



## EXPLORE FRANCE AT YOUR OWN PACE

### Day 1: Arrival in Blois

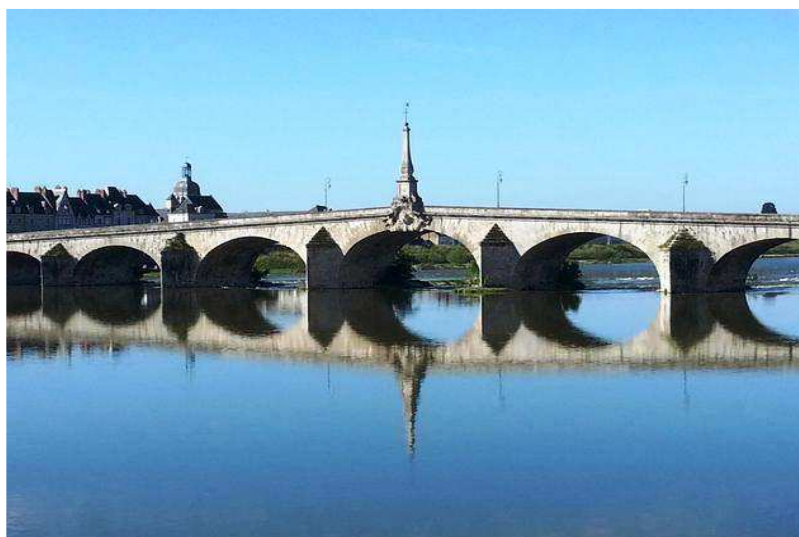
Upon your arrival in Blois, you can settle in to your hotel, in the heart of Blois. Our Trip Manager will meet you at the hotel to check your bike fitting and go over the trip package with you. You will also want to take some time to explore this small city. Spanning both sides of the Loire River, the town is a maze of twisting cobblestoned streets and stairways, interspersed with beautiful half-timbered houses and lively squares and parks. Of course, you can also visit the Royal Chateau of Blois, residence of 7 kings and 10 queens of France, and the first historical residence to be restored acting as a model for the restoration of many of the other chateaux. Today it is also the Art Museum of the city, filled with more than 35,000 works of art. Dinner is included this evening at one of our favourite local restaurants. (the DELUXE itinerary stays in nearby Chambord and you will visit the Chateau de Cheverny and its hunting dogs instead of Blois on your first ride; the transfer to the hotel from the train station in Blois is included).

### Day 2: Loop Ride to the Chateau de Chambord 49 km / 31 miles

Your route takes you along a great and easygoing bike path following the Loire River, eastwards to the bridge at Muides. From there, curve away from the banks of the Loire, southwards through pretty villages like Ste Dye. From there, it is not too far to reach the Chateau de Chambord by the end of the morning. For one of your first chateau visit in the region, it is one of the most impressive. A monumental Royal hunting residence, built by King Francois I in the heart of a huge enclosed forest, the Chateau of Chambord is a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture. The size of it alone is astonishing, along with the beautiful sculpted details throughout the building. After exploring Chambord, your route turns back towards Blois, through lovely quiet countryside and several villages, before returning to the Loire River. We leave you to explore the restaurants of Blois for your dinner this evening.

### Day 3: Blois to Amboise via the Chateau Chaumont 45 km / 28 miles

You leave Blois today, riding out from the town southwards through the tranquil small roads of the Rully Forest, and small villages, south of the Loire River. Decide if you want to detour to Cellettes in the morning to visit the Chateau de Beauregard with its famous Gallery of Portraits, over 26m long. Onwards along the Beuvron River valley to rejoin the Loire in pretty Candes, and then follow a great bike path to Chaumont. The Chateau de Chaumont,





acquired by the powerful Catherine de Medici in 1560, is today renowned for its English-style Garden Festival where contemporary garden designers display their work. Your route continues, meandering through small villages and pretty vineyards all the way to Amboise, your destination for the day. Famous not only for its chateau, which dominates the town, but also for the beautiful "Clos de Lucé" manor house which was Leonardo Da Vinci's residence whilst he was in the service of the French King. You can visit it, and admire the models of his inventions, as well as see the chapel at the chateau where he is buried... We include your dinner this evening in a restaurant with great ambiance in the medieval centre.

**Day 4: Loop Ride to the Chateau de Chenonceau** 46 km / 29 miles

Today's route takes you southward, away from the Loire River along quiet, un-trafficked roads through forests and fields, and eventually descending to another river, the Cher, and the Château de Chenonceau, a wall of elegance spanning it. Renaissance Chenonceau is one of the most popular chateaux in France. It was completed in the 16th century, when it was given as a gift by King Henry II to his beloved mistress, Diane de Poitiers. Diane has the stunning arched corridor across the river constructed and oversees the planting of extensive gardens. She was the unquestioned mistress of the castle, but after King Henry II died in 1559, his strong-willed and jealous widow and regent Catherine de Medici forced Diane to exchange it for the Château Chaumont, and triumphantly makes Chenonceau her own residence. After visiting the tranquil scene of such feminine battling, and finding some lunch in the neighbouring village, your route takes you back on a great bike path next to the Cher River, and then through pretty countryside, forest, and villages back to Amboise.



**Day 5: Amboise to Tours** 30 km / 19 miles

Your ride today is not very long, allowing you time in Tours once you get there. The route partially follows tiny un-trafficked roads, and partly a dedicated bike path, above and parallel to the Loire River all the way. You pass through small villages and pretty vineyards before spotting the steeple of Tours Cathedral in the distance. Once you arrive and settle in to your hotel, you can take some time to explore. During the Middle Ages, Tours consisted of two juxtaposed and competing centres: The "City" in the east, successor of the late Roman 'castrum', was composed of religious establishment (the cathedral and palace of the archbishops) and of the castle of Tours, seat of the authority of the Counts and of the King of France. In the west, the "New City" structured around the Abbey of Saint Martin was freed from the control of the City during the

10th century. This space became the economic centre of Tours. The two centres were linked during the 14th century, but you still sense the two halves today. We provide a self-guided walking tour to explore the Medieval centre (Vieux Tours), with the half-timbered houses, the many parks, and Place Plumereau, a lively square with many restaurants and pubs.





**Day 6: Tours to Azay-le-Rideau** 35 km / 22 miles  
After your breakfast, the first part of today's ride abandons the Loire River, to follow on a bike path the smaller winding Cher River. The bike path that you are on leaves Tours away from any traffic, and meanders through easygoing countryside and through small hamlets, on the outskirts of Tours, bringing you eventually through the small town of Savonnieres, and on to Villandry, where we highly recommend you make a stop. The castle in Villandry can be visited, but it is the beautiful Renaissance gardens that are of worldwide renown. You can

wander through the vegetable gardens, flower gardens, water garden, and symbolic garden, all beautifully presented in formal patterns, outlined with low box hedges. The route then continues southwards, through forest and pretty fields of wheat and flowers, descending eventually to yet another River, the Indre, and the town of Azay le Rideau. You will want to take some time to explore the town and visit the castle - not one of the largest chateaux of the Loire in size, the 16th century castle of Azay is one of the prettiest, with the mix of Italian Renaissance style that was so popular, and the charm of a French castle on the water, as it sits on the banks of the Indre River.

### **Day 7: Azay le Rideau to Chinon** 35 or 48 km / 22 or 30 Miles

From Azay you leave the Indre River and ride northwards back to the Loire on easygoing terrain. Once there, you then follow a wonderful bike route next to the River westwards, with the option to detour over the elegant bridge into Langeais, to see the impressive fortified castle there. Continuing on, you soon reach the Château d'Ussé, the enchanting castle that inspired the Sleeping Beauty castle of Disney fame. Your destination is medieval Chinon, a lovely and lively town spanning the banks of the river, but your approach brings you via the renowned vineyards that have made the town's reputation, for the delicious, crisp red wines, with their particular spiced-fruit flavours. Chinon is firmly anchored in the region's history; it was here that Joan of Arc arrived to convince the Dauphin King of her destiny to win back lost territories from the English. Imagine her plea to the unbelieving court as you wander the ruins of the castle today. You can spend some time wandering town, including Rue Voltaire with its many medieval houses, its boutiques and cafés, before your dinner tonight.

### **Day 8: Chinon to Saumur via Fontevraud** 47 km / 29 Miles

Your final ride is a lovely route through the countryside of the Loire Valley, where famous medieval French author François Rabelais spent his youth. In the small town of Fontevraud, you should take some time to visit the abbey there. Founded in 1099, the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud is one of the biggest monastic complexes of western Christendom. Eleanor of Aquitaine is buried in a painted stone coffin within the walls of the abbey, with her husband, Henry II, and her son, the famous Richard the Lionheart. You pass several other sites as you approach Saumur, including troglodyte communities, mushroom caves, and an artisanal 'hammered apple' maker, as well as the towns of Candes-St-Martin and Montsoreau which are classed as two of France's "Prettiest Villages". The historic centre of Saumur makes for great explorations; many of the monuments are built in the lovely soft local stone known as tuffeau. The Château de Saumur stands high overlooking the town. Saumur is home to the "Cadre Noir", the National School of Horsemanship, known for its annual horse shows, as well as the Armoured and Cavalry Training School.

