

# *Loire Source to Sea*



*... from a mountain trickle to the Atlantic Ocean!*

## **THE LOIRE IS FRANCE'S LONGEST RIVER**

and on this ride you will follow it from its source in the mountains of the Auvergne in the Massif Central. The tiny spring is hidden under a mountain in the central south of France and it then loops north before turning west to meet the sea near the seafaring city of Nantes. By this stage it is a wide, powerful waterway which used to carry much of France's waterborne trade.

Along the way you will pass many wonderful old villages, abbeys, canal aqueducts and of course the chateaux for which the Loire is well known. There are also, from about half way, almost continuous vineyards along the river giving us something local to refresh ourselves with each night!

We love making journeys by bike and this is one that you will remember fondly as the quiet pace of river life is combined with the fascinating sights along the way.

## **At a glance.....**

- 11 days' riding
- 662 miles (1,053km)
- Hilly first 3 days then mostly very flat
- Daily distances from 38 to 70 miles (61 to 111 km)
- 12 nights in comfortable 3\*\*\* family run hotels
- 10 dinners
- 2 night dinner not included
- 5 picnic lunches included
- Snacks, drinks and cakes along the way
- Fully supported

**YOU WILL SEE** the world famous Loire Valley Chateaux on your ride through France including Chambord (pictured), Azay-le-Rideau, Chenonceaux and Usse, which Walt Disney used as his model for Sleeping Beauty when he made his cartoon of the famous fairy tale. This world Heritage and UNESCO site is one of the highlights of any holiday so don't forget your camera!



**Day 1:** Arrival and transfer to hotel near the source of the river high in the mountains.

**Day 2:** Leaving the hotel we cycle the 7 miles or so to leave our bikes by the side of the road and make the short walk to the spot where the infant Loire bubbles up through the mountains of the Massif Central. Then it's back on the road for a hilly day and the start of our epic journey. We can't always follow the river precisely as it meanders through the mountains but we follow its general direction taking in some unspoilt countryside as we go, and stop for the night in Le Puy en Velay in the heart of the Massif Central. (91 km / 57 miles).

**Day 3:** We start the day following the river down a gorge with this first section being either flat or downhill. After this there are some hills, and some fine views of the river finding its way through the rocky landscape, before a flat last 20km with only the hill up to our overnight village to contend with. One extended climb at about 50 miles. St Galmier is where Badoit water is sourced and bottled. (107 km / 67 miles).

