

Italy: Sicily, the Noto Valley & Syracuse

Bike Vacation Only

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 is rated Easy/Moderate. The rides are on paved country roads, mostly rolling, with little car traffic. On two days, a short shuttle takes guests up a hill, allowing them to ride along a crest and then downhill. The roads are good but in some rural areas, the terrain is uneven with a few potholes.

Average Daily Mileage: 10 - 40 miles

Average Cycling Time: 01:00 - 04:00

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

Meet your VBT representative and the rest of the group at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby of our Taormina hotel.

From Taormina, you'll travel to Scicli by private motor coach (transportation time is approximately three hours with a short stop on the way). 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 Choices

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)

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: 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)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3: 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)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4: 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)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: 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 — 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)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6: Bike a scenic route to baroque Floridia / Honey tasting / Sicilian cooking class

Your ride crosses a scenic region that was inhabited in prehistoric times, and where archeologists have found cave tombs carved in the steep limestone cliffs. As you bike the quiet roads and a long canyon, you will admire the countryside dotted with farms and typical *masserias* with the sea – as far as Syracuse – in the distance. Today's highlight is walking the Sant'Alfano bridge, and just before Canicattini Bagni, take the opportunity to become familiar with its mysterious statues.

A local specialty of this area is honey. You will stop to meet Rosa and visit her organic farm, where she will introduce you to her bees and a myriad of honey products. Intrigued by her husband's vocation for beekeeping, Rosa decided to turn his hobby into a business. In 2001 she opened this entirely family-run

business specializing in raw, high quality honey, and bee products. Rosa is also committed to promoting the preservation of a rare and endangered Sicilian thyme that she uses in her award-winning honey. Her passion is contagious.

After your visit with Rosa stop in the baroque town of Floridia. Park your bike by the imposing Chiesa Madre church and find a typical café or restaurant for lunch on your own. 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 Floridia — 36 km (22 miles)

Afternoon: Floridia to Carato — 12 km (7 miles)

What to Expect:

This morning, the ride starts with a long gradual climb that can be skipped by a short van shuttle. It travels along and up and down a quiet region cut by a long scenic canyon on a paved road. It crosses the village of Canicattini Bagni, then continues down the canyon on a long and gradual route into the small city of Floridia, 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: 12 – 48 km (7 – 29 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Travel to Syracuse / Free time / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

After an included breakfast, complimentary transportation is provided to our Syracuse hotel located in Ortigia. You will arrive at approximately 10:15 a.m. Follow a VBT local guide on a private two-hour walk of Ortigia, if you like. The rest of the day you are free to explore on your own. If you depart earlier, you must make transportation arrangements from the last hotel at your own expense. Taxi cost to Syracuse is about €35/\$45 USD (travel time is about 30 minutes).

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Borgo Hedone (Days: 1,2)

A luxurious and centrally located property in Scicli, Borgo Hedone is a world-class hotel in a restored 17th-century villa with smaller buildings, spread out in a picturesque little borgo, all connected by stone staircases and little patios. Two swimming pools (outdoor and indoor heated) and terraces offer the best view of the baroque town and the Duomo. The hotel is air conditioned, and WiFi is available in the lobby.

Hotel Kallikoros (Days: 3,4)

Wonderfully located on a hill blanketed with carob and olive trees, vineyards, and orange groves, the Kallikoros offers sweeping views from its panoramic sun terrace. A large swimming pool, luxurious spa, an elegant restaurant featuring local specialties, and comfortable, air-conditioned rooms with large showers all make for an enjoyable stay. Walking paths line the estate.

Hotel Borgo del Carato (Days: 5,6)

Passing through the ancient stone archway, guests feel transported to a distant past. Large buildings and walls enclose the palm-studded courtyard where dinner is served by candlelight in summer. The property is air conditioned and set on manicured grounds planted with flowers and citrus, carob, and centuries-old olive trees.

Grand Hotel Ortigia (Day: 7)

Built in the late 19