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From
€9,977 EUR

Single Room
€11,364 EUR

Twin Room
€9,977 EUR

Prices valid until
30th December 2024

18 days
Duration

France
Destination

Level 2 - Moderate
Activity

Southwest France: Along the Canal du Midi

Apr 15 2024 to May 02 2024

A journey through Southwest France along the Canal du Midi

Join Odyssey Traveller as we explore the UNESCO-listed Canal du Midi in Southwest France with this tour. The Canal was engineered by Pierre-Paul Riquet as a means to increase trade from Bordeaux and the Atlantic to Sète and the Mediterranean. Taking approximately 14 years to complete, it is a feat of engineering ingenuity and artistic design, earning its title as one of the oldest operating canals in Europe and a treasure of world heritage scenery that shaped the Industrial Revolution

and modern technology.

This 17-day tour is orientated to the senior couple or solo traveller with a keen interest for engineering, architecture, and culture. The group will be escorted by a helpful Odyssey Traveller program leader and a number of knowledgeable local guides. We will delve into southern France's rich history and wind along the Canal that links many of the area's biggest cities and best attractions. On this tour, we will spend multiple nights in:

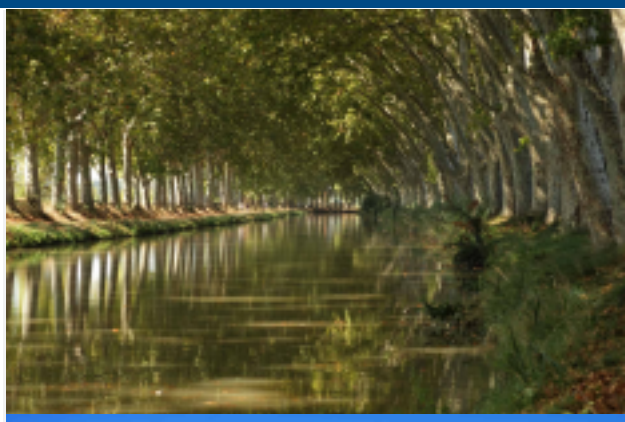
- **Bordeaux,** UNESCO-listed 'Port of the Moon', our Atlantic opening to the Canal. Bordeaux has so much to offer in addition to its world-class French wine.
- **Toulouse,** the 'Pink City' linking the Garonne river to the Canal, is a hub of activity and home to exceptional French cuisine.
- **Carcassone,** the other-worldly fortified city from medieval times. The city, and a number of nearby excursions, are shinning examples of world heritage conservation.
- **Béziers,** with its Spanish influence, is a majestic city and host to two of the most important engineering accomplishments of the Canal du Midi.
- **Montpellier,** a city that is perfectly designed to mix and appreciate architecture throughout its 1,000 year history.
- **Nice,** in the French Riviera, boasts a stunning Mediterranean backdrop of blue waters and vibrant buildings. It is also from here that we will travel to Monaco.

Articles about France & the South-West of France published by Odyssey Traveller

The following list of articles, represents some of the articles published by Odyssey Traveller for mature aged and senior travellers to maximise their knowledge and enjoyment of France and in particular the South West France when visiting;

- Understanding South West France
- Ten of the best travel books on France
- Ten things to do in France when you visit
- Questions about France
- Studying Gargoyles and grotesques
- Around the world in six coffees
- Ten of the best French cookery books.
- Ten of the Best art galleries in Europe to visit.
- A guide on France for mature travellers

For all the articles published by Odyssey Traveller, please click through to this link



External articles to assist you plan your visit to France

- History of the Canal du Midi.
- Seven great stops along the Canal du midi
- Exploring Chatres cathedral
- War of religion; France
- Published articles on French history.