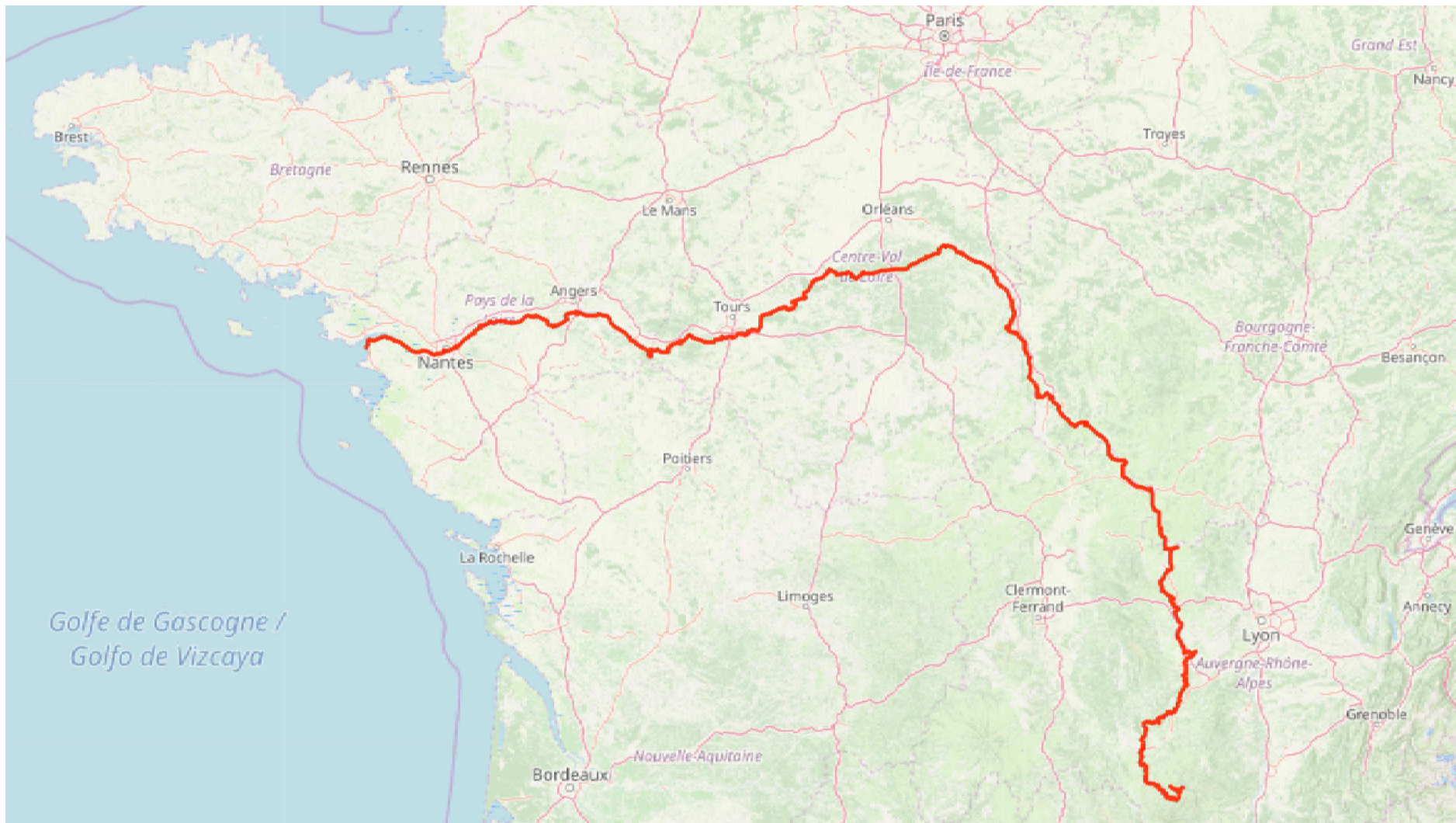


*The ride begins in the uplands of the Auvergne*

**Day 4:** After a good night's sleep this is the last of the harder days and with a fine route tracking the river this should not present any problems. Our first stop though is to fill up our water bottles at the Badoit Well! A day of two halves, part one being pretty flat, part 2 having more hills. Once again there are some lovely sections alongside the river with a picnic by a beautiful chateau on an island. (97 km / 61 miles).

**Day 5:** The river is becoming noticeably larger and many more vil-





**Loire Source to Sea route map. The ride starts in the Massif Central southwest of Lyon and continues for 1,100 km to the Atlantic ocean near St Nazaire.**

lages sit astride its banks. Once again, many of these are completely unspoilt and it is a privilege to witness a landscape unaltered for centuries. It is either flat or very gentle downhill all day, making for fast and easy progress, including some sections along a 'voie verte' and a tarmac canal tow-path. Perfect! Our hotel is in the ancient town of Bourbon Lancy, with a gastronomic menu sure to delight. (79km / 49 miles).



*Sancerre, a pretty town amongst famous vineyards and a great coffee stop!*

**Day 6:** Another virtually flat day means despite the distance, you will make good speed with little effort. Decize and Nevers, the two larger towns passed today, are both historic: Julius Ceasar is said to have visited both. Nevers is a good place to pause and reflect that we have covered almost 400km already. Leading up from the quay, winding streets contain many fine houses. Similarly, La Charitee sur Loire, where we stay the night, is a fine old town with cobbled streets and an old abbey. (112km / 70 miles).

**Day 7:** Today the mood shifts as we start to see larger and larger castles along the way, marking the southern extremities of chateaux country. First, however, we must climb the hill to Sancerre which is surely worth it for the fine views of the river and the central square lined with wine merchants' shops and purveyors of the local goat's cheese. This is prime wine country which now continues most of the way to the sea. There is then a progression of castles including Chatillon, Gien and Sully, where we pause for the night. (102 km / 64 miles).

