

## Spain: Barcelona & Costa Brava

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

The hills along Spain's Costa Brava are a famous training ground for professional cyclists—and with this innovative self-guided cycling vacation, they're well within reach for riders of all levels of ability. In medieval Girona, you'll meet your local Spanish host who gives you an insider's view of Catalonia—and is available 24/7 if you need support along the way. From there, you're free to explore at your own pace—winding your way through quaint farming villages, perhaps even challenging yourself to crest some of Spain's legendary climbs if you choose. Pedal along the legendary Costa Brava, spinning through the coastal pine forest that astounded Ernest Hemmingway and Salvador Dali with its beauty. In the evenings, return to authentic boutique hotels where you'll enjoy splendid Spanish wines, seaside sunsets—and a sumptuous, included dinner in a Michelin-recognized restaurant.

### Cultural Highlights

- Explore Girona's cultural treasures, including the old Jewish Quarter, medieval walls, Gothic churches, and Romanesque architecture.
- Savor superb Catalan seafood and farm-fresh cuisine, complemented by excellent local wines, including sparkling cava.
- Cycle through history, with stops to view Greco-Roman ruins at Empúries, Gothic landmarks in Girona, and charming medieval villages.
- Discover the most significant Greco-Roman ruins on the Iberian Peninsula at the coastal archaeological site of Empúries.
- Immerse yourself in authentic Catalan village life in the historic town of Pals.

### What to Expect

This tour features a mix of easy terrain and moderate hills, making it ideal for both beginner and experienced cyclists. Rides take place on flat to rolling paved roads and designated bike lanes. The inland Mediterranean landscape includes gentle hills, while roads near coastal towns tend to be flatter but may have more traffic. Some historic town centers include cobblestone streets. Please verify your bike selection before the tour begins, as changes may not be possible upon arrival. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available as needed.

**Tour Duration:** 9 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 18-31 miles

**Average Cycling Time:** 2-5 hours

## Climate Information

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

March 61°/44°, April 64°/47°, May 69°/54°, June 76°/60°, September 78°/62°, October 71°/55°

### **Average Rainfall (in.)**

March 1.6, April 1.9, May 2.3, June 1.6, September 3.4, October 3.6

## FLIGHT DAY: Depart for Your Vacation

Depart home for Spain. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

## ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in Barcelona / Pre-Tour Hotel Night: Girona

Upon arrival at Barcelona El Prat Airport, make your own independent travel arrangements to Girona. For full travel details, refer to your *Vacation Preparation Handbook*.

Arrive in Girona this afternoon. You'll have time to soak up the city's ancient past as you stroll narrow cobbled streets past the brightly colored houses of the Old Town. Visit the magnificent cathedral, which boasts one of the world's largest Gothic naves, or cross the Onyar River to explore one of Europe's best-preserved Jewish quarters. Girona's main square and nearby pedestrian streets offer a variety of excellent restaurants for dinner on your own.

You'll be staying for two nights at Hotel Nord 1901, located at Carrer Nord 7–9 in the heart of Girona. This elegant boutique hotel offers stylish, modern comfort just steps from Girona's Old Town and picturesque pedestrian squares. Its central location makes it an ideal base for discovering the city's vibrant culinary scene, medieval architecture, and charming cafés.

## DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Girona Loop Ride

After breakfast, enjoy a leisurely morning. You may wish to take a stroll through Plaça de la Independència, just steps from your hotel, where you'll find cafés, shops, and a glimpse of daily life in Girona's Old Town.

Meet your VBT Local Host at 1:00 p.m. in the lobby of Hotel Nord 1901 for your Welcome Orientation. Please arrive dressed and ready for cycling. Your Local Host will be carrying a VBT sign and/or wearing VBT apparel.

Your self-guided bike tour begins as you set off on your own, following your Ride with GPS app. Your first invigorating ride forms a figure eight, leading you northwest of Girona into the Catalan countryside and the gently sloping foothills of the Pre-Pyrenees. You ascend gradually, enjoying lovely views of the village of Montcal below. As you ride, take inspiration knowing the Rocacorba climb is nearby—this challenging ascent up Puigsou Mountain, named for the 12th-century sanctuary of Rocacorba near the summit, is a favorite training route for professional cyclists and a rewarding test for determined amateurs.

