

France: Vineyards of Beaujolais

Bike Vacation Only

VBT knows Beaujolais like the back of our hand—and it shows. From the moment you meet your VBT Local Host, you'll feel like a Beaujolais insider—enjoying 24/7 support when you need it, and independence when you don't. On this splendid self-guided adventure, VBT reveals the scenic routes and hidden vineyard châteaux that took us years of pedaling to discover. Along the way, spin through charming medieval villages in Viré-Clessé, Pouilly-Fuissé, and *Les Pierres Dorées*—where you can sample some of the world's finest vintages. Savor two included dinners—without leaving the castle grounds. Revel in the opulence of a French château, including an on-site *oenothèque* and the luxury of French hospitality at its finest.

Cultural Highlights

- Cycle through the iconic vineyards of Beaujolais, coasting through charming wine villages that produce some of France's finest wines.
- Explore the renowned appellations and golden-stone villages of Pouilly-Fuissé, Saint-Amour, and Romanèche-Thorins.
- Ride into Cluny, once the epicenter of Christianity, and visit its remarkable 10th-century abbey.
- Sample fine Chardonnays in the namesake village where this celebrated white wine originated.
- Savor the luxurious amenities and stunning setting of a Beaujolais château, where gourmet meals and estate-produced wines elevate your vacation.

What to Expect

This tour features a mix of easy terrain and moderate hills, making it ideal for both beginner and experienced cyclists. Rides take place on flat to rolling paved roads and designated bike lanes. Urban riding in and out of the small city of Mâcon primarily follows bike lanes and paths, while rural roads tend to have minimal traffic during the day. Please verify your bike selection for this tour, as it is not always possible to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available if needed.

Tour Duration: 6 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 17-43 miles

Average Cycling Time: 2-4 hours

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 67°/50°, June 73°/57°, July 80°/61°, August 79°/60°, September 72°/54°, October 61°/47°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 3.0, June 3.1, July 2.6, August 3.1, September 3.0, October 3.4

DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Welcome Orientation / Mâcon and Saône River Bike Path

We suggest arriving in France at least one day prior to the tour start date. Make your own independent travel arrangements to Mâcon. For details, refer to your *Vacation Preparation Handbook*.

Meet your VBT Local Host at 2:00 p.m. in the lobby of Hotel & Spa Panorama 360, along with any other VBT guests, for your Welcome Orientation. Please be dressed and ready for cycling. If your room is not ready at the time of the meeting, there will be time to prepare afterward. Your Local Host will be carrying a VBT sign and/or wearing VBT apparel.

You'll be spending the next three nights at Hotel & Spa Panorama 360, a sleek and modern retreat located in the heart of Mâcon. This contemporary four-star hotel features a rooftop bar with panoramic views, a full-service spa, and well-appointed guest rooms—offering comfort and convenience in a central location.

Today's ride into the Beaujolais region—nestled in southern Burgundy—offers a preview of this scenic area, renowned for its culinary splendors and rich viniculture of light-bodied red wines and bright whites. Though it is one of the least crowded wine regions in France, it boasts one of the nation's highest concentrations of vineyards, world-class gastronomy, charming villages, a Mediterranean-like climate, and gently rolling hills. It all adds up to some of the most rewarding cycling in Europe.

You'll depart from your Mâcon hotel and follow the Saône River bike path through a region that lies between Burgundy to the north and the Rhône Valley to the south. The Romans began cultivating vineyards here in the 1st century, some of which still thrive today. Benedictine monks later maintained the tradition until the Duchy of Burgundy assumed control in the 15th century.

Mâcon is also the birthplace of 19th-century poet and diplomat Alphonse de Lamartine. The town's pastel-hued buildings line the Saône River and are especially picturesque in spring when the

cherry blossoms bloom. Today's riverside ride is the perfect introduction to the region's natural and cultural beauty.

This evening, enjoy your first taste of Burgundian cuisine—perhaps sampling the famed *boeuf bourguignon* in its birthplace, paired with a light Gamay or Pinot Gris.

Today's Ride Choices

Mâcon Loop — 27 km (17 miles)

What to Expect:

This ride gives you the opportunity to get comfortable with your bike as you follow fairly flat bike lanes through city streets and pedal out of Mâcon, passing low-elevation wine villages and vineyards along the west bank of the Saône River. Midway, you'll encounter two gentle ascents before crossing the river and returning via a low-traffic, mostly flat bike path. The final stretch—less than three miles—is on a well-packed gravel surface that leads back to the center of Mâcon.

DAY 2: Mâcon to Cluny / Stay Put Day

After breakfast, you depart Mâcon on a dedicated bike path, heading west on a gentle uphill out of the Saône River Valley. Your destination is the historic town of Cluny, once the spiritual center of Europe during the Middle Ages. The former abbey, founded by William I of Aquitaine in 910 AD, became the largest Christian complex in the world—surpassing all others until the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Though much of it was destroyed—first pillaged by the Huguenots in 1562 and later dismantled and dynamited—its historical significance remains immense. Its ornately carved stones were sold off by a local priest, yet around ten percent of the original structure still stands, offering a haunting and awe-inspiring glimpse into its former grandeur.

