

A photograph of an outdoor café in Beaune, France. The scene is set in a courtyard with stone walls. In the foreground, there are round tables with white tablecloths and ornate black chairs. A large arched window on the left shows a glimpse of the interior. In the center, a wooden door is open, revealing a chandelier and a hallway inside. The text 'Southern France & Beyond' is overlaid in a large, white, cursive font on the left side of the image.

# Southern France & Beyond

## BY AIR, CANAL & RIVER

**B**eaches and bistros. Movie stars and modern art. Wine and wonder. The mystique of southern France lures millions of visitors each year. From historic Roman ruins to sleepy hillside towns, this region is rich in both old-world history and contemporary appeal. As Anabelle Valentin, general manager of **Hôtel Jardins Secrets** in Nîmes, says, “[The South of France] is special in the way that it is a beautiful mix of people, a mix of landscapes, fauna and flora, cultures and treasures from past.”

Options abound when deciding how to experience the region. Following are sample itineraries with some Harper Alliance partners for travel by air, river and canal, all of which provide unique perspectives of this magical destination.

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## Hôtel du Palais Imperial Resort & Spa

**BIARRITZ, FRANCE** – Scenically situated along the Basque coastline in southwestern France, this historical palace was originally built by Napoleon III for his wife, Eugenie, in 1854. More than 30 years later, the residence was transformed into an opulent hotel for discerning travelers—and today, the stunning edifice features 120 rooms and 30 suites with carefully appointed period furnishings and other original details, such as crystal chandeliers. “We maintain the highest standards,” explains Jean-Louis Leimbacher, the property’s general manager. Eighty percent of the rooms offer panoramic views of Biscay Bay. Over the years, legendary stars, such as Gary Cooper, Buster Keaton and Ava Gardner, have stayed at the majestic hotel.

Beyond its elegant interiors, the property offers direct access to the two main beaches of Biarritz allowing guests to walk directly to the pristine, sandy stretches with no worries of traversing busy lanes of traffic. For dining, there are three restaurants to choose from: Villa Eugenie has been awarded one Michelin star with its menu that highlights local seafood and regional produce; La Rotonde offers uninterrupted views of the coastline. Its historic décor harkens to the grand receptions of the Belle Époque era; and for more casual dining, guests can venture to Hippocampe, located near the property’s outdoor pool. The warm, seawater pool is surrounded by a series of private cabanas. At the 30,000-square-foot spa, guests are invited to enjoy the indoor pool and fitness club, or select from one of the relaxing spa treatments. Near the hotel, guests can participate in other leisure activities. For instance, there are 12 golf courses within 30 minutes of the property. Or, within walking distance, guests can shop at some of France’s finest stores. “Hotel du Palais is fabulous,” says one Andrew Harper member. “It was our second visit, and it didn’t disappoint.” **Recommended since 2007.**

**AH** Andrew Harper members receive: preferred rates; an upgrade, when available upon check-in; daily buffet breakfast served at the restaurant; late checkout, when available; when booking a Residential Suite, a one-way airport transfer; and for stays of three nights or longer, one ticket per person to either the Sea Museum or Chocolate Museum.



For reservations contact the Andrew Harper travel office:  
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Beaune

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## By Air

Looking to include France as part of a multi-country world tour? In partnership with Andrew Harper, **TCS & Starquest Expeditions** recently introduced the Cultures and Cuisines tour by private jet. For two weeks, traverse the skies and explore the traditional foods and distinct lifestyles of the world's people, all the while traveling in a spacious 78-passenger Boeing 757 aircraft equipped with a multi-media library, scrumptious meals and a specially trained flight crew. In between dipping into the hot springs of Iceland and learning how to make spring rolls in Vietnam, enjoy two unforgettable days in Burgundy.

### DAY 1

After a stop in Greece, fly north to France, landing in the charming city of Dijon, which has been a center of international trade for almost 2,000 years. Stroll through the streets of the historic city center, home to one of the country's oldest museums, the Musée des Beaux-Arts. Marvel at the Palais des Ducs, once the palace of the grand dukes of Burgundy and now home to the parliament house. Visit the gothic church of Notre Dame and study the Renaissance architecture of elegant private homes. After the sun sets, enjoy a presentation on the wines of the Burgundy region by a renowned French sommelier, followed by a private tasting.

