

Exploring Undiscovered France

Superb Sights and a Gourmet's Paradise

October 14th ~ 25th 2010

In Association With

The Coffee Grounds

Join us on an unforgettable visit to the winemakers and chateaux of Aquitaine and the Loire. The less traveled southwestern realms of France not only boast unspoiled countryside and magnificent sights but they also offer a rich history ranging from prehistoric cave drawings to the 100-year war with England, as well as the crusade against the Albigensian "heretics". Moreover, the Languedoc, Dordogne, Bordeaux and Loire regions pride themselves in their hearty cuisine and their excellent wines, many of which are still unknown outside of the country. Our 12-day journey will allow us to explore the stunning sights, culinary delicacies and eclectic wines that "undiscovered" France has in store.

OUR ITINERARY:

October 14th We depart the USA for Toulouse, France.

October 15th We arrive at Toulouse airport late morning where our hosts *David and Christine Harper* will escort us by private tour bus to the stunning walled citadel of **Carcassonne**. Here we'll be enchanted by the ancient medieval alleyways, towering turrets and massive ramparts of Europe's best preserved walled town. After free time for a bite to eat or coffee and a peek into Carcassonne's enticing shops, we continue south to our base in the Upper Aude Valley: the fortified castle of Duc de Joyeuse in Couiza (www.chateau-des-ducs.com). *After a welcome drink of Blanquette de Limoux, we are served our dinner consisting of Crayfish Risotto, Pullet of the Lauragais region and Macaroons with Raspberry Sorbet. Our wines include a white Limoux, a red Fitou and a traditional style semi-dry Blanquette.* Overnight Couiza.

October 16th After breakfast we visit the perched village of **Rennes-le-Chateau**, centerpiece of much mystery and alleged treasure. Here we'll visit Father Saunière's bizarre church, as well as the presbytery, now converted into a museum recounting the strange events surrounding the unexplained wealth of a country priest. The puzzling origins of the man's suddenly found riches

have been the object of numerous books and novels and even alluded to in Dan Brown's "Da Vinci Code". Later we visit the bustling town of **Limoux** where, after free time for lunch and shopping, we'll be offered a **tasting of three excellent regional wines** including Baroness Philippine de Rothschild's *Baron'Arques*. *This evening our dinner at the castle will feature the southwest specialty "Cassoulet" and a Rosemary-flavored Crème Brûlée. Our wine selection includes a delightful rosé, as well as a red Corbières and a red Minervois.* Overnight Couiza.

October 17th After breakfast we depart for the greatly rewarding Dordogne / Perigord region, a land of natural beauty and exceptional historic interest. Our first stop will be at the **cave of Pech Merle**, featuring some of the oldest prehistoric artwork known to man. Horses, mammoths and bison created by early man some 24,000 years ago are set among beautiful shapes and colors sculpted by the flow of water and time. Our next stop is at the **spectacular perched village of Rocamadour**, one of the most famous pilgrimage centers in France. After free time to explore this eagle's nest of chapels, shrines and shop-lined alleyways, we complete the final leg of our journey to the tiny village of **Beynac** near Sarlat where we check into Domaine de Monrecour (www.monrecour.com). *Dinner at the chateau features Foie Gras, rich Beef Stew and Tarte Tatin. The wines include Monbazillac, Entre-deux-Mers and a red Bergerac.* Overnight Beynac.

October 18th After breakfast we take a full-day excursion to **Saint Emilion in the Bordeaux region**. Here we take a tour of the fascinating **underground attractions** of this delightful stone village. Catacombs, a hidden hermitage and a vast monolithic church count among the highlights we can admire before some free time for lunch. Early afternoon we'll visit an **exclusive private winery** followed by a **tasting of St Emilion wines** at a selected village store. Later in the afternoon we tour **Chateau de Tiregand** owned by a descendant of Antoine de St Exupéry, the author of the children's classic "The Little Prince". Here we are introduced to the world of Pécharmant, undoubtedly Bergerac's finest red wines. *Dinner tonight will be served near our hotel at La Tonnelle: Creamy Chestnut Soup, Duck Confit and Warm Walnut Cake. We choose Bergerac wines to accompany our hearty meal.* Overnight Beynac.