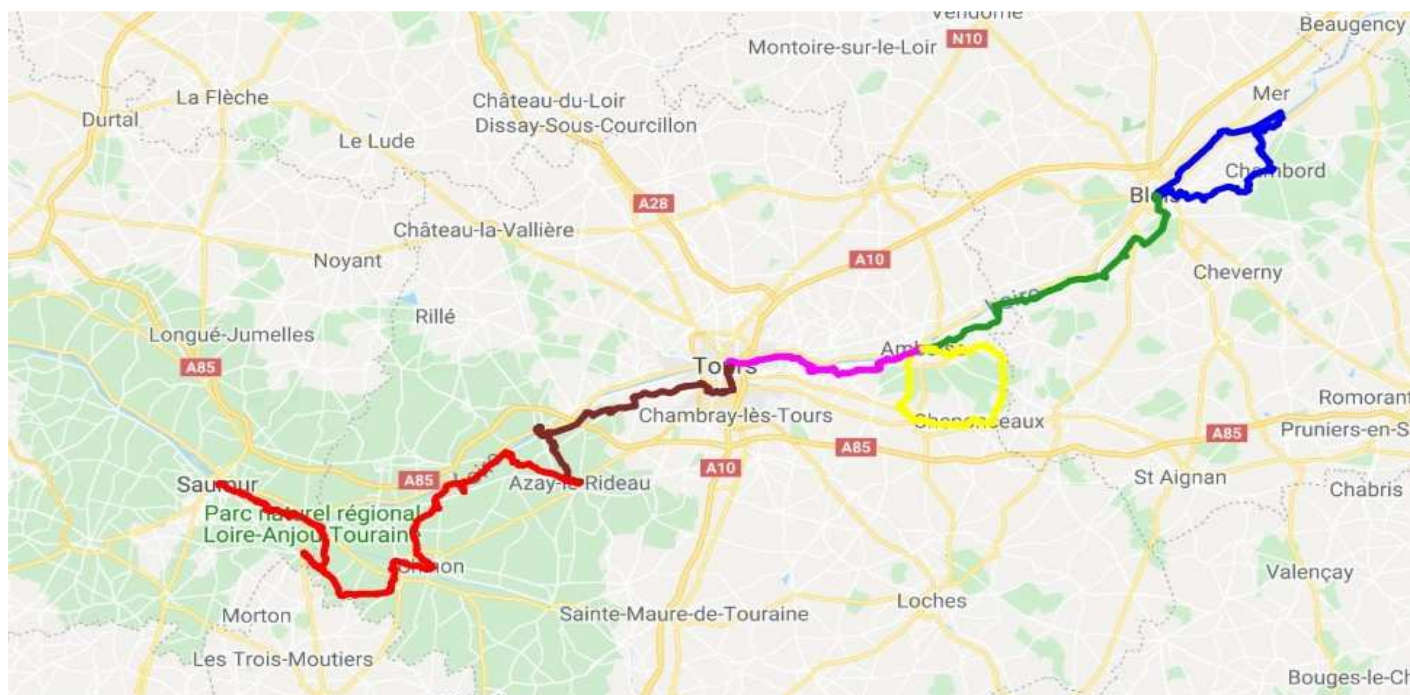




There is an interesting and unique tank museum, with more than 850 armored vehicles, wheeled or tracked.

### Day 9: Departure – Bon Voyage!

After a final breakfast, connections are easy from the Saumur train station for your further travels.



### What's included in your Loire Valley Biking Tour

- 8 nights' accommodation of the comfort level of your choice: CLASSIC, CLASSIC + or DELUXE
- Hotel taxes
- All breakfasts, 4 dinners (drinks not included with dinners)
- Fully equipped quality touring bike (E-bikes and Road bikes are available on request with a supplement)
- Orientation with our Trip Manager
- Detailed maps and step-by-step route instructions
- Regional information and advice
- Uploadable GPS file of the route to use on a free APP in your smartphone  
\* Can be used without international internet plan (offline)
- Luggage transfers from hotel to hotel
- Phone call support 7 days a week

