

FRANCE – PROVENCE

8-day / 7-night easy to moderate one-hotel guided walks at Gréoux-les-Bains near Gorge du Verdon

EARLY BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL



At the heart of rural France is a beautiful part of the popular region of **Provence** hardly touched by tourism. This is a wild land filled with the scent of wild flowers, fields of lavender, dramatic rock escarpments and a landscape dotted with little hill towns and villages; the perfect countryside for walkers.

It is here, based in the picturesque town of Gréoux-les-Bains in a four-star family-run hotel - offering outstanding cuisine sourced from local produce - that we can explore the *Routes de la Lavande*, an area steeped in the culture of lavender production and visit charming hill-top villages in the spectacular French 'Grand Canyon' the Gorges du Verdon.

Cost from: \$2610 per person (twin share) Single room supplement from \$540 (limited availability)

Departs: 25th April; 2nd, 9th, 16th May; 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th September, 2020

Includes: 7 nights in comfortable hotel accommodation with ensuite bathrooms, with 7 breakfasts, 7 evening meals, experienced walks leader, 5 guided walks, local transport to/from walks.

Not Included: Airport transfers from Marseille Provence Airport (can be pre-booked at extra cost, we recommend you take these – please ask for details when booking), meals and drinks not mentioned, personal expenses, transport and/or activities on your free day.

A typical centre-based **Classic Walking Holiday** offers a choice of 2 guided walks daily, each of varying length and ascent. For those new to walking, we suggest you start at the easier level, where the pace is the gentlest. We have plenty of stops to enjoy the views and to rest. As your holiday progresses you may feel confident to try a more challenging level, or stick to the same level - it's your choice. There is usually a free-day midweek to relax, go sightseeing or to explore the baths, parks and cultural activities in Gréoux-les-Bains.

Walks may include the pretty town of Forqualquier with its bustling local market; the medieval citadel of Mane-en-Provence or the village of Lurs perched high on a rocky crag. We can enjoy highlights of several of the great long distance GR routes of France such as the dramatic ridge walk on the Chemin de St Jacques (the Way of Saint James pilgrimage route). Nearer Gréoux there are meadows of poppies and the walk across the lavender plateaux. A highlight is always Moustiers Saint Marie, deemed easily as one of the prettiest villages in France, perched beneath a rocky cliff and with a suspended star high above the stone church.

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VILLA BORGHESE: The charming four-star hotel has a fine tradition of service and is a member of the prestigious *Châteaux Demeures de Tradition* and the *Relais du Silence* groups. The balconies of the 50 large simple bedrooms – each with its own en-suite bathroom – look out over the gardens towards the hilltop castle of Gréoux-les-Bains. There is a small outdoor heated swimming pool next to the pleasant terrace and a cosy bar with an open fireplace. The walls throughout the hotel are covered in local artworks depicting many scenes of the region, both traditional and contemporary including copies of Neolithic cave paintings. The hotel prides itself on serving locally sourced fresh and traditional produce from within 20km of the town.

WALKING GRADES:

Easier Walks



7 to 13km walking on good paths which are sometimes rocky with up to 420m of ascent a day.

Harder Walks



10 to 16km mainly on good walking paths, with some steeper, rougher, routes on rocky ground and up to 750m of ascent in a day.

Suggested Itinerary

This program should give you a feel for the walks but is subject to change. Each year we listen carefully to the views of our guests and make improvements to our walking programs. Further information will be sent to you prior to your holiday; however, the walk selection each week is made by your walk leaders. A finalised itinerary will be available at the hotel and your leaders will brief you every evening about the next day's walks.

Day 1: Arrival day

Please make your way to the hotel by mid-afternoon. Depending on your arrival time you may have the opportunity to settle into your room and perhaps see a little of the resort before the evening meal. On the first evening your leaders will explain more about the walks and activities planned for the week.

Day 2: Greoux and St Martin de Bromes

The easier and harder walks follow very different routes today. The walkers choosing the easier route will climb up to the vast plateau of Valansole for sweeping views, then cross the plateau past lavender fields and olive plantations on an old droving route. Descending to the ancient walls of Greoux castle, there is time to explore before returning to the village. The harder walk crosses the Verdon River and shadows its banks for some time, then ascends to the truffle hamlet of Les Maurras, and further up to a glorious viewpoint from where we can see Greoux's castle and the Verdon valley. Return to the village again alongside the river.

