

France: Vineyards of Beaujolais

Bike Vacation Only

VBT knows Beaujolais like the back of our hand—and it shows. From the moment you meet your VBT Local host, you'll feel like a Beaujolais insider—enjoying 24/7 support when you need it, and independence when you don't. On this splendid self-guided adventure, VBT reveals the scenic routes and hidden vineyard chateaux that took us years of pedaling to discover. Along the way, spin through charming medieval villages in Viré-Clessé, Pouilly-Fuissé, and Les Pierres Dorées—where you can sample some of the world's finest vintages. Savor two included dinners—without leaving the castle grounds. Revel in the opulence of French chateaux during a stay in not one, but two, castle hotels—including one with an on-site oenothèque and the luxury of French hospitality at its finest.

Cultural Highlights

- Cycle among the iconic vineyards of Beaujolais, coasting through charming wine villages producing some of France's great wines.
- Explore the renowned wine appellations and stunning stone villages of Pouilly-Fuissé, Saint-Amour, and Romaneche-Thorins.
- Ride into Cluny, once the world's epicenter of Christianity, and view its 10th-century abbey.
- Sample fine Chardonnays when you pause in the village that gave the white wine its name.
- Savor the luxurious amenities and stunning settings of two Beaujolais châteaux, where gourmet meals and home-produced wines elevate your vacation.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginner and experienced cyclists. Rides are on flat to rolling paved roads and some bike lanes. Urban riding in and out of the small city of Mâcon is mainly on bike lanes and bike paths. Country roads have little traffic in the middle of the day. Please verify your bike selection for this tour, as it is not always possible to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available if needed.

Tour Duration: 6 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 17-43 miles

Average Cycling Time: 2-4 hours

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 67°/50°, June 73°/57°, July 80°/61°, August 79°/60°, September 72°/54°, October 61°/47°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 3, June 3.1, July 2.6, August 3.1, September 3.0, October 3.4

DAY 1: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Welcome Orientation / Mâcon and Saône river bike path

We suggest arriving in France at least one day prior to the tour start date. Make your own independent travel arrangements to Mâcon.

Today's ride into the Beaujolais region – nestled in South Burgundy – provides a preview of this scenic area renowned for its culinary splendors and rich viniculture of light-bodied red wines and bright whites. This is the least crowded wine region of France, despite that it boasts one of the nation's highest concentrations of vineyards, a world-renowned gastronomy, endless charming villages, a Mediterranean-like climate and gently rolling hills. It all makes for some of the most rewarding cycling in Europe, as you'll soon discover.

You set out from your Mâcon hotel and follow the Saône River bike path. This stunning region rests between Burgundy to the north and the Rhône valley to the south. Romans arrived here in the 1st century, cultivating vast vineyards; some of their original plantings remain to this day. Later, Benedictine monks oversaw the wineries until the Duchy of Burgundy took them over in the 15th century. Mâcon is celebrated as the birthplace of Alphonse Lamartine, 19th-century poet and diplomat. Today, a pastiche of pastel-hued buildings line the Saône, made even more magnificent each spring when the cherry blossoms bloom. Your riverside ride introduces you to all its beauty and charm.

This evening, savor your first experience of Burgundian cuisine, perhaps sampling the famed *beef bourguignon* in its birthplace, accompanied by a light Gamay or Pinot gris.

Today's Ride Choices

Mâcon loop – 27 km (17 miles)

What to Expect:

This ride will give you the opportunity to become familiar with your bike as you cycle the fairly flat bike

lanes of city streets and pedal out of Mâcon through some lower elevation wine villages and vineyards to the west bank of the Saône River. You encounter two gentle ascents mid-way, then cross the Saône River and follow the fairly flat, low-traffic bike path back (under three miles on well-packed gravel) to the center of Mâcon.

DAY 2: Mâcon to Viré or Mâcon to Chardonnay / Stay Put Day

If you wish, take today to explore the Burgundian city of Mâcon. Stroll its cobbled streets, stopping at any of its inviting cafés to drink up the old-world atmosphere. The city is home to an array of churches of all sizes, from the Old Mâcon Cathedral to the newer Cathedral of Saint-Vincent. Or cross the Pont Saint-Laurent to the small village of Saint-Laurent-Sur-Saône.

On the bike, we have a couple of ways for you to, as the locals say, follow the grape! Pedal the flat Voie Bleue bike path, tracing the banks of the Saône. Varied birdlife keeps you company on this tranquil route. You leave the river behind to cycle into the wine country where the Chardonnay grape is grown and soon get to Viré. This charming hamlet was put on oenophiles' maps after it partnered with its neighbor, Clessé, to create the Viré-Clessé appellation, today a producer of one of the region's finest wines.

