

From the rocks and soil of the terroir – to the wine in your glass
Understanding and Tasting the Great Wines of France

A “study & experience” tour in the company of
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HISTORIC SITES & TOWNS TO BE VISITED ON THE 2010 TOUR
BURGUNDY & the RHONE VALLEY

AUXERRE

Probably best known to the average Frenchman for its first division football team, Auxerre is nevertheless one of the most delightful towns in Burgundy. Take time to walk across some of the bridges over the River Yonne, or walk along the river bank facing the cathedral on the other side, and you have some of the loveliest panoramic views in Burgundy! The beautiful cathedral is a monument to three centuries of gothic style, and if its flamboyant facade is its most celebrated feature, the great porches and some of the stained glass windows both dating from the 13th century are absolute jewels of gothic art. You can also visit the 11th century crypt which is all that remains of the original romanesque cathedral, while in the nearby ancient Benedictine abbey, founded by Clothilde, you can visit the Carolingian crypt, a veritable subterranean church with its three naves....The old town is most pleasant with the half-timbered houses dating back to the 14th, 15th and early 16th centuries – and the floral decorations of which the town is justly proud .

ABBAYE DE PONTIGNY

Not only is Pontigny the largest Cistercian abbey church in Europe, it is also one of the finest, purest, beautiful examples of Cistercian architecture to be seen anywhere. If Reims cathedral represents French gothic architecture at its most perfect, Pontigny represents the most perfect form of Cistercian achievement – built in the mid 12th century it illustrates more than any other great church building the transition from romanesque to gothic style. It was the second of the abbeys founded by Citeaux (a year before that of Clairvaux), and quickly became a place of great commercial importance (Pontigny being close to the great market routes and centres through Troyes and Provins), trading especially in cereals, cattle and wine. It became a place of considerable wealth, while many of its abbots were to become bishops, archbishops and cardinals. During these two great centuries of development, Pontigny offered exile to three Archbishops of Canterbury – Thomas Becket, Etienne Langton, and Edmond Rich – this latter later becoming Saint Edmond, his body rests here at Pontigny.

VEZELAY

The great basilica standing superbly on its “sacred hill”, together with the village running down and round the ridge, were among the earliest World Heritage monuments declared in France. The basilica is the finest example of Burgundian Romanesque architecture, while Vezelay itself has been one of the great European centres of Christianity from early medieval times to the present day. One of the major St James of Compostella roads across France and Spain starts here, while the second (Saint Bernard) and third Crusade (Richard the Lion Heart) set out from here in Vezelay. Its great tympanum, over the

west door, is one of the most famous in the world, while one of France's most celebrated restaurants, Marc Meneau's *L'Espérance*, lies at the foot of the hill. In all but winter, the village is inhabited by painters, potters, and craftsmen of many different crafts, some of them among the greatest in France today, and known throughout the world....

BEAUNE

Wine capital of the great Burgundy wines, Beaune is universally renowned for its glorious *Hospices* (all wine-lovers will know of the world famous wine auction held here every year), a magnificent building blending all that was best in the Pre-Renaissance architectural mixture of Burgundian and Flemish styles, the whole topped with perhaps the most photographed roof in France! The Hospices possesses some 120 acres of the greatest vineyards in the world! The Burgundy Wine Museum is housed in an impressive 15th – 16th century mansion which belonged to the Dukes of Burgundy – in addition to all things wine, there is a superb modern Aubusson tapestry designed by France's greatest 20th century tapestry maker, Jean Lurcat.

CLOS VOUGEOT

Independently of all that this name conjures up where great Burgundy wines are concerned, the château is will worth a visit in its own right. The present chateau was completed during the Renaissance, but some of the most famous parts which can be visited date from the 12th – 14th centuries, include the truly magnificent timber roof frame in the 14th century monks' dormitory. The whole property was owned by the Abbey of Citeaux from the 12th century until the French Revolution.