October 19th After breakfast we embark on a journey of discovery in our surroundings; the first stop being at a small hamlet of ancient **all-stone huts called *Bories***. After this curious attraction, we take a tour of the elegant **Chateau de Puymartin** dating from the 15th century. Our next sight is a feast for the eyes: the romantic **gardens of Eyrignac**, prized as some of the most beautiful in the region. On the way back to our hotel, we stop at Moulin de la Tour, a traditional **water-powered mill** where we'll discover how for centuries oil has been produced from walnuts, almonds and hazelnuts. The range of walnut-based products sold at this family-run mill is impressive. *Tonight we'll have dinner at La Hoirie, famed for its outstanding regional cuisine: Homemade Chicken Pâté with Olives and dried Tomatoes, Scallops cooked with Potatoes, Celeriac & Morels and a Pumpkin-based Creation with Chestnut Ice-Cream will close our feast. Côtes-du-Rhone wines will accompany our meal.* Overnight Beynac.

October 20th After breakfast we visit the **fortified castle of Beynac**, just a few minutes from our hotel. One of the best examples of a well-preserved feudal castle in France, the fortress offers us panoramic views of the Dordogne River, as well as a glimpse of medieval castle life when it was used by great rulers such as Richard the Lion heart in the late 12th century. We'll next find ourselves floating on the Dordogne in a **traditional Perigord boat**, a *gabare*. Free time for lunch and shopping will be had at nearby **Sarlat**, one of the most beautiful towns in France. Late afternoon we'll take a tour of a **local distillery**, offering an overwhelming selection of wine-based or fruit-based aperitifs, fruit or berry liqueurs, fruit brandies and flower or berry creams. *Dinner will be served in the heart of Sarlat's medieval center in a former mint: Sautéed Fresh Duck Liver with Apples, succulent Coq au Vin and Pear Belle Helene will be highlighted by whites, rosés from Bergerac and a red Cahors.* Overnight Beynac.

October 21st After breakfast we check out of our hotel to head north towards the **Loire region**. En route we tour the century-old kiln, as well as the showrooms of **Royal Limoges**, one of France's most famous porcelain manufactures and still in operation since 1797. Later we stop to pay a silent tribute at a singular site of a great WWII tragedy: **Oradour-sur-Glane**. Just days after the 1944 Allied D-Day landings in Normandy, an SS division set an example against any possible local or regional resistance by brutally murdering

the population of an entire village. We may view the town's empty houses and edifices where everything was left in place since the day of the massacre. Upon arrival in Saumur on the Loire River, we'll check into Hotel Anne d'Anjou (www.hotel-anneanjou.com). *A short stroll into the town center will lead us to the Café de la Place where we'll enjoy a bistro-style meal: Chicory, Bacon and Beaufort Cheese Salad with Raspberry Dressing, Roast Chicken in a Balsamic Reduction, Hot & Cold Apple Dream. Our meal will be livened up by Loire Region wines including a white Sancerre and a Pouilly-Fumé.* Overnight Saumur.

October 22nd After breakfast we'll start the day with an excursion to the unusual **troglodyte hamlet of Rochemenier**. Here we'll see how people used natural caves and overhangs or carved out cavities in the soft tuffa stone to create dwellings, barns, as well as workshops and storage. Later we **tour the impressive castle of Montreuil-Bellay** where we'll be *served lunch in the castle kitchen accompanied by the property's outstanding wines such as l'Amarante: Smoked Salmon & Soft Leak Tart, moist Veal baked in Bread Crust, Salad & Cheese, Orange & Cointreau dessert.* In the afternoon we tour the old **Combiere distillery** which handcrafts all its products. The precursor of **Cointreau**, Combiere produces the world's first *triple sec*, as well as the popular French cherry aperitif *Guignolet* and the once-forbidden Absinth. The evening meal will be on our own at one of Saumur's fine restaurants. Overnight Saumur.

October 23rd After breakfast we have a morning free to explore Saumur's **bustling outdoor market** and to visit the rest of the town with its many shops, cafes and attractive architecture. Some of us may want to spend some time instead at Saumur's **armed vehicle museum** with over 200 exhibits from 17 countries. In the afternoon we visit the **largest Dolmen in France**, dating back to the Neolithic Age. Later we tour an underground **mushroom farm** featuring several types of delicious mushrooms, some of which can be purchased dried. Our final visit of the day is to the truly beautiful carved caves of the **Bouvet-Ladubay winery**. These thousand-year-old galleries come alive with discreet lighting, artistically sculpted tuffa stone and dramatic music. Though the winery produces mainly traditional Champagne method sparkling whites, many of the vintages are first aged in oak barrels. Our tasting will include three whites and one rosé. *This evening's dinner will be served at the gourmet restaurant Les*

Menestrels, located in our hotel's courtyard: Homemade Ravioli stuffed with Mushrooms or Artichoke Heart, Suckling Pig, Artist's Palette of Chocolate Enticements. Our wines are selected from the Loire Region. Overnight Saumur.

