

Week in Provence



Provence is the perfect place for a relaxing holiday. Starting the week with beautiful quiet roads which wind their way around rocky outcrops up to ancient villages, we continue through vineyards and through the Rhône valley, famed for its wine. We move on through the Luberon Valley, also known as the 'Colorado Provençal', through lavender fields and on to the Gorges de la Nesque. The final day sees us tackling the great and iconic 'Géant de Provence' - Mont Ventoux. Superb local food and wine top off the fantastic riding and make for a most memorable week. Covering a total of 303 miles (with shorter options available on some of the days) this exciting and challenging tour provides a rewarding experience through some fantastic areas. Your bags will be transported for you each day and we will be having some fantastic lunches along with our famous 'brew stops' twice a day providing you with everything you need to keep you going - you certainly won't go hungry!

Highlights

- Historic cities of Arles and Avignon.
- Visit the incredible Roman aqueduct at the Pont Du Gard - a UNESCO world heritage site
- Cycle through the vineyards of the Rhône - maybe stopping to sample some of the local vin
- See some fantastic ancient hilltop towns
- The stunning Luberon valley
- Unforgettable Gorges de la Nesque, Rhône vineyards and lavender fields

What's included?

7 nights' accommodation, 7 breakfasts, 6 lunches

Refreshment stops with our famous red brew vans

Mechanical support including spare bikes and equipment

GPS files and route notes

Full logistical planning and support from the first to the last night including luggage transfers

2 back up vans and a guide cycling at the back of the group

Pick up from airport / station on arrival day (Saturday) and transfer to Marseilles airport at the end of the tour.

Peak Tours cycle shirt and certificate

Lots of fun!



Itinerary

Saturday: Non-riding day

Arrive at Marseille and transfer to Arles. Our guides will set off from our base in Glossop on Thursday with all the bikes and stop a couple of times en route to Dover to pick up bikes. A coach will depart from Marseille airport at 17:30 to arrive in Arles for 18:30 to allow time to settle in before the first evening meal.

Founded by the ancient Greeks, Arles also has a wealth of Roman architecture and the well preserved amphitheatre in the centre of town is a particular highlight. Arles is also well known as a place where Van Gogh resided and the intense light and colours of the region inspired many of his landscape paintings.

Sunday: Arles to Avignon

Distance: 43 or 69 miles / 70 or 111 km
Elevation: 1306 or 1922 ft / 398 or 585 m

A stunning ride takes us northwards away from Arles and into the Alpilles National Park wedged between the Camargue and the Luberon. This rugged countryside of limestone rocks, vineyards and olive groves is perfect cycling country and we visit a number of attractive villages such as Le Beaux-de-Provence and St Remy de Provence.

After lunch you could choose to cycle directly to Avignon, spending the rest of the afternoon exploring the city, which has a wealth of magnificent art and architecture and is also home to the worlds largest Gothic palace. Alternatively you can opt for the longer route which takes in one of France's most famous landmarks at the Roman aqueduct of the Pont du Gard, before heading to Avignon.

Monday: Avignon Loop - The Rhone, Vaucluse and Chateauneuf-du-Pape

Distance: 38 or 75 miles / 61 or 121 km
Elevation: 650 or 2880 ft / 198 or 853 m

Covering the area north and east of Avignon we cycle along side the mighty Rhone and

through numerous vineyards and charming little hamlets and villages of the Cotes du Rhone. We will pass through the town of Chateauneuf-du-Pape where you may wish to sample a glass of the local vino before returning to Avignon. If you want to take it easy then you can do a shorter ride to Chateauneuf-du-Pape and back or if you didn't ride to the Pont du Gard then you may wish to do that instead.

Tuesday: Avignon to Apt

Distance: 58 miles / 94 km
Elevation: 3985 ft / 1187 m

Leaving Avignon behind you venture deeper into Provence across the Plateau de Vaucluse and into the Luberon. After an easy start the route soon gives way to hillier countryside with a number of breathtaking views. Further along the scenery becomes more and more spectacular as you pass through stunning limestone gorges dotted with pretty villages built into the rock. You will pass by some of France's most picturesque hill villages such as Gordes and Roussillon before arriving at the sleepy little town of Apt.

Wednesday: Apt Loop-The Luberon Valley

Distance: 20 or 60 miles / 32 or 96 km
Elevation: 1824 or 4430 ft / 556 or 1350 m

The Luberon is named after the mountains that dominate the area and many unusual plant and animal species can be found here such as Egyptian vultures, eagle owls and Bonelli's eagles which you may spot if you are lucky. The area is also known as the place where the author Peter Mayle wrote many books chronicling his life as an English expatriate including 'A Year in Provence'. Another fabulous ride takes in many of the regions best routes along quiet narrow country lanes visiting villages such as Bonnieux and Lourmarin. Travelling by bike has to be the best way to explore this simply stunning region. For those that don't fancy cycling 60 miles there's an option for a shorter route.

