



Provence of the Luberon & Ventoux 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, Gordes, Sault, and Vaison-la-Romaine.

Tour Type: Circuit tour

Terrain: Moderately challenging to challenging. The "challenging" portions are limited to a few long climbs, but the cycling effort required for these climbs should not be a deterrent to the average cyclist.

Length: 7 days / 8 nights

Distance: Total: 146 miles / 235 km (assuming the longest of the 3 options for the circuit of perched Luberon villages.) Average per day: 29 miles / 47 km.

Highlights:

- Some of France's most beautiful perched medieval villages -- Gordes, Roussillon, Ménerbes, Goult, etc. -- bathed in the warm Provencal sun.
- The Mediterranean light, vegetation, and views through the dense Luberon forests.
- The sheer beauty of the Mediterranean landscapes and the play of light that so captivated Impressionists like Van Gogh.
- The charming riverside villages of Isle-sur-la-Sorgue and Fontaine de Vaucluse.
- The charming villages in the shadow of Mont Ventoux.
- Spectacular views of Mont Ventoux from your scenic ride along the Toulourenc River.
- Vineyards, wine villages, and free wine tasting opportunities.
- Avignon, the region's most colorful and cultured city, with its medieval wall surrounding the city and its former Papal palace.

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 Gordes - 42 km / 26 miles. Spend 2 nights.

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. The first half 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 Provencal Venice owing to its being traversed by five branches of the River Sorgue. With its blocks of riverside cafes and restaurants, Isle-sur-la-Sorgue makes a wonderful rest stop before beginning the second, more challenging half of the day's ride.

Next you'll visit 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.

After tearing yourself away from Fontaine de Vaucluse you'll begin your climb in earnest into the Luberon, with ever expanding views and more charming villages as you make your way to one of the Luberon's most magnificent hilltop villages, Gordes.

If the Luberon were a country, Gordes would be its capital. This is the Parthenon of Provence, an imposing edifice born of stone that has always attracted its share of attention because it is just so good-looking. Inevitably, Gordes is officially one of The Most Beautiful Villages in France. It's not just the stunning view of Gordes as you approach it; Gordes is also a pleasure to explore from within, along its tight alleyways and arcades. There are many restaurants and cafes, from simple to refined; some bakeries and food stores; and a thriving arts scene. Your explorations will take you to the spots where the view outward from Gordes is also spectacular, high over the Luberon plain.

Day 3: Circuit of the perched villages of the Luberon - 42 km / 26 miles, 38 km / 24 miles, or 26 km / 16 miles.

Today you'll have the entire day to delight in the perched villages of the Luberon -- that part of Provence made famous by Peter Mayle in his bestselling memoir, [A Year in Provence](#). With a

choice of 3 cycling loops from which to choose -- in accordance with your cycling skill and your enthusiasm for climbing -- today's ride is truly one of the highlights of this tour. The options range from 42 km / 26 miles with 5 challenging climbs to 26 km / 16 miles with 2 challenging climbs. Whichever option you choose, you'll cycle through deep Mediterranean forests laced with rugged limestone outcroppings, and each of your climbs will be rewarded with absolutely stunning views.

Depending on the route that you choose, you'll have the opportunity to visit some or all of the quintessentially Provençal villages of Lacoste, Roussillon, Ménerbes, Goult, and Joucas. Both Ménerbes and Roussillon are officially classified as among "The Most Beautiful Villages in France."

A visit to Roussillon is included in each of the day's cycling options as it is just too special to be missed. Not only does it occupy the highest point in the area (i.e. unobstructed views), but it is also adjacent to the ochre quarries responsible for the amazing colors of its buildings. From the center of the village you can take the Ochre Walk, an incredible nature walk through ochre-colored hills, a color you've most likely never seen in nature.

You'll marvel at the picturesque beauty of each medieval enclave you choose to visit today, with their stone cottages clinging to the hillsides overlooking the majestic landscapes below them.

Day 4: Gordes to Bédoin - 35 km / 22 miles. Spend 2 nights.

Today's ride is the most challenging, on account of the serious climb required to head north from Gordes. You'll tackle this stretch early in the day, though, and be rewarded with an incredibly dramatic cycling experience through the rugged mountain terrain. Following your climb to visit the charming village of Venasque, classified as one of "The Most Beautiful Villages in France", the remainder of your ride features gentle terrain and fairly frequent villages to stop and explore. Because of the strenuous climb, we have kept today's cycling distance fairly low.

