

Cycling Safaris

LOIRE VALLEY 2018

Self guided Tour
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 Arrive

Transfers will be arranged from Saumur train station. You start from Montreuil Bellay, a delightful walled village with striking chateau overlooking the river Thouet. A chance to lounge by the pool and enjoy a cold pastis.

DAY 2 Montreuil Bellay to Chinon 26 miles / 42 km

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

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

You leave Vienne and cycle towards the river Indre where you find Château Ussé. Next stop is Villandry and its Michelin 3***rated gardens., then cycle through delightful riding country to Azay-le-Rideau, another top-rated chateau. Tonight you will stay at the Hotel Château with the chance to visit the spectacular *son et lumière*, and the spectacle at Azay-le-Rideau is worth the stroll.

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

Today is a long cycle, 37 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 you are at the Hotel George Sands.

DAY 5 **Loches to Montrichard** **26 miles / 42 km**

A long memorable day, with some glorious cycling that takes you off the tourist route, and 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. You can cycle to the Caves du Monmousseau for a tour of their wine cave and a tasting of their sparkling wines, but please check times. Tonight you are beside the banks of the River Cher at the Hotel Bellevue.

DAY 6 **Montrichard to Chambord** **31 miles / 50 km**

Follow the Cher valley, visiting fascinating mushroom caves at Bourré where they grow Blue Foot, Shitake, Oyster and Paris mushrooms – it's a great visit, but please check times. After lunch, the route follows quiet backroads across deserted countryside to château Cheverny which lies in the Cour-Cheverny appellation with wine made from the local Romanian grape. The Château Chombarde is 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 **Chambord to Amboise** **39 miles / 63 km**

Much of today is spent beside the Loire downstream, passing through Chaumont. Your final destination is Amboise. With its beautiful white château overlooking the Loire and the bustling medieval centre, Amboise was also the last home of Leonardo da Vinci at the Clos-Luce, which is well worth a visit, and your last night is at the Hotel le Vinci.

DAY 8 **Homeward bound**

We will arrange transport to Amboise train station with an 11-minute journey to the TGV station at St Pierre des Corps. A gentle departure time from St Pierre of 10.30 arrives in Paris before midday, and London by mid-afternoon.

2018 TOUR DATES

Arrival any day between May 1 – September 22

2018 TOUR PRICE

€1,210.00 euro per person sharing
+ €395.00 single room supplement if travelling with others
+ €155.00 additional solo supplement if travelling on your own

WHAT THE TOUR PRICE INCLUDES

- 7 nights hotel accommodation
- Luggage transferred locally
- 24 speed hybrid touring bike
- Basic repair kit
- Helmet, if required
- Waterproof jacket
- Panniers, water bottle, cycling jersey
- Comprehensive road book
- Transfer from Saumur train station to the starting point of the tour
- Transfer to Amboise train station at the tour end

Not included:

Dinners

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!

BACK UP SERVICE

As this is a self led trip you do not have the back-up of a guide and support van. Our aim is to allow you feel like an independent traveller, free to cycle each day at your own pace while at the same time having the security of knowing that your luggage will be waiting for you in your next accommodation.

If you experience small problems with the bike (e.g., a puncture) you will have a spare tube, pump and tyre levers. You also have access to a 24 hour helpline.

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.)

Recommended times:

From/To London:

Outward Journey	Depart London St Pancras International	11.25
	Arrive Paris Gare du Nord	14.58
	Depart Paris Montparnasse	16:46
	Arrive St Pierre Des Corps	17:45
	Depart St Pierree Des Corps	18:06
	Arrive Saumur	18:38
	Transfer to Hotel	
Inbound Journey	Transfer from Hotel	
	Depart Amboise	09:39
	Arrive St Pierre Des Corps	09:50
	Depart St Pierre Des Corps	10:15
	Arrive Paris Montparnasse	11:16
	Depart Paris Gare du Nord	13:13
	Arrive London St Pancras	14:39

From /To Paris

Outward Journey	Depart Paris Montparnasse	16:46
	Arrive St Pierre Des Corps	17:45
	Depart St Pierre Des Corps	18:06
	Arrive Saumur	18:38
Inbound Journey	Transfer from Hotel	
	Depart Amboise	09:39
	Arrive Paris Montparnasse	11:16

There are no direct trains from Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport.

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. Our representative will help you arrange another transfer to the hotel.

You can of course make your own way to and from the tour. All details on trains in France are available through the website www.raileurope.com/us/index.htm.

Local transfers are from Saumur train station to the first hotel, and from the last hotel to Amboise 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 Saumur at 18:40 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 Saumur station by 18:45. At the end of the week you will be brought to the train station Amboise 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 from Saumur and from St Pierre 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 representative will help you arrange another transfer to the hotel.

Making your own way to Saumur

You can get a train to Saumur either from Paris or from St Pierre Des Corps.

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/

GENERAL INFORMATION

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 Borgeuil 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.