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Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild - St Jean, Cap Ferrat - French Riviera

Photos by Circa Tours

## *Essential Spain and Southern France*

Madrid - Barcelona - Provence - French Riviera  
(14 days - 12 nights)

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# SAMPLE ITINERARY

This is an example of a possible itinerary. It can be resized, reorganized and customized to fit your interests, budget and schedule. It can also be combined with other tours.

## HIGHLIGHTS (14 days - 12 nights)

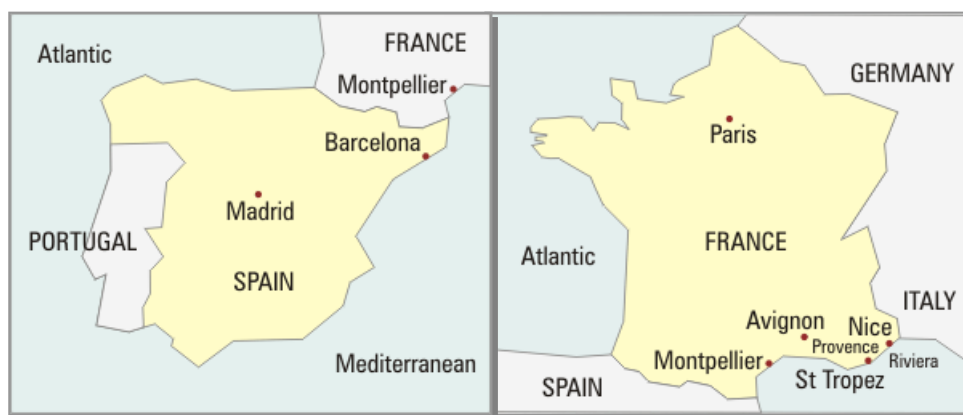
DAY	ACTIVITIES	NIGHT
1	Leave U.S.	
2	Arrive in <b>Madrid</b> . Private airport transfer. At leisure	Madrid
3	Day at leisure to explore museums	Madrid
4	Private walking tour of Royal Palace and vicinity. Afternoon high-speed train to <b>Barcelona</b>	Barcelona
5	Half-day private tour of the city	Barcelona
6	Day at leisure to relax or explore Barcelona (tickets for hop on/off bus)	Barcelona
7	Train to <b>Montpellier</b> . Pick up rental car. Drive to Provence	Avignon
8	Explore <b>Provence</b> at leisure (Arles, <b>Avignon</b> , Chateauneuf du Pape, Pont du Gard, Orange, le Luberon mountains, etc.)	Avignon
9	Explore Provence at leisure. Drive to <b>French Riviera</b> (Visit L'Annonciade museum in <b>St Tropez</b> )	St Tropez
10	Drive to <b>Nice</b> . Return rental car at the airport	Nice
11	Full-day private tour to Museums (Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, etc.)	Nice
12	Full-day private tour to <b>St Paul de Vence</b> (Maeght Foundation), Renoir's studio, decorated chapels, etc. OR any other site of your choice (Cap Ferrat, Monaco, Eze, etc.)	Nice
13	Day at leisure in Nice (hop-on hop-off bus)	Nice
14	Private airport transfer. Return to U.S.	

**ITINERARY** (for more options, see our "Spain Highlights" and "France Highlights")

**Day 1:** Leave U.S.

**Day 2:** Arrive in **Madrid**. After your private chauffeur picks you up at the airport, settle into your hotel and relax after your overnight flight or start exploring the city on your own.

**Day 3:** You have the whole day to yourself today. Enjoy the city and/or some of Madrid's great museums:



The **Prado Museum** is one of Europe's top museums, and it is also one of Madrid's best attractions. Built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Neoclassical style, it emphasizes Spanish art up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Goya's *El Tres de Mayo*, Velazquez's *Las Meninas*, and El Greco's *Adoracion de los Pastores (the Adoration of the Shepherds)* are some of the most famous pieces on display, but there are many more artists represented: Ribera, Murillo, and Zurbaran, to name a few. There is a substantial collection of Dutch and Italian masters as well (the museum is closed on Mondays).

