



Loire Valley Châteaux: Hub & Spoke Version

Tour Overview

This tour is 6 days / 6 nights with day-trip rides from your base in the beautiful city of Amboise. Using short train rides to various starting points, you will have the opportunity to visit at least 8 major castles. The length of the average train ride is 20 minutes at an average cost of 6 Euros per ride. You'll be provided with a schedule of the trains that permit bicycles, and there is no extra charge for bikes. And it's all very easy! Major châteaux on this itinerary include Blois, Chambord, Chaumont-sur-Loire, Amboise, Chenonceau, Villandry, Azay-le-Rideau, and Langeais.

Even if you're not particularly interested in visiting castles, this is an extraordinary tour for beautiful scenery and easy cycling on bike paths or extremely lightly-traveled roads.

Tour Dates: You may begin this tour on any day from April 1 to October 31. See [Schedule](#) for blackout dates and additional tour scheduling considerations.

Location: The Loire Valley region of France known as the "Garden of France." The region has been on the UNESCO's World Heritage list since 2000, owing to its culture and art, concentrated largely in the region's châteaux (castles). The Loire Valley is just 1 - 2 hours from Paris. Overnight destinations on this tour include Blois, Amboise, and Tours.

Tour Type: Hub & Spoke

Terrain: Flat for the most part with occasional stretches of gently rolling hills. Only a couple of climbs that require the granny gear. Cycling is primarily on designated bike routes, which may be separate paths or tiny roads shared with local residents.

Length: 6 days / 6 nights

Distance: Total distance is 237 km / 147 miles. Average distance per day is 47 km / 29 miles.

Highlights:

- The historic royal cities of Blois, Amboise, and Tours.
- The grandest of the Loire Valley castles, including the castles of Blois, Chambord, Chaumont-sur-Loire, Amboise, Chenonceau, Villandry, Langeais, and Azay-le-Rideau.
- Countless smaller castles and historical sights.
- Tranquil cycling on bike paths and tiny, quiet roads.
- Easy cycling along the banks of the region's lovely rivers: the Loire, the Cher, and the Indre.
- Beautiful countryside and charming medieval villages.
- Vineyards and lots of opportunities for wine tastings.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Amboise. Explore the city and its chateau. Spend 6 nights.

Your tour begins in the historic town of Amboise, located about 2 hours by train from Paris. You may arrive as early as you wish to maximize the time you have to see the sights of this lovely city and its royal chateau. No formal tour activities are planned for this day.

With its impressive collection of Renaissance and Gothic furniture, Château d'Amboise is of an earlier era than the other castles on your tour, built atop a bluff for defense. There is a magnificent view from the castle's terrace of Amboise's pointed roofs and walls, and of the River Loire meandering through the lush valley.

Also worth a visit in Amboise is the manor house of le Clos Lucé, where Leonardo da Vinci (at the invitation of King Francois I) lived the final years of his life. Transformed into a museum, the Château du Clos Lucé provides an opportunity to penetrate the captivating universe of a genius. The basement houses the museum of Leonardo's fabulous machines, a collection of models made by IBM based on his designs, which were four centuries ahead of his time. Studying the many machines that he designed, you may even conclude that it was Leonardo himself who invented the bicycle!

In addition, you'll definitely want to spend some time strolling the tiny streets of this incredibly beautiful town. Enjoy a glass of wine or a snack in one of the many cafés lining the lovely squares while soaking in the local ambiance. Amboise maintains a series of scenic and historic walks that are well-signed and take you into nooks and crannies of the town that many never see. This is another highly recommended activity.

Day 2: Take a short 20-minute train ride to Tours to pick up your rental bikes. Cycle to Villandry and return to explore Old Tours - 40 km / 25 miles. Return to Amboise by train.

You'll pick up your rental bikes just 2 blocks from the train station in Tours. After leaving busy Tours on designated bike paths, your route follows the River Cher to the beautiful riverside village of Savonnières and the adjacent Grottes Petrifiantes (petrifying caves.) Formerly used as quarries, these caves are now open to the public for viewing their immense underground galleries.

