

England: Oxford & the Cotswolds

Bike Vacation + Air Package

Ride along rolling fields, stone walls, and ancient tree-lined lanes to lovingly preserved villages of thatched-roofed cottages and historic pubs. Along the way, take your time exploring the splendors of Churchill's Blenheim Palace, the pleasures of Hidcote Gardens, the Shakespearean sites of Stratford-upon-Avon, and the historic market towns of Bourton-on-the-Water, Chipping Campden, and Moreton-in-Marsh. And frame your unforgettable reel with stays in Oxford and Bath.

Cultural Highlights

Explore Blenheim Palace, the stunning early 18th-century manor house, birthplace of Winston Churchill, and UNESCO World Heritage site

Cycle the bucolic country lanes of the Cotswolds into cottage-lined villages that have not changed for centuries

Stay overnight in charming towns constructed of honey-hued Cotswolds stone

Indulge in traditional and modern English fare—full English breakfasts, afternoon teas, pub lunches and farm-to-fork dining

Explore the Roman, medieval, and 18th-century Georgian architecture in the historic center of Bath

Stay in Tetbury, home of Prince Charles's Highgrove Royal Gardens and Highgrove Shop, where you can shop for products that support his charities

Pedal past filming locations of numerous television series such as *Downton Abbey*, *Endeavour* and *Inspector Morse*

See film locations of the Harry Potter movies in Oxford and Blenheim Palace

Ride into Bath along part of the historic Fosse Way, the Roman road spanning southwest England

What to Expect

This tour is rated moderate with analog bikes and easy to moderate with E-bikes. It offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists. Rides are on designated bike routes that are quiet country roads with a small percentage of the total on dedicated bike paths. The traffic will be somewhat busier when entering and exiting larger towns such as Oxford, Stratford, and Bath. Routes follow flat river valleys and then ascend to rolling hills. Please verify your bike selection for this tour as it is not always possible to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available as needed.

Tour Duration: 9 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 28.4 - 42

Average Cycling Time: 01:15 - 03:30

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 72°/49°, Jun 79°/56°, Jul 79°/59°, Aug 81°/61°, Sep 75°/55°, Oct 63°/47°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 2.8, Jun 2.5, Jul 1.5, Aug 2.6, Sep 2.2, Oct 2.7

DAY 1: Depart home / Fly overnight to London

Depart home for England. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

DAY 2: Arrive in London / Travel to Oxford

Arrive at London Heathrow and travel to Oxford.

Upon arrival at the London Airport, make your own independent travel arrangements to Oxford. Collect your bags and clear customs then choose from several transportation options that VBT recommends in your Road Book or decide your own path.

Oxford is undoubtedly England's most recognizable city outside of London, famous the world over for its prestigious University, the oldest in the English-speaking world. Wander the network of cobbled lanes lined with noble buildings spanning some 800 years. Ascend St. Martin's Tower, also called "Carfax Tower," for sweeping views of the city's rooftops and soaring spires. Visit some of the college buildings, such as Christ Church College where you'll find the Tudor dining hall which provided inspiration for the Great Hall at Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films. A tour of Oxford's castle will unveil stories of the last 1,000 years. For a taste of more recent history, browse the stalls of the historic Covered Market, open since 1774.

Hotel: voco Oxford Spires Hotel,

Meals: None Included

DAY 3: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Ride from Oxford to Moreton-in-Marsh

Meet your VBT local host at 9:00 a.m. for your Welcome Orientation, along with any other VBT guests departing on the same day, in your hotel lobby. Please be dressed and ready for cycling. Your local host will be carrying a VBT sign.

The welcome orientation with your VBT local host includes:

- An overview of the itinerary
- Bike fitting and equipment familiarization
- Review of the Ride with GPS navigation app
- Important contact information in case you need to reach your VBT local host
- Safety briefing
- Local suggestions (restaurants, things to do, etc.)

Get underway with your Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation into the bucolic and tranquil landscapes of the Cotswolds! You cycle out of Oxford on bike lanes and along the lovely Oxford Canal towpath. Another dedicated bike lane leads you into the serene countryside. Take your time and enjoy these vistas, the essence of rural England. Your route soon delivers you to the glorious English Baroque Blenheim Palace, a sprawling UNESCO World Heritage site with extensive landscaped grounds and gardens designed by Capability Brown in the 18th century. But the name most famously associated with the palace is Winston Churchill—this was his birthplace. You'll surely want to have lunch here in the café or the Orangery. After, you may linger a while—strolling the magnificent public grounds or touring the palace's interior (at your own expense).

