

France: Bordeaux to La Rochelle

Bike Vacation Only

Sun, sea, scenery, history, and cycling are essential ingredients of this spin through southwest France. Behold crashing surf, a wide sky, and fields of wildflowers as you roll along dedicated bike routes toward medieval fortresses, Belle Epoque villas, and idyllic island landscape. Along the way, you'll stroll ancient ramparts and cobbled streets and feel sand between your toes ... climb a lighthouse for sweeping views ... venture into caves carved into limestone cliffs ... and taste succulent fresh oysters. Only cycling brings you this close to this sensory corner of France.

Cultural Highlights

Visit four of the "Most Beautiful Villages in France": Talmont-sur-Gironde, Brouage, La Flotte and Ars-en-Ré.

Complement your cycling with swimming at Atlantic beaches.

Cycle portions of *La Vélodyssée*, a coastal bike route offering unspoiled views.

Learn for yourself why the oysters of the Marennes-Oléron region are considered some of the tastiest in the world.

Visit the well-preserved, fortified town of Brouage, birthplace of explorer Samuel de Champlain.

Marvel at the Transporter Bridge, a triumph of engineering.

Explore La Corderie Royale, a 17th-century historic monument in Rochefort.

Visit l'Hermione, the famous replica of the 18th century 32-gun frigate

Delight in the beaches and Belle Epoque villas of the seaside town of Fouras-les-Bains.

Join a local guide for a walking tour of La Rochelle, featuring its 14th-century fortifications.

Admire Atlantic views from the Phare des Baleines lighthouse or from the Saint-Martin Church bell tower

What to Expect

This tour is rated Easy. Road, hybrid and e-bikes are offered. We cycle several sections of La Velodyssée, La Flow Velo and the bike paths on Ile de Re. These bike routes are on paved roads with shoulder or bike lane or on bike paths, sometimes gravel. We do ride over some cobblestone in Rochefort, La Rochelle, and Saint-Martin-de-Re (we recommend you dismount and walk those sections) and we do cross railroad tracks and wood bridges, which can be slippery (dismount and walk your bike is recommended). There are some gently rolling hills on Day 3 AM ride between Saint-Palais-sur-Mer and La Tremblade. Wind can be a factor along the Atlantic ocean.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 4 - 44

Average Cycling Time: 00:30 - 03:30

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 65°/52°, Jun 71°/57°, Jul 75°/61°, Aug 76°/61°, Sep 71°/56°, Oct 64°/51°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 2.4, Jun 2.0, Jul 1.7, Aug 2.1, Sep 2.7, Oct 3.2

DAY 1: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Transfer Saint-Palais-sur-Mer

If you would like to transfer with your small group to La Primavera Hotel and Restaurant in Saint-Palais-sur-Mer (approximately two hours), meet your VBT representative/driver and the rest of your group at our hotel in Bordeaux (Hôtel Mercure Bordeaux Cité Mondiale Centre Ville, 18 Parvis des Chartrons 20 quais des Chartrons, 33080 Bordeaux, France, phone +33 5 56 01 79 79) at 12:30 p.m. You will transfer by motorcoach (approximately two hours) to La Primavera Hotel and Restaurant in Saint-Palais-sur-Mer. Please plan to buy lunch on your own before this transfer. Please wear cycling clothes (and bring your own pedals and/or saddle in your day pack) in preparation for the warm-up ride. La Primavera Hotel check-in time is 3:00 p.m. and your room may not be ready before the warm-up ride.

If you arrive at our Bordeaux hotel later than 12:30 p.m. or if you would prefer to transfer to La Primavera Hotel and Restaurant independently, you must take a taxi at your own expense (approximately 250 euros/two hours). Please contact La Primavera Hotel and Restaurant to advise of any travel delays or changes, and the staff will pass your message on to your VBT trip leaders. Contact the hotel if you need help getting a taxi. Alternatively, you may consult the SNCF website <https://www.sncf.com/> for train schedules from the Bordeaux-Saint-Jean train station to the Royan, France, SNCF train station (approximately 2 1/2-hour train ride, then taxi from Royan to La Primavera Hotel, 6.8 miles/11 km., 15-30 euros). Please note that your train may arrive in Royan in the late afternoon, in which case you may miss the warm-up ride.

La Primavera Hotel and Restaurant is a welcoming, three-star, family-run oceanfront hotel. Perched on the cliffs of the Atlantic overlooking fine sand beaches, this quiet coastal retreat is a perfect place to relax and unwind. In the afternoon, you'll join your trip leaders for a safety and bike-fitting session, followed by a short warm-up ride along quiet country roads. Later, gather with the group for a welcome cocktail. Dinner is at the hotel.

