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# VAN GOGH'S FRANCE

Follow in the footsteps of the Netherland's greatest artistic export at the destinations around France where he sought creative inspiration

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**At the National Gallery in London from September, the exhibition *Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers* celebrates the artist's imagination in bringing to life some of the most romantic views of France. Vincent van Gogh was a true wanderer at heart, constantly seeking inspiration from the diverse landscapes and vibrant cultures he encountered. His creative life began in the Netherlands, where the rural scenes of Nuenen deeply influenced his early works. But it is really while traveling around France, as the new exhibition shows, that his artistic vision truly blossomed.**

In the dawning days of Impressionism, Paris was the place to be. Theo van Gogh, an astute art dealer, told his brother about the scientific and artistic revolution that was taking French society by storm. Vincent joined him in Paris ❶ in March 1886. He befriended Pissarro, Toulouse-Lautrec and Gauguin, who shared their interest in light and colour. Influenced by the Japanese woodblocks, he produced a series of works depicting *Le Moulin de la Galette* ❷, a windmill at the top of Montmartre. He stayed in the City of Light for two years, painting street scenes, portraits, crowds, the river – Paris in all its glory, during the day and at night.

Yearning for sunnier climes, Vincent packed his bags and headed to the south of France. He arrived in Arles ❸ in February 1888, with a dream of starting an artists' colony. The *Atelier du Midi*, he thought, would attract people from far and wide to create and exchange ideas. He chose *The Yellow House*, near the centre of town, and rented four rooms. Fascinated by the local life, Vincent painted a view of his new space, the green shutters of his studio – soon to be his home – as well as the adjacent restaurant where he often ate. He also painted three versions of his bedroom, which today are among his most recognisable works. Drawn to nature and flowers, Van Gogh also painted his second series of *Sunflowers* here, inspired by the flowers growing in the nearby fields.

Paul Gauguin, who would be the colony's only resident, joined Vincent in Arles in October 1888. During their time together,

they painted side by side, and took a trip to the Musée Fabre in Montpellier to admire works by Gustave Courbet and Eugène Delacroix, and arguing about Rembrandt well into the night. One evening, after a heated argument, Vincent cut off his ear. While Vincent recovered in the town's hospital, Place Félix Rey, he painted the view of the flowery courtyard, which he could see from his room. Vincent was always in awe of his surrounding landscapes. He felt transported by the bright hues revealed by the southern sun, and they manifested in his mind and work as beautiful swirling patterns.

Vincent left Arles for Saint-Rémy de Provence ❹ in May 1889, painting landscapes along the way. He marveled at the cypress trees swaying with the winds, the soft noise of the breeze in the wheat sheaves. He checked himself in to the asylum at Saint-Paul-de-Mausole in Saint-Rémy, a monastery rising prettily above fields of lavender and olive

## **'Vincent was always in awe of the landscapes that surrounded him'**

trees. *The Starry Night*, painted during his year there, can be seen as both an ode to nature and a depiction of the artist's inner turmoil.

In May 1890, he headed for the flourishing artistic community of Auvers-sur-Oise, near Paris. In his short time there, he made dozens of canvases, drawings and sketches, including Charles-François's Daubigny's garden as well as the village's Gothic-Romanesque church. In July 1890, the artist reached the end of his journey near the wheat fields he so adored. He lived a life of constant travel, relentlessly pursuing beauty, and left a legacy that continues to captivate the world today.

*Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers* will be at the National Gallery in London from 14 September – 19 January 2025



## 21st century exhibitions

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### VAN GOGH: THE LAST VOYAGES

You've got until the end of this month to catch this digital exhibition at Chateau d'Auvers, just north of Paris, taking you on a tour of France through Van Gogh's most famous works. [chateau-auvers.fr](http://chateau-auvers.fr)

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### FROM VERMEER TO VAN GOGH

This exhibition in Bordeaux presents the best of the Dutch Masters through total immersion, transporting you to Flemish canals and lush countryside. [bassins-lumieres.com](http://bassins-lumieres.com)

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### VAN GOGH: THE IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

Head to Lyon for a wonderful show (also in London and other European cities) that projects huge animated versions of Van Gogh's greatest works on walls, bringing his art to life. [vangoghexpo.com](http://vangoghexpo.com)

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