



Loire Valley Châteaux 6-Day Circuit Tour

Tour Overview

This tour is 6 days / 7 nights with 4 different overnight destinations and the opportunity to visit at least 10 major castles. Major châteaux on this itinerary include Blois, Chambord, Chaumont-sur-Loire, Amboise, Chenonceau, Villandry, Azay-le-Rideau, Langeais, Ussé, and Chinon.

Tour Dates: You may begin this tour on any day from May 1 to September 30. 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, Azay-le-Rideau, and Chinon.

Tour Type: Circuit tour

Terrain: Flat for the most part with stretches of gently rolling terrain. There is one long climb on Day 4, two long climbs on Day 5, and 1 long climb on Day 6 as you climb the plateau between river valleys. None of these climbs should be viewed as a deterrent to the average cyclist. Cycling is primarily on designated bike routes, which may be separate paths or tiny roads shared with local residents.

Length: 6 days / 7 nights

Distance: Total distance is 260 km / 161 miles.

Highlights:

- The historic royal cities of Blois, Amboise, Tours, and Chinon.
- The grandest of the Loire Valley castles, including the castles of Blois, Chambord, Chaumont-sur-Loire, Amboise, Chenonceau, Villandry, Azay-le-Rideau, Ussé, Chinon, and Langeais.
- 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, Cher, Indre, and Vienne.
- Beautiful countryside and charming medieval villages.
- Two villages officially designated as among France's most beautiful: Montsoreau and Candes-Saint-Martin.
- The Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, one of the largest monastic complexes in Western Christendom.
- 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: Take a Short Train Ride to Tours with your Bikes. Cycle from Tours to Azay-le-Rideau - 35 km / 22 miles. Or Cycle from Amboise to Azay-le-Rideau with no Train Ride - 63 km / 39 miles. Spend 1 night in Azay.

Following a short 20-minute train ride to Tours with your bikes, you'll begin an exciting ride to 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.

Day 5: Cycle from Azay-le-Rideau to Chinon - 40 km / 25 miles. Spend 2 nights in Chinon.

On today's ride you'll visit three more of the region's most renowned chateaux: Langeais, Ussé, and Chinon. (Of course, you'll also have tomorrow to visit Chinon if you're short on time today.) To do so your route traverses the plateau twice, first from the River Indre back to the Loire, and then from the Loire to the River Vienne. This beautiful ride is refreshing to the soul, but is a more

difficult on the legs than sticking to the river valleys. But you'll be handsomely rewarded by your climbing feats, both with views and lovely rides through the vineyards.

After your first climb you'll dash back down to the Loire to complete the short ride to your first castle, the Chateau de Langeais. You'll arrive in Langeais over its magnificent suspension bridge, almost as popular as its chateau. Langeais is a lovely medieval village, set at the junction of the Loire Valley's wine and castle routes. Its 15th century château, known for its exceptional collection of tapestries, is the perfect example of a late medieval castle, complete with parapet walk and drawbridge.

Following your visit to Langeais you'll return to a stretch of serene riverside cycling along the levy of the Loire and past the charming village of Bréhémont. Effortless cycling takes you all the way to your next castle, the 15th century Château d'Ussé. Colloquially known as the "Sleeping Beauty" castle, legend has it that this castle inspired Charles Perrault to create the fairy tale of the same name. It is also believed to be among the castles that inspired the Disney castles.

After a short stop in the lovely adjacent village of Rigny-Ussé, it's back in the saddle for your final leg to Chinon. After a short ride along the Loire and a longish climb into the gorgeous village of Huismes you'll follow bucolic cycling routes through farmland, woods and vineyards. The day's ride ends in Chinon, a renowned medieval city of art and history wedged between the banks of the River Vienne and (of course) the towering heights of its castle. Chinon's main street is great for strolling, being open only to pedestrians. Numerous medieval houses show off picturesque details: half-timbered houses with carved corbels, stone gables with corner turrets, mullioned windows and sculpted doorways. The English Gardens with their towering plane trees also make for a nice stroll.

There is no need to sweat the climb to this castle; there is an elevator conveniently located in the center of town to whisk you to the castle and upper town. Recently renovated, the huge fortress castle was originally a Roman camp. The current structure dates largely from the 11th century.

Day 6: Cycle the Chinon Loop - 47 km / 29 miles.

Today's ride is one of exceptional beauty. You'll begin with a nice, flat stretch of wooded cycling along the southern shore of the River Vienne, and then you'll head into gently rolling countryside that presents one beautiful village after another -- Cinais, Seuilly, Lerné. These are classic French villages that preserve an ancient understated beauty.

After enjoying gently rolling terrain you'll climb once more into the woods, vineyards, and farms on your way to the Royal Abbey of Fontevraud, one of the largest monastic complexes in western Christendom. Founded in 1101, the abbey's protectors were the counts of Anjou, followed by their descendants, the Plantagenet kings of England.

Shortly beyond the Abbey, your route returns to the River Vienne and two villages officially classified as "most beautiful villages in France." Adjacent to each other and strung like pearls along the stunning riverfront, the villages of Montsoreau and Candes-St-Martin enjoy a setting that is hard to beat, wedged between the river and the rock cliffs that rise sharply from the river's banks. These cliffs are scattered with troglodytic dwellings -- homes built right into the rock cliffs. In Montsoreau you'll have the opportunity to visit its romantic castle, just opened to the public in 2001 following a complete renovation.

As you seamlessly move from Montsoreau to Candes-Saint Martin, you have to stop to view the confluence of two great rivers: the Vienne and the Loire. And the wander the narrow streets of Candes with its black slate roofs contrasting with the white tufa walls that adorn the houses.

After crossing the Vienne, you'll return to easy cycling along the northern shore of the river, occasionally passing through more quaint villages before you arrive back in Chinon.

Tour Price: US \$675.00 per person

- **Children's Price** - Children 16 years or younger traveling with 2 adults: \$275.00 per child.
- **Tour Deposit:** \$200.00 per adult and \$100.00 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 6 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.
- 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 Chinon 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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