Hotel: La Primavera Hotel and Restaurant

Meals: Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 6 km (4 miles)

Afternoon

Warm-Up: 6 km (4 miles)

What to Expect: Take an easy loop ride starting on the path along the ocean and then through small villages back to your hotel. Except for one moderate hill, the route is mostly flat. The mileage is short, but you can extend it if you wish by cycling to the town center of Saint-Palais and/or to La Grande Côte, a beautiful and famous beach (approx. 0.87 miles/1.4 km from the hotel), passing cafés and terraces along the way.

DAY 2: Cycle to Meschers-sur-Gironde / Talmont-sur-Gironde

Your morning begins with a spin along *La Vélodyssée*, a bike route known for its unspoiled landscapes. Your route follows a coastline called *La Côte de Beauté*, or beautiful coast. This estuary, where the Gironde river flows into the Atlantic Ocean, is the largest in Europe.

As you enter Royan, you'll see a memorial to the heroes of the Frankton Operation of World War II. In December 1942, an officer of the British Royal Marines and 11 volunteers from this elite corps carried out a commando raid against German ships in Bordeaux, paddling upriver at night from Royan to Bordeaux. Only two survived.

From Royan, you'll follow another scenic coastal route, Canal des 2 Mers, to Meschers-sur-Gironde. Once a sleepy fishing village, Meschers-sur-Gironde is now a pretty resort town set between forest and the sea. Here, you'll have a chance to explore the Caves of Matata—troglodyte caves cut into chalky limestone outcroppings that, through history, have sheltered pirates, plunderers, and Protestant refugees.

From here, you'll pedal along the ocean to Talmont-sur-Gironde, a lovely and well-preserved village founded in 1284. Today, the village is recognized as one of the "Most Beautiful Villages in France." Admire the 12th-century Church of Sainte-Radegonde, whose Romanesque façade defines the skyline, stroll narrow streets lined with charming white houses adorned with roses and hollyhocks. Here enjoy lunch and a wine tasting at Les Hauts de Talmont.

Afterward, cycle or shuttle back to your hotel, where you can relax at the wonderful pool, go swimming in the ocean or take a coastal walk into the charming resort nearby.

Tonight, join your hosts at La Primavera on the terrace for dinner at the hotel.

Hotel: La Primavera Hotel and Restaurant

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 7 – 54 km (4 – 34 miles)

Morning

Saint-Palais-sur-Mer to Talmont-sur-Gironde: 29 km (18 miles)

Afternoon

Talamont-sur-Gironde to hotel: 29 km (18 miles)

What to Expect: Today's route is almost entirely on paved roads with some car traffic. From the hotel to Royan, you will ride the *La Vélodyssée* bike route for 10 km (6 miles), then roll along the Canal des 2 Mers for 20 km (12 miles) to Talmont-sur-Gironde. Please note that, when the path is on a sidewalk shared with pedestrians, the pedestrians always have the right of way. Also, be sure to check for traffic and pedestrians at intersections and be mindful of curbs.

The support vehicle shuttle back to the hotel is available if you prefer to pass on the afternoon ride.

DAY 3: Cycle to La Tremblade and Brouage / Transfer to Rochefort

This morning, you'll say goodbye to your hosts at La Primavera and ride *La Vélodyssée* bike route through countryside and thick pine forest and along the Atlantic coast. The oysters and mussels that abound in the waters off this coast are world-renowned for their quality. View marshes and oyster farms as you spin toward La Tremblade and enjoy a lunch on your own showcasing these delicious shellfish.

Next, discover Brouage, where the ramparts of Cardinal Richelieu's citadel still stand, overlooking what once was a thriving harbor. The harbor silted up during the 17th century, however, desolating the village below. Today, it is a peaceful community of villagers cultivating the mussel beds. Brouage is also famous as the birthplace of Samuel de Champlain, the navigator who opened Quebec to settlement by the French.

Later, continue cycling to the Transporter Bridge, built between 1898 and 1900 by French engineer Ferdinand Arnodin or shuttle to the historic town of Rochefort. Founded as a naval base during the 17th century, Rochefort boasts a well-preserved Old Town with narrow streets, museums, galleries, boutiques, parks and gardens—and the occasional costumed villager. Here, you'll settle into your hotel. As you enjoy dinner at your hotel restaurant, you can gaze at passing boats on the Charente River.

