



How to choose the trip of your two-wheeled dreams

Top tips from your Europe bike tour experts





How to choose your bike tour

With hundreds of bike tour options available in Europe, finding and choosing the right tour for you can seem daunting. But that's why we're here!

Based on more than a decade of experience helping more than 20,000 clients plan trips throughout Europe, we've developed this guide to help you through the process.

So you want to do a bike tour!

You're in good company! More and more travelers are taking to two wheels to explore the world. Indeed, touring by bike is perhaps the best way to truly experience the landscape and culture of a region—the unique features of the terrain, the smell of flowers or ripening grapes, the sounds of wildlife, or the people and hidden treasures of small towns. Or, in the words of Ernest Hemingway:

“It is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best, since you have to sweat up the hills and coast down them. Thus you remember them as they actually are, while in a motor car only a high hill impresses you, and you have no such accurate remembrance of country you have driven through as you gain by riding a bicycle.”

And as one travel writer has also described it: traveling by car, train, or bus is like watching an amazingly beautiful movie go by. **Traveling by bike is like being *in the movie*.**

Whether you are a family going on your first bike tour, a couple going on a honeymoon or 35th vacation together, a group of friends who want to share a unique travel experience, or an avid cyclist who wants to take on a new challenge, there's a tour out there that's perfect for you. You can choose from a variety of difficulty levels, terrains, and route types—from easy, flat rides along paved bike paths to routes that take you up some of the most challenging mountains in the world.



Top 10 questions to ask yourself

1

What's my budget?

Until recently, you had a choice of two extremes: “on the cheap” self-contained tours, where you’re entirely on your own, or expensive “all-inclusive” luxury tours. But the bulk of our tours fall somewhere in between—and since they’re run primarily by local tour companies, you get the best value possible!

2

What's my intent?

Maybe it's the slow pace, so you can get to know and feel the country, meet the people and have time to sightsee. Maybe cycling is the focus, where culture and history may be secondary to setting and scenery. Or maybe you're looking for an opportunity to get in some training miles in a new and exciting setting.

3

Where do I want to go?

Take an inventory of the most important elements you want built into your experience. Do you have special interests like history, trail riding, wine or cuisine? What's the setting of your daydreams: a quiet stretch of seacoast, an alpine forest, or a bustling market square?

4

Where do I want to spend my nights?

(Not to get too personal!)

While most of your riding time is typically spent in quiet countryside or on backroads, overnight locations vary by tour. Do you enjoy the excitement of the city, or is a peaceful evening in a rural farmhouse more your speed? Would you like to be in a new location each night or be based in one hotel for the entire tour?

5

Do I prefer riding with a guide and a group or more on my own?

If you enjoy traveling with a group, meeting new people, and having a guide and structured schedule, a guided group tour may be the best fit for you. If you prefer to be independent and to choose your traveling companions and daily schedule, consider a self-guided individual tour. They're a money-saving alternative to guided tours, and the tour operator still organizes all of the details for you, including hotels, luggage transfers and routes.

6

What's my ability level?

Do you like riding up hills or mountains, or are you more of a flatlander—or somewhere in between?



Top 10 questions to ask yourself (CONTINUED)

7

How far do I want to ride each day?

Remember you are on vacation and there will be a lot to see along the way—and you'll be riding for several days, usually back to back. So don't use your weekly Sunday ride as a guide. We almost never hear feedback that daily distances were too short!

8

What's the make-up of my party?

Is your party made up of people with varying levels of cycling ability—or enthusiasm? You may want programs that offer multiple ride options, or maybe even days off with optional rides.

9

What kind of route surface and setting am I comfortable with?

Would you prefer a route that primarily follows paved bike paths? Are you comfortable with light to moderate road traffic? Will going “off-road” even on wide, packed-dirt trails make you nervous, or are you ready to shred some singletrack?

10

Do I want to ride every day?

While most tours take you from point A to point B each day, there are tour options that stay in one place every night, making it easy to take a day off if you like. Home base tours (AKA “hub and spoke tours”) and bike and boat tours are good options if you plan to take a rest day or two.





How to find the perfect bicycle tour

When you've answered the questions and have a better idea of what you're looking for, you can move to the next key phase: choosing your perfect tour! Here are some suggestions to help guide your search.

First, decide between guided or self-guided

Guided tours

Guided tours are just that. You have a guide, a set plan and a structured daily schedule. These tours will have just about everything planned out for you: hotels, rental bikes, routes, meals, luggage transfers, sightseeing tours and more. The guide will be there to show you the region and to help in case of breakdowns (mechanical or human).



Riders tend to stick together as a group with the guide. They sometimes can go ahead to the next turn or next town, but the norm is sticking together.

Guided tours usually include lodging, breakfast, evening dinners, rental bikes, support van or bus with driver, ride-along guide, luggage transport, detailed route planning, and more.



