

# EXPLORE!

## Canal du Midi

8 days

France - Trip code CCM



## Canal du Midi

Cycling some of the tree-lined path along the Canal du Midi, this trip leads us from ancient Roman cities to the Mediterranean coast. Ride through the natural beauty of the Corbières region and absorb the rich history, from the 12th century cathedral in Narbonne to the medieval fortress town of Carcassonne.

## Trip highlights

- ★ **Canal du Midi** - Cycle alongside one of the greatest works of civil engineering of the 17th century
- ★ **Béziers and Narbonne** - Explore these fascinating medieval cities and their local markets
- ★ **Cathar Castles** - Ride through the picturesque landscapes and historic villages of the Languedoc Region or up to the castles of Lastours
- ★ **Carcassonne** - Discover this fascinating and impressively preserved walled fortress
- ★ **Local wines and cuisine** - Enjoy sampling regional delicacies and sampling the excellent local wines

### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

#### Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

### CYCLING GRADE:

#### Easy

Suitable for anyone who enjoys easy and relatively short rides on flat or gently undulating terrain. Ideal if you simply want to explore a region by bike at a relaxed pace.

**GROUP SIZE:****10 - 16**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

# Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

## DAY 1 - Join trip Carcassonne Airport

We join our trip at Carcassonne airport where you are met by a local representative then drive to historic Béziers where you are met by your Explore Leader. Situated at the heart of a huge wine growing area, it has a colourful and fascinating history. The Gothic cathedral sits high above the canal on the site of the Romanesque building destroyed by the Crusaders' fires against the Cathars. The old centre is crisscrossed by narrow streets offering some great views over the Orb Valley, whilst in the distance the hills of the Cevennes rise up to form the start of the Massif Central. The town is also famous for its Poutous- a delicious treat made from honey, Bitterois- a cake made from almonds as well as some fine regional wines and chocolate. There will be a short briefing to introduce you to the itinerary for the days ahead.

If you wish to drive to the start of the trip please ask us for parking details.



**Accommodation: Hotel Imperator** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Optional ride to Valras Plage, circular route back to Beziers

After becoming acquainted with our bicycles, we cycle out along the Canal du Midi, crossing the River Orb by aqueduct. The Canal's 99 locks and 130 bridges constitute an engineering marvel and its tree-lined tranquil beauty affords us an ideal opportunity to explore the delightful countryside of this part of south-west France. Connecting old trade routes between Languedoc and Aquitaine, the canal was the brainchild of Pierre-Paul Riquet, a 17th century noble whose persistence and fortitude convinced both Louis XIV and his First Minister, Colbert, of the merits of linking the Atlantic with the Mediterranean. The project was begun in 1667 and took some 14 years to complete, eventually carving a trail some 240km in length, from the River Garonne to Agde on the Mediterranean coast. Unfortunately for Monsieur Riquet he died just six months short of the canal's completion, so never actually saw what came to be known as 'Riquet's Ditch' finished. River traffic brought immense prosperity to the towns along its course, until the arrival of the Sète-Bordeaux railway in 1857, which all but saw an end to the commercial importance of the canal. Following a route over the nearby hills we ride away from the canal through the undulating landscape and quiet country roads to Valras Plage. Here there is time for a leisurely lunch and the chance to relax on the seaside beach or take a swim before heading inland again to join the canal path back to Béziers for our second night.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 45 kilometres (Total 166 metres ascent and 164 meters descent)



**Accommodation: Hotel Imperator** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 3 - Cycle south along waterways and country lanes; ride to Narbonne

Leaving Béziers behind this morning we ride south along the course of the waterway, passing the famous nine locks at Fonseranes. The locks comprise of eight water basins that extend 300m up a slope of 21.5m, a spectacular feat of civil engineering. There is an opportunity to visit ancient field structures at Montady, where you can get some stunning views across the Béziers plain and the Malpas tunnel. Measuring 173m in length the tunnel was dug below the Colline de Montady in just six days. This was the first tunnel of its kind to be used for the access of canal traffic. From here we turn away from the canal for a short time, taking a route that passes through a rural landscape of traditional village life, to the city of Narbonne, our final destination for today.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 35 kilometres (Total 89 metres ascent and 140 meters descent)



**Accommodation: Hotel Zenitude Residence - Narbonne** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 4 - Free day or optional circular cycle route via Gruissan back to Narbonne

Today has been left free to explore Narbonne and its surroundings with optional rides on the flat or hillier terrain should you wish. There are options to cycle from Narbonne to either Narbonne Plage or Gruissan via the Canal de la Robine, past the sea lagoons and along the coastline. Closer to home, you can explore the city itself. Formerly the capital of Rome's first settlement in Gaul, Narbonne was once a thriving port and a major centre of commercial enterprise and communication during the middle ages until plague, the English and the silting up of the harbour saw an end to its importance and prosperity during the 14th century. Today its restored medieval quarter and dominating cathedral choir makes it an interesting place to soak up something of the atmosphere of its halcyon days and learn a little of the fascinating history of this region.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 30 kilometres (Total 7 metres ascent and 8 meters descent) or 46 kilometres (Total 98 metres ascent and 98 meters descent) depending on which route taken.



