

## Italy: Valleys of the Dolomites

### Bike Vacation Only

For this innovative cycling vacation, we've combined the best of Italy's Dolomite bike paths—creating beautifully diverse scenery on gentle valley routes. Cycle down the Cimabanche Pass from Lago di Landro and past Lago di Dobbiaco—also called “Tolblacher See” in German. As you pedal into South Tyrol, our local leaders will introduce you to the marriage of Italian and German culture that make this region unique. Here, you'll find road signs in two languages, along with charming chalets serving South Tyrolean cuisine—a fusion of Italian and Austrian traditions. The landscape also changes—as rugged mountain passes give way to the green meadows and orderly farmhouses of the Pusteria Valley. As you spin along the Aurina River Valley, you'll discover tumultuous waterfalls and ancient castles peppering the mountain's slopes.

### Cultural Highlights

- Marvel at the scenic alpine vistas that surround you as you cycle easy bike paths.
- Gain a rare glimpse into the ancient Ladin culture, and feast on mountain specialties.
- Thrill to a 1,900-foot (580-meter) descent along the Val Venosta Bike Path.
- Enter into the dual Austrian-Italian culture of South Tyrol, as you explore the little city of San Candido.
- Explore the historical abbey of Novacella, surrounded by vineyards, on a guided walking tour.

### What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain and is suitable for beginner and experienced cyclists. It runs mostly on dedicated and well-maintained bike paths, 5% of which is on packed gravel paths. Additional miles on easy/moderate and mostly unpaved terrain offer options for more avid cyclists. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance with hills.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 4-36 miles

**Average Cycling Time:** 1-4 hours

**Group size:** 14-20 max

### Climate Information

**Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

May 72°/49°, June 79°/56°, July 79°/59°, August 81°/61°, September 75°/55°, October 64°/47°

**Average Rainfall (in.)**

May 2.8, June 2.5, July 1.5, August 2.6, September 2.2, October 2.7

## **DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Travel to Cortina d'Ampezzo / Warm-Up Ride / Welcome Reception and Dinner**

Meet your fellow travelers and VBT representative at 9:30 a.m. on Tronchetto Island, outside the entrance of the People Mover facility.

Once the group has gathered, you will depart for Cortina d'Ampezzo by private coach. The drive to Cortina takes approximately two hours, with a short stop along the way. Upon arrival, your VBT trip leaders will meet you and escort you to your first hotel, located in the heart of Cortina.

You'll arrive in time for lunch on your own. The hotel is situated on the main street, a lively pedestrian area lined with elegant shops, restaurants, and trendy cafés.

After lunch, take time to settle into your hotel before joining your VBT trip leaders for a safety and bike-fitting session, followed by a warm-up ride along Cortina's scenic bike paths. Tonight, enjoy a welcome cocktail reception in the hotel's elegant bar, followed by a special welcome dinner. Savor local Ampezzan specialties, a delightful fusion of Austrian Tyrolean and Italian Venetian culinary traditions.

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

Afternoon: Cortina d'Ampezzo Warm-Up Ride — 6 km (3 miles)

### **What to Expect:**

Today's warm-up ride is a loop that takes you from the city center to the outskirts of Cortina, partially along a bike path. Expect some traffic as you ride in and out of the town.

Cumulative Distance Range: 6 km (3 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

## **DAY 2: Cycle to Cadore / Mountain Lodge Lunch**

After breakfast, set out on a downhill ride along the Boite River Valley on the Dolomites Bike Path. This invigorating descent begins at 4,000 feet (1,220 meters) and ends at 3,000 feet (850 meters) in Valle di Cadore. Once a railway connecting the small villages of the Cadore mountain community, this scenic path offers breathtaking views. As you ride, the Le Tofane mountain range marks your progress. Soon, you'll admire the towering pyramidal peak of Antelao to your left and the saddle-like summit of Mount Pelmo to your right. The latter is a nature reserve, home to prehistoric fossils and well-preserved dinosaur footprints.

You are now in the Ampezzan Valley, one of the four historic Ladin valleys. The Ladins—a population descended from Celtic tribes and Roman soldiers—have long called this remote region home. Isolated from the rest of Italy for centuries, they have preserved their distinct language, Ladin, which is closely related to Swiss Romansh, Surselvan, and Friulian. It is still spoken in neighboring Austro-Italian border regions today.

