



CLASSIC  
EDELWEISS TOURS

## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

From Paris, the city of love, to the rugged cliffs of Brittany and the beaches of Normandy.

## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

### RIDING DAY 1 : VERSAILLES - TOURS

#### Standard Route (267 km / 166 miles)

It's our first riding day and we dive straight into French history. We leave the hustle and bustle of the Paris metropolitan area behind us as we head southwest to Chartres. Lonely Planet calls the city's cathedral "one of the crowning architectural achievements of Western civilization" and that is certainly true. It is a must-see for any visitor to France and therefore also for us. We won't miss it!

Later in the day, we reach the valley of the Loire River where countless castles are lined up like pearls on a string. Chambord is the biggest, most spectacular, and most famous one and shouldn't be missed, but of course, you can also leave the beaten track and find your own castle.

If there is enough time left today we can stop in Amboise and pay homage to Leonardo Da Vinci, who is buried here in the castle. Otherwise, just wave at him from the other side of the river...

#### Highlights:

##### #1: Cathédral Notre-Dame de Chartres



The magnificent cathedral Notre Dame de Chartres dates back to the early 13th century and is best known for its extraordinary stained glass windows, some of which are even older than the building itself. Its two spires, a 105-metre (349 ft) plain pyramid completed in Romanesque style and a 113-metre (377 ft) Gothic spire on top of an older tower are visible from far away. It is possible and

recommended to climb up to the viewing platform to enjoy sweeping views of the cathedral and the neat old town surrounding it.

([www.diocese-chartres.com](http://www.diocese-chartres.com))

## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

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### #2: Château de Chambord



The Château de Chambord is without a doubt the most beautiful, the largest and also the most visited of all the palaces in the Loire valley. King Franz I. began the project during the first half of the 16th century. Even though he never really lived there for an extended time, he used it frequently for hunting trips. The hunting area was about as big as the city of Paris! Later, Louis XIV. used it for some of

his festivities.

### #3: Amboise



Once, the royal seat of France, today pretty little Amboise is one of the most attractive towns on the Loire river. It has a beautiful, imposing chateau and a lovely old town full of timber-framed houses. Mary Queen of Scots spent some of her childhood years here before she sailed back to Scotland and Leonardo Da Vinci whiled away the last three years of his life here. Today the manor where he lived is a museum

and houses models of many of his inventions.

## RIDING DAY 2 : TOURS - ANGERS

### Standard Route (207 km / 129 miles)

Le Mans did not get damaged during WWII, so the old town is still beautifully intact. Important sites include the cathedral St. Julien and the gallo-roman city walls, built in the 3rd century and still in remarkable shape. But of course the number one attraction - at least for gas heads - is the world-famous racetrack "Circuit des 24 Heures", that has been hosting motorsports events for more than 100 years. An interesting museum tells the story of this one-of-a-kind track.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Musée des 24 Heures du Mans (Le Mans Museum)



The 24 hours of Le Mans is one of the oldest and one of the most prestigious automobile races in the world. Held annually since 1923, the "Mother of Endurance Races" takes place partly on public roads (of course closed to the public during the event), while the permanent circuit, named "Circuit Bugatti" hosts other races like MotoGP and Formula One. One stretch of public roads, the "Mulsanne Straight", saw cars running at speeds of over 250 mph (400 km/h) before chicanes were introduced to reduce the speed. The straight was also the site of the worst disaster in motor racing when, in 1955, a car crashed and exploded, killing the driver and 83 spectators. You can learn everything about this legendary track in the adjacent museum; it may also tell you why Porsche's sports cars have their ignition lock to the left of the steering wheel...

## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

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### #2: Angers



Angers is the historical capital of Anjou and was for centuries an important stronghold in north-western France. It is the cradle of the Plantagenêt dynasty and during the reign of René of Anjou it was one of the intellectual centres of Europe. Angers, a city of 150,000 people, enjoys a rich cultural life, made possible by its universities and museums.

