

# Fields of Sunflowers: Cycling through the French Countryside

Discover France on a bike and make it a deluxe experience. Deluxe Cycle Tours present a portfolio of meticulously designed French cycling tours to three of the most stunning and spectacular of all the French regions; each a journey guaranteed to give the travellers an authentic French experience:



## Sights and History of the Dordogne

The Dordogne is peppered with 'chocolate box' villages that whilst restored retain their charm. Villages that developed around fortifications cling to hillsides and others that grew from the prosperity of the river lazily nestle alongside the languidly flowing river on the valley floor.

Roman history is significant and intrinsic to the area. At the time of occupation the Gauls, resisting the desire of Rome to rule, named the region 'Perigord', the home to the 'four tribes'. We view the pre-historic art of the Lascaux caves, visit the historically significant towns of Sarlat and Domme and trace the footsteps of Richard the Lionheart and Knights Templar.

The legacy of a more turbulent era is evident in the medieval fortresses and feudal villages that witnessed the bloodshed and violence of the 'Hundred Years War' and the 'Wars of Religion'. The 'Revolution' razed to the ground many of the châteaux liberally scattered across the rural landscape of the country but some survived the destruction and tastefully repaired of the ravages of time and restored to former glory they now make either superb homes or excellent auberge.



### **Sights and History of the Provence Cycling Vacation**

Our route steers us away from the traffic and through sleepy towns and villages that inspired Van Gogh and we take time to explore the Roman history that remains. Speed is definitely not on the agenda. This varied region has just about every type of terrain imaginable for a varied cycling tour in France; rocky and rugged mountains of the Alpilles, the Luberon and Mont Ventoux to the East; marshlands of the Camargue in the South and fertile plains of the Rhône Valley in the West.

Inhabited since prehistoric times, Provence was once part of the ancient Narbonensis and the Ligurians, and then the Celts, were amongst its early inhabitants. In 600 BC, Phoenician sailors founded a Greek colony, which they named Massalia, the now modern port of Marseilles, and were responsible for introducing the grapevine and the olive to the area. In the 2nd century BC, the area occupied by the Romans, eventually became a province of the Roman Empire; this would account for the vast amount of Roman antiquities found and preserved to this day, and visited on our French cycle tour.



## **Sights & History of the Loire Valley Cycling Vacation**

The Loire Valley climate is temperate, ideal for cycling, with few extremes. Average daytime summer temperatures are in the high twenties and low thirties centigrade though it is much warmer at the height of the midday sun.

Visit Chateau d'Ussé, the inspiration behind Sleeping Beauty, and Clos Lucé, the temporary residence of Leonardo da Vinci. If you don't fancy the challenge of the odd hill then this region is for you with its almost flat sunflower-filled landscape peppered with beautiful towns and villages. The end of the days brings stunning accommodation in beautiful locations accompanied by gourmet traditional food and local wine.

The Romans occupied what is now Pays de la Loire in 52 BC after displacing the powerful Cenomanni and Carnute tribes during the Iron Age, and they were responsible for creating the towns of Angers and Le Mans. Christianity gained the ascendancy in 313 and the following centuries witnessed a series of invasions, notably the Vikings in the 9th century. The end of the first millennium saw the rise of the powerful counts of Maine and Anjou--the most famous being Henri Plantagenet, who later became King of England.

In 1202, the region eventually returned to the French crown and soon became the cradle of feudalism and, in the 16th century, a platform for Renaissance ideas including architecture, literature and music. The Wars of Religion (1562-79) took its toll on the region until King Louis XIV managed to restore peace and order as power was centralised under the crown.

The Loire Valley has always been a firm favourite amongst the clients of Deluxe Cycle Tours, mainly due to the fact that the terrain is very flat, but 2011 also saw this change and Provence was the most

successful venue for tours.

## Deluxe Cycle Tours – Our Challenges

*“2011 saw all our American clientele disappear and if it hadn’t been for our usual majority Australian customers then this year would have been very disappointing. Our challenge for 2012 is to attract more clients and specifically more clients from the USA. Another challenge is convincing our prospective clients that because our prices are cheaper this doesn’t mean that we’re offering an inferior product and that being a smaller company we can offer more for a smaller, more realistic price.”*

**Gary Livermore, Company Director**

**By Gary Livermore**

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