

## FRANCE – THE CHATEAUX OF THE LOIRE VALLEY

8-days/ 7-nights **SELF-GUIDED** inn-to-inn walking holiday



This is France's '*Valley of the Kings*', where throughout history great palaces and castles have been constructed. It is a landscape that inspired Balzac, the place **Leonardo da Vinci** spent his final days and is buried, where Joan of Arc reputedly fought the English during the Hundred Years' War.

The Loire is a major wine region supporting a thriving tourism industry and a unique regional cuisine. The walking here can be hilly for short bursts, but generally the combination of pathways and farm and forest trails make for easily manageable gentle walking and a wonderful introduction to walking in France. Our walk takes you to the great chateaux at Amboise, Chenonceau, Azay le Rideau, Villandry and Chinon and through the great vineyards of Vouvray, Chinon, Saumur, and Anjou.

The combination of walking, spectacular historical sites, the food and wines of the Loire, makes this walk full of interest and pleasure and an ideal place to start for those with a love of France or setting out on a walking holiday for the first time.

**Departs:** Daily on demand, 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> October

**Cost from:** **\$2620** per person twin share.  
Single room supplement on request.

**Tour starts:** Amboise **Ends:** Saumur

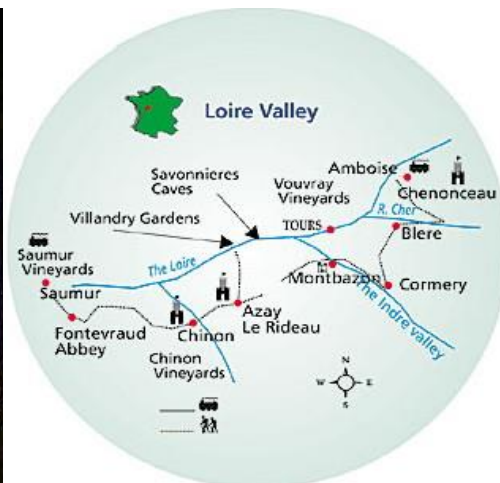
**Includes:** 7 nights' of hotel accommodation with ensuite facilities; luggage transfers (1 bag per person up to 20kg), 7 breakfasts, 1 dinner, route notes and maps (1 set per room), transfers as per itinerary, emergency assistance.

**Not included:** Lunches, snacks, drinks, 6 dinners, entrance fees, travel to/from the start and end point of the tour, personal expenses, taxis or unscheduled transfers required during the trip, travel insurance, etc.

**Grading:** This tour is graded Easy to Moderate. This walk should present no difficulties for anyone in reasonable condition and accustomed to day-walks in undulating countryside.

**Accommodation and Meals:** Accommodation is in 2 and 3-star hotels and on 1 night in a 5-star hotel, one of the *Relais et Chateaux* group of hotels. The hotels described are our usual choice; if not available then we use alternatives (sometimes with a supplement) and you will be advised when booking. One evening is on a half board basis (dinner, bed & breakfast); on six nights bed and breakfast only are included and dinner can be obtained from nearby restaurants. Picnic lunches are not included in the tour cost but are available from hotels at extra cost; alternatively picnic food can be bought along the route.

**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details and reservations**



## Suggested itinerary:

The following itinerary is offered as a working guide only and may be subject to variation depending on the weather and other factors. Time is allowed to visit chateaux and other sites of interest along the way, but entry fees **are not** included in the tour price.

### Day 1: Arrive Amboise

Aim to arrive in Amboise, a picturesque town on the south bank of the Loire, in the afternoon, so you have some time to explore. The old town boasts the still impressive remnants of what was a magnificent chateau as well as Le Clos Luce, a redbrick manor house that was the home of the great inventor Leonardo da Vinci for three years until his death in 1519. The chateau and Le Clos Luce (which incorporates a museum of models based on da Vinci's designs) are both open to the public, each requiring about an hour to visit.

Our usual hotel is a fine provincial wood beamed 2-star Logis de France hotel in the heart of Amboise, a short walk from Le Clos Luce and near the railway station. Amboise is reached by direct intercity train from Paris Gare d'Austerlitz (2 hours), or by TGV from Paris Montparnasse connecting to regional train in St-Pierre-des-Corps (1.5 hours). Seat reservations are compulsory on TGV services.

### Day 2: Amboise to Chenonceaux

**walking @ 16km**

Amble through the Forêt d'Amboise to Chenonceau where you can have lunch and then spend the rest of the day visiting one of the very finest of the Loire chateaux, the 'chateau shaped by women' (*château des dames*) which 'stretches across the River Cher in a perfect harmony of water, greenery, gardens and trees in a fine natural setting'. A visit takes up to 2 hours.

Stay in a comfortable 2-star *Logis de France* in Chenonceaux, with exposed beams and a magnificent fireplace in the dining room. The cuisine here is famed for its quality so you may like to have dinner here.

An upgrade to a 3-star hotel is possible in Chenonceaux with a supplement (ask for details). This is a charming hotel about 150 metres from the Chateau de Chenonceau. Celebrities such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Churchill, Rockefeller and many others have stayed here. There is a swimming pool, a peaceful garden and restaurant. Please ask about cost and availability when booking.