The **Reina Sofia Museum** occupies an 18<sup>th</sup>-century building that has been renovated in a modern, avant-garde style by architect Jean Nouvel. As a modern art museum, it houses treasures of contemporary Spanish art such as works by Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Juan Miro and many more. Since 1992, it has been the home of Guernica, Picasso's famed



work depicting the 1937 Civil War bombing of a small Basque village by the German air force. This is a very dramatic painting and, as such, a major draw for history and modern art enthusiasts (the museum is closed on Tuesdays).

The **Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum** displays over 600 works of art ranging from medieval to modern pieces, giving the viewer a chance to enjoy an overall understanding of the history of Western art. The collection includes world-class examples of Italian, Flemish, Renaissance, Baroque, Impressionist, and all the way to 20th-century American paintings. The Thyssen's more "human-size" display is a fine complement to the Prado's massive collection (the museum is closed on Mondays).

**Plaza Mayor.** One would not conceive of going to Madrid without a stroll around the cobble-stoned Plaza Mayor and down the narrow streets of the nearby old section of the city. Built in 1619 and once the site of public executions and bullfights, the plaza is the heart of the city. It is a quiet, pedestrian-only enclosed square with ancient arcades surrounded on all four sides by restaurants, bars and shops. Stop for refreshment at one of the outdoor cafes and watch the world go by while listening to the melodic tunes of the street musicians.

Other places of interest:

- **Retiro Park.** A few blocks east of the Prado Museum, a 300-acre park good for strolling, picnicking or boating on the lake.
- **Botanical Gardens** with rare plants and trees, next to the Prado Museum.
- **Sorolla Museum.** The house of famous painter Joaquin Sorolla (1863-1923) with some of his luminous paintings

**Day 4:** This morning, let your private guide walk you around the **Royal Palace** and the surrounding historic neighborhood. The Royal Palace is one of the most popular attractions in Madrid. This elegant building is one of Europe's greatest palaces, in close competition with the likes of Versailles in Paris, Schonbrunn in Vienna and the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. It was built in the 1700s by King Philip V, the grandson of Louis XIV. With over 2,000 rooms - only a handful of which can be visited, of course - it is full of sumptuous interiors: luxurious tapestries, priceless porcelain, elegant furniture and more. (The palace is still used for official state receptions, so it is sometimes closed to the public.)

This afternoon, hop on the smooth riding high-speed train. Relax and enjoy the scenery as you cross Castilla la Mancha, Aragon and Catalonia on your way to Barcelona (3 hours).

**Day 5:** Start your exploration of Barcelona with an overview of the city on a half-day private tour with your own driver and expert guide (suggested visits: Sagrada Familia, Park Guell and museums: Juan Miro Foundation, Picasso Museum, etc.)



**La Sagrada Familia** ("Expiatory Church of the Holy Family"), a massive, privately-funded Roman Catholic church still under construction. It is the crowning achievement of renowned Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926). The building's scale and idiosyncratic architecture have made it one of Spain's top tourist attractions. The architecture is unlike anything ever built anywhere. The older section looks like it was carved out of a massive rock. The statuary in the newer section is reminiscent of the characters in a Star Wars movie. The inside shows a clear Gothic influence. The grandiose design and the magnitude of the project are absolutely mind-boggling. It is a masterpiece of creativity and imagination.



**Casa Batlló and Casa Mila**, also known as La Pedrera (Catalan word for "Quarry"): Two fanciful buildings designed by Antoni Gaudí in the Modernista (Art Nouveau) style at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are both located on one of Barcelona's widest boulevards, the Passeig de Gracia. They are particularly remarkable because of Gaudí's avoidance of straight lines and his use of colorful ceramic tiles and curving wrought iron.





