Tour ‘Booklet’

You are travelling to Europe – a wonderful assembly of diverse countries that have, over hundreds of years, evolved and formulated their individual and often unique customs, styles and quirkiness. We want to (and sometimes have to) fit into the region’s natural patterns and irregularities. Much will appear so very different from ‘home’ – and surely it is exactly those very differences that inspired you to go there in the first place!

To help you, this useful booklet contains additional general travelling handy hints, additional information specific to your tour, plus brief introductory information regarding the major sites and regions you will be visiting.

Where possible, while on tour, your Tour Manager will access and provide local city maps. It is surprisingly difficult to supply in advance any genuinely useful city maps that can fit on an A4 sheet of paper and still show street names with any clarity. Either the larger city map is too detailed and the print is minute, or the usefulness is just not there. Where possible we have included them.

We would like to wish you a wonderful trip through Europe and a safe return home.

Best wishes from the Albatross Team
LA FRANCAISE TOUR

Some local and regional background information.

This information is meant only as a light overview of some of the towns and regions you will be visiting.

Paris
To many, Paris is the romantic capital of Europe - and to some, the romantic capital of the world! And who could blame them: From the animated discussions and laughter at the pavement cafes, through to lovers strolling along the Champs Elysees and on to the grand structure of the Eiffel Tower, and other famous buildings.

A beautiful city situated on the River Seine, Paris has many fine buildings and monuments, ranging from the well-known sights of the Eiffel Tower and the cathedral of Notre Dame to modern buildings such as the Pompidou Centre and the glass pyramids in front of the Musée du Louvre. Each area of Paris has its own particular character and appeal: the classical architecture of the Right Bank, with its perspectives down long, broad boulevards; the narrow streets of the Marais lined with museums and small shops; and the traditionally bohemian Latin Quarter.

Paris boasts a wealth of famous museums from the large collections of the Musée du Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay, to smaller museums dedicated to specific artists, such as the Musée Rodin and the Musée Picasso. The city also attracts visitors for its famous restaurants and cafés, and for its reputation as one of Europe's fashion capitals, the home of haute couture. Make sure you spend free time strolling amongst the broad boulevards, shops and museums of Paris. Perhaps also visit the village-like Montmartre around the hilltop Basilique du Sacré Coeur.

Getting around the city is very easy using the extensive metro system. Maps of the city and the metro system will be available at your hotel reception.

Rouen
Situated in Northern France on the River Seine is the medieval town of Rouen which boasts wonderful half timbered buildings. Known for its Notre Dame Cathedral with its gothic facades which feature in a series of paintings by Claude Monet.

Rouen was the location of the execution of Joan of Arc in 1431 where she was burned at the stake.

On Gros Horloge Street is one of the oldest astronomical clocks which was constructed in 1389 sitting high above an arch with a dial of 2.5m wide in diameter.

Honfleur
The fishing harbour of Honfleur has old, beautiful buildings lining the port which has been the inspiration of so many artists. Take a walk along one of the cobbled stoned streets lined with shops and pavement cafes. Visit the 15th century church of Saint Catherine which stands high dominating the main square. This is one of the largest churches in France made out of wood with a separate bell tower. The bell tower is now a museum of religious art.

Bayeux
The well preserved historical old town of Bayeux is situated just off the coast of France in Normandy. Wonder around the old town down the cobbledstoned streets visiting the local shops or walk along the
River Aure which flows through Bayeux to enjoy the beautiful views of the city. Make a stop at the impressive 11th century gothic style cathedral in the city centre.

Home to the magnificent 70 metre long Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts William the Conqueror’s invasion of Britain in 1066 through a series of fifty or so scenes. Commonly mistakenly assumed as a tapestry it is in fact embroidery.

Visit the UNESCO listed Bayeux Museum which is the only museum that has dedicated a huge 2300m² to the battle of Normandy. In the museum there are works of art and other history in addition to the battle of Normandy.

**Normandy - Arromanches-les-Bains – the ‘key to Normandy’**

Off the beach you will see the remains of Mulberry ‘B’ Harbour, often referred to as the ‘key to Normandy’.

A ‘Mulberry harbour’ was a type of temporary harbour developed in World War II to offload cargo on the beaches during the Allied invasion of Normandy. Each complete Mulberry harbour was constructed out of 600,000 tons of concrete between 33 jetties, and had 10 miles (15 km) of floating roadways to land men and vehicles on the beach.

