

French Castles Tour



Châteaux of Paris and the Loire Valley

Visit and tour Paris, the capital of France, and spend three nights there altogether – two at the beginning and one at the end.

Spend four nights in the Loire Valley, the garden of France. With its mild climate the Loire was the favourite residence of kings and their kin. It remains a corner of paradise, with its dream-like palaces, elegant towns, quiet landscapes and majestic rivers. The vineyards are a feast to the eyes and their fruits a joy to the palate.

Castle, palace and regional highlights include the Montmartre district, the Palace of Versailles, the Eiffel Tower, a Seine Cruise, and Notre Dame in Paris; Fontainebleau Palace, Orléans, Chenonceau Palace, Amboise Castle and village, Manor Clos-Lucé, Cheverny and Chambord Châteaux, Blois Castle and town, Villandry Château, and Tours.

Map



*It is not yet the south.
And it is no longer the north
It is a fine compromise,
A peaceful area
Where the two faces of
France meet.*

– Maurice Bedel
La Touraine
(1952)

Itinerary

Day 1 - DEPARTURE

Board your flight from your home destination to Paris, France. This itinerary assumes this to be an overnight flight.

Air fare independently arranged.



Day 2 - WELCOME TO PARIS

Arrival in Paris, France.

Individual transfer to your hotel in Paris.

Tonight you'll meet your travelling companions and tour director, and enjoy a welcome dinner in Montmartre, the artist district high above the city with great panoramic views.



> Your tour includes: Transfer from airport to Paris hotel, welcome dinner with menu choices and wine (or, of course, something else), hotel in Paris

Day 3 - PARIS - VERSAILLES, EIFFEL TOWER

After breakfast, board your sparkling clean coach to go for a guided tour of VERSAILLES, perhaps the most famous palace in the world. From 1682, when King Louis XIV moved from Paris, until the royal family was forced to return to the capital in 1789, the Court of Versailles was the centre of power in France. Spend several hours visiting the Palace of Palaces and the famous gardens with the elegant fountains.

In the afternoon we go up to the second floor of the EIFFEL TOWER for majestic views. This tower, built for the 1889 World's Fair, is one of the most recognizable structures in the world and is the most visited paid monument anywhere.

Dinner tonight is on your own.



> Buffet breakfast, door-to-door transportation, tour of Versailles, entrance to Eiffel Tower, hotel in Paris

Day 4 - FONTAINEBLEAU, ORLÉANS, CÉRÉ LA RONDE

We leave Paris this morning to visit nearby FONTAINEBLEAU. Used by the kings of France from the 12th century, the medieval royal hunting lodge of Fontainebleau – standing at the heart of a vast forest in the Ile-de-France – was transformed, enlarged and embellished in the 16th century by François I, who wanted to make a 'New Rome' of it. Surrounded by an immense park, the Italianate palace combines Renaissance and French artistic traditions.

We continue on to ORLÉANS, the city which Joan of Arc liberated in 1429. Breaking the English siege was one of the great episodes in the history of France, and marked the rebirth of a country and a of people that had been sinking into despair. Enjoy free time here for lunch.

Later we continue to our new home – the Château de Razay in CÉRÉ LA RONDE, in the heart of the Loire Valley. The chateau was built at the end of the 15th century and is surrounded by 85 acres of grounds and woodlands.



> Buffet breakfast, door-to-door transportation, guided tour of Fontainebleau Castle, three-course dinner with menu choices, one beverage, and coffee or tea, hotel - Château de Razay in Céré La Ronde

Day 5 - CHENONCEAU PALACE, AMBOISE CASTLE, CLOS-LUCÉ

In the morning we go first to visit nearby CHENONCEAU, the “Ladies Castle”. This beautiful castle stretches across the River Cher in a harmonious natural setting of water, greenery, gardens and trees. Over a period of 400 years this castle was shaped by women, royal wives, mistresses and queens.

