

France: Normandy & Brittany

Bike Vacation Only

Fortified seaside Saint-Malo and historical D-Day beaches frame this fascinating journey. Immerse yourself in two classic regions: Normandy and Brittany as you bike France across fertile Norman farmland and into picturesque Breton ports. You'll learn how the drama of World War II still resounds along the famous beaches and headlands of Normandy and experience Brittany's seafaring lifestyle. Hop off your bike to peruse outdoor market stalls, wander the winding cobblestone streets of fairytale-like towns, or even swim in the English Channel, with a tour of Mont Saint-Michel a fitting grand finale. And indulge your taste buds with regional cuisine along the way, sampling some of the world's freshest oysters, creamy Camembert cheese, and crisp apple cider.

Cultural Highlights

- Learn how cider is made during a visit to a family-run apple orchard—and enjoy a taste and picnic.
- Visualize the dramatic events of D-Day as you tour Omaha Beach with a local guide.
- Stroll a fairytale setting of ramparts, half-timbered houses, and harbor views on a guided tour of the Breton town of Dinan.
- Savor crepes, a paper-thin style savory pancake and specialty of Brittany and Normandy during dinner at an authentic creperie.
- Visit spectacular Mont Saint-Michel, the medieval island-village crowned by its well-preserved Benedictine abbey.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain mixed with moderate hills. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance. Ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists.

Average Daily Mileage: 15 - 30 miles

Average Cycling Time: 00:45 - 02:45

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Apr 57°/43°, May 63°/46°, Jun 68°/52°, Jul 72°/55°, Aug 70°/55°, Sep 68°/52°, Oct 61°/46°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Apr 1.8, May 2.4, Jun 1.9, Jul 1.9, Aug 2.1, Sep 2.8, Oct 2.7

DAY 1: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Travel to Bayeux

Meet your fellow travelers in the lobby of the Hotel Pullman Paris Bercy at 8:00 a.m. for an 8:30 a.m. departure by private coach to Bayeux. If you use your own pedals and saddle, please put them in your carry-on luggage for easy access. Travel time is approximately 3.5 hours, depending on traffic. If you prefer to make your own way to Bayeux at your own expense, hotel details are listed in your final documents. You will meet your VBT trip leaders in the hotel. Please contact this hotel to advise of any travel delays or changes that will cause you to miss our 12:30 p.m. lunch and safety and bike-fitting session, and the hotel staff will pass your message on to your VBT trip leaders.

Your bike adventure begins with a simple warm-up ride from your hotel out into the verdant Norman countryside to Longues-sur-Mer, where you view World War II coastal fortifications on a headland overlooking the English Channel.

This evening, gather with your fellow travelers for a welcome reception, followed by dinner at the hotel.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon Warm-up — 12

What to Expect:

Your warm-up ride is a loop out of the center of Bayeux and into the countryside along a combination of roads and bike lanes to the German batteries of Longues-sur-Mer on a bluff overlooking the English Channel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 km (12 miles)

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2: Cycle to Arromanches

After breakfast this morning, you'll cycle through rolling farmlands and timeless country villages. Along

the way, you might visit a family-run umbrella workshop. This morning's destination is the coastal town of Arromanches, which played a vital role in the D-Day landings. Here, Allies built one of their famous Mulberry harbors—a portable, temporary structure that helped transfer troops and supplies. The remains can still be seen at low tide. Learn more about the harbor and the landings at the D-Day Museum, which you'll have time to explore on your own. Another possible independent discovery in this town is Arromanches 360, a circular theater showing a fascinating film about D-Day and its aftermath using wartime footage and modern images. Enjoy lunch on your own in Arromanches—and perhaps even go for a swim in the Channel!

