

Cycling Safaris

LOIRE VALLEY 2025

Guided Tour

Guide cycling with group | 300 km | 7 nights / 8 days



Between the 13th and the 16th Centuries, French royalty built an amazing collection of beautiful renaissance chateaux.

On the Loire Valley cycling tour we visit Chateau Chambord, the largest of the Loire chateaux, built by Francois I as a hunting lodge and containing a spectacular staircase by Leonardo Da Vinci. We visit Chenonceau, once the home of Henry II's mistress, Diane of Poitiers, evicted by his widow, Catherine de Medici, who then went on to build the iconic ballroom across the River Cher.

The Chateaux are stunning, and we've put together a great itinerary of visits. But of course, we have got great food, interesting wines, and the path less trodden.

TOUR ITINERARY

DAY 1 Arrive

We arrive at our hotel in Chinon in the afternoon. We stay at the Hotel de France in the heart of this beautiful medieval city, overlooking the beautiful Place du Général de Gaulle where you can relax in any of the many pavement bars and cafes.

In the 12th Century Chinon was effectively the English capital as successive Kings made their home in the château. It is much older than most Loire château, and its military purpose is obvious from its commanding position along the ridge that overlooks the medieval town of Chinon.

DAY 2 The Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, and beautiful vineyards**38 km / 24 miles**

We leave Chinon along the banks of the River Vienne and make our way to the Royal Abbey at Fontevraud. This huge Abbey was traditionally the home of many French Queens but is most famous as the resting place of Henry II, his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine and their son Richard the Lionheart. King John I's wife, Isabelle of Angouleme, also lies with them, but she's a bit less famous, poor love.

From Fontevraud it's downhill to Montsoreau where the Vienne enters the River Loire. We'll cross the Vienne, and cycle along the opposite bank back into Chinon.

DAY 3 Sleeping Beauty Woz 'Ere**33 miles / 52 km**

We start today with a tour of the castle of Chinon. As well as home to English Kings, the castle contains the tower where Joan of Arc 'heard the voices' telling her she would be granted an army to relieve the siege of Orléans.

We leave the Vienne and continue our cycling tour back towards the Indre and the Loire.

Overlooking the Indre is the first of the big-league château, Château Ussé, the inspiration for Charles Perrault's Sleeping Beauty.

Next on our hit-list is Villandry, an unexceptional château, but with gardens that Michelin rate as a 3*** attraction - 'worth a journey in their own right'. There are three gardens - a vegetable garden, a flower garden and a water garden.

Each year the gardening team choose a theme and tell a story in flowers. Villandry is really something, and not to be missed.

Finally today we cycle the 11 km or so to Azay-le-Rideau, another member of the Premier League of Loire Châteaux. Azay-le-Rideau is surrounded on three sides by the River Indre, which has been carefully landscaped to provide a beautiful reflective setting for this ornate château.

There was no military purpose to Azay-le-Rideau, it was just designed to be beautiful, and it is.

Tonight we stay at the Hotel des Chateaux, on the outskirts of Azay-le-Rideau a short stroll from the town.

DAY 4 A Tale of two Châteaux**36 miles / 57 km**

We start the day with a visit to the purely decorative château of Azay-le-Rideau on the river Indre, and boy is it decorative, and finish in the medieval Cité Royale of Loches, on the Indre, where sits the Donjon of Loches.

A donjon is a fortress and this place is very obviously built for function rather than form.

In between we cycle over the beautiful rolling farmland of the river Indre, acclaimed as the most beautiful landscape of all the rivers of the Loire Valley.

Depending on timing and inclination, we may be able to visit the Donjon in Loches on our arrival in town, or, if you prefer, a stroll around the royal residence, home of many French Kings, not to mention their wives and mistresses. There will also be more opportunity for these visits tomorrow morning as both are just a stroll (okay, a steep stroll) away from tonight's hotel, the George Sands.

DAY 5 Chateau Chenonceau**26 miles / 42 km**

Before leaving Loches, we will attempt to fill any gaps left in your knowledge of its medieval royal buildings (possibly caused by indulging in an extra beer or two on the delightful terrace of the Georges Sands yesterday afternoon.) after which we will head back across country to the most visited of all Loire Châteaux, Chenonceau. Built as a bridge over the Cher and surrounded by ornamental gardens and man-made moats, this château manages to live up to the usual French hyperbole of its website. It truly is unforgettable.

Most of the rooms are open, and this is a chance to see original floors, tapestries and furniture. In general French Châteaux don't have all the furnishings and interior detail that we often see in British castles. Chenonceau is a pleasant exception, and Louise of Lorraine's room, painted entirely in black with silver motifs of tears and crowns of thorns to mourn her dead husband, is especially memorable.

