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The flag of Occitania (this and all other illustrations free of copyright c/o Wikimedia Commons)

“OCCITANIA”: A LEISURELY EXPLORATION OF SOUTHERN FRANCE

The Pyrenees – Andorra - river valleys of the Dordogne and the Lot – Lascaux - Conques – Rocamadour –
Toulouse - Carcassonne – Costa Brava - etc.

16 days, from Thursday, October 13, to Friday, October 28, 2022

A leisurely coach tour of Occitania, France’s magnificent southern region, including the high peaks of the Pyrenees, the lovely Dordogne and Lot River valleys, ancient pilgrimage shrines such as Conques and Rocamadour, medieval towns such as Cahors and Carcassonne, the prehistoric cave paintings of Lascaux, plus magnificent Mediterranean coastal scenery. Comfortable 3-star/superior tourist-class hotels, excellent local cuisine, and history talks by your tour escort, historian Jacques R. Pauwels, PhD, author of books such as ‘Beneath the Dust of Time: A History of the Names of People and Places’.

Tour price, based on double occupancy: \$4,695 from Toronto

“Land only” (from/to Barcelona Airport): \$3,745 - Single room supplement: \$750

PROPOSED ITINERARY:

Day 1 - Thursday, October 13: Late evening departure from Toronto to Barcelona, with Air Canada. Dinner and a light breakfast will be served on board.

Day 2 - Friday, October 14: Arrival at 10:05 AM in Barcelona. A private coach will be waiting to take us north into the Pyrenees mountains. Arrival in the picturesque Catalan town of Seu d’Urgell, where we check into one of Spain’s famous state-owned hotels known as “[paradors](#)”. Check in, and free time to settle in. How about a swim in the hotel’s indoor pool before our leisurely early-evening walk through the town’s quaint old quarter and dinner in the hotel’s restaurant?

Day 3 – Saturday, October 15: After breakfast, visit Seu d’Urgell’s Cathedral and beautiful cloister. Then we motor high into the Pyrenees to visit the miniature state of Andorra, whose twin sovereigns are the French president and the bishop of Seu d’Urgell! In recent decades, Andorra, formerly a sleepy mountain village, has metamorphosed into a booming city – and duty-free shopping paradise! Return to Seu in late afternoon and opportunity to check out the annual Pyrenees cheese fair being held in the town! No group dinner this evening.

Day 4 – Sunday, October 16: Today, breathtaking mountain scenery awaits us as we motor via the tows of Sort into the valley of the Noguera Pallresa, allegedly the most powerful river in the Pyrenees, and through a wild limestone gorge, the Congost de Collegats, to Pobla de Segur. We continue to Pont de Sert and, if time permits, take a sidetrip into the Boi Valley, famous for its Romanesque churches, collectively classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. On to the mountain resort of Vielha in the Aran Valley, for a mid-afternoon coffee break before crossing into France. Arrival in time for dinner in Bagnères de Luchon, an attractive spa situated in a valley surrounded by majestic mountain peaks! Ever since Roman times, the local hot water springs have served as a magnet to visitors, including celebrities such as Flaubert, Bismarck, and Matahari. Accommodation in the 3-star/superior-tourist class [Hotel Panoramic](#), located on the main street, and dinner in the hotel.



< View from the summit of the Tourmalet

Day 5 - Monday, October 17: A day of sightseeing in the spectacular Pyrenees, with as highlight the summit of the formidable Col du Tourmalet (alt. 2,115m), the highest paved pass in this mountain range, often featured in the prestigious Tour de France bicycle race. Return to Bagnères de Luchon in mid-afternoon and time to explore the town on your own, shop, visit the thermal springs, or take a cable car to the Superbagnères mountain peak (and famous ski station) overlooking the town from an altitude of over 2,200 meter above sea level. No group dinner this evening.