Just beyond Savonnières, you arrive at the Château de Villandry, one of the last great Renaissance castles to be built in the Loire Valley. Best known for its internationally renowned gardens, Villandry's grounds contain canals, fountains, cascades, vine-covered pergolas, and a Romanesque village church.

After your visit of the castle, you'll cycle along the Loire back to Tours for a ride through the heart of Old Tours, which beckons you to dismount and take a stroll through its narrow medieval streets and beautiful squares lined with half-timbered buildings. The restoration of Old Tours with its pedestrian-only areas was in fact so successful that it led to national legislation providing incentives for the restoration and preservation of the nation's medieval structures (*la Loi Malraux*.) Of course, you'll also have the opportunity to visit Tours' own château before calling it a day.

Day 3: Take a 20-minute train ride to Blois. Cycle to the Château de Chambord and return to Blois via riverside cycling along the Loire - 47 km / 29 miles. Return to Amboise by train.

Today you will visit one of the most important sights of your tour: the magnificent Château de Chambord. Chambord is the largest by far of all the Loire castles and is built on a scale that foreshadowed the château at Versailles. It owes its impact to its fine architectural unity and sumptuous Renaissance decoration, dating from the period when this style was at its most splendid. Among the must-sees of Chambord are the famous double staircase, conceived by Leonardo da Vinci; and the roof terrace -- a maze of lanterns, chimneys, stairs, and dormer windows. The château contains 440 rooms, hundreds of fireplaces, and boasts a collection of some 3000 objects of art, furniture, and tapestries. Adding to the vastness of Chambord's scale is its setting in a 13,591 acre park that is enclosed by the longest wall in France..

On the way to Chambord you'll have the opportunity to see the real France -- charming medieval villages, vineyards, and of course, the River Loire. Following your visit to Chambord, your return ride to Blois includes 8 miles / 13 km of cycling along the mighty Loire, with stunning views of the countryside and the castles on the opposite river bank.

Day 4: Cycle to the Château de Chenonceau and return via riverside cycling along the Cher - 51 km / 32 miles.

The principal attraction of today's ride is the incredibly beautiful Château de Chenonceau, a 15th century castle stretching across the River Cher in a harmonious setting of water, gardens, and trees. To this perfection is added the elegance of the château's architecture, interior decor, and magnificent furniture. The château consists of a rectangular mansion with turrets at the corners. Catherine de Medici's two-storied gallery stretches across the bridge over the river. For sheer beauty, a visit to the Château de Chenonceau is a must.

Today's cycling route is equally impressive. After a mostly wooded route along tranquil roads on the way to Chenonceau, your return route follows the ancient towpath of the River Cher for easy, beautiful riverside cycling past the pretty villages of Bléré, Nitray, and Azay-sur-Cher, as well as several more castles. A stop at the Château de Nitray (website in French only), another pearl of the Renaissance, is recommended for those with the energy. The final leg of today's ride takes you back into the vineyards and into gently rolling terrain that is pleasurable and not too taxing.

Day 5: Take a short 20-minute train ride to Blois and return to Amboise by bike. Explore Blois and its castle, as well as the castle of Chaumont. 46 km / 29 miles.

Since 1986 Blois has been designated a "City of Art and History", owing to its efforts to value and preserve the vast treasures of its glorious past. Blois is an easy walking town, with a large expanse of pedestrian-only streets located at the foot of its castle.

Blois Castle was built in four successive stages: medieval (13th century), transition (Gothic-Renaissance in late 15th and early 16th centuries), Renaissance (1515 - 1524), and Classical. The result as described by Henry James: The facade of the château is "one of the most beautiful and elaborate of all the old royal residences in this part of France."

