

Heart-to-Heart



HOW DOES THE HEARTCYCLE LOTTERY WORK?

Sometimes, HeartCycle tours are so popular that we are unable to confirm all members who wish to be on them. In such cases, as your registrar, I conduct a lottery to determine who will be confirmed and who will be waitlisted. This article explains the process and I hope debunks any myths about it.

Every tour has a maximum number of riders permitted. This is for the enjoyment and safety of all. This number varies by tour and is influenced by numerous factors including location, hotel capacity, fixed-based vs. moving tour, and the comfort level of the tour leaders and SAG drivers. The maximum is noted on each tour description and often includes tour leaders and SAGs (typically four on domestic tours and one on international or vendor-led tours).

The tour director announces the next year's tour portfolio at the annual luncheon in October at which time the tours go live on the HeartCycle website. Each tour has an opening date, which is provided to all members via email. Overseas tours are often opened in late summer whereas domestic tours are typically opened in late October or early November. Each tour remains open for initial registration for 4 days; this timeframe is communicated to all members via email. At the end of that initial registration period, if fewer people have registered than the maximum permitted, I confirm all. If more people have registered than permitted, then the registrar conducts a lottery.

Who is exempt from the lottery? All HeartCycle volunteers are provided ONE priority per year. This includes board members, tour leaders, and working members. A priority, which must be claimed before registration, means that that volunteer will be exempt from a lottery (if one is needed) and in most cases will be guaranteed a spot on the tour.

Also exempt from the lottery are registrants who meet the following conditions:

- The stated roommate of a rider using a priority is automatically admitted to the tour.
- Sprinter drivers, if not the tour leader or SAG, are also exempt from the lottery.
- The roommate of a tour leader is automatically admitted to the tour.

The lottery process of the remaining registrations is a completely random and computer-generated process. Neither the tour leaders nor anyone has a say in who gets in and who doesn't except for the exemptions noted above. I have heard from numerous sources that they believe the tour leader or others get to choose who is on their tour. That is completely false. The majority of HeartCycle tours do NOT require a lottery. For the 2025 tours, 14 tours were posted and 4 required a lottery. Questions: Rita Kurelja - Registrar

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Assistant Tour Director

TOUR DIRECTOR MUSINGS

Here we are at the start of the year, and friends are asking, "Where are you going this year?" So, where are you going? If you are looking for open tours, we've got two: Central CO Rockies (July 9–17) and Steamboat Springs NextGen (August 17–22). You don't have to register with a next-generation member to go on the Steamboat Springs tour. High country Colorado in the summertime is glorious—green hillsides, wildflowers, and rivers! Both tours are sure to maximize your enjoyment of summer.

In the meantime, let's continue to focus on fitness. I like to think of the four pillars of fitness: cardio, strength, flexibility, and balance. Most of us cyclists are cardio aficionados. We've trained our hearts to be efficient machines! Strength training is going to help us improve our power to weight ratio. Remember to work on those core muscles too. Stretching can enhance flexibility and improve joint mobility. How often do we make time for that? Improve your stability and coordination by practicing balance moves. Research indicates that physical fitness has a direct and positive impact on mental fitness. Let's go!

Janet Slate, Tour Director

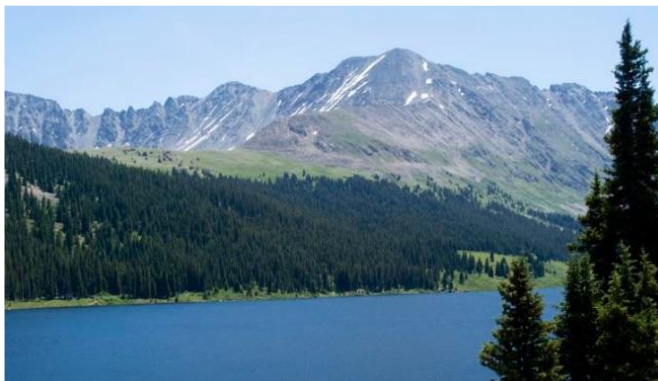
jslate@ultrasys.net

2025 Tour Openings

The following two tours still have availability (10 and 18 spots, respectively):

Central CO Rockies, July 9–17:

Escape the heat of summer in Rocky Mountains in central Colorado. Each day, we will increase our mileage and elevation gain. The summer flowers will be in bloom. This semi fixed-base tour with just two hotels covers many great routes in the high country. We have room!



