

## Spain: Andalusia, Córdoba & Granada

### Bike Vacation Only

While other bike tours merely touch the tourist centers of southern Spain, this comprehensive Andalusian cycling vacation takes you deep into the region's heart. Starting in the sensual southern city of Seville, you'll cycle into the ancient Moorish city of Córdoba, where we've found an authentic Andalusian villa for you to stay in—complete with carved wooden ceilings and a traditional Spanish courtyard. Our itinerary brings you through the famous Ruta Del Vino wine road, spinning past white-washed villages and stopping at an authentic, Andalusian *cortijo* for lunch with VBT's local friends. After pedaling past medieval castles in Jaen, you'll return home to your own ancient castle (now a Parador hotel) where you'll discover the secrets of Andalusian cooking during a class with a local chef. As you cycle the Ruta de las Fortalezas and roll into Granada, you might even hear the haunting chords of a flamenco guitar calling your name.

### Cultural Highlights

- Embark on a guided tour of Córdoba featuring a visit to the amazing Mezquita.
- Ride through olive groves and vineyards along the Ruta del Vino Wine Road.
- Sangria!
- Spin downhill past castles, Roman ruins, and mountain villages toward enchanting Granada.
- Explore the Alhambra Palace—one of Spain's biggest attractions and a UNESCO World Heritage site.

### What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain mixed with moderate hills and is ideal for both beginner and experienced cyclists. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 18-45 miles

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

**Group size:** 14-20 max

### Climate Information

**Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

March 70°/47°, April 73°/50°, May 80°/56°, June 88°/62°, September 90°/64°, October 78°/56°, November 68°/49°

**Average Rainfall (in.)**

March 1.4, April 2.2, May 1.5, June 0.5, September 0.8, October 2.2, November 3.2

## DAY 1: Warm-up ride / Welcome reception

Meet your VBT trip leaders and the rest of the group at the Palma del Rio Hotel at 10:00 a.m. Please be dressed in your riding attire.

Your trip leaders will host an informative tour overview, as well as a safety and bike-fitting session, followed by a warm-up ride around Palma del Rio. You will be riding on the fertile lowland of the Guadalquivir River.

After the warm-up ride, you will have time for lunch on your own at the hotel or at one of Palma del Rio's restaurants. Spend the remainder of the afternoon relaxing by the quiet swimming pool, strolling through the extensive grounds and vegetable gardens, or exploring the town's sites. Ambitious riders may opt for an afternoon ride toward the foothills of the Sierra Morena.

Tonight, gather with your trip leaders and travel mates for a welcome reception, including tapas and sangria, two of Andalusia's regional specialties. You'll learn about the history of Spain and Andalusia before dinner is served.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Warm-up Loop – 13 km (8 miles)

Afternoon: Sierra Morena Loop – 27 km (17 miles)

### What to Expect:

Your ride in Andalusia starts with an easy warm-up loop. You will cross the Genil River as you exit town. From there, you will see the fertile plain of the Guadalquivir River and pass a typical Andalusian farm called a *cortijo*. If you choose to ride after lunch on your own, you can cycle out of town toward the foothills of Sierra Morena, looping back down to the Guadalquivir River valley.

Cumulative Distance Range: 13 – 40 km (8 – 25 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

## DAY 2: Horanchuelos / the foothills of the Sierra Morena

En route to Córdoba, you'll ride up to the foothills of the Sierra Morena Mountain Range and the Parque Natural de Horanchuelos. Following the Guadalquivir River, you will make your way into the Campiña Cordobesa-Córdoban countryside. Along the way, you'll stop for an included lunch.

Later in the afternoon, you'll arrive at your beautiful and centrally located four-star Córdoba hotel. In the 11th century, Cordoba was the largest and most cosmopolitan city in Europe with a well-developed system for running water and streetlights, along with vast libraries where Arabic, Latin, and Greek manuscripts were translated. Jews, Muslims, and Christians all coexisted in this cultural crossroads. Exceptional monuments like the Mezquita of Córdoba are a good representation of the blend of these different cultures. Famous sons of Córdoba include the philosophers Seneca (Roman), Averroes (Arab), and Maimonides (Jewish). Córdoba has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1984.

Your hotel is a few steps from the Mezquita in the Judería—the charming Jewish district and the heart of Córdoba. It consists of ancient, private homes from the 17th and 18th centuries with lovely patios and fountains. The property was carefully restored in 2009.

