

England: Bath & the Cotswolds

Bike Vacation Only

There's no need to hurry through England's Cotswolds—this well-paced cycling vacation gives you plenty of time to savor the journey. From the moment you meet your local trip leaders, you'll feel right at home in this bucolic countryside of rose gardens, thatched-roof cottages, and green meadows dotted with white lambs. Spin past quaint market towns—perhaps pausing to quaff a pint of ale in an authentic British pub. Explore 12th century colleges in Oxford and visit Blenheim Palace—the birthplace of Winston Churchill. Come home to hotels dripping with Cotswolds charm—including a 15th century weaver's cottage in Burford—and a 16th century manor house in Moreton-on-Marsh.

Cultural Highlights

- Enter the world of *Downton Abbey* in Bampton, its stand-in on the beloved PBS series.
- Explore the gardens and staterooms of Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill and a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Cycle through a classic English countryside of sheep-dotted pastures, woodlands, market towns, tiny hamlets, and thatched-cottage villages.
- Experience the charms of Bourton-on-the-Water, called the “Venice of the Cotswolds” for its graceful arched stone bridges.
- Probe the region's Roman heritage on a 2,000-year-old cycling route and end at the ancient ruins in Bath.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain mixed with moderate hills, mainly on quiet country roads. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who need assistance with the hills. Ideal for enthusiastic beginners to experienced cyclists.

Tour Duration: 6 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 10-42 miles

Average Cycling Time: 1-5 hours

Group size: 14-20 max

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 61°/46°, June 64°/52°, July 68°/55°, August 68°/55°, September 63°/52°, October 55°/46°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 1.7, June 1.7, July 1.5, August 1.6, September 1.8, October 2.3

DAY 1: Oxford / VBT Bicycling Vacation begins / Burford

Meet your fellow travelers and VBT trip leaders at 1:00 p.m. in the lobby of the Oxford hotel. You will have a chance to change into your biking gear in the hotel's public restrooms. Please note: Plan to eat lunch or a snack on your own beforehand, as the next scheduled meal is dinner.

Take a short shuttle to the village of Bampton, the start of your cycling adventure. After a safety and bike-fitting session, enjoy a pleasant pedal through the countryside to Bampton. This charming village will seem familiar to *Downton Abbey* fans: it doubled as the fictional Yorkshire village of Downton in the beloved PBS series. Continue cycling through small hamlets and past tree-lined fields into Burford, your home for the next two nights.

Tonight, enjoy a welcome dinner in the hotel's restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Bampton to Burford — 19 km (12 miles)

What to Expect:

Cycle along mainly flat quiet country lanes, with a gradual incline into Burford.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 km (12 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: Windrush Valley / Blenheim Palace

Cycle the breathtaking Windrush Valley today, crossing the river and traversing the rolling hills of the Cotswolds. Ride through the sylvan Wychwood Forest to the village of Leafield and the charming market town of Charlbury. The centerpiece of the day is your visit to Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The 2,000-acre (809-hectare) estate features beautifully

manicured grounds laid out by one of England's—and history's—great landscape designers, Capability Brown. All pathways lead to the resplendent palace, where you have free time for lunch and an included visit of the state rooms and the Churchill exhibition. You may also enjoy a leisurely stroll around the grounds. After a rewarding visit, ride or shuttle back to Burford.

Dinner is on your own tonight. Burford has several options for a fine meal.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Burford to Charlbury — 16 km (10 miles) OR Burford to Blenheim Palace — 34 km (22 miles)

Afternoon: Blenheim Palace to Burford — 32 km (21 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's route is more undulating than yesterday's but again follows quiet country lanes. As you cycle the picturesque Windrush Valley, enjoy views of dry-stone walls, pastures, and agricultural fields along the roadside. Pass the great woodlands of Wychwood Forest before coasting into the small market town of Charlbury. Continue on to the breathtaking Blenheim Palace, the midpoint of the day, and enjoy the impeccably designed landscape as you explore the grounds and estate rooms. The afternoon route departs Blenheim and traces lovely country lanes to the thatched-cottage village of Minster Lovell. Continue along the Windrush Valley back into Burford.

