



Gardens of Paris, Normandy & the Loire Valley with Sharon Richardson

15 days | Oct 08 2026—Oct 22 2026

Majestic and meticulous. Lush and legendary. Cultivated and captivating. France's gardens tell stories as rich as the soil from which they grow. Follow in the footsteps of Pierre S. du Pont, designer of Longwood Gardens, through the very landscapes that inspired his masterpiece. Journey from the symmetrical grandeur of Versailles' royal parterres to the historic garden estates of Normandy, where elegant terraces thrive in the salt-kissed maritime air. Continue south to the Loire Valley's château gardens, where Renaissance vision meets botanical splendor. Along the way, savor local cheeses, Normandy calvados, and garden vistas that transform with the changing light—landscapes where history, art, and nature intertwine in perfect French harmony.



Your tour package includes

- 13 nights in handpicked hotels
- Breakfast daily
- 5 dinners with beer or wine
- 1 cheese & brandy tasting
- 14 sightseeing tours
- Expert Tour Director & local guides
- Private deluxe motor coach

Included highlights

- Versailles Palace & gardens
- Chantilly Plant Days
- Monet's Gardens & Giverny
- Normandy coastline
- Calvados tasting
- Chateau de Brecy
- La Maison du Camembert tour & tasting
- Chateau de Chenonceau floral demonstration
- International Garden Festival at Domaine de Chaumont
- Chateau de Villandry
- Evening Seine river cruise in Paris

Tour pace

On this guided tour, you'll walk for at least 3 hours daily across mostly flat terrain, including paved roads, cobblestone streets, and sandy paths, with some hills.

For more information, contact

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15 days

Overnight Flight → 1 night

Day 1: Travel day

Board your overnight flight to Paris today.

Paris → 3 nights

Day 2: Arrival in Paris

Included meals: welcome dinner

Bonne arrivée! After clearing arrivals, transfer from the airport to your hotel to recharge. This evening, join your fellow travelers at a local restaurant for a welcome dinner, served with beer or wine, and let your first impression of Paris leave you enchante.

Day 3: Sightseeing tour of Paris & Versailles Palace

Included meals: breakfast

Ready to be dazzled by the City of Light? Follow a local guide on a sightseeing tour to get an overview of its most recognizable landmarks and a feel for the character of its arrondissements. (That's French for "districts," and it's how Parisians refer to the city's neighborhoods.)

- Drive down the sycamore-lined Avenue des Champs-Élysées and take in the magnificent Arc de Triomphe, originally built to commemorate one of Napoleon's many conquests. A dozen different avenues spoke from this epic arch, making it Paris' symbolic heart.
- Pass the 16th-century Pont Neuf, the oldest stone bridge in Paris, and Notre-Dame Cathedral. Watching over its arrondissement from an island in the Seine River, this French Gothic masterwork is a veritable icon.
- Stop for a photo at the Eiffel Tower (you know this one!) before viewing the Palais Garnier opera house and the Place de la Concorde, the city's grandest square.
- Pass by the I.M. Pei-designed Louvre Pyramid—the grandiose glass gateway to the world's preeminent art museum.
- Marvel at the Hotel des Invalides: Erected in

the 17th century and built to a height of roughly 350 feet, this gold-domed structure is the largest church building in Paris and serves as the final resting place of its greatest military leaders.

This afternoon, travel outside of Paris to the opulent Palace of Versailles, a transformation from a modest hunting lodge to the most magnificent château in France, envied by royalty across the globe.

- Marvel at the grandeur of the palace as you tour the State Apartments, where the lavish decor and intricate details will transport you back to the days of Louis XIV. The highlight of your visit will undoubtedly be the glittering Hall of Mirrors, where history was made and treaties were signed amidst the dazzling reflections of crystal chandeliers and gilded statues.
- Wander through the expansive gardens, designed by the renowned landscape architect André Le Nôtre. As you stroll along the manicured paths, you'll encounter exquisite statues, splendid fountains, and vibrant flowerbeds that create a picturesque and serene atmosphere. Each corner of the garden offers a new delight, from the musical fountains to the hidden groves.

Day 4: Chantilly Plant Days

Included meals: breakfast

Spend your day wandering through the renowned Chantilly Plant Days, where botanical splendor meets artistic excellence in a feast for the senses. As you explore the show's meticulously designed thematic gardens, you'll encounter rare and collectible plant specimens that even experienced gardeners rarely have the opportunity to admire. Take time to appreciate the artistic craftsmanship on display throughout the grounds, where horticultural design transforms into living art against the backdrop of one of France's most elegant estates.