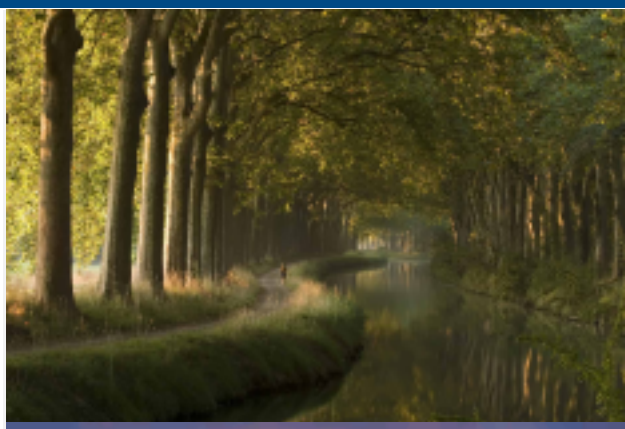
Other Odyssey Tours

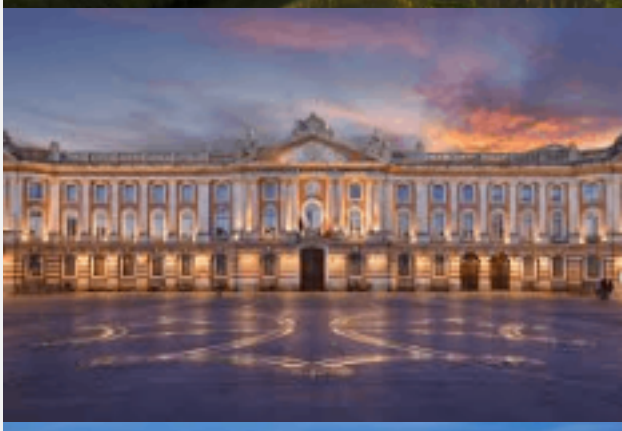
The small group tour of the Canal du Midi is only one of many of the small group tours offered by Odyssey Traveller to France. You might also want to check out our entire collection of tours to Europe offered to mature aged and Senior travellers each year.

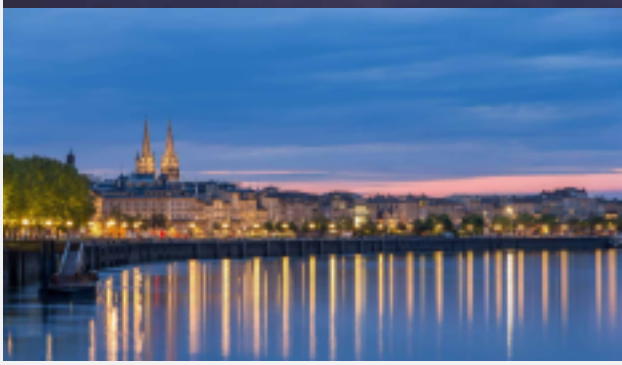
For more details, click the ‘Top 5’ or ‘Itinerary’ buttons above! If you’re keen to experience this tour, please call or send an email. Or, to book,

simply fill in the form on the right-hand side of this page.

Odyssey Traveller regularly offers tours designed for the active senior or mature traveller to enjoy in a small group holiday and learning environment. We also publish articles to provide more information to our loyal and prospective participants.







Highlights

1. Learn about and see engineering highlights along the UNESCO-listed Canal du Midi.
2. Spend a day in the independent city-state of Monaco.
3. Tickle your taste buds with traditional French cuisine and wine tastings in Bordeaux.
4. Visit palaces and cathedrals galore, including Albi's Sainte-Cécil Cathedral and Avignon's Palais des Papes.
5. Immerse yourself in French history dating as far back as the Paleolithic period in the Grotte de Niaux.

Itinerary

Day 1

Locations: Bordeaux

Overview:

The group will arrive in Bordeaux and make their own way to the hotel. After some time to settle in, we will hold a welcome meeting to get to know the rest of the group as well as our lovely program leader. Additionally, we will share a three course meal at a local restaurant.

Accommodation:

3 nights in Quality Hotel Bordeaux or similar.