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 – 66 km (10 – 43 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Bourton-on-the-Water / Lower Slaughter

More of the stunning Windrush Valley unfolds before you today, a picture-perfect canvas of the Cotswolds. By day's end, you will understand why our trip leaders call this peaceful region "happy valley." The Windrush was named for the way its namesake river winds through the rushes, or the tall grasses along the waterway's banks. Enjoy a spin through the historic Sherborne Estate, part of England's only remaining 17th-century deer course, created for sport by one John "Crump" Dutton.

Your route continues to one of the Cotswolds' treasures: Bourton-on-the-Water. This quaint village is

sometimes called the “Venice of the Cotswolds” for the graceful arched stone bridges that cross the River Windrush in town. There’ll be time to explore its many charms and have lunch on your own or even seek out a famous cream tea.

Later, cycle to the old mill town, Lower Slaughter. The handsome sandstone manor houses and churches recall a stately era of lords and ladies. It is pure pleasure to take a slow pedal through these quintessential English villages. After time here, you may shuttle to your next hotel in Moreton-on-Marsh, or enjoy a longer riding day through more beautiful countryside, where you may visit the renowned Daylesford Organic, one of the UK’s most sustainable organic working farms. This evening, share your discoveries with fellow travelers over dinner at the hotel.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Burford to Bourton-on-the-Water — 27 km (17 miles)

Afternoon: Bourton-on-the-Water to Moreton-in-Marsh — 27 km (17 miles)

What to Expect:

The route begins along the Windrush Valley, passing through the small hamlets of Little Barrington and Windrush. The day’s main hill climb leads up to Clapton-on-the-Hill. Then it’s a lovely downhill coast to Bourton-on-the-Water. Park your bike and enjoy a stroll around this pretty town with its many bridges and shops. Continue along more rolling countryside into the scenic village of Lower Slaughter. The day’s longer option leads to the hamlets of Lower Swell and Upper Swell through pastures dotted with sheep.

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 – 54 km (17 – 34 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Chipping Campden / Hidcote Gardens / Broadway Tower

After breakfast, set out into the magnificent hedge- and tree-lined country lanes of the North Cotswolds. Gentle hills surround you as you make your way to the small market town of Chipping Campden, home to the Cotswold “Olimpicks” and honey-hued limestone buildings. Browse its Market Hall and central High Street before continuing your ride to the American-inspired Hidcote Gardens, one of England’s most influential Arts and Crafts gardens. Its colorful and intricately designed outdoor “rooms” are full of

surprises.

After, you may ride or shuttle up to Broadway Tower, where, on a clear day, you will be rewarded with extensive views of the surrounding countryside. Lady Coventry of Worcester had this Gothic folly built at 1,204 feet (367 meters) above sea level strictly for her pleasure. The views take in 16 counties and stretch all the way to Wales on a clear day.

Inspired by this beguiling canvas, you continue your ride through the lavender fields at Snowhill and on to the tiny hamlet of Kington for lunch at a local pub. Formerly owned by Corpus Christi College, The Halfway Inn creates the best homemade burgers in the Cotswolds and is well known for its great atmosphere and variety of pub dogs. After lunch, you may ride or shuttle back to the hotel.

This evening is free for you to explore Moreton-in-Marsh and try one of its restaurants.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Moreton-in-Marsh to Hidcote Gardens — 19 km (12 miles) | Moreton-in-Marsh to Kington — 41 km (26 miles)

Afternoon: Kington to Moreton-in-Marsh — 22 km (14 miles)

What to Expect:

The first section of today's ride is slightly undulating along lovely tree- and hedge-lined country lanes, passing through pretty hamlets. Stop in Chipping Campden to explore ancient High Street and the Market Hall. You pass over the railway line on the outskirts of Chipping Campden, then cycle uphill toward Hidcote Gardens. Park your bike by the entrance and enjoy a visit. You can shuttle or cycle to Broadway Tower; the ride is 5.5 miles (8.9 km) with a long steady uphill climb. After you take in the 360-degree views, the route leads through beautiful countryside down a long, steady hill to the tiny village of Kington, where a well-deserved pub lunch awaits. From here, either shuttle or ride through undulating country lanes back to the hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 63 km (12 – 40 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5: Cycle through the Southern Cotswolds to Bath

Shuttle this morning for about an hour through the stunning English countryside to the small hamlet of Westonbirt. From here, you cycle along the Fosse Way, a 2,000-year-old Roman route linking Exeter and Lincoln. Remarkable for ancient engineering, the road never veers more than six miles (10 km) from a straight line for its full distance of 182 miles (293 km). You, however, will ride just a fraction of this historic pathway, eventually leaving it to follow a road into the heart of Bath, the elegant Georgian jewel of England. You approach the city via the 200-year-old Kennet and Avon Canal, lined with beautifully painted narrow boats.

