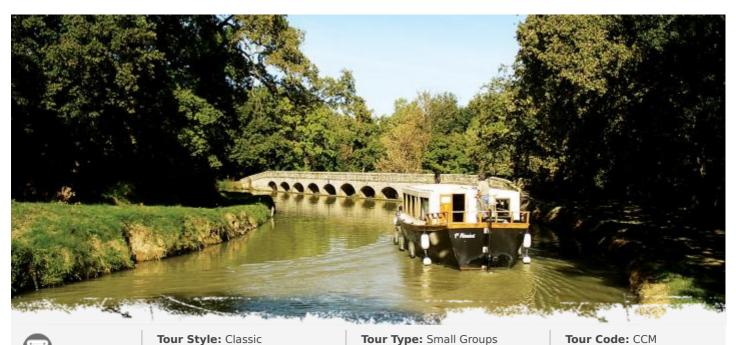


Canal du Midi (CCM 2014)

Production with the solution



TOUR **DURATION** 8



Cycling Grade: Easy

Cycle the Canal Du Midi - A grand 17th century canal to link the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site

Tour Comfort: Standard

- Picturesque landscapes of southwest France rewarding views from our bikes
- Medieval France A chance to explore the rich histories of Narbonne, Carcassonne and the Cathar Castles of Lastours
- Food and Wine The usual fine French cuisine and excellent local wines

Tour Essentials

Accommodation: 7 nights Standard Hotel

Included Meals: 7 breakfasts, 0

lunches, 0 dinners

Start Point: Join tour: Béziers Tour ends: Beziers rail

End Point: station

Transport: Bicycle, Bus, Train

Countries: France

Canal Du Midi

Rich with history and natural beauty, this cycling tour leads us down to the Mediterranean coast and long the tree-lined towpaths of the Canal du Midi. We admire the medieval fortress town of Carcassonne and the 12th century cathedral in Narbonne. As we ride into the heart of the Minervois wine region we pass some of the prettiest scenery in southwest France.

Cycling Information

On this tour we cycle 228 km over six days (an average of 38km per day) with further optional rides available. Four of the cycling days are circular routes and therefore optional. We travel mainly on canal towpaths and country roads, on flat or gently undulating terrain. Maps are provided to cycle individually or in groups while the tour leader drives the support vehicle, except on circular routes when the tour leader will cycle with the group. We have graded the route as easy.



Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Cycling Grade: Easy

Suitable for cyclists who enjoy easy and relatively short rides on flat or gently undulating terrain. Ideal if you simply want to explore a region by bike at a relaxed pace.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

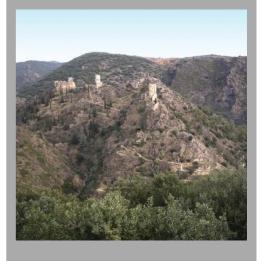
While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or











Join tour Beziers

Joining the tour in Beziers today, there will be a short briefing to introduce you to the itinerary for the coming days ahead. Beziers, sits at the heart of a huge wine growing area and has a colourful and fascinating history. The gothic cathedral sits high above the canal on the site of the romanesque building destroyed by the Crusaders' fires during the Crusades against the Cathars. The old centre is peppered with narrow streets leading to stunning views over the Orb Valley, whilst in the distance the hills of the Cevennes rise up to form the start of the Massif Central. The town is also famous for its Poutous, a delicious treat made from honey and Bitterois, a cake made from almonds as well as some fine regional wines and chocolate. Fine wines, good food and glorious scenery, what better way to start!



Ride to Valras Plage

After becoming acquainted with our bicycles, our journey begins in earnest today as we head south, towards the coast at Valras Plage. Following a route that takes us across a mainly level, or at the very most slightly undulating landscape, we head along quiet country roads to Valras Plage for a leisurely lunch and the chance to relax on the beach or take a swim before meandering inland again to join the towpaths of the Canal du Midi. Connecting the old trade routes between the Languedoc and Aquitaine, the canal was the brainchild of Pierre-Paul Riquet, a 17th century noble whose persistence and fortitude convinced both Louis XIV and his First Minister, Colbert, of the merits of linking the Atlantic with the Mediterranean. The project was begun in 1667 and took some 14 years to complete, eventually carving a trail some 240km in length, from the River Garonne to Agde on the Mediterranean coast. Unfortunately for Monsieur Riquet he died just six months short of the canal's completion, so never actually saw what came to be known as 'Riquet's Ditch' finished. River traffic brought immense prosperity to the towns along its course, until the arrival of the Sete-Bordeaux railway in 1857, which all but saw an end to the commercial importance of the canal. Lined with trees and consisting of some 99 locks and 130 bridges, the canal is an engineering marvel and its tranquil beauty affords us an ideal opportunity to explore something of the delightful countryside of this part of south-west France. (Total cycling distance approx 45km)