Day 2

Locations: Bordeaux

Overview:

This morning we will embark on a half-day sightseeing tour under the tutelage of a local guide. Our explorations will lead us past the main sites of the city through the ages, including such places as the Bordeaux Cathedral, built 1096, Place de la Bourse, built 1730, and the Cité du Vin museum, built 2016. These places all enhance the city's wine-soaked history, which we will learn more about by spending some time in the Museum of Wine and Trade. The region has been perfectly-suited to wine production since grapes were first cultivated in the area circa 71 A.D. It wasn't until several hundred years later, in the 1300s, that King Henry II popularised the high-quality, well-aged wines internationally and trade shot up from there.

Of course to further uncork the history of wine in the area, we will spend the afternoon traveling through the vineyard-laden countryside to the Saint Émilion winery, where we will have a tour and wine-tasting. The Saint Émilion jurisdiction, best known for its rich Merlot blends, was inscribed to UNESCO world heritage listings for its prominence in Europe's viticultural history.

Accommodation:

Quality Hotel Bordeaux or similar.

Day 3

Locations: Bordeaux

Overview:

We will take a full day excursion from Bordeaux to the coast, where we will visit Arcachon Bay. Only an hour's drive from Bordeaux, the beautiful beachy town of Arcachon grew from a small fishing village to the top weekend getaway for Bordeaux urbanites. High above any other attraction in the area is the Dune du Pilat (also referred to as the Dune du Pyla), the crowning jewel of the area. It is the tallest sand dune in Europe, measuring 110m high and spanning nearly 3km. To celebrate

the town's marine heritage, we will enjoy an oyster tasting.

We will then make our way back to Bordeaux, where another wine tasting and river cruise await. This will mark our first taste of time spent along the Canal du Midi as we float along the Garonne River, the gateway to the Atlantic for trade throughout southwest France. Dinner will be be left for the group to enjoy on their own.

Accommodation:

Quality Hotel Bordeaux or similar.

Day 4

Locations: Bordeaux to Toulouse

Overview:

Today will be a travel day as we take a coach running alongside the Garonne river. Over the course of the day, we will travel nearly 250km to Toulouse, making plenty of stops for sightseeing and taking in the landscapes along the way. Firstly, after breakfast, we will wind our way southeast through the lush French countryside to Marmande, a town praised for its exceptional fresh produce. In addition to stopping for views of the Canal, we will take some time to appreciate the Église Notre Dame de Marmande. The church and its cloisters were originally constructed in the 14th century and have been very well maintained throughout the years. We will take some time to stretch our legs by a stroll through its impressive gardens.

Continuing our journey, we will make our way to Agen. Once there, we will visit the Agen Cathedral and the Musée des Beaux Arts, home to a number of impressive European landscape artists. The Agen Cathedral is UNESCO-protected with gothic design. It boasts intricately painted murals depicting the introduction of Christianity to the region on the ceilings and walls.

40km east of Agen marks the parting of the Garonne river into the Tarn River to the north and the Canal de Garonne to the south, which is part of the Canal du Midi waterway. A slight detour along the Tarn river will bring us to our last stop before reaching Toulousse, the town of Moissac, one of the largest fruit producers of the area and a popular resting spot along the Le Puy route of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage. Our stop will mostly focus on visiting the Moissac Abbey.

The striking Roman-style architecture of the Abbey and its cloisters provides a stark contrast to the vibrant art deco scene that took over the town following a flood that in 1930 washed away most every other building except the Abbey.

We will complete our drive to Toulouse, check in to the hotel and enjoy the rest of the night at your own leisure.

Accommodation:

3 nights in Mercure Toulouse Centre Wilson Capitole or similar.

Day 5

Locations: Toulouse

Overview:

We will spend the morning together on a city tour. Our local guide will take us around the “Pink City”, so called due to its use of characteristic rose-hued bricks. This brick is most recognisable in the city’s Capitole building and the Couvent des Jacobins, both of which we will be taking some time to visit. Toulouse became a centre for trade even before the Canal du Midi connected the Mediterranean to the Garonne river. People’s wares from the Mediterranean were carried by land to Toulouse to board ships for the Atlantic. Even still, trade skyrocketed after the Canal was completed in 1681. As a result, the Place du Capitole was erected in the 1750s as an administrative centre to the newly wealthy region. The Jacobins church is one of the most prominent institutions of Toulouse’s cityscape. The gothic structure was established in 1230 as the first Catholic church in a prodominately Cathar region. From that point on throuhghout the rest of the 13th century, it continued to be embellished in time with the growth of the catholic congregation.

