Switzerland & France: Lake Geneva, Annecy & Valleys of the Alps

Bike Vacation + Air Package

Ride with ease amid the legendary Alps, a cyclist's dream. Discover the best kept secrets of Switzerland's Valais canton and France's Rhône-Alpes region as you follow mostly flat routes along the Rhône and Isère rivers to two of the area's most stunning lakes – Geneva and Annecy – and the small picturesque Lake of Saint-André. Around you, snow-capped peaks soar to the heavens, their profiles reflected in shimmering lakes. Charming villages slope down gentle hills. Medieval cities like Annecy and Chambéry nestle in deep valleys. Here, the air is clean, the farms and orchards are bursting with life, local wines and farm-fresh cuisine is plentiful and solid-rock massifs point to one breathtaking vista after another. Whoever said bike tours in the French and Swiss Alps were reserved for the strongest of cyclists hadn't traveled with VBT. Join us!

Cultural Highlights

- Cycle well-paved bike paths amid stunning alpine beauty in France and Switzerland
- Pedal along three stunning lakes of the Rhône-Alpes region–Geneva, Annecy, and Saint-André–delighting in bike paths along the Rhône and Isère rivers
- Savor Swiss and French cuisine and wine to fuel and enhance your journey, from fondues and Fendant to *coq au vin* and Pinot Noir
- Stroll the atmospheric medieval Old Towns of Annecy and Chambéry, grand cultural capitals of once-mighty French kingdoms
- Savor a two-night stay in a grand French château, built in 1450 by a chivalrous noble family

What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain on well-paved bike paths and low traffic country roads. Most paths follow rivers and lakes, with mountains far in the distance. It is ideal for beginning cyclists. Longer mileage options on some days offer fun for more avid bikers.

Average Daily Mileage: 5 - 39 miles
Average Cycling Time: 00:20 - 04:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 67º/50º, Jun 73º/57º, Jul 80º/61º, Aug 79º/60º, Sep 72º/54º, Oct 61º/47º

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 3.0, Jun 3.1, Jul 2.6, Aug 3.1, Sep 3.0, Oct 3.4

FLIGHT DAY: Depart from the United States or Canada

Your vacation is about to begin! Spend your first night aloft and arrive ready for an unforgettable trip.

ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in Geneva / Travel to Chamonix*

A VBT representative will greet you at the Geneva airport to start your adventure off right. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located hotel in Chamonix. From here, you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

DAY 1: VBT Bicycling Vacation begins / Warm-up ride / Travel to Switzerland / Abbey of St-Maurice / Welcome reception and dinner

Enjoy your included breakfast this morning and a last stroll in Chamonix. At 12:00 p.m. board our private motorcoach to Switzerland. Make sure you pack some lunch before departing. A short stop is planned along the way to let you enjoy your meal. And remember that in French Chamonix, the local currency is the euro while in Swiss Lavey-les-Bains, the local currency is the Swiss franc.

All guests meet at 2:00 p.m. in the lobby of Grand Hotel des Bains de Lavey for a safety and bike-fitting session with your trip leaders. Your biking clothes are not required to attend this meeting. By session's end, your rooms will be ready, and you will have time to settle in and change into your biking clothes. Later, enjoy a warm-up ride on country roads through charming Swiss villages. The most important is Saint-Maurice. Its abbey is known throughout Christianity, founded in the year 515 on the spot where the relic of martyr Maurice were kept. Still today, it is a key stop on the pilgrimage route from Canterbury to Rome. You pause to visit the basilica, the catacombs and the amazing Treasure, which features exceptional examples of medieval goldsmith's art.

This evening, gather for a welcome reception and dinner at the hotel Swiss Chalet bar and restaurant, savoring specialties of the Valais canton.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-up — 7 km (5 miles)

What to Expect:

The warm-up ride will give you the opportunity to become familiar with your bike as you ride country roads with little traffic. There will be an occasional uphill climb, and the ride will take you through the charming Swiss village of Saint-Maurice.