Day 6 - Tuesday, October 18: Departure after breakfast. We motor north and visit Saint Bertrand de Comminges, a quaint medieval borough and formerly an important sanctuary along one of the four traditional pilgrims' roads to Compostela that crisscrossed France, namely the *Via Tolosana* or "Toulouse Road." Visit to the unusual Romanesque church and cloisters. We are now in the French province of Languedoc, in many ways the heartland of Occitania and our next stop is in its capital, the vibrant "pink city" of Toulouse. Time for lunch and a leisurely sightseeing tour by little train, with highlights such as Place du Capitole, the scenic banks of the Garonne, the Canal du Midi, the 16th-century Pont Neuf, and two superb architectural creations from the Middle Ages, the Romanesque Basilica St. Sernin, possibly the most beautiful pilgrimage church on the road to Compostela, and the Gothic Church of the Jacobins, i.e. the Dominicans, which contains the tomb of the famous Dominican scholar, St. Thomas Aquinas. In the afternoon we continue north into the neighbouring Occitanian province of Périgord. Our destination is one of the most picturesque old towns in France, Sarlat-la-Canéda. Accommodation in the centrally located superior tourist-class/3-star [Hotel Montaigne](#). Dinner of regional specialties in a typical restaurant.

Day 7 - Wednesday, October 19: Day entirely at leisure to explore beautiful [Sarlat](#) on your own. A "must" this morning is a visit to the very popular weekly morning market! The town is bursting with shops selling traditional regional artefacts and delicacies but visiting them can wait until the afternoon. Also, do not miss the church of Sainte-Marie, recently restored by world-famous architect Jean Nouvel, who was born in Sarlat, converted into a covered market, and featuring a panoramic elevator that takes visitors to the top of the bell tower for breathtaking views of the town.

Day 8 - Thursday, October 20: Full-day exploration of wonderful Périgord, the highlight a visit to a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Lascaux, home of the world's most famous prehistoric cave paintings, estimated to be about 17,000 years old and mostly depicting large animals hunted by stone-age humans. Because the cave itself is not open to the public, we visit a high-quality, identical [reproduction](#).

Day 9 - Friday, October 21: Today we tour the very scenic Dordogne River valley, with the mighty medieval castle of Beynac, pretty villages such as Domme, and the gardens of the [Château of Marqueyssac](#), with their amazing topiaries.



The Dordogne River valley



Chateau and gardens of Marqueyssac

Day 10 - Saturday, October 22: Departure from Sarlat after breakfast. We enter the Dordogne River valley again, but now explore its eastern stretch, located in yet another Occitanian province, Quercy, featuring magnificent sights such as La Treyne Castle and Creysse, officially ranked as one of the prettiest villages in France; many pundits believe this region to be the most picturesque in all of France! Exiting the valley, we cross the rugged [Causse](#), a limestone “agro-pastoral cultural landscape” typical for much of Quercy and classified as a UNESCO site. Late afternoon arrival in Rocamadour, a famous sanctuary on the traditional pilgrimage road to Compostela Road, clinging precariously to a rocky cliff which rises dramatically from the floor of a verdant river valley. Dinner of regional specialties, and overnight in the best hotel in the village, the [Beau-Site](#)..

The magnificent medieval sanctuary of Rocamadour, clinging to its rock! >

Day 11 - Sunday, October 23: Morning sightseeing in Rocamadour, with attractions such as the Chapel of the Black Madonna, the Cave of the Hermit, the Sword of Roland, the amazing panorama from the castle walls, etc. Rest of the day free to shop and/or explore on your own.



Day 12 - Monday, October 24: Excursion to the capital of Quercy, Cahors, a town spectacularly situated on a meander of the river Lot. Our visit includes the ancient quarter around the cathedral, the Fontaine des Chartreux, a spring that used to be a place of worship to the Celts who lived here in Antiquity, and above all the impressive fortified, and perfectly preserved, medieval bridge, the Pont Valentré, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most photographed monuments in France! Via the scenic [Lot River valley](#) and the town of Figeac to Conques, arguably the prettiest of all towns and villages along the roads to Santiago de Compostela in France! The major attraction here is the magnificent Romanesque Abbey Church of Ste. Foy, featuring fine sculptures, a cloister, and a sumptuous collection of relics and other treasures, most famously the 10th-century statue-reliquary of the church’s patron, Ste. Foy, herself. Return to Rocamadour in late afternoon.



