

## France: Wine & Châteaux of the Loire Valley

### Bike Vacation Only

Explore a land of grand castles and resplendent gardens during unrivalled cycling in the Loire Valley of France. Ride bucolic farmlands to French villages and cultural centers steeped in charm and history, from quaint Cour-Cheverny to historic Amboise and magnificent Tours. Follow the scenic Loire River and the Loire & Terroir bike path to wine growers and their stellar vintages. See the cave dwellings of medieval peasants. And marvel at the undisputed stars of the Loire – the sprawling châteaux built as royal retreats: stunning Chambord with its 440 rooms, Chenonceau with its gallery spanning the Cher River, Villandry with its impeccable gardens and Chaumont with its riverside setting. What's more, you'll conclude your journey amid the pinnacle of château opulence: the glorious Palace of Versailles.

### Cultural Highlights

Explore some of the 440 rooms of Château Chambord, the largest castle in the Loire Valley, on a self-guided visit.

Marvel at the resplendence of the 15th-century Château de Chaumont and its delightful gardens, beautifully set on the Loire River.

Learn about the colorful and scandalous history of King Henry II and Catherine de Medici during an audio-guide tour of Château de Chenonceau.

Admire the geometric, terraced gardens of Château de Villandry, bursting with flowers, vegetables and herbs.

Contrast the châteaux of the Loire Valley with the opulence of Versailles during your audio-guided tour.

Sip the region's celebrated wines during an included tasting.

Cycle the Loire & Terroir bicycle path past the rolling vineyards of France's renowned wine-producing AOC of Touraine.

Stroll the magnificent medieval Old Town of Tours, pausing to admire its stunning cathedral.

Roll into the bucolic landscapes that inspired famed French novelist and playwright Honoré de Balzac.

Uncover the history of medieval peasant cave-dwellers during a guided tour of the Troglodyte Valley of Goupillières.

### What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain throughout the trip, with a few rolling hills. Ideal for beginning cyclists. Our VBT van shuttle is always available for those who need assistance.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 13 - 33

**Average Cycling Time:** 01:00 - 03:00

## Climate Information

### Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Apr 58°/39°, May 65°/44°, Jun 69°/50°, Jul 74°/53°, Aug 73°/53°, Sep 68°/49°, Oct 57°/42°

### Average Rainfall (in.)

Apr 1.8, May 2.5, Jun 3.3, Jul 1.7, Aug 3.5, Sep 2.3, Oct 2.9

## DAY 1: Transfer to Cour-Cheverny

Meet your VBT representative at 12:15 p.m. in the lobby of the Hotel Château Frontenac (54 Rue Pierre Charron 75008, Paris; Tel: + 33 1 532 3131 from outside of France or 01 532 3131 from within France). The representative will assist with your transfer to the Relais des Trois Châteaux in Cour-Cheverny near Blois, where you meet your VBT trip leaders. The transfer will take approximately three hours. Please enjoy an early lunch in Paris, or pack a lunch to eat during your transfer.

If you arrive at the Hotel Château Frontenac later than 12:15 p.m., you must make arrangements to travel to Blois independently and arrive by 3:30 p.m. It is possible to take a train at your own expense from Paris Austerlitz station to Blois. From the Blois train station, you need to take a taxi to the first hotel at your own expense. Taxi cost is approximately 30 euros (travel time approximately 20 minutes). Please contact the first hotel to advise the staff if this is the case, so they can inform your VBT trip leaders.

Cour-Cheverny is a small town situated on the southern bank of the Loire River in the heart of the Loire Valley. Surrounded by fertile farms and vineyards, it is especially known for its white and red wines and for its historic 17th-century castle. Soon after your arrival, join your trip leaders for a safety and bike-fitting session, followed by a short warm-up ride in the afternoon. This evening, enjoy a welcome reception and dinner with your fellow travelers at the hotel.

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 13 km (8 miles)

*Afternoon*

Warm-up: 13 km (8 miles)

What to Expect: An easy loop takes you from the center of Cour-Cheverny to Cheverny and into the

countryside past meadows, small farms, forest and petite castles, then back to your hotel.

Accommodation: Relais des Trois Châteaux, Cour-Cheverny

Included Meals: Dinner

## DAY 2: Ride to Chambord / Marvel at Château de Chambord

After breakfast, cycle directly from the hotel, riding on a mix of quieter roads and bike paths to Chambord, home of the remarkable Château de Chambord. The largest castle in the Loire Valley, its 440 rooms were never intended for permanent residents. The castle was designed as a seasonal hunting lodge and as a venue for hosting large receptions for King Francois I. The monarch built the château from 1519-1547 while living in royal residences in Blois and Amboise. The 21-mile-long garden wall is the longest wall in France. Of particular interest are the castle's double-helix staircases, which allow two people to travel up and down without crossing one another's path. Step back in time during a self-guided visit here.

