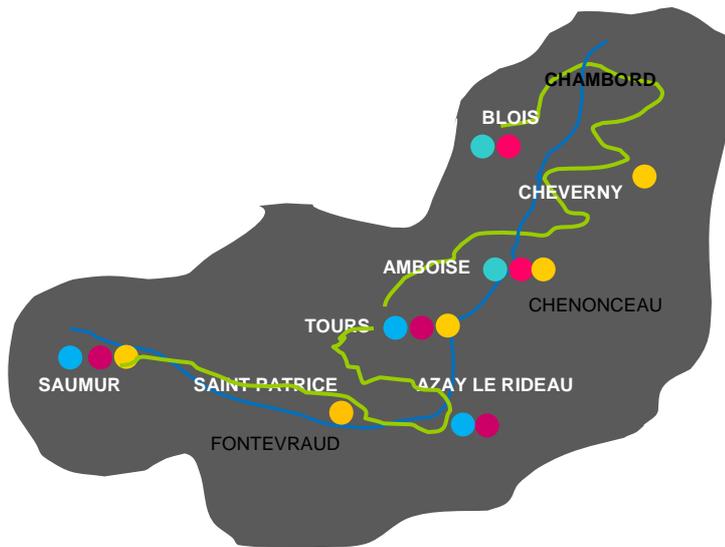




COLOURS OF FRANCE LOIRE VALLEY BIKING

8 NIGHTS / 9 DAYS
I WANT IT ALL



EXPLORE

LOIRE VALLEY 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 (in 1845) 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. (please note, the DELUXE itinerary stays in nearby Cheverny; the transfer to the hotel from the train station in Blois is included).

Day 2 : Loop ride to Chateau de Chambord 49 km

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.



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Day 3 : Blois to Amboise 45 km

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 Beaugard with its famous Gallery of Portraits, over 26m long. Onwards along the Beuvron River valley to rejoin the Loire in pretty Candés, 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 : Chateau de Chenonceau Loop ride 46 km

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 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 through the pretty countryside on quiet roads and bike paths to Amboise for a second evening.





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Day 5 : Amboise to Tours 30 km

Your ride today is not very long, allowing you some exploration 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. You pass through small villages and pretty vineyards before spotting the steeple of Tours Cathedral in the distance. During the Middle Ages, Tours consisted of two juxtaposed and competing centres: The "City" in the east, built on the Roman 'castrum', was composed of religious powers (the cathedral and palace of the archbishops) and of the castle of Tours, seat of 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 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 help your explorations of 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

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 Savonnières, 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 châteaux 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. (please note, the DELUXE itinerary stays this evening in St Patrice sur Loire; you will be able to visit Langeais Castle instead of Azay).

Day 7 : Azay le Rideau to Saumur 55 km

Today's ride is your longest, but the terrain, parallel to the banks of the river all day, is quite easygoing. From Azay you leave the Indre River and ride northwards to the Loire. Once there, follow a wonderful bike route westwards. You soon reach the Château d'Ussé, the enchanting castle that inspired the Sleeping Beauty castle of Disney fame. You will ride through Candes-St-Martin and Montsoreau, both on the official list of France's Prettiest Villages. You may decide to stop and visit the incredible mushroom



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caves on the outskirts of Montsoreau. Your destination is the Medieval town of Saumur. The historic centre of Saumur makes for great explorations, with many of the monuments are built in the lovely soft local stone known as tufa. We provide a walking tour to help your explorations. Saumur is home to the “Cadre Noir”, the National School of Horsemanship, known for its annual horse shows, as well as the Armoured Branch and Cavalry Training School, for armored forces (tanks). There is an interesting and unique tank museum, with more than 850 armored vehicles. We include dinner this evening, at one of our favourite restaurants.

Day 8 : Loop ride to the Abbey of Fontevraud 45 km

Your final ride is a lovely loop, heading our across the peaceful countryside where famous medieval French author François Rabelais spent his youth. You arrive in the small town of Fontevraud, where 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 who retired and died here is buried within the walls of the abbey, with her husband, Henry II, and her son, the famous Richard the Lion heart. Their painted stone coffins lie in the center of the Abbey Church. The abbey ceased to be used for its original purpose with the arrival of the revolution, and became a prison until the 1960's, when its restoration took place. Continue onwards; your ride bringing you back to Saumur passes through the vineyards just above the Loire River, offering beautiful countryside and views.

Day 9 : Departure - Bon Voyage!

After a final breakfast, connection are easy from Saumur train station to your further travels.

What's Included

- 8 nights' accommodation in the comfort level of your choice CLASSIC, CLASSIC+ or DELUXE
- All Hotel taxes
- All breakfasts, 4 dinners (drinks not included with dinners)
- Bike Fitting and Orientation with our Trip Manager at the start of the trip
- Fully equipped quality hybrid bike
- Detailed maps and step-by-step route notes
- Regional information and advice
- Luggage transfers from hotel to hotel
- Emergency phone call support 7 days a week

