England: Oxford & the Cotswolds

Bike Vacation + Air Package

Savor the unspoiled Cotswolds at your own pace during this inn-to-inn Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation as you travel through one of Britain's most celebrated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Ride along rolling fields, stone walls, and ancient, tree-lined lanes through lovingly preserved villages of thatch-roofed cottages and historic pubs. Along the way, you'll want to take some time to explore the splendors of Churchill's Blenheim Palace and the all the beauty of Hidcote Gardens. You'll visit the Shakespearean sites at Stratford-upon-Avon, and the historic market towns of Bourton-on-the-Water, Chipping Campden, and Moreton-in-Marsh. Your unforgettable self-guided bike trip will be framed by 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.
- 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
- Pedal past filming locations of numerous television series such as Downton Abbey, Endeavour and Inspector Morse

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.

Average Daily Mileage: 28 - 42 miles
Average Cycling Time: 01:15 - 03:30

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)
May 72º/49º, Jun 79º/56º, Jul 79º/59º, Aug 81º/61º, Sep 75º/55º, Oct 63º/47º
Average Rainfall (in.)
May 2.8, Jun 2.5, Jul 1.5, Aug 2.6, Sep 2.2, Oct 2.7

FLIGHT DAY: Depart home / Fly overnight to London

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

ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in London / Travel to Oxford

Arrive at London Heathrow and travel to Oxford.

Upon arrival at the London Airport, make your own travel arrangements to Oxford. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook.

Aside from London, Oxford is undoubtedly England's most recognizable city, 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, some over 800 years old. Ascend St. Martin's Tower, also called "CarfaxTower," 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 open the door to stories dating back 1,000 years. For a taste of more recent history, browse the stalls of the historic Covered Market, open since 1774.

DAY 1: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Ride from Oxford to Moreton-in-Marsh

Meet your VBT Local host at 9:00 a.m., along with any other VBT guests arriving on the same day, for

your Welcome Orientation 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.)

Set out on your Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation into the bucolic landscape of the Cotswolds! You will 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 leads to the glorious Baroque Blenheim Palace, a sprawling UNESCO World Heritage site with extensive landscaped grounds and gardens designed by Capability Brown in the 18th century. 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. Afterwards, you may want to stroll the magnificent public grounds or tour the palace's interior (at your own expense).

Inspired by your brush with English nobility, 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 will 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, making reservations upon your arrival is highly recommended.

Today's Ride Choices

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

What To Expect:

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

Depart along the Oxford Canal towpath (packed dirt) to a dedicated paved bike lane that parallels a

somewhat busy road for 7 miles. Then transition to narrow, paved, low traffic country lanes to the town of Woodstock and the expansive grounds of Blenheim Palace. After departing Blenheim Palace, continue on a rolling descent past Chadlington and then descend gently into the center of the town of Moreton-in-Marsh.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 2: Cycle to Chipping Campden to Hidcote Gardens to Stratford-upon-Avon / Stay Put Day

Today is a Stay Put Day brimming with possibilities. Our route leads you to some of the most charming roads 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 hamlet 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 and 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—William Shakespeare. In this pretty city, dotted with timber-framed houses that evoke Old England, you can visit the playwright’s homes (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.

Today’s Ride Choices

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

What To Expect:

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

We suggest an early start in order to enjoy all day has to offer. Departing Moreton-in-Marsh, you will immediately cycle into a countryside of rolling pastures, copses, and charming villages. After ascending to Hidcote Gardens, the route descends into a valley and onto a rail-trail, shared-use path (walkers,

cyclists, horseback riders) all the way to 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Moreton-in-Marsh to Broadway Tower to Snowshill to the Slaughters to Bourton-on-the-Water to the Windrush Valley to Burford / Move on Day

You will depart Moreton-in-Marsh and ride again through Chipping Campden, but from there you will head to 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. You’ll enjoy expansive views of 16 counties and as far as Wales from atop this “beacon hill,” the second highest point in the Cotswolds. You’ll continue through the lavender fields of Snowshill, the hamlets of Upper and Lower Slaughter with an old mill and river, and into 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 back to 1654.

From there, you will ride an uphill route from Bourton-on-the-Water before coasting 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 (where live deer were used as “incentives” for dog races) and leads to 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.

Today’s Ride Choices

Moreton to Burford — 36.4 miles

What To Expect:

Moreton to Burford — 36.4 miles

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 Snowshill and the Slaughters. A gradual descent leads into Bourton-on-the-Water, a good stopping point for a late lunch or snack. Your afternoon ride has one significant hill followed by an easy descent into Burford.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Burford to Bibury to Sapperton to Tetbury / Move on Day

You will 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 will cycle through other villages and hamlets, seemingly untouched by modern development, into Sapperton, the tiny village that played a large role in the mid-19th century Arts and Crafts movement that started in England in response to a perceived decline in decorative arts. You might enjoy a lunch break at The Bell, a hospitable and traditional English pub that has won awards for its fresh homemade fare.

Afterwards, 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 can explore if you wish. (Check the website for dates. It is suggested that you make reservations well in advance.) The center of Tetbury was central to the wool and yarn trade. If you love antiquing, Tetbury is the place to find an ideal piece in one of the many bric à brac shops. Purchases at the Highgrove Estate shop support the Prince's charities. Dinner options are available at the hotel or in town.

Today's Ride Choices

Burford to Tetbury — 34.7 miles

What To Expect:

Burford to Tetbury — 34.7 miles

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. From there, the route mainly descends to the charming town of Tetbury.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Tetbury to Bath / Move on Day

We recommend departing Tetbury early to give yourself ample time to explore Bath, your final destination. You will 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 Roman builders were able to achieve for a full 182 miles. You'll ride a much shorter segment, culminating in an 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 18th-century stone buildings for which the city is known.

If you arrive in Bath by lunchtime, you'll have many options for your meal, or perhaps afternoon tea in the Grand Pump Room, adjacent to the Roman Baths museum. You might also tour Jane Austen's house. Be sure to save time 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 your 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 you plan on dining at the Francis Hotel's restaurant, Monsieur Blanc, reservations are highly recommended.

Today's Ride Choices

Tetbury to Bath — 28.4 miles

What To Expect:

Tetbury to Bath — 28.4 miles

Follow the Fosse Way along fairly even terrain until you descend and ascend across three dips, passing many farms and trailheads. Please be mindful that you will be sharing the route with cars and horseback riders. 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 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 bike before exploring the city.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Bath / Free time / VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

After an included 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. 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DEPARTURE DAY: Departure

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

*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.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

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.

Redesdale Arms Hotel (Days: 1,2)

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.

The Highway Inn (Day: 3)

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: 4)

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 you 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.

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.