**Accommodation: Hotel Zenitude Residence - Narbonne** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 5 - Visit Narbonne or optional circular cycle route Vines & Olives

Our day begins with a visit to Narbonne's 100 year old market (Les Halles) where we will have time to browse all the stalls and purchase fresh provisions for our picnic lunch. Following Le Canal de La Robine north out of the city, we are soon riding along the 12 km of tree lined path between the waterside and the vineyards. We stop to view the engineering feat where this short canal joins the river Aude, and ultimately it's connection with the Canal du Midi, then we leave the waterside path and take to the country lanes. Passing through the 10th century village of Moussan, we will stop for our picnic lunch by a 9th century chapel amid the vines and olive trees. Joining a new cycle route in Montredon-des-Corbières, we cross the low hills to return to Narbonne, where the afternoon is left free to visit the sights.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 31 kilometres (Total 197 metres ascent and 197 metres descent)



**Accommodation: Hotel Zenitude Residence - Narbonne** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 6 - Cycle the vineyards, farms and towpaths; ride to Carcassonne

After a short train ride this morning to the wine producing town of Lézignan Corbières, our route brings us to one of the region's most visually spectacular settings, the walled fortress of Carcassonne. Once one of the most important and powerful cities in the south, before the all-consuming Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars saw the town fall to the notorious onslaught of the forces of Simon de Montfort. Our ride takes us along the towpath of the Canal du Midi, via a patchwork landscape of vineyards, farms and attractive villages. On the way, we pass the interesting Ecluse de L'Aiguille where the imaginative lock keeper has created some delightfully humorous sculptures from recycled wood and metal. We then finish the day's ride following the waterway into Carcassonne.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 55 kilometres (Total 123 metres ascent and 72 meters descent)



**Accommodation: Hotel Espace Cite** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - View the walled fortress of Carcassonne; cycle locally

Our final day's riding allows the option to do as much or as little as you want. There are a number of optional rides out from Carcassonne, with a chance to cycle along the canal towards Bram and Villepinte and visit the red-roofed streets of these attractive towns, or perhaps take a more energetic option and head into the surrounding hills to visit the old Cathar castle of Chateaux de Lastours, nestling amongst the wild lands of the Orbial Valley. Actually consisting of four defensive fortresses these are the northernmost citadels of the Cathars, built to protect the route between Carcassonne and Mazamet. Dominating the landscape of scrub, cypress and wildflowers that blanket the river valleys, these ancient keeps present a majestic and poignant reminder of a time

when upheaval and religious intolerance blighted this tranquil countryside. Of course you may decide to explore the delights of Carcassonne itself, immersing yourself amongst its medieval remains and enjoying the unique delights of what is surely one of the most perfectly preserved towns of its kind anywhere in France. The city holds a wealth of delights, from the twin towers of the Porte Narbonnaise, to the spectacular Chateau Comtal in the heart of La Cite, whilst at the Basilique St-Nazaire you can find samples of some of the best medieval stained glass in the Midi.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 35 kilometres (Total 350 metres ascent and 349 meters descent) or 70 kilometres (Total 104 metres ascent and 105 meters descent) depending on which route taken.



**Accommodation: Hotel Espace Cite** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Trip ends Carcassonne

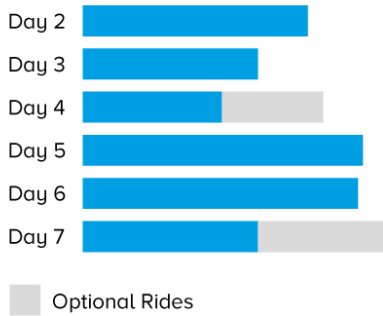
The trip ends in Carcassonne after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## Cycling information

## DAILY DISTANCE



CCM Distance Chart



### General cycling information

On this trip we cycle 203 km over six days (an average of 34 km per day) with further optional rides available. Two of the cycling days are circular routes and therefore optional. We travel mainly on canal towpaths and country roads, on flat or gently undulating terrain. Maps are provided to cycle individually or in groups while the Explore Leader drives the support vehicle, except on circular routes when the Explore Leader will cycle with the group. We have graded the route as easy. GPX files are available for this holiday.

### Bike included

21 gear RTE 520 hybrid bikes with front suspension.