You'll have time to explore the remains of the abbey, stroll through Cluny's charming town center, and perhaps enjoy a light lunch at a local café.

Later, cycle back to Mâcon, where your evening is free to dine at your leisure. Consider a stroll along the Saône River promenade, and enjoy dinner at one of the many inviting restaurants or bistros offering regional specialties and local wines.

Today's Ride Choices

Mâcon to Cluny Short Option — 30 km (18 miles) OR Mâcon to Cluny Long Option — 39 km (24 miles)

Cluny to Mâcon Short Option — 30 km (18 miles) OR Cluny to Mâcon Long Option — 39 km (24 miles)

What to Expect:

Depart Mâcon on town streets for a few miles before joining a packed gravel bike path along a former railway line designated as a greenway—*voie verte* in French. The path gradually ascends out of the Saône River Valley, passing small towns, villages, and vineyards, with scenic views of the Château de Berzé-le-Châtel. On the short option, you'll enter the Bois Clair Rail Trail Bike Tunnel—a long, lit tunnel just under a mile in length—and emerge on the other side in Cluny. Please note: If the Bois Clair Tunnel is closed, use the alternate route titled "D2 Mâcon to Cluny when tunnel is closed" (31 km / 19 miles). On the long option, after cycling through the wine-producing villages of Igé and Azé, a steady climb of just under 5 km (3 miles) is rewarded with a descent into the town of Massilly, where you'll rejoin the bike path leading into Cluny. After your visit to Cluny, retrace your route back to Mâcon.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Mâcon to Viré or Chardonnay / Stay Put Day

If you wish, take today to explore the Burgundian city of Mâcon. Stroll its cobbled streets, stopping at any of its inviting cafés to soak in the old-world atmosphere. The city is home to an array of churches, from the Old Mâcon Cathedral to the newer Cathedral of Saint-Vincent. Or cross the Pont Saint-Laurent to the small village of Saint-Laurent-sur-Saône.

On the bike, we offer a couple of ways for you to—as the locals say—*follow the grape!* Pedal the flat Voie Bleue bike path, which traces the banks of the Saône. Varied birdlife keeps you company on this tranquil route. You'll then leave the river behind and cycle into the wine country where the Chardonnay grape is grown, arriving in the charming hamlet of Viré. This village was put on oenophiles' maps after it partnered with its neighbor, Clessé, to create the Viré-Clessé appellation—today a producer of some of the region's finest wines.

The longer option today brings you past vistas of massive rocky outcrops to a small village whose name is synonymous with one of the world's most popular white wines: Chardonnay. The earliest record of Chardonnay wine dates to 1330, likely around the time local Cistercian monks developed the variety and distributed it throughout France. To protect their vineyards, the monks built stone walls, and soon a village of stone houses emerged around the *lavoir* (a stream-fed wash-house) and several *domaines* (wine producers).

Today's Ride Choices

Mâcon to Viré Short Loop — 40 km (25 miles) OR Mâcon to Chardonnay Long Loop — 59 km (37 miles)

What to Expect:

Depart Mâcon in the morning, following the La Voie Bleue bike path north along the Saône River to the winemaking town of Viré. The longer loop continues through rolling vineyards into the town of Chardonnay. Both loops return south on country roads and through villages to Mâcon, where you rejoin bike lanes and encounter some busier traffic as you approach your city-center hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Mâcon to Belleville-en-Beaujolais / Move on Day

Depart Mâcon and pedal into the heart of the finest vineyards of Beaujolais. Choose from an easy or more challenging ride, each delivering you to famed appellations and picturesque villages. You'll pass through the Pouilly-Fuissé region, where Chardonnay is the sole grape variety, and Juliénas, known for its robust reds. No matter your route, you won't miss the impressive Rock of Solutré—a dramatic limestone escarpment offering panoramic views over the Beaujolais region and its many vineyards. A nearby museum reveals the area's fascinating prehistoric past, once inhabited by Paleolithic peoples. The trails around the rock were also a favorite walking route of President François Mitterrand.

Continue cycling through scenic, rolling vineyards, passing through charming villages like Le Moulin-à-Vent and Romanèche-Thorins, noted for its scenic windmill. Later, arrive at your accommodation for the next two nights: Château de Pizay, a striking wine estate surrounded by 200 acres of vineyards and featuring a 17th-century garden designed by Le Nôtre, the landscape architect of Versailles. The château combines historic grandeur with modern comforts and

features a renowned wine cellar, spa, and self-guided wine trail (available at an additional cost), ideal for wine enthusiasts and casual sippers alike.

