

# Cycling the Canal du Midi In Provence, France

By Diane Covington-Carter



Photos for this article: Diane Covington-Carter

**The late afternoon sun sparked on the river Aude as we stopped at the bridge to admire the medieval walled city of Carcassonne, on the hill in the distance. It was the final stop on our seven-day bicycle tour in Provence, cycling 25 to 30 a day.**

At ages 74 and 68 respectively, my husband and I were happy. We savored our sense of accomplishment before heading up the hill to our hotel. We would celebrate that night in the medieval city.

## The Previous Fall...

We'd talked about doing a bicycle trip in France for six years and since we weren't getting any younger, we realized we'd better get on with it. The challenges were to find a tour that fit several criteria: our Fall dates, my desire to avoid roads with cars whizzing by and a cycling distance of about 30 miles a day.

We settled on a tour along the Canal du Midi in Provence, cycling along the old towpath and passing through villages with minimal time on roads. And since I'm also a Francophile and speak French, it sounded perfect.

The Canal du Midi, completed in 1681, was once used to transport goods. Now, vacationers in rented boats, leisurely cruising along, create the main activity.

We began on the Mediterranean. The first evening, after an orientation, we tried out our bicycles and were given a map and directions to follow each day. The tour company, which had handled all the hotel reservations, would move our luggage each day.

The next morning, after breakfast, we set out. Our path took us along the Mediterranean and we breathed in the fresh salt air as we rode past walkers, joggers and shuttered beach clubs.

Each day was an adventure as we pedaled through villages where church bells rang out the hour. The tour company had little signs on lampposts and street signs which meant, 'this way' and we were always relieved to see them, reassuring us we were on track.

Most of our time, we cycled along the Canal du Midi, peaceful and shaded from the September sun by huge plane trees. We watched boats navigating locks and waved to the cruisers; sometimes we moved at a faster pace than they did.



Breakfast was included in our tour each morning but evenings we enjoyed the fun and freedom of exploring each village and finding a restaurant.

Most evenings we each chose 'le menu', a three-course option for between 17-20 Euros. (20-24 dollars.) Dessert choices included chocolate mousse, crème brûlée or a lemon or apple tart. After bicycling all day, I indulged without guilt.



Mornings, we'd stash a sandwich in our saddlebags and stop wherever we wanted for a picnic. Then there was always a 'grand crème (latte), when we needed another break.

We cycled past open markets selling antiques and villages like Villeneuve-lès-Béziers which looked so much like a quintessential charming French village. I thought I'd fallen into a postcard.

As we took a well-earned break on a park bench, munching snacks and drinking water, I told my husband, "I've never spent this much consecutive time on a bicycle seat in my life!" But I was relishing the adventure and enjoying the challenge. That evening, to our delight, our hotel room included a Jacuzzi tub, the perfect remedy for our tired muscles.

September was harvest time and we watched as giant truckloads of grapes poured their contents into crushing machines. I breathed in the rich fragrance of ripe, red grapes as we pedaled past.

This region of Provence, Languedoc Occitanie, has earned an excellent reputation for its wine. We sampled the various 'Vin de Pays d'Oc' wines with our dinners each night.

At the end of our tour, we took the TGV/fast train to Paris for a few days before heading home. We loved the trip so much that we're planning our next one, possibly for ten days. There are so many choices, The Loire Valley in France, Greece, Croatia.

We're not sure yet. But we know that it will be a fun and adventure filled journey.

*Diane Covington-Carter is an award-winning writer of articles and books. [www.dianecovingtoncarter.com](http://www.dianecovingtoncarter.com). © Diane Covington-Carter 2018*

## IF YOU GO...

- Train so that you know that you can bicycle the 25-30 miles each day. (The bicycle seats were comfortable.) An electric bike is also an option.
- Slow down, relax and enjoy the beauty of Provence as you pedal along. We can learn a lot from the French's 'l'art de vivre', the art of living.
- Have a sense of adventure as you explore villages and meet people in cafes. At one, we began chatting with a couple from Australia and they knew my Australian cousin.
- Take the train. Sit back, relax and enjoy the scenery on France's fast trains. The experience is a luxury we don't have here and is not to be missed.

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