

## Italy: Sicily, the Noto Valley & Syracuse

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

When considering a Sicily cycling vacation, ask yourself this question—would you rather stay in a glossy resort hotel, or are you looking for something more authentic? If you chose the latter, VBT's local Sicilian trip leaders are delighted to welcome you to their island home! Here, you'll stay at authentic accommodations showcasing Sicily's rich cultural history – including a 18th century palace with stucco decorated ceilings. Pedal gentle bike paths along coastal valleys, stopping for lunch with a local family on their organic farm. Accompany a Sicilian truffle hunter and his dog on a search for this culinary prize. Through it all, your gregarious Sicilian trip leaders help you make local friends—using nothing but gestures, good humor, and your winning smile.

### Cultural Highlights

- Explore Baroque Scicli with a local guide, and venture outside the city to the lovely Noto Valley.
- Tour an organic beekeeping farm in the canyons of the Iblean upland.
- Join your hotel chef for a hands-on demonstration of Sicilian cooking.
- Discover the fishing village of Marzamemi, recently restored to its 17th-century glory.
- Complement your cycling with basking in the sun or swimming at the beach.

### What to Expect

This tour is rated Easy/Moderate. The rides are on paved country roads, mostly rolling, with little car traffic. On two days, a short shuttle takes guests up a hill, allowing them to ride along a crest and then downhill. The roads are good but in some rural areas, the terrain is uneven with a few potholes.

**Tour Duration:** 10 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 9-40 miles

**Average Cycling Time:** 1-5 hours

**Group size:** 22 max

### Climate Information

#### Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

March 65°/42°, April 70°/46°, May 78°/52°, June 86°/59°, September 87°/62°, October 78°/56°, November 69°/48°

#### Average Rainfall (in.)

March 1.6, April 1.5, May 0.9, June 0.4, September 1.4, October 3.9, November 2.2

## **FLIGHT DAY: Depart for Your Vacation**

Your vacation is about to begin! Spend your first night aloft and arrive ready for an unforgettable trip.

## **ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in Catania / Pre-Tour Hotel Night: Taormina**

A VBT representative will greet you at the Catania Airport to start your adventure off right. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located hotel in Taormina. From here, you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

## **DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Travel to Scicli / Welcome Reception and Dinner**

After an included breakfast, meet your VBT representative and the rest of the group in the lobby of our Taormina hotel at 8:30 a.m. The VBT representative will be easily recognizable, holding a VBT sign.

From Taormina, you'll travel to Scicli by private motorcoach (approximately three hours, including a short stop along the way). Upon arrival, meet your trip leaders and take a short walk through the picturesque alleyways near your hotel. They will also provide recommendations for lunch, giving you the perfect opportunity to begin exploring Sicilian specialties.

Early this afternoon, settle into your luxurious hotel, a 19th-century noble palace built by a knight—an extraordinary setting to uncover the history of Sicilian nobility.

After a safety talk and bike fitting, follow your trip leaders on a warm-up ride through the stunning Noto Valley. Later, gather with the group for a welcome cocktail beneath the frescoed vaults of our hotel, followed by an authentic Sicilian dinner at a local restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-Up Ride — 16 km (10 miles)

What to Expect:

The warm-up ride takes you through Altopiano Ibleo, a peaceful rural region just outside Scicli. As you leave your hotel, you'll cycle out of town, passing farms and groves of olive and carob trees, all framed by historic stone walls. In the distance, enjoy stunning views of the coastline and the sea. On your return, take in a breathtaking panoramic view of this beautiful Baroque town.

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 km (10 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 2: Scicli to Sampieri / Beach Picnic/ Scicli Guided Walking Tour**

After breakfast, cycle through the rolling countryside of the Province of Ragusa, heading toward the sea. Along the way, you'll be surrounded by miles of stone walls, cattle grazing beneath the shade of majestic carob and olive trees, and vegetable greenhouses that supply markets both locally and across Europe.

