

Rail holidays to France

Expressions



Chateaux of the Loire by rail and car



Chateaux of the Loire by rail and car

8 NIGHTS / 9 DAYS

Angers

Chinon

Amboise



This 8-night rail-drive touring holiday to the Chateaux of the Loire Valley includes stays in two chateaux-hotels and one historic town mansion in three different places in the Loire Valley. You take the Eurostar to Paris and change to the high-speed TGV to Tours. With a departure about 09.30 hrs from London you reach Tours by about 15.00 hrs. You then have the use of a hire-car to tour the region, before returning by train to Paris and Eurostar to London. The return journey is also very simple with convenient timings, with a departure from Tours at about midday and an arrival in London just after 16.30 hrs. The Loire Valley is known as the garden of France but historically the region was the playground of the kings of France for hundreds of years. The River Loire itself was a major means of communication in Gallo-Roman times and the river itself was surrounded by fertile fields and forests teeming with game, and this encouraged the economic development of its towns from an early age. Later the region became strategically important during the Hundred Years War and the remains of mediaeval strongholds and fortresses still bear witness to this. Eventually the fortified castles were replaced by chateaux designed to be for enjoyment and relaxation. The Loire Valley became the playground of the Kings of France. The area is rich in sites that show the development of western culture since Gallo-Roman times. The numerous chateaux are obvious places of interest (Chambord, Cheverny, Villandry, Chenonceau, Aazy-le-Rideau among many others) but there are many gardens, some attached to chateaux, vineyards, walks, river trips, local festivals, museums and galleries, son-et-lumiere shows, markets (Tours boasts no fewer than twenty markets), and fine dining with an array of Michelin-starred restaurants. Your touring holiday of the Loire Valley starts with a Eurotunnel crossing from Folkestone to Calais. You then drive to your first stop for three nights at Amboise on the River Loire. From here you can visit Amboise itself, Chenonceau, Chateau du Clos Lucé, Tours and local vineyards and gardens. Your next stay is north of Angers, capital of the Anjou and cradle of the Plantagenet dynasty. Angers and its famous Apocalypse Tapestry makes for an interesting excursion. From here, drive through tranquil landscapes punctuated by stately châteaux and fields of vines of the Parc Naturel Régional Loire Anjou Touraine en-route to your third stay south of Chinon. Stop off perhaps in the delightful town of Saumur, set between the Loire and Thouet rivers and renowned for its famous vineyards and Cadre Noir riding school. From your base south of Chinon, visit the mediaeval town itself, Villandry, Azay-le-Rideau and the abbey of Fontevraud. You return by TGV from Tours to Paris and on to London by Eurostar.

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

All train times are approximate and may vary depending on travel dates.

Expressions



Chateau Chenonceau

PRICES

From £1,960 per person

Prices from £1,960 per person based on two people sharing a double or twin room.

DATES

This rail holiday can be arranged throughout the year. Timings and the route can vary depending on the month and day of the week.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Eurostar standard class London to Paris return, and TGV second-class Paris to Tours return
- Hire of a group B car for 8 days
- 3 nights' bed and breakfast in a Traditional double room at Le Choiseul, at Amboise
- 2 nights' bed and breakfast in a Manor House double room at the Château de Noirieux near Angers
- 3 nights' bed and breakfast in a Classic double room at the Château de Marçay near Chinon
- Concierge service and Expressions Holidays regional helpful hints

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Early check-in or late check-out at any hotels (although we can arrange this on request at additional cost)
- Any other services not mentioned above, such as transfers and meals except breakfast at hotels
- Personal holiday insurance. This is essential and cover should be in place from when you book the holiday.
- Local tourist tax, usually between Euros 1 and 3 per person per night, and payable locally to the hotel
- Transfers in Paris

Day one London to Amboise

Your rail-drive touring holiday of the Chateaux of the Loire starts with a Eurostar journey from London to Paris, a change of stations in Paris and then the high-speed TGV from Paris to Tours, at the heart of the Garden of France. If you leave London about 09.30 hrs you arrive in Tours about 15.00 hrs. You collect your hire-car from the station and your first stay is at Amboise, just to the east of Tours and about 40 minutes' drive. You stay in Amboise for three nights.

