

# Janet's Agricultural Tours Newsletter

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## Agricultural Tours Offer a Different Approach

Most tourists want to see major cities and world-famous attractions. But there are others who prefer a different approach to seeing the world. Janet Spear caters to the latter group. She knows her way around an airport, but she also knows her way around a farm. Since 1999 she has been organizing and leading tours that focus not only on a region's historical and cultural highlights, but especially on its agriculture. Her carefully planned itineraries are tailored to meet her clients' special interests in all things agricultural. She typically spends 12 months researching and developing the itinerary for a tour. Often she works with members of Agricultural Tour Operators International in the destination country to find knowledgeable local guides and the venues that will be of most interest to her tour group.

Last spring she led a group of 18—mostly farmers, business professionals, and retired educators—on a 2-week tour of Argentina and Brazil. The tour began in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with sightseeing in the city, a welcome dinner, and rousing tango show. A planned visit to the Liniers Livestock Market had to be canceled, as it was temporarily shut down by a farmers' strike in reaction to government plans to dramatically raise export taxes on agricultural products. The government countered the farmers' strike by organizing a huge protest against the farmers in the center of the city. This created quite a sight, though not one which Janet or any of her tour group had anticipated. Not to worry, as an experienced tour leader, Janet takes the unexpected in stride and makes other arrangements. Every trip has its logistical challenges—lost luggage, farmers on strike, or something else—situations to be managed as part of her job.

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*Examining the sorghum crop in Cascavel, Brazil.*

## Tour of France Focuses on Cheese and Wine

February 22, 2009, is the departure date for Janet's next tour. This time she will lead a group to France. What a great opportunity to leave New England in the dead of winter and enjoy warmer weather and the spectacular scenery of the French countryside as well as visit agricultural, education, and cultural points of interest throughout France. Janet has developed this 10-day tour especially for the State of Maine Cheese Guild, but membership in the guild is not a prerequisite—anyone is welcome to join the tour.

The fascinating itinerary begins with a the flight from Boston to Paris. A guided tour of the city, along with a welcome dinner, and a visit to Rungis Market, France's largest wholesale market, just south of the city are highlights at the start of the tour.

From Paris, the tour heads south through the rural regions of Isle de France and Champagne en route to Burgundy, with visits to farms and specialty cheese makers along the way. Next, a full day of visits with cheese producers in the Auvergne region. The Loire Valley is next on the schedule, including a visit to the Chateau of Chenonceaux, one of the most picturesque of all the chateaux in the Loire Valley. Continue on toward Normandy through countryside marked by a patchwork of fields, lush rolling pastures, dairy farms, and apple orchards.

In Normandy visit the Graindorge cheese factory in Livarot. Arrive in Caen by mid-afternoon for a relaxing afternoon and evening free for exploring the town. Next morning visit St. Pierre Farmer's Market with over 400 stalls. From there, the tour heads to Mont Saint Michel, the famous island-fortress monastery that seems to rise out of the sea.

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*Artfully arranged veggies at the farmers' market near Paris.*

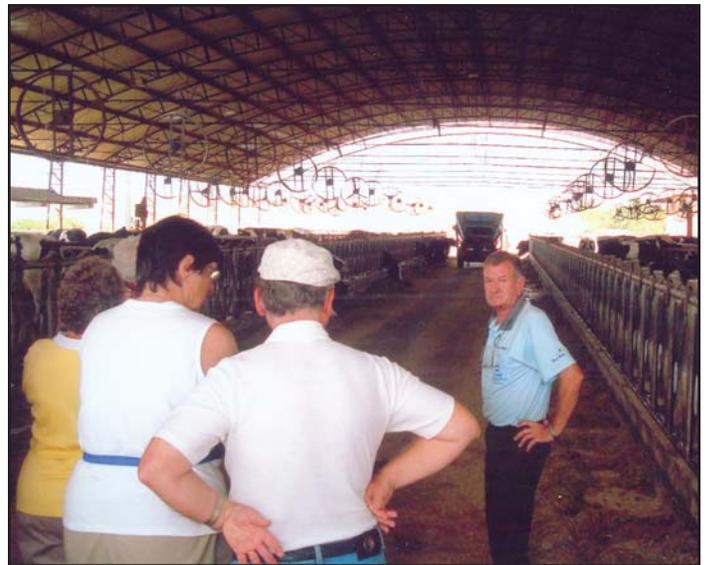
In the next couple of days the group traveled to several farms where crops included corn, soybeans, sunflowers, and cattle, and they learned about the “no till” growing methods used in the region.

Next, the group flew to Mendoza, capital of Mendoza Province, in western Argentina, at the foot of the Andes Mountains. This province is part of the “Pampas,” a vast, richly fertile plain that is home to many huge farms and ranches. Mendoza is responsible for 90% of the wine production in Argentina as well as much of the fruit and vegetable production. The group visited a “boutique winery” there and observed both harvesting and processing of grapes. And, of course, a wine tasting was part of the visit. Because Mendoza is a naturally dry area, irrigation is necessary, and it comes from the melting snows of the Andes.

Another plane ride took the group to Iguazú Falls in the northeastern corner of Argentina, where it borders both Brazil and Paraguay. Here, two great rivers, the Iguazú and the Paraná, join and flow through a spectacular canyon, forming 275 waterfalls. The falls are surrounded by a park that is home to many species of animals and plants. The mild climate and constant 75% humidity create a habitat that supports lush flowering vegetation year-round. Using the extensive walkways and a boat excursion, the tour members explored the falls before making their way across the river and into Brazil to begin the next leg of their journey.