Camargue for bird watching and a taste of wilderness in the swampy Rhone River delta. Drive back through the cities of Tarascon and Beaucaire to watch a falconry demonstration at the chateau (all year except winter).

**Northern Luberon.** If you like nature and quaint villages, northern Luberon is the place to explore: Hilltop villages like Gordes and its well-preserved "Bories" settlements; the ochre limestone quarries of Roussillon; the Romanesque Abbey of Senanque; the Fontaine de Vaucluse and its natural spring gushing out of the ground to form a river; Isle sur la Sorgue, famous for its antiques shops, and more (Ménerbes, Lacoste...) A scenic, leisurely sightseeing day!

**Aix and the Luberon.** This morning, Aix en Provence, the home of famous Impressionist painter Paul Cezanne, invites you for a stroll along its fashionable tree-lined Cours Mirabeau. Then up into the hills to the South Luberon to reach the quaint village of Lourmarin dominated by an elegant Renaissance castle. In the afternoon, on to the discovery of other quiet villages as Cadenet, Vaugine, Cucuron, etc.

**Nîmes and le Pont du Gard.** The Pont du Gard Roman aqueduct (a World Heritage monument) has been standing for more than 2,000 years and is an absolute must-see. Then, head out to Uzès to discover its picturesque streets and interesting Romanesque architecture. Scenic drive through the typical "garrigue" (rugged and dry Provencal landscape) to reach the bustling city of Nîmes, with its well-preserved "Maison Carrée" Roman temple and a Roman amphitheater still used for local "corridas" (the French version of Pamplona's "running of the bulls," but inside an enclosed arena). On the way back, visit a troglodyte monastery dating back to the 5th century.

**Day 9:** More of Provence at your own pace as you start inching towards the French Riviera. Explore the glamorous seaside resort of **St Tropez**, a charming port town with elegant shops, fine dining and luxury boats. Visit the Annonciade Museum with a long list of post-Impressionist and Fauvist names: Bonnard, Braque, Derain, Dufy, Maillol, Marquet, Matisse, Rouault, Seurat, Signac, Utrillo, Von Dongen, Vlaminck, Vuillard... Some of them are lesser-known but they're all good! Art lovers should also visit the 10th century Chateau Suffren, one of the town's oldest buildings (a museum in its own right) and host to various temporary international art exhibits year-round.

**Day 10:** Drive on to Nice and return your rental car at the airport by 2:00 pm. Check into your hotel and start exploring the city.

**Day 11:** Today your private driver will take you to any part of the **French Riviera** of your choice, and there are a lot of possibilities. With its glitzy film festivals, luxury yachts and beach lifestyle, the French Riviera (known to the locals as "la Côte d'Azur" - named after the striking deep blue color of the Mediterranean) is one of the poshest seaside playgrounds in Europe - a favorite place for queens, czars, princes and the rich and famous. But common folks go there, too. The region's mild weather makes it a favorite spot for vacationers from colder climes to the north. And, for decades, the sunshine and unique ambient luminosity has also motivated hordes of artists to move there (Picasso being the most well-known example). With all the region has to offer, it should come as no surprise that this is a very busy place. Nice, at the epicenter of it all, is an ideal base of operations for fun and exciting discoveries.



One of the biggest reasons for visiting the French Riviera is modern art, and there is lots of it everywhere: museums, galleries, outdoor sculptures, you name it... Another reason is the Mediterranean ambiance and "joie de vivre" - a mixture of scenery, architecture, ancient villages, food, beach life, music, etc. Here's a list of things to see when you get there (do give yourself plenty of vacation time!)

- **Nice - Musée des Beaux Arts.** Art from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century with works by Jules Cheret, Raoul Dufy, Kees van Dongen, Eugene Boudin, Auguste Rodin among others plus ceramics by Picasso, displayed in a sumptuous neo-classical villa.
- **Nice - Musée d'Art Moderne.** Avant-garde works by Andy Warhol, Nikki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Yves Klein, Christo and other modern artists in an ultra-



modern setting.

