

Provence Guided Walking Holiday

Tour Style: European Centre Based
Destinations: France & Mediterranean
Trip code: PVLCL
2 & 3



HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

Pretty Provençal towns and the surrounding countryside provide delightful walking and plenty to explore. Climb to the vast plateau of Valansole behind Gréoux-les-Bains town, walk above the awe-inspiring Verdon Gorge and visit Moustiers-Sainte-Marie, deemed to be one of the prettiest villages in France. Immerse yourself in the landscape of Matisse, Cezanne and Van Gogh in this quiet corner of France. Rolling fields, blue skies, gorgeous villages and excellent food and wine epitomise everyone's image of Provence. We hope that this holiday will deliver that, and a little bit more. As well as sitting in the Route de le Lavande, an area steeped in the culture of lavender production, Gréoux-les-Bains straddles the exquisite Luberon region and the mighty Verdon Gorge (the Grand Canyon of France) with 800m sheer cliffs which sum up this area's unspoilt countryside. The traditional Provençal market in the hilltop village of Forcalquier has run for centuries on Mondays and we can make our picnic lunch from delicious local breads, olives, tapenade, cheese and meats. Gréoux-les-Bains, a former spa town, is off the main Provençal tourist track and is a bustling town full of local commerce. It has an impressive hilltop castle, reached by walking up pretty pedestrianised roads, and a smattering of tourist shops in the old town. The hotel is 15 minutes walk from the old town where there are good cafés in the pleasant central square.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- A full programme of guided walks with 2 options every walking day
- All transport to and from the walks
- The services of experienced HF Holidays leaders
- "With flight" holidays include return flights from the UK and hotel transfers
- 7 night's accommodation in en-suite rooms
- Half board - continental breakfast and evening meal

HOLIDAYS HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover unspoilt Provence, famed for its food and wine
- Relax in pretty Gréoux-les-Bains, known for its thermal spring
- Visit charming hill-top villages including Moustiers-Sainte-Marie, officially one of the prettiest in France
- Explore delightful Quinson and enjoy views of the spectacular Verdon Gorge
- Visit the 16th Century windmills while walking in and around Régusse

TRIP SUITABILITY

This is a level 2 and level 3 graded Activity, Easier walks: 4 to 8 miles (6½ to 13km) on good paths, which are sometimes rocky underfoot. Up to 1,400 feet (420m) of ascent in a day. Harder walks: 6 to 10 miles (9½ to 16km) on good paths, with some steeper, rougher routes. Up to 2,500 feet (750m) of ascent in a day.



ITINERARY

Day 1: Arrival Day

Welcome to Hotel Villa Borghese. Unpack and settle in.

Day 2: Introducing Gréoux: Between River And Plateau

Today both walks start and finish at the hotel.

Option 1 - Up To The Valansole Plateau And Discovering Greoux

Distance: 7 miles (11km)

Total ascent: 1,000 feet (300m)

In summary: We will climb up to the vast plateau of Valensole behind the town to take in the wide sweeping horizon towards Manosque and the mountains. Using an old livestock droving route, passing lavender and olive plantations, we travel across the plateau. Meeting the old road from Manosque we start our descent to arrive eventually beneath the ancient walls of Gréoux castle. We have time to explore before a final short descent into the heart of the old town, where you can choose to explore its narrow streets and linger over a drink or continue back to the hotel and a swim perhaps.

Highlight: Spectacular views down to Manosque from the Valensole plateau.

Option 2 - Crossing The Verdon To The Hamlet Of Les Maurras

Distance: 9 miles (14½km)

Total ascent: 1,700 feet (510m)

In summary: The harder walk takes us in the opposite direction to the easier group, starting by crossing the Verdon River on Gréoux's ancient bridge. We follow the river bank for a short time before climbing steeply up on wooded tracks. Views open up as we travel towards the remote hamlet of Les Maurras, an area known for its truffles. Continuing to climb we pass over the subterranean route of the old Verdon irrigation canal which we will see later in the week. Arriving at the highest point of the day we are greeted by a view of Gréoux's castle in the distance, before descending and climbing again to pass the remote chapel of Notre Dame des Oeufs, enjoying views over the lower Verdon valley. Our final descent leads us back over the river and into town.

Highlight: Visit the Notre Dame des Oeufs and discover it's local custom.

Day 3: Forcalquier And The Abbey Of Salagon At Mane

Today both groups take the coach to the bustling hill town of Forcalquier and its thriving atmospheric weekly market.

