

Provence – Hilltop to Harbours

- ‘Back on a bike after many years away – your encouragement and simple cycling tips really boosted my confidence. Thank you so much. ’

Moriah, Steyning,

- ‘We just loved Le Lavandou and the easy cycling along the coast towards St Tropez was such a surprise.’

Janet and Ron, Cheshire,

- ‘What a fantastic ride to Paris. It’s hard to put into words the euphoria I felt when we were cycling down the Champs-Élysées.’

Ian, West Sussex,

- ‘You were just wonderful guides on our first ever trip to Provence . . . we will definitely be back – in fact we’ve just booked!’

The Crane Family, Warwickshire,

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Highlights:

Spectacular Sea Views
Fantastic Panoramas
Scented Landscape
Perching Villages
Riviera Glamour
Majestic Lakes

Summary

Discover a hidden Provence before sinking into a bed by the Med. Ranging the length and breadth of the Provencal landscape, this great cycling tour will immerse you in Provence. After a first relaxing evening and peaceful sleep,

we will transport you to a slightly wilder and remote part of the landscape. More sparsely populated than the coastal areas, the north of Provence contains some dramatic landscape; deep gorges, wooded slopes and an intricate network of valleys connecting smaller and sleepier towns, villages and hamlets. It has an ancient history where people lived not just on the land but sometimes in it. Rolling over its undulating hills and down its wooded valleys, your ride will carry you every closer to the sea. Picking your way carefully through the Massif des Maures, a couple of hillier days will bring you to a dramatic vantage point overlooking the Mediterranean. You will be able to take an exhilarating rush down to the azure water of the sea before exploring the harbours and perching villages of this beautiful coastal stretch of Provence.

Great cycling down quiet lanes and along hidden tracks is possibly the very best way to discover and unlock the heart and secrets of Provence.

Let Provence put a smile on your face every day from dawn until dusk.

Tour in Brief:

- Fellow Velo Welcome Briefing
- 14 Nights Accommodation
- 14 Continental Breakfasts
- Lunches on Fully Guided
- Luggage Transfers
- Cycling Guide on Fully Guided
- Carefully Selected Routes
- High Quality Bikes
- Support Vehicle

Tour Map

Introduction

This tour is a mainly easy grade ride on most cycling days but has two more adventurous days in the middle, however if these appear too challenging, they can be avoided by choosing a mid-tour coastal transfer (see the More Information page) before rejoining on a downhill run to the sea. Charting a wonderfully varied and dramatic course through a sometimes more remote and hidden landscape, you will be exploring the length and breadth of Provence. Short riding days allow ample time to explore the landscape and the small towns and villages along your route and, here are also ample opportunities to dive into refreshing waters whether rivers, lakes, the sea or your hotel pool. Three nominally 'rest' days make sure that there is plenty of time to explore in other ways but, with extra self-guided rides available, there is nothing to stop you staying in the saddle if you want to just keep riding.

Day 1 Arrive at Les Arcs sur Argens

Arrive in Les Arcs and be transferred to a lovely nearby hotel for a relaxing evening before the start of your cycling tour.

Day 2 Lac de Sainte-Croix and the Verdon Valley – 24 km

On your first cycling day, we will meet you at your hotel and take you inland to the northern limit of a more hidden Provence. At Lac de Sainte-Croix you will have some time to explore as well as take a dip in its brilliant blue water, before a picnic that will help you prepare for your ride. Starting in the saddle from a vantage point with fantastic views over the landscape of rolling hills, your first ride is an easy but exhilarating one.

Day 3 Verdon Valley to Moissac Bellevue – 20 km

Travel just a little further down the Verdon valley and you will get a glimpse of some of its more gorge-like character and, perhaps be tempted to set the bike aside for an hour or so to take a short paddle down river and back. Coming out of the valley and finding a path across the undulating hills of northern Provence inevitably means a little climb but, we have found you a secretive stage of the tour where few cycle wheels may roll. It has a short sharper stretch but, even if you get off to push briefly, you will be rewarded with both beauty and solitude in the landscape. Moissac is a small but beautiful village perched on the higher ground with wonderful views over upper Provence.

