



# Voyage&Cultures

Presents

**A journey through the backroads of the Loire Valley in France  
August 28st to September 4, 2020**

**Paris – Tours – Loches – Chaumont – Amboise - small villages in the Loire Valley - Versailles**

**Voyage&Cultures** is an organization offering bilingual cultural tours in the Loire Valley for small groups. Our tours provide an authentic opportunity to explore the backroads and countryside of the Loire Valley with artists and locals to gain insights into the region's gastronomy, tradition, art, and history

## **How is this tour unique?**

- You will interact with locals and artists and be hosted for a few meals in their home.
- You will discover sites off the beaten path. The itinerary is a mix of cities, small historic towns, and quaint villages.
- You will taste regional specialties and wines in a 16th century home and vineyard.
- You will shop at a local farmers' market.
- You will have diverse dining experiences (bistros, private homes, a crêperie, and a gastronomic Michelin star restaurant).
- You will attend a poetic and musical performance in a private residence.
- Your tour leaders are French. They will not only share their love of their home country, but also provide individual coaching in French tailored to your level and needs.
- The tour is bilingual and you will have the option to practice your French with the tour leaders and various hosts as much or as little as you want.
- We will provide a balance between group activities and time on your own.
- **Our group will be limited to 12 participants** plus the tour leaders.

## **Day by Day itinerary**

Be aware that our tour will require a fair amount of walking each day, with some of it on cobbled streets and uneven surfaces, uphill climbs, and stairs.

Our group will be limited to 12 participants, plus the tour leaders.

**\*\*\* Meals included: B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner**

Travel to Paris, Charles De Gaulle airport. *Bon Voyage!*

**Everybody is responsible for booking their own flight.** The tour starts in the hotel in Paris.

### **Day 1 – Friday, August 28th: Paris**

Rachel will meet the group in the hotel lobby late afternoon and we will walk to a restaurant for a welcome dinner. **D**

### **Day 2 – Saturday August 29th: Paris - Tours**

This morning, we will ease into the flow of the City of Light with a leisurely **walking tour** and an independent lunch in Paris. We will then **travel by TGV (high speed train) for Tours**. After hotel check in for a six-night stay, and time to freshen up, you will meet your local hosts Zurg & Yopo with a welcome *apéritif and buffet*. **B – D**

### **Day 3 – Sunday, August 30th: Tours**

We will start the day with a **guided tour of the old city and of The Musée du Compagnonnage** housed in a former abbey. The museum exhibits, masterpieces created for reception into a guild, along with Companions' attributes (sticks, flasks). The Companions are the highly skilled artisans of France known throughout the world for their magnificent monuments and buildings. These carpenters, stone carvers, metal-workers, and other craftsmen belong to independent guilds, which were first established in the Middle Ages and have survived centuries of change. As of 2010, UNESCO inscribed the "Compagnonnage" into the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It will be a good introduction to the many crafts we will encounter throughout our trip.

The rest of the day is free for you to explore Tours on your own. There will be an optional French conversation class in the late afternoon. In the evening, we will enjoy an **apéritif together in a traditional *guinguette*** (type of restaurants popular in the 19th century) along the Loire river. Dinner is independent that evening. **B - Apéritif**

### **Day 4 – Monday, August 31st: Chaumont-sur-Loire – Vineyard of Vouvray**

This morning we will enjoy a **guided tour of stunning Château de Chaumont**, once acquired by Catherine de Medici in 1560. After an independent lunch on the chateau grounds, we will experience the **international garden festival**, an open-air contemporary landscape art show in

the estate of the chateau. Every year, landscape artists from all over the world create contemporary gardens on a specific theme.

Late afternoon, after a scenic drive through the rolling landscapes of the Loire valley, we will **visit a vineyard to taste Vouvray wine and sample regional specialties**. Vouvray is the largest wine appellation in the Touraine region, producing white wines in a range of styles from dry and sparkling to sweet dessert wines. We will return to Tours in time for an independent dinner. **B - Apéritif**

#### **Day 5 – Tuesday, September 1st: Traditional and quaint villages of the Loire Valley**

In the morning, we will wander through the scenic backroads of Southern Touraine and make a few stops at various villages and off the beaten path sites like a **5,000-year-old dolmen**, a private chateau, and **troglodytes' dwellings**. We will share lunch in a local traditional village restaurant.

In the afternoon, we will have a guided tour of the **museum of the Prehistory** housed in the Renaissance château and medieval fortress of the nearby village Grand-Pressigny. It has an impressive collection of prehistoric objects from Southern Touraine.

Afterwards, we will be hosted in the **16th century home of tour hosts, Zurg and Yopo**, for a music and poetry performance, a tasting of wine and regional specialties, followed by a concert and folk-dance performance under the stars. There will also be plenty of opportunities to mingle and exchange with the local performers. **B – L - D**

#### **Day 6 – Wednesday September 2nd - Loches**

Today we travel to Loches, birthplace of our host, Zurg. Loches is a medieval fortified town built on a long rocky outcrop above the Indre River. We will stroll through the winding streets filled with architectural gems including the collegiate church and its **lovely farmer's market**. We will purchase our lunch at the market and share a picnic on the grounds of the chateau overlooking the valley.

We will tour both the **Renaissance chateau**, Logis Royal (Royal lodgings) and its nearby **11<sup>th</sup> century dungeon**, a model of military architecture, later converted into a royal prison by Louis XI. The Renaissance Logis Royal is a highly significant site in French history where figures such as Joan of Arc, Agnès Sorel and Anne of Brittany resided.