Option 1 - Forcalquier To The Abbey Of Salagon At Mane

Distance: 4 miles (6½km)

Total ascent: 600 feet (180m)

In summary: The easier group will have time to explore this historic town and its market, perhaps climbing to the Citadel to see the carillon and observe the magnificent view before setting off. Our tracks are stony in places but never too steep as we cross the wooded limestone plateau on our journey to Mane. We will pass interesting stone bories, old shepherds' shelters, and it may be possible to visit the ancient Abbey of Salagon and its ethno-botanical gardens.

Highlight: A local interest guide will accompany the group today to explain more about the local area.

Option 2 - Discovering The Sculpted Landscape From Forcalquier To Mane

Distance: 8 miles (13km)

Total ascent: 1,300 feet (390m)

In summary: After a brief look around the market we make a steady climb out of Forcalquier to the plateau of Les Mourres to see the strangely shaped limestone rocks created by water and wind erosion over the centuries. On descending we will pass dry stone bories (huts) and old shepherds' shelters before passing the abbey to arrive at Mane for welcome refreshments.

Highlight: The limestone rocks at Les Mourres.

Day 4: Discovering Regusse And The View From La Colle

Today both groups will travel by coach to the village of Regusse, crossing the Verdon and into the neighbouring region of Haute Var.

Option 1 - A Walk Around Régusse

Distance: 7 miles (11km)

Total ascent: 600 feet (180m)

In summary: Starting on the edge of the village we enter mature oak and cedar woodland. We then climb steadily before reaching the lower slopes of La Colle, climbing high enough for good views south over Regusse and the vast forests of the Var that stretch towards Mont St Victoire near Aix en Provence. Returning to the village there should be time to explore and see its two fine 16th century windmills before finishing in a welcoming café/bar.

Highlight: Visit the windmills at Regusse.

Option 2 - Régusse: Climbing Up To The View From La Colle

Distance: 9 miles (14½km)

Total ascent: 1,300 feet (390m)

In summary: Starting from the same point, we initially follow a similar route through mature woodland, crossing a minor road before making the steady climb to the summit of La Colle. We then walk the ridge and we are rewarded by panoramic views. To the north is Moustiers and its huge lake, with the plateau of Valansole and Mont Ventoux in the distance; to the south we can see Mont St Victoire and St Baume on the horizon. Our descent is on wide stony tracks, steep in places, with occasional views of Regusse far below. We arrive in the outskirts of the village and follow the route of the easier group into town.

Highlight: Panoramic views from the summit of La Colle.

Day 5: Free Day

Each week there is a free day when no guided walks are offered. This is an ideal opportunity to relax around the hotel, walk independently or visit local places of interest. Some options for your free day may include:

Gréoux-les-Bains:

Explore the town of Gréouxles-Bains and learn about the therapeutic qualities of its natural spring that was discovered by the Romans. Walk up to the Castle of the Templars before stopping for lunch at one of the town's many restaurants.

Hotel facilities:

Enjoy the facilities of the Hotel Villa Borghese: a swim in its heated pool, a relaxing lunch on the terrace or a game of table tennis or boules.

Manosque and Aix-en-Provence:

There are bus connections to Manosque and Aix en Provence. Your leaders will be able to direct you to the timetable and the right bus stop.

For information on Gréoux-les-Bains please visit www.gréouxles-bains.com

Day 6: The Ridges Above Moustiers St Marie

Our walks today take different routes to finish in the medieval streets of Moustiers St Marie.

Option 1 - Ancient Route Into Moustiers Saint Marie

Distance: 6 miles (9½km)

Total ascent: 1,000 feet (300m)

In summary: We will be dropped off at the ancient monastery of Notre Dame de Segriès, now a retreat. We walk up its driveway passing the monastery chapel and buildings to reach another part of the huge plateau of Valansole. From here we descend on a minor road and follow woodland tracks to Embourgues we catch advance views of the way that Moustier St Marie clings dramatically to the cliff ahead. Finally, we ascend to an olive grove and then contour round the hill to cross a charming stone bridge and pass through the ancient Porte de Riou to explore the medieval streets of Moustiers St Marie.

Highlight: Time to explore the streets of Moustiers St Marie.

Option 2 - The Crête De L'ourbes & Moustiers Saint Marie.

Distance: 7 miles (11km)

Total ascent: 2,100ft (630m)

In summary: This walk takes us steeply up to the craggy ridge of L'Oubes with great views over the Lac St Croix and the start of the Upper Verdon Gorge. After crossing the summit and descending to a dry riverbed the terrain becomes more open before the final spectacular descent to Moustiers St Marie on a twisting ancient road.

Highlight: Walk up to the chapel of Notre Dame de Beauvoir perched high on its rock for magnificent views.