Day 4 Moissac Bellevue to Cotignac – 22 km

From another great vantage point overlooking the Provencal landscape, you can be sure that today's ride will be mostly level or downhill so, look forward to soaking it up. You will follow quiet picturesque tracks through the Pelenq forest, through to the beautiful perching village of Fox Amphoux; a great lunchtime stop just a tiny spur from the overall route. More wooded slopes will bring you through the Cassole Vallon to the charming 'troglodyte' town of Cotignac. A two night stay here will give you time for more of the Provencal atmosphere to wash over you or, some more intimate exploration of this quiet part of Provence.

Day 5 Cotignac

Some time of your own to choose between exploring the beauty and secrets of Cotignac or a self-guided cycle ride out to the tranquillity of Sillans-la-Cascade and its 42 metre high waterfall – you might even fit in both options. Cotignac is famous for its protective cliff barrier which is flanked by a pair of medieval towers, the cliffs riddled with caves and holes have been a source of refuge and shelter for millennia. There are of course more creature comforts nowadays and, the cafés and restaurants of this peaceful town make for a more comfortable refuge for the cycling explorer of today.

Day 6 Cotignac to Flassans-sur-Issole – 24 km

Leaving your Cotignac 'cave' behind, your final riding day is a little more undulating passage through the landscape via Carcès and Cabasse to your last night's stop. Carcès could be thought of as a town of walls and water; there are prominent murals painted around the town all by the same artist and, in addition to the nearby lake which your ride will follow, there is a 'Circuits des Fontaines et Lavoirs' which makes for an unusual tour of the town. Cabasse sits by the green wooded slopes of the Issole valley and has a beautiful heart to the village, particularly around the main square, and it makes for another great spot to explore on your journey.



Day 7 Flassans-sur-Issole to La Garde Freinet – 30 km

The first, and easier, of the more adventurous days of the tour will take you steadily climbing out of this inland valley area and into the slightly more rugged landscape of the Massif des Maures. The vegetation of the massif is mainly, cork-oak, chestnut and maquis (the Mediterranean shrubland that gave the French WWII Resistance their nickname). After your ascent, take time to relax and unwind in La Garde Freinet, a great Provencal village sitting on top of a natural pass between the Argens and the sea. If you have energy to spare, there is a dramatic walk from the village up to an ancient hillfort with even more expansive views.



Day 8 La Garde Freinet to Cogolin – 12 km

Taking two days to cross over this part of the Massif des Maures offers the bonus of a largely downhill ride today towards a narrow coastal plain. Gliding through the oak hills and small vineyards, you can choose whether to head more directly for your near-coastal destination or, take a short but delightful detour into the perching village of Grimaud. Before you reach Grimaud, you will see the substantial remains of its castle towering over the village; it and the beautiful heart of the medieval village will give fine reward to your exploration.



Day 9 Cogolin to Le Lavandou – 37 km

This is one of the longest days of the tour and covers the largest climb as well; from close to the coast on the northern side of a ridge in the Massif des Maures, a sustained climb, through a wild cork-oak landscape, will bring you to a spectacular elevated panorama out over the Mediterranean. You are then rewarded with a fantastic undulating route along the crest of the massif. As you ride the ridge, views alternate between sea and a wooded heartland. The end of the day's ride will surely put a smile on your face as you descend to the coast for your first bed by the med.



Day 10 Le Lavandou

A day of wonderful choices, there is a great opportunity to take a short boat ride over to the island of Port Cros for a half day exploration on foot of this beautiful tiny national park or, you could stay in the saddle for a

self-guided ride over to Bregancon with its coastal vineyards, more remote beaches and former presidential 'palace'. Alternatively, you could spend the whole day exploring Le Lavandou and relaxing on the beach.



