

Tour
Information



Christmas in Southern Provence by Rail





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Please ensure your 10-year British Passport is not out of date and is valid for a full three months beyond the duration of your visit.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 a return train ticket.

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 Lille, 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 **thebaggageman**, 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 Aix-en-Provence, transfer by coach to Hotel Aquabella (approx. 30 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

Aquabella Hotel

The Aquabella Hotel is an impressive, modern four-star spa hotel, located in the centre of town within walking distance of most of the main sights. L'Orangerie restaurant offers excellent cuisine, and it is here where you will enjoy your Christmas Eve dinner and Christmas Day lunch. Superb spa facilities combine with an extensive fitness centre to offer guests a range of fantastic facilities for their leisure. The hotel bar provides a relaxed environment to enjoy a cocktail after a long day. Rooms are comfortable and contemporary with private bath/shower, air-conditioning, TV, telephone, minibar and hairdryer.

For more information, visit the hotel's website:

<http://www.aquabella.fr/default-en.html>



Food

The words *Provençal cuisine* conjure colourful and mouth-watering images of red and yellow peppers, glorious tomatoes, aubergines, fresh fish, olives and olive oil, citrus fruits and golden melons ripened in the Mediterranean sunshine. Locally grown fruit and vegetables, Provençal herbs (basil, thyme, rosemary, sage, marjoram...), olive oil and garlic form the basis of many of the local dishes, of which the most famous is *Ratatouille* (stew of courgettes, tomatoes, red and green peppers and aubergines braised with garlic, olive oil and *Herbes de Provence*). Other typical Provençal dishes include *Bouillabaisse* (fish soup), *Soupe au Pistou* (vegetable and bean soup with fresh basil), *Pissaladière* (golden onion, anchovy and olive pizza), *Ratatouille*, *Daube Provençale* (classic French beef stew), *Salade Niçoise* (made with fresh tuna, olives, green beans, anchovies, new potatoes and boiled egg), *Aïoli* (garlic mayonnaise generally accompanies fish, vegetables or crusty bread) and *tapenade* (luscious Provençal paste made with olives, olive oil, anchovies, capers and garlic).

Enjoy the traditional southern Provençal sweets, such as *Tarte Tropezienne* (rich tart filled with crème patissier), *Calisson d'Aix* (made from a paste of ground almonds, candied melon and orange peel, covered with bright royal icing) and

Nougat. 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: *a 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

Wine is by far the most popular alcoholic beverage in France, and the choice will vary according to region. Provence is best known for its rosé wine; the pink wines of Massalia (today's Marseille) are famous in Roman times. Côtes de Provence AOC is the main wine region, producing about 75% of all wine in Provence, principally a fine rosé. The local Côtes du Rhône, Côtes de Provence, Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence, and Coteaux varois en Provence wines are an excellent accompaniment to the regional cuisine. *Pastis* (such as *Ricard*), the local anise-flavoured liqueur, is diluted with water to make a refreshing and hugely popular aperitif.

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.

This tour is on a bed and breakfast basis and includes:

- Welcome dinner on arrival at the hotel.
- Christmas Eve dinner in a local restaurant
- Christmas Day lunch in a local restaurant



Destination

Escape to the south of France this Christmas to follow in the footsteps of artists, writers and royalty through the dramatic hill towns, chic cities, glamorous resorts and fantastic scenery of southern Provence. Based in the delightful provincial capital, Aix, enjoy the region's rich artistic heritage with an easy going touring itinerary that includes Marseille, Arles, Les Baux, Bandol, Cassis and the spectacular Calanques.

Places of interest included in the tour:

Aix-en-Provence

Aix-en-Provence is one of Provence's most beautiful towns with a wealth of sights that reward detailed exploration. Highlights include the Cathedral of St Sauveur, noted for Froment's "Triptych of the Burning Bush" and several museums including the Archaeology and Tapestry Museums. There is a Cézanne trail, too, that takes you to significant locations in the artist's life, such as the family estate, Jas de Bouffan, the quarries at Bibémus, and his studio at Les Lauves. Aix is a wonderful place to linger, too, at an outdoor café, particularly one of many along the elegant tree-lined Cours Mirabeau.

For more information about Aix-en-Provence, visit:
<http://www.aixenprovencetourism.com/en/>

Arles and Les Baux-de-Provence

Once a metropolis of Roman Gaul, Arles became a symbol of ardent Christianity as can be seen through the arena, the Alyscamps burial grounds, the amphitheatre and the Roman baths of Constantin. Set in the heart of the Alpilles regional country park, Les Baux-de-Provence is a listed heritage site that has won titles such as "one of the Most Beautiful Villages in France" or "Station classée". And the essence that gives Provencal villages their very special atmosphere and fragrance is here too – small squares, well-shaded terraces, narrow streets and small shops. Set upon a rocky outcrop, the Castle of Les Baux dominates the medieval village of Les Baux de Provence and offers incredible panoramic views over the Alpilles.