Rendezvous with your trip leaders at the Holburne Museum. The rest of the day is free to enjoy lunch and the many sights of this beautiful city, including the unmissable Roman Baths, the Royal Crescent, the King's Circus, Jane Austen's House, and Bath Abbey. Bath also boasts many boutique shops and opportunities to join locals for English afternoon tea. This afternoon, there'll be free time to continue your exploration of Bath or just to relax and reflect on your week. This evening, recount your memorable journey over a festive farewell dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Westonbirt to Bath — 34 km (21 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's route is relatively flat, with just three short uphill sections and a long downhill to join the canal. The route along the Fosse Way is very straight. Cycle along quiet lanes through beautiful countryside, a bit less sedate in feel to the northern Cotswolds but nonetheless beautiful. Upon reaching the canal, you follow a car-free towpath of compact gravel. Pass through one of the canal tunnels before arriving at the Holburne Museum. In keeping with local etiquette, please walk your bike through Sydney Gardens to the museum.

Cumulative Distance Range: 34 km (21 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6: VBT Bicycling Vacation ends / Departure

This morning's ride leads out of Bath along the Two Tunnels cycle route, following the lush river valley. Later, rejoin the Kennet and Avon canal, over the magnificent Dundas aqueduct, which was built to traverse the valley in 1800.

The canal leads back into the city, where you bid farewell to your trip leaders and travel companions. The hotel will help arrange a taxi to the train station, where you can catch service to Paddington Station in London.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Bath Tunnels and Canals — 21 km (13 miles)

What to Expect:

The beginning of today's ride features the Two Tunnels cycle route out of Bath. A moderate climb leads up to the Tucking Mill viaduct before returning to the canal for gentle riding along the car-free trail system back into Bath. Enjoy the tranquility of this scenic region on your final cycling day. Again, please follow local etiquette and walk your bike through Sydney Gardens to the museum on your return to Bath.

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 km (13 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

The Lamb Inn (Days 1-2)

Situated on a tranquil side street in the historic market town of Burford, the Lamb Inn is a quiet retreat that evokes the charms of English country life. The 15th-century former weaver's cottage is steeped in the history of the wool-trading market town of Burford. Today, its warm touches—from an open log fire and a majestic grandfather clock to inviting sitting areas—offer a soothing welcome after a day of exploring the Cotswolds. And the restaurant, outdoor terrace, and cozy bar provide options for delicious dining. Please note that the Lamb Inn is not air conditioned.

The Manor House Hotel (Days 3-4)

On the main street of Moreton-in-Marsh sits the Manor House Hotel, a 16th-century golden-stone manor converted into a classic country-house luxury hotel. Bedrooms are un-air conditioned and stylishly decorated with modern furnishings and warm colors, and feature views of the surrounding town and countryside. Common rooms include a library, inviting sofas, and striking artwork. A terrace on the ground floor opens onto a tranquil garden with herbaceous borders, pathways, and a 300-year-old mulberry tree. Moreton-in-Marsh has been a market town since the 1200s and a travelers' stop for 1,700 years; its main street has many 18th-century inns and houses. Please note: this accommodation is available on limited departures.

Francis Hotel Bath (Day 5)

Located in the heart of the storied city of Bath with views of historic Queen Square, the air-conditioned Francis Hotel exudes Georgian sophistication. The plush armchairs and period furnishings of the beautiful 18th-century townhouse lend this fine hotel an elegant authenticity. Even the Beatles were lured here by its refined elegance; they were guests in 1963. During your stay, you may take afternoon tea in the Tea Room, enjoy a cocktail in the bar, and savor a meal at the Brasserie Blanc, the onsite French-themed restaurant.