

## Italy: Sicily, the Noto Valley & Syracuse

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

A banquet of sensory delights awaits you in Sicily. Your trip includes the sounds of pounding surf, dramatic vistas as far as the eye can see, delightful jasmine-scented breezes, and the delicious bounty of land and sea. You'll sample it all on an artfully crafted itinerary that features exhilarating riding through olive groves, past Roman mosaics, and into ancient villages that capture the spirit of the past. Work up an appetite for homemade chocolate, cheese, and honey, and savor the harvest of hotel gardens—even learning secrets of Sicilian cuisine from a local chef. Road cycling in Sicily has never been this good!



### Cultural Highlights

- Explore baroque Scicli with a local guide, and venture outside the city to the lovely Noto Valley.
- Indulge in the tantalizing confections of a family-owned chocolate factory.
- Join your hotel chef for a hands-on demonstration of Sicilian cooking.

- Discover the fishing village of Marzamemi, recently restored to its 17th-century glory.
- Complement your cycling with basking in the sun or swimming at the beach.

## 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 van is always available for those who need assistance.

**Tour Duration:** 10 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 10 - 40

**Average Cycling Time:** 01:00 - 04:00

**Group size:** 20 max

## Climate Information

### Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Mar 65°/42°, Apr 70°/46°, May 78°/52°, Jun 86°/59°, Sep 87°/62°, Oct 78°/56°, Nov 69°/48°

### Average Rainfall (in.)

Mar 1.6, Apr 1.5, May 0.9, Jun 0.4, Sep 1.4, Oct 3.9, Nov 2.2

## DAY 1: Depart from the United States or Canada

All you have to do is get to the airport. On our Air Packages, we'll take care of the rest, handling all the logistics, so you can travel with peace of mind. Spend your first night aloft and arrive refreshed for an unforgettable trip.

## DAY 2: Arrive in Catania / Travel to Taormina

A VBT representative will greet you at the Catania airport to start your adventure off right. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your hotel in Taormina. From your centrally located hotel, you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

Accommodation: Hotel Monte Tauro, Taormina

## DAY 3: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Travel to Scicli / Walking tour of Scicli / Welcome reception and dinner

From Taormina, you'll travel to Scicli by private motor coach (transportation time is approximately 2.5 hours). The city is listed among UNESCO's World Heritage sites for its baroque palaces and churches.

You will be greeted by our local guide and embark on a 40-minute walking tour. You will have time for lunch with plenty of options in this wonderful little city.

Early this afternoon, settle into your luxurious hotel Borgo Hedone. The hotel is a carefully restored 17th-century villa with outbuildings, configured in a picturesque *borgo*, all connected by stone staircases and little patios. Terraces and two swimming pools (outdoor and indoor heated) offer the best view of the baroque town and the *Duomo*. After a safety talk and bike-fitting, follow your trip leaders on a warm-up ride outside the town in the beautiful Noto Valley. Later, gather with the group for a welcome cocktail on the elegant grounds of our hotel followed by a true Sicilian dinner at a local restaurant.

Today's Ride Choice

Afternoon: Warm-up – 14 km (9 miles)

**What to Expect:** The warm-up ride explores Altopiano Ibleo, a peaceful, rural region outside Scicli. After an initial short stretch in the city, you will soon be cycling out of town, passing farms and groves of olive and carob trees set along old stone walls. In the distance, you will see the coastline and the sea. On the way back, you will have a wonderful panoramic view of this baroque town.

Cumulative Distance Range: 14 km (9 miles)

Accommodation: Borgo Hedone, Scicli

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 4: Cycle to Sampieri / Picnic by the beach / Explore Scicli at night**

After breakfast, cycle the rolling countryside in the Province of Ragusa toward the sea, surrounded by miles of stone walls, cattle grazing in the shade of stately carob and olive trees, and vegetable greenhouses that supply markets both local and all over Europe.

You will reach Sampieri via a bike path along the sea. Sampieri is a summer resort town and its beaches are ideal for swimming. Your morning ride ends at a peaceful pine forest for a picnic prepared by your VBT trip leaders. Take some time to stroll around or swim at the beach. Reward yourself with a delicious *gelato*. From here, you can continue riding or shuttle to your hotel where you can relax at the swimming pool or explore the sites of Scicli. The city has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site for the extraordinary beauty and the importance of its late-baroque architecture, built after a devastating earthquake in 1693.

