

Italy: Puglia, Alberobello & Lecce

Bike Vacation Only

Experience VBT's passion for Puglia! From the moment you meet your Pugliese Local host in Alberobello, you'll feel like family—discovering deep cultural insights that add dimension to your independent exploration. Stay in the white-washed city of Ostuni, in a 13th century palace turned into a small intimate hotel, and stroll the maze of narrow and winding alleyways. Cycle the cobalt-blue shores of the Ionian Sea to Gallipoli—a walled medieval city, where you can indulge in fresh local seafood, including prawns, oysters, and (if you're feeling adventurous) even sea urchins. As you pedal the turquoise coast to Santa Maria di Leuca at the very heel of Italy's boot, you'll experience the magical confluence of the Ionian and Adriatic seas. With the support of your friendly Pugliese host available 24/7, you'll experience the perfect balance of navigation and imagination on this one-of-a-kind Self-Guided Cycling Vacation.

Cultural Highlights

- Stay overnight in the white-washed city of Ostuni, in a 13th-century palace turned into a small intimate hotel.
- Cycle the Ionian and Adriatic coastlines at your own pace, stopping to explore whatever and whenever you wish.
- Stay in the seaside towns of Santa Maria di Leuca and Otranto, rich in ancient history and legend.
- Enjoy ample opportunities to swim at sandy beaches and Mediterranean coves tucked under limestone cliffs.
- Ride into Lecce, known as the "Florence of the South" for its exuberant Baroque architecture.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginner and experienced cyclists. Rides are on relatively flat paved roads and bike lanes paralleling the seacoast. Expect more rolling Mediterranean landscapes inland and semi-urban riding into historic centers. Please verify your bike selection for this tour as it is not always possible to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available if needed.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 15-32 miles

Average Cycling Time: 2-5 hours

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

March 55°/46°, April 60°/50°, May 68°/55°, June 75°/62°, July 80°/68°, August 80°/68°, September 75°/64°, October 68°/57°, November 58°/42°

Average Rainfall (in.)

March 3.0, April 1.7, May 1.0, June 0.9, July 0.3, August 0.3, September 2.5, October 3.8, November 2.6

DAY 1: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Loop ride Alberobello to Ostuni

We suggest arriving in Italy at least one day prior to the start date as your Puglia Self-Guided Biking Vacation begins at 12:30 p.m. Make your own way to Alberobello, where you will begin your self-guided adventure. For details, refer to your VBT Vacation Preparation Handbook.

When you arrive in Alberobello, you might feel as if you've stepped into a fairytale, thanks to the many *trulli*. These round, white-washed, dry-stone huts capped with conical limestone roofs were constructed without mortar to be quickly disassembled when word got around that the taxman was on his way. Their original purpose was to store agricultural tools and they later became dwellings. Today, they are a carefully preserved symbol of Puglia and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Many have been beautifully restored for modern living, including the ones clustered within the hotel village that welcomes you today.

Meet your VBT Local host at 12:30 p.m. for your Welcome Orientation in the lobby of the Trulli & Puglia, along with any other VBT guests arriving on the same day. Please be dressed and ready for cycling. Your Local host will be carrying a VBT sign.

Get to know your bicycle and ease into the rhythm of your Puglia Self-Guided Biking Vacation during today's ride. From the center of Alberobello, you will enter the rolling Itria Valley. Take your time on today's ride, stopping to savor the rustic landscape of ancient olive trees, small vineyards, and vegetable gardens interspersed among farmhouses and *trulli*. These buildings are so unique and special that UNESCO has listed them among the World Heritage Sites. Your route brings you through Locorotondo, where a picture stop is recommended to the typical cummerse houses. A last panoramic stretch takes you to the white-washed city of Ostuni. As unique as beautiful, the heart of the city where your hotel is located, is a maze of narrow and winding alleyways, where colorful pots of flowers make a delightful and picturesque contrast with the white houses. Traditionally painted white, the buildings reflect the intense sunlight and keep the interiors cool. Tonight, walk up the white 'Cittadella' where the houses were excavated into the limestone and pick a restaurant for dinner on own – you may try one that was a

former cave.

