

The Road from the Past

Traveling Through History in France

Tour based on the book of the same name by Ina Caro

Saturday, April 10 – Sunday, April 18, 2010

9 days, 8 nights

“Most people return from Europe with a memory of the places they have visited that is very much like a salad after it has been put through a Cuisinart. They have been to so many countries and heard so many dates and names of kings that when they return, the trip is all a blur. When I see the typical American tourist, I feel like yelling out, “Don’t do it that way, it’s no fun. Do it my way. If you do it my way, you will rent a time machine – available at any rent-a-car agency – and drive through history. Our time machine can’t take us into the future any faster than a minute at a time, but we can, if we properly plan our route, actually simulate the sensation of traveling through several centuries of the past on a magical vacation in France. If you follow the route I describe from Provence to Paris, traveling to some of the most magnificent and beautiful monasteries, churches, chateaux, and towns built in France over a period of nearly two thousand years, and visit these sites in the order they were built, you will feel almost as if you are traveling through the past, through the history of France.”

Ina Caro

“I have done this trip, and I guarantee you, it will change your view of France forever. It did mine. I felt like I was literally walking through the pages of a fairy tale. I did this trip about four years ago, and since then have always wanted to take people back to these incredible places. This is the France that you have perhaps never seen, but always wanted to see... the countryside, Provence, castles, medieval fortresses, and tranquil rivers...all in the context of a story with some of the most colorful characters to be found in the pages of history.

We will start in Provence and work our way up to the Valley of the Kings, savoring every day. Total drive time is only about 14 hours, so we have some good time to experience the road through history. We will travel by van, and I will take you through the story with some of Ina Caro’s words. Also, we have some local guides to explain the different periods of history. Accommodations include a 15th century inn, an old riverside inn, and a castle.”

*-Kim Morgan
Tour Guide*

Part I Provence

A Funny Thing Happened to Me on My Way to Marseille

“I had originally come to Orange by accident...” Thus begins a journey into the Roman conquest of the Gauls, the significance of Vercingetorix, and the vestiges of these lost civilizations that led the shadowed path into the dark ages. Just like the Scottish clans did, the Gallic tribes in France resisted Roman occupation by banding together. They carried out clever strategies of guerilla warfare, but in the end the Roman force was just too strong. The Roman occupation of the area, however, was certainly not the worst fate these early Frenchmen would experience. The extraordinary ability that the Romans had of creating order brought great trade and wealth to the area that would be enjoyed for centuries to come. For example, the Romans created 50,000 miles of roads and waterways that transformed a tribal country into an international colony. Indeed, the barbarians who finally toppled Rome would try to hold onto the Roman ways without success.

Saturday, April 10

- Fly into Marseille, France
- Transfer to hotel
- Welcome and Provençal dinner

Sunday, April 11

The scent of lavender permeates the stores, and the sun moves lazily over the provincial French town of Orange, dominated by “the finest wall in my kingdom,” said Louis XIV. That’s saying something for the king of Versailles. Here in Provence, the Roman legions took their leisure, and Marcus Agrippa built an amazing aqueduct.

- Breakfast at hotel
- Provençal market in the morning
- Lunch
- Tour the Arch de Triumph and Theater at Orange
(Driving 1 hour)

Monday, April 12

The area around Narbonne bridges the history between ancient Rome and the emerging Middle Ages. The Romans had fallen to the barbarians in AD 270. Here the Visigoths

were so impressed with the empire they looted, they did whatever they could to continue it. The king took the emperor's half sister hostage and forced her to lead their wedding procession. The Visigoths dressed like Romans, ate like Romans, but ultimately couldn't pull it off. Find out what happened to the emperor's half-sister. Then, feel the years pass as we tour Fontfroide, a hilltop abbey nestled in rugged wild hills and cliffs.

- Hike Pont Du Gard
- Lunch
- Late afternoon visit to abbey
- Hotel in Carcassonne
- Evening free or optional night walk along the ramparts.
(Driving – 3 hours)

Part II

The Dark Ages

I had put off visiting Carcassonne for years because I had been told that it was touristy, over-restored, and phony, a Disneyland caricature of the middle Ages. But when I saw the towers of Carcassonne for the first time, I didn't care. It was a dream floating back untouched by time from the middle Ages, a mirage, a medieval Brigadoon." Ina Caro

"And it's true, I didn't care either. Seeing the walls of the ancient city shimmer in blue-gray twilight under moon and stars is something you should not miss. In Carcassonne we see counts vying for power, rebels from the Catholic Church, and the middle Ages at its most dramatic." Kim Morgan, Tour Guide

