

HERBAL JOURNEY TO PROVENCE June 21 – July 3, 2008

With Herbalists, Jane Bothwell and Cascade Anderson Geller

*DAILY ITINERARY

Day one, Saturday, June 21. In the morning we'll meet with the group at the Marseille Provence Airport to take the scenic drive north to the department of Drome. Along the way, we'll visit the rural Abbey of St. Michael of Thyme, dating to 1000 AD. Here the monks prepare a thyme liqueur. In this region, the patron saint Maceillin is celebrated each June when the men bring a bottle of their wine to the chapel, listen to the gospel in Provencal and have their wine blessed. After a toast to God, the remainder of the bottle is used as a medicinal remedy for the rest of the year. We may make one more stop before we arrive at our destination village, Buis les Baronnies. After getting settled, there will be time for relaxation and perhaps a refreshing swim in the pool. We'll end the day with our welcome dinner, compliments of the tour, at a delightful local restaurant.

Day two, Sunday, June 22. We'll start our day with a tribute to water as our special guest, Rosita Arvigo, leads us in the ceremony and techniques of sacred bathing. Then we'll explore the village and our lovely country of the boxwoods on foot, including the local botanical trail. We'll be on the lookout for herb ingredients to soak in the local olive oil for making a salve, and other preparations. Some of the highlights will be a visit to the local herb museum, Maison des Plantes Aromatiques et Medicinales, a stroll along the River Ouveze (watch some games of petanque), and a hike up to the rocky spine above the village called St. Julian. Food and other supplies will be available to buy in the village to stock your refrigerator and pantry.

Day three, Monday, June 23. St. John's Eve – Mid-Summer's Eve. The morning is free thyme. Since we'll have a late night at the celebration tonight, the morning is a good time to sleep in, lounge around getting to know each other better or take a stroll. At about 2 PM we will depart for the village of Valreas, about thirty beautiful miles to the northwest. This village has celebrated this ancient holiday with Le Nuit du Petite St.-Jean, the evening festivities to celebrate St. John's Eve, since 1504. We'll have time to explore the historic village. The cars will be available if you want to take a rest at any time to get ready for the evening. We'll have a later dinner and watch the magic begin. Plan on being home very late tonight but tomorrow you can sleep in and have some free thyme before our activities begin.

Day four, Tuesday, June 24. St. John's Day – Mid-Summer's Day, the ancient calendar's longest day of the year and the most powerful day to harvest herbs. The morning is devoted to free thyme and the afternoon to wild lavender. After lunch, we'll depart to visit the wild lavender patches in the surrounding mountains. We'll walk in ceremony and honor as we make lavender flower essences and harvest some for our products.

Day five, Wednesday, June 25. Today the colorful and delicious bounty of the region, and beyond, arrives in our village for market day. From about 8 AM until noon, there will be a feast for the senses. You can buy food and drink for the week and for the evening potluck – wonderful produce, cheeses, olives and tapenades, and Buis' market is famous for the herbalists who bring their wares including linden flowers, vibrant lavender bundles and other herbs. The honey is rich and thick. You'll see why we want to have our kitchens so that we can take full advantage of the bounty. There's also prepared foods and beverages available, so it's a fine place to eat brunch or tote a picnic back to our chalets. Part of the market is like a department store of sorts with colorful print fabrics, tablecloths, soaps, baskets, clothing, hardware, and many other items. In the late afternoon, we'll meet back at our chalets for a medicine-making and cooking class with our bounty. In the evening, we'll have a pot-luck, merry-making feast of our own.

Day six, Thursday, June 26. In the morning, we'll leave Buis-les-Baronnies taking the scenic drive to the southeast through the countryside of Sault, Le Pays de Sault, a UNESCO world heritage site known for its fields of lavender, wheat and sunflowers. In St-Maxamin-la-Ste-Baume, we will visit the Basilique Royale that dates from the 13th century and is dedicated to the relic of Mary Magdalene. Our final destination is the north side of the Massif de la Ste-Baume, the mountain of the sacred cave, said to be where Mary Madgalene spent her last three decades. This mountain is noted for its herbs, wildflowers and ancient forests. We'll hike to cave (about 45 minutes), herb walking along the way. We'll decide where to have dinner and return late in the evening.