In the afternoon, shuttle back to your hotel or ride back along a different route. You have the rest of the day to spend as you wish, exploring the town and the 17th-century castle of Cour-Cheverny or relaxing in the hotel's garden and grounds. Before dinner, learn about some of the wines of the area and sample some during a tasting. Dinner is included tonight at a local restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 – 47 km (13 – 29 miles)

*Morning*

Cour-Cheverny to Chambord: 21 km (13 miles)

*Afternoon*

Chambord to Cour-Cheverny: 26 km (16 miles)

What to Expect: Ride dedicated bikes lanes and paths through gentle countryside to the Château de Chambord. After lunch on your own, shuttle back or ride a different loop back to your hotel.

Accommodation: Relais des Trois Châteaux, Cour-Cheverny

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 3: Cycle to Amboise via Chaumont

This morning, you bike from your hotel in the direction of the Loire River. Today's journey takes you through the glorious countryside, nicknamed the "Garden of France" for its abundance of fruit orchards and vegetable and flower gardens. Joining the Loire River bicycle path at Candé-sur-Beuvron, you

continue on to Chaumont-sur-Loire, where you can enjoy a picnic or restaurant lunch and explore the 15th-century Château de Chaumont and its delightful gardens (entrance included).

Then, continue cycling to the town of Amboise. The château that dominates the town was once home to Charles VIII, Louis XII and Francois I. Leonardo da Vinci came to live in Amboise in 1516 and evidence of his work remains where he resided at the Clos Lucé Manor, a short walk from the château.

Tonight, enjoy free time to take a short walk into Amboise and sample one of its wonderful restaurants.

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 – 51 km (13 – 31 miles)

*Morning*

Cour-Cheverny to Chaumont-sur-Loire: 30 km (18 miles)

*Afternoon*

Chaumont-sur-Loire to Amboise: 21 km (13 miles)

What to Expect: Ride to Chaumont-sur-Loire via Montou-sur-Bièvre and Candé-sur-Beuvron along quiet country roads and a bike path, following a small river and meandering through quaint hamlets. Those wishing to continue riding in the afternoon cycle from Chaumont-sur-Loire to Amboise along the Loire à Vélo bike path, a cycling route along the Loire river.

Accommodation: Le Manoir les Minimes, Amboise

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 4: Chenonceaux

After breakfast, pedal along a scenic route to the Château de Chenonceau on the Cher River, known as the most romantic of the Loire châteaux. Its history is the stuff of epic novels: King Henry II gave the château as a gift to his beautiful lover, Diane de Poitiers. She built the first gardens and added a bridge to connect the château to the Cher's south bank. After Henry's death, his jealous wife, Catherine de Medici, took the château from Diane and built the unique gallery that today straddles the river. It became her favorite residence, and she later hosted the marriage of her son, Francis II, to Mary Queen of Scots, here in 1560.

Enjoy ample time to tour the château with your included audio-guide headset. There'll be time, too, to stroll its gardens and topiary maze before picnicking with your travel mates. You may shuttle back to the hotel or continue cycling, perhaps stopping en route to visit Da Vinci's fascinating manor-house and

museum of Clos Lucé or Amboise's stunning royal castle.

This evening, continue exploring Amboise, and enjoy dinner on your own.

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 15 – 44 km (9 – 27 miles)

*Morning*

Amboise to Chenonceaux: 29 km (18 miles)

*Afternoon*

Chenonceaux to Amboise: 15 km (9 miles)

What to Expect: Cycle to the town of Chenonceaux on a mix of flat to gently-rolling terrain and tour the romantic château. After lunch, return to your hotel by support vehicle. Or cycle back to Amboise via the Chenonceaux-Amboise bike route. Before reaching the hotel, you can stop and visit Clos Lucé (Da Vinci's manor house and museum) and/or Amboise royal castle. Both visits are optional and at your expense.

Accommodation: Le Manoir les Minimes, Amboise

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 5: Vineyards of the Touraine / Tours

After breakfast, you ride on the Loire & Terroir bicycle path, a name that reflects the special soil and local conditions that produce the region's distinct wines on the northern banks of the Loire River. This is France's famed Touraine AOC, the appellation beloved for its dry white wines and red wines made complex by its tannins. Viticulture has been practiced here since at least the Middle Ages, when the Catholic Church maintained vineyards at local monasteries. You cycle through Vouvray, where you may choose to stop for a tasting of its smooth and wonderful renowned white wines.

Arrive in Tours, where you may visit the cathedral or stroll its pedestrian streets and the famous Place Plumereau in the heart of the medieval city. Enjoy lunch on your own here, then continue along La Loire à Velo bike path into Montlouis-sur-Loire. There will be free time to explore this pretty small town before continuing to your hotel for the next two nights, Château de la Bourdaisière. The château is famous for its tomato and dahlia collection, so make sure you explore its magnificent gardens. You may also take advantage of its lovely outdoor swimming pool.