**Day 8:** We leave the river and cut across country in order to miss the built up city of Orleans. The terrain is once more flat so there is plenty of time to stop and explore. The fine renaissance architecture is now a frequent sight and nowhere more so than at Chambord, which lies just before our overnight stop and is the largest of all. We recommend pushing on to Chambord for a late lunch then a walk around the magnificent palace. The meal at the hotel should be a good one if past experience is anything to go by. (84 km / 58 miles).



**Day 9:** There are many famous places on our route today. It's a



lovely ride to get there, through vineyards and fields of sunflowers, and this continues to our destination of Azay le Rideau. This very lovely 'small' chateau sits in a pretty town and has wonderful grounds; the ideal place to end the day with a stroll around the parkland, which is open late tonight and so will have fewer visitors than during day-time. (109 km / 68 miles).



**Day 10:** Azay to Saumur contains some of the most lovely cycling of the trip. Candes sur Loire and St Martin are justifiably graded as two of the most beautiful villages in France, whilst Saumur is known as the pearl of the Loire. It exudes an air of sophistication with its hilltop chateau and the famous cavalry riding school, the cadre noir, having its home here. We ride on through vineyards towards Angers, where we stop in a small village just next the river. The terrain through the vineyards is characterised by small hills but again the overall picture is of gentle and manageable cycling. (105 km / 65 miles).

**Day 11:** To Nantes, today, and the history of the river is evident throughout. Although only now navigable as far as Nantes, in past years the quaysides lining it

*'The most enjoyable cycling holiday I've been on in 15 years - quiet but well-maintained roads, beautiful and occasionally stunning scenery, overnight stops in hotels and towns with character, and even bags carried up to rooms.'*



*The start and finish for our bottle of water, travelling the Loire with us from the Source to the Sea.*

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were an important feature of the local trading economy. Nantes is a large city which we enter by quiet cycle lanes, and the hustle and bustle, together with the knowledge that tomorrow we will end our journey along France's longest river, add a certain excitement to the evening. (104 km / 65 miles).

## TRAVEL TO THE TOUR

Travel to and from the start and end of the tour is not included in our prices due to the vast range of places our riders come from. For many of our riders it's perfectly possible to do this trip without flying.

**Train:** If travelling by train from the UK you should aim to change in Lille (easier than Paris) then take a train to Lyon Part Dieu and then to Le Puy en Valence from where we collect – the journey from Lyon to Le Puy is up the river gorge so is an interesting journey.

**Air:** The nearest airport with regular services is Lyon from where you can get a train to Le Puy en Velay as described above.

## TRAVEL HOME

**Air:** Nantes has an airport with an increasingly good range of flights. Alternatively you can catch a direct TGV back to Paris to fly out again.

**Train:** At the end we can take you to Nantes, which is on the TGV network

## BIKES & EQUIPMENT

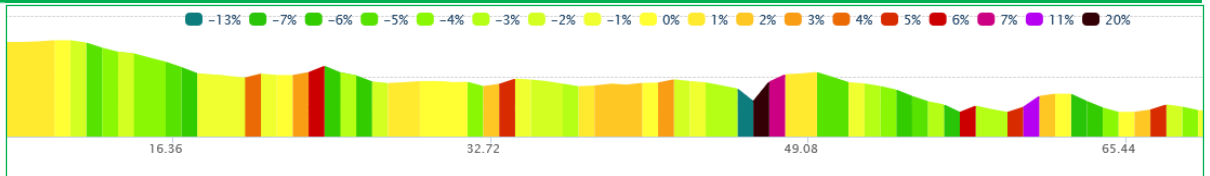
We recommend road or touring bicycles, although we have had people complete the ride very happily on mountain bikes with road tyres ('slicks'). All bikes are secure at night. You won't need panniers or bar bags as you will frequently see the vans. Garmins / GPS are highly recommended.

We send you out a kit list in advance of your holiday so you know what to pack. A number of our hotels have swimming pools.

