

**A Royal Taste of The Countryside: Normandy & Brittany**  
**September 27th to October 5th, 2009**

This uncommon epicurean adventure is more than a gourmet's dream journey – it epitomizes the philosophy of today's Slow Food movement as we pay homage to six of France's Sites of Exceptional Culinary Taste and discover the time-honored traditions of artisans, producers, and growers.

As we tour the mythical coast and lush countryside, we will savor wine and food at its source, prepare local cuisine and be welcomed by great chefs of the region. Our culinary adventure begins like royalty - we'll take a private tour of Louis XIV's Kitchen Garden, Le Potager du Roi, and then continue on to the Normandy countryside to stroll through a pear orchard and visit a cheese making dairy farm. On Brittany's coast we will travel out to the oyster beds and have a tasting *in situ*. Join us on this extraordinary epicurean adventure to these special destinations.

We'll visit 6 Sites of Exceptional Culinary Taste in Normandy and Brittany:

- **Potager du Roi**, Louis XIV's kitchen garden at Versailles
- **Domaine St. Hippolyte**, home of livarot, pont l'evêque and pave d'auge cheese
- **Cancale**, seaside port of Cancalaise oyster farming
- **Bocage Domfrontais**, countryside of Poire
- **Cavados Domfrontais**, Normandy's secret calvados
- **Palais Benedictine**, liqueur made from a Monk's recipe

**Day 1 – September 27 - Versailles** - Arrive in Paris and transfer by private car to the **Trianon Palace**, a luxury hotel and spa. Occupying seven acres in a tree-filled park and bordering Louis XIV's Palace of Versailles, the Trianon Palace has always been a magnet for fashionable society and lovers of cuisine. After settling into the luxury hotel, the afternoon is yours to explore the garden, the palace or the town. You may want to book a relaxing massage in the spa. In the early evening, a welcome reception of champagne cocktails and amuse bouches is followed by an exceptional gourmet dinner at *La Veranda Brasserie* that begins our epicurean adventure.

### **Day 2 – September 28 – Potager du Roi, King's Kitchen Garden**

**of Versailles** - A stroll in the King's Garden is a perfect way to start our morning, before we make an invited appearance at the first national "Taste of the Countryside" Fair, "*Un Gout du Paysage*." Like King Louis XIV and his courtiers, we'll be feted with the absolute best products from the Sites of Exceptional Culinary Taste all over France. The Fair will feature tastings, cooking classes, specially guided tours of the King's garden, and a theatre troupe performing short plays based on the fables of LaFontaine. The garden, *Le Potager du Roi*, a Site of Exceptional Culinary Taste, open to the public since 1991, is exactly as Louis XIV would have known it. Not only does it provide over 300 varieties of fruits and vegetables, it's aesthetically and artistically pleasing to wander through the immaculately cared-for rows. A team of 30 gardeners harvest over 80 tons of fruits and vegetables each year. We will lunch here. Your evening is at leisure.

**Day 3 – September 29 – Bocage Domfrontais** - Departure for the *Bocage Domfrontais*, another Site of Exceptional Culinary Taste. In the heart of the Andaines Forest, we'll lunch from our panier, a picnic basket brimming with local lamb, sausage, Normand cheese and even a mushroom sandwich. We'll be in the forest and former stomping grounds of that old heart-throb, Sir Lancelot du Lac. But we won't be looking for the Knights of the Round Table. Instead, we're accompanied by a mycologue, a scientist who specializes in mushrooms. These perfect mushroom specimens will grace our table as we enjoy a dinner in the restaurant gastronomique of our hotel, the **Manoir du Lys**, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne a luxurious hideaway in the only spa town in western France. The lakeside *belle-epoque* town is like no other you'll find in France.

**Day 4 – September 30 – Bagnoles de l'Orne** - A morning visit to the market in Bagnoles de l'Orne is just the beginning of this exceptional day. Our meeting with a local farmer includes a degustation of *pommeau* - the local aperitif made from apple juice and calvados, hard cider and, of course, the local specialty, *calvados*. We'll be introduced to the regional cuisine and learn why the *trou Normand*, a digestif of flavorful brandy, distilled from apple cider, is offered between courses of Normand cuisine. In the afternoon, starred chef Franck Quintin takes us into his kitchen for a hands-on cooking course. We will use the fresh autumnal products that we bring home from our market

**Day 5 – October 1 – Route du Poire, Calvados Domfrontais** - A visit to the farm of an artisanal cheesemaker offers the opportunity to learn about the making of *livarot*, *pont l'evêque* and fresh *pave d'auge* cheeses, made exclusively from the milk of Race Normand "happy" cows. We'll stroll through pear and apple orchards and taste the AOC-labelled Poire Domfrontais (sometimes called "perry") along with the unique *Calvados Domfrontais*. We will lunch in a private home, and, to top it all off, a horse-drawn carriage ride will take us through the Bocage and give us an incredible view of Mont St. Michel before we depart for St. Malo and our boutique hotel, **Villefromoy**, St Malo, just a few steps from the sea. This evening will be at your leisure.