### Day 3: Chenonceaux to Montbazon

**walking @ 27km**

Start the day with a short transfer (included in tour price) from Chenonceaux through farmland from the valley of the Cher to that of the Indre and the village of Reignac. You then walk following the GR46 along the valley, through fields of sunflowers to the village of Montbazon on the edge of the city of Tours. A highlight is the ancient Gallo-Roman bridge, which carries the GR41 (here a narrow mule path through a forest) across a tributary of the Indre. Montbazon is home to what is said to be the oldest castle in France – the Fortress of the Black Falcon, built by Fulk Nerra, Count of Anjou, in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century.

The walk from Veigne to Montbazon at the end of the day is rather suburban and can be avoided by taking a short taxi ride from Veigne (at own expense) – this shortens the walk by about 6km.

In Montbazon your accommodation is a well-appointed riverside annex of the Chateau d'Artigny, one of the famous 'Relais et Chateaux' group of hotels, situated on a bluff with a fine view over the river Indre. If you choose to dine here, dinner is a special event (smart attire recommended) with an excellent wine list.

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#### **Day 4: Montbazou to Azay-le-Rideau**

**walking @ 27km or 15km**

Today there are two alternatives: the first is to follow the GR3 from Montbazou along the banks of the Indre to Azay-le-Rideau. On the way visit the former home of the novelist Balzac in the small chateau at Sache. This route is about 27km and 6 hours of walking. Alternatively you can hire a taxi (paid locally, cost approx. €50-60) to take you from Montbazou to the celebrated gardens at Villandry, one of the wonders of France. From Villandry it is about 3½ hours' walk past the confluence of the Rivers Cher and Loire and along picturesque woodland paths and quiet roads to Azay-le-Rideau. Both Villandry and Azay-le-Rideau are awarded the highest accolade by the Michelin Guide. The *son et lumiere* (sound and light) display at Azay-le-Rideau makes for a memorable after-dinner stroll.

In Azay, your hotel is set in the heart of this charming village, 50 metres from the chateau. The 18<sup>th</sup> Century house was built in a style typical of the Tours area. One feature of the hotel is the 19<sup>th</sup> Century former school across the flower decked patio which, like the rest of the hotel, has been tastefully transformed into delightful accommodation. Bed and breakfast included; there is a wide choice of restaurants and bistros nearby.

#### **Day 5: Azay-le-Rideau to Chinon**

**walking @ 27km**

Start the day with a brief visit to the chateau of Azay, one of the gems of the Renaissance. Then walk via the village of St Benoit-la-Forêt, set in the midst of the vast forest of Chinon, and on to Chinon itself, a medieval town dominated by the walls of its ruined castle (once Henry II's favourite residence), at the centre of a well-known wine-growing region. This is the longest day of the tour, with at least seven hours of walking over undulating terrain. Reward yourself with a glass (or two) of local wine at the end of the day. Chinon's reds are light-bodied, elegant and structured, made from Cabernet Franc, and the whites are primarily Chenin Blanc, made in a light, easy-drinking and refreshing style.

Your hotel in Chinon has the charm of an authentic dwelling-place built in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and modified in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. It is just a few hundred metres from the town centre, the medieval quarter and the chateau.

#### **Day 6: Chinon to Fontevraud**

**walking @ 16km**

After visiting the chateau and its Jeanne d'Arc museum (allow 1 to 2 hours), you cross the river Vienne and follow its left bank downstream for a few kilometres before striking off across the Forêt de Fontevraud to the celebrated abbey of that name, the most extensive set of monastic buildings in France. The 12<sup>th</sup> Century abbey church houses the tombs of several Plantagenet royals.

Stay near Fontevraud in a charming country house built with the luminous limestone of the Loire Valley. The oldest part of the house – as well as the tithe barn – date from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. This agricultural estate was once the home farm of the Abbey at Fontevraud and has been owned by the same family since the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The buildings have been elegantly renovated and the family now welcomes guests to well-appointed guest rooms. Dinner in the hotel restaurant this evening.

#### **Day 7: Fontevraud to Saumur**

**walking @ 21km**

Continue your walk to Montsoreau, at the confluence of the Vienne and the Loire, where the caves in the river cliffs are used for mushroom cultivation. From Montsoreau walk through vineyards along the steep south bank of the Loire to Saumur, famous for its wines, its cavalry school, and its chateau overlooking the Loire. In the historic town of Saumur, stay in a centrally located small 3-star Logis hotel, close to the chateau. Bed and breakfast is included; there is a wide choice of restaurants nearby for that final dinner.

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

Tour arrangements end in Saumur after breakfast. Saumur is well-connected by train to Tours and Angers with onward connections to Nantes, Paris, Bordeaux and other parts of France. If you have time, we highly recommend a visit to one of the historic cities of Angers, Tours or Blois.

**Extra nights** can be arranged at Amboise, Saumur or any of the stops along the route. Please ask about cost and availability when booking.

Other walking holidays from **Outdoor Travel** – guided in small groups or self-guided with inn-to-inn luggage transfers and meals – are available in many parts of Europe including the **Way of St James** from Le Puy to Santiago from France to Spain, walks on the **Amalfi or Cinque Terre** Coast in Italy, **Circuit of Mont Blanc** in the Alps and the **West Highland Way** in Scotland or the classic Wainwrights **Coast to Coast** walk in England.

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

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