



Vineyards & Van Gogh 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. We ask that tour participants arrive at the tour's starting point at least one day prior to Day 1 of their tour to avoid the impact of possible travel delays. No activities are scheduled for this day. 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 charming mountain-top villages. You'll enjoy a tremendous variety of terrain and geography on this tour -- from the flat Rhone valley plain to the Luberon mountains.

The tour begins and ends in Avignon, 3 - 4 hours from Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport by express train. Overnight destinations include Avignon, Gordes, Saint-Rémy, and Arles.

Tour Type: Circuit tour

Terrain: Moderately challenging to challenging. This is the easiest of our Provence circuit tours, though you will not want for challenging cycling. While there are lots of ups and downs on this tour, you will also enjoy long, relatively flat stretches of effortless cycling. Day 5's climb to Les-Baux-de-Provence is the most difficult on this itinerary (and totally worth it!) We do, however, provide an alternate route should you wish to have the option to forego the climb to Les Baux.

Length: 6 days / 7 nights

Distance: Total: 99 miles / 160 km + Circuit of the Perched Luberon Villages: 26 miles / 42 km, 24 miles / 38 km or 16 miles / 26 km.

Highlights:

- 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.
- Some of France's most beautiful perched medieval villages -- Gordes, Roussillon, Ménerbes, Goult, Lacoste, and Joucas -- bathed in the warm Provencal sun.
- Beautiful Saint-Rémy, home of Vincent Van Gogh, birthplace of Nostradamus, and location of the Roman ruins of Glanum.
- Les Baux de Provence, one of France's most beautiful villages and commanding one of the most incredible vistas anywhere.
- Arles, with its web of narrow medieval streets, its Roman amphitheatre, and homages to its most famous resident, Vincent Van Gogh.
- Vineyards 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 Provençal 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 you choose, you'll have the opportunity to visit some or all of 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.

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, with their stone cottages clinging to the hillsides overlooking the majestic landscapes below them.

Day 4: Gordes to Saint-Rémy-de-Provence - 40 km / 25 miles. Spend 1 night.

You'll get a richly deserved break from climbing today as your ride is one very long descent from the mountains of the Luberon. You'll enjoy miles of easy cycling along tiny, traffic-free roads through orchards and vineyards with continued views of the surrounding hills. Your route takes you through Cavaillon, renowned for its melons and one of the largest towns of the region. And you'll arrive in Saint-Rémy sufficiently early to enjoy all the sights of this extraordinary town.

St-Rémy is undoubtedly one of the most delightful towns in all Provence. Encircled by a boulevard of plane trees, the center of the town is a warren of fine old buildings, pretty squares, plant-filled alleyways, and cooling fountains. Its charms inspired Provencal poets as well as novelist Gertrude Stein. The Hôtel Estrine, a fine old mansion, contains the *Centre d'Art Presence Van Gogh* (closed Mondays) with audiovisual displays and documentation on Van Gogh, and exhibitions of contemporary works.

A half-mile outside St-Remy are the ruins of Glanum, a major Roman town, and the remarkable Roman monuments know as *Les Antiques*, consisting of a well-preserved mausoleum and a triumphal arch by the side of the road. The 60 foot-high mausoleum, with elaborate bas-reliefs on the podium, was erected around AD 30. The triumphal arch, dating from around the same time, was one of the first of its kind in Provence.

Just below the site is the former monastery of St-Paul-de-Mausole, where Van Gogh was hospitalized. It is still a private sanatorium, but you can walk down the main driveway and visit the church and the 12th century cloisters.

Day 5: Saint-Rémy to Arles - 32 km / 20 miles. Spend 1 night.

Today you'll visit one of the most remarkable sights in all of Provence: the ancient village of Les Baux, perched atop the beautiful Alpilles mountain range. The climb to Les Baux is challenging, but comes early in today's ride and is breathtakingly gorgeous. The Alpilles rise dramatically from the Rhone Valley and provide unobstructed vistas for miles.

