Vineyards and Wines of the Loire Valley
with Abby Nash, faculty leader
September 27 – October 5, 2012

Itinerary

September 27, 2012  Departure from U.S.
Depart U.S. on independent flights to Paris

September 28  Arrival in Paris
After arriving in the Paris, transfer independently to the Hotel Pont Royal on the Left Bank in central Paris.
Start the afternoon by joining a Parisian culinary expert on a food-focused tour of Left Bank gourmet icons Boulangerie Poilâne, Chocolatier Debauve et Gallais, and Fromagerie Androuet. This evening, celebrate the beginning of our journey into French food and wine with a dinner at the Ferme Saint Simon, just steps away from our hotel.

Hotel Pont Royal, Paris (D)

September 29  Paris—Chartres—Blois—Tours
Depart Paris early this morning for our drive southwestward to the Loire Valley. En route, stop in Chartres to see one of the most important medieval cathedrals in the world. Take a guided tour of the cathedral with Malcolm Miller, longtime author and expert on the Chartres Cathedral, its history, its artwork, and its hidden meanings. Reaching the banks of the Loire River, continue to the village of Blois. Before touring the Chateau de Blois, one of the most important royal residences of the Loire, relax over a gourmet lunch at the chateau’s own Restaurant l’Orangerie, presided over by chef Jean-Marc Molveaux. Follow in the footsteps of Joan of Arc, King Francis I, and many other great historical figures while touring the Chateau de Blois. In the late afternoon, arrive at the Hotel l’Univers in Tours, our home for the next six nights. Dinner is on your own this evening, with multiple recommendations available from your tour escort.

Hotel l’Univers, Tours (B, L)

September 30  Villandry—Azay-le-Rideau—Touraine Wineries
Begin the morning with a brief visit to the Renaissance chateau of Azay-le-Rideau. We then make the brief drive to the chateau of Villandry, famous for its gardens. Schedule permitting, meet owner Henri Carvallo and learn about his ambitious plans for preserving and expanding the gardens. Later, we will tour the property with an expert guide and participate in the Journees du Potager, a festival celebrating Villandry’s one-of-a-kind vegetable garden. Next, have lunch at Le Chai at the Manoir de Restigné, a Michelin-starred restaurant. This afternoon, we tour two prominent vineyards: Hubert Audebert and the Chateau de Parnay. These visits will allow us to experience the many local varietals of Cabernet Franc and Saumur-Champigny. Dinner is independent in Tours this evening.

Hotel l’Univers, Tours (B, L)

October 1  Tours—Vouvray
This morning, take part in an optional 3-hour guided tour of our home base of Tours. Explore the city’s streets and squares, palaces and churches, and morning market. Enjoy a visit to the Touraine Wines Museum for a lecture on the history of wine in this region of France and a walk through the museum’s 13th-century cellars. Free time is given for an independent lunch.

In the afternoon, we head to the nearby village of Vouvray. We will visit two very different wineries beginning with the large production of Jean-Claude Aubert, who focuses primarily on Chenin Blanc wines. We continue to the small but award-winning winery of a young couple where we will taste a wide variety of their wines, ranging from dry to demi-sec, culminating with a sparkling white. Our day comes to a conclusion with a dinner at Restaurant Les Chalands, a traditional favorite of local winemakers for over fifty years.

*Hotel l’Univers, Tours (B, D)*

**October 2**  
Chenonceau–Amboise—Chaumont

Spend the morning discovering the Chateau de Chenonceau, arching across the placid waters of the River Cher, and Clos Lucé, the final home of Leonardo da Vinci where a museum is now dedicated to the artist and inventor. A special treat today is our multi-course lunch at the two-starred Michelin restaurant, Domaine des Hauts de Loire. The afternoon is dedicated to the dozens of display gardens at the Chaumont International Garden Festival. Second only to the Chelsea Flower Show in European importance, this garden fair is well-known for its huge diversity of plants, flowers, and elegant lay-outs, with over 25 separate gardens created by top European designers. It makes for a lovely complement to the many castles and wineries we are visiting on the tour. Back in Tours, the evening is independent.

*Hotel l’Univers, Tours (B, L)*

**October 3**  
Sancerre—Chavignol

Drive to Sancerre this morning for a special visit and lunch at one of the region’s finest wineries, that of Alphose Maillot. In the afternoon, after a visit to the winery of Pascal Cotat, we will visit a cheese dairy outside the small village of Chavignol to learn about the timeless production of the Crottin de Chavignol goat cheese. Our hostess, Isabelle Naudet, a respected traditional producer of Crottin de Chavignol, will walk us through the production process before we enjoy a tasting of several varieties of different ages, paired with local wines. Returning toward Tours, we stop in town of Bourges for a tour of its UNESCO-designated Gothic cathedral. We return to the hotel in the evening, with an independent dinner back in Tours.

*Hotel l’Univers, Tours (B, L)*

**October 4**  
Fontevraud–Chinon—Auvers-sur-Oise—Paris

Pack your bags before todays’ activities, as we will not be returning to Tours. With the luggage on the coach, begin the day with a visit to the Fontevraud Abbey, burial place of Richard the Lion Heart, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and other Plantagenet rulers. Not far away is Chinon, where we take a walking tour before free time for lunch. In the afternoon, drive to the northern side of Paris for a special farewell dinner at the Hostellerie du Nord, located in the small town of Auvers-sur-Oise, a favorite of Impressionist painters. After dinner, continue to a convenient airport hotel, avoiding a very early departure time and minimizing the amount of time that would have been spent in transit the next morning.

*Hotel l’Univers, Tours (B, D)*

**October 5**  
TRANSFER TO PARIS, RETURN TO U.S.

Early morning transfer (7:30am) to the Paris-CDG airport to meet afternoon flights back to the U.S.A.