



Loire Valley Châteaux 5-Day Circuit Tour

Overnight Destinations: Blois, Amboise, & Tours

Tour Overview

This tour is 5 days / 6 nights with 3 different overnight destinations and the opportunity to visit at least 7 major castles. Major châteaux on this itinerary include Blois, Chambord, Chaumont-sur-Loire, Amboise, Chenonceau, Azay-le-Rideau, and Villandry. Overnight destinations include Blois, Amboise, and Tours.

This itinerary differs from our other 5-Day circuit tour in that you cycle the short 28 km / 17 miles from Amboise to Tours rather than taking the train and immediately continuing your cycling to Azay-le-Rideau. In effect, this means that you can spend a leisurely second morning in Amboise, and ensure that you have enough time to see all of its sights before making the short, but lovely ride to Tours. It also gives you more time for sightseeing in Tours.

Tour Dates: You may begin this tour on any day from May 1 to September 30. We ask that tour participants arrive at the tour's starting point at least one day prior to Day 1 of their tour to avoid the impact of possible travel delays. No activities are scheduled for this day. See [Schedule](#) for blackout dates and additional tour scheduling considerations.

Location: The Loire Valley region of France known as the "Garden of France." The region has been on the UNESCO's World Heritage list since 2000, owing to its culture and art, concentrated largely in the region's châteaux (castles). The Loire Valley is just 1 - 2 hours from Paris. Overnight destinations on this tour include Blois, Amboise, and Tours.

Tour Type: Circuit tour

Terrain: Easy to moderately challenging. Flat for the most part with occasional stretches of gently rolling hills. Only a couple of climbs that require the granny gear. Cycling is primarily on designated bike routes, which may be separate paths or tiny roads shared with local residents.

Length: 5 days / 6 nights

Distance: Total distance is 228 km / 141 miles. Average distance per day is 46 km / 28 miles.

Highlights:

- The historic royal cities of Blois, Amboise, and Tours.
- The grandest of the Loire Valley castles, including the castles of Blois, Chambord, Chaumont-sur-Loire, Amboise, Chenonceau, Villandry, and Azay-le-Rideau.
- Countless smaller castles and historical sights.
- Tranquil cycling on bike paths and tiny, quiet roads.
- Easy cycling along the banks of the region's lovely rivers: the Loire, the Cher, & the Indre.
- Beautiful countryside and charming medieval villages.
- Vineyards and lots of opportunities for wine tastings.

Daily Itinerary

Arrive in Blois. Explore the city and its chateau. Spend 2 nights.

Your tour begins in the historic town of Blois, located about 2 hours by train from Paris. You may arrive as early as you wish to maximize the time you have to see the sights of this Renaissance city and its royal chateau. No formal tour activities are planned for this day.

Since 1986 Blois has been designated a "City of Art and History" owing to its efforts to value and preserve the vast treasures of its glorious past. Blois is an easy walking town, with a large expanse of pedestrian-only streets located at the foot of its castle.

Blois Castle was built in four successive stages: medieval (13th century), transition (Gothic-Renaissance in late 15th and early 16th centuries), Renaissance (1515 - 1524), and Classical. The result as described by Henry James: The facade of the château is "one of the most beautiful and elaborate of all the old royal residences in this part of France."

Day 1: Pick up rental bikes. Cycle to the Château de Chambord and return via riverside cycling along the Loire - 44 km / 27 miles.

Today you will visit one of the most important sights of your tour: the magnificent Château de Chambord. Chambord is the largest by far of all the Loire castles and is built on a scale that foreshadowed the château at Versailles. It owes its impact to its fine architectural unity and sumptuous Renaissance decoration, dating from the period when this style was at its most splendid. Among the must-sees of Chambord are the famous double staircase, conceived by Leonardo da Vinci; and the roof terrace -- a maze of lanterns, chimneys, stairs, and dormer windows. The château contains 440 rooms, hundreds of fireplaces, and boasts a collection of some 3000 objects of art, furniture, and tapestries. Adding to the vastness of Chambord's scale is its setting in a 13,591 acre park that is enclosed by the longest wall in France.

