

France: Vineyards of Beaujolais

Bike Vacation Only

Imagine cycling into the tranquil heart of Beaujolais, where the finest wines and most sublime cuisine greet you at every turn. Our inn-to-inn Self-Guided Bicycling Vacation through Beaujolais wine country reveals this storied region, with a wide choice of rides on traffic-free rural roads, through gently rolling vineyards and into authentic, timeless villages. Coast into Chardonnay, where the namesake wine was born. Explore the charming hamlets of Pouilly-Fuissé, Saint-Amour and Romaneche-Thorins. Step back in time as you explore prehistoric sites, Roman ruins, the medieval abbey of Cluny and villages carved from golden-hued stone. Along the way, experience memorable stays at a boutique city hotel and at stunning historic châteaux, where surrounding vineyards produce delicious wines and award-winning chefs serve the finest in French gastronomy.

Cultural Highlights

Cycle among the iconic vineyards of Beaujolais, coasting through charming wine villages producing some of France's great wines

Explore the renowned wine appellations and stunning stone villages of Pouilly-Fuissé, Saint-Amour and Romaneche-Thorins

Ride into Cluny, once the world's epicenter of Christianity, and view its 10th-century abbey

Pedal to the Rock of Solutré, a striking limestone outcropping towering over vineyards and a favorite walking destination of former President Mitterand

Take a spin among Southern Beaujolais' 15th-century villages of golden stone, the *Pierres dorées*, constructed of luminescent limestone

Sample fine Chardonnays when you pause in the village that gave the white wine its name

Savor the luxurious amenities and stunning settings of two four-star Beaujolais chateaux, where gourmet meals and home-produced wines elevate your vacation

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginner and experienced cyclists. Rides are on flat to rolling paved roads and some bike lanes. Urban riding in and out of the small city of Mâcon is mainly on bike lanes and bike paths. Countryside roads have little traffic in the middle of the day. 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 if needed.

Tour Duration: 6 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 20 - 37

Average Cycling Time: 01:45 - 04:30

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

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

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 3, Jun 3.1, Jul 2.6, Aug 3.1, Sep 3.0, Oct 3.4

DAY 1: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Welcome orientation / Mâcon and Saône river bike path

We suggest arriving in France at least one day prior to the tour start date. Make your independent travel arrangements to Mâcon. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook. Meet your VBT local host at 1:00 p.m., along with any other VBT guests departing on the same day, for your Welcome orientation in the lobby of the Hotel Panorama 360 (4 Rue Paul Gateaud, 71000 Mâcon, France, Tel +33 3 85 50 20 42). Please be dressed and ready for cycling. Your local host will be carrying a VBT sign and/or wearing a VBT garment.

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.)

Today's short warm-up ride into the Beaujolais region – nestled in South Burgundy – provides a preview of this scenic area renowned for its culinary splendors and rich viniculture of light-bodied red wines and bright whites. This is the least crowded wine region of France, despite that it boasts one of the nation's highest concentrations of vineyards, a world-renowned gastronomy, endless charming villages, a Mediterranean-like climate and gently rolling hills. It all makes for some of the most rewarding cycling in Europe, as you'll soon discover.

You set out from your Mâcon hotel and follow the Saône River bike path. This stunning region rests between Burgundy to the north and the Rhône valley to the south. Romans arrived here in the 1st century, cultivating vast vineyards; some of their original plantings remain to this day. Later, Benedictine monks

oversaw the wineries until the Duchy of Burgundy took them over in the 15th century. Mâcon is celebrated as the birthplace of Alphonse Lamartine, 19th-century poet and diplomat. Today, a pretty pastiche of pastel-hued buildings line the Saône, made even more magnificent each spring when the cherry blossoms bloom. Your riverside ride introduces you to all its beauty and charm.

This evening, savor your first experience of Burgundian cuisine, perhaps sampling the famed *beef bourguignon* in its birthplace, accompanied by a light Gamay or Pinot gris.

Today's Ride:

Macon loop: 28.2 km (17.5 miles)

What to Expect: The warm-up ride will give you the opportunity to become familiar with your bike as you cycle the fairly flat bike lanes of city streets and pedal out of Mâcon through some lower elevation wine villages and vineyards to the west bank of the Saône River. You encounter two ascents, one at the 4-km point (2.5 miles) and the next at the 8.7-km point (5.5 miles). At 15.4 km (around 9.5 miles), re-cross the Saône River and follow the fairly flat, low-traffic bike path back (with some very hard packed gravel from km 21.3 to 23) to the center of Mâcon.

