



Provence of the Tour de France

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 that most famous mountain stage of the Tour de France race, the climb up Mont Ventoux, France's highest peak between the Pyrenees and the Alps. For those who dream of completing a Tour de France mountain stage, this tour incorporates the climb up Mont Ventoux into one of its stages. For those who prefer to leave Tour de France mountain stages to the professionals, however, an incredibly beautiful alternate route is provided.

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: Very challenging. This is the most challenging of our Provence tour itineraries from the standpoint of the amount of climbing required. Even if you choose to forego the Mont Ventoux climb, this itinerary is as demanding as it is beautiful. Of course, you will be generously rewarded for your efforts. Days 3, 4, and 5 are the most difficult.

Length: 6 days / 7 nights

Distance: Total: 169 miles / 273 km. Average per day: 33 miles / 55 km.

Highlights:

- Some of France's most beautiful perched medieval villages -- Gordes, Roussillon, Ménerbes, Goult, etc. -- bathed in the warm Provencal sun.
- The climb up Mont Ventoux, the roof of Provence and location of the popular Tour de France mountain stage. You also have the option of being shuttled with your bikes to the summit to begin your cycling from there. There is no additional charge for this service.
- 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 gorges of the Nesque and the Toulourenc Rivers.
- 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.

Following your departure from Avignon and its environs, you'll begin your first required day of cycling 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 - 45 km / 28 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](#). Today's ride is truly one of the highlights of this tour as you cycle through deep Mediterranean forests

laced with rugged limestone outcroppings, each of your climbs being rewarded with absolutely stunning views. You'll have the opportunity to visit the quintessentially Provencal villages of Lacoste, Roussillon, Ménerbes, Goult, and Joucas. Both Ménerbes and Roussillon are officially classified as among The Most Beautiful Villages in France.

Your visit to Roussillon includes the opportunity to visit the adjacent 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 visit today, with their stone cottages clinging to the hillsides overlooking the majestic landscapes below them.

Day 4: Gordes to Sault - 60 km / 37 miles. Spend 1 night.

On today's ride, you'll turn your sights almost exclusively toward the raw, unspoiled, off-the-beaten path natural beauty of the Luberon. Shortly after your departure from Gordes, you'll skirt the nearby mountains cycling alongside jagged rock walls. Your route today is largely a steady climb, with some exciting roller coaster-like ups and downs. The highlight of this day's ride however is the magnificence of the Gorges de la Nesque with its expansive vistas, hairpin switchback turns and Grand Canyon-esque drama. After leaving the Gorges, you'll soon arrive in Sault, the staging point for your Mount Ventoux adventure.

Day 5: Sault to Vaison-la-Romaine - 57.1 km / 35 miles via Mont Ventoux or 46.6 km / 29 miles via easier alternate. Spend 1 night.

For couples or groups consisting of individuals with different fitness, skill and / or interest levels, the climb up Mount Ventoux, the mountain made famous by its inclusion in many Tour de France races, is optional. The alternative route consists of gently rolling hills interspersed with stretches of flat, effortless cycling and a couple of climbs. The alternative route includes the spectacular scenery of the Valley of the Toulourenc and passes through several beautiful villages as well.

You also have the option of being shuttled to the summit of Mont Ventoux with your bikes so that you can enjoy the tremendous views and exhilarating descent without the extremely challenging climb. If you choose this option you will begin your cycling to Vaison-la-Romaine from Mont Ventoux's summit. To take advantage of this free service we simply ask that you notify your Diverse Direction's support representative no later than 7:00 am on Day 5.

For our adventure seekers, our climb up Mount Ventoux begins in Sault, the most popular approach to the summit due to its more manageable grade overall. From Sault to Chalet Reynard (the point at which all approaches up the mountain converge) the grade ranges from 1% to 6%. Midway through your climb up the mountain's forested eastern slope you'll encounter an average grade of slightly less than 6% for 7 consecutive kilometers.

From Chalet Reynard to the summit, the grade ranges from 6.5% to 10.4% with the steepest grade occurring at the very summit for 1.1 kms. By the time you've reached the mountain's barren summit, you will have climbed 1150 meters over 21.1 kilometers. Of course, your descent to Vaison-la-Romaine is a spine-tingling, hair-raising, thrill-a-minute, once in a lifetime experience as well.

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 6: Vaison to Avignon - 69 km / 43 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 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: \$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 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.
- Monitoring of your Mont Ventoux climb: Your support representative will monitor your progress as you climb Mont Ventoux and will be available to give you a ride to the summit if you feel you cannot make it. The price for this additional service is US \$95.00 for 1 - 2 persons. If you wish to take advantage of this service you must notify your support representative by 8:30 am of the morning of your Mont Ventoux climb.
- 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](#).