

Provence & the Côte d'Azur

HIGHLIGHTS

- Gazing seawards from the vertiginous heights of La Turbie on the **Grande Corniche** (p339)
- Viewing **perched villages** (p335) from a variety of different angles
- Coming to grips with the immensity of the ages-old **Gorges du Verdon** (p344)

TERRAIN

A bit of everything – from relatively flat along the coast and in the vineyards to hills and then mountains in the interior.

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Provence and the Côte d'Azur conjure up images of rolling lavender fields, blue skies, gorgeous villages, wonderful food and superb wine – most people's idea of a perfect holiday. They certainly deliver on all those fronts, but what many don't expect is the incredible diversity. Tucked into the southeastern corner of the mainland, their noisy cosmopolitan coastal cities contrast stiffly with the cycling paradise just inland, an Eden of tiny villages linked by deserted mountain roads.

From the Alps of Haute-Provence (Upper Provence), the land falls away towards the Mediterranean – you can cycle continuously downhill for 100km or more – but deep, steep-sided valleys create a barrier to east-west riding. The Rhône delta area, known as the Camargue, is a flat, windswept extravaganza of bird life, ideally explored by bike. The hilly, sun-rich Luberon is a mix of manicured vineyards and ancient villages tumbling haphazardly down rocky slopes. Legendary Mont Ventoux, one of the major climbs of the Tour de France, lurks in the hinterland, silently luring cyclist-pilgrims to its summit. In the midst of all of this, historic sites abound, with relics dating from prehistoric to Roman times alongside ruined and restored châteaux of the Middle Ages. There's something in Provence for every cyclist, from the mountain goat to the casual day-tripper.

The rides in this chapter can be easily strung together, starting in the east and working towards the west.



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