France Bike & River Cruise: Lyon to Nice

Bike Vacation Only

The Saône and Rhône rivers of France and their vineyard-laden banks beg to be explored by bicycle. To help you uncover every last bend along these scenic waterways, we invite you on a luxury river cruise that's equal parts bicycling vacation. From the culinary capital of Lyon to historic Avignon and the artistic haven of Arles on this France bike and boat adventure, you'll enjoy lavish amenities aboard a finely appointed river ship, disembarking each day to cycle into the heart of Burgundy and Provence. Join walking tours of medieval riverside treasures and cultural centers. Follow the scenic Via Rhône bike trail as the river flows alongside you. And pause to tour an olive oil farm, sample wines at fertile vineyards, and savor a French picnic alongside the magnificent Pont du Gard.

Cultural Highlights

Admire the magnificent vistas of France's most renowned wine regions by river and by bicycle.
Enjoy the best of both worlds: an all-inclusive river ship cruise *and* a VBT Bicycling Vacation.
Explore France from Burgundy to Provence, yet unpack your gear and your bags only once.
Ride among the lush, fertile vineyards of Burgundy and Provence, pausing at your leisure for wine tastings and tours.
Savor a delicious picnic lunch before learning the history of the magnificent Pont du Gard at the renowned Roman aqueduct and UNESCO World Heritage site's museum.
Walk the cobbled and historic streets of Lyon and Avignon as a local guide brings them alive with history and lore.

What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain throughout the trip and is ideal for beginning cyclists. There are longer options with slight hills for the more experienced cyclists.

Tour Duration: 8 Days
Average Daily Mileage: 4 - 36

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

DAY 1: Lyon / Embark ship / Warm-up ride

You are responsible for making your own way to Lyon, France, to meet your trip leaders and fellow travelers. Please note that you cannot embark before 12:30 p.m. as the ship is being prepared for you.

The ship will be docked at Quai Claude Bernard, between the bridges Pont Gallieni and Pont de l'Université, along the left bank of the Rhône River. As the exact location of the ship may change, please call upon your arrival in Lyon for directions.

Emerald Liberté, Phone: +33 7 85 54 42 30 or +33 7 85 54 42 31, Email: liberte@emeraldwaterways.com

Your cabin may not be ready for you until 3:00 p.m. However, you are welcome to enjoy lunch on board, served between 12:30 and 3:30 p.m., relax in the ship's common areas, stretch your legs, or explore town.

At 2:30 p.m., meet your trip leaders and fellow travelers on board for introductions and a safety and bike-fitting session, followed by a warm-up ride on local bike paths along the Rhône. Later, enjoy dinner on board. The ship sails for Chalon-sur-Saône this evening.

Please note regarding WiFi on board the ship: Due to the nature of the ship movements, Internet access is not always available. If stable Internet access is critical to you, VBT recommends that you purchase your own bundle before traveling overseas.

Please note regarding Ride with GPS: There is limited WiFi on board. If you wish to use Ride with GPS on your smartphone, VBT recommends that you download your VBT Maps & Route Notes from a WiFi zone prior to arrival on the ship. During your vacation, you will be able to follow these route notes on your smartphone with turn-by-turn voice navigation as you ride. As always, VBT also provides our traditional printed maps and route notes during the tour.

Please note regarding 'Discover More' tours: Emerald Waterways offers three optional tours during your cruise at an additional cost. Your VBT trip leaders will be able to answer questions about scheduling and can connect you with Emerald staff onboard to make bookings. We recommend that you book as soon as practical once onboard, as the tours are capacity restricted.

Visit to Perouges

When: Day 3 (Lyon), 2:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Includes: Coach transfer, local guide
Note: Passengers doing this tour will not be able to participate in the VBT ride
Price: EUR 39.00 per person

Grignan with castle visit
When: Day 5 (Viviers), 2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Includes: Coach transfer, local guide
Note: Passengers doing this tour will not be able to participate in the VBT ride
Price: EUR 63.00 per person

Excursion to Les Baux de Provence
When: Day 7 (Arles), 2:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Includes: Coach transfer, local guide
Note: Passengers doing this tour will not be able to participate in VBT ride
Price: EUR 52.00 per person

Accommodation: MS *Emerald Liberté*
Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:
Cumulative Distance Range: 7 km (4 miles)
Afternoon
Lyon Warm-up Loop: 7 km (4 miles)

What to Expect: The ride from our ship is on local, paved bike paths in Lyon. Get acquainted with your route notes, Ride with GPS, your bicycle, and the locals. Check your brakes and play with shifting your full range of gears.