Today's Ride Choices

Alberobello to Ostuni — 38 km (24 miles)

What to Expect:

Alberobello to Ostuni:

The ride departs narrow town streets and follows paved rural roads into ancient olive groves and past farmhouses and typical trulli huts. After 7 miles you enter Locorotondo, a must-do visit. A few miles out of this small town, you cross the scenic bridge of Figazzano and start a 2 mile unpaved well-beaten bike path. Some easy ascents and descents take you finally into Ostuni, where you need to pay attention to some car traffic. The hotel is at short distance and located in the city center. You ride a short stretch on cobblestone and then walk your bike shortly up on large stones, that could be slippery in the rain. Ask the reception where to park your bike, then park and lock your bike there. Do not leave it unattended out of the hotel door.

DAY 2: Travel to Ionian Coast and Cycle Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli & Sannicola/ Move on Day

After breakfast, at 9:00 a.m. a 60-minute drive takes you to the Salento Peninsula on the magnificent Ionian Coast, where sandy beaches and the cobalt-blue waters of inviting inlets are sure to lure you in for a refreshing dip. Your initial destination is the seaside resort town of Porto Cesareo, overseen by a handsome 16th-century watchtower. From here, your Puglia Self-Guided Biking Vacation takes you for a spectacular coastal ride, passing through villages that showcase the real Puglia. Get out of the saddle as the spirit moves you, for photos, or to poke into a shop. You'll find that conversations with locals come easily in this corner of Italy that sees few visitors!

Later, you'll glide into the Old Town of Gallipoli, the "Gem of Salento," a medieval fortified island city linked to the mainland by a 16th-century bridge. Gallipoli was part of *Magna Graecia*, or Greater Greece, which included vast swathes of southern Italy and Sicily in ancient times. Once a center for olive oil, today Gallipoli is a lively city, full of boutiques, cafés, and vestiges from its Greek and Roman days. The fishing port still brings in the catch of the day and the surrounding walls, once a defense against centuries of invasions, is the perfect place to join locals in their *passeggiata*, or afternoon stroll, before a well-earned *aperitivo* overlooking Sant' Andrea's lighthouse. Resume cycling to get to your cozy *masseria* for an

authentic Salento experience.

Today's Ride Choices

Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli and Sannicola – 47 km (29 miles)

Nardò loop – 9 km (6 miles)

What to Expect:

Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli and Sannicola:

Departing Porto Cesareo, your ride stays mainly along the coast on a mixture of roads and dedicated bike lanes through populated areas, farmland, and open fields with the sea in the distance on your right. Rising after 13 km (eight miles), the day's steepest ascent is more than made up for by stunning sea views, after which you will veer inland for about five km (three miles). The route returns to the coast through some charming small ports and beaches before rolling into the center of Gallipoli. There you can get as far as the old 'cittadella' and make a loop all around it, then park and lock your bike to explore on foot. The ride continues out of town to your masseria-hotel. Pay attention to car traffic as you ride in and out of Gallipoli.

Nardò loop:

Enjoy an optional visit of Nardò, on an almost 9 km (6 miles) ride in the countryside, into the heart of Nardò and returning to the coast. Nardò is rich in history and the monuments will offer you a cultural insight into its past. Breathe the authentic life of a back-country Salentine village by stopping at the historical winery, Schola Sarmenti. Grab a snack from a pastry shop or enjoy lunch in a historical café in the main square. You rejoin the Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli route at the 16.7 km (27 mile) point.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Sannicola to Santa Maria di Leuca / Move on Day

Relish another day cycling as your Puglia self-guided biking tour takes you along the Ionian Sea, where each crystalline beach seems more inviting than the last. You might want to plan on an early start so you can take as many swim breaks as you wish. There will also be opportunities to stop for true Italian coffee and to grab lunch at a seaside restaurant in Marina di Torre San Giovanni. And of course, an Italian cycling adventure cannot live up to its reputation if it doesn't include at least a daily stop for *gelato*. As

much as you'll enjoy the culinary and swim breaks, it's the vistas and picturesque marinas that are truly inspiring in this breathtaking corner of Puglia. You will end the day in Santa Maria di Leuca—a beautiful destination perched on a low seaside promontory and steeped in ancient history and legend. This historic town was named for the white cliffs that have been providing the scenic backdrop to your ride (*leukos* is Greek for “white”).