Inspired by your brush with English nobility, you continue on more lovely roads to Daylesford, where an upmarket Cotswolds organic farm shop and café might tempt you into another break. Pass through the charming villages of Churchill and Kingham before arriving in the market town of Moreton-in-Marsh in the North Cotswolds. You settle in here for two nights. There are ample dinner options for an evening on your own, either in town or at your hotel. If you plan to dine at the hotel's fine-dining establishment, reservations are highly recommended upon arrival.

Hotel: Redesdale Arms

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride:

Oxford to Moreton-in-Marsh via Blenheim: 35.5 miles

What to Expect: Depart along the Oxford Canal towpath (packed dirt) to a dedicated paved bike lane that parallels a somewhat busy road for 5 miles, and into the expansive grounds of Blenheim Palace. After departing Blenheim Palace, head into the gently rolling hills of the Cotswolds and into the center of the town of Moreton-in-Marsh.

DAY 4: Cycle to Chipping Campden to Hidcote Gardens to Stratford-upon-Avon

Today is a Stay Put Day brimming with exploration. Our route leads you to some of the most charming lanes and bike paths in the North Cotswolds. Begin with a scenic spin to the historic wool market town of Chipping Campden, home to the quirky “Cotswold Olimpicks,” an annual celebration of sport and mirth that features competitions such as tug of war, shin-kicking, and piano smashing. The village is also celebrated for its Market Hall, built in 1627, its honey-hued limestone buildings and its long tradition of arts and crafts. Then continue to the village of Hidcote Bartrim and the landscaped Hidcote Gardens. Its series of outdoor “rooms” were designed by American horticulturalist Major Lawrence Johnston in the early 20th century. Its pathways are lined with topiary, stone walls, and hornbeam.

Next, continue cycling along a revitalized rail trail, bound for Stratford-upon-Avon, the hometown of an artist of quite another sort—the bard himself, William Shakespeare. In this pretty city, dotted with timber-framed houses that evoke Old England, you can visit the playwright’s houses (Hall’s Croft, Nash’s House, and Anne Hathaway’s Cottage among them), the church where he is buried, and the famous Royal Shakespeare Company and its theatre. En route back to the hotel, it is worth stopping at the delightful Ebrington Arms, voted English Pub of the Year in 2018.

Hotel: Redesdale Arms

Meals: Breakfast

Today’s Ride:

Moreton-in-Marsh to Stratford-upon-Avon to Moreton-in-Marsh: 41.7 miles

What to Expect: To enjoy all the day has to offer we suggest an early start. Departing Moreton-in-Marsh, you immediately cycle into a rolling countryside of pastures, copses, and charming villages. Ascend to Hidcote Gardens, then the route descends into a valley and onto a rail-to-trail shared-use path (walkers, cyclists, horseback riders) all the way Stratford-upon-Avon. Depart Stratford-upon-Avon on the same route until just outside of Ebrington, continuing to Aston Magna to rejoin the morning route and make a final descent from Batsford to Moreton-in-Marsh.

DAY 5: Moreton-in-Marsh to Broadway Tower to Snowhill to the Slaughters to Bourton-on-the-Water to the Windrush Valley to Burford

You depart Moreton-in-Marsh, and as yesterday riding through Chipping Campden, and onto Broadway Tower. This 18th-century “folly” was commissioned by Lady Coventry of Worcester. Capability Brown, the designer of the grounds at Blenheim Palace, had a role in this extravagance, too. As for you, you’ll enjoy expansive views from atop this “beacon hill,” including 16 counties and, in the distance, Wales, from the second highest point in the Cotswolds. Then you continue with a pleasant pedal through the lavender fields of Snowhill, the hamlets of Upper and Lower Slaughter with its old mill and river, and onto the beguiling village of Bourton-on-the-Water. Known as the “Venice of the Cotswolds,” this pretty town spreads over a wide, flat vale and is graced by the River Windrush and its five quaint stone bridges, the oldest one dating to 1654. Consult your VBT Road Book for lunch ideas in this scenic haven, perhaps finding a spot on picturesque High Street.

