



Day 7: Colmar

Highlights: Gorgeous Munster Valley, La Maison du Fromages

Perhaps the best known town on your route today is Munster, founded by evangelizing Irish monks in the 7th century A.D. They brought their cheese making skills with them and created one of the most famous cheeses in France. We'll stop at the Maison du Fromage and learn how Munster cheese is made. Plan on a lunch stop here, or continue on to Colmar to explore the canals, museums, and great shopping. Colmar has been a famous market and wine center since the 13th century. Daily mileage: Distance: 41 km (25 miles).

This evening's hotel:

Hotel St Martin
38, Grand Rue
68000 Colmar

Tel: 03 89 24 11 51

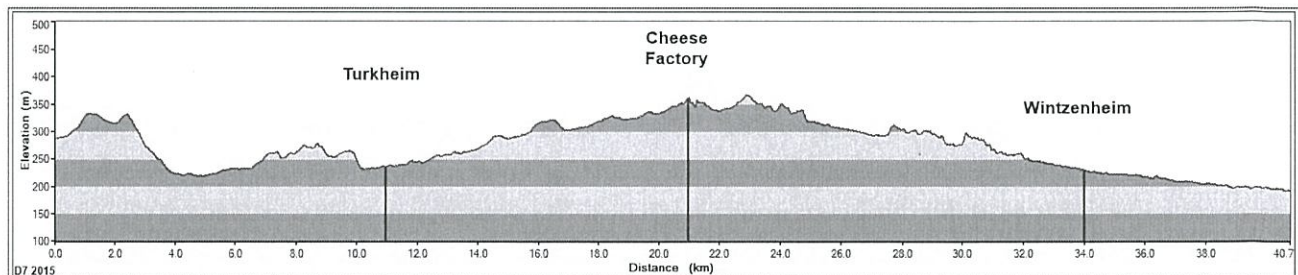
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In an emergency call 112

Today's Ride: The route today is easy, mostly flat along the Munster valley. Leaving Riquewhir we will stop for a Munster cheese making demonstration. From there you'll have the option of visiting the village of Munster for coffee or lunch or keep biking on to Colmar via a beautiful and quiet country road.



Lunch and Dinner: When we stop for the cheese making demonstration you also can stop for a delicious meal at La Maison du Fromage and taste all the local products. Another option is to continue on and to stop in Munster with its numerous cafe and restaurant. If you are feeling speedy today you can continue on to Colmar for Lunch. We'll enjoy dinner together this evening at a local favorite restaurant in the center of Colmar.

You Might Like to Know: Turckheim has a fantastic wine cooperative on the right side of the road just before our route takes us out of town and although we don't recommend drinking before cycling, we suggest you pop in to take a look and maybe buy some of bottles of wine to go! Wine Cooperatives play a major role in France and all the major wine-producing countries in Europe. Frequently people think of coops as a more factory side of winemaking. Compared to small family wineries, they do have the ability to churn out industrial quantities of cheap wine. Winemaking equipment is expensive. By pooling resources, smaller growers have access to the winemaking expertise, equipment, and marketing resources of larger producers.



In addition to the mass produced wines though, cooperatives also make and bottle small batches, even of single vineyards, that compete with top estate-bottled wines but cost less to make. In a given wine producing area, estate-bottled wines are generally best from a quality standpoint, but they usually cost more. On the other hand, coops have access to more fruit, from which they can choose the best for their top products.

Perhaps the most outstanding town on our route today is Munster, founded by evangelizing Irish monks in the 7th C. A.D. Luckily they did not only bring the light of faith but they also brought the skill of making cheese with them. And as it seems it must have been a heavenly conspiracy or blessing to combine this knowledge with the cows and the meadows of the Munster valley. Thus one of the most famous and smelly cheeses in France was created. But the true wonder, despite the smell, is the taste of this exceptional cheese and even more astonishing is how well the Gewurztraminer pairs with the Munster cheese.

Originally this distinctive cheese was made in the Benedictine Monasteries in Munster around the 7th Century, as a method to conserve milk. Celebrated throughout the valley, this soft round smooth cheese made from cow milk has a distinctive character and can be enjoyed with a piece of bread, with cumin seeds or melted with potatoes in the oven and, of course, a glass of Gewurtztraminer. This cheese is protected by an Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC). This certification regulates the main steps of the cheese process. The producers are required to observe a rigorous process. The cheese crust must be washed regularly. It is matured in damp cellars for five weeks for the smaller formats (roughly 300 g) and up to 2 to 3 months for the larger ones (about 1500 g). During this period, the rind is periodically washed with brine (a solution of salt). The added moisture helps the development of bacteria that gives this cheese its particular taste and color.

Considered as the "capital of Alsatian wine", Colmar is renowned for its well preserved old town, its numerous architectural landmarks and its museums and its lovely canals. The city was conquered by France under King Louis XIV in 1673. Then with the rest of Alsace, Colmar was annexed by the newly formed German empire in 1871 as a result of the Franco-Prussian war. It returned to France after World War I according to the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, was annexed by Nazi Germany in 1940, and then reverted to French control after the battle of the "Colmar Pocket" in 1945.

Bike Safety Tip: Learn to shift your weight as you turn: Make a right turn by leaning the bike to the right and putting your outside (left) pedal in the down position. Most of your weight will be on that outside pedal.

French Lesson of the Day: Shopping!

In France, handling the merchandise in any business establishment is considered bad manners; ask a salesperson for assistance.

- How much does it cost? - *Combien cela coute-t-il?*
- How much is it? - *C'est combien?*
- Excuse me (if you don't understand) - *Comment?*
- Can I try it on ? – *Est ce que je peut l'essayer?*

Cycling the Vineyards of Alsace

Scale 1:100.000

Day 7: Pedal the Rhine Plain today or into the Vosges Mountains

Towns for Navigation: Kientzheim (4 km), Ammerschwir (6 km), Turkheim (10 km), Zimmerbach (15 km), Wihr-au-Val (18 km), Munster Cheese Factory (21 km), Wintzenheim (34 km), Colmar(41 km).