In Brazil they visited the Itaipu Dam hydroelectric plant, which is the largest of its kind in the world. From there they continued on to Cascavel, where they visited a dairy farm which has its own biodiesel plant, making fuel from the cows’ manure. The next several days brought visits to agricultural cooperatives for grain and poultry producers as well as a university seed research station, a small distillery producing a local brew called cachaca from sugar cane, a private agricultural college, and a several biodiesel plants.

The ethanol fuel industry is currently much more advanced in Brazil and Argentina than it is in United States. All new cars there are required to be “flex-fuel” vehicles, meaning



*Touring a large dairy operation, the group sees how this highly productive farm manages 780 cows, which are milked three times daily and tended by 26 workers. The farm also has its own plant that makes use of the cow manure to produce methane fuel.*

that they can burn ethanol, gasoline, or a combination of the two. Ethanol is available at all the service stations and actually costs less than gasoline (although both cost more than gasoline does here). There, most ethanol is made from sugar cane—rather than corn, as it is here—because the climate is suitable for sugar cane, which is better than corn for making the fuel. A crop which has an even higher yield—approximately twice as much as sugar cane—they have found, is the sweet potato. Research into the use of sweet potatoes for ethanol is now well underway, with four plants being built this year to process sweet potatoes. Brazil is being very aggressive in addressing the energy crisis.

Nearing the end of their tour, one more domestic flight took the group to Rio de Janeiro. An afternoon of sightseeing was the prelude to a farewell dinner and samba show on the group’s final evening before the next day’s return trip to Maine.

Janet’s interest in agricultural tours is a natural outgrowth of her own farming activity. She and her husband, Bob, and other family members own Spear Farms, Inc., a multi-generational family farm in Nobleboro, Maine, which supplies a variety of seasonal produce to their two farmstands, on Center Street in Nobleboro and Atlantic Highway in nearby Waldoboro.

Janet says the ideas for her tours come mostly from her clients, who have given her much positive feedback over the years. “We learned more about agriculture in two weeks than in several years,” was a comment received after a recent trip. “An A++!” raved another client.

Last winter Janet organized a strawberry tour in Spain, to precede a strawberry growers’ convention there. For that tour, her U.S. clients were joined by strawberry growers from Canada and Australia, making for a truly international group of 42 people.



*Walkways at Iguazú Falls allow visitors to get a closeup view of the spectacular waterfalls.*

## Tour of France Focuses on Cheese and Wine . . . . .continued from p.1

The tour concludes with a visit to a farm growing apples for the production of cider and calvados, including the opportunity for tasting, then a return to Paris and a free afternoon there before boarding the Bateaux Mouches for a farewell dinner cruise along the Seine. On March 3rd, depart for airport for return flight to Boston.



*Chateau Chenonceau*



*View of a cheese making operation in France.*

### **Cheese & Wine Tour of France**

#### **The tour price includes:**

- Round-trip airfare from Boston to Paris
- 8 nights hotel accommodations based on sharing twin rooms (single room available for additional fee)
- Included meals: daily breakfast, 7 dinners, 3 lunches
- Comfortable motor coach transportation throughout the tour
- Panoramic guided sightseeing tour of Paris
- Guided tour of Mont Saint Michel
- Entrance to Chateau of Chenonceau and Mont St Michel
- All farm and technical visits
- Vineyard tours and wine and calvados tastings
- Dinner cruise on Bateaux Mouches
- Services of local tour manager
- Tips and gratuities for included services
- Baggage handling in hotels (1 piece per person)

**Cost per person** \$3215.00 double occupancy. Single supplement \$550.00. **Note:** Due to currency fluctuation and fuel surcharges, prices are subject to change at time of final invoicing.

### **Travel Tip**

Make sure to apply for your passport in plenty of time to avoid worry about getting it in time. Some larger post offices can provide and accept applications and even take the required photos. Call your local P.O. to see if they provide this service.

### **I'm interested! Please send me more information**

*Please print*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ @ \_\_\_\_\_

- France, Cheese and Wine Tour - Feb. 22–Mar. 3, 2009
- Italy, Rome, Florence, Venice, Lake Garda & Milan - Mar. 29–Apr. 7, 2009
- I'm not ready to travel just yet, but please keep me on your mailing list for future trips

Please return form to: Janet Spear, 14 Eugley Hill Rd., Nobleboro, ME 04555

## Springtime in Italy, March 29–April 7, 2009

Experience Italy's spectacular scenery and diverse landscape with fellow Maine travelers. Visit agricultural operations in Tuscany and Chianina Valley including organically grown wheat, hay, pulses, and broad beans. Visit an olive grove and see an old mill where olives are still cold-pressed. Visit a family farm raising top-quality Chianina cattle and a cereal farm and winery near Lake Garda. Guided sight-seeing tours in Rome, Florence, Venice, Verona, and Milan are included so you will see the most famous sights. Tour package includes entrance to the Colosseum, Vatican museums, Uffizi Galleries, Accademia, Giotto's tower, Doges Palace, Juliet's house, Verona Arena, DaVinci's Last Supper, and La Scala Museum. This 10-day tour is still being planned. Call or email to receive details when available.



*Janet and the local tour guide at Ponte Vecchio in Florence, Italy.*



*Venice canal boats.*

**Next U.S. Tour:  
Iowa Farm Country, 2009,  
more information forthcoming**

*Janet at the Eiffel Tower in Paris*



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Nobleboro, ME 04555