

Italy: Puglia's Undiscovered Coast

Bike Vacation Only

Turquoise seas, olive groves, and medieval architecture surround you in the wine country of Puglia. Explore remote trails along stone-sculpted seaside villages and traditional trulli huts. This exquisite region is surrounded by three majestic bodies of water, giving you unparalleled, 360-degree coastal views and cool Adriatic breezes along your journey. With VBT's Puglia bike tour, you'll travel back in time as you cycle along the ancient walled city of Acaya and refresh yourself with a dip in the crystalline waters of Otranto, Italy's easternmost tip. Your trip includes dining with locals on farm fresh cuisine, topped with an olive oil tasting in Ostuni,

Cultural Highlights

Enjoy incomparable accommodations with 6 nights at luxurious *masserie* and countryside hotels
Ride along quiet country roads past 800-year-old olive groves to the ancient coastal site of Egnatia
Share a farm-fresh lunch and taste delicious olive oils with your masseria hosts
Bike from the ancient walled city of Acaya to the beautiful, rugged coast
Enjoy unhurried pedaling along rural pathways heading to the coastal town of Castro Marina
Refresh yourself with a swim in Otranto's crystalline waters
Picnic with a local family at their organic farm near the sea

What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain on low-traffic country roads and is ideal for beginning cyclists. For more avid cyclists, several days offer longer mileage options. All cyclists will thoroughly enjoy the scenic routes along the coast. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance along the road.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 5 - 43

Average Cycling Time: 01:00 - 3:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Mar 55°/46°, Apr 60°/50°, May 68°/55°, Jun 75°/62°, Jul 80°/68°, Aug 80°/68°, Sep 75°/64°, Oct

68°/57°, Nov 58°/42°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Mar 3.0, Apr 1.7, May 1.0, Jun 0.9, Jul 0.3, Aug 0.3, Sep 2.5, Oct 3.8, Nov 2.7

DAY 1: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Warm-up ride to Savelletri

Meet your VBT trip leaders at 2:00 p.m. in the lobby of the first *masseria* in Fasano. To get to the *masseria*, you can take a taxi from the Bari railway station (the cost is approx. 130 Euros) or the Bari airport (approx. 140 Euros). You can also contact our transfer company in advance (TAXI SERVICE, Anthony, info@taxi-services.it, phone +39 330 964 927) and book directly with them. They provide transfers from the Bari airport at a special rate of 120 Euros. You can also travel to the *masseria* by train from Bari (the closest airport) or Rome. The closest railway station to the *masseria* is Fasano. If you take a train from Rome to Fasano, you may need to connect in Bari. Once in Fasano, call the *masseria* to arrange for a taxi or shuttle pickup (approximately a 10-minute drive). If your arrival at the *masseria* is scheduled later than 2:00 p.m. or if you are delayed, please contact the hotel, and the staff will pass your message along to your VBT trip leaders. Leaders will start the safety talk at 3:00 p.m., so in case of delay, make sure you come dressed and ready for biking at 3:00 p.m. in the main lobby.

VBT highly recommends flying to Italy at least one day before the tour begins. This will allow you to rest and recover from jet lag before you begin sightseeing and cycling.

For guests staying at Masseria Torre Coccaro you have the option of partaking in VBT Cooking School, which is a big highlight for many Puglia travelers. This class will teach you how to prepare typical Apulian dishes before dining on the fruits of your labor. You will have to reserve your spot by contacting the *masseria* directly before 7:00 p.m. the day before the 10:30 a.m. session. The price is €50 per person and includes lunch and drinks.

For guests staying at Masseria Calderisi, an optional cooking class of approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes with the *masseria's* chef can be reserved by contacting the *masseria* directly before 7:00 p.m. the day before the 10:30 a.m. session. You will have fun while learning how to prepare typical Apulian dishes. The workshop will extend through lunch and include your meal – a typical informal Apulian lunch that will feature the fruits of your labor as well as refreshments. The price is €50 per person and includes lunch and drinks.