Two prefabricated or artificial military harbours - were taken across the English Channel from Britain with the invading army in sections and assembled off the coast of Normandy as part of the D-Day invasion of France. By June 9, just 3 days after D-Day, two harbours codenamed Mulberry 'A' and 'B' were constructed at Omaha Beach and Arromanches, respectively. However, a large storm on June 19 destroyed the American harbour at Omaha, leaving only the British harbour which came to be known as Port Winston at Arromanches. While the harbour at Omaha was destroyed sooner than expected (due to it not being securely anchored to the sea bed), Port Winston saw heavy use for 8 months—despite being designed to last only 3 months. In the 10 months after D-Day, it was used to land over 2.5 million men, 500,000 vehicles, and 4 million tonnes of supplies providing much needed reinforcements in France.

**Mont St Michel**

The abbey is perched atop a rocky outcrop linked to mainland France by a narrow causeway. The giant monastery dominates the tiny village beneath it and the entire complex has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage site.

Rising from the waves of the Baie St-Michel, Mont-Saint-Michel is without doubt one of France’s greatest marvels.

An abbey was first built on the islet in the year 708, and by the Middle Ages it had become a place of pilgrimage. The buildings seen today, date from various eras. The glorious abbey of Saint Michel was built mainly in the 11th to 13th centuries and has a severe Romanesque nave and elegant 15th-century Gothic choir, while its neo-Gothic façade dates from 1780.

The abbey buildings on the north side, including the refectory and the exquisite cloister, are known collectively as La Merveille.

A one mile long causeway connects Mont-Saint-Michel to the mainland; it is possible to walk around the islet at low tide, although the tides rise dangerously fast.

**Angers**

The 13th century granite Châteaux d'Angers houses the carefully restored medieval Apocalypse Tapestry with its magnificent glowing red, blue and gold threads.

The Apocalypse Tapestry is the longest tapestry in the world, and depicts scenes from the Book of Revelation. It was woven between 1373 and 1382. Originally 140m (459ft), the surviving 100m are now on display. Decorative tapestries were portable and often had a ritual or symbolic function. Kings and
noblemen could roll up and transport tapestries from one residence to another. In churches, they could be displayed on special occasions. Tapestries were also draped on the walls of castles for insulation during winter, as well as for decorative display.

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, a rich tapestry panel woven with symbolic emblems, mottoes, or coats of arms called a baldachin, canopy of state or cloth of state was hung behind and over a throne as a symbol of authority.

**Amboise**
Amboise is famous for its Royal Palace and the famous Manor House ‘Le Clos Lucé’- which is located 500 metres from the Royal Château.  
In 1516, Francis I invited Leonardo da Vinci to Amboise and provided him with the Clos Lucé as a place to stay and to work. Leonardo, a famous painter and inventor, arrived with three samples of his painting, namely the Mona Lisa, Sainte Anne, and Saint Jean Baptiste. Leonardo lived at the Clos Lucé for the last three years of his life, and died there on 2 May 1519.  
Today, the Clos Lucé is a museum that reflects the prestigious history of the region and includes forty models of the various machines designed by Leonardo.

**Château Chambord**
During the 15th and 16th centuries, the Kings of France and their courtiers built their holiday palaces in the verdant Loire Valley. The grandest of all is the magnificent Châteaux Chambord. This enormous chateau was created by King Francois I as a hunting lodge within the surrounding grounds, which consisted of over 5,000 wooded hectares. This is the largest of all the Chateaux in the Loire valley with a 128 meters wide façade and more than 800 sculpted columns. The elaborately decorated roof with its assorted towers, spires and chimneys resembles the skyline of a town. Some suggest it was intentionally designed to resemble the skyline of Constantinople (now Istanbul).

**Blois** is the capital of the Loire-et-Cher department (region) of central France.  
Blois is known for its historic castle and old town with narrow cobbled streets. Capital of France in the 15th and 16th centuries under King Louis XII, Blois is one of the most engaging towns on the Loire, with a vast chateaux riddled with royal intrigues. Nearby is the three-spired abbey-church of Saint Nicolas, and the charming, partly pedestrianised old town, which stretches between the castle and the Saint-Louis Cathedral. This area is characterised by half-timbered and stone houses, hilly cobbled streets, and steep staircases, from which sweeping views of the town can be seen.