DAY 2: Chalon-sur-Saône / Burgundy vineyards / Visit Beaune

After cruising north along the picturesque Saône River, dock at Chalon-sur-Saône, where the river meets the Canal du Centre. You are in the heart of Burgundy, where more than 4,500 family-run wineries produce world-renowned wines in the Côtes de Beaune. Disembark to ride a scenic bike route among the most famous vineyards in the world, passing vast expanses of arbor-laid grapes and fine wineries. Coast through charming wine-making villages that lend Burgundy its distinctive character, from Puligny-Montrachet to Pommard, and produce some of the finest Grand Cru vintages. You pause in Mersault for

photos and perhaps a glass of wine.

After lunch you shuttle to Beaune, the center of Burgundy wine production and home to the Hospices of Beaune. This finely preserved sample of 15th-century Burgundian architecture is renowned for its polychrome roof and its annual wine auction. Alternately, you may cycle here instead of shuttling, following a ten-mile segment of the celebrated Route de Grand Crus past stunning landscapes and vineyards with ample opportunities to pause along the way for wine tastings.

This evening on board, enjoy a Captain's Welcome Cocktail and Gala Dinner as you sail back to Lyon.

Accommodation: MS *Emerald Liberté*
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:
Cumulative Distance Range: 50 km (31 miles)
Morning
Chalon-sur-Saône to Lunch in Puligny-Montrachet: 34 km (21 miles)
Afternoon
From Lunch to Beaune: 16 km (10 miles)

What to Expect: Cycle on a beautiful paved path along the Canal du Centre to Santenay. Then, continue on a bike route through the vineyards of the Côtes de Beaune, passing world-famous villages such as Puligny-Montrachet, Meursault and Pommard. Board the van shuttle to Beaune after lunch. If you prefer, our longer cycling option leads you through vineyards on the prestigious Route des Grand Crus, with wine-tasting opportunities all the way to Beaune.

DAY 3: Lyon city walking / Afternoon loop to nature reserve

Arrive back in Lyon this morning as you're enjoying breakfast on board. Then disembark for a city tour of France's gastronomic capital renowned for its *coq au vin*, or chicken with wine, and *quenelles de brochet*, or mousse of pike. The heart of the 2,000-year-old city lies on a thin peninsula between the Rhône and Saône Rivers. It's easy to imagine *canuts*, or silk merchants of old, zigzagging through the maze of old-world streets, cutting through the purpose-built narrow passageways known as *traboules*. Much of the city is a UNESCO World Heritage site, renowned as an urban "site of great commercial and strategic significance." You will also ascend Fourvière Hill, where the splendid Basilique de Notre Dame gazes out over the city. You can also take in some of the city from a cyclist's perspective, gaining a more intimate view of its riverbanks and Old City on an optional bike loop before lunch.

After lunch on board, head out on the bikes again to the Grand Parc de Miribel-Jonage on the outskirts of Lyon beyond its city gates. This 5,400-acre parkland blankets most of the Rhône's Miribel-Jonage island, created in the 1800s when the Miribel and Jonage canals were dredged. Today, it is a pleasure park for city dwellers and a wildlife preserve. After time enjoying its flat bike paths through forests and past a lake, you may shuttle or ride back to the ship and enjoy the remainder of the day exploring on your own or relaxing on deck or in the ship's lounge. After dinner, you sail toward Tournon for another memorable day of riding.

Accommodation: MS *Emerald Liberté*
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:
Cumulative Distance Range: 58 km (36 miles)
Morning
Optional Loop in Lyon: 9 km (5 miles)
Afternoon
Ride to Miribel Jonage with Shuttle: 29 km (18 miles)
From Shuttle pick up to ship: 20 km (13 miles)

What to Expect: The optional morning's ride loops you through an attractive urban area of Lyon, partly on bike trails along the river. In the afternoon, you ride through an urban area to the outskirts of Lyon and the Grand Parc de Miribel-Jonage, a nature park where bike paths pass lakes and follow small canals. In the nature reserve, some of our bike route follows packed gravel roads. You may return to the ship either by shuttle or by bicycle.

