



## Provence Gems 5-Day Circuit 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, Roman ruins, and Mont Ventoux, France's highest peak between the Pyrenees and the Alps, made famous as a frequent mountain stage of the Tour de France race. The tour begins and ends in Avignon, 3 - 4 hours from Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport by express train. Overnight destinations include Avignon, Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, and Orange.

**Tour Type:** Circuit tour

**Terrain:** Easy to moderately challenging, with one challenging climb on the final day.

**Length:** 5 days / 6 nights

**Distance:** Total: 106 miles / 170 km. Average per day: 26.5 miles / 42.5 km.

### Highlights:

- Avignon, the region's most colorful and cultured city, with its medieval wall surrounding the city and its former Papal palace.
- The charming riverside villages of Isle-sur-la-Sorgue and Fontaine de Vaucluse, source of the resurgent River Sorgue.
- Pernes-les-Fontaines with its 40+ fountains.
- The colorful city of Orange with its Roman theatre and triumphal arch.
- The exquisite wine villages of Saint-Cécile-les-Vignes, Rochegude, and Châteauneuf-du-Pape.
- Miles of vineyards with lots of opportunities for wine tastings.
- Miles of tranquil roads ideally suited for cycling.
- Villeneuve, the second city of the Popes.

## **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 the Pont du Gard (Roman Aqueduct)**

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 60-km / 37-mile day trip ride to the Pont du Gard, one of Provence's greatest wonders. Constructed by the Romans in the 1st century to transport clean drinking water to the Roman city of Nîmes, this remarkable aqueduct bridges the River Gard today as it has for 2000 years.

### **Day 2: Avignon to Isle-sur-la-Sorgue - 38 km / 24 miles. Spend 1 night.**

On your first required day of cycling you'll depart bustling Avignon on a series of new bike paths and bike routes -- nicely protected from city traffic -- and will soon find yourself on quiet country roads winding through the famous vineyards of the Rhone river valley. Most of today's route is almost completely flat with the exception of a climb to the sleepy village of Jonquerettes. You'll continue easy cycling through the lively market town of le Thor and on to Isle-sur-le-Sorgue, often referred to as the Provençal Venice owing to its being traversed by five branches of the River Sorgue.

More town than village, with tall plane trees and green streams, Isle-sur-la-Sorgue is "the island on the Sorgue" a few kilometers from the river's source at Fontaine de Vaucluse. Over the last 40 years Isle-sur-la-Sorgue has become famous as the antiques capital of Provence, indeed of France, if you don't count Paris. There are many permanent antique shops, art galleries and interior décor shops here, grouped in several "villages." Isle-sur-la-Sorgue is a pleasant walking town. The bars and cafes retain their authenticity, little footbridges take you over the water, and narrow, winding streets tunnel into the old centre of town, and the courtyards lined with antiquaries.

Before you end your cycling day, however, you'll continue a bit farther to the charming village of Fontaine de Vaucluse. Squeezed into the sharp end of a narrow valley, the village takes its name from the beautiful and mysterious spring feeding the river Sorgue. This spring comes from deep underground - nobody knows how deep. In the 1950s, Jacques Yves Cousteau came with a submersible to explore the depths but did not find the bottom. Gushing out of a 230 meter high cliff, the underground spring is the world's fifth most powerful resurgent river. This extraordinary phenomenon forms the crystal-clear Sorgue river, which soon turns a startling emerald; and it's this vivid hue that dominates the village of Fontaine de Vaucluse.

You'll have the option to spend this evening in Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, Fontaine de Vaucluse, or in a tranquil rural location between these two lovely villages.

### **Day 3: Isle-sur-la-Sorgue to Orange - 48 km / 30 miles. Spend 2 nights.**

Today's ride features a joyous variety of quiet country roads, historic villages, and beautiful landscapes. For most of the day you'll cycle through the ancient *Comtat de Venaissin*, the principality that did not become part of France until 1791 and of which Orange was the capital. Most of the villages on your route reveal their history with surrounding ramparts and a central castle, though in some cases only vestiges remain.

Just 5 kilometers from Isle-sur-la-Sorgue you reach the first of these villages, Velleron, which was founded by the Romans, fortified by medieval barons, and later became a health spa owing to its alkaline, sulfur-bearing waters. Following a short ride through the wooded foothills of the Ventoux mountains, you arrive in Pernes-les-Fontaines, named for its 40+ fountains, many of which feature intricately carved stone. You'll enter the historic center through one gate in the ramparts and leave by yet another.