You will reach Sampieri via a scenic bike path along the sea. This charming summer resort town boasts beautiful beaches, perfect for a refreshing swim. Your morning ride ends at a peaceful pine forest, where you'll enjoy a picnic lunch on the beach. Take some time to stroll the shoreline or go for a swim while lunch is being prepared. Be sure to treat yourself to a delicious gelato before continuing your journey. From here, you can either keep riding or shuttle back to your hotel for a well-deserved rest.

This evening, join our local guide for a 40-minute walking tour of Scicli, a city recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site for its extraordinary late-Baroque architecture, built following a devastating earthquake in 1693. Admire the magnificent buildings illuminated at night, providing a stunning backdrop for dinner on your own.

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Morning: Scicli to Sampieri — 27 km (17 miles)

Afternoon: Sampieri to Scicli — 17 km (10 miles)

### **What to Expect:**

This morning, cycle through quiet countryside, passing stone walls and greenhouses that contribute to Sicily's role in supplying 10% of Europe's fruits and vegetables. The paved, low-traffic roads lead gradually

downhill before joining a scenic, flat bike path through a park by the sea, where a sandy beach offers a chance to swim. In the afternoon, enjoy easy coastal riding through Sampieri, a seaside village, before tackling a long but manageable uphill ride back to Scicli. If preferred, take the support vehicle to skip the climb and spend the afternoon exploring this Baroque city. For experienced cyclists, an additional independent ride may be available—ask your trip leader for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 – 44 km (10 – 27 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 3: Noto Valley / Organic Farm Lunch**

Today, pedal through the peaceful, rolling countryside of Modica and Val di Noto, passing rural landscapes and small hamlets on your way to San Giacomo, where you'll stop for lunch.

At lunchtime, you'll be welcomed by Mama Nella, the farm's owner, who expertly oversees its 20-acre estate while crafting breads, focaccia, jams, sherbets, and more for her guests. Enjoy a typical Sicilian meal, featuring Pasta alla Norma, garden-fresh vegetables, local cheese, and olives, followed by a delicious tasting of Modica chocolate.

In the afternoon, your ride takes a mostly downhill route toward the sea and your hotel. Settle in at Villa Favorita, built in 1753 in the Renaissance style on what was once the feud of the Marquis of Avola. Relax by the swimming pool or on the terrace, which offers breathtaking views of the blue sea on one side and the orange rooftops of Baroque Noto at sunset on the other.

This evening, meet Corrada, a descendant of the Marquis of Castelluccio, for a tour of the villa's elegant common rooms and its orange garden with giant cacti, before enjoying dinner at the villa's restaurant.

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Morning: Modica to Farm — 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon: Farm to Villa Favorita — 39 km (24 miles)

What to Expect:

The morning ride begins in Modica and follows one of the most scenic routes of the tour, winding through the rolling countryside of Modica and Val di Noto and passing rural landscapes on the way to your lunch stop. In the afternoon, the ride from lunch to Villa Favorita is mostly downhill. If you prefer a shorter ride, VBT offers a van shuttle to the hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 – 65 km (16 – 40 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 4: Villa del Tello Mosaics / Marzamemi / Porto Palo / Noto**

After a hearty breakfast, pedal along quiet, mostly easy country roads toward the sea. Along the way, take a moment to admire the fourth-century mosaics of Roman Villa del Tello.

Your destination is the recently restored, ancient fishing village of Marzamemi, nestled on a small promontory south of Syracuse. Developed in the 17th century around a tuna fishery, Marzamemi is home to Sicily's second-largest fishery, now recognized as a national monument. The Princes of Villadorata still visit their 17th-century palace, a stunning summer residence. Marzamemi offers plenty of relaxing cafés and local seafood restaurants, making it an ideal spot for lunch on your own.

In the afternoon, continue riding toward Porto Palo, the southernmost tip of Sicily, considered one of the most scenic cycling routes in Italy. From here, take in breathtaking views of Isola di Capo Passero. If the weather is favorable, enjoy a refreshing swim at the beach.

Spend the rest of the day relaxing before shuttling to Noto for a leisurely stroll, admiring the stunning Baroque architecture of this historic city.

Dinner is on your own in Noto.

