



## Provence of the Caesars Tour

### Tour Overview

**Tour Dates:** You may begin this tour on any day, but please note that bike pick-up and return cannot occur on a Sunday. See [Schedule](#) for blackout dates and additional tour scheduling considerations.

**Location:** Located in the far southeast of France, Provence is known for its lovely Mediterranean climate, fields of sunflowers, vineyards, the Impressionists, its Papal palace and Roman ruins. Most people are somewhat familiar with this region of France which was made popular by Peter Mayle's best-selling book, [A Year in Provence](#). What many people don't realize is just how diverse are the many areas that comprise Provence, nor how deeply rooted the region's history is in that of ancient Rome.

In the deep south of France, the tour begins and ends in Avignon, 3 - 4 hours from Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport by express train. The vegetation, light, and ambiance is Mediterranean. Overnight destinations include Avignon, Uzès, Aiguèze, Orange, and Vaison-la-Romaine.

**Tour Type:** Circuit tour

**Terrain:** Moderately challenging to challenging. The terrain, like all facets of this itinerary, is diverse. While there are lots of long and sometimes steep climbs, you will also enjoy long, relatively flat stretches of effortless cycling. This itinerary is much less challenging than our Provence of the Tour de France tour.

**Length:** 7 days / 8 nights

**Distance:** Total: 160 miles / 260 km. Average per day: 32 miles / 52 km.

### Highlights:

**Marvel at the sheer beauty** of the Mediterranean landscapes, vegetation (fields of sunflowers) and the play of light that so captivated Impressionists like Van Gogh.

**An incredibly varied geography** including mountain ranges, semi-arid *garrigue*, rolling vineyards, and cliff-studded river valleys.

**Enjoy free wine tasting** opportunities nearly everywhere along your route.

**Explore Roman ruins** as impressive as those of Italy; particularly the grand aqueduct of the region, the Pont du Gard, the Triumphal Arch and coliseum at Orange, and the multi-tiered ruins of beautiful Vaison-la-Romaine.

**Perched medieval villages** bathed in the warm Provençal sun.

**Avignon**, the region's most colorful and cultured city, with its medieval wall surrounding the city and its former Papal palace (the popes resided here during the 14th century.)

## **Daily Itinerary**

### **Arrive in Avignon. Spend 2 nights.**

Arrive in Avignon at the time of your choosing. No activities are scheduled for this day.

### **Day 1: Free Day in Avignon with Optional Cycling to Isle-sur-la-Sorgue & Fontaine de Vaucluse.**

Avignon is a vibrant, sunny, southern city, full of historical sights. Must-sees include the Palais des Papes, the palatial residence of the Popes who moved here from Rome in the 14th century when Rome was politically unstable, and the city's collection of art museums and Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance churches. You'll be fascinated by Avignon's centuries old ramparts which completely surround the city's medieval center, as well as the 12th century bridge which partially spans the mighty Rhone River. You'll be staying within the city's walled center, just a few short steps from a multitude of fabulous restaurants and shops.

On this, your first full day in Avignon, you'll pick up your bicycle and have the opportunity to take it for a leisurely spin around Avignon. Alternatively, you may take a scenic 61-km / 38-mile day trip ride that includes two very noteworthy destinations: Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, with the five branches of the River Sorgue meandering through it; and the charming village of Fontaine de Vaucluse, where you can visit the source of the River Sorgue. Gushing out of a 230 meter high cliff, the underground spring is the world's fifth most powerful resurgent river.

### **Day 2: Avignon to Uzès - 53 km / 33 miles. Spend 1 night.**

Today you begin your adventure, quickly leaving the hustle and bustle of Avignon behind as you cycle a series of back roads in almost complete serenity. The first village through which you'll cycle, 16<sup>th</sup> century Aramon, feels forgotten by time. If you're visiting in September, you may even experience a running of the bulls! From Aramon you'll continue to Théziers, another medieval village set amidst the rolling hills of the Gard, and then on to Remoulins, gateway to the Pont du Gard. Constructed by the Romans in the 1st century to transport clean drinking water to the Roman city of Nîmes, this remarkable aqueduct bridges the Gard today as it has for 2000 years. The area surrounding the aqueduct is a park, complete with riverside beaches and a lovely picnic area. Plan to picnic here for lunch amidst its splendor. When it's time to leave, you'll actually cycle across the Pont du Gard.

From the Pont du Gard, you'll cycle on tiny traffic-free roads through lovely vineyards and the charming villages of Sanilhac and Sagriès. As you begin the final 10 kilometers of the day's ride, you'll encounter the first of several climbs on your way to Uzès. Uzès commands a striking pose, sitting on the tip of a limestone plateau overlooking the Alzon valley. Established as a duchy in 1565, Uzès is still often referred to as the Duchy of Uzès. Its medieval core has been restored to its old grandeur, featuring such notable monuments as the Duchal Palace, the Eglise St. Etienne, the Cathédrale St. Théodorit, and the Tour Fenestrelle, a 12<sup>th</sup> century relic of a former Romanesque cathedral destroyed in the Wars of Religion. From its numerous sidewalk cafés, Uzès is a lively place to people-watch and soak up local color.

### **Day 3: Uzès to Aiguèze / St. Martin d'Ardèche - 56 km / 35 miles. Spend 2 nights.**

You're going to love the non-stop beauty of this day's scenery. In fact, the route itself is the real sight seeing treat today. You'll begin your day with a challenging climb out of Uzès to the top of a plateau. Your route then takes you through beautiful countryside and several medieval villages to the enchanting town of Goudargues, known to the French as the Venice of the Gard (With its many canals, you'll soon understand why).