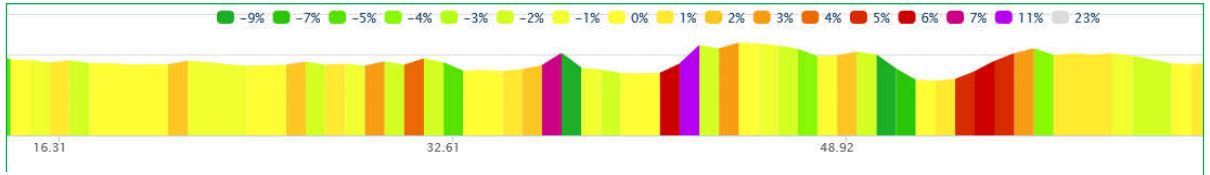
**TERRAIN** The ride has a hilly first three days and is then very innocuous all the way to the finish. Riding through the vineyards on days 8 and 9 there are some small hills but these are short and not steep. They wouldn't normally be worthy of mention except that the rest of the ride is so flat!

*There are elevation charts on the page following. These are for general identification only. Actual route may vary. Note different scales for each day. Distances on graphs are km. Charts and data from mapmyride which tends to overestimate climb figures compared to a Garmin, so if you use a Garmin take 1/3 off to get a feel for how a day compares to a ride you know.*

