

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

### Bike Vacation Only

Sprawling vineyards, river valleys, and alpine vistas... this picturesque route reveals the best of the region. Roll into Les Baux-de-Provence, a charming village set atop majestic bluffs. Trace the Durance and Rhône rivers along the Alpilles, pausing to wander cobblestone streets in medieval towns. Enjoy a spectacular visual and musical production at Carrières de Lumières, whose shows are set in an abandoned limestone quarry. Cycle through the gentle countryside that inspired Vincent van Gogh's paintings and meet a local historian at the Saint-Paul Asylum, where the artist admitted himself. Stroll the Pont du Gard, an astonishing ancient aqueduct and impressive reflection of Roman architectural engineering. Feast along the way, indulge in wine tastings, home-hosted meals, and gourmet picnics. Discover why this tour surpasses all other bike trips in Provence, France.

### Cultural Highlights

- Delve into the imagination of artist Vincent van Gogh on a private guided tour.
- Roll through pastoral landscapes of olive groves, vineyards, farms, and villages, set against the lofty Alpilles.
- Stride across the Pont du Gard, the magnificent, UNESCO-cited Roman aqueduct.
- Join a local guide on a tour of Avignon, the "City of the Popes."

### 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 vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance with the hills.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 7 - 33 miles

**Average Cycling Time:** 00:45 - 03:15

**Group size:** 20 max

### 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: VBT Bicycling Vacation begins / Saint-Rémy-de-Provence**

Meet at the first hotel in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence by 2:00 p.m. If you arrive by train into Avignon, take a taxi at your own expense. If you are in Aix-en-Provence, you may take the VBT coach transportation from Hotel Aquabella departing at 11:00 a.m. to Saint-Rémy-de-Provence at no additional expense (approximately one hour). Please meet your VBT representative/coach driver at 11:00 a.m. parked outside of the Hotel Aquabella in Aix-en-Provence. If you arrive at the Aix-en-Provence TGV train station, you are only a 20-minute taxi ride away from Hotel Aquabella.

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. At 2:00 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.

### Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-up – 12 km (7 miles)

### What to Expect:

Begin your explorations with a warm-up ride around Saint-Rémy-de-Provence.

Cumulative Distance Range: 12 km (7 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

## **DAY 2: Cycle to Les Baux**

Breathtaking scenery and excellent cycling await you on the first full day of your Provence bike trip. After breakfast, 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, 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.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Saint-Rémy to Les Baux Loop — 32 km (20 miles) OR Saint-Rémy to Les Baux — 10 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. If you wish, you may add an extra loop in the Alpilles before lunch. You may cycle back to the hotel or return by support vehicle after lunch on your own.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast

### **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 Duveillier 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. Here, you'll enjoy a home-cooked dinner, flavored by the herbs of her native Provence and the rich tradition of her family cuisine.

### Today's Ride Choices

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.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 4: Pont du Gard / 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 a short stop at the abbey or picnic lunch on your own, 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 BCE (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 Avignon. Once settled in, you have time to relax, perhaps in the hotel's rooftop pool or in the secret garden, before gathering for an authentic Provençal meal.

#### Today's Ride Choices

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

Afternoon: Abbaye to the Pont du Gard — 33 km (21 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 stop at 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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 — 52 km (12 — 33 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

### **DAY 5: Avignon**

Sleep in this morning, then linger over breakfast before joining a local guide for a walking tour of the fabled "City of the Popes." Stroll the timeless cobblestone streets of this ancient city.

Try lunch at one of the local bistros, or enjoy a picnic in a public garden.

In the afternoon, you may go on a bike ride or take a break from your bike to explore by foot. If you choose to spend the afternoon in Avignon, then the rest of the day is yours to traverse 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 Provençal fabric tablecloth.

If you decide to cycle, the ride will take you across the river to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon where you will ride up to Fortress Saint André and admire the view over Avignon and the Rhône River. Next, you will ride to Island de La Barthelasse through many orchards before returning to your hotel.

Tonight is free for you to enjoy dinner in one of the local restaurants.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Avignon to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon loop – 23 km (14 miles)

What to Expect:

This morning, join a guided walking tour of Avignon inside the ancient city walls. This afternoon, explore Avignon at your leisure or cycle to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon then through the flat island of La Barthelasse.

Cumulative Distance Range: 23 km (14 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **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 peaches, pears, melons, pumpkins, asparagus, and market-garden produce. Leaving the river valley, you'll cycle through typical Provençal landscapes, vineyards, to Chateau de Manissy, for a visit of the old château's farm and enjoy a picnic prepared by a local friend. 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, exchange stories of your Provence bike trip as you celebrate with your fellow travelers during a special farewell dinner.

## Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Avignon to Chateau de Manissy – 23 km (14 miles)

Afternoon: Lunch to Tavel to Hotel – 20 km (12 miles) OR Lunch to Tavel to Hotel PLUS – 43 km (27 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 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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 – 66 km (12 – 41 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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

After breakfast, transportation is provided to the Avignon TGV train station, arriving at approximately 8:45 a.m. Your tour ends here.

Important: Train departures from the Avignon TGV train station prior to 9:40 a.m. are not recommended. If you depart earlier, you must make transportation arrangements from the last hotel to the train station at your own expense (approximately 35 €, with a travel time of about 20 minutes).

Included 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 small but comfortable air-

conditioned room. Free wireless Internet connections are available throughout the hotel.

### **Hôtel Cloître St-Louis (Days: 4,5,6)**

Hotel Cloitre Saint-Louis is located in the historic town of Avignon. This 16th-century former military hospital built on the remains of a Jesuit novitiate offers a shaded courtyard, rooftop pool and combines a contemporary décor set in an historic building, including air conditioning, and provides an elegant and peaceful haven after a rewarding day of exploring. Relax in the common areas, including a restaurant featuring Mediterranean flavors, a bar in the shaded garden, a large solarium terrace, as well as a rooftop swimming pool with panoramic views of Avignon.