

Panther Car Club 4th – 14th June 2012

Classic Tour of The Ardennes, Luxembourg, Moselle, Lorraine, Champagne and Picardy's 'Land of the Three Musketeers'

The borders of Belgium, Germany and France including the Duchy of Luxembourg hide some of the most scenic touring in Northern Europe with a surprising array of picturesque towns and varied attractions to visit.

Our itinerary covers motor racing and underground rivers in the Belgian Ardennes, wine tasting and Roman heritage in the German Moselle Valley, scenic valleys and little fortress towns in Luxembourg, the heritage of France's great defensive forts and cities in the Lorraine region finishing in the great fortress town of Sedan in the French Ardennes, and finally the wines and heritage of France's Champagne region.

Join us for a classic tour circuit driving between 4 countries uncovering many delights.

Tour Bases and Hotels

Spa – Belgian Ardennes 4th – 6th June

Nestled in the woods and hills of the Belgian Ardennes, Spa has attracted visitors to its springs since Roman times and become one of Europe's first 'Spa' resorts in the 17th century, being known as the café of Europe. Today its name is used universally for this form of tourism.

The town retains a lovely old grandiose feel and is of course now famous for the nearby Belgian Grand Prix Circuit.

Radisson Blu Palace Hotel ****

Situated in the heart of the town next to Europe's oldest Casino, the Palace Hotel offers sumptuous accommodation with restaurant and bar. Bedrooms come with free internet access, cable TV, safe, tea / coffee tray, trouser press, hair dryer, mini bar and climate control. The hotel has its own wellness area with sauna and Turkish bath, and also included in your stay is one complimentary visit to the adjoining world famous Les Thermes thermal spa centre. The hotel has its own underground parking.

Leiwen – Moselle River Valley 6th – 10th June

Our base to uncover this highly scenic river valley with its steep sided vineyard clad slopes and scenic towns. This little village is in a wonderful scenic location on a bend in the Moselle river. From here we will also visit the Roman City of Trier and the hidden delights of Luxembourg's citadel towns and deep valleys

Hotel Zummethof ***

This delightful family run hotel enjoys and simply beautiful panoramic view over a U bend in the Moselle river. The hotel comes with its own restaurant and wine bar with

majestic views from its large terrace. The simply furnished bedrooms come with en-suite shower and WC.

Sedan – French Ardennes 10th – 12th June

Sedan is a beautiful old town dominated by Europe's largest Medieval Fortress. It is also historically synonymous with the defence of France during wars with Germany and earlier with the Holy Roman Empire, the town and the surrounding area is a joy to discover.

Hotel Le Chateau Fort *+**

This highly unique and historic hotel is situated within the medieval fortress of Sedan, with its own parking available for our cars in the courtyard. The property has wonderful historical décor and atmosphere and houses a fine restaurant with bar. Bedrooms come with Cable TV, separate en-suite bathroom and WC rooms, ironing facilities and hairdryer.

Soissons – Picardy / Champagne

Situated on the borders of Picardy and the Champagne regions, Soissons has a special significance with the France with a fascinating ancient history surrounding the origins of the French nation. With some notable attractions, Soissons is also ideally situated to uncover the nearby multitude of Champagne's vineyards and chateau domains and eastern Picardy's castles and gardens.

Best Western Hotel des Francs ***

Situated in the very centre of town, this is a brand new hotel with its own secure underground parking with a bright modern contemporary feel. The property comes with its own restaurant and bar whilst all en-suite bedrooms come with cable TV tea / coffee tray and hairdryer.

Tour Itinerary

Monday 4th June

Departure from the UK by ferry from **Dover to Calais**. We continue into Belgium with 2 options. Those looking to make a scenic stop en-route to Spa are recommended to take the motorway towards Brussels, where a break from driving is recommended in the beautiful city of Bruges, before continuing to our first destination via Liege. Otherwise To avoid traffic around Brussels, take the route via Lille, Mons and Liège. Arrival in Spa this afternoon at your leisure. Some overseas members will be joining us today. Evening meal and overnight.

Tuesday 5th June

Optional morning scenic rural drive through the delightful wooded valleys of the Belgian Ardennes to Durbuy. This delightful little town of little brick and stone houses and cobbled streets with many traditional shops also houses a jam factory and micro brewery, ceramic and painting workshops, topiary gardens and arboretum. This afternoon we

recommend a short drive to the Caves of Remouchamps for a visit to these special caves that includes an underground boat trip. **Remouchamps is also directly on route back to Spa from Durbuy.** Otherwise take time at leisure in the delightful town of Spa and why not try out the famous thermal spa complex. Dinner and overnight in Spa.

Wednesday 6th June

We depart today for a scenic drive in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg before heading to our next base in the vineyards of the German Moselle valley. We recommend a route to uncover the winding deep valleys and lovely fortress towns of the surprisingly scenic and charming little country with highlights including Clervaux, following the Moselle river on the German border to Vianden, then on to Diekirch and picking up the Mullerthal valley to finish in Echternach before heading to our base across the border in the German Moselle region. Dinner and overnight in Leiwen.