Rouen → 3 nights

Day 5: Rouen via Chateau La Roche-Guyon & Giverny

Included meals: breakfast, dinner

Journey west toward Rouen today, discovering two treasured gems of the Normandy region along the scenic route. Your day unfolds with architectural wonders carved into cliffs and the gardens that inspired Impressionist masterpieces, giving you a glimpse into France's artistic and historical legacy.

- Arrive at Chateau La Roche-Guyon, an extraordinary fortress dramatically carved into the limestone cliffs overlooking the Seine River, where centuries of French history come alive through its unique architecture.
- Follow your guide through the château's historic interiors and ascend through terraced gardens that climb the hillside, offering sweeping panoramic views of the Seine Valley below.
- Continue your artistic pilgrimage to Giverny, where Claude Monet created his most beloved paintings, and embark on a sightseeing tour of his colorful house where the master painter lived and worked.
- Wander through the enchanting gardens that inspired Monet's water lily series, crossing the iconic Japanese bridge and marveling at the reflecting ponds that appear in countless Impressionist masterpieces.
- Enjoy free time to explore Giverny at your own pace, with the opportunity to savor lunch at one of the local cafés or bistros either before or after your garden exploration.

After your day of exploration, you'll continue to your hotel in Rouen where you'll get checked in into your accommodations. Once refreshed, reconvene with your fellow travelers for tonight's included dinner.

Day 6: Jardin Le Vasterival, Le Bois des Moutiers & Chateau de Miromesnil

Included meals: breakfast

Immerse yourself in Normandy's horticultural treasures as you explore three distinctive gardens, each showcasing a different vision of landscape design. From wild and naturalistic plantings to formal Arts and Crafts precision and historic chateau grounds, today's journey reveals the artistic soul of French garden traditions.

- Visit the enchanting Jardin Le Vasterival, where Princess Greta Sturdza transformed 30 acres of wild thicket into a magical undergrowth that changes with each season.

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- Follow your guide through Le Vasterival's winding paths, discovering how shapes, colors, and scents from more than 7,000 species and varieties of plants blend together in perpetual, harmonious change.
- Continue to Le Bois des Moutiers, where celebrated gardens designed in the Arts and Crafts style create a perfect harmony between architecture and landscape.
- Wander amid vibrant rhododendrons and rare plantings as your guide reveals the garden's secrets, pausing occasionally to admire sweeping views toward the sea that frame this botanical masterpiece.
- Arrive at the stately Chateau de Miromesnil, a magnificent 16th-century Norman château perhaps most famous as the birthplace of renowned writer Guy de Maupassant.
- Explore the château's historic rooms filled with period furniture and artwork before strolling through its peaceful walled garden and park, where centuries of careful cultivation create a tranquil backdrop to this architectural treasure.

Day 7: Le Jardin Plume & Lyons-la-Forêt

Included meals: breakfast

Spend your third day exploring more of the picturesque countryside of Normandy, discovering both innovative garden design and one of France's most enchanting medieval villages. Today's journey reveals the region's unique blend of natural beauty and historic charm, showcasing why Normandy has captivated visitors for centuries.

- Start at Le Jardin Plume, an internationally acclaimed contemporary garden where geometric precision meets naturalistic planting in a poetic dance of form and freedom.
- Wander through the garden's distinctive "rooms" where ornamental grasses sway like feathers (plumes) in the breeze, creating a mesmerizing tapestry of texture and movement against meticulously clipped hedges.
- Continue to the enchanting village of Lyons-la-Forêt, where your Tour Director will guide you through cobblestone streets lined with half-timbered houses and picturesque squares that have inspired countless artists and writers through the centuries.

- Enjoy free time to explore this medieval gem at your own pace, perhaps visiting the historic covered market hall dating from the 18th century or simply relaxing at a local café to absorb the tranquil atmosphere.

Normandy Region → 2 nights

Day 8: Normandy Region via Les Jardins d'Étretat, Honfleur & calvados tasting

Included meals: breakfast, liquor tasting, dinner

Make your way to the picturesque Normandy region today, where dramatic coastal landscapes meet charming harbor towns and centuries-old culinary traditions. Your exploration takes you from artistic gardens perched on iconic white cliffs to a medieval port, concluding with a taste of Normandy's celebrated apple brandy.