Masseria is the local name for large farms, which were fortified around the 16th century to ward off attacks by pirates and brigands. *Masserie* feature high boundary walls, angular towers, drawbridges, and watchtowers. Families worked and lived inside these walls with their own church, oil mill, and oven for

baking bread. These farms also housed cisterns for water, storage rooms for tools and hay, stables, and everything else needed for day-to-day life. These days they are elegant country resorts, most of which grow produce and bottle their own olive oil.

ALL guests: Please be in the main lobby at 3:00 p.m., dressed and ready for biking for introductions and a safety meeting. Readily identifiable VBT trip leaders will be in the main lobby beginning at 2:00 p.m. to answer any questions, provide assistance and collect pedals you may have brought from home.

This afternoon take a short warm-up ride along quiet country roads, past 800-year-old olive groves to the fishing village of Savelletri.

Later, enjoy a welcome cocktail reception on the elegant hotel patio. Dinner is at the hotel restaurant and is prepared with local products and herbs produced on the farm.

Accommodation: Masseria Torre Coccaro, Savelletri

Alternate Hotels: Masseria Calderisi or Masseria Torre del Diamante

Included Meals: Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 14.5 km (9 miles)

Afternoon

Savelletri Warm-up: 14.5 km (9 miles)

What to Expect: A loop in the countryside on a totally flat and paved terrain through the fishing village of Savelletri.

DAY 2: Olive Oil tasting / Lunch at Il Frantoio farm

This morning, you will ride inland to Masseria Il Frantoio, another award-winning country hotel famous for the quality of their food. The estate extends over 150 acres and includes a "secret garden" planted with orange and lemon trees, as well as a well-preserved underground olive oil mill. Your hosts, Armando and Rosalba, have collected many interesting odds and ends over the years, from ancient dresses and hats to precious books and a gramophone. Each piece has its own story.

Your lunch at Il Frantoio is prepared using produce grown on the farm and is truly an experience for all of your senses. You'll also have the opportunity to try a sampling of five different extra-virgin oils that Rosalba uses to flavor her focaccia, pickles, preserves, and delicious *laganari* pasta.

Later, you can opt to relax or continue cycling to the hotel along the ancient Traian road. An additional moderate ride option takes you up to the whitewashed city of Ostuni. End your day with a shuttle to the nearby small city of Savelletri on the sea. You are free to traverse the cozy pedestrian area to choose a restaurant for your dinner.

Accommodation: Masseria Torre Coccaro, Savelletri

Alternate Hotels: Masseria Calderisi or Masseria Torre del Diamante

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 – 67 km (12 - 41 miles)

Morning

Hotel to Il Frantoio: 28 km (17 miles)

Afternoon

Il Frantoio to Hotel: 20 km (12 miles)

Il Frantoio to Hotel Plus (moderate): 19 km (12 miles)

What to Expect: An inland bike ride in a rural setting passing through charming, small villages. An optional moderate ride will take you up to the hill of Ostuni and down toward the ocean before joining the Traian road back to the hotel. The regular afternoon ride avoids the hill and takes you through the countryside on the quiet, historical Traian road to the hotel.

DAY 3: Cycle to Egnatia and Monopoli

After breakfast, you'll cycle along the coast on quiet roads, completely surrounded by ancient olive trees. Puglia ranks first in Italy in the production of olive oil, wine, and hay, and second for almonds. You'll stop on the way to explore the archeological site of Egnatia, an ancient Messapian (and later Roman) coastal town of great economic and military importance in the 10th century. The museum on the grounds includes precious finds such as sculptures, jewels, funeral equipment, and *gnathia* which is the distinctive local pottery which usually features figurative painting on the upper half and ornamental designs on the lower portion. Later, continue to Monopoli, where you'll have the chance to visit the beautiful cathedral and old harbor. You'll have free time to stroll and eat lunch on your own. Walk the maze of pedestrian streets in Monopoli's old city center and see how they make the city so intimate.

Shuttle or ride back along the sea to your *masseria* and enjoy the amenities. Dinner is included at the *Masseria* restaurant.

Accommodation: Masseria Torre Coccaro, Savelletri

Alternate Hotels: Masseria Calderisi or Masseria Torre del Diamante

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 – 66 km (11 - 40 miles)

Morning

Hotel to Monopoli: 27 km (16 miles)

Afternoon

Monopoli to Hotel: 18 km (11 miles)

Monopoli to Hotel Plus (moderate): 23 km (14 miles)

What to Expect: The coastal terrain is flat and there is an optional stop at the end of the ride at our *masseria's* private beach, with a short shuttle back to hotel. An additional ride option provides a moderate trek inland from Monopoli on a beautiful, long and gradual uphill, followed by a rolling, hilly road and a very scenic downhill to our *masseria*.

DAY 4: Acaya / Cycle along the coast of Salento

Leave Savelletri and take a morning shuttle further south to embark on another day of your stunning Puglia bike ride towards Salento. You'll begin at the walled city of Acaya and ride through the ancient city's archway on country roads which are free from traffic and marked as bike paths. You'll finish your morning ride at the rugged coast where you will enjoy the spectacular view of Torre dell'Orso village, rising steeply from the sea and sandy bay. The village is a good spot to buy some lunch before either hitting the road again or taking a shuttle to the hotel. The afternoon offers more fun cycling on quiet country roads and along the small Alimini Lakes as you head to your next *masseria*.

After settling into your cozy accommodations, enjoy the hotel amenities or simply relax with a good book. Dinner is at a nearby *masseria* tonight.

Accommodation: Masseria Montelauro, Otranto

Alternate Hotels: Masseria Muntibianchi

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 – 44 km (11 - 27 miles)

Morning

Acaya to Torre dell'Orso: 18 km (11 miles)

Afternoon

Torre dell'Orso to Hotel: 26 km (16 miles)

What to Expect: A beautiful bike ride in the countryside mostly on marked bike roads to Torre dell'Orso on the sea where we'll break for lunch. In the afternoon you'll have a choice of a shuttle to the hotel or cycling more lovely country roads with some easy rolling hills by the Alimini Lakes, followed by a final flat stretch to our *masseria*.

DAY 5: Cycle to Otranto / Picnic by an organic farm / Discover Otranto

Bike from your hotel on country roads through sleepy villages, where a stop in a colorful local bar for an Italian coffee can be a wonderful diversion. Your route is shaded by big olive trees and towering oaks as you head toward the coast. By lunch, you'll reach an organic farm near the sea, where the friendly owners, Antonio and Marina, will open their private garden to host a picnic lunch prepared by your trip leaders.

After lunch, discover Otranto, a picturesque town on the Italian coast. Founded by the Greeks, Otranto is surrounded by great ramparts and walls. Starting in late spring, its atmosphere is enlivened by local craft studios selling clay whistles, baskets, hand-dyed fabric, and ceramics. The city's highlight is Otranto Cathedral's enormous, 8,611-square-foot floor mosaic representing the Tree of Life which was created by a monk in 1163. A visit to Otranto is also your opportunity to switch sports and take a dip in the sea.

Today's ride ends on flat country roads, where you'll catch sight of *menhirs* and *dolmens*—ancient monoliths and tombs—before returning to your hotel. This evening, you can dine on your own at the hotel or shuttle to Otranto for dinner at one of the many outdoor cafés or restaurants.

Accommodation: Masseria Montelauro, Otranto

Alternate Hotels: Masseria Muntibianchi

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 7 – 49 km (4 – 30.5 miles)

Morning

Hotel to Agriturismo Fontanelle: 33 km (20.5 miles)

Afternoon

Agriturismo Fontanelle to Otranto: 7 km (4 miles)

Otranto to Hotel: 9 km (6 miles)

What to Expect: Most of today's riding is the morning to give you time in the afternoon to explore the historical capital of Salento, the city of Otranto and possibly go for a swim. The ride takes us inland from our *masseria* on paved country roads free from car traffic. The afternoon ride is a short and flat route through olive groves to our your next *masseria*. An optional additional ride is an easy to moderate loop with undulating terrain starting from Otranto.

