

## FRANCE – PROVENCE & THE LUBERON

8-days / 7-nights moderate to challenging inn-to-inn GUIDED cycling from Avignon



Provence is one of the most popular regions in France for cycling – and it's easy to see why: beautiful scenery, surprisingly well-preserved Roman ruins, delicious food and some of France's most interesting wine regions. On this tour we see the iconic lavender fields, olive groves and sunflowers of Provence, and so much more: the dry *garrigue* countryside, terraced vineyards rising up rugged hills, the mighty Rhône River and Mont Ventoux, the 'giant of Provence' so influential in the Tour de France. Provence is synonymous with Vincent van Gogh, and we visit the asylum where he painted many of his most famous works. The bright colours, the sun-drenched landscape and the unique quality of the light attracted many artists to the area, including Gauguin, Cézanne and Picasso. Cycling through the rural countryside is a delight for all senses – the air is scented with *herbes de Provence* (rosemary, thyme, lavender) which grow wild on the hillsides.

Our focus is on the western-most part of Provence – the low mountains of the Alpilles, the hills and beautiful rural villages of the Luberon, the UNESCO World Heritage site of Orange and the centre of Avignon. We taste the renowned wines of Châteauneuf-du-Pape and the great-value, high-quality reds and rosés of Les Baux de Provence, one of France's newest appellations. And then of course there is the food. Typical Provençal cuisine utilises fresh, sun-kissed vegetables and fruit, goat cheese, olive oil, olives and garlic, and the abundant fish and shellfish of the Mediterranean Sea, all flavoured with *herbes de Provence*.

**Cost from:** \$2780 per person, twin-share. Single room supplement from \$700

**Departs:** 15<sup>th</sup> June; 3<sup>rd</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2019

**Grading:** Moderate to challenging – 35 to 50 km daily, undulating terrain with some steep climbs.

**Includes:** 7 nights' accommodation in carefully selected 2- and 3-star hotels (all rooms with private bathrooms), breakfast and dinner daily, wine-tasting at vineyards, route notes, luggage transfers, cycle tour guide, hire of quality multi-geared hybrid touring bicycle with helmet, lock, panniers and water bottle, transfers from/to Avignon TGV station at the start/end of the tour.

**Not included:** Lunches, drinks, entrance fees at local attractions, personal expenses.

**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**





**Suggested Itinerary** – please note weather and road conditions, group interests and the decision of the tour guide will influence the final route taken each day:

### **Day 1: Arrive Avignon**

Make your own way to the hotel in Villeneuve-les-Avignon, or join the short transfer to the hotel from Avignon TGV station late this afternoon.

### **Day 2: Avignon to St-Rémy-de-Provence**

**cycling distance @ 36km**

A fairly easy day to start our Provençal adventure. We ride a dedicated cycle path alongside the Rhône then cross the river to head towards St-Rémy. Just outside of St-Rémy is Glanum, a ruined Roman town dating to 27BC, abandoned around 300 years later when it was overrun by the Germanic Alemanni tribes. It has a huge triumphal arch and mausoleum; everything else was covered by scree falling from the Alpilles over many centuries. In 1921 they realised a whole town was buried here and began excavations. Between Glanum and St-Rémy we pass by the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole Asylum where Van Gogh committed himself after his confrontation with best friend Paul Gauguin, and where he painted many famous works.

### **Day 3: St-Rémy-de-Provence to Cavailon**

**cycling distance @ 50km**

We set off into the Alpilles, for one of the most beautiful stretches of cycling in France. We follow the little Gaudre de Valmourian, winding through spectacular scenery. It's a decent climb to Les Baux de Provence, a fascinating, ruined fortress. Ruled over for centuries by (alleged) descendants of Balthazar, one of the biblical Three Kings, this fortress wreaked havoc throughout Provence and as far afield as Toulouse. Eventually it became part of France, but following a rebellion was destroyed by none other than Cardinal Richelieu of Three Musketeers fame. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was the site for the discovery of aluminium ore, hence the name 'bauxite'. Astonishingly, Les Baux became such a backwater that it effectively disappeared. It was rediscovered, excavated and restored after World War II. Les Baux de Provence is also one of the most recent wine regions to be awarded *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* status, so we stop for a tasting before our final push of the day into Cavailon, the gateway to the Luberon.