The old medieval centre is still dominated by the massive château, home of the Plantagenêt dynasty. It also houses the Apocalypse Tapestry, the biggest medieval tapestry ensemble in the world. It is 101 metres long, dates back to the late 14th century and illustrates the Book of Revelations. Angers is also the home of the world-famous orange liqueur, Cointreau.

# FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

## RIDING DAY 3 : ANGERS - CARNAC

### Standard Route (286 km / 178 miles)

Our ride today brings us to the region of Bretagne, a part of France that is literally outstanding. Jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean like a finger, Brittany – as it is known in English – is rugged and wild, its inhabitants, the Bretons, are independent-minded and enjoy being different from the French. In their own language, which is of Celtic origin, they call it Breizh. Nantes used to be its capital, but it was given to another region (Pays de la Loire) back in 1956, an injustice that still causes disputes today.

We reach the coast at St. Nazaire, during WWII the site of an important submarine base. Not of the French, but of the Nazis. This ghostly remnant of a dark chapter in history can be visited and toured. La Baule claims to have the longest and most beautiful beach in Europe, but Spaniards and Italians may disagree. La Baule lies on the Guerande Peninsula which also features large salt marshes, another interesting thing to look at. And after we've seen all of this we can finally go to Brittany.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Submarine base



Situated at the mouth of the Loire River, the town of Saint-Nazaire is famous for its port facilities and shipyards. Main sight is the submarine bunker that was built here by the Nazis during WWII as part of the Atlantic Wall. The gigantic building consists of almost half a million cubic meters of reinforced concrete and is not exactly beautiful, but very interesting. The submarine "Espodon" is on display and can

be toured.

Also in Saint-Nazaire is the shipyard Chantiers de l'Atlantique which specialises in building cruise liners (like the world's 3rd largest, the QE2), and a construction facility of airplane maker Airbus.

## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

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### #2: Guérande Peninsula



The Guérande Peninsula overlooks two contrasting landscapes: the "Pays Blanc" (White Land), named white because of its salt marshes, and the "Pays Noir", with the Brière peat bog. The salt marshes have been in use since the 9th century and today cover an area of approximately 1,700 hectares. Around 150,000 tonnes of table salt are harvested here each year, along with 300 tons of Fleur de

Sel, the best, most luxurious, and most expensive part. It contains traces of algae and bacteria and has much more mineral complexity than table salt. Fleur de Sel makes a wonderful souvenir!

## RIDING DAY 4 : CARNAC

### Standard Route (187 km / 116 miles)

Brittany is a popular tourist destination, but most visitors focus on the coast. The interior seems to be a world away, that's why we go there. After checking out some of the world-famous megaliths, menhirs and passage tombs that litter the area around Carnac like giant breadcrumbs left behind by a picnicing super-alien we head inland. Josselin has a fairy-tale castle and a picturesque old town; what a lovely place for our lunch.

Small side roads take us back to Carnac. There should be enough time left to check out the museum or ride to the beach for a dip in the cold waters of the Atlantic. Enjoy!

### Highlights:

#### #1: Mégalithes de Carnac (Megaliths of Carnac)



The standing stones of Carnac are one of Brittany's greatest attractions. Three fields – Ménéac, Kermario and Kerlescan – contain around 3,000 aligned megaliths, which date from 3500 - 5000BC. The granite stones were erected on the spot where they were dug, hence the differing sizes, although it is not known why they were put up; it is thought they had a religious or cultural significance. We do know

though, that putting them in an upright position was a lot of work; the heaviest ones weigh up to 350 tons!

#### #2: Basilique Sainte-Anne-d'Auray



The large Basilica of Sainte-Anne d'Auray is a major site of pilgrimage, France's second most important one after Lourdes. Saint Anne is one of the patron saints of Brittany. The Basilica was built in the mid-nineteenth century to replace an earlier church which had housed an ancient statue of Anne. The statue was said to have been miraculously discovered by Yves Nicolazic, a local peasant,

who claimed to have had visions from the saint asking him to build a church in her honour. Unfortunately, the statue was destroyed during the French Revolution.



## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

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### #3: Josselin



Josselin is a must-visit on any tour of the Breton heartlands. Its impressive medieval castle, still lived in by members of the legendary Rohan family, the doll museum or its attractive old town which is full of cozy cafes and restaurants, Josselin has something for everyone. Overlooking the Oust Valley, Josselin's castle has been in the Rohan family on and off for centuries. In fact, the town is named after the son of the viscount who built it. The castle, now owned by the only remaining branch of the Rohans, is open to the public from April to October. Visitors can admire the 19th-century dining room, the drawing-room with its impressive 16th-century fireplace, and the library that houses more than 3,000 volumes from the 17th century. Around the castle are French-style gardens with vast lawns and low hedges as well as a rose garden with 40 different species. The gardens host a Medieval Festival each year on 14th July.

# FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

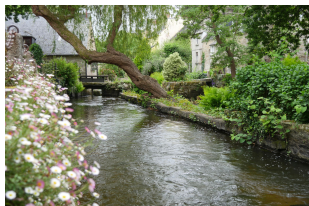
## RIDING DAY 5 : CARNAC - CARENTEC

### Standard Route (240 km / 149 miles)

The southern coast of Brittany is called Morbihan, which means "small sea" in Breton. We follow it to Pont Aven, a picturesque little town made famous by Paul Gauguin and his artist friends. Past Quimper, the lively capital of the Département, we reach the westernmost point of our tour and also one of the highest points of Brittany, a "mountain" named Ménez-Hom. From here we head inland again and then towards the wild northern coast. Around here, Brittany is especially "Breton"!

### Highlights:

#### #1: Pont-Aven



For several hundred years Pont-Aven was a quiet port town with an industry based around its watermills and port, then towards the end of the 19th century it also gained a reputation as an art town. An artistic community had already been established here for around 20 years, but its fame became assured in 1886 when Gauguin first discovered the town and its picturesque setting, and came here to establish a studio. A significant number of artists are still attracted here, with the town referred to by the local tourist authorities as a 'city of artists'.

#### #2: Locronan



Locronan is named after the Irish Saint Ronan, one of the most venerated Saints in Brittany and was founded in the 6th century. This medieval village features a beautiful town square with a fantastic 11th century church, perfectly framed by old stone buildings. This is a great place to stock up on souvenirs, with dozens of small shops offering everything you never knew you needed. Locronan is a member of the "Le Plus Beaux Villages de France", the organisation of the most beautiful villages in France, so remember to bring your camera!

### #3: Ménez-Hom



Dominating the Bay of Douarnenez, the long-backed Ménez-Hom hill was sacred to prehistoric people and inspired Breton legends. Take in the sensational views from the top, over 1,000ft above sea level, and you'll understand why it was considered so special. The Ménez-Hom proves an exhilarating place as it is the most westerly, most majestic of the hills of the Montagnes Noires that run

across southern Finistère. From its rounded heights, you get uplifting, 360° views across the country's western parts and the ocean beyond. It's thought Celts worshipped their sun god here, while a mother goddess was honored at a spring on the hillside. Mysterious traces of stone walls have been found around the top of the Ménez-Hom, but no one is quite sure from when they date ([www.brittanytourism.com](http://www.brittanytourism.com)).

## RIDING DAY 6 : CARENTEC - SAINT-MALO

### Standard Route (251 km / 156 miles)

Today we cover Brittany's north coast. Among the most popular sections is the Pink Granite Coast where the cliffs are - you guessed it - colored pink. From here we ride past the Coast of Penthièvre, named after a noble family that controlled this region for almost a thousand years. We head straight past it and towards Cap Fréhel, the western end of the Emerald Coast, and one of the wildest and most rugged points along the entire coast of Brittany. Hub and biggest city in the region is St. Malo (pop. 50,000), an ancient port town ringed by a giant wall. After heavy destruction in WWII the old town was rebuilt exactly as it was before, a smart decision, as today it is one of the most visited places in all of France.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Côte de Granit Rose (Pink Granite Coast)