- Arrive at Les Jardins d'Étretat, a remarkable clifftop garden where contemporary art installations blend seamlessly with meticulously sculpted greenery, creating a surreal landscape between earth and sky.
- Follow your guide through this living gallery, where each carefully designed garden room frames breathtaking views of Étretat's famous chalk cliffs and natural sea arches that have inspired countless artists through the centuries.
- Continue to the enchanting port town of Honfleur, where colorful narrow houses crowd around the picturesque old harbor that has remained largely unchanged since it was painted by Impressionist masters.
- Enjoy free time to wander Honfleur's cobblestone streets, perhaps savoring a leisurely lunch at a waterfront café while admiring the medieval architecture and vibrant artistic atmosphere that continues to captivate visitors.
- Visit a traditional Normandy distillery to discover the secrets behind Calvados, the region's celebrated apple brandy that has been produced here for generations.
- Explore the distillery's immersive exhibits showcasing apple orchards, fermentation techniques, and aging processes before concluding your visit with a guided tasting of this distinctive Norman spirit in various stages of maturation.

Sit down for an included dinner this evening, served with beer or wine.

Day 9: Gardens of Normandy

Included meals: breakfast

Travel through the diverse horticultural landscape of Normandy today, exploring centuries of garden design from aristocratic estates to vibrant botanical collections.

- Visit the Chateau de Brecy, where a rare 17th-century Italian-style garden unfolds across four terraces adorned with classical statues, elegant balustrades, and meticulously shaped topiaries—one of France's few surviving examples from this era.
- Continue to Bayeux for free time to enjoy lunch at your leisure in this charming historic town, known for its medieval streets and inviting cafés.
- Conclude your horticultural journey at the Jardin des Plantes in Caen, an expansive botanical garden and arboretum showcasing over 8,000 plant species across verdant alleys and specialized greenhouses. Discover collections that blend native Normandy flora with exotic specimens, creating a living museum of botanical diversity.

Loire Valley → 4 nights

Day 10: Loire Valley via Jardin du Pays d'Auge & Maison du Camembert

Included meals: breakfast, tasting, dinner

Turn inland toward the majestic Loire Valley today, pausing along the way to explore Normandy's pastoral beauty and culinary heritage.

- Visit Jardin du Pays d'Auge, where verdant meadows, flourishing orchards, and thoughtfully designed ornamental gardens showcase the rich agricultural landscapes and creative garden design that define the Normandy countryside.
- Continue to La Maison du Camembert to indulge in one of Normandy's most beloved culinary treasures, where interactive exhibits and demonstrations reveal the fascinating heritage behind this iconic cheese.
- Savor the rich, creamy flavors of authentic Camembert during a delectable tasting that celebrates traditional production methods and the artisanal craftsmanship that has made this cheese celebrated worldwide.

After checking into your Loire Valley hotel, rejoin your fellow travelers for tonight's included dinner at a local restaurant, accompanied by beer or wine.

Day 11: Sightseeing tour of Chateau de Chenonceau

Included meals: breakfast

Spend today in the heart of the Loire Valley with a visit to one of France's most enchanting and historically rich estates. Known as the "Ladies' Castle," Chateau de Chenonceau is a stunning Renaissance masterpiece that spans the River Cher and tells the compelling story of powerful women who shaped French history.

- Journey to Chateau de Chenonceau, where the elegant château stretches gracefully across the River Cher, creating one of the most photographed and admired architectural vistas in all of France.
- Learn how powerful women—from Diane de Poitiers to Catherine de' Medici—shaped the chateau's destiny, leaving their distinct marks on its architecture, gardens, and place in French cultural heritage.
- Explore the chateau's interior rooms with your guide, noting the feminine influence in the refined décor, delicate tapestries, and fresh flower arrangements that continue the tradition started by its female custodians.
- Watch a floral arrangement demonstration showcasing how the château's seasonal bouquets are created for display throughout the estate.
- Wander through the beautifully manicured gardens, designed to showcase both aesthetic beauty and practical innovation, reflecting the creativity and vision of the chateau's remarkable female owners.

Enjoy a free evening to unwind and scroll through your photos—or add a few more to your camera roll on an optional excursion to a wine cellar for a tasting of local vintages paired with dinner.

