

England: Bath & the Cotswolds

Bike Vacation Only

The richly textured canvas of the Cotswolds unfolds before you during this rewarding reel through the classic English countryside. Cycle hedge-lined lanes into handsome sandstone villages celebrated for their timeless charm, from Bourton-on-Water to Chipping Campden. Pedal the gentle and bucolic vistas of the Windrush Valley and the ancient Roman route of Fosse Way. Visits to the splendid Hidcote Gardens, exploration of the Georgian jewel of Bath, and an exploration of Blenheim Palace round out a truly memorable experience in this unforgettable pocket of England.

Cultural Highlights

Stroll the footpaths of Hidcote Gardens, one of England's most influential Arts and Crafts gardens

Explore the fine medieval stone buildings of the village of Burford

Ride into 17th-century market towns, where wool, yarn, and farm produce were traded and sold for centuries

Arrive by bike into the city of Bath, a rich repository of grand Georgian and Regency architecture

Pedal among the 2,000 magnificently landscaped acres surrounding Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Winston Churchill

Cycle quiet country lanes past and follow the ancient Roman Fosse Way and the Kennet and Avon Canal

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain mixed with moderate hills, mainly on quiet country roads.

Our VBT van support is always available for those who need assistance with the hills. Ideal for enthusiastic beginners to experienced cyclists.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 10 - 42

Average Cycling Time: 01:00 - 04:15

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 61°/46°, Jun 64°/52°, Jul 68°/55°, Aug 68°/55°, Sep 63°/52°, Oct 55°/46°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 1.7, Jun 1.7, Jul 1.5, Aug 1.6, Sep 1.8, Oct 2.3

DAY 1: VBT Biking Vacation begins

Meet your fellow travelers and VBT trip leaders at 1:00 p.m. in the lobby of the Oxford Hotel (73 High Street, Oxford OX1 4BE, Tel +44 1865 248 332). You will have a chance to change into your biking gear in the hotel's public restrooms. Please note: Plan to eat lunch or a snack on your own beforehand, as the next scheduled meal is dinner.

If your arrival is delayed, please contact our hotel in Oxford to advise staff and they will pass your message along to your VBT trip leaders. VBT highly recommends flying to England at least one day before the tour begins. This allows you to rest and recover from jet lag before you begin sightseeing and biking.

Take a short support vehicle shuttle to the village of Bampton, the start of your cycling adventure. After a safety and bike-fitting session, enjoy a pleasant pedal through the countryside to Bampton. This charming village will seem familiar to Downton Abbey fans: it doubled as the fictional Yorkshire village of Downton in the beloved PBS series. Continue cycling through small hamlets and past tree-lined fields into Burford, your home for the next two nights.

Tonight, enjoy a welcome dinner in the hotel's restaurant.

Hotel: The Lamb Inn

Meals: Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 12 miles

Afternoon

Bampton to Burford: 12 miles

What to Expect: Cycle along mainly flat quiet country lanes, with a gradual incline into Burford.

DAY 2: Windrush Valley and Blenheim Palace

Cycle the breathtaking Windrush Valley today, crossing the river and traversing the rolling hills of the Cotswolds. Ride through the sylvan Wychwood Forest to the village of Leafield and the charming market

town of Charlbury. The centerpiece of the day is your visit to Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The 2,000-acre estate features beautifully manicured grounds laid out by one of England's—and history's—great landscape designers, Capability Brown. All pathways lead to the resplendent palace, where you have free time for lunch and an included visit of the state rooms and the Churchill exhibition. You may also enjoy a leisurely stroll around the grounds. After a rewarding visit, ride or shuttle back to Burford.

Dinner is on your own tonight. Burford has several options for a fine meal.

Hotel: The Lamb Inn

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 10 - 42 miles

Morning

Burford to Charlbury: 10 miles

OR

Burford to Blenheim Palace: 21 miles

Afternoon

Blenheim Palace to Burford: 21 miles

What to Expect: Today's route is more undulating than yesterday's but again follows quiet country lanes. As you cycle the picturesque Windrush Valley, enjoy views of dry-stone walls, pastures, and agricultural fields along the roadside. Pass the great woodlands of Wychwood Forest before coasting into the small market town of Charlbury. Continue on to the breathtaking Blenheim Palace, the mid-point of the day, and enjoy the impeccably designed landscape as you explore the grounds and estate rooms. The afternoon route departs Blenheim and traces lovely country lanes to the thatched cottage village of Minster Lovell. Continue along the Windrush Valley back into Burford.

