

Italy: Valleys of the Dolomites

Bike Vacation Only

A very different side of Italy is unveiled on this uniquely rewarding tour to the country's German-flavored north. Road cycling the Dolomites was never easier, as you spin along mostly flat or downhill bike paths, breathing in fresh mountain air and marveling at spectacular vistas of mountain peaks, sparkling lakes, lush forests, emerald meadows, and countryside dotted with picturesque farms and villages. Along the way, you'll explore historic cities, meet an ancient culture found nowhere else on Earth, and enter the dual Austrian-Italian ambiance of Tyrol. You'll also be fueled by tasty meals of local specialties and end each day in 4-star accommodations—including a chic health resort set amid pampering thermal springs. Don't miss this chance to experience the Dolomites—VBT style!



Cultural Highlights

- Marvel at the scenic alpine vistas that surround you as you cycle easy bike paths

- Gain a rare glimpse into the ancient Ladin culture, and feast on mountain specialties
- Thrill to a 1,900-foot (580-meter) descent along the Val Venosta Bike Path
- Enter into the dual Austrian-Italian culture of the South Tyrol, as you explore the little city of San Candido
- Savor a spectacularly scenic barbecue lunch and perhaps stroll to roaring waterfalls
- Discover the city of Brunico and its pedestrian area, full of cafés, gelato shops, and boutiques
- Explore the beautiful cathedral, cloister, and palace of Bressanone on a guided walking tour

What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain and is suitable for beginning cyclists who are comfortable with extended downhill rides and riding on packed gravel paths. Additional miles on easy/moderate terrain offer options for more avid cyclists. Our VBT support shuttle is always available for those who need assistance with hills. Hybrid bikes are best for performance in this area. We highly recommend training on hills prior to this tour.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 4 - 36

Average Cycling Time: 00:30 - 03:45

Group size: 20 max

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 72°/49°, Jun 79°/56°, Jul 79°/59°, Aug 81°/61°, Sep 75°/55°, Oct 63°/47°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 2.8, Jun 2.5, Jul 1.5, Aug 2.6, Sep 2.2, Oct 2.7

DAY 1: Transfer to Cortina d'Ampezzo / Warm-up ride / Welcome reception & dinner

Meet your fellow travelers and VBT representative at 10:00 a.m. at the Venice airport. The meeting point is the bar called Café CULTO at the WATER TRANSPORT terminal of Venice Marco Polo airport.

If you arrive from the airport terminal: Follow the blue WATER TRANSPORT sign inside the arrival terminal. You will take an elevator to the first floor (departure terminal). Make a right turn outside the elevator and keep following the blue sign. You will be soon walking on a walkway for 3-4 minutes. At the bottom of the walkway, take the escalator down and turn left. Walk all the way (approximately 200 feet

[61 meters] from the escalator) to the end of the dock, until you see Café CULTO at the very bottom. If you arrive by water with Alilaguna boat: You will find Café CULTO immediately on your right as you disembark. Your VBT representative will be holding a VBT sign. Once the group is gathered, you will depart for Cortina d'Ampezzo by private coach. If you need to contact our representative, her name is Claire, and her mobile phone number is +39 347 563 7921.

If your 10:00 a.m. arrival is delayed, please contact our hotel in Cortina d'Ampezzo to advise staff of the delay, and they will pass your message along to your VBT trip leaders. In the event of delays, also please see page 3 of "For Travel-Related Emergencies." VBT highly recommends flying to Italy at least one day before the tour begins. This allows you to rest and recover from jet lag before you begin sightseeing and cycling.

You'll arrive in Cortina in time for lunch on your own. The hotel is located in the heart of the city, a few steps from the main shopping and pedestrian area full of life, elegant shops, restaurants, and trendy cafés. After lunch, enjoy time to settle into your hotel. Later, your VBT trip leaders will discuss the rules of bike safety and provide you with specific tips for riding on sloped and gravel paths as you begin road cycling the Dolomites. Afterward, join them for a warm-up ride.