Les Baux is one of the classic sights of Provence, a powerful evocation of the feudal dynasties which once ruled the country. Perched on a barren rock plateau jutting out southward from the Alpilles chain, Les Baux had been a stronghold since Ligurian times, but it first achieved notoriety in the 10th century when it became the power base for the ambitious seigneurs of Baux, who claimed to be descended from Balthazar of Bethlehem, one of the three kings who attended Christ's Nativity. They adopted the Star of Bethlehem for their coat of arms and waged war incessantly. They gained control of over 80 surrounding towns and villages — secure in the knowledge that their eagles' nest at Les Baux was impregnable. Today Les Baux is officially classified as one of "The Most Beautiful Villages in France."

For those who prefer not to make the challenging climb to Les Baux, an easy alternative route is provided.

From Les Baux you'll enjoy a thrilling descent back to the plain. You'll have the opportunity to stop and enjoy the charming villages of Maussane-les-Alpilles and Paradou on your tranquil easy ride to Arles. You'll also pass the remains of a Roman aqueduct that actually crosses your route.

Once the Roman capital of Provence, then an important religious center in the Middle Ages, Arles later became a focal point for the Provençal renaissance of the 19th century. For five centuries Arles thrived at the crossroads of trade routes between Italy and Spain (the Domitian Way) and between the Mediterranean and Northern Gaul; was a significant center for the early Christian church; and hosted several major synods. Arles went into decline from the 13th century onward — when it was overtaken in political and economic importance by Aix and Marseille.

Most of the sights in Arles are concentrated in a compact area downtown. Arles' star attraction is undoubtedly the amphitheater known as the Arènes, which was probably built around the end of the 1st century AD. It is just a bit larger than the amphitheater at Nîmes, although slightly less well preserved. The Théâtre Antique just to the south, was built during the reign of Augustus, but was pillaged for stone in the 5th century by Christians eager to build churches.

Alongside Cézanne, Van Gogh's towering genius will forever be linked with the light-filled landscapes of Provence and the brilliance of the southern skies. Van Gogh took up painting at the age of 27, having previously been an art dealer, a teacher, and an evangelical preacher. After falling under the spell of the Impressionists he moved to Arles in 1888 and, although he wrote that the town had "a worn and sickly look" about it, (no longer true!) he nonetheless stayed, captivated by the vivid colors around him.

Day 6: Arles to Avignon - 46 km / 28 miles - Spend 1 night.

The first half of today's ride is almost completely flat, as you cycle tiny country roads from Arles to the pretty town of Tarascon. The streets of Tarascon — lined with rose, lemon, and ochre houses with pots of geraniums in the windows and laundry flapping in the breeze — make for a delightful place to wander around. In addition, Tarascon boasts a castle that doesn't even require a climb! Rooted in a limestone rock over the Rhone, Tarascon's castle gleams like white satin between the sun and water, a storybook feudal castle with crenellations and moat. Its location on the banks of the Rhone, its massive appearance which contrasts with its inside architecture, and its exceptional state of preservation make the building one of the finest medieval castles in France. In the 13th century the castle, opposite the royal city of Beaucaire, defended Provence's western boundary.

As you continue your way back to Avignon, we'll take you off the beaten path to the enchanting Montagnette, a range of hills that parallels the Rhone as it flows southwest from Avignon. The setting is beautiful -- a typical Provençal landscape of rock escarpments, hillsides fragrant with wild flowers and aromatic herbs, quiet hollows sheltering olive, almond, and apricot trees, pines, and poplars. Here you'll have one short, steep climb immediately following your visit to the charming, practically tourist-free village of Boulbon.

Boulbon is dominated by its ancient defensive castle which for centuries stood as a sentinel for the Counts of Provence against the Kingdom of France. Other sights in Boulbon include the Romanesque Eglise Sainte-Anne, constructed in 1628 and restored in 2009; and the Porte Lorient, one of the remaining gates of the fortified village.

During your final kilometers into Avignon you will no doubt begin to wonder just where the city is. We'll take you in via tranquil rolling lanes that are far from the area's bustle and provide one last opportunity to savor all that is the best of Provence.

Tour Price: US \$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.
- 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](#).