Day seven, Friday, June 27. Today our outing is close by. We can go in the morning, eat lunch out and be home in time to take a warm afternoon swim. Or we can leave the morning free and enjoy the late afternoon light and let the tourists thin out since we are going to an area that is growing in popularity, for good reason. At some time, we'll depart for a tour of a fascinatingly beautiful region just to the west known as the Dentelles de Montmirail – limestone rocks of lace noted for their wildflowers. We'll take a hike, visit one of the “most beautiful villages in France”, as well as other perched villages, and end up in Vaison-la-Romaine, a large, ancient village noted for its Roman ruins.

Day eight, Saturday, June 28 In the mid-morning, we'll depart for the market at Mollans-sur-Ouveze, an area famous for many regional, biologique (organic) products. After eating and shopping, we'll continue on a loop tour through stunning countryside on the north side of Mt. Ventoux, the highest mountain in Provence. We'll visit fields of lavender, clary sage and other aromatics, as well as the wild herbs. We'll take a hike, visit stunning mountain villages such as Brantes with its center of arts, an organic winery, and other local farmers practicing biologique farming methods. If we desire, we can have an herb class, to process any items we may have procured in the past few days, and a potluck dinner with our market items.

Day nine, Sunday, June 29. Today is a day left open for surprises, relaxation and re-creation or outings on your own. There are possibilities for adventure if you are so inclined. There may be a brocantes (antique) markets to visit or perhaps we will have learned of a cultural event in a nearby village. Maybe a drive south to the famous Luberon or north to the mountains could materialize. You may want to catch up on writing post cards or journaling. There are always wonderful walks or scenic drives to be had. The day is our oyster...

Day ten, Monday, June 30. We're off for a full day's adventure to the Mediterranean Sea. We'll leave on the early side of the morning heading southwest to the legendary Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, honored as the landing site of the boat carrying the three Mary's, Martha, her resurrected brother Lazarus and the Egyptian servant of the Mary's, Sarah. Mary Salome founded a church here while Mary Magdalene ended up traveling to the cave at Ste-Baume. The Romany people (derogatorily called Gypsies) make an annual pilgrimage to this site in May to honor Sarah, their patron saint. The village is in the Carmargue, the huge bio-diverse delta of the Rhone River. If we are lucky, we will get to see some of the famous white horses, black bulls and pink flamingoes. We'll also meet many plants different from those of our highland village. On our way home, we'll stop in Arles, a World Heritage site dating back to 6th century Greeks and still dominated by the Roman arena. Van Gogh lived and painted here; in fact many of his most famous paintings were done here and it is where he sacrificed his ear.

Day eleven, Tuesday, July 1. In the morning there is free thyme. If inclined, Rosita can lead us in sacred bathing. After lunch, or if we may decide to eat lunch there, we'll drive to Nyons about 20 beautiful miles to the northwest. There we will visit the Distillerie Bleu, a small aromatic plant distillery owned by herbalist Phillippe Soquel. A shop is also onsite and wonderful essential oils, soaps and other products are available for purchase. Nyons is famous for their small, flavorful Tanche olives that have achieved the designation of AOC, or Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée, the French certification granted to certain foods or wines indicating their geographical authenticity. We will visit the olive museum and learn more about olive processing and olive oil production,

and eat good olives. If there's time, we'll also visit La Scourtinerie, an artisans workshop where coconut fiber is processed into mats, such as those once used to filter olive oil between the grinding stones. We will savor our last restaurant dinner tonight, compliments of the tour, and have a final potluck supper together tomorrow at our chalets.

Day twelve, Wednesday, July 2. Today, the last day of our tour, is market day in our village. It would have been the linden flower festival had not the Chinese market overtaken the French. There will be linden products anyway. It's a perfect time to get gifts and last minute regional treasures. If we decide to have a potluck, we'll get some food and drink to feast upon. We'll leave some time today for surprises, imagination and to catch-up with what we have not had time for as of yet. We'll visit any of the village sites we may have missed earlier. We'll bottle up our precious herbals and then try to get everything packed up. In the evening, we'll gather for our last supper together , a potluck at our chalets.

Day thirteen, Thursday, July 3. Our day of departure, we'll arrange our cars for drop offs at the airport or other stations of transportation. Merci beaucoup. Au revoir...

***Please note that this itinerary, like life itself, is subject to change without notice. We have included many outings but it is always possible to opt out of anything and spend some time doing absolutely nothing but enjoying the beautiful scenery and interesting village life. As a group, we may wish to make some rearrangements.**

Do you want to know more about anything on the itinerary? Wikipedia has some good information on a variety of the places we will visit as well as an enlightening discourse on the Romany people. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roma_people.