

France Bike & River Cruise: Lyon to Nice

Bike Vacation Only

Discover the heart of French wine country on this luxurious Bike & Boat vacation. As your ship cruises through three iconic French regions, you'll find yourself waking up to different sights each morning—a Gothic cathedral one day, followed by an ancient castle shrouded in mist, a charming riverside village, or a peaceful quayside scene on a clear Sunday morning. After breakfast, your well-maintained, fitted VBT bike awaits—along with a pair of local VBT trip leaders to guide you on carefully-curated routes through the famous vineyards of Burgundy and the Côtes du Rhône—culminating in Arles, the southern city that inspired Van Gogh. In the evenings, you'll enjoy relaxing with your ship's five-star amenities—including a pool, cinema, on-board putting green, bar, and restaurant serving a full menu of locally-inspired cuisine.

Cultural Highlights

- Admire the magnificent vistas of France's most renowned wine regions by river and by bicycle.
- Enjoy the best of both worlds: an all-inclusive river ship cruise and a VBT Bicycling Vacation.
- Ride among the lush, fertile vineyards of Burgundy and Provence, pausing at your leisure for wine tastings and tours.
- Savor a delicious picnic lunch before learning the history of the magnificent Pont du Gard at the renowned Roman aqueduct and UNESCO World Heritage site's museum.
- Walk the cobbled and historic streets of Lyon and Avignon as a local guide brings them alive with history and lore.

What to Expect

On Shore: This tour offers easy riverside terrain, with a few climbs to reach riverside towns. Riding is primarily on bike paths of both pavement and packed gravel, with some road riding through both urban and rural areas. Our VBT support shuttle is available every day at designated points for those who need assistance.

On Board Ship: Your group of up to 24 VBT guests will be part of a larger group on board our 132-passenger river cruise ship. Every day will include your choice of exclusive VBT activities and opportunities to join others. While in port, your ship may be docked adjacent to other ships. This means you may walk through other ships while boarding or disembarking, and some views may be obstructed while in port.

Tour Duration: 8 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 9-41 miles

Average Cycling Time: 1-4 hours

Group size: 14-24 max

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, June 3.1, July 2.6, August 3.1, September 3, October 3.4

DAY 1: Lyon / Embark ship

You are responsible for making your own way to Lyon, France, to meet your trip leaders and fellow travelers. Please note that you cannot embark before 12:30 p.m. as the ship is being prepared for you. If you fly to Lyon Airport, the flight arrival must be no later than 4:30 p.m., as the ship leaves Lyon at 7:00 p.m.

The ship will be docked either at Quai Claude Bernard, between the bridges Pont Gallieni and Pont de l'Université, or at Port Rambaud (37 Quai Rambaud, Lyon). VBT will confirm the location in your final guest documents. As the exact location of the ship may change, please call the ship upon your arrival in Lyon for directions.

Your cabin may not be ready for you until 3:00 p.m. However, you are welcome to enjoy lunch on board, served between 12:30 and 3:30 p.m., relax in the ship's common areas, stretch your legs, or explore town.

After lunch, meet your trip leaders and fellow travelers on board for introductions and a safety orientation, followed by an introductory walk through Lyon. Later, enjoy dinner on board. The ship sails for Chalon-sur-Saône this evening.

Today's Ride Choices

What to Expect:

Non-biking day

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2: Chalon-sur-Saône / Burgundy vineyards / Visit Beaune

After cruising north along the picturesque Saône River, dock at Chalon-sur-Saône, where the river meets the Canal du Centre. You are in the heart of Burgundy, where more than 4,500 family-run wineries produce world-renowned wines in the Côtes de Beaune. Disembark to ride a scenic bike route among the most famous vineyards in the world, passing vast expanses of arbor-laid grapes and fine wineries. Coast through charming winemaking villages that lend Burgundy its distinctive character, from Puligny-Montrachet to Pommard, and produce some of the finest Grand Cru vintages.

Your bike ride will finish in Beaune, the center of Burgundy wine production and home to the Hospices of Beaune. After lunch in a local restaurant, you will visit this finely preserved example of 15th-century Burgundian architecture, renowned for its polychrome roof and its annual wine auction. Following the visit to the Hospices and some free time, a shuttle will take you back to the ship.

This evening on board, enjoy a captain's welcome cocktail and gala dinner as you sail back to Lyon.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Chalon-sur-Saône to Puligny-Montrachet — 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon: Puligny-Montrachet to Beaune — 13 km (8 miles)

What to Expect:

Cycle on a beautiful paved path along the Canal du Centre to Santenay. Then, continue on a bike route through the vineyards of the Côtes de Beaune, passing world-famous villages such as Puligny-Montrachet, Meursault, and Pommard. Continue cycling, or board the shuttle to Beaune after a snack stop. If you prefer, our longer cycling option leads you through vineyards on the prestigious Route des Grand Crus, with wine-tasting opportunities all the way to Beaune.