Day 11 Le Lavandou to La Croix Valmer – 24 km

A short and gentle ride today but with plenty of temptations to linger along the coast, small harbours, marinas and beaches dot the coastline here. You even have the time to start and finish your ride with a dip in the sea. Cycle a mixture of dedicated routes, quiet lanes and a hidden part of the old coastal railway line. You finish the ride in La Croix Valmer, still below the Massif des Maures and, overlooking the Bay of Cavalaire-sur-Mer, one of the scenes of the allied landings in August 1944.



Day 12 La Croix Valmer to Sainte Maxime – 32 km

Today's ride starts with a brief turn inland to cross the peninsula on slightly more undulating (but hugely rewarding) lanes towards St Tropez. Along the route you will visit one of Provence's classic perching villages at Ramatuelle, in a dense medieval core, tightly packed houses peer over cooling narrow lanes. Ride on to St Tropez, you will emerge from quiet back streets into an archetypal village square with an expanse of boule pistes and bordered by restaurants. More narrow streets will bring you through to the old fishing harbour now usually punctuated by gleaming yachts.



Day 13 Sainte Maxime

A second day of holiday choices, if you chose to take up the exploring options on your day in Le Lavandou then this could be a day for real relaxation. Sainte Maxime is one of the slightly quieter resort towns of the Riviera, a popular holiday retreat for the wealthy in the 1930s and relatively unspoilt since then, there are choices of beaches and a lovely evening atmosphere. Of course, if you want just a little more glamour and some more serious people watching then, you can always hop onto the little ferryboat back over to St Tropez.



Day 14 Sainte Maxime to Saint-Raphaël – 24 km

Your final ride is the most gentle of the whole tour, in part clinging to the coastal edge, a combination of cycle lanes, quieter roads and the old course of the coastal railway line (the Train des Pignes) carry you alongside the Mediterranean to journey's end. This stretch of Provence's coastline was central to the allied landings which helped to liberate the south of France towards the end of the Second World War, the drama of those events is still celebrated every summer. Once more there are plenty of peaceful spots along the route for picnics and dips in the warm waters.



Day 15 Depart Saint-Raphaël

After your final bed by the Med, leave Saint-Raphaël on your onward journey or homeward return.

Eat Sleep Drink

Eat

From your arrival before the cycling starts, to the day of your departure, breakfast is included at each of your accommodation venues on the tour. That means that even if you take it in a leisurely fashion, you will have enough fuel onboard to start each ride or, head out on one of the optional exploring days of the tour. If you are on the Fully Guided Tour, lunches are included on each of the cycling days, either gathered up near the beginning of the ride or planned at a local hostelry (and, there will be one day when you will just come upon a picnic laid out for you around a corner on the journey). On your exploring days we will give you suggestions on where lunch can easily be tracked down, whatever your plan for the day. On this tour, we leave the evening meal venues with you; the more secluded nature of this tour means that your primary option is more likely to be to eat at your accommodation but, there will be some other choices in wider villages.



Sleep

For groups on our Fully Guided Tour most of the accommodation will be in small and specially selected hotels; welcoming staff, lovely comfortable rooms and the promise of a great night's sleep. Chambres d'Hotes can be included in the mix on this tour, particularly for couples and smaller groups on the Self-guided option. Peace and tranquillity is what we are offering and, perhaps just the song of the cicada to remind you that you are laying your head down in a less familiar place.



Drink

Maintaining both your energy and hydration levels while cycling is very important. On all but one cycling day of this tour, it is easy to keep yourself supplied with water and soft drinks. We will provide all the information you need to track down supplies and, will make sure that on the one ride where they are a little more sparse, that we set you off with plenty of water onboard. As we are in the south of France, it will be of no surprise that, when it comes to more profitable liquid refreshments from the land, wine is at the fore. Provence is renowned for its Rosé but it also produces some high quality red wine too. There is also a great tradition of co-operative wine producing by smaller producers often centred around small towns and villages.



