

## FRANCE – WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF VAN GOGH

8-day / 7-night **SELF-GUIDED** inn-to-inn walking holiday from Avignon to St Remy, Les Baux and Arles



This walk traces the footsteps of the great *Impressioniste* painter Vincent Van Gogh through places that he painted and would have known well in Provence. Stroll through the limestone outcrops of in Les Alpilles, a massif of white rock peaks that seem to rise apparently sheer from the plain of the Rhône Valley. Walk a landscape of vineyards, olive groves and almond trees, along paths dotted with cypress trees and churches.

Van Gogh left Paris for Arles in 1888 and started the most ambitious and productive period of his life. He worked under luminescent skies and the bleaching Provençal sun painting fields, drawbridges, cypress trees, cafés, the local farming 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.

On this easy to moderate walk – with pre-booked typical Provençal family run comfortable hotels and daily baggage transfers – you can discover many of the Alpilles landscapes that he painted, from St Rémy to Les Baux de Provence and onto the once Roman city of Arles. See for yourself the quintessential honey coloured villages and ancient buildings. Then rest in the early evening with a dish of exquisite French food and wine.

**Dates:** Daily on demand from March to June and from September to mid-November.

**Cost from:** **\$1795** per person twin share  
**\$2025** per person twin share, boutique hotels  
Season supplements from \$160 per person late April to June and late August to September  
Single room and Solo Traveller supplements on request

**Included:** 7 nights’ comfortable accommodation in 3-star hotels with ensuite bathrooms, 7 continental breakfasts, detailed route notes and maps and GPX files, local tourist information, luggage transfers between hotels (clients take their luggage with them on the Day 2 transfer), client transfers as per the itinerary, emergency assistance hotline.

**Not included:** Lunches and dinners, drinks, transfer from Arles on Day 8 (transfer back to Avignon may be arranged at extra cost, please ask for details), optional sightseeing, museum entrance fees, personal items.

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**Walking Notes:** 3 – 6 hours of easy to moderate walking each day. The walking is mainly easy, and some days are short. However terrain can be rough and stony, and high temperatures can make the walks more challenging. Carry plenty of drinking water and adequate sun protection including a hat.

In June and September, accessible walks and trails may be determined by weather conditions. If a walk is not possible due to weather conditions or fire risk (you will be given an information phone number and will need to check the conditions locally) or for any personal reason, any extra costs due to modifications on the spot will be at your own expense.

### **Suggested itinerary:**

#### **Day 1: Arrive Avignon**

Make your own way to your first hotel in Avignon. You are free to arrive at any time during the day, and if your room is not quite ready you can leave your bags at the hotel and go off and explore. Discover the beauty of one of Provence's great cities. Stay in a hotel on one of the leafy city streets of Avignon for the first night.

#### **Day 2 Avignon – Saint Rémy (transfer) & walking in Saint Rémy** **walking @ 4km**

After breakfast, spend the morning discovering Avignon; from the *Palais des Papes* to the *Pont d'Avignon*, this is a stroll through history. Perhaps visit the covered markets which are on every morning except Mondays. After lunch take a private transfer by taxi (taking your bags with you) from Avignon towards the Alpilles. You are free to take a short, warm-up walk and discover Saint Rémy de Provence, the adopted home of the Marquis de Sade and Van Gogh, via the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC Greco-Roman site of Glanum (entry cost additional, closed Mondays) and into the surrounding hills. The town's Van Gogh walking tour heads away from the town centre and towards the foot of the Alpilles, and enamel reproductions of his works face the landscapes that inspired them. Van Gogh spent the last year of his life in Saint Rémy, completing some of his most renowned works, including *Starry Night*. Stroll through the tiny labyrinth of streets in the centre of town, taking the time to choose between several excellent restaurants. You stay two nights in Saint Rémy.

#### **Day 3 Circular walk from and back to Saint Rémy** **walking @ 10km or 18km**

Walk from Saint Rémy into the Alpilles hills with great views of the Rhône Valley all the way to the Luberon. Take the time to visit the Saint-Paul de Mausole monastery where Van Gogh created 150 paintings in a year's time. Enjoy your second night in Saint Rémy.

#### **Day 4 Saint Rémy – Les Baux de Provence** **walking @ 10km**

A memorable walk from Saint Rémy into the Baux valley starts with an ascent to the ridge, then follow a track among wild thyme and cistus flowers, with open views north to the mountains and south to the flatlands. The medieval village of Les Baux de Provence, perched on its rocky spur (bau means escarpment in Provençal) appears in the distance and you continue along the ridgeline trail to the village. This charming hilltop town belonged to the Grimaldi family until 1790, and Prince Albert of Monaco retains the honorary title of Marquis of Les Baux. You stay in the heart of Les Baux for two nights.

#### **Day 5 Circular walk to Maussane** **walking @ 12km**

Today's walk is through the Baux Valley to Maussane. Exiting the village from its medieval gate you descend by a winding forestry path to the plains, and via canals and olive groves you reach the typical Provençal village of Maussane. Enjoy the village centre's cafés and local producers like the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Cornille mill where you can taste one of Provence's best olive oils, or try a tapenade at Jean Martin. If you are in Maussane on a Thursday you can explore the village's morning market. Refuel for the walk back up to Les Baux on a hidden path behind the village, for your second night's stay.

#### **Day 6 Les Baux – Chapelle Saint Gabriel, transfer to Arles** **walking @ 16km**

Enjoy a morning walk to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Romanesque St Gabriel Chapel. Afterwards, there is a short transfer to Arles and your hotel in the heart of the city, where you stay two nights. This allows plenty of time to discover Van Gogh's second home and explore the UNESCO World Heritage-listed city centre, with its Roman and Romanesque remains, including the amphitheatre, the baths of Constantine, and the Roman and medieval city walls and ramparts.

#### **Day 7 Free day in Arles**

A free day in Arles to explore (market days are Wednesday or Saturday) or discover the Rhône River delta, the Camargue, which is only a few kilometres southward (return journey by bus to Les Saintes Maries de la Mer – cost not included) and the coast.

#### **Day 8 Departure day**

Tour arrangements end after breakfast in Arles.

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

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