

Hidden Loire

4 Night Tour - Bed & Breakfast

Your itinerary

The following pages contain general information about your car or motorcycle tour and the locations where you will stay. The order in which they appear may not be the order your hotels have been confirmed for you - for your individual itinerary please refer to your holiday documentation.



Château de Brézé



Maps and route planning

To help plan your trip we provide an excellent map of France. It's also useful to go to travel websites such as Google maps, viamichelin.com* or www.theaa.co.uk.

*Motorway tolls, where applicable, are indicated on this site.

Hotel directions With your travel documents is an information sheet for each hotel we have booked for you giving directions together with some further details.

Arrival Unless stated, you will be expected to arrive at each of the hotels pre-booked for you by 6pm each day. This should allow time for a fairly leisurely drive between hotel stops but if you find you will be arriving later than this please ring the hotel so that your room is held for you.

The tour is on a bed and breakfast basis.

Your itinerary follows a route through the heart of the Loire Valley giving the opportunity to see some of its most famous châteaux and fabulous towns such as Saumur, Amboise and Chinon but also to discover places off the usual tourist track. There is not too much driving between overnight stops leaving plenty of time for sightseeing along the way - here we give some ideas of places you may like to visit.

Champtoceaux

This historic village with its terracotta roofed buildings is in a great position beside the Loire. Initially called Châteauceaux, its roots can be traced back to the Stone Age, and the present village was built a short distance from the site of the original fortified city which was destroyed in 1420. Take a river cruise from Champtoceaux onboard 'La Luce' for a memorable trip along this less well known part of the Loire (1 April to 1 October, tickets from the tourist office, behind the church). This is a great way to discover the flora and fauna of the river banks plus wonderful views of the Folies-Siffait and the tower of Oudon (a painting of this scene by Turner hangs in the Tate in London) and the Château de Clermont - there's commentary in French from the guide on board and binoculars are provided. Just 100m from your hotel, the Champalud gardens have a panoramic outlook over the Loire and there are several lovely walks from here including one along a wooden path to La Patache river port.

If you would like to spend some time in Nantes, it's only a 40 minute drive from here. As well as some modern architecture it's a very attractive place with historic riverside buildings and cobbled streets in the old city which is good to explore on foot. It's also the capital of crisp dry white Muscadet wines produced locally which are a great accompaniment to seafood.



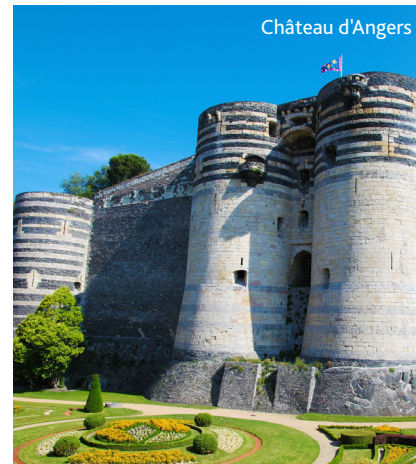
The Loire at Champtoceaux

Vernantes

It's a drive of around 90 minutes to Vernantes from Champtoceaux, and roughly midway between the two is the city of Angers which is renowned for its wealth of art and culture. There is a park and ride as well as plenty of parking in the city if you would like to make a stop here. The old quarter has lovely medieval streets of half timbered buildings and the multi turreted château on the river Maine is one of the main attractions and houses the 600 year old Apocalypse Tapestry, a huge, incredibly detailed masterpiece of needlecraft. As well as this there are art galleries, museums and wonderful parks and gardens.

Vernantes is a small quiet town with the distinction of having 2 churches next to each other, just across from your hotel which is known for its excellent gourmet restaurant so this is the ideal place to stay for dinner!

Saumur - a 20 minute drive from Vernantes, is surrounded by vineyards and has a majestic château overlooking the Loire. Whilst here it's a must to visit one of the sparkling wine cellars which are open for guided visits. We recommend Bouvet Ladubey caves which make a small charge of approx 4€ for an hour's visit - there are guided tours in English through the historic stone cellars (book in advance, see www.bouvetladubay.com). This makes a fascinating visit whether or not you like sparkling wine. The area is also known for its many troglodyte properties built into the white tufa stone making ideal living conditions - warm in winter, cool in summer, and perfect for wine storage ... and mushroom growing. The mushroom museum is another interesting visit, see musee-du-champignon.com (wear warm clothes to both these underground attractions), deep in the rocks where over 500 species of mushroom are farmed. France's Cadre Noir national cavalry school is also in this city so you may have the chance to see some of the magnificent horses in training. There is a great choice of places to eat in Saumur - as a suggestion Le Grand Bleu is reputedly an excellent fish and seafood restaurant with a maître restaurateur.