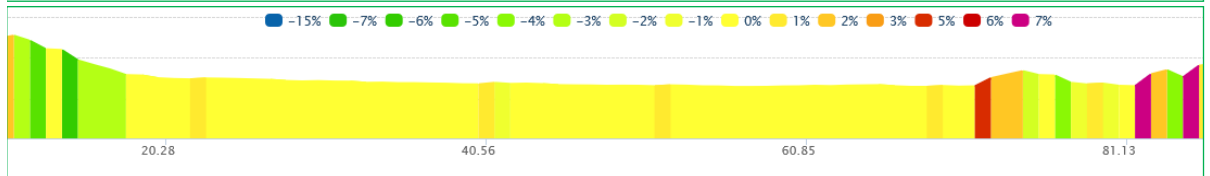
**1**  
51 miles  
1,438m



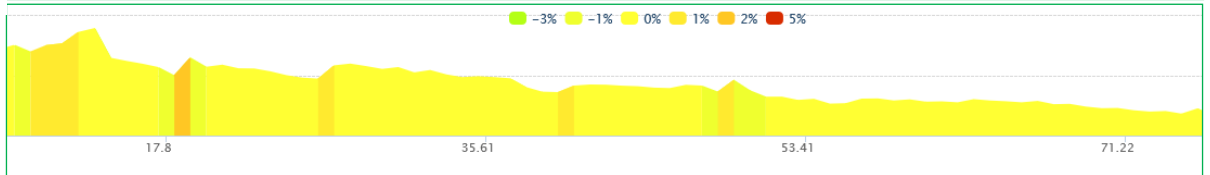
**2**  
51 miles  
1714m



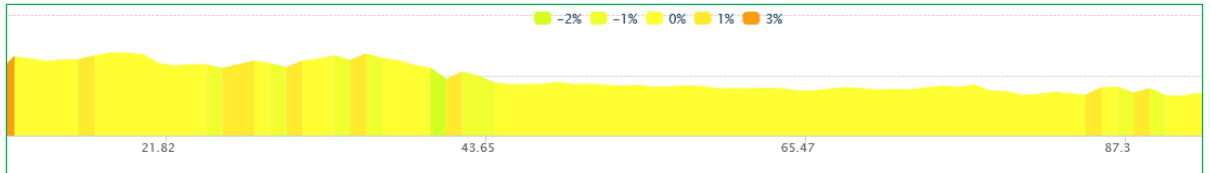
**3**  
63 miles  
1043m



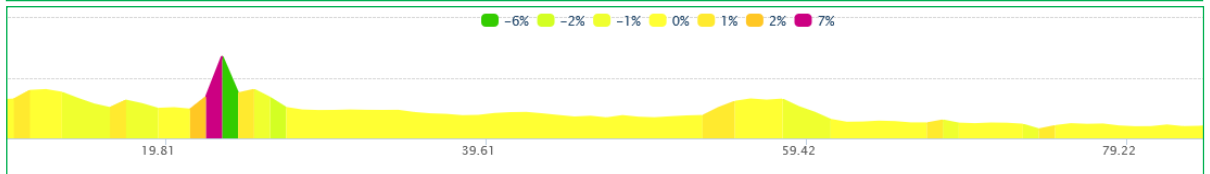
**4**  
51 miles  
304m



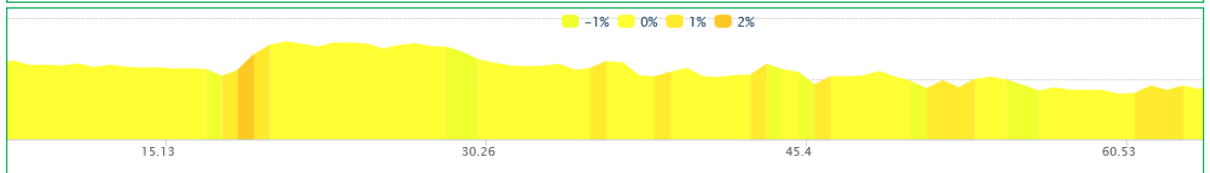
**5**  
68 miles  
372m



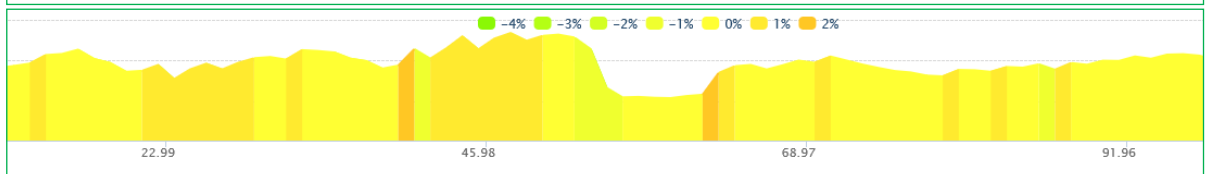
**6**  
62 miles  
430m



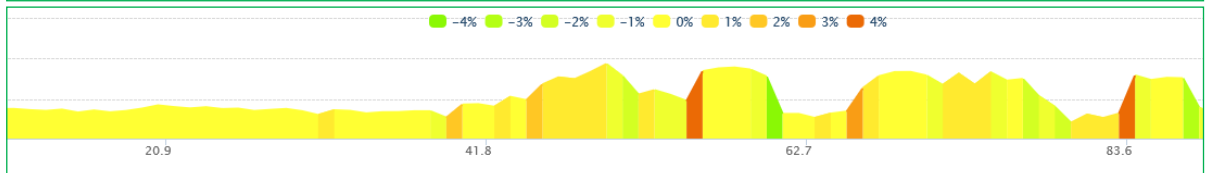
**7**  
47miles  
270m



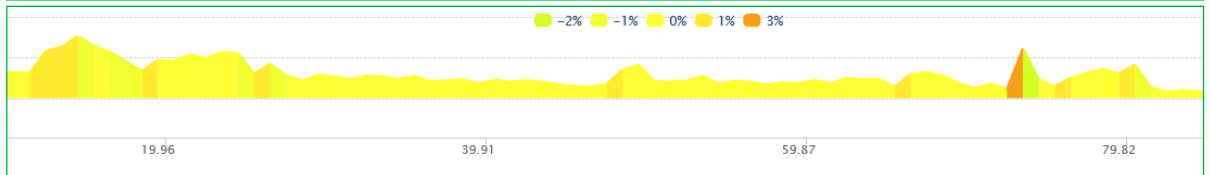
**8**  
71 miles  
488m



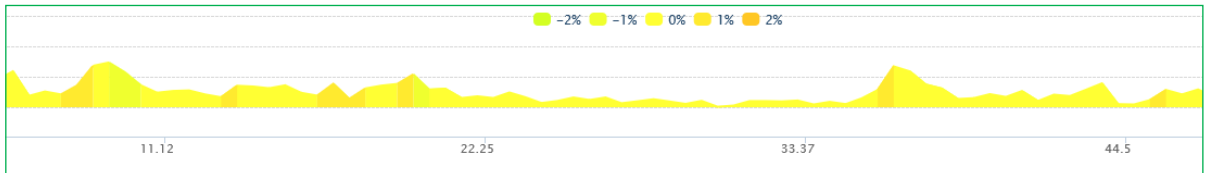
**9**  
65 miles  
654m



**10**  
62 miles  
413m



**11**  
35 miles  
147m





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## NAVIGATION

**WE PROVIDE** a printed route card with turn by turn instructions. We also provide .gpx and .tcx files, and if you do not already use a Garmin / GPS, we cannot recommend enough purchasing one in advance of the holiday and familiarising yourself with it. They really do make life so much easier and your trip that much more enjoyable.

