

# PROVENCE OF THE CAESARS TOUR

## 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, Uzès, Aiguèze, Orange, 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: 165 miles / 267 km. Average per day: 33 miles / 53 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 century's 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 Uzès - 53 km / 33 miles. Spend 1 night in Uzès.**

Just a short distance beyond the hustle and bustle of Avignon, you'll enter the world-renowned Provencal countryside. The first village through which you'll cycle, 16<sup>th</sup> century Aramon, feels forgotten by time. If you're visiting in September, you may even experience a running of the bulls! From Aramon you'll continue to Thézières, another medieval village set amidst the rolling hills of the Gard, and then on to Remoulins, gateway to the Pont du Gard. Constructed by the Romans in the 1st century to transport clean drinking water to the Roman city of Nîmes, this remarkable aqueduct bridges the Gard today as it has for 2000 years. The area surrounding the aqueduct is a park, complete with riverside beaches and a lovely picnic area. Plan to picnic here for lunch amidst its splendor. When it's time to leave, you'll actually cycle across the Pont du Gard.

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From the Pont du Gard, you'll cycle on tiny traffic-free roads through lovely vineyards and the charming villages of Sanilhac and Sagriès. As you begin the final 10 km's of the day's ride, you'll encounter the first of several climbs on your way to Uzès. Uzès commands a striking pose, sitting on the tip of a limestone plateau overlooking the Alzon valley. Established as a duchy in 1565, Uzès is still often referred to as the Duchy of Uzès. Its medieval core has been restored to its old grandeur, featuring such notable monuments as the Duchal Palace, the Eglise St. Etienne, the Cathédrale St. Théodorit, and the Tour Fenestrelle, a 12<sup>th</sup> century relic of a former Romanesque cathedral destroyed in the Wars of Religion. From its numerous sidewalk cafés, Uzès is a lively place to people-watch and soak up local color.

### **Day 3: Uzès to Aiguèze / St. Martin d'Ardèche - 62 km / 39 miles. Spend 2 nights in Aiguèze / St. Martin.**

You're going to love the non-stop beauty of this day's scenery. In fact, the route itself is the real sight seeing treat today. You'll begin your day with a challenging climb out of Uzès to the top of a plateau. Your route then takes you through beautiful countryside and several medieval villages to the enchanting town of Goudargues, known to the French as the Venice of the Gard (with its many canals, you'll soon understand why). Beyond Goudargues, you'll wedge your way through the Gorge of the Cèze, before beginning your last long climb of the day to St. Roman.

If you elect to stay in the fairytale-like hamlet of Aiguèze, your cycling ends here; otherwise you'll continue on to St. Martin. Aiguèze is a charming 14th century village perched high upon a cliff overlooking the Ardèche river. Beyond the turnoff for Aiguèze, you'll descend to the Ardèche River and your entry into St. Martin via a narrow suspension bridge. Sitting by the river at the eastern entrance to the Gorge of the Ardèche, St. Martin is a small riverside village with a relaxing ambience and offers a multitude of leisure time activities.

### **Day 4: Free Day in Aiguèze / St. Martin.**

For a relaxing Provençal experience, Aiguèze / St. Martin can't be beat. Enjoy the riverside parks and beaches, sit by the pool at your hotel, or simply stroll the tiny lanes of these sister villages. Or, for a more active approach to your free day, kayak down the Ardèche -- complete with rapids -- and / or cycle the winding road that towers above the gorge on the St. Martin side of the river. Along this road, you'll find magnificent vistas and several fascinating underground caves offering guided tours.

### **Day 5: St. Martin to Orange - 42 km / 26 miles - Spend 1 night in Orange.**

Before those hamstrings completely stiffen up, it's time to hit the road again for a relatively short ride to Orange. Today's ride is again beautiful; you'll pass through vineyards, rolling countryside, and lovely villages like Pont-St-Esprit with its medieval bridge over the Rhone. Arriving early into Orange, you'll enjoy the better part of your day exploring its many sights. Upon entering the city, you can't miss one of its most compelling landmarks, the Roman Triumphal Arch. One of the best preserved of the Roman gateway arches, the Arc de Triomphe has marked the entry into Orange for 2000 years.

You mustn't miss the Roman theater either; it's the best preserved not only in Provence but also in the whole of the Roman empire. During the summer, an international music festival is held at the theater. Adjacent to the theater, are the ruins of the Roman theater district. Finally, you'll enjoy exploring the lively old town of Orange, where you'll be staying. When you're tired, linger over a coffee at a sidewalk café while soaking up the local color.

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### **Day 6: Orange to Vaison-la-Romaine - 36 km / 22.5 miles - Spend 1 night in Vaison-la-Romaine.**

Today's ride takes you deep into vineyard country and through the beautiful villages of St-Cecile-les-Vignes, Cairanne, and Rasteau, before reaching your destination, 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 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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.