The Italian provinces of Trento and Bolzano enjoy a unique degree of autonomy, with their own administrative systems. In particular, Cortina d'Ampezzo follows its own legislative structure, known as the Regole d'Ampezzo. Rooted in ancient Celtic property laws, this system ensures that the 800 original families of the area govern the common land, which cannot be divided or sold to outsiders.

Enjoy a lunch of mountain specialties in a panoramic setting along your route. Early this afternoon, you may shuttle or cycle back to Cortina, where you'll have time to explore on your own. Take a leisurely walk around Cortina, following VBT route directions, or visit the Ethnography Museum to see its collection of antique tools and cultural artifacts. In summer, you may opt to ride a gondola to the scenic slopes of Le Tofane or Faloria, where stunning alpine vistas await. Alternatively, take a taxi and a short hike to the open-air Museum of the Great War, located on the peaks of Rifugio 5-Torri—one of the most fascinating and moving historical sites in the Dolomites.

Tonight, dine on your own at one of the town's many fine restaurants. After dinner, consider taking an evening stroll through Cortina. In the summer, your visit might coincide with a sports event, cultural festival, folk celebration, or classical music concert.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Cortina to Cadore — 23 km (14 miles)

Afternoon: Cadore to Cortina — 24 km (15 miles) | Cortina Walk — 4 km (3 miles)

### What to Expect:

Descend along an old rail trail that connects Dobbiaco to Valle and Tai di Cadore. This morning's ride follows the downhill stretch of this scenic route, starting in Cortina and ending in Valle di Cadore, with an elevation loss of approximately 1,000 feet (305 meters). In the afternoon, you have the option to cycle back to Cortina along the same path—this time uphill—or take a van shuttle if you prefer not to ride. Later, enjoy a scenic and easy walk from your hotel and back, offering stunning views of the Dolomites. Today may also include an optional independent ride for expert cyclists; please ask your tour leaders for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 23 – 47 km (14 – 29 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 3: Lake Landro to Dobbiaco, San Candido, and Brunico

This morning, a brief shuttle takes you over the scenic Cimabanche Pass to Lake Landro, where you begin a gentle downhill and flat ride on bike paths leading to Dobbiaco and San Candido. The views along the way are spectacular as you pedal past Pomagagnon Mountain, the iconic Tre Cime di Lavaredo (the famous “Three Peaks”), and the picturesque Toblacher Lake. Along the route, you may choose to stop at a small World War I cemetery at the foothills of Monte Piana, a poignant tribute to fallen soldiers.

As you arrive in Dobbiaco, the landscape transforms. Rugged mountains and alpine lakes give way to rolling meadows and emerald pastures, dotted with large, traditional farmhouses (masi). Snow-capped peaks rise in the distance, framing the Pusteria Valley, a true cyclist's paradise. This region is renowned for its network of bike paths, cycling-friendly hotels, and shops, all promoting an eco-conscious and active lifestyle.

Continuing on, you'll reach San Candido, a charming South Tyrolean town near the Austrian border. After lunch, take time to explore this millennium-old city, strolling through its cobblestone pedestrian area. You may wish to visit the ancient Romanesque Duomo della Collegiata, the oldest monastery in the Dolomites, or refresh yourself at one of the many stone fountains that dot the town. The Pusteria Valley is rich in history and legend, once serving as a vital trade route from Rome to Aguntum (now in Austria).

Later, cycle through the Upper Pusteria Valley to Brunico, following the Rienza River through lush meadows, tranquil forests, and charming villages. As you ride deeper into South Tyrol, you'll notice the

strong Austrian influence—from the bilingual road signs (German first, then Italian) to the distinctive architecture and local traditions. The terrain is paved, with only a few short unpaved stretches through wooded areas. VBT offers two cycling options: easy and easy-to-moderate routes.

Upon arrival in Riscone, you'll check into your elegant hotel, nestled at the foothills of the Plan de Corones mountain ridge. Here, you'll enjoy comfort and relaxation, with amenities such as a large garden, an indoor swimming pool fed by mountain springs, in-room waterbeds, and sauna facilities. Dinner is served in the hotel's elegant restaurant, featuring a fresh salad buffet with locally sourced ingredients and a selection of regional wines.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Lake Landro to San Candido — 17 km (10 miles)

Afternoon: San Candido to Riscone with Shuttle — 17 km — (10 miles) | San Candido to Riscone — 38 km (24 miles)

### What to Expect:

Start the day with a shuttle ride up to Cimabanche Pass and Lake Landro. The flat sections of today's ride extend from Lake Landro to San Candido (your lunch stop) and from San Candido to Monguelfo. While most of the route follows well-paved bike paths, there are a few short stretches on well-packed gravel paths. From Monguelfo, you can choose to take the VBT shuttle to the hotel or continue cycling along a gently rolling route with some unpaved sections through the woods before arriving in Riscone.

