

## Cycling holidays in Loire valley

# B05-ST chateaus from Tours to Saumur

*Self-guided cycling tour (7 days & 6 nights) with accommodation in 2 or 3-star hotels and 1 dinner.*

### Itinerary

#### Day 1 – Arrival at Tours

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. Bicycles delivery and adjustment at the hotel at 6:00 pm or in the next morning - *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel in Tours center*

#### Day 2 –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 2-star hotel in Azay*

#### Day 3 – Chateaux of Langeais, Ussé and 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 2-star hotel in Chinon.*



## Day 4 – Chinon and the royal abbey of Fontevraud

20 km/13 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. You will leave Chinon crossing the Vienne River. The first stop will be to visit La Devinière, a 14th century house where Rabelais was born. You will continue to cycle through countryside and forests 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) - *Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel in Fontevraud*

## Day 5 – Brézé chateau and Montreuil-Bellay

40 km/25 miles circular ride –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 reach Montreuil Bellay, quaint little town surrounded by fortifications – which is still standing for the most part – bordering the Thouet River. There you may visit the lofty fortified castle built during the XI century: 650-meter long fortifications and 13 towers demonstrate the powerful defensiveness of this site! Later on, during the Renaissance era, its owners ordered the building of the ‘new castle’, an elegant mansion combining comfort with the Italian palaces style. You will cycle back to Fontevraud in late afternoon - *Lodging and breakfast in the same hotel in Fontevraud*

## Day 6 – Candes St Martin, Montsoreau chateau and Saumur

35 km/ 22 miles ride – 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 you stroll along the riverbank to admire the Montsoreau castle, an ancient stronghold built on the Loire riverbanks and modified during the XV century. You will then follow the Loire River's banks 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 examples 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 before leaving the city. Return of bikes at the hotel at 6:00pm - Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel in Saumur



**Day 7 –Saumur** – end of the tour after breakfast

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## Season

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

## What's included

- 6 night accommodations in 2 or 3-star hotels with breakfast
- 1 dinner
- 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:* You easily reach Tours which is located at the junction of A10, A85 and A28 motorways

*By train:* Direct trains from Paris-Austerlitz to Tours (about 2 hours journey) or by TGV from Paris Montparnasse to St Pierre des Corps (4Km from Tours) or Tours. Trains from Saumur to Paris or trains to Tours or St Pierre des Corps and TGV (fast trains) and to Paris

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