Cumulative Distance Range: 7 km (5 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 2: Route du Rhône bike path / Sion

After a hearty European breakfast, set out on the tranquil Route du Rhône bike path, following the course of the Rhône upriver. As you get underway, you leave the steep jagged cliffs of the Dent de Morcles behind. These dramatic rocky slopes mark the westernmost reaches of the Bernese Alps, dropping precipitously into the Rhône Valley. Before you, the exhilarating vistas of Switzerland's majestic and towering range opens up.

Near Evionnaz, traverse a serene nature reserve beloved by the residents of the Valais canton before pedaling into a valley blanketed with lush vineyards. The Valais is Switzerland's third largest wine region. Some of the classified Grand Crus of Sion – like the Fendant and the Syrah—may sound familiar to you.

Your ride along the river is leisurely and never dull. You cycle past small villages on the gentle slopes of the valleys and spin past farms and orchards of apples, apricots, pears, cherries, strawberries and raspberries. Even the legendary Valais headwind, which caresses the valley from late morning to evening during good weather, cannot tarnish this incredibly scenic ride into this hidden corner of Switzerland.

As you approach Sion, the capital of the Valais canton, the two towering rock bastions of Tourbillon and Valère greet you from their lofty perches. There'll be time to stroll the pedestrian streets of the Old Town, maybe following the VBT optional walk prepared by your trip leaders, rich in culture and history and embellished with stone fountains and lively cafés. After lunch on your own, you travel back to your hotel, where you have time to rest in the shade of huge sequoia trees, walk on the trails of the landscaped park, or soak in the thermal pools, where your entry is included.

Dinner is at the hotel's restaurant tonight, where you can select your favorites directly from a large buffet spread.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Lavey to Saillon — 24 km (15 miles) | Saillon to Sion — 18 km (11 miles) | Walk in Sion — 2 km (1 mile)

What to Expect:

Today's ride is easy and flat, almost entirely on a well-paved bike path. The headwind that generally starts blowing around mid-morning up the valley in good weather may slow down your pace. Expect some traffic at the end of the long option entering the city of Sion, where drivers are generally used to and gentle with riders. Today may offer an additional independent ride for experienced cyclists. Ask your trip leader for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 — 42 km (11 — 26 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 3: Villeneuve on Lake Geneva / Montreux / Travel to France

After breakfast, you cycle out of Saint-Maurice into the Chablais region, the spectacular alpine area straddling Switzerland and France. Your route again follows the Rhône River, pointing you toward Lake Geneva. As you ride out of the village, you may glimpse the sharp, soaring peaks of the Dents du Midi chain. Despite your mountainous surroundings, today's route is very relaxed, tracing a pleasant valley on well-paved bike paths and passing Swiss chalets, manicured gardens, and postcard-perfect ponds.

At Le Bouveret, just before the river pours into Lake Geneva, your route gently bends right onto the Rhône bridge. Here, you ride into the shaded wetlands of Les Grangettes. This peaceful nature reserve hosts a profusion of biodiversity, including many migratory birds. This morning's pleasant spin ends at the eastern tip of Lake Geneva in Villeneuve, or New Town, which in fact boasts a charming Old Town of cobbled streets and inviting cafés – the ideal place for a stop and a short stroll. After, you cycle or shuttle to Montreux.

If you choose to ride, follow a lakeside route, passing by the historic Chillon Castle and continuing to Montreux on the way. You end your ride in this popular resort town on Lake Geneva where you can

admire elegant villas and lovely gardens. Stop at Place du Marché, where a statue of Freddie Mercury gazes out over the lake. For fans of the rock band, Queen, the free visit to the Exhibition Space of the Mountains Studios inside the casino may reveal a highlight! The lake promenade is the perfect spot to enjoy lunch on your own. Then continue by private motorcoach into France and the picturesque village of Talloires, hugging the shores of scenic Lake Annecy. Settle in to your hotel here, a hidden gem away from the crowds and set beautifully on the water with magnificent views of the Massif des Bauges to the west and La Tournette and Col de Forclaz to the east. Celebrities like Mark Twain and Paul Cezanne stayed in this historical and century-old former abbey. The sublime Saint Germain abbey and chapel perches high above on a distant hillside.

Tonight, stroll into historic Talloires for dinner on your own. You might try a Raclette with the famous quality cheeses of Haute-Savoie and match it with a local wine, like Chignin or Apremont.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Lavey to Villeneuve — 32 km (20 miles) | Villeneuve to Montreux — 7 km (4 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride is easy and mostly follows a flat paved bike path until Villeneuve. When the weather is good, a mid-morning to evening headwind blows up the valley and can slow down the ride. From Villeneuve to Montreux, the route, for the first two miles, is a bike lane shared by pedestrians, and then on a regularly trafficked slightly rolling road. The Villeneuve to Montreux option requires some caution and is therefore rated easy/moderate.

Cumulative Distance Range: 32 — 39 km (20 — 24 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Lake Annecy loop / Paccard Bell Foundry / Medieval Annecy

After breakfast begin your ride by cycling south from your hotel in the Haute-Savoie region. Your focus is the breathtaking Lake Annecy—Europe's cleanest lake thanks to protection measures enacted in the 1960s—and its namesake city. Your loop follows a well-paved bike path past the staggering sheer cliffs of the Bauges Mountains that seem to surge dramatically out of the waters.

As you approach the city of Annecy, follow the sign to the Paccard Bell Foundry if you wish. Over seven

generations, this family business has cast more than 120,000 bells for institutions all over the world, including the bells that ring out from the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. In 1950 and 1951, it cast 57 replicas of the Liberty Bell and distributed one to each of the then 48 US states as tributes to the American role in the liberation of Europe during World War II. The largest bell they've made is the 66,000-pound World Peace Bell, which hangs in Newport, Kentucky. It rings every day at 12:05 p.m. so as not to drown out the city's other noontime bells.

Later, arrive in historic Annecy, called the "Pearl of the French Alps" for its stunning setting between mountains and lakes. There'll be time to explore its pedestrian streets lined with charming canals, bridges and archways that might bring Venice to mind. The Old Town is full of unique charms and historic buildings. Admire the Palais de l'Isle, a 12th-century prison on an islet in the River Thiou, the Château d'Annecy, the 16th-century Cathedral of Saint-Pierre and the Pont des Amours, the Lover's Bridge. Savor lunch on your own in an inviting café, perhaps watching swans glide on the river, and enjoy a *crème glacée*—locally made ice cream—for dessert.

Shuttle back to the hotel, or join today's longer option that completes a circumference around the lake. Pass a popular lake beach, perhaps dipping your toes in the crystal-clear water, and several lakeside villages steeped in charm. In the distance, catch sight of the Aravis Mountains, famous for the hairpin turns and steep bends featured on the Tour de France.

Later, relax and take a dip in the lake, stroll the vegetable gardens by the cloister or treat yourself to the hotel spa. Dinner is at the hotel gourmet restaurant, a delicious meal of French specialties.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Talloires to Annecy — 26 km (16 miles) | Walk Annecy — 2 km (1 mile)

Afternoon: Annecy to Talloires — 13 km (8 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride follows a well paved road and bike path. There is an initial steep downhill soon after Talloires, then it is all flat to Annecy. The area, especially before Annecy, is very popular and bikers may encounter skaters and walkers on the path. The afternoon ride is easy although it includes one climb. Note: in the summer it may be crowded with a number of bikers. In the villages, attention must be paid to cars. Today may offer an additional independent ride for experienced cyclists. Ask your trip leader for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 13 —39 km (8 — 24 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5: Cycle to the medieval Cité de Conflans along the Chaise and Arly Rivers / Wine tasting / Settle into your château

After a hearty French breakfast, say goodbye to your hosts and set out on one of the most beautiful rides of the region. Leaving the southern tip of Lake Annecy, you cycle along a quiet, smooth bike path as the Bauges Range rises up on one side and the Beaufortain soars on the other. Gorges and caves in the distance tell that the region has been inhabited by man since the Neolithic Age.

After a slight climb at Ugine, you leave the Haute-Savoie and meet the L'Arly River, which you follow to Albertville. Gateway to some of the best international ski areas of the Alps, Albertville hosted the 1992 Winter Olympics. Following your included lunch, you walk to the neighboring medieval city of Conflans. A French historic site and monument, the picturesque Cité de Conflans is sheltered behind 14th century walls and offers views of the Combe de Savoie valley, the Bauges and Chartreuse mountains like no other. In the afternoon continue cycling the new paved bike path that lines the Isère River into fertile farmlands. Here it is common to meet local farmers caring for their *pépinières,* or vine nurseries. Your ride ends in the shaded pond district called Lake de Carouge.