Days two and three in Amboise

You have two full days to explore this part of the Loire Valley. There are numerous places of importance to visit within a very short drive. Amboise, on the banks of the river Loire, is home to the Chateau d'Amboise, a 15th century residence of Charles VIII and where you will find the tomb of Leonardo da Vinci. Nearby is the Chateau du Clos Lucé where Leonardo Da Vinci lived. In the grounds are displays of working models of this designs. Not far from Amboise is the Château de Chenonceau, known sometimes at the 'Ladies Castle' due to its string of female owners, such as Catherine de Medici and Diane de Poitiers, is not to be missed. This château offers an extensive art gallery and a collection of exquisite Flemish tapestries, as well as wine-tasting opportunities. You can dine in L'Orangerie, the on-site restaurant, or relax in the tea rooms, before exploring the wax museum or enjoying a boat ride. In the warmer summer months of July and August, night strolls around the castle and its grounds are very atmospheric, particularly with the backdrop of music by Arcangelo Corelli. Whilst in Amboise, you may want to visit the capital of the region, Tours. It is an ancient university town and this region purports to speak the

'purest' form of French. The old town is a delight with its narrow streets and tall, gabled, half-timbered houses. The Cathedral of Saint Gatien dates from the 12th century but most of it is obviously flamboyant Gothic, completed about the same time as the Chateau de Chenonceau. In Montlouis-sur-Loire, we recommend visiting the Domaine de la Taille aux Loups to taste the local wine: the dry and fizzy Moelleux wines from this region.

Day four Amboise to Angers

This is really a day to explore the north bank of the River Loire and there is lots of see along the way, from fortified towns with the mediaeval chateaux, such as at Luyens and Langeais, to the vineyards at Bourgueil. This might also be the day to visit the Chateau of Villandry. Your stop for tonight and the next day is just to the north of the town of Angers.

Day five in Angers

Just a short distance from the banks of the river itself, sits the historic town of Angers. A number of prestigious châteaux are open for tours, including the Château de Brissac, the home of the 13th Duke of Brissac, where you see the Duke's collection of antique paintings, the unique private theatre commissioned by the Duchess in the 19th century and dedicated solely to opera, and finally into the Château's wine cellar, where you will be invited to taste the wine produced on the Duke's estate. The Château of Angers itself is the ideal spot to take in views of the whole town, while strolling around the beautiful aromatic landscaped gardens, not to mention the Apocalypse Tapestry kept within its walls. Venture into Nantes to the enormous Château des Ducs de Bretagne. Its combination of 15th century, 17th century, and Renaissance architecture pays testament to how this

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

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Chinon

imposing structure has developed over time. While these châteaux may be some of the most historic and impressive in Angers' immediate vicinity, other, smaller châteaux are open for wine-tasting sessions; some wines to look out for are Saumur-Champigny, Coteaux-de-l'Aubance, Coteaux-du-Layon, and the famous Coulée-de-Serrant. For a relaxing break from exploring, sit back on one of the Loire de Lumière cruises around some of the 300km of navigable waterways in the region.

Day six Angers to Chinon

Your journey today includes a mixture of castles, abbeys and wine. Set off along the King's Valley Route and cross to the southern side of the Loire to see the 11th century Château de Saumur, formerly a fortress, manor house, town governor's residence, prison, arms and ammunitions depot, and now housing the museum. Nearby are the troglodyte caves the Loire valley is famous for. Not far from Saumur is the Abbaye of Fontevraud, with its strong Plantagenet connections. You can see the effigies of Richard the Lionheart and his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine here. From here it's a short drive to your next stop, amid the fertile land south of Chinon, fields of vines and sunflowers and orchards. You stay here for three nights.

Days seven and eight in Chinon

On the bank of the river Vienne sits Chinon and the Chinon Fortresse Royale, dating back to the 10th century and the legend of King Arthur. Popular wine-tasting spots include La Cave Montplaisir, the Cave Painctes for specifically Rabelais wine, and the Château de Coulaine for the local speciality, Chinon Blanc. On the edge of the Chinon Forest, sits the Château d'Ussé, so elegant in its architecture

and positioning that it inspired Charles Perrault's 'Sleeping Beauty'. Or, to witness something very unusual, in the context of the French château tradition, tour the remarkable underground fortress at the Château de Brézé, sometimes called a château within a château. Nearby is the gem of a chateau at Azay-le-Rideau, built on an island in the Indre River, under the patronage of King Francois I. It combines French tradition and Italian innovation and typifies the style of architecture that developed in the 16th century.

