

Cycling Safaris

LOIRE VALLEY 2018

Guided Tour

Guide cycling with group | 315 km | 7 nights / 8 days



Known as the Valley of the Kings and the Garden of France, the Loire Valley is a lush region steeped in History. The French Royal Court moved there in the 14th Century, sparking a riot of Renaissance architecture including the magnificent chateaux of Chambord with its 365 chimneys, Chenonceau with its spectacular ballroom, and dozens more. The Loire Valley also boasts fields and fields of sunflowers and a surprising variety of wines as well as distinctive and delicious cuisine.

TOUR ITINERARY

DAY 1 **Saturday** **Arrive**

Transfers will be arranged from Angers train station.

We start from Montreuil Bellay, a delightful walled village with a striking chateau overlooking the river Thouet. We have time to set your bikes up and go for a spin, but you may prefer to lounge by the pool and enjoy a cold pastis.

DAY 2 **Sunday** **Montreuil to Chinon** **26 miles / 42 km**

An easy ride to one of the highlights of our week, Chateau Brézé, a wine-making estate famous for its amazing underground chateau. Leaving Brézé we make our way to the Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, once home to many French queens. After lunch we descend to the river Vienne and cycle along a riverside path to Chinon where we stay at the Hotel France in the heart of medieval Chinon.

DAY 3 Monday Chinon to Azay-le-Rideau 34 miles / 55 km

We leave Vienne and cycle towards the river Indre where we find Château Ussé. Next stop is Villandry and its Michelin 3***-rated gardens. We tour through deserted countryside before coming to Azay-le-Rideau, another top-rated château. Tonight we stay at the Hotel Château with the chance to visit the spectacular *son et lumière* after dinner, and the spectacle at Azay-le-Rideau is worth the stroll.

DAY 4 Tuesday Azay-le-Rideau to Loches 37 miles / 59 km

Today is a long cycle, 40 miles plus, but much of it follows the delightful Indre valley, and the flat rolling countryside that divides the Indre and the River Cher. The Indre valley is widely regarded as the prettiest of all the many river valleys in the region, and Loches is an unsung delight with a lovely château and a charming town centre. Tonight we stay at the Hotel George Sands.

DAY 5 Wednesday Loches to Montrichard 26 miles / 42 km

A long memorable day, with some glorious cycling that takes us off the tourist route north to the Cher Valley and to the most famous of all the Loire Châteaux, Chenonceau. The Ballroom, built by Catherine de Medici, spans the Cher in spectacular fashion. This afternoon we cycle the Caves du Monmousseau for a tour and a tasting of their sparkling wines. Tonight we stay beside the banks of the River Cher at the Hotel Bellevue.

DAY 6 Thursday Montrichard to Chambord 31 miles / 50 km

We set off along the Cher valley visiting fascinating mushroom caves at Bourre, where they grow Blue Foot, Shitake, Oyster and Paris mushrooms. After lunch we pass château Cheverny which lies in the Cour-Cheverny appellation with wine made from the local Romarantin grape. If we have time we'll visit Domainede Tessier, the finest of the local producers. We conclude the day at Château Chombard, by far the largest of all the Loire châteaux (and the best!). The hotel, the Grand St. Michel faces this beautiful château in the middle of a vast hunting park.

DAY 7 Friday Chambord to Amboise 39 miles / 63 km

We spend much of today beside the Loire, passing through Chaumont. Our final destination is Amboise. With its chateau facing the loire and bustling medieval centre, Amboise also boasts the last home of Leonardo da Vinci at the Clos-Luce, which we'll visit, and our last night is at the hotel le Vinci.

DAY 8 Saturday Homeward bound

We're only 20 minutes from the TGV station at St Pierre des Corps, and a gentle departure time of 10.30 am gets us back to Paris before midday and London St Pancras by mid-afternoon.

2018 GROUP TOUR DATES

June 30
July 21
August 25

2018 TOUR PRICE

€1,585.00 per person sharing
+ €395.00 single supplement
If you are travelling on your own we will endeavour to find a room mate for you

WHAT THE TOUR PRICE INCLUDES

7 nights hotel accommodation
7 dinners
Guide cycling with the group
Luggage transferred locally
24 speed hybrid touring bike, pannier bag & helmet
Vineyard fees and wine-tasting
Set Transfer from Angers to the starting point of the tour
Set Transfer from Amboise to St Pierre des Corps at the tour end

Not included:

Admission charges to the châteaux
Train tickets

WHAT TO BRING

Comfortable cycling clothing – padded cycling shorts and cycling gloves are invaluable.
Training shoes are fine for cycling.
Hat, sunglasses, suntan lotion, swimwear.
Casual clothes for evening. You may be grateful for something warm with long sleeves.
Helmets, though not obligatory in France, are highly recommended. To be sure of comfort we suggest you bring your own helmet, however, in the event that you need a helmet, they are provided.

BIKE / FITNESS



We use Trek 7300 FX Hybrid 24 speed touring bike with aluminium frame and Shimano gear system.