After your tour of the castle you'll be treated to a magnificent day of cycling. From the farm fields and woods immediately surrounding Blois, to an awesome forested ride along the River Beuvron, your short 13-mile / 21 km ride to the Château of Chaumont-sur-Loire will leave you wanting more cycling. But you won't want to miss Chaumont with its beautiful gardens and impressive collection of period furnishings and tapestries. Like the château of Amboise, this defensive castle commands a beautiful view of the town and river. The feudal austerity of the structure is softened by its Renaissance influence, its elegant stair tower, and its sumptuous Council Room. The 10-minute walk uphill to the castle provides the opportunity to admire the fine landscaped gardens, as well as cedars, lime trees, and redwoods. The view from the terrace is remarkable.

After departing Chaumont, your cycling route takes you atop the plateau -- one of this tour's few climbs -- along quiet roads and into the region's vineyards. You'll enjoy stunning views of the surrounding area, without a lot of ups and downs.

Day 6: Take the train from Amboise to Tours - Cycle from Tours to the Château de Langeais and the Château d'Azay-le-Rideau - 50 km / 31 miles. Return to Amboise by train.

Today's route begins with beautiful cycling along the unspoiled River Cher, passing its confluence with the Loire. You'll enjoy cycling tiny roads along the levy of the rivers, which provide just enough elevation to afford a nice view of all there is to see. You'll arrive in Langeais over its magnificent suspension bridge, almost as popular as its chateau. Langeais is a lovely medieval village, set at the junction of the Loire Valley's wine and castle routes. Its 15th century château, known for its exceptional collection of tapestries, is the perfect example of a late medieval castle, complete with parapet walk and drawbridge.

Following your visit to Langeais you'll return to serene riverside cycling to the charming village of Bréhémont and your introduction to the River Indre. Following the course of the Indre you arrive at your final castle.

Truly one of the gems of the Renaissance, the Château de Azay-le-Rideau commands a luxuriant setting on the banks of the River Indre. Its lines and dimensions suit the site so perfectly that it conveys an unforgettable impression of elegance. Partly built over the River Indre, Azay-le-Rideau consists of two main wings set at right angles. The reflections in the water add to the chimerical quality of the site and, together with the rows of houses and gardens along the Indre, make excellent subjects for photographs. The interior is lavishly decorated and furnished with some pieces of truly outstanding beauty.

The historic center of the village of Azay-le-Rideau is another unforgettable experience -- so classically French. After your visit, you'll return to Tours via a quick train ride. You'll return your rental bikes before 7 pm.

Tour Price: US \$375.00 per person

Children's Price - Children 16 years or younger traveling with 2 adults: \$200.00 per child.

Discounts are available for parties of 5 or more adults.

The tour price includes:

- Tour Documentation: Route instructions, maps, Pre-trip Preparation Guide, On-Road Quick Reference Guide, and Sights Guide.
- Bike Rental for 5 Days: Excellent quality hybrid bike with map carrier, cyclometer, water bottle cage, rear rack, rear pannier, lock, repair kit, helmet, and on-road bike assistance. Optional pedal cages. Tandem bikes are also available.
- Pick-up of your rental bikes at the conclusion of your tour.
- Reservation of your Accommodations
- English-Speaking Support Staff
- Shipping and Handling Charges for US customers

The tour price does NOT include:

- Hotels: Because you are free to select from a wide range of hotels -- from charming and basic 2-star to 4-star luxury (where available) -- the cost of your hotel accommodations is not bundled into the tour package price. A list of accommodations options for this tour, with website links, is available upon request.
- Meals: You are free to determine your own budget for meals. A wide variety of options are available -- from creating a picnic from provisions obtained at a boulangerie / patisserie, to dining at bistros and restaurants, or taking meals at your hotel (where available.) Please note that breakfasts are NOT included in France hotel rates. However, hotels with restaurants often offer a demi-pension option, which includes the cost of your room, breakfast, and dinner at a reasonable price.
- Transportation from your home to Blois and from Tours to your home
- The cost of local train rides to and from the day-trip ride starting points
- Personal expenses
- Insurance
- Shipping and Handling Charges for non-US customers. A shipping & handling charge of US \$15.00 will be added to tour package orders outside the US.

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