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 – 55 km (10 – 34 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 4: The Aurina and Tures Valleys

After breakfast, begin your ride to Brunico, following an easy bike path that winds through the city's outskirts and alongside the roaring Rienza River. Later, explore the stunning Aurina and Tures valleys, where about 90% of today's route follows gentle paths and quiet country roads along the Aurino River. As you cycle past towering mountains, you'll spot hilltop castles and cattle farms—reminders of the region's rich history. Strategically located at the crossroads of four valleys, Brunico was once a vital stronghold,

with its castles serving as watchtowers and defense posts. Along the way, ride past charming hamlets of wooden houses, high steeples, manicured gardens, and traditional cattle pens.

Today's lunch is included at a local mountain lodge, where the owner, Gunther, and his family raise goats and craft delicious cheeses and dairy-based dishes. Gunther and his mother, Marlene, take pride in their farm-to-table philosophy, stating, "Everything our guests buy and eat here is produced onsite."

After lunch, you may wish to take a short walk or a five-minute bike ride to visit the first of the three roaring Riva Waterfalls. Back at the hotel, take time to relax—perhaps unwind in the hotel spa.

Later this afternoon, explore Brunico's lively pedestrian area, lined with cafés, gelato shops, and boutiques. You may also want to visit Ripa Castle, once the summer residence of prince-bishops. Today, it is one of five museum-castles curated by world-renowned mountaineer Reinhold Messner, dedicated to showcasing mountain cultures from four continents.

For expert cyclists, an independent optional ride may be available—please ask your tour leaders for details.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Riscone to Wasserfallbar — 28 km (17 miles)

Afternoon: Wasserfallbar to Riscone — 19 km (12 miles)

#### What to Expect:

At the base of the Vedrette di Ries Mountains (3,436 meters / 11,273 feet), ride through Val di Tures, which stretches between Valle Aurina and Vetta d'Italia Mountain. The route follows a well-paved bike path for most of the ride, offering breathtaking views of the Dolomite peaks, some soaring as high as 3,510 meters (11,516 feet).

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 47 km (12 – 29 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 5: The Isarco River Valley / Abbey of Novacella Guided Visit

This morning, follow the picturesque Pusteria Valley bike path along the Rienza River, enjoying a scenic ride through forests, charming villages, and covered bridges. Along the way, stop to explore the historic Abbey of Novacella with our local guide. This remarkable site, nestled among vineyards cultivated by Augustinian canons, is a place of spirituality, beauty, and culture. Founded in 1142, the abbey was an important Romanesque-medieval cultural center. Its Renaissance-era fortifications, built to safeguard its precious manuscripts and works of art, successfully protected it from Turkish invasions.

By lunchtime, arrive in the medieval city of Bressanone, located at the confluence of the Rienza and Isarco rivers. The city's narrow, porticoed streets and vibrantly colored houses create an enchanting atmosphere.

Early this afternoon, take a shuttle to Merano, where your centrally located hotel sits on the pedestrian Kurpromenade along the River Adige, directly across from the historic Kurhaus. Before dinner, take time to relax, enjoy the hotel's wellness center and pool, or indulge in the famous thermal pools for which Merano is renowned.

Like Cortina, Merano is a lively cultural city, offering concerts and evening entertainment during the summer months. Enjoy a leisurely stroll through its porticoed streets, admire its historic architecture, and discover its gourmet restaurants and fine wine bars.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Riscone to Novacella to Bressanone — 40 km (25 miles)

Afternoon: Bressanone to Shuttle Point — 2 km (1 mile)

### What to Expect:

Exit Val Pusteria and cycle through the Eisack/Isarco River Valley, following a bike path for most of the route to the Abbey of Novacella and onward to Bressanone. Upon arrival at the Abbey, you'll park your bike and enjoy a short walking tour. After lunch, a brief ride brings you to a parking area where you'll meet your private shuttle for the transfer to your hotel in Merano (approximately 90 minutes).