Today's longer option takes you past vistas of massive rocky outcrops to a small village whose name is synonymous with one of the world's most popular white wines: Chardonnay. The earliest record of Chardonnay wine dates to 1330, likely around the time when local Cistercian monks created the variety and distributed it throughout France. To protect their vineyards, the monks constructed stone walls; soon, a village of stone houses emerged around the *lavoir*, a stream-fed wash-house, and several *domaines* (wine producers).

Today's Ride Choices

Mâcon to Viré short loop — 40 km (25 miles) | Mâcon to Chardonnay long loop — 59 km (37 miles)

What to Expect:

Depart Mâcon in the morning, following the La Voie Bleue bike path north along the Saône River to the wine-making town of Viré. The long loop continues through rolling vineyards into the town of Chardonnay. Both loops return south on country roads and through villages to Mâcon, where you join bike lanes and encounter some busier traffic as you return to your city-center hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Mâcon to Cluny to Crêches sur Saône / Move on Day

After breakfast, you depart Mâcon on a dedicated bike path, heading west on a gentle uphill out of the Saône River Valley. Your destination is the historic town of Cluny, the center of Christianity in the Middle Ages. The former abbey here was established by William I of Aquitaine in 910 AD and grew into the largest Christian complex in the world, until the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It was pillaged by the Huguenots in 1562 and later dynamited. Its richly carved stones were sold by an unscrupulous local priest. Today, some ten percent of the original structure remains, a haunting echo of its former self.

There'll be time to explore the abbey and the town before cycling to your next hotel set amidst vineyards in a beautifully manicured park. At its center, you find an 17th-century castle. Once you settle in, there is time to relax and indulge in the hotel's swimming pool and grounds.

Savor a special dinner this evening in the hotel's inviting dining room overlooking the property. Your menu includes locally sourced products seasoned and cooked to perfection.

Today's Ride Choices

Mâcon to Cluny to Crêches sur Saône short option – 61 km (37 miles) | Cluny to Crêches sur Saône long option – 70 km (43 miles)

What to Expect:

Depart Mâcon on town streets for a few miles before joining a packed gravel bike path on a former railway line designated a greenway, or *voie verte* in French. The path gradually ascends out of the Saône River valley past small towns, villages and vineyards, with views of the castle of Berzé-le-Châtel. On the short option, you enter a long, lit tunnel for just under a mile and emerge at the other end in Cluny. Please note, if the Bois Clair tunnel is closed, please use the route "D3 Mâcon to Cluny when tunnel is closed" (31 km (19 miles)). On the long option, after riding through the Chardonnay wine-producing villages of Igé and Azé, a steady climb of just under 5 km (3 miles) is rewarded by a descent to the town of Massilly where you join the bike path to Cluny. After visiting Cluny, you retrace a few miles on a rolling ride generally descending back toward the Saône River valley.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Crêches sur Saône to Belleville-en-Beaujolais / Move on Day

Depart Crêches sur Saône and pedal into the heart of the finest vineyards of Beaujolais. Choose an easy or a more challenging ride, each one delivering you to the appellations and villages. Recognizable names of wines en route are Pouilly-Fuissé, whose only grape variety is the Chardonnay and Juliéna. No matter your route, you can't miss the impressive Rock of Solutré, a breathtaking limestone escarpment offering stunning views of the Beaujolais region and its many vineyards. Also a fascinating prehistoric site, an illuminating museum chronicles the paleolithic inhabitants. What's more, the trails around the rock proved a favorite walking route of President François Mitterrand.

Continue cycling through scenic, rolling vineyards, passing through delightful villages like Le Moulin à Vent and Romanèche-Thorins, with its scenic windmill. Later, you arrive at your accommodation for the next two nights, a château wine estate surrounded by 200 acres of vineyards and a 17th-century garden designed by Le Nôtre, the celebrated landscape architect of Versailles. Once settled into your comfortable room, you are welcome at an extra expense to follow the château's self-guided wine trail, interesting for both wine aficionados and novices.

For dinner on your own, you may choose to dine at your hotel's fine-dining restaurant (dinner is included here tomorrow night) or take the short taxi ride into the nearby historic town of Belleville. Here, you can view the 12th-century Notre Dame church and choose from suggested restaurants.

Today's Ride Choices

Château de la Barge to Château de Pizay short option — 29 km (18 miles) | Château de la Barge to Château de Pizay long option — 52 km (26 miles)

What to Expect:

The route rolls out of Crêches sur Saône on narrow roads, weaving in and out of vineyards and villages that have been producing wine for centuries.

The short option stays closer to the Saône Valley floor and you may encounter a bit more traffic through vineyards and villages to your hotel in Belleville-en-Beaujolais.