Later settle in to your elegant French château, then visit the 15th-century cellar and savor a wine tasting before a delicious dinner overseen by your gracious hosts. It's the perfect end of a beautiful day and an ideal venue to sample the region's finest wines.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Talloires to Cité de Conflans — 35 km (22 miles)

Afternoon: Cité de Conflans to Lac de Carouge — 27 km (17 miles)

What to Expect:

With the exception of a short climb into the city of Conflans, the ride today is very easy and follows mostly a bike path along rivers or country roads. All in all, it is a very enjoyable day of cycling.

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 — 62 km (17 — 39 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6: Ride to Lake of Saint-André / Stroll Chambéry

Today promises another ride into stunning cultural and natural beauty. From your château you cycle along gently rolling and scenic country roads, meandering through small charming villages and vineyards. You skirt the base of Mont Granier, a gigantic crag and the icon of this green region called Chartreuse, to the peaceful small Lake of Saint-André. Then you follow the course of the small L'Albanne River into picturesque Chambéry, boasting a rich history as the capital of the Kingdom of Savoy from the 13th to the 16th centuries. The Château des Ducs de Savoie still dominates the cityscape, nestled in a maze of medieval alleyways in the city center. You pause for lunch on your own here, taking time to also admire the 15th– and 16th-century estates along the shop-lined rue Croix-d'Or.

Your return ride follows a different easy bike path. Avid riders may follow a scenic route with an opportunity to enjoy wonderful views of the distant Tarantaise peaks, some reaching more than 11,000 feet. The Col du Galibier in the sunny Maurienne valley with its 8,681 feet ranks with the Col de l'Iseran as one of the highest mountain passes in France. There stands a monument to Henri Desgranges, who initiated the Tour de France cycle race in 1903. Epic climbs are sure come to mind as you experience a bit of the captivating cycling of the Alps without the big hills.

Back at your château, there'll be time to relax by the swimming pool and prepare for a final festive dinner featuring French specialties of the region.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Chateau de Challes to Lac Saint-André to Chambéry — 27 km (17 miles) | Walk in Chambéry — 2 km (1 mile)

Afternoon: Chambéry to Chateau de Challes — 9 km (5 miles) | Chambéry to Barby to Chateau de Challes Plus — 17 km (10 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride follows paved rolling country roads to Lake of Saint- André and along vineyards, then a flat and paved bike path through shaded parks into the historic center of Chambéry. Entering the city, the path becomes a biking lane and you will ride on a short stretch of cobblestone. Expect some traffic into and out of Chambéry. The afternoon ride is mostly on a flat bike path back to the hotel. An extra 8 km loop includes a short and very gradual climb on the first hills of the Massif des Bauges. A not to miss

loop, if you want to enjoy the views of the valley, Mount Granier, and southern Alps from a nice perspective.

Cumulative Distance Range: 9 — 44 km (5 — 27 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Travel to Lyon* / VBT Bicycling Vacation ends / Free time

Travel to your hotel in Lyon*, an elegant and centrally located 5-star hotel, arriving at about 10:30 a.m. VBT provides city information that includes highlights and recommendations for what to see and do in Lyon. Use the rest of the day to relax. Or begin exploring Lyon, following your whims and desires either on foot or using the city's network of buses and trams and the subway.

Your hotel is located on the Presqu'île, the peninsula surrounded by the two rivers, in the major shopping and partly pedestrian area, near museums and picturesque streets. Please note that hotel check-in is 2:00 p.m., but the hotel will try to have rooms available earlier if possible and will store your luggage if needed. If you have chosen the independent Post-Trip Extension to Lyon, you will remain at this hotel for three nights.

*On tour dates beginning 9/10/23, 9/24/23, 10/1/23, and 10/8/23 the tour departs from Geneva, Switzerland. You travel to your hotel in Geneva, a centrally located four-star hotel, arriving at about 10:30 a.m. Keep your passport handy at the Swiss-French border. On these tour dates, a one-night stay is offered in Geneva, there is no independent Post-Trip Extension. The departure is from the Geneva airport.

