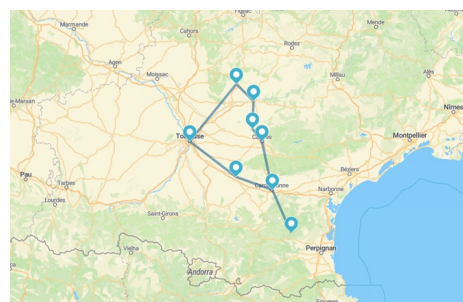




France, 5 Days · Tailor-made by car

Route of the Cathars

The sun-kissed southwest of France, cradle of the Cathar religion, beholds a fascinating past. The "Route of the Cathars" takes the traveller on a thrilling adventure into the past, visiting the places frequented by followers of Catharism, a religion created by group of Christians whose behaviour was far from the opulence of the Church of that time, and who were given shelter by knights in their beautiful châteaux, the last bastions against the violent persecution of Pope Innocent III. The Route visits dreamlike castles perched on sheer cliffs, many of them open to the public, inviting you to let your imagination run free while touring this stunning region blessed by nature. Take your time to discover unique places such as the Abbey of Fontfroide and fascinating castles such as Aguilar, Peyrepertuse, Quéribus, Puilaurens, and the four Cathar Castles of Lastours. Most of the fortifications are in ruins today, but it's easy to imagine them in their role as zealous protectors of the peace. The Route of the Cathars is designed to be experienced at the wheel, enjoying every step of the way. Straddling both sides of the road are vineyards and sunflower fields; multicoloured landscapes dotted with cypress, pine and boxwood trees; and quaint villages and medieval towns that have been protected by solemn strongholds for many centuries. The route runs through historic towns such as the fortified Carcassonne (World Heritage Site by UNESCO), the vibrant and cultural Toulouse, and the artistic and stylish Albi (also World Heritage Site by UNESCO). Take advantage of this trip on French soil to sail along the historic Canal du Midi (World Heritage Site by UNESCO); enjoy a wine-tasting session in the ancient cellars of Gaillac; and discover the beauty of enchanted villages like Cordes-sur-Ciel, Castelnaudary, Castres and Lautrec. Travel to the southwest of France and marvel at its incredible history, its beautiful walled towns, exquisite cuisine and breathtaking scenery. Please note: The local Tourist Offices offer travellers the "Passeport du Pays des Sites Cathares", which gives 20 discounted admission fees, including to the main Cathar castles.



CULTURAL

Departure date: Departures from July 2026 till July 2027

From: London

Travel details

● DAY 1 · CITY OF ORIGIN - TOULOUSE

Flight departure from the city of origin to Toulouse and rental car pick-up. Your adventure on French soil begins here! La Ville Rose (Pink City) captivates travellers with an exceptional historical and artistic heritage, a vibrant lifestyle, delicious cuisine and an incredible cultural agenda, on a par with all major European cities. Capital of the Occitanie Pyrénées Méditerranée region, Toulouse simply oozes joie de vivre in its streets, cafés, daily markets, terraces, restaurants (3 with Michelin stars), boutiques and twenty-plus museums... Birthplace of Concorde and the Ariane rocket, and homeland of Airbus, the city perfectly combines its business side with a laid-back university atmosphere. Place du Capitole, the Saint-Sernin basilica (part of the UNESCO-listed Camino de Santiago), the cloister of the Jacobins, the mansions built in the Renaissance, the A380 production line and the Space City are just some of the must-sees. And if you want to see the city skyline from the water, take a boat along the Garonne or the Canal du Midi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Overnight stay in Toulouse.

● DAY 2 · TOULOUSE - SEUIL DE NAUROUZE - CASTELNAUDARY - CARCASSONNE

After enjoying the charms of Toulouse, we'll head off to the ancient Carcassonne, located about an hour's drive away and declared World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Ahead is a road dotted with beautiful villages such as Castelnaudary and a delectable Mediterranean environment. If you have time, we recommend visiting Seuil de Naurouze, birthplace of the Canal du Midi and watershed point between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Onward with our journey. In the distance we'll make out the profile of the fortified city of Carcassonne! The image from the road is simply amazing. This city was one of the largest Cathar strongholds. Within the walls, the Cathars enjoyed shelter and protection against the will of Pope Innocent III. Perfectly preserved, this medieval citadel entices the traveller with its ancient history and one of the most complete walled cities in the whole of Europe. Strolling through its arches, its cobbled streets, its walls and its towers, you'll feel like a character from the Middle Ages. In the morning, you can visit the Medieval City. In the afternoon, head over to the Bastide Saint Louis, the city centre, a 20-minute walk from the Medieval City. Here you'll find a market with typical produce, a host of shops, palaces and the bustling Place Carnot, surrounded by restaurants and bars. Our recommendation: enjoy a typical cassoulet accompanied by a good Minervois or Corbières red wine. Overnight stay in Carcassonne.

