

## Vallée de vélo

It's been 18 years in the making, but La Loire à Vélo, an 800km network of cycle paths along the Loire river, is finally finished. Saddle up for a tour of the highlights

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### 01 OUTDOOR ART

The mouth of France's longest river is home to Estuaire, a series of large-scale outdoor contemporary artworks. Dinosaur bones, tilting houses, giant portraits... See how many of the 28 pieces you can find and keep your camera handy for some seriously good photo opportunities along the way. [estuaire.info](http://estuaire.info)

### 02 LAZY RIVER

Before the French railway boom of the 1840s, the Loire was a major thoroughfare and trade route. Get a taste of life back in the day with a trip on a traditional sailing vessel. Tours with Passeurs de Loire depart from Sigloy. Take a 90-minute cruise down river – or why not make it an overnight adventure? [passeursdeloire.fr](http://passeursdeloire.fr)

Orleans

05

Chartres

05

Loire Valley

06

04

Le Mans

02

03

Bourges

**03 BERRY FANCY**

The Loire Valley is filled to bursting with spectacular châteaux, former aristocratic holiday homes. Château de Chambord is the largest in the region and contains an extraordinary double helix staircase thought to be designed by Leonardo da Vinci. It's also the home of yummy Chambord raspberry liqueur. [chambord.org](http://chambord.org)

**04 WINE TOUR**

Take a trip around sparkling wine-makers Bouvet-Ladubay's atmospheric cellars – part of an enormous network of 1,000-year-old quarries beneath the town of Saint-Hilaire-Saint-Florent. Once you've returned to the surface, sample four delicious varieties of bubbles at a tasting. [bouvet-ladubay.fr](http://bouvet-ladubay.fr)

**05 OLD ORLÉANS**

Its most revered visitor is still probably Joan of Arc, the 17-year-old who delivered the city from the English in 1429 and earned her nickname, 'The Maid of Orleans'. She is celebrated everywhere – museums, statues, stained glass windows in the cathedral – and with a festival, from 29 April to 8 May. [orleans.fr](http://orleans.fr)

**06 CAVE HOTEL**

Wannabe cavemen should head to Turquant, where the four-star Demeure de La Vignole ([demeure-vignole.com](http://demeure-vignole.com)) is carved out of soft tuffeau cliffs and offers the ultimate in rock 'n' roll stays. Nearby Troglododo, in Azay-le-Rideau, is a more basic, but no less neanderthal-esque, alternative. [troglododo.fr](http://troglododo.fr)