

## SHERPA: FRANCE – IN THE FOOTSTEP'S OF VAN GOGH

7-day / 6-night self-guided walking holidays (JPV - Revised December 2010)



In 1888 Van Gogh left Paris for Arles in Provence where he started the most ambitious and productive period of his life.

He worked under luminescent skies and the bleaching Provencal Sun painting the fields, drawbridges, cypress trees, cafes, local folk and ancient Abbey Ruins. Here he famously exclaimed 'My God! If only I had known of this country when I was 25, instead of coming here at 35!' Living at Arles, his technique modified as he began to use the swirling brush strokes and intense colours that you see in works like 'Bedroom at Arles' (1888), and 'Starry Night' (1889). He seemed to imbue visible phenomena with vitality.

In his enthusiasm he encouraged the painter Paul Gauguin to join him, but within weeks they began to have violent disagreements, culminating in a quarrel in which van Gogh threatened Gauguin with a razor. It was that night, in deep remorse, Van Gogh famously cut off part of his own ear.

This walk traces his footsteps through some of the places that he painted and would have known well. More specifically you will be strolling in Les Alpilles, a small massif standing out as its white peaks rise apparently sheer from the plain of the Rhône valley, its slopes covered in vineyards along with olive and almond trees. Along paths dotted with cypress trees and lone chapels.

Here you will discover the many images of the Alpilles' landscapes he painted from St-Rémy to the Baux-de-Provence and onto Arles. We are confident that you will have a better time of it than Van Gogh did; for a time he was in a hospital at Arles, he then spent a year in the nearby asylum of Saint-Rémy, working between repeated spells of madness. Just after completing his ominous Crows in the Wheat fields (1890) in the small town of Auvers sur l'Oise near Paris, he shot himself on July 27, 1890, and died two days later.

**Cost:** \$1655 per person twin share Single supplement \$370 Solo traveller supplement 270

**Departs:** Daily day from March to early June and mid September to November. It can be very hot in Provence in July and August and those months are best avoided. This is an ideal trip for spring, early summer or autumn: times of early flowers or golden hues and of Lavender. Spring and autumn can bring rain spells and storms. In winter and occasionally through to March the strong cold Mistral wind can blow.

**Arrival:** Anytime during the day, rooms may not be available if you arrive very early, but you will be able to leave your luggage and explore.

**First hotel:** In Avignon. **End of Tour:** In Arles after breakfast on Day 7.

**Day stages:** 3.5 – 6 hours of easy walking each day.

**Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations**

**Level of difficulty:** Fitness is a very subjective matter, our walking grades presume a certain standard common to similar tours and an individual's perception of their own fitness in relation to a grading will vary. The walking on this tour is mainly easy - some of the days are short. However that some trails are quite rough and stony. You don't have to be super fit to do this tour, but you should be able to walk for a few hours each day. Carry plenty of drinking water and adequate protection against the sun, including a sun hat.

**Waymarks:** The trail follows in the main well-established paths, much of the way being waymarked with local waymarks or the white/red GR (Grande Randonnee) paint marks and presents no special difficulties. Map reading ability is necessary.

**On Self-Guided Tours:** We provide you with route notes and maps.

**Transfer:** Taxis and hotel vehicles transfer clients' bags from one hotel to the next on days 4 & 6. Clients travel with their bags to the first hotel on Day 1, from the last hotel on Day 7 and on Day 2 on the bus to St Remy de Provence (bus ticket included).

**Suggested accommodation & Meals:** 6-continental breakfasts and 4-dinners are included. Dinners normally include entree, main course and dessert; occasionally this is a two-course meal. Picnic lunches are not included in the tour cost but are available from hotels or can easily be obtained from local shops. We indicate in the route notes where there are suitable restaurants or cafes for lunch stops, or recommend you carry food if there are none convenient to the trail.

**Night 1:** in a 2-star hotel inside Avignon's fortified centre. This is an attractive small town hotel on a quiet boulevard; only 15-minutes walk from all the sites and Palace of The Popes.

**Nights 2 & 3:** in a 2-star hotel in Saint Remy de Provence, you will be welcomed to a picturesque and intimate family run hotel offering guests comfortable bedrooms, looking out onto the hotel pool.

**Nights 4 & 5:** at a small, charming hotel in the heart of the Baux de Provence, overlooking the valley below and the Medieval Castle above. Restaurant with panoramic view, lounge with period fireplace and traditional Provençal cuisine using local produce.

**Night 6:** in Arles in a very rustic and typically Provençal structure, our 2-star hotel is located near the Roman theatre and the River Rhone. It is a lovingly restored 16th and 17th century structure with charming 'fin de siècle' rooms.

*Please note that in the case of late bookings or hotel closure we may use various other hotels, which offer a similar standard of accommodation and cuisine*

## GENERAL INFORMATION:

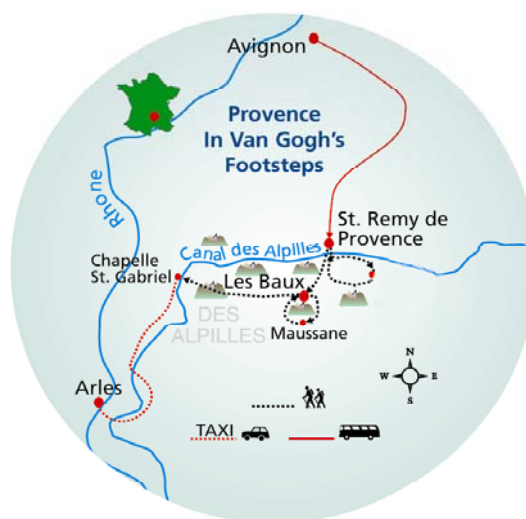
**Baths:** it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.

