

VINEYARDS & VAN GOGH TOUR

BY DIVERSE DIRECTIONS: SELF-GUIDED BICYCLE TOURS

Tour Overview

Tour Dates You may begin this tour on any day except Sunday. See Schedule page for blackout dates and additional tour scheduling details.

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 5 nights in Avignon and 3 nights in Arles.

Type Hub & Spoke 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. Ride as many days as you like. Day trips include options for adding distance and challenge. Day trips can also be shortened.

Distance Choose from 7 day-trips ranging from 27 - 54 miles (44 - 87 km) in length.

Day-Trip Descriptions

Base 1: Avignon

Avignon is a vibrant southern city, full of historical sights. Must-sees include the city's many museums, churches and the Palais des Papes, the residence of the Popes who moved here from Rome in the 14th century when Rome was politically unstable. Avignon's medieval center is completely surrounded by ramparts, giving the city a most unusual look.

Spoke 1: Vintage Vaucluse

Route: Begins and ends in Avignon. Largely flat with just a couple of climbs. Optional side trip provides additional climbing opportunities.

Distance: 64 km / 40 miles

Description: This day trip takes you through the many vineyards of the Vaucluse Department and offers two noteworthy destinations, Pernes-les-Fontaines and Isle-sur-la-Sorgue. This route features peaceful roads through woods and vineyards; and quaint tiny villages to explore such as le Thor, St. Saturnin, and Jonquerettes.

Option: Optional side trip to the beautiful villages of St. Didier and Venasque adds 22 km / 14 miles and several long climbs.

Spoke 2: Papal Grapes

Route: Begins and ends in Avignon. Mostly flat except for the areas around Chateauneuf-du-Pape.

Distance: 52.6 km / 39 miles

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Description: This day trip takes you through the vineyards that belonged to the papacy when, during the 14th century, the popes resided in Avignon and maintained a summer residence near Chateauneuf-du-Pape. You leave Avignon by way of the Isle de la Barthelasse, an island in the middle of the Rhone River with splendid views of Avignon. The route takes you down tiny roads through beautiful orchards, along the cliff-studded Rhone River to the village of Roquemaure, and then to the vineyards of Chateauneuf-du-Pape. Chateauneuf is a world renowned center of wine making, as the Chateauneuf vintage is one of the world's most exclusive appellations. Other villages worthy of exploration include Bedarrides and Entraigues.

Option: Optional side trip to the city of Orange with its Roman Triumphal Arch and Amphitheatre, both of which date to the first century of the Common Era. Side trip adds 20 km / 12 miles and lots of rolling terrain.

Spoke 3: Vintage Heights

Route: Begins and ends in Avignon. Mostly flat, with some rolling terrain and just a couple of climbs near the end. Optional side trip provides additional climbing opportunities.

Distance: 43 km / 27 miles

Description: This day trip takes you to the lovely wine villages of the Cotes du Rhone appellation in the uplands of the Gard Department. The route begins with an option to spend some time in Avignon's sister city, Villeneuve-les-Avignon, which boasts a number of notable sites of its own. After following the towering cliffs of the Rhone River to the village of Roquemaure, you head west into gently rolling vineyards and the charming wine villages of Saint-Laurent-des-Arbres, Lirac, and Tavel.

Option: Optional side trip into the wooded peaks to the west with their unusual granite outcroppings adds 15.3 km / 10 miles. Though challenging, this side trip offers incredible scenery and spectacular views.

Spoke 4: Pont du Gard

Route: Begins and ends in Avignon. Lots of ups and downs and some long climbs. Optional side trip provides additional climbing opportunities.

Distance: 66 km / 41 miles

Description: This day trip's primary destination is the Roman aqueduct called 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. You'll also cycle through a number of charming medieval villages like 16th century Aramon, which feels forgotten by time. If you're visiting in September, you may even experience a running of the bulls! The area surrounding the Pont du Gard is a park, complete with riverside beaches and a lovely picnic area.

Option: Optional side trip to the magnificently perched village of Castillon-du-Gard adds 11 km / 7 miles and a very long climb. Your efforts are rewarded by one of France's most beautiful villages and extraordinary views.

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Spoke 5: The Route to Arles

Route: Begins in Avignon and ends in Arles. The route is mostly flat along very quiet roads with some rolling stretches on route to Tarascon.

Distance: 47 km / 29 miles

Description: This day trip takes you to your second base location, Arles, by way of Tarascon and Beaucaire, two towns that have been around since Roman times. Tarascon boasts a fairytale 15th century chateau, considered to be one of the finest fortified medieval castles in the whole of France. The route takes you first down the wooded shores of the Rhone and then along the tops of the hills that border the Rhone to Tarascon. Following Tarascon you cycle through quiet farmland that ends just before Arles.

Base 2: Arles

Once the Roman capital of Provence, then a major religious center during the Middle Ages, Arles offers a number of monuments from its glorious past including a magnificent Roman amphitheatre. Today, Arles is the unofficial capital of the Camargue. Van Gogh moved to Arles in 1888, captivated by the vivid colors of the surrounding countryside. Following the loss of his ear, Van Gogh moved to St. Remy, where he prolifically produced over 100 drawings and 150 canvases.

Spoke 6: Baux-de-Provence

Route: Begins and ends in Arles. The route is flat or gently rolling until you reach the Alpilles, after which you have a 3.5 km or 2 mile climb to Baux.

Distance: 56 km / 35 miles

Description: This day trip's primary destination is the perched medieval village of Baux-de-Provence. Sitting atop les Alpilles, a jagged range of mountains that pops up out of nowhere, the scenery and views here are a must. As you leave Arles you pass the remnants of an ancient Roman aqueduct and enter the gorgeous countryside made famous by Van Gogh and other Impressionists. In addition, you will have the opportunity to explore the medieval villages of Paradou, Maussane, St. Etienne-du-Grès, and the town of Fontvieille.

Option: Optional side trip to Van Gogh's town of St. Remy and the Roman ruins at Glanum adds 11 km / 7 miles.

Spoke 7: Subtropical Provence

Route: Begins and ends in Arles. The terrain is completely flat.

Distance: 56 km / 35 miles

Description: This day trip takes you into the Camargue, the vast wetland of the Rhone delta, where rice is the principle crop. The Camargue is a rich tapestry of many different ecosystems, a haven for wildlife, and a joy for anyone seeking tranquility or long, wild communion with a watery landscape. Much of this region is a nature conservation area, and you may see all manner of wildlife including flamingos, white horses, and bulls. You will likely see as much wildlife as people.