For now, you'll turn south as rolling terrain carries you through the traditional Catalan town of Sant Medir, known for its annual candy festival in early March. Then, enjoy an easy coast back to the center of Girona.

Girona is a cycling mecca and culinary gem, boasting one of the highest concentrations of Michelin-starred restaurants in Spain, including El Celler de Can Roca, once ranked the best restaurant in the world. Even casual spots feature exceptional Catalan fare—perfect for rewarding your first ride.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Girona "Under Roca Corba" Loop — 29 km (18 miles)

#### What to Expect:

Depart along city streets and ride into the countryside on secondary paved roads. You'll pass horse farms and small villages before gradually ascending to the highest point just past Montcal. Enjoy stunning views of Girona and the surrounding mountains—part of tomorrow's ride—before a rolling descent leads you back to the center of Girona. This first ride of the week is a great way to get your legs moving while still allowing time to explore the city.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 2: Cycle Girona to Platja de Pals / Move on Day**

Today you'll cycle out of Girona, heading east toward the Mediterranean. After winding your way out of the city, you have two route options to reach the coast. One features a long climb favored by many

cyclists drawn to the region—and it's easy to see why, as you're surrounded by emerald-green hills and forests. Pause at the Els Àngels chapel to admire its historic stonework along the way.

From the highest point, you'll be rewarded with fantastic views—northwest to the Pyrenees and east to the Mediterranean. Linger for a moment to take it all in before coasting to a flat finish through scenic fields and farming villages. The two routes converge in Madremanya, then continue through the villages of Monells, Corçà, Ullastret, Canapost, and Peratallada. Each of these centers is worth a quick stop to explore and soak up the rural Catalan character. This network of quiet, paved country roads—with little traffic—is a cyclist's dream, crisscrossing a classic Mediterranean landscape.

The ride ends at Hotel Sa Punta, your elegant retreat just outside the coastal village of Platja de Pals. Nestled among pine trees and gardens, the hotel blends the sophistication of a boutique hotel with the ease of a luxurious beach house. Warm materials like wood and natural fibers create a relaxed, contemporary ambiance in the rooms, each with a private terrace. Unwind in the saltwater pool, take a short stroll to the nearby beach, or enjoy a drink on the garden terrace before a special included dinner at the hotel's celebrated restaurant.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Girona to Platja de Pals via Els Àngels — 59 km (37 miles) OR Girona to Platja de Pals via Foixà — 63 km (39 miles)

#### What to Expect:

##### Girona to Platja de Pals via Els Àngels:

Begin cycling from your city-center hotel along pedestrian and city streets. After 4 km (2.4 miles), you'll leave the city behind and begin a steady ascent to Els Àngels. The highest point is at 15 km (9 miles), after which you'll enjoy a nearly 5 km (3-mile) descent—with some steep sections—into the lovely medieval town of Madremanya. Another 5 km (3 miles) of downhill riding brings you to Monells, then continues along flat farmland through several villages, ending at your hotel in Sa Punta.

##### Girona to Platja de Pals via Foixà:

Begin cycling from your city-center hotel along pedestrian and city streets. Expect some traffic for the first 8 km (5 miles) as you pass through Girona's outskirts. From there, the route follows quiet country roads, with two ascents after 20 km (12 miles), leading to the charming medieval town of Madremanya. Another 5 km (3 miles) of downhill riding brings you to Monells, then continues along flat farmland through several villages, ending at your hotel in Sa Punta.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 3: Pals to Llafranc / Move on Day

Today's ride leads you to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and Spain's Costa Brava. You'll begin along bucolic country roads, passing meadows and fertile farmland. Catalan *masias*—traditional country houses like the one you stayed in last night—dot the landscape, adding to the region's timeless charm. Your first destination is Calonge, just beyond the outskirts of La Bisbal d'Empordà. This is the province of Baix Empordà, or Lower Empordà, where gentle agricultural plains are topped by small ridgelines and crisscrossed by quiet rural roads—ideal for cycling. Take time to explore the 13th-century towers and walls of Calonge Castle, and enjoy views of the Bay of Sant Antoni.