Level of difficulty: Loire Valley - ** flat throughout, with a few 'lurkers'
Average daily distance 30 miles
Maximum daily distance 35 miles

- ***** Training camps / sport cyclists. 50 to 80 miles per day, hills an integral part.
- **** Distances and / or hills make this a challenging tour suitable for people who exercise regularly.
- *** Moderate level of fitness required. Distances are no more than 40 miles a day, but hilly terrain.
- ** Distances and terrain are slightly easier, suitable for people who are not strangers to exercise, but don't get out as often as they'd like!

GROUP, GUIDE AND BACK-UP SERVICE

The maximum group size on these tours is fifteen people and one, sometimes two guides. Each person has their own route details, as well as a guide who cycles with you, while your luggage is locally transferred each day. There is no "sag" wagon as such but we can arrange to collect the weary!!

TRAVEL INFORMATION

It is up to you to make your way to and from the tour. To help you in your travel arrangements we will arrange a transfer to the start point (included in the tour price).

The best way to arrive on the tour is by train from London or Paris (Charles de Gaulle Airport or Montparnasse Train Station). (Please note: Check-in no later than 30 minutes before departure.)

From/To London:

Outward Journey	Departure London St Pancras Int.	10:57	Change of train in Lille Europe
	Arrival Angers	17:12	
Homeward Journey	Departure St Pierre des Corps	11:01	Change of train in Lille Europe
	Arrival London St Pancras Int.	16:03	

Note, there is a change of trains in Lille Europe.

From/To Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport or Paris Montparnasse Train Station

Outward Journey	Departure Ch. De Gaulle Airport	14:48
	Arrival Angers	17:12
Homeward Journey	Departure St Pierre des Corps	11:01
	Arrival Ch. De Gaulle Airport	12:39

Outward Journey	Departure Montparnasse	15:52
	Arrival Angers	17:25
Homeward Journey	Departure St Pierre des Corps	11:19
	Arrival Montparnasse	12:24

Local transfers are from Angers station to the first hotel, and from the last hotel to St Pierre Des Corps station. **Please note the arrival and departure stations are different.**

Please take careful note of the train times above. Our transfers are scheduled to meet these designated trains; if these train times are inconvenient, please contact us so that we can be sure of arranging appropriate transfers.

You will be met at Angers between 17:12 and 17:25 on Saturday by a tour representative who will be easily identifiable and brought by minibus to the starting point at Montreuil Bellay. Our transfer aims to leave Angers station by 17:40. At the end of the week you will be brought to the train station St Pierre des Corps for the departure to Paris Charles de Gaulle / Montparnasse and London (via Lille) at 11:01. Both transfers are included in the tour price.

These are the only transfers that we arrange to Angers and from St Pierre des Corps so it is very important that you are on the right train. If you are experiencing any difficulties, do let us know and we will try to help as much as we can. If you do miss the train, try and arrange to get on the next one. If you have to pay for another ticket you are responsible for the cost (depending on circumstances you may be covered by insurance). Call the owner of the first hotel and give them your name and arrival details. The tour guide will help you arrange another transfer to the hotel.

Making your own way to Montreuil Bellay

You can get a train to Saumur either from Paris or from St Pierre Des Corps, and buses operated by the train company leave Saumur for Mntreuil Bellay every hour.

Information on trains in France can be found on the website: www.raileurope.com/us/index.htm

You have to arrange train tickets yourselves. You can contact a company called Rail Canterbury who supply European rail tickets all over the world: www.rail-canterbury.co.uk/

The Wines of the Loire Valley

The Loire valley is a long way north for a wine region, but for centuries 'the Garden of France' has produced vast quantities of wine. The only world class wines from the Loire are the imperishable vins liquoreux found among the Coteaux du Layon in appellations such as Bonnezeaux and Chaume, but there are wines of real interest and quality to be found by those willing to look.

The first vineyards on its descent from the Massif Central are found in Pouilly Fumé and Sancerre, renowned for their flinty dry sauvignon blancs. Further downstream there are red wine appellations such as Chinon, St Nicholas de Bourgueil and the more prestigious Saumur-Champigny, all made primarily from the Cabernet France grape.

Saumur-Champigny is restricted to just 9 municipalities, but the wider appellation of Saumur is the largest producer of sparkling wines in the world outside Champagne. The history of sparkling wine here is a result of too many unreliable harvests producing thin, acidic wine. Locals developed the method of adding sugar to encourage a secondary fermentation that produces a more reliable product, and the famous fizz. This isn't cheap Champagne - some argue that this is where the 'traditional method' was first discovered, and there are some wines of real quality produced under the appellation of Saumur Brut.

Another appellation of note is Vouvray, once one of the most renowned appellations in France, and now rebuilding that reputation. Vignerons in Vouvray can only produce white wine, and can only use the Chenin Blanc grape, but the variety of wines is surprising. There are bone-dry Vouvray Sec wines, and they range from off-dry to moelleux (not quite as sweet as a vin liquoreux). There are also sparkling wines and most unusually of all, Vouvray Pétillant - very slightly sparkling wine. This method requires a better quality wine to start with, and so a good Pétillant can be a delight on a hot summer day.

Food and Drink

What if I have any special dietary requirements?

Vegetarians are catered for (please advise if you eat fish). Vegans choice will be limited, but they can be accommodated.

Are beverages included with the meals?

No, all beverages are to your own account.