

SHERPA: FRANCE – THE LOIRE VALLEY

8-day / 7-night self-guided walking holidays

(CLV - Revised: October 10)



This is a self-guided hotel-based on-road cycle tour exploring not just the valley of the Loire but also those of its left bank tributaries the Cher, the Indre and the Vienne. Unlike most of our self-guided cycling tours, this is a linear rather than a circular tour, which has the advantage that you can cover more ground without the need to return the bikes to the starting point. There are opportunities to visit the chateaux at: Amboise, La Bourdaisière, Chenonceau, Loches, Villandry (celebrated for its gardens), Saxe (former home of Honoré de Balzac), Azay-le-Rideau, Ussé (the castle of the Sleeping Beauty), Chinon and Saumur. It is probably not feasible to plan to visit them all. Also on the itinerary are Clos Luce (former home of Leonardo da Vinci), and the Abbey of Fontevraud. Vouvray, Chinon and Saumur all produce fine wines.

Cost: \$1920 per person twin share Single room supplements \$295 Solo traveller add \$160

Departs: Every Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday from March to late October.

Level of Difficulty: Grade A - generally easy cycling, some hills - with day stages from 37 to 45km. The terrain is relatively flat, with short climbs of up to 70-metres or so out of the river valleys onto the intervening level plateau areas. This makes cycling easy and enjoyable.

The Bikes: On this tour bike hire is included in the tour price and no security deposit is required. The bikes are 21-speed hybrid bikes equipped with saddlebags, pump, repair kit, water bottle and key lock and map support, and helmets. The repair kit contains patches, glue, tyre levers, spare inner tube, and spare cable for brakes/gears. The bikes weigh around 15kg and frame sizes are in the range 45cm to 60cm V-brakes. Wheels can be removed without tools. The bikes are delivered to the first hotel in Amboise and collected from the final hotel in Saumur. Before travelling, we will need to be advised your height and inside leg measurements, so that we can organize for the correct bikes to be available for your arrival.

Route Notes: We provide a set of 1:100,000 (1cm = 1km) road maps (6 A4 sheets) with our cycling route marked on them, and for a more general overview, the Michelin 1:250,000 road map (1cm to 2.5km). We also provide specially researched route descriptions.

Arrival: The starting point of the tour is at Amboise, which is reached by direct non-TGV train from Paris Gare d'Austerlitz (2 hours). At Amboise it is 15 minutes walk or (if you are carrying heavy luggage) a taxi ride. Alternatively, there are direct TGV trains from each of (a) Paris Montparnasse (1 hour) (b) Paris CDG airport (1hour 45 mins) to Tours St Pierre des Corps, from where there are local train services to Amboise. Seat reservations are obligatory on TGV trains and a supplementary fare is payable. French National Railway timetables can be found at <http://www.sncf.com>, or at <http://www.raileurope.com>.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

After the tour to get to Paris by train from Saumur Rive Droite station (a 10 minute walk or short taxi ride across the Loire bridge from the last hotel). Take a local train to Angers (30 minutes) or Tours (1 hour). There are direct TGV services from both Angers and from Tours to each of (a) Paris Montparnasse (1.5 hours or 1 hour) for ORLY airport), (b) CDG airport (about 2 hours). Seat reservations are obligatory on TGV trains. There is also a non-TGV service from Tours to Paris Austerlitz. Check times on the Internet and locally before travelling

GENERAL INFORMATION

Luggage: When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room.

Accommodation & Meals: Hotels normally with en suite shower and WC. Half board on 5 nights, B&B only on 2 nights. Picnic lunches are not included in the tour price but are available from hotels or local shops. We indicate in the route notes where there are suitable restaurants or cafes for lunch stops, or recommend you carry food if there are none convenient to the route.

An upgrade to a 3-star hotel is possible in Chenonceau (ask for supplement details). This charming hotel, where your hosts will kindly welcome you, is located 150 metres away from the Chateau de Chenonceau. Celebrities such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Churchill, Rockefeller and many others stayed under this very roof. You will enjoy the swimming pool in a peaceful garden and taste all the local delights at the restaurant.

Night 1. Amboise. A fine provincial wood beamed 2-star Logis de France hotel at the heart of the historic town of Amboise, a short walk from Le Clos Luce, Leonardo da Vinci's last residence, which contains a museum of models based on his designs. Half board (dinner at restaurant nearby).

Night 2. Chenonceau. Our 2-star Logis de France accommodation has a magnificent fireplace and exposed beams. Half board.

Night 3. Loches. From the centre of a quiet landscaped park, overlooking the historic town, this hotel offers an exceptional panoramic view. It has also a large terrace and a swimming pool. Half board.

Night 4. Montbazou. A well-appointed riverside annex of the Chateau d'Artigny, one of the famous 'Relais et Chateaux' group of hotels. Dinner and breakfast in the chateau itself, which is situated on a bluff with a fine view over the river Indre. The dinner has to be seen to be believed: an amazing assault on the senses! Shirt and tie are seriously recommended. Breakfast is generous with a wide choice. Half board.

Night 5. Azay-le-Rideau. The hotel is set in a semi pedestrian street in the heart of this charming village and just 50 metres from the elegant chateau. You will find here, the charm of the past combined with the comfort of today. The 18th century house was built in a style typical of the Tours area. One of the features of the hotel is the 19th century school, situated across the flower decked patio and which, like the rest of the hotel, has been tastefully transformed into delightful accommodation. Bed and breakfast only included; there is a choice of places to take your evening meal. .

Night 6. Chinon. The hotel has the charm of an authentic dwelling-place built in the fifteenth century and modified in the eighteenth century. It is just a few hundred metres from the town centre, the medieval quarter and the chateau. Half board.