- **Nice - Matisse Museum.** The world's largest collection of the master's works housed in a beautiful 17<sup>th</sup>-century Mediterranean villa.
- **Nice - Chagall's Biblical Museum.** The museum was built specifically for this copious collection of Chagall's brightly colored paintings inspired by scenes from the Old Testament.
- **Nice - The tramway stations,** a dozen or so of them decorated with whimsical modern murals and sculptures from living artists (some of these works are best seen at night).
- **St Paul-de-Vence - Maeght Foundation** (Jose Luis Sert,

architect). Modern art by nearly every major artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Sculptures by Miro, Giacometti, Calder and others are scattered all around the shaded lawns and gardens. Equally impressive collection on the inside: Chagall, Braque, Fernand Leger, etc.

- **Antibes - Picasso Museum,** located in the Chateau Grimaldi where the artist worked in 1946. Over 200 of his works are shown there: paintings, ceramics, tiles, vases, plates, etc.
- **Biot - Fernand Leger Museum** featuring a works by the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century artist, including a sizeable collection of paintings, mosaics, stained-glass windows and more.
- **Menton - Jean Cocteau Museum,** just before the Italian border. This seaside museum located in a 17<sup>th</sup>-century fortress highlights Cocteau's many talents: artist, dramatist, poet, and filmmaker.
- **La Napoule/Cannes - Henry Clews Museum.** Unusual art by a lesser-known turn-of-the-century American artist (Rodin was an acquaintance of his). Beautiful gardens with fountains and topiary surrounding an austere seaside fortress.
- **Cagnes-sur-Mer - Renoir's House/Museum.** The artist lived there from 1907 to 1919. The villa displays a handful of his works and his studio can be visited (no abstract art here but well worth the visit)



**Day 12:** Enjoy a repeat of yesterday, but to different places.

Chapels decorated by famous artists:

- **Vence - Matisse's Chapel of the Rosary** (Le Corbusier, architect). Quintessential late Matisse. A modest chapel with some of his most simplified designs.
- **Vallauris - Picasso's War and Peace Chapel and Museum.** Murals depicting war on one side and peace on the other. The subject and style are reminiscent of his famous Guernica painting.
- **Villefranche - Jean Cocteau's Chapelle St Pierre.** A 17<sup>th</sup>-century chapel decorated with elegant frescoes.
- **Le Cannet/Cannes - Tobiassse's Chapelle St Sauveur.** Brightly colorful murals using a different kind of modern-day bas-reliefs painted with absolutely stunning results.
- **Menton - Jean Cocteau's Wedding Room.** More elegant frescoes by the French artist.



Other places of interest not related to art:

- **Nice - Russian Orthodox Cathedral.** Built in early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Czar Nicholas II, complete with onion domes, gilded icons and colorful frescoes. Unusual for the area but an amazing building.
- **Nice - Promenade des Anglais.** A four-mile beach-side boulevard lined with grand hotels and other fine buildings.
- **Old Nice** with colorful Belle Epoque buildings, ornate baroque churches, narrow streets, a flower market and alluring shops.
- **Cap Ferrat - The villa of Baroness Ephrussi de Rothschild.** An extravagant pastel-pink palazzo with opulent interiors and nine gorgeous gardens (French, Spanish, Florentine, roses, rare trees, exotic...) all decorated with fountains (some musical), ponds, statuary and shaded paths.
- **Cap Ferrat - Villa Kerilos.** A perfect replica of an ancient Greek villa from the island of Delos.

