

## Cycling holidays in Loire valley

### B03-CO chateaus from Chambord to Saumur

*Self-guided cycling tour (12 days & 11 nights) with accommodation in 3 or 4-star hotels and 4 gourmet dinners.*

#### Itinerary



#### Day 1 – Arrival at Blois –

Discovery tour of the city- You will visit the imposing chateau that reunites around a same courtyard four buildings from different centuries, four high points of the French Architecture and houses the Beaux-Arts and Archeological museums. You will tour the Saint Louis cathedral, numerous churches and gardens that make the city more attractive. Bicycles delivery and adjustment at the hotel at 6:00 pm or in the next morning - Lodging and breakfast in a 4-star hotel alongside the Loire River.

#### Day 2 – chateau of Chambord

Loop ride of 35 km (21 miles) - You cycle along Loire river or on the hillsides covered with vines. You will cross some

picturesque villages before reaching Saint Dyé sur Loire, a former river port where passed all building materials for the erection of Chambord château. You will tour this village, its narrow lanes, its wells and remains of walls. Then you will go to Chambord, 6km away, through fields and forests. True Mecca of the French Renaissance, embodiment of the royal power of François I before Louis XIV, the Chambord castle never ceased fascinating its hosts and visitors, today as much as five centuries ago... 440 rooms, 365 fireplaces, 83 staircases! Amazing madness required by a King who wanted to affirm his power to the powerful ones of Europe! Chambord is the most palatial and the most dazzling castle of the Loire Valley. Back to Blois via the green and shady Cosson valley - Lodging and breakfast in the same 4-star hotel in Blois

#### Day 3 –Beauregard and Cheverny chateaux

44 km/22 miles ride – You leave Blois crossing the Loire River and you head to Cellettes and chateau of Beauregard through forest. The interest of this Renaissance style castle, modified though out the centuries, lies in its splendid Galerie des Illustres (Gallery of the Celebrated Ones). This gallery hosts over 300 Kings, Queens and Greats of European Courts' portraits of the era. Do not miss the Cabinet des Grelots (Bells Cabinet), quaint little work cabinet. After a nice walk in the magnificent park, you continue to cycle through countryside to discover the refined elegance of the Cheverny castle with its classical white stone façade, seigniorial mansion built in the mid 1600's. The castle, kept its furniture and decoration from the XVII century.

It is surrounded by a magnificent English style park harboring the orangery and a kennel hosting a pack of 70 dogs that only await for the sound of the horn to thrust. In the adjacent trophy room, over 2 000 antlers are exposed. You keep on this ride through fields, vineyards and forests, crossing some villages like Chitenay and Les Montils. Then you will cycle along the Beuvron, lovely river, to Candes sur Beuvron and Chaumont sur Loire - Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel sited at the bottom of Chaumont chateau.





## Day 4 - Château of Chaumont and Montrichard

28 km/17 miles ride – Start your day by visiting Chaumont chateau. Overlooking the Loire River from atop a cliff, the Castle used to be a fortress built during the X century. Demolished by Louis XI in 1465, it was then replaced by a more modern castle built by the Amboise family, who gained fame during the Italian wars. It was modified again during the XVIII century and lost its defensive look with the disappearing of the building closing the courtyard on the valley side. The castle of Chaumont is richly furnished and decorated. At the end of the XIX century, Prince Amédée of Broglie had luxurious stables installed as well as an English style landscaped park at the same time the castle

was being restored. You will cross forest and vineyard and come across the Cher riverbank and Montrichard. You will go up alleys bordered by vintage houses and reach the square donjon, the ultimate testimony of a fortress, which used to protect the bridge over the Cher River. From atop that hill, you will get a breathtaking view of the town and the valley. You may want to visit the town's beautiful churches along with some interesting fountains. You will cross over the bridge and take a last look at the magnificent view of the town before continuing on to Chenonceaux and its renowned castle, one of the most beautiful and most elegant of the Loire valley - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a charming 3-star hotel in the centre of the village*

## Day 5 –Chenonceau chateau and Amboise

18 km/11 miles ride – this day starts with the visit of Chenonceau castle. Erected on the Cher River, atop an old windmill's foundation, the chateau is a true illustration of the Renaissance era's architecture. A ladies castle according to French history since they supervised its construction embellished it and saved it from the French Revolution's damages. The castle is surrounded by a magnificent park and some beautiful French style gardens. It hosts a marvelous collection of vintage furniture from the Renaissance era, tapestries dating from the XVI and XVII centuries as well as some vintage master pieces. You leave the Cher banks to go to Amboise through forests, vineyards and some lovely small valleys. You will discover the pagoda of Chanteloup on the outskirts of Amboise. This Chinese style construction of a pure Louis XVI style was erected in 1775 and offers atop its 44 meters an imposing view of the Loire valley and the Amboise forest. It is the last testimony of the Duke of Choiseul's famous castle, destroyed in 1823 by a group of estate merchants who sold it away stone by stone! There you will enjoy old-fashioned outdoor activities or will take a romantic stroll by the 3 hectare pond. You reach Amboise and end this day with a discovery tour of the town which hosts several old houses and manors. The Town Hall Museum is housed by an ancient mansion built during late 1500's. There you may view some harmoniously displayed objects and documents, reminders of Amboise's rich past in a Renaissance setting. Virgin of the XIV century tapestries from Aubusson, King Louis Philip's furniture, testimonies from the Duke of Choiseul and few paintings from his castle - *Lodging and breakfast in a 4-star hotel in Amboise center*

