

France: Bordeaux to La Rochelle

Bike Vacation Only

Like a fine wine, France’s coastal region should be savored slowly, and that’s just what you’ll do on this bike tour. Coasting on an Atlantic breeze, you’ll behold sweeping sea views while cycling La Rochelle, inhale the fragrance of wildflowers, and taste succulent oysters and local wine. You’ll hear your footsteps clatter on the cobbled lanes of an Old Town, and behold some of the “Most Beautiful Villages in France.” Guided tours will open a window to history as you stroll ancient ramparts and board a replica of a Revolutionary War ship. And you’ll end each day in carefully curated accommodations that offer sumptuous dining and pampering amenities. Best of all, you’ll experience these sensory pleasures at a leisurely pace, as only a bicycling vacation allows.



Cultural Highlights

- Cycle along La Vélodyssée, a bike route known for its unspoiled landscapes.

- Enjoy a wine tasting in the lovely and well-preserved village of Talmont-sur-Gironde.
- See for yourself why Talmont-sur-Gironde, Brouage, and Ars-en-Ré are listed among the “Most Beautiful Villages” in France.
- Pass oyster farms and perhaps pause to sample these tasty shellfish as you spin toward La Tremblade.
- Discover a cyclist’s paradise on Ile de Ré and perhaps admire Atlantic views from its lighthouse or bell tower.

What to Expect

This tour is rated Easy. Road, hybrid and e-bikes are offered. We cycle several sections of La Velodyssee, 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: 01:15 - 04:00

Group size: 20 max

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 to Saint-Palais-sur-Mer

Meet your VBT representative/driver and the rest of your group at our hotel in Bordeaux (Mercure Bordeaux Cité Mondiale Centre Ville Hotel, 18 Parvis des Chartrons 20 quais des Chartrons, 33080 Bordeaux, France, phone +33 5 56 01 79 79) at 12:30 p.m. for a departure at 1:00 p.m. You will travel by motorcoach (approximately two hours) to La Villa Ouest Hotel and Spa in Saint-Palais-sur-Mer. Please plan to buy lunch on your own beforehand. Please wear cycling clothes (and bring your pedals and/or

saddle in your day pack, if you brought your own with you) in preparation for the warm-up ride. La Villa Ouest 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 1:00 p.m. or if you would prefer to travel to La Villa Ouest Hotel and Spa independently, you must take a taxi at your own expense (approximately €250 /two hours). Please contact La Villa Ouest 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 sncf.com/ for train schedules from the Bordeaux-Saint-Jean train station to the Royan, France, SNCF train station (approximately 2.5-hour train ride, then taxi from Royan to La Villa Ouest, 4 miles/7 km, €15-30). Please note that your train may arrive in Royan in the late afternoon, in which case you may miss the warm-up ride.

La Villa Ouest is a welcoming, three-star, family-run boutique hotel in the heart of Saint-Palais-sur-Mer. Just steps away from the ocean, 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 at the hotel. Dinner is at a local restaurant nearby.

Today's Ride Choice

Afternoon: Warm-up – 7 km (4 miles)

What to Expect: Take an easy loop ride toward Plage de la Grande Cote and back to your hotel through quiet residential streets. 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 La Grande Cote, a beautiful and famous beach, passing seafood cafes and terraces along the way.

Cumulative Distance Range: 7 km (4 miles)

Accommodation: La Villa Ouest Hotel and Spa, Saint-Palais-sur-Mer

Included Meals: Dinner

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

Your morning begins with a spin along *La Velodysee*, a bike route known for its unspoiled landscapes. Your route follows a coastline called *La Cote de Beaute*, 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 facade 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, a winery with stunning views of the church.

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

Tonight, stroll to a nearby restaurant for dinner on your own.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Saint-Palais-sur-Mer to Talmont-sur-Gironde – 28 km (17 miles)

Afternoon: Talamont-sur-Gironde to hotel – 27 km (17 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 Velodysee* bike route for 9 km (5 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 is available to shuttle back to the hotel if you prefer to pass on the afternoon ride.

