

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

Bike Vacation + Air Package

Soft sunlight, beautiful countryside, a savory herb-infused cuisine, renowned wines, and an easygoing ambiance—no wonder Provence has been a magnet for travelers since Roman times. And no wonder it is still sought out today. Following the Rhône from Aix-en-Provence to Avignon, you'll admire stunning views of the Alpilles mountains, experience the artistic inspiration of Vincent van Gogh, walk a Roman aqueduct and explore the medieval "City of the Popes." You'll also encounter the Provence of today during a home-cooked meal, a visit to a wine estate and a walk with a local historian.

Cultural Highlights

Admire stunning views of Arles, the Camargue and the Alpilles from the village of Les Baux.

Enter the world and landscapes of Vincent Van Gogh in the company of a local historian.

Savor true Provençal cuisine prepared by a noted pastry chef in her home.

Cycle a pristine countryside of olive groves, green valleys, vineyards and timeless villages, flanked by the soaring Alpilles.

Visit the Abbaye St. Michel de Frigolet, a monastery dating to the 12th century.

Ponder the genius of the ancient Romans as you stroll across the Pont du Gard aqueduct, an architectural masterpiece.

Sample local vintages in the famous wine town of Lirac.

Hear your footsteps clatter on the cobbled streets of Avignon during a guided tour of this "City of the Popes."

What to Expect

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

Tour Duration: 10 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 11 - 41

Average Cycling Time: 00:45 - 03:15

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Apr 67°/45°, May 74°/51°, Jun 82°/58°, Jul 87°/61°, Aug 87°/60°, Sep 78°/57°, Oct 68°/49°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Apr 2.1, May 2.5, Jun 1.7, Jul 1.3, Aug 1.8, Sep 2.6, Oct 3.3

DAY 1: Depart from home / Fly overnight to Marseilles

Depart from home for France. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

DAY 2: Arrive in Marseilles and transfer to your Aix-en-Provence hotel

Upon arrival at Marseilles (MRS) Airport, claim your luggage and clear customs. If your luggage is lost, fill in a PIR form before leaving the customs area; VBT representatives are not allowed into the customs area. Make sure that your VBT luggage tags are attached to your bags. This helps the representative identify you.

After exiting customs, enter the arrival hall and look for your VBT representative or driver, who will be holding a VBT sign. Your representative will welcome you to France and arrange for your transfer via taxi or van to your Aix-en-Provence hotel (approximately 45 minutes, depending upon traffic). Important: If you are delayed in meeting your VBT representative at the Marseilles Airport, please proceed to the Information Desk in your arrival terminal (either A or B) and call 04 42 93 01 44 (number from within France). Outside of France, call +33 442 93 01 44.

VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations on what to see and do in Aix-en-Provence. Use the rest of the day to relax or begin exploring the city. Dinner is on your own.

Hotel: Hotel Aquabella

DAY 3: Transfer to Saint-Rémy-de-Provence / VBT Bicycle Vacation begins

VBT Air Package and Pre-Trip Extension guests: Meet your VBT representative in the hotel lobby at 11:00 a.m. and transfer by bus to Saint-Rémy-de-Provence (approximately 1 hour).

Your inviting hotel here has magnificent views over the Alpilles Mountains. You have free time to stroll into town for lunch on your own and relax on the hotel grounds as you settle in. Please note that rooms

may not be ready until 3:00 p.m. At 2:30 p.m., meet your VBT Trip Leaders for a short introduction, followed by a safety and bike-fitting session and warm-up ride. Tonight, attend a welcome wine reception and dinner.

Hotel: Hotel de l'Image

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 7.5 miles (12.1 km)

DAY 4: Cycle to Les Baux

Breathtaking scenery and excellent cycling await you after breakfast as you roll into the heart of the Alpilles to Les Baux-de-Provence. Stop at some interesting sites along the way, such as the ancient fortress of Les Baux, which sits on an 800-foot (243.8-meter) rocky plateau.

The beautiful village of Les Baux with views of the Alpilles. As you walk through, pause at the architectural accomplishments of its church, château, town hall, hospital, chapels, houses, and doorways.

Have lunch on your own here. Then, cycle toward Saint-Rémy-de-Provence through the gentle countryside that inspired Van Gogh to create more than 150 paintings.

