



Vineyards & Van Gogh Hub & Spoke 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. Though most people are somewhat familiar with this region of France, few realize just how diverse are the many areas that comprise Provence, or how deeply rooted the region's history is in that of ancient Rome.

The tour begins in Avignon and ends in Arles, 3 - 4 hours from Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport by express train. Overnight destinations include 5 nights in Avignon and 3 nights in Arles.

Tour Type: Hub & Spoke Tour

Terrain: Easy to moderately challenging. The terrain, like everything about this region, is diverse. While there are lots of ups and downs on this tour (some challenging), you will also enjoy long, relatively flat stretches of effortless cycling.

Length: 3 days / 4 nights to 7 days / 8 nights. You can choose any combination of nights in Avignon and Arles.

Distance: Choose from 7 day-trips ranging from 25 - 38 miles (41 - 61 km) in length.

Highlights:

Roman ruins as impressive as those of Italy; particularly the grand aqueduct of the region, the Pont du Gard, the magnificently preserved theater at Arles, and the Triumphal Arch and amphitheatre at Orange.

The dramatic rise of the Alpilles Mountains and the perched village of Baux-de-Provence.

The unique Mediterranean wetlands habitat of the Camargue.

The sheer beauty of the Mediterranean landscapes 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.

Perched medieval villages bathed in the warm Provençal sun.

The colorful city of Avignon with its medieval wall surrounding the city and its former Papal palace.

Day Trip Descriptions

Hub 1: Avignon

Avignon is a vibrant southern city, full of historical sights. Must-sees include the city's many museums, churches and the Palais des Papes, the residence of the Popes who moved here from Rome in the 14th century when Rome was politically unstable. Avignon's medieval center is completely surrounded by ramparts, giving the city a most unusual look.

Spoke 1: Vintage Vaucluse

Route: Begins and ends in Avignon. Largely flat with just a couple of climbs.

Distance: 61 km / 38 miles

Description: This day trip takes you through the many vineyards of the Vaucluse Department and offers two 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. This route features peaceful roads through woods and vineyards; and quaint tiny villages to explore such as le Thor and Jonquerettes.

Spoke 2: Papal Grapes & Orange

Route: Begins in Avignon and ends in Orange. You will return to Avignon by train with your bike. All trains permit bikes, the trains are frequent, the ride takes approximately 20 minutes, and bikes travel free of charge. The route is mostly flat except for the areas around Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Distance: 41 km / 25 miles

Description: This day trip takes you through the vineyards that belonged to the papacy when, during the 14th century, the popes resided in Avignon and maintained a summer residence near Châteauneuf-du-Pape. You'll leave Avignon by way of the Isle de la Barthelasse, an island in the middle of the Rhone River with splendid views of Avignon. The route takes you down tiny roads through beautiful orchards, along the cliff-studded Rhone River to the village of Roquemaure, and then to the vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Châteauneuf is a world renowned center of wine making, as the Châteauneuf vintage is one of the world's most exclusive appellations.

From Châteauneuf you'll cycle through beautiful vineyards to the historic city of Orange. Orange has a long history that goes back to the days of the Romans. In fact, the Roman Theater (*Théâtre Antique*) is the best preserved in the whole of the Roman empire, and is justifiably the pride of the city. In the second half of the 12th century Orange became the seat of a small principality called *Comtat Venaissin*, which became a part of the Netherlands in the 16th century. It was not until 1713 that Orange became part of France. All of Orange's principle sights are located in the lovely old town center. Orange is a lively, colorful city that will seduce you with its charms.

Spoke 3: Vintage Heights

Route: Begins and ends in Avignon. One long steep climb near the beginning of the ride provides most of your elevation gain. The remainder of the route is gently rolling with just a few short climbs.

Distance: 46 km / 29 miles

Description: This day trip takes you to the lovely wine villages of the Cotes du Rhone appellation in the uplands of the Gard Department. The route begins with a long, tough climb to the village of Sauveterre, a small village with a maze of narrow streets built along the foot of a steep escarpment. With your elevation gain behind you, you're on to Pujaut, another charming village and your entry into the highland vineyards of the Gard.

From Pujaut you'll continue west to the village of Tavel, celebrated for its world-renowned rosé wines. From Tavel you'll make a loop through the surrounding vineyards, feeling very much as if you're atop the world.

Turning back towards Avignon, your route takes you over tiny roads, through more vineyards, and then onto the *Route des Falaises* (the Cliffs Route) for several kilometers of dramatic mountain beauty -- with no climb required. Then you cycle onward to Villeneuve-lez-Avignon by way of another series of gorgeous, winding, tiny lanes that feel more like bike paths than roads. Avignon's sister city, Villeneuve-lez-Avignon is an historic city that was established by the cardinals in the 14th century when the papal city of Avignon had no remaining living space. 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.

Spoke 4: Pont du Gard

Route: Begins and ends in Avignon. Mostly gently rolling terrain with a few moderately challenging climbs. An optional side trip to the village of Castillon-du-Gard provides additional mileage and challenge.

Distance: 60 km / 37 miles

Description: The route to the Pont du Gard is a wonder of tiny, beautiful roads almost completely free of vehicle traffic. The journey is a joy in and of itself, passing through a number of charming medieval villages like 16th century Aramon, Théziers, and Remoulins. If you're visiting in September, you may even experience Aramon's running of the bulls!