Day 7: Quinson And The Gorge Of The Verdon

A pleasant drive brings both groups to the lower Verdon Gorge. Both groups will have the opportunity to walk in the gorge and see the remains of the old Verdon canal, built to channel water to the city of Aix en Provence. The paths in the gorge are narrow in places but have handrails; there are also occasional metal staircases with handrails.

Option 1 - Quinson: The Chapel Of Saint Maxime And The Verdon Gorge.

Distance: 7 miles (11km)

Total ascent: 900ft (270m)

In summary: We climb up a rough zigzag path to the plateau of Male Sauque to follow fairly level tracks until we descend to the chapel of St Maxime. This is an ideal lunch spot and there is time to admire the view down to the gorge. We descend to a shady woodland path that leads us to the Verdon gorge and old canal. Passing through a short tunnel, we walk on top of the retaining wall of the old canal and eventually follow a suspended wooden walkway (with handrail) that is just a few feet above the river. It is then a short walk to the village of Quinson which has an interesting museum dedicated to prehistoric man's settlement in this region.

Highlight: The breathtaking Verdon gorge.

Option 2 - Verdon Gorge From Quinson To The Chapel Of St Maxime

Distance: 6 miles (9½km)

Total ascent: 900 feet (270m)

In summary: The harder walk starts in the gorge on a rocky, but fairly level, path with occasional steps cut into the rock. There are metal handrails and staircases in places and a timber walkway suspended above the river, before the path follows the top of the retaining wall of an old Napoleonic canal. After passing through a short tunnel we initially ascend through woodland before a final short steep ascent to the ridge and chapel of St Maxime. We return descending a steep, but stepped, route down the side of a gorge, to arrive back at river level, then follow the original route back to the Verdon Bridge and well earned refreshments. There is a short level river walk back to the village of Quinson where our transport awaits.

Highlight: Discover one of Europe's most beautiful river canyons.

Day 8: Departure Day

We hope to see you again soon.

ACCOMMODATION

Villa Borghese - Provence

The 4-star Villa Borghese has a fine tradition of service and is a member of the prestigios Châteaux Demeures de Tradition and the Relais du Silence groups. The owners of Villa Borghese will be very happy to welcome you to their hotel which is in a lovely, quiet and comfortable setting surrounded by gardens and woodland. Gréoux-les-Bains is close to the Verdon Gorges, the Luberon and the lavender fields in Provence. The hotel has an outdoor pool, tennis courts, fitness centre and spa.

Accommodation Info

Rooms

Villa Borghese has 50 en-suite bedrooms, most of which have a balcony or terrace.

Facilities in the bedrooms include:

- Telephone
- TV
- Hairdryer
- Safe deposit box
- Air conditioning
- Shaving point
- Mini-bar (extra charge)

The hotel is surrounded by a small wood and offers pleasant views from the bedrooms.

Facilities

There is a small outdoor heated swimming pool next to the pleasant terrace.

Villa Borghese contains tennis courts, table tennis, and a spa offering treatments (extra charge).

Relax at the cosy bar with an open fireplace.

The hotel offers its guests free WiFi.

Food & Drink

Holidays at Gréoux-les-Bains are Half Board with a 3-course served dinner.

The hotel prides itself on serving locally sourced produce from within 20km of the town.

Your Evenings

The friendly atmosphere of our holidays continues into the evening.

Enjoy a glass of wine or local beer before hearing about the next day's activities. Your evening meal is the main focus of the evening. After dinner relax on the terrace or in the bar, with a drink and chat with your fellow guests or try your hand in a friendly game of boules.

Travel Details

THE HASSLE-FREE OPTION

We offer flights from Heathrow to Marseille airport (UK connections via British Airways shuttle available from Manchester, Leeds Bradford, Newcastle, Glasgow or Edinburgh airports: £139). For flight times and prices please see the Dates & Prices tab.

If you choose this option we automatically include return transfers between the airport and the hotel. The coach transfer takes approx 1 hour 15 minutes to the Villa Borghese.

THE FLEXIBLE TRAVEL OPTION

Alternatively, tailor your journey to suit you by booking your holiday 'without flight' allowing you the freedom to book your own flights from your local airport.

If you choose this option, transfers are not included in the price. We recommend independent travellers meet our **HF Holidays' transfer coach** from Marseilles airport. This is timed to meet the HF Holidays' flights* (provisional flight times can be found on the dates and prices tab or you can call us on 020 8732 1220 for more information). Cost per single journey is £21.50

Our airport taxi service operates at this resort: £150 per single taxi journey

Transfers must be pre-booked. Please call 020 8732 1220 for more details

* Please note that HF Holidays is not responsible for your onward travel if you fail to meet the transfer coach

USEFUL HOLIDAY INFORMATION

Joining Instructions (With Flights)

If you have booked your holiday 'with flight' you will arrive at Marseille Airport. From the UK we offer flights from London Heathrow with flight connections from Manchester. Please note that meals are not usually provided on European flights, although some airlines may offer a small snack.

