

# Guided Cycling in Provence



## Highlights

The Provence region of France is an eclectic display of all things cultural, and there is no better way of touring this magnificent Mediterranean treasure trove than by taking a fully guided, week-long holiday cycling in Provence!

Provence is a beautiful region in Mediterranean south France neighbouring Italy, and has a history stretching back to ancient Rome and beyond. As with any landscape with such a varied gradient and terrain, Provence is a cyclist's dream come true and you won't be short of things to marvel at during your week. A lot of the amazing trails you'll explore on the itinerary aren't well known to locals let alone tourists, so you'll get the benefit of having an expertly crafted Provence cycling trip as well as getting the most out of the historical and cultural aspect of this cycling holiday. Another added bonus to the trip is the vehicular support, transporting your luggage to the next hotel where it'll be waiting for you along with a chilled glass of wine and a gourmet meal – perfect!

The itinerary for this trip is so well put together that it takes the guise of many holidays, from cycling holiday to history trip to cultural adventure and culinary tour, but underneath all the trimmings it is what it says on the tin: a damned good cycling holiday in Provence! The wealth of history Provence has to offer is tangible, and you'll come across many well preserved Roman architecture sites (including Pont Du Gard, an ancient aqueduct recognized by UNESCO as a world heritage site) and other curiosities by the River Rhone. The river itself is the only major European river to flow into the Mediterranean and makes for a great travel companion as you cycle alongside it.

## Is it for me?

It's hard not to be bowled over by the quintessential charm of cycling in Provence, and the people most likely to get the most out of this tour are bike enthusiasts (obviously), foodies and couples looking for an active and romantic week away. A certain level of fitness is required and you'll be in the saddle for quite a while on each day, but you don't need to be Lance Armstrong. In fact, complete cycling novices are welcome to join the tour but may not get a huge amount of enjoyment out of the hill riding. Be advised that the height of summer (July/August) can see temperatures soar into the 30s with a high sun, so avoid these months if you're not good with the heat and definitely pack lots of sun cream no matter what time of the year.

## Accommodation

Throughout the week you'll be welcomed to a fabulous meal and locally made beverages at a variety of hotels, which at the end of a long day's riding will seem like home away from home. All of the hotels are independently run and as a result you can expect great service from your hospitable hosts, as well as top notch facilities from indoor pools to tennis courts. All rooms are en-suite and a day cycling in the fresh air will guarantee you sleep like a log. The food you can expect on the tour is typical of French/Mediterranean food – lavish, varied and with no expense spared. All meals are included in the price from dinner on the arrival day, although all beverages are at your own account.

## Itinerary

**Day One:** Arrive at the hotel in Villeneuve Les Avignon. Most people arrive in Avignon by train either from Paris or from London, although there are some direct flights to Avignon and to Nimes. The group will spend its first night at the Residence les Cedres with your friendly host, Christophe.

Prices from

**1,150** GBP (7 days) per person

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**Day Two:** After breakfast, you'll set off on what will be an gentle day to ease you in. The terrain is nice and flat as far as Chateaufort du Pape where you'll get to take a break from cycling and taste the renowned local brew at Domaine de la Solitude. In the afternoon the route passes over the hill where the best vines are grown and follow quiet roads into the town of Orange. Orange was originally a retirement town for Roman soldiers, and today boasts a truly spectacular Roman theatre which you'll visit before dinner. You'll also get to have a look at the huge triumphal arch that dates back to the reign of Augustus, with the theatre and the arch together are classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. (25 Miles)

**Day Three:** Today you'll cross the mighty Rhone, by far the biggest river in France (by volume) and a rich source of history in the region. You'll make your way along the river to Uzes, following tiny back roads that take you past Tavel, home of the best rose wines in France. Tonight you'll be staying at the Hotel St Genies just outside Uzes with Rik and his family and eating gourmet-style at the Taverne in the Uzes' old town. (30 Miles)

