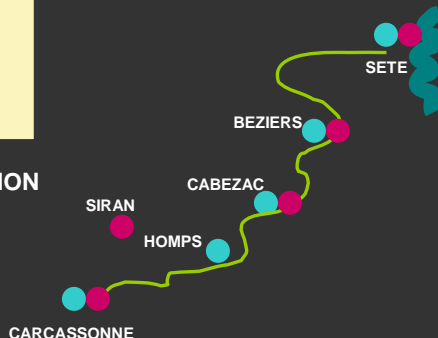




MAP OF FRANCE

CANAL DU MIDI

THE CORBIÈRES REGION



CANAL DU MIDI - 6 NIGHTS / 7 DAYS

HOTEL SELECTION

Day 1 : Arrival in Carcassonne

It is hard to believe that Carcassonne is real, when you first approach it from afar. The ancient city, (a settlement here from as far back as 3500 BC), sits majestically high, is ringed completely by its castle-like ramparts. The city and its fortifications was rated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997. You'll soak up the view from your hotel, located by the medieval walls. You will have time to relax and read your package of trip information by the swimming pool, before wandering in to explore the cobblestoned streets.

Day 2 : Carcassonne to Siran 45 km

You have a relaxing, easy ride today, as it leaves Carcassonne and follows the roads and bike paths along the Canal (flat). Your route takes you through a mix of villages with odd names, stemming from the regional language, which for centuries was not French, but the local "Occitan": Marsellette, Puichéric (with its 13th century church and annual pig festival!) and La Redorte. You pass a first feat of canal engineering as well, the bridge of Orbiel, taking the canal over the Orbiel River! At the end of the day leave the canal bike path to ride through the tiny roads and villages of the picturesque Minervois vineyards – perhaps stop for a wine tasting, as your ride is almost finished! Your goal is the beautiful Chateau de Siran, in the heart of the village of the same name. Dinner at your hotel

Day 3 : Siran to Cabezac 39 km

Your ride today starts in the middle of a beautiful terrain of vineyards and small villages, before returning to the Canal bike path in Homps, an ancient commercial port, where the regional barrels of wine were loaded into boats for the journey to Bordeaux. The small village today is charming and quite tranquil, making it hard to imagine its busy past. You'll continue along the Canal bike path all the way to Le Somail, with its pretty bridges, at which point you leave the canal again to pedal through the olive groves, vineyards, and flowered fields of the scenic surrounding countryside. You are headed for the hamlet of Cabezac, sitting on the Cesse River, with its natural still pools. By the hotel, using the river for power, is a working olive mill, where you can stop for a taste of the production of the "eternal trees". Night in Cabezac itself, with dinner at the hotel's excellent restaurant. Dinner included tonight.

Day 4 : Cabezac to Villeneuve-les-Beziers 55 km

Today's ride is your longest, but it is easygoing cycling all the way, along the Canal du Midi to the villages of Colombiers, and Capeatang. Be sure to stop and see the "Tunnel de Malpas" which allowed barges to continue their route passing along its 165 metres of tunneled underground vaulting. No one believed that the canal's engineer, Pierre-Paul Riquet, could complete this feat, and in fact the King even ordered that he stop, and deviate the canal's route. He feigned obedience, but completed the tunnel in secrecy, unveiling it only after his project was done. Enjoy two other feats of canal engineering: the Fonserannes locks, and the Orb Aqueduct (in effect a bridge, carrying the waters - and traffic - of the Canal du Midi over the Orb River!). Near the end of the day, you pass by Beziers. Detours in to the town if you like for a visit – we provide a small walking tour, or return tomorrow if you prefer; your charming hotel is in Villeneuve-les-Beziers, just 5 km further along the Canal.

Day 5 : Loop ride to the beach in Valras 30 km

Your ride today is pretty, and easy, not following the bike path, but tiny un-trafficked roads, through vineyards and fields. You are heading towards the Mediterranean Coast, passing the lively town of Serignan, and then on to Valras. This former fishing village at the mouth of the River Orb has retained its old charms with its seafront reminiscent of Nice, its beautiful turn of the century villas, and its Casino. The fishermen of the village sell their fresh wares in the traditional covered market every morning. There are 4 km of pristine beach, and a lively marina with over 220 boats moored up the edges of the Orb River. Visit the unusual Palais de la Maquette, a museum in a previous restaurant, with displays of LEGO and K'nex models, some of which have made it into the Guinness Book of World Records! The ride is short so you can enjoy the beach, or take the time to return to Beziers for some explorations at the end of the day.

Day 6 : Villeneuve-les-Beziers to Sete 44 km

Before leaving town, be sure to visit the old town centre. You can buy fruit, bread, and cheese at the market for your picnic. You will ride right to the end of the Canal de Midi today, saying good-bye to it, as it empties in to the sea at Agde. From there, enjoy the luxury of the beautiful new bike path that follows the sandy beach for 12 kilometres before arriving in the lively port town of Sete itself. Be sure to pack your bathing suit today as you will want to jump into the waves! Final night and dinner in Sete.

Day 7 : Departure - Bon Voyage!

After a final breakfast, the trip is over. You can catch the train from the Sete for your further travels.

CLASSIC TOUR

** Hotel le Montmorency in Carcassonne

<http://www.lemontmorency.com>

** Auberge de l'Arbousier in Homps

<http://www.auberge-canaldumidi.com>

*** Bastide de Cabezac in Cabezac

<http://www.la-bastide-cabezac.com>

** Hotel des Poètes in Béziers

<http://hoteldespoetes.net>

*** Grand Hotel standard room in Sete

<http://www.legrandhotelsete.com>

CLASSIC + TOUR

*** Hotel du Château in Carcassonne

<http://www.hotelduchateau.net>

*** Château de Siran in Siran

<http://www.chateau-de-siran.com>

*** Bastide de Cabezac in Cabezac

<http://www.la-bastide-cabezac.com>

*** B&B la Chamberte in Villeneuve les Beziers

<http://www.lachamberte.com>

*** Grand Hotel superior room in Sete

<http://www.legrandhotelsete.com>

Exact hotels depend on availability at time of booking