"Beautiful scenic routes especially the latter half of the week. Picnic lunches were fabulous and lovely venues were much appreciated. The group size gave you the opportunity to cycle with lots of different people throughout the week. Trip was a fantastic experience and was just the right level for us."

Angela

Itinerary

Thursday: Apt to Sault via Gorges de la Nesque

Distance: 51 miles / 82 km
Elevation: 5770 ft / 1758 m

The day begins with some lovely roads through scenic limestone gorge and then through a mixture of grassland and low woodland and pastureland and vineyards. Following this, the route takes us through the Gorge de Nesque, arguably the most spectacular gorge in Provence, after the Gorge du Verdon. An incredibly scenic road climbs gradually through this majestic gorge revealing ever more stunning views.

Due to the many short but low tunnels along the road that clings to the cliff side the route is gloriously free of traffic. After a rewarding day in the saddle you'll be able to put your feet up in the town of Sault where you'll be able to look out to Mont Ventoux - the Giant of Provence!

Friday: The ascent of Mont Ventoux

Up and down the same way:
Distance: 32 miles / 52 km

Elevation: 4330 ft / 1319 m

Up Ventoux, descending to Bedoin and cycling along the valley back to Sault

Distance: 48 miles / 77 km
Elevation: 7039 ft / 2145 m

We finish this tour with the ascent of Mont Ventoux. We will tackle the hill from the 'easiest' side from Sault, however this is still a difficult climb whichever way you do it. For those who want to relax after the ride then you can come back down the long sweeping road back into Sault or you may wish to drop down to Bedoin to complete a loop around. In the evening we will have our final celebratory group meal together (conga and group hug optional).

Saturday: Departure Day

A coach will pick you up at 8.00 to arrive at Marseille airport for 10.00, for your trains or flights home. Meanwhile your bikes will start their journey back home in our back up van and will stop of a couple of times en-route to Derbyshire.



"Loved it all, so nice to have routes planned, and I can tell lots of thought goes into them. Nice for some days to have choice (although not being used to this, I did the long one every day!) They took us on quiet roads, through lovely villages and to sightseeing points, a great way to see a place."

Hannah

Tour Logistics

The start of the tour

The tour starts in Arles on the first Saturday. There are two main options for arriving to Arles:

Train: Arles is accessible by train, taking around 8 hrs 15 mins (including 3 changes) from London St Pancras. Paris to Arles direct on the train takes just over 4 hrs.

Alternatively, you could get the train to Marseille Airport, which takes between 7-8hrs, usually with 3 changes (including one in Marseille). Paris to Marseille direct on the train takes around 3hrs 20 minutes. Some customers choose to arrive in Marseille a day before the tour starts and have a day to explore, before taking the train directly to Arles (50-60 minutes). This can be a great way to extend your holiday at either end to combine tourism with your cycling.

Plane: There are direct flights to Marseille from various different UK airports. However, from some airports you will need to fly via other hubs such as Amsterdam.

Whether you arrive at Marseille Airport by train or by plane, we will have a guide to meet you and a coach booked for 17:30, Marseille to Arles which takes around 1hr by road. If you are arriving earlier then you can leave your bags with our guides if you want to have a look around Marseille (you would need to get from the airport to the city) before the coach arrives at 17:30. If you arrive after 17:30 then you will need to arrange your own transport from the airport to your accommodation in Arles. There is a taxi rank immediately outside the airport should you need to use this option.

We have a group meal on Saturday night and then the cycling starts on Sunday. We will take your bikes over for you so that you don't have to take them on the train or plane. You can either drop them off with us in Glossop, Derbyshire beforehand or meet us on the Thursday before the tour starts as we drive down to Dover. Alternatively you can post your bike to us and we will take it over for you.

The end of the tour

The final day's riding is on Friday and a coach will arrive on Saturday morning at 8.00 to take you back to Marseille airport for approx 10.00 for your trains or flight home. One of the guides will drive a van with all of your bikes in back to England and you can either meet them on Sunday as they are driving north, pick up your bike from us in Glossop at some point (no charge) or alternatively we can box your bike and post it back to you - The price for this courier service is available on request.

Support

Usually each tour has 3 guides:

- One driving the 'brew van' - each day will usually have a morning and afternoon 'brew stop,' with a table full of snacks and drinks. You will also bring a small bag/rucksack to the morning brief and leave this in the 'brew van' which can be accessed throughout the day.
- One driving the 'luggage / lunch van' - transporting your luggage from hotel to hotel, as well as setting up your lunches
- One riding at the back of the group - you will have detailed route notes so that you can go slower or faster than the leader if you prefer or you can cycle with the tour guide at the back so that you don't have to navigate at all
- Mechanical support: we carry a range of spare parts so that repairs can be made en route and we also have spare bikes available in the event that your bike has a serious breakdown. If we can't fix your bike then we will get it to the nearest bike shop
- Each guide will be contactable by phone during the day so if you have any issues you can get straight in touch with them
- For smaller groups you might only have one guide that cycles with the group and one back up driver or for groups of 12 or less just one tour leader will provide back-up for you.