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Morning: Villa Favorita to Marzamemi — 30 km (19 miles)

Afternoon: Marzamemi to Porto Palo — 8 km (5 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's loop ride follows remote country roads, far from traffic, leading to Marzamemi and the coast. Marzamemi is entirely car-free, making it a delightful place to explore on foot. In the afternoon, the route follows the coastline, featuring gently rolling terrain and stunning sea views. From Porto Palo, you will shuttle back to the hotel by private coach. For experienced cyclists, an additional independent ride may be available—ask your trip leader for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 – 38 km (5 – 24 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 5: Belvedere di Noto / Truffle Hunt / Feudo Bauli to Borgo del Carato**

Enjoy a short shuttle up to the Belvedere di Noto plateau, where you'll begin a scenic ride leading to your lunch stop at Feudo Bauli.

Acquired in the late 18th century for the noble Judica family, this 150-acre country estate remained in the same family for generations. The property includes several historic buildings and a vast holm oak forest, where ancient rock-carved dwellings once served as homes. The entire setting is steeped in history and atmosphere.

Here, you'll join a local truffle hunter and his dog on a search for the precious black truffle. At lunch, savor the fruits of your labor with *risotto al tartufo*, along with other specialties crafted by the estate's chef using fresh garden ingredients.

In the afternoon, a scenic ride leads to your final destination: Borgo del Carato, an ancient fortified *masseria* surrounded by acres of carob and olive trees. This elegant country inn will be your home for the next two nights, offering tranquil surroundings, breathtaking views, a luxurious spa, and a panoramic pool set in a manicured garden of fragrant flowers.

This evening, meet your gracious hosts and learn how the carat (carob seed) became the unit of weight for diamonds, inspiring the name of the Borgo. Tonight's dinner will feature local Sicilian specialties, providing the perfect conclusion to a day of discovery.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Belvedere di Noto to Feudo Bauli — 21 km (13 miles)

Afternoon: Feudo Bauli to Borgo del Carato — 20 km (12 miles)

What to Expect:

A 15-minute shuttle takes you to Belvedere di Noto, away from the city traffic of Noto. From there, enjoy a scenic ride along rolling country roads with minimal traffic, leading to your lunch stop at the Bauli country resort. After lunch, the ride continues across a picturesque plateau on a quiet road with almost no traffic. For experienced cyclists, an additional independent ride may be available—ask your trip leader for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 — 41 km (12 — 25 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 6: Canyon Ride / Honey Tasting in Floridia / Sicilian Cooking Class**

Your ride departs from the hotel, crossing a scenic region once inhabited in prehistoric times, where archaeologists have discovered cave tombs carved into steep limestone cliffs. As you cycle along quiet roads and through a vast canyon, you'll take in the countryside dotted with farms and traditional *masserias*, with the sea stretching as far as Syracuse in the distance.

A highlight of today's ride is a stop to explore the Sant'Alfano Bridge, a semi-circular arched stone bridge adorned with mysterious statues, just before reaching Canicattini Bagni. This area is known for its local honey, a specialty of the region.

After riding through the village and continuing down the canyon on a long, gradual route, you'll stop for lunch at an organic farm run by Rosa. Inspired by her husband's passion for beekeeping, Rosa turned his hobby into a family-run business specializing in raw, high-quality honey and bee products. She is also dedicated to preserving a rare and endangered Sicilian thyme, which she uses in her award-winning honey. Rosa's enthusiasm is contagious, and her reputation among former VBT guests is legendary. During your visit, she will treat you to a honey tasting, which will extend to other local specialties as part of your included lunch.

After lunch, continue your ride and cross the Baroque town of Floridia. You might choose to park your bike near the impressive Chiesa Madre church for a short stroll and a *pasta di mandorle* pastry.