< Conques and its Romanesque abbey church

The fortified medieval bridge in Cahors >

Day 13 - Tuesday, October 25: Departure from Rocamadour after breakfast. We motor south to the world-famous medieval town of Carcassonne, still surrounded by its mighty walls and fortifications, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. We will have time there for sightseeing as well as lunch. In the afternoon, we continue through the Rousillon a small but picturesque region tucked away between the mountains of the Pyrenees and the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea, into Spain's

autonomous region of Catalonia, very much a part of the Occitanian “universe” during the Middle Ages. Dinner and overnight in a hotel overlooking the beach in the beautiful resort of Rosas on the rugged but beautiful stretch of Mediterranean coast known as the [Costa Brava](#). Dinner and overnight in the four-star Hotel Maritim overlooking the wonderful beach, the [Miramar](#).



The fortified city of Carcassonne >

Day 14 - Wednesday, October 26: After a leisurely breakfast, we explore the beautiful Costa Brava and its continuation across the French border, the less known but equally impressive Côte Vermeille, or “Ruby Coast,” both dotted with resorts such as Cadaques and Argelès, favourite haunts of painters such as Dali, Picasso, and Matisse. In the afternoon, we return to Roses via the Catalan town of Figueres, birthplace of Salvador Dali, where we visit the fascinating “[Theatre-Museum](#)” devoted to the life and work of the great surrealist artist. Return to the hotel and free evening.



The waterfront in the resort of Rosas



The Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres

Day 15 - Thursday, October 27: Day at leisure in the beautiful resort of Rosas. Final group dinner in the restaurant of our hotel.

Day 16 - Friday, October 28: After breakfast, transfer to Barcelona Airport in time for the non-stop return flight to Toronto, with Air Canada, departing around noon and arriving at 3:00 PM.

Tour price, based on double occupancy: \$4,695 from Toronto
“Land only” (from/to Barcelona Airport): \$3,745 - Single room supplement: \$750

Included in the tour price are:

- Return flight Toronto-Barcelona, with Air Canada, including the usual combination of airport taxes, security fees and fuel surcharges.
- Accommodation based on double occupancy in superior tourist-class (3-star) hotels; the single room supplement is \$750;
- Breakfast daily and a total of *six* dinners of full lunches;
- Overland transportation by private coach;
- All sightseeing and visits as outlined in the itinerary, including admission to museums and monuments mentioned.
- Airport lounge pass for air-inclusive bookings made more than 90 days prior to departure.

Not included are:

- All items of a personal nature.
- Beverages with dinners, and meals other than those outlined above.
- A gratuity for the coach driver, 30 Euros or dollar equivalent, to be paid locally.
- Travel Insurance, available upon request.

WHAT/WHERE IS "OCCITANIA"

Occitania is the historical region in southern Europe where Occitan or *lenga d'òc*, in French: *langue d'oc*), a Romance language, was historically the main language spoken, and where it is sometimes still used, for the most part as a second language. This cultural area roughly encompasses the southern third of France, and especially the province known as Languedoc, in addition to Monaco and a slice of northern Spain, the region of Catalonia. Occitania has been recognized as a linguistic and cultural concept since the Middle Ages but has never been a legal nor a political entity under this name. (Source: Wikipedia)

Video with a hymn to Occitania: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmCZRRb3YQc>

Suggested reading: Denis Knight, *Days in Occitania*

Websites about food and wine of the Périgord, Occitania's quintessential foodie region:

<https://www.visit-dordogne-valley.co.uk/french-living/food-specialities> -

<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/gourmet-dordogne-how-to-make-the-most-of-one-of-frances-top-foodie-regions> - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-kwGejbaf4>

TERMS & CONDITIONS

RESERVATIONS AND DEPOSITS:

Reservations should be made as early as possible to ensure the departure of your choice. A deposit of \$750.00 required at the time of registration. Your reservation is confirmed upon receipt of your deposit and registration form. No reservations will be accepted without a signed registration form.

REFUND OF UNUSED ARRANGEMENTS:

Because the rates of Pauwels Travel Bureau Ltd. are based on group participation, no refund can be made for any tour accommodation or tour service or tour feature not taken. If cancellation occurs while the tour is in progress, no refund can be made for the tour portion not taken. We strongly suggest that to allow for any unexpected contingencies, you purchase the all-inclusive insurance.