This evening, stroll Scicli and enjoy the magnificent architecture lit up at night, the perfect backdrop for dinner on your own. Al Galu' is one of the restaurants most recommended by our tour leaders. There guests can enjoy dinner – a feast for both palate and eyes - under the high vaults of an ancient *masseria*.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Scicli to Sampieri – 23 km (14 miles)

Afternoon: Sampieri to Scicli – 17 km (10 miles)

What to Expect: The morning ride heads through the quiet countryside and a patchwork landscape accentuated by lovely stone walls. The roads are paved with little car traffic and you will pedal gradually downhill. Along the way, you will see large greenhouses, one of the city's main sources of income, as Sicily provides 10% of Europe's fruits and vegetables. The ride follows a scenic, flat bike path through a park by the sea with a sandy beach for swimming. Trip leaders will prepare a picnic lunch in the shade of the pine trees. In the afternoon, it's easy coastal riding through the seaside village of Sampieri, followed by a long, yet manageable, uphill ride back to your hotel in Scicli, leaving the afternoon free for you to discover this baroque city. You can opt for the support vehicle shuttle to skip the hill.

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 – 40 km (10 – 24 miles)

Accommodation: Borgo Hedone, Scicli

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 5: Chocolate tasting in Modica / Cycle the Noto Valley / Lunch at organic farm**

Today you have the choice of taking the shuttle or heading out on a moderate ride, progressively gaining almost 1,000 feet of elevation, as you head into Modica to enjoy one of the most interesting visits of the week: the chocolate factory of the Bonajuto family. The oldest factory of its kind in town, Antica Dolceria Bonajuto has been processing cocoa since 1880, using Aztec techniques imported by the Spanish more than 400 years ago. A mouthwatering tasting is a must after the tour. From baroque Modica, you will pedal north in the peaceful countryside of the Noto Valley, with a stop on the way for lunch at an organic farm. You will be welcomed by the owner (Mama Nella) who oversees the many activities of her 123.5-acre (50-hectare) farm while making focaccia bread, jams, sherbets, and much more for her guests. Fresh ricotta, made especially for you by a local cheesemaker, will be included in your lunch.

Your afternoon ride from Balata di Modica follows a mostly downhill route to your hotel, along scenic country roads flanked by elegant olive and carob trees. Relax at this stylish hotel, which features a large outdoor swimming pool and spa, and enjoy dinner at its restaurant accompanied by local red wine.

## Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Scicli to Modica – 15 km (9 miles) | Modica to San Giacomo – 26 km (15 miles) Afternoon: San Giacomo to Kallikoros – 24 km (14 miles)

What to Expect: Some guests will shuttle from the hotel to Modica but others may opt for an moderate bike ride starting at the bottom of a canyon and heading up to the Bonajuto chocolate factory, progressively gaining almost 1,000 feet of elevation. The standard morning ride starts after the chocolate factory visit and is one of the most scenic routes offered on this tour. It unfolds in the rolling countryside of Modica and Val di Noto, past rural areas and through little hamlets to San Giacomo, the lunch stop. The afternoon ride from the lunch stop to Hotel Kallikoros is a mostly downhill route. The landscape reminds one of Tuscany with quiet country roads flanked by terraced fields of olive groves and carob trees. For many, this is the best ride of the week.

Cumulative Distance Range: 24 – 65 km (14 – 38 miles)

Accommodation: Hotel Kallikoros, Noto

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 6: Admire the Mosaics of Villa del Tellaro / Explore the ancient fishing village and tuna fishery of Marzamemi / Explore Baroque Noto**

After a hearty breakfast, pedal along quiet, mostly easy country roads, toward the sea. On the way, you'll want to stop to admire the fourth-century Roman villa mosaics.

Your destination is the recently restored, ancient fishing village of Marzamemi, nestled on a small promontory south of Syracuse. In good weather, you can take a break at the San Lorenzo beach for a refreshing swim. Marzamemi was developed in the 17th century around a tuna fishery, which is now the second-largest in Sicily and a national monument. The family known as the Princes of Villadorata still visit their 17th-century palace, a beautiful summer residence. Marzamemi is a good place to find a relaxing café or local fish restaurant for lunch on your own.

Retrace your way back to the hotel in the afternoon. You can spend the rest of the day relaxing or opt to follow your hotel hosts on an interesting, short walk around their large estate to learn about the crops used in traditional Sicilian cuisine. Then, shuttle to Noto for a stroll in this famous baroque city to admire the local architecture. Dinner is on your own.

## Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Kallikoros to Marzamemi – 35 km (21 miles)

Afternoon: Marzamemi to Kallikoros – 29.5 km (18 miles)

What to Expect: Today's loop is on remote country roads, away from traffic, to Marzamemi and the coast. Marzamemi is completely free from car traffic and pleasant to stroll on foot. The afternoon route is moderate with some hills on paved country roads. The VBT support vehicle is available for guests wishing to shuttle back to the hotel for free time at the pool and gardens.

