



Orchid Digest's May 2023 Orchid Tour to Provence and Rhône-Alpes, France

Join the Orchid Digest for a unique, extraordinary eleven-day orchid and cultural safari through two of France's iconic regions: Provence and the Rhône Alpes. Collectively these two regions are known for their rich botanical biodiversity. This is the peak blooming period in the regions on our itinerary.

The trek will take us through several habitats: Mediterranean grasslands, forests, wetlands, and alpine meadows. We will also see orchids amongst rocky limestone outcroppings and along waterways and road embankments.

The tour begins Thursday, May 18, 2023, with two and a half days of exploration in Provence. We then move north for eight days of travel throughout the Ardèche-Rhône-Alpes Region, concluding on Sunday, May 28, 2023, in the Central Rhône Valley city of Valence.

While the orchids are the *raison d'être* for the guided tour, we've also earmarked a sampling of France's beautiful historical, cultural, and geological sites to visit. And no trip to France is complete without indulging in local gastronomic specialties and wines of the regions along our planned route!

If you are an orchid enthusiast who loves off-the-beaten path travel to observe orchids in situ with a good dose of culture, history, and gourmandize, this tour is for you! We invite you to join the Orchid Digest for its second tour through Southeastern France this coming May.

- Dates: Thursday, May 18, 2023, through Sunday, May 28, 2023.

We will meet at the train station in the Mediterranean Port City of Toulon by 4:00 pm and conclude the tour at the TGV Station (the Bullet Train) in Valence at 4:30 pm. Specifics will be sent to registrants upon payment of their deposit.

- Tour Group: Minimum of 10 people. Maximum of 12.

There will be two guides/translators: Nancy Benay and Corinne Georgin Legendre of EcoRando Tourism Services. Local orchid experts will join us at several different sites.

- Cost: \$4,000.00. Single supplement \$300.00

Included: lodging, food, transportation with a driver, and entrance fees to museums, cultural, and speleological sites listed in the itinerary.

Not included: round-trip travel to Toulon, France, and from Valence, France; travel insurance (required by the Orchid Digest), beverages including alcohol, purchases, and tips for drivers and local guides.

- \$500.00 per person donation to the Orchid Digest Corporation is included in the tour price. Donations to the Orchid Digest (a 501(c)3 organization) may be tax-deductible depending on the fiscal policy of your country of residence.

- Deposit and Payment:

The deposit of \$1,000 is due Wednesday, February 22, 2023. (Refundable up to this

date)

Final Payment is due Monday, April 3, 2023.

- Hotel Lodging:
 - 1) Hotel le Coudon***, La Farlède, Var, Provence, 5/18-5/19
 - 2) Hotel l'Atrium****, Valence, Drôme, Rhône-Alpes, 5/20-5/23
 - 3) Le Château du Poët Célard, le Poët Célard, Drôme Provençale, Rhône-Alpes 5/24-5/25
 - 4) Hotel Saint Vincent**, Apremont, Savoie, Rhône-Alpes 5/26-5/27
- What will we see? Genera include *Anacamptis*, *Orchis*, *Dactylorhiza*, *Neotenia*, *Serapias*, *Cephalanthera*, *Limodorum*, *Cypripedium*, *Himantoglossum*, *Listeria*, *Neottia*, and a few others depending on the progress of this year's blooming season. A highlight in Provence will be the opportunity to observe the rare *Ophrys philippi*, once considered extinct but rediscovered in 2000.
- In addition to viewing orchids, we will visit historical and cultural sites, including Chateau de Crussol, Valhrona Chocolate-Tain Hermitage; Resistance Memorial Visit-Col de Chau, Resistance Museum, Vassieux, and the Speleological Cavern, Choranche.
- **IMPORTANT INFORMATION:** All participants must have a travel medical insurance policy with a minimum of \$50,000 evacuation coverage. A travel cancellation policy is also advised, but that is up to the participant. All participants must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and must complete liability and medical information forms before the trip. US passports must be valid for at least three months BEYOND your planned departure date.