Hotel: Mercure Rochefort La Corderie Royale Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 – 72 km (12 – 45 miles)

Morning

Saint-Palais-sur-Mer to La Tremblade: 31 km (19 miles)

Afternoon

La Tremblade to Brouage: 18 km (11 miles)

Brouage to Rochefort: 21 km (13 miles)

What to Expect: This morning's route is mostly very gently rolling terrain. Some sections along the Atlantic Ocean follow narrow paved roads with some car traffic. You will cycle small roads through the marshes of the oyster-farm region of Marennes-Oléron.

The ride from Brouage to the Transporter Bridge is on mostly flat rural roads with some gentle hills. Cross the Charente River with the bridge's gondola with your bike and continue riding to your hotel along the marshes and banks of the Charente River.

DAY 4: Fouras / Rochefort / l'Hermione

This morning enjoy a leisurely breakfast before you begin cycling to Fouras on sections of *La Vélodyssée* and *La Flow Vélo* bike routes.

Spin along the Charente River and on country roads, passing canals, meadows, and villages en route to the charming seaside town of Fouras. Located on a small peninsula on the Charente-Maritime coast, Fouras attracts visitors for its beautiful beaches and pretty Belle Epoque villas. Here, you'll find a lovely oceanfront promenade, beaches, a polygonal tower, a covered market, and boutiques. Explore this gem of a town at your leisure and enjoy lunch on your own.

After lunch, cycle back to Rochefort, where you'll enjoy an included visit of Rochefort's most famous ship replica, *l'Hermione*, which General Lafayette sailed in 1780 to support the American Revolution and which foundered in 1793. The replica was constructed in 1997. If you have time, stop in for an optional visit of La Corderie Royale, a 17th-century royal rope-making factory that was nearly destroyed during World War II. Today, it is a historic monument and International Centre of the Sea.

Dinner is on your own tonight.

Hotel: Mercure Rochefort La Corderie Royale Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 – 48 km (11 – 30 miles)

Morning

Rochefort to Fouras: 27 km (17 miles)

Afternoon

Fouras to Rochefort: 19 km (12 miles)

What to Expect: Some sections of today's route are unpaved. The morning ride traces the Charentes River, then continues on flat, easy country roads to the town of Fouras. The afternoon route is similar with scenic variations.

DAY 5: La Rochelle / Guided walking tour / Ile-de-Ré

After breakfast, cycle to the historic town of La Rochelle. Dating to the 10th century, this magnificent port town welcomes you with two iconic 14th-century towers and a harbor lined with elegant buildings. Today, the harbor serves as the yachting center of France's Atlantic coast. Here, you'll meet a local guide for a walking tour of the town. Take in panoramic views of the sea as you stroll its ancient ramparts, and explore the town's winding cobblestone streets, medieval churches, and shops. Pause along the Atlantic Ocean in Les Boucholeurs or Chatellaillon for lunch on your own.

Then, rejoin your trip leaders for a shuttle or ride to Saint-Martin-de-Ré, which is notable for its star-shaped, 17th-century ramparts. This UNESCO World Heritage site, whose charming fortifications, half-timbered houses, colorful shutters, historic monuments, and donkeys in trousers are sure to captivate you.

Enjoy a short stroll through the cobbled streets to your hotel, where you may relax or sip a house cocktail. You may also arrange for a spa treatment (advanced reservations recommended; contact the hotel directly) or reserve use of the counter-current pool, Jacuzzi and sauna (service charge applies; 55-minute rental periods). Dinner is on your own tonight in Saint-Martin-de-Ré, where choices abound.

Hotel: La Baronnie Hotel and Spa

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 13 – 84 km (8 – 52 miles)

Morning

Rochefort to Châtelailon-Plage: 24 km (15 miles)

Afternoon

Châtelailon-Plage to La Rochelle: 16 km (10 miles)

La Rochelle to Saint-Martin-de Ré: 25 km (16 miles)

What to Expect: Enjoy countryside roads and coastal views for most of today's ride. As you leave Rochefort, you'll ride mostly on flat, paved roads, with a few stretches of cobblestone. Châtelailon is a great place for lunch: cafés, restaurants, a covered market, and stores. The afternoon ride is a mix of country roads and secondary roads. The ride from La Rochelle to Ile de Ré includes a 3-km (1.9-mile) bridge with a protected bike path on either side.