### Bike information

Your included bike is a 21 gear RTE 520 hybrid and will be the correct frame size for your height. These are unisex step-through frames, but women's step through frames are available, but are limited in number and size and may vary in bike type - please request at time of booking. A 15-litre pannier and water bottle holder are included as well as the facility to fit your own pedals or saddle if you wish to bring them. A support vehicle carries the luggage from point to point and is driven by the Explore Leader. Maps are provided to cycle individually or as a group. We provide spare parts and take care of the day to day maintenance. All you need to bring is your own helmet.

### Cycling grade

Easy

## Why book this trip

Unlike many other operators, we include the hire of your bike in the overall cost of the holiday: you don't need to bring your own or pay extra to hire one locally. We also provide a support vehicle, spare parts and take care of day to day bike maintenance. All you need bring is your own helmet.

## What's included?



### Included meals

Breakfast: 7



### Transport

Bicycle  
Train



### Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader / Driver



### Accommodation

7 nights standard hotel

## Trip information

## Country information

### France

#### Climate

Across France, from April - August, weather conditions are generally warm and pleasant with moderate rainfall; Autumn temperatures are a bit lower and the winter months (though colder) remain mild. The summer months on the Mediterranean Coast in the south tend to be warmer than the rest of France and have less rainfall, and also more mild winters; freezing conditions are nearly unheard of. The mountainous areas of the Alps, Juros and Pyrenees can be quite different. During summer the morning and evening temperatures are considerably cooler and it becomes much colder in winter with heavy snowfall. Western France, along the English Channel, there can be very strong winds and frequent rain during the winter months Nov - Apr. Wine harvesting takes place in late August/early September.

#### Time difference to GMT

+1

#### Plugs

2 Pin Round

#### Religion

Catholic

#### Language

French

## Budgeting and packing

### Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

N/A

### Clothing

Pack essentially for hot weather. During the day you can expect to live in T-shirts and shorts, but you may wish to bring smart casual wear for the evenings. Bring a warm fleece for cool evenings and raingear for occasional rain. May, June and September may be slightly cooler. Please note that French health regulations require that men wear 'proper' (Lycra) swimming trunks in pools and not shorts.

### Footwear

If you are not bringing cycle shoes then try to bring stiff-soled shoes as these are better for cycling - transmitting your energy into the pedals more efficiently. This becomes more relevant and recommended the more demanding the grade and distances to cover. SPD cycle shoes are not well suited to trips that combine sightseeing with cycling. Comfortable shoes, trainers, sandals or flip flops are useful when not on the bike.

### Luggage

20kg

### Luggage: On tour

We recommend you bring a daypack and one main piece of luggage (total allowance: 44lb/20kg) which will be transported between hotels while you cycle. Check the bike details section to see if a pannier or handlebar bag is provided on the bike. Remember, you are expected to carry your own luggage - don't overload yourself.

### Equipment

On all Explore cycle holidays we strongly recommend you bring along and wear your cycle helmet. In case of an accident resulting in personal injury, certain insurance policies are invalidated in cases where a helmet was not being worn. Cycle glasses to protect against dust, pollen and the sun, padded cycle gloves and a water bottle or water delivery system (e.g. camelback or platypus) are also useful. You may choose to bring your own gel seat cover for added comfort. If a handle bar bag or pannier is not provided (check bike details) then you may like to bring a small rucksack to wear while cycling. Other items to consider bringing are a sunhat and sun cream, torch, earplugs and insect repellent. Please carry some or all of your cycling equipment e.g. helmet as part of your hand luggage.

## Tipping

### Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

### Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip.

## Country Information

### France

#### Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

##### Lunch price

£11

##### Dinner price

£16.00 - 18.00

##### Beer price

£4

##### Water price

£1.3

#### Foreign Exchange

##### Local currency

Euro

##### Recommended Currency For Exchange

Pounds Sterling and US Dollars can only be changed in larger airports with a Bureau de Change. Please change currency into Euros prior to arriving in France.

##### Where To Exchange

Bureau de Change can only be found in major cities and large airports. Many French banks no longer exchange Foreign currency.

##### ATM Availability

In cities and most major towns

##### Credit Card Acceptance

In major restaurants (make sure you have informed your credit card company that you are travelling abroad as some companies will reject payments)

##### Travellers Cheques

Travellers Cheques are no longer commonly accepted and can only be changed in larger airports with a Bureau de Change.



## Transport Information

Bicycle, Train

## Accommodation notes

### Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Standard - Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

## Essential Information

### FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click [here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click [here](#)

### Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

### Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

### Visa and Passport Information

France: Visas are not required by UK, EU, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

### Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

### Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

### Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

### Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of

your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station. Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers. If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

## Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom. Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

### Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

### Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## France

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory. Tetanus recommended. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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