



Avignon

Population: 87,100

51 miles (82 km) northeast of Aix-en-Provence/60 miles (100 km) northwest of Marseille/425 miles (685 km) south of Paris

Avignon is located at the point where the Rhône and Durance rivers join. In 1309, when Pope Clément V arrived after fleeing the corruption of Rome, the town became the capital of Christendom for 68 years. Although the last pope left in 1377, you're reminded of the papal legacy everywhere in modern-day Avignon. Its large student population makes it a vibrant city unlike most of the small villages of Provence. The students, upscale boutiques and crowded cafés all make Avignon the most cosmopolitan city in Provence.

We'll take you on walks in the most visited cities in Provence: Avignon, Aix-en-Provence, and Arles. We'll also introduce you to other wonderful towns in Provence.

AVIGNON WALK

Our walk begins near the train station at the Porte de la République, one of the entries through the massive walls built by the Church. You'll be on cours Jean-Jaurés. Head down the right side of this street to the tourist office at 41 cours Jean-Jaurés. Here you can pick up a map of the city. Turn right out of the tourist office.



The street turns into rue de la République. This is the main street of Avignon and is filled with shops. At the corner of rue de la République and rue Frédéric Mistral at number 27 is our first stop.

Musée Lapidaire (closed Tuesdays), located in a Jesuit chapel, is filled with a collection of sculpture and stonework from the 1st and 2nd centuries.

Turn right at rue Frédéric Mistral, at the end of the street you'll run into another fine museum.

La Fondation Angladon-Dubrujead, at 5 rue Laboureur, is filled with the works of Picasso, van Gogh, Degas, Modigliani and Cézanne, to name a few. There's also a collection of furniture and art objects. Closed Mondays.

Continue down rue de la République and you'll find yourself at our next stop.

Place de l'Horloge is the heart of the city, filled with bistros, cafés, and restaurants. It gets its name from the Gothic clock tower (**Tour du Jacquemart**). Great people-watching! On the left is the **City Hall** (Hôtel de Ville) and a little further down on the left is the 19th-century **Opéra House**.

Off the place de l'Horloge is the place du Palais (rue Phillippe connects the two places). You make a right from place de l'Horloge at the Hôtel du Palais des Papes.

At the place du Palais, you'll find the **Palais des Papes** (the colossal Papal Palace to your right), the **Petit Palais** (straight ahead, the former residence of cardinals and bishops, and home of a museum devoted mostly to Italian paintings and sculptures from Avignon's churches), and the **Cathédrale Notre-Dame des Doms** (also to your right, with the tombs of two popes who ruled from Avignon. It's topped by the gold statue of the Virgin Mary). Visit the cathedral last.

With the cathedral to your back head right through the gates into our next sight.

Enter the promenade, and you'll head up into the **Rocher-des-Doms** (Rock of the Domes). You can enjoy the views across the Rhône River from this rocky bluff and garden. Huge pine trees, statues and swans make this a great place to relax. There's a small vineyard down the slope. From here, you can also look down at the four remaining arches of the **Pont St-Bénézet** (St. Bénézet Bridge) and the ruins in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon across the river.

You can retrace your steps back to the rue de la République to return to the beginning of this walk.

Wine Tasting

You're in the heart of **wine country**. Look for signs saying *Cave Coopérative* at vineyards. If they say *dégustation*, this means that the winery offers free wine tastings. Although there's no obligation to buy, you should get at least one bottle (especially if you've spent some time at the winery).

Aix-en-Provence

Population: 139,000

19 miles (31 km) northeast of

Marseille/51 miles (82 km)

southeast of Avignon/110 miles

(176 km) west of Nice/474 miles

(760 km) south of Paris

Aix is a graceful and sophisticated city. Between the 12th and 15th centuries it was the capital of Provence. The Romans called it “Aqua Sextius” (Waters of Sextius) after the thermal springs that flow here and the Roman general (Caius Sextius Calvinus) who founded the city. Shaded squares with bubbling fountains in the Old Quarter, 17th-century town houses and the **cours Mirabeau** (the grand main avenue) make Aix a must for all visitors to Provence. It’s a cultural center enhanced by thousands of students who attend one of France’s oldest universities. The artist Paul Cézanne is from here, and created many of his best-known works here.

AIX-EN-PROVENCE WALK

Our walk begins at the tourist office at place Général-de-Gaulle at the Rotonde traffic circle. You can pick up a map here at the tourist office.

