



LUXURY TRAVEL

# Now's the Time to Book an Epic Trip Around Next Year's Tour de France

**Calling all cyclists: book now or hold your peace until 2018.**

by **Nikki Ekstein**

November 21, 2016 — 3:21 AM EST

When Andy Levine, the chief executive officer and founder of [DuVine Cycling + Adventure Co.](#), talks about the Tour de France, he fires up with as much wattage as Nairo Quintana on a steep climb.

“Following the Tour is like following a circus and maybe following the Grateful Dead,” he says. His energy builds with each phrase. “It’s all sorts of wild and crazy. You’re following this exciting party that stretches 200 kilometers each day. It’s like Burning Man!”

That's why every year, he and his company immerse guests in the middle of it all. He gets them into VIP areas, where they can watch the athletes getting ready for a new leg, training with their coaches, and setting up their bikes; he secures prime seats in the bleachers near the Arc de Triomphe, where the race comes to its momentous close; and he takes guests biking ahead of the competitive pack on several legs, for an immersive experience that can't be rivaled. He's also friends with many of the athletes, so insider access is a given.



DuVine travelers take a break along the Tour de France paths. Source: DuVine Cycling + Adventure Co.

There's space for only 14 guests on each of three DuVine trips: one that goes from the Alps to Paris; another focuses on the mountain stages and legendary climbing routes in the Pyrenees; and a third goes soft on cycling and hard on wine tastings in Burgundy, a new destination for the Tour. Unlike similar trips, DuVine takes guests biking in front of the Tour on select legs, rather than following behind the entire thing.

Demand is running high this year, so enthusiasts will want to book now. “Cycling is getting more and more popular. and the Tour is becoming a bucket list thing again,” says Levine, who added that it’s no coincidence that LVMH is now poised to acquire the high-end bike manufacturer, Pinarello.



The peloton approaching the Col du Lautaret climb during the 2014 Tour de France. Photographer: Doug Pensinger/Getty Images

Another reason demand is high? Few outfitters offer trips alongside the Tour to begin with. A list of official operators can be found here; not all of them focus on end-to-end services by which travelers can expect to have top-notch accommodations and guiding. (The list isn’t comprehensive; it reflects only operators that pay to have the direct affiliation.)

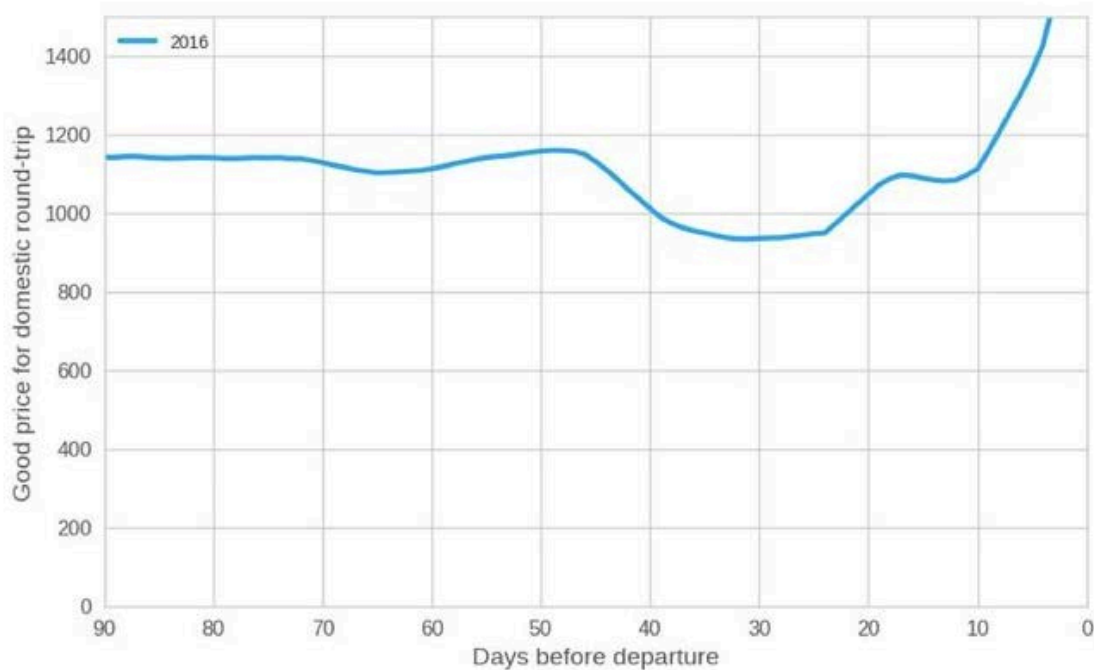
Trek Travel, the most esteemed company among the Tour’s “approved agents,” says its Tour de France Alps trip has already sold out. But other itineraries—such as a Pyrenees-focused trip and another that focuses on the Paris finish line experience—still have availability. Butterfield & Robinson, which once offered Tour de France trips, has stopped offering them because of logistical concerns, like high cancelation costs and limited hotel stock.



Spectators at the finish of a Tour de France leg. Source: DuVine Cycling + Adventure Co.

In other words, book a remaining spot on one of these top-notch trips while they last. There aren't many of them, and they're going fast.

But don't book your airfare until later. According to online travel agency [Hopper](#), which specializes in aviation-data insights and airfare predictions, flights to Paris in July won't vary substantially in price until 48 days before departure. But since summer is a busy season for travel to France, expect to pay a premium for tickets; Hopper has identified a "good deal price" as being roughly \$915, if you're leaving from U.S. East Coast airports (New York's JFK, Washington's Dulles, Boston's Logan) and \$1175 if you're leaving from San Francisco or Los Angeles.



Hopper's data show that airfare prices to Paris from the U.S. will start climbing steeply one month ahead of a July departure. Source: Hopper

As for how to choose among the different types of trips? The Alps and Paris trip is the most popular—partly because of the climactic finale, which allows guests to spend time in the City of Light, and partly because it's the itinerary that spends the most time alongside the Tour itself. (It coincides with a full four legs of the race.) Trek Travel's equivalent trip is also that company's first to sell out.

For diehard cyclists, a mountain stages trip is the next-best option; the physical demands will be challenging, and you'll feel satisfied tackling some of the world's most iconic climbs. And if you're not looking to sweat for a week straight, focus on Paris (or Burgundy), where you're guaranteed a more esoteric trip with luxury hotels and amazing food and wine. Either way, you'll join the diehard cheering squads for at least one leg.



Cheering on the competitors during a tough mountain stage. Source: DuVine Cycling + Adventure Co.

“At the finish line for famous legs, there will be close to 100,000 people cheering, ‘allez, allez, allez!’” says Levine about the festive spirit of the Tour. “Watching on your couch is amazing, but being there live? That’s the whole deal.”