Guided tours can also be broken down into two sub-categories:

- **Guided group tour** - You usually bike in a group of 8 to 20 people. If you're traveling with a local company in the region, you typically tour with riders from several different countries, which makes for new acquaintances and international friendships.
- **Guided private tour** – You travel only with your own party plus a guide—the tour is just for you! This often allows for more flexibility with the set schedule and route.

[More on guided tours >](#)

Self-guided tours

Self-guided tours are becoming the most popular form of bicycle tourism. They cost less than guided tours but still maintain a level of support and convenience that allows you the flexibility to explore on your own, without sweating the logistics.

It doesn't mean that you're totally on your own. These tours have logistics covered for you: hotel reservations, luggage transfer, detailed tour information with maps and route descriptions, and usually a hotline in case of emergencies or problems. You'll have someone to call!

Self-guided tours typically include lodging, breakfast, luggage transport from hotel to hotel, tour descriptions, maps, detailed route planning, and an emergency hotline.

You do need some level of independence. It's your responsibility to get to the next hotel every day, even if you head into bad weather or just don't feel like riding anymore. While the operator usually gives you a list of bike shops along the route, you do need to know how to fix a flat tire.

[More on self-guided tours >](#)



Quick comparison

Here's an easy comparison of standard amenities and services provided in each type of tour.

	Guided	Self-guided
Lodging	✓	✓
Breakfast buffet	✓	✓
Luggage transport from hotel to hotel	✓	✓
Route information, travel material and route maps	✓	✓
Detailed route planning	✓	✓
Evening dinners	✓	<i>Optional</i>
Riding with group	✓	<i>Sometimes</i>
Support van or bus	✓	—
Informed travel guide riding with group	✓	—
Admissions and local tours	✓	—
Hotline for questions and issues along the route	—	✓

(Remember: these can vary by tour, so be sure to confirm the services provided for a specific tour!)

Next, pick a destination

So, where to? As with planning any trip, take an inventory of your interests and the most important elements you want incorporated into a tour. Perhaps you're a history buff who wants to visit the historic sites of a particular region, a wine and food connoisseur who wants to focus on vineyards and local cuisine, or a family looking for an especially leisurely ride with plenty of kid-friendly, off-the-bike activities.

Consider the following questions when taking an inventory of your interests:

- What's the setting of your cycling daydreams? Is there a particular region of Europe calling to you to explore?"
- Do you prefer mountainous landscapes, coastal vistas, or river valley rides
- Do you prefer a combination of biking and boat excursions?
- Do you want a "familiar" setting or one that is more exotic and perhaps even challenging?
- Do you like hot weather or a more temperate climate?
- Is language an issue for you, where you'd prefer countries where English is widely spoken?

Our site has info on all the European countries where we offer tours (and many popular regions within them). [Explore our destinations](#) to learn about the draw for travelers and cyclists to each!



Choose your preferred level of difficulty

You'll find tours on our site suitable for a wide range of physical ability levels. The majority of tours cover about 20 to 40 miles (32 to 64 km) per day and are designed for travelers who enjoy a leisurely pace. But there's plenty to satisfy those craving a challenge too!

There are three key pieces of info on tour pages to help identify which tours are right for your ability level.

Terrain - Describes how much climbing you should expect.

Daily distances - Check out average daily distances, plus many daily programs list distances for each day so you can determine if there are any days that are longer than you're comfortable with.

Level of difficulty - We use two scales for difficulty level, depending on the type of bike you'll use on the tour.



Level of difficulty	Tours using road, hybrid or touring bikes	Tours using mountain bikes
1	Mostly flat	Mostly flat, wide trails
2	Flat with some gentle slopes	Some gentle slopes, wide trails
3	Rolling, hilly terrain	Rolling, hilly terrain and/or narrow trails
4	Some long and/or steep climbs	Some long and/or steep climbs and/or technical trails
5	Extensive climbing	Extensive climbing and/or highly technical trails

If this is your first bicycle tour and you're not an avid cyclist, you should probably select a level 1 or 2 tour. Avid cyclists who want a challenge may consider level 3 and 4 tours, though level 5 is reserved for the only the craziest—we mean, most enthusiastic—of cyclists!

Choose a route type you're comfortable with

Routes are selected for their charm and beauty, as well as for their cultural and historical importance. Many tours travel along paved bicycle paths or lightly traveled back roads through the countryside or from village to village. In many southern European countries, tours often switch to meadow and forest paths or side roads.

On many tours, short distances on roads with traffic are often unavoidable, especially when entering and leaving cities. Before selecting a tour it is important that you consider the **route type** and your comfort level riding in light to moderate road traffic. If you prefer to have limited riding on roads, then you should probably select a tour that primarily follows a bike path.

You should also consider the **riding surface**. Do you mind the occasional stretch on packed dirt or gravel, or do you prefer asphalt all the way? Again, it's crucial to know the terrain and surfaces before you make your choice. Make sure you read tour descriptions or ask us questions to ensure you will be comfortable with the characteristics of the day-to-day route type.