CANCELLATION POLICY:

Refund of deposit is made if cancellation is received in writing by Pauwels Travel Bureau Ltd. more than 90 days prior of the departure date of the tour less a \$500.00 non-refundable administrative fee per person. For cancellation received in writing 90 days prior or less the following cancellation charges apply:

90 days to 61 days before departure: 25% of tour cost

60 to 31 days before departure: 50% of tour cost

Within 30 days prior to departure: 100% of tour cost

RESPONSIBILITY:

The acceptance of the initial service to be provided under the tour shall be considered an acceptance by the tour member of those conditions. We also reserve the right to decline, to accept or retain any person as a member of the tour. We reserve the right without notice, to withdraw any part or all of the tour. Factors such as airline schedule changes, hotel overbookings, inclement weather, travel warnings by the Canadian Government etc. may necessitate changes in the itinerary. There may also be other circumstances in which changes become necessary or advisable.

By commencing the tour, I agree to the release and agreement as included below.

RELEASE & AGREEMENT:

By placing my deposit and commencing the tour I understand and agree to the following:

1. That all tours are delivered in conjunction with other service providers, including but not limited to travel agent and booking services, airlines, hotel and accommodation providers, transportation providers including but not limited to coach, train and ferry services, restaurant providers, and local guides. We shall not be held responsible for the failure by any person or company to render any transportation, lodging or other travel service to be provided on the tour. All hotels, transportation and other travel services are provided subject to all the terms and conditions under which they are offered to the public generally.
2. I know that tour programs include walking and may including hiking and fitness programs that have potential hazardous activities associated with them. I should not participate prior to approval by my physician. I assume any and all other risks associated with these events included but not limited to falls, contact with other participants, the effects of the weather including high heat and/or humidity.
3. To release, indemnify and hold harmless Pauwels Travel Bureau and their affiliates (which term shall include parents, subsidiaries, officers, directors, shareholders, agents and employees of Pauwels Travel Bureau as well as Pauwels Travel themselves) (the "Released Parties") from, and agree not to sue the Released Parties for, any claims that I may have arising from, or in connection with, any personal injury, bodily injury, mental anguish, emotional distress, physical, property or other damage that I may suffer from any cause whatsoever related in any way to my participation in this tour. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, I release, indemnify and hold harmless the Released Parties from, and agree not to sue them for any personal injury, bodily injury, mental anguish, emotional distress, physical, property or other damage that I may suffer from the Released Parties' negligence other than from intentional or reckless acts by such parties. I further agree to release, indemnify and hold harmless the Released Parties from any and all acts of God, war (whether declared or undeclared), terrorist activities, incidents of politically motivated violence, illness or quarantine, strikes or government restrictions or the acts or omissions of any other agents over which the Released Parties have no direct or indirect control, including, without limitation, airlines, railways, bus companies, hotels, shipping companies, guides and sub-contracted agents or tour operators. This release also includes activities not offered that may be considered risky. I further release any Tour Directors, bus drivers or other individuals involved in my tour.
4. That the air carrier's liability for loss of or damage to baggage or property, or for death or injury to person, is limited by their tariffs, or the Warsaw Convention, or both.
5. That Pauwels Travel Bureau shall have no liability or responsibility for me when I am absent from activities, such as visits to friends or relatives or during stay-ahead/stay-behind option periods if the stay-ahead/stay-behind period does not include the services of a Tour Director.
6. To abide by directions of my Tour Director or other leadership personnel during my tour. Failure to do so may result in my termination from tour immediately. I understand that to disobey such rules or directions are to waive the right to any refund, and that I may be sent home at my own expense. The participant and family undertake full financial responsibility for any damage caused by the participant and agree to pay his/her return home on the first available flight, should his/her behavior be deemed detrimental to the welfare of the group.
7. To abide by all local laws when in Canada and abroad, including those concerning drugs and alcohol and that if I abuse or disobey such laws, even unintentionally, I waive my right to a refund, and Pauwels Travel may send me home at my own expense. I also understand that should local authorities be involved; I will be subject to the laws of the country I am visiting.
8. That if I become ill or incapacitated, Pauwels Travel and its employees, or a designated chaperone may take any action they deem necessary for my safety and well-being, including securing medical treatment (at my own expense) and transporting me home. In the event of a medical emergency, Pauwels Travel will attempt to cause appropriate treatment to be administered, and the traveller authorizes Pauwels Travel to do so. Pauwels Travel, however, makes no warranty that it will be able to cause effective (or any) emergency treatment to be administered.