As you approach Bédoin views of Mont Ventoux begin to dominate. Bédoin is a charming agricultural village in the shadow of Mont Ventoux. Its official limits cover a large area, including several hamlets like Sainte-Colombe, Les Baux and Les Vaudrans that share its wonderful Mediterranean climate, being almost daily bathed in sunshine. Bédoin also contains one of the largest communal forests in France and the most prolific in the Vaucluse, supporting more than 1200 species of plants. The area produces an excellent quality wine, as well as fruits and asparagus. The village center is compact and is dominated by the huge, imposing Church of Saint-Antonin. Built in the Jesuit style in 1702, it has a Spanish look. There are several charming squares lined with outdoor cafes, and there is a weekly market each Monday morning. Bédoin caters to cyclists in a huge way, being one of the primary staging points for those making an assault on Mont Ventoux.

Day 5: Loop Ride from Bédoin - 28 km / 17 miles.

Though technically an optional ride, this one is truly not to be missed! The day begins with a long climb up the Bédoin - Malaucène Road through the forest on the southwestern slopes of Mont Ventoux. The view from the summit is breathtaking; on a clear day one can see all the way to the Mediterranean coast. Because of the long climb, we've kept the distance of this ride to a minimum so that you can savor every moment of the beauty.

After an incredible descent you'll wind via miniscule roads through vineyards and sleepy villages on your way to Le Barroux, a little gem of a medieval village. An imposing 12-century castle dominates this well restored, pleasant little perched village.

Following Le Barroux you'll have the opportunity to explore two other charming villages. First, Caromb, an ancient fortified village built on a low hill in a beautiful valley blanketed with vineyards, cherry and apricot orchards, and truffle oaks. Caromb has a vibrant, open and sunny Provençal feeling, the buildings being well-restored and lived in. It is home to one of the largest Romanesque churches in the Vaucluse, the church of Saint Maurice, erected in the 14th century. Finally, you'll end your short cycling day with a climb to Crillon-Le-Brave, Bédoin's immediate neighbor to the west. Crillon is a charming hilltop village built for defensive purposes. The village

takes its name from the most legendary of its dukes, Louis des Balbes de Berton de Crillon. Nicknamed "Le Brave Crillon", he was one of Henry IV's fiercest and most valiant generals during the French Wars of Religion in the late 16th century. Most of the buildings date from the 16th and 17th centuries. The village is tiny -- only one paved road, a café, a hotel, a restaurant, a church, and a school -- yet it has a lively feel. Its setting is stunning.

Day 6: Bédoin to Châteauneuf-du-Pape - 42 km / 26 miles. Spend 1 night.

If you chose to forego the optional ride from Bédoin, you'll still have the opportunity to visit Crillon-Le-Brave and Caromb, as today's route passes through these villages on its way west. From Caromb you get into new territory, beginning with a beautiful ride through the olive groves before pausing to take in the beauty of Beaumes-de-Venise.

Beaumes-de-Venise is a market town and commercial center for the outlying farms and hamlets. Busy and bustling, life in the village centers around an open central area with squares, weathered stone fountains, shops, and outdoor terrace cafés with plenty of shade from the plane trees. The word "beaume" means cave or grotto, and Beaumes-de-Venise is built against a line of cliffs along the southwestern edge of the Ventoux mountains. The old houses and narrow streets of the medieval village rise up to the reddish sandstone cliffs with their many caves. Beaumes-de-Venise produces Côtes de Ventoux wines. It also has its own appellation, Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise, one of France's best sweet white wines.

Following still more charming villages -- Aubignan and Bédarrides -- you arrive at the day's final destination of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The fame of this small town revolves around the wines that bear its name. 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.

Day 7: Châteauneuf-du-Pape to Avignon - 35 km / 22 miles - Spend 1 night.

Today's relatively short ride includes an incredible diversity of landscapes. First you'll spend some time cycling through the lovely vineyards surrounding Châteauneuf-du-Pape, before you head south to west, crossing the Rhone into the Gard. On this side of the Rhone, the landscape changes dramatically once you leave the tiny roads through the orchards and sunflower fields of the river valley. The land here is dryer and the vegetation scrubbier. After passing through the villages of Roquemaure, Sauveterre, and Pujaut, you'll make one last climb for a thrilling ride through this dramatic landscape.

Your final descent takes you 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: \$795.00 per person

- **Children's Price** - Children 16 years or younger traveling with 2 adults: \$375.00 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 7 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](#).