The ballroom, built by Catherine de Medici, spans the Cher in spectacular fashion, and although the Château had no military value it took on a gloomy historical role in the 20th century. First, it served as an army hospital in the First World War. Then, In the Second World War, the Cher was the boundary between Nazi-occupied France and Vichy France. Château Chenonceau was a border post, each end of the ballroom opening into a different country.

Leaving Chenonceau, we'll cycle the 10 miles or so to the fabulous Royal Chateau of Amboise. Amboise is a lively, thriving little town with a medieval centre - you may think we've earned a cold drink in the square below the imposing Chateau, before we make our way to the Hotel Vinci.

DAY 6 Upstream to Blois**26 miles / 41 km**

From Amboise we follow delightful backroads to the Chateau of Chaumont. This is the Chateau that King Henry II's mistress, Diane of Poitiers, was given as a consolation prize in exchange for Chenonceau.

It's quite a consolation prize! The grounds are beautiful, the trees as good as an arboretum. The Chateau is lovely, too, with a fabulous stable block, but these days Chaumont is best-known for its garden festival.

From Chaumont we'll cross over to the North bank of the river Loire for the first time, and cycle a lovely, flat leisurely 15 miles or so into the centre of Blois.

This afternoon we'll visit the Chateau of Blois, in the centre of town. This is one of the largest and most magnificent of all the Loire Chateau, with 100 bedrooms and over 500 rooms (I think only Chambord is bigger). The Chateau was built, and added to, over a period of 400 years by various Kings, Queens and heirs. But the additions and extra wings were done with money and taste - not desperate repairs by impoverished minor royals! A really memorable building.

DAY 7 Chambord - The World's Grandest Hunting Lodge**30 miles / 48 km**

We leave Blois following the River Loire upstream, on a combination of small roads and cycle paths. But before we do, Saturday is market day in Blois. It boasts a particularly thriving local cheese selection. We cross the Loire at Muides-sur-Loire, and cycle through forests full of deer and wild boar on our way to the grandest Loire chateaux of them all, Chambord.

Chambord was built as a hunting lodge by Francois 1, King of France. The chateau itself is beautiful, the largest of all the Loire Chateau, featuring 365 chimneys. As well as exploring the chateau, we can access the roof by the amazing double-helix staircase, once thought to have been designed by Leonardo da Vinci. Two people can enter the staircase from opposite sides and descend to the ground floor without ever meeting.

Chambord sits within Europe's longest wall, 34 Km long, enclosing the royal hunting grounds. Although we'll see evidence of wild boar everywhere, they're so shy that it's difficult to see them. Dusk is the best option, and there are 'hides' dotted throughout the forest, but sadly we won't be here at dusk!

We'll leave Chambord, still cycling through hunting forest, as we make our way back along the River Cosson, and cross back into Blois and our hotel.

DAY 8

Homeward bound

We're about a 45-minute drive from the TGV station at St Pierre des Corps, and a gentle departure time of 10.30 am from Saint Pierre allows for a decent breakfast and gets us back into Paris for late morning.

2025 GROUP TOUR DATES

June 28

July 26

2025 TOUR PRICE

€2080 per person sharing

+ €455 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 with breakfast
- All evening meals
- Luggage transfers
- Route notes and maps
- Tour guide that accompanies the group
- Bike hire, with panniers, water bottle, helmet, etc.
- Details of all hotels and restaurants
- All routes available in GPS form
- Cycling jersey
- Vineyard tasting fees
- Transfer from Amboise to St Pierre des Corps at the tour end

Not included:

E-Bike rental available for €190 supplement

Admission charges to the châteaux

Transfer from Angers (rtn from St. Pierre des Corps) to/from hotel €85

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 FX3 Hybrid 27 speed touring bike with aluminium frame and Shimano gear system.

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|------------------------|---|
| 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 offer the option of booking a transfer to the start point and from the last nights hotel back to the train station. The cost for this is €85 (Transfer from Angers (rtn from St. Pierre des Corps) to/from hotel.

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:

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|------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Outward Journey | Departure London St Pancras Int. | 08:31 | Change of train in Lille Europe |
| | Arrival Angers | 15:10 | |
| Homeward Journey | Departure St Pierre des Corps | 11:02 | Change of train in Lille Europe |
| | Arrival London St Pancras Int. | 16:05 | |

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

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

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| Outward Journey | Departure Ch. De Gaulle Airport | 12:48 |
| | Arrival Angers | 15:17 |
| Homeward Journey | Departure St Pierre des Corps | 11:02 |
| | Arrival Ch. De Gaulle Airport | 12:41 |

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|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Outward Journey | Departure Montparnasse | 13:46 |
| | Arrival Angers | 15:10 |
| Homeward Journey | Departure St Pierre des Corps | 10:54 |
| | Arrival Montparnasse | 12:01 |

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.

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

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 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.