Tuesday, April 13

- Tour Carcassonne – morning walk of ramparts
- Drive to the Dordogne River Valley
- Arrival at Hotel Belle Etoile
- Gourmet dinner at Belle Etoile
(Driving – about 3 hours)

Part III

The Dordogne River Valley

Of Barons, Knights, martyrs and kinds

"Time seems to have stood still in this pastoral portion of the valley encompassing Beynac, Domme, Castelnaud, and Sarlat, where every meal is a treasured memory and every view a poet's challenge. Although serene and peaceful, it evokes, more than any other part of France, the fierce and brutal Hundred Years War...The war officially began in 1337, when a French king died without a male heir and successive English kings claimed the double crown of France and England through the female line, and it officially ended in 1453, after Joan of Arc inspired the people of France to victory over the English" Ina Caro.

Wednesday, April 14

- Optional early morning market or hike in Beynac
- Morning tour of Castlenaud. This castle tells the story of the French and English war. In 100 years, the most frequent proclamation by the English was “You are English today. Deal with it,” and the most frequent prayers by the French were “Please God, deliver us from the nasty Normans.”
- Afternoon canoeing, or free time to tour castle of Beynac or just enjoy the area. There are hiking trails that go up and around the picture perfect town of Beynac.
(Local driving)

Thursday, April 15

- Morning drive to the historic town of Chinon
- Lunch
- Guided tour of Chinon

Chinon is an old, medieval town with a crumbling castle. It surprises with its essential history. It's a good beginning to the late medieval period moving into the Renaissance. Henry II, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and their son, Richard the Lionhearted all called this home at one time. Most importantly, it was in this castle that Joan of Arc first implored Charles VII to take the throne back from the English.

(Driving 5 hours)

Part IV

The Loire Valley

“The first book my mother read to me was a collection of fairy tales, filled with castles and captive princesses who were always saved by chivalrous knights in shining armor. Fairy tales do not generally come true. If you marry a frog, he stays a frog...and magic is merely the explanation given for phenomena we cannot explain empirically. However, as with irregular Latin verbs, there are exceptions to most rules. For example, thirty years after my mother stopped reading to me, I was completely bewitched when I discovered an enchanted valley called the Loire, where kings and princes and princesses lived in castles more wonderful than I had ever imagined as I fell asleep each night listening to my mother's voice...this enchanted valley, which is like a necklace containing a thousand Renaissance jewels. Most of them were built from a stone that whitens with age, so instead of becoming grim and sober with the passing centuries, they have become more and more beautiful.”

Friday, April 16

- Short morning stops at the castles of Usse and Azay le Rideau
 - Lunch in Amboise
 - Amboise castle and afternoon time in Chateau fu Clos Luce and Leonardo da Vinci Park.
 - Settle into hotel
 - Gourmet dinner
- (Local driving – about a half hour between each castle)**

“In 1516, Leonardo da Vinci packed his bags (and several of his favorite paintings, including the Mona Lisa) and left an imploding Rome for better wine and working conditions in the Loire Valley. He accepted the position of engineer, architect and painter to the French king. This “House of Light” is the plush palace where he spent his last three years. (He died here on May 2, 1519.) France’s Renaissance king, Francois I, set Leonardo up here just so he could enjoy his intellectual company. Francois I was 22 when his 65-year-old mentor moved in. The basement floor is filled with sketches recording the storm pattern of Leonardo’s brain and models of his remarkable inventions. In the model room you will notice the entry to the long tunnel that connected his house with the chateau. Your visit finishes with a stroll through the park grounds, which feature life-size models of his inventions.”

Saturday, April 17

- Visit castles at Chambord and Chenonceau

Arguably the most beautiful castles in the world, and certainly full of wonderful stories, intricate characters, powerful kings, pivotal queens, and the magic touch of master builders such as Leonardo da Vinci among others. When one rounds the corner on Chambord, it is one of those surprising, jaw-dropping sites that one never forgets. With over 400 rooms, it is one of the largest and most amazing castles in the world. Equally astounding is Chenonceau, one of the most beautiful and romantic castles in Europe. Spanning the river, it provides a detailed tour of the lavish furnishings of Renaissance castles and a Queen’s kitchen.

- Gourmet dinner
- (Local driving - about a half hour between each castle)**

Sunday, April 18

- Morning free. There is a market in Amboise, or hikes in the parks, hot air balloon options, sleeping in options...
- Fly out of Paris
(Driving time – 2.5 hours)