On the way to Chambord you'll have the opportunity to see the real France -- charming medieval villages, vineyards, and of course, the River Loire. Following your visit to Chambord, your return ride to Blois includes 8 miles / 13 km of cycling along the mighty Loire, with stunning views of the countryside and the castles on the opposite river bank.

Day 2: Cycle from Blois to Amboise via the Château de Chaumont - 43 km / 26 miles. Spend 2 nights in Amboise.

Prepare yourself for a magnificent day of cycling. From the farm fields and woods immediately surrounding Blois, to an awesome forested ride along the River Beuvron, your short 13-mile / 21 km ride to the Château of Chaumont-sur-Loire will leave you wanting more cycling. But you won't want to miss Chaumont with its beautiful gardens and impressive collection of period furnishings and tapestries. Like the château of Amboise (which you will see later today), this defensive castle commands a beautiful view of the town and river. The feudal austerity of the structure is softened by its Renaissance influence, its elegant stair tower, and its sumptuous Council Room. The 10-minute walk uphill to the castle provides the opportunity to admire the fine landscaped gardens, as well as cedars, lime trees, and redwoods. The view from the terrace is remarkable.

After departing Chaumont, your cycling route takes you atop the plateau -- one of this tour's few climbs -- along quiet roads and into the region's vineyards. You'll enjoy stunning views of the surrounding area, without a lot of ups and downs.

After settling into your hotel, the royal castle at Amboise beckons. With its impressive collection of Renaissance and Gothic furniture, this castle is of an earlier era than the other castles on your tour, built atop a bluff for defense. There is a magnificent view from the castle's terrace of Amboise's pointed roofs and walls, and of the River Loire meandering through the lush valley.

Also well worth a visit in Amboise is the manor house of le Clos Lucé, where Leonardo da Vinci (at the invitation of King Francois I) lived the final years of his life. Transformed into a museum, the Château du Clos Lucé provides an opportunity to penetrate the captivating universe of a genius. The basement houses the museum of Leonardo's fabulous machines, a collection of models made by IBM based on his designs, which were four centuries ahead of his time.

Studying the many machines that he designed, you may even conclude that it was Leonardo himself who invented the bicycle!

In addition, you'll definitely want to spend some time strolling the tiny streets of this incredibly beautiful town. Enjoy a glass of wine or a snack in one of the many cafés lining the lovely squares while soaking in the local ambiance. Amboise maintains a series of scenic and historic walks that are well-signed and take you into nooks and crannies of the town that many never see. This is another highly recommended activity.

Day 3: Cycle to the Château de Chenonceau and return via riverside cycling along the Cher - 51 km / 32 miles.

The principal attraction of today's ride is the incredibly beautiful Château de Chenonceau, a 15th century castle stretching across the River Cher in a harmonious setting of water, gardens, and trees. To this perfection is added the elegance of the château's architecture, interior decor, and magnificent furniture. The château consists of a rectangular mansion with turrets at the corners. Catherine de Medici's two-storied gallery stretches across the bridge over the river. For sheer beauty, a visit to the Château de Chenonceau is a must.

Today's cycling route is equally impressive. After a mostly wooded route along tranquil roads on the way to Chenonceau, your return route follows the ancient towpath of the River Cher for easy, beautiful riverside cycling past the pretty villages of Bléré, Nitray, and Azay-sur-Cher, as well as several more castles. A stop at the Château de Nitray (website in French only), another pearl of the Renaissance, is recommended for those with the energy. The final leg of today's ride takes you back into the vineyards and into gently rolling terrain that is pleasurable and not too taxing.

Day 4: Complete Sightseeing in Amboise. Cycle to Tours - 28 km / 17 miles. Spend 2 nights.

Because today's ride to Tours is a short one -- and doesn't involve any castle visits -- you're free to spend a relaxed morning completing your sightseeing in Amboise...or just have a leisurely morning...or plan to arrive early in Tours so that you have plenty of time to enjoy its many sights.