Steamboat Springs NextGen, August 17–22:

Grab a younger relative and cycle with us in beautiful Routt County, Colorado. Our daily rides will have optional gravel additions to challenge you. This fixed-base tour has Old West ranches, lightly traveled roads, and scenic lakes.



We have limited availability on the following tours:

South Island, New Zealand, March 6–22:

Just one spot for a woman to share is available on this fully supported, small group tour with experienced local guides of the lakes, mountains, and coasts on the beautiful South Island of New Zealand.

Alaska, August 2–9:

We have just one spot available for a woman to share on this loop tour through the central part of Alaska, which includes three meals per day and bike rental.

Paso Robles, October 18–26:

Room for a man to share and one shared room on this classic fixed-base tour in the heart of Wine Country, California. October is uncrowded with mild weather—a great way to wrap up your biking season.

Le Monastere “*Un jour magnifique.*” By Greg Lestikow

That’s what I overheard our driver, Patrice, say to Le Monastere’s founder and guide extraordinaire, Chris Georgas. It was the first stop on our first morning of riding near Limoux, France, and Patrice had just handed out a bag of gooey sticky buns to hold us over until lunch in the riverside town of Lagrasse.

I was certainly thinking how magnificent a day it was, with the cool autumn sun slanting down on us and the blood pumping through our legs after a gradual climb out of Limoux. But it was gratifying to hear someone like Patrice confirm my hunch since, from what I could tell, he was a long-time local and accustomed to beautiful days in the French countryside.

My dad and I had been talking about a trip to Le Monastere since our three-week journey across the UK with the Heart Cycle-led LEJOG tour in 2021. Invariably, over beers or a whiskey with long-time Heart Cyclers, the conversation would turn to their favorite tours over the years. And even more predictably, that conversation would lead us to Limoux, where Chris and his wife Fabienne have converted a 12th century monastery and inn into a spacious hotel that has become a sort of pilgrimage destination for Heart Cyclers over the last decade. We talked to several people who had made multiple trips to Le Monastere and couldn’t say enough about it: the food, the weather, the seemingly endless supply of small and well-maintained back roads to explore.

My dad, who’s been going on Heart Cycle trips since the nineties, started to feel left out. And that’s how we ended up here, on the side of the road with Patrice and Chris, eating freshly baked French pastries and looking forward to another four and a half days of riding.

All signs had pointed to a great week to come. We arrived at Le Monastere with the other ten Heart Cycle riders on Saturday morning. Chris quickly went to work on our fittings, setting us up on high quality bikes (I had a Specialized Tarmac S-Works with a pretty flashy custom paint job) in good working order. He then led us on a six-mile warm-up spin out of Limoux to the town of Saint Polycarpe, home to an eighth century abbey and a well-preserved medieval aqueduct that spans the Ruisseau Saint-Polycarpe, a tributary of the Aude river that gives the region its name. Chris alternated between wrenching our bikes to get the fit just right and giving us an overview of the area’s history.

We wrapped up the day sitting in Le Monastere’s leafy courtyard with a dinner full of bright flavors and (as was to become a ritual) a lot of great local wine! One thing we did not get that night was a ride briefing. Instead, Chris told us that he plans the route the morning of, after waking up at 6:00am to analyze the “three W’s” of the day: Weather, Wind, and last night’s Wine consumption.

Day 1: “You call that a gorge?”

Sure enough, the next morning we came to the breakfast table and found a small stack of photocopied Michelin maps with our route marked in yellow highlighter. I came to think of these as Chris’s Treasure Maps, and I don’t think I’m the only one who kept all five as a souvenir of our week.

Sunday’s treasure map took us back through Saint Polycarpe and up rolling hills on the way to the town of Lagrasse. Rows of grapevines gave way to rocky, dry terrain as we climbed. At the top, one of us asked Chris about the gorge we’d be riding through as we came into lunch.