The long option rises higher in the vineyards. Your efforts are rewarded with sweeping views over vineyards and the entire Saône Valley. Enjoy exhilarating descents, twisting through villages and hamlets to your hotel in Belleville-en-Beaujolais.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Loop through Golden Villages / Stay Put Day

Spend today as you wish, taking advantage of the amenities and vinicultural offerings at your château, exploring more of Belleville or heading out on your choice of several exhilarating rides. Or enjoy a little of each!

If you choose to cycle, select from two routes. This part of southern Beaujolais contains 39 villages of Golden Stone, or *Pierres dorées*, a charming cluster of stone hamlets surrounded by vistas of rolling hills and fertile vineyards that many have compared to Tuscany. The buildings get their warm golden hue from the locally quarried limestone tinged with iron oxide. This luminous stone was used in the construction of Lyon and other parts of Beaujolais, taken from a quarry that has been abandoned since World War I.

A shorter ride keeps you “close to home,” ideal if you’d like an easy, mellow outing just to keep your legs moving. You cross the Saône and ride along a riverside bike path, then enjoy gentle hills through vineyards and villages. To get in more miles, follow a challenging spin on the *voie verte*, or greenway, to a bike path with a gradual ascent to 2,520 feet and a nice coast past more wineries and hamlets.

Back at the château, immerse yourself in the wine culture of Beaujolais. Enjoy a relaxing stroll along the vineyard’s walking trails, perhaps following the romantic “wine history walk in the park.” At an additional expense, attend a wine initiation course or a self-guided wine educational tour and tasting in the onsite *Oenothèque*. You might also take a dip in the heated outdoor swimming pool, get in a match at the tennis court and (at additional cost) treat yourself to a massage or other spa treatment.

An elegant dinner is included in the fine-dining restaurant of your château, a fitting end to celebrate your exploration of Beaujolais. Depending on the weather, enjoy the stylishly decorated historic dining room or dine al fresco in the castle’s courtyard.

Today's Ride Choices

Château de Pizay southern Beaujolais easy loop – 35 km (22 miles) | Château de Pizay to Beaujeu challenging option – 46 km (30 miles)

What to Expect:

This varied route rolls south out of your château to the nearby town of Belleville and crosses the Saône to a riverside bike path. You follow this for a few miles (between 8 and 10 km), just north of the *Pierres dorées* village then cross back over the Saône and gently ascend through vineyards and villages. You reach your maximum elevation of approximately 1,000 feet at the 26-kilometer mark (15 miles), then gently roll back to the Ardierie River Valley, joining the Beaujolais Greenway back to your hotel.

The challenging option follows the *voie verte* (greenway) to Saint-Didier-sur-Beaujeu. You then trace a bike route with one gradual climb to the highest point of 2,520 feet at about kilometer 25.8 (16 miles). A gradual descent brings you back through Quincie-en-Beaujolais, on the northern edge of the *Pierres dorées* villages, and into an easy coast through vineyards and villages to your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel. Check-out is at 10:00 a.m. Your tour concludes here, and you may make your arrangements to your next destination. If you are flying home, note that airline schedules might prevent you from departing for the U.S. today. Please check airline schedules carefully.

The Belleville-en-Beaujolais train station on the main train line between Paris and Lyon is a short taxi ride from your hotel, which can assist with arrangements.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Panorama 360 (Days 1-2)

Occupying the elegant and historic former Post Office building in the heart of Mâcon, The Panorama 360 is one of the city's finest boutique hotels. Stylish and sophisticated, the entire property has been renovated to meet the needs of the modern traveler. The rooftop Skybar provides sweeping views of the city and its surroundings, while the breakfast room, also on the top floor, is bathed in morning light. Each air-conditioned room is bright and contemporary, designed for comfort with heated floors and light-regulating shades. During your stay, at an additional expense, treat yourself to the fitness and spa facilities, including a sauna, steam room, massage, and heated indoor pool.

Chateau de la Barge (Day 3)

A historic castle hotel set among the vineyards of Beaujolais offers comfortable spacious guest rooms with all amenities and views over the grounds or outdoor swimming pool. Located on the outskirts of a village with classic French décor inside and out, its fine-dining restaurant offers Burgundian specialties with a modern touch as well as an extensive French wine list.

Chateau de Pizay (Days 4-5)

Spread over almost 200 acres, the magnificent Château de Pizay was built between the 11th and 19th centuries. Located in the heart of Beaujolais, this stunning property boasts vast vineyards that produce its own fine wines and a sophisticated dining room serving some of the region's most delectable gourmet cuisine. Take time here to admire the 19th-century chapel or follow the onsite wine history trail. Stroll the 75-acre forest, the miles of vineyard paths, or the 17th-century garden designed by Le Nôtre, the architect behind the gardens of Versailles. Each air-conditioned, spacious room provides classic furnishings and overlooks the lovely castle grounds.