Accommodation: Hotel Panorama 360, Mâcon

DAY 2: Mâcon to Viré or Mâcon to Chardonnay / Stay Put Day

If you wish, take today to explore the Burgundian city of Mâcon. Stroll its cobbled streets, stopping at any of its inviting cafés to drink up the old-world atmosphere. The city is home to an array of churches of all sizes, from the Old Mâcon Cathedral to the newer Cathedral of Saint-Vincent. Or cross the Pont Saint-Laurent to the small village of Saint-Laurent-Sur-Saône.

If you prefer to cycle, we have a couple of ways for you to, as the locals say, follow the grape! Pedal the flat Voie Bleue bike path, tracing the banks of the Saône. Varied birdlife keeps you company on this tranquil route. You leave the river behind to cycle into the wine country where the Chardonnay grape is grown and soon get to Viré. This charming hamlet was put on oenophiles' maps after it partnered with its neighbor, Clessé, to create the Viré-Clessé appellation, today a producer of one of the region's finest wines.

Today's longer option takes you past vistas of massive rocky outcrops to a small village whose name is synonymous with one of the world's most popular white wines: Chardonnay. The earliest record of Chardonnay wine dates to 1330, likely around the time when local Cistercian monks created the variety

and distributed it throughout France. To protect their vineyards, the monks constructed stone walls; soon, a village of stone houses emerged around the *lavoir*, a stream-fed wash-house, and several *domaines* (wine producers).

Today's Rides:

Mâcon to Viré short loop: 39.9 km (25 miles)

Mâcon to Chardonnay long loop: 59.3 km (37 miles)

What to Expect: Depart Mâcon in the morning, following the La Voie Bleue bike path north along the Saône River to the wine-making town of Viré. The long loop continues through rolling vineyards into the town of Chardonnay. Both loops return south on country roads and through villages to Mâcon, where you join bike lanes and encounter some busier traffic as you return to your city-center hotel.

Accommodation: Hotel Panorama 360, Mâcon

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Mâcon to Cluny to Igé / Move on Day

After breakfast, you depart Mâcon on a dedicated bike path, heading west on a gentle uphill out of the Saône River Valley. Your destination is the historic town of Cluny, the center of Christianity in the Middle Ages. The former abbey here was established by William I of Aquitaine in 910 AD and grew into the largest Christian complex in the world, until the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It was pillaged by the Huguenots in 1562 and later dynamited. Its richly carved stones were sold by an unscrupulous group that included a local priest. Today, some ten percent of the original structure remains, a haunting echo of its former self.

There'll be time to explore the abbey and the town before following one of three routes (ranging from easy to challenging) to the enchanting village of Igé, and your next hotel set in a beautifully manicured, 10-acre park. At its center, you find a magical 13th-century manor house whose property includes a chapel, orchard and heated swimming pool. This splendid accommodation and fine-dining restaurant is overseen by the Michelin-starred chef Georges Blanc, celebrated for his award-winning cuisine and dedication to the region's culinary heritage. Once you settle in, take time to explore the small village, then there is time to relax and indulge in the hotel's swimming pool and grounds.

Savor a very special dinner this evening in the hotel's eye-catching dining room. Georges Blanc earned his stripes in the kitchen as a "saucier" – a master sauce maker – a crucial skill in French cuisine. Your menu includes locally sourced products seasoned and cooked to perfection.

Today's Rides:

Mâcon to Cluny: 28 km (17 miles)

Cluny to Igé short option: 21 km (13 miles)

Cluny to Igé challenging option: 30.9 km (19 miles)

Cluny to Igé via Cormatin long option: 40 km (24 miles)

What to Expect: Depart Mâcon on town streets for about 4 km (2.5 miles) before joining a packed gravel bike path on a former railway line designated a greenway, or *voie verte* in French. The path gradually ascends out of the Saône River valley past small towns, villages and vineyards, with views of the castle of Berzé-le-Châtel at about kilometer 19 (mile 12). You soon enter a long, well-lit tunnel for 1.6 km (.99 miles) and emerge at the other end in Cluny.

For the short option to your hotel, retrace the *voie verte* (greenway) to kilometer 14.5 (mile 9), then turn north onto rolling country roads through small villages, fragrant forest and open fields.

The medium, challenging option contains some significant elevation gain (a total of 1,750 feet) with an initial climb of about 5.5 km (3.4 miles). There's a second climb before the route flattens out for the last 11 km (7 miles) on country roads through small towns and agricultural landscapes.

