

St Malo Cycling Tour



Approximately 190miles (total climb of 5000 feet). A fairly flat route through some splendid medieval citadels including lively St Malo and colourful, charming Dinan. A cycle path follows the scenic River Rance and Ille et Vilaine canal to Rennes, the grandiose capital of Brittany. After the fascinating old town of Vitré and the medieval chateau of Fougères, another cycle path takes the route of a former railway towards France's second most iconic tourist spot, the ancient and extraordinary island of Mont St Michel. A third cycle route, often on dykes, crosses beautiful and blissfully flat marshland. Next is a stunning coast road with a string of windmills and pristine sandy beaches. Once you have had your fill of oysters in Cancale, it's back to St Malo for crepes or whatever else takes your fancy.

1. St Malo – walled citadel.

Most visitors head for the characterful, imposing and bustling old town, which is full of restaurants, shops and hotels. Accommodation may be easier to find and cheaper outside the walls. The route takes the beautiful Rance valley to Dinan, passing through the delightful and un-spoilt riverside village of St Suliac (with camping). Turn left at Taden to join the cycle path that runs along the edge of the Rance. Hotels and campsites. **21 miles to Dinan.**

2. Dinan – late medieval walled citadel. From your riverside path, the small and beautiful port of Dinan comes into view. With its ancient bridge, the Pont

Gothique, it makes an ideal lunch or drink stop. On top of the hill, right next to the river is the citadel. Consider leaving your bike in the port and take a short walk up a steep, colourful, cobbled street into a quaint and enchanting town of half timbered houses. If your muscles allow, climb the ancient clock tower for panoramic views. Dinan is every bit as spectacular as St Malo but quieter. Tourist information, hotels, hostel, campsite. **20 miles to Tinténiac.**

From Dinan, pick up the Voie Verte cycle route number 3, just south of the Pont Gothique. The first few hundred yards through woodland are quite narrow and a bit bumpy but then it becomes a well surfaced towpath of the River Rance. The river later turns into the Ille et Vilaine canal.

3. Tinténiac and Hédé – pleasant small towns.

Less than a couple of miles from the canal, they offer food and lodging. There are some impressive and sometimes quirky lock keepers cottages along this stretch of the canal and if you are lucky you may spot a red squirrel. Fellow cyclists are almost as rare as the squirrels in all but high season. Tourist information and municipal campsite at Tinténiac. Alternative campsite between the two towns. Hotel in Hédé.

29 miles to Rennes

The canal path takes you right to the heart of Rennes but if you don't like big cities or if you just want to cut off a corner, leave the canal 7 miles north at Beton (hotel here).

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4. Rennes – pleasant city, built to impress. Rennes has wide boulevards, spacious squares and imposing buildings. Its old quarter, north of the river is lively and full of character. Cyclists are quite well looked after with many marked cycle lanes making for an easier city than many to negotiate. Tourist information, hotels, campsite.

26 miles to Vitré.

From Rennes to Acigné the road is fairly busy but then becomes quieter. The route passes through Champeaux with an impressive well in a paved square.

5. Vitré – well preserved medieval market town. It's surprising Vitré isn't better known by tourists. It's a welcoming place with a turreted fairytale castle and countless atmospheric streets. Even the municipal campsite has some impressive 19th century stone fortifications scattered through the pitches. Tourist information, hotels, campsite 1.5 miles south of town.

18 miles to Fougères.

6. Fougères – old town boasting the largest medieval castle in Europe. The town is built on two levels separated by imposing granite cliffs. The public gardens overlooking the castle and the medieval part of town are spectacular. Tourist information, hotels, campsite.

19 miles to Antrain

There is a hill to get out of Fougères but you soon pick up a cycle track which takes the path of a disused railway all the way to Antrain.

7. Antrain – End of the cycle track. The route then follows a generally flat river route through the beautiful Sougéal marshes. Campsite

9 miles to Pontorson

8. Pontorson – quiet, small town, useful base for Mont St Michel. Hotels, hostel, campsite.

5.5 miles to Mont St Michel

A cycle route along the River Couesnon starts from the town or behind the campsite and youth hostel. At the time of writing it was under construction with a gravelly surface, but still useable. A wide road runs across the causeway to the Mont St Michel, suitable for cyclists.

9. Mont St Michel – hugely popular and magnificent fortified island topped with an imposing 8th century abbey. An entire town with a jumble of winding streets and the spectacular abbey, site of medieval pilgrimages, is crammed onto an outcrop of rocks. The whole rises to an impressive eighty metres and commands an imposing position in the bay between Brittany and Normandy. Hotels.

27 miles to Cancale.

In contrast to the buzz of Mont St Michel, the reclaimed marshland land to the west, criss-crossed by dikes, is a haven of rural tranquillity and makes for perfect, unhurried cycling. After taking the bridge at Beauvoir, you can either follow the cycle signs to Cancale, which routes via a bumpy cycle path, or find your own way through the lanes. Look out for the many windmills along the coast road after Cherrueix.

10. Cancale – seaside resort and important oyster growing area. Even if you don't like oysters, the town is charming in its own right. To the north is the windswept and incredibly scenic Point du Grouin. The road runs along the coast and offers stunning views to the north. Hotels, hostel, campsite.

15 miles to St Malo.

St Malo – departure port

Useful Information

High visibility jackets

It is now a requirement for cyclists to wear a high visibility jacket when outside town at night or if the daytime visibility is poor.

Maps

The online map for this route is drawn as accurately as possible for roads, but may be a little inaccurate for the cycle paths. You may want to print from the online map to show routes into and out of towns as these can be difficult to find. It is suggested that you purchase maps of scale less than 3 miles: inch (189,000:1) and copy this route onto your map.

Cycle paths and routes

France has many voies vertes (cycle ways) and this route used three sections of dedicated cycle paths.

The surface is of compacted gravel and sand and generally fairly flat. Mountain bikes, hybrid bikes and touring bikes will have no problem with the surface, but road bikes with narrow tyres may find some parts of the paths difficult. The path from St Michael to St Anne is very bumpy, but there are alternative quiet roads that can be taken. If your tyres are wide and you carry a pump, one trick is to let a little air out of the tyres whilst on the bumpy paths. The cycle path from Fougères to Antrain is unsuitable for tandems due to narrow staggered gates, and any cyclists carrying wide luggage will find these gates a test of their cycling skills.

Roads

The main D roads connecting towns are well signed but can be busy. Most maps show these as yellow or red roads. Un-numbered roads, or small D or C roads connecting small hamlets are quieter. These are often shown as white roads on maps. Approach roads to any large town can be busy, depending on the time of day, and coast roads can be busy depending on the season. French drivers are generally courteous.

Touring tips

Tourist information offices have town plans to help find the start of cycle paths and can advise on accommodation in their area. Be aware that most will close for a long lunch break, and some will be closed on Sunday.