The chateau of Chenonceau, shrouded in aristocratic dignity, exudes a strangely suave atmosphere. It lies at some distance from the village, which stands respectfully to one side. It can be glimpsed at the end of a wide avenue enhanced with greenery, surrounded by woods, framed by a vast park boasting fine lawns. Built on rippling waters, it rears its pretty turrets and square chimneys into the skies. The Cher runs beneath it, swirling at the foot of its arches, whose pointed features break up in the sparkling current. The general feeling is one of gentle peace, elegance and comforting strength. Its stillness is not remotely boring and its melancholy is never conductive or remorse.

– Gustave Flaubert, *Par les Champs et les Grèves* (1847)

We continue on to Amboise for lunch, and afterwards visit the CHÂTEAU D'AMBOISE, once a very important royal residence and home for several French kings. Charles VIII died here after hitting his head against a low doorway. The palace is a mix of Gothic and Renaissance architecture, and is now less than a third of the size it was in the 16th century.

Amboise is closely associated with the last three years of the life of Leonardo da Vinci. He is believed to be buried in the Chapel St. Hubert on the ramparts of the Castle.

Day 5 - Continued

Da Vinci lived nearby in MANOR CLOS-LUCÉ as a guest of King Francis. We visit this palace, now a museum with period furniture, sketches and working models of the ideas of this renaissance genius.



> Buffet breakfast, door-to-door transportation, entrance fees and guided tours of the above castles, three-course dinner, hotel - Château de Razay in Céré La Ronde

Day 6 - CHEVERNY, CHAMBORD, BLOIS CASTLE AND TOWN

This morning our first visit is to the CHÂTEAU DE CHEVERNY. The symmetric design and harmonious grandeur of the façade are characteristic features of the period of Henri IV and Louis XIII. The interior is sumptuously appointed, with beautiful furniture, sculptures, gilt work, marble and multicoloured paneling.

We continue with a very short ride to CHÂTEAU DE CHAMBORD:

Chambord is truly royal – royal in its great scale, its grand air, its indifference to common considerations. – Henry James

This château, the largest by far of all the Loire châteaux, is built on a scale foreshadowing that of the Palace of Versailles. All year round, from sunset to midnight, a sophisticated system of floodlighting allows visitors to feast their eyes on the castle’s outstanding architecture, set off by a dazzling kaleidoscope or red, white, yellow and blue.

On to the Royal City of Blois where we visit the ROYAL CHÂTEAU DE BLOIS, the residence of several French kings and also the place where Joan of Arc went in 1429 to be blessed by the Archbishop of Reims before departing with her army to drive the English from Orléans.

Built in the middle of the town that it effectively controlled, the Château de Blois comprises several buildings constructed from the 13th to the 17th century around the main courtyard. Its most famous piece of architecture is the magnificent spiral staircase in the François I wing.

Free time for dinner in this beautiful city on the hillside overlooking the river Loire where many of the medieval streets still remain.

> Buffet breakfast, door-to-door transportation, entrance fees and tours of the above castles, hotel - Château de Razay in Céré La Ronde



Day 7 - VILLANDRY, TOURS

Today we visit CHÂTEAU DE VILLANDRY, one of the last great Renaissance chateaux to be built in the Loire Valley. It has unusual features for the Touraine area, such as rectangular pavilions instead of round towers, as well as a distinctive layout of the esplanade and its moat. However, Villandry's international fame is based not so much on the chateau as on its gardens, which are among the most fascinating in all of France and Europe.

In the afternoon we drive to TOURS, the capital of Touraine, a thriving economic and cultural centre. Go for a stroll in Place Plumereau, a picturesque and animated square, once a marketplace, lined with 15th century timber-framed houses alternating with stone facades.

Enjoy a café au lait in the square and get your final Loire Valley souvenirs.



Tonight we are having a nice dinner in a medieval village.