Thursday 7th June

Suggested excursion today is into the Hunsrueck Hills, with its unspoiled scenery, pretty towns and villages, castle ruins and into the Nahe river valley, famed for its mining of gems and copper. Our route takes us up into the hills to Morbach following a scenic drive to the historic little town of Herrstein before reaching the Nahe river valley. Our route continues to Fischbach where you can visit the local copper mines before continuing to Idar Oberstein, a fascinating heritage town of old houses, museums with a cliff top castle with Europe's only Gem Mine open to visitors, before returning to our hotel via Allenbach and Thalfang. Dinner and overnight in Leiwen.

Friday 8th June

A leisurely day today with a recommended visit to the nearby heritage city of Trier. The Roman origins of Trier are clear to see with the still standing Porta Nigra Gate and Amphitheatre which are well worth a visit.

A late afternoon wine tasting at the Thomas Schmitt cellars 50 metres from our hotel are included with our stay in Liewen before dinner.

Saturday 9th June

Starting our day with a dash north by motorway we will then turn off to visit the delightful town of Cochem on the river Moselle dominated by its castle. Time free in Cochem before we make a scenic drive following the Moselle's meandering course south through vineyards and delightful villages, with recommended stops in Traben-Trarbach and Berncastel-Kues before returning to our hotel. For our final night in Leiwen the hotel will be putting on some traditional musical entertainment after dinner.

Sunday 10th June

We depart following the motorway west through the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg before exiting at Arlon to head south into France and the Lorraine region, our tour route takes us through Herserange famous for its ceramics factory (visit must be pre-booked at least 3 weeks in advance), the fortified town of Longwy then to Fermont-en-Longuyon to the amazing Maginot Line World War II underground fortress (visit must be pre-booked at 14.00 or 15.30). Our route takes us south west to little city of Verdun, whose sights

include the extraordinary Underground Fortress Citadel and War Museum, the Centre for War and Peace, 1000 year old cathedral and city gates. We now follow the course of the river Meuse north-west into the French Ardennes region arriving at Sedan our next base, with dinner and overnight accommodation in the delightful Hotel Le Chateau Fort within a huge medieval fortress.

Monday 11th June

Spend time at leisure in Sedan to explore this delightful town and visit the huge medieval castle fortress. Attractive local towns nearby are Bouillon just across the Belgian border and Charleville-Mezieres. You can alternatively extend these excursions into a full day itinerary through the Ardennes between France and Belgium visiting delightful Bouillon with its hilltop castle, then following the winding river Semois west through Vresse sur Semois, and Montherme, before heading south to Charleville-Mezieres whose sights include the wonderful medieval centre, ducal palace and ramparts. Return to Sedan. Dinner and overnight.

Tuesday 12th June

We depart today into the Champagne region on a country route through Chemery, La Chesne, Vouziers, Moumelan-le-Grand and Tours-sur-Marne to Epernay. The heritage town of Epernay is regarded as the birthplace of the 'methode Champagnoise' of making sparkling wine created by the Dom Perignon. There are numerous large and small champagne cellars to visit in Epernay. We follow the course of the river Marne this afternoon through Damery, Reuil, Pont a Binson to Dormans, then onwards to the scenic town of Chateau Thierry making the western edge of the champagne producing region (optional pre-booked visit to the privately owned Chateau de Conde en Brie for tasting). We then head north to our final base in Soissons. Dinner and overnight.

Wednesday 13th June

Soissons is associated with a long heritage back into Roman times with the Gaulish leader Clovis, the first tribal leader to unite the French tribes in a fight against Rome, and the first ideas of a united French nation. The local cathedral near our hotel is well worth a visit.

Our proposed circular tour today covers part of the charming Aisne region of Picardy around Soissons and Laon which is associated with the author Alexandre Dumas and his novel 'The Three Musketeers'. Starting at Villers Cotterets the author's birthplace, there is a wonderful garden that can be visited in nearby Oigny en Valois. Continue to Pierrefonds, home to one of Europe's most spectacular medieval castles, currently used in the BBC series 'Merlin' as Camelot Castle. Heading north east via Blerancourt we reach Coucy-le-Chateau, home to one of France's most medieval themed towns where you can still buy a coat of armour! Here you can see the ruins of the France's strongest ever built medieval castle, which was unfortunately destroyed in WW1. Our route finishes in Laon. This little city has a beautifully preserved citadel to visit, before our return to Soissons. Dinner and overnight.

Thursday 14th June

Departure home today. Those of us returning to the UK will have a return channel crossing from **Calais** to Dover. A notable stop en-route is the town of Arras with its 2 perfectly preserved medieval squares and a fascinating visit to the tunnels under the town used by troops in WW1.

Included

- **Return channel ferry crossings by car from Dover to Calais**
- **2 nights Half Board at the Radisson Blu Palace Hotel in Spa**
- **4 nights Half Board with local vineyard wine tasting and entertainment evening at the Hotel Zummethof in Leiwen**
- **2 nights Half Board at the Hotel Le Chateau Fort in Sedan**
- **2 nights Half Board at the Best Western Hotel des Francs in Soissons**