Day nine Chinon to London

You return your hire-car to Tours this morning to take the TGV back to Paris, with a change of stations, and then the Eurostar from Paris to London. There is a service that leaves Tours just after midday and you arrive in London just after 16.30 hrs.

GENERAL INFORMATION

this rail holiday is one of several suggested rail holidays we can offer you exactly as it is but also with any alterations you might want including extra nights in one or more places or adding in extra places. All our tours can be extended so that you can include a longer stay in one mountain or lake resort too, perhaps at the end of the itinerary. Do call to discuss the options with our travel consultants.



OUR TOURS

Our rail tours are for individuals travelling on their own or in their own family group. You do not join a group and you are not escorted.

FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Our arrangements are very flexible in that you choose to travel on any day you want, subject to availability of trains and hotels. As mentioned above, additional nights can be added at any point.

EUROSTAR

A rail holiday to France starts with a journey by Eurostar from London St Pancras, Ebbsfleet or Ashford stations in the UK to either Paris Gare du Nord or Lille Europe. In summer months there are direct trains on Saturdays from London St Pancras to Avignon with no change required.

Eurostar offers almost hourly departures every day, allowing you to travel from the centre of London to the centre of Paris on the same train in three hours. Not all trains stop at the Ebbsfleet and Ashford stations in Kent, but parking is plentiful at both stations and it allows you to avoid London.

Check-in is 30 minutes prior to departure, customs formalities are completed before boarding and there is no limit to the amount of baggage that can be taken on board. The Eurostar trains themselves have 8 coaches which are split into Standard Class, Standard Premier and Business Premier as well as 2 cafeterias. Standard Premier customers are served a light cold meal and enjoy a more spacious environment than Standard Class, while Business Premier customers receive a hot meal and unlimited beverages as well as lounge access.

TRAIN TIMES

We have planned our itineraries based on train times that work day by day at the time of planning which can be up to a year before you travel. Usually train times stay more or less the same every day, season by season. The times we have planned will be discussed with you at the time you enquire about the holiday and they are detailed to you in your written holiday quotation. It may be that the timetable changes between the planning of the itinerary and when you come to book but we can always adjust the itinerary to suit the actual train times and any requirements you have for particular times of travel.

FIRST OR SECOND CLASS

We will automatically include travel in second class but lots of our clients do upgrade to first class service. On Eurostar this is called Premier Standard for leisure travellers as it gives you an upgraded on-board service and more spacious seating but without paying for the fully-flexible business tickets. On the TGV trains within France, upgrading to first class gives you more spacious seating with increased legroom. The price of upgrading varies from route to route but is something that is not always proportionately a lot more on the price of the overall holiday, so well-worth considering.

TRANSFERS

Transfers in Paris between stations and from the station to each hotel are not automatically included in the price of the holiday. In Paris most clients choose to take a taxi between the stations rather than go on the Metro but we can arrange a private car with driver to take you in between. This is quite useful if you are a family group that can't fit into one Paris taxi.

OUR PRICES

The sample prices mentioned in this leaflet are generally a 'from' price based on the cheapest season of travel. However, train fares and hotel rates can change (up and down depending on offers), so we give you an accurate price for your holiday when we provide you with a quotation. Our sample prices should be used as an indication of how much a particular combination will cost and to show the differences on average between the hotel categories on offer.

TOUR CODE

FRBR05

BOOKING CONDITIONS

Our booking conditions apply to all holidays. A copy can be found on our website and a copy is also sent to you with a written quotation and when you make a booking.

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Expressions Holidays offers full financial protection for all holidays you book with us. If your holiday includes a flight, the ATOL (3076) covers the costs of the holiday. If the holiday does not include a flight, it is the ABTOT bond that protects the cost of the holiday. We are also members of AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators).

Expressions Holidays

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HOW TO BOOK

To make a booking, just phone us on

01392 441250

and we can take you through the details we need and start the booking process.