

Iceland and France Nov 2017



Oct 29 Arrived Paris at 6AM Breakfast by the Trocadero then headed to Versailles. In the afternoon, we visited Monet's Garden in Giverny.

Oct 30 Spent a day at Leisure in Paris. Revisiting favored sights and restaurants. Explored the Marais District around our Hotel.

Oct 31- Nov 5 6 days in Iceland with a local guide. Apart from the usual Southern route, we also drove through the West and Northern regions.

Nov 5- Nov 8 Self-drive around Provence. Our Home base was in Aix En Provence.

Nov 8- Nov 10 Self-drive around Alsace. Our home base was in Colmar. We then took the train back to CDG Paris for our evening flight.



Save on time commuting or waiting on tours around Paris. You can hire your own driver to take you around select attractions.

Day Trips From Paris

We arrived early morning in Paris. Rather than wait around our Hotel for check in, we made use of our free time exploring the outskirts of Paris. [Chateau Versailles](#) was something I wanted to revisit while [Monet's Garden](#) in Giverny was a sight not to miss this time. Our driver, Noel V of [Jubileecarsparis.com](#) promptly met us at by the arrival gate. He suggested we have breakfast by the Trocadero. We paid homage to the Eiffel Tower sans the

crowd. It was so nice to enjoy it with serenity. From there, Versailles was about 20min drive. We still queued outside the Chateau for about 45min to an hour despite our tickets on hand. That's just how full it gets. By Lunch, Monet's Garden was a breeze to enter. Tours usually come in the morning. We enjoyed a late lunch by Les Nymphéas overlooking another pretty garden.



A Day at Leisure in Paris

We really just wanted to enjoy the city at a relaxed pace. It was literally a day of nothing! The only thing we had in mind was lunch in L Entrecote along Champs Elysees and the rest was planned around that. We decided to window shop around Galleries Lafayette by Haussman. Realizing it was our only time to shop this whole trip actually. After lunch, we strolled down Champs Elysees with a pit stop by Laduree for their famed macarons. We revisited some beloved sights like

the Louvre Square, the Notre Dame and Pont Neuf on the way back. Benches were not only for rest but vantage points to enjoy the action along the River Seine. Just embracing the Parisian vibe was a tour in itself.

Our afternoon was dedicated to just walking about the [Marais District](#). Loved the Old Paris ambiance around this area. The markets, shopping, restaurants were all just steps away. As we ventured, we hit [Rue De Rosiers](#),

Paris' famous Jewish neighborhood. Had the best Falafels there.

For dinner, we were craving for Moules Frites! What a treat it was to discover a Leon De Bruxelles just 10min walk from our hotel.

The next morning, we had breakfast by Place des Vosges.





Hotel Jeanne D' Arc - Marais

Loved all the details of this cozy hotel. Centrally located in the charming Marais District.





A great way to experience Iceland for limited days is with an experienced Local Guide. Lisa was not only intelligent she was also very nurturing and attentive to our needs. It was such a comfortable and hassle-free trip. We pre-arranged our lodging and some restaurants with her. We took photos and went sightseeing without pressure on the schedule. She diligently checked the weather for safety en-route and looked out for the Northern Lights for us (though it's always a risk) even as we retired for the evening. Not only did we see the beauty of Iceland, we also appreciated the culture and ways of Icelandic people as we spoke in-depth about each other's countries.



ICELAND

Day 1. Airport pick up. See [The Bridge Between Continents](#) - a small footbridge over a major fissure which provides clear evidence of the presence of a diverging plate margin. The bridge was built as a symbol for the connection between Eurasian and North America tectonic plates. Take time to explore more of [Reykjanes Peninsula](#) before your scheduled stop at the [Blue Lagoon](#). The landscape at the peninsula is rough and a bit alien looking. There isn't all that much grass, instead there are great lava fields covered in moss. There are old craters, fissures and bubbling, geothermal mud pools. By the sea there are many places with amazing rock formations, most of them very dark grey. They are particularly spectacular when the wind is blowing and the sea violently hammers upon the rocks, wave after wave. Dinner in Matwerk Kitchen.