Hilltop to Harbours Recommended Tour Months

We normally recommend that customers undertake this tour in any of the following months in our cycling season; May, June, July, August, September or October – August in Provence can be a little warm for some cyclists but, we can help you plan your days and routes to make best use of the cooler hours, shady lunchtime rests and, we often provide additional support to ensure you can still enjoy your cycling experience – just contact us to check on availability.

Hilltop to Harbours Fully Guided – Tours from £1975.00/person

Hilltop to Harbours Self-guided – Tours from £1735.00/person

Our standard prices for this tour, whether Fully Guided or Self-guided, are best achieved when we have as much advance booking time as possible (we would still try to match the price even on last minute bookings but, accommodation is normally the largest component in a tour price and, the one which can vary the most).

The tour price is based on 2 people sharing rooms but, we can also quote for single room occupancy if that is what a customer wants (there is nearly always a supplement to be paid with such a booking but we would advise on the details before you committed to your holiday).

Most holiday accommodation in France is charged on a room basis rather than a per person price and, there is often very limited or no discount on the price for children. However, for any booking where a group is happy to share family or multi-bed rooms, we may even be able to quote a lower price per person for the tour (if you advise us that you would be happy with such an accommodation arrangement).

We do not add margins to the accommodation we book for our tours so, if we can book accommodation at a lower price, we will pass these savings on to our customers.

More Information

Travel to and from your Tour

- This Tour starts and finishes in Les Arcs sur Argens and finishes in Saint-Raphaël, both are easily accessible by train, plane and automobile. Because there are so many options we do not book this part of your trip for you, however we can guide you through the multitude of options. We will of course help you with your short transfer between the start and finish locations.

For anyone joining by car we can provide a location to leave your car for the duration of your Tour. Eurostar and TGV trains offer excellent services from the UK to Les Arcs and can be seen on:

www.raileurope.com

www.voyages-sncf.com

Travelling by train can be a fascinating way to travel and competes very favourably time wise with travelling by plane.

Both budget and scheduled airlines fly into Nice and we can supply information for onward travel to Les Arcs by train.

If you are bringing your own bike

- For those of you bringing your own bicycle, again we can help you with this, however it is worth considering at this point the cost of putting your bike on a plane or train against using one of our special Fellow Velo bikes.

Fancy a longer holiday

- For anyone who wants to extend their holiday with us, we can book additional hotels for you at the start or end of your Tour, just call us on 07811 285021.

Prefer to skip the more adventurous cycling element

- This tour links and expands on our Hidden Provence and Bed by the Med routes but, the connecting stage raises the cycling grade to 'Adventurous'. If you love the sound of the overall tour but would prefer to stay with easier graded cycling, we can easily arrange a mid-tour 'pass' from the start of Day 7, which will transport you over the Massif des Maures for two nights near the coast. We would then collect you so that you conveniently rejoin the main tour on Day 9 as it approaches the downhill run to the sea.

Families, and/or non cycling companions

- We think Hilltop to Harbours is a great choice for more adventurous families looking for a quiet rural change of pace, with easy length cycling days on quiet lanes and tracks. Call us to discuss the different cycle options (tag along, child bike etc) available to children.
- If you have a partner, spouse or friend who doesn't share your love of cycling but would love to be with you then, don't despair. On any of our Fully Guided Tours, a non-cycling companion can get a lift with the support vehicle from location to location. Our Hilltop to Harbours tour landscape has plenty going for it to entertain and surprise the non-cyclist and, there are a number of 'rest' days whether you can share much more relaxing time together.

Travel Pack

- Your personally tailored travel pack will be with you approx 3 weeks prior to your Tour start date. There will be oodles of information for you in this pack.

Any queries at all before you book

- We don't want to bombard you with masses of text to read, so anything at all that needs clarification please call us on 07811 285021, 01788 568371 or email us at jane@fellowvelo.com