### DAY 2

The next day, wake up and explore the historic town of Beaune, a hub of the Burgundy wine trade for centuries. Sitting on a maze of cellars housing some of the world's greatest vintages makes time spent here a true treat for any oenophile. Visit the medieval fortress of Chateau de Rully. Tour the Wine Museum, containing ancient cuverie (wine presses) and explore the museum of the Hotel-Dieu des Hospices de Beaune, an infirmary that was in continual use for more than 500 years. In the evening, take a rare private tour and enjoy a gourmet dinner at the historic 12th-century Château du Clos de Vougeot, home of the exclusive Confrerie des Chevaliers du Tastevin wine society.



Hotel-Dieu des Hospices de Beaune

# THROUGH THE Canals

Nearly 50 canals meander throughout the entirety of France. Perhaps one of the most relaxing and up close ways to see the sights is to drift through these waterways on a barge cruise. As Mr. Harper says, "Barge cruises, which travel along a network of linked canals through medieval villages and rolling vineyards, are a particularly appealing and hassle-free way of exploring the French countryside."

**Frontiers International Travel** offers a variety of different itineraries for coasting through the Canal du Midi, the oldest functioning canal in Europe. This canal, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is 150 miles long and carves a perfect pathway for visitors to take in the sights of Southern France. While on board an exclusive barge that accommodates between four and eight guests, you'll enjoy scrumptious regional cuisine prepared with fresh local produce by a private on-board chef, as well as specially selected wines made from grapes grown in the region.

### DAY 1

Begin your cruise by immersing yourself in the spectacular beauty of the Canal du Midi. Sheltered by a canopy of sycamore trees, settle in, meet the crew and enjoy your first dinner on board as you cruise to La Roque.

### DAY 2

In the morning, visit Mirepoix, nestled in the foothills of the Pyrenees and home to a magnificent wooden-columned marketplace. Dine on a lunch of delicious specialties like mountain ham and cheeses made from sheep and cows that graze in the nearby pastures. After lunch, meander through colorful, charming shops before returning to the barge.

### DAY 3

The next day, relax on board after breakfast while the barge makes its

## Domaine de Verchant Hôtel & Spa



### MONTPELLIER, FRANCE –

Nestled amid rolling hills of private vineyards, this five-star boutique hotel and spa offers 26 elegant rooms and suites. Each of the guest quarters seamlessly combines contemporary, stylish furnishings with the original charm and character of the estate. The grand mansion dates back to the 14th century, with its antique stone walls and weathered shutters. The Bishop of Montpellier granted Pierre De Verchant a "domaine," or estate, which took on his name, and went on to remain in his family for two centuries. Raymond Morel, who redesigned the Murano and Kube mansions in Paris, transformed the property into a refined retreat and spa. Among the many amenities and activities, guests can relax in an outdoor pool surrounded by lush lawns and vineyards, or a heated indoor hydrotherapy pool in the spa.

**Recommended since 2009.**

**AH** Andrew Harper members receive: preferred rates; an upgrade, when available upon check-in; daily buffet breakfast served at the restaurant or in room; private airport transfers; a welcome bottle of wine per room; one wine-tasting per room; and a 10 percent discount on all spa treatments.

Frontiers International Travel  
Canal du Midi

PHOTO ON OPENING SPREAD AND TOP PHOTO © TCS & STARQUEST EXPEDITIONS

way past the sunflower and wheat fields of the plains. At noon, disembark to begin your exploration of the local area, either visiting the city of Carcassonne, the largest walled medieval fortress town in Europe, or partaking in tastings of locally produced sparkling wine and enjoying a guided walk through town. Return to the boat in the evening and continue your journey.