After our morning tour, you will be given the afternoon to further explore the city on your own.

Accommodation:

Mercure Toulouse Centre Wilson Capitole or similar.

Day 6

Locations: Toulouse

Overview:

Today we will travel to Albi for a half day city tour. It is approximately and hour and a half drive, but we will stop at a few quaint villages along the way. Albi is UNESCO-listed for its complimentary combination of medieval architecture and urban design. The Sainte-Cécile Cathedral is an integral part of Albi's world heritage listing, which hails it as a "most remarkable monumental symbol." According to the Albi Tourism Office, the Cathedral holds the titles for the largest brick-built cathedral in the world and the largest painted cathedral in Europe. This will be a stop on our tour so that we can bask in its magnificance. We will especially take the time to appreciate its Choir of the Canons, a church within a cathedral, and the treasury room, with a multitude of valuable artifacts from human history, most notably the Mappa Mundi, a medieval world map. We will also visit the neighbouring bishop's palace, the Palais de la Berbie, which is one of the oldest castles in France. We will also stroll through its terraces and gardens. According to the Toulouse-Laudrec Museum, which we will also tour during our time in Albi, the Palais represents one of most well-maintained episcopal institutions in France.

Following our tour of the Museum, Palais, and Cathedral, we will return to Toulouse for an evening of individual leisure.

Accommodation:

Mercure Toulouse Centre Wilson Capitole or similar.

Day 7

Locations: Toulouse to Carcassonne

Overview:

We will spend this day travelling toward the medieval fortified city of Carcassonne. Our first stop on the way will be to view the Seuil de Naurouze, the highest point of the Canal du Midi, standing at 190m above sea level. At the time of Riquet's construction of the canal, the Seuil de Naurouze was intended to be the water source to flow east and west toward the Atlantic and Mediterranean. It was later abandoned due to flowage problems, namely silting. Now, the Bassin de Saint Ferréol

feeds the Canal.

We will next stop in Castelnaudary. Here we will visit one of only two multi-tiered lock systems on the Canal, the second being the Fonserranes locks. These locks were named the Saint Roch locks after the town's Saint Roch Chapel. Additionally, the remains of a nuber of renaissance-dated windmills can be found perched on the bank beside the lock.

We will break from driving again in Revel, where exploration will be completely up to you.

Another 30 minutes drive southeast will take us to the Bassin de Saint Ferréol, the Canal du Midi's primary water source. The dam is a great success of Pierre Paul Riquet's because it was the first dam specially designed to feed a navigable canal. Without this Bassin, it would have been impossible for the Canal's locks to function properly in the dry summer months.

The Bassin is filled using the Laudot River as well as a number of smaller streams from the Black Mountain. Part of the construction of the Canal meant introducing channels to redirect these smaller streams to the Bassin. We will travel another 30 minutes to Les Cammazes to see the Voute Vauban, one example of a tunneled channel diverting natural stream flows to the Bassin.

Our last stop before we arrive at our day's final destination is the Château de Saissac. We will take a guided tour of the remains of this 10th century Cathar castle. The remains of the remains of the castle provide picturesque vistas extending to the Pyrenees mountains. The Castle also houses a 2000-piece coin collection dating to the 1270s.

From there we will continue to Carcassonne for a free evening.

Accommodation:

3 nights in Les Trois Coironnes Panoramique Cité or similar.

Day 8

Locations: Carcassonne

Overview:

Today we will travel southwest from Carcassonne to the historical monument of the Château de Montségur. The site has long been of

military importance due to its high elevation for monitoring the area. In the early 1200s, a Cathar castle was established on the hill, which could hold approximately 500 people, including a large number of soldiers. It was dubbed the “last Cathar stronghold”, but was conquered by a 10,000-man army led by Hugues des Arcis. Soon thereafter, it was demolished and replaced with the military fortress that remains today.