Back at the hotel, roll up your sleeves for a hands-on Sicilian cooking class, where you'll learn to prepare *arancini di riso* with a local chef. End the day by sharing the fruits of your labor with fellow travelers at a farewell dinner in the hotel restaurant.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Carato to Honey Farm — 30 km (19 miles)

Afternoon: Honey Farm to Floridia and Carato — 17 km (11 miles)

### What to Expect:

This morning, the ride begins with a long, gradual climb, which can be skipped with a short van shuttle. The route follows a quiet, scenic region, winding along a paved road that cuts through a long canyon. It passes through the village of Canicattini Bagni before descending the canyon on a long, gradual stretch into the small city of Floridia, your lunch stop. In the afternoon, enjoy a slightly rolling, panoramic ride leading to the large estate of your hotel. This quiet, fully paved route offers stunning views, with the sea at your back as you approach your destination.

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 — 47 km (11 — 30 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Travel to Syracuse / Your VBT Vacation Ends / Post-Tour Hotel Night: Syracuse**

After an included breakfast, complimentary transportation by private minibus (approximately 30 minutes) will take you to your centrally located hotel in Ortigia, Syracuse, arriving at approximately 10:15 a.m.

Join a VBT local guide for a two-hour private walking tour of Ortigia, then enjoy the rest of the day exploring this captivating town. You may choose to visit the Archaeological Park, a must-see for visitors, or continue wandering through Ortigia's historic streets, where medieval and Baroque treasures await around every corner.



Browse craft and souvenir shops, explore fashion designer boutiques, or relax at cafés offering pastries and local specialties to tempt your palate. The entire city of Syracuse is a UNESCO World Heritage site, recognized for its extraordinary beauty and historical significance.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DEPARTURE DAY: Departure**

After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation to Catania Airport will be provided. The drive takes approximately 50 to 60 minutes, depending on traffic, for your departing flight.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **Accommodations**

May vary depending on departure date.

### **Hotel Monte Tauro (Arrival Day)**

Built in the 1970s (when large, raw concrete walls were in vogue), this fascinating 4-star hotel offers sophisticated character and wonderful views of the Gulf of Naxos and Mount Etna. A panoramic glass elevator built in layers along the profile of the mountain connects the floors. Enjoy the modern ambiance and Italian-designed furnishings, as well as the swimming pool, breakfast room, and lobby, with its stunning view of the sea. Your quiet and comfortable, air-conditioned room features a private balcony.

### **Palazzo Favacchio (Days 1-2)**

Enjoy city views and easy access to prime attractions at the Palazzo Favacchio, an intimate boutique hotel enviably situated in the heart of Scicli. Take advantage of the shared kitchen and lounge during your stay, as well as a comfortable room with individual climate control, flatscreen satellite TV, ironing board, coffeemaker, and private bathroom with shower and hairdryer. Free WiFi is available throughout the property, and local specialties are served buffet-style nearby.

### **Villa Favorita (Days 3-4)**

Villa Favorita Relais was born with the transformation of the 18th century villa property of the Di Lorenzo

barons of Granieri marquis of Castelluccio family. To this day the Relais is managed by direct descendants of the family. The manor entrance with its almond tree boulevard announces the unicity of the Villa. The bedrooms and the rest of the compound maintain the charm of the original mansion thanks to the restorations which have been carried out following all the original architectural principles and the guidelines traced by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage. The restaurant enjoys a spacious terrace overlooking a citrus grove. Its menu offers a variety of local dishes, farm to table home grown products, and local wines. The swimming pool offers a wonderful view of the Baroque city of Noto. A garden surrounds the entire property which is without doubt a distinctive feature of Villa Favorita.

### **Hotel Borgo del Carato (Days 5-6)**

Passing through the ancient stone archway, guests feel transported to a distant past. Large buildings and walls enclose the palm-studded courtyard where dinner is served by candlelight in summer. The property is air conditioned and set on manicured grounds planted with flowers and citrus, carob, and centuries-old olive trees.

### **Grand Hotel Ortigia (Day 7)**

Built in the late 19th century and completely refurbished in 1995, the Grand Hotel Ortigia preserves the original architectural lines and elegance of the Liberty style. One of the hotel's special features is the original foundational walls dating back to Roman times and other archaeological relics. This air-conditioned, seaside property is walking distance from Duomo square and Fonte Aretusa.