DAY 3: Windrush Valley / Bourton-on-the-Water / Slaughters

More of the stunning Windrush Valley unfolds before you today, a picture-perfect canvas of the Cotswolds. By day's end, you will understand why our trip leaders call this peaceful region "happy valley." The Windrush was named for the way its namesake river winds through the rushes, or the tall grasses

along the waterway's banks. Enjoy a reel through the historic Sherborne Estate, part of England's only remaining 17th-century deer course, created for sport by one John "Crump" Dutton. Your route continues to one of the Cotswolds' treasures: Bourton-on-the-Water. This quaint village is sometimes called the "Venice of the Cotswolds" for the graceful arched stone bridges that cross the River Windrush in town. There'll be time to explore its many charms and have lunch on your own or even seek out a famous cream tea. Later, cycle to the old mill town, Lower Slaughter. The handsome sandstone manor houses and churches recall a stately era of lords and ladies. It is pure pleasure to take a slow pedal through these quintessential English villages. After time here, you may shuttle to your next hotel in Moreton-on-Marsh, or enjoy a longer riding day through more beautiful countryside, where you may visit the renowned Daylesford Organic, one of the UK's most sustainable organic working farms. This evening, share your discoveries with fellow travelers over dinner at the hotel.

Hotel: The Manor House Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 - 34 miles

Morning

Burford to Bourton-on-the-Water: 17 miles

Afternoon

Bourton-on-the-Water to Moreton-in-Marsh: 17 miles

What to Expect: The route begins along the Windrush Valley, passing through the small hamlets of Little Barrington and Windrush. The day's main hill climb leads up to Clapton-on-the-Hill. Then it's a lovely downhill coast to Bourton-on-the-Water. Park your bikes and enjoy a stroll around this pretty town with its many bridges and shops. Continue along more rolling countryside into the scenic village of Lower Slaughter. The day's longer option leads to the hamlets of Lower Swell and Upper Swell through pastures dotted with sheep.

DAY 4: Chipping Campden / Hidcote Gardens / Broadway Tower

After breakfast, set out into the magnificent hedge- and tree-lined country lanes of the North Cotswolds. Gentle hills surround you as you make your way to the small market town of Chipping Campden, home to the Cotswold "Olimpicks" and honey-hued limestone buildings. Browse its Market Hall and central High Street before continuing your reel to the American-inspired Hidcote Gardens, one of England's most

influential Arts and Crafts gardens. Its colorful and intricately designed outdoor “rooms” are full of surprises. After, you may ride or shuttle up to Broadway Tower, where, on a clear day, you will be rewarded with extensive views of the surrounding countryside. Lady Coventry of Worcester had this Gothic folly built at 1,204 feet above sea level strictly for her pleasure.

The views take in 16 counties and stretch all the way to Wales on a clear day. Inspired by this beguiling canvas, you continue your ride through the lavender fields at Snowhill and to the tiny hamlet of Kineton for lunch at a local pub. Formerly owned by Corpus Christi College, The Halfway Inn creates the best homemade burgers in the Cotswolds and is well known for its great atmosphere and variety of pub dogs. After lunch, you may ride or shuttle back to the hotel.

This evening is free for you to explore Moreton-in-Marsh and try one of its restaurants.

Hotel: The Manor House Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 12 - 40 miles

Morning

Moreton-in-Marsh to Hidcote Gardens: 12 miles

OR

Moreton-in-Marsh to Kineton: 26 miles

Afternoon

Kineton to Moreton-in-Marsh: 14 miles

What to Expect: The first section of today's ride is slightly undulating along lovely tree- and hedge-lined country lanes, passing through pretty hamlets. Stop in Chipping Campden to explore ancient High Street and the Market Hall. You pass over the railway line on the outskirts of Chipping Campden, then cycle uphill towards Hidcote Gardens. Park your bike by the entrance and enjoy a visit. You can shuttle or cycle to Broadway Tower; the ride is 5.5 miles with a long steady uphill climb. After taking in the 360 degree views, the route leads through beautiful countryside down a long, steady hill to the tiny village of Kineton where a well-deserved pub lunch awaits. From here, either shuttle or ride through undulating country lanes back to the hotel.

DAY 5: Cycle through the Southern Cotswolds to Bath

Shuttle this morning for about an hour through the stunning English countryside to the small hamlet of Westonbirt. From here, you cycle along the Fosse Way, a 2,000-year-old Roman route linking Exeter and Lincoln. Remarkable for ancient engineering, the road never veers more than six miles from a straight line for its full distance of 182 miles. You, however, will ride just a fraction of this historic pathway, eventually leaving it to follow a road into the heart of Bath, the elegant Georgian jewel of England. You approach the city via the 200-year old Kennet and Avon Canal, lined with beautifully painted narrow boats.

Rendezvous with your trip leaders at the Holburne Museum. The rest of the day is free to enjoy lunch and the many sights of this beautiful city, including the unmissable Roman Baths, the Royal Crescent, the King's Circus, Jane Austen's House, and Bath Abbey. Bath also boasts many boutique shops and opportunities to join locals for English afternoon tea. Try one of the many local restaurants for dinner tonight.