The locals claim that this is where the Ionian meets the Adriatic, although officially it is further east. Pause at Punta Ristola for sweeping views of the lighthouse, Italy's second most important, and the adjacent Basilica Sanctuary of Saint Mary—also known as *De Finibus Terrae*, or “The End of the Land,” named when it was commonly believed that the earth was flat. The Basilica, built over a Roman temple and dedicated to the goddess Minerva, marks where Saint Peter is said to have started his long walk to Rome after crossing the Mediterranean from Jerusalem. Today, the devout follow in his footsteps along the Via Francigena pilgrimage route.

After a rewarding day, settle into your exclusive enclave and enjoy an included dinner at your hotel.

Today's Ride Choices

Sannicola to Santa Maria di Leuca — 64 km (40 miles)

Santa Maria di Leuca loop — 14 km (9 miles)

Optional Santa Maria di Leuca walk — 6 km (3 miles)

What to Expect:

Sannicola to Santa Maria di Leuca:

An easy ride that stays almost entirely along the coast on roads or shared-use bike lanes (in Italian, signs for *percorso cicloturistico* indicate a slower speed limit for cars). You will pass many sandy beaches, marinas, and beach resorts with ample options for swimming, lunch, coffee, and ice cream, as well as many scenic viewpoints and ancient watchtowers. As you round the tip of the peninsula, you will pass the Devil's Cave, a natural limestone cave.

Santa Maria di Leuca loop:

Enjoy a loop from the hotel heading inland on peaceful countryside routes with gentle ascents and descents. The route takes you into Santa Maria di Leuca before returning to rural roads leading to delightful views of the sea on your way down to the coast!

Optional Santa Maria di Leuca walk:

The walk, roundtrip from your hotel, is about 5 km and takes you to the most important highlights of the village. You can find information about the embarcadero if you wish to enjoy the boat excursion along the coast from a sea perspective.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Santa Maria di Leuca to Otranto / Move on Day

Today's ride continues along the dramatic Adriatic Coast with the sea on your right for the entire day, as your Puglia self-guided biking tour takes you descending into enticing crystalline coves. Later, some invigorating climbs lead to high bluffs with breathtaking views followed by exhilarating descents bringing you to quaint harbor villages. At today's highest elevations, you'll pass a series of ancient watchtowers where guards once kept an eye out for intruders approaching from the southern Mediterranean. As you ride, you'll find plenty of options for lunch and snacks; perhaps you'll sample freshly prepared seafood or *provola e mortadella*. One final long and steady downhill brings you into Otranto, Italy's easternmost point. Surrounded by great ramparts, it is one of Italy's most scenic coastal towns, situated on the Strait of Otranto, which separates Italy from Albania by just 45 miles.

Otranto's Old Town is a rich amalgam of the history of past invaders: Greeks, Romans, and Turks among them. Exploring it on your Puglia self-guided biking tour is a must, and stopping in its 11th-century cathedral is absolutely required. Behind the altar, the bones of 813 martyrs who fell in a 15th-century siege are encased in a glass cabinet. But the medieval mosaic floor, the largest in Europe, is the real draw: Created in 1163 by a resident monk, the "Tree of Life" spans 8,611 square feet. Back outside, you might find your own mosaics—and other crafts—among the bustling stalls that line the narrow lanes. Otranto's 15th-century castle is also worth a visit for its history and the exhibit devoted to the now-closed Neolithic caves in Porto Badisco that you passed on your way into town.

