

H O T E L
crillon le brave
P R O V E N C E

Day trips

All around Crillon le Brave there are easy day trips to explore Provence's wine, history, art and natural beauty. Scroll down the page for a brief description of just a few of the possibilities.

1. The Wine Route – Châteauneuf du Pape and the Côtes du Rhône

At Crillon le Brave we are lucky to have a lot of great wine in the neighbourhood. Rhône Valley wines are finally getting the attention they deserve and in an easy day tour from Crillon le Brave you can taste some of the best Rhône wines and meet the people who make them. Just 20 minutes away from us are the villages of Beaumes-de-Venise, Vacqueyras, Gigondas, Sablet, and Séguret, each one having its own appellation in the Côtes du Rhône. The villages are pretty, the wines are terrific.

After a morning spent meandering through this area and perhaps after lunch in a little restaurant at the edge of Séguret, head about a half hour south to Châteauneuf du Pape. Here the problem is choice. There are so many excellent producers it is impossible to do more than scratch the surface in a day. Pick one or two of the great names – Château de Beaucastel, Château Rayas, Château la Nerthe, Château de la Gardine, Domaine de Vieux Télégraphe – and also stop in to visit one or two smaller and less well know producers. La Cave du Verger des Papes is an excellent place in the town of Châteauneuf to taste and buy a broad selection of wines.

As we are surrounded by the vineyards of the Côtes du Ventoux, we cannot forget to encourage you to sample some of the best wines of this appellation. They are slowly being discovered by people in the know – Robert Parker has been handing out scores of 88 and 90 to some of our neighbours – but these wines are still for the most part undiscovered treasures and exceptional values.

2. The Lubéron and Isle-sur-la-Sorgue

Leave Crillon and glide through the Côtes du Ventoux vineyards on your way to Vènasque, medieval capital of the papal territory of the Comtat Venaissin. After winding your way through an old river gorge and crossing the plateau de Vaucluse you reach the Abbaye de Sénanque, a 12th century Cistercian monastery which sits alone in a valley, surrounded by fields of lavender, and seemingly still trapped in the Middle Ages.

Just over a hill from Sénanque is the famous village of Gordes, a truly beautiful sight. From Gordes head east just a few kilometres to the small town of Rousillon. The town is a veritable palette of ochre colours, from dark earthy tones to bright reds and warm yellows. Wander through the ochre quarries (now a nature park), drop into a pottery studio and then cross the floor of the Lubéron Valley to Bonnieux. Now you are in the territory made famous by Peter Mayle in his books on Provence. From Bonnieux on to Lacoste, Ménerbes and Oppède, there is a lot to see.

On the way back to Crillon le Brave a stop in Isle-sur-la-Sorgue is a must. Now the undisputed antiques capital of Provence, the town was once better known as the "Venice of Provence" for the canals which carry the clear waters of the Sorgue river through the town. Saturday and Sunday are the big days for antique buyers, although most dealers are also open on Monday. From Isle-sur-la-Sorgue it's a half-hour drive back to Crillon le Brave, passing through Pernes-les-Fontaines, known for its many fountains throughout the streets of the town.

3. Vaison la Romaine and the Dentelles of Montmirail

Just half an hour north of Crillon le Brave is Vaison-la-Romaine, a pretty town with a long history and a lively market on Tuesday morning. Take in the market, then maybe explore the artists' studios in the medieval part of town or wander through the impressive Roman ruins. A few kilometres outside Vaison is the village of Séguret, perched on a hillside looking over the Rhône Valley. Classified as one of the most beautiful villages of France, Séguret also prides itself as being the guardian of Provence's Christmas traditions. Here you can wander the cobblestoned streets - closed to cars - and buy a few santons to create your own Provençal nativity scene.

Just south of Séguret is the dramatic stone outcrop of the Dentelles de Montmirail, and excellent spot for a hike to admire the view (or rock-climbing for the more adventurous) below. On the way back to Crillon le Brave, consider a stop in Beaumes de Venise for a bottle of its superb olive oil or for a tasting of its famous Muscat wine. Then for one last spectacular view, drive up to the tiny village of Suzette and enjoy a glass of rosé in the local café across the road from the one-room school house. From Suzette it's downhill past the château at Le Barroux and on back to Crillon le Brave.

4. St Rémy and Les Alpilles

A trip to the area of Saint Rémy-de-Provence and the Alpilles hills south of the Durance River gives you a different look at Provence. Just an hour south of Crillon le Brave, you will notice subtle changes in the vegetation and other features of the landscape. Wednesday morning is market day and you will find St Rémy at its liveliest. Apart from the market St. Rémy has many small shops worth visiting. Among them is the pastry shop of Anne Daguin and Herman van Beeck, "Le Petit Duc", where you will be tantalized by intriguing and delicious biscuits created from ancient recipes. In St-Rémy you can also buy some of the superb olive oil produced in the Baux-de-Provence region.

St Rémy is inextricably linked with van Gogh, and just outside town on the route toward the village of Les Baux you can visit the sanatorium where he spent time. Another two kilometres down the road are the extensive Roman ruins of Glanum. From Glanum continue on the road up and over the Alpilles and down into the valley of Les Baux and its sea of olive trees. Stop in for an olive oil tasting at one of the mills. The medieval village of Les Baux is very busy during the summer season, but it is spectacular to look at and so at least worth a stop to admire it from the road below.

5. Mont Ventoux and the back-country

A tour around Mont Ventoux will take you into the spectacular back-country of Provence where it's not unusual to come across a herd of sheep heading into the hills for the summer. If you head toward the small village of Flassan you pass through cherry orchards and vineyards, all the while having a spectacular view of the 6000 ft. high Mont Ventoux, "the Giant of Provence".

From Flassan you descend to the village of Villes sur Auzon to pick up the corniche road which travels along the upper edge of the canyon of the Nesque River. There are delightful panoramic views and plenty of places to stop to enjoy them. At the end of the Nesque canyon a beautiful broad valley of lavender fields awaits you. From late June to mid-August the scent of lavender fills the air in the valley. August 15th is the traditional day to celebrate the lavender harvest with a big festival in the town of Sault. Of course every Wednesday of the year the traditional market also gives the village a festive air. The botanical garden near Sault grows lavender and demonstrates its many uses in perfumes, aromatherapy, and cooking.

From Sault you head north, with the valley of Toulourenc River and the tiny village of Brantes as your destinations. A trip to Brantes, perched on a steep hillside opposite the north face of Mont Ventoux, is an experience of delightful surprises. The first surprise is the discovery of the village itself. The wild and rugged countryside of the Toulourenc Valley gives little suggestion that anyone would choose to settle here. Yet, as you crane your neck and look up from the valley floor, there it is, Brantes, looking so improbable and so enchanting. As you walk through the village gate and along the ancient stone alleyways, the second surprise is to discover that the village still has life, that it is not just a silent sentinel left over from an era long past. Sixty or so people call Brantes home, living with the rhythm of the seasons and relying on the morning visit of the grocery truck for their supply of milk and bread. One of Brantes' best surprises is found in a village house beside the church, set apart from its neighbours only by a few pretty coloured tiles which decorate its facade. There you find Martine Gilles and Jaap Weiman, their studio, and their beautiful faïence creations. After a visit to the faïence studio and maybe a light snack in the local café, La Poterne, follow the river valley west and return to Crillon le Brave via Malaucène.