The long option via Cormatin has less overall climbing than the medium option. The route is flat for the first 15 km (9 miles) until you arrive in the small town of Cormatin. Pause to visit its 17th-century castle, surrounded by a moat and beautifully maintained French gardens. A long gradual climb of about 12 km (7 mile) is followed by a rolling descent to the Château d'Igé in Igé.

Accommodation: Château d'Igé, Igé

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Igé to Belleville-en-Beaujolais / Move on Day

Depart Igé and pedal into the heart of the finest vineyards of Beaujolais. Choose an easy or a more challenging ride, each one delivering you to the appellations and villages. Ride into Pouilly-Fuissé, whose only grape variety is the Chardonnay. Admire the neat and tidy town of Saint-Amour. And pass through the tiny valley village of Juliénas. No matter your route, you also have the chance to gaze upon the impressive Rock of Solutré, a breathtaking limestone escarpment offering stunning views of the Beaujolais region and its many vineyards. The protected natural area and its impressive rock not only oversees a distinctive grassland; it also hosted the Solutrean paleolithic culture some 52,000 years ago.

Today, a fascinating prehistoric site and an illuminating museum chronicle the primitive people. What's more, the trails around the rock proved a favorite walking route of President François Mitterand. This is one of France's most beloved treasures.

Continue cycling through scenic, rolling vineyards, passing through delightful villages like Le Moulin à Vent and Romanèche-Thorins, with its scenic windmill. Later, you arrive at your accommodation for the next two nights, a château wine estate surrounded by 200 acres of vineyards and a 17th-century garden designed by Le Nôtre, the celebrated landscape architect of Versailles. Once settled into your comfortable room, you are welcome at an extra expense to follow the château's self-guided wine trail, interesting for both wine aficionados and novices.

For dinner on your own, you may choose to dine at your hotel's fine-dining restaurant (dinner is included here tomorrow night) or take the short taxi ride into the nearby historic town of Belleville. Here, you can view the 12th-century Notre Dame church and choose from suggested restaurants.

Today's Rides:

Château d'Igé to Château de Pizay short option: 42.8 km (27 miles)

Château d'Igé to Château de Pizay long option: 50.4 km (32 miles)

What to Expect: The route rolls out of Igé on a gentle descent. Crossing the route to Cluny, you ascend on narrow roads, weaving in and out of vineyards and villages that have been producing wine for centuries.

The short option stays closer to the Saône Valley floor and may see a bit more traffic as it rolls through vineyards and villages to your hotel in Belleville-en-Beaujolais.

The long option rises higher in the vineyards with total elevation gain of 2,200 feet. Your efforts are rewarded with sweeping views over vineyards and the entire Saône Valley. Enjoy exhilarating descents, twisting through villages and hamlets to your hotel in Belleville-en-Beaujolais.

Accommodation: Château de Pizay, Belleville-en-Beaujolais

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Loop through Golden Villages / Stay Put Day

Spend today as you wish, taking advantage of the amenities and vinicultural offerings at your château, exploring more of Belleville or heading out on your choice of several exhilarating rides. Or enjoy a little of each!

If you choose to cycle, select from three routes we've planned for you. Today's longer option follows roads into some of Beaujolais' 39 villages of Golden Stone, or *Pierres dorées*, a charming cluster of stone hamlets surrounded by vistas of rolling hills and fertile vineyards that many have compared to Tuscany. The buildings get their warm golden hue from the locally quarried limestone tinged with iron oxide. This luminous stone was used in the construction of Lyon and other parts of Beaujolais, taken from a quarry that has been abandoned since World War I.

A shorter, more leisurely ride keeps you "close to home," ideal if you'd like an easy, mellow outing just to keep your legs moving. You cross the Saône and ride along a riverside bike path, then enjoy gentle hills through vineyards and villages. To get in more miles, follow our third route, a challenging spin on the *voie verte*, or greenway, to a bike path with a gradual ascent to 2,520 feet and a nice coast past more wineries and hamlets.

Back at the château, immerse yourself in the wine culture of Beaujolais. Enjoy a relaxing stroll along the vineyard's walking trails, perhaps following the romantic "wine history walk in the park." At an additional expense, attend a wine initiation course or a self-guided wine educational tour and tasting in the onsite *Oenothèque*. You might also take a dip in the heated outdoor swimming pool, get in a match at the tennis court and (at additional cost) treat yourself to a massage or other spa treatment.