Cycle to Narbonne

Leaving Beziers behind this morning we head south once more, following the course of the waterway, passing the famous nine locks at Fonseranes. One of the highlights of the entire canal system, the locks comprise of eight ovoid water basins, unique to the Canal du Midi, that extend 300m up a slope of some 21.5m, a spectacular feat of civil engineering that makes this site one of the most popular attractions in the entire Languedoc-Roussillon region. There is an option today to visit the pre-Roman site of Oppidium d'Enserune, from where you can get some stunning views across the Beziers plain, including the medieval crop formations of the Etang de Montady and the Malpas tunnel. Measuring some 173m in length the tunnel was dug below the Colline de Montady in just six days and was the first of its kind to be used for the access of sailing vessels. From here we turn away from the canal for a short time, taking a route that passes through a rural landscape of traditional village life, en route to the city of Narbonne, our final destination for today. (Total cycling distance approx 35km)



Free day; optional rides

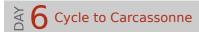
Today has been left free to explore something of Narbonne and its environs and the itinerary is very much dependent upon on the interests of our group. There are options to cycle from Narbonne to either Narbonne Plage or Gruissan via the Canal de la Robine, Given the nature of today's riding the terrain you choose is very much up to the individual, offering a mainly level landscape to traverse, but with a chance to explore something of the hilly routes around the 'Clapes' range should you so decide. You may of course prefer to stay a little closer to home and explore the city itself. Formerly the capital of Rome's first settlement in Gaul, Narbonne was once a thriving port and a major centre of commercial enterprise and communication during the Middle Ages, that is until plague, the English and the silting up of the harbour saw an end to its importance and prosperity during the 14th century. Today its restored medieval quarter and dominating cathedral choir makes it an interesting place to soak up something of the atmosphere of its halcyon days and learn a little of the fascinating history of this region. (Total cycling distance approx 33-56km, depending on the option chosen)



Free day; optional rides

Our optional cycle takes us to the lakes of Bages and Peyriac, to view some of the wildlife that inhabit the lagoons including the resident flamingos from where we continue to the nearby Abbey of Fontfroide, a beautifully restored 12th century Romanesque structure that boasts some lovely cloisters, as well as a spectacular rose garden. The abbey survived the Cathar Wars, the Black Death and the Revolution and it was only the death of the last abbot at the end of the 19th century and the introduction of laws ending monastic communities that finally saw the monastery close. Extensive restoration has seen the buildings restored to something of their former glory, with some spectacular stained glass, intricate reliefs and wall paintings enhancing the former quarters of the monks. After our visit (optional) we continue continue to rejoin the Canal de Robine, another of Paul Riquet's projects, joining up with the southern end of the Canal du Midi. We follow part of its delightful tree-lined course this afternoon as we return to Narbonne (Total cycling distance approx 56km).





After a short transfer this morning to the wine producing town of Lezignan corbieres our ride today brings us to one of the region's most visually spectacular settings, the walled fortress of Carcassonne, once one of the most important and powerful cities in the south, before the all consuming Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars saw the town fall to the notorious onslaught of the forces of Simon de Montfort. Our ride takes us via the pathways of the Canal du Midi, through a patchwork landscape of attractive villages, wildflowers and vineyards. There will also be an opportunity, for those that wish, to take a swim today, in the nearby Lake of Jouarres, before finishing the day's ride in Carcassonne itself. (Total cycling distance approx 55km)



Optional rides from Carcassonne

Our final day's riding allows the option to do as much or as little as you want. There are a number of optional rides out from Carcassonne, with a chance to cycle along the canal towards Bram and Villepinte and visit the red-roofed streets of these attractive towns, or perhaps take a more energetic option and head into the surrounding hills to visit the old Cathar castle of Chateaux de Lastours, nestling amongst the wild lands of the Orbiel Valley. Actually consisting of four defensive fortresses these are the northernmost citadels of the Cathars, built to protect the route between Carcassonne and Mazamet. Dominating the landscape of scrub, cypress and wildflowers that blanket the river valleys, these ancient keeps present a majestic and poignant reminder of a time when upheaval and religious intolerance blighted this tranquil countryside. Of course you may decide to explore the delights of Carcassonne itself, immersing yourself amongst its medieval remains and enjoying the unique delights of what is surely one of the most perfectly preserved towns of its kind anywhere in France. The city holds a wealth of delights, from the twin towers of the Porte Narbonnaise, to the spectacular Chateau Comtal in the heart of La Cite, whilst at the Basilique St-Nazaire you can find samples of some of the best medieval stained glass in the Midi. (The shortest ride will be 35km, the longest 75km. The terrain too will vary between flat or hilly, depending upon the route chosen)



Tour ends Beziers rail station

After breakfast this morning we drive from Carcassone to Beziers Rail Station.

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 7 breakfasts, 0 lunches,0 dinners included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.



Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Foreign Exchange

France

Local Currency: Euro

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Pounds Sterling and US Dollars can be easily exchanged in France.

