

PROVENCE OF THE TOUR DE FRANCE

BY DIVERSE DIRECTIONS: SELF-GUIDED BICYCLE TOURS

Tour Overview

Tour Dates See the Schedule page on our website.

Location The Provence Region of France. In the deep south of France, the tour begins and ends in Avignon, 3.5 - 4.5 hours from Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport by express train. The vegetation, light, and ambiance is Mediterranean. Overnight destinations include Avignon, Gordes, Sault, and Vaison-la-Romaine.

Type Circuit Tour. This tour is available with standard or gold support.

Terrain The terrain, like everything about this region, is diverse. While there are lots of ups and downs on this tour (some challenging), you will also enjoy long, relatively flat stretches of effortless cycling.

Length 7 days / 8 nights.

Distance Total: 173 miles / 279 km. Average per day: 34.6 miles / 55.8 km.

Daily Itinerary

Day 0: Arrival Day in Avignon.

We ask that all tour participants arrive in Avignon no later than the evening before the first day of the tour. This reduces any stress associated with travel delays, as no activities are required until Day 1 of your tour.

Day 1: Free Day in Avignon.

During your first full day in Avignon, you'll pick-up your bicycle and have the opportunity to take it for a leisurely spin around Avignon or on the beautiful island in the Rhone called the Isle de Barthelasse. In addition, you'll have plenty of time to sight-see, shop, dine and prepare for your next day's departure.

Avignon is a vibrant, sunny, southern city, full of historical sights. Must-sees include the Palais des Papes, the palatial residence of the Popes who moved here from Rome in the 14th century when Rome was politically unstable, and the city's collection of art museums and Romanesque, gothic and renaissance churches. In addition, you will be fascinated by Avignon's centuries old ramparts which completely surround the city's medieval center, as well as the 12th century bridge which partially spans the mighty Rhone River. You'll be staying within the city's walled center, just a few short steps from a multitude of fabulous restaurants and shops.

Day 2: Avignon to Gordes - 47 km / 30 miles. Spend 2 nights in Gordes.

Following your departure from Avignon and its environs, you'll begin your first full day of cycling on quiet country roads winding through the famous vineyards of the Rhone river valley. Your route today is largely flat with just a couple of climbs and includes numerous opportunities to explore the warm, quiet and welcoming villages for which Provence is widely known. On your way to Gordes, you'll pass through the sleepy village of Jonquérettes, the often lively market town of le Thor, and magical Isle-sur-le-Sorgue with the five branches of the Sorgue River meandering through it. You'll end your day by entering into the region of Provence known as the Lubéron staying for two nights in one of it's most magnificent hilltop villages, Gordes.

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Day 3: Circuit of the perched villages of the Lubéron - 45 km / 28 miles.

Having entered the Lubéron -- that part of Provence made famous by Peter Mayle in his bestselling memoir, [A Year in Provence](#) -- on this day's circuit trip, you will see and experience more of the region's magnificent natural beauty, as well as an incredible sampling of southern France's most beautiful villages all perched high atop the cliffs of the foothills. Your route today is largely, gently rolling hills interspersed with some short to mid-length climbs. You'll cycle through deep green forests laced with ochre-colored rock formations and visit quintessentially Provencal villages such as Lacoste, Roussillon, Menerbes and Goult. Like your approach into Gordes yesterday, you'll marvel at the picturesque beauty of these medieval enclaves with their stone cottages clinging to their hillsides overlooking the majestic landscapes below them.

Day 4: Gordes to Sault - 60 km / 37 miles. Spend 1 night in Sault.

On today's ride, you'll turn your sights almost exclusively toward the raw, unspoiled, off-the-beaten path natural beauty of the Lubéron. Shortly after your departure from Gordes, you'll skirt the nearby mountains cycling alongside jagged rock walls. Your route today is largely a steady climb, with some exciting roller coaster-like ups and downs. The highlight of this day's ride however is the magnificence of the Gorges de la Nesque with its expansive vistas, hairpin switchback turns and Grand Canyon-esque drama. After leaving the Gorges, you'll soon arrive in Sault, the staging point for your Mount Ventoux adventure.

Day 5: Sault to Vaison-la-Romaine - 57.1 km / 35 miles via Mont Ventoux or - 46.6 km / 29 miles via alternate. Spend 2 nights in Vaison-la-Romaine.

For couples and groups consisting of individuals with different fitness, skill and / or interest levels, the climb-up Mount Ventoux, the mountain made famous by five-time Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong, is optional. The alternative route consists of gently rolling hills interspersed with stretches of flat, effortless cycling and a couple of climbs. The alternative route includes the spectacular scenery of the Valley of the Toulourenc and passes through several beautiful villages as well.

For our adventure seekers, our climb up Mount Ventoux begins in Sault, the most popular approach to the summit due to its more manageable grade overall. From Sault to Chalet Reynard (the point at which all approaches up the mountain converge) the grade ranges from 1% to 6%. Midway through your climb up the mountain's forested eastern slope you'll encounter an average grade of slightly less than 6% for 7 consecutive kilometers.

From Chalet Reynard to the summit, the grade ranges from 6.5% to 10.4% with the steepest grade occurring at the very summit for 1.1 kms. By the time you've reached the mountain's barren summit, you will have climbed 1150 meters over 21.1 kilometers. Of course, your descent to Vaison-la-Romaine is a spine-tingling, hair-raising, thrill-a-minute, once in a lifetime experience as well.

Day 6: Free day in Vaison-la-Romaine.

You'll appreciate a full day to explore magnificent Vaison-la-Romaine. We recommend beginning your exploration of Vaison in the medieval upper town with its narrow, winding streets lined with beautiful gardens, charming shops and wonderful restaurants. Perched above the upper town you'll find the ruins of a 12th century castle and its once mighty fortifications. As mid-day approaches, you'll want to descend the hill on which the upper town rests to experience the convivial ambience of Vaison's lively new town. There, we recommend having lunch and shopping for locally crafted treasures before descending further to spend your afternoon exploring the excavated ruins of an extensive Roman settlement including the homes of its wealthiest

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residents with their still intact mosaic floors and indoor plumbing. Vaison is indeed a sensual delight!

Day 7: Vaison to Avignon - 70 km / 44 miles - Spend 1 night in Avignon.

Dominated by exquisite natural beauty and a numerous villages, each lovelier than the last, you may be tempted to devote the entire day to this final stage of your tour itinerary. From Vaison, you'll travel along the edge of the Dentelles (French for lace) Mountains down the Route du Vin to the charming winemaking villages of Séguret, Sablet, and Gigondas. From there, you'll head east for more level cycling, passing through one of France's most exclusive wine appellations, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, a wonderful place to have lunch and explore.

After lunch, you'll cross the Rhone back into the Gard region. Your route will take you down the west side of the Rhone to Roquemaure and then, onto to the Isle de Barthelasse where you'll cycle on tiny back roads through apple, peach and pear orchards and fields of sunflowers. Before returning to Avignon however, we recommend stopping in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, just across the Rhone from Avignon. Villeneuve is where the cardinals settled when on their arrival in the 14th century in Avignon they found no place to build. In addition to its many splendid sights such as the massive citadel known as Fort St André and the Tour Phillippe le Bel, from here, you'll enjoy incredible views of Avignon and Mount Ventoux.