DAY 4: Tournon / Valence

Begin today with a short walk in the charming little town of Tournon, nestled between the river and vineyard-laden slopes that produce some of the region's finest wines. As you explore, an ancient castle oversees your progress from high upon a promontory. Later, you ride along the Rhône towards Valence, following the renowned Via Rhône bike trail. When complete, this remarkable pathway will take cyclists from Geneva, Switzerland, all the way to the Mediterranean Sea, passing spectacular riverscapes, pretty villages in the typical style of southern France and expansive vineyards along the way.

Your destination is Valence, known as "the doorway to the South of France" and one of the country's official French Towns and Lands of Art and History. You will soon see why as you coast past elegant

mansard-roof architecture, lovely gardens and the pretty Place des Clercs. After lunch at a local restaurant, there'll be time to explore its atmospheric Old Town and see the 11th-century Romanesque Saint-Apollinaire Cathedral, founded in 1095. You may shuttle or ride back to the ship. Later, enjoy a wine tasting of local vintages on board, following another delicious, thoughtfully prepared meal. This evening, you sail towards Viviers.

Accommodation: MS *Emerald Liberté*
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:
Cumulative Distance Range: 43 km (27 miles)
Morning
Tournon to Valence: 22 km (14 miles)
Afternoon
Valence to Tournon: 21 km (13 miles)

What to Expect: After a short walk in Tournon, this morning's ride follows easy bike trails along the river, partly on packed gravel bike paths past highly scenic vistas. After having lunch and exploring the sights of Valence by bike for a couple hours, you return to the ship via your choice of shuttle or bicycle. The riding route back to our mooring partly follows a main road that you share with cars.

DAY 5: Viviers / Bike to St. Etienne-des-Sorts

Disembark for a guided visit of Viviers, one of the more unique towns on the Rhône. Settled by Romans, the small village was forced to erect walls when conflicts of the ensuing centuries arrived. The Renaissance period was kinder and more peaceful; the stunning Maison des Chevaliers still stands as a testament to that creative era. A stroll through Viviers' cobbled streets is a journey back in time. After lunch onboard the ship, you return to the scenic bike paths of the Via Rhône.

Today's ride leads you past some of the Rhône's religious treasures, tracing lovely greenways and quiet roads along the way. Cathedrals, chapels, grand clerical residences and the Iles des Dames islands mark your route. Once you coast into Bourg-Saint-Andéol, home to handsome patrician houses, you shuttle to St. Etienne des Sorts to meet your ship, which has sailed here during your ride. Avid riders may choose to cycle to the ship instead. Surrounded by scenic mountains, this was a center of industry in the late 1800s, when workmen quarried nearby hills, felled poplar trees and hauled them to the Rhône, where they were loaded onto boats known as *sapines* for transport to Avignon. Still today, the best bargemen on the river hail from St. Etienne des Sorts. Upon arrival, you embark your ship and savor dinner this evening as you

sail to Avignon.

Accommodation: MS *Emerald Liberté*
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:
Cumulative Distance Range: 44 km (27 miles)
Afternoon
Viviers to Bourg-Saint-Andéol with Shuttle to St. Etienne-des-Sorts: 33 km (20 miles)
Bourg-Saint-Andéol to ship: 11 km (7 miles)

What to Expect: Today's ride follows the easy, flat path along the Rhône River on dedicated bike trails. You pass various villages marked by cathedrals and chapels and ride along quiet branches of the river, traversing the Iles des Dames islands. The short option offers a shuttle from the small town of Bourg-Saint-Andéol to the ship. The longer option leads you directly to the ship, docked in St. Etienne des Sorts.

DAY 6: Avignon / Bike to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon

You dock early this morning in Avignon, the legendary City of Popes where the papacy was centered for 70 years in the 14th century. After breakfast on board, set out on a walking tour of this magnificent and historic city. Marvel at the mighty Palais des Papes, the Papal Palace, one of the great architectural wonders of France. View the adjacent historic Pont St. Bènèzet reaching out into the river; only four of its original 22 arches remain. Then step through Avignon's gates to explore this fascinating UNESCO World Heritage site, its medieval walls enclosing a rich repository of architecture that spans the ages. There'll be free time here before lunch on board.

