

Fairy Tale France Les Plus Beaux Villages

Twelve Day Tour ~ September 20 – October 1, 2025

Highlights: Roundtrip Airfare Newark to Toulouse and Bordeaux to Newark • One Dreamy Night Cordes sur Ciel • Four Fairy Tale Nights at the Stunning Manoir de Larouque Delprat, Autoire • Four Charming Nights at the Panoramic Hotel L'Esplanade, Domme • One Beachy Night at La Grande Hotel de la Plage, Biscarrosse • Regions of Dordogne & The Lot • Les Plus Beaux Villages de France • Stunning Saint Cirq Lapopie • Astonishing Autoire • Charming Carennac • Gouffre de Padirac • Chateau de Montal • Colorful Collonges des Rouges • Lovely Loubressac • Autoire's Cascading Waterfall Walk • Chateau des Anglais Hike • La Borie D'Imbert Goat Cheese Farm • Remarkable Rocamadour • Chapelle Notre Dame's Miracle Madonna • Ferme des Alix Lavender Shop • Walnut Farm & Mill • Truffadou Scenic Train Ride • Marvelous Martel • Water Gardens of Carsac Aillac • Dapper Domme • Chateau des Milandes • Falconry Display • The Sorcerer's Cave • Les Eyzies de Tayac • Prehistoric Paintings of Fonte de Gaume • Splendid Saint Leon sur Vezere • Spectacular Sarlat la Caneda • Manoir de Gisson • Chateau de Lacypierre • Beautiful Beynac • Magnificent Monpazier • Marqueyssac Gardens • La Rocque Gagneau • Gabarre Cruise • Dune du Pilat • Sensational Saint Emilion • All Breakfasts • TBD Lunches • TBD Dinners • Fully Escorted

There are few special places in the world where authentic, innate beauty remains even to this day, places where time stands still among quaint medieval villages perched on cliffs to turreted chateaux nestled in lush greenery. The valleys of the Dordogne and Lot in the southwest corner of France is a place that emanates this essence and where fairy tales come to life. We'll travel slowly through these regions along narrow winding country roads taking in all the pristine scenery past ancient castles and medieval villages that stand as silent witnesses to centuries of history just waiting to be discovered. These regions shared a tumultuous and legendary past leaving an incredible cultural heritage throughout the land. We'll immerse in this past as we travel through Les Plus Beaux Villages de France, the most beautiful villages in France, where rivers meander through pastoral countryside or carve their way below spectacular cliffs. Along our journey will be many unique marvels that have withstood the test of time from prehistoric cave paintings and places of pilgrimage to giant chasms, medieval fortresses, and Renaissance castles. Stand tall upon a natural phenomenon, the highest sand dune in Europe with mesmerizing views of the sparkling sea and wander through enchanted magical gardens filled with surprises. If all of this sounds like the perfect dream, then grab your magic wand and give it a swirl and we'll whisk you away on our fairy tale adventure in France!

Day 1. Get comfortable and a few winks of sleep on our overnight flight where we wake up in France!

Day 2. We'll step into our first fairy tale at the captivating Cordes sur Ciel, a place evoking the imagined image of a village perched in the sky. This is a timeless place with 800 years of history felt in its medieval atmosphere. As one of the bastides or fortified towns built during periods of prosperity in the Middle Ages, the village is designed by skilled mathematicians with streets surrounding a central square where you can still enjoy getting lost in a maze of time. After checking into our comfy B&B take a trip back to the Middle Ages as you wander the cobbled streets past fortified doors, ramparts, and carved Gothic facades.



Carennac – The Lot



Marqueyssac Gardens

Day 3. Our fairy tale adventure brings us into The Lot with perfectly preserved villages of beauty, rich heritage and timeless charms. Perched above the Lot River we'll find the stunning Saint Cirq Lapopie, straight out of the Middle Ages. The best way to approach this beauty is to walk the Chemin de Halage Bouzies or towboat path, a picturesque walkway carved out of limestone rocks that hugs the Lot River. Once our feet hit the town, immerse in the nobility of its architecture and the elegance of its arcades, staircases, and fortified gates as you wander the medieval streets. Stop for lunch when you like at one of the many enticing cafes and restaurants along your path. Now we make our way through the lovely countryside to our new home in The Little Versailles, the astonishing Autoire. Developed during the Renaissance, this tiny village adopted its nickname from the numerous noblemen who took residence here. You'll feel like part of the nobility as we check into our new manor home for the next four nights at the extraordinary Manoir de Laroque Delprat dating from the 17th century. Meander through the narrow lanes past the village's honey colored stone and brown tiled roofs that harmoniously blend with the dramatic cliff backdrop to flower decked fountain in the village square.

