

Provence – Independent Hilltops and 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:

Fantastic Panoramas
Beautiful Beaches
Scented Landscape
Riviera Magic
Spectacular Sea Views
Swimming in the Sea

Summary

On our Hilltops and Harbours cycle tour, after a first relaxing evening and peaceful sleep, ride an adventurous circuit that captures the soul of Provence. More sparsely populated than the coastal areas, the north of the region contains some dramatic landscape; deep gorges, wooded slopes and an intricate network of valleys connecting smaller and sleepier towns, villages and hamlets. From Provence's northern reaches, great cycling down quiet lanes and along hidden tracks is the very best way to discover and unlock its heartland, at its and your natural pace.

Move through a hidden landscape of vineyards, olive groves, pastures and peaceful river valleys before you traverse the Massif des Maures to reach the Mediterranean Sea. Explore the delights of the Côte d'Azur in a gentle and relaxing way; often just tucked behind the glitz and the glamour, you will have plenty of opportunities to dip into the Riviera lifestyle or you can choose to glide by along its lesser known trails.

You can choose to cycle on every day of the tour or create your own excursions; a boat over to explore the island of the Port Cros National Park or, a day just soaking up the sights, sounds and sun in St Tropez.

From Provence's hilltops to its harbours, this is a wonderful journey which rewards its travellers with a number of Beds by the Med.

Tour in Brief:

- Fellow Velo Tour Pack
- 14 Nights Accommodation
- 14 Continental Breakfasts
- Carefully Selected Routes
- Telephone Support

Tour Map

Introduction

One of our most adventurous cycle tours, the route also has some much easier cycling days within it; a great circuit of Provence, its length, its breadth and, its heartland. Relatively short riding days allow ample time to explore the landscape, its flora and fauna, and the small towns and villages along your route. There are some significant hills along the way but, all give access to some fantastic locations. In case you seek more varied discovery, you will have time to explore some special locations on foot or in the water and, we have also planned for a few non-cycling days too (though a great additional self-guided ride could always be taken instead).

Day 1 Arrive at Saint-Raphaël

Arrive in Saint-Raphaël and check in to a lovely hotel for a relaxing evening before the start of your cycling tour.

Day 2 Saint-Raphaël to Les Arcs sur Argens – 36 km

Your tour begins with a gentle level departure from the Mediterranean at Saint-Raphaël but the more adventurous cycling that characterises the tour comes into view as you navigate around the dominant Rocher de Roquebrune. This great red mass in the landscape is skirted to the south side but,

getting close to its slopes means some hills for the rider before the relative sanctuary of the Argens Valley is rejoined.



Day 3 Les Arcs to Tourtour – 28 km

Ride further north into a more hidden Provence of small vineyards and olive groves. The route climbs gently through the length of the ride to ensure your easiest passage into the heart of the landscape. Tourtour is among the most beautiful villages of France, surrounded by grassland and meadows, its quiet streets and trickling fountains combine with vernacular architecture to produce a quintessential Provencale tableau.



Day 4 Tourtour to Verdon Valley – 29 km

A gently undulating ride with the wonderful bonus that it is balance towards much more coasting downhill than pedalling up. Today takes you to the very northern edge of Provence and the Valley of the Verdon; cool bright blue waters below you and rocky slopes around you. The clear blue Verdon is a playground for water-sports enthusiasts and, its slopes and crags a huge draw for climbers; enjoy the opportunity to just roll through the landscape soaking its treasures up.



Day 5 Verdon Valley to Cotignac – 38 km

Travel just a little further down the Verdon valley and you will get a glimpse of some of its more gorge-like character. 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. You will follow picturesque tracks through the Pelenq forest, through to the beautiful perching village of Fox Amphoux; then on to the charming 'troglodyte' town of Cotignac.



Day 6 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 cafes and restaurants of this peaceful town make for a more

comfortable refuge for the cycling explorer of today.



Day 7 Cotignac to Flassans-sur-Issole – 24 km

Leaving your Cotignac 'cave' behind, your riding day is a little more undulating passage through the landscape via Carcès and Cabasse. 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. 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 8 Flassans-sur-Issole to La Garde Freinet – 30 km

Steadily climb 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 Provençale 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 9 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 10 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 11 Le Lavandou

A second rest-day of wonderful choices, there is a great opportunity to take a short boat ride over to the island of Port Cros for a halfday exploration on foot of this beautiful tiny national park or, you could stay in the saddle for a self-guided ride over to Brégançon 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 12 Le Lavandou to Sainte Maxime – 40 km

A 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 could choose to go via St Tropez with its old fishing harbour now usually punctuated by gleaming yachts. A ferryboat can carry just a few bikes across the bay to Sainte Maxime.



Day 13 Sainte Maxime

A third 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. Your Travel Pack will include information on convenient locations for gathering picnic supplies for lunch and, hostelrys where you can have it all provided on a plate. On this tour, we leave the evening meal venues with you; there are options to eat in at your accommodation and, on most evenings, you will be in a small town where there is plenty of choice from traditional Provencale, to Italian influence or the bounties of the adjacent sea.



Sleep

Most of your 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'hôtes are often included in the mix on this tour, particularly for couples and smaller groups.



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. This tour takes you through that landscape with easy options to try before you buy.



Hilltops and Harbours (Independent) Recommended Tour Dates

We normally recommend that customers undertake this tour in May, June, July, September or October but you could choose almost any time during our cycling season but, some cyclists may find August in Provence a little warm – just contact us to check on availability.

Hilltops and Harbours Independent Tour from £1395.00/person

Fellow Velo Independent Tour recommended dates have been chosen on the basis of factors such as;

- Climate and Weather Norms
- Convenient Holiday Dates
- Maximising Landscape Beauty
- Local Facility Holiday Seasons
- Local Traffic Patterns

We can offer our Fellow Velo Independent Tours between Easter and October, with the flexibility to meet your needs. Just let us know which date you would like to start your tour on and, we will do all that we can to deliver the holiday package you are looking for.

Our standard prices for this tour 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 Saint-Raphaël, which is 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.

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 Saint-Raphaël 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 Saint-Raphaël by train.

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.

Families

- We think Hilltops and Harbours is ideal for more adventurous families, though you are cycling on most days, there will be time for dips in the sea and time to familiarise yourself with a few towns where you will spend two nights on the tour.

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 or 01788 568371 or, email us at jane@fellowvelo.com