“Gorge?” Chris said. “What gorge?”

“It’s right here on your map,” we said, pointing at a bold “GORGE” marker on his treasure map, just beside the pink highlighter.

“Oh, I don’t know why it says that,” Chris insisted. “That’s not what I’d call a gorge, at least not around these parts.”

I think we were all a bit confused when, after downing Patrice’s sticky rolls, we rode through a bucolic section of road with a river running beside us and dramatic rock walls on either side. “Maybe not a stunner,” I remember thinking. “But you could definitely call this a gorge.”

Lunch at Lagrasse put those thoughts out of mind. One fellow rider ordered a plate of escargot for the group, confirming that we were, indeed, in France. Further confirmation was offered when our total lunch time clocked in at two hours and fifteen minutes, which I believe the French refer to as “le fast food.” After the obligatory confusion about the bill (“Wait, we only ordered three chicken gizzard salads, and you charged us for four”) we were off.

The afternoon brought us up to the 600-meter Col de la Loubiere. Along the way, we were notified by road signs featuring aggressive looking wild boars that this was hunting territory; a few rifle shots echoing through the dense foliage drove the point home. The end of the day was a ten-mile descent back to Limoux, which I can only describe as the reason most of us love to be on a bike. We had the wind at our back, the sun on our faces, and the prospect of good Occitanian wine on our return. It doesn’t get any better.

Day 2: “Now that’s a gorge.”

One lesson I learned from Chris Georgas is the power of surprise.

Don’t know what your route’s going to be tomorrow? That will make it all the more fun to discover when you’re out there on your bike.

Not sure what’s for dinner? Doesn’t matter, your palette will be pleasantly surprised.

Didn’t know that you were going to be riding through a rock tunnel improbably carved into the side of sheer cliffs that drop hundreds of feet into impossibly clear, blue waters in the river below? Well, maybe you should stop trying to anticipate so much.

The gorge in question on this day was Les Gorges de Calamus. Chris told us beforehand in his understated Canadian manner that “now you’ll be seeing what a real gorge is.” He was not kidding. Chris himself hopped on a bike to lead us down the one-lane road that creeps across the cliff faces, counseling caution lest we run into the two-foot-tall barriers separating us from the great beyond. I couldn’t read the signs at the top that explained to cars how they were to navigate the route, but I’m guessing they said something like, “Don’t try it.”

We ate lunch at the base of the gorge overlooking a hermitage built into the rock walls – baguette sandwiches with strangely colored (delicious) cheeses, chips, and draft beer. It turned out we’d need the energy and the buzz, as we were about to tackle our most challenging climb of the trip, the 706-meter Col de Saint Louis. This was the only Col featuring road signs every kilometer that told you the average gradient of the next kilometer. I assume these signs were invented by sadists and/or motorists who are trying to get cyclists off the road. The highest number I remember seeing is 11%, but I blacked out for the last few clicks.

One highlight of this climb is the Snail Bridge (Pont d’Escargot). Isabel, Chris’s right-hand woman for the last 20 years, told me about the name of the bridge after we got to the top.

“Oh, Snail Bridge. I get it,” I said after thinking about it for a second. “Because you first go under the bridge, through the archway, before you circle around and come over the bridge itself. Kind of like a clover leaf, or the shape of a snail’s shell.”

“Yes, I suppose,” she said with her signature wry French smile. “But I think they call it that because you are going as slow as a snail when you go over it.” I had to admit that her interpretation made more sense.

We polished off our longest day of riding with a French country dinner at our old friend Patrice’s house, which offered a captivating view of a small village near Limoux. He and his gracious wife cooked up liver pate, duck and chicken cassoulet, and the biggest, richest bowl of chocolate mousse I’d ever seen.

It was, as Patrice might say, *une nuit magnifique*.