Of course, the day's primary destination is the Roman aqueduct called 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 Pont was in use for 1000 years, of which 500 were without maintenance; it survives today in nearly intact condition. The area surrounding the Pont du Gard is a park, complete with riverside beaches and a lovely picnic area.

You can cycle across the aqueduct, and you will definitely do so if you're making the optional side trip to the magnificently perched village of Castillon-du-Gard. This detour adds 11 km / 7 miles to your cycling day, and a very long climb. Your efforts are rewarded by one of France's most beautiful villages and extraordinary views.

The Route to Arles

Route: Begins in Avignon and ends in Arles. With the exception of one very moderate climb, the route is almost completely flat along very quiet roads.

Distance: 47 km / 29 miles

Description: This day trip takes you to your second base location, Arles, by way of Boulbon and Tarascon. A bit off the tourist track, Boulbon is a lovely historic village nestled in La Montagnette, a range of hills which parallels the Rhone as it flows southwest from Avignon. The setting is beautiful -- a typical Provencal landscape of rock escarpments; hillsides fragrant with wild flowers and aromatic herbs; and quiet hollows sheltering olive, almond, and apricot trees, pines, and poplars.

A very scenic, quiet route takes you on to Tarascon, in existence since Roman times and boasting a fairytale 15th century chateau considered to be one of the finest fortified medieval castles in the whole of France. Tarascon is a lively, authentic town with no pretention and is a wonderful town for strolling or enjoying a sidewalk cafe. From Tarascon you'll cycle tiny lanes through the farmland and woods just a stone's throw from the Rhone River. Then suddenly you emerge into the dense maze of narrow streets that comprise Arles medieval center.

Hub 2: Arles

Once the Roman capital of Provence, then a major religious center during the Middle Ages, Arles offers a number of monuments from its glorious past including a magnificent Roman amphitheatre. Today, Arles is the unofficial capital of the Camargue. Most of the sights in Arles are concentrated in a compact area downtown, bordered on one side by the Rhone and on the other by the Boulevard des Lices, where you'll find the main tourist office and numerous cafes in which to sit and watch the world go by. Van Gogh moved to Arles in 1888, captivated by the vivid colors of the surrounding countryside. Following the loss of his ear, Van Gogh moved to St. Remy, where he prolifically produced over 100 drawings and 150 canvases.

Spoke 1: Saint-Rémy

Route: Begins and ends in Arles. The route is flat or gently rolling the entire way to Saint-Rémy.

Distance: 54 km / 33 miles

Description: Much like the ride from Tarascon to Arles, the first half of today's route is through the low-lying farmland of the fertile Rhone Valley. About midway to Saint-Rémy you'll cycle through the pretty town of Saint-Etienne-du-Grès, after which you begin a steady but not-at-all steep climb into the forests surrounding Saint-Rémy.

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-Rémy are the ruins of Glanum 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. Glanum was a major Roman city at the beginning of the first millennium AD.

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.

Spoke 2: Les Baux-de-Provence

Route: Begins and ends in Arles. The route is flat or gently rolling until you reach the Alpilles, after which you have a 3.5 km or 2 mile climb to Les Baux.

Distance: 51 km / 32 miles

Description: The ride to the perched medieval village of Baux-de-Provence is through the pretty countryside made famous by Van Gogh and other Impressionists. Your route passes between the remnants of an ancient Roman aqueduct and takes a more urban tone as you reach the charming sister villages of Paradou and Maussane. From Maussane your long climb begins to the top of the Alpilles, a jagged range of mountains that pops up out of nowhere. The scenery is spectacular and unobstructed views abound.

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' aerie at les Baux was impregnable.

On your return ride from Les Baux, you have the option of making a short 9 km / 5.5 mile side trip to St. Rémy, in the event that you wish to combine these two destinations.

Spoke 3: The Camargue: Wetlands of the Rhone Delta

Route: Begins and ends in Arles. The terrain is completely flat.

Distance: 57 km / 35 miles

Description: This day trip takes you into the Camargue, the vast wetland of the Rhone delta formed by the two branches of the Rhone where they meet the sea. The Camargue is a rich tapestry of many different ecosystems, a haven for wildlife and a joy for anyone seeking tranquility amid its watery landscapes. In the Middle Ages communities of monks settled on the edge of this swamp to collect valuable salt, but by the 17th century they had been replaced by ranchers whose primary purpose was the raising of the famous white horses and the black, longhorn bulls which thrive on the saline pastures.

The whole of the delta is part of the *Parc Naturel Régional la Camargue*, created in 1970, which covers 210,000 acres and aims to achieve a balance between traditional activities, the interests of local inhabitants, and nature conservation.

Pricing Details

Note: All prices are US dollars.

- 7 Days - \$575.00 per adult & \$275.00 per child*
- 6 Days - \$550.00 per adult & \$250.00 per child*
- 5 Days - \$525.00 per adult & \$225.00 per child*
- 4 Days - \$500.00 per adult & \$200.00 per child*
- 3 Days - \$475.00 per adult & \$175.00 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.

*Children age 16 or younger traveling with 2 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 3 - 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.
- Pick-up of your Rental Bike in Arles
- Baggage Transfer
- 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 Arles 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](#).