The pink-colored granite along this 20 mile stretch of coastline at Ploumanac'h is around 300 million years old. Many of these rocks, some as big as a house, are shaped in a bizarre way and therefore carry imaginative names like rabbit, witch, or Napoleon's hat. The tidal range around here is 35 to 40 ft, so during low tide, you can easily stroll around between the rocks and let your imagination run

wild

#### #2: Paimpol



Set around a working fishing port, pretty little Paimpol is steeped in history. The town center is full of beautifully restored half-timbered houses which are, in turn, full of cosy cafes. Pointe de Guilben is a lookout high on a rugged cliff from where awesome views of the coastline open up.

Just south of the town are the remains of the Abbey of Beauport, founded in 1202, closed in 1790 and today in the process of being reclaimed by nature. This is a special and irresistibly romantic place.

## #3: Cap Fréhel



Of all the rugged, windswept, wild, and scenic cliffs, headlands, and peninsulas of this ragged northern coast of Brittany, Cap Fréhel is probably the most rugged, wild and scenic one. It juts out into the sea, 5 miles long and with cliffs up to 200 ft high. The tip is adorned with two lighthouses, one from the 17th century, built by the famous architect Vauban, and one from 1950. Feeling the wrath of

nature here on a windy, foggy day can show you what the end of the world might actually feel like...

## #4: Barrage de la Rance (tidal power station)



La Barrage de la Rance is the world's oldest tidal power station. The facility is located on the estuary of the Rance River between the cities Dinard and St. Malo. For 45 years after it opened on 26th November 1966 it was by far the largest tidal power station in the world, in terms of installed capacity, until it was surpassed by a station in South Korea in 2011. With a peak rating of 240 Megawatts, generated

by its 24 turbines, it has an annual output of approximately 600 GWh.

The development and construction costs were high but these have now been recovered and electricity production costs are lower than that of nuclear power generation (1.8c per kWh, versus 2.5c per kWh for nuclear).

The facility attracts approximately 70,000 visitors per year and a canal lock in the west end of the dam permits the passage of 20,000 vessels each year between the English Channel and the Rance. The highway on the barrage linking Dinard and La Rance is used by 26,000 vehicles each day.

## #5: Saint-Malo



Walking through the cobble streets of St Malo's old town feels like you've stepped back in time. This popular tourist destination and busy ferry port offers you an authentic glimpse into Brittany's important seafaring past. Watch out, there could be pirates around any corner!

St Malo has several districts, the most popular being Intra Muros or 'inside the walls'. The tall granite buildings, most of which were restored after being bombed during WWII, house an interesting mix of cozy cafes and restaurants to suit all tastes and dozen of shops. Take a tour on the little train to get your bearings or enjoy a bracing walk around the ramparts. The Musée de la Ville tells you all you need to know about the town's history and includes some fascinating maritime objects like the prow of a ship.

## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

### RIDING DAY 7 : SAINT-MALO - BAYEUX

#### Standard Route (210 km / 130 miles)

Two of Normandy's top attractions are on our menu today. Mont St. Michel draws about 3 million visitors per year to the far western corner of the province, the parking lot might be the largest in all of France. But don't worry, even while throbbing with tourists from all around the globe St. Micheal's has the potential to take your breath away. Look at it from the shore and ponder its rich history of more than 1,300 years of monastic work.

After lunch, we head back to the freeway and use it as long as it's toll-free. Then we dive deep into Normandy's back yard, away from the crowds, on roads that sometimes are barely wide enough for two bikes to pass. Bayeux, our destination, remained unscathed in WWII and welcomes us with an impressive cathedral and the museum that houses the world-famous tapestry. More history in one day? Quite impossible.

#### Highlights:

##### #1: Mont Saint-Michel



In the year 708, a vision of the Archangel Michael prompted Bishop Aubert d'Avranches to build a chapel on the summit of an island off the Normandy's coast. From the late 10th century on, the Benedictines turned it into a fortified abbey that was besieged several times during the Hundred Year's War, but never taken. Today the ensemble of slender towers and tall turrets is one of France's most iconic

images, adorns one out of two covers of books about France, and attracts millions of visitors each year, but nevertheless it can instantly take you back to the Middle Ages!

