One of the strongest motivations to travel is the deep yearning we have to connect with the past. Some may explain this by an awareness of past lives, others may simply enjoy the thrill of entering an ancient building or standing in a timeless landscape where their imaginations ignite and conjure the past. If this is the experience you are seeking, there could be no better place to spend a week than in the mysterious and spellbinding Ariège. Set in the south-west of France, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, our tour director, Gavin Miller has found the perfect setting for a week of time travel, the Château de Camon.

Charlemagne, on his return from harassing the Moors in Spain, put the village of Camon under the authority of Notre-Dame. By the middle of the 10th century a Benedictine Abbey was in place. Troubadors, crusaders, itinerant knights, Spanish princesses and persecuted Cathars passed through the region. The Abbey of Camon was an important sanctuary along the way and by the 16th century a fortified manor (château) had been built to secure the Abbey. The château has now been offering comfort and tranquility to travelers for five hundred years! Vaulted ceilings, four-poster beds, beautiful fabrics and all the amenities of 21st-century living make the château both spine-tinglingly authentic and sumptuously cozy.

With the Château de Camon as our base for seven nights, each day we will set off to explore the antiquities of the Aude and Ariège regions. From the ruins of Cathar castles to the medieval grandeur of Carcassonne, it will be impossible to head home without feeling touched by the shadows of the past.
Patricia Reilly, Associate Professor of Art History, has been faculty lecturer for Swarthmore Alumni trips to Rome, Sicily, Holland, and Belgium. She specializes in Classical and Renaissance art and teaches courses on topics such as the Art of Ancient Greece and Rome, Western Tradition, Global Renaissance, Michelangelo to Mussolini, Cracking Visual Codes, and Exhibiting Women. She also co-teaches Art, Chemistry, and Conservation (with Chemistry Professor, Tom Stephenson) and The Classical Tradition in Art and Literature (with Classics Professor, Grace Ledbetter). Patricia is excited to join you on this trip, and to share with you the history of the Greek monuments we will visit as well as the debates that currently surround them.

Program Highlights & Inclusions

The following services are included:
- All ground transportation as detailed in the itinerary;
- Breakfast daily, 1 lunch, 5 dinners;
- Discover Europe Tour Director throughout;
- Porterage of one large suitcase per person;
- Entrance fees to all sites included in the itinerary;
- Arrival and departure transfers included per transfer schedule;

Visit the prehistoric cave paintings in the vast chamber of the Grotte de Niaux;

Excursion to Mirepoix on market day. There will be time to explore one of France’s most exquisite medieval squares followed by picnic lunch at the nearby village of Roquefixade where we can take a walk to view the medieval castle;

Visit to the Château de Foix, regional capital and the home of the powerful counts of Foix;

Travel to Montaillou, high in the Pyrenees and enjoy lunch in spa town of Ax-les-Thermes;

Excursion through the countryside to the magical Romanesque Abbey of St. Hilaire. Then on to Limoux, famed for its Blanquette - a sparkling wine.

Visit the bio-dynamic vineyard of Chateau Maris where we will have a tour tasting and lunch and then an afternoon visit to Carcassonne;

Travel to the mountain-top village of Rennes-le-Château followed by a visit to Puivert and its relatively intact Cathar castle,