Itinerary

Thursday, May 18, 2023: Arrive by 4:00 pm at the train station in the Mediterranean Port City of Toulon, France. Transfer to the Hotel le Coudon, La Farlède (north of Toulon). <https://www.hotel-le-coudon.fr/en>. Welcome dinner.

Friday, May 19, 2023 (le Var). Morning visit near the village of Belgentier to observe the rare *Ophrys philippi*. Afternoon: orchid hunting near the Massif and the Plaine des Maures in the Var. An orchid specialist from the SFO PACA will accompany us throughout the day. Overnight at the Hotel le Coudon.

Saturday, May 20, 2023 (les Bouches du Rhône). We will explore the Massif de la Sainte Baume, a short range of mountains that is northeast of Marseille. Due to its higher elevation, the orchids and other native flora continue to bloom through May and June, notably *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Anacamptis* (syn. *Orchis*) *laxiflora*, *Orchis mascula*, *Ophrys apifera*, *Ophrys scolopax*, *Ophrys sphegodes* ssp. *provincialis*, *Platanthera chlorantha*, and *Himantoglossum hircinum*.

Late afternoon board a TGV (bullet train) at the Gare (Station) TGV at Aix-en-Provence for the short trip to Valence in the Northern Rhône Valley, where we begin the second phase of the tour through the Drôme, the Vercors, the Drôme Provençale, the Diois, and a corner of the Savoie near Chambéry. Overnight at the Hotel l'Atrium, Valence. <https://www.atrrium-hotel.fr>.

Sunday, May 21, 2023 (Château de Crussol on the Ardèche side of the Rhône River). The morning will be spent exploring the orchid-dense slopes below the ruins of the medieval Château de Crussol with its amazing panoramic views of the vineyards and orchards in the surrounding countryside. Among the species that bloom at Crussol in May are *Ophrys apifera*, *Ophrys fuciflora* (syn. *druentica*), *Orchis simia*, *Orchis militaris*, *Anacamptis* (syn. *Orchis*) *pyramidalis*, *Limodorum abortivum*, and *Cephalanthera* species. In the afternoon, we will indulge in wine and chocolate during a scheduled visit to the Vineyard of Tain-Hermitage and Valrhona's Cité du Chocolat for a visit to its interactive museum and a wine and chocolate pairing. Overnight at the Hotel l'Atrium.

Monday, May 22, 2023: Le Vallon de Saint Genis, Rochefort-Samson (in the Monts du Matin, Drôme): "A Carpet of Orchids." With forty-two species, numerous primary hybrids, and some very fascinating pelorics, the Vallon de Saint Genis is one of the top orchid habitats in France. Some local native orchid specialists have dubbed it the "Holy Grail of Orchid Sites" in France, and during the spring months, it becomes a pilgrimage site. We will spend the full day exploring the Vallon and its floral carpet, accompanied by a local orchid expert from the SFO Rhône-Alpes.

May-blooming species: *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Cephalanthera damasonium*, *Cephalanthera longifolia*, *Dactylorhiza sambucina*, *Limodorum abortivum*, *Neotinea ustulata*, *Coeloglossum viride*, *Neottia ovata*, *Ophrys apifera*, *Ophrys druentica*, *Ophrys fuciflora*, *Ophrys* × *flavicans* (syn. *drumana*), *Orchis anthropophora*, *Orchis militaris*, and *Orchis simia*. Add to this list numerous hybrids in addition to the famous "Mickeyes," as the French call them, aka pelorics of *Ophrys speculum* and *Ophrys fuciflora*. Overnight at the Hotel l'Atrium.

Tuesday, May 23, 2023: Orchids and WWII History Day of the Vercors (la Drôme). The day will be spent discovering the history and the geography of the Massif of the Vercors. The morning will begin with a drive along the Route de la Combe Laval, a scenic balcony road constructed by Italian stone workers during the second half of the 19th Century. It has been described as the most magnificent road in the French Alps. Throughout the day, we will stop to view orchids in bloom along the roadsides, and the last stop of the day will take us to the alpine meadows of the high plateau at Font d'Urle.