An elegant dinner is included in the fine-dining restaurant of your château, a fitting end to celebrate your exploration of Beaujolais. Depending on the weather, enjoy the stylishly decorated historic dining room or dine al fresco in the castle's courtyard.

Today's Ride:

Château de Pizay to Pierres dorées loop: 63 km (40 miles)

What to Expect: This delightful and exhilarating route takes you into the heart of the *Pierres dorées* villages, passing beautiful yellow-stone Renaissance villages and vineyards that lie to the south of your hotel and east of the Saône River. At about 34 kilometers (21 miles), you follow the Saône River Valley on an easy spin back through villages and past riverside views to your hotel.

Château de Pizay southern Beaujolais loop: 35 km (22 miles)

What to Expect: This varied route rolls south out of your château to the nearby town of Belleville and crosses the Saône to a riverside bike path. You follow this for a few miles (between 7.6 and 10 km), just north of the *Pierres dorées* villages, then cross back over the Saône and gently ascend through vineyards

and villages. You reach your maximum elevation of approximately 1,000 feet at the 22 km mark (13 miles), then gently roll back to the Ardiere River Valley, joining the Beaujolais Greenway back to your hotel.

Château de Pizay to Beaujeu challenging option: 46.1 km (30 miles)

What to Expect: The challenging option follows the *voie verte* (greenway) to Saint-Didier-sur-Beaujeu. You then trace a bike route with one gradual climb to the highest point of 2,520 feet at about kilometer 25.8 (16 miles). A gradual descent brings you back through Quincie-en-Beaujolais, on the northern edge of the *Pierres dorées* villages, and into an easy coast through vineyards and villages to your hotel.

Accommodation: Château de Pizay, Belleville-en-Beaujolais

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6: Transfer to Lyon / VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel. Check-out is at 10:00 a.m., when a complimentary transfer of about 45 minutes is provided to Lyon and the Hotel Carlton Lyon MGallery by Sofitel (4 rue Jussieu, Lyon). Your tour concludes here, and you may make your arrangements to your next destination. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook. If you are flying home, note that airline schedules might prevent you from departing for the U.S. today. Please check airline schedules carefully. If you plan to schedule return flights immediately following the tour's conclusion, please call your airline directly for specific check-in requirements.

If you are departing Belleville on your own and do not require the VBT transfer to Lyon, note that the Belleville-en-Beaujolais train station on the main train line between Paris and Lyon is a short taxi ride (2.6 miles) from your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Chateau d'Ige (Day: 3)

Luxurious and historic, the Château d'Igé adds elegant royal touches to your vacation. This historic 13th-century castle has been magically transformed into a 4-star hotel that evokes the noble traditions of old in a peaceful rural setting. Its 10 acres include a heated outdoor pool, tranquil walking paths to a small

stream, an inviting orchard, and an 11th-century chapel. Each room was inspired by the castle's rich past, providing all the amenities you need for a comfortable stay. Meals are overseen by award-winning restaurateur Georges Blanc, either in the atmospheric medieval-era dining room with its enormous fireplace or on the scenic terrace overlooking the gardens. Please note that the Château d'Igé is not air-conditioned.

Panorama 360 (Days: 1,2)

Occupying the elegant and historic former Post Office building in the heart of Mâcon, The Panorama 360 is one of the city's finest boutique hotels. Stylish and sophisticated, the entire property has been renovated to meet the needs of the modern traveler. The rooftop Skybar provides sweeping views of the city and its surroundings, while the breakfast room, also on the top floor, is bathed in morning light. Each air-conditioned room is bright and contemporary, designed for comfort with heated floors and light-regulating shades. During your stay, at an additional expense, treat yourself to the fitness and spa facilities, including a sauna, steam room, massage, and heated indoor pool.

Chateau de Pizay (Days: 4,5)

Spread over almost 200 acres, the magnificent Château de Pizay was built between the 11th and 19th centuries. Located in the heart of Beaujolais, this stunning property boasts vast vineyards that produce its own fine wines and a sophisticated dining room serving some of the region's most delectable gourmet cuisine. Take time here to admire the 19th-century chapel or follow the onsite wine history trail. Stroll the 75-acre forest, the miles of vineyard paths, or the 17th-century garden designed by Le Nôtre, the architect behind the gardens of Versailles. Each air-conditioned, spacious room provides classic furnishings and overlooks the lovely castle grounds.