9. That Pauwels Travel may use any film likenesses taken of me and any of my comments while on a tour for future publication and also use my contact information for future Pauwels Travel communications.

A WORD ABOUT *GROUP* AIRFARES:

Please note that when booking one of our air inclusive tours, Pauwels Travel has negotiated reduced rates with the airline that we are able to confirm and lock in up to 359 days before travel. While it is wonderful to share the savings and flexibility this provides with you, our valued guests, the privilege does come with some restrictions. In some cases it may not be possible to collect frequent flyer miles, you may not be able to check in online 24 hours before travel, or you may need to try checking in with your ticket number rather than your booking reference and, in **almost ALL cases we are not able to offer advanced seat selection.**

It is the airline that makes the reservation and has control over the booking so it is their policy, not ours, that prevents us from assigning specific seats. If a request is made, it is passed on to the airline by our staff when they submit the names to the airline, i.e., 30-60 days prior to departure. Calling us several days before you leave will not change this fact nor will getting upset with our staff.

If a certain type of seat is indispensable to you, we suggest that you book our tour on a “land only” basis and make individual flight arrangements, in which case you may be able to get the seat of your choice; Pauwels Travel would be happy to assist you with that reservation at absolutely no additional charge. We will offer you the best fare available, but please note that this can only be done once a tour is a guaranteed departure because your individual airfare’s conditions are likely to involve cancellation penalties.

We thank you in advance for your kind understanding of the above!

REGISTRATION FORM

Please book _____ seat(s) on the "Occitania Tour" from October 13 – 28, 2022.

Enclosed is my/our deposit of _____ (\$750 per person, *plus* insurance premium if taken.)

I wish to book on group flights _____ OR land only _____. (If booking land only please send the office a copy of your flight details).

Deposit and insurance premium, if taken, are due with registration. You will be invoiced for the balance due 45 days prior to departure.

WE REQUIRE A COPY OF YOUR PASSPORT (INFORMATION PAGES ONLY) VALID 3 MONTHS AFTER TOUR TO BE SENT IN WITH YOUR REGISTRATION FORM.

PASSPORT NAME(S): **Please** indicate the appropriate title (Mr., Mrs., Miss, Dr., Ms.)

Surname _____ First _____ Middle(s) _____

Surname _____ First _____ Middle(s) _____

If applicable, give your commonly used first name as you would like it to appear on your name tag: (e.g. "Liz" for "Mary Elizabeth")

Address: _____ City: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

If traveling alone, is a SINGLE ROOM REQUIRED? YES _____ NO _____

If sharing, what is your bed preference: twin (2 beds) _____ double (1 bed) _____?

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS: We find the earlier a request is made, the more success we have in filling it, so please list any dietary requests, allergies, any special physical needs or frequent flyer numbers etc here. We cannot ensure requests made 30 days or less prior to departure will be possible.

Insurance, Please call the office for premiums then record it on application and add premium to deposit.

I /we would like to purchase (please check and record your rate):

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

All-inclusive Package _____ Non-medical Package _____

Other _____ **OR** Decline Insurance _____

PAYMENT: Cheque payable to Pauwels Travel E-transfer to tours@pauwelstravel.com Visa Mastercard
American Express

Amount Paid: _____ Card Number: _____

Expiry: _____ Security Code: _____ Signature: _____

"I/we agree to the terms and conditions attached to the program, have indicated our insurance choice, indicated any special requests and included payment".

Date _____ **(Signature) (s)** _____

Please forward this completed and signed form, copy of passport and payment to:

PAUWELS TRAVEL BUREAU LTD.

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