

## 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 from the United States or Canada**

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

## **ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in Catania / Travel to 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: VBT Bicycling Vacation begins / Travel to Scicli / Walking tour of 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 and holding a sign.

From Taormina, you'll travel to Scicli by private motor coach (transportation time is approximately three hours with a short stop on the way). In Scicli, follow our local guide and embark on a 40-minute walking tour. The city is listed among UNESCO's World Heritage sites for its baroque palaces and churches. You will have time for lunch with plenty of options in this wonderful little city.

Early this afternoon, settle into your luxurious hotel, a 19th century palace built by a knight, and an amazing setting to discover the history of local Sicilian nobility. After a safety talk and bike-fitting, follow your trip leaders on a warm-up ride outside the town in the beautiful Noto Valley. Later, gather with the group for a welcome cocktail under the frescoed vaults of our hotel, followed by a true Sicilian dinner at a local restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-up — 16 km (10 miles)

What to Expect:

The warm-up ride explores Altopiano Ibleo, a peaceful, rural region outside Scicli. Leaving your hotel, you cycle out of town, passing farms and groves of olive and carob trees set along old stone walls. In the distance, you will see the coastline and the sea. On the way back, you will have a wonderful panoramic view of this baroque town.

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 km (10 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 2: Cycle to Sampieri / Lunch by the beach

After breakfast, cycle the rolling countryside in the Province of Ragusa toward the sea, surrounded by miles of stone walls, cattle grazing in the shade of stately carob and olive trees, and vegetable greenhouses that supply markets both local and all over Europe.

You will reach Sampieri via a bike path along the sea. Sampieri is a summer resort town and its beaches are ideal for swimming. Your morning ride ends at a peaceful pine forest for a picnic lunch on the beach. Take some time to stroll around or swim while lunch is getting prepared. Reward yourself with a delicious gelato. From here, you can continue riding or shuttle to your hotel and relax. The city has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site for the extraordinary beauty and the importance of its late-baroque architecture, built after a devastating earthquake in 1693.

This evening, stroll Scicli and enjoy the magnificent architecture lit up at night, the perfect 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:

The morning ride heads through the quiet countryside and a patchwork landscape accentuated by lovely stone walls. The roads are paved with little car traffic and you will pedal gradually downhill. Along the way, you will see large greenhouses, one of the city's main sources of income, as Sicily provides 10% of

Europe's fruits and vegetables. The ride follows a scenic, flat bike path through a park by the sea with a sandy beach for swimming. In the afternoon, it's easy coastal riding through the seaside village of Sampieri, followed by a long, yet manageable, uphill ride back to your hotel in Scicli, leaving the afternoon free for you to discover this baroque city. You can opt for the support vehicle to skip the hill.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

### **DAY 3: Cycle the Noto Valley / Lunch at an organic farm**

Today pedal in the peaceful and rolling countryside of Modica and Val di Noto, past rural areas and through little hamlets to San Giacomo, the lunch stop. At lunch time, you are welcomed by the owner (mama Nella) who oversees the many activities of her 20-acre farm while making breads, focaccia, jams, sherbets, and much more for her guests. Complement your lunch with typical Sicilian dish Pasta alla Norma, garden to table vegetables, local cheese and olives, followed by a mouthwatering tasting of Modica chocolate.

Your afternoon ride follows a mostly downhill route toward the sea and your hotel. Relax at Villa Favorita, built in 1753 following the Renaissance design on what once was the feud of the marquis of Avola. Enjoy the swimming pool and terrace with views of the blue sea on one side, and the orange roofs of Baroque Noto at sunset, on the other.

Tonight meet the owner Corrada, a descendant of the marquis of Castelluccio and tour the beautiful common rooms and orange garden with giant cactus, before enjoying dinner at the villa 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 starts from Modica and is one of the most scenic routes offered on this tour. It unfolds in the rolling countryside of Modica and Val di Noto, past rural areas to your lunch stop. The afternoon

ride from the lunch stop to Villa Favorita is a mostly downhill route. If you like to shorten it, VBT offers a van shuttle to your hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 – 65 km (16 – 39 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 4: Admire the Mosaics of Villa del Tellaro / Explore the ancient fishing village and tuna fishery of Marzamemi / Porto Palo / Explore Baroque Noto**

After a hearty breakfast, pedal along quiet, mostly easy country roads, toward the sea. On the way, you'll want to stop to admire the fourth-century Roman Villa del Tellaro mosaics.

Your destination is the recently restored, ancient fishing village of Marzamemi, nestled on a small promontory south of Syracuse. In good weather, you can take a break at the San Lorenzo beach for a refreshing swim. Marzamemi was developed in the 17th century around a tuna fishery, which is now the second-largest in Sicily and a national monument. The family known as the Princes of Villadorata still visit their 17th-century palace, a beautiful summer residence. Marzamemi is a good place to find a relaxing café or local fish restaurant for lunch on your own.

This afternoon continue riding toward the most southern tip of Sicily, the beaches of Porto Palo. From here enjoy beautiful views of the islands of Isola di Capo Passero and Isola delle Correnti (Isle of Currents). It is said to be one of the most scenic places to ride in Italy.