Spend the rest of the evening at your leisure, enjoying all the amenities of your hotel or venturing out to explore Córdoba's historic sites. Dinner is on your own.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Palma to Posadas — 33 km (20 miles)

Afternoon: Posadas to Lunch — 15 km (9 miles) OR Posadas to Lunch and Córdoba — 33 km (20 miles)

### What to Expect:

Today's ride starts through Palma del Río and continues gently uphill toward Hornachuelos. You'll leave the Guadalquivir River plain behind as you bike along the border of the Sierra. The ride is mostly easy, but there will be some uphill cycling no longer than half mile. By noon, you will approach the quiet town of Posadas for a break. If you are taking the short option, you can take our shuttle to our lunch location. If you continue cycling from the town of Posadas after your break, you'll cross the Rio Guadalquivir for an

easy ride to the Cortijo el Temple for lunch. After lunch, you will shuttle to Córdoba or continue cycling on longer option that includes a series of hills to the outskirts of Córdoba. From there, you will be shuttled to the hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 33 – 66 km (20 – 40 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 3: Explore Córdoba

After breakfast, meet your local guide and set out on foot. Start by visiting a nearby synagogue and then continue to the Mezquita.

Originally built as a temple, lighthouse, and warehouse, the Mezquita was once the second-largest mosque in the world and later consecrated as a Christian church after Córdoba was captured by the Spanish in the 12th century. Today, it is considered one of the world's greatest examples of Moorish architecture. From the Mezquita, you'll see the Alcazar de los Reyes Cristianos, and the Archiepiscopal Palais, the Roman Bridge with 16 arches spanning the Guadalquivir River, as well as the synagogue built in 1315 in La Judería. Córdoba is also an excellent place to shop for pottery, silverwork, *abanicos* (fans), cotton and leather goods, embroidered mantillas (scarves), shawls, and wooden crafts. A Bullfighting Museum pays homage to the controversial sport.

Take time on your own this afternoon to explore the many sites and shops of Córdoba. You might want to enjoy an ancient local tradition: an Arab bath in one of the nearby hammams. Immerse yourself in its warm waters, followed by a relaxing massage with essential oils.

Tonight, choose a restaurant for dinner on your own in Córdoba. You might visit a flamenco house in front of the Mezquita or one of the restaurants in La Judería, the Jewish district, where you can also taste local specialties like *caldereta de cordero*, ragout of lamb, or sausages such as *morcilla*, *caña de lomo*, and *salchichón de Pozo Blanco*. *Salmorejo* and *flamenquines* are the most famous Cordovan dishes. Arab influences can be found in the sweet *alfajores* and *pestiños* with almonds and honey.

Today's Ride Choices

What to Expect:

Non-biking day: Explore Córdoba

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 4: Ruta del Vino / La Via Verde / Andalusian cortijo

After breakfast, you will leave Córdoba and shuttle to the Cordillera Subbética and the Ruta del Vino wine road. As the name suggests, this hilly region is full of olive trees and vineyards, producing and exporting excellent white wines and olive oils. One of the most renowned wines produced in this area is the Pedro Ximénez sweet wine, particularly recommended to complement local *postres* desserts. For brunch, you will stop at a beautiful bodega and taste locally produced wines with your meal.

From there you will ride toward the Subbética mountain range, where you have the option of cycling on the Via Verde rails-to-trails path. Avid cyclists looking for some hills can opt for a more challenging route.

On your way to the perched village of Zuheros, keep your eyes open for a variety of birds, including two of the many protected species of this area: the peregrine falcon, symbol of the Natural Park of La Sierra Subbética, and the griffon vulture.

Near Luque, you'll stop at a *cortijo* for a late picnic lunch, with ingredients sourced almost entirely from the garden of your host, Balbino, who also proudly serves the farm's prize-winning, organic olive oil.

After lunch, hop on a shuttle to your next hotel. The 18th-century Parador de Jaen, one of Andalusia's most beautiful castles, sits high above the city of Jaen, atop Santa Catalina Hill, on the site of the former Santa Catalina Castle, an 8th-century Moorish fortress. This evening, you may enjoy an included dinner at your leisure at the hotel.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Wine Road to La Primilla — 20 km (12 miles)

Afternoon: La Primilla to Cortijillo on bike path — 40 km (24 miles) OR La Primilla to Cortijillo on road PLUS — 44 km (26 miles)

What to Expect:

You will take a bus from Córdoba to the Montilla-Moriles hills, one of the famous wine regions of Andalusia, and start riding from Espejo, passing several *lagares*, farms where grapes are grown and pressed. You will stay on rolling terrain in the morning with just a few hills, arriving at Lagar La Primilla for brunch and a wine tasting. Afterward, you can shuttle to your starting point on the Vía Verde rails-to-trails path, where you can expect a beautiful easy ride all the way to Cortijillo. Other riders may opt for some hills on the longer moderate ride.

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 – 64 km (12 – 38 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 5: Explore the region of Jaen, land of castles and olive groves / Andalusian cooking demonstration**

Today, your loop ride follows the road to Gardia, the ancient Roman and Visigoth city of Mentesa Bastia, guarded by its 12th-century castle built on a rocky promontory. You'll also visit the Puente de la Sierra, the so-called entrance to the Sierra de Jaen, the small group of mountains on the old road to Granada. After you pause for lunch on your own in Puente de la Sierra, you may choose to challenge yourself with a ride to the Otiñar Castle, surrounded by stunning mountains and deep limestone canyons. Or return to the Parador and perhaps visit the Santa Catalina castle on your own, just steps from your hotel.

