IFEAT Study Tours go from strength to strength. They are proving to be a great learning experience – in the company of other industry specialists, who might be competitors but become good friends. This facilitates the growth of the international IFEAT family. While each Study Tour follows a similar format they remain very different, predominantly because of the country and companies visited as well as different participants.

The Study Tour to France – the spiritual home of the fragrance and flavour industry - was longer and larger than the previous seven Tours. It took place from July 5th to 15th and some 48 participants from 15 countries visited 23 organisations involved in the F&F ingredients supply chain. These included producers, processors, cooperatives, traders, compounders, manufacturers and research organisations – from small farmers to large multinational companies with annual turnovers in excess of €1 billion.

The Tour began with a Welcome Reception on Sunday evening in Avignon, close to the Mediterranean, and finished 11 days later at Bariritz on the Atlantic coast. Over 10 days participants saw the production and processing of essential oils and aroma chemicals produced and imported into these two important production and processing areas of France, including lavender, lavender clary sage, pine derivatives as well as many small specialty items. The tour was timed to match the cropping and processing of the lavender, lavender clary sage crops – and delegates were not disappointed. For three days we saw the spectacular colours and the harvesting on the Plateaux de Albion and Valensole – and these images will stay in the memories of delegates for many years to come. Delegates visited the lavender/lavandin and clary sage production and processing operations of Bontoux, Cassan, Fourrui, Burcheri, Aubry and SCARP and learnt about new planting and processing techniques and other research activities of CRIEPAM and CENSO. In addition, there was a long visit to L’Occitane’s headquarters at Manosque, where delegates obtained detailed insights into the operations of this global natural and organic ingredients based cosmetics and well-being product manufacturer and retailer.

Then followed three days in the Grasse area, home of the world’s perfume industry. Excellent visits were made to two of Mane’s state-of-the-art technical, scientific and creative operations, as well as the Payan Bertrand and Robertet processing plants. These were followed by a guided tour of the International Museum of Perfumery. The visits illustrated the region’s considerable know-how and innovation in the transformation of aromatic raw materials and how important it remains for our industry.

On Sunday afternoon, while visiting St Honorat Island off Cannes, we learnt that our evening flight from Nice to Bordeaux was cancelled. By some miracle, Beatrice Torrente of the Emphase tour agency who accompanied us throughout the Tour, managed to arrange a 550 km detour via Paris for the group, involving an additional flight, but remarkably arriving in Bordeaux only an hour behind schedule on one of the busiest travel weekends of the year in France! In the Landes area we visited Biolandes operations at Le Sen and then on July 14th – the most important national holiday in France – DRT arranged a visit around their large plant at Vieill-Saint-Girons. The day ended with a Gala Farewell Dinner at the Café de Paris in Biarritz, where everyone received a red Basque Beret and watched a spectacular firework display to celebrate Bastille Day. The visits and quality of information dispensed by the hosts varied. Most companies provided excellent introductions or videos to explain their operations; and it was obvious that each company had put in a lot of effort to provide detailed analysis of their production and processing operations, enabling delegates to become much wiser regarding the specifics, as well as learn about new innovative techniques in all areas of the supply chain. Moreover, several of the companies sponsored superb meals and provided gifts as mementos of the visits. The group was able to present each company with a copy of the Delegate Pack, containing detailed briefing notes on the companies and delegates, as well as various essential oils and articles on the French F&F industry.

The innovation on the China Study Tour of “Bus Lectures” continued and knowledgeable and experienced specialists from around the world were able to both explain in greater detail what we had seen as well as put it into context. The wide range of expertise and knowledge on hand made it remarkably useful and informative.

The Tour provided a lasting impression of the French F&F ingredients sector as well as the kindness and hospitality of our hosts and the French “art de vivre”. In addition, the coach journeys revealed some beautiful scenery, particularly Les Gorges du Verdon, and there were many cultural insights including the Palace of the Popes, Château Smith Haut Lafitte and St Paul de Vence. Yet again, the study tour achieved its objectives of seeing at first hand the production and processing of various F&F ingredients and obtaining a much clearer understanding of the various processes, capabilities and set-up of different facilities and an appreciation of the broad spectrum of F&F products that France can offer. Delegates were able to meet up with some of the key figures within our industry. Finally, participants were able to get to know the other delegates and their expertise, and share some unique cultural experiences. Thus, it proved to be another superb tour thanks to the support, excellent hospitality and commitment of the French companies that were visited – nearly all of which are IFEAT members – as well as the efforts of Thierry Duclos and Beatrice Torrente.