For dinner, we will experience a **gourmet meal in a gastronomic Michelin star restaurant** in a small village. **D**

#### **Day 7 – Thursday, September 3rd – Tours – Amboise**

We'll spend the first part of our day in Amboise, perched on a cliff above the Loire River and pay homage to Leonardo da Vinci, buried in the chapel's chateau. We'll enjoy a self-guided visit of the **Clos-Lucé, the Manor House in which Leonardo da Vinci lived** under the patronage

of the King François I. In addition to period rooms, the manor houses a museum of fascinating displays and 3-D models highlighting Leonardo's life and ingenious inventions.

The outdoor park also features full scale model of his inventions. There will be time to have lunch in the park of Clos Lucé and explore the town with its narrow streets, boutiques, and timbered housing. We will return to Tours in the afternoon to give you time to unwind and pack before meeting at a **local crêperie for a casual group dinner**. If time permits, we will view the light show celebrating 500 years of Renaissance. **B - D**

### **Day 8 – Friday, September 4<sup>th</sup> – Versailles**

Today we leave the Loire Valley and head to the town of Versailles. We will start with a guided visit of **Le Potager du Roi, the kitchen garden of the King Louis 14** near the Palace of Versailles where you will learn about the history of gardening, the trendy dishes at the Court, and many anecdotes about King Louis 14 and his favorite food.

Afterwards, we will enjoy **an afternoon of French hospitality at the 18<sup>th</sup> century home of Isabelle**. She will serve wine and homemade French dishes inspired by the tastes of the French court. Rachel's sister, who is a singer, will perform some of her favorite French songs. Then, we will stroll through the magnificent **park of the Palace** to see a few highlights. After saying our "au revoir," with an *apéritif* at a wine bar, we will head back to our hotel at Charles De Gaulle airport.

**B – L - Apéritif**

### **Day 9 – Saturday, September 5<sup>th</sup> - Paris Charles de Gaulle airport.**

Catch your departure flight for the US, via Paris. *Au Revoir!*

### **Your tour leaders**

**Rachel Christophe BAKER** is a native of France. She was born and raised near Versailles and has been living in Chicago for over 20 years. With a background in art history and business administration, she has over 15 years of experience developing and managing cultural programs for various institutions in Chicago including the French Consulate and the Loyola University Art Museum, as well as co-founding a francophone salon to experience and practice French language through arts and culture. Since 2008, she has created and led tours in various regions of France. In addition, she teaches French at the Alliance Française and privately, and works as a Fine Art appraiser.

**Laurent BERTRAND (Zurg) & Sylvie RIBES (Yopo)**, a duet of artists, performance poets, national organizers and Slam Poetry teachers. They have been running a poetry slam show in Tours for the last 10 years and founded a national network and national events for poetry slam in France. They also created "PoeZYk", a musical show with their poems and a piano player. Zurg & Yopo participated yearly in Rachel's Café Culture francophone art salons. They live in a small village in Loire Valley, and perform yearly at the legendary Green Mill in Chicago

**Accommodation:**

1 night in a Parisian hotel on the Left Bank, in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighborhood  
6 nights at 4-stars Grand Hotel de Tours, centrally located  
1 night at Mercure Hotel at Charles De Gaulle airport

**Price:**

**\$3,600.00** based on double occupancy – Without airfare – For a small group of 12 people  
**\$600.00** single supplement. We can pair you with a roommate if you are interested.

Includes accommodation (8 nights, double occupancy) in a 4-star hotel in Tours and a 3-star hotel in Paris, breakfast daily, lunches and dinners as indicated in the itinerary, guided tours, all museum and sightseeing fees, land transportation (mini-van, and TGV train from Paris to Tour), French instruction, and the services of a bilingual tour leader and two bilingual local hosts.

**Information:**

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Check our website: <https://voyageandcultures.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VoyageCultures/>

## Testimonials from 2018 Loire Valley tour



Rachel Baker and her French team have put together a movable feast of incredible cultural and historical sites, such as Léonard de Vinci's chateau at Amboise, as well as memorable explorations of wine and food from the Loire Valley. But even more importantly, French language learners, whether debutants or seasoned veterans, will benefit from the opportunities to practice their French in a supportive environment. I heartily recommend this unique travel experience that features both visits to well-known tourist attractions and meaningful interactions with local artisans, musicians, and writers.

**Marcia Whitney-Schenck**

Wonderful trip. Thoughtfully curated by Rachel our superb tour leader. Culturally rich with delightful surprises would unlikely be experienced on other tours.

**Brian Burrow**

Rachel, Yopo and Zurg have put together a wonderful itinerary featuring a fine balance of the history and culture of the Loire Valley. From Neolithic dwellings and sites to modern day poetry performance accompanied by local musicians, the trip brimmed with unique experiences. Featuring gastronomic adventures, music, dancing and walks among gardens and chateaux, it provides an unequalled insight into life in the valley throughout time. However, what makes this trip outstanding is the charm and personalities of our hosts who welcomed us into their homes and lives and feted us with music, poetry, food and wine and the gracious generosity of French hospitality. Even if your language skills are rusty, there is much to be gained from this excursion, not the least of which is a desire to learn enough to return to France with a deeper appreciation of her people and maybe some better skills the next time!

**Nancy McPike**

Our tour leaders created a special experience for us, with an out-of-the-ordinary blend of places to visit and marvelously prepared local food and wine to enjoy. Our guides and drivers were friendly and helpful, all the time. I am so glad I was able to be part of this trip.

**Jeriann Walsh**

Each day was planned well, with a variety of activities, no day having too many of the same type. Our guides were a team, who were positive and efficient leaders, enjoyable companions, and extended hospitality to us in their own homes.

**Anne Rollo**