+ Loire Valley Dinner & Wine Tasting

Day 12: International Garden Festival at Domaine de Chaumont

Included meals: breakfast

Today, explore the International Garden Festival at Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, where creative landscape design takes center stage. Begin with a guided tour through this year's festival gardens, where designers and botanists from around the world showcase innovative installations that interpret the annual theme. Your guide will highlight the concepts and techniques behind these living artworks. After the tour, enjoy free time to revisit gardens of interest, explore the château's permanent collections, or discover the contemporary art exhibitions throughout the grounds. The domain features several cafés

where you can stop for lunch or a coffee break during your visit. Today, explore the renowned International Garden Festival at Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, a prestigious annual event where landscape design meets artistic expression and innovation takes root in carefully crafted garden installations.

- Begin with a guided tour through this year's festival gardens, where designers and botanists from around the world showcase creative installations interpreting the annual theme.
- Learn from your expert guide about the concepts, techniques, and stories behind these living artworks, discovering details and design elements you might otherwise miss.
- Enjoy free time after the tour to revisit gardens that particularly captured your imagination or explore those you haven't yet seen at your own pace.
- Discover the château's permanent gardens and contemporary art exhibitions thoughtfully placed throughout the grounds, adding another dimension to your visit.
- Stop at one of the domain's charming cafés for lunch or a coffee break when you need refreshment, with time to relax and reflect on the botanical inspirations surrounding you.

Day 13: Chateau de Villandry

Included meals: breakfast

Visit Château de Villandry today, a Renaissance château celebrated for having the most spectacular ornamental kitchen gardens in France.

- Discover the famous ornamental kitchen garden, where vibrant vegetables are arranged in geometric patterns that blend practicality with artistry, creating a living tapestry of color and form.
- Wander through the formal ornamental gardens with their intricate box hedges shaped into symbols of love—from tender hearts to passionate flames—designed to represent different aspects of romance.
- Admire the water garden's serene reflecting pools and the sun garden's Mediterranean-inspired terraces, where carefully orchestrated plantings create distinct atmospheres across multiple garden levels.

The evening is yours to explore at your leisure.

Day 14: Paris via Chartres & evening Seine river cruise

Included meals: breakfast, farewell dinner

Bid farewell to the Loire Valley this morning as you journey back toward the City of Light for your final night in France. Along the way, make a memorable stop in the medieval city of Chartres, home to the magnificent Chartres Cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture in existence.

Take in the nighttime allure of the City of Light for a special final evening in Paris. The event begins with a celebratory farewell dinner at a local restaurant. After you dine, board a boat cruise along the Seine. As you coast along the river and under Paris' bridges, you'll behold the illuminated monuments of the city glittering alongside the riverbanks.

Please note: The dress code may vary depending on the restaurant for your dinner. Your Tour Director will advise you on what to wear, but shorts and sneakers are likely to be considered inappropriate attire.

Flight Home

Day 15: Departure

Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)

Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

Paris → 1 night

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Customize your experience

Customize your tour by adding excursion options. Excursions offered on the same day will occur at different times, so there's no need to choose. Save \$10 when you book your excursion up to three days before your tour departs.* Excursions requiring advance reservation only list this discounted price. Call or go online to customize your tour: <https://groups.goaheadtours.com/tours/sharonrichardsonzhhg> | 800-438-7672

Day 11: Loire Valley Dinner & Wine Tasting

From \$109.00 . Visit the link above for pricing info. (5 hours, departs in the evening, dinner included)

Cap off your day in the Loire Valley by taking in views of châteaux and greenery on your way to a local wine cellar. With its central location in the country, this area draws culinary influence from several parts of France, which you'll experience during a wine tasting and dinner at a local restaurant.

*Optional excursions may be purchased up to three days prior to departure or while on tour. Pre-purchased optional excursions cannot be canceled within three days prior to departure or while on tour. Select optional excursions require advance booking and cannot be purchased or canceled after the advanced reservation deadline. Go Ahead Tours accepts payment by cash, Visa or MasterCard for optional excursions purchased on tour. Additional fees may apply for optional excursions purchased on tour. Excursions require a minimum number of participants to operate. Details and prices are subject to change. Due to seasonal hours of operation and availability, some excursions may not operate. If this occurs, you will be refunded any payments made for that excursion post-tour. Learn more at <https://www.goaheadtours.com/about/terms>.