



## NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2012

### South West France - Tour report from a NADFAS group

We're frequently asked for new tour suggestions based on the experience of previous groups, so we thought it might be a good idea to include extracts from a report received from Vanessa Shenton, tours organiser of Beckenham and Bromley Decorative and Fine Arts Society, in her own words. Please do get in touch with us if you'd like a detailed copy of the itinerary or if you would like to speak to her about the group's experience.

*Once again we've returned from a successful tour, this time to Albi. Although this south western corner of France was not well known to the group, several hailed our visit as 'the best trip ever'. You were right to propose that the countryside, the preponderance of small towns loaded with history, the art and all the facilities we have come to expect would make it just the sort of venue we would love.*

*The gem of our tour was Celine, your selection as our valued guide. Although she was a local, general guide, I think you know that she was also studying the history of art and architecture to become a specialist. Stories of the past and present of her beloved region were matched by her knowledge of church and domestic architecture and the works of Toulouse Lautrec, Ingres and others. She was practical and concerned with our wellbeing; she also discussed daily programmes with me and was very amenable to minor adaptations.*

*Of the venues in our programme, perhaps the favourites were just around the corner from our hotel, that is, Albi Cathedral and the Toulouse Lautrec Museum. The city of Toulouse required a bit more walking but the churches of St. Sernin and Les Jacobins and the private collection in the Fondation Bemberg made our visit well worth while. Along the valleys of the Tarn and Aveyron we enjoyed the little towns of Najac and Cordes-sur-Ciel, reminding ourselves of what we knew of Albigensian history. We decided not to climb the 13th century fortress in Najac as a recent shower had made the cobbles slippery, but instead Celine added to our programme her birthplace, nearby Villefranche-de-Rouergue, another historic*

*town with its unusual church and splendid Thursday market. Montauban had a modest collection of Ingres' work but a wonderful central square and charming little restaurants, and near Gaillac a tasting of the local Perle wines allowed our teetotallers a chance to investigate a rambling old vineyard and manor house, both ripe for restoration.*

*Having recognised the charms of this touristically undeveloped corner of Europe, you planned our visit. It was a joy never to encounter crowds or unmanageable traffic and yet to see what was of the best in art and architecture, as well as towns and countryside offering an unsophisticated but very friendly welcome.*

*Thank you for designing such a refreshing tour and for supporting us on the way so well.*



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Cover picture - Albrecht Dürer, Haller Madonna, (Washington, National Gallery of Art, Kress Collection)

### The Year Ahead

January is the time when we reflect on the experiences of the past 12 months and look forward to events in the pipeline during the coming year.

Despite the cancellation of tours to Syria we are pleased to report a good year in 2011 with a healthy take-up on the majority of tours which you collectively organised with us. The perennial favourites continue to be just that, with Italy, Spain, France and Germany constantly at the forefront of demand and newer arrivals such as Bulgaria featuring for the first time. Our choice of UK tours continues to expand as some groups choose to stay closer to home, but geographical proximity does not necessarily mean familiarity since we are often able to arrange private and unique visits as part of your tour even in areas which one might consider to be less exotic! Our short feature on Paris in this newsletter is a case in point since many of the visits covered in our itinerary are little-known gems which we feel will appeal to even the most seasoned traveller.

### Staff News

On the staffing front we are delighted to welcome Karen Rogers as a permanent member of our team here in Bath. Karen is a graduate in French and German and brings with her several years experience of organising group tours to Europe. She will unquestionably prove to be a valuable addition and no doubt many of you will be speaking with her in the year ahead. In addition, we are also pleased to announce another new arrival, albeit of a diminutive kind, as Ali Bevan gave birth to a baby boy in October 2011.

Many of you have known Ali for some time and you'll be pleased to know that motherhood is suiting her admirably. She will be returning to us later in the year following maternity leave.

### Major Exhibition In Germany

#### *Dürer in Nuremberg*

The largest exhibition in Germany on Dürer in over 40 years will take place in the artist's home town of Nuremberg between May and September 2012. Dürer



was the first German artist to enjoy recognition within his own lifetime and is considered to be one of the greatest artists of the Northern Renaissance.

He experimented in many media, from delicate watercolours of plant and animal life to dramatic woodcuts

and engravings on religious themes. His art is a blend of Northern and Southern traditions, profoundly influenced by the Venetian painting he saw during his visits to the city.

This major exhibition offers a unique opportunity to witness Dürer's artistic development through a series of pictorial and written documents, many of which will be on show for the first time. It offers a marvellous opportunity to witness the artist's genius at first hand in the city in which he worked and lived. We have designed several itineraries which incorporate this exhibition together with additional visits in Nuremberg such as Dürer's house and the impressive Imperial Castle as well as trips further afield. Foremost among these is a visit to Würzburg where the astonishing Residenz Palace is one of Europe's most renowned baroque palaces and which contains glorious frescoes by Tiepolo. There are direct flights from London to Nuremberg and therefore a short break of just a few days can easily be arranged for your group.