## #2: Bayeux



October 14, 1066: the invasion of England by William II, Duke of Normandy, comes to a final showdown at Hastings. Harold, King of England, is defeated and William goes down in history as “William the Conqueror”. To immortalize the story it was “written” down, or in this case embroidered onto a strip of linen cloth, almost 70 meters long, within 10 years after William’s victory, to be displayed in Bayeux cathedral. Today this priceless 950-year-old piece of art is in a museum, waiting for you to marvel at it.



## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

### RIDING DAY 8 : BAYEUX

#### Standard Route (149 km / 93 miles)

During the last one thousand years Normandy has played a pivotal role in European history on several occasions. William the Conqueror set sail from here in 1066 and Jacques Cartier did the same in 1534, the first to bring England under Norman rule, the second to discover Canada. Normandy was the front line during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) and again in 1944, when American, Canadian and British forces landed here to liberate Europe from the Nazis. History is everywhere around here. Just close your eyes and you can feel it. Of course we strongly recommend not closing your eyes while riding...

This rest day is dedicated to the liberation of Europe that started here in the summer of 1944. There are countless monuments, museums, cemeteries, battlefields, viewpoints and historic sites of all kinds along this stretch of coastline. You could spend a week of sightseeing around here and still not see everything. Our ride today focuses on some of the most important locations like the Pointe du Hoc, the American War Cemetery and Arromanches, where the remains of the artificial port are still visible off the coast. Get in touch with history!

If you want to travel further back in time, by a mere 950 years, just go and see the world-famous tapestry of Bayeux. It depicts, in surprising detail, how William the Conqueror took England, back in 1066.

#### Highlights:

##### #1: D-Day beaches and memorials



June 6, 1944: D-Day. Within one hour 175,000 soldiers and 20,000 vehicles land on the coast of Normandy, making "Operation Overlord" the largest military operation in history. The Battle of Normandy raged on for 76 days, claimed 500,000 lives, and caused widespread destruction. Some cities, like Le Havre, were completely wiped out. It was the beginning of the liberation of Europe, a year later

World War II was over.

Today the 80 km of beaches north of Bayeux are a huge open-air museum full of exhibitions, cemeteries, memorials, museums and relics from the war. "Battlefield Tourism" is an important source of income for this part of the country.

## #2: Bayeux



October 14, 1066: the invasion of England by William II, Duke of Normandy, comes to a final showdown at Hastings. Harold, King of England, is defeated and William goes down in history as “William the Conqueror”. To immortalize the story it was “written” down, or in this case embroidered onto a strip of linen cloth, almost 70 meters long, within 10 years after William’s victory, to be displayed in Bayeux cathedral. Today this priceless 950-year-old piece of art is in a museum, waiting for you to marvel at it.

## RIDING DAY 9 : BAYEUX - ÉTRETAT

### Standard Route (135 km / 84 miles)

We leave Bayeux behind and head further east. The Café Gondrée was the first building to be liberated on D-Day, the place is loaded with history and absolutely worth a stop. We follow the coast, but not within sight, because everything here is developed and built up; drones of French and British tourists descend on these beaches every summer. Honfleur, a small town situated close to the mouth of the Seine, escaped the war undamaged, in fact it has not been involved in any fighting for hundreds of years, so the little port and the narrow houses around it are almost unbearably picturesque.

Next we cross the Pont de Normandie, a suspension bridge that elegantly swings across the river Seine. At the time it was opened in 1995 it was the longest bridge of that kind in the world (almost 2,2 km) and one of the highest (piers 203 meters tall). Past Le Havre, a city completely wiped out in WWII, we approach the Alabaster Coast and Étretat, a small town framed by tall, snow-white cliffs.

