

Tour
Information



Christmas in the Loire Valley





Travel

Passports

Please ensure your 10-year British Passport is not out of date and is valid for a full three months beyond the duration of your visit. EU, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino or Switzerland valid national identification cards are also acceptable for travel to France.

Visas

British and EU passport holders are not required to have a visa.

For all other passport holders please check the visa requirements with the appropriate embassy.

French consulate: PO Box 57, 6A Cromwell Place, London SW7 2EW; Tel (020) 7838 2000/1. Information Service: Tel (0891) 887 733, Fax: (020) 7838 2046. Opening hours: 0900-1130 (and 1600-1630 for visa collection only) Mon-Fri (except British and French national holidays).



Tickets

You will be issued with return train tickets.

Please take care not to lose your tickets and please check that the details on your tickets are accurate. Your ticket is non-transferable and non-refundable. No refund can be given for non-used portions.

Standard Premier on Eurostar tickets is indicated by two asterisks in the class type section in the top right-hand corner. A light meal will be served to passengers travelling Standard Premier on Eurostar. Standard class Eurostar tickets do not include any food or drink on board, although there is a buffet car serving drinks and snacks.

TGV tickets do not include any food or drink on board, although a buffet car is available.

Train Seats

On all legs of the journey you have reserved seat and carriage numbers which are shown clearly on your ticket.



Baggage

As with most trains, passengers are responsible for carrying baggage onto and off the train. Baggage can be stored on overhead shelves or at the entrance to the carriages. Trolleys are available at St Pancras and Paris, but bags do need to be carried on to the platform. Porters are sometimes but not always available at St Pancras.

Travel Editions recommends a luggage delivery service called **thebaggagecompany**, where your suitcase can be picked up from your home before departure and delivered straight to your hotel; therefore, removing the worry about carrying your cases onto and off the trains.

For further information:

<http://www.thebaggageman.com>

Labels

Please use the luggage labels provided. It is useful to have your home address located inside your suitcase should the label go astray.

Transfers

On arrival in St Pierre des Corps, transfer by coach to the Oceania Univers Hotel in Tours (approx. 15 minutes).

Special Requests

If you haven't already, please notify Travel Editions of any special requests as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements.



Accommodation

Oceania Univers Hotel

The 4-star Oceania Univers Hotel is located in the centre of Tours and has been welcoming guests since its opening in 1846. Facilities at the hotel include an indoor pool, spa with jacuzzi and gym, bar, restaurant, the recently renovated air-conditioned bedrooms feature private bath/shower, hairdryer, satellite TV, telephone, and free wi-fi.

For more information visit the hotel's website:

<https://www.oceaniahotels.com/h/hotel-oceania-l-univers-tours>



Food

At the centre of local gastronomy, goat cheese comes in five different AOC variations: Crottin de Chavignol (a small, round, slightly bulging delight), Sainte-Maure de Touraine (a bûche famously tied up with a strand of hay), Selles-sur-Cher (rounds with a fine blue crust), and for the finish, two pyramids: Valençay, the top of which will have been sliced off by Talleyrand, and Pouligny-Saint-Pierre, which managed to keep its head. To this mix add Trèfle, a newcomer among chèvres, and cow's milk cheeses such as Cendré d'Olivet and Feuille de Dreux.

The best-known specialities here are rillettes de Tours, poached eggs au Chinon, saupiquet nivernais, pâté berrichon with eggs, chicken en barbouille, nougats de Tours, Chinon peaches, sabayon de golden, prune candies, and dried pears.

For those with a sweet tooth, desserts here are also delicious: macaroons, jams, dries apples and pears, shortbreads. Coffee is served after the meal and will be black, in small cups, unless a *café au lait* (or *crème*) is requested.

Almost all restaurants offer two types of meals: *à la carte* (extensive choice for each course, generally more expensive) and *le menu* (a set meal at a fixed price). The bill (*l'addition*) will not be presented until it is asked for, even if clients sit and talk for half an hour after finishing their meal. Usually, a

discretionary service charge is added to your bill in restaurants and bars, and no further tipping is required.

Generally speaking, mealtimes in France are strictly observed. Lunch is as a rule served from noon to 1330, dinner usually from 2000-2130, but the larger the city, the later the dining hour.



Drink

The Loire Valley wine region includes the French wine regions situated along the Loire River from the Muscadet region near the city of Nantes on the Atlantic coast to the region of Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé just southeast of the city of Orléans in north central France. In between are the regions of Anjou, Saumur, Bourgueil, Chinon, and Vouvray. The Loire Valley itself follows the river through the Loire province to the river's origins in the Cévennes but the majority of the wine production takes place in the regions noted above. While the majority of production is white wine from the Chenin blanc, Sauvignon blanc and Melon de Bourgogne grapes, there are red wines made (especially around the Chinon region) from Cabernet franc. In addition to still wines, rosé, sparkling and dessert wines are also produced. With Crémant production throughout the Loire, it is the second largest sparkling wine producer in France after Champagne. The Loire Valley has a long history of winemaking dating back to the 1st century.