From there, we will travel to Niaux, where will will have a guided tour to the Grotte de Niaux, caves with paleolithic art. The spacious, 2km-long cave is home to a number of rock paintings, floor engravings, as well as graffiti dated 1602. Our tour will feature the amazing detail that the more than 10,000 year old painting have.

Our day will conclude with our return trip to Carcassonne.

Accommodation:

Les Trois Couronnes Panoramique Cité or similar.

Day 9

Locations: Carcassonne

Overview:

This day will be dedicated to exploring all that is to love about Carcassonne. The morning will be spent on a locally-guided tour of the Château and Ramparts. The fortress town is UNESCO listed for bring a prime medieval institution that has maintained its stronghold since its establishment over 2000 years ago. It was strategically placed at France’s border; however, with the 1659 Treaty of the Pyrennees, the border was relocated south to its current position. Our guide will explain further as we stroll through old town.

After our tour, you will be free to explore the historic buildings, cafes and shops as you please for the remainder of the afternoon.

Accommodation:

Les Trois Couronnes Panoramique Cité or similar.

Day 10

Locations: Carcassonne to Béziers

Overview:

We leave Carcassone this morning traveling first to Homps. The town has been a major wine port for the Languedoc region since the construction of the Canal du Midi. Within the same century, the beautiful Saint Amand Church was estimated to be built. We will take a visit of the Church, after which you will be given some free time to to explore the town of Homps on your own. The main attractions of Homps are located on the banks of the Canal, which is enclosed by trees, perfect for a stroll.

From there, we will travel south to Narbonne. The town itself dates back to the Romans in 118 B.C., established as a point along the Via Domitia trade route. Two highlights that we will stop to see are the Merchants Bridge and the Frontfroide Abbey. The Merchants Bridge is one of only a handful of inhabited bridges in the world. The Frontfroide Abbey is an interesting structure whose origins date back to the 11th century. But, the architectural grandeur it has today didn't begin until the 12th century as it was jointly granted land from France and Spain and works continued to embellish the chapter house and cloisters.

After these visits we will finish our drive to Béziers.

Accommodation:

2 nights in Hotel le XIX or similar.

Day 11

Locations: Béziers

Overview:

Today we will have a full day sightseeing. It is here in Béziers, one of the oldest French towns, that two of the greatest engineering feats along the Canal du Midi reside, the Malpas Tunnel and the Fonserranes locks. First, our local guide will take us for a walk through the Malpas Tunnel. The Tunnel is a testament to Pierre Paul Riquet's dedication to the Canal project as the government ordered him to stop works on the tunnel due to the danger of the fragile sandstone's collapse. While the government deliberated on how to proceed, Riquet continued digging

the 165m tunnel and reinforced it with concrete, accomplishing the first navigable canal tunnel in Europe. Next, we will stopto view the Fonserrannes locks. These locks are also referred to as the Seven Lock Water Stairway due to its seven oval-shaped tiers, making them the largest set of locks on the Canal and allowing them to raise and lower boats approximately 21.5m.

Our tour of Béziers will also include a viewing of the Béziers Arena. There are strong ties to Roman heritage as well as to familiarly Spanish culture in this area of France. The Arena itself resembles several arenas that can be found south of the border. It is also here that bullfighting has long been a pass time of choice.

The night will then be yours to enjoy.

Accommodation:

Hotel le XIX or similar.

Day 12

Locations: Béziers to Montpellier

Overview:

Today we bid Béziers adieu and travel toward Montpellier. We will stop for a half-day tour of Sète, one of the most important ports throughout the ages. Since the Bronze age it has been a hub for trade, and thus was an appropriate ending place for the Canal. We will visit the Old Port together and enjoy lunch at a local restaurant. It is an idealistic example of a Mediterranean town and is known for its superb seafood cuisine.

After lunch, we will make the remainder of the journey to Montpellier. Upon arrival, the afternoon will be spent at your leisure.