However, the focus for the day is a page out of World War II history as we follow the French Resistance Movement through the high plateaus of the Vercors in and around the villages of la Chapelle-en-Vercors and Vassieux-en Vercors. The resistance fighters used the high plateaus of the Massif du Vercors as a refuge during WWII as they carried out sabotage operations against the German troops based in the region. Our guide will be Etienne Legendre, a certified mountain guide and long-time resident of the Vercors. Overnight at the Hotel l'Atrium.

Wednesday, May 24, 2023: Orchids and Medieval Villages in the Drôme Provençale. We will leave Valence on the morning of the 24th to drive to the Drôme Provençale. It gets its name from its geographic, historical, and climatic proximity with the more traditional provençal departments of the Vaucluse and the Alpes of Haute Provence located to the south. We will stop to explore the medieval, perched village of Bourdeaux, hike along the banks of the Roubion River, a wetlands habitat, and then continue a few kilometers south to the nearby village of Crupiès to explore for the afternoon. Among the species typically in bloom in mid-May are *Ophrys druentica*, *Ophrys fuciflora* ssp. *demangei*, *Ophrys bertolonii*, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Himantoglossum hircinum*, *Limodorum abortivum*, *Orchis anthropophora*,

Platanthera bifolia, and *Neotinea ustulata*. Overnight at Le Château du Poët Célard, le Poët Célard, Drôme Provençale, Rhône-Alpes.

Thursday, May 25, 2023: The Orchids of the Vallon de Combeau (le Parc Naturel du Vercors). Our destination is the Vallon de Combeau, on the southern tip of the Parc Naturel du Vercors. Its forests and meadows are rich in various species including, *Neottia ovata*, *Neottia nidus-avis*, *Cephalanthera longifolia*, *Cephalanthera damasonium*, *Orchis mascula*, and *Orchis purpurea*. However, the Vallon is a particularly well-known habitat for several “less common” native orchids *Orchis spitzelii*, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, and the iconic *Cypripedium calceolus*. Overnight at Le Château du Poët Célard.

Friday, May 26, 2023: Orchids of Chichilianne and the Col de Prayet (Southern Isère). Morning and early afternoon exploration in and around Chichilianne and le Col de Prayet, where we should have the opportunity to view other “less common” species, *Orchis pallens*, *Dactylorhiza majalis*, *Corallorhiza trifida*, *Orchis spitzelii*, *Neottia cordata*, *Coeloglossum virida*, and *Cypripedium calceolus*.

In the afternoon, we will drive to Chambéry in the Savoie, where we will spend the last two days on the trail. Overnight at the Hotel Saint Vincent, Apremont, Savoie, Rhône-Alpes. <https://www.hotellesaintvincent73.fr/hotel>.

Saturday, May 27, 2023: The Orchids of the Col de Granier, the Massif de la Chartreuse (Savoie). The hunt for the *Cypripedium calceolus* will be the focus for the two days that we spend in the Mountains of the Chartreuse near the city of Chambéry. Unlike most regions of France where the *calceolus* is considered rare, substantial populations there bloom from mid-May through June. Overnight at the Hotel Saint Vincent.

Sunday, May 28, 2023. The Orchids of the Col de Granier, the Massif de la Chartreuse (Savoie), and the conclusion of the tour. This morning we will continue our hunt for *Cypripedium calceolus*.

We will leave Chambéry on Sunday at noon, May 28, for the return drive to the Gare TGV, Valence. Time- permitting, we will stop en route for a visit to the Grotte de Choranche, a speleological cavern located in the Vercors.

The bus will arrive at the train station by 4:30 pm. The bullet train from the Gare TGV, Valence, to the Gare de Lyon, Paris, takes from 2.5 hours to three hours. If you prefer to leave on Monday morning, May 29, 2023, several hotels are conveniently located across from the station. Note: the cost of the hotel for this evening is not included in the cost of the tour.

Please contact Nancy Benay at ndbenay@gmail.com for questions.