

DISCOVERING FRANCE: THE EASTERN LOIRE VALLEY

Course Outline

Course ACLT6207

Since 1986, Paul Davenport has been driving and cycling through the French countryside with his family, friends, and university students and alumni, combining sightseeing and wonderful food and wine with conversations about French life and culture. Join the former President of Western University in class as he brings his trips to life with images, stories about the secrets of this magical valley, and selections from great films and literature. Visit the great chateaux and churches, as well as the small towns and vineyards that Paul knows so well. The course is set up like a driving (or cycling) tour through the French countryside: we go from town to town and discover the historical and cultural gems which make France special. While our total route is only 300 km, the sites we see and stories we learn are truly spectacular. Our trip has four parts, corresponding to the four classes:

- 1 Tours to Amboise
- 2 Amboise to Valencay
- 3 Valencay to Blois
- 4 Blois to Orleans

Course Objectives. By the end of this course, you will have a greater knowledge of and familiarity with selected aspects of the history, geography, culture, wines, food, and every day life of the Loire Valley. You will learn about: the wars of religion in 16th century France; the great pamphleteer Paul Louis Courier; Vouvray wine; Leonardo da Vinci in Amboise; the women of Chenonceau; the great diplomat Talleyrand at Valencay; Alain-Fournier, his one novel *Le Grand Meaulnes*, and the author's tragic death; the TinTin children's stories and their connection to the Chateau de Cheverny; the three Musketeers (and why we say three when there seem to be four); the hit ordered by King Henry III at the Chateau de Blois; Molière's play at Chambord and how it finally seduced the King; and Joan of Arc's remarkable leadership at Orleans.

Readings. Our four readings are English translations from the French. All are available in English for free on the web. Our four French authors are Anatole France.

DVDs. With each of our four courses, we view excerpts from a DVD which illustrates the themes of the course and brings to life French history and culture.

Class 1 Tours to Amboise

We travel east from Tours to Amboise along the Loire and Cher Rivers.

- Tours: St. Martin and the Miracle of Springtime in November
- Joan of Arc stops in Tour on her way to confront the British
- Montlouis-sur-Loire: A Competitive Wine Maker
- Azay-sur-Cher: The Priest who banned the Sunday dance
- Larcay: Murder in the Forest
- Veretz: The pen is mightier than the sword
- Noizay: Dusty bottles of Vouvray wine in caves 500 years old

- Amboise

Class 2 Amboise to Valencay

- Amboise: the Amboise Conspiracy of 1560
- Clos-Lucé and Leonardo da Vinci: The Legend Continues
- Chenonceau: Four remarkable women
- Montrichard: The King's cynical arranged marriage of a competitor backfires!
- Aigeuvives: Monks in the forest
- Zoo Beauval: Music hall girl creates a zoo
- Valencay

Class 3 Valencay to Blois

- Valencay: Napoleon I call his top diplomat "crap in a silk stocking"
- Romorantin-Lathenay: home of a great King and Queen
- Sologne: a dangerous swamp rescued by Napoleon III
- Alain-Fournier and a magical novel, *Le Grand Meaulnes*
- Chateau de Cheverny: a gorgeous family home with a tradition of deer hunting
- Hergé and the Adventures of Tintin, with Milou, Captain Haddock, and Professor Tournesol
- Chaumont-sur-Loire: a substitute for Chenonceau rejected by Diane de Poitiers
- Catherine de' Medici and her astrologer Ruggieri look into the future; she doesn't like it.
- Blois

Class 4 Blois to Orleans

- Four stages of construction of the Chateau de Blois: Medieval, Gothic, Renaissance, and Classical
- Chateau de Blois: King Henry III orders an assassination in 1588
- Denis Papin, a brilliant Huguenot inventor exiled from France
- Chambord: Molière wins the King's favor for his play after Lully jumps on the harpsichord
- The Count of Chambord declines to be King because he wants a white flag
- Saint-Laurent-Nouant: does nuclear power have a future in France?
- A decision of the Council of Beaugency in 1152 indirectly leads to centuries of war with England
- The capital of Gaul revolts against Caesar and drives off Attila the Hun.
- France in despair: the siege of Orleans by the English, 1428-29