Where possible you will be met as you enter the arrivals hall by an HF Holidays' leader. Look out for their distinctive badge and clipboard. Your leader may be on the same flight as you or may arrive on another flight. Occasionally we will ask our transfer coach company to meet you. The driver will be in the arrivals hall holding an 'HF Holidays' sign.

The onward journey to Gréoux-les-Bains by coach takes approximately 1½ hours.

Joining Instructions (Without Flights)

For independent travellers: For guests who have booked their holiday 'without flight' HF Holidays can help you to reach the hotel in the following ways:

HF Holidays' transfer coach from Marseille airport. These are timed to meet the HF Holidays' flights (provisional flight times can be found at www.hfholidays.co.uk or by calling (0)20 8732 1220). Cost per single journey is £38. Please note that HF Holidays is not responsible for your onward travel if you fail to meet the transfer coach under any circumstance

Transfers must be pre-booked. If you have not already booked your transfer please call +44 (0)20 8732 1220

What To Bring

Essential Equipment

To enjoy walking/hiking comfortably and safely, footwear, clothing and equipment needs to be suitable for the conditions. Safety and comfort are our priorities, so our advice is to come prepared for all eventualities.

- Footwear with a good grip on the sole (e.g. Vibram sole) is the key to avoiding accidents.
- Walking/hiking boots providing ankle support and good grip are recommended (ideally worn in), and specialist walking socks to avoid blisters.
- Several layers of clothing, which can be added or removed, are better than a single layer (include spares).

- Fabrics (lightweight and fast drying) designed for the outdoors are recommended.
- Waterproof jacket and waterproof over trousers.
- Warm hat and gloves.
- Denim jeans and capes are not suitable on any walks.
- Rucksack with a waterproof liner.
- Thermos flask for hot drink.
- Water bottle (at least 2 litre).
- Spare high-energy food such as a chocolate bar.
- Small torch.
- First aid kit – your leader's first aid kit doesn't contain any medication or blister kits (such as Compeed).
- Sun hat and sunglasses
- Sun cream.

Optional Equipment

- Walking poles are useful, particularly for descents.
- Insect repellent.
- Camera.
- Gaiters.

Safety On Your Holiday

We are committed to running our Guided Walking holidays in a safe manner and your co-operation with this is much appreciated. No outdoor activity can be 100% risk free; however, if you take sensible precautions and adhere to your leaders' instructions, your holiday will be both safe and enjoyable. On the first evening of your holiday (dependent on arrival time, the leaders will give a short talk about safety on the walks – we would ask everyone to attend.

Walking as a group: Our leaders always consider the safety of the group as a whole and will show more caution over potential risks (such as bad or exceptionally hot weather than an individual or couple might make on a private outing. Walks may be modified or cancelled following the leaders' assessment of the day-to-day situation. Your leaders will refuse to accept any guest whose clothing, equipment, behaviour or walking ability is considered unsuitable, and where it could affect the safety and enjoyment of other guests on the proposed walk. It is your responsibility to follow the leader's guidelines, for the benefit and safety of the group as a whole. If you leave the group, then your leader will no longer have responsibility for you. For safety reasons, we stipulate a minimum party size of two guests in addition to the leader.

First aid: In line with current practice, each leader carries a group first aid kit but is not able to supply any 'medication', including aspirin, paracetamol, antihistamines and antiseptic cream.

Hydration: In warm weather it is very important to keep hydrated. You will need to carry water with you on walks, more during hot weather or on more demanding walks. One good way of hydrating is to use a hydration pack which allows drinking without constant stopping. This can then be filled up from water sources as required.

Insurance: Insurance is a condition of booking. Therefore if you have not already arranged insurance, it is imperative that you do so, and advise us of the insurance company and policy number.

Even with an EHIC card, medicines and outpatient treatment normally have to be paid for at the time and the costs reclaimed afterwards – details are available at dh.gov.uk/travellers. Therefore insurance is extremely important, as is access to emergency money, preferably a credit card.

Useful Information

The local language is French.

Is considered safe to drink, but if you prefer, bottled mineral water can be purchased from the hotel or local supermarkets.

If the international number you wish to call starts with a 0, you must drop the starting digit when dialling the number.

To dial a UK number 0044

To dial a French number 0033

Local Currency

The local currency is the Euro.