Enjoy time to relax before you meet up with the rest of your group to learn how to make a popular Andalusian dish this evening. Dinner will be served in the Parador's beautiful dining room with its combination of Moorish and Spanish décor.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Jaén to Puente de la Sierra – 35 km (21 miles)

Afternoon: Otiñar Canyon PLUS – 15 km (9 miles)

What to Expect:

Start your ride with a descent and mainly flat road before you begin a long but gradual climb to Guardia, with its castle above. From here, you will continue on a gentle and undulating road with views of the mountains of Jaen, all the way to the main entrance of the Sierra de Jaen mountains. Here you stop for

lunch on your own, or if you are looking for more mileage, you may opt for a challenging ride to the castle of Otiñar, rewarding you with probably the most stunning views of the entire trip. Today may offer an additional independent ride for experienced cyclists. Ask your trip leader for details or opt for shuttle back to Parador.

Cumulative Distance Range: 35 – 50 km (9 – 30 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 6: Travel to Granada

After breakfast, you will start your morning ride in the small town of Benalúa de las Villas. Begin with a gradual descent through a valley with the Sierra Nevada mountain range in the distance, and head toward the enchanting city of Granada. You will pedal through towns that were heavily fortified in the Middle Ages prior to the final conquest of Granada in 1492, including Colomera with its castle and towering church. As you continue on the Ruta de las Fortalezas, you will find traces of Roman influence, including a 2,000-year-old bridge. Leaving the mountains and small villages behind, you will enter La Vega Granada's main valley and finish your ride with lunch and a celebratory toast under the shade of pine trees with a cool breeze coming from the Cubillas Reservoir.

This evening, join your trip leaders for a festive farewell dinner and sample some regional culinary delights.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Ruta de las Fortalezas to Olivares – 25 km (15 miles) | Olivares to Campus Nautico – 21 km (13 miles)

What to Expect:

Your final ride takes you from the mountains north of Granada down to the Genil River lowlands. Begin by leaving Benalúa de las Villas and heading down a mountain valley with the impressive Sierra Nevada mountain range as the backdrop. You will pass a 2,000-year-old Roman bridge and the towns of Colomera and Moclín with their Arab fortresses and Christian churches. The ride is a gently rolling route with a continuous descent into the valley and along the Genil riverbank. Today may offer an additional independent ride for experienced cyclists. Ask your trip leader for details or choose the short option from

Olivares.

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 – 46 km (13 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 7: Alhambra Palace / VBT Bicycling Vacation ends

After breakfast, you will meet your local guide and walk to the Alhambra Palace for an included visit to the Palace and Generalife Gardens, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Due to hotel check-out times, please settle your hotel bill and check out prior to your included visit of the Alhambra Palace. After the tour, you will return to the hotel to collect your luggage and continue to your next destination. Your flight from Granada should not be scheduled to depart earlier than 3:00 p.m.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### Monasterio de San Francisco (Day 1)

Monasterio de San Francisco was a Franciscan monastery built in 1492 by the VII Señor de Palmas orders. It was transformed into a charming hotel in 1985, yet preserves the simplicity and tranquility of a monastery. The refectory is now a quiet reading room, the ancient vegetable garden still supplies the kitchen, and the patios are the same ones walked by the monks in silent prayer five centuries ago. Only the large swimming pool shaded by orange trees is a reminder of the modern world. Today, guests can still drink the juice of the garden's 65 orange trees, some of which are five centuries old. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout the premises.

### Las Casas de la Juderia Cordoba (Days 2-3)

Hotel Las Casas de la Judería is located a few steps from the Mezquita in the very heart of Córdoba. It consists of ancient, private homes from the 17th and 18th centuries with charming patios, gardens, and fountains. The property is air conditioned and beautifully restored, and exhibits a perfect blend of history



and comfort. Free WiFi is also available.

### **Parador de Jaen (Days 4-5)**

The Parador de Jaen, part of Spain's group of historic hotels, offers stunning views of the three mountains surrounding the city of Jaen. It is located at the top of Santa Catalina hill, in the 18th-century castle that has been beautifully restored. Enjoy modern comfort combined with historic authenticity and regional Andalusian craftsmanship evidenced in the stunning dining room, vaulted entry hall, extensive gardens, and outdoor swimming pool. Santa Catalina Castle is a few steps away from the hotels and can be explored on its own. Air conditioning and WiFi are available.

### **Hotel NH Collection Victoria (Day 6)**

Enjoy an ideal location in the heart of Granada and an elegant ambiance during your stay at the Hotel NH Collection Granada Victoria. The hotel is located near the Cathedral, Royal Chapel, and Alcaicería bazaar, in a bustling neighborhood of shops and restaurants. The Alhambra is just a 20-minute walk away. Savor traditional Mediterranean cuisine in the hotel's sunny restaurant or tapas at the bar. Your soundproof and air-conditioned room features a flat-screen TV, free WiFi, and private bath with rain-effect shower.