



EXPLORE FRANCE AT YOUR OWN PACE

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, and is ringed completely by its castle-like ramparts. The city and its fortifications were rated as 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. Dinner in the old city.

Day 2: Carcassonne to Siran 49 km / 30 Miles

After your bike fitting this morning, you have a relaxing, easy ride, as it leaves Carcassonne and follows the roads and bike paths along the Canal (flat, and in good condition). 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": Marseillette, 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, passing the canal right 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.

Day 3: On to Narbonne 48 km / 30 Miles

Pedal through the beautiful terrain of Corbieres 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 stone-arch bridges, at which point you leave the canal once again, this time heading south through the olive groves, vineyards, and flowered fields to Narbonne. Narbonne used to be a port town, until centuries of silt gradually built up – it is now 10 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. But it reminds us of its previous importance, with its canals, 13th century Cathedral, and Archbishops Palace, Roman *Horreum*, and, today, a plethora of restaurants and lively squares

Day 4: Options around Narbonne

You may wake up, finish a flaky buttery croissant, and decide to hang out in Narbonne itself today. There is lots to see, and we provide a small self-guided walking tour to help in your explorations. But there are two riding options as well today: one, very easy-going, eats up those silted-up 10 miles to the sea on a great bike path, bringing you to the fantastic beaches of Le Gruissan or Port la Nouvelle; a refreshing contrast with these beaches and those of the Côte d'Azur is the lack of commercialisation: there's no paying to get



onto the beach, no shelling out again for parasols and sunbeds. Just lovely golden sand and the lapping waves of the Mediterranean. Alternately, a slightly more rolling loop ride brings you to the 1000-year old Fontefroide Abbey, where you can visit, and enjoy some of their wines with your lunch.

Day 5: Narbonne to Beziers 48 km / 30 Miles

Leaving Narbonne this morning you follow the bike path of the Canal de la Robine, heading northwards to a bridge crossing the Aude River in Cuxac. You are aiming back to your old friend the Canal du Midi, which you'll re-join in the small port and winemaking village of Capestang. As you approach Beziers, be sure to stop and admire the "Tunnel de Malpas" which allowed barges to continue their route passing along its 165 metres of tunnelled underground vaulting. No one believed that the canal's creator, Pierre-Paul Riquet, could succeed with this engineering challenge: the King even ordered that he stop this part of the project and deviate the canal's route. He feigned obedience, but completed the tunnel in secrecy, unveiling it only after it was done. Enjoy two other feats of canal engineering as you are almost in Beziers: the Fonserranes locks, and the Orb Aqueduct (in effect a bridge, carrying the waters - and traffic - of the Canal du Midi over the Orb River). Time to explore the old town centre...

Day 6: Departure from Beziers

After a final breakfast, you can catch the train from Beziers train station for your further travels. Bon Voyage!

What's included in your Canal Du Midi package:

- 5 nights' accommodation in the comfort level of your choice: CLASSIC, CLASSIC+, or DELUXE
- All hotel taxes
- All breakfasts, 3 dinners (drinks not included with dinners)
- Orientation with our Trip Manager at the start of the trip
- Fully equipped quality touring bike (*E-bikes are available on request with a supplement)
- Detailed maps and step-by-step route notes
- Uploadable GPS file of the route to use on a free APP in your smartphone
- Regional information and advice
- Luggage transfers from hotel to hotel
- Phone call support 7 days a week