The route to Tours is lovely, alternating between farm fields, pastureland, and vineyards, all on tiny roads that comprise part of the Loire à Vélo bike route network. Your route takes you through the pretty village of Montlouis-sur-Loire, where you'll have to stop for a cafe to take in the charms of the village. From Montlouis you'll cycle a dedicated bike path that follows the course of the Loire for the remainder of the ride to Tours. Upon your arrival in Tours, your route takes you (and provides the opportunity to visit) Tours' castle, the Saint Gatien Cathedral, and Tours' esteemed Museum of Fine Arts.

Later you'll have to spend some time in Old Tours, with its narrow medieval streets and beautiful squares lined with half-timbered buildings. The restoration of Old Tours with its pedestrian-only areas was so successful that it led to national legislation providing incentives for the restoration and preservation of the nation's medieval structures (la Loi Malraux.)

Day 5: Cycle from Tours to Azay-le-Rideau - 35 km / 22 miles. Return to Tours by Train with your Bikes.

On today's ride you'll visit two of the greatest chateaux of the Loire: Villandry and Azay-le-Rideau. After leaving busy Tours on designated bike paths, your route follows the River Cher to the beautiful riverside village of Savonnières.

Just beyond Savonnières, you arrive at the Château de Villandry, one of the last great Renaissance castles to be built in the Loire Valley. Best known for its internationally renowned gardens, Villandry's grounds contain canals, fountains, cascades, vine-covered pergolas, and a Romanesque village church.

After your visit of the castle, you'll make one long climb to the top of the plateau to enjoy tranquil cycling through the Touraine's rich farmland and vineyards on your way to Azay-le-Rideau. You'll cycle designated bike routes that rarely see motorized traffic. A steep descent takes you down to the river valley of the Indre and the charming village of Azay-le-Rideau.

The main attraction in Azay-le-Rideau is its castle, truly one of the gems of the Renaissance, commanding a luxuriant setting on the banks of the River Indre. Its lines and dimensions suit the site so perfectly that it conveys an unforgettable impression of elegance. Partly built over the River Indre, Azay-le-Rideau consists of two main wings set at right angles. The reflections in the water add to the chimerical quality of the site and, together with the rows of houses and gardens along the Indre, make excellent subjects for photographs. The interior is lavishly decorated and furnished with some pieces of truly outstanding beauty.

Tour Price: \$535.00 per person

- **Children's Price** - Children 16 years or younger traveling with 2 adults: \$250.00 per child.
- **Tour Deposit:** \$200.00 per adult and \$75.00 per child. Deposits are charged when tour materials are sent and hotel availability has been confirmed.
- **Discounts** are available for parties of 5 or more adults.

The tour price includes:

- Tour Documentation: Route instructions, maps, Pre-trip Preparation Guide, On-Road Quick Reference Guide, and Sights Guide.
- Bike Rental for 5 Days: Excellent quality hybrid bike with map carrier, cyclometer, water bottle cage, rear rack, rear pannier, lock, repair kit, helmet, and on-road bike assistance. Optional pedal cages. Tandem bikes are also available. Road/racing bikes are available for a supplemental charge.
- Pick-up of your rental bikes at the conclusion of your tour.
- Baggage Transfers
- Reservation of your Accommodations
- English-Speaking Support Staff
- Shipping and Handling Charges for US customers, unless expedited shipping is required.

The tour price does NOT include:

- Hotels: Because you are free to select from a wide range of hotels -- from charming and basic 2-star to 4-star luxury (where available) -- the cost of your hotel accommodations is not bundled into the tour package price. A list of accommodations options for this tour, with website links, is available upon request.
- Meals: You are free to determine your own budget for meals. A wide variety of options are available -- from creating a picnic from provisions obtained at a boulangerie / patisserie, to dining at bistros and restaurants, or taking meals at your hotel (where available.) Please note that breakfasts are NOT included in France hotel rates. However, hotels with restaurants often offer a demi-pension option, which includes the cost of your room, breakfast, and dinner at a reasonable price.
- Transportation from your home to Blois and from Tours to your home
- Personal expenses
- Insurance
- Postage Charges for non-US customers: The postage required to send your tour materials by US Postal Service Priority Mail will be added to tour orders made from outside the US. This charge averages \$20.00 for delivery within 6 - 10 business days.
- Expedited Shipping (all nations): If the shipment of tour materials must be expedited, the express mail charges will be added to the tour package price

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