14 DAYS

A GOURMAND'S TOUR OF FRANCE

Long hailed as a culinary haven, France, home to the famed Michelin Guide, is an epicure's ideal destination. From decadent dinner cruises on the Seine to champagne and caviar tastings by the Mediterranean, this 14-day tour gives you a glimpse of Gallic gastronomy at its best. BY PAYAL UTTAM

LANGOUSTINES RAFRAICHIES CAVIAR / ALAIN DUCASSE AU PLAZA ATHÉNÉE

4 MONASTIC MOMENTS

Begin your day with a gourmet food walk through a traditional Norman market in Saint-Pierre-sur-Dives. Your guide will lead you through the stalls of the ancient market hall where you can sample regional favorites like camembert, *livarot* and fresh cider. Save room for lunch at neighborhood bistro **Les Plaisirs des Mets** before driving to the Benedictine abbey of **Mont Saint-Michel** for the afternoon. A UNESCO World Heritage site, this Gothic-style monastery sits atop a dramatic islet surrounded by sand flats. For dinner, sample progressive Normandy cuisine at **Côté Resto**.

Côté Resto: Manager Gilbert Petit, 44-2-31-89-31-33; gilbert.petit3@gmail.com; www.cote-restohonfleur.com

5 THE LOVELY LOIRE

Head south to Tours in the Loire Valley, one of France's most exciting wine regions, and check into **Les Hautes Roches**, an 18th-century manor house partially set in a cliff face. Your deluxe room has the best view of the Loire River (about US$279 a night). A guide from luxury tour operator **French Wine Explorers** will take you to **Château de Chenonceau**. Dine inside the castle at **L'Orangerie** before exploring the grounds. A hot-air balloon will be parked outside to take you on a ride over the valley. Lucky for you, back at the hotel, Michelin-star chef Didier Edon is one of the best in the region.

Les Hautes Roches: Chef Didier Edon, 33-2-47-52-88-88; hautesroches@relaischateaux.com; www.leshautesroches.com

6 ON TO ONZAIN

This morning French Wine Explorers have arranged for a private visit to the celebrated **Caves Duhard** estate. Venture into the cavernous 16th-century cellars and enjoy a tasting of young and aged wines paired with regional delicacies like foie gras, pâté de campagne and goat cheese. After lunch at the stylish **Olivier Arlot** restaurant, take a lazy canoe ride down the Loire. Dinner will be at the **Domaine des Hauts de Loire**, a former 19th-century hunting lodge in Onzain. Treat yourself to the *menu dégustation*, featuring Aquitane caviar with scampi blancmange.

Domaine des Hauts de Loire: General Manager Pierre Alain Bonnigal, 33-2-54-20-72-57; hauts-loire@relaischateaux.com; www.relaischateaux.com

7 BETTER IN BURGUNDY

Next stop, Burgundy. Your **Loizerolle Suite** at the **Abbaye de la Bussière** has majestic, cathedral-like interiors (from about US$529 a night). An Abercrombie & Kent guide will escort you to a cooking class at **The Cook's Atelier** in Beaune. Begin with a glass of *crémant* before trying your hand at a Burgundian classic like beef bourguignon. Next, head to the prestigious **Domaine Faiveley** family estate in Nuits-Saint-Georges for a private tasting. Dinner is at Michelin-starred chef Patrick Bertron's **Relais Bernard Loiseau**.

Abbaye de la Bussière: Co-owner Clive Cummings, 33-3-80-49-02-29; info@abbaye-dela-bussiere.com; www.abbaye-dela-bussiere.com

8 BORDEAUX FOR TRUFFLES

Today, head into the woods for a truffle hunting expedition with Michelin-starred chef Emmanuel Hebrard and truffle expert Alain Gauthiot. Return to the hotel with your spoils and enjoy a truffle-inspired lunch. Fly to Bordeaux in the afternoon. The **Grand Hotel de Bordeaux & Spa** will host you for three days. The **Royal Suite**'s 1,076-square-foot terrace comes with a Jacuzzi and sprawling views of the city (about US$6,689 a night). Tonight, Pascal Nibaudeau, the Michelin-starred executive chef at **Le Pressoir d'Argent**, will lead a private cooking class followed by a three-course dinner paired with a medley of wines.

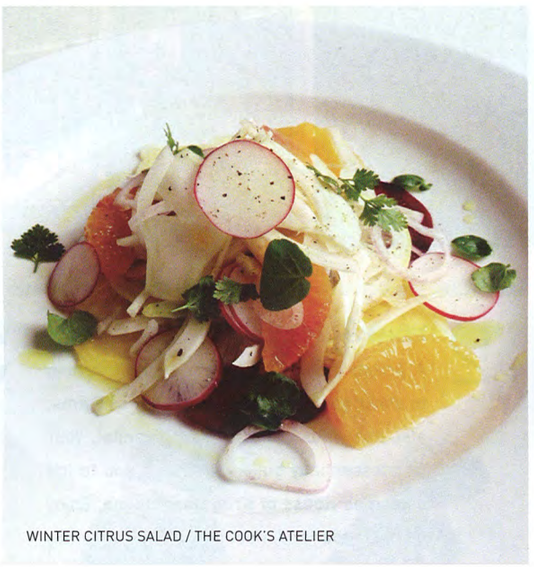
Grand Hotel de Bordeaux: Head Concierge Gregory Vacca, 33-05-57-30-43-00; gregory.vacca@ghbordeaux.com; www.ghbordeaux.com

9 BACK IN TIME

The hotel's wine concierge has planned the perfect day trip to the medieval village of Saint-Émilion. Oenophiles flock here for merlot and cabernet franc from the oldest *terroir* in Bordeaux. Start with a grand cru tasting at the stunning **Château De Ferrand**. Built during Louis XIV's reign, the estate boasts several of the region's top vintages. Lunch is at the family-owned restaurant **Logis de la Cadène**. Expect hearty seafood dishes like pan-fried prawns with basil sauce. Dinner will be at the much talked about **Hostellerie de Plaisance**.

Hostellerie de Plaisance: General Manager Philippe Etchebest, 33-5-57-55-07-55; contact@hostelleriedeplaisance.com; www.hostellerie-plaisance.com

ON THE LOIRE RIVER / CHÂTEAU DE CHENONCEAU



WINTER CITRUS SALAD / THE COOK'S ATELIER

ROOFTOP VISTA / HOSTELLERIE DE PLAISANCE