Your hotel is a half mile walk from Lake Geneva and the main sights and shopping area. You will have an entire day to discover the city, stroll the lake promenade with the famous Jet d'Eau fountain, visit the Old Town and beautiful cathedral (the home church of to John Calvin), and maybe shop for chocolate and watches!

Please note that hotel check-in is 3:00 p.m., but the hotel will try to have rooms available earlier if possible or will be happy to store your luggage.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DEPARTURE DAY: Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation to the Lyon* airport will be provided (an approximately 60-minute drive, depending on traffic) for your departing flight.

*On tour dates FAB:2023-09-10, FAB:2023-09-24, FAB:2023-10-01, FAB:2023-10-08 the tour departs from Geneva, Switzerland, and transportation is offered to the Geneva airport (an approximately 15-20-minute drive).

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hôtel Le Morgane (Day: 1)

This elegant and environmentally friendly four-star hotel offers mountain views and a fine-dining restaurant just a short walk away from Chamonix's pedestrian main street. Contemporary, tranquil guestrooms are naturally cooled without air conditioning, and plush with wood accents and neutral tones. A spa complete with swimming pool, steam room, sauna, and treatment facilities is on site.

Grand Hotel des Bains (Days: 1,2)

Located in the lush, green countryside of a stunning Swiss valley, the Grand Hotel des Bains boasts its own landscaped park festooned with flowers and rare sequoia trees. It is conveniently nestled between the Rhône River bike path and a steep rock massif. Natural underground thermal reservoirs feed the spa facility with 22 treatment rooms and hot spring pools, the latter complimentary to VBT guests. Sample a local Raclette in the chalet-style restaurant. Each of the 68 rooms is well appointed and recently renovated in a sleek, modern style.

Abbaye de Talloires (Days: 3,4)

Centuries of history, a long list of celebrities who have stayed there such as Mark Twain, Paul Cézanne and Jean Reno amongst many others. Fine dining is assured with the gourmet restaurant and the light cuisine with the brasserie restaurant at lunch time during summer. The historical wine cellar is filled with hidden treasures. Rooms and suites, each one different from the other are offering breathtaking views. The completely renovated Spa of 200m² with domination of wood panelling and cosy atmosphere; the vaulted bar for romantic evenings; the pontoon equipped with beach beds to escape the everyday world, a wide choice of cultural and sporting activities and so many more. But, above all, it's the people who work here that make this hotel such a special place to stay, the Abbaye de Talloires is the only hotel in France to win twice (2009 and 2013) 4* et 5* Hotel Customers Trophy Award for its quality of service! L'Abbaye de Talloires is very proud to be awarded in January 2017 the 1st prize for the Best wine list in France in the category of Fine dining restaurants!

Hotel Château des Comtes de Challes (Days: 5,6)

Built in 1450 by the chivalrous Challes family, this splendid château was originally a strong house watching over several feudal estates. It became an inn and eatery in 1860 after thermal springs were uncovered here. Today, it is France's oldest hotel occupying a château. Its ancient towers still stand and a secret cave is home to the wine collection, both open for guided visits. In the property's park, take a dip in the heated swimming pool in the company of old lime, juniper, Lebanon cedar, Virginia tulip and chestnut trees. And delight in the exquisite meals prepared by the chef in one of the four beautiful dining rooms or on the garden terrace.

Hotel Carlton Lyon MGallery by Sofitel (Day: 7)

The Hotel Carlton Lyon MGallery by Sofitel is a fully renovated, stylish, 4-star boutique hotel in the heart of Lyon's pedestrian historic center. It has retained its authenticity and personality by combining contemporary comfort with sophistication and refinement. A five-minute walk from the Metro Bellecour, the hotel is the ideal base from which to discover Lyon: the Opera, museums, Cathedral St Jean, shopping streets, and the Rhône River are all nearby. Each of the air-conditioned rooms offers lush décor and all the amenities you need for a comfortable stay. Onsite, you may relax in the plush lobby bar under the soft light of pearl chandeliers.