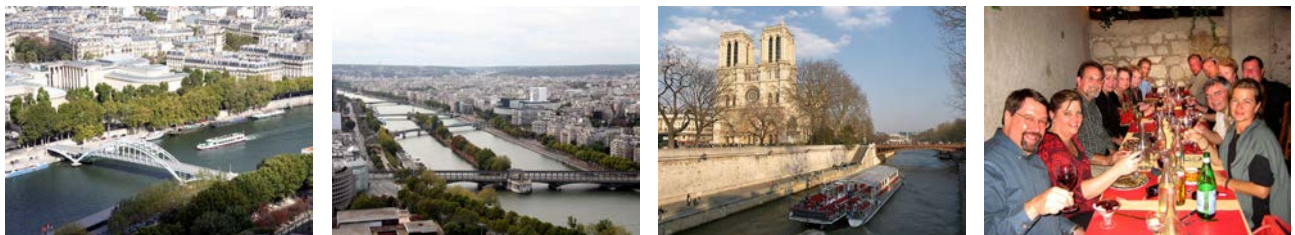
> Buffet breakfast, door-to-door transportation, entrance fees and tours of the above castles, three-course dinner, hotel - Château de Razay in Céré La Ronde

Day 8 - PARIS - SEINE RIVER CRUISE, NOTRE DAME

We leave the Loire Valley this morning and head north again to Paris.

After free time for lunch we board a River Boat for a nice cruise on the SEINE RIVER. We see many of the city's most famous landmarks from the river and, pass under many of the three dozen bridges over the river in Paris.

Our cruise is followed by an inside guided tour of NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL, widely considered one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture. This cathedral, constructed over the period from 1163 to 1345, was among the first buildings in the world to use the flying buttress arched exterior supports.



A short ride to your overnight hotel near the Charles de Gaulle (CDG) airport in Roissy. Enjoy a great farewell dinner and celebrate a wonderful week in France with your travelling companions.

> Buffet breakfast, door-to-door transportation, Seine River cruise, Notre Dame guide fees, three-course dinner, hotel in Paris-Roissy

Day 9 - AU REVOIR FRANCE

After breakfast individual transfers to catch your homebound flight, which arrives the same day.



> *Buffet breakfast, transfer to Airport*

Cost and Date Information

- Tours include:
- all features as per itinerary,
 - 7 breakfast buffets,
 - 5 three-course dinners, each including one drink and coffee or tea,
 - accommodation for 7 nights,
 - door-to-door transportation (bus, boat, etc.),
 - reservation fees, entrance fees, and local guide fees, and
 - the services of the Tour Director and Driver throughout the tour.

All castle visits include inside tours with guides and plenty of time on your own.

There are no hidden extras.

The **French Castles Tour** is offered on the following basis:

Tour prices are for the **land segment** only. Air fare is not included.

Prices are per person, in U.S. dollars, based on double occupancy. Single Occupancy is available for a Single Supplement charge of US \$ 350. A child 8 to 16 years old sharing a room with two adults receives a 30% reduction on this tour.

Guaranteed Departure: The French Castles Tour is guaranteed to operate as scheduled and will not be cancelled due to a low level of participation.

A deposit of US \$ 300 per person is required to secure a reservation.

Personal expenses, lunches and gratuities for the driver and local guides are not included.

French Castles Tour – 2012

Your overnight flight leaves	Double Occupancy	Single Occupancy	Child 8 - 17 with 2 Adults
August 17, 2012	US \$ 2,790	US \$ 3,140	US \$ 1,953

Detailed **Reservation Request** instructions and your choice of an online or paper form are provided on the Reservations page of www.europeancastlestours.com .

Final payment is due 45 days before departure.

Cost and Date Information, continued

Five weeks before departure you will receive a detailed information package with lots of travel tips and information about places we will visit.

Participation in Astrid Baur Travel tours is conditional on acceptance of the Astrid Baur Travel **Terms and Conditions** posted on the Reservations page of www.europeancastlestours.com .

Cancellation Policy

If notice of cancellation is received more than 45 days prior to tour start, the deposit will be retained.

Otherwise:	31 to 45 days prior to tour start:	20 % of total price
	15 to 30 days prior to tour start:	35 % of total price
	8 to 14 days prior to tour start:	50 % of total price
	1 to 7 days prior to tour start:	75 % of total price
	Departure day and later:	100 % of total price

The deposit will be applied to any cancellation charges.

Contact Information

Would you like to talk to passengers from previous tours? Let me know.

I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have, and very pleased to take your reservation.

Astrid Baur, Tour Director

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