Dinner tonight is included at the château's fine-dining restaurant—also the setting for tomorrow's dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Hotel & Spa Panorama 360 to Château de Pizay Short Option — 29 km (18 miles) OR Hotel & Spa Panorama 360 to Château de Pizay Long Option — 52 km (26 miles)

What to Expect:

The route rolls out of Mâcon on narrow roads, weaving through vineyards and villages that have been producing wine for centuries. The short option stays closer to the Saône Valley floor, where you may encounter a bit more traffic as you pass through vineyards and villages en route to your hotel in Belleville-en-Beaujolais. The long option climbs higher into the vineyards. Your efforts are rewarded with sweeping views over the vine-covered slopes and the entire Saône Valley. Enjoy exhilarating descents as you twist through scenic hamlets and villages before arriving at your hotel in Belleville-en-Beaujolais.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5: Loop Through Golden Stone Villages / Stay Put Day

Spend the day as you wish, whether enjoying the amenities and vinicultural offerings at your château, exploring more of Belleville, or heading out on one of several invigorating rides—or a little of each!

If you choose to cycle, select from two routes. This part of southern Beaujolais is home to 39 Golden Stone villages, or *Pierres dorées*—a charming cluster of hilltop hamlets surrounded by rolling vineyards, often compared to Tuscany. The buildings' warm golden hue comes from locally quarried limestone, naturally tinted with iron oxide. This luminous stone was used in the construction of Lyon and many Beaujolais towns, sourced from a quarry abandoned since World War I.

A shorter ride keeps you close to home—ideal if you're looking for a mellow outing to stretch your legs. Cross the Saône and follow a riverside bike path, then meander through gentle hills and

peaceful villages. For more mileage, opt for a challenging spin on the *voie verte* (greenway), climbing gradually to 2,520 feet before coasting past wineries and hamlets back to your hotel.

Back at the château, immerse yourself in the wine culture of Beaujolais. Take a stroll along the vineyard trails, perhaps following the romantic “wine history walk in the park.” At additional cost, you can participate in a wine initiation course or embark on a self-guided tasting in the onsite *Oenothèque*. You may also choose to relax by the heated outdoor pool, enjoy a match on the tennis court, or indulge in a massage or spa treatment.

An elegant dinner is included this evening at the château’s fine-dining restaurant—a fitting finale to your time in Beaujolais. Weather permitting, dine al fresco in the castle courtyard or enjoy the stylishly restored historic dining room.

Today's Ride Choices

Château de Pizay: Southern Beaujolais Easy Loop — 35 km (22 miles) OR Château de Pizay to Beaujeu: Challenging Option — 46 km (30 miles)

What to Expect:

This varied route rolls south from your château to the nearby town of Belleville, crossing the Saône to follow a riverside bike path for 8 to 10 km just north of the Pierres Dorées villages. You then cross back over the Saône and gently ascend through vineyards and villages, reaching your maximum elevation of approximately 1,000 feet at the 26-kilometer mark (15 miles), before rolling back to the Ardière River Valley and rejoining the Beaujolais Greenway to your hotel. The challenging option follows the *voie verte* (Greenway) to Saint-Didier-sur-Beaujeu, then traces a bike route with a gradual climb to the highest point of 2,520 feet at about kilometer 25.8 (16 miles). From here, a steady descent brings you through Quincié-en-Beaujolais, on the northern edge of the Pierres Dorées villages, and finishes with an easy coast through vineyards and hamlets to your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6: Your VBT Vacation Ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel. Check-out is at 10:00 a.m. Your tour concludes here, and you may make your own arrangements to your next destination. For details, refer to your Vacation Preparation Handbook. If you are flying home, please note that airline schedules might prevent you from departing for the U.S. today. Be sure to check schedules carefully. If you plan to schedule return flights immediately following the tour's conclusion, we recommend contacting your airline directly for specific check-in requirements.

The Belleville-en-Beaujolais train station, located on the main rail line between Paris and Lyon, is a short taxi ride from your hotel. Hotel staff can assist with arranging transportation.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel & Spa Panorama 360 (Days 1-3)

Occupying the elegant and historic former Post Office building in the heart of Mâcon, The Panorama 360 is one of the city's finest boutique hotels. Stylish and sophisticated, the entire property has been renovated to meet the needs of the modern traveler. The rooftop Skybar provides sweeping views of the city and its surroundings, while the breakfast room, also on the top floor, is bathed in morning light. Each air-conditioned room is bright and contemporary, designed for comfort with heated floors and light-regulating shades. During your stay, at an additional expense, treat yourself to the fitness and spa facilities, including a sauna, steam room, massage, and heated indoor pool.

Chateau de Pizay (Days 4-5)

Spread over almost 200 acres, the magnificent Château de Pizay was built between the 11th and 19th centuries. Located in the heart of Beaujolais, this stunning property boasts vast vineyards that produce its own fine wines and a sophisticated dining room serving some of the region's most delectable gourmet cuisine. Take time here to admire the 19th-century chapel or follow the onsite wine history trail. Stroll the 75-acre forest, the miles of vineyard paths, or the 17th-century garden designed by Le Nôtre, the architect behind the gardens of Versailles. Each air-conditioned, spacious room provides classic furnishings and overlooks the lovely castle grounds.