Spend the rest of the day relaxing before shuttling to Noto for a stroll to admire the local architecture in this famous baroque 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 is on remote country roads, away from traffic, to Marzamemi and the coast. Marzamemi is completely free from car traffic and pleasant to stroll on foot. The afternoon route follows the coastline and is gently rolling, with great sea views. From Porto Palo to the hotel you are shuttled by a private coach.

Today may offer an additional independent ride for experienced cyclists. Ask your trip leader for details.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 5: Truffle hunt / Bike on the crest of a scenic plateau near Palazzolo Acreide

Enjoy a short shuttle up a plateau called the Belvedere di Noto, from where you will pedal a panoramic route ending at your lunch stop, the Feudo Baulu. Acquired at the end of the 18th century for the noble family of the baron Judica, this property belonged to the same family for generations. Today, the Feudo Baulu is a country estate covering 150 acres including several buildings and a large wild holm oak wood forest. In the forest there are houses carved in the rocks that were inhabited in ancient times. The entire property is quite evocative. Here, you will follow a local truffle hunter and his dog Siri, in search of the precious black mushrooms. At lunch, enjoy the result of your 'work' with 'risotto al tartufo' and more specialties prepared by the chef with fresh garden produce.

In the afternoon, another scenic route leads to your final destination: an ancient fortified *masseria*, or farm estate, surrounded by acres of carob and olive trees. This fine country inn, Borgo del Carato, is your home for the next two nights. You will be seduced by the quietude, the sweeping views, the elegant spa, and the panoramic pool set in a manicured garden of fragrant flowers. Horseback riding is also available. Tonight, you will meet the owner and discover why the *carat*, or carob seed, is the unit of weight for diamonds and the name of the Borgo. Tonight's dinner will be prepared with fresh vegetables and herbs from the garden.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Belvedere di Noto to Feudo Baulu – 21 km (13 miles)

Afternoon: Baully to Borgo del Carato – 20 km (12 miles)

What to Expect:

A 15 min shuttle takes you to the starting point at Belvedere di Noto, far from the city traffic of Noto. From there, ride rolling scenic and country roads with little car traffic to your lunch stop, the Baully country resort. Afterwards, the ride continues along a scenic plateau on a road with almost no car traffic.

Today may offer an additional independent ride for experienced cyclists. Ask your trip leader for details.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 6: Bike along a canyon / Honey tasting in Floridaia / Sicilian cooking class**

Your ride crosses a scenic region that was inhabited in prehistoric times, and where archeologists have found cave tombs carved in the steep limestone cliffs. As you bike the quiet roads and a long canyon, you will admire the countryside dotted with farms and typical *masserias* with the sea—as far as Syracuse—in the distance. Today's highlight is walking the Sant'Alfano bridge, and just before Canicattini Bagni, take the opportunity to become familiar with its mysterious statues.

A local specialty of this area is honey. You will stop to meet Rosa and visit her organic farm, where she will introduce you to her bees and a myriad of honey products. Intrigued by her husband's vocation for beekeeping, Rosa decided to turn his hobby into a business. In 2001 she opened this entirely family-run business specializing in raw, high quality honey, and bee products. Rosa is also committed to promoting the preservation of a rare and endangered Sicilian thyme that she uses in her award-winning honey. Her passion is so contagious, and her fame so spread-out with former VBT guests, that the tasting will extend to more local specialties to include also your lunch.

After your visit with Rosa, back on your bike, cross the baroque town of Floridaia. Maybe park your bike by the imposing Chiesa Madre church for a short stroll and a *pasta di mandorle* pastry.

Back at the hotel, learn about Sicilian cuisine by preparing dinner with a local chef. Share the fruits of your labor with fellow travelers at a farewell dinner in the hotel restaurant.

## Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Carato to Florida — 36 km (22 miles)

Afternoon: Florida to Carato — 12 km (7 miles)

### What to Expect:

This morning, the ride starts with a long gradual climb that can be skipped by a short van shuttle. It travels along and up and down a quiet region cut by a long scenic canyon on a paved road. It crosses the village of Canicattini Bagni, then continues down the canyon on a long and gradual route into the small city of Florida, which is your lunch stop. The afternoon ride follows a slightly rolling and very panoramic route, leading to the large estate of our hotel. It is a very quiet, fully paved route, with the sea at your back.

Cumulative Distance Range: 12 – 48 km (7 – 29 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Travel to Syracuse / VBT Bicycling Vacation ends / Free time**

After an included breakfast, complimentary transportation by private minibus (about 30 minutes) is provided to your centrally located hotel in Ortigia, Syracuse for your final overnight. You will arrive at approximately 10:15 a.m. Follow a VBT local guide on a two-hour private walk of Ortigia, then spend the rest of the day exploring this wonderful town. You can consider a visit to the archeological park – a must-see for visitors. Or continue wandering the old city of Ortigia, its ancient medieval and Baroque delights are around every corner. Browse craft and souvenir shops, fashion designer stores and cafes with pastry and local specialties that whet your appetite. The entire city of Syracuse is a UNESCO World Heritage site, so spectacular is its beauty and importance.

If you have chosen the independent Post-Trip Extension, you will remain at this hotel for three nights. Syracuse is a good base for daily trips to Piazza Armerina and Agrigento. Your guide can facilitate your visits there.

Included Meals: Breakfast



## DEPARTURE DAY: Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation to the Catania airport will be provided (an approximately 50 to 60 minute drive, 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.