## SUPPORT VEHICLES



**OUR VAN** support on this trip caters for all speeds of rider and is there to provide everything you need to make your trip easier, so that all you have to do is pedal. We provide a coffee stop in the morning and snacks throughout the day but you will see us far more frequently than that as we sit by the side of the road to see you all through a tricky junction or to dispense suntan lotion. Everyone loves our homemade cake (you have to eat it all, because we get in trouble if we take any back at the end of the trip) and we also have a range of spares on board. You can leave a daybag in the van with waterproofs, gels, your iPad or whatever you may need to get at throughout the day—you will see us every hour on average and we are always only a phone call away. Various referred to by riders as ‘the mothership’, and ‘ride HQ’, our vans are all this and more and the



## GROUP RIDING

**YOU DO NOT NEED TO RIDE AS A GROUP** as our support vehicles will cater for everyone's speed. You will usually find someone else who rides at a pace that you are comfortable with, even if you did not know them before the holiday began. If you find yourself riding in a large group and are not familiar with group riding, ask us, or other riders, to explain about warning signals and how to pass information about hazards on the road between yourselves. If you are a slower rider you can still complete the route at your own pace, although on longer days you may want to set off a little earlier – we always advise completing 60% of the daily distance by lunch time. It is important to ride at your pace, not someone else's.

Our group sizes vary from 4 up to 12. Sometimes we go to 14, but we are keen to keep the personal service that our returning customers love. On our feedback form a lot of people have told us that we should stress the benefits of small groups—so we have!

*'Of 6 companies that we have used for this format of holiday you are far and away the best.'*

## ABOUT US

We are a specialist family run company and we care deeply that you have a good time. It's more than likely that one of the business owners will be leading your trip. This isn't just a livelihood for us, it's a vocation, so we'll do whatever we can to look after you and make sure you have fun! We're mad keen cyclists and want to pass on the joys of riding in France. This means is that if you want to ring us at 9pm on a Sunday with some questions, please do. If we can't come to the phone we will get back to you surprisingly quickly. You'll probably be speaking to the person who planned the route and has actually ridden it, or chose the hotels.



*Emptying the bottle of water from the Source into the Sea*

If you have any questions at all, or wish to book, please call us on +44 (0)1300 350555 or email [info@greenjerseycycling.co.uk](mailto:info@greenjerseycycling.co.uk).

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## HOTELS

We use small family-run hotels wherever possible where a generous breakfast is offered. All have en suite facilities. The average rating is 3-star. We use one chambres d'hotes on this trip (like an upmarket B&B). Accommodation is on a half board basis. If a hotel does not have a restaurant for dinner then we eat out (cost included in tour). We arrange tables together for the evening meals although you are of course free to come and go as you please. If you have any dietary requirements please let us know in advance. On one night (your guides' night off) dinner is not included and you are free to make your own choice. On this tour that is in Nantes (the penultimate night) which is a city with plenty of choice for all tastes and budgets.

## MEALS & DRINKS

Breakfast and dinner (usually) is included in the cost of your holiday and we also provide a glass of wine, beer or soft drink with the evening meal; if you want more you simply pay the hotel / restaurant at the time of ordering. Coffee after the meal is not included as we don't believe in pricing in something that 80% of our riders never drink.

For lunch, we will tell you where you will find places to eat / buy food. On several days on this tour we provide a picnic lunch (included in the cost of the holiday) where facilities are scarce due to the rural nature of our route.

## DATES & PRICES 2020/2021

Please see our website

## BESPOKE DATES

If you can rustle up a group of 8 or more we can put on a bespoke date just for your group.

**TO BOOK:** [Our booking pages can be found at http://greenjerseycycling.co.uk/contact](http://greenjerseycycling.co.uk/contact)

Green Jersey French Cycling Tours, March 2020