Afterward, you either cycle or shuttle back to the hotel. This afternoon, you may choose to visit Bayeux's stunning cathedral, consecrated in 1077 in the presence of William the Conqueror. Or you may choose to visit the museum housing the intricate 11th-century Bayeux tapestry, a treasured fabric over 220 feet long depicting the Battle of Hastings and the victory of William the Conqueror over the English. In pedestrian-friendly Bayeux, you might also wish to walk to the Battle of Normandy Memorial Museum. Tonight, you have the night free to enjoy dinner on your own in town.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Bayeux to Arromanches — 16

Afternoon Arromanches to Bayeux — 7 | Arromanches to Bayeux Plus — 12

What to Expect:

This morning's route takes you through rural countryside with typical Norman farms and villages to the coast and beach in the town of Arromanches, with views of the artificial harbor. If you choose to continue cycling in the afternoon, choose from shorter and longer routes back to the hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 11 – 45 km (7 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Visit Omaha Beach and the American Cemetery with our local guide

This morning, cycle through verdant countryside and fragrant orchards past old stone farmhouses. Arrive in Omaha Beach, perhaps the best-known D-Day landing site. There'll be free time for lunch here before joining your passionate local guide, a World War II expert who leads you along the shore and sheds light

on the D-Day landings. Operation Overlord that started in the early morning hours of June 6, 1944 and remain the largest military operation in history.

You'll then cycle the short distance to the American Cemetery, a 170-acre, meticulously landscaped memorial overlooking Omaha Beach and the English Channel. Your local guide will again provide insight into this site, containing 9,387 perfectly aligned white crosses and Stars of David, marking the graves of the brave American servicemen and women who perished during World War II.

After time at these moving sites, you take a shuttle back to Bayeux. Later, join your trip leaders for dinner at an authentic creperie serving the specialty of the region.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Bayeux to Omaha Beach — 18

Afternoon Omaha Beach — 6

What to Expect:

Today's ride takes you out of Bayeux on city streets and bike lanes and soon into the Normandy countryside of meadows and apple orchards on lightly traveled narrow roads to a short but steep descent to Omaha Beach. After lunch, you ride along the beach for about two miles then rise to the bluff above it to the American Cemetery.

Cumulative Distance Range: 9 – 39 km (6 – 24 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Explore rural Normandy / Travel to Saint-Malo

Pedal out of Bayeux into rural Normandy for a close-up look at its celebrated fertile pasturelands dotted with grazing cows and half-timbered country manors to an apple orchard and cider maker.

You may choose to briefly explore Bayeux's small Wednesday outdoor market where your trip leaders will purchase a few local specialties for today's picnic lunch.

Since the 1600s, Normandy has been known for its exceptional apples and the beverages they produce,

notably cider and Calvados, the famous apple brandy named for the region. Your hosts will demonstrate how their organic apples are harvested, pressed and fermented to produce cider. Of course, samples are provided! A picnic lunch prepared by your trip leaders caps off your visit.

After lunch, you may continue cycling toward the Abbey of Saint-Martin-de-Mondaye, settled by the Norbertine order. Dating to the 13th century, the present abbey and church were entirely rebuilt in the 18th century. The long option continues to the town of Balleroy, ending just in front of the 17th-century Château de Balleroy.

From here, travel by coach to Saint-Malo, a beautiful medieval fortified city along Brittany's coast, the legendary home of French corsairs or privateers. Your hotel is located directly on the broad sand beach and the wide seaside promenade leading into the walled Old Town of Saint-Malo. During your stay, you can indulge in several spa and therapy rooms, including an indoor, seawater swimming pool. Stroll to a local restaurant for dinner tonight.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Bayeux to Les Vergers de Durcy — 7 | Les Vergers de Durcy to Balleroy — 14

What to Expect:

Your morning ride follows country roads to the cider-producing farm of the Domaine de la Flaguerie. The afternoon option continues along quiet narrow roads to Saint-Martin-de-Mondaye Abbey and then on to the town of Balleroy, ending in front of the Château de Balleroy.

Cumulative Distance Range: 11 – 33 km (7 – 21 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5: Visit Dinan / Saint-Suliac

After breakfast, shuttle approximately 40 minutes to Dinan, a fairytale walled city perched high atop a hill on the edge of Brittany. Here, you'll walk with a local guide along the narrow cobblestone streets of its medieval center, where a splendid Gothic church greets you.