The black and white marble fountain at place Général-de-Gaulle (in the middle of the traffic circle) dates back to the 19th century, and features the figures of Fine Art, Agriculture and Justice at the top.

Head down the right side of cours Mirabeau.

This broad street lined with plane trees and stone buildings was built in the 17th century. You’ll pass elegant buildings, four fountains, and many cafés and shops. This is the heart of Aix.

Stop at the corner of cours Mirabeau and rue du 4 Septembre.

One of the grand mansions on this street, the impressive **Hôtel Maurel de Pontèves** (now the Tribunal of Commerce) with its sculpted figures is at number 38 (on the corner).

In the middle of the cours Mirabeau is the **Fontaine Moussue** (it means “Mossy Fountain,” and you’ll understand why when you look at it).

Turn right onto rue du 4 Septembre.

You're now entering the **Quartier Mazarin**. It was here where Aix nobility built elegant town houses in the 17th and 18th centuries. After a short walk, you'll be at **place des Quatre Dauphins** dominated by its Baroque fountain.

Turn left onto rue Cardinale.

At place St-Jean-de-Malte on rue Cardinale (right before the church) you can stop in at the **Musée Granet/Musée des Beaux-Arts** (Closed Tues.) on the right side of the street. Located in a former priory, it's home to a collection of European art from the 16th to 19th centuries. You'll find eight Cézanne paintings here, along with a collection of his drawings and watercolors.

Next to the museum is one of Aix's many churches.

Drop in for a quick view of **Eglise St-Jean-de-Malta**. This Gothic church and chapel of the Knights of Malta (a charitable organization) is home to the tombs of the counts of Provence.

Make a left at rue d'Italie. Cross Place Forbin and the street turns into rue Thiers.

You're now in the **Old Town**, with its maze of streets and shops.

At the end of rue Thiers is place Verdun and place des Prêcheurs.

If you're taking this walk on Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday mornings, you'll run into a huge **market** at place Verdun where you can buy anything from antiques to clothes.

Circle around both places.

To your left is the **Palais de Justice**. In the center is an **obelisk** and to your right is the church **Eglise de la Madeleine**.

Turn around (heading back in the direction you entered the places), and find passage Agard.

Passage Agard (it has the words “Agard” written above it) is a covered passageway lined with shops.

Go through the passage and when you exit, you’ll be back on the cours Mirabeau.

To your right as you exit the passage (at 53 cours Mirabeau) you can stop for coffee or a light snack at one of the sidewalk tables at **Brasserie Les Deux Garçons**. This 19th-century brasserie has been a meeting place for intellectuals and writers for years. Today, you’ll also find quite a few tourists.

You can now head back down the cours Mirabeau to the beginning of our walk.

Arles

Population: 52,300

57 miles (92 km) northwest of Marseille/22 miles (36 km) south of Avignon/19 miles (31 km) southeast of Nîmes/450 miles (725 km) south of Paris

On the banks of the Rhône River, Arles is one of the three “A’s” that make up the most visited cities in Provence (along with Aix-en-Provence and Avignon). Arles has everything you could want in a Provence city: festivals, an Old Town, Roman ruins, cafés (especially on **la place du Forum**) and intimate restaurants. Since Arles is situated at the head of the Rhône delta, it’s on the route that linked Italy and Spain. When the Romans came into possession of Spain, Arles became an important and strategic town for the Romans. Bullfights, still held in the arena, are a reminder of Arles’s Spanish connection.

The folk culture and traditions of Arles are alive and well, and you’ll see locals dressed in traditional Arlesian costumes on occasions. Van Gogh came here in 1888 and created some of his best-known paintings. Look around and you’ll notice that



many of the scenes featured in those paintings remain today.

ARLES WALK

We begin our walk at the tourist information center at the esplanade Charles de Gaulle on boulevard des Lices (part of the main road around the old town). Pick up a free map of the city here. As you exit the information center (with the center to your back), cross the street and head left down boulevard des Lices past the cafés. After rue Wilson watch for the stairs on your right (at Brasserie Lou Peyrou). Head up the stairs, down small rue Gageron to place Dr. Félix Rey.

Espace van Gogh is in the courtyard to your left and is open to the public (free admission). This is where Vincent van Gogh was sent after he cut off part of his left ear. The courtyard has been landscaped to match van Gogh's famous painting *Le Jardin de l'Hôtel-Dieu*.

With Espace van Gogh to your back, head left down rue President Wilson until you reach rue de la République. Number 29 is our next stop.