**Chateau Chenonceaux** is possibly one of the most photographed of the Loire Chateaux, this 16th century Chateau of Chenonceaux is famous for its romantic architecture spanning the river Cher on a series of arches. Two women played a role in its development—Diane de Poitiers, Henri II’s mistress, whom he established there, and Catherine de Médicis, Henri’s wife, who ousted Diane after Henri's death in 1559. It was Catherine who added the three-storey Long Gallery on the bridge spanning the river. The interior, with many original fireplaces and ceilings, is hung with tapestries and paintings.  
Entrance to the Chateau is via a driveway known as the Grand Avenue of Plane trees and to one side are the gardens of Diane de Poitiers and the more intimate gardens of Catherine de' Medici.  
In emphasizing the grace of this chateau it was once said “If all the chateaux of the Loire Valley were parading at a grand ball it would be Chenonceaux you would beg to dance with!”

**Azay-le-Rideau**
The charming village of Azay-le-Rideau gives its name to the graceful chateaux. The château of Azay-le-Rideau was built from 1515 to 1527 and was one of the earliest French Renaissance châteaux. Built on an island in the Indre River, its foundations rise straight out of the water.
**Chateaux Villandry**

Villandry was completed around 1536 and was the last of the large chateaus built in the Loire Valley during the Renaissance.

Villandry was built by Jean le Breton, one of François I’s Finance Ministers, and who also supervised the construction of Chateau Chambord. During Le Breton’s time as ambassador to Italy he studied the Italian Renaissance art of gardening. Le Breton created Villandry on the site of an old 12th century castle, keeping only the old tower behind the main courtyard. Villandry stayed in le Breton family until 1754 and then became the property of the Marquis de Castellane, the King’s Ambassador who built the classical style outbuildings that you can see on either side of the front courtyard.

The gardens of Chateaux Villandry, inspired by the classic gardens of the 16th century, are famous for the variety of gardens designs and displays. There is a water garden, sun garden, music garden and love garden with ponds, topiary, ornamental hedges and an extraordinary kitchen and herb garden covering 12,500 square metres.

**La Rochelle**

Arguably the most attractive and unspoiled town on France's Atlantic seaboard is the delightful port of La Rochelle. Located on the Bay of Biscay, La Rochelle's main feature is the "Vieux Port" ("Old Harbour"), which is at the heart of the city, picturesque and lined with seafood restaurants. The city walls are open to promenade and the old town has been well-preserved.

Dating back as far as Roman times, La Rochelle has a very rich history. In the 12th century it s awarded the status of a free port, even minting its own coins. Later it became the most important trading port of the Knights Templar and in the 14th century was held by the English throughout the Hundred Years War. During the French Wars of religion the city adopted Calvinism and in the 17th century in the Huguenot rebellions La Rochelle was laid siege to by Louis 13th and the infamous Cardinal Richelieu.

La Rochelle possesses a commercial harbour in deep water, named La Pallice. During the Second World War Germany made La Rochelle their primary submarine base on the Atlantic and their large submarine bunker still stands there, although it is not being used. This was used for the U-Boat scenes in the movie ‘Raiders of the Lost Ark’.

**Cognac**

The name of the world's best-known types of brandy! To be entitled to be called a ‘Cognac’, liquor must be made in certain areas around the town of Cognac and must be made according to strictly-defined regulations in order to be granted the name Cognac.

While there are close to 200 cognac producers, a large percentage of cognac - 90% according to one 2008 estimate- is produced by only four companies: Courvoisier, Hennessy, Martell, and Remy Martin.

**Bordeaux**

With a population of just over 1,000,000 Bordeaux is the capital of the Aquitaine region which stretches east as far as the Dordogne region.

The 18th century was the golden age of Bordeaux. Many downtown buildings (about 5,000), including those on the quays, are from this period. The city’s waterfront on the River Garonne makes an attractive spectacle and there is a stately 18th century town centre with its Place du Parlement, and Place de la Bourse. Behind these grand buildings you’ll find the winding streets and alleys of the beautifully preserved medieval quarter – most of which is pedestrianised. This is a perfect location to shop, relax and enjoy a baguette and a glass of wine in a sidewalk café.

Bordeaux has about 116,160 hectares of vineyards, 57 appellations, 10,000 wine-producing châteaux and 13,000 grape growers. With an annual production of approximately 850 million bottles, Bordeaux produces large quantities of everyday wine, as well as some of the most expensive wines in the world. Included among the latter are the area's five premier cru (first growth) red wines (four from Médoc and one, Château Haut-Brion, from Graves), established by the Bordeaux Wine Official Classification of 1855: The first growths are: Château Lafite-Rothschild, Château Margaux, Château Latour, Château Haut-Brion,
Château Mouton-Rothschild (In 1855 Mouton-Rothschild was ranked a Second Growth. In 1973, it was elevated to First Growth status).
Both red and white wines are made in Bordeaux.
Red wines are generally made from a blend of grapes, and may be made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit verdot, Malbec, and, less commonly in recent years, Carménère.
White Bordeaux is made from Sauvignon blanc, Sémillon, and Muscadelle. Sauternes is a subregion of Graves known for its intensely sweet, white, dessert wines such as Château d’Yquem.