If weather permits this evening, your small group will have dinner in the dahlia garden. Otherwise, you'll enjoy the ambiance of one of the lounges inside the château.

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 15 – 49 km (9 – 30 miles)

*Morning*

Amboise to Tours: 34 km (21 miles)

*Afternoon*

Tours to Montlouis: 15 km (9 miles)

What to Expect: This morning's ride mostly follows the Loire & Terroir route through varied landscapes and villages. If you wish to continue cycling after lunch on your own, follow La Loire à Vélo bike route to Montlouis-sur-Loire.

Accommodation: Château de la Bourdaisière, Montlouis-sur-Loire

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 6: Discover Villandry /Azay-le-Rideau / The Troglodyte Valley of Goupillières**

After breakfast, shuttle to the Château de Villandry. Its geometric, terraced gardens are unlike any other in France. The last of the large châteaux built during the Renaissance on the banks of the Loire, it was completed around 1536. Later, cycle on a beautiful bike route along the Loire River and on to Azay-le-Rideau. Here you may wish to explore the delightful historic district and the 16th-century island château, with its foundations emerging directly from the Indre River. You may pause for lunch as you explore.

Continue cycling along the Indre à Vélo bike route through a region that figured prominently in works by Honoré de Balzac, the 19th-century French literary master who called Azay-le-Rideau a "diamond set in the Indre." Your afternoon route leads you to La Vallée Troglodytique des Goupillières (the Troglodyte Valley of Goupillières). While the aristocracy lived in the Loire's exquisite riverside castles, a large number of peasants and the working population of the region lived in cave-type dwellings dug out of the region's tufa limestone. Learn about their lives during a guided visit to these restored dwellings, which were inhabited from the early Middle Ages up until just a century ago. Later, return to the hotel by shuttle.

Enjoy a final festive dinner together at the hotel, where you can share your stories of cycling the Loire Valley with your fellow cyclists and trip leaders.

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 25 – 52 km (15 – 32 miles)

*Morning*

Villandry to Azay-le-Rideau: 25 km (15 miles)

*Afternoon*

Azay-le-Rideau to Veigné: 27 km (17 miles)

What to Expect: Enjoy a beautiful gentle ride along the river to Azay-le-Rideau this morning. If you wish, continue cycling a few hills along the Indre à vélo bike route after lunch, pausing for your included tour of the Troglodyte Valley of Goupillières.

Accommodation: Château de la Bourdaisière, Montlouis-sur-Loire

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 7: Paris

The tour ends at our hotel after breakfast this morning. You may make your arrangements to leave the hotel at any time that is convenient. Checkout time is 11:00 a.m. Trains depart from Tours or Saint-Pierre-des-Corps railway stations to Paris and to Charles de Gaulle Airport. You are responsible for all transfer arrangements. A taxi from the hotel to Tours or Saint-Pierre-des-Corps railway station takes 15-20 minutes and costs approximately 45 euros (3-passenger maximum). We recommend you ask your VBT trip leaders or the hotel to help make the reservation at least a day in advance.

Later, rejoin the shuttle to our final hotel, located near Charles de Gaulle Airport.

This evening is free. You may wish to dine at your hotel and enjoy its leisure facilities.

Accommodation: Hotel Pullman Paris Roissy CDG Airport

Included Meals: Breakfast

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### Château de la Bourdaisière (Days: 5,6)

Perfectly positioned amid the Loire Valley's famous châteaux, the Château de la Bourdaisière is a magnificent structure in itself. Converted from a 15th-century castle, it features 29 rooms, each named after a historic figure from the history of the Touraine region and this château. In your room, enjoy an elegant décor featuring fabrics from the famous houses of Braquenié et Frey, as well as free WiFi access and beautiful views of the estate's 140-acre park. And take advantage of the hotel's large open-air heated swimming pool, tennis courts, animal park and charming breakfast room. Please note that this property

is not air conditioned.

### **Le Manoir Les Minimes (Days: 3,4)**

Set on the south bank of Loire River, with lovely views of the Château d'Amboise, the Manoir Les Minimes boasts an exceptional location in an authentic part of the city. Formerly a convent and private home, this refined hotel is decorated with fine antiques. Its grounds boast an elegant terrace and gardens. Each of the 14 uniquely appointed rooms overlooks either the château or the Loire River. Internet access and air conditioning are available throughout the hotel.

### **Relais des Trois Châteaux (Days: 1,2)**

This elegant and comfortable 4-star hotel in the heart of the charming village of Cour-Cheverny has been hosting visitors to the Loire region since the mid-19th century. Individually decorated air-conditioned rooms combine classic furnishings with one-of-a-kind artwork, evoking the feel of the nearby Renaissance castles. Its highly rated restaurant offers an outdoor terrace where fresh local ingredients and local wines are served.