Tonight is free for you to stroll Saint-Rémy's narrow cobblestone streets, browse the enticing shops, and admire the ancient restored houses with their Renaissance façades. Dinner is on your own in one of the local restaurants.

Please note: For those that begin the tour on Wednesday your scheduled Mathilde tour and Odile dinner will take place tonight (Day 2-Thursday). For those that begin the tour on Sunday, your scheduled Mathilde tour and Odile dinner will take place on Tuesday (Day 3).

Hotel: Hotel de l'Image

Meals: Breakfast

Daily Options: 6, 19 or 25 miles (9.4, 31.7 or 41.1 km)

DAY 5: Discover the beautiful heart of Les Alpilles

After breakfast, prepare for what may be the most beautiful cycling of the entire week. You'll ride through pristine Provençal countryside, passing olive groves and the soaring Alpilles. A small chain extending

from the Luberon, the Alpilles are not very wide but rise dramatically out of the Rhône Valley. Their foothills are flanked by the Durance and Rhône rivers

As you cycle, you can stop to wander through timeless villages. Perhaps you'll explore Eygalières and its lovely stone-built homes lining small winding streets. Maybe enjoy a picnic in a cool field, shaded by olive or almond trees. If you're up for a more ambitious riding day, our longer option offers even more delightful scenery.

Later, meet up with your Trip Leaders and walk to meet local historian Mathilde Duvillier by the Saint-Paul Asylum, where Vincent Van Gogh admitted himself. Madame Duvillier will guide your small group to many of the places pictured in the artist's works during his time here, enabling you to relate the scenes directly to them. You'll also venture inside the sanitarium to see the carefully reproduced layout and furnishings of Van Gogh's room.

After another short walk, you arrive at the home of VBT friend Odile Mifsud, a well-known pastry chef. Here, you'll enjoy a home-cooked dinner, flavored by the herbs of her native Provence and the rich tradition of her family cuisine.

Please note: For those that begin the tour on Wednesday your scheduled dinner on your own will take place tonight (Day 3-Friday). For those that begin the tour on Sunday, dinner on your own is Monday (Day 2).

Hotel: Hotel de l'Image

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 11, 22 or 39 miles (19.1, 36 or 64.2 km)

DAY 6: Explore Pont du Gard

After eating breakfast and choosing picnic items before leaving Saint-Rémy, ride to the Abbaye St. Michel de Frigolet. Enjoy a visit of this revered site set in a pine forest, which dates to at least 1133.

After your visit, you may shuttle or cycle to the Pont du Gard. Whichever you choose, you'll cross the Rhône River and arrive in the Languedoc region. Built by the Romans in the first century BC (and declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985), the Pont du Gard is just one segment of a 31-mile-long (49.9-km) aqueduct built to transport water from a spring in Uzès to the city of Nîmes. Much of the aqueduct has deteriorated over time, but this most impressive span still stands. Consisting of three levels, this bridge

appears surprisingly delicate despite the massive stones used in its construction. Park your bike and walk across this stunning architectural achievement. Remarkably, the structure was built entirely without mortar, using stones that weighed up to six tons.

After exploring the Pont du Gard, shuttle to your next hotel in Villeneuve-les-Avignon. Once settled in, you have time to relax, perhaps in the hotel's pool or shady terrace, before gathering for an authentic Provençal meal at your hotel.

Hotel: Hotel La Magnaneraie

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 12, 32 or 43 miles (19, 51.7 or 68.7 km)

DAY 7: Loop through Tavel wine country

Today's ride takes you into the Gard district on the right bank of the Rhône River. Your route follows the agricultural plain of the river, planted mainly with apples, melons, pumpkins, asparagus, and market-garden produce. Leaving the river valley, you'll cycle through typical Provençal landscapes, vineyards, and the charming villages, renowned for their red-wine vineyards for more than 2,000 years. Here, you'll visit an old château's farm and enjoy a picnic lunch. You'll also sample some local wine in the cellar's tasting room.

En route back to the hotel, cycle through the village of Tavel, famous for its rosé wine.

Tonight is free for you to explore the historic town of Villeneuve-les-Avignon and enjoy dinner in one of the local restaurants.

Please note: For those that begin the tour on Wednesday your scheduled ride to Tavel wine country and the wine tasting and picnic will take place on Monday. For those that begin the tour on Sunday, your scheduled ride to Tavel wine country and the wine tasting and picnic will take place on Thursday.