Check in Hotel Alda for 2 nights. This property has one of the best rated locations in Reykjavik. Located on Laugavegur shopping street in central Reykjavik, this hotel offers modern rooms with a flat-screen TV and free WiFi access. The staff are very accommodating and the breakfast served was impeccable - A great value to consider here. The famous [golde](#) is a 5min walk away, while the Main City Square takes about 10min.





Day 2. Early Breakfast at Sandholt Bakery. [Golden Circle](#). The Golden Circle consists of three equally stunning locations in Southwest Iceland: Þingvellir National Park, the Geysir Geothermal Area, and Gullfoss waterfall. These sights are renowned across the world and are all as spectacular as they are unique. From the beautiful and powerful waterfall of Gullfoss, you have the option to go snowmobiling for one hour at the [Langjökull Glacier](#). Price is around 24.000 ISK (about USD200) pp. From there we go back to [Reykjavik](#). Dinner at Sægreifinn Sea Baron. Their lobster soup is a must. Stop by Laundromat Café for some drinks or dessert. If you have space, have a hotdog by Bæjarns Bezu Pylsur.

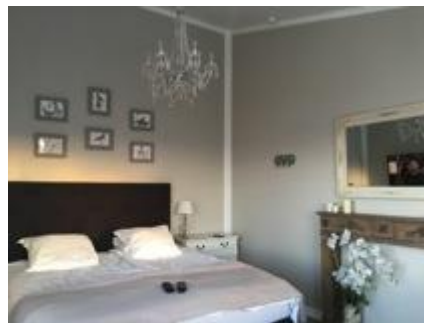
Day 3. South Coast. Pick up at your hotel at 8:30. We drive over the highly geothermal active mountain area of Hellisheiði towards the town of Hveragerði. From there we drive along the South coast where you will find beautiful waterfalls of [Seljalandsfoss](#) and [Skogarfoss](#) as well as the [Black beaches of Vik](#) and Reynisfjara. Option to insert Glacier Walk on [Solheimajökull Glacier](#). The price is 9,500 ISK (about USD90) pp. Overnight stay at Laxarbakki, a beautiful local country hotel with a perfect location for Northern lights if the weather conditions are right.



Hotel Laxarbakki

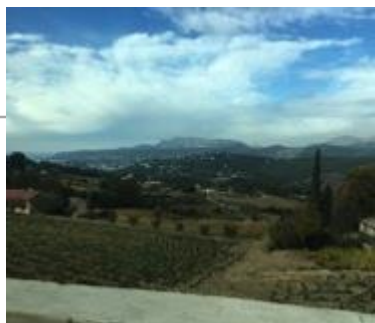


Day 4. North Iceland. Pick up at the hotel at 8:00. We drive towards the beautiful capital of North Iceland, [Akureyri](#), and from there you can head on to Husavik, a great place to go whale watching. If you have time, you can check out the [Myvatn](#) area, North Iceland's more intimate solution to the Blue Lagoon as well as enjoy the eerie volcanic rock formations. Another option is a shorter drive from Akureyri to [Godafoss](#) known as "The Waterfall of the Gods". Drive Southwest to Hvammstangi where you will spend a night in Mork Superior Cottages, a quaint country place by the Midfjordur Fjord where seals and killer whales can be often seen during the summer. Excellent dinner in Sjavarborg.



Day 5. West Iceland. Drive through a beautiful area of glaciers and great mountains as we descend to the little town of [Borgarnes](#) for brunch at Geirabakari Kaffihus. Enjoy the rural sceneries in Hvalfaroarsveit, stop to take a closer look at Icelandic Horses and Sheep grazing happily. Take in the views before we head back to Reykjavik. We pass through The Hvalfjörður Tunnel, a road tunnel under the Hvalfjörður fjord in Iceland and a part of Route 1. From the time it was built in July 1998, it has shortened travel time from Reykjavík to the western and northern parts of the island by 45 kilometers (28 mi). Passing the fjord now takes 7 minutes instead of about an hour. Check in Hotel Alda and explore the city at leisure. Try the Tasting Menu in Fish Market. Option to book a Northern Lights Tour www.re.is/day-tours/northern-lights-tour/ on your last evening. Price is 5,900 ISK (about USD60) pp.