### Highlights:

#### #1: Mémorial Pégasus (Pegasus Bridge Museum)



A few minutes past midnight on June 6, 1944, Major John Howard and 83 troops of the British Airborne Division landed in the dense undergrowth near Bénouville. In a surprise attack, they took the strategically important bridge on the lower Orne River from the German occupiers – a successful start of the allied landing in Normandy.

After the war, the bridge was named Pegasus Bridge, in honor of the British paratroopers. Decades later it became too small and was due for a replacement, but the war veterans, as well as the locals, protested fiercely. So an exact copy was built in 1994 – only larger. The original can be viewed in the museum next door, along with a replica of one of those glider planes that could carry 28 troops, 1 cannon, and 1 Jeep.

## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

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### #2: Honfleur



Many people consider Honfleur to be Normandy's most beautiful seaside town. Unlike neighboring Le Havre it didn't get destroyed during WWII, so the Old Port, built in the mid-17th century, is as picturesque as ever. Famous artists like Boudin, Cézanne, and Renoir liked it too and lived here for a while, back in the 19th century.

### #3: Étretat



This little town is famous for its bright white limestone cliffs. They are up to almost 400 ft high and offer spectacular views, especially on a sunny day under a clear blue sky. The color of the cliffs gave the coast its name: the Côte d'Albatre, or Alabaster Coast, stretching from Ététat to Le Tréport in the northeast, a distance of 130 km.

## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA

### RIDING DAY 10 : ÉTRETAT - VERSAILLES

#### Standard Route (256 km / 159 miles)

It's our last riding day today and we commence it by catching one last glimpse of the Alabaster Coast and the snow-white cliffs. A bit further inland we meet the Seine again, the river we are going to follow for the rest of the day. We cross it on a little ferry and conduct a quick visit to the ruins of Jumièges Abbey, then we take another small ferry and ride around the big city of Rouen in a wide arc. If you are interested in a detour into Rouen, talk to your tour guide, he/she will have a suitable option up his/her sleeve.

We continue alongside the river Seine, the Grande Dame among the rivers of France. Famous impressionist Claude Monet lived and worked in Giverny, and if you want you can get an impression of his life and art there. Pun intended.

#### Highlights:

##### #1: Abbaye de Jumièges (Jumièges Abbey)



Of all the ruins in France, this historic abbey in a lazy loop of the lower Seine might be the most impressive. In the river oxbows of Normandy, between the towns of Rouen and Le Havre, the village of Jumièges is home to an old monastery, left wide open to the sky since the days of the French Revolution. The Benedictine monastery at Jumièges was first established in the year 654 by an abbot (later saint) named

Philibert. It was a pretty spiffy place, well-appointed and well-staffed, which meant just about everyone from the Vikings to the Huguenots wanted a piece of it (mostly the Vikings, who sacked it with some regularity). In the middle of all the invasions and rebuilding, in 1067 coming home from his victory across the Channel, William the Conqueror stopped by for a re-consecration. With his protection, things started off again on a long course of (mostly) smooth sailing. The order was able to rebuild—spiritually, financially, scholarly, and artistically—although with some setbacks during the Huguenot Wars of the 16th century. Cut to the French Revolution, which dealt the monastery its final blow. The brothers dispersed, the abbey fell apart, and it was eventually sold off for scrap and stone. Over the next 60 years, it was a ghost of its former self, until 1852 when it was recognized for its value as a landscape of exquisite ruins. It was maintained in private hands for some time, and finally fully protected by the State in 1946 for its unparalleled historical and architectural power. ([www.atlasobscura.com](http://www.atlasobscura.com))

## FROM PARIS TO OMAHA


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### #2: Giverny



You have probably heard of Claude Monet (1840 - 1926), inventor of the impressionist style. He lived in Giverny for the last 43 years of his life. His restored home and garden are open to the public. A particular highlight is the water-lily pond with its famous Japanese bridge which features in many of Monet's masterpieces. It was here in Giverny that Monet indulged his love of nature, painting, gardening and

photography. As you stroll through the exquisite gardens and admire the pond and bridge, you'll enter into Monet's world where art and nature became one. (L.P.)



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