St Emilion
Located about 40 kilometres to the east of Bordeaux, Saint-Émilion’s history goes back to prehistoric times and is a World Heritage site, with fascinating Romanesque churches and ruins stretching all along steep and narrow streets. The Romans planted vineyards in what was to become Saint-Émilion as early as the 2nd century and the town was later named after a travelling monk called Émilion.
Boasting medieval ramparts, the ruins of the Cloître des Cordeliers and the unusual 14th century underground church this charming town is an excellent place to visit.

Perigueux – Capital of the ‘White Perigord’
Perigueux, on the River L'Isle, is built almost entirely out of limestone. As you walk through the narrow alleys bursting with shops and delicatessens you’ll come across numerous tiny squares surrounded by cafes and restaurants. Cathédrale St Front looms large over the red roofs of this busy medieval market town. The style and design of the domes was later copied to create the famous Basilique du Sacré Coeur in Paris. The region around Perigueux is also famous for truffles and walnuts.

The Dordogne – also known as the Périgord
The county of Périgord dates back to when the area was inhabited by the Gauls, it was home to four tribes, the name for "four tribes" in the Gaulish language was "Petrocore". The area eventually became known as the county of Le Périgord and its inhabitants became known as the Périgordins (or Périgourdins).
There are four Périgords (regions) in the Dordogne:
- The "Périgord Vert" (Green Périgord) with its main town of Nontron, consists of verdant valleys in a region crossed by many rivers and streams
- The "Périgord Blanc" (White Périgord) situated around the department's capital of Périgueux, is a region of limestone plateaux, wide valleys and meadows
- The "Périgord Pourpre" (Purple Périgord) with its capital of Bergerac, is a wine region
- The "Périgord Noir" (Black Périgord) surrounding the administrative center of Sarlat, overlooks the valleys of the Vézère and the Dordogne, where the woods of oak and pine give it its name. This is the most famous part of the region with its sleepy villages, medieval chateaux, meandering rivers and lush landscape that so epitomises French rural life. The Dordogne river flows through lush countryside, past medieval castles and the incredibly picturesque villages including Beynac, La Roc Gageac and Domme

Sarlat la Caneda – Capital of the ‘Black Perigord’
Perfectly preserved Sarlat la Caneda, is one of the most stunning towns in France. An exceptionally well preserved city, it boasts architecture dating back as far as 1,000 years.
The fantastic Sarlat markets, renowned as being amongst the very best in all of France happen every Wednesday and Saturday. Enjoy the experience of sampling the myriad of local cheeses, foie gras, truffles, walnuts and wines. Time to buy some crusty bread and tapenade for a delicious picnic! This is the real France at its best!
Les Eyzies-de-Tayac
Les Eyzies-de-Tayac is in the heart of the Vezere Valley in the Dordogne region of France. This town was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979. Here there are prehistoric caves dating back 200,000 years ago from the Paleolithic era with extensive wall drawings. Visit the National Prehistoric Museum which houses thousands of archaeological objects and collections from the prehistoric era. In town you will see a mix of buildings of stone and half-timbered houses with the cliffs and rock formations looming over the village. Enjoy a drink at one of the cafes or restaurants in town while admiring the amazing scenery this area of France brings.

La Roc Gageac
This beautiful town sits at the base of a cliff along the Dordogne River with picturesque views. Listed as one of ‘The most beautiful villages of France’ it tends to feature on many calendar and guidebook covers. The traditional yellow stone houses with stone roofs have been built along the river’s edge and up to the cliff. At the end of the village is the imposing renaissance built Chateau de la Malartie which dates back to the 19th century.

Domme
This medieval village sits atop a hill overlooking the Dordogne River. Domme is a member of “The Most Beautiful Villages of France” association. Lining the charming streets you will see plenty of flowers outside the houses. In the village there are a couple of historical buildings from the medieval times such as the Market Hall Square and Place de la Rode.