Where to Exchange: Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability: Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

Credit Card Acceptance: In major restaurants (make sure you have informed your credit card company that you are travelling abroad as some companies will reject payments)

Travellers Cheques: These can be cashed at virtually any bank and urban post office in France. Outside of major tourist regions very few shops or hotels accept travelers checks as payment.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

For passengers making their own travel arrangements, please ensure you join the group as described on day one of the tour itinerary. If you are considering purchasing your own airline tickets, you can book these through any travel agent, directly with an airline or through an online flight consolidator. In all cases, we would be happy to arrange transfers to and from the joining point of your tour if

Joining Tour Abroad

Clients booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the joining point. Please refer to separate 'Joining Instructions' for time and place of rendezvous with tour leader

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a huge selection of competitive flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport to ensure you get the very best priced flight at all times.

On our website we do display a UK flight inclusive package price which is usually based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure the best available fare for your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining any of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment, personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable.

If you require travel insurance for your tour, Explore Worldwide is an appointed representative of Campbell Irvine Limited, who is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services authority. Our travel insurance policy is specially tailored to the needs of the adventure traveller and will cover you for any included activity on any Explore trip. You can either purchase this at the time of booking or call us on 0844 499 0903 after you have booked.

Visa Information

France: Visas are not required by UK, EU, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

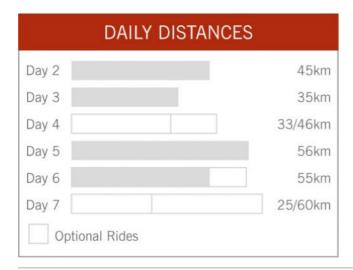


Vaccinations & Protection

France

Nothing compulsory. Tetanus recommended. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Tour



Climate

France

Summer days are generally warm and sunny, although rain can occur at all times of the year. Summers are a little warmer than those in southern Britain. Wine harvesting takes place in late August/early September.

Footwear

Cycle shoes if you wish, trainers and comfortable shoes for evening wear.

Clothing

Pack essentially for hot weather. During the day you can expect to live in T-shirts and shorts, but you may wish to bring smart casual wear for the evenings. Bring a warm fleece for cool evenings and raingear for occasional rain. May, June and September may be slightly cooler. Please note that French health regulations require that men wear 'proper' (Lycra) swimming trunks in pools and not shorts.

Equipment

As there may be the option to swim in the ocean please bring a beach towel. A cycling helmet is essential and cycle gloves, shorts and water bottle are all recommended. For your own comfort you may like to bring a gel seat cover. You may also wish to bring a penknife, wrap around sunglasses and a high factor suncream. Panniers, locks, map-holder, basic toolkit and water-bottle holder are all supplied locally. A torch is useful in case of powercuts/emergencies.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of luggage and a daysac. Remember, you are expected to carry your own luggage - don't overload yourself. The support vehicle will transfer the main luggage between night stops.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

General Information

Food

France

Lunch: 11.00 **Dinner: 23.00**



Water

France

1 30

Country details

France

Size of Country: 674,843 sq km

Population: 65,821,885 Major Language: French

Religion: Catholic

Time Difference to GMT: +1

Electric Supply & Plugs

France

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, elephant, or any number of unusual forms of transport . Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to - and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures and traditional, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: The Sunshine Orphanage (which cares for abandoned children in Luxor, Egypt), Education for All (sponsoring children through their secondary education in Morocco), The Hope Foundation (helping an Indian Village to recover from the 2004 Tsunami) and the Mufindi Orphanage, which support AIDS orphans in Tanzania.

We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation, Travel Operators for Tigers (helping save the Bengal Tiger from extinction) and Friends for Conservation. We have also adopted a beautiful Sri Lankan Elephant called

We are delighted to have received a Five Star sustainable tourism status from the Association of Independent Tour Operators in recognition of our on-going commitment to sustainable tourism.

Cool Earth

Explore are delighted to support Cool Earth to reduce carbon emissions through preventing the illegal deforestation of the South America rainforest. One of the top sources of global carbon emissions, rainforest deforestation equivalent to the USA's annual emissions, it also destroys flora and fauna, sometimes to the point of extinction. It also degrades the lives and communities of the 350 million residents of the rainforest.

Cool Earth prevents the deforestation through its support of local communities as forest guardians and by focussing on areas in immediate danger of deforestation. It has so far protected over 350,000 acres of rainforest, with each acre saving an emission of 260 tons of CO2, as well as protecting rare animals and plants. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year. In addition to mitigating emissions, when you travel with Explore, you are helping to protect the source of 20% of the world's fresh water and oxygen, as well as the livelihoods of the 1.6 billion people who are reliant on the rainforest.

www.coolearth.org



Earth Matters

- The Travel Foundation
 - Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern
 - Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% nonrefundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2013 and 31st December 2014.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2014 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2014. 2015/16 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2015.

These tour notes were last updated on 09/12/2013 02:38:21