Tonight, enjoy a welcome cocktail reception in the hotel's cozy bar, followed by a special welcome dinner in the hotel restaurant. Some local Ampezzan specialties will immerse you in culinary traditions influenced by both Austrian Tyrol and Italian Veneto kitchens.

Accommodation: Hotel Europa, Cortina d'Ampezzo

Included Meals: Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 6 km (4 miles)

Afternoon

Cortina d'Ampezzo Warm-up: 6 km (4 miles)

What to Expect: Today's warm up-ride unfolds on a well-paved and well-marked bike path that by-passes the city of Cortina d'Ampezzo but is totally free from any car traffic. You will cycle it back and forth.

DAY 2: Cycle to Cadore / Picnic with trip leaders

After breakfast, set out on a downhill spin along the Boite River Valley on the Dolomites Bike Path. This invigorating descent begins at 4,000 feet (1,220 meters) and ends at 3,000 feet (850 meters), in Valle di

Cadore. This scenic path was once a railway that connected the little villages of the Cadore mountain community. Le Tofane mountain range marks your progress. Soon you'll admire the towering pyramidal peak of Antelao to your left and the saddle-like summit of Mount Pelmo to your right. The latter is a nature reserve that protects many prehistoric fossils and dinosaur footprints.

You are now in the Ampezzan Valley, one of the four historic Ladin valleys. The Ladins—a population evolved from Celtic tribes and Roman soldiers—call this lovely pocket of Italy home. Long remote and secluded from the rest of Italy, they remain a proud people whose rare language, Ladin, is closely related to Swiss Romansh, Surselvan, and Friulian. It is also still spoken in nearby Austro-Italian border regions.

The two Italian provinces of Trento and Bolzano are administratively independent from the rest of Italy, affording them a degree of autonomy. In particular, Cortina retains its own legislative system, one that is unique in the Dolomites: a council known as Regole d'Ampezzo. Under the *regole* and the ancient Celtic structure of property ownership, the 800 original families administer the community's common land, which cannot be split or sold to outsiders or other families.

Enjoy a lunch of mountain specialties during a picnic in a panoramic setting along your route. Early this afternoon, you may shuttle or cycle back to Cortina, where you have time to explore on your own. Take an easy walk around Cortina following the VBT route directions, or visit the Ethnography Museum to view its collection of antique tools and cultural artifacts. In the summertime, ride a gondola to the slopes of Le Tofane or Faloria to enjoy breathtaking alpine vistas. Or take a taxi and a walk to the open-air Museum of the Great War, set on the peaks of Rifugio 5-Torri, one of the most fascinating and moving excursions in the Dolomites. Dinner is on your own tonight; in the summer, you may opt to dine at a *rifugio* in the mountains.

After dinner, we recommend a stroll in Cortina. In the summer, your visit might coincide with a cultural event, folk festival, or classical music concert.

Accommodation: Hotel Europa, Cortina d'Ampezzo

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 - 54 km (17 - 34 miles)

Morning

Cortina to Cadore: 27.2 km (17 miles)

Afternoon

Cadore to Cortina: 27.1 km (17 miles)

What to Expect: Descend via an old rail trail that links Dobbiaco to Calalzo. Our morning ride follows the downhill stretch of this trail, which is mostly on gravel bike paths. You start in Cortina and end in Valle di Cadore, losing 1,000 feet (305 meters) elevation. For a longer and easy/moderate option, you may return the same way.

DAY 3: Ride bike paths to Dobbiaco, San Candido, and Brunico

This morning a brief shuttle takes you on the scenic Cimabanche Pass and Lake Landro, where you start biking an easy downhill and flat ride on bike paths to Dobbiaco and San Candido. The views on the way are spectacular: You'll pedal past Pomagagnon Mountain, Tre Cime di Lavaredo (the famous "Three Peaks"), and picturesque Toblacher Lake. En route, you might stop to pay tribute to the fallen of World War I at an intimate cemetery at the foothills of Monte Piana.

As you arrive in Dobbiaco, the landscape changes: rugged mountains skirted with green and roadside alpine lakes give way to open meadows and emerald pastures dotted with large, isolated farmhouses, or *masi*. Snow-capped peaks rise in the distance. This is the Pusteria Valley, a paradise for cyclists with its network of bike paths, bike hotels, and bike shops aimed at promoting an environmentally friendly lifestyle and healthy discovery of the valleys.

