

## France: Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Les Baux & Avignon

### Bike Vacation Only

VBT's Provençal trip leaders are more than just guides—they're family! With our deep relationships in Provence, we've got the inside scoop on bike routes only the locals know. Cycle the majestic Alpilles, discovering the vibrant colors that inspired Van Gogh's masterpieces. Experience a stunning spectacle at Carrières de Lumières—a theatre carved from an ancient limestone quarry. Pedal a traffic-free bike path to the charming village of Chateauneuf-du-Pape—where you'll sample the region's exquisite vintages. Stroll the cobbled streets of Saint-Rémy and Avignon. Discover the medieval town of Uzès. Throughout your journey, you'll find the sights, sounds, and flavors of Provence are more vibrant when seen through the eyes of those who call this region home.

### Cultural Highlights

- Delve into the imagination of artist Vincent van Gogh on a private guided tour.
- Roll through pastoral landscapes of olive groves, vineyards, farms, and villages, set against the lofty Alpilles.
- Stride across the Pont du Gard, the magnificent, UNESCO-cited Roman aqueduct.
- Join a local guide on a tour of Avignon, the "City of the Popes."
- Explore Chateauneuf-du Pape, where life is lived in its wine.

### What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain mixed with moderate hills and is suitable for novice cyclists and ideal for experienced cyclists. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance with the hills.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 6-40 miles

**Average Cycling Time:** 2-5 hours

**Group size:** 20 max

### Climate Information

#### Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

April 67°/45°, May 74°/51°, June 82°/58°, September 78°/57°, October 68°/49°

#### Average Rainfall (in.)

April 2.1, May 2.5, June 1.7, September 2.6, October 3.3

## **DAY 1: Optional Transport from Aix-en-Provence to Castillon-du-Gard / Your VBT Vacation Begins / Warm-Up Loop Ride from Castillon-du-Gard to Vers-Pont-du-Gard**

Meet at the first hotel in Castillon-du-Gard by 2:30 p.m.

Your hotel is located in the heart of this charming hilltop village. At 2:30 p.m., meet your VBT Trip Leaders for a brief introduction, followed by a safety and bike-fitting session and a warm-up ride. This evening, attend a welcome reception and dinner at the hotel.

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Afternoon: Warm-Up Ride — 8 km (5 miles)

### **What to Expect:**

Begin your explorations with a warm-up ride to the village of Vers-Pont-du-Gard. Return to Castillon-du-Gard, a 13th-century village with cobblestone streets, gargoyles, an old watchtower, a Romanesque chapel, and the ochre façades of magnificently restored houses.

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 km (5 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

## **DAY 2: Avignon / Chateauneuf-du-Pape**

Breathtaking scenery and excellent cycling await you on the first full day of your Provence bike trip. After breakfast at your hotel, cycle from Castillon-du-Gard to Avignon, and enjoy lunch on your own.

After lunch in Avignon, join a local guide for a walking tour of the fabled “City of the Popes.” Stroll the timeless cobblestone streets of this ancient UNESCO World Heritage Site, rich with history and charm.

Later this afternoon, cycle to Châteauneuf-du-Pape along the new cycling path on the island of La Barthelasse. Pause in the village at a wine cellar for a tasting of the region’s distinctive red and white

wines, shaped by the pebbly soil and sunny climate. You may also visit the ruins of the 14th-century castle built by Pope John XXII, take in sweeping views of the Rhône Valley and Mont Ventoux, and explore the charming streets lined with shops. From here, return to the hotel in Castillon-du-Gard by coach.

Tonight is free for you to enjoy an authentic Provençal dinner at one of the village restaurants or at your hotel.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Castillon to Avignon — 34 km (21 miles)

Afternoon: Avignon to Châteauneuf-du-Pape — 18 km (11 miles)

### What to Expect:

Enjoy a morning ride, mainly on quiet country roads, from the Gard to the Vaucluse department, taking in impressive first views of France's historic papal city as you approach Avignon. After lunch on your own, join a guided walking tour inside the ancient city walls. Later this afternoon, cycle along the ViaRhôna bike path, which connects to the greenway leading to Châteauneuf-du-Pape for a wine tasting. Afterwards, shuttle back to the hotel before enjoying dinner on your own.