This pretty much sums up our trip in Provence. One of our favorite destinations!

<http://www.traveller.com.au/20-reasons-to-visit-provence-grt8sc>

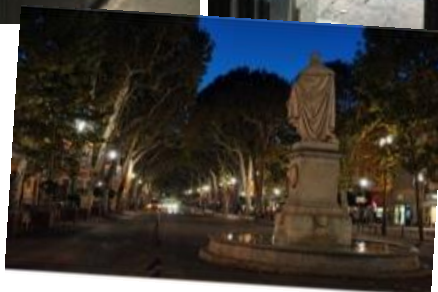
Exploring Provence

From Reykjavik we flew through Paris to Marseille. We rented a car and headed to our Air BNB flat in Aix En Provence. Loved the quirky interiors of our cozy abode that was just along Cours Mirabeau. Close to the shops and restaurants. An added bonus to our stay was catching the Tuesday Morning Market – right outside our building.

<https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/8810091>



Located in the South of France just 30 kilometers (19 miles) north of Marseille, Aix En Provence was an excellent base for our day trips around Provence. Our drives were not more than two hours from point to point then we would still have time to explore the rest of the city at leisure.



It is one France's most beautiful cities known for its gorgeous architecture as well as its vibrant culture. The bustling historic city center can be easily explored on foot. You'll find many cafes, shops and boutiques all around the historic center. If you want to get some shopping done this is a good place to start! Every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday morning the city center hosts Le Grand Marché, which is a great farmers market where you can pick up all sorts of fresh produce.

Cours Mirabeau, the city's main avenue and cultural hotspot, is lined with beautiful plane trees, and houses. The characteristic Roman architecture of the buildings along the avenue is absolutely stunning. The Cours Mirabeau also boasts many beloved cafes and restaurants. Have Dinner in Les Deux Garçons, which is popular with locals and tourists alike.

Also known as the home of Cézanne – father of Post Impressionist Art, Route Cezanne takes you along a journey of inspirations that translated to the maestro's famous paintings e.g. Mont Sainte-Victoire. Some of his paintings can be admired at the Musee Granet. Beside his works, this excellent museum houses art by Granet, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Monet and more.



Itinerary 1

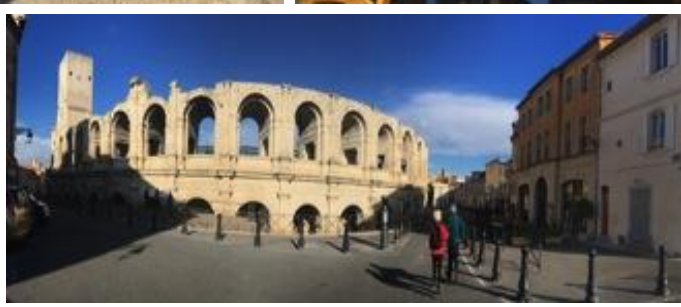
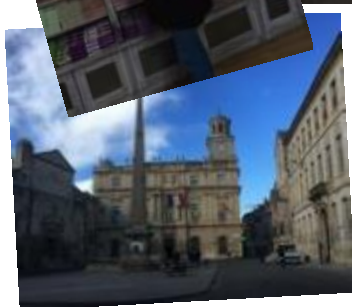
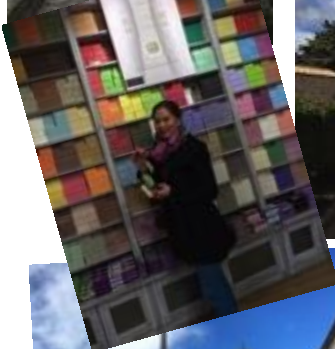
<https://www.viator.com/tours/Aix-en-Provence/Avignon-Les-Baux-de-Provence-and-Chateauneuf-du-Pape-Day-Trip-from-Aix-en-Provence/d5228-5849PROVENCEDAY>



We simply followed itineraries to organize our days but didn't follow it to detail. Since we were disembarking in Marseille this December, we decided to hold off Avignon and replaced it with a visit to Arles instead. But what a beauty it was to see Chateauneuf du Pape, illuminated in the evening, on our way back.