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 – 64.5 km (16 – 40 miles)

Accommodation: Hotel Kallikoros, Noto

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 7: Visit a donkey farm / Bike on the crest of a scenic plateau near Palazzolo Acreide**

A short shuttle takes you to your starting point near Testa dell'Acqua. From here, you will pedal a panoramic route ending for lunch at a local farm, where Salvo and his brothers tend their donkeys. One of the brothers is a chef, and he'll prepare delicious local specialties, including empanadas, for lunch.

In the afternoon, another scenic route leads to your final destination: an ancient fortified *masseria*, or farm estate, surrounded by acres of carob and olive trees. This fine country inn, Borgo del Carato, is your home for the next two nights. You will be seduced by the quietude, the sweeping views, the elegant spa, and the panoramic pool set in a manicured garden of fragrant flowers. Horseback riding is also available. Tonight, you will meet the owner and discover why the *carat*, or carob seed, is the unit of weight for diamonds and the name of the Borgo. Tonight's dinner will be prepared with fresh vegetables and herbs from the garden.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Testa dell'Acqua to Agri Milo – 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon: Agri Milo to Borgo del Carato – 23 km (14 miles)

What to Expect: Take a 25-minute bus shuttle to the starting point near Testa dell'Acqua. From there, the ride will follow paved country roads with little car traffic on the way to your lunch stop, the Agri Milo farm. Afterwards, the ride retraces part of that route before following the crest of a scenic plateau on a road with almost no car traffic. Some stretches of the ride have broken pavement, but all the roads are paved, with the exception of the farm driveway.

Cumulative Distance Range: 23 – 49 km (14 – 30 miles)

Accommodation: Hotel Borgo del Carato, Palazzolo Acreide

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 8: Bike along Pantalica Canyon / Honey tasting in Solarino / Sicilian cooking class

This morning's ride heads to Pantalica Canyon and Anapo River Valley. A UNESCO World Heritage site, today it's a vast nature reserve and archaeological site. Over the centuries, the mysterious and mythological Anapo River eroded the soft limestone and created deep canyons and caves, some of which have yet to be explored. Archeologists have discovered more than 5,000 cave tombs carved in the steep limestone cliffs, dating from prehistoric to Byzantine times.

A local specialty of this area is honey. You will stop to meet Michele and his family and visit his organic farm, where he will introduce you to his bees and his myriad of honey products, which are grown in a way that respects the climate and plant biodiversity. Depending on when you visit, you may find orange, honeysuckle, cardoon, or thyme honeys. Don't miss the opportunity to taste the *Spirito dei Fascitrari*, an alcoholic drink made by fermented honey.

Stop for lunch on your own in the little town of Solarino, with its typical Italian piazza filled with cafés beloved by locals. Try the specialties of the local eatery: stuffed calzoni, pizza and *arancini di riso*, *pasta di mandorle*, cannoli, and *gelato*!

Back at the hotel, learn about Sicilian cuisine by preparing dinner with a local chef. Share the fruits of your labor with fellow travelers at a farewell dinner in the hotel restaurant.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Borgo del Carato to Solarino – 29 km (18 miles)

Afternoon: Solarino to Carato – 10 km (6 miles)

What to Expect: This morning, the ride travels down the Anapo River canyon and crosses the mythological Anapo River on a paved narrow country road. Caution must be used on the steep downhill stretch to the bottom of the valley and where some potholes form after rain. The ride continues down the canyon on a long and gradual route into the small city of Solarino, which is your lunch stop. The afternoon ride follows a slightly rolling and very panoramic route, leading to the large estate of our hotel. It is a very quiet, fully paved route, with the sea at your back.

Cumulative Distance Range: 10 – 39 km (6 – 24 miles)

Accommodation: Hotel Borgo del Carato, Palazzolo Acreide

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 9: Travel to Syracuse / Free time / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends**

After an included breakfast, complimentary transportation by private minibus (about 30 minutes) to your centrally located hotel in Ortigia, Syracuse for your final overnight. You arrive at approximately 10:15 a.m. Follow a VBT local guide on a two-hour private walk of Ortigia, then spend the rest of the day exploring this wonderful town. You can consider a visit to the archeological park – a must-see for visitors. Or continue wandering the old city of Ortigia, its ancient medieval and Baroque delights are around every corner. Browse craft and souvenir shops, fashion designer stores and cafes with pastry and local specialties that whet your appetite. The entire city of Syracuse is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, so spectacular is its beauty and importance. Your room may not be available until 3:00 p.m., but you may store your luggage at the reception desk.

If you have chosen the independent Post-Trip Extension to Syracuse, you will remain at this hotel for the next three nights. Syracuse is a good base for daily trips to Piazza Armerina and Agrigento. Your guide can facilitate your visits there.

Accommodation: Grand Hotel Ortigia, Syracuse

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 10: Departure**

After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation to the Catania airport will be provided (an approximately 50 to 60 minute drive, depending on traffic) for your departing flight.

Included Meals: Breakfast