Lascaux
Famous for the Paleolithic paintings in the complex caves located near the village of Montignac is the UNESCO World Heritage listed site. Discovered in 1940, the caves opened to the public 8 years later. Due to the high number of visitors each day the caves had to be closed from the public by 1955 as the paintings were starting to become damaged by carbon dioxide. Some of the paintings inside are thought to be 17,300 years old and consist of images of large animals which lived in the area at the time. A replica of a few of the caves ‘Lascaux II’ were created in 1983 not far from the original caves.

Autun
Autun is located in the Burgundy region, also known as Bourgogne, in the heart of France. Autun is a Celtic, Roman and Medieval town containing architecture spanning the ages – from Roman ramparts to the famous St Lazare Cathedral. Autun Cathedral is well known for its architectural sculptures. You will find lively atmosphere near the cathedral, or you could take a stroll along the cobbled streets down to the shopping area where you will find many alluring chocolate shops and patisseries.

Dijon
Capital of the grand Dukes of Burgundy in the 14th century, the town boasts many elegant buildings, embellished with statues and fine carvings. At the heart of Dijon lies the Palais des Ducs, once the home of the 17th century Burgundian court.

Beaune in Burgundy
The old town of Beaune is capital of the Burgundian wine industry. Beaune is surrounded by some of the world's most famous wine villages; the facilities and cellars of many producers large and small are to be found in Beaune. The annual wine auction of the Hospices de Beaune is the primary wine auction in France. Beaune is a walled city. About half of the battlements, ramparts, and the moat, remain in good condition and the central "old town" is extensive. Landmarks in Beaune include the Halles, the Hospices, the Beffroï, and Notre Dame.
The fascinating Hospices de Beaune is a remarkable building. Covered with multicoloured glazed roof tiles the ‘Hotel Dieu’ was built over 550 years ago to help the town’s folk in a time of poverty and famine.

**Troyes**

The town of Troyes is steeped in history. Originally settled on the junction of several Roman roads, Troyes became an important religious and cultural regional centre. Nowadays the old town, set near the ornate façade of Cathédrale St Pierre et St Paul, is an architectural time capsule. The pedestrianised Rue Roger Salengro is lined with fine 16th century timber and brick houses, jutting out over the street, and on Rue Champeaux, the houses facing each other in the narrow alleyways virtually touch at the top.

**Champagne**

The region of Champagne gives its name to perhaps the most famous ‘brew’ in the world. The wine of Champagne was lighter than those of its southern neighbouring states and originally drunk ‘without bubbles’. This was due to the cooler climate causing grapes to mature more slowly. Additionally, the cold winter temperatures prematurely halted fermentation in the cellars, leaving dormant yeast cells that would awaken in the warmth of spring and start fermenting again. One of the byproducts of fermentation is the release of carbon dioxide gas, which, if the wine is bottled, is trapped inside the wine, causing intense pressure. The pressure inside the weak, early French wine bottles often caused the bottles to explode, creating havoc in the cellars. If the bottle survived, the wine was found to contain bubbles, something that the early Champenois were horrified to see, considering it a fault. It was in the 17th century, Champenois wine makers, most notably the Benedictine monk Dom Pérignon (1638–1715), were refining the method making Champagne. At the same time the British were developing a taste for the unique bubbly wine. Demand grew and the modern Champagne ‘festive drink’ was born. The ‘Route du Champagne’ or ‘Champagne Road’, where most of the Grand Champagne Houses or ‘Caves’ are located, stretches between Reims in the north and Epernay in the south. The wine ‘caves’ of Mercier are the largest champagne producers in the world. Eugene Mercier founded his own Champagne House in 1858. 13 years later he started building a series of 18 kms of spectacular cellars and tunnels that actually linked directly to the Paris-Strasbourg railway line. In 1970 Mercier merged with Moet & Chandon and in 2000 they appointed Monique Charpentier as ‘chef de cave’ (manager of the champagne caves) – the first ever woman to hold this prestigious post at a major champagne house.

**Reims**

Reims is the capital of the Champagne region. Founded by the Gauls, it became a major city during the period of the Roman Empire. Reims played a prominent ceremonial role in French monarchical history as the traditional site of the crowning of the kings of France. The Cathedral of Reims played the same role in France as Westminster Abbey did in England. Hence Joan of Arc’s symbolic crowning of Charles VII in 1429.

Hostilities in World War I greatly damaged the city. German bombardment and a subsequent fire in 1914 did severe damage to the cathedral. The ruined cathedral became one of the central images of anti-German propaganda produced in France during the war, Rue de Vesle is the main street (in sections named differently) which passes through the Place Royale – one of the cities main squares with a statue of Louis XV. Place Cardinal-Luçon has an equestrian statue of Joan of Arc.