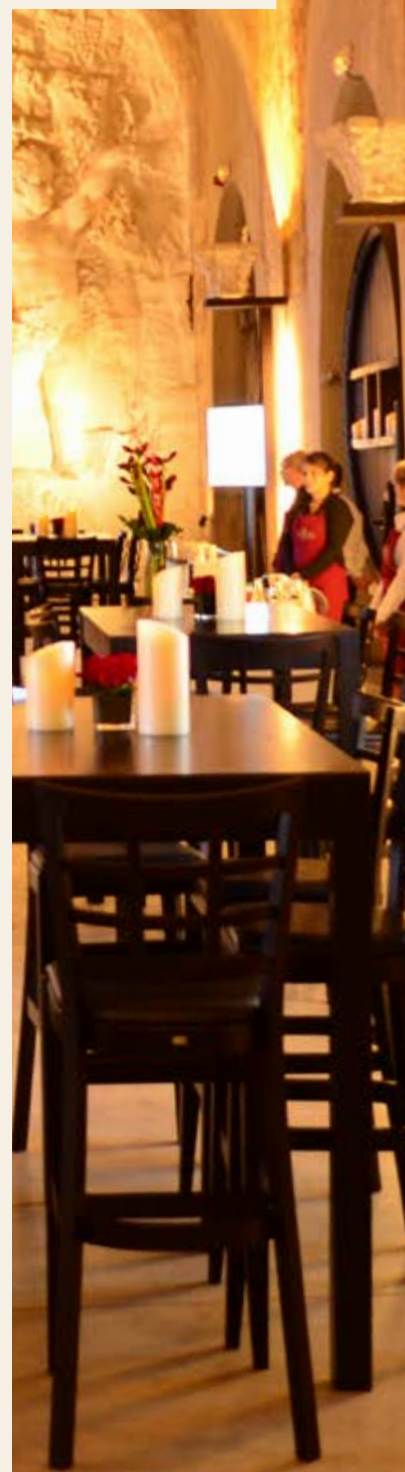


Determine if you want rest days along the way

On most tours, you cycle from point A to point B each day—the scenery changes and you cover a lot of ground. But there's something to be said for staying multiple nights in one town and taking day trips: you don't have to pack each morning, you can settle in, and you can really get to know a location. And, if you don't feel like riding, you can rest or pursue another activity (such as exploring the town, relaxing by the pool or taking a hike). This type of tour is a good option for couples or groups who have varying cycling abilities—it allows each individual in the group to go on rides or other excursions based on their interests.

We offer a small selection of **“home base” tours** (sometimes called **“hub and spoke”** tours) where you stay in the same hotel every night and do day rides to explore the region. Many of the more traditional point-to-point style tours also feature double overnights in towns along the way, giving you the choice to ride or take the day off on the second day.

Another option if you want to incorporate rest days into your trip is a **bike and boat tour**, which combines bike touring with river or coastal cruises. Your lodging each night is, essentially, a floating hotel that stays in a central location, follows you along your route, or meets you at the end of the day. If you want to take a rest day you can choose to stay on the boat or participate in other excursions or side trips. Bike and boat tours are particularly popular for couples and families who enjoy having rest days and experiencing the ambiance of the boat—or simply don't want to pack and unpack every day!





How to find your tour

Start searching

Now that you have an idea of key things to consider when looking for a bike tour, it's time to start searching! Your answers to the "Top 10 questions to ask yourself" can help guide your search and assessment of any bike tour you'll find on the Internet.

But if you want to peruse a curated collection of tours backed by helpful advisors, just visit the single site that centralizes the best companies, tour programs, and values—BikeTours.com!

Our [Tour Search](#) lets you select key parameters, so make as many or as few selections as you like! Search by:

- Destination
(country or region)
- Level of difficulty
- Guided or self-guided
- Price range
- Average daily distance
- Duration
- Month

Let us help

Our [team of tour advisors](#) can answer any and every question you throw their way. Our staff members are lucky enough to travel and sample some of our tours each year and can speak first-hand about a growing number of tours on our site. We maintain close relationships with our tour operator partners across Europe and work together to provide a high level of service to each of our clients.

If you need input or advice at any point as you plan your tour, that's what we're here for! We're always happy to brainstorm tour options with you or answer any of your questions. [E-mail](mailto:info@biketours.com) us at info@biketours.com or give us a call at 1-877-462-2423 (+1-423-756-8907).



Why use BikeTours.com?

While you can certainly use the popular search engines to find local tour companies in Europe, BikeTours.com makes it easy for you! We serve as a central resource for Europe bike tours, representing more than 75 tour companies that offer 200+ tours throughout Europe.

We don't operate the tours, and we don't lead the tours or ride with you. (We leave that to our expert colleagues at our partner tour companies!) But we can help you find, choose and plan your tour, and we take care of the full booking and payment process. And the rates on our site are the same that you'll find on the tour companies' websites.

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