Accommodation:

2 nights in Best Western Plus Comedie Sain Roch or similar.

Day 13

Locations: Montpellier

Overview:

Today will be a free day for you to explore the stunning town of Montpellier at your leisure.

Accommodation:

Best Western Plus Comedie Saint Roch or similar.

Day 14

Locations: Montpellier to Arles

Overview:

Traveling from Montpellier, we will make our first stop at Nimes for a view of its Roman Ampitheatre. Subject to opening availability, we will enter the compound for a closer look of the arena built 70 A.D.

From there, we will continue to Avignon, were we will meet a local guide for a half day tour of the town. Included in the tour will be entrance to the Palais des Papes, or Palace of the Popes, as well as Avignon Bridge, officially called the Pont St. Bénézet. The Palace is the largest gothic-style palace in Europe as it measures the size of approximately four gothic cathedrals, according to its website. We will spend some time exploring more than a dozen historically adorned rooms. Then we will go to the Avignon Bridge. Inspiring the song *Sur le Pont d'Avignon*, the Bridge is what remains of the 12th century crossing of the Rhone river. These two landmarks are included in the UNESCO World Heritage Listing for Avignon, the "City of Popes," and its medieval architecture.

We will rest overnight in Arles, before continuing our journey east to Nice.

Accommodation:

1 night in Ibis Styles or similar.

Day 15

Locations: Arles to Nice

Overview:

After breakfast, we will reboard the coach. Subject to dates, we will first stop to visit the flower markets in Aix-en-Provence. Otherwise, we will continue to Grasse. Here we will enjoy a Parfumier workshop. Illuminating our senses, we will enjoy a workshop dedicated to creating an inviting and unique scent.

Following this stop, we will continue to Nice.

Accommodation:

3 nights in Best Western Plus Hotel Massena Nice or similar.

Day 16

Locations: Nice

Overview:

Today we will drive an hour from Nice for a full day excursion to Monaco. Firstly, we will take a half day sightseeing tour with a local guide. We will see the main sights of the city with interesting commentary from our guide. We will view the Princes' Palace, where the sovereign Prince of Monaco has resided since its erection in 1191. The interior design of the palace was largely influenced by the Palace of Versaille, including its own version of a hall of mirrors. We will also visit the Monaco Saint Nicholas Cathedral, the resting place of Grimaldi Princes of Monaco. In addition to the princes, the tomb of actress Grace Kelly is located here.

In the afternoon we will spend some time in the old part of town referred to as Le Rocher. We will enter the Oceanographic Museum, which has views looking out at the Mediterranean sea and thousands of ocean creatures on display. The combination aquarium-museum provides an even balance of entertainment and education about our oceans.

After our time at the Museum, we will return to Nice.

Accommodation:

Best Western Plus Hotel Massena Nice or similar.

Day 17

Locations: Nice

Overview:

The group will be given a full day of leisure for you to explore beautiful Nice on the French Riviera.

We will regroup in the evening to share a three-course dinner at a local restaurant for our last night together.

Accommodation:

Best Western Plus Hotel Massena Nice or similar.

Day 18

Locations: Nice

Overview:

After breakfast marks the end of the tour.

Inclusions / Exclusions

- **What's included in our Tour**
  - 17 nights of hotel accommodation.
  - 17 breakfasts, 1 lunch and 2 dinners as indicated.
  - Applicable entry fees and services of local guides.
  - Touring by comfortable and modern coach.
  - Field trips as indicated.
  - Services of an Odyssey program leader.
  - Detailed tour information booklet.

  What's not included in our Tour
  - Return international airfare and departure taxes.

- Comprehensive international travel insurance.
- Gratuities and necessary tips.
- Items of a personal nature such as telephone calls and laundry.
- Meals not specified in the itinerary.

Level 2 - Moderate

Participants must be able to carry their own luggage, climb and descend stairs, be in good health, mobile and able to participate in 3-5 hours of physical activity per day, the equivalent of walking/hiking up to 8 kilometres on uneven ground.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any requests for further information about this tour or any others offered by Odyssey Travel.