### **Day 4: Cavailon to Montoux**

**cycling distance @ 48km**

Leaving the Alpilles behind, we cycle into the Lubéron hills today. This was the region where Peter Mayle set his book *A Year in Provence*, and the Lubéron are the reason many people visit Provence. Our first stop is in the delightful village of Gordes, with its stone-built houses, tiny, winding streets and panoramic views. From here we climb into the Lubéron proper to the iconic Abbey de Sénanque, described by the Michelin guide as a 'beautiful, isolated Cistercian abbey surrounded by a sea of lavender'. The 12<sup>th</sup> Century abbey is still inhabited by monks, who produce honey, liqueurs and lavender oil. Leaving the abbey we continue to climb through the stunning landscape, earning our descent into Carpentras. We stay in Montoux, enjoying wonderful views of Mont Ventoux, the 'Giant of Provence', and admiring the fortitude of those cyclists who ride up it!

### **Day 5: Circuit ride through vineyards**

**cycling distance @ 41km**

A beautiful ride, nice and leisurely, through pretty scenery, with much wine-tasting and cycling through vineyards. There is still some ascent on this ride (though less than yesterday) and we taste some fabulous wines from some of the best appellations in Provence. On our little loop today we cycle through the appellations of Beaumes de Venise, Gigondas and Vacqueyras, which are, after Chateauneuf du Pape, probably the best appellations in the Cotes du Rhône region. Our stops may include the Domaine de Durban (AOP Beaumes de Venise) and Caveau Gabriel Meffre (AOP Gigondas).

**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**





### **Day 6: Montoux to Orange**

**cycling distance @ 30km**

We farewell the Lubéron and ride towards Courthezon, visiting an interesting vineyard, the Caves Jamet to learn more about the rules of appellations. The owner produces both Chateauneuf du Pape AND Vin de France (the lowest classification available)! In the afternoon we arrive in Orange, originally a retirement village for former Roman soldiers. Orange boasts a truly spectacular Roman theatre which we have a chance to visit before dinner, along with the huge triumphal arch that dates back to the reign of Augustus. The theatre and the arch together are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Provence derives its name from the Roman *Provincia Gallia* (province of the Gauls).

### **Day 7: Orange to Avignon**

**cycling distance @ 36km**

Leaving Orange, it's a short ride on back roads to the famous wine village Chateauneuf du Pape. In this bustling village, devoted to its namesake wine, we visit the Domaine de Nalys for wine-tasting and to learn more about olives in their silvery olive groves. After a picnic lunch we cycle along a series of islands in the Rhône to Avignon. We have time to explore Avignon this afternoon – perhaps with a cold drink, gazing across the square at the enormous Palais des Papes.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, fleeing chaotic violence in Rome, Pope Clement V moved to Avignon, which became the base for seven successive popes. One of these, Benedict XII, supervised the completion of the largest gothic building in France, the vast, fortified Papal palace. If time permits we can have a look round the interior of the palace, but the most spectacular view is from the outside, marvelling at the sheer size. Leaving Avignon, we cross the Rhône the last time and climb the short hill back to Villeneuve-les-Avignon and our hotel.

### **Day 8: Departure day from Villeneuve-les-Avignon**

Tour ends after breakfast in Villeneuve-les-Avignon with an optional late-morning transfer to Avignon TGV.



**Outdoor Travel** offer cycling – guided in small groups or self-guided with luggage transfers – in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, England, Scotland, Romania, Austria, Poland, Hungary, in the Czech Republic, Vietnam and New Zealand. Bike & Boat cycling cruises are available in France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, the Po River Delta and Venice in Italy, the Dalmatian Coast of Croatia, and the islands of Greece.

### **Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations**

- Call Toll free: 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or Fax (03) 57501020
- Email: [info@outdoortravel.com.au](mailto:info@outdoortravel.com.au)
- Web: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au>
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright, VIC 3741, Australia