You ride an uphill route from Bourton-on-the-Water, then coast down into the Windrush Valley, known locally as “happy valley.” Your route traverses the grounds of Sherborne Estate, England’s only remaining 17th-century deer course and grandstand, and then leads you to medieval Burford. This former wool town boasts a medieval bridge and old stone houses with Tudor and Georgian facades. After settling in to your hotel, you’ll find options for dinner in town or at your inn. If you plan to dine at the hotel’s fine-dining establishment, reservations are highly recommended upon arrival.

Hotel: The Highway Inn

Meals: Breakfast

Today’s Ride:

Moreton to Burford: 36.4 miles

What to Expect: You depart Moreton-in-Marsh along High Street and are soon cycling little-trafficked country roads past pastureland and into one pretty village after another, including Snowhill and the Slaughters. A gradual descent leads into Bourton-on-the-Water, a good stopping point for a late lunch or snack. After, one significant hill is followed by an easy descent into Burford.

DAY 6: Burford to Bibury to Sapperton to Tetbury

You depart Burford on slightly rolling terrain to Bibury. This utterly charming village is best known for its Arlington Row, a cluster of slate-roofed stone cottages and gardens that have become a national symbol of England. This picturesque little district is so enchanting that Henry Ford had the audacious idea to ship

the village in its entirety to the United States! From Bibury, you cycle through other villages and hamlets, seemingly untouched by modern development, into Sapperton, the tiny village that played a large role in the Arts and Crafts Movement that started in England. You might enjoy a break here for lunch at The Bell, a hospitable and traditionally English pub that has won awards for its fresh homemade fare.

After, continue on a mostly downhill route, entering the town where the estate of Prince Charles at Highgrove is located. His gardens are open for tours, so you might to explore. (Check website for dates and reservations well in advance.) Later, coast into the center of Tetbury, central to the wool and yarn trade. If you love antiquing, Tetbury is your place to find an ideal piece in one of its many bric à brac shops. Purchases at the Highgrove Estate shop support the Prince's charities. Dinner options are available either at the hotel or in town.

Hotel: Ormond Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride:

Burford to Tetbury: 34.7 miles

What to Expect: Ride quiet rolling and bucolic rural terrain with some fairly noticeable ascents and descents until the town of Sapperton, where we recommend lunch at the inviting Bell pub. Then, the route mainly descends to the charming town of Tetbury.

DAY 7: Tetbury to Bath

We recommend departing Tetbury first thing to give yourself ample time to explore Bath, your final destination. You spend much of the morning following the Fosse Way, a 2,000-year old Roman road that rolls through stunning, untouched countryside. It's believed that this route was originally a defensive ditch, dug by Romans to mark and protect the western boundary of the empire. Even today, engineers marvel at the straight line that Roman builders were able to achieve for its distance of 182 miles. Of course, you'll ride a much shorter segment, culminating in a final exhilarating descent to the 200-year old Kennet and Avon Canal. Tracing the canal, you pass the Sydney Gardens, the only surviving 18th-century pleasure gardens in England. At their height, they were used daily for long walks, fairs, and public breakfasts. Jane Austen was among the locals who enjoyed the blooms and pathways. Then follow a street showcasing the stone 18th-century buildings for which the city is known.

If you arrive in Bath by lunchtime, you'll have many options for your meal, or perhaps you'll take afternoon

tea in the Grand Pump Room, adjacent to the Roman Baths museum. You might also tour Jane Austen's House. Be sure to make time, too, to stroll along the Royal Crescent, a row of 30 terraced houses considered the finest example of Georgian architecture in England.

This evening, celebrate your Cotswolds experience in style at a plush hotel, perfectly situated in the heart of the city, where there is no end to inviting shops, world-class restaurants, and lively pubs. If dining this evening at the Francis Hotel's restaurant, Monsieur Blanc, reservations are highly recommended.