Spent some leisure time in Les Baux de Provence – a charming medieval village that clings to the top of a rocky cliff. Admired postcard-perfect views over the Provencal countryside, and then wandered around the village's cobblestone streets, gazing at the old fortress ruins. Enjoyed a typical Provencal lunch in one of the local restaurants.



Arles is noteworthy for its beautifully preserved Roman monuments. Besides the city's Roman heritage, Arles is also known for its strong sense of cultural identity. Once the home of Vincent van Gogh, the city is home to striking architecture that attracts art and architecture lovers from around the world, and you'll see several of its finest examples as you walk through. One can imagine Van Gogh's life in the city through several places that inspired the artist's works, like the imaginatively named Café Van Gogh in Forum Square. The distinctive yellow-fronted café is said to be the building in Van Gogh's acclaimed *The Café Terrace* painting. We marveled at the ruins of Arles Amphitheatre where some 12,000 people could once be seated, and then explored the city's intriguing ancient theater. Only two of its original Corinthian columns are still standing, but the ruins certainly hint at its former glory. Walked past St-Trophime church, admiring its carved 12th-century doorway, as we proceeded to our next destination.



A stop at the UNESCO-listed Pont du Gard, a remarkably preserved Roman aqueduct dating back to the 1st century AD.



Itinerary 2

<https://www.viator.com/tours/Aix-en-Provence/Verdon-Gorge-and-Moustiers-Sainte-Marie-Day-Trip-from-Aix-en-Provence/d5228-5849VERDON>



Our first visit was the lovely French town of Moustiers-Sainte-Marie, set amidst rocky mountains. Spent some good time exploring its medieval streets known for its ceramics and pottery shops.

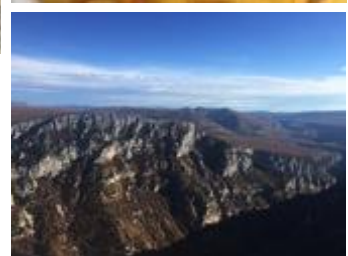
The Notre-Dame de Beauvoir chapel, sitting high in the notch above the village, dates back to the time of Charlemagne in 8th century, and was restored in the 12th and 16th centuries. The chapel is actually built on the site of an even older one from the 5th century. The steep walk up to the chapel follows a wide paved path, passing through defensive doorways. The path, lined with 12 stations of the cross, has been used for pilgrimages to the chapel since the year 470.

Lunch of regional Provençal specialities at a terrace cafe before making the most of the views over the Maira Valley.



The spectacular Verdon Gorge.

Admiring views over craggy peaks and the Verdon River. Sublime panoramic view over the landscape.



The 'Grand Canyon of Europe' slices a 25km swath through Haute-Provence's limestone plateau all the way to the foothills of the Alps. Etched out over millions of years by the Verdon River, the gorges have formed the centrepiece of the Parc Naturel Régional du Verdon since 1997. With their sheer, plunging cliffs – in some places 700m high, twice the height of the Eiffel Tower – the gorges are a haven for birds, including a colony of reintroduced griffon vultures.



Lake of Sainte-Croix (Lac du Sainte-Croix), a stunning turquoise lake that feeds from the Verdon River.

Itinerary 3

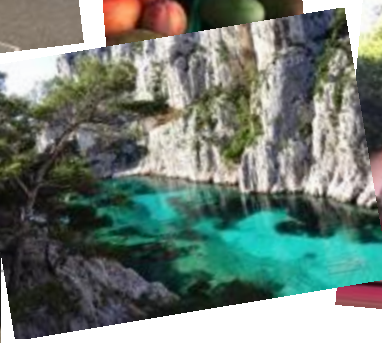
<https://www.viator.com/tours/Aix-en-Provence/Cassis-Half-Day-Trip-from-Aix-en-Provence/d5228-5849CASSIS>



The less glamorous but equally beautiful little sister to nearby St Tropez, those leaving Provence for the sun-dazzled shores of the French Riviera will find everything they're looking for in Cassis. This is the South of France at its most postcard-worthy - vast sandy beaches flanking a pretty harbor of painted fishing boats and magnificent yachts, and traditional cafés lining the stone-paved streets.