Hotel: The Francis Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 miles

Morning

Westonbirt to Bath: 19 miles

What to Expect: Today's route is relatively flat, with just three short uphill sections and a long downhill to join the canal. Our route along the Fosse Way is very straight. Cycle along quiet lanes through beautiful countryside, a bit less sedate in feel to the northern Cotswolds but nonetheless beautiful. Upon reaching the canal, you follow a car-free towpath of compact gravel. Pass through one of the canal tunnels before arriving at the Holburne Museum. In keeping with local etiquette, please walk your bike through Sydney Gardens to the museum.

DAY 6: Bradford-on-Avon / Lacock / Bath

This morning's ride leads out of Bath along the Kennet and Avon canal, over the magnificent Dundas and Avoncliff aqueducts which were built to traverse the valley in 1800. Follow the river valley to the old wool town of Bradford-on-Avon where you might stop for an early coffee or tea at one of the many cafes. Shuttle to lunch from here or continue riding to Lacock as the Cotswold Hills and Mendip Hills mark your

progress along the way.

Enjoy plentiful options for lunch in Lacock, a village wholly owned by the National Trust, and was recently featured in both the Downton Abbey and Harry Potter films. Complete with a 13th century Abbey, the village will surely charm and delight both historians and gastronomes alike. Take the return shuttle back to Bath or continue riding through the countryside to rejoin the canal system leading into Bath. This afternoon there'll be free time to continue your exploration of Bath or just to relax and reflect on your week. This evening, recount your memorable journey over a festive farewell dinner.

Hotel: The Francis Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 10 - 38 miles

Morning

Bath to Bradford-on-Avon: 10 miles

OR

Bath to Lacock: 21 miles

OR

Lacock to Bath: 17 miles

What to Expect: The beginning and end of today's ride features gentle terrain along the car-free canal system in and out of Bath. The remaining miles are more undulating and explore the scenic Cotswold countryside through small hamlets and historic villages. Enjoy the tranquility of this scenic region on your final cycling day. Again, please follow local etiquette and walk your bike through Sydney Gardens to the museum on your return to Bath.

DAY 7: Transfer to Bristol / VBT Biking Vacation ends

Your tour ends after breakfast today. The hotel will help arrange a taxi to the train station, where you can catch service to Paddington Station in London.

Bristol is steeped in English and world history. John Cabot set sail from here in 1497 and discovered the Canadian province of Newfoundland. Despite its inland harbor location, Bristol was one of the world's

greatest ports in the 17th and 18th centuries.

When trade declined, the burgeoning city became noted for its engineering prowess. It was soon synonymous with its famous engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, a titan of the Industrial Revolution. The city is a living history of his accomplishments. He designed the magnificent Temple Meads Railway Station and the steamship, *SS Great Britain*, the first iron hulled screw-propelled steamship to cross the Atlantic. His Clifton Suspension Bridge is a symbol of the city.

Bristol today is modern, vibrant, and attractive, home to richly varied architecture. Fine old churches, elegant Georgian terraces and crescents (especially in the Clifton suburb), and imposing Victorian public buildings all grace its cityscape. Strap on your walking shoes and stroll Gloucester Road, said to be Europe's longest stretch of independent shops. Sample a buffet of international cuisine at the St. Nicholas Market. And perhaps grab a pint at a pub along the city's shop-lined Floating Harbor. One of the best ways to take it all in is via the Open Top sightseeing bus.

Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Francis Hotel Bath (Days: 5,6)

Located in the heart of the storied city of Bath with views of historic Queen Square, the air-conditioned Francis Hotel exudes Georgian sophistication. The plush armchairs and period furnishings of the beautiful 18th-century townhouse lend this fine hotel an elegant authenticity. Even the Beatles were lured here by its refined elegance; they were guests in 1963. During your stay, you may take afternoon tea in the Tea Room, enjoy a cocktail in the bar, and savor a meal at the Brasserie Blanc, the onsite French-themed restaurant.

The Lamb Inn (Days: 1,2)

Situated on a tranquil side street in the historic market town of Burford, the Lamb Inn is a quiet retreat that evokes the charms of English country life. The 15th-century former weaver's cottage is steeped in the history of the wool-trading market town of Burford. Today, its warm touches—from an open log fire and a majestic grandfather clock to inviting sitting areas—offer a soothing welcome after a day of exploring the Cotswolds. And the restaurant, outdoor terrace, and cozy bar provide options for delicious

dining. Please note that the Lamb Inn is not air conditioned.

The Manor House Hotel (Days: 3,4)

On the main street of Moreton-in-Marsh sits the Manor House Hotel, a 16th-century golden-stone manor converted into a classic country-house luxury hotel. Bedrooms are un-air conditioned and stylishly decorated with modern furnishings and warm colors, and feature views of the surrounding town and countryside. Common rooms include a library, inviting sofas, and striking artwork. A terrace on the ground floor opens onto a tranquil garden with herbaceous borders, pathways, and a 300-year-old mulberry tree. Moreton-in-Marsh has been a market town since the 1200s and a travelers' stop for 1,700 years; its main street has many 18th-century inns and houses. Please note: this accommodation is available on limited departures.