Château d'Angers



Saumur

Château de Brézé - 11k south of Saumur or 31k from Vernantes, this beautiful and slightly mysterious château makes an interesting visit. Above ground is the Renaissance residence lived in by the aristocracy of the time and underneath the castle is a huge underground fortress, the largest in Europe, which opens onto a very deep (18 metres) dry moat. There are 28 kilometres of tunnels and some of these can be explored as well as troglodyte cave dwellings - it is fascinating and great fun for those with a sense of adventure and a love of history.

Chinon



It's less than an hour between Vernantes and Chinon, and you may like to visit Bourgueil on the way. This pretty village is known for its red wine and there's a small museum here offering free wine tasting. Alternatively you could take a very slightly longer route taking in the Loire-Anjou-Touraine Natural Regional Park and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Fontevraud-l'Abbaye.

Chinon itself is a charming town built beside the river Vienne, overlooked by a hilltop medieval fortress, the Forteresse Royale, which can be reached by a lift from the street below. There is little to see inside the fortress but there are towers, passageways, dungeons and battlements, all telling a story of days gone by. There are also fantastic views over the town and river, making this a very worthwhile visit. Just near the fortress you might like to try the Gandoyau restaurant which has a terrace where you can dine whilst enjoying panoramic views. The town is surrounded by miles of vineyards and Chinon produces some fine wines which you will not fail to notice during a visit here!



Azay le Rideau is a 20 minute drive from Chinon, where there is one of the region's most visited châteaux, alongside the river Indre.

Chitenay



There are various routes you could take between Chinon and Chitenay and you will be spoilt for choice for places to visit along the way. It's a drive of around 1hr 30 so there is plenty of time to make a few stops. One of the most famous of the Loire châteaux, Chenonceau is a must see, with its arches spanning the river Cher and its wonderful surrounding gardens. There is also Amboise which has a

château overlooking the Loire - only a portion of the original building remains but it's still impressive. A walk through town takes you to the last home of Leonardo da Vinci, Château du Clos Lucé, which houses a museum with models of his designs. At the Mini Châteaux park near Amboise you can catch up with miniature versions of places you might

not have had time to see! There is also Tours - a great city to visit, known for its wines as well as reputedly the place where the most perfect French is spoken. One of the best parts to head for is Place Plumereau in the old quarter, a lovely square with pavement cafés, half timbered houses, cobbled streets and the Gothic cathedral and Basilica are not far away.

Vouvray - another place where you can visit a troglodyte cellar, discover how high quality sparkling wines are produced, from the vine to the glass, then taste and buy if you would like to take some home.

Villandry - as well as the Renaissance château here, visitors are drawn to see the exceptional gardens. These are on 3 levels and are magnificent to see - from the elaborate French formal gardens to the notorious potager (vegetable garden) best viewed from the belvedere and higher floors of the château.



Château de Cheverny - (a 10 minute drive from Chitenay) has been very well preserved and is one of the most beautifully furnished of the châteaux, having been owned by the same family for many centuries. This castle was also an inspiration for the Belgian author Hergé for the comic hero Tintin, and there is a permanent exhibition here, 'The Secret of Moulinart'. Take a walk through the grounds and see the famous hunting hounds being fed in the kennels.

Fougères sur Bièvre - (7k from Chitenay) has a very different type of château to all the others of the Loire Valley. Off the main tourist routes, it is worth a detour to see this less ostentatious fortified castle which was built from Beauce ragstone and white 'tuffeau' stone. The staff are friendly and knowledgeable and this makes a fascinating visit.

Chaumont sur Loire - a 20 minute drive from Chitenay, has one of the largest and most stunning of the Loire châteaux. Originally built over 1000 years ago, it was razed to the ground in 1465 and then rebuilt within a few years on the same site alongside the Loire and lavishly furnished in Renaissance style. The landscaped grounds are also fabulous and the International Garden Festival is held here annually from April to early November, when artists from all over the world create some amazing themed gardens.



The Château of Chaumont sur Loire