

Greetings Loire Travelers!

This letter will provide some insight into what to pack, what you'll experience on the cruise, and little things you should know to enhance your travel to Western France.

There's a lot of information here over a wide range of topics. Please read it over as soon as you can.

Airport Check in

Please check in for your flight at least 2 hours prior to flight time. I always recommend an early check in for a trip like this. You'll need to have your passport and confirmation/ticket number for your flight. It's a good time now to verify that your passport has 3 months validity left after your return home. If not, your passport must be renewed.

Remember your passport

Make a couple of photocopies to place in your baggage and another with a friend at home. If lost or stolen, passports are much easier to replace if you have a facsimile copy. Take a picture of the signature page as a backup.

No visas are required for France (for US or Canadian Citizens), but your passport must have at least 3 months validity remaining from the date you depart France for home.

The visa requirement for US visitors to Europe has been delayed once again. All you need is your passport. **Check your passport expiration date today.**

Dining aboard

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served aboard. I collected dietary preferences on the initial registration form. These have been passed on the cruise line. If you have a specific allergy to items, it's always a good idea to remind the service staff in the dining room.

Breakfast and lunch are typically a buffet service. Dinner in the main dining room is seated. There are no reservations. Generally, you are seated as you arrive. If you want to dine with friends, it's best that you arrive with them for seating together. Tables for 4 are most common, though some are available for 6 guests.

Touring in France:

There are two things I have found over the years that makes travel to France a much easier prospect. The first is the greeting. France is a very egalitarian country. It makes a difference to the average citizen providing a service to be greeted and treated like an equal. If you want the best service possible in a restaurant, coffee shop, or retail store, make a point of greeting the person taking your order or managing a shop with a "bonjour". A little goes a long way, and could make the difference of having a very positive or very negative personal experience.

The other issue relates to the art of dining in France. Dining in France is just not a rushed experience. If you only have an hour to complete your lunch, be sure to make the server aware of that. Even with advance notification, don't be surprised if your check doesn't appear automatically. You'll need to ask for it. A simple "monsieur (Où Madame/Mademoiselle) l'addition sil vous plait" will solve the problem. If you don't feel comfortable with the words, the act of scribbling a sum in the air accomplishes your goal. Your typical meal can take 3 times longer than you might expect just because that's the way it's done.

The Ship

I encourage you to check out the ship in advance using the link above to get a little more familiar with it in advance of our boarding. Here is a link to the [ship](#) and a [video](#) that should get you a little jazzed for the experience.

- Wi-fi** Yes, you'll be able to connect to the outside world. It's a marine satellite system, so probably a little slower than you might be used to. You'll find the best connection when we're stopped and/or when your other passengers aren't competing for bandwidth.
- Pool** Sorry, no pool on the ship
- Dining** Breakfast lunch and dinner are included each day. Check the daily schedule for times and menus

- Drinks** Beer and wine are served every day. Liquor is available for an additional cost.
- Laundry** There is no laundry available on board
- Climate** The ship is air conditioned
- Workout** No exercise room on the ship
- Telephone** I assume that most of you will bring a phone. See the section below that discusses phone plans and calling.
- Smoking** Smoking is not permitted anywhere on board.

24-hour clock

Get used to using the 24-hour clock. Most of Europe works this way. 11:30 pm is noted as 23:30. This is especially important when catching any sort of scheduled transportation. Add 12 to PM times to come up with the correct number. Two PM becomes 14:00. Five AM is 05:00.

Weather

Late April weather typically sees average temps from 57-70 degrees. With the level of precipitation and temperatures, the weather averages very much resemble weather in the Pacific Northwest.

I suggest checking Accuweather.com or Weather.com for a 10-day forecast just before you pack.

Suggested Dress

There is no established dress code for this tour. It's entirely up to you. The one rule that the cruise line would like to see enforced is that men wear long pants in the dining room for dinner.

There is absolutely no reason to pack any formal wear. Be comfortable. Because of cool evenings, I suggest a layered approach. Cool mornings, warming in the afternoon. I have a shell that blocks wind and rain which will be in my suitcase as I arrive in Paris. I may never take it out, but it's there if I need it.

