

Daily Itinerary

DAY 1

VB T Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Ride from Oxford to Moreton-in-Marsh

We suggest arriving in England at least one day prior to the tour start date as your tour begins at 9:00 a.m. Make your own independent travel arrangements to Oxford. From Heathrow, you can choose from several transportation options that VBT recommends in your Road Book, or decide your own path. 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.

Today's Ride:

Oxford to Moreton-in-Marsh via Blenheim: 31.1 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 7 miles. Then transition to narrow paved un-trafficked country lanes to the town of Woodstock and the expansive grounds of Blenheim Palace. After departing the back gate of Blenheim, continue a rolling descent past Chadlington, then descend gently into the center of the town of Moreton-in-Marsh.

Meals: B (included for Self-Guided Ait+ guests only)

Redesdale Arms

DAY 2

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

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 Olympics,” 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. 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.

Today's Ride:

Moreton-in-Marsh to Stratford-upon-Avon to Moreton-in-Marsh: 41.8 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. Depart Stratford 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.

Meals: B

Redesdale Arms

DAY 3

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.

Today's Ride:

Moreton to Burford: 34.7 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.

Meals: B

The Highway Inn

DAY 4

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, skirting the estate of Prince Charles at Highgrove. His gardens are open for tours, so you might stop 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.

Today's Ride:

Burford to Tetbury: 34.6 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.

Meals: B

Ormond Hotel

DAY 5

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.

Today's Ride:

Tetbury to Bath: 29.6 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.

Meals: B

Francis Hotel

DAY 6

Bath / Free time / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel in Bath and depart on your own on your onward travels. Depending upon your destination, it may not be possible to depart for the U.S. on the last day of the tour. 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.