

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

### Bike Vacation Only

The soaring Alpilles mark your bike path through this picturesque pocket of Provence. Your spirits will rise with their lofty peaks as your rides lead from an ancient fortress atop a rocky plateau to a fertile river valley. Admire landscapes that inspired immortal canvases by Vincent van Gogh. Delve into the region's ancient Roman heritage, and stroll the cobblestones of medieval villages. Indulge in the wines and herb-infused cuisine that have made Provence a gourmet mecca. And discover why this tour surpasses all other bike trips in Provence, France.

### Cultural Highlights

Enjoy a bird's-eye view of Arles, the Camargue, and the Alpilles from the village of Les Baux.

Delve into the imagination of artist Vincent van Gogh on a private guided tour.

Treat your taste buds to authentic Provençal cuisine in the home of a noted pastry chef.

Roll through pastoral landscapes of olive groves, vineyards, farms, and villages, set against the lofty Alpilles.

Discover the Abbaye St. Michel de Frigolet, a 12th-century monastery.

Stride across the Pont du Gard, the magnificent, UNESCO-cited Roman aqueduct.

Taste the delicious wines that have made the village of Lirac famous.

Join a local guide on a tour of Avignon, the "City of the Popes."

Prepare to be dazzled by a spectacular multimedia production at Carrières de Lumières.

### What to Expect

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

**Tour Duration:** 7 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: Transfer to Saint-Rémy-de-Provence / VBT Bicycle Vacation begins**

Meet at the first hotel in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence by 2:30 p.m. If you arrive by train into Avignon, take a taxi at your own expense (approximately 65 euros and about 30 minutes' traveling time). If you are in Aix-en-Provence, you may take the VBT coach transfer to Saint-Rémy-de-Provence at no additional expense (approximately one hour). Please meet your VBT representative at 11:00 a.m. in the lobby of the Hotel Aquabella in Aix-en-Provence.

Please contact the hotel to advise the staff of any travel delays or changes, and they will pass your message to your VBT trip leaders.

Hotel: Hotel de l'Image

Meals: Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 12 km (7 miles)

Afternoon

Warm-up: 12 km (7 miles)

What to Expect: Begin your explorations with a warm-up ride around Saint-Rémy-de-Provence.

## **DAY 2: 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 has many lookouts with stunning views of Arles, the Camargue, and 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. Afterward, experience an extraordinary visual and musical production at Carrières de Lumières, whose spectacular multimedia shows are set in an abandoned limestone quarry. Then, cycle back 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 who begin the tour on Wednesday, your scheduled guided tour with local historian Mathilde Duvillier followed by dinner at the home of VBT friend Odile Mifsud, a well-known pastry chef, will take place today (Day 2-Thursday).

Hotel: Hotel de l'Image

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 9 – 42 km (6 – 26 miles)

Morning

Saint-Rémy to Les Baux Loop: 32 km (20 miles)

OR

Saint-Rémy to Les Baux: 9 km (6 miles)

Afternoon

Les Baux to Saint-Rémy: 10 km (6 miles)

What to Expect: This morning, cycle into the heart of the Alpilles to Les Baux-de-Provence, situated on a rocky plateau. You may cycle back to the hotel or return by support vehicle after lunch on your own. If you wish, you may add an extra loop in the Alpilles before riding back to your hotel.

## **DAY 3: Les Alpilles / van Gogh tour / Home-hosted dinner**

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. While here, you might walk to the top of the village to view the panorama, and enjoy a picnic lunch on your own 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 Du villier by the Saint-Paul Asylum, where Vincent van Gogh admitted himself. Mathilde 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 who begin the tour on Wednesday your scheduled dinner on your own will take place tonight (Day 3-Friday). For those who begin the tour on Sunday, dinner on your own is on Monday (Day 2).

Hotel: Hotel de l'Image

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 – 62 km (11– 38 miles)

Morning

Saint-Rémy to Eygalières: 19 km (12 miles)

Afternoon

Saint-Rémy Loop: 17 km (11 miles)

OR

Saint-Rémy Loop Plus: 43 km (27 miles)

What to Expect: Start to cycle through the pristine Provencal countryside, passing olive groves and the Alpilles mountains. Consider a stop in Eygalières to explore this Provencal village, buy a picnic lunch or try one of the local restaurants and don't forget to walk to the top of the village to enjoy the panorama.