In elegant restaurants the wine list will be separate from the main menu, but in less opulent establishments will be printed on the back or along the side of the *carte*. The waiter will usually be glad to advise an appropriate choice. If in doubt, try the house wine; this will usually be less expensive and will always be the owner's pride.

Meals included in the price of your holiday are:

Breakfast – daily

Dinner – Christmas Eve at a local restaurant

Lunch – Christmas Day at a local restaurant



Destination

The Loire Valley is located in the middle stretch of the Loire River in central France and is referred to as the Cradle of the French and the Garden of France due to the abundance of vineyards and fruit orchards, and artichoke, and asparagus fields, which line the banks of the river. Notable for its historic towns, architecture, and wines, the valley has been inhabited since the Stone Ages. In 2000, UNESCO added the central part of the Loire River valley to its list of World Heritage Sites.

Places of interest included in the tour:

Tours

Tours, the principal city of the department of Indre-et-Loire (formerly Touraine) in the Loire Valley, has a well preserved cultural heritage which rests easily against its modern, vibrant and dynamic image of today. It has been a seat of learning since the middle ages and carries on this fine tradition through its university today. The city has much to offer the first-time visitor and although small enough to walk its modern tramway transport system allows for easy and inexpensive access to many of its landmarks and tourist sites.

For more information about Tours please visit:
<https://www.experienceloire.com/tours.htm>

Vouvray

Vouvray is situated east of the city of Tours along the right bank of the Loire River, and is a town that appears for the first time in 1284 in its French form Vouvray and is renowned for its white wine. The region of Vouvray is known as the home of Chenin Blanc. Vouvray is also the name of an AOC designation (since 1936) that makes wines from the Chenin Blanc grape. While use of the Arbois grape is permitted, chances are that if you are drinking a Vouvray, it is made from Chenin. Chenin Blanc is also called Pineau Blanc de la Loire. Under AOC law, the wines may be Sec (dry), Demi-Sec (Semi-Dry), Moelleux (Mellow) or Sparkling. Vouvray is characterized by its picturesque cave dwellings, the extent of its vineyards and steep hillside, Vouvray Balzac when passing in 1831 was deeply impressed, "as Vouvray is nestled in the canyons and rock slides, in more than one place there are three storey houses dug into the rock and connected by dangerous stairs carved into the stone".

For more information about Vouvray please visit:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vouvray>

Fontevraud Abbey

Fontevraud Royal Abbey, situated where the three regions of Poitou, Anjou and Touraine meet, is one of the largest surviving monastic cities from the Middle Ages. The Abbey was listed as an Historic Monument in 1840, and, as part of the Loire Valley, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000. In a green valley just a few kilometres from the Loire River, near Saumur, Fontevraud is one of the unmissable stops on a visit to the Loire Valley. Since its creation nearly a thousand years ago by an eccentric monk, the Abbey has always been a 'singular foundation'. A place of social and sexual diversity! The Abbey was run by an abbess, who gave shelter to men and women in the four priories: Sainte-Marie for the 'contemplatives', Sainte-Marie-Madeleine for the lay sisters, Saint-Jean de l'Habit for the monks, and Saint-Lazare for nuns caring for lepers.

For more information about Fontevraud Abbey, visit:
<http://www.fontevraud.fr/>

Saumur

Saumur is situated at the southern end of Anjou, at the confluence of the Thouet and the Loire Rivers, in an area of ancient settlement. Saumur dates back to the fourth century BC - it was created as a small village in ancient times called simply 'Mur' with people who lived in caves (called 'habitations troglodytes'), dug along the sides of steep mountain ranges to the east of Saumur. Saumur is a very attractive town with its white stone buildings, grey slate rooves and riverside setting, all topped of course by its grand chateau set on a hill above the town. It is a lively shopping town and has lots of attractive streets to explore and several nice squares with cafes and restaurants that are charming places to stop for a drink or a meal. The Place Saint Pierre is particularly attractive with the imposing church of Saint Pierre which dates to the 12 and 13th centuries and contains some lovely stained glass windows. Also on the square are some attractive half-timber buildings from the 15 and 16th centuries.