The ancient fishing port of Cassis is now a popular seaside resort, marrying its historic architecture with a flush of modern restaurants and boutique hotels, but the town's most unique selling point is its location. Set beneath the towering white limestone cliffs of the Cap Canaille – France's highest cliff – and surrounded by 'calanques', a series of sheltered inlets, home to the region's renowned white Cassis stone quarries.

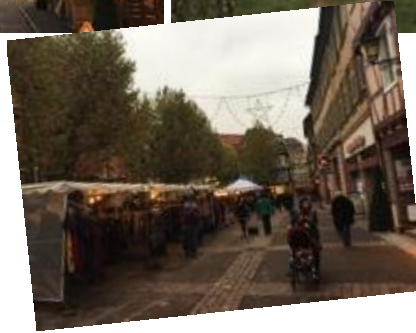
It's Cassis' laid back small-town vibe, along with its selection of pristine beaches and the dramatic Castle of Cassis, that makes it a magnet for tourists during the summer months, but the town also draws a steady stream of wine lovers to its surrounding vineyards, celebrated for their historic Cassis wines.



Exploring Alsace

Itinerary 1

<https://www.viator.com/tours/Colmar/Small-Group-Gems-of-Alsace-Day-Tour-from-Colmar/d22940-2016P50>



Sceneries by the breathtaking Alsace 'Wine Route'. Located between the Rhine valley and the Vosges mountain range, the 60-year-old route winds across the slopes for more than 106 miles (170km). We drove through rows of undulating, vine-covered hills, and through quaint villages with narrow streets and charming flower decked houses clustered around the local church steeple.



Haut Koenigsbourg Castle. Built in 12th century, the Castle occupied a strategic position controlling the wine and wheat routes to the North and the salt route that came from the East.

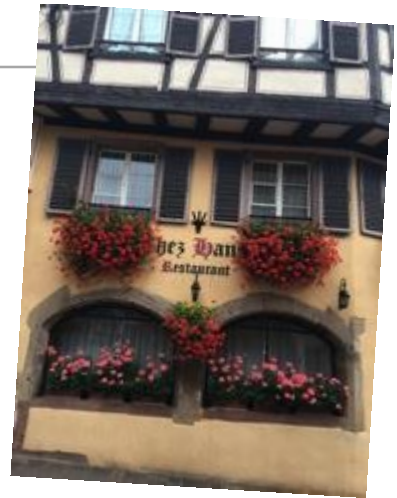


Riquewihr looks like a set in a Disney Movie. Surrounded by ramparts, the village has been very fortunate to survive war and destruction. Its tiny streets, fortified walls and old houses have preserved their 16th century splendor virtually intact, making for remarkable architectural harmony. It is one of the Most Beautiful Villages in France.



A Day at Leisure in Colmar.

Colmar is one of the most picturesque, colorful towns one should see before ... too late. It was like walking through a Fairy Tale - Even my husband was humming Disney songs.



Christmas Markets



St. Martin's Church



Marche Couvert

The Ibis Styles Colmar Centre hotel is set in an 18th-century brewery in the historic centre, just 200 m from the Gothic St Martin's Church.



Strasbourg in the AM

TGV to CDG Paris

Fly Back to Manila



A towering cathedral, uniquely gorgeous architecture, historic cobblestoned streets and quirky yet delightful restaurants all combine to create the beautiful city of Strasbourg. There is nothing quite like arriving in Strasbourg's Central Station (Gare de Strasbourg) and embarking on your self-guided walking tour of the city, knowing that you can experience much of this place on foot and within a few hours.



The trip from Paris to Strasbourg takes about 2 hours and 20 minutes thanks to the TGV France-Germany or the French TGV. Both are high-speed trains with a bar-buffet car and comfortable seats on board.