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 – 39 km (16 – 24 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3: Lyon city walking / Afternoon loop to nature reserve

Arrive back in Lyon this morning as you're enjoying breakfast on board. Then disembark for a city tour of France's gastronomic capital renowned for its *coq au vin*, or chicken with wine, and *quenelles de brochet*, or mousse of pike. The heart of the 2,000-year-old city lies on a thin peninsula between the Rhône and Saône rivers. It's easy to imagine *canuts*, or silk merchants of old, zigzagging through the maze of Old World streets, cutting through the purpose-built narrow passageways known as *traboules*. Much of the city is a UNESCO World Heritage site, renowned as an urban "site of great commercial and strategic significance." You will also ascend Fourvière Hill, where the splendid Basilique de Notre Dame gazes out over the city.

After lunch on board, head out on the bikes to the Grand Parc de Miribel-Jonage on the outskirts of Lyon, beyond its city gates. This 5,400-acre (2,185-hectare) parkland blankets most of the Rhône's Miribel-Jonage island, created in the 1800s when the Miribel and Jonage canals were dredged. Today, it is a pleasure park for city dwellers and a wildlife preserve. After time enjoying its flat bike paths through forests and past a lake, you may shuttle or cycle back to the ship and enjoy the remainder of the day exploring on your own or relaxing on deck or in the ship's lounge. After dinner, you sail toward Tournon for another day of riding.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Lyon to Grand Parc – 23 km (14 miles) | Grand Parc to Lyon – 14 km (9 miles)

What to Expect:

This afternoon, you ride through an urban area to the outskirts of Lyon and the Grand Parc de Miribel-Jonage, a nature park where bike paths pass lakes and follow small canals. In the nature reserve, some of your bike route follows packed gravel roads. You may return to the ship either by shuttle or by bicycle.

Cumulative Distance Range: 23 – 37 km (14 – 23 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4: Tournon

Begin today with a ride along the Rhône, following the renowned Via Rhôna bike trail. When complete, this

remarkable pathway will take cyclists from Geneva, Switzerland, all the way to the Mediterranean Sea, passing spectacular riverscapes, pretty villages in the typical style of southern France, and expansive vineyards along the way. With a detour along the Isère River, your scenic loop will finish at the ship just before lunch.

In the afternoon, take a short walk in the charming little town of Tournon, nestled between the river and vineyard-laden slopes that produce some of the region's finest wines. As you explore, an ancient castle oversees your progress from high upon a promontory. Later, enjoy a wine tasting of local vintages and a delicious barbeque lunch on board (eather permitting). This evening, you sail towards Viviers.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Tournon to Beaumont – 24 km (15 miles)

Afternoon: Beaumont to Tournon – 14 km (9 miles)

What to Expect:

This morning's ride follows easy bike trails along the river, partly on packed gravel bike paths past highly scenic vistas. After a van snack stop in Beaumont, you return to the ship via your choice of shuttle or bicycle. The riding route back to our mooring follows small vineyards and quiet country roads.

Cumulative Distance Range: 24 – 38 km (15 – 24 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5: Viviers

Disembark in Viviers, a historic town on the Rhône, you return to the scenic bike paths of the Via Rhône and cycle toward Bourg-Saint-Andéol, home to handsome patrician houses, churches, chapels, and grand clerical residences. The second part of the ride leads you past some of the Rhône's religious treasures, tracing lovely greenways, quiet roads, and the Iles des Dames islands, along your way back to Viviers.

Settled by Romans, Viviers was forced to erect walls when conflicts of the ensuing centuries arrived. The Renaissance period was kinder and more peaceful; the stunning Maison des Chevaliers still stands as a testament to that creative era. After lunch on board the ship, a stroll through Viviers' cobbled streets is a

journey back in time. You may also choose to cycle an out-and-back ride along the Rhône, instead of the walking tour.

A delicious dinner with your trip leaders and a music-request evening on board are still in store, as you sail to Avignon later in the evening.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Viviers to Bourg-Saint-Andéol – 17 km (11 miles) | Bourg-Saint-Andéol to Viviers – 18 km (11 miles)

Afternoon: Optional afternoon ride – 31 km (19 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride follows the easy, flat path along the Rhône River on dedicated bike trails to Bourg-Saint-Andéol. You pass various villages marked by churches and chapels and ride along quiet branches of the river, traversing the Iles des Dames islands. The short option offers a shuttle from the small town of Bourg-Saint-Andéol back to the ship. The longer option leads you to Viviers on a different bike route.