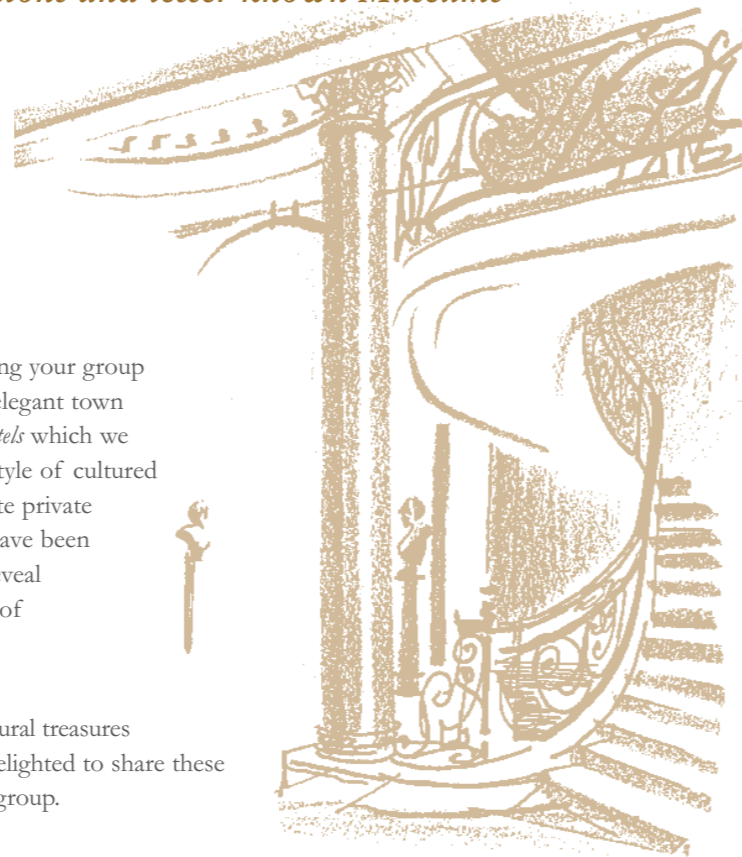
## Paris In A New Light

### Patrician Homes, Private Collections and lesser-known Museums

Iconic architectural sights, superb collections and major exhibitions of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art have attracted vast numbers of visitors to Paris over the years, and will of course continue to do so. But even the frequent visitor to the city often overlooks some of the more intimate cultural treasures which await the curious explorer, away from the usual tourist trail and often ignored by the hordes that congregate elsewhere.

Our tours to Paris show you the city in a different light, allowing your group to rediscover the capital's cultural heritage by way of visits to elegant town houses, private homes and intimate museums. The splendid *hôtels* which we feature provide opportunities to experience the elegance and style of cultured Parisian life of previous centuries - the *grands salons* and intimate private rooms with their magnificent art, furnishings and decoration have been preserved in their entirety. In addition, visits outside the city reveal further glimpses of France's aristocratic past by way of a tour of a private *château*.

Even seasoned travellers will find that our itineraries contain cultural treasures that are little known and yet of outstanding quality. We will be delighted to share these with you so please do get in touch for an itinerary to suit your group.



## The Holy Land - New for 2012

A new addition to our portfolio in 2012, the itinerary for our tour to Holy Land is strongly evocative of familiar Biblical scenes. It is steeped in references to the ancient world and yet also offers a tour through a modern country with varied and dramatic landscapes. The tour takes us along sites which pre date the birth of Christ by several hundred years, via Herod the Great in the first century BC to architectural gems from the Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman periods. We spend several days in Jerusalem, with visits to the walled city, Mount of Olives, King David's tomb, Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity as well as taking a look at the achievements of the city's more recent past in the shape of the Knesset, the Israel Museum, Givat ram Campus of the Hebrew

University and the Chagall stained glass windows of the Hadassah Medical Centre. We spend time at the Dead Sea and at Qumran where the Scrolls were found, at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Masada, and in Jericho which is considered to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. Although the tour is not a pilgrimage in the strictest sense we naturally visit several places of great significance in Christianity, notably the Sea of Galilee, the site of many miracles and whose shores witnessed many of Christ's teachings, and the town of Nazareth, the childhood home of Jesus and where the Church of the Annunciation was built above the grotto where the angel Gabriel is said to have appeared to the Virgin Mary.

## Russian Arts Capitals - Now is the time

Just a few years ago it seemed that everyone was itching to get to St Petersburg in Russia, particularly during and immediately after the tri-centenary celebrations of the birth of the city's founder, Peter the Great. Since then, vast improvements have been made to St Petersburg's tourism infrastructure, particularly in relation to the choice and quality of hotels available to foreign visitors. St Petersburg's cultural attractions are well documented since its museums and galleries are world-class, but often the experience could be marred by indifferent service and by being limited to staying in some vast Soviet monolithic monstrosity. Those days are now well and

truly over, and the choice of centrally located, reasonably priced hotels has increased dramatically, making a visit here an altogether different experience. It is also worth noting that there is now an excellent high-speed train service between St Petersburg and Moscow which covers the journey in around four hours.

This means that a two-centre visit is an attractive proposition for a group tour, particularly for those who may have yet to experience the treasures to be found in the Kremlin, the Tretyakov and Pushkin Museums in Moscow.

For those who have already visited St Petersburg, a second visit to the city will reveal some treasures not encountered the first time around (and of course a single visit to the Hermitage cannot possibly do it justice) so we feel that this is an opportune time to combine both St Petersburg and Moscow in a single visit to Russia.

Please do contact us for suggested six and seven day itineraries.

