

ITINERARY

Wednesday March 17 – PHOENIX / PARIS

At 9:55AM, our Continental jet soars over the Valley of the Sun. It's the beginning of our French venture. Arrive Houston at 2:40PM and at 3:30PM we take off on our transatlantic crossing to Paris. Meals and drinks served in flight. Free headsets to enjoy the movie and audio programs.

Thursday March 18 – PARIS

At 6:55AM, our jet touches down gently and, following the usual formalities, we board our waiting motor-coach for the transfer to our centrally-located hotel, the **Mercure Opera Garnier**, in the Opera area of the French capital. Check in and time to unpack, rest a while and get acquainted with our new environment. This afternoon, we enjoy a comprehensive city survey embracing the most emblematic sites and monuments: the Arch of Triumph, Champs-Élysées, Place de la Concorde, Eiffel Tower, Trocadéro, Royal Palace, Louvre Museum, Tuileries Gardens, Notre-Dame Cathedral, Seine River, the Latin Quarter, the fashionable Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the Invalides and many other sites of interest.

Tonight we celebrate our acquaintance with the “**City of Lights**” with a Welcome Dinner at a well-known venue in the vicinity of our hotel. Enjoy the chef's culinary creations paired with brand-name wines. Coffee, liqueur and a glass of Champagne will seal our banquet....

Friday March 19 – PARIS / RHEIMS / PARIS

This morning, we drive to Rheims, the capital of the Champagne region. Most Kings of France were crowned here, in the famous Gothic Cathedral. We have a special “*rendez-vous*” in the venerable cellars of the Taittinger Wineries, established in 1734. There, we will learn all about the art of making Champagne and taste what is the best! Exquisite hors d'oeuvres will be served during our Champagne tasting. Back to the hotel in the late afternoon. Tonight, we have the opportunity to try the bistro or the small intimate restaurant of our choice.

Saturday March 20 – PARIS / NORMANDY BEACHES

Early breakfast and soon we are on our way to Normandy! A scenic drive across this rich land to historic **Caen**, from where William the Conqueror used to rule over Normandy, before his conquest of England. Next, we see Arranches, site of the artificial harbor built by the Allies prior to the D-Day landing. Visit of the beaches of the American Sector, the National Guard Memorial at Vierville-sur-Mer and the Cemetery of Colleville, where thousands of GIs are buried. Time for lunch en route. We conclude our day with a visit to the War Museum of Omaha Beach. Lunch en route is included. In the late afternoon, reach Pontorson and our 16th century establishment, **Hotel Montgomery**. Enjoy a relaxing dinner at the hotel, and savor the delicious local specialties with wine or cider and coffee.

Sunday March 21 – MONT ST. MICHEL / ST. MALO

This morning, our guide will show us the old fortified town of St. Malo, the Corsairs' haven that saw Cartier sail off on his discovery voyage to Canada in the 16th century. Time for lunch on our own in one of the many quaint restaurants in the harbor area. In the afternoon, visit the medieval Benedictine Abbey of Mont Saint Michel, originally a legendary oratory, later grown into a majestic abbey. Perched on the top of the rocky islet, it is now one of the contemporary Wonders of the World. Return to our hotel where another magnificent dinner awaits us. Wine and coffee included, as customary.

Monday March 22 – NORMANDY / LOIRE VALLEY

This morning, we drive southeast, on our way to the Loire Valley through the historical townships of Rennes, capital city of Brittany, Laval, Le Mans, of 24-hour car-racing fame, Angers, Saumur and Langeais. Lunch en route. Reach our **Chateau des Sept Tours**, in Courcelles de Touraine in the late afternoon. Time to get acquainted with our new environment before our gourmet dinner, served in the “Orangerie”. Wine and coffee included.

Tuesday March 23 – LOIRE VALLEY CHATEAUX

Today, we view the many castles in the area between Chinon and Chambord: Azay-le-Rideau, Villandry, Montbazou, Ussé, that inspired Perrault to write his “Sleeping Beauty” fairy-tale, Tours, Amboise, Chaumont, and Blois. We will end with in-depth visits of **Chenonceau**, admittedly the most beautiful of the Loire castles and gigantic **Chambord**, the largest, with 440 rooms! Lunch on our own in Cheverny. Tonight, wine-tasting and dinner in a typical “*troglydite*” restaurant in Villandry.

Wednesday March 24 – LOIRE VALLEY / PARIS

We bid “*Au revoir*” to the marvelous Loire Valley as we drive towards Chartres where we stop to admire the famous rose-windows of the cathedral. Time for lunch on our own and continue to elegant Versailles Palace to visit the sumptuously appointed royal apartments, the Hall of Mirrors, the formal gardens and monumental fountains. We reach Paris in the early evening and check in again at our hotel, where our rooms are pre-registered.

Dinner on our own.

Thursday March 25 – PARIS

Breakfast at leisure and the entire day is free of any planned activities. **Paris is ours!** More exploring on our own? Perhaps an optional visit to the Louvre? Browse around on the fashionable avenues? Stroll along the Champs-Élysées or the Seine River? Go to Montmartre? Climb up the Eiffel Tower? Continue our gastronomic adventures? Do some shopping? Sit at a sidewalk café and watch the world go by?

Lunch and dinner on our own.

Friday March 26 – PARIS

We have all day to wind up our last-minute souvenir-hunting and prepare for our return flight home. Tonight, we celebrate our last evening in Paris with a memorable dinner-cruise. We will enjoy the delicious food and fine wine as our “*bateau*” glides on the Seine and the glittering lights of the “**Ville-Lumière**” reflect romantically in the river... Unquestionably an evening to remember and a fitting finale to our “French Escapade”!

Saturday March 27 – PARIS / PHOENIX

Breakfast and transfer to Charles de Gaulle Airport in time to board our return flight home, leaving at 8:25AM. Arrive Phoenix Sky Harbor at 3:09PM the same day.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