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 – 66 km (11 – 41 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6: Avignon / Bike to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon

You dock early this morning in Avignon, the legendary City of Popes where the papacy was centered for 70 years in the 14th century. After breakfast on board, set out on a walking tour of this magnificent and historic city. Marvel at the mighty Palais des Papes, the Papal Palace, one of the great architectural wonders of France. View the adjacent historic Pont St. Bénézet, a medieval bridge reaching out into the river; only four of its original 22 arches remain. Then step through Avignon's gates to explore this fascinating UNESCO World Heritage site; its medieval walls enclose a rich repository of architecture that spans the ages. There'll be free time here before lunch on board.

Alternatively, cycle a scenic loop around Avignon, discovering small, countryside roads and small villages.

This afternoon, enjoy a short ride across the river to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, which once served as a resort of the French cardinals who resided at Avignon. You pass over the island Ile de la Barthelasse to reach the river's opposite bank. Quiet, scenic roads with minimal traffic lead to one of the former olive-oil mills in Provence, founded in 1358. Enjoy a tasting of their production and learn how olive oil is made; perhaps you'll purchase some so you can take a taste of France home with you! After savoring some delicate pastries and a drink, you have free time here before returning to the ship by shuttle or bicycle.

This evening, savor an authentic Provençal dinner, prepared and hosted by a local chef whom we have invited on board.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Independent Avignon loop — 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon: Avignon to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon — 19 km (12 miles) | Villeneuve-lès-Avignon to Ship — 5 km (3 miles)

What to Expect:

Ride across the Rhône River to Ile de la Barthelasse, a tranquil island, then continue to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon on the opposite bank. You ride on quiet roads with very limited traffic. After a tour of a former olive-oil mill and free time in town, you have the option to ride back following a slightly different route. The optional morning loop follows small, countryside roads through small villages.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 50 km (12 – 31 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7: Arles / Bike to Pont du Gard / Farewell dinner

Begin the day with a morning walk to the magnificent old town of Arles with your trip leaders. Then board a 45-minute shuttle to the spectacularly preserved Pont de Gard. A UNESCO World Heritage site, this 2,000-year-old Roman aqueduct once transported water 31 miles (50 km) from Nimes. There'll be time to visit the enlightening museum, where you can learn how this towering structure was built without mortar.

Your trip leaders have arranged a savory picnic lunch to enjoy by the river, with a magnificent view of the

aqueduct. After lunch, your bike invites you for a last, scenic ride of the week. The first part of your route follows an old, renovated rail trail to Beaucaire, where you can join a shuttle to Arles. If you choose to continue cycling, you will follow quiet, paved country roads through the fertile farmlands that provide Provence with its rich bounty. Later join the captain's cocktail and farewell dinner with your trip leaders and raise your glass to an unforgettable week.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Pont du Gard to Beaucaire – 20 km (12 miles) | Beaucaire to Arles – 22 km (14 miles)

What to Expect:

Begin the day with a short walk in the historic center of Arles, followed by a 45-minute shuttle to the Pont du Gard. You cycle in the afternoon on a beautifully renovated bike path along the rails of an old train line to Beaucaire. The second part of the bike ride follows paved, quiet country roads along flat terrain. As you are riding through open fields, you might experience some wind. For a shorter option, you can shuttle from Beaucaire to the ship.

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 – 42 km (12 – 26 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8: Disembark / VBT Bicycling Vacation ends

After breakfast, say goodbye to your ship crew and trip leaders as your tour ends. It is important that you disembark ship no later than 9:00 a.m. The Gare d'Arles train station is across the pier, a three-minute walk. Taxis will be available for transportation to the airport.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

MS Emerald Liberté (Days 1-7)

Cruise the Rhône river on MS *Emerald Liberté*, designed for luxury river cruising. Five cabin categories offer the amenities and contemporary style of a boutique hotel room. Enjoy full-service hospitality, comfortable social spaces, a golf putting green, walking tracks on the sun deck, pool, and cinema. *Emerald Liberté* is designed to provide the most efficient and comfortable journey during your seven nights on board. The 54 generously-proportioned suites and 14 staterooms feature all the amenities you need to begin and end each rewarding day, including a private bath with shower, hairdryer, bathrobes, and slippers. A mini-bar and complimentary bottled water are restocked daily and a safe protects your valuables. Complimentary WiFi and a flat-screen TV with infotainment system keep you plugged in. Onboard power is 220 volts; North American guests may require a power adapter.

VBT offers two cabin types spread across five cabin categories:

Emerald Stateroom (Categories D+E), or Emerald Panorama Balcony Suite (Categories A+B+C). VBT can also request additional cabin types based on availability.