Later, continue your breathtaking ride to Palamós, home to one of the last surviving fishing fleets along these shores. This beloved beach town offers a glimpse into traditional coastal life. Then cycle through a peaceful coastal pine forest to reach Llafranc, a charming seaside resort with a small sandy beach where Ernest Hemingway and Salvador Dalí are said to have spent time. On a bluff high above town, the historic Saint Sebastian lighthouse continues to warn sailors of the rocky coastline below.

Tonight, you'll stay at Hotel Mas Pastora, an adults-only boutique hotel tucked just a short walk from Llafranc's beachside promenade. Set amid gardens and pine trees, the hotel blends contemporary comfort with rustic charm. It's a tranquil oasis in the heart of the Costa Brava, ideally located for exploring the town on foot. Unwind at the relaxing saltwater pool or enjoy a cocktail at the hotel's inviting chill-out bar, designed for guests to gather and relax in a peaceful, natural setting. After settling in, take a stroll to the waterfront and enjoy one of the many inviting restaurants that line the promenade.

### Today's Ride Choices

Platja de Pals to Llafranc — 54 km (34 miles)

Llafranc Challenging Loop — 21 km (13 miles)

### What to Expect:

#### Platja de Pals to Llafranc:

Roll out of your hotel with a short, steep downhill, then continue along flat, paved rural roads through tiny villages and farmland. You'll pass the town of Peratallada and skirt the outskirts of the larger town of La

Bisbal d'Empordà before returning to quiet country lanes. A gradual climb of about 4 km (2.5 miles) leads to a ridge with expansive views of the Mediterranean Sea. At 28 km (17 miles), a gentle descent brings you into Calonge, where you'll join slightly busier roads as you approach the coast. You'll encounter the most traffic of your trip near Palamós, but soon return to smaller, quieter roads. Conclude your rewarding ride with a slight descent into the seaside town of Llafranc—followed by a very short but steep ascent to the hotel.

#### Llafranc Challenging Loop:

This short but challenging loop is ideal for those who don't mind climbing—just over 1,500 feet (457 meters)—and want to take in more spectacular Costa Brava views. The route heads north, roughly paralleling the coast and coming closest to the sea at the charming port of Tamariu. After 11 km (7 miles), you'll turn inland and loop south through the little massif of Begur, then coast mostly downhill past the outskirts of Palafrugell and back to Llafranc.

#### Optional Llafranc to Calella Walk:

Enjoy a stunning out-and-back coastal walk along the GR 92 trail, which departs from Llafranc's seafront. The path hugs the rocky coastline, with tunnels and stairs winding above cliffs and secluded coves once home to fishermen. This route offers some of the most iconic and beautiful viewpoints on the Costa Brava. The path is signed and includes handrails in some sections, but appropriate footwear (sneakers) is highly recommended. Refer to your Ride with GPS Route Notes or ask your hotel for a local map.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 4: Llafranc to Empúries / Move on Day

Today's ride takes you up and over the coastal range, across the gentle plains of the Costa Brava, and north from the Baix (Lower) Empordà to the Alt (Upper) Empordà, with ample opportunities to stop and explore. Your ride begins in a dreamy landscape of medieval towns and traditional *mas* farmhouses. Skirt the town of Palafrugell—once a major producer of cork harvested from nearby forests—and ride into the beautifully preserved hilltop town of Pals. This remarkable medieval center features cobblestone streets framed by arches and stone balconies. Its 49-foot (15-meter) Romanesque tower, the Torre de les Hores ("Tower of the Hours"), was built between the 11th and 13th centuries.

From here, ride through rice paddies and orchards and into the medieval village of Palau-Sator. Continue north to Torroella de Montgrí, once an inland port for the Kings of Aragon until the Ter River silted up and shifted its fortunes. As you cycle onward, the dramatic Montgrí Massif rises to the west. You're now in

the heart of Dalí's native region, enjoying an easy spin to the coast.