Day 3: Forcalquier and the Abbey of Salagon at Mane

We travel by coach to the bustling hill town of Forcalquier with its weekly atmospheric street market. We may spend some time exploring this historic town before descending on good tracks across a wooded limestone plateau to visit the Abbey of Salagon with its ethno-botanical gardens. Alternatively we climb higher on the plateau to see the weird wind shaped rocks of Les Mourres before descending the ridge of la Colle to arrive at the Abbey. We end the day walking into the small town of Mane for refreshments.

Day 4: Regusse and the view from La Colle

A short coach ride to the village of Regusse, from where we walk through mature oak and cedar forest, then make the steady climb to La Colle. The easier route reaches the lower slopes whilst the more challenging walk continues to the summit, with panoramic views of Moustiers and its lake, the plateau of Valansole, Mont Ventoux and Mont St Victoire. If time permits we may see the 16th Century windmills in Regusse, before finishing the day in a welcoming café-bar for afternoon refreshments.



Day 5: Free Day

Today no walks are organised allowing you to explore on your own or just relax around the hotel. Some options for your free day include exploring the town of Gréoux les Bains and its natural spring that was discovered by the Romans. Or, if there is sufficient interest your leaders may be able to arrange transport for a visit to the nearby centres of Manosque or Aix-en-Provence.

Day 6: The ridges above Moustiers Saint Marie

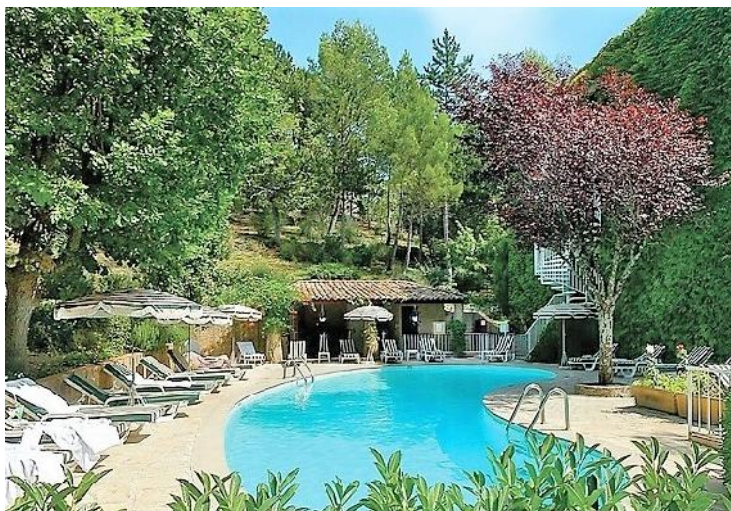
Again the walkers start from different locations; the hired transport drops one group in the village of Roumoules and the other just outside Moustiers Ste Marie. The first group walk along good level tracks through pleasant open country before steeply descending the ridge on a horse track with good views towards Moustiers. The more challenging walk after an initial level section climbs steeply up to the craggy ridge of l'Ourbes with great views over the lake of St Croix. After crossing the summit and descending to a dry riverbed the terrain becomes more open before the final descent to Moustiers on an old Roman road.

Day 7: Quinson and the gorge of the Verdon

A short coach ride brings both groups to the lower gorge of the Verdon River. The groups take different routes to arrive at the delightful hilltop chapel of St Maxime, one walking right down in the gorge on steps with cable handrails and timber platforms suspended over the river in places, and the other taking the broader tracks that follow the higher ground. Leaving the chapel one group will descend on a stony road to return to Quinson while the other ventures further into the Male Sauque plateau walking on high level wooded paths. Quinson village has an interesting museum dedicated to Prehistoric human settlement in this region.

Day 8: Departure Day

Tour ends after breakfast, a coach transfer to Marseille Provence Airport is available at extra cost at a set time.



Outdoor Travel specialises in walking and cycling holidays. We offer a wide range of guided or self-guided walks in many different areas of France such as Dordogne, the Riviera Coast, Burgundy, Auvergne, Tarn, the Pyrenees, Corsica and in the UK and across Europe including Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Germany and Austria.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

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