This afternoon, enjoy a short ride across the river to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, which once served as a resort of the French cardinals who resided at Avignon. You pass over the island Ile de Piot to reach the river's opposite bank. Quiet, scenic roads with minimal traffic lead to one of the oldest operating olive oil mills in Provence, founded in 1358. Enjoy a tour with your host to witness the production of one of the region's most prized products; perhaps you'll purchase some so you can take a taste of France home with you! You have free time here before returning to the ship by shuttle or bicycle. This evening, savor an authentic Provençal dinner, prepared and hosted by a local chef who we have invited on board.

Accommodation: MS *Emerald Liberté*
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:
Cumulative Distance Range: 28 km (18 miles)
Afternoon
Avignon to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon with Shuttle to ship: 14 km (9 miles)
Villeneuve-lès-Avignon to ship: 14 km (9 miles)

What to Expect: Ride across the Rhône River to Ile de Piot, a tranquil island, then continue to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon on the opposite bank. We ride on quiet roads with very limited traffic. After a tour at an olive oil mill, and free time in town, the optional ride back will follow a slightly different route.

DAY 7: Arles / Bike to Pont du Gard / Farewell Dinner

Shuttle to the outskirts of Arles this morning to begin the day's ride to the spectacularly preserved Pont de Gard. A UNESCO World Heritage site, this 2,000-year-old Roman aqueduct once transported water 31 miles from Nimes. Your route follows quiet, paved country roads and leads you through the fertile farmlands that provide Provence with its rich bounty. For a shorter ride, you may stay on the shuttle until reaching Beaucaire and pick up an old, renovated rail trail instead.

Your trip leaders have prepared a savory picnic lunch to enjoy by the river, with a magnificent view of the aqueduct. After, there'll be time to visit the enlightening museum, where you can learn how this towering structure was built without mortar. Stroll the pathways of the park around the site, or take an optional loop ride from the museum. Later, shuttle back to the ship and join the Captain's Cocktail and Farewell Dinner.

Accommodation: MS *Emerald Liberté*
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:
Cumulative Distance Range: 56 km (35 miles)
Morning
Arles to Beaucaire: 22 km (14 miles)
Beaucaire to Pont du Gard: 21 km (13 miles)
Afternoon
Optional Loop around Pont du Gard: 13 km (8 miles)

What to Expect: Following a short shuttle, you begin riding in the outskirts of Arles. The route follows paved, quiet country roads along flat terrain. As you are riding through open fields, you might experience

some wind. For a shorter option, you can shuttle to Beaucaire, from where you continue on a beautifully renovated bike path along the rails of an old train line. As you approach Pont du Gard, you experience a slight incline. The afternoon ride is a short loop that incorporates some smaller hills. After, return to the ship via a 45-minute shuttle.

DAY 8: Disembark / Your France Bike & River Cuise: Lyon to Nice tour concludes

After breakfast, say goodbye to your ship crew and trip leaders as your tour ends. It is important that you disembark ship no later than 9:00 a.m. The Gare d'Arles train station is across the pier, a 3-minute walk. . Taxis will be available for transfers to the airport. The closest international airport is Marseille Provence (MRS), by taxi it takes about one hour, and costs approximately 150-190 USD per car.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

MS Emerald Liberté (Days: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7)

Cruise the Rhône river on MS Emerald Liberté, designed for luxury river cruising. Five cabin categories offer the amenities and contemporary style of a boutique hotel room. Enjoy full-service hospitality, comfortable social spaces, a golf putting green, walking tracks on the sun deck, pool, and cinema. Emerald Liberté is designed to provide the most efficient and comfortable journey during your seven nights on board. The 54 generously-proportioned suites and 14 staterooms feature all the amenities you need to begin and end each rewarding day, including a private bath with shower, hairdryer, bathrobes, and slippers. A mini-bar and complimentary bottled water are restocked daily and a safe protects your valuables. Complimentary WiFi and a flat-screen TV with infotainment system keep you plugged in. Onboard power is 220 volts; North American guests may require a power adapter. VBT offers two cabin types spread across five cabin categories: Emerald Stateroom (Categories D+E), or Emerald Panorama Balcony Suite (Categories A+B+C). VBT can also request additional cabin types based on availability.