After free time for lunch, reunite with your bike at the town's riverside port and enjoy a scenic ride along the River Rance. You'll pause to explore Saint-Suliac, a charming village known for its quintessential

granite homes draped with fishing nets. Later this afternoon you have time to enjoy your hotel's amenities, swim in the ocean, weather permitting, or stroll along the promenade. Your trip leaders will provide suggestions for dinner on your own tonight.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon Dinan to Saint-Suliac — 16 | Saint-Suliac to Saint-Malo — 12

What to Expect:

After a tour and exploration of Dinan's market, ride from this beautifully preserved Breton town along an easy designated bike route along the Rance River with a few miles of hard-packed gravel and on to the charming fishing port of Saint-Suliac. On the longer option, you continue cycling from Saint-Suliac through country roads, then onto the slightly busier streets of Saint-Malo.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 45 km (12 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Cancale / Saint-Malo / Farewell dinner

Today's ride traces the beautifully rugged Brittany coast. Your first stop is the Jacques Cartier Manor House. In 1534, Cartier crossed the Atlantic and sailed up the St. Lawrence River as far as modern-day Montreal. After these explorations and naming the land Canada, he settled in this manor house situated between Saint-Malo and Cancale. Enjoy a visit and short film about this native Breton.

Later, you'll cycle along the coast, admiring sweeping views from Pointe du Grouin before continuing to the picturesque fishing port of Cancale, known for its superior huîtres, or oysters. King Louis XIV was reportedly so enamored of these particular bivalves that he had fresh oysters brought daily from Cancale to Versailles. You'll have the opportunity to taste them for yourself, elbow to elbow with locals, during a visit to an oyster market.

After free time for lunch, loop back to Saint-Malo on another scenic route.

Tonight, gather at your hotel for a special farewell dinner.

Please note: the May 22-28, 2022 group will have dinner at local restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Saint-Malo to Cancale — 14

Afternoon Cancale to Saint-Malo — 8

What to Expect:

Admire sweeping views as you ride along the rugged Brittany coastline to Cancale this morning. Add an afternoon ride, turning inland through an agricultural area growing many vegetable varieties.

Cumulative Distance Range: 13 – 35 km (8 – 22 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Travel to Charles de Gaulle Airport via Mont Saint-Michel / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

You are welcome to join us on an all-day drive to the Air Package hotel at Roissy, Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris. This excursion includes a visit to Mont Saint-Michel, the spectacular abbey-crowned island that is one of the most coveted destinations in France. You will arrive at the hotel at around 5:30 p.m. Or you may make your arrangements to leave the Grand Hotel des Thermes on your own; checkout time is 11:00 a.m. Trains depart from Saint-Malo to Paris Montparnasse or Paris CDG Airport via Rennes. You are responsible for all transportation arrangements. We recommend you ask your VBT trip leaders or the hotel for assistance in making any travel reservations at least one day in advance.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Le Lion d'Or (Days: 1,2,3)

This 4-star boutique hotel has a long tradition of hospitality, as it is a renovated 18th-century coaching inn. Located in the historic heart of Bayeux, it is tucked into an inner private courtyard just steps away from the famed Tapestry Museum. Individually decorated rooms are light-filled, with modern tones and fabrics paired with classic furnishings. A welcoming bar and lounge at the entrance are near the fine-dining restaurant.

Grand Hotel des Thermes (Days: 4,5,6)

Overlooking the Gulf of Saint-Malo, the 5-star Grand Hotel des Thermes offers a luxurious end to a day of biking. Since 1881, as a vacation retreat for European royalty, it continues that tradition of excellence today. As a guest, you'll enjoy free access to the swimming pool, sauna, hammam (Turkish-style bath), and fitness area. The hotel also boasts a popular spa with a selection of treatments, a bar, and three restaurants. All rooms have a private balcony.

Hotel Pullman Paris Centre – Bercy (Day: 7)

The four-star Hotel Pullman Paris Centre – Bercy lies at the heart of the Bercy Village pedestrian complex of Paris, near the Grande Bibliothèque and Palais Omnisport stadium and the Bastille and Marais districts. Air-conditioned guest rooms feature plush contemporary décor. Indulge in contemporary French cuisine made with regional produce in the hotel's restaurant L'Esprit du 12ième, as well as an extensive wine cellar at the Vinoteca. Enjoy a drink in Le Point Bar or on the bar's patio. And relax in the sauna and fitness center.