**Day Four:** Leaving the boundaries of Provence, today the party will cycle along tiny back roads and across almost-unheard of trails in order to reach the spectacular Pont du Gard, an ancient Roman aqueduct and another UNESCO World Heritage Site. The bridge was built by the Romans to carry water across the River Gardon to Nîmes. 275 metres long and 48 metres high, this is an amazing photo opportunity you won't want to miss! Also worthy of note is a rather lovely gift standing next to the aqueduct - a set of three olive trees, each more than 1,000 years old, donated by the Spanish government. In the afternoon you'll continue along the back routes leading through the beautiful wilds of the French countryside and on to Beaucaire on the banks of the Rhone. Beaucaire is a port town, facing Tarascon on the opposite bank, where you'll be staying at the Hotel Les Doctrinaires and enjoy yet more culinary delights! (30 Miles)

**Day Five:** The expedition continues once again after breakfast, crossing back over the Rhone this morning and returning into Provence. After a coffee stop in Fontvieille, you'll embark on a longish climb into the Alpilles bringing you to Les Baux de Provence, a fascinating ruined fortress. Alleged to have been ruled over for centuries by descendants of Balthazar, one of the biblical three kings, this fortress was enabled attackers to wreak havoc throughout Provence and as far afield as Toulouse. Eventually it became part of France, but following a rebellion was destroyed by none other than Cardinal Richelieu of (of Three Musketeers fame!) Les Baux de Provence is also one of the most recent wine regions to be awarded 'Appellation d'Origine Controllee' status, so there will be a stop at Domaine Mas de la Dame for a tasting session before tackling the final hill of the day, leading over the Alpilles and down into St Remy. On the way you'll pass Glanum, a ruined Roman town that was inundated by scree falling from the Alpilles over many centuries. It has a huge triumphal arch and mausoleum at one end of the town, and these have always been visible. However, it was not until 1921 did anyone realise that a whole town was buried just yards away. Right next door to Glanum is the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole Asylum where Van Gogh did much of his painting, a fascinating site where there are many information points pointing out exactly where he did a lot of his great works. Finally, you'll finish the downhill run into St Remy and the Hotel Castelet des Alpilles, enjoying a well earned dinner at Le Jardin de Frédéric. (27 Miles)

**Day Six:** The route today leads you on a secret back road out of St. Rémy, following the spectacular silhouette of the Alpilles as far as Eygalieres, then through Cavaillon to the Lubéron Hills. The Lubéron are the reason many people visit Provence. They don't have the same needle-sharp profile of the Alpilles, but if anything they're more beautiful and much higher. Today's cycling is one of the more challenging given the hilly terrain, but much of the trail leads through forests and sleepy villages to Rousillon where you'll spend the night. (38 Miles)

**Day Seven:** You'll start the final day of the tour with a fantastic downhill - the pay off from yesterday afternoon's ascent – before climbing once again to the pretty village of Gordes which offers some spectacular panoramas. After enjoying the great views the route will lead you down the back roads to the Fontaine de Vaucluse. This extraordinary resurgent spring is the source of the River Sorgue, and you'll follow the Sorgue valley through to Isle-sur-la-Sorgue. This sleepy town, built around the many channels carved out by the Sorgue, has become famous as France's leading antiques market. Following lunch at Isle-sur-la-Sorgue the group will follow a series of quiet roads into Avignon, where you can enjoy a cold drink gazing across the square at the enormous Palais des Papes. Depending on how you're doing for time there should be opportunity to explore Avignon before crossing the Rhone for one last time and climbing the short hill back to Villeneuve les Avignon, completing the tour. (35 Miles)

## Details

### Getting there

Most people arrive in Avignon by train either from Paris or from London, although there are some direct flights to Avignon and to Nîmes.

### Price includes

Expert cycling guide from days two to seven, equipment hire, six nights' accommodation, meals throughout (except lunches).

### Available

Jan—Dec

### Typical Duration

1 week

### Comfort level

Reasonably comfortable (Inns, B&Bs, luxury camping etc.)

### Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed

