

Cyclists are Most Welcome in the Land of the Tour de France

The Loire Valley just two hours south of Paris has the greatest concentration of chateaux in France. This region was once a favourite hangout of French Renaissance kings who built magnificent chateaus along the Loire River (the longest river in France and the last of the wild rivers in Europe) to entertain in lavish style while enjoying the incredible beauty of the landscape.

Often called the Garden of France, it is a traditional land of sleepy towns full of narrow streets, old-fashioned cafes and markets, imposing cathedrals and opulent chateaux. The words 'ornate' and 'charming' immediately spring to mind. Strategically important during the Hundred Years War, fashionable among the Parisian rich during the Renaissance, this is France's legendary castle country.

Today, the Loire Valley continues to lure visitors to explore the splendid French countryside with its historic castles and abbeys, and to taste some of the best food and wines in the world. The vineyards around Tours thrive on the fertile soil around the river and its tributaries, and many producers are well prepared to receive visitors and are more than happy for them to try a glass or two.

A great way to experience this gorgeous valley is on two wheels - on a bike tour along the Loire a Velo trail - a 300-mile bike trail made up of country paths and small roads that winds along the Loire River through the enchanting villages and towns of the Loire Valley. The trail meanders exquisitely beside France's longest and most evocative river. The trail will surely become one of the most popular in Europe, partly for the extraordinary views and tranquil atmosphere.

A special "Loire a Velo" handbook has been produced to mark the project, and is an excellent companion for visiting families wishing to see the Loire Valley on two wheels. It allows cyclists to select a route to suit, discovering lesser-known areas of the Loire, chateaux, wildlife and culture.

The Loire biking season runs from April to October.

No, you don't have to be Lance Armstrong to bike the Loire a Velo trail. That is just it. The whole point is to slow down and enjoy the scenery. Biking clubs will zoom past you on country roads, dressed to the nines in their colourful racing outfits because the Loire Valley is also a favourite destination for serious bikers as well. Remember you are in the land of the Tour de France.

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About the Author

Corina Clemence runs Chateau du Guerinet, near Blois a luxury chateau for up to 15 people perfect for a cycling holiday visitin g Loire Valley's best chateaux and vineyards. Rent a castle in France <http://www.loirechateau.com> Rent a french chateau