

## Italy: Coastal Villages of Tuscany

### Bike Vacation Only

Tuscany's stunningly beautiful coast begs to be explored by bicycle, and we've mapped out our Tuscany bike tour to offer the most breathtaking experiences. Picturesque towns dot the countryside with a patchwork of colors, surrounded by cypress, cork, and pine forests that hug the azure waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Discover Etruscan and medieval history in magnificent hilltop villages and hamlets. Dine alongside gracious local hosts, enjoying seasonal, farm-fresh cuisine from their organic gardens. Sample smooth olive oils while learning about different pressing methods. Taste varieties of celebrated wines along the picturesque Strada del Vino. Finally, rejuvenate in the natural pool and springs of an Etruscan Calidarium. This is Tuscany, VBT style.

### Cultural Highlights

- Ride Italy's renowned wine route, the Strada del Vino
- Savor a meal and learn how to prepare it with the founder of Cooking in Tuscany at her home
- Sample freshly pressed olive oil and enjoy lunch and a tour at the Fonte di Foiano olive-oil mill
- Cycle to 10th-century Suvereto via the breathtaking Etruscan Coast
- Rejuvenate in the Etruscan hot springs

### What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills, and is ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists. Our VBT support shuttle is always available for those who need assistance with the hills.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 7 - 48

**Average Cycling Time:** 00:45 - 03:30

### Climate Information

**Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

Apr 68°/46°, May 75°/53°, Jun 84°/58°, Sep 81°/58°, Oct 69°/51°

**Average Rainfall (in.)**

Apr 2.9, May 3.0, Jun 2.7, Sep 3.3, Oct 4.0

## DAY 1: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Travel to Collemezzano / Warm-up ride

Your tour starts at 11:30 a.m. at our Florence hotel (Hotel De La Ville, Piazza Antinori 1, Firenze, phone +39 055 2381805). Your trip leaders will meet you in the lobby wearing VBT staff garments. You will travel by private coach to Collemezzano, stopping along the way so you can buy lunch. If your arrival at our Florence hotel is later than 11:30 a.m. or if you are delayed, you must take a taxi (approximately two hours) at your own expense (approximately €180) to the Agrihotel Elisabetta. Additionally, if you are heading to the centrally located meeting point from Florence's city center, you must travel at your own expense. Contact the Florence hotel to advise them of any travel delays or changes and ask the front desk to pass the message on to your VBT trip leaders.

On arrival in Collemezzano, you will proceed to the Agrihotel Elisabetta, a family-run *agriturismo* hotel that produces much of its own wine, olive oil, fruit and vegetables. This inviting accommodation and its smiling owner, Luigi Brunetti, will surely enchant you. After settling in, meet your trip leaders to officially begin your Tuscany bike tour with a safety and bike-fitting session before a short warm-up ride over gentle hills, past old farmhouses shaded by cypress trees. Later this afternoon, our gregarious host Luigi will take you on a guided tour of his wine cellar which in Italy is called a cantina. Here, sample some of Luigi's varietals while sharing the day's stories with your small group. Dinner is at the hotel restaurant.

Today's Ride Choice

Afternoon: Warm-up Cecina – 14 km (8 miles)

What to Expect: A pleasant countryside loop around our *agriturismo* traversing slightly rolling terrain. Enjoy bucolic vistas and little car traffic.

Cumulative Distance Range: 14 km (8 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

## DAY 2: Ride the road of the “3 Comuni” / Costa degli Etruschi

After breakfast, today's Tuscany bike tour takes you on a jaunt along a scenic road from Castellina Marittima across Maremma Pisana, riding high in the foothills of the Cecina Valley. Your view from these splendid hills extends from the coast and faraway islands to the valley nestled between the Tyrrhenian Sea and the mountains on Tuscany's Costa degli Etruschi—the Etruscan Coast. During this invigorating ride through the rolling countryside, you will pass the “3 Comuni,” or three hilltop towns, and pedal your way to Casale Marittimo, the most picturesque of the trio. You'll admire its medieval castle and the 12th-century Sant'Andrea Church. For lunch, you will gather at a scenic spot with your fellow riders for a

delicious picnic prepared by your trip leaders.