What's Included?

- 7 nights' accommodation, 7 breakfasts, 6 lunches
- Refreshments from the brew van
- Mechanical support including spare bikes should these be needed
- GPS files and route notes
- Full logistical planning and support from the first to the last night including luggage transfers
- 2 back up vans and a guide cycling at the back of the group
- Pick up from airport / station on arrival day (Saturday) and transfer to the airport at the end of the tour
- A Peak Tours cycle shirt and certificate
- Luggage transfer each day
- Lots of fun!

Food

Breakfast

Breakfast is included in the cost of the tour, and will vary slightly between the various hotels and B&Bs that we use, but you can usually expect have a choice of some cooked breakfast options, as well as toast, cereals, fruit juices, tea, coffee etc.

Lunch

Lunches will be provided each day and will generally be a picnic or a local restaurant.

Evening meals

Evening meals can be bought at your accommodation or in a nearby restaurant. On the first and final evenings of the tour we will have a group meal at the hotel.

Dietary requirements

Please let us know of any dietary requirements you have and we will ensure that all lunch stops and places we eat evening meals are informed.

There will also be snacks on the 'brew van' to suit any and all dietary needs!

Accommodation

You have a choice sharing a double or a twin room. If you would like your own space then you can choose the single room option, or sole occupancy of a double. Most of the rooms are en suite however there maybe a few nights where your room isn't en suite (Sole occupancy of a double room or double is guaranteed en suite). On the Provence tour Accommodation is in clean and comfortable 3 star hotels or top end 2 star hotels when 3 star aren't available (France has an unusual rating system).

What's not included?

- Evening meals / dinner
- Drinks at lunchtime
- Insurance
- Cycle hire (available for a fee)
- Garmin hire (available for a fee)
- Transport to the start and from at the end of the tour for you and your bike (available for a fee)

Kit list

Clothing for all weathers is recommended so waterproofs are essential.

A full recommended kit list is provided and we are always happy to answer any questions that you may have. You can see details of a kit list [here](#).

Luggage is restricted to a maximum of 18kg per person—we have to look after our guides and their backs as they will be carrying your luggage in and out of the hotels!

Insurance

We strongly recommend that you take out adequate insurance for your tour which, as an absolute minimum should cover accident & medical expenses if you are travelling outside the UK, cover for your bike and belongings and cancellation cover in the event that you have to cancel your tour for unforeseen circumstances.

You should be aware that if you have an accident or fall ill while on the tour you will lose the money paid for the trip. A travel insurance policy would allow you to reclaim most of the money as well as providing insurance in case you lose your bags or if your bike is stolen, broken etc.

Your policy should also cover cancellation costs if you cancel the tour within 8 weeks of departure. If this happens we will try to fill your space and return your funds to you but if we are unable to fill your place you will lose the funds paid for the tour.

We have partnered with Yellow Jersey who provide Travel and Cycle insurance for UK residents. You can find further details [here](#).

Am I fit enough?

Difficulty

This week-long tour, with 6 days of cycling, with some optional shorter or rest days, has been designed to take in many of Provence's highlights whilst also allowing time for relaxation and exploration if desired.

This tour is classed as a grade 5 tour. See details of difficulty rating [here](#).

You will be expected to be able to complete an average of 40-50 miles / 64-80 km per day depending on which length of routes you ride.

Cycling the above distances on consecutive days will not be too challenging for people on this tour.

How fast do I need to be?

Generally, most cyclists completing this tour will be capable of cycling at 9 miles / 14 kmph over the whole day, keeping in mind that some days are hillier than others, and you will be stopping for breaks and lunches.

Most days start at 8:30 and we ask that all riders are finished by 18:00 at the latest, to allow you time to relax and explore the places that you stay in the evenings.

Are there any hills on the tour?

Despite being one of our easier tours, there are still some significant hills along the route. There are a few days with options for shorter or longer rides so there should be something to suit everyone.

Training

The fitter you are and the more training that you do beforehand will add to the enjoyment of your tour and improve your chances of succeeding the challenge.

If you need any advice about fitness please contact us and we will be happy to discuss any questions and concerns that you may have.

We have a training document which has a suggested training programme, which you can access [here](#).

Bikes

The Provence tour can be completed by people on all types of bikes: it is important you ride on a bike on which you are most comfortable. Most people choose to ride on road or touring bikes for this tour.

You can transport your bike in the following ways:

- bringing your own - most people using this option will arrive by train.
- we can transport your bike for you if you can get your bike to us in Glossop in the Peak District

Please ensure that your bike is fully serviced and in good working order before the start of the trip. It is advisable to have your bike serviced a few weeks before the start of the tour. This will allow time to 'bed in' before you start your ride.

Alternatively you can hire a bike from us, please see our website for more information.

