

THE WALKING PARTY

ITINERARY FOR THE HAUT QUERCY

Distance: 68km approx

Walking: moderate



James and Diana Tamlyn moved to their 18th century farmhouse in France 15 years ago, enthused by the romance and beauty of the area. James' love of the flora and fauna, their combined fascination for the food, wine and local traditions and personal contacts make the week a special experience that you could not enjoy as an individual traveller.

This area of south west France, known as the 'Quercy', was given by Eleanor of Aquitaine to Henri d'Anjou in 1152, two years before he became Henry II of England, and its beauty and timelessness has changed little since. Not only that but it is still known today as being the gastronomic heart of France.

Day 1 After meeting up with James and the rest of the group in the morning at Toulouse airport you will be driven for lunch at Albi. This has one of the most beautiful and important cathedrals in France. A papal statement of the thirteenth century. We will visit the cathedral after lunch before driving on a beautiful medieval cliff hanging village famed for being one of the prettiest villages of France. This has an outstanding position over the river and is surrounded by iron red and manganese blue cliffs. As we are there off season it is a truly magical experience, especially at night: beautifully floodlit and quiet. You stay at a charming auberge in the centre of the village where you will spend your first four nights in easy comfort and with wonderful views. Dinner in the village.

Day 2 After breakfast we set off on foot to cross the river and walk up to get far reaching views of the river valley. Donkeys will be in tow with all the kit and masses of drink. We walk to an extraordinary sixteenth century chateau where we will picnic on the terrace perched above and overlooking the river and across to a pretty hilltop village. This beautiful chateau is steeped in history. First built by the famous Gordon family of Scotland, it has been in the hands of the same family since they bought it from the former Minister for War to Louis XVI (not a great position to have at the time of the Revolution!). We have a privileged

visit with the owner who is now the proud grand father of twenty four grand children! In the afternoon we wander back along the river valley, keeping an eye out for kingfishers, to return to the village hotel. Dinner in the village. *Walk: 18km with vehicle option*



Day 3 We drive to a different river valley from where we walk with donkeys and kit for the 'Four Bridges' walk along the cliffs and down along the river littered with lofty poplars and chequered with fields where corn can be seen stacked in stooks. Picnic lunch on the banks in an historic village by a ruined abbey. In the afternoon we set off further downstream where the last of the stone bridges spans the babbling brook. Drive to the hotel. Dinner at the hotel. *Walk: 7km + optional 7km*

Day 4 We drive to the majesty of another beautiful chateau in the middle of the countryside for a walk with the donkeys through the cause with its typical stone walled paths before we arrive in the middle of nowhere for a lovely al fresco picnic with Diana in a pasture surrounded by lombardy poplars and cliffs. A big hill in the afternoon and soon (enough!) you find yourselves back in the medieval cliff hanging village of St Cirq Lapopie. Dinner in St Cirq Lapopie. *Walk: 15km*

Day 5 We walk along an ancient tow path, carved into the cliffs alongside the river, where slid the heavy barges trailed by slow horses and which is a famous part of the equally famous Chemin de St Jacques. We then meet up with our vehicle and drive along roads chiselled through the cliffs before reaching the ancient city of Cahors for the hustle and bustle of market day. Excellent 'cuisine' at our favourite restaurant before a drive through the Quercy Blanc landscape. We shall visit the famous medieval masterpiece of the Pont Valentré and pass through the tiny bastide of Castelfranc before arriving at your hotel where you will stay your last three nights. This is a charming manor house. All bedrooms have en suite bathrooms and are large and wonderfully comfortable. You will spend your next three nights under the watchful eye of Bernard and Eva Philippe. There is a swimming pool. *Walk: 5km*

Day 6 A drive in the morning to Château Chambert. We set off on foot, for stunning views over the valleys of Jurassic limestone. We will pass through vineyards and tiny villages before arriving for a lovely lunch in a café routiere. These cafés show you just how good basic French cuisine is. A plethora of lorry drivers and locals pile in to eat excellent food at midday. Vive la France! After lunch we visit the mighty honey-coloured castle of Bonaguil. This was a castle much admired by T. E. Lawrence. Most of it was built in the sixteenth century by Baron Berenger de Roquefeuil. We will then rejoin the vehicle to return to your manor house. Dinner at the manor house. *Walk: 9km*

Day 7 We leave by car to drop off for a walk through the beautiful Quercy Blanc with wonderful flowers to the twelfth century village of Montcuq. This is a lovely village with a towering keep and we will lunch beneath the chestnut tree in its heart. We then drive to a village for a circuitous walk through more lovely countryside before returning to your hotel. Dinner at the hotel.
Walk: 10km

Day 8 You leave in the morning for Toulouse airport.



NOTE: This tour starts and ends at Toulouse airport. The itinerary is subject to change according to local conditions. All mileages shown are approximate.