DAY 6: Ile de Ré

During the 17th century, Ile de Ré was coveted by many for its position of military importance and its production of salt and wine, leaving a legacy of historic attractions and charming towns and villages that you can enjoy today. After a leisurely breakfast this morning, set off to explore the island. You'll find that it was made for cycling! The island is flat, and its vineyards, pine forests and, at the more remote west end, oyster beds and salt marshes are crisscrossed with cycle paths that link its 10 small communities.

Start off your island excursion riding along the ocean and through the salt marshes. Pause in Ars-en-Ré for lunch in a local café. After lunch, continue to the youngest village on the island, Saint-Clément-des-Baleines. Salt, wine, and fishing are the longtime mainstays of the economy here. A cyclist paradise, the bike paths take you past dry stone walls and fields of colorful wildflowers, including hollyhocks – the flower of the island. As you ride you may catch a whiff of sulphur from the salt marshes. Highlights of the

village include the 15th-century locks, the local market, and the Phare des Baleines lighthouse, which you are welcome to climb (257 steps) for sweeping Atlantic views. Then, follow the bike path and bike routes back to Saint-Martin. Climb the bell tower of Saint-Martin Church for one last glimpse of this stone star between land and sea, a UNESCO World Heritage site and part of the Network of Major Sites built by Vauban.

Tonight, gather with your travel mates to sip an aperitif as the sun sets behind the horizon. Then, celebrate your journey and share reminiscences over a festive farewell dinner at a local restaurant, *La Baleine Bleue*.

Hotel: La Baronnie Hotel and Spa

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 – 45 km (13 – 28 miles)

Morning

Saint-Martin to Saint-Clément-des-Baleines: 32 km (20 miles)

Afternoon

Saint-Clément-des-Baleines to Saint-Martin: 24 km (15 miles)

What to Expect: The entirety of today's route follows flat terrain as you cycle toward La Flotte, Le Blois-Plage, and Saint-Clément-des-Baleines. Then, cycle back to Saint-Martin on bike paths and routes.

DAY 7: Transfer to La Rochelle train station / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

After breakfast, transfer to La Rochelle train station by private motorcoach, arriving at approximately 10:30 a.m. Important: Train departures from La Rochelle train station prior to 11:00 a.m. are not recommended. If you depart earlier, you must make transfer arrangements from the last hotel at your own expense. Taxi cost to the La Rochelle train station is approximately 49-62 euros (travel time approximately 45 minutes).

If you have chosen the independent Post-trip Extension to Paris, you'll remain at this hotel for the next two nights. Upon your arrival, your VBT Paris representative will be there to answer your questions. An optional orientation walking tour of the quartier will be offered. Check your VBT City Information for additional optional tour options.

Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

La Baronnie Hotel and Spa (Days: 5,6)

This oasis in the heart of France's favorite vacation island is the perfect finale to your getaway. A historic ambiance infuses the 18th-century manor, which once was purchased by Louis XVI for Marie Antoinette. Just steps away lies the port of the island's historic capital, Saint-Martin-de-Ré. This charming, 4-star, boutique hotel, has tastefully decorated rooms with 18th-century-inspired fabrics, and modern conveniences. The young, friendly, and attentive team will gladly serve you a delicious house cocktail in the sun-drenched terrace, or you may relax in the shady gardens and secluded courtyards. The spa, Jacuzzi, counter-current pool, and sauna are also the perfect finale to an exhilarating day of cycling (reservations required and fees apply for use of the counter-current pool/Jacuzzi/sauna). While some rooms have air conditioning, fans are available in rooms without air conditioning. WiFi is available throughout the hotel.

Mercure Rochefort La Corderie Royale Hotel (Days: 3,4)

This centrally located, historic property, set on the banks of the Charente River, is just steps from the Corderie Royale, the Hermione, restaurants, and other attractions. The hotel was fully renovated in 2018, and its contemporary and spacious rooms, bar, and restaurant are most welcoming. All rooms offer ultra-comfortable beds, a fully equipped bathroom, satellite TV, telephone, and a view of either the swimming pool, the Charente River, or La Corderie Royale. Free WiFi and air conditioning are available throughout the hotel.

Hotel La Primavera (Days: 1,2)

Family-owned for three generations, this charming seaside hotel welcomes you with warmth and hospitality. Set within a 4.9-acre (2-hectare) park near a small beach, it also offers tennis and an indoor pool with ocean views—perfect for a refreshing dip after an exhilarating day of cycling. Enjoy an *apéritif* in the medieval lounge, escape to the shady garden, and take in panoramic views from the hotel restaurant as you savor traditional and innovative dishes paired with a selection of more than 300 wines from the family's cellar. Free WiFi and air conditioning are available throughout the property.