## Day 6 – Amboise, Montlouis and Vouvray vineyards

30 km/18 miles ride - the day starts with the discovery of Clos Luce and Amboise chateaux. The Clos Lucé castle, beautiful white and pink stone construction was the last home of Leonardo Da Vinci. Invited to France by François I, the famous Italian artist stayed and worked there until his death. Let yourself be amazed by the genius of this visionary man while discovering the famous machines he drew and which were recreated under the patronage of IBM. Traverse this ancient town and its numerous alleys bordered by vintage houses and you will reach the Loire riverbank and its castle. Erected during the XV and XVI centuries, at the request of Charles VIII and François I, the Amboise Castle was the first regal mansion under the French Renaissance therefore hosting an exceptional furniture collection. Overlooking Amboise, the gardens offer one of the most beautiful landscapes of the Loire River. Then you will cycle through vineyards of Montlouis and Vouvray to reach Tours. Tasting is not forbidden.... *Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel in Tours center*



## Day 7 –Tours and St Côme priory

Tours is a town of art and history. This ancient Gallo-Roman capital became Saint Martin's town during the IV century when the inhabitants begged him to be their bishop. A great builder, Saint Martin covered the Touraine grounds with churches and chapels. He also required the erection of the Marmoutier monastery on the North river bank of the Loire. During the V century, a basilica was erected above Saint Martin's tomb. Today, only two towers remain: the Charlemagne Tower and the Clock Tower. During the XV and XVI centuries, Tours became the capital of the French Kingdom. It enjoyed a true blossoming of art and architecture. It is the perfect place to stroll along alleys and small parks, around the Place Plumereau bordered by beautiful wooden houses, or in the cathedral district, which has begun construction in the XIII century and was not finished before the XVI century. You may visit the cloister Psalette which is located right next to it and the castle whose tower Tour de Guise is the only remains from the XIII century. Tours possesses beautiful museum: the Beaux Arts museum located in the ancient bishop or the archeological museum of Touraine region located in the beautiful Hôtel Gouin – true masterpiece from the Renaissance era. You can leave the city to go to St Come priory, 5 km away, to admire the remains of this stop on the way to Santiago de Compostella where Ronsard poet is buried in the middle of a magnificent rose garden, a contemporary creation inspired by Medieval and Renaissance gardens - Return of cycles at 6:00 pm at the hotel - *Lodging and breakfast in the same 3-star hotel in Tours center*



## Day 8 –Villandry and Azay le Rideau chateaux

30 or 38 km ride (18 or 24 miles) - You will leave Tours by the riverbanks, first the Loire river's then the Cher's, in order to reach Villandry passing by Savonnière's quaint little village. Villandry was erected around 1536 and is the last of the big castles built on the Loire riverbanks during the Renaissance era. The magnificent gardens of the Chateau de Villandry, reminder of the spirit of the gardens of the Renaissance, were restored at the beginning of the 20th Century by Dr. J. Carvallo, the owner since 1906. Trough countryside or following the Cher and Loire river's banks you will go to Azay le Rideau. Built on an island in the middle of the Indre River, the Azay-Le-Rideau castle was erected during François I's reign by a rich financier. It is one of the dwellings combining French castle charm to the Italian palaces' grace. The monumental staircase – which concentrates most of this rich décor – is the prestige centerpiece of this architecture. Rich person tapestries and pieces of furniture of XVI, XVII and XVIII centuries decorate the apartments of the castle. To the South and West, two ponds are laid out, reflecting facades.

*Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel in Azay le Rideau*

## Day 9 – Châteaux de Langeais, d'Ussé et Chinon.

42 km/26 miles ride – You will cross orchards for several kilometers to reach the Loire River. You will cross an unusual bridge over the Loire in order to reach Langeais, one of the oldest towns in the Touraine region, which is overlooked by its imposing castle. The later was built at the request of Louis XI, on the site of an ancient fortress which was destroyed during the 'Hundred Years War' and which the square donjon is the only remains. Nowadays, the castle is home to a beautiful Renaissance style furniture collection retracing the seigniorial life of the XV century and Renaissance era. Then you will follow Loire River's banks to come across Ussé where you may visit Sleeping Beauty's castle since it is said to have inspired Charles Perrault. Located on the edge of the Chinon forest, overlooking the Loire and Indre valleys, this castle seduces with its many roofs, small steeples, dormers and fire places which detach it from its green surroundings. The opened part of the castle is home to beautiful furniture as well as Flemish tapestries. The chapel, isolated in the park, is a perfect example of Renaissance style buildings. Magnificent gardens overlook the Indre valley. You will go to Chinon through forests and vineyards.

*Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel in the centre of Chinon.*





## Day 10 – Chinon, Royal abbey of Fontevraud, Candes St Martin and Montsoreau

35 km/22 miles ride – Let the day start by a quaint visit of Chinon, an ancient medieval city that is home to numerous remains from its rich past. Located atop a hillside overlooking the Vienne River, the castle spreads over 400 meters. True illustration of the Military art of the Middle Age, it is the product of additions and modifications spreading from the X to the XV century. This historical city has held on to ancient houses and few churches, which you may discover while strolling through its alleys. Then you will leave Chinon crossing the Vienne River to reach Fontevraud and the famous abbey. It is among the vastest monastic

ensembles of the Christian world. Founded in 1101 by Robert of Arbrissel, it quickly became famous by welcoming religious communities from different horizons, which, were placed under the authority of an abbess. Each community had its own covenant. The Abbey enjoyed the patronage of great protectors such as the Duke of Anjou and his descendants the Plantagenet, kings of England. The abbey houses the remains of Henri II, Alienor of Aquitaine and their son Richard the Lion Hearted. The French Revolution terminated the order in 1792 and part of the buildings was transformed into prisons until 1963. Since then, the site has been undergoing major restructuration work. You may visit the abbey, cloisters of Saint Mary and Saint Benoit, the dining hall as well as the kitchens (magnificent building). After this discovery tour you will cycle down through vineyards to Candes Saint Martin, a quaint village at the crossing point of Vienne and Loire River. There you may see a magnificent church dating from the XII and XIII centuries, built on the spot where Saint Martin passed away. You will then continue your stroll along the riverbank to admire the Montsoreau castle, an ancient stronghold built on the Loire riverbanks and modified during the XV century.

*Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a charming 3-star hotel in Fontevraud*

## Day 11 – Cave dwelling villages, Breze chateau and Saumur

30 km/ 19 miles ride – the day starts with the discovery of typical villages wedged between Loire river and cliffs which housed some cave dwellings and numerous wine cellars. Through countryside you will bike to an out of the ordinary castle which holds many surprises: the Castle of Brézé. Surrounded by 13 meter large and 18 meter deep ditches, this fortified castle has been modified for centuries to become this elegant mansion which can be partially visited (great gallery, bedrooms, kitchens...) But this castle holds another secret: an underground fortress, dug into the freestone underneath the castle. You may travel through the mile long passage to uncover an amazing world! But the amazement and surprise do not end here! The ditch was haven to the villagers during the XVI century and homes were carved in the tender rock. You will discover a whole village with its baker, a silk farm since silk worms were raised, as well as magnificent wine presses and caves. You will then cycle to Saumur famous for its cavalry school and its wines. The Duke of Anjou ordered the building of a pleasure dwelling during the XIV century, based on a XIII century fortress. With its large windows, its Fleur de Lys ornate crenels, its main staircase with finely worked bays, the castle of Saumur is one of the rare standing example of the civil princely architecture from late Middle Age. You may stroll down the ancient district between the castle and the bridge, along quaint alleys bordered by ancient houses. Return of bikes at the hotel at 6:00 pm - Lodging and breakfast in a 4-star hotel in Saumur



## Day 12 - Saumur – end of the tour after breakfast

## Season

From beginning of April to End of October. You start the tour the day you want

## What's included

- 11 night accommodations in 3 or 4-star hotels with breakfast
- 4 gourmet dinners
- Rental of fully-equipped hybrid bike including helmet, pannier, lock, puncture repair kit, map wallet and a theft/accidental damage insurance
- transfer of luggage between hotels and guest houses
- Road book including cycling itineraries, detailed maps, information about sites to see, wineries and restaurants on route and Green Michelin tourist guide about Loire valley
- Bilingual emergency phone call support 7 days a week

*Visa fees - transportation fees to and from the cycling tour area – Travel and bike liability insurance (strongly recommended on all trips) - Transfers except those mentioned above – Drinks - Additional meals - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls,... are not included*

## Tour difficulty

No major difficulty. This tour is for everybody in good health. Rolling countryside with occasional hills or short ascents with low elevation gain (in vineyards for example) you cycle quiet country roads or sometimes gravel tracks that link chateaux and towns.

## Getting there and away

*By road:* Blois is located by A10 motorway (exit 17 – Blois)

*By train:* Direct trains from Paris-Austerlitz to Blois (about 2 hours' journey) on return you take a train from Saumur to Tours or Saint Pierre des Corps and connection to Paris Montparnasse by TGV (fast trains)

*Where park your car:* Toll guarded car park in Blois. Back from Tours to Blois by train