Cumulative Distance Range: 28 – 55 km (17 – 34 miles)

Accommodation: La Villa Ouest Hotel and Spa, Saint-Palais-sur-Mer

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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

This morning, you'll say goodbye to your charming hosts at La Villa Ouest and ride *La Velodysee* 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Saint-Palais-sur-Mer to La Tremblade – 33 km (21 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 bike paths and roads with some car traffic. You will cycle small roads through the marshes of the oyster-farm region of Marennes-Oleron.

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

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 – 72 km (11 – 45 miles)

Accommodation: Mercure Rochefort La Corderie Royale Hotel, Rochefort

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Fouras / Rochefort / l'Hermione

This morning enjoy a leisurely breakfast before you begin cycling to Fouras on sections of *La Velodysee* and *La Flow Velo* 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 at a local restaurant tonight.

Today's Ride Choices

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 Charente River, then continues on flat, easy country roads to the town of Fouras. The afternoon route is similar with scenic variations.

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 – 48 km (12 – 29 miles)

Accommodation: Mercure Rochefort La Corderie Royale Hotel, Rochefort

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5: La Rochelle / Guided walking tour / Ile de Re

After breakfast, leave Rochefort on your bicycle through small *communes* (villages) in the Charente-Maritime region reaching the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and the flora and fauna of the Marais d'Yves Nature Reserve. Pause along the Atlantic Ocean in Les Boucholeurs or Chatellaillon-Plage for lunch on your own.

After lunch, cycle along the ocean 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.

Then, rejoin your trip leaders for a shuttle or ride to Saint-Martin-de-Re, 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 (advance 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-Re, where choices abound. Please note, for the June 1-7, 2022 land departure date, we will be using two hotels for your last two nights on the bike tour (La Baronnie Hotel and Spa and Hotel La Jetée). The hotels are near to each other and the group will be split at random, but we will strive to keep travel companions at the same hotel.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Rochefort to Chatelaillon-Plage – 24 km (15 miles)

Afternoon: Chatelaillon-Plage to La Rochelle – 16 km (10 miles) | La Rochelle to Saint-Martin-de Re – 23 km (14 miles)

What to Expect: Enjoy country 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. Chatelaillon-Plage is a great place for lunch, with cafes, 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 Re offers beautiful views of the ocean and includes a 3-km (1.9-mile) bridge with a protected bike path on either side.

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 – 63 km (10 – 39 miles)

Accommodation: La Baronnie Hotel and Spa, Hotel La Jetée (June 1-7, 2022 tour only), Saint-Martin-de-Re

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Ile de Re

During the 17th century, the Ile de Re 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-Re for lunch in a local cafe. After lunch, continue to the youngest village on the island, Saint-Clement-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 island 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*. Please note, for the June 1-7, 2022 land departure date, we will be using two hotels for your last two nights on the bike tour (La Baronnie Hotel and Spa and Hotel La Jetée). The hotels are near to each other and the group will be split at random, but we will strive to keep travel companions at the same hotel.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Saint-Martin to Ars-en-Re – 20 km (12 miles)

Afternoon: Ars-en-Re to Le Phare – 12 km (7 miles) | Ars-en-Re to La Patache beach to Le Phare – 19 km (12 miles)

What to Expect: The entirety of today's route follows flat terrain as you cycle to Saint-Clement-des-Baleines. It is a lovely ride mostly on paved bike paths—a real paradise for bicyclists. Then, cycle back to Saint-Martin on bike paths and routes.

Cumulative Distance Range: 12 – 55 km (7 – 33 miles)

Accommodation: La Baronnie Hotel and Spa, Hotel La Jetée (June 1-7, 2022 tour only), Saint-Martin-de-

Re

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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

After breakfast, travel 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 transportation arrangements from the last hotel at your own expense. Taxi cost to the La Rochelle train station is approximately €49-62 (travel time approximately 45 minutes).

Included Meals: Breakfast