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 - 52 km (11 - 32 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 3: Uzès / Pont du Gard

Today's ride takes you to Uzès, a charming medieval town. Visit its well-preserved historic center, where cobblestone pathways lead to ancient castles, hidden gardens, and picturesque squares.

After lunch, cycle to the banks of the Gardon River and its famous Roman aqueduct bridge. Spend the rest of the afternoon exploring this architectural masterpiece. Built by the Romans in the first century BCE and declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1985, the Pont du Gard is part of a 31-mile (49.9 km) aqueduct that once transported water from a spring in Uzès to the city of Nîmes. Remarkably, the structure was built entirely without mortar, using stones weighing up to six tons. Consisting of three tiers, the bridge appears surprisingly delicate despite the massive materials used in its construction. While

much of the aqueduct has deteriorated over time, this impressive span still stands. You'll have the opportunity to walk across this stunning feat of ancient engineering.

It's then just a short bike ride back to your hotel.

Tonight, enjoy dinner at one of the local restaurants.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Castillon to Uzès — 29 km (18 miles)

Afternoon: Uzès to Pont du Gard — 14 km (9 miles) | Pont du Gard to Castillon-du-Gard — 4 km (2 miles)

#### What to Expect:

This morning, cycle through beautiful agricultural land as you make your way up to Uzès. Wander the narrow streets before enjoying lunch on your own. This afternoon, ride from Uzès to the Pont du Gard for a visit to this impressive Roman aqueduct. After your visit, enjoy a short bike ride back to the hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 4 - 47 km (2 - 29 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 4: Frigolet Abbey / Saint-Rémy-de-Provence

After breakfast this morning, begin cycling toward the Rhône River, crossing at Beaucaire into Tarascon, then continuing north along the river to an organic farm near Barbentane for a picnic lunch featuring Provençal favorites.

After lunch, pedal to your hotel in Saint-Rémy. Route options include a more direct path through Graveson and Maillane, or a longer, hillier route through the Montagnette to Frigolet Abbey, a 12th-century sanctuary nestled in a forest of pines and cypresses. Visit the exterior grounds and the two historic churches of this peaceful site, which is dedicated to Saint Michael the Archangel. The abbey takes its name from the wild thyme (*ferigoulo* in Provençal) that grows abundantly on the surrounding hills.

Once settled in, you'll have time to relax—perhaps with a swim in the hotel's outdoor pool—before

venturing out for dinner at one of Saint-Rémy's local restaurants, where you can savor regional Provençal cuisine in a charming village setting.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Castillon-du-Gard to Barbentane — 43 km (27 miles)

Afternoon: Barbentane to Saint Rémy — 20 km (12 miles) OR PLUS: Barbentane to Saint Rémy via St Michel de Frigolet — 25 km (15 miles)

### What to Expect:

This morning, cycle from the hotel toward the Rhône River, following sections of La Voie Verte, a dedicated bike path, and cross the river at Beaucaire into Tarascon, continuing on toward Barbentane for an included picnic lunch. After lunch, choose between a more direct route to the hotel in Saint-Rémy or a longer ride to the Abbey of Frigolet before continuing on to Saint-Rémy.

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 - 68 km (12 - 42 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 5: Cycle to Les Baux / Van Gogh Tour

After breakfast, cycle into the heart of the Alpilles to Les Baux-de-Provence, stopping at notable sites along the way, such as the ancient fortress of Les Baux, perched on an 800-foot (244-meter) rocky plateau.

The beautiful village of Les Baux offers many scenic lookouts with stunning views of Arles, the Camargue, and the surrounding Alpilles. As you wander through, take time to admire the architectural details of the church, château, town hall, hospital, chapels, and historic houses and doorways.

Enjoy lunch on your own here. Afterward, experience an extraordinary visual and musical production at Carrières de Lumières, a spectacular multimedia show set in an abandoned limestone quarry.

Then, cycle back toward Saint-Rémy-de-Provence through the gentle countryside that inspired Vincent van Gogh to create more than 150 paintings.

