

France: Bordeaux to La Rochelle

Bike Vacation Only

Cultural Highlights

- Cycle along *La Vélodyssée*, a bike route known for its unspoiled landscapes.
- Discover 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 and Les Boucholeurs.
- 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 offers a combination of easy terrain and some moderate hills and is ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists. Our VBT support vehicle is available in designated spots for those who would like assistance. Wind can be a factor when riding along the Atlantic Ocean.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

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 / Travel to Saint-Palais-sur-Mer

Meet your VBT representative/driver and the rest of your group at our hotel in Bordeaux 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.

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 Choices

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 Côte, a beautiful and famous beach, passing seafood cafés and terraces along the way.

Cumulative Distance Range: 7 km (4 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

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 at a local restaurant.

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 — 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 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 — 57 km (17 — 35 miles)

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 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.

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 — 22 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-Oléron.

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)

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 Véloodyssée* 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 museum, *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 — 20 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: 20 — 47 km (12 — 29 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5: La Rochelle / Île de Ré

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 Châtelailon-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 have time to explore the town on your own. 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-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 (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-Ré, where choices abound.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Rochefort to Châtelailon-Plage — 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon:: Châtelailon-Plage to La Rochelle — 17 km (10 miles) | La Rochelle to Saint-Martin-de Ré — 24 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. Châtelailon-Plage is a great place for lunch, with 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 Île de Ré 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: 17 — 67 km (10 — 42 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Île de Ré

During the 17th century, the Île 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 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. Perhaps you will 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Saint-Martin to Ars-en-Ré – 21 km (13 miles)

Afternoon:: Ars-en-Ré to Le Phare – 12 km (7 miles) | Le Phare to Saint-Martin – 23 km (14 miles)

What to Expect:

The entirety of today's route follows flat terrain as you cycle to Saint-Clément-des-Baleines. It is a lovely, 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 – 34 miles)

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 10:15 a.m.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

La Villa Ouest (Days: 1,2)

This charming boutique hotel welcomes you with warmth and hospitality. Steps from the beach and the center of Saint-Palais-sur-Mer, La Villa Ouest offers 26 contemporary rooms with WiFi and air conditioning, a wine bar, tea room, elegant terrace and intimate garden. The new garden Spa “The Maeva” is open daily and has a sauna, steam room and outdoor jacuzzi. Discover Belle Epoque villas along the *Sentier des Douaniers*, a foot path along the coast that connects the beaches.

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.

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.

Pullman Paris Montparnasse (Day: 7)

Located in the 14th arrondissement of Paris, a few steps from Gare de Montparnasse train station, this polished hotel offers classic rooms and access to Paris' main attractions in just a few minutes by foot, bus, or metro. Marvel at one of the best views of the French capital from the rooftop terrace, and delight in views of the hotel gardens from the bright and airy restaurant. Your air-conditioned room has a private bath, LCD-screen satellite TV, minibar and safe. WiFi is available throughout the hotel, and an Internet terminal is also available in the lobby.