Beyond Goudargues, you'll have the opportunity to take a short side-trip to a truly unique natural site: the Cascades du Sautadet. Here, the River Cèze has carved out channels and cavities in the 5 million year old limestone rock to create a spectacular series of waterfalls and pools in which you can take a refreshing dip. Just a stone's throw from the falls is the village of La Roque-sur-Cèze, classified as one of France's most beautiful villages. The village, built on a rock peak overlooking the Cèze, is dominated by the traces of the former castle and its chapel, sloping cobbled streets, and houses made with creamy stones and curved-tiles cornices.

At the end of today's ride you have the option of lodging in the fairytale-like hamlet of Aiguèze, a charming 14th century village perched high upon a cliff overlooking the Ardèche river. Or you may stay just across the river in Saint Martin, a small riverside village with a relaxing ambience located at the eastern entrance to the Gorge of the Ardèche.

**Day 4: Free Day in Aiguèze / St. Martin.**

For a relaxing Provencal experience, Aiguèze / St. Martin can't be beat. Enjoy the riverside parks and beaches, sit by the pool at your hotel, or simply stroll the tiny lanes of these sister villages. Or, for a more active approach to your free day, kayak down the Ardèche -- complete with rapids -- and / or cycle the winding road that towers above the gorge on the St. Martin side of the river. Along this road, you'll find magnificent vistas and several fascinating underground caves offering guided tours.

**Day 5: St. Martin to Orange - 42 km / 26 miles - Spend 1 night.**

Before those hamstrings completely stiffen up, it's time to hit the road again for a relatively short ride to Orange. Today's ride is again beautiful; you'll pass through vineyards, rolling countryside, and lovely villages like Pont-St-Esprit with its medieval bridge over the Rhone. Arriving early into Orange, you'll enjoy the better part of your day exploring its many sights. Upon entering the city, you can't miss one of its most compelling landmarks, the Roman Triumphal Arch. One of the best preserved of the Roman gateway arches, the *Arc de Triomphe* has marked the entry into Orange for 2000 years.

You mustn't miss the Roman theater either; it's the best preserved not only in Provence but also in the whole of the Roman empire. During the summer, an international music festival is held at the theater. Adjacent to the theater, are the ruins of the Roman theater district. Finally, you'll enjoy exploring the lively old town of Orange, where you'll be staying. When you're tired, linger over a coffee at a sidewalk café while soaking up the local color.

**Day 6: Orange to Vaison-la-Romaine - 36 km / 22.5 miles - Spend 1 night.**

Today's ride takes you deep into vineyard country and through the beautiful villages of St-Cecile-les-Vignes, Cairanne, and Rasteau, before reaching your destination, magnificent Vaison-la-Romaine.

Most of the hotels we recommend in Vaison-la-Romaine are located in the medieval upper town, a peaceful quarter with narrow, winding streets lined with beautiful gardens, charming shops and wonderful restaurants. The views are magnificent. Perched above the upper town you'll find the ruins of a 12th century castle and its once mighty fortifications.

After settling in, you'll want to make the short walk / descent to the convivial ambience of Vaison's lively new town. Highly recommended is a visit to the excavated ruins of an extensive Roman settlement, right in the heart of downtown Vaison. You'll get a fascinating look at the homes of its wealthiest residents with their still intact mosaic floors and indoor plumbing.

**Day 7: Vaison to Avignon - 70 km / 44 miles - Spend 1 night.**

Dominated by exquisite natural beauty and a numerous villages, each lovelier than the last, you may be tempted to devote the entire day to this final stage of your tour itinerary. From Vaison, you'll travel along the edge of the Dentelles (French for lace) Mountains down the Route du Vin to the charming winemaking villages of Séguret, Sablet, and Gigondas. From there, you'll head east for more level cycling, passing through one of France's most exclusive wine appellations, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, a wonderful place to have lunch and explore.

After lunch, you'll cross the Rhone back into the Gard region. Your route takes you down the west side of the Rhone along tiny back roads through fields of sunflowers and apple, peach and pear orchards. Before returning to Avignon we recommend a stop in Villeneuve-lez-Avignon, just across the Rhone from Avignon. It was in Villeneuve that the cardinals settled when upon their arrival in the 14th century they found no remaining place to build in the papal city of Avignon. In addition to its many splendid sights such as the massive citadel known as Fort St André, the Papal Monastery of Val de Benediction, and the Tour Philippe le Bel, Villeneuve commands incredible views of Avignon and Mount Ventoux.

## **Tour Price: \$895.00 per person**

- **Children's Price** - Children 16 years or younger traveling with 2 adults: \$400.00 per child.
- **Tour Deposit:** \$250.00 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, map, Pre-trip Preparation Guide, On-Road Quick Reference Guide, and Sights Guide.
- Bike Rental for 6 Days: Excellent quality hybrid or mountain bike with handlebar bag, map carrier, cyclometer, water bottle cage, rear rack, lock, repair kit, and helmet. Optional pedal cages. Road / racing bikes are available for a supplemental charge.
- Daily Baggage Transfers
- English-Speaking Support Staff
- Reservation of your Accommodations
- Shipping and Handling Charges for US customers, unless expedited shipping is required.
- Basic SAG Support: If you choose not to cycle on one or more days due to weather, illness, etc., AND you notify your Diverse Directions support representative in advance so that you and your bikes can be transported along with your luggage, no additional charges will apply.

### **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. See our [Accommodations Options](#) page for the price ranges of each category of hotel. 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.
- SAG services beyond Basic SAG Support: If you have begun your cycling and feel that you cannot complete the day's cycling, you may call your support representative for a ride to your next hotel for yourself and your bike. This SAG service is provided at our cost, based on the time and fuel required, without markup. Thus, the cost of this service varies depending upon the distances entailed. The cost of SAG services beyond Basic SAG Support are billed to your credit card following your tour.
- Transportation from your home to Avignon and from Avignon 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