Day 4. Let's get to know this tiny beauty of a village, Autoire and its hidden wondrous secrets. A short walk from town following the river into the shade of the forests will bring us to the delightful Cascade d'Autoire waterfall. This little beauty starts high in the surrounding cliffs and flows through the valley all the way to town then out into the plains of the Dordogne. A magical carriage ride will take us to charming Carennac, dating from the 11th century but with traces of human existence since neolithic times. After an included lunch, survey this enchanting village kingdom at your whim and fancy. Don't miss the church of Saint Pierre with its ornately carved portal that is simply divine and the adjoining cloister and picturesque courtyard. Set your eyes in amazement among the Chateau des Doyens dramatically built in case of attack. Now we get close to the center of the Earth at Gouffre de Padirac on an incredible subterranean journey into a world of wonders. This spellbinding natural wonder allows us to explore a network of caverns and take an underground boat ride through pristine turquoise water. Once back in lovely Autoire, the night is yours as you please.

Day 5. Grab your tiara because today we're invited to visit the French Renaissance jewel, Chateau de Montal. Our guided tour will take us through this romantic multi-faceted castle that was part medieval fortress, part residential palace built by a widow, a work of art looted but then restored, and a refuge for Mona Lisa during the Second World War. After, wander the lovely grounds and take in the peaceful views. Your ruby slippers will fit in perfectly with the blazing red buildings that make up the colorful village Collonges-la-Rouge. Take a wander through this dreamy little town with its flamboyant stonework and ochre colored slate that is quintessentially French and find a tasty lunch on your own. Lovely Loubressac set on a rocky outcrop with picturesque panoramic views is our next delight. This flowery hilltop village filled with peaceful courtyards, decorative balconies, and fairy tale staircases leading to winding cobbled lanes is just perfect for exploration. Once back home in Autoire, join our adventurous hike to the Chateau des Anglais, a ruined 13th century castle built into a cliff overlooking the town with extensive views of the valley and plains below or just relax in the beauty of our Manor Home.

Day 6. If you haven't noticed already, the Lot region is home to some of the most acclaimed foods of France including foie gras, truffles, and of course cheese! We must make a stop at the goat cheese farm La Borie d'Imbert where we'll meet the goats who make all this yumminess possible then watch the magic as it happens with live cheese production in the factory. While we're here, we must sample some! Onto remarkable Rocamadour, a sacred city where miracles happen. Built on three levels within a cliff, Rocamadour is a place of legend and history where ancient stone houses and majestic towers cascade off the cliff into the Alzou Canyon. Feel a thousand years of history beneath your feet as you roam through this important pilgrimage site to the Grand Staircase separating the lower town from the Sanctuary made up of eight chapels including the Chapelle Notre Dame and its miracle giving Black Madonna. Wander the ramparts for amazing views, become awestruck by fabulous frescoes, and find a delicious lunch at your favorite spot on your own. The floral fragrance of lavender will fill our senses at La Ferme des Alix. Browse the farm shop and learn the magical powers and history of true lavender. A special treat will put a spell on you at our next secret stop!

Day 7. We continue our fairyland quest as we travel the rolling hills past ancient villages with hidden castles into the heart of the Dordogne. Since the 10th century, walnuts have been cultivated in this region for their medicinal and nutritional values and today we'll be part of that history on our visit to Moulin a Huile, a walnut farm and oil mill. Marvelous Martel with 12th century meandering streets and stunning architecture resembling illustrations straight out of a fairy tale book is our next exploration. Wander through this enchanting town past the beautifully preserved medieval houses separated by intertwining passages and small cobbled streets and find a tasty French lunch on your own. As Martel grew over the centuries, it became the Kingdom of the Truffle with its own steam train used as transport for these delectables. We'll take a scenic ride on the Truffadou along these same tracks that offer a wonderful panorama of the Dordogne Valley. A fanciful garden that looks like a Monet painting come to life awaits at the Water Gardens at Carsac-Aillac. Stroll the unique aquatic labyrinth across Japanese bridges past exotic water lilies and croaking frogs. Our new home will be in dapper Domme, a stunning bastide medieval town perched on a hill with extraordinary views of the Dordogne Valley and meandering river below. Spend your evening exploring the narrow passageways lined with lovely golden yellow stone houses and fortified arches then make your way up to walk along the ramparts with three impressive original doors. Search for the secret held inside the towers here that was once a prison that held the Knights Templars.

Day 8. Put on your glass slippers because it's time to explore the Sleeping Beauty castle Chateau des Milandes. Built in 1489, this charming castle with its magnificent Gothic features and Renaissance architectural treats including turrets, winding staircases, and stained-glass windows has a most interesting past to reveal. Take your time to explore every nook and cranny and learn its history from being a home for an eminent family from the French aristocracy to the home for the colorful American cabaret singer/dancer Josephine Baker whose art deco styled bathrooms remain among the castle walls. Enjoy an included lunch at the brasserie, then wander the delightful French garden and landscaped park and join the Birds of Prey Demonstration where we promise you won't be the prey. Now we'll be transported back to prehistoric times as we explore the Sorcerer's Cave. In a small hamlet of pretty, stone buildings with rare stone roofs lies a cave with engravings made by prehistoric man during the Magdalenian period about 17,000 years ago. What makes these engravings even more special is the "Sorcerer" as human figures are a rare find in prehistoric art. There are only 12 other human representations dating from prehistoric times in France so this will be a rare treat! On our way to another prehistoric discovery, we'll pass through the lovely town Les Eyzies de Tayac centered in an area filled with cliff and rock formations surrounded by rivers, hills and tranquil countryside. It's here where we'll step into 14,000 BC in Fonte de Gaume where evidence showed human inhabitation up through the age of the Neanderthals. Follow the path of ancient history to be amazed by beautiful, well preserved prehistoric art adorning the walls. Splendid Saint Leon sur Vezere is close by so we must take a peek at its charms and get lost in its narrow meandering pathways and alleys.

