

Gardens of the Loire Valley, France

September 5-16, 2024

The Loire is the longest river in France, and gives its name to this beautiful valley, abounding in romantic and historic castles, charming villages, constructed of limestone, wineries, and, of course, gardens. The Loire Valley is known as the “Valley of the Kings of France” and “The Garden of France.”

5th September: Departure from the United States.

6th September: Arrival at Charles de Gaulle airport, Paris.
Our first visit, La Grenouillère, some 30km south-west of Paris, is the lovely creation of its owner, Françoise Lacaze. There is something of a Japanese influence here. We continue to Orléans, best known for its association with Joan of Arc, the liberator of France in the 15th century. Our hotel, The Mercure, is situated on the north bank of the River Loire, close to the city centre. Dinner and overnight Hotel Mercure Orléans Centre.

7th September: Guided walking tour of this historic city named after the Roman Emperor Aurelian, taking in a reconstruction of Joan of Arc’s house, the cathedral, and its historic streets. As dinner is on your own tonight, this will give you an opportunity to check out some of the restaurants. After lunch our touring bus will take us to La Source, where we will have a guided tour of this large public park, which has received the official title of “remarkable garden,” awarded to French gardens of particular aesthetic, botanical or historical interest. Dinner on your own tonight. Overnight Hôtel Mercure Orléans Centre.

8th September: We head deeper into the Loire Valley, and start with a visit to Chambord, the largest of the Loire Valley châteaux, and a UNESCO world Heritage site. Only a few of the 426 rooms are open to the public, and we will visit these. We will see the amazing double revolution staircase, probably designed by Leonardo de Vinci, and then we will see, in the grounds, a display of horsemanship, with the riders in medieval costume. This afternoon we check into the Château de la Bourdaisière, our home for the next three nights. We arrive on the day of a major festival, that of the tomato! Not only are we staying at a château, but a major horticultural experience with its enormous tomato collection, herb garden and dahlia garden. Dinner on your own tonight in nearby Montlouis-sur-Loire. Overnight Château de la Bourdaisière.

9th September: This morning we visit the International Garden Festival at the historic Château of Chaumont. This is not like Philadelphia or Chelsea as there are no stands selling garden related services or products. It’s a Summer-long festival, with each year

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having a different theme. There are permanent collections of clematis, asters, peonies, dahlias, and asters. We later visit the floral village of Chedigny, where the main street has been turned over to flowers. There is also a garden, “The Presbytery.” Renowned specialists were involved in designing it, featuring several species of perennial and annual plants, decorative, medicinal, aromatic, shrubs, fruit trees and a “remarkable tree.” Overnight and dinner Château de la Bourdaisière.

10th September: Château de Chenonceau. This is one of the most visited châteaux in France, so this will be our first visit, hopefully avoiding the inevitable crowds. Not only is it a very interesting and historic castle, in a beautiful location spanning The Indre, a tributary of The Loire, but it has not just one, but three gardens. One of the gardens, and in the opinion of our guide, Michael, the best, is hidden, and missed by the hordes visiting the château. This afternoon we visit Amboise, a beautiful little town on the banks of The Loire. Leonardi di Vinci lived here from 1515 to 1519, and we’ll visit Clos Lucé, his home and garden. Dinner and overnight Château de la Bourdaisière.

11th September: Our next four nights will be in Tours, the city at the heart of the Loire Valley. We first take a guided tour of the old city, with its quaint streets, its medieval houses steeped in history, and the basilica of Saint Martin. He was a Roman military officer who converted to Christianity, and became the first bishop of Tours. The main square, Place Plumereau, has many restaurants for you to check out for your two free evenings. This afternoon we visit the Saint-Cosme Priory, where the poet Pierre de Ronsard was Prior from 1565 to 1585. He was passionate about botany, gardening and flowers. The garden, mainly roses, is a tribute to him. Dinner and overnight Hotel Hampton by Hilton Tours Centre.

12th September: Château de Villandry. Constructed in the early 16th century, the castle has been, since the early 1900’s the home of the Carvallo family. The castle is lovely, and its easy to see that it’s a cared-for family home. However, it’s the magnificent garden that is the centrepiece of the visit. It is the largest potager garden in the world, with a mixture of colorful vegetables and flowers in the symmetrical parterres. There is also a very well-labeled herb garden, and a maze. We then tour through beautiful limestone villages to the Château du Rivau, a medieval fortress, surrounded by 15 gardens. Garden designer Patricia Laigneau ensures that there are always at least two gardens in peak condition. Dinner on your own tonight. Overnight Hotel Hampton by Hilton Tours Centre.