Hotel: Francis Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride:

Tetbury to Bath: 28.4 miles

What to Expect: Follow the Fosse Way along fairly even terrain until you descend and ascend across three dips. Please be mindful of sharing the route with cars and horseback riders as you pass many farms and trail heads on this road. Enjoy a final descent to the paved canal towpath and follow it into the center of Bath. We recommend walking your bike for the final city half mile through Bath's pedestrian streets, just before the Pulteney Bridge at the end of Great Pulteney Street. Once in Bath, we strongly recommend riding directly to the Francis Hotel to store your bikes before exploring the city.

DAY 8: Bath / Free time / VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

After breakfast, you have the day to explore the city of Bath or its surroundings, visiting some spots you may have missed yesterday. For sweeping views of the city and the Roman Baths, climb the tower of Bath Abbey. Inside, admire the scalloped vaulted ceiling and fantastic stained glass behind the altar. Stop by No. 1 Royal Crescent to learn more about England's most famous row of houses and their 18th-century architect, John Wood the Younger. Browse the decorative arts collection at the Holburne Museum or the paintings at the Victoria Art Gallery. (It's recommended to book tickets in advance online for the Roman Baths, Victoria Art Gallery, and Textile Museum). Venture farther afield to marvel at the mysterious standing stones at Stonehenge, sample the namesake cheeses of the village of Cheddar, or uncover the histories of Wells, Glastonbury, and Bradford-on-Avon. See visitbath.co.uk and your VBT City Information for all the options.

Hotel: Francis Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 9: Depart for home

After breakfast* this morning, allow yourself a minimum of 5 hours prior to your flight departure to get to London Heathrow. This timeframe includes approximately 2 hours of travel and around 3 hours of recommended pre-flight check-in time.

* Please note: For guests with early-morning departures, breakfast at the hotel may not be available. Please check with the front desk to verify the times that breakfast is served.

Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Francis Hotel Bath (Days: 7,8)

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 Highway Inn (Day: 5)

Both contemporary and traditional, the Highway Inn is a warm and inviting boutique hotel of just eleven rooms. Located in the heart of Burford, this charming inn of stone and timber shows off its unique character and passion for local heritage. Its current owner is proud to oversee a property that has been a true Cotswold inn for more than 500 years. Savor local ales in the lounge and enjoy freshly prepared meals at the restaurant, where all ingredients are locally sourced. The beautiful, finely crafted fireplaces are all original to the 1480 building and a cozy courtyard provides the ideal hideaway to enjoy a glass of wine. Please note that the Highway Inn is not air-conditioned.

The Ormond at Tetbury (Day: 6)

A comfortable blend of old and new, the Ormond at Tetbury has been welcoming travelers since the 17th century. This former coaching inn is ideally situated in the village center and boasts a warm homey interior, stone-built outdoor spaces and lovely gardens where you can take your morning breakfast or an afternoon glass of wine. The cycle-friendly hotel has a dedicated space for your bike. The Ormond Pub is popular with locals for its down-to-earth food that focuses on flavor, whether you're starting your day with a full English breakfast or ending it with a cocktail and pizza. Please note that the Ormond at Tetbury is not air-conditioned.

Redesdale Arms Hotel (Days: 3,4)

The award-winning Redesdale Arms is conveniently located on Moreton-in-Marsh's main High Street, lined with 18th-century buildings. This classic property is steeped in history, occupying a building that dates to 1650. Built from the region's famed honey-hued stone and hand-hewn oak beams, it exudes the authentic character of the Cotswolds. The on-site restaurant serves updated British and international fare in several dining rooms, on outdoor tables, and at the fireside bar. Individually decorated rooms are updated and modern. Please note that the Redesdale Arms is not air-conditioned.

voco Oxford Spires Hotel (Day: 2)

With its lovely location beside the Thames River and amid a lovely parkland, the voco Oxford Spires Hotel is a comfortable haven from which to explore the City of Spires. Cotswolds stone and plush yet elegant interiors combine throughout to create a truly welcoming space of understated luxury. Modern amenities mingle seamlessly with traditional touches in this air-conditioned hotel. Deacon's Restaurant promises fine cuisine prepared with ingredients sourced from the Oxfordshire countryside, while the bar and lounge—and an outdoor terrace—offer a casual atmosphere for relaxing over a drink or a spot of tea. Each comfortable room is accented with a warmth and décor inspired by the English countryside.