For more information about Saumur please visit:
<https://www.loirevalleyfrance.net/places/saumur.html>

Chateau de Chenonceau

The Château de Chenonceau is a French château spanning the River Cher, near the small village of Chenonceaux in the Indre-et-Loire département of the Loire Valley in France. It is one of the best-known châteaux of the Loire valley, and other than Versailles, the most visited. The estate of Chenonceau is first mentioned in writing in the 11th century. The current château was built in 1514–1522 on the foundations of an old mill and was later extended to span the river. The bridge over the river was built (1556-1559) to designs by the French Renaissance architect Philibert de l'Orme, and the gallery on the bridge, built from 1570–1576 to designs by Jean Bullant.

For more information about the chateau, visit: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%C3%A2teau_de_Chenonceau

Amboise

Amboise is incredibly charming but also a bit 'touristy' because of its popularity with visitors to the Loire Valley. What brings them here is its historical links to the French Royal Family, its markets and a little surprisingly perhaps, its connection with Leonardo de Vinci. The town still retains its medieval feel and has plenty of good restaurants and cafes to relax in and sample the local wines and produce of the area. The Loire river here at Amboise is best appreciated from atop the chateau or by a stroll across the bridge to the Leonardo da Vinci statue on Ile d'Or then looking back towards the town. Francois I spent his childhood here at the chateau and when he succeeded to the throne, he lavished much of his social skills on Amboise. He held frequent balls, feasts, tournaments and it was he who in 1516 invited Leonardo da Vinci to stay at the delightful Manoir du Clos-Luce, nearby with the promise of a pension, with the only requirement being that he devote some of his time to conversation and companionship. It is said that there is a secret tunnel from the chateau to the Manoir du Clos-Luce. Leonardo's remains now lie within the Chapel of Saint-Hubert within the grounds of the chateau. A visit to Amboise would not be complete without a short walk down Rue Victor-Hugo past the troglodyte houses (complete with satellite dishes) cut into the limestone cliff face, to the enchanting house and gardens where Leonardo de Vinci spent his final years

For more information about Amboise please visit: <https://www.experienceloire.com/amboise.htm>

Chateau de Chambord

The Château de Chambord at Chambord, Loir-et-Cher, France, is one of the most recognisable châteaux in the world because of its very distinctive French Renaissance architecture which blends traditional French medieval forms with classical Renaissance structures. The building, which was never completed, was constructed by King Francis I of France. Chambord is the largest château in the Loire Valley; it was built to serve as a hunting lodge for Francis I, who maintained his royal residences at the Château de Blois and Amboise. The original design of the Château de Chambord is attributed, though with some doubt, to Domenico da Cortona; Leonardo da Vinci may also have been involved.

For more information about the chateau, visit: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ch%C3%A2teau_de_Chambord

Blois

The Royal City of Blois sits proudly by the banks of the Loire with its skyline dominated by its cathedral and famous Chateau. The city was the favoured stronghold of the kings of France for 100 years, With the chateau being the principle royal residence from when Louis XII established his court here in 1498 until Henry IV moved it to Paris in 1598. Blois is the 'prefecture' (capital) of the department of Loire-et-Cher and is the established business centre of a farming district which produces wheat, vegetables (especially asparagus) and wine in abundance. Auguste Poulain opened a confectionary-chocolate factory in Blois in 1848, the site now is a hotel but his legacy lives on and is evident on almost every street corner.

For more information about Blois please visit: <https://www.experienceloire.com/blois.htm>

Recommended reading

Graham Robb, *The Discovery of France*.

A general introduction to French culture, landscape and history, it also features an excellent insight into the distinctive character of France's regions.

Robert Polodori, *Chateaux of the Loire Valley*

The architectural heritage of the French kings is nowhere as present as in the Loire Valley. Magnificent castles, sophisticated gardens and sweeping parks demonstrate both the monarchs' power and appreciation of art, attracting and fascinating uncounted visitors to this day.

Christmas

It is traditional in France for families to have their main Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve. Most shops will be closed on Christmas Day although there will be a limited selection of bars and restaurants open. Your tour manager will have details of opening times and Christmas services.

Tour manager

Your tour manager will be on hand throughout the tour to ensure that everything operated according to plan. If you have any problems or questions please see him or her immediately – it is often possible to resolve complaints or problems very quickly on the spot, and do everything to help you enjoy your holiday.



The Basics

Climate – The weather in The Loire Valley at this time of year is likely to be cold, but there is the chance of the odd shower. Our best advice is to come prepared.

Time – GMT +2 hours (Summer time Apr-Oct); GMT + 1 (Standard time Nov-Mar).

Language – French.

Religion – Roman Catholic.

National holidays – New Year's Day (01 Jan); Easter Monday; Labour day (01 May); Victory in Europe day (08 May); Ascension day; Whit Sunday; Whit Monday; National day (14 Jul); Assumption of Mary (15 Aug); All Saints' day (01 Nov); Armistice day (11 Nov); Christmas day (25 Dec).