#### DAY 4

Your trip's final full day begins with morning views of the snow-capped Pyrenees, which separate France from Spain. A series of canal locks grouped closely together delivers the barge on to the grand bassin reservoir within the historic town center of Castelnaudary. In the afternoon, visit the delightful Ferme de Cabriole and meet the owners—and animals—who make delicious cheeses. You will learn the process of cheese-making—and, of course, taste the final product. Then return to the barge for your final dinner on board before docking the next day in Toulouse.



French cheese shop

# ON THE River

Experienced and aspiring artists will feel right at home aboard the **Orient-Express** Picture Perfect barge tour, part of the company's **Afloat in France** offerings. For seven days and six nights, you'll travel from the Rhône Valley to Arles. Inspiration will abound as you marvel at fields of lavender, stunning architecture and charming hilltop villages that dot the landscape along the majestic Rhône.

#### DAY 1

Climb aboard the *Napoleon*, a 12-guest barge that evokes the intimacy of a charming inn and the magnificence of a chic hotel. Partake in a Champagne toast, get to know the crew and meet your on-board art tutor, who will help you hone your skills throughout your journey.

#### DAY 2

Cruise toward Viviers. In the afternoon, a perfect spot on the riverbank will serve as the setting for your first lesson. Soak in the stunning scenery as you put brush to paper, capturing the wonder of your surroundings in your own unique way.

#### DAY 3

Drive through the countryside of Provence to Grignan for a day of painting amongst the fields of lavender. If you have time, Jeremy Barbet, general manager of La Bastide de Moustiers, suggests a hot-air balloon flight over these fragrant, vibrant meadows. After lunch, you'll return to the *Napoleon* and continue the journey south, passing through the Lock of Bollene.

#### DAY 4

Cruise toward Avignon, stopping at Châteauneuf-du-Pape for a wine-tasting. When you arrive in Avignon, you'll enjoy an afternoon of painting, taking inspiration from the stunning architecture of this fortified city. Absorb the modern energy of the city streets, a stark contrast to the impressive Palais des Papes (the Pope's Palace), where you'll feel as if you've stepped back in time to the 14th century.

#### DAY 5

Day five brings you toward the city of Arles, a place as famous for its Roman history as for its connection to post-impressionism and modern art. Here you can visit Les Arenes, an ancient Roman arena that once seated more than 20,000 spectators for gladiator standoffs. Or make your way through the city, stopping at the spots where Van Gogh once stood with his paintbrush and easel. Arles provided the backdrop for some of the artist's most famous works, including "Starry Night,"

"Bedroom" and "The Yellow House." After lunch, you'll visit the hilltop village of Les Baux de Provence before returning to the boat.

#### DAY 6

In the morning, enjoy a walking tour of Arles before continuing to Vallabregues, a quiet town where the art of basket-weaving is still a mainstay of local culture. In the afternoon, you'll visit a traditional 18th-century Provençal bastide (manor house).

#### DAY 7

Say goodbye to your tutor, crew and fellow travelers. Gather your masterpieces, disembark and return home or continue on your journey. ✈

## ON YOUR Own

*Andrew Harper staff and partners share favorite spots for those wishing to explore the region on their own.*

"Gordes is a picturesque town in the hills overlooking the valley. It has a really quaint market."  
—Andrew Harper Travel Office

"The famous Gorges du Verdon is definitely the attraction a visitor should not miss. It is a majestic and preserved site, one of the deepest and largest canyons in Europe, which can be explored by car through a dramatic and scenic road, or by foot for the courageous through a walking trail along the river."  
—Jeremy Barbet, general manager of La Bastide de Moustiers

"In Nice, the Chagall Museum has a remarkable collection of important paintings and stained glass, and the nearby Matisse Museum features a particularly fine collection as well."  
—Andrew Harper Travel Office

"Without any doubt, visit the village of Moustiers Sainte Marie, a magnificent place which offers a new perspective at each visit. Its labyrinth of tiny lanes, numerous fountains and its secular chapel are accessible by an old winding footpath which dominates the village."  
—Jeremy Barbet, general manager of La Bastide de Moustiers

"If coming to the South of France, you must visit Nîmes. It is a city full of treasures to be discovered at least once in this life."  
—Anabelle Valentin, general manager of Hôtel Jardins Secrets

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Gorges du Verdon