**Day 6 – October 2 – Cancale** – After breakfast, a late morning will allow for a walk on the beach or a spa treatment at Les Thermes Marins. *Cancale* is a Site of Exceptional Culinary Taste, and known the world over for the special oysters harvested here. Our day includes a sail along the beautiful blue Brittany coast in the bay of Mont St. Michel on a Bisquine. This unique type of boat, used to harvest oysters during the 1800's, has been recreated by the passionate Bretons. At the small port town, we'll visit La Ferme Marine and have a cooking class with Chef Michel, a former student of 3-star chef Olivier Roellinger. He'll present a meli-melo of hot and cold oysters, variations with lemon/lime or vinegar, and a gratin with *Comte* cheese. As he explains local culture and cuisine, he'll show us how to make and enjoy local specialties, even using seaweed. Dinner follows.

**Day 7 - October 3 – Villedieu-les-Poëles and Honfleur** – On our way to Honfleur, we'll stop for lunch and visit the town of Villedieu-les-Poëles, home to the well-known Mauviel copperworks. Watch the artisans at work and visit village stores with owners who make and sell "anything" copper. Gourmands will be happy to save packing room for a pot, pan or copper souvenir. Our stay in Honfleur, one of Normandy's best-preserved ports, will be in a luxury "old farm" hotel - of course with a spa and beautiful pool, **La Ferme St. Simeon**, Honfleur The evening is free to stroll through the town that was a favorite retreat of 19th century artists. The Honfleur sunlight enchanted Monet, Sisley and Courbet, among others.

**Day 8 - October 4 – Palais Benedictine** – Morning excursion to the seaside town of Fecamp. Walk under and around the bell tower and shop in the busy little town. Our tour of the Benedictine Palace, Site of Exceptional Culinary Taste for Benedictine liqueur is a lesson in the creative use of 27 herbs and spices. Get your

camera ready for shots of not only the palace, but the uniquely-designed array of fresh spices. More widely recognized today as B&B, Benedictine, a rich amber liqueur, was a favorite of King Francois I, the first King of France. Like royalty, we end our tour just as we began - dining *comme un roi*, like a king, in the refined restaurant of our seafront hotel. Our farewell dinner will include Normand specialties like seafood prepared with mustard and tomatoes, and *le demoiselle de Cherbourg*, small lobsters with a sauce of white wine. Normandy apples weave their way into in many of the dishes offered by the Boelen family, along with a fine selection of calvados. This final royal feast of fresh products from the Pays d'Auge tops off a grand adventure!

**Day 9 October 5 – Depart for Paris** – Morning transfer to the Paris Airport.

### **Accommodations**

#### *Trianon Spa and Palace, Versailles*

The Trianon Palace & Spa, a Westin Hotel, is situated in the heart of Versailles. An exceptional retreat charged with history, it sits on the edge of the Royal domain of Versailles in a three-acre wooded park, less than a mile from Louis XIV's famed Chateau de Versailles. Activities for travelers searching for cultural, gourmet, or sensory experiences.

#### *Manoir du Lys, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne*

A former hunting lodge, this charming manor home - cum acclaimed restaurant - is nestled on the edges of the Andaine forest. Our hosts are the Quinton family including Michelin starred Franck Quinton, and we will be well looked after.

#### *Villefromoy, St Malo*

Dating from the Second Empire the hotel boast rooms with sea views overlooking "Rochebonne" beach, and captures the very essence of Saint-Malo. This outstanding property has been fully renovated and restored to all the former charm town house of yesteryear.

#### *La Ferme St. Simeon, Honfleur*

An elegant farmhouse with half-timbered ceilings and slate roofs, decorated in chintz and antiques recalling the Ferme's nineteenth-century heyday. Rooms are spacious and charming, thick with history, and even the bathrooms have been meticulously maintained; they're functional yet still authentic, Relais & Châteaux.

## Guides

**Debra Fioritto** is a culinary tour guide, teaches French at the University of Indiana South Bend. She is an expert in the history, legend and lore of French Cuisine. She has eaten her way through most of the regions of France and is always in search of the perfect marriage of two food products. Debra has a degree in French and International Relations and has traveled and lived throughout Europe.

**Kathryn Morton** is a Certified Western European Culinary Travel Specialist and a Certified Destination Specialist - France. She is also a French teacher who enjoys promoting her passion for traveling to the sources of France's hidden culinary treasures. A France specialist with a Master's Degree in French Language and Literature, she has taught French at the University of North Carolina Greensboro and High Point University. She is creator and teacher of "Destination France," a French culture class for students and travelers. Kathryn travels to the countryside of France as often as she can, absorbing local customs, traditions, and of course food and wine. She attended *L'école de Trois Ponts*, a French language and cooking school in Roanne, France, home to the famous *Trois Gros 3-star Michelin* restaurant.

Both Kathryn and Debra have been appointed sole US representatives of the 71 government-designated gastronomic taste monuments, "The Sites of Exceptional Culinary Taste" (*Les Sites Remarquables du Goût*) in France.

## Food & Wine

Breakfast – Daily

Lunches – all lunches, with the exception of days 6 and 8 as noted on itinerary

Dinners – all dinners, with the exception of days 2 and 7, as noted on itinerary

Wines and water will be served with lunches and dinners

Transportation – Air-Conditioned mini-bus

## Prices

\$6,300 per person based on double occupancy

\$1,500 single supplement