



Valley of the Kings

Biking in France's chateau country

King Francois I was flustered. He had just received word that his two sons were being held hostage in Spain. Instead of paying the enormous ransom, Francois decided the boys could stay in Spain a while, and he spent all his money building a new castle.

Today, of course, Francois would have a PR office to advise against such a move. But in 1522 being a king still meant something, so today we can marvel at what remains of that era: Over a dozen grand palaces and chateaus clustered in the Loire Valley. Here is Usse, where the legend of Sleeping Beauty was born; Chenonceau, leap-frogging across the river Cher; and sturdy Chinon, at which Joan of Arc strode into history. Yet, just a few miles from each lie quiet cycling roads and villages where time seems to have stopped.

Valley of the Kings

Sept. 16-23, 2000, \$1,695

Big Loire Little Loir

Biking in France's heartland

There's more to France than Paris. Here, on our shortest bike trip, enjoy a taste of the real France. Bike along a tree-lined

riverside road to Troo, where an elderly woman will proudly show you the cave, in her backyard, where Christians hid out 1500 years ago. Sip coffee by the enchanting canals of Vendome. Let a semi-retired miller introduce you to a way of life you thought had vanished. And then, marvel at two of the Loire's grandest castles: The 440-room Chambord, designed by Leonardo da Vinci; and Blois.

Big Loire, Little Loir, June 3-8, 2000, a gay men's trip, \$1,195; Sept. 10-15, 2000, \$1,250

This autumn, as the chestnuts fall and fresh-picked grapes infuse the air, we'll offer our first trips in Tuscany. Few names ring with as much history as this rolling section of Italy. The ancient Etruscans left monuments, seven centuries before Christ; later came the Romans. Tuscany served as the heart of the Renaissance, and the arch-rivals of Florence and Siena sought to outshine one another. Yet for all the history, Tuscany still holds deep forests, fields streaked with red poppies, and intoxicating vistas, awaiting exploration by foot, or by bike.



Flavors of Tuscany



Biking in Tuscany

The narrow streets of Florence and Siena serve as the anchors for a picturesque bike route that sweeps through the wine region of Chianti, into forests where wild boar still ferret out buried truffles ... and to restaurants where local basil, rosemary and thyme will flavor dishes cooked in time-worn traditions.

Flavors of Tuscany, Sept. 11-18, 2000, \$2,095

TUSCAN TRAILS

Hiking in Tuscany

Our hiking week in Tuscany begins with four nights in the fairy-tale village of San Gimignano, a perfectly preserved medieval town perched on a hill. Then we'll transfer to the town of Radda, in the heart of Chianti wine country, for three more nights. At each location, our daily hikes take us to both natural and historic locations.

Tuscan Trails, Sept. 20-27, 2000, \$1,295