Afterward, continue cycling downhill through the charming village of Bibbona, entering the fragrant Cecina pine forest. Your route back to the hotel traces the azure sea waters, giving you a chance to go for a swim if you wish. If you prefer, you may return in the shuttle. This evening is yours to spend at your leisure at Agrihotel Elisabetta, where dinner is on your own.

#### Today's Ride Choice

Morning: Castellina Marittima to Casale Marittimo – 23 km (14 miles) | Castellina Marittima to Casale Marittimo Plus – 32 km (20 miles)

Afternoon: Casale Marittimo to the Etruscan Coast and hotel – 30 km (19 miles)

What to Expect: After a 20-minute shuttle up to Castellina Marittima, enjoy a long scenic downhill ride into the Cecina Valley. Then climb up to Montescudaio to begin riding the rolling “Strada dei 3 Comuni”, connecting the three hilltop villages of Montescudaio, Guardistallo, and Casale Marittimo. Those with additional energy can ride a longer, moderate loop in the hills before lunch. Then, thrill to an exhilarating descent to the sea, riding through a cool, fragrant pine forest on an unpaved, but well-beaten path. Your ride finishes with paved city streets and bike paths heading to your hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 23 – 62 km (14 – 39 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 3: Cycle Cecina Mare and the Strada del Vino / Visit an Olive Oil Mill / Spa and Beach time**

Begin your day by pedaling the Cecina Mare promenade on route to the Strada del Vino, one of the most beautiful of Italy’s wine roads. Your route skirts the Ornellaia vineyards, traversing gently rolling hills. You will stop at the family-owned and operated Fonte di Foiano olive oil mill. During your visit, you’ll meet the Di Gaetano family, who will lead you on a private tour of the press and workshop. Taste the oil during a *degustazione* (sampling) on the terrace. During your tasting, Simone Di Gaetano will explain the differences between the various flavors of Italy’s olive-growing regions. Afterward, find your place at the table on the farm’s grounds for a delicious vegetarian lunch prepared by Simone’s brother and chef, Paolo, using fragrant, organic vegetables.

This afternoon, shuttle to the Tombolo Talasso Resort, your deluxe hotel right on the Tyrrhenian Sea, or continue cycling on easy back roads. You might stretch out in the sand at the hotel’s private beach, or relax in one of the five thermal swimming pools at the Wellness Center. Filtered water is pumped directly

from the sea into the pools. Tonight, you'll gather together for an Italian *aperitivo* with your VBT trip leaders. They can suggest a restaurant for dinner on your own in the lovely seaside village of Marina di Castagneto.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Collemezzano to Fonte di Foiano Oil Mill – 36 km (22 miles)

Afternoon: Fonte di Foiano to Il Tombolo – 11 km (7 miles)

What to Expect: This morning's ride is initially flat and includes a stretch through a pine forest on three miles of well-packed, unpaved terrain along the beach and sea. After the first 10 miles, the route meanders past vineyards on a moderately rolling route and along the famous 'bolgherese' road, named after the medieval village of Bolgheri. These panoramic routes are very popular also with local cyclists. The last miles are flat as you approach the sea and continue to the hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 11 – 47 km (7 – 29 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 4: Bike Shop / Cooking Class

After breakfast, your Tuscany bike tour continues through the historic Strada del Vino. You will get to Bolgheri, one of the most prestigious wine regions in Italy. In addition to its own DOC (Denominazione di Origine Controllata or Denomination of Controlled Origin) wines, you will want to sample the Super Tuscans – red wines that revolutionized the Italian winemaking industry. Bolgheri is also known for its Viale dei Cipressi, a cypress-lined avenue immortalized in the poem "San Guido" by Giosue Carducci. You may want to stroll along this boulevard after enjoying lunch on your own.