After another short interlude through the rich farmland that supplies much of the local fruits and vegetables you arrive in Bédarrides, the beautiful "City of 7 Rivers" and home to the Eglise Saint Laurent, where agreement was reached in 1791 for the *Comtat de Venaission* to become part of France. Of course, it's not all about history; Bédarrides' streets are filled with interesting shops and cafes. Just a short distance beyond Bédarrides you arrive at the first of this tour's wine villages, Courthézon, still surrounded by its 12th century walls, and then the grand expanse of the Côtes du Rhône vineyards. You'll pass many signs for "degustation" (wine-tasting) and you're near enough to the day's final destination that it is an ideal time to reward yourself with the local beverage.

You'll leave the vineyards as you near Orange on surprisingly quiet, wooded roads that provide no hint that a major historic city is just ahead. Orange is a gem -- bustling, beautiful, colorful, welcoming, and rich in history. Its Roman theatre is 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. On the opposite end of the city, the Roman Triumphal Arch has marked the entry into Orange for 2000 years. Of course, the history is not all Roman. The medieval historic center, almost completely pedestrianized and restored, lures you into its labyrinthine streets and many lively squares.

#### **Day 4: Circuit of Côtes du Rhône Wine Villages - 44 km / 27 miles.**

Today's ride is all about vineyards, historic wine villages, and scenic natural beauty. Just as was the case with yesterday's ride, you'll alternate between vineyards and woods and villages throughout the ride.

After a short stop in Camaret-sur-Aigues, you'll re-enter the vineyards in earnest before reaching the lovely wine villages of Sainte-Cécile-les-Vignes and Rochegude. Sainte-Cécile-les-Vignes, one of the most important of the Côtes du Rhône wine-making areas, is surrounded by vineyards right up to the heart of the village. The medieval center is ringed by shaded, plane-tree lined streets that beg a stop at one of the many sidewalk cafes. Rochegude, too charming to be believed, has been cultivating the vine since Roman times. It is said that its wine was a favorite of Emperor Domitian.

Just beyond Rochegude an awesomely beautiful stretch of wooded cycling will thrill you until you reach the next village, Sérignan du Comtat, another delightful place to wander and soak in history and the Provençal light. Sérignan was the home of Jean Henri Fabre, the world-renowned entomologist whose name appears on streets throughout France. His house, Harmas, has become a national museum holding the treasures of this wise sage: drawings, books, herbs, minerals, insects, mollusks, fossils, and a botanical garden with more than 800 different species.

#### **Day 5: Orange to Avignon - 40 km / 25 miles. Spend 1 night.**

Your final day of cycling begins in the vineyards south of Orange with gorgeous views of the countryside as you near the most famous of all the local appellations, Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The first vineyards were planted here in the 14th century by the Avignon popes, one of whom, John XVII, also built a castle at the summit of the village as a summer residence. The Château des Papes was set on fire in 1562 during the Wars of Religion and then finally blown up by the retreating Germans in 1944. The two remaining walls give a good idea of the scale of the original château and from its hilltop vantage point there are fabulous views down the Rhone valley.

As you approach the vineyards of the area you will notice something curious: there is no soil visible at all, only a sea of smooth pebbles between the vines. This alluvial shingle has a beneficial effect, magnifying the heat of the sun on the grapes by day and keeping them warm

long into the night. This superheated microclimate and the wide spacing between the vines produces a wine with the highest maximum strength of any French wine.

Following your visit to Châteauneuf-du-Pape, you'll cross the Rhone into the Gard. On this side of the Rhone, the landscape is more dramatic, but still scattered with vineyards and lovely historic villages. After passing through Roquemaure, you'll make the toughest climb of the tour through the beautiful village of Sauveterre, You'll continue to tiny Pujaut, and then enjoy a final thrilling ride through the beautifully forested countryside before descending into 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: \$595.00 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, map, Pre-trip Preparation Guide, On-Road Quick Reference Guide, and Sights Guide.
- Bike Rental for 5 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

For Diverse Directions' payment terms, cancellation policy, and all terms & conditions, please see [Terms & Conditions](#).