For more information about Arles, visit:
<https://www.provenceweb.fr/e/bouches/arles/arles.htm>
For more information about Les Baux-de-Provence, visit:
<http://www.lesbauxdeprovence.com/en>

Cassis & the Calanques

Cassis is a Mediterranean fishing port in southern France. Overlooked by a centuries-old château, it's known for pebbly beaches and its calanques. The harbor features pastel-colored buildings, sidewalk cafes and restaurants. Local vineyards are known for producing Cassis white wine. From Marseille to Cassis the coastline forms narrow inlets, the Calanques, a series of jagged white cliffs (some up to 400 metres high) reflected in the dazzling turquoise water.

For more information about Cassis, visit:
<https://www.ot-cassis.com/en/>

Toulon & Hyères

Tucked into a fine natural harbour, Toulon is home to France's Mediterranean fleet. Sights here include the opera house, Cathédrale Ste-Marie-de-la-Sedo and several interesting museums including the Musée des Arts Asiatique, Baroque Musée de la Marine and Hotel des Arts. The palm-tree-lined streets of Hyères make for a charming town, one of the oldest resorts in the south of France, attracting such luminaries as Queen Victoria, Robert Louis Stevenson and Edith Wharton since its 18th century inception. Sights here include the 13th century church of St Louis, delightful old town and elegant Belle-Epoque buildings.

For more information about Toulon, visit:
<http://toulontourisme.com/en/>
For more information about Hyeres, visit:
<http://www.hyeres-tourism.co.uk/>

Marseille

A fascinating day today as we explore France's largest port and 2nd largest city, Marseilles, with a population of 800,000. It has close links to the Middle East and North Africa which lend it an exotic, cosmopolitan air. Sights here included the renowned fish market, the old harbour, Chateau d'If, setting for Dumas' Counte of Monte Cristo, 11th century Abbey of St Victor, church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, Cathédrale de la Major and several excellent museums including the Musée des Beaux Arts and Archaeology Museum.

For more information about Marseille, visit:
<http://www.marseille-tourisme.com/en/>

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.

Reading suggestions

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.

Bernard Levin, *From the Camargue to the Alps: A Walk Across France in Hannibal's footsteps*.

As the title suggests, English journalist Bernard Levin follows the Carthaginian military commander's path across France to Italy, describing history, landscape and culture on his way.

James Pope-Hennessy, *Aspects of Provence*.

A concise and vivid survey of Provence.

Peter Mayle, *A year in Provence*.

An entertaining account of the author's life as an expatriate in Provence and his take on the locals and their customs.

Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*, 1766.

Laurance Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, 1768.

Both 18th century authors travelled through France, to Nice, continuing along to Italy. Sterne's personal and sentimental account can be seen as a response to quarrelsome and deriding Smollett's.

Lady Winifred Fortescue, *Perfume from Provence*, 1935.

This bestseller related the everyday life in a village in Provence during the inter-war period.

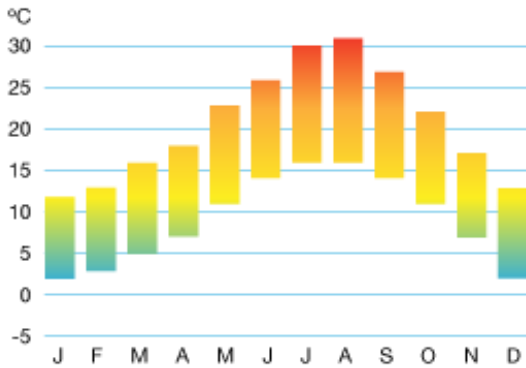
F Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*.

Fitzgerald's famous novel is set in the glamour and extravagance of the 1920s French Riviera.



The Basics

Climate – The weather in Southern Provence at this time of year is likely to be cool, and 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. Even in cities, it's advisable to carry a supply of cash with you at all times. Varying amounts of commission can be charged.

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 – Aix-en-Provence has a wide variety of shops. Smaller towns will have small boutiques and beautiful markets.

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 some museums close on Mondays.

Clothes – You may like to bring a warm sweater for cool evenings. Light rain wear for the occasional storm and good 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.

Shoes – we suggest good grip/flat walking shoes for walking on excursions.

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:

British Consulate Marseille

24 avenue du Prado

13006 Marseille

France

+33 (0)4 91 15 72 10

Marseilleconsular.marseille@fco.gov.uk

Mon, Wed and Fri: 0900 to 1230. Outside these hours a consular Emergency Service is in operation and can be contacted on +33 (0)4 91 15 72 10

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