Day 9. Beautiful Beynac is on the next page of our fairy tale book. We'll follow the traces of medieval times along its stone paved streets and houses in blond stone all the way up to the magnificent Chateau de Beynac. You will instantly be turned into a knight or a queen (and hopefully not a frog!) once you step among this fortress's majestic facades with views overlooking your village kingdom. Turn the page and we'll step into spectacular Sarlat the most renowned beautiful village in France and for good reason. With so much history and beauty in every square inch take time to look in every direction to find all the treasures surrounding you. Pop into the elegance of the 13th century Manoir de Gisson then join us for an included quick lunch so there's lots of time to explore. A very special treat awaits at Chateau de Lacypierre, a place of enchantment where we'll discover the family history of its reconstruction as it was saved from decay and ruin to the grand beauty you'll be delighted by today.

Day 10. It may be a bit out of the way, but we can't miss magnificent Monpazier, a bastide town par excellence. Here you can discover medieval life in its main square which is almost completely intact from 600 years ago. and is surrounded by beautiful stone houses and a market hall with its original weigh scales. This is one place you can't get lost as the streets are parallel in grid form, so take a wander and see what treasures are revealed. More magnificence will be uncovered at the dreamy Gardens of Marqueyssac made up of a spellbinding swirl of box hedges set high above the Dordogne River. Stroll among the stunning scenery and find the wooded cliff top with swings to take in the views along with a hidden waterfall and interesting collection of "heads" in the woods. The perfect picture post card village of La Roque Gageac sits at the foot of a towering limestone cliff along the banks of the Dordogne River. We'll find our way along the labyrinth of cobbled streets to our scenic ride on a gabare. Now explore the village passing by the impressive Manoir de la Tarde and Chateau de la Malartrie, fortress built into a cliff, and the glorious exotic hidden garden next to the parish church.

Day 11. We must say adieu to the wonderful Dordogne but more spectacular sights await! Our countryside drive will lead us towards Bordeaux with a stop along the way at the wine lovers Saint Emilion. Discover this splendid village that feels like an outdoor museum with a history spanning 13 centuries all around you. Wander and find some lunch on your own before we make our way to the next bewildering natural wonder. As we make our way to the Atlantic coast a towering surprise of sand will set the scenery. Dune du Pilat is Europe's tallest sand dune that is wedged between the sparkling sea and a glittering green pine forest. Over thousands of years nature has created this extraordinary dune that is a fascinating array of shapes and colors ever changing with time and season. It's definitely worth the climb for the staggering views that bring a peaceful serenity. We spend our last night among the brilliant coast at Le Grande Hotel de la Plage located on the edge of the ocean in the beach town Biscarrosse. Get into a beachy vibe and enjoy a relaxing evening with our last included dinner together as we toast to a fabulous fairy tale.

Day 12. It's so hard to say goodbye to such a fairy tale dream, so why not bring those feelings along back home where we can often return to this lovely region of France among our memories. © 2024 The Educated Wanderer

Air transportation is provided by United Airlines. A surcharge will apply if United Airlines increases the price of its airfare. One piece of luggage per person (baggage fee by United is included) and one small carry-on are permitted. **A valid, government-issued picture ID is required to board the plane.**

Saturday, September 20: Flight # departs Newark at PM and arrives in Paris at AM

Flight # departs Paris at PM and arrives in Toulouse at PM

Wednesday, October 1: Flight # departs Bordeaux at PM and arrives in Paris at PM

Flight # departs Paris at PM and arrives in Newark at PM

Price per person is \$ Twin & \$ Single. No reservations accepted without a deposit of \$500 per person. Make checks payable to "Group Tours & Travel", and mail to our address above. Final payment is due May 5, 2024. There are no refunds if cancellation occurs after May 5, 2024. Group Tours is not responsible for any delays, cancellations, injuries or circumstances beyond its control and reserves the right to change the itinerary. All trip components are subject to change in accordance with Government, State and Local guidelines and/or mandates. Travel protection/cancellation coverage is available and highly recommended, but not included. This tour will run rain or shine. Visit www.educatedwanderer.com for additional tours and photos.

*Due to the changes in airline booking policies, airfare will need to be booked before the cancellation date. Once flights are booked, we cannot refund that portion of the tour unless you'd like to pay an additional cost for refundable tickets.

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