



THE CHÂTEAU DE CAMON

EXPLORING THE LANGUEDOC
FROM OUR BASE IN A FRENCH CHÂTEAU

SEPTEMBER 8 - 16, 2023

One of the strongest motivations to travel is the deep yearning we have to connect with the past. Some may explain this by an awareness of past lives, others may simply enjoy the thrill of entering an ancient building or standing in a timeless landscape where their imaginations ignite and conjure the past. If this is the experience you are seeking, there could be no better place to spend a week than in the mysterious and spellbinding Ariège. Set in the south-west of France, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, Gavin Miller has found the perfect setting for a week of time travel, the Château de Camon.

Charlemagne, on his return from harassing the Moors in Spain, put the village of Camon under the authority of Notre-Dame. By the middle of the 10th century a Benedictine Abbey was in place. Troubadors, crusaders, itinerant knights, Spanish princesses and persecuted Cathars passed through the region. The Abbey of Camon was an important sanctuary along the way and by the 16th century a fortified manor (château) had been built to secure the Abbey. The château has now been offering comfort and tranquility to travelers for five hundred years! Vaulted ceilings, four-poster beds, beautiful fabrics and all the amenities of 21st-century living make the château both spine-tinglingly authentic and sumptuously cosy.

With the Château de Camon as our base for seven nights, each day we will set off to explore the antiquities of the Aude and Ariège regions. From the ruins of Cathar castles to the medieval grandeur of Carcassonne, it will be impossible to head home without feeling touched by the shadows of the past!



CHÂTEAU DE CAMON



CARCASSONNE

THE COST OF THIS ITINERARY, PER PERSON, DOUBLE OCCUPANCY IS:

LAND ONLY (NO AIRFARE INCLUDED): \$ 3880
SINGLE SUPPLEMENT: \$ 890

*Airfares are available from many U.S. cities.
Please call for details.*

THE FOLLOWING SERVICES ARE INCLUDED:

- HOTELS:** 7 nights' accommodation in a French Château
- GUIDES:** Discover Europe tour guide throughout
- MEALS:** Breakfast daily, 1 lunch, 5 dinners
- COACHING:** All ground transportation as detailed in the itinerary
- EXPENSES:** Portage of one large suitcase per person
- ENTRANCES:** Entrance fees to all sites included in the itinerary

Please note that travel insurance is not included on this tour. Insurance information will be mailed to each registrant on receipt of deposit.

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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8th - Departure from your US gateway city. **OVERNIGHT: PLANE**

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9th - Your arrival in Toulouse will be met by Discover Europe's representative for the short (one and a half hour) drive to the Château. The rest of the day is free to unpack, relax and begin exploring the neighborhood. This evening the group will gather on the terrace for drinks before a welcome dinner party. **(D) Overnight: CAMON**

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10th - A leisurely start this morning, to shake off the effects of the long flights. We'll take a stroll around the village and visit the abbey church, before we set off on our excursion. Our first stop will be the town of Foix, dominated by its imposing Château. We'll have free time for lunch here before continuing to our next destination. The more adventurous can opt for a half-mile walk along an uneven subterranean

riverbed which will take you back to the Magdalenian period (circa 11,000 BC) and to the vast chamber of the Grotte de Niaux. Leaping from the walls of the cave are the most beautiful images of horses, ibex, stags and bison, some still as fresh as the day they were painted. These are among the best prehistoric paintings you will see anywhere in Europe. Those who do not fancy the adventure will be dropped at the local prehistory museum in Tarascon, where you can see replicas of the cave art. We dine at the Château again this evening.

(B, D) OVERNIGHT: CAMON

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11th - After a leisurely breakfast on the terrace, overlooking the lovely gardens set against the distant Pyrenean peaks, a three mile journey will bring us to Mirepoix on market day. There will be time to explore one of France's most exquisite medieval squares, and enjoy a coffee at one of the many cafes. Weather permitting, we will have a picnic lunch at the nearby village of Roquefixade where we will take a walk to the medieval castle. Then we will head for Montsegur. The ruined castle, set high on a rocky crag, was the final refuge of the persecuted Cathars. In 1244 the Catholic Church carried out one of its worst ever atrocities; 225 Cathars, who refused to recant, were burnt on a communal pyre. There will be time to make the ascent to the castle (30 minutes), for those who enjoy a hike, and for those with nothing to prove, a wonderful respite to take in the views and reflect on the horrors of the past! Before heading home, there will be a stop at the village museum. On returning to the hotel there will be time to relax and enjoy a cocktail on the terrace, before we go to a local restaurant for dinner. **(B, D) OVERNIGHT: CAMON**



TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12th - Weather permitting, we'll head up into the high Pyrenees today. Our first stop will be the beautiful village of Montailou, overlooked by the ruins of the medieval castle. This was the village written about by Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie in his fascinating book Montailou, which gives a vivid picture of life in a mountain village during the time of the Cathar repression. This afternoon we wend our way down the mountains, through the spa town of Ax-les-Thermes, where we will stop for lunch, back to Camon. Tonight dinner is included again at the Château. **(B, D) OVERNIGHT: CAMON**

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13th - This morning we'll cut across the heavenly Ariège countryside to the magical Romanesque Abbey of St. Hilaire. Then on to Limoux, famed for its Blanquette - a sparkling wine. There will be time to find lunch and then free time for shopping in La Place de la République in the beautiful heart of the old town before returning to Camon in mid-afternoon, the rest of your day is free - you can choose to eat at the hotel again or venture out to a local restaurant in nearby Mirepoix. **(B) OVERNIGHT: CAMON**

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14th - Our first stop this morning will be the bio-dynamic vineyard of Chateau Maris. We have a tour of the cellars and taste the delightful product before we have lunch (included). This afternoon we visit Carcassonne. If you had to choose one medieval fortress town to visit, Carcassonne would be it. Restored to perfection, you only need imagine fellow travelers dressed in sackcloth, doublet and hose, and you're back in the medieval world! We will visit the beautiful St. Nazaire church with some of the loveliest stained glass in France. There will be time to tour the inner fortress, Château Comtal, and wander the narrow alleyways, before we return to Camon for a free evening. **(B, L) OVERNIGHT: CAMON**



FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15th - This morning we'll head to the mountain-top village of Rennes-le-Château. A visit to the parish church will either spark or rejuvenate your interest in Dan Brown's mysteries. The church is full of symbols and secret codes which may indicate that Abbé Saunière, the priest from 1885 to 1910, had discovered the lost treasure of Solomon, brought to the region by the Visigoths in the 5th century. We'll have time here for lunch before a beautiful drive takes us back home, stopping in Puivert on the way. Relatively intact for a Cathar castle, Puivert is in a wonderful position overlooking the surrounding countryside. We'll also visit the Museum of Quercorb (the local name for the surrounding area) in the village. Tonight, a final dinner at the Château, always beautifully presented by master chef Tom. **(B, D) OVERNIGHT: CAMON**

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16th - Reluctantly we will bid farewell to the abbey this morning and head back to Toulouse Airport for flights back to the US. **(B)**

**Key to included meals: B - breakfast, L - lunch, D - dinner*