October 24th After breakfast we travel towards Paris, stopping first at **Leonardo da Vinci's last residence and workshop**: Chateau du Clos Lucé where he was hosted by the king of France. Here we discover the lesser-known talent of this great Renaissance genius: his stupendous inventions and his life's philosophy. Arriving in **Paris** we'll view some of the city's famed landmarks as we make our way to Place de la Madeleine. Those who wish may visit **Claude Monet's great water lily canvases** while others may prefer to **visit the finest French food stores: Fauchon and Ediard**. Nearby we may also marvel at the grand interior of the classical style Madeleine Church. After checking into our airport hotel *we break bread together one last time – at least on this journey – at nearby L'Ecurie restaurant, located in former stables: Hot Goat Cheese in Flaky Pastry on Salad, Guinea Hen with Black Truffles, Normandy Apple Tart with Coffee Ice-Cream. Our farewell dinner will be complemented by David's surprise wine selection.* Overnight Roissy, near Paris Airport (www.accorhotels.com/gb/hotel-1245-mercure-paris-roissy-charles-de-gaulle/index.shtml).

October 25th After breakfast a 10-minute transfer will take us to the departure terminal for our homeward flight.

Itinerary is subject to change.

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Exploring Undiscovered France

"A Gourmet's Paradise"

October 14th ~ 25th, 2010

Price with air from Mpls/St. Paul: \$5,867 Single supplement: \$700 Land only \$5,067
(Per person based on double occupancy)

Superior Room Supplement: A limited number of room upgrades are available at our hotels **except** our second hotel, Domaine de Monrecour. These superior accommodations may vary but will likely be larger with upgraded furnishings. A limited number of these accommodations are available. Requests will be honored on a first come, first serve basis. Additional cost: \$499 per person.

Included tour features:

Roundtrip economy class air transportation
from Mpls/St. Paul
Services of a professional tour manager
10 breakfasts, 9 dinners, 1 lunch in castle
Winery tastings as noted in itinerary
Tips for restaurant staff at incld dinner's
Luggage handling (1 suitcase per person)

First class coach transportation
10 nights in 3 star accommodations
Wine and water with 10 meals
All guided tours and admission fees
Local bed tax, air tax and fees

Not included: End of tour gratuity to tour manager or bus driver. Items of a personal nature such as room service, dry cleaning, phone calls, baggage fees assessed by the airlines.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Reservations: If you have previously sent in the requested deposit of \$300.00 per person and wish to retain your reserved place on our tour then we ask you to **(1)** please submit the completed application along with **(2)** an additional deposit of \$300.00 per person and **(3)** a copy of the inside page of your passport to us no later than **February 19, 2010**.

If you have previously sent in a deposit for our tour and no longer wish to participate then please inform our office no later than **February 19, 2010** and we will return your deposit in full.

Insurance: Price of insurance is \$299 per person and must be purchased at time of second deposit in order to cover any pre-existing medical conditions. (Information regarding the insurance will be mailed to all tour members.)

Final Payment: Final payment is due by **June 7, 2010**.

Cancellation schedule:

- From receipt of second deposit to June 6 - \$600 per person

- From June 7 to August 13 - \$1000 per person
- After August 13, 2010 - No refund

Smoking: We kindly request no smoking when and wherever the group is traveling together.

Extending Your Stay: You may extend your stay in Europe for a fee of \$100 per person, plus any additional fees assessed by the airline. Some restrictions may apply. Please ask for details if you are interested.

Important: You must possess a valid U.S. Passport. The passport must be valid for 6 months from your return date to the U.S. at the conclusion of the tour.

Responsibility: These tours are operated by Higgins' Travel & Cruise Center at 2514 Golf Road., Eau Claire, WI 54701 and Backroads of Europe L.L.C / David and Christine Harper, 12 / 83471 Schoenau a. Koenigssee, Germany. Higgins' and Harper will act only as agent for tour members in arranging transportation, accommodations, sightseeing and admissions. We reserve the right at our sole discretion to make changes to the itinerary and are not responsible to any person for expense, loss of time or money or other circumstance that result from such a change. Rates are quoted upon tariffs and exchange rates current at time of printing and are subject to change at any time. Should the exchange rate change dramatically, the price of the tour may need to be adjusted. Also, if fuel surcharges are imposed, the price of the tour may need to be adjusted. We may decline or accept any person as a tour member at any time. Higgins' and Harper will not be responsible for any loss or damage to personal property or for injuries or damages incurred by a tour member. Higgins' and Harper may cancel the tour, should it become necessary, and refund all monies, thus releasing Higgins' Travel & Cruise Center and David Harper from any further obligation. We require a minimum of 18 participants to operate this tour.

MAIL APPLICATION TO:

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