Day 3: Easy Rider

Chris knows how to pace things. After an 80-mile day with over 5,300 feet of climbing, it was time to cruise through the French countryside. We pedaled leisurely past fields of sunflowers and grapevines just starting to change to yellows and reds. Chris pointed out the ancient town of Montreal, whose soldiers brought the name to Canada when they were stationed there in the 1600s. (That's the explanation Chris gave us. Wikipedia has a different explanation, but I've learned to trust Chris).

We had lunch in the town of Mirepoix, which is known for the well-preserved wooden architecture in its central square – “It's one of the few towns around here that hasn't burned down at least once over the last couple hundred years,” Chris explained to us. It was the perfect place to stretch the legs before visiting the town's cathedral, which has a fascinating diorama showing the various stages of its construction from the 13th century to the present day.

After that, it was a quick spin back to Limoux and (surprise!) another mouthwatering French dinner, this time at a little family bistro at which we were the only group being served for the night. You get spoiled at Le Monastere.

Day 4: No rain days

Chris told us that, in the thirty-odd years he's been doing this, he's had less than a dozen rain days. Today we would learn how he's accomplished that feat.

In the morning, after we'd picked up our Treasure Maps, Chris told us it was going to be a rainy, windy day all over the region, but not to fret. He'd picked out a route where we'd get the best weather. Ultimately, our goal was the town of Minerve. We would ideally get about 30 miles of riding before we hit the finish line, but we might shorten the route based on what he saw the weather doing.

We hopped in the vans and started driving. It was just starting to rain at our planned departure point, so Chris loaded us back up and we continued our drive east. The clouds followed us, and our second jumping-off point was also rainy and blustery. Finally, at our third stop – the very French-sounding hamlet of Felines-Minervoises – we saw some clear skies. Chris and Isabel got our wheels on the road quickly, and we climbed rolling hills to Montcelebre, which saw the Tour come through in 2016 and again in 2021.

After that, we descended through what the uninitiated might call a “gorge” and, after rounding a corner, came upon our final “Chris Georgas No Peeking Special.” I'm not sure how my fellow travelers saw it, but I felt like Indiana Jones walking into the room that housed the Holy Grail, or Dorothy opening her farmhouse door on Oz for the first time. The town of Minerve is built right into the cliffs around the River Cesse, accessible by foot across a viaduct supported by gaping stone arches.

People who know about these things call it One of Most Beautiful Towns in France. “It’s a pretty nice little town, eh,” was how Chris described it to us that morning.

Although we hadn’t earned it with only 15 miles of riding, we ate a hearty hot lunch in Minerve and then took a brief, sunny tour of the battlements, including a replica of the catapult that the Crusaders used to besiege the Cathars back in the 12th century.

As we left, we got a great view of the surrounding countryside, all the way past Limoux to the foothills of the Pyrenees. Nothing but dark curtains of rain. Chris had done it again.

Day 5: The Da Vinci Ride

The destination for our final day of riding was Rennes-le-Château. Our daily map took on new significance, as some believe there might be honest to goodness treasure hidden under the church and the surrounding area. As Chris explained to us, these claims originated with a parish priest named Berenger Sauniere, who refurbished and expanded the church in the late 1800s. Nobody knew where he got the money to fund the construction. One popular theory was that Sauniere had found evidence that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had married and started a family, and that the Catholic Church bribed him not to reveal this bombshell to the public.

If this sounds familiar, it’s because an author named Dan Brown was inspired by the Rennes-le-Château mystery and wrote a book called The Da Vinci Code. We had a chance to tour the lovely on-site museum – we did not see Tom Hanks, unfortunately – and to enjoy views of the Pyrenees from the village sculpture garden before our final lunch.

We finished our last day of riding by retracing some short sections that we’d done on our first and second days. I usually try to minimize doubling up on segments during fixed-base rides, but there was something magical about it this time around. It made me realize how much we’d seen in such a short period of time, and how much I don’t have space for in a short summary like this – the ruins of Roman baths, the plump Buddha-like peak of Bugarach, the marble statues of little drummer boys and fierce bull heads.

Dinner that evening was at Le Monastere. Duck, of course, cooked to perfection and served by Chris’s wife, Fabienne. We had enough wine that I don’t remember for sure, but I’m pretty certain we toasted to Guy Kelley, our tour coordinator, who did a fantastic job communicating before and during the trip, and whose efforts were key in making our first trip to Le Monastere a joy.