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- 13th September: This morning we visit Tours market to buy goodies for a picnic on the banks of The Loire, or one of its tributaries, The Cher and The Vienne. A French market is a cultural and gastronomic experience not to be missed. Weather permitting (and it's usually pretty settled in mid-September), we will picnic on the banks on the one of the three above rivers. The area around Tours is known as Touraine. Although not so well known as Burgundy, Champagne or Bordeaux, the Touraine wines equal all these regions for quality. The principal grape varieties are sauvignon (white), cabernet franc red), gamay (red). The region produces more than 28 million bottles a year. Likewise, the region isn't widely known for its excellent cheeses. Most, like Coeur de Touraine, are made from goat's milk. Le Roule is made with cow's milk, enriched with herbs and garlic. We will have a tasting of cheese and wine at one of the many wineries. Dinner on your own. Overnight Hotel Hampton by Hilton Tours Centre.
- 14th September: This morning is a visit to a private garden, "The Ceders," created by the owners, Françoise and Alain Rouillier. It's a sloping site of ½ acre. They have created a lovely garden on this challenging site. Our second garden is called "The Little Maid," and is the creation of Mireille Etavard. It contains more than 500 trees and shrubs, 1000 perennials, 600 roses, 200 heathers, and reflects her travels in China, Japan, Morocco, Nepal and Peru. Dinner and overnight Hotel Hampton by Hilton Tours Centre.
- 15th September: We head north again today, and our first visit will be to Chartres, a beautiful small city with a UNESCO heritage site cathedral. The cathedral is known for its stained-glass windows, many of them in a unique shade of blue. This will also be our lunch stop as there are many eateries. Our final visit of the tour is the park of the Château of Rambouillet. We stroll around the English garden, and admire the "shell cottage" with its interior entirely decorated with shells! Dinner and overnight Hotel Pullman Roissy.
- 16th September: Transfer to CDG. Our hotel very close to Charles de Gaulle airport so we won't have to worry about getting caught in the Paris traffic.

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CHEDIGNY



BOURDAISIÈRE



PLACE PLUMEREAU – TOURS



CHATEAU CHAMBORD



Jardin du Clos des Cèdres



CHARTRES CATHEDRAL

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COST

The cost of the trip will include bed & breakfast & 6 dinners as noted above, travel by touring coach, garden visits as mentioned (entrance fees included), services of a specialist tour manager/guide, all taxes. **Air fare to Europe not included.** All hotels, tours and garden visits are subject to availability. Cost for **Gardens of the Loire Valley, France with Chris Adams and Michael Smith - 2024** tour \$4,850.00 (airfare not included), plus \$900.00 single supplement. A \$500 deposit **plus** 10% of the balance will hold your spot! **Final payments will be due in two payments, a schedule will be sent to you.**

INSURANCE

It is **highly recommended** that you look in to buying trip cancellation and baggage insurance. You can research options on websites like www.insuremytrip.com. Insurance can help with lost baggage, injuries while traveling and even COVID expenses of extra room or transportation if you need to leave the trip. You are responsible for any extra expenses incurred in these situations and insurance can help with them. Plan for the unexpected.

FORCE MAJEURE: Come With Me Tours, LLC. and/or suppliers of services pursuant to or in connection with this itinerary shall not be responsible or become liable for any delay incurred by any person in connection with any means of transportation; or, for loss, injury, death, inconvenience, or damage as a result of circumstances amounting to force majeure. Force majeure means any event or circumstance that Come With Me Tours, LLC. or the supplier of the services in question could not foresee or avoid. Such events and circumstances may include, acts of God, actual or threatened war, insurrection, riots, strikes, civil action, decisions by governments or governing authority, technical or maintenance problems with transport, changes of schedules, or operational decisions of air carriers, terrorist activity or the threat thereof, Industria action, natural or nuclear activity, epidemic, pandemic, illness, physical injury, quarantine, medical or customs or immigration regulation, delay, or cancellation, adverse weather conditions, fire and all similar events outside the control of Come With Me Tours, LLC. and/or the supplier of services.

TOUR DOES NOT INCLUDE: Airfare; charges for excessive baggage; cancellation, health, accident, or baggage insurance; charges for room service; items of a personal nature (i.e., laundry and phone bills); meals, unless noted; liquor, wine, soft beverages, bottled water; **end of trip tip to tour manager or guides.**

Fitness Level is moderate: Participants must be able to carry their own luggage, climb and descend stairs, be in good health, mobile and able to participate in 3-5 hours of physical activity per day, the equivalent of walking up to 3-4 miles on uneven ground. Gardens often have uneven paths and slopes to negotiate and often limited handrails.

Please use your best judgment on your fitness and discuss any concerns with me.