Women in traditional costumes greet you at the **Museon Arlaten** (Arles Museum), filled with regional clothes, furniture, portraits and art objects. The museum has a room dedicated to Frédéric Mistral, a poet from Provence who was awarded the 1904 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Continue down rue de la République (right as you're facing the museum) until you reach the large square.

The **place de la République** is the main square in Arles. Take in the **City Hall** (Hôtel de Ville) dating back to the 1600s. The **obelisk** with its carved features is thought to have been a trophy from the conquest of Egypt by Rome during the reign of Emperor Augustus.

On the place de la République is the town's main church, the **Eglise St-Trophime/Cloître St-Trophime**.

Admire the vivid frieze of the Last Judgment in the doorway, the 4th-century sarcophagus inside the church, and visit the cloisters, a masterpiece of medieval architecture. The left chapel holds relics of St-Trophime and other saints.

As you exit the church (with the church to your back), head right. Continue down pedestrian-only rue de l'Hôtel de Ville.

Turn right at rue des Arènes and head uphill. You'll soon find yourself facing our next stop.

You're now at one of the most spectacular Roman monuments in Provence. The well-preserved **Arena** (Arènes) with its two tiers of arches and four medieval towers once sat over 20,000 spectators. It still hosts bullfights. Great views of Arles from the top tier of the arena.

Detour

If you turn left down rue des Arènes, you'll run into **la place du Forum**. You can take a break at one of the many cafés, including **Café de la Nuit**. It's the one that looks like a vibrant van Gogh painting. Great people-watching here!

*Exit the arena (with the Arena to your back) and head left to visit the picturesque ruins of the **Théâtre Antique** (you'll cross place Bornier to rue de la Calade).*

Used today as a stage for festivals, this ancient theatre was built in the 1st century B.C. and seated 20,000. All that remains now are two columns.

Nîmes

Population: 137,200

26 miles (43 km) southwest of Avignon/19 miles (31 km) northwest of Arles

Officially part of the Languedoc region, Nîmes is a popular destination for visitors to Provence. Some of the world's best-preserved Roman sights are here, giving it the nickname "the Rome of France." The town is dotted with Roman ruins such as the **Tour Magne** (a tower on Mont Cavalier and the city's

Best Roman Sights in Provence

- **Pont du Gard** is a huge three-tiered, arched aqueduct spanning the Gardon River (13 miles southwest of Avignon)
- theatre and arena in **Arles**
- ruins and 2,000-year-old bridge (Pont Romain) in **Vaison-la-Romaine**
- Théâtre Antique and Arc de Triomphe in **Orange**
- ruins of a Gallo-Roman village (Glanum/Les Antiques) in **St-Rémy**
- Roman gate and tower in **Nîmes**

oldest monument). It's frenetic and not at all like the calm small villages of Provence. Did you know that denim (the material that all those jeans are made of) was created here in the Middle Ages? The **Old Town** is easily explored on foot and home to the major sights, including:

The steel-and-glass **Carré d'Art** (closed Mondays), a contemporary art museum.

The **Maison Carrée** is a Roman temple modeled after the Temple of Apollo in Rome.

The well-preserved arena (**Amphithéâtre Romain**) is a miniature of the Colosseum in Rome. Today, it's used for performances and an occasional bullfight.

Across the street from the arena is the **Musée des Cultures Taurines** (closed Mondays), a bullfighting museum.

The **Musée Archéologique et d'Histoire Naturelle** (closed Mondays), a museum of archaeology and natural history, is filled with statues, friezes, pottery, and coins.

The **Cathédral Notre-Dame et St-Castor** has a beautifully preserved Romanesque frieze featuring Adam, Eve, Abel, and Noah. The inside features a 4th-century sarcophagus.

Off of place aux Herbes (near the cathedral) is the **Musée du Vieux-Nîmes** (Museum of Old Nîmes) showcasing life in Nîmes in the Middle Ages, including a 14th-century jacket made of the famous *denim de Nîmes*, the fabric that Levi-Stauss used for blue jeans. The museum is closed on Mondays.

And don't miss the lively **place de l'Horloge** (Clock Square).

Lourmarin

Population 1,100

6 miles (10 km) south of Bonnieux

Lourmarin's winding narrow streets are lined with stone houses painted in shades of ochre and beige. It has a Renaissance chapel and both Catholic and Protestant churches. The village lies at the foot of the Luberon Mountain range which is covered with pine and oak trees. Surrounding the village are olive groves and vineyards. Although French vacationers discovered this little village years ago, it's now popular with foreign tourists. Its renovated *château* is the site of frequent concerts and exhibits.