Tonight, you'll stay at Hostal Spa Empúries, a stylish eco-conscious retreat located directly on the seafront, beside the famed Greco-Roman ruins of Empúries. Surrounded by pine trees and coastal trails, this historic property—once a 20th-century lodge for archaeologists—now features sustainably designed rooms, serene gardens, and direct beach access. Enjoy the onsite spa, outdoor lounge areas, and seasonal Mediterranean cuisine served with a view. It's the perfect place to unwind after your day's ride.

### Today's Ride Choices

Llafranc to Empúries — 52 km (32 miles)

#### What to Expect:

Today's ride begins with a short ascent away from the coast—about 2 km (1.2 miles)—so you may want to pocket a croissant for afterward. You'll skirt the town of Palafrugell and some busier roads, partially following a bike path. At around 17 km (10.5 miles), you enter the historic hilltop town of Pals. From there, continue riding through rice paddies, orchards, and the medieval village of Palau-Sator. As you approach Torroella de Montgrí, expect more traffic and town streets before returning to quieter, gently rolling rural roads. At 46 km (28.5 miles), you'll pass through the village of Albons. From here, a short stretch north along the coast brings you to your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 5: Empúries / Stay Put Day

Take today to relax and enjoy your seaside hotel. You might paddleboard or lounge on the beach before strolling into nearby L'Escala, a former fishing port known for its anchovy trade. Anchovies were once the main catch here and remain central to the town's identity—celebrated each October during the annual Anchovy Festival. The town is divided into distinct areas worth exploring: the modern port, the atmospheric Old Town, and the nearby archaeological site of Empúries. The Archaeology Museum of Catalonia – Empúries, just a short walk from your hotel via a shared-use path, offers a fascinating glimpse into the region's Greco-Roman past.

If you're up for more cycling, a scenic 49-km (29-mile) inland loop offers rewarding elevation and panoramic views of the Bay of Roses and the Pyrenees. After a thrilling descent, the route brings you to

Sant Pere Pescador, a charming riverside town along the Fluvià. Here, you can relax on the long sandy beach, explore the remains of a 14th-century castle, and enjoy lunch at a local café featuring fresh seafood. On your return, the route runs parallel to the coast, passing the impressive archaeological site at Empúries—the most important Greco-Roman ruins on the Iberian Peninsula. Take time to explore the ancient Roman walls and remarkably preserved mosaics.

This evening, consult our recommendations for a memorable final dinner. Restaurants in Sant Martí d'Empúries are just a 10-minute walk away, while the lively dining scene in L'Escala is about 30 minutes on foot.

### Today's Ride Choices

Empúries Loop — 49 km (31 miles)

### What to Expect:

Begin by riding inland, away from the seaside, through rolling farmland. After an initial climb, follow a high plateau with sweeping views of the Pyrenees and the Bay of Roses. A quick descent is followed by a sharp turn and an ascent to the highest point of the day at approximately 23.6 km (14.6 miles). From there, enjoy a sustained descent through farmland and villages, then continue over a series of rolling hills before reaching the flatter plains near Sant Tomàs de Fluvià. At Sant Pere Pescador, cross the Fluvià River and turn south, paralleling the coast through the medieval town of Sant Martí d'Empúries, continuing on to your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 6: Your VBT Vacation Ends / Post-Tour Hotel Night: Barcelona**

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel. The front desk can assist with arranging your transportation to Barcelona.

Upon arrival in Barcelona, head to Hotel 1898, your centrally located accommodations in the heart of the city. Set in a beautifully restored 19th-century building on Las Ramblas, this elegant hotel blends colonial style with modern comfort. It features a rooftop pool, serene spa, and excellent access to the city's cultural and culinary highlights. After dropping off your luggage, you'll be perfectly positioned to explore on foot—whether wandering the tree-lined Las Ramblas, discovering the narrow alleys of the Gothic Quarter, or heading to the waterfront at Port Vell.