## **DAY 4: Pont du Gard / Villeneuve-lès-Avignon**

Cycle through the countryside to the Abbaye St. Michel de Frigolet after breakfast this morning. Set in a pine forest, this revered site 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. Remarkably, the structure was built entirely without mortar, using stones that weighed up to six tons. Consisting of three levels, this bridge appears surprisingly delicate despite the massive stones used in its construction. Much of the aqueduct has deteriorated over time, but this most impressive span still stands. Park your bike and walk across this stunning architectural achievement.

After exploring the Pont du Gard, shuttle to your next hotel, in Villeneuve-lès-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

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 – 69 km (11 – 43 miles)

Morning

Saint-Rémy to Abbaye St. Michel de Frigolet: 19 km (12 miles)

Abbaye to Pont du Gard: 33 km (21 miles)

OR

Castillon-du-Gard to the Pont du Gard Plus: 17 km (11 miles)

What to Expect: This morning, cycle through the beautiful and flat countryside of the Rhône Valley. You'll start climbing uphill as you approach the Abbaye St. Michel de Frigolet. After your visit to the abbey, you may board the support vehicle to the Pont du Gard or continue riding across the Rhône River, arriving in the Occitan region. If you desire a longer ride, pedal through Vers en route to the Pont du Gard.

## DAY 5: 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.

The rest of the day is yours to explore Avignon on your own. City highlights include 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. You may also wish to buy some local pottery or a Provençal fabric tablecloth. Try lunch at one of the local bistros, or enjoy a picnic by the river.

In the afternoon, cycle or shuttle back to the hotel.

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

Hotel: Hotel La Magnaneraie

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 13 – 28 km (8 – 17 miles)

Morning

Villeneuve-lès-Avignon to Avignon: 13 km (8 miles)

Afternoon

Avignon to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon: 15 km (9 miles)

What to Expect: This morning, cycle southeast toward Avignon and leave your bike inside the ancient city walls. Cycle back to the hotel through the flat island of La Barthelasse, if you wish.

## DAY 6: Lirac and Tavel / Wine tasting

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 village of Lirac, renowned for its red-wine vineyards for more than 2,000 years. Here, you'll visit an old château's farm and enjoy a picnic prepared by your trip leaders. 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. Here, you may stop for an optional tasting in a wine cellar.

Tonight, celebrate with your fellow travelers during a special farewell dinner.

Please note: For those who begin the tour on Wednesday, your scheduled ride to Avignon, your guided tour of Avignon, and dinner on your own will take place on Sunday (Day 5). For those who begin the tour on Sunday, your scheduled ride to Avignon and your guided tour of Avignon will take place on Friday (Day 6).

Hotel: Hotel La Magnaneraie

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 60 km (12 – 37 miles)

Morning

Villeneuve-lès-Avignon to Chateau de Manissy: 19 km (12 miles)

Afternoon

Lunch to Tavel to hotel: 20 km (12 miles)

OR

Lunch to Tavel to hotel Plus: 41 km (25 miles)

What to Expect: This morning, cycle through beautiful and flat agricultural land along the Rhône Valley. Then, head away from the river, traversing a low ridge to Chateau de Manissy on the Route des Vignobles. After a picnic lunch and wine tasting here, you can take the support vehicle back to the hotel or cycle back, passing through Tavel en route. The longer option goes to Lirac before cutting through a forested plateau, making an additional loop to Tavel before returning to the hotel.

## **DAY 7: Avignon / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends**

After breakfast, transfer to the Avignon TGV train station, arriving at approximately 9:10 a.m. Your tour ends here.

Important: Train departures from the Avignon TGV train station prior to 9:30 a.m. are not recommended.

If you depart earlier, you must make transfer arrangements from the last hotel to the train station at your own expense (approximately 35 euros, with a travel time of about 20 minutes).

Meals: Breakfast

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### Hotel de l'Image (Days: 1,2,3)

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: 4,5,6)

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.