DAY 6: Discover the Eastern Tip of Italy

After breakfast, you'll set out on one of the best rides in all of Italy. Starting in the interior of Salento, you'll follow gentle, rural pathways through little villages to the coastal town of Castro Marina. From there, you'll continue to Santa Cesarea, a quiet town set on the edge of the Adriatic Sea, where you can enjoy lunch on your own in one of the many cozy cafes. Fortified, you'll follow the cliffs to the town of Porto Badisco, famous for its azure waters and prehistoric Cervi Grottoes, before continuing to Cape Otranto, the easternmost tip of Italy. You'll cycle back to the hotel in time to freshen up before an extraordinary farewell dinner with Puglia wines and specialties at your *masseria* restaurant.

Accommodation: Masseria Montelauro, Otranto

Alternate Hotels: Masseria Muntibianchi

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 14 – 57 km (9 – 35 miles)

Morning

Hotel to Santa Cesarea Terme: 25 km (15 miles)

Afternoon

Hotel to Santa Cesarea Terme: 14 km (9 miles)

Santa Cesarea Terme to Hotel Plus (moderate): 18 km (11 miles)

What to Expect: This mostly coastal ride is probably the most panoramic bike ride of the week. There is one major uphill after lunch, which can be skipped with a short support vehicle shuttle. The longer afternoon ride has more coastal riding along a road with a bit more traffic and is rated as moderate.

DAY 7: Transfer to Lecce / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

After breakfast, transfer to the Brindisi airport, arriving at approximately 11:30 a.m.

Important: Flight departures from Brindisi prior to 1:30 p.m. are not recommended; those departing earlier must make transfer arrangements at their own expense from the last hotel in Otranto to Brindisi (approximately 1 hour). The cost of a taxi to the Brindisi airport is approximately 80 euros (\$87 USD). The motorcoach will first stop in Lecce to drop VBT Air Package guests and then continue to the Brindisi airport. You are welcome to get off in Lecce if you prefer.

Accommodation: Patria Palace Hotel, Lecce

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8: Depart for Home

Fly home or continue your journey with an optional post-trip extension in Rome.

Find detailed itineraries at vbt.com.

After breakfast, transfer to the Brindisi airport for your flight to Rome or back home. VBT recommends that you check the transfer time in your "Transfer Reminder" the night before your flight. The transfer is prearranged with the reception desk and is prepaid by VBT.

Please note: If you extend your stay beyond the scheduled program dates, return transportation to the airport will be at your own expense.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Masseria Torre Coccaro Hotel (Days: 1,2,3)

The fortified Masseria Torre Coccaro was built in the 16th century and is known today for its watchtower and the centuries-old olive groves and carob trees that surround it. It has retained the simple and characteristic whitewashed look of old masserie, but this 5-star resort is a relaxing oasis of tranquility, where food is still artfully prepared from local produce grown on the property and the rooms have air conditioning. The onsite Aveda Health Club has a unique setting in a series of evocative caves. Its Jacuzzi pools are kept at different temperatures, and its hammam (Turkish bath) offers beauty treatments and relaxing massages. The private sandy beach with umbrellas and sunchairs is at your disposal, as is the beautifully designed swimming pool nestled among the olive trees and palms—perfect

for a refreshing dip.

Masseria Muntibianchi (Days: 4,5,6)

Nestled among century-old olive trees and graced with the natural fragrance of the Mediterranean landscape and the nearby sea of Otranto, Masseria Muntibianchi is a peaceful oasis. Though recently constructed, its white walls evoke the traditional local *pietra leccese* stone, and its architecture is inspired by traditional countryside estates. There is a private pool set in the courtyard, and a cozy reading room inside. Your rooms has an en-suite bath with shower and other comforts, such as free Wi-Fi, air-conditioning and heating, 32" satellite TV, safe, mini-bar, electronic locks, wake-up service, hair dryer, and a line of courtesy cosmetics.