**Breakfast:** in countries such as France usually consists of coffee and toast/croissant, if you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some food the night before or from patisseries before walking. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

**Single Supplements:** are payable on most of our tours. The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms.

**Language:** Note that you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you have left home to find things different, bring a phrase book, and try to learn a bit of French!

**Luggage:** When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room. Please politely ask someone if you need assistance.



## Suggested itinerary:

**Day 1:** Flight to Marseille. Transfer from airport to railway station to Avignon. Stay inside Avignon's fortified city for the first night. Discover the beauty of one of Provence's great cities. From the "Palais des Papes" to the "Pont d'Avignon," a stroll through history.

The city was a strategic site in the Rhone valley, owing its origin to the Doms rock, which made a great defensive site overlooking the river. With the arrival of the popes in the 14th Century, the city became a second Rome. It was enriched by art in the 17th and 18th Centuries and it remained Papal property up to the French revolution. Stroll around the shopping streets in the pedestrian area (Joseph Vernet and St Agricola streets), the district of la Balance and along the large Ave de Republic. You will find Provençal materials, ceramics and pottery, terra cotta figurines (santons), handicrafts, and other specialties of the region. You may want to try a cruise on the River Rhone. There are cruises of various lengths that you can book up. There is a 1-hour cruise around Avignon to see the Bridge, the Rocher des Doms, Fort St André and Philippe Le Bel tower, in order to look at the bridge and town from the waters edge. (Cruises may not operate early or late in the season). (Dinner not included). Hotel Avignon.

**Day 2:** Saint Remy discovery walk (1 hour 30). Transfer from Avignon towards the Alpilles, (by local bus with your luggage). On your warm-up walk, discover Saint Rémy de Provence, the adopted home of the Marquis de Sade and Van Gogh. You can visit the Greco-Roman site of Glanum (entry charge, closed Mondays). Hotel Saint Rémy. (Dinner included).

**Day 3:** Saint Rémy to Saint Remy (6 hour circuit). Distance 18 km, ascent/descent 830m. Walk from St. Remy into the Alpilles, with great views of the Rhone Valley all the way to the Luberon. This is the hardest walk of the tour with some steep, stoney sections but the views are terrific! Walk up to a mountain cliff wall with holes in it for a different view of Provence. The day can be made easier and a couple of hours saved by missing out the circular ridge section of the walk. Take the time to visit the Saint-Paul de Mausole monastery where Van Gogh created 150 paintings in a year. Hotel Saint Rémy. (Dinner included).

**Day 4:** Saint Remy - Les Baux de Provence. Distance 10 km, 3.5 hours, ascent 650m, descent 520m. A beautiful day from Saint Rémy to les Baux. You'll be staying in the heart of the Baux de Provence (10th century AD) at the summit of the Alpilles with views across to the Camargue. (baux means escarpment in Provençal). A wonderful hilltop town that belonged to the Grimaldi family until 1790. Today, Prince Albert of Monaco retains the honorary title of Marquis of Les Baux. Visit the chateau ruins using the very detailed audio guide (entrance charge about 8 Euros). Hotel in the Baux de Provence. (Dinner included).

**Day 5:** Les Baux de Provence - Maussane - Les Baux circuit. Distance 12 km, (inc. visit to Maussane), 4 hours, ascent and descent 535m. A walk in the Baux Valley, to the typical village of Maussane. Forest trails take you down through gardens and then farmlands of the Baux field 'apron'. Once in Maussane maybe visit the central cafés, morning market (on Thursday) and producers of local wonders like the 17th century Cornille mill where you can taste one of Provence's best olive oils or try a tapenade at 'Jean Martin'. Hotel in the Baux de Provence. (Dinner included).

**Day 6:** Les baux de Provence to Chapelle Saint Gabriel. Distance 16 km, 4-5 hours, ascent 590m, descent 770m. Morning walk from les Baux de Provence to the 12th century Roman Saint Gabriel Chapel; a stroll on good forest trails out of the western edge of the Alpilles Massif. Afterwards, a short transfer to Arles (25 mins) and your hotel in the heart of the city to discover Van Gogh's second home and the city's Roman centre! It has important and well-preserved Roman and Medieval sites, including amphitheatre and baths. Hotel Arles. (Dinner not included).

**Day 7:** Depart Arles after breakfast. Transfer not included to Arles SNCF, for trains to Marseilles, Nimes or Avignon. Extra nights are possible anywhere along the route

**Other walking holidays** – guided in small groups or self-guided with inn-to-inn luggage transfers & meals are available in many parts of Europe through **Outdoor Travel** including in France the **Dordogne**, Vermillion Coast, **Corsica**, Burgundy, Alsace, the **Loire Valley**, Cevennes & the Ardeche. For long distance routes we offer the the **Way of St James** from Le Puy to Conques

### Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations

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