Soon, you'll arrive in San Candido in South Tyrol, close to the Austrian border. After lunch here, there'll be time for a stroll in this millennium-old little city. Visit the ancient, Romanesque Duomo della Collegiata—the oldest monastery in the Dolomites—and drink at one of the many stone fountains in the cobblestone pedestrian area. The Pusteria Valley is rich in history and legend, as it was on the ancient trade route to Aguntum (now in Austria) from Rome.

Later, cycle along the Upper Pusteria Valley to Brunico through lush meadows, sylvan forests, and charming villages, always following the course of the Rienza River. As you ride through the heart of South Tyrol, you'll experience a strong Austrian influence in the language (all signs are first in German and then Italian), the architectural features, and the local traditions. The terrain here is paved except for some short stretches in the woods. VBT offers both an easy and an easy-to-moderate ride. Later, you arrive at your hotel in Riscone, beautifully situated at the foothills of the Plan de Corones mountain ridge. You're sure to feel comfortable and even spoiled here: The hotel features a large garden, an indoor swimming pool fed by pristine mountain springs, in-room waterbeds, and sauna options. Dinner is served at the elegant hotel restaurant and includes a large salad buffet of fresh, locally sourced produce.

Accommodation: Park Hotel Schoenblick, Riscone

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 – 54 km (10 - 33 miles)

Morning

Lake Landro to San Candido: 17 km (10 miles)

Afternoon

San Candido to Riscone with Shuttle: 17 km (10 miles)

OR

San Candido to Riscone: 37 km (23 miles)

What to Expect: Start with a shuttle up the Cimabanche Pass and Lake Landro. The easiest legs of today's ride are from Lake Landro and San Candido (your lunch stop) and between San Candido and Monguelfo. Some short stretches are on well-beaten gravel bike path, but most of your ride is on well-paved bike paths. From Monguelfo, take the VBT shuttle to the hotel or continue cycling an easy/moderate stretch (with unpaved sections in the woods) to Riscone.

DAY 4: Cycle through the Aurina and Tures valleys

After breakfast, begin cycling across the wide Plan de Corones plateau. On the way, you can admire the traditional *masi* farmhouses above Brunico. Later, discover the beauty of the valleys of Aurina and Tures. About 90% of today's route follows easy paths along the Aurino River, by high mountains dotted with slope-hugging castles and cattle farms. Brunico was built in a strategic position at the crossroads of four valleys; the castles you see once watched and defended the territory. Ride past tidy hamlets of wooden houses, high steeples, well-manicured gardens, and cattle pens.

Lunch is included today in a spectacularly scenic spot, a special barbecue meal of tasty meats and crispy vegetables prepared by our host, Mani. After lunch, you may take a short easy walk to the roaring Riva waterfalls, perhaps choosing to explore these lovely surroundings further and hike to the higher waterfall. Afterward, bike back to your hotel, or hop a shuttle and pamper yourself at the hotel spa. An optional easy-to-moderate loop is also offered if you feel energetic and wish to ride more! If you're cycling back to your hotel, pause on your way to discover the city of Brunico and its pedestrian area, full of cafés, gelato shops, and boutiques. Or visit Ripa Castle, once the summer residence of prince-bishops. Today, it is one of the five museum-castles that world-famous mountain climber Reinhold Messner has transformed into a cultural center dedicated to mountain people from four continents.

Accommodation: Park Hotel Schoenblick, Riscone

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 46 km (11 - 27 miles)

Morning

Riscone to Wasserfallbar: 27 km (16 miles)

Afternoon

Wasserfallbar to Riscone: 19 km (11 miles)

What to Expect: At the base of the Vedrette di Ries Mountains (3,436 meters/11,273 feet), ride the Val di Tures, stretching between the Valle Aurina and the Vetta d'Italia Mountain. The ride is mostly on a well-paved bike path. Throughout your ride, admire Dolomite mountains that soar as high as 3,510 meters (11,516 feet). The last 2 km (1.2 miles) back to your hotel are uphill; you can choose to take our shuttle with your trip leaders.