Hotel: Hotel La Magnaneraie

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Daily Options: 12, 22.3 or 37 miles (19.3, 39 or 60 km)

DAY 8: Guided tour of Avignon

Sleep in this morning, then linger over breakfast before cycling southeast toward Avignon, the fabled “City of the Popes.” Leave your bike inside the city walls and stroll the timeless cobblestone streets. Your small group will meet a local guide for a walking tour of this ancient city. Later, there’ll be time to explore some of the city’s highlights on your own, such as the former papal residence—the immense Palais des Papes (Papal Palace). Now a museum, this Gothic building was fortified with walls up to 18 feet (5.5 meters) thick. Or perhaps you’ll walk the surviving section of the Pont d’Avignon. Built in the 12th century, this bridge originally spanned the Rhône but has suffered frequent collapses from floods. Only four of its original 22 arches remain.

The rest of the day is yours to enjoy. During your free time, you may wish to buy some local pottery or a handmade tablecloth. Try lunch at one of the local bistros, or enjoy a picnic in one of Avignon’s gardens. In the afternoon, cycle or shuttle back to the hotel. Tonight, celebrate with your fellow travelers during a special farewell dinner.

Please note: For those that begin the tour on Wednesday your scheduled ride to Avignon, guided tour of Avignon, and dinner on your own will take place Sunday. For those that begin the tour on Sunday, your scheduled ride to Avignon, guided tour of Avignon, and dinner on our own will take place on Friday.

Hotel: Hotel La Magnaneraie

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 8 or 17 miles (13.2 or 28.1 km)

DAY 9: Transfer to Avignon TGV railway station / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

After breakfast, one of your Trip Leaders will transfer you to the Avignon TGV train station, arriving at approximately 9:10 a.m., and continue by TGV high-speed train to Paris at approximately 10:00 a.m., about a three-hour journey. Before you leave them, please verify with your Trip Leaders the time of your transfer from your Paris hotel to the Paris Charles de Gaulle airport tomorrow.

Upon arrival in the “City of Light,” you are met by a VBT representative and transferred to your centrally located hotel. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations on what to see and do in Paris.

Hotel: Hotel Rochester

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 10: Depart for home

After breakfast*, transfer to the Paris Charles De Gaulle airport for your return flight**. Please ensure you are ready in the hotel reception area at the designated time.

*Please note: For guests with early-morning departures, breakfast at the hotel may not be available. Please check with the front desk to verify the times that breakfast is served.

** VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. If you extend your stay beyond the scheduled program dates, return transportation to the airport will be at your own expense.

Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel Aquabella (Day: 2)

The Hotel Aquabella is ideally situated in the heart of the Old Town of Aix-en-Provence, at the foot of the ancient fortifications and in the center of the markets of Provence. From this convenient location, all of Aix is just a few steps away. When you're not exploring the lively city of Aix, unwind in the hotel's spa or heated pool. Each room is air conditioned and elegantly decorated in Provençal style.

Hotel de l'Image (Days: 3,4,5)

Located in the center of Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, the Hotel de l'Image is one of Provence's most charming hotels. Inspired by the theme of photography, it has a gallery, private collection, and a projection hall. It also offers a restaurant, swimming pool, beautiful garden, and stunning views of the Alpilles. And you're sure to enjoy the contemporary styling of your air-conditioned room. Free wireless Internet connections are available throughout the hotel.

Hotel La Magnaneraie (Days: 6,7,8)

The Hotel La Magnaneraie is located in the historic town of Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, less than two miles from Avignon. Surrounded by a lush park, this 15th-century former residence of cardinals and one-time silkworm estate combines the charm of an ancient mansion with modern comforts, including air

conditioning, and provides an elegant and peaceful haven after a rewarding day of exploring. Enjoy the beautifully decorated common areas, including a restaurant featuring many regional specialties and a spacious lounge and bar, as well as an outdoor garden with a swimming pool.

Hotel Rochester (Day: 9)

This 4-star hotel is located a few steps from the Champs-Élysées and the Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré, in one of Paris' most elegant and well-known quarters. It is a very easy and safe base for exploring, shopping, and taking evening strolls. Small and family-run, it exudes an ambiance of elegance, charm, and Old World traditions. Relax in the hotel spa and in your room, which is decorated in a Louis XV style. Enjoy its modern amenities, including air conditioning (April to October), cable satellite TV, free wireless Internet service, in-room safe, and minibar.