

England: Bath & the Cotswolds

Bike Vacation Only

The charming Cotswolds of your imagination come to life before your eyes on this UK cycling holiday. You'll pedal along tranquil country lanes, viewing the woodlands, sheep-dotted pastures, and agricultural fields of the Windrush Valley, pausing to explore market towns, tiny hamlets, and thatched-cottage villages. Contrast these discoveries with visits to the splendid Hidcote Gardens, magnificent Blenheim Palace, and the Georgian jewel of Bath. You'll also touch the region's ancient roots as you cycle the 2,000-year-old Fosse Way, explore the Roman ruins of Bath. Lunch at a local pub, daily English breakfasts, and overnights at small country estates round out your authentic experience of this wonderful corner of England.

Cultural Highlights

- Enter the world of *Downton Abbey* in Bampton, its stand-in on the beloved PBS series.
- Explore the gardens and state rooms of Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill and a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Cycle through a classic English countryside of sheep-dotted pastures, woodlands, market towns, tiny hamlets, and thatched-cottage villages.
- Experience the charms of Bourton-on-the-Water, called the "Venice of the Cotswolds" for its graceful arched stone bridges.
- Probe the region's Roman heritage on a 2,000-year-old cycling route and end at the ancient ruins in Bath.

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 miles

Average Cycling Time: 01:00 - 04:15

Group size: 20 max

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 0, Jun 0, Jul 0, Aug 0, Sep 0.9, Oct 0

DAY 1: Oxford / VBT Bicycling Vacation begins / Burford

Meet your fellow travelers and VBT trip leaders at 1:00 p.m. in the lobby of the Oxford Hotel (Abingdon Road, Oxford OX1 4PS, Tel +44 1865 324 324). 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon Bampton to Burford – 19 km (12 miles)

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

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 km (12 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: Windrush Valley/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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Burford to Charlbury – 16 km (10 miles) | Burford to Blenheim Palace – 34 km (21 miles)

Afternoon Blenheim Palace to Burford – 32 km (20 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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 – 67 km (10 - 41 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Bourton-on-the-Water / Lower Slaughter

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 spin 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Burford to Bourton-on-the-Water – 27 km (17 miles)

Afternoon Bourton-on-the-Water to Moreton-in-Marsh – 27 km (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 bike 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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 – 56 km (17 - 35 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

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 ride 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 (367 meters) 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 on 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Moreton-in-Marsh to Hidcote Gardens – 19 km (12 miles) | Moreton-in-Marsh to Kington – 41 km (26 miles)

Afternoon Kington to Moreton-in-Marsh – 22 km (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 (8.9 km) with a long steady uphill climb. After you take in the 360-degree views, the route leads through beautiful countryside down a long, steady hill to the tiny village of Kington, where a well-deserved pub lunch awaits. From here, either shuttle or ride through undulating country lanes back to the hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 64 km (12 - 40 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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 (10 km) from a straight line for its full distance of 182 miles (293 km). 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Westonbirt to Bath – 34 km (21 miles)

What to Expect: Today's route is relatively flat, with just three short uphill sections and a long downhill to join the canal. The 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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 34 km (21 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

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 cafés. 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, it 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 historians and gastronomes alike. Take the return shuttle to Bath or continue riding through the countryside to rejoin the canal system leading into the city. 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Bath to Bradford-on-Avon – 16 km (10 miles) | Bath to Lacock – 34 km (21 miles)

Afternoon Lacock to Bath – 27 km (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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 – 61 km (10 - 38 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: VBT Bicycling Vacation ends

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

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

The Lamb (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.

Manor House Hotel (Days: 3,4)

Located in the center of Moreton-in-Marsh, the 4-star Manor House Hotel is an idyllic country manor reminiscent of English nobility. The 16th-century house is the ultimate in sophistication, offering luxurious accommodations, a finely curated library with cozy armchairs, an award-winning restaurant, and stunning walled gardens. Many of its interiors were inspired by the natural beauty of the Cotswolds. Each room boasts its own historic charm and décor. Please note that the Manor House Hotel is not air conditioned.

Francis Hotel (Days: 5,6)

Located in the heart of the historic city of Bath with views of Queen Square, the air-conditioned, Regency-

style Francis Hotel exudes Georgian sophistication. The plush armchairs and period furnishings of the beautiful 18th-century townhouse lend this fine hotel an elegant authenticity that invites you to linger over afternoon tea or drinks. 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.