It was to be sure, a wonderful week of exploring. *Un voyage magnifique*



The Town of Minerve



Riding under the arches of cypress trees originally planted by Napoleon to protect his troops from the sun.



Our fearless leader Guy (pronounced “Ghee” on this trip) in the medieval town of Mirepoix



The stunning Gorges de Calamus



The fortress at Carcassonne, which many of the group visited during our rest day





Wine country in fall



A traditional farm dinner at Patrice's house



A relaxed lunch on our first day in the town of Lagrasse

Colorado Heartcycle 2025 Tours

South Island, New Zealand

Christchurch, New Zealand

March 6-22 2025 Status: Open
16 Days, Int./Adv. \$5,100.00
Janet Slate jslate@totalspeed.com

Shikoku Pilgrimage, Japan

Koyasan, Japan

April 6-18 2025 Status: Wait List
12 days, Intermediate \$4,500.00
Tina Vessels tina.vessels@gmail.com

Springtime in Solvang

Solvang, California

April 12 – 19 2025 Status: Open
6 days, Int. \$1,660.00
Mark Lestikow mark.lestikow@closetfactory-colorado.com
Polly Lestikow pollyb.lestikow@closetfactory.com

Underground Railroad Year 2

Mobile, Alabama

May 10-25 2025 Status: Open
14 days, Int./Adv. \$3,500.00
Jim Schroeder, jimmyschweb@gmail.com
Ron Finch, blouie-rfinch@comcast.net

Randonee 'en Dordogne, France

Bordeaux, France

June 1-13 2025 Status: Wait List
12 days, Int. \$3,500.00
Fred Yu frederickyu@comcast.net

Le Monastere in Southern France

Limoux, France

June 21-28 2025 Status: Waitlist
7 days, Int/Adv \$3,350.00
Tom Kissinger tom_k@pipeline.com

MN-WI:Mississippi River Weave

June 21-30 2025 Status: Open
9 days, Int./Adv.
Minneapolis, MN \$2,000.00
Jim Schroeder jimmyschweb@gmail.com
Ron Finch blouie-rfinch@comcast.net

Central CO Rockies

LINK TO SIGN UP FOR 2025
TOURS:

<https://www.heartcycle.org/tours>

Frisco, CO
July 9-17, 2025 Status: Open
8days, Int/Adv \$2,160.00
Guy Kelley guy.kelley@comcast.net
Scott MacCormack SAMacCormack@gmail.com

Jackson Hole, WY

July 24-29, 2025 Status: Waitlist
5 days, Easy \$1,800.00
Clare Bena cbvamoots@gmail.com
Cindy Dore, cdorecycle@gmail.com

Alaska, the Last Frontier

Anchorage, Alaska
August 2-9, 2025 Status: Open
7 days, Intermediate \$4,280.00
Scott MacCormack SAMacCormack@gmail.com

Steamboat Springs NextGen Tour

Steamboat Springs, CO

August 17-22, 2025 Status: Open
5 days, Intermediate \$1,350.00
Mark Lestikow mark.lestikow@closetfactory-colorado.com
Greg Lestikow glestikow@gmail.com

Acadia: Rocky Coastal Maine

Bar Harbor, Maine

September 8-16, 2025 Status: Waitlist
8 days Intermediate \$2,700.00
Patty Menz pattymenz@verizon.net
John Pennick jdpenrick@gmail.com

Le Monastere in Southern France

Limoux, France

October 4-11, 2025 Status: Waitlist
7 days, Int/Adv \$3,350.00
Tom Kissinger tom_k@pipeline.com

Paso Robles Wine Country

Paso Robles, CA

October 18-26, 2025 Status: Open
8 days Int/Adv \$2,450.00
Cindy Alvarez sindelou2@gmail.com
Helayn Storch Helaynstorch@hotmail.com

**LINK TO SIGN UP FOR 2025
TOURS:**
<https://www.heartcycle.org/tours>

The monthly giggle: courtesy of Judy Siel