DAY 5: Ride the Isarco River Valley / Bressanone

This morning, join the picturesque Pusteria Valley bike path along the Rienza River and enjoy a beautiful ride through forests, tiny villages, and covered bridges. Your ride will end in Fortezza, where you will be in sight of the mighty fortress built under the Austrian Emperor Franz I, and the Sachsenklemme, a place that had a significant role to play in the Tyrolean freedom fights of 1809.

Before lunch, shuttle into the medieval city of Bressanone. Located at the confluence of the Rienza and Isarco rivers, it was an important religious center, evidenced by its cathedral, with its beautiful frescoed and sculptured cloister; the Hofburg Bishopric Palace; and the stone city gates. The narrow, porticoed streets and multicolored houses will capture your heart as you follow your local guide Gerdi on a walking tour. After the tour enjoy lunch on your own.

Early this afternoon, shuttle to Merano. Your hotel is centrally located on the pedestrian Kurpromenade on the River Adige, opposite the historic Kurhouse. There'll be time before dinner to relax, perhaps enjoy the wellness center and pool, or indulge in the famous thermal pools for which Merano is known.

Like Cortina, Merano is a vibrant cultural city, offering concerts and entertainment on summer evenings. The city features great gourmet restaurants and fine wine bars.

Accommodation: Hotel Terme Merano, Merano

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 34 km (21 miles)

Morning

Casteldarne to Fortezza: 34 km (21 miles)

What to Expect: Exit the Val Pusteria and cycle through the Eisack/ Isarco River valley to Fortezza. Part of the ride is unpaved on bike paths and in the woods. In Fortezza, the bike path ends, and you board a 20-minute shuttle to Bressanone so that you may spend some time on your own in this historic and pedestrian town. You will not cycle in the afternoon. After a short walking tour of Bressanone with a local guide, transfer to Merano.

DAY 6: Glorenza / Venosta Valley

Today, prepare for a particularly picturesque ride during your final day road cycling Dolomites, as you gradually descend and follow the course of the river. You'll start riding in the Renaissance village of Glorenza, surrounded by mountain peaks, and you'll cycle through dozens of sprawling apple orchards, for which Venosta Valley is famous. You'll also pass vineyards and castles adorning the slopes. In late August, you roll by many tractors and farmers tending to their fields. It's sure to be one of your more memorable rides. For lunch on your own, we recommend pausing at one of the restaurants that you find along the river.

If you feel energetic, you can ride all the way back to Merano. Otherwise, we have planned to shuttle you by local train (a 20-30 minute ride), a very popular and convenient option for bikers and locals in this area.

Later tonight in Merano, raise a glass of Blauburgunder wine and toast the week over a farewell dinner in a typical local restaurant and Biergarten.

Accommodation: Hotel Terme Merano, Merano

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 25 – 61 km (15 - 37 miles)

Morning

Glorenza to Castelbello: 36 km (22 miles)

Afternoon

Castelbello to Merano: 25 km (15 miles)

What to Expect: Today's ride follows the Val Venosta Bike Path, starting from an altitude of 2,975 feet (907 meters) and gradually descending. Most of the path is on well-paved terrain, with a very short stretch unpaved. The short option ends at Castelbello train station after 22 miles (35 km) and a descent of 1,050 feet (320 meters). If you choose this option, you will embark a train to Merano. Your trip leader will handle your ticket and show you where to leave your bike. Today's longer cycling option leads to your hotel in Merano, after a total descent of 1,900 feet (580 meters).

DAY 7: Free time in Merano / Transfer to Verona / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

Your tour ends at our Merano hotel today. The morning is free. You can take a taxi on your own to the Merano train station (approximately €10-15; the ride is about 5 minutes). Most trains connect in Bolzano. If you prefer, you are welcome to board our coach to Verona at 1:00 p.m., arrive at our Verona hotel around 3:30 p.m., and make your connections there on your own.

Please note: Italian museums are closed on Mondays.

Included Meals: Breakfast