

FRANCE – LOIRE VALLEY CHATEAUX, WINE & GARDENS

8-days / 7-nights **SELF-GUIDED** inn-to-inn cycling through the Valley of the Kings from Tours



An eclectic mix of romantic chateaux, troglodyte cave homes, formal gardens, glorious silks and tapestries, fine wine and French cuisine and a host of picturesque villages makes the Loire Valley a unique and popular destination. Gentle rolling hills and tranquil rural scenery make this an ideal place for cycling. Easily accessed from Paris, hence its popularity with French and English kings including Henry II, Richard I and Richard the Lionheart, the Loire is the longest river in France, part tranquil, tamed by farming, and part wild and protected. The valley supports a vibrant wine industry. Inn-to-inn self-guided cycling holidays are a great way to explore with the freedom and flexibility to see more of the countryside and move at your own pace. You can stop and relax or explore, secure in the knowledge that your room is waiting for you and your bags have gone ahead.

Departs: Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, late March to early November, 2020

Cost from: **\$1695** per person twin-share Single room supplement from **\$580**
Half Board supplement **\$540** per person (includes seven 4-course dinners)

Includes: 7 nights' accommodation in comfortable 3- or 4-star hotels and guesthouses in ensuite rooms, breakfast daily; hire of multi-gear hybrid touring bike; luggage transfers; welcome briefing; detailed route notes with stage-by-stage route descriptions, maps and travel information; emergency telephone support. If you opt to pay the Half Board supplement then a 4-course dinner is included each night.

Not included: Other meals, drinks, personal expenses, optional visits or entry fees, local city taxes (paid locally), travel to/from the start/end of the tour. Hire of bike helmets is not included – we recommend you take your own helmet or hire one for around \$20 when making your booking.

E-bike hire: From \$200 per E-bike – availability strictly limited, please request when booking.



Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details and reservations

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive in Tours

Arrive at your hotel in the capital of Touraine. We suggest you allow time to visit the city with its Gothic cathedral, narrow lanes and historic quarter.

Day 2: Tours – Chinon

cycling @ 61km

Leave the city following the River Loire. After a few kilometres you arrive at the breathtaking gardens and chateaux of Villandry – certainly a place to plan to stop for at least a couple of hours – perhaps even for lunch.

Following minor roads through the Loire Valley, there are great views of the river and, passing fields and meadows of flowers in spring and summer, you arrive at ‘*Sleeping Beauty’s*’ castle, the Chateau at Ussé. Cycle on to Chinon on the River Vienne, dominated by the ruins of the medieval Chateau de Chinon. Originally built for the Counts of Blois, it fell to the house of Anjou in the 11th Century and was seized in 1156 by King Henry II of England from his brother Geoffrey d’Anjou after Geoffrey rebelled against Henry’s rule. Henry II fell in love with this beautiful town and made several changes to the castle; it became one of his favourite residences. The castle came under French control early in the 13th Century. Joan of Arc is reputed to have been a guest here of the French King Charles VII, in 1429 during the height of the Hundred Years’ War.

Day 3: Chinon – Fontevraud – Chinon

cycling @ 55 - 70km

Follow a circular cycle route from Chinon to Fontevraud, one of the biggest abbeys in France and once regarded as the centre of civilization in Europe. Here you will find the tomb of Richard the Lionheart (although when he died at Chalus in 1199, his heart was reportedly buried with his brother in Rouen, his brain and entrails went to an abbey at Charroux, and the remainder was entombed at Fontevraud, although the actual burial place is still unknown). The Abbey and its community thrived during the 12th Century under protection of the Plantagenet family but later during the French Revolution and under Napoléon it was used as a prison. This UNESCO listed building has recently been restored. Cycle back to Chinon passing through the vineyards of Anjou.

Day 4: Chinon – Azay-le-Rideau

cycling @ 36km

From Chinon to Azay-le-Rideau, you cycle picturesque trails through forests of beech and oak. Your arrival into Azay-le-Rideau will introduce you to the beautiful Indre Valley: with its romantic river views, beautiful houses made of local stone and the amazing chateau described as a *diamond* by the French writer Honoré de Balzac.

Day 5: Azay-le-Rideau – Chenonceaux

cycling @ 60km

You leave the Indre Valley and follow the tranquil Cher River valley cycling past Montbazou and the lovely town of Bléré en route to the famous “Château des Dames” (the Ladies’ Castle), the Chateau of Chenonceau; much of the design and construction of the palace was overseen by women. Behind a door, or during a walk in the magnificent gardens, perhaps you will encounter the ghosts of Catherine de Médici or Diane de Poitiers.

Day 6: Chenonceaux – Blois

cycling @ 76km

Pass Montrichard in the Cher valley and several typical little villages arriving at Cheverny. Then you follow the River Loire to Blois; seat of French royalty for many years, the town offers a mixture of architectural and artistic styles from various periods, including Gothic, Renaissance and Classical. The chateau at Blois itself has an interesting history and is well worth a visit.

Day 7: Blois – Tours

cycling @ 71km

The last day of cycling, although long, will leave you with unforgettable memories. You again follow the River Loire to another famous royal castle: the Chateau of Amboise perched high above the river. Whilst visiting Amboise, do see Clos Lucé, the famous house nearby where Leonardo da Vinci spent the last years of his life. The house contains many of his codex plans, and its gardens are full of reproductions of his contraptions. His white marble tomb, festooned with carvings of dogs, is in the grounds of the Chateau Amboise. Later in the day ride to Tours again along the tranquil River Loire.

Day 8: Departure day

Tour ends after breakfast in Tours.

Other **Outdoor Travel** cycling destinations include Spain, France, Holland, Ireland, England and Scotland, Poland, in the Czech Republic, Romania, China, Vietnam, North America, New Zealand and Australia.

We also offer group guided **Bike and Barge** cycling cruises in many destinations including along the canals and rivers of **France, Belgium, Holland and Germany**, along the coast in **Turkey**, or **Vietnam**.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

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