After lunch on your own, cycle back to your hotel, stopping at Daniela's excellent bicycle shop – a local treasure - along the way. In the evening, enjoy a home-hosted dinner in a typical Tuscan country house. Your host, Chicca (pronounced "Key-ka"), will open her home and you will get the opportunity to join her in cooking dinner. Chicca is the founder of Cooking in Tuscany, a culinary-gastronomic association that promotes traditional Italian and Tuscan cuisine in Italy and abroad. The goals of the association are to experiment with and research traditional recipes, to use and emphasize seasonal products, and to promote the culture and tradition of the region through knowledge of local ingredients. And, of course, to share the hospitality and warmth of an Italian family! Chicca will present a one-hour, hands-on cooking class, after which you will have the chance to dine on your own creations at sunset under the pergola.

## Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Bolgheri and La Strada del Vino – 23 km (14 miles) OR Bolgheri and La Strada del Vino Plus – 34 km (20 miles)

Afternoon: Bolgheri to Il Tombolo – 18 km (11 miles)

What to Expect: The morning ride sets a relaxed pace for the day, with either a short or longer option along the Strada del Vino to our lunch stop. You will bike on country roads lined with hundreds of olive trees. After lunch, follow a different route that includes 1.6 km (1 mile) on an unpaved bike path in a pine forest, back to our hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 – 52 km (11 – 31 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 5: Cycle Castagneto, Sassetta, and Suvereto / Enjoy Natural Hot Springs

Today's adventure from Castagneto follows one of the most picturesque routes in Europe. Cycling past chestnut, cork and pine trees, medieval estates, and sunflower fields, you will arrive in Suvereto, an ancient village whose origins date to the year 1000. Overlooking the Costa degli Etruschi in the green valley beside the Cornia River, it is a true jewel, rich in history and art. Suvereto displays remarkable architectural harmony: Its ancient walls enclose paved streets lined with stone houses, historic buildings, impressive churches and shadowy cloisters. You will stop for lunch in Suvereto before continuing into the peaceful Cornia Valley on a beautiful rolling and mostly downhill road, free from car traffic.

A longer loop takes you further south to Cura Nuova on a country road. Our destination, and home for the next two nights, is the peaceful Hotel Calidario. The hotel boasts a unique natural open-air 3,000 square meter pool, formed by the hot springs, rich in minerals, flowing from a granite basin situated deep in the rocks behind the hotel. The area is home to a number of Cornia Valley natural parks which include several Roman and Etruscan finds. The waters of the area were used by the Etruscans to melt metals.

After a wonderful day of cycling, settle in, relax and enjoy the springs and hotel spa. Tonight, try the wood-fired pizza of the hotel, prepared with several different organic doughs, or select another item from the menu.

## Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Il Tombolo to Suvereto – 31 km (19 miles) | Sassetta to Suvereto with Shuttle – 15 km (9 miles)

Afternoon: Suvereto to Calidarium – 20 km (12 miles) OR Suvereto to Cura Nuova and Calidarium – 47 km (28 miles)

What to Expect: Today's morning ride can begin with a shuttle or an uphill climb to Castagneto Carducci. From there, it follows a scenic and undulating stretch of road to Suvereto. If you wish, you may shuttle to Sassetta to begin your ride to Suvereto, trimming 16.1 km (10 miles) off your morning route before our lunch stop. The afternoon ride follows an easy and downhill route to Hotel Calidario. The longer extra ride is mostly easy with some slightly rolling hills, far from car traffic, in the beautiful hills of Cornia Park.