Cumulative Distance Range: 42 km (26 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 6: Glorenza / Venosta Valley

Today, enjoy a particularly picturesque ride on your final day of road cycling in the Dolomites, as you gradually descend and follow the course of the river. Your ride begins in the Renaissance village of Glorenza, nestled among towering mountain peaks, before taking you through vast apple orchards, for which the Venosta Valley is famous. Along the way, you'll also pass vineyards and historic castles perched on the slopes. If you're riding in late August, expect to see farmers and tractors busily tending to the fields—an authentic glimpse of rural life. This ride is sure to be one of the most memorable of your journey.

For lunch on your own, we recommend stopping at one of the restaurants along the river to enjoy a meal in a scenic setting.

If you're feeling energetic, you can ride all the way back to Merano. Otherwise, take advantage of the local train shuttle—a popular and convenient option for both cyclists and locals—that will transport you back in just 20 to 30 minutes.

Tonight in Merano, raise a glass of Blauburgunder wine and toast to a fantastic week over a farewell dinner at a panoramic gourmet restaurant, showcasing the exceptional fine dining of South Tyrol.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Glorenza to Castelbello — 36 km (22 miles)

Afternoon: Castelbello to Merano — 25 km (15 miles)

### What to Expect:

Today's ride follows the Val Venosta Bike Path, starting from an altitude of 2,975 feet (907 meters) and gradually descending. Most of the path is on well-paved terrain. The short option ends at Castelbello train station after 22 miles (35 km) and a descent of 1,050 feet (320 meters). If you choose this option, you will embark a train to Merano. Your trip leader will handle your ticket and show you where to leave your bike. Today's longer cycling option leads to your hotel in Merano, after a total descent of 1,900 feet (580 meters).



Cumulative Distance Range: 25 – 61 km (15 – 37 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Your VBT Vacation Ends / Optional Free Time in Merano and Travel to Verona**

Your tour concludes today at our Merano hotel, with the morning free for you to enjoy at your leisure. If you need transportation, you can take a taxi to the Merano train station (a 5-minute ride). Most train routes require a connection in Bolzano.

If you prefer, you are welcome to board our coach to Verona at 1:00 p.m., arriving at our Verona hotel around 3:30 p.m., where you can make your onward travel connections independently.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **Accommodations**

May vary depending on departure date.

### **Hotel Cortina (Days 1-2)**

This elegant family-owned hotel is in the heart of Cortina d'Ampezzo, surrounded by the impressive panorama of the Dolomites. The property has retained the charm of the traditional Ampezzo-style, with furnishings of antique wood decorated floral motifs and hand-forged iron accessories. A wellness center, restaurant, and terrace bar round out the amenities.

### **Hotel Montis (Days 3-4)**

Nestled at the foot of Plan de Corones Mountain and surrounded by sprawling green meadows, our Riscone hotel enjoys a spellbinding setting. It may remind you of a resplendent Austrian chalet, but its Italian hospitality is unrivaled. Beautifully manicured grounds and adjacent walking trails help you drink in the bucolic charm of the Pusteria Valley. After thrilling days of cycling, indulge in a spa treatment or swim in its atrium pool fed by mountain springs. In its restaurant, savor gourmet meals with South Tyrolean flair and a hearty buffet breakfast. Each room features views of the splendid grounds, as well as a flat-screen LCD satellite TV, telephone, in-room safe, and private bath with shower and hairdryer. The hotel is

not air conditioned, as nights are cooler at this altitude but fans are provided in each room on request. Free WiFi is available throughout.

### **Hotel Terme Merano (Days 5-6)**

Located in the center of Merano, a chic health resort, the Hotel Terme Merano is directly connected to Merano's public thermal baths and park, and also features its own Wellness & Spa facility. Take advantage of its many amenities, including indoor and outdoor pools, fitness center, whirlpool, steam bath, sauna, aroma bath, and beauty and cosmetic treatments. The innovative modern architecture of this stunning property, created by celebrity designer Matteo Thun, blends harmoniously with the beautiful South Tyrolean Alps that surround it. Your comfortable room features air conditioning, a flat-screen LCD satellite TV, mini bar, safe, bathroom and slippers, a bag, and bath with private shower, toiletries, and hairdryer. The hotel is air-conditioned and WiFi is available throughout.