Visitors have quite a few cafés and restaurants to choose from. It's become the gastronomic capital of the area. It's a lovely town with much to offer, and a great base for touring some of the prettiest towns of Provence.

Saignon

Population: 1,050

2 miles (3 km) southeast of Apt

Out of the way, but certainly worth the trip! This lovely, quiet, and unspoiled town high on a hill has picturesque shady squares, ancient fountains and ruins of ancient baths. The wood-carved doors of the Roman church **Eglise Notre-Dame de Pitié** depict Christ and Mary. The cemetery behind the church provides its permanent "residents" with a panoramic view of the countryside.

Oppède-le-Vieux

Population: 1,250

16 miles (26 km) southeast of Avignon/9 miles (14 km) south of Gordes

This hilltop village (don't confuse it with the lower modern town of Oppède), surrounded by thick forests, was deserted in 1900. The ruins of a medieval *château* loom above. In fact,

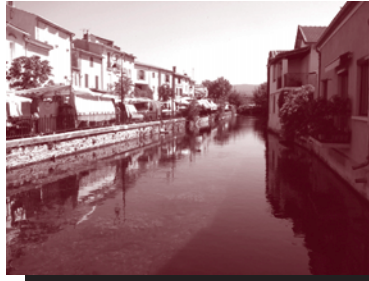
much of the town itself is still in ruins, although some artists and writers have moved in and beautifully restored homes. You must park at the base of the hill (€2) and walk through a tiered garden filled with local plants labeled with their Latin, French and English names. Cross through the old city gate and walk up the steep alleys to visit the 13th-century church **Notre-Dame d'Alydon**, with its gargoyles and hexagon-shaped bell tower. Truly a taste of old Provence.

L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue

Population: 17,200

16 miles (26 km) east of Avignon/25 miles (40 km) southeast of Orange

The name means “Island on the Sorgue River.” I love this valley town. You’ll find pedestrian bridges with flower boxes crossing graceful canals. The town is often referred to as the “Venice of Provence.” Nine moss-covered waterwheels (that once powered the town’s paper, silk and wool mills) remain along the canals. Only Paris is said to have more antique and secondhand shops in France. There are more than 300 shops in this little town. Most are open daily. There’s a huge antique fair at Easter. This otherwise quiet town is filled with crowds on Sunday. Stands loaded with local produce, crafts and antiques fill the streets along with street performers. Browse the market and then watch others do the same at one of the many cafés. There’s a more sedate market on Thursdays.



Uzès

Population: 8,000

15 miles (25 km) north of Nîmes/24 miles (39 km) west of Avignon

Don't bypass Uzès on the border of Provence in the Languedoc

region. Begin your visit at the imposing **Cathédrale St-Théodorit** (you can't miss it and there's a large car park next to it). The cathedral, built on the site of a Roman temple, dates to 1652. Those are the remains of St-Firmin in the glass coffin on the left side of the cathedral. When outside, look up at the **Tour Fénestrelle**. Doesn't it look like the Leaning Tower of Pisa? As you face the cathedral, there's a former palace to your left that now houses the city's courts of law.

Across the street from the cathedral is the old town where you'll find the **ducal palace** on place du Duché. Descendants of the House of Uzès still live here (*Tel. 04/66.22.18.96, Open daily, admission: €10*). But don't come here just for the palace, come to walk the beautiful and car-free old town and to visit the **medieval garden** on rue Port Royal (*Open daily, admission: €2*). The **place aux Herbes** with sheltered walkways and medieval homes is a relaxing place to take a coffee break, although it's not so calm on Wednesday mornings and Saturdays when it hosts a lively market.

Cassis

Population: 8,000

19 miles (30 km) east of Marseille/25 miles (42 km) west of Toulon

Waterfront cafés around a beautiful port, buildings painted in pastel, boutiques and a medieval castle (the **Château de Cassis**) all make this Provence's most attractive coastal town. The water is clean and clear, and the beaches, like many others on this coast, are pebbly rather than sandy. The 1,200-foot cliff above the *château* is **Cap Canaille**, Europe's highest coastal cliff. Frankly, there isn't much to do in Cassis except lie on the beach and either look at the castle or the beachgoers, but, after all, that's what you came here for. Parking is scarce in town, so you can park outside and take a shuttle bus into town (watch for the signs saying "*navette*"). They're free and depart every 15 minutes.

PROVENCE GETTING THERE/GETTING AROUND

The **Nice-Côte d'Azur Airport** is located on a peninsula between Nice and Antibes. It's 20 minutes west of the central