Night 7. Saumur. A small hotel in the centre of this fashionable town on the banks of the Loire, close to the old town and the chateau. Bed and breakfast is only included; there is a wide choice of restaurants nearby for that final dinner.

Baths: it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.

Breakfast: in countries such as France/Italy/Spain/Greece etc are usually coffee and toast/croissant, if you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some food the night before. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Single Supplements: are payable on most of our tours. The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms.

Itinerary Guide

Time is allowed to visit chateaux and other sites of interest along the way, but entry fees are **not** included in the tour price. You will probably not have time or energy to visit them all! Fans of Leonardo da Vinci's futuristic gadgetry will not want to miss Le Clos Luce.

The structure itself, carved from stone quarried from nearby limestone cliffs, the tapestries and furnishings of the Chateau de Chenonceau, built on a bridge over the River Cher with spectacular arches, are definitely not to be missed. The gardens at Villandry are incomparable with its rows of neatly clipped box hedges, flower gardens, trees and water features. The "promenade avec son-et-lumière" at Azay le Rideau is a relaxing but at the same time exhilarating experience that changes constantly with the season.



Day 1. Arrive Amboise, a picturesque town on the south bank of the Loire. Amboise boasts the still impressive remnants of what was a magnificent chateau as well as Le Clos Luce, a redbrick manor house that was the home of the polymath Leonardo da Vinci for 3 years until his death in 1519. Chateau and Le Clos Luce (which incorporates a museum of models based on da Vinci's designs) are both open to the public, each visit requiring approximately 1-hour. There will be time to visit either of these before departure on the morning of day 2. Entry fees: Chateau d'Amboise approximately 6 Euros; Le Clos Luce approximately 6 Euros.

Day 2. Before leaving town try to find time to visit Le Clos Luce, where Leonardo da Vinci lived as the guest of Francois I from 1516 to 1519. Then on to the Chateau of La Bourdaisière, built under the orders of Francois I for his mistress Marie Guelin.

After following the Loire valley downstream for a few km, we turn off to visit the Chateau de la Bourdaisière, before continuing following the Cher Valley upstream to Chenonceau and our overnight stop. You could visit this famous chateau today, but we would recommend going tomorrow after breakfast (see below), before the tourist hoards arrive. Entry fees: Le Clos Luce approx. 6 Euros; La Bourdaisière approximately 5 Euros.

Day 3. At Chenonceau, where you can easily spend two or three hours visiting one of the very finest of the Loire chateaux, the 'chateau shaped by women', including its early 16th century designer Catherine Bricennet as well as Diane de Poitiers and Catherine de Medici, which 'stretches across the River Cher in a perfect harmony of water, greenery, gardens and trees in a fine natural setting'. After the visit and maybe lunch continue over the low hilly watershed to Loches on the River Indre. Entry fee: Chateau de Chenonceau approximately 7 Euros.

Day 4. Time to visit the chateau of Loches in the morning before an easy ride down the peaceful Indre valley, stopping en route at Cormery, where the now ruined abbey stood for 100-years until 1791. Then on to Montbazou where your destination is Port-Moulin in the grounds of the Chateau d'Artigny now converted to a hotel. Entry fee: Chateau de Loches: approximately 5 Euros.

Day 5. Today we ride from Montbazou to the celebrated gardens at Villandry, one of the wonders of France with the opportunity to visit the former home of the novelist Balzac in the small chateau at Sache. From Villandry it is about 1 hour's ride past the confluence of the Rivers Cher and Loire and along picturesque woodland tracks and quiet roads to Azay le Rideau. Both Villandry and Azay are awarded the highest accolade of 'worth a journey' by the Michelin Guide. The son et lumière display at the Chateau of Azay, set on an island in the Indre, is highly recommended for a delightful and memorable, if relatively expensive (11 Euros) stroll after dinner. Entry fees: Villandry gardens approximately 5 Euros; Chateau d'Azay le Rideau (daytime) approximately 5 Euros, Son-et-Lumière approximately 10 Euros.

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Day 6. There is time for a daytime visit to the chateau of Azay, one of the gems of the Renaissance, before continuing our ride via the wonderful 'sleeping beauty' (la belle au bois dormant) chateau of Ussé and on to Chinon itself, a medieval town on the north bank of the Vienne dominated by the walls of its ruined mediaeval fortress and the centre of a well-known wine-growing region. Within the fortress is a museum illustrating the career of the Maid of Orleans (otherwise known as Joan of Arc). Entry fees: Chateau d'Ussé approximately 10 Euros; Chateau de Chinon approximately 5 Euros.

Day 7. After crossing the river Vienne you ride through the Foret de Fontevraud to the celebrated abbey of that name, the most extensive set of monastic buildings in France. The 12th century abbey church houses the tombs of several Plantageanet royals (Kings and Queens of England in the 14th and 15th centuries). The way continues past vineyards along the steep south bank of the Loire to Saumur, famous for its white wines, its cavalry school, and its chateau overlooking the Loire. Entry fees: Chateau de Saumur and Museum of Decorative Arts approximately 6 Euros.

Day 8.

The tour ends at Saumur on the morning of day 8 after breakfast. The bikes will be collected from your hotel in Saumur.



Other cycling holidays – These are just a few of the many small group guided or self-guided inn-to-inn cycling tours Outdoor Travel offer in Europe - including river rides from Passau to Vienna along the Danube or from Vienna to Budapest.

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For cycling on pilgrimage trails we offer the Way of St James or Camino De Santiago in Spain.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

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