Morning tours may be a bit chilly, with warming as the day goes on. We may also experience some precipitation along the way. Layer up in the morning if it's chilly.

Remove layers as the day progresses. Bring a lightweight raincoat and/or a collapsible umbrella with you.

Be certain to bring comfortable walking shoes. Break them in before the trip. Cobbled streets and uneven surfaces are common.

We've got daylight hours to spare during our time in France with sunrise about 6:30 AM and sunset occurring a little after 9:40 PM.

Speaking French

The ship adjusts with announcements and staff that accommodate different nationalities. To avoid multiple announcements in different languages, I will request announcements be limited to English.

When ashore, it pays to use French wherever you can. The effort is appreciated. There are recent products on the market with translation capabilities. I use google translate on my phone if I come across a menu item that's worrisome. There's a nice feature with the app that allows me to scan an entire page at once for translation. Great for restaurants.

Shipboard Account

The currency on board is the Euro. You'll be asked to register a credit card on arrival so that you can charge items throughout the week. You'll settle the account with cash or card before disembarkation.

Electrical plugs and adaptors

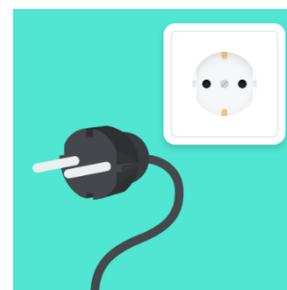
On board, the outlets available are 110 VAC and/or 220 VAC at 50 Hz, most vessel areas and cabins feature European type plugs.

For the ship, and if you plan to stay longer in France, you will need to bring C electrical adaptors. See the diagram below.

You will need an adaptor and convertor for most US manufactured electrical devices that you take. The convertor changes the voltage, and adaptor allows you to plug it in. US Voltage is 110-120, and Europe runs on 220-240 volts. Battery chargers, curling irons, hair dryers are among these items. You can buy adapter/convertor kits at most drug stores. They come with many adaptors.

There is a wide range of plug types. You will need to use an F type plug, shown here.

Your computer and/or smart phone charger, if you bring one, should have already come equipped with a transformer/convertor in the cord. Check the voltage requirements on the transformer portion of the power cord. If it comes with a transformer in the cord, you will just need a plug adapter, not a current



Type F

Adaptors/convertors are available at travel stores, Target, Amazon, etc.

Telephones

Call your provider to see what they recommend for phone coverage overseas. Each year it seems that US carriers become more competitive with coverage plans for Europe.

If your current phone isn't equipped to work in Europe, one of the most affordable options is to buy a simple phone over there with pre-purchased minutes. There are many local phone stores in Europe that will sell inexpensive phones with preloaded minutes if you need to have the means to call home. An inexpensive smartphone preloaded with 300 minutes will probably cost you less than \$100.

Whatsapp

This is the app most widely used to communicate in Europe and elsewhere. It's sponsored by Meta (Face Book) and is free. It's important that you have an international data plan for texting. Otherwise, you will only receive and send messages when you're tapped into Wi-Fi. If you're not getting messages with the app in real time, the benefits are largely lost. Contact your carrier to get a data to see about a data plan.

Calls are free using the app as long as the person you're calling is also using the app. The quality can sometimes be sketchy in terms of quality when you're falling

back on 5G transmission. It uses a VOIP technology so that you sometimes get some echo. Making your call while on Wi-Fi can solve that problem.

I would like you all to download this app if you're not already using it. Send a text to me, using the app, at 425 417 3322 (with your name, please) so that I can add you to the Loire group. The same goes for anyone staying longer in Bordeaux or Normandy. I will add you to a Whatsapp group for these tours. Last minute changes sometimes cannot be avoided. This is a great way to provide updates.

Any changes to schedule during the week will be announced and posted to the Whatsapp group. It's a great tool provided everyone uses it.

Currency

The Euro has been the official currency in France since 2002. The dollar has taken a beating the last few months, and right now, you should expect that it will take about \$1.13 to purchase one euro. I'm hoping it swings back the other way over the next few weeks, but plan on spending a little more over there.

Bear in mind that these are the rates at which banks buy from other banks. The Dollar moves up and down a few pegs in a week's time, but has been mostly stable the past month or so.