● DAY 3 · CARCASSONNE - FONTFROIDE ABBEY - AGUILAR CASTLE - PEYREPERTUSE CASTLE - QUÉRIBUS CASTLE - PUILAURENS CASTLE - CARCASSONNE

The drive through Cathar country continues. Today we will embark upon one of the most striking legs of the journey. Lying ahead are magnificent castles which, nestled high in the mountains and with the Pyrenees at their feet, seem to defy time and silence. Our first stop will be the majestic Cistercian abbey of Fontfroide, where for much of the year it's possible to have lunch at a restaurant located within the abbey itself (check opening hours). Onward journey to discover the amazing Cathar legacy, guarded in a series of castles atop sheer cliff faces. Aguilar Castle, the smallest of the Cathar Castles and located on a hill near the village of Tuchan, and the amazing Peyrepertuse Castle, the biggest of all and surrounded by a huge vertical drop of 800 metres, are stops on this picturesque Route of the Cathars. And now on to the last Cathar stronghold: the outstanding Quéribus Castle! Perched atop a 728-metre hill, it has a well-preserved interior structure. From here, we can head back to Carcassonne by crossing the Corbières massif through the Gorges de Galamus. A real wonder! If you have time, round off this fascinating day at Puilaurens Castle, one of the most spectacular Cathar fortresses. Legend has it that at night the spirit of the White Lady, granddaughter of Philip IV of France, wanders through dismantled battlements. Back to Carcassonne. When the sun goes down, the Cité becomes a great theatre where tourists, locals and the moonlight provide a unique atmosphere. Overnight stay in Carcassonne.

● DAY 4 · CARCASSONNE - CATHAR CASTLES OF LASTOURS - CASTRES - LAUTREC - ALBI - CORDES-SUR-CEL - TOULOUSE

Departure from Carcassonne towards the stylish city of Albi, the birthplace of Catharism. In the Black Mountains, we'll stop off at the four Cathar castles of Lastours (Cabaret, Surdespine, Quertineux and Tour Regine), located about 300 metres above sea level. Scene of intense Cathar activity in the past, local legends say that there is still a tunnel connecting the city with the medieval castles. If you don't have time to climb to the top, you can admire them from a vantage point located at the foot of the castles. Onward journey to Castres, where you'll see the beautiful houses on the riverbank and the Musée Goya, and then to Lautrec, home to one of France's most beautiful windmills. We'll continue on our journey back in time to an era when the fierce struggle between the Church and the Cathar heresy peppered the region with a wealth of architectural heritage. And then we'll hit the town of Albi! Such was the relationship of the town with the Cathar movement that the heretics were called Albigensians. To demonstrate its power, the Church built in Albi the superb Cathedral Sainte-Cécile and the impressive Episcopal Palace of Berbie, one of the oldest bishop's palaces of France and current home of the prestigious Musée Toulouse-Lautrec. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, this artistic French city retains its old appearance characterised by the Pont-Vieux and fortifications lining the River Tarn. A thirty-minute drive from Albi takes us to one of the most emblematic places on the tour: Cordes-sur-Ciel. A beautiful village with cobblestone streets oozing history and whose inhabitants behold endless legends about the Cathars they sheltered. Here you can taste the typical "croquant de Cordes", a delicious biscuit with sugar and almonds. If you visit in spring or summer, we recommend a stroll through the beautiful Jardin des Paradis.

Before returning to Toulouse, which is an hour's drive away, you could also visit a Gaillac wine cellar.

Overnight stay in Toulouse.

● DAY 5 · TOULOUSE - CITY OF ORIGIN

Arrival at the airport with enough time to drop off your rental car and flight back to the city of origin.

Arrival. End of the trip and our services.

Your trip includes

Your trip includes

- ✓ Return flight.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Toulouse.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Toulouse.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Carcassonne.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Carcassonne.
- ✓ Rent-a-car.
- ✓ Insolvency protection.

Your trip doesn't include

- ✗ Accommodation taxes in France direct payment in facility.
- ✗ Possible toll charges.

Destinations Visited

Toulouse



Castelnaudary



Carcassonne



Duilhac - Sous - Peyrepertuse



Castres



Lautrec



Albi



CordessurCiel



Important remarks

- Triple rooms in Europe are generally rooms with twin beds or a double, in which a folding bed is installed to accommodate the third person. Due to the inconvenience this causes, we advise against using this option as far the possible.
- Check-in time at the hotel on the day of arrival depends on each establishment, but in no case will it be before 3:00 p.m., unless otherwise indicated.
- The proposed excursions and tours for each day are purely suggestions, as you can tailor the trip to suit your times, tastes and needs.
- A credit card is considered a guarantee, so sometimes you will need one for check-in at hotels.
- Hotels usually have cots available. Otherwise, babies will have to share a bed with an adult.
- To pick up your rental car, you'll need a credit (not debit) card in the name of the person who made the booking, who must also be the named driver of the vehicle.
- Consult the necessary documentation to enter the destinations visited and for transit in the countries where air stopovers are made.