



EXPLORE FRANCE AT YOUR OWN PACE

Day 1: Arrival in Toulouse

Upon your arrival in Toulouse, settle in to your hotel and freshen up, and then take some time to explore this lovely city. The capital of both the French department, and the larger Midi-Pyrenees Region, Toulouse is also the heart of Europe's aerospace industry, home of both France's Airbus Company and also a great attraction park, the Cité de l'Espace. Its world renowned university is one of the oldest in Europe (founded in 1229), and it was already the capital of the Visigoth Kingdom in the 5th century! A city with unique architecture made of pinkish terracotta bricks, earning it the nickname la Ville Rose ("the Pink City"), Toulouse counts two UNESCO World Heritage sites, the Canal Du Midi, and the Basilica of St. Sernin, which lies on the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route.

Day 2: Toulouse to Castelnaudary 66 Km / 41 Miles

You have a long, but easygoing ride today, as it is very flat, and almost completely on lovely, paved bike path. Pass your first locks and canal projects on route to the small town of Castelnaudary, built on the foundations of the original Roman town. It is hard to imagine the centuries of warfare incurred here, as you wander the lovely small streets, eventually loved by Catherine de Medicis, when, as King Henri II's wife, she becomes Countess of the region. The port here is developed as one of the main stops for barges on the Canal du Midi's route, with a large (7 hectare) water basin. Castelnaudary is also the capital of one of the region's great specialties, the rich stew of beans, duck, and pork called cassoulet! (*note the DELUXE itinerary hotel is outside of Castelnaudary, in the hamlet of La Pomarede).

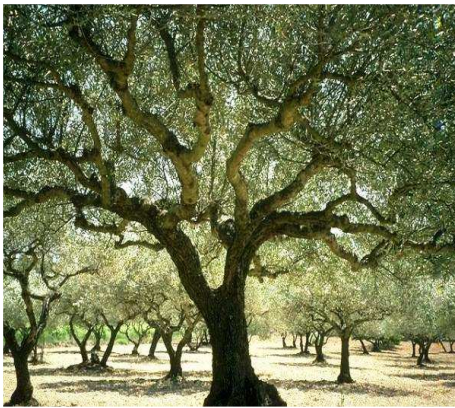
Day 3: Castelnaudary to Carcassonne 44 Km / 27 Miles

Continue parallel to the Canal du Midi, sometimes on the tow path, often on tiny roads through small villages, all the way to Carcassonne. It is hard to believe that this town is real, when you first approach it from afar. The ancient city, or Cité, (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 a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997. You'll soak up the view from your hotel, located right by the medieval walls, before wandering in to explore the cobblestoned streets and ramparts, or to sit in a café and watch the world go by before your dinner.





CANAL DU MIDI BIKING

**Day 4: Carcassonne to Siran 49 Km / 30 Miles**

You have a relaxing, easy ride today, 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 another feat of canal engineering as well, the bridge of Orbiel, carrying the canal right over the Orbiel River! You also enter the wine region of the Canal du Midi today as you leave the canal to head into the picturesque Minervois vineyards – perhaps stop for a wine tasting, near the end of the day, as your ride is almost finished... Your beautiful hotel, the Chateau Siran is in a tiny village in the heart of the vineyards. (*note the CLASSIC itinerary hotel is in the small village of Conilhac-Corbieres).

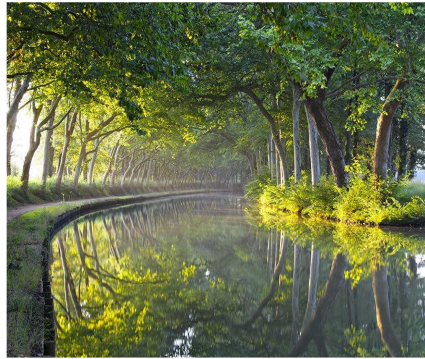
Day 5: On to Narbonne 48 km / 30 Miles

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 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 6: 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 final 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 on to 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 7: 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, 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 Fonserrannes 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 8: Beziers to Sete 59 km / 37 Miles

You ride right to the end of the Canal de Midi today, calling out "*adieu*" as it empties in to the sea at Agde, originally a Greek port town. Stop to admire the beautiful Renaissance buildings of this town, as well as the Saint Stephen's cathedral. Along the way, cross over the ingenious Libron locks system over the canal, and ride through the town of Vias, with its market square and Saint John the Baptist church, made entirely from the regional stone. From there, enjoy the luxury of the beautiful new bike path that follows the sandy Mediterranean 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 9: Departure from Sete

After breakfast, your Canal du Midi Bike tour has come to an end. You can take some time to explore Sete if you like this morning (the hotel can hold your bags for you) before getting connections out of Sete train station for your further travels. Bon Voyage!

What's included in your Canal Du Midi package:

- 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 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 your smartphone
 - * Can be used without international internet plan (offline)
- Luggage transfers from hotel to hotel
- Phone call support 7 days a week