Electricity

220 Volt AC with round two pin plugs; you will need an adaptor for any appliances brought from the UK.

ATM Availability

There are several ATM machines in Gréoux-les-Bains where you can obtain money.

HOW TO BOOK

When you're ready to book, you can choose to **book online** or book **over the phone**. Our website offers secure online booking for our holidays, is available 24/7, and offers more in-depth information about all our holidays. If you prefer to call us, our experienced and knowledgeable team are available to answer any specific questions you have and can offer guidance as to which holiday is best suited to your needs.

Our office is open: Monday to Friday: 9am – 7pm Saturday & Sunday: 9am – 1pm Bank Holiday Monday: 9am – 1pm

PAYING YOUR DEPOSIT

To secure the holiday of your choice, you will need to pay a deposit: UK & European Holidays: £150 per person and Worldwide Holidays: £250 per person. You can pay your deposit by debit or credit card with no additional card fees charged or make an online BACS payment directly into HF's bank account, please see details under BACS payments. You can also pay your deposit by cheque within seven days of booking. Cheques should be made payable to 'HF Holidays Ltd' with your booking reference / Order ID on the back.

ASSOCIATE'S FEE

Non-members can join our holidays by paying an Associate's fee of £10 per person per holiday. Alternatively, full life membership is available from £100 – visit hfholidays.co.uk/membership for details.

BACS PAYMENTS

Please quote your booking reference / Order ID when you make your payment online: Bank Name: Svenska Handelsbanken AB (publ) Account Name: HF Holidays Ltd Account Number: 35923304 Sort Code: 40-51-62 IBAN: GB92HAND40516235923304 Swift / Bic Code: HANDGB22

Once we have received your booking and deposit, we will send a confirmation invoice to the lead name. Please check this carefully. For bookings 'with flights' it is essential that the names on your booking confirmation invoice match those on your passport for bookings overseas. Please advise us immediately of any errors. Any name changes after the balance of your holiday has been paid will be subject to a fee levied by the airline.

MANAGE MY BOOKINGS

Payments can also be made through the Manage My Booking function on our website. Click on the link at the top of our homepage. This is available to all customers who provide an email address at the time of booking.

YOUR FINAL BALANCE

The balance is due 10 weeks before departure. As with paying your deposit, you can pay your final balance by debit or credit card, make an online BACS payment directly into HF's bank account or pay by cheque.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is an important part of any booking and essential for one of our holidays. HF Holidays works with specialist. Insurance Brokers Campbell Irvine Direct. For more information or to obtain a quote call them on 01702 427 236 or visit hfholidays.co.uk/insurance

PEACE OF MIND

ATOL:

The air holidays and flights in this brochure are ATOL-protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 710. In the unlikely event of our insolvency, the CAA will ensure that you are not stranded abroad and will arrange to refund any money you have paid us for advance bookings. For further information visit the ATOL website atol.org.uk

MEMBER OF ABTOT:

HF Holidays is a member of ABTOT (The Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited) which provides financial protection under the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992 for HF Holidays Ltd and in the event of their insolvency, protection is provided for the following: 1. non-flight packages commencing in and returning to the UK; 2. non-flight packages commencing and returning to a country other than the UK; 3. flight inclusive packages that commence outside of the UK and Republic of Ireland, which are sold to customers outside of the UK and Republic of Ireland. 1, 2 and 3 provides for a refund in the event you have not yet travelled. 1 and 3 provides for repatriation. Please note that bookings made outside the UK and Republic of Ireland are only protected by ABTOT when purchased directly with HF Holidays Ltd.

TRIP NOTE VALIDITY

These Trip Notes are valid based on the date printed at the bottom of the page. They will occasionally be updated post booking and pre-departure. We will send you the latest trip notes prior to departure through a link in your pre departure documents or we can send you a copy in the post if preferred.

In booking this trip you should be confident in your ability to participate in all activities described in these Trip Notes. If you have any doubt about your suitability you should call HF Holidays and ask to speak to one of the team about this itinerary.

The information in these Trip Notes is given in good faith. Where differences exist between the Trip Notes and our current brochure, the Trip Notes supersede the brochure. All holidays can be subject to unexpected changes; so please be prepared to be flexible where necessary. At times, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned due to weather conditions, political, physical or other factors. In these circumstances we will make the best possible alternative arrangements to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary.

PRICE GUARANTEE

We promise that our earliest published prices will always be the best and if we reduce our holiday price after your booking has been confirmed, we will pass this reduction on to you. Our price promise applies if any subsequent offer price is for an identical holiday, duration, location and date and does not cover any optional extras, flights or additional services.

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