Your VBT city information provides useful recommendations for exploring Barcelona on your own this afternoon and evening.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DEPARTURE DAY: Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, allow yourself a minimum of four hours prior to your flight from Barcelona El Prat Airport (BCN). This timeframe accounts for approximately one hour of travel to the airport and the recommended three-hour pre-flight check-in. For more details, please refer to your *Vacation Preparation Handbook*.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### Nord 1901 (Days 1-2)

Located in the historic heart of Girona, the Nord 1901 Hotel was completely renovated in 2009 to offer sophisticated flair and modern amenities while still preserving the ambiance of its Old Town setting. Intimate and family-operated, it is within walking distance of Girona's main attractions, including the colorful houses along the River Onvar, the Plaza Independencia, the Jewish quarter, the cathedral, and a wide range of popular restaurants and cafés. Enjoy breakfast on the garden terrace and take advantage of the only garden in the city center with a swimming pool. Each luxurious room is equipped with climate control, a safe, hot-water kettle for coffee- and tea-making, flat-screen TV, free WiFi, and a private bath with shower, bathrobe, slippers, and hairdryer.

### Hotel Sa Punta (Day 2)

Hotel Sa Punta is a charming retreat nestled in a pine grove less than a 15-minute walk from the beach of Pals in Costa Brava. Recently renovated, this stylish 4-star property blends relaxed "Beach House" comfort with modern design and warm hospitality. Each of the 34 spacious rooms and suites features air conditioning, free Wi-Fi, and a private terrace—many with sweeping views of the Medes Islands, part of a protected natural park. Guests can unwind in the beautifully landscaped gardens, swim in the semi-

Olympic saltwater pool, or gather at the poolside bar and lounge for cocktails, foosball, or a game of pétanque. The onsite restaurant, Dalia at Sa Punta, offers fresh Mediterranean cuisine featuring locally sourced ingredients, complemented by a curated wine list. A generous breakfast buffet is served daily on the garden terrace. The hotel's peaceful setting in the heart of Costa Brava's Golden Triangle makes it an ideal base for both exploration and relaxation.

### **Hotel mas Pastora (Day 3)**

Situated in the fishing village of Llafranc, Hotel Mas Pastora boasts a rich history as an 18th-century Catalan country house that once belonged to the noble Marquises de Cruilles. Its current family has owned the property since the 1930s and has lovingly created a beautiful, garden-like setting. This charming, air-conditioned hotel, recently restored as an eco-friendly property, boasts energy-efficient construction, solar panels, and rainwater recycling. Swim in the saltwater pool, or walk down to the beach, just a few hundred feet away. Wind down your day at the bar with a tapas menu and local wines. Your room offers all the amenities you need for a comfortable stay, including a private terrace overlooking the pool and grounds, providing a slice of Catalan countryside.

### **Hostal spa Empúries (Days 4-5)**

Situated directly on Portitxol Beach and on our route, overlooking the Bay of Roses, the Hostal spa Empúries stands on an ancient settlement, beside the Greek and Roman ruins of Empúries, and is within easy walking distance of the medieval towns of Sant Marti d'Empúries and L'Escala. The air-conditioned resort hotel is dedicated to sustainable tourism and also to the health and well-being of its guests. The property features lovely gardens of native vegetation, an outdoor terrace overlooking the sea, and landscaped areas to stroll through. Gym facilities are complimentary, and optional spa services and indoor pools are also available.

### **Hotel 1898 (Day 6)**

Discover a true treasure. Located in the heart of Barcelona, the historic Hotel 1898 was once home to the Philippines Tobacco Company. The structure was built in 1891 by architect Josep Oriol Mestres. Early in this century, hotelier Núñez i Navarro restored the property, preserving its historic splendor and 19th-century architectural elements and transforming it into the modern-day Hotel 1898. Today, this unique, colonial-style structure exudes a special personality that brings the best of Barcelona's rich past to its guests. Centrally located on Las Ramblas Boulevard and just a block from Placa de Catalunya, the hotel is an easy walk to all of Barcelona's important sites. The elegant rooms are equipped with air conditioning, free WiFi, and beautiful marble bathrooms. The rooftop terrace features a heated swimming pool, as well as a lovely indoor pool, fitness center, and spa in the tastefully designed basement of the

hotel.