Spending overseas

The ATM or Bancomat is the best way to obtain cash in France. They are easy to find along the route. Plan on a trip to the ATM every other day to withdraw Euro. You get the best exchange rate and won't have to worry about whether a vendor will accept a credit card.

Credit cards give you a fairly good exchange rate and most card offer consumer protection on your purchase. You also have a record of your purchase. Some bank cards charge 1-2% for purchases made in foreign currency, which offsets the beneficial rate somewhat. Chase Bank and a few others offer cards that do not charge the foreign exchange fee. Check with your bank to see about foreign currency fees. Make sure you keep your receipts.

I have found that Visa cards seem to have the widest acceptance, followed by Mastercard. It is sometimes difficult to get a vendor to accept American Express, perhaps because of their fee structure. Most smaller shops will not want to accept your card. They get hit with fees that make cash a much more attractive alternative for them.

Bringing US Currency and hoping to exchange notes is a mistake. Banks keep shorter hours. Some don't offer foreign exchange, and many others won't like the condition of the notes you want to change. It certainly couldn't hurt to bring some US Dollars (new bills, \$50 or \$100 denomination) to use as a back up in case your card gets compromised or your banks security department locks it down.

You should be able to order some Euros from your bank if you want to arrive there with some (though really not necessary). There is usually a fee and you have to allow time for your bank to secure the currency. It's easiest just to hit the ATM at the airport or the nearest one to your destination. At each ATM Stop, get enough cash to last you for a couple days. **Please note that airport and rail station ATM machines usually charge a higher fee. The last note related to ATMs is to use one that's associated with a bank. The "stand-alone" machines can charge more. Euronet machines are a rip off and will charge a higher exchange and more fees. Avoid them.**

Traveler's checks are a thing of the past. They are a distant third to Cash (ATM), followed by credit card.

My bank (chase) no longer wants me to notify them of overseas card usage. You may want to check with your bank to see what their preferences are. Be prepared to have a card stop working while you're there. Bank loss management departments now find it easier to simply shut down your account at the first sign of irregularity than to manage individual travelers. Be aware that your credit card may be suspended with overseas use. If generally takes a call to your bank to rectify the problem. **You should be sure to get the toll-free international number for your bank in the event of an over-reaching security algorithm at your bank.**

Another Note: I have a wallet that is **RFID protected**. Some credit and debit cards can be read remotely using a portable reader. Add a level of protection by purchasing RFID sleeves for your cards. You can also find RFID wallets online.

Packing your bags

There are a few excellent websites dedicated to the art of packing for a trip. I have reproduced some of that information here, but you may want to visit some of these sites yourself. The links are www.oratory.com/travel, and <https://happytowander.com/suitcase-packing-tips/>. Unlike other ships I have chartered, there are no laundry services available on board. Keep this in mind as you pack.

Laundry

There are no laundry services available on board the Loire Princesse. Guests coming with me to Bordeaux or afterward to Bayeux will have the opportunity to send laundry with the hotels there.

Security/Safety

Outside of Paris itself, there is very little violent crime toward tourists in France. There is, however, a great deal of pickpocketing and scams in which tourists are a prime target.

Be particularly aware of your belongings and surroundings in crowded places. Markets, churches, restaurants are places where a lack of attention can lead to a snag in your holiday fun.

Take a photo of your passport with your phone. It's also a good idea to photocopy the data page and zip it into a suitcase pocket. Leave a copy with a friend or relative that is able to fax or email that copy should you need it. It's much easier to replace a lost or stolen passport if you have a facsimile to present.

Rick Steves and people that have used them, swear by a money belt. I've always found them to be somewhat uncomfortable, but you may want to give it a try. Please! No wallets in back pockets! Purses and backpacks should always be zipped closed and held in front of you in crowded situations. See the section on RFID protection under Banking.

Buddy up! If you're going out, don't go alone. There is safety in numbers.

Each cruise cabin has a personal safe for guest use.

Suggested Gratuities

Taxi drivers generally expect an extra 1-2 euro in the city. If you get help with your bags and you have an exceptional driver, then 5% is a nice addition.

Hotel porters-generally 1 € per bag.

I generally tip a guide for a ½ day tour €5. A little more if they were exceptional.