Currency – Euro. €1 = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents.

Banks – Cashpoints compatible with international banking networks are located in all towns and cities, as well as airports, major train stations and other spots. They usually offer an attractive exchange rate. Those banks that still exchange foreign currencies into local money will always charge a transaction fee, so withdrawing money from an ATM usually represents the most logical means of obtaining euros.

Credit cards – American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted across the country. If you're eating at a restaurant, check prior to the meal that your card will be an acceptable form of payment. It is advisable to carry a supply of cash with you at all times, as restaurants and shops in small villages may not accept credit cards.

Electricity – 220 volt, two-pin continental plug.

Drinking water – Tap water is safe to drink. (Although you'll find a huge amount of bottled water for sale too)

Shops and museums – Department stores are open 0900-1830 Monday to Saturday. Most shops are closed between 1200-1430. Some food shops (particularly bakers) are open Sunday mornings, in which case they will probably close Monday. Many shops close all day or half-day Monday. Please note that most museums are closed on Mondays.

Clothes & Shoes – You may like to bring a warm sweater for cool evenings. Light rain wear for the occasional storm and good flat/grip walking shoes are recommended.

Camera – bring plenty of memory cards/film and any spare camera batteries as these are not always available. Please check with your guide before photographing people.

Bath plugs – The hotel has plugs for basins, but it is useful to carry a 'universal' one with you.

Telephones/mobiles – You should be able to use your mobile phone in France, depending on your operator and contract.

Tipping – To keep our tours affordable, we do not increase the tour price by adding in tips. However, in the tourism industry, there is a certain level of expectation that when receiving a good service, one does award with a tip. Tour Managers, Representatives, Guides and Drivers appreciate a tip at the end of their involvement with the tour, but this is entirely at your discretion. We believe in allowing you to tip according to your level of satisfaction with their services, but for your guidance about £2-3 per person per day for the tour manager is the norm. We would like to reiterate that tipping is an entirely optional payment and this information is given purely to answer any questions you may have about it.



Health

Doctor/Dentist/Chemist

Please talk to your tour manager if you are feeling unwell and they will organise for you to see a doctor.

Keep receipts for insurance claims.



Hospital

Your tour manager/hotel reception will arrange hospital transport.

Keep receipts for insurance claims.

General Health Advice

We suggest you take a good supply of your own individual medicines with you and always keep some in your hand luggage in case you get delayed or your luggage goes astray. General-purpose supplies for bites, stings, or scratches, and your usual medication for headaches, or stomach upsets are always recommended. Oral re-hydration sachets are excellent for topping up salt and glucose levels.

Visit the NHS Fit For Travel website for more generally information specific to the country you are visiting – www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

Inoculations

You should check with your own doctor and take their advice as to which inoculations are required for the country you are visiting, as only they know your medical history and recommendations are liable to change at short notice.



Insurance

To be covered under your Travel Insurance Policy, if you become ill, it is essential that you contact a local doctor and also telephone the emergency number of your insurance company. You will **NOT** be covered for any claim unless this procedure is carried out. Your insurance company will then decide on the best course of medical attention.

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

The EHIC replaced the old E111 in 2006. Valid in all EEA countries, the card lets you get state healthcare at a reduced cost or sometimes for free. It will cover you for treatment that is needed to allow you to continue your stay until your planned return. It also covers the treatment of pre-existing medical conditions.

Please note that the EHIC **is not** an alternative to travel insurance. It will not cover any private medical healthcare or costs such as being flown back to the UK, or lost or stolen property. Therefore, it is important to have both an EHIC and a valid private travel insurance policy. It is also important to note that each country's healthcare system is slightly different, so the EHIC might not cover everything that would be generally free on the NHS.

We strongly recommend that you take out an appropriate travel insurance policy when you travel abroad.

For more information about the EHIC please visit:

<https://www.ehic.org.uk>



Emergencies

Should an emergency arise, please call our offices on:

00 44 20 7251 0045

Outside office hours (Mon-Fri 0900-1700), telephone our emergency staff on:

00 44 7899 796542 or

00 44 7831 133079 or

00 44 1235 850720

PLEASE USE THESE NUMBERS ONLY IN THE EVENT OF A GENUINE EMERGENCY.

If you find that you are in need of consular assistance during your holiday:

Consular services Paris

16 rue d'Anjou

75008 Paris

France

Tel: +33 (0)1 44 51 31 00

Fax: +33 (0)1 44 51 31 27

Open Mon-Fri 0930-1230. Outside these hours a consular Emergency Service is in operation and can be contacted on +33 (0)1 44 51 31 00.

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