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## The Must Rides

As you plan this year's vacations, set aside a few days-or weeks-to pedal around one-or all-of these 7 cycling wonderlands.

By Bruce Hildenbrand



## Alpe d'Huez

Since its first inclusion in the Tour de France, in 1952, when Italian championissimo Fausto Coppi climbed to victory, a win atop this 21-switchback ascent has become the most coveted prize in the Grand Tours. It's also the most manic stage of any Tour de France in which it's included. Each turn has a sign commemorating one of the stage winners. (Coppi and Armstrong share a spot on switchback 21.) So popular is this 8-mile climb that photographers stake out the road every day in the summer to sell photos to passing riders.

**Best Time to Go:** Late spring through early fall for riding-but if you're into crowds, bring camping gear or rent a van and arrive days early to secure a site to watch the Tour.

**It's Most Fun If You're This Fit:** With an average grade of only about 8 percent, this Alp isn't crushing-it's the storied battles between pros that give it notoriety. If you're not trying to race up it at 15 mph, even a moderately fit recreational rider should enjoy summiting.

**Get There With:** Breaking Away Bicycling Tours' Tour de Alpes, July 14-22, \$3,198; [www.breakingaway.com](http://www.breakingaway.com)

## Napa & Sonoma Valleys

Perhaps because pasta, the cornerstone of the cycling diet, virtually demands to be enjoyed with wine, these adjacent wine-country regions in northern California have become synonymous with good riding-so much so that if you live in the U.S. you might be surprised at how popular our native vineyards have become with foreign cyclists. Napa and Sonoma are not merely local favorites; they're legitimate international must-rides. The varied terrain can satisfy everyone from the flat-seeking novice to the hard-core hammerhead. The roads are lightly traveled. The cuisine maintains its gourmet appeal while ranging in price from cheap basics to outrageously expensive feasts. And there's a wine tasting, it seems, on every mile.

**Best Time To Go:** Anytime-that's the beauty of it.

**It's Most Fun If You're This Fit:** With the variety of terrain available, readiness to eat and drink is more important than cycling preparedness. Climbs such as Spring Mountain, Skagg's Springs and Oakville Grade will turn sinewy steel bands of muscle into tapioca. West Dry Creek Road, River Road



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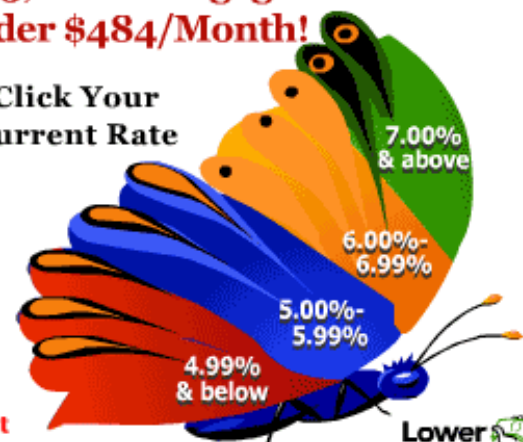
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James Startt

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