Restaurant servers are tipped 5% to 10%. If the service or meal was bad, don't tip.

Here is a paragraph from CroisiEurope with tipping suggestions:

Tipping habits vary according to the country and culture. At CroisiEurope, tips are collected globally at the end of the trip and shared equally among all the crew members.

This attention from our passengers allows us to show that they have appreciated the quality of the services and the attention that was given to them during the cruise, at all levels.

How much should I leave? A tip of between £5 and £10 per day and per person is an average, but each passenger is free to give what he or she wishes. An envelope is left in your cabin during your last evening on board. Put it in the box provided for this purpose at the ship's reception desk when you disembark.

Motion issues on board

You will rarely encounter any motion issues on a river cruise.

Swim gear

The Loire Princesse does not offer a pool or spa. The Renaissance Bordeaux has a roof top pool if you're coming early. There is no pool at the Bayeux if you're staying later.

Drinks

There is a full-service bar aboard. Wine, beer, and soft drinks are available to you throughout the day for no charge. Liquor is available at the bar for a charge.

Arrival/Departure at the ship

I will email a boarding card to you about 10 days before departure. You can print a copy or add the pdf to your phone. You'll need it to board to board the ship.

Guests are welcome to board beginning at 5:00 PM on the 25th. If you're in Nantes and want to drop bags, you can do this after 12:00 PM. They'll hold them for you until you return to board at 5:00.

The location of the ship is 30 Quai Fernand Crouan. It's centrally located in town. I suggest you Uber from the airport or the rail station. The French Rail station is just 4.2km from the cruise location, a 36-minute walk or ten-minute taxi or Uber. The airport is just 15 minutes by Uber or taxi to the south.

Charter: May 25-30, 2025					Nantes Round Trip
DATE	DEPART	FROM	ARRIVE	AT	EXCURSIONS
25/05/2025	EMB 17H00	NANTES			
	19H30	NANTES			
26/05/2025			01H00	ST-NAZAIRE	ST NAZAIRE SHIPYARDS + MUSEUM ESCAL ATLANTIQUE 09H00
	13H00	ST-NAZAIRE	19H00	NANTES	CRUISE ON ERDRE RIVER - BATEAUX NANTAIS 21H00
27/05/2025		NANTES			CITY OF NANTES 08H00
					ROUTE DU MUSCADET 14h
28/05/2025	02H30	NANTES	12H30	CHALONNES	CITY OF ANGERS / 14H00 CHATEAU DE BRISSAC 14H00
29/05/2025	12H30	CHALONNES	16H30	ANCENIS	08h00 FULL DAY AT THE CHATEAUX DE LA LOIRE
	23H59	ANCENIS			
30/05/2025			04H00	NANTES	
	DEB 09H00				

Traveler Name list

I am often asked about publishing a guest list of participants. Given security and privacy issues, I don't generally send guest name lists in advance of travel. Using the Whatsapp phone/text program will provide you with contact details for other tour members. The same goes for the end of the tour. If you want to share contact information with other travelers, Whatsapp is the best way.

Ship times are always subject to change. Check for current schedules at the front desk.

Sunday, May 25th

Board Ship	5:00 PM (30 Quai Fernand Crouan)
Depart Nantes	7:00 PM
Arrive St Nazaire	1:00 AM +1

Monday, May 26th

Depart St Nazaire	1:00 PM
Arrive Nantes	8:00 PM

Tuesday, May 27th

Depart Nantes	6:30 PM
Arrive Ancenis	11:30 PM

Wednesday, May 28th

Depart Ancenis	8:00 AM
Arrive Chalennes	1:00 PM

Thursday, May 29th

Depart Chalennes	12:00 PM
Arrive Ancenis	5:00 PM
Depart Ancenis	8:30 PM

Friday, May 30th

Arrive Nantes	9:00 AM
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Pre-cruise tour of Bordeaux

With the exception of 6-8 guests who are arriving early, participants will arrive in Bordeaux the afternoon of May 22nd. We're staying at the Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel. Guests arriving at the property will be able to check in anytime after 3:00 PM. Reservations are held under your name. The same applies if you are coming in a day early. Uber is the best way in from the airport (approx. €39) or Bordeaux St Jean rail station (approx. €19). I arrive the evening of the 21st by train from CDG, but not to the hotel before 9:00 PM.