At dinnertime, you can stroll to the city's inviting waterfront with its wide terrace and lovely vistas.

Today's Ride Choices

Santa Maria di Leuca to Otranto — 52 km (32 miles)

What to Expect:

You will ride along the Adriatic Coast, with the week's highest elevation gains and losses. The route is high above the sea on bluffs and also dips down to charming harbor villages with stops for swimming, food, and drinks. The second climb of the day takes you to Torre Nasparo, with its spectacular views east and north. On a clear day, after the last big climb to Torre Minervino, before reaching Italy's most easterly lighthouse of Punta Palascia, you may spot Albania's Acroceurani mountain range and some Greek islands on the other side of the Adriatic Sea. A sustained descent brings you to Porto Badisco, Approdo di Enea and then into Otranto.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Otranto / Stay Put Day

Enjoy a Stay Put Day to do as you please. If you just can't stay off the saddle, take a loop ride into the interior away from the sea, following quiet country roads. An initial slight ascent lifts you above Otranto and then flattens out as it winds through olive groves framed by stone walls. You may stop to ponder ancient dolmens and menhirs, the region's mysterious prehistoric standing stones. Take your time on this scenic route, perhaps pausing to toast your good fortune at a local winery or stopping to observe a traditional weaving workshop. Back at Otranto's beach, reward yourself with a swim and a delicious seafood lunch along the port.

Alternately, you can join a boat excursion along the dramatic coastal cliffs and past spectacular grottos, stopping for swims along the way. You may prefer to spend the day on land, browsing Otranto's inviting shops, and the halls and grounds of its seaside castle. Your Puglia Self-Guided Biking Vacation offers plenty of choices.

Today's Ride Choices

Otranto to Uggiano la Chiesa loop — 26 km (16 miles) | Otranto Walk — 3 km (2 miles)

What to Expect:

A narrow road exits the center of Otranto. After an initial, gradual ascent, the route flattens out on quiet country roads, rolling through olive groves and past stone walls, farms and hamlets. You may stop for lunch and a tasting at a winery or visit a traditional weaving workshop along the way. Scattered throughout the landscape are prehistoric standing stones.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Otranto to Lecce / Move on Day

Leaving Otranto today, you'll savor the last ride of your Puglia Self-Guided Biking Vacation along the dramatic Adriatic coast. Ride along the Strait of Otranto before turning into a countryside of enormous olive and oak trees. This scenic route leads to the small Renaissance village of Acaya, one of Puglia's last remaining fortified cities. Its notable 16th-century grid of streets divides the town into rectangular "islands." After exploring, you'll join a bike path that leads into the center of Lecce. This beautiful city is constructed from a pink-tinged local stone called *pietra dorata*. There is so much Baroque-period architecture with chiseled cherubs, angels, and saints, that Lecce has been called the "Florence of the South." As you explore, your week of cycling will no doubt bring a new sense of urgency to your gelato cravings; you'll have plenty of options to satisfy them here!

An intimate boutique hotel in the heart of the pedestrian Old City welcomes you to Lecce, a fine finale for your trip. Settle in and then take a short stroll to historic sites, including the Piazza Sant'Oronzo, the city's main square with its centerpiece Roman amphitheater. Pick any of the narrow streets that fan out from the square to discover charming neighborhoods—and duck into any number of rustic eateries serving the hearty cuisine for which the city is known, including pureed fava beans and broccolini and a robust *primitivo* wine. It's the perfect way to celebrate your ride around Italy's heel!

Today's Ride Choices

Otranto to Lecce — 50 km (31 miles)

Optional Lecce walk — 3 km (2 miles)

What to Expect:

Otranto to Lecce:

After an initial ascent departing Otranto from sea level, the ride is mainly flat along the coast, then at around the 30 km (18 miles) after San Foca, you will turn inland through olive groves and begin a slight sustained ascent to Acaya, one of the best examples of a Renaissance fortified town in Italy. From there, you'll join a bike path that leads into the center of Lecce. Although Lecce is a bike-friendly city, please be aware that urban riding will be very busy compared to the low-traffic riding you have enjoyed this week. Please exercise caution and, although not required, we recommend walking your bike the last few

kilometers to your hotel.