Cumulative Distance Range: 15 – 78 km (9 – 47 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 6: Explore Campiglia Marittima, Baratti Bay and the ancient city of Populonia**

After breakfast, shuttle or cycle to Campiglia Marittima. This was an ancient Etruscan center where metals were forged and melted. You will cycle by the Archeological Mines Park of San Silvestro, a protected natural park where copper, lead ores, and other minerals have been mined for centuries, and today is a museum. You will follow a winding panoramic route sloping down through a plain, a thick pine forest, and finally to the edge of the Tuscan sea. After parking your bikes at the bay of Baratti, you will have time to swim or explore the area's Etruscan archeological sites including burial mounds. Baratti is a tiny hamlet of only 15 residents, but that number swells on weekends and during the summer with people windsurfing, swimming, or walking the trails. We will have lunch in a former watch tower, turned into a fine restaurant overlooking the bay. Early in the afternoon, a short shuttle will take you up the hill for more views across the water. You will discover the neighboring city of Populonia which had a very active port during the Etruscan and Roman eras, importing iron ore from the near Isle of Elba and trading finished metal goods. The remains of this once-thriving but abandoned area is preserved within this walled city.

Ride back to your hotel, enjoy more relaxation and maybe a massage in the hotel spa. Your Tuscany bike tour concludes here, and tonight you'll enjoy a memorable farewell dinner with your fellow cyclists.

Today's Ride Choices:

Morning: Hotel to Campiglia (moderate) – 6 km (4 miles) | Campiglia Marittima to Baratti – 26 km (15 miles)

Afternoon: Baratti to Hotel Calidarium – 15 km (9 miles)

This morning you can shuttle to start an easy valley ride from the hilltop town of Campiglia Marittima or

ride from the hotel to Campiglia for an extra 4 miles of uphill challenge. Today's gentle hills leave you ample time to explore Baratti's seaside bay and then retrace your route back to the hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 15 – 47 km (9 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Travel to Rome / Free Time / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends**

After breakfast, transportation is provided to our Rome hotel. Your trip ends here between 11:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. You are responsible for your own transportation to the airport for your flight home.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **Accommodations**

May vary depending on departure date.

### **Agrihotel Elisabetta (Days: 1,2)**

Luigi Brunetti's Agrihotel Elisabetta is situated on a hill in the village of Collemezzano, today part of Cecina in the province of Livorno. After many years as a successful chef across Europe, Luigi realized his dream of returning to Italy and purchasing a farm. Today, this farm and vintage farmhouse—surrounded by vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees—welcomes guests into 31 country-style rooms. While here you'll enjoy wine, fruit, and olive oil produced on the premises, as well as gourmet cuisine prepared by Luigi himself and served in the hotel's restaurant. Enjoy panoramic views from the terrace, take a dip in the pool, and retire to your comfortable room with air conditioning, television, telephone, minibar, and private bath with shower. WiFi is available in the lobby and in select rooms.

### **Tombolo Thalasso Resort (Days: 3,4)**

The Tombolo Talasso Resort is set on its own private beach in the charming seaside village of Marina di Castagneto Carducci on the Etruscan Coast. During your stay, you'll be surrounded by enchanting views of green hills, vineyards, and olive groves. Indulge in the luxurious wellness center, where five thermal pools are fed by sea water and where massages and other treatments help soothe the soul and relax the body. All rooms are air conditioned and have a flat-screen TV with SKY channels, a minibar, telephone, hairdryer, and bathroom with shower or bathtub. WiFi is available throughout the resort. The hotel's private beach, sun chairs and umbrellas as well as the changing cabins are free for guests and there is a brand new restaurant on the beach.

## Hotel Calidario Terme Etrusche (Days: 5,6)

The hotel is part of a property built around the natural pool of the hot springs of Venturina. A 3,000 square meter lake channels the water, flowing almost constantly year-round and maintaining a temperature of approximately 32° C. Water comes from two outlets placed at one end, below the hill where the spring is located deep underground. The property has several special amenities, including a lovely, small stone church, quaint rooms, a cozy restaurant, spa, reception area, large sun terrace, and lushly landscaped walking trail. Although the air-conditioned hotel has 4-star services and amenities, it prefers to keep a lower profile and with an official 3-star rating due to the limited number of rooms, there is no 24-hour reception. The pace is relaxing and peaceful. The spa, with its brick vaulted ceiling and Tepidarium, is a great complement to the thermal pool. Treatments can be booked. Entry to the pool is complementary to VBT guests but entry to the spa costs 20 Euros.