

## 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
- 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 beginner and experienced cyclists. It runs mostly on dedicated and well-maintained bike paths, 5% of which is on packed gravel paths. Additional miles on easy/moderate and mostly unpaved terrain offer options for more avid cyclists. Hybrid bikes are preferred if planning to ride the extra options. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance with hills.

**Average Daily Mileage:** 4 - 36 miles

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

### Climate Information

### **Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

May 72°/49°, Jun 79°/56°, Jul 79°/59°, Aug 81°/61°, Sep 75°/55°, Oct 64°/47°

### **Average Rainfall (in.)**

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

## **DAY 1: Travel to Cortina d'Ampezzo / Warm-up ride / Welcome reception and 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.

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 Marenza, and her mobile phone number is +39 320 40 67 790.

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, join your VBT trip leaders for a safety and bike-fitting session, followed by a warm-up ride on Cortina bike paths.

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

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Afternoon: Cortina d'Ampezzo Warm-up — 8 km (5 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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 km (5 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

## **DAY 2: Cycle to Cadore / Time on own in Cortina**

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 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. Another option is to relax at the hotel with a plunge in the indoor swimming pool or indulge in a treatment at the spa before venturing out on your own to dine at one of the town's many fine restaurants.

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.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Cortina to Cadore — 24 km (15 miles)

Afternoon: Cadore to Cortina — 24 km (15 miles) | Cortina walk — 4 km (3 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. You start in Cortina and end in Valle di Cadore, losing 1,000 feet (305 meters) elevation. The afternoon option follows the same way, uphill. You can opt for a van shuttle if you prefer to rest. In Cortina we recommend following the self-guided walk, recorded in RWGPS and therefore available on your phone, that is an easy and enjoyable loop from to your hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 24 km (15 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **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 and local wines.

### Today's Ride Choices

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 flatlegs 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 a slightly rolling stretch with some unpaved sections in the woods to Riscone.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 4: Cycle through the Aurina and Tures valleys**

After breakfast, begin cycling to Brunico where an easy bike path takes you in the surroundings of the city and along the roaring Rienza River. Later, discover the beauty of the valleys of Aurina and Tures. About 90% of today's route follows easy paths and country roads 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 at a local mountain lodge, where the owner Gunther and his family breed 54 goats and make delicious cheeses and dishes with their low fat milk. Gunther and his mother Marlene are proud that 'everything that guests buy and eat here is produced onsite'. After lunch, it is worthwhile to take a short easy walk or 5 minute bike ride to the first of the three roaring Riva waterfalls. There perhaps choose to explore these lovely surroundings further and hike to the higher waterfall and try the fly-line to quickly descend back. Bike back to your hotel, or hop a shuttle and pamper yourself at the hotel spa.

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.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Riscone to Wasserfallbar — 28 km (17 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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 – 47 km (11 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **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.

By lunch time, arrive in 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. In Bressanone, there are numerous choices for lunch on your own today!

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. You will enjoy strolling the porticoed streets and admiring its historical houses. The city features great gourmet restaurants and fine wine bars.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Riscone to Bressanone — 36 km (22 miles)

### What to Expect:

Exit the Val Pusteria and cycle through the Eisack/Isarco River valley to Rio di Pusteria on bike paths and in the woods. The paths are unpaved. In Rio a new paved bike path and country roads lead you in the heart of Bressanone. You will not cycle in the afternoon. After a short walking tour of Bressanone with a local guide, travel to Merano.

Cumulative Distance Range: 36 km (22 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **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.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Glorenza to Castebello — 35 km (21 miles)

Afternoon: Castebello 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. The short option ends at Castebello train station after 21 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).

Cumulative Distance Range: 25 – 60 km (15 – 36 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 7: VBT Bicycling Vacation ends / Free time in Merano / Travel to Verona**

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.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **Accommodations**

May vary depending on departure date.



### Hotel Bellevue Suites & Spa (Day: 1)

A historic hotel located in the heart of Cortina and near the pedestrian area, Hotel Bellevue Suites & Spa will not disappoint. Its rooms are decorated in the typical local style with wood parquet flooring and paneling. The hotel features a wellness spa, fitness room, a lounge bar, and two restaurants. The Stella Polare restaurant is well known in Cortina for its fine service, elegant atmosphere, and local specialties.

### Grand Hotel Savoia Cortina (Day: 2)

This 19th-century luxury hotel boasts an ideal location, just a short stroll from the historical heart of Cortina. Steeped in tradition, the property offers guests air-conditioned rooms with contemporary décor; a full-service spa with indoor pool, sauna, and fitness room. Dine at the hotel's tea bar, elegant restaurant, or piano bar.

### Park Hotel Schoenblick (Days: 3,4)

Nestled at the foot of Plan de Corones Mountain and surrounded by sprawling green meadows, our Riscone hotel enjoys a spellbinding setting. It may remind you of a resplendent Austrian chalet, but its Italian hospitality is unrivaled. Beautifully manicured grounds and adjacent walking trails help you drink in the bucolic charm of the Pusteria Valley. After thrilling days of cycling, indulge in a spa treatment or swim in its atrium pool fed by mountain springs. In its restaurant, savor gourmet meals with South Tyrolean flair and a hearty buffet breakfast. Each room features views of the splendid grounds, as well as a flat-screen LCD satellite TV, telephone, in-room safe, and private bath with shower and hairdryer. The hotel is not air conditioned, as nights are cooler at this altitude but fans are provided in each room on request. Free WiFi is available throughout.

### Hotel Terme Merano (Days: 5,6)

Located in the center of Merano, a chic health resort, the Hotel Terme Merano is directly connected to Merano's public thermal baths and park, and also features its own Wellness & Spa facility. Take advantage of its many amenities, including indoor and outdoor pools, fitness center, whirlpool, steam bath, sauna, aroma bath, and beauty and cosmetic treatments. The innovative modern architecture of this stunning property, created by celebrity designer Matteo Thun, blends harmoniously with the beautiful South Tyrolean Alps that surround it. Your comfortable room features air conditioning, a flat-screen LCD satellite TV, mini bar, safe, bathroom and slippers, a bag, and bath with private shower, toiletries, and hairdryer. The hotel is air-conditioned and WiFi is available throughout.