Optional Lecce walk:

A suggested walk from your hotel to discover the major monuments of the capital of Baroque style and gastronomic insights of the traditional food of the county.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7: Lecce / VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel in Lecce and depart on your own. For details, refer to your VBT Vacation Preparation Handbook. Depending upon your destination, it may not be possible to depart for the U.S. on the last day of your Puglia Self-Guided Biking Vacation. Please check airline schedules carefully. If you plan to schedule a return flight immediately following the tour's conclusion, please call your airline directly for specific check-in requirements.

Lecce has good train connections with all main lines connecting to destinations throughout Italy (e.g., Naples, five hours; Rome, 5.5 hours). The train and bus stations are just under 1.4 km (0.9 miles) from your hotel; a 20-minute walk across the pedestrian city center.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel La Terra (Day 1)

Tradition is at the heart of Hotel La Terra, set in the historic center of Ostuni, also known as the "White City." The elegant 13th-century building suggests a medieval palace, while also offering the modern comforts you expect from a fine hotel. Set next-door to a Benedictine monastery and offering sweeping views of the town, the hotel exudes a serene atmosphere that's a perfect counterpoint to an exhilarating day of hiking. In its beautiful dining room, framed by exposed stone, savor authentic local cuisine accompanied by a carefully curated selection of Apulian wines.

Masseria Relais Santa Teresa (Day 2)

A charmingly restored, 17th-century *masseria* (fortified farm estate) sets the tone for your stay in Puglia. Centered around a courtyard filled with fragrant gardens and surrounded by a wooded, 22-acre private park, this four-star property's restaurant features cuisine expertly crafted from local ingredients, including a generous breakfast buffet with continental and Italian options. Enjoy sun terraces with umbrellas and loungers, an outdoor pool and pool bar, and the Mediterranean ambiance of your air-conditioned room. Free WiFi is available in the common areas.

Hotel Approdo (Day 3)

Inspired by the lush and inviting Mediterranean Sea, the Hotel Approdo enjoys a prime location overlooking the scenic marina of Santa Maria di Leuca. This bright and airy air-conditioned hotel has been in the same family for three generations since Don Michele Rossi built it in 1964. During your stay, relax by the swimming pool surrounded by greenery, sip a local vintage on the expansive sea-view terrace as you recline under a canopy on a lounge, and savor a delicious meal of local specialties in the refined restaurant. Approdo is Italian for "landing," and you'll be glad to have found yours here.

Hotel Albania (Days 4-5)

Centrally located near Otranto's Old Town, the pretty public gardens, and the seaside promenade, the Hotel Albania is named for the Albanian mountains that are visible across the Otranto Strait on a clear day. Its whitewashed, brightly lit interiors provide a soothing setting while the Vista Mare Restaurant on the top floor offers stunning sea views. In the sun-bathed dining room, enjoy a generous breakfast of fruits from the owner's farm, homemade jams, and locally sourced meats and cheeses. Air-conditioned rooms in this delightfully designed hotel have been completely renovated and decorated in light colors and simple clean lines.

Suite Hotel Santa Chiara (Day 6)

Converted from an 18th-century baronial palace, this elegant new boutique hotel was lovingly designed to blend with the historic and artistic heritage of Lecce. From the entryway to your room, the interior generates a sense of tranquility with soothing colors and elegant appointments. Amenities include the café, bar, and gym. For breakfast, sweet and savory dishes in the tradition of Lecce cuisine are served in the roof garden, along with panoramic views of the historic city center. When you're ready to explore Lecce, highlights such as the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, Piazza Sant'Oronzo, ancient Roman theater, Saint Claire Church, the Must Museum, and the Piazza del Duomo are just steps away.