **corniches** – coastal views are mind-blowing – and day three take the train to glitzy **Monaco**. Then move to fishing port **St-Tropez** where millionaire yachts jostle for space with street artists. Rise early the next morning for the place des Lices market and frolic away the afternoon on the sand at Plage de Pampelonne. Day six is a toss-up between a dramatic drive along the **Corniche des Maures** to **Bormes-les-Mimosas** and the staggering **Route des Crêtes** mountain pass, or a boat trip to the *très belle* **Îles d'Hyères**. Head inland next to **Aix-en-Provence**, a canvas of graceful 19th-century architecture, stylish cafes and hidden squares. From Aix, it's a hop and a skip to **Ventabren** where lunch or dinner alfresco at La Table de Ventabren is what eating in Provence is all about. Devote your last two days to the wild **Gorges du Verdon**, Europe's largest canyon, two hour's drive northeast, or the gentler **Luberon** with its bounty of photogenic hilltop villages.

5 DAYS

Spring in the Alps

A trip to the French Alps often translates as one week of skiing in one place. Yet take the time to explore the region after the snow has melted – spring or early summer is best – and you'll be pleasantly surprised. Warm up with old-town ambling, lakeside strolling and warm-weather swimming in fairy-tale **Annecy**, a lakeside town just 45km from Geneva, Switzerland. On day two move on to **Chamonix** at the foot of Mont Blanc, Western Europe's highest peak: ride a cable car up to the **Aiguille du Midi** or, if the sky is not crystal-clear, ride a train up to the **Mer de Glace** glacier. Yet more unforgettable views of the Mont Blanc seduce along hiking trails in **St-Gervais** and **Megève**, chic, picturesque Alpine villages with medieval old towns. Let the adrenalin rip, or push on via **Chambéry** to the **Parc National de la Vanoise**, where spectacular hiking in **Les Trois Vallées** easily pleases outdoor junkies. A fitting finale to your Alpine foray is the dizzying drive through the **Parc National des Écrins** to **Briançon**, the loveliest of all the medieval villages in the French Alps, famous for its Vauban fortifications.



Jean-Bernard Carillet

Lille, Flanders & the Somme; Brittany Paris-based (and Metz-born) journalist and photographer, Jean-Bernard has clocked up innumerable trips to all French regions and is a passionate ambassador of his own country. Just before researching this edition, he presented a five-episode series on French TV, named *France's Most Beautiful Region*, for which he criss-crossed France for five months with a TV crew, searching for the best travel experiences in the country.



Kerry Christiani

Champagne; Alsace & Lorraine Kerry has been travelling to France since her school days to brush up her *français*, which she studied to MA level. Seeing Alsace's picture-book Route des Vins in spring bloom, tasting Champagne's finest in caves in Reims and Épernay, and hiking to the quietest corners of the hilly Vosges were memorable moments researching this edition. An award-winning travel writer, Kerry has authored and co-authored some 20 guidebooks. Kerry

also wrote the Outdoor Activities and Landscapes and Wildlife features this edition. She lists her latest work at www.kerrychristiani.com.



Gregor Clark

Burgundy; Lyon & the Rhône Valley; Massif Central Gregor's love affair with France started on the midnight streets of Paris at age 14, when, jetlagged and culture-shocked, he successfully ordered a crêpe using his never-before-tested high school French. He's been feeding his France obsession ever since and writing for LP since 2000. Highlights of this research trip include *bouchon*-crawling in Lyon, returning to Vézelay, Salers and Gorges de l'Ardèche (three of his all-time favourites) and seeing a dog exit a boulangerie in Auxerre, baguette firmly held in mouth.



Emilie Filou

The French Riviera & Monaco; Corsica Emilie was born in Paris but spent most of her childhood holidays roaming the south of France. She now lives in London, where she works as a freelance journalist specialising in development issues in Africa. She goes to the Côte d'Azur every summer. For this book, she loved rekindling with her Corsican heritage and finding more about her late grandmother's homeland. See more of Emilie's work on www.emiliefilou.com; she tweets at @emiliefilou.

Read more about Emilie at:
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Catherine Le Nevez

Paris; Around Paris Catherine first lived in Paris aged four and she's been returning here at every opportunity since, completing her Doctorate of Creative Arts in Writing, Masters in Professional Writing, and post-grad qualifications in Editing and Publishing along the way. Catherine's writing includes scores of Lonely Planet guides to Paris, France and far beyond. Revisiting her favourite Parisian haunts and uncovering new ones remains a highlight of this and every assignment here and, wanderlust aside, Paris remains her favourite city on earth.



Daniel Robinson

Normandy; French Alps & the Jura Mountains Daniel has been writing guidebooks and articles about France since shortly after the end of the Jurassic period. His favourite leisure activities range from walking the Grand Balcon Sud trail above Chamonix to trying to interpret the Bayeux Tapestry's naughty margin vignettes. Brought up in the United States and Israel, he holds degrees from Princeton and Tel Aviv University. His travel writing has appeared in various newspapers and magazines, including the *New York Times*, and has been translated into 10 languages.

Read more about Daniel at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/DanielRobinson



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Nicola Williams

Coordinating author; Provence British writer Nicola has lived in France and written about it for more than a decade. From her hillside house on the southern shore of Lake Geneva, it's an easy hop to Provence and the south of France where she has spent endless years revelling in its extraordinary art, architecture and cuisine. Nicola has worked on numerous titles for Lonely Planet, including *Discover France* and *Discover Paris*. Find her on Twitter

at @Tripalong.

Read more about Nicola at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/nicolawilliams



Alexis Averbuck

The Loire Valley; Dordogne, Limousin & the Lot Alexis first came to France when she was four and now visits every chance she gets. Whether browsing markets in the Dordogne, château-hopping in the Loire or careening through hill-top villages in Provence (she also contributes to the *Provence & Côte d'Azur* book), she immerses herself in all things French. A travel writer for two decades, Alexis has lived in Antarctica for a year, crossed the Pacific by sailboat, and is also a

painter – see her work at www.alexisaverbuck.com.

Read more about Alexis at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/alexisaverbuck



Oliver Berry

The Pyrenees; Toulouse Area; Languedoc-Roussillon A professional writer and photographer based in Cornwall and Bristol, Oliver has been travelling to France since the tender age of two. For this book he covered the southwest region, including the Pyrenees, Languedoc and the pink city of Toulouse. Research highlights included kayaking through the Gorges du Tarn and watching the sunset from the Pic du Midi. You can see his latest work at www.oliverberry.com.



Stuart Butler

Atlantic Coast; French Basque Country Stuart's first encounters with southwest France came on family holidays. When he was older he spent every summer surfing off the beaches of the southwest, until one day he found himself so hooked on the region he was unable to leave – he has been there ever since. His travels for Lonely Planet, and a wide variety of magazines, have taken him beyond France to the shores of the Arctic, the deserts of Asia and the forests of

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