(CITEAUX)

Although there is now very little to see of what is left of what was once one of the most important centres in the history of Christianity, it is nevertheless very moving to pass by the site, reflecting on all the place had meant for so many centuries, and knowing that its history is also intimately linked with that of the Clos Vougeot)

ROCHE DE SOLUTRE

This most famous of the Burgundy landmarks stands out high above the great vineyards of Pouilly and Fuissé, giving stunning views over the whole of the Maconnais region for those who can face the climb to the top. If the weather is really fine, you may even see the Alps!! Solutré was rendered particularly famous during the 20th century by François Mitterrand who made an annual pilgrimage over some four decades to the top of the rock over the Whitsuntide weekend in memory of the French Resistance. But it was in the mid 19th century that the first important finds were made that were to put Solutré on the world archeological map, with discoveries dating back to 18.000 years BC. Subsequent research has found traces of human activity going back more than 25.000 years.

The **PREHISTORY MUSEUM** at the foot of the rock, reflects 150 years of archeological search and discovery concerning the different periods of the prehistoric and paleolithic ages, offering interesting theories concerning the huge quantities of animal bones discovered here (sometimes spread over several acres and up to two metres in depth...)

CLUNY

Founded in the 10th century, Cluny is one of the most famous names in the history of Christianity, the great abbey church was the largest in Europe (177 metres long) until St Peter's was constructed in the

17th century (186 metres long!). In the mid 12th century, there were nearly 500 monks in residence. Although very little remains of this former grandeur, it is nevertheless easy to imagine the magnificence of the site as you wander around today. Cluny became immensely rich, so that inevitably a period of decadence, commensurate with its enormous wealth, set in during the 14th and 15th centuries. Much was destroyed during the Wars of Religion, much of what remained disappeared with the French Revolution (the site became a stone quarry for over a quarter of a century!). Perhaps the most stunning building remaining to be visited is the 54 metre long 13th century flour storage building – now used as a concert hall.

(CHATEAU DE CORMATIN)

Cormatin is not only one of the most enjoyable places to visit in Burgundy, it is one of the finest examples of 17th century architecture in France. In addition to which it boasts an absolutely magnificent garden and park (abandoned for more than a century, it was completely restored in the late 20th century). If the outside appears harmonious and impressive, the interior is simply splendid! It would be a great pity not to see this jewel of Burgundian, indeed of French classical architecture and decoration.

ORANGE

This small delightful town is a real pleasure to wander through, especially when all illuminated at nightfall. In the very centre is to be found one of the great treasures of France, the World heritage site of the Roman Theatre (home to the annual international opera & music festival *Les Chorégies d'Orange*).

The theatre, built during the reign of Caesar Augustus, is considered one of the finest examples of a Roman theatre anywhere in the world, and most probably the best preserved. The great north wall behind the stage is 37m high, and Louis XIV described it as the most beautiful wall in the kingdom of France. The same is arguably true of the French Republic! The great arena can seat for the *Chorégies* on a summer's evening up to ten thousand spectators.

AVIGNON

The whole of the medieval centre of Avignon is classified World Heritage, and if the 14th century Palais des Papes constitutes the famous centre piece, the whole ensemble, including the 12th century romanesque fortified cathedral, is considered one of the finest examples of medieval religious, administrative and military architecture in Europe. The history of the tensions between the king of France and the papacy in Rome will be unveiled as one explores the magnificent Palace, which the Pope Jean XXII, former archbishop of Avignon, created out of what was originally his modest episcopal palace. In all, there were to be seven popes in Avignon, with the result that 14th century Avignon became one of the world's most important centres of Christianity, and the palace itself, not just a worthy setting for the most powerful of the Church's princes, became the centre of intellectual, artistic and commercial life, surrounded by the splendour, richness and magnificence of architecture and decoration. In passing it might be noted that Jean XXII not only started transformation of the old buildings into the marvellous palace we know today, but in typical fashion of a local lad made good, he planted just outside Avignon to the north of the city the first vines of a vineyard to become as celebrated as the palace itself – Chateauneuf-du-Pape!

Before leaving Avignon, one should take a walk down to the bridge over the river Rhone, built in the 13th century, restored in the 15th, and part of which was swept away in floods in the 17th century – leaving it with the form we know today, and the fame of which is sung by every youngster learning French round the world, “Sur le pont d'Avignon, on y danse..”!!