- **Grasse - “Perfumeries”** (Fragonard, Gallimard and Molinard). These functioning production facilities are open for visits (and smell tests), as is the nearby International Perfume Museum owned by the city of Grasse.
- **Monaco - The Exotic Gardens** with thousands of cacti and succulents growing on a steep cliff-side garden with magnificent views of the Mediterranean. Watch the changing of the guard at the Prince’s Palace (every day at 11:55 am). Other visits in Monaco: the Monte-Carlo Casino designed by Charles Garnier, the architect of the Neo-Baroque Opera Garnier in Paris; and the Musee Oceanographique et Aquarium.
- **La Turbie**, high above Monaco. Ancient village and monument to Augustus Caesar with views of the Mediterranean.
- **Eze**. A touristy but very pretty village with exotic gardens and a castle on top of a promontory overlooking the Mediterranean (on a clear day you can see Corsica).
- **Vallauris**. Pottery shops and artists at work.
- **Biot**. Glass works and glass blowers at work.
- **Cannes**. The old town.
- **La Mortola, Italy - The Hanbury Gardens** (only a few miles over the border). Tranquil and luscious gardens with views of the Mediterranean and over 5,800 species of ornamental plants.



**Day 13:** On your final day, continue exploring on your own. Enjoy fantastic views of the city from the top deck of a hop-on-hop-off bus. Get off as often as you please at any of the 11 stops. Discover Nice at your own pace: the "Promenade des Anglais", Cimiez monastery, the Mont Boron, etc. and perhaps do some shopping.

**Day 14:** Private airport transfer. Return to U.S.

Hello, my name is **Pierre Mainguené**. I personally handcrafted this itinerary.



I am the co-founder and president of Circa Tours. I was born and raised in Brittany, France so, as a native European, I love everything about the “old country” especially France, Spain and Portugal, the three countries we specialize in. I love their history (and there is lots of it), their art (same thing), their cuisine (especially in France, Catalonia and the Basque Country), their wine (everywhere), their lifestyle and the endless diversity of the local cultures.

In dozens of trips I have taken to Europe, I have traveled to nearly every corner of those countries, and I continue my journey of discovery every year. I am a Travel-Institute certified France and Spain Specialist, and I am also recognized by the Tourist Office of Portugal as a certified Portugal Specialist.

My goal is to create the best possible trip for you. I am always ready to listen to your wishes (however creative) and feedback, and I will always enjoy sharing my experiences with you.

That’s me, by the way, in front of a Joaquin Sorolla painting in Madrid. And, the following are some comments made by a few of our clients:

- “Our trip was fantastic! We had such a wonderful time! All went well including getting our train tickets to Seville changed the day of the strike. Our guides were nothing less than phenomenal! We can't thank you and your staff enough for putting together a trip that was worthy of our 30th anniversary celebration!” M.B., Massachusetts
- “Pierre. Thank you for your services. I really enjoyed dealing with you. You are so knowledgeable, pleasant and professional. I certainly will recommend you to friends.” J.L., Colorado

- “It was not a good trip - it was a GREAT trip! Truly everything was fabulous, ran smoothly, and worked well. The guides were excellent, the itinerary perfect. We enjoyed Spain very much and will ask you for assistance on our next journey to southern Europe!” J.K., California
- “Circa Tours did a good job. They worked very closely with us in putting the program together. We were very pleased with how efficient everything ran. The information we received from Circa Tours was done up very well, which allowed us to just pull the appropriate paperwork and be on our way. The tours were very well done. The guides we had with the local travel providers did a very good job of explaining the areas we toured. Pierre at Circa Tours made sure we saw a bit of everything.” D.T., Florida
- “We are all home, safe and sound - very tired, but in a hazy daze of love for France. Thank you and Carolyn SO much for arranging such an amazing trip for all of us. Throughout the trip, my sisters, mom and myself could be heard saying such things as, “THANK YOU, PIERRE”...or, “thank goodness for Pierre!!!” Martine was an excellent guide, by the way...very good, nice, thorough and professional. We wouldn't have been able to do HALF of what we did (and certainly not with nearly as much carefree enjoyment) with out her. Thank you and Carolyn for all of you expertise and care in helping us and doing all of the hard work for us! Thank you! Thank you!!!!” K.B., Iowa