Later, meet your Trip Leaders and walk together to meet local historian, Mathilde Duvillier, near the Saint-Paul Asylum, where van Gogh voluntarily admitted himself. Mathilde will guide your small group to many of the actual locations depicted in van Gogh's works during his time in Saint-Rémy, allowing you to connect the scenes directly with the paintings. You'll also venture inside the sanitarium, where you'll see a carefully recreated version of van Gogh's room, complete with historically accurate furnishings and layout.

After a short walk back to Saint-Rémy, enjoy dinner on your own.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Saint-Rémy to Les Baux Loop — 9 km (6 miles) OR Saint-Rémy to Les Baux PLUS — 31 km (19 miles)

Afternoon: Les Baux to Saint-Rémy — 9 km (6 miles)

#### What to Expect:

This morning, cycle into the heart of the Alpilles to Les Baux-de-Provence, perched on a rocky plateau. If you wish, you may add an optional extra loop in the Alpilles before lunch. After lunch on your own, you can choose to cycle back to the hotel or return by support vehicle. Later, walk to meet a local historian for a van Gogh tour, followed by dinner on your own in town.

Cumulative Distance Range: 9 – 40 km (6 – 25 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 6: Les Alpilles

After breakfast, prepare for what may be the most beautiful cycling of the entire week. Today's ride takes you through pristine Provençal countryside, past olive groves and the soaring Alpilles. A small mountain range extending from the Luberon, the Alpilles are not especially wide but rise dramatically from the Rhône Valley, flanked by the Durance and Rhône Rivers.

Along the way, take time to stop and explore timeless villages. Perhaps you'll visit Eygalières, where lovely stone-built homes line small, winding streets. While there, consider walking to the top of the village to

enjoy sweeping views of the surrounding landscape. You may also choose to enjoy a picnic lunch on your own in a cool field shaded by olive or almond trees. If you're up for a more ambitious ride, a longer route option offers even more delightful scenery.

Later this afternoon, you're free to stroll the narrow cobblestone streets of Saint-Rémy, browse its inviting shops, and admire the beautifully restored Renaissance façades of its historic houses.

This evening, gather with your fellow travelers to celebrate the week's unforgettable experiences during a special farewell dinner.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Saint-Rémy to Eygalières — 20 km (12 miles)

Afternoon: Eygalières to Hotel — 17 km (11 miles) OR Eygalières and Alpilles to Hotel PLUS — 41 km (25 miles)

### What to Expect:

Start to cycle through the pristine Provençal countryside, passing olive groves and the Alpilles mountains. Consider a stop in Eygalières to explore this Provençal village and its outdoor market. Buy a picnic lunch or try one of the local restaurants—and don't forget to walk to the top of the village to enjoy the panorama.

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 – 61 km (11 – 38 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Optional Transport to Marseille / Your VBT Vacation Ends**

After breakfast, your tour concludes either at the Saint-Rémy hotel or with included transportation to our centrally located hotel in Marseille, arriving at approximately 10:30 a.m. Please note that transportation to the Marseille Airport or to other hotels in Marseille is not provided.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### Le Vieux Castillon (Days 1-3)

Nestled in the village of Castillon-du-Gard and overlooking the valley of the Gardon, Le Vieux Castillon, a MICHELIN Key distinction hotel, boasts a renaissance architecture with untold charm. From the hotel terrace discover panoramic views of the Mont Ventoux vineyards, take a dip in the lovely outdoor pool, rejuvenate with a treatment at the Clarins Spa (accessible by a treatment reservation only), or simply relax at this magical Provence property. Each air-conditioned room is well-appointed with all the amenities needed for a comfortable stay.

### Hotel Gounod (Days 4-6)

This unique boutique hotel named for a 19th-century French composer occupies the town's original staging inn, making it the oldest hotel in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. Fully refurbished, the hotel's air-conditioned, individually decorated rooms look onto the hotel's garden. Dramatic colors are complemented by stylish furnishings and artwork, both antique and modern. On the ground floor, a tearoom with eclectic décor offers homemade and local cakes and treats, fine teas, and fruit drinks. With a long tradition of attracting artists, this pleasant Provençal town with a lovely historical center and weekly outdoor market (Wednesdays) is perhaps best known for the Saint-Paul de Mausole monastery. Located amid the olive groves just on the outskirts of town, this is where van Gogh received psychiatric treatment.