We have dinner planned at a nearby restaurant for 7:30 PM on the 22nd. Prior to that we'll meet at the rooftop bar for a drink at 6:00 PM.

We have two full days of touring in and around Bordeaux with a start of 9:00 AM both days. Breakfast is included in your room charges. We'll break up into smaller groups of 8 to facilitate the tour.

You're on your own for dinner the nights of the 23rd and 24th. I suggest asking the concierge at the hotel for suggestions.

We'll depart Bordeaux for Nantes the morning of the 25th just after breakfast. The drive is about 4 hours. We'll stop for a lunch break in the city of La Rochelle for about 2 hours. We plan to arrive at the pier in Nantes about 2:00 PM and will drop all the bags off at the ship. Be sure to have all your bags tagged with your name so they make their way to your cabin.

We have a local guide greeting us at the ship to start a walking tour of the old town between 3:00 and 5:00 PM. We can begin boarding the ship at 5:00.

Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel 16 Rue de Gironde [+33 5 19 80 02 00](tel:+33519800200)

Thursday, May 22nd	Overnight Renaissance Bordeaux	
Meet at Gina (bar) at Renaissance Bordeaux for a drink		6:00 PM
Dinner at Café Maritime		7:30 PM

Friday, May 23rd Overnight Renaissance Bordeaux
 Depart for tour to Arcachon, Dunes de Pilat with wine tasting 9:00 AM
 Return to hotel 6:00 PM

Saturday, May 24th Overnight Renaissance Bordeaux
 Depart for day tour to Saint Emilion for wine tasting 9:00 AM
 Return to the hotel 6:00 PM

Sunday, May 25th Depart for Nantes
 Ready to board the coach for the drive to Nantes 9:45 AM
 Stop for snack and leg stretch en-route 11:30 AM
 Resume route to Nantes 12:30 PM
 Arrive 30 Quai Fernand Crouan 2:30 PM
 Begin walking tour of Nantes 3:00 PM
 End walking tour at ship location 5:00 PM

Post Cruise tour to Normandy

We depart directly from the ship at 9:30 for the drive to our hotel in Bayeux. En-route we'll make a stop for about 90 minutes at Mont Saint-Michel to allow time for a quick look and light lunch on your own.

We're staying at la Reine Mathilde, a boutique property in the heart of the city. We have two full days of touring the beaches and WWII sites on the peninsula. The group will be split into smaller groups of 11 guests for our two days. The proposed itinerary is shown below. It's possible that the days may be reversed, depending on the guide's preference.

Hotel La Reine Mathilde-23 Rue Larcher, Bayeux [+33 2 31 92 08 13](tel:+33231920813)

Friday, May 30th
 Depart Loire Princesse 9:30 AM
 Arrive Mont Saint-Michel 12:00 PM
 Depart Mont-Saint Michel 2:00 PM
 Arrive Bayeux 4:00 PM
 Evening free Overnight la Reine Mathilde

Saturday, May 31st

Begin the tour day at 9:00 AM with an expected return to the hotel at 6:00 PM. We've a full day of touring planned of the region today with important historic sites like [Pointe du Hoc](#), [Omaha Beach](#), and the [American military cemetery](#) at Colleville-sur-Mer. We'll stop for lunch mid-day near Colleville. For our touring of historic sites, we break up into smaller groups with personal guides. Dinner tonight is on your own. (BL)

Sunday, June 1st

Same start time as before. Another day of touring the [Normandy Peninsula](#) with a focus on what took place there 70 years ago. Today we visit Ouistreham, [Pegasus Bridge](#), and the [Mémorial de Caen](#) before returning to our hotel in Bayeux. We'll have a farewell dinner near the hotel this evening at 7:30.

Monday, June 2nd

We'll load the coach early and be on our way by 8:30 AM with a planned arrival at CDG (Terminal 2E) at 12:00 noon.

If you come up with any specific questions for me about the tour, please send those by email to brad@nwtravel.com. I may repost the question and answer on the whatsapp group for other guests to reference as well.

See you in France.

Brad