

# 3 France WAYS

**Budget is no barrier to a tour across the Channel, finds Aby Dunsby**

[@abradunsby](#)

**H**istoric cities, grandiose architecture, chic cafes and lots of wine. It's almost impossible not to be seduced by France's myriad charms, which probably explains why it remains the world's top tourist destination.

While its proximity and cultural familiarity make France a popular choice for independent travellers, it's the country's staggering variety that will draw many clients towards an escorted tour, offering a hassle-free way to soak up as many sights as possible.

Bursting with lavish museums,

art and historical riches, Paris makes for a serious showstopper, but there's plenty more of France to explore with an expert guide, from the VIP beaches that drape the Côte d'Azur's sun-splashed coastline, to the majestic chateaux of the Loire Valley and Normandy's historic battlefields.

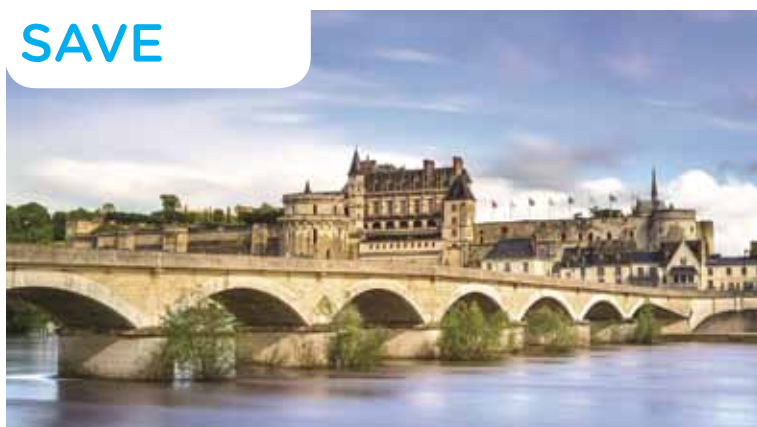
Themed tours delve even deeper into specific aspects of French culture, whether it's an inspiring stroll through Claude Monet's art-filled gardens, a visit to a Gothic cathedral, or a day spent sipping wine in the vineyard-strewn countryside.

## ► SAVE: CITY DELIGHTS

It's the city that needs no introduction. Beloved of artists, bons vivants, writers and revolutionaries, Paris is a city steeped in history and there's as much pleasure to be found in visiting its many iconic landmarks as simply sipping coffee and watching the world go by from a bustling boulevard cafe.

Riviera Travel's four-day Paris tour lets clients do both, with guided touring around all the main sights and a day spent in the artists' quarter of Montmartre, with free time

## SAVE



## SPEND



## SPLURGE





**FAR LEFT:**  
Monet's Garden  
at Giverny

**LEFT:**  
Normandy,  
France



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→ to explore (from £229). Leger's Paris and Monet and Loire Valley tour packs in the sights too, combining a full day exploring Paris with a visit to the grand Chateau de Versailles, and a trip to the home and gardens of Monet at Giverny in Normandy to see the famous water lilies the artist loved to paint.

Just two hours southwest of Paris lies the Loire Valley, which is dotted with chateaux that ooze pomp and splendour. Travelsphere offers a seven-day rail tour of the region, which includes visits to the Renaissance chateaux of Villandry and Chenonceau plus a trip to Monet's garden (from £679).

All excursions are included in the

price of Diamond Rail's Normandy's Flower Coast, Honfleur and Calvados tour, making it ideal for penny-conscious clients. Trips to the seaside

resorts of Deauville and Trouville, a tour with apple brandy tasting at a Calvados distillery and a visit with cheese tasting at a Livarot cheese farm all feature on the itinerary (from £429).

For those looking to tick off as much of the country as possible without over-spending, Cosmos Tours & Cruises covers France's best-loved and contrasting regions, cities and sights in a whistle-stop 14-day tour (from £1,259). In Normandy, clients can visit historic Second World War landing beaches, the 11th-century Bayeux Tapestry and Mont Saint Michel, a spectacular fairytale-like island topped with a towering medieval monastery. Other highlights include a stopover in Cognac and the Bordeaux area for tastings, a visit to the chic beaches of the French Riviera, dining in Lyon and a trip to the medieval town of Beaune.

Trafalgar's tour Highlights of France – part of its value-driven Costsaver programme – is similarly extensive, throwing a scenic drive through Avignon into the mix, from £1,175 for 13 days land only.

## ▶ SPEND: PAST TIMES

With its rich and sometimes bloody past, Normandy tops many a history lovers' must-see list. From the Norman invasion of England in 1066 to the D-Day landings of 1944, the region is bursting with historic tales to tell.

Titan's battlefields tour, The Allied Invasion of Normandy, makes the moving events surrounding this turning point in the war – dubbed Operation Overlord – the focus of its five-day trip. The tour will take clients to the five invasion beaches – codenamed



**LEFT:**  
Vieux Port,  
La Rochelle

PICTURES: ISTOCK/FRITZ HIRSCHER/ TRAVELSPHERE; RIVIERA TRAVEL; DOUGLAS MACRAE



# 3 WAYS

→ Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword – along a 50-mile stretch of pretty, quiet Normandy coast, while expert guides retell some of the stories of bravery.

For clients craving sun-baked beaches, pastel-hued villas and cinematic cliff-top views, it's all about the south. Provence and the Côte d'Azur are the areas that sparkle the brightest, teaming poetic landscapes with art, beaches, and Mediterranean-inspired cuisine.

The best of the south has been packaged into a nine-night Saga tour, Glorious Provence and the Côte d'Azur, which takes clients from the fortified city of Carcassonne, to the cobbled streets of Avignon and the Roman city of Nîmes, where the crumbling amphitheatre stands at its centre.

A trip to the market in Aix-en-Provence offers clients the chance to sample regional produce including olives, blue cheeses, and the popular anise-flavoured spirit pastis, while sun-seekers can top up their tans on the beach in Cannes (from £899).



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If mountain air appeals more than sun and sea, an escorted tour taking in glacier-strewn Mont Blanc, serene Lake Geneva and medieval Annecy should fit the bill. The accommodation on Riviera Travel's new eight-day tour is based in Chamonix, the popular ski resort at the foot of Mont Blanc.

The exploration begins by climbing 900 metres by train through forests, viaducts and lake-water streams to view Europe's longest glacier. More glorious views are in store as clients move on to the lakeside town of Annecy, which boasts its own



12th-century castle, while a trip to Lake Geneva and nearby spa town Évian-les-Bains – famed for its eponymous water – is equally photogenic. Clients can get an extra dose of culture as they cross into Italy to stroll around Aosta's Roman remains, and there's even time to visit Switzerland to marvel at Château Chillon on Lake Geneva, which served as



inspiration for Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon* (eight days from £949.)

## ► SPLURGE: TUCK IN

Few nations take food as seriously as the French, and whether it's a freshly baked, still-warm baguette from the boulangerie or a Michelin-starred tasting menu, it warrants complete, undivided attention. Alongside →

**ABOVE LEFT:** Honfleur, Normandy

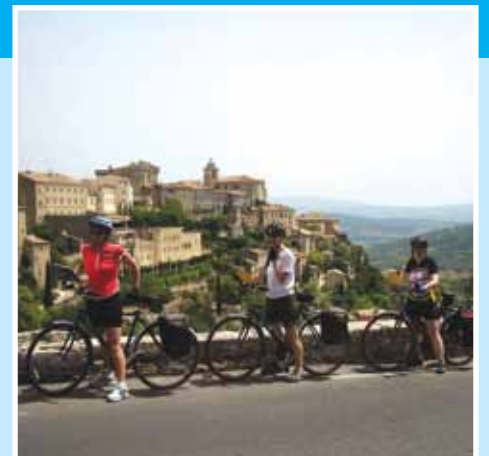
**ABOVE:** Côte d'Azur

## Active tours

With its comparatively mild weather, quiet roads and the reward of a delicious French dinner at the end of it, it's easy to see why cycling and walking holidays to France are so popular.

Exodus's escorted cycling tours tend to be for die-hard fans of Lycra who can recreate the most famous cycling race of all on its Alpine Cols of the Tour de France programme, which involves tackling the Col de la Bonette, the highest col in Europe; while its Raid Pyrenean Coast to Coast Ride takes clients on an epic journey across 11 of the most famous cols in the Pyrenees as they cycle from the Atlantic to the Med. Both are eight-day tours, from £1,059 or £1,129 respectively.

For a gentler pace, suggest Explore's Canal du Midi tour, which allows plenty of time to take in the natural beauty of the Corbières region (from £879, eight days).



Walkers are similarly well served, whether they want to stroll through the idyllic Dordogne (Mac's Adventure has an eight-day tour from £650), enjoy tranquil walks punctuated by wine-tasting in Bordeaux (Explore's nine-day tour starts at £1,099), or take on more of a challenge with a gruelling Mont Blanc trek from Exodus (priced from £1,999 for eight days).

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**LEFT:**  
Foie gras

**RIGHT:**  
Château  
Lagrezette  
vineyard

**BELOW:**  
Palais de la  
Bourse



its classic dishes, France is famous for its local specialities, bestowing it with a distinct flavour and identity from one region to the next.

Those looking to appreciate France's cultural heritage through its cuisine need look no further than Insight Vacations' Easy Pace

France tour, which combines a focus on wine and fine dining with sightseeing excursions.

Clients will start their journey with the historical treasures of Paris, while a trip to Arles – the Roman town that inspired some of Vincent van Gogh's paintings – and Monaco, to visit the tomb of

Princess Grace of Monaco, also feature on the cultural agenda. Food and drink highlights en route include wine tasting in the postcard-pretty village of Chateaufort-du-Pape in Provence, or the optional addition of olive oil sampling from the mill at Les Baux-de-Provence. Prices start at £1,823 for 10 days.

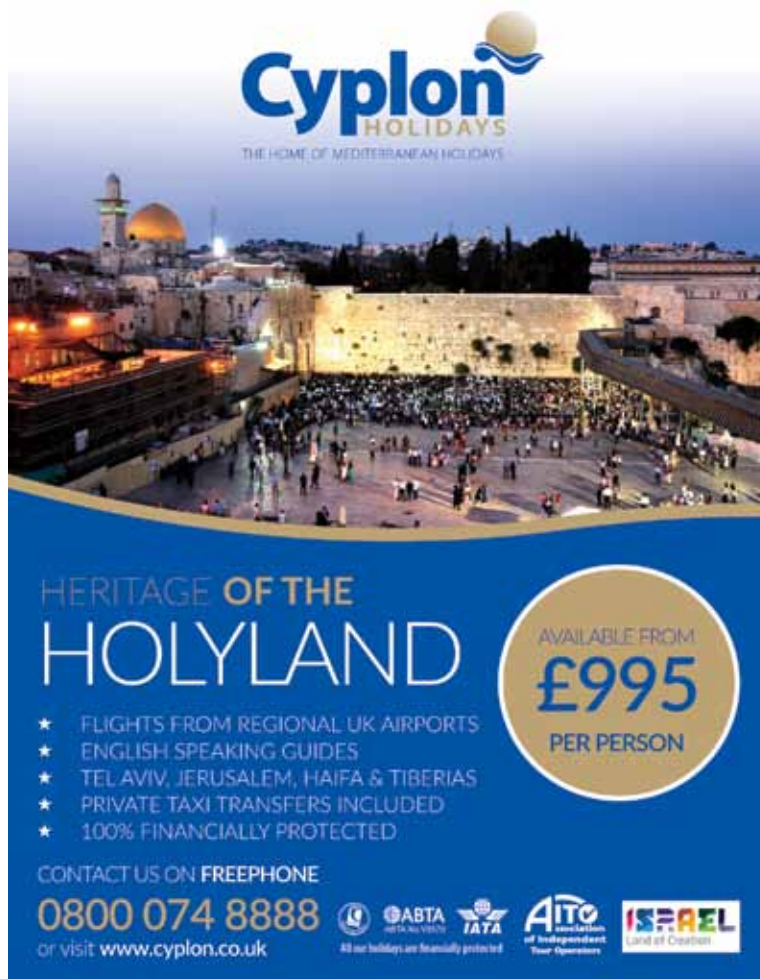
Offering an even more in-depth culinary adventure around just one region – and focusing on the real crème de la crème of French cuisine – Insight Vacations' French Elegance tour is part of its Luxury Gold collection. Highlights include dinner at Michelin-starred Le Dauphin Restaurant in Normandy's chic seaside town of Deauville, oyster-tasting in St Malo, and a gourmet walk through Paris to sample local delicacies including cheese,

chocolate and macaroons.

"Our customers and agents were asking for a foodie tour of France, and that is what we have put together," says Just You head of product Christina Hunter-Locke.

After heeding that demand, the singles operator now offers a gastronomic trip to Bordeaux where clients can sample vintages from the vineyards of Sauternes and Graves, and try local specialities from the luxurious base of a converted manor house in the leafy Gironde region (six days from £1,059).

For those seeking lunch of the liquid variety, Great Rail Journeys' Luxury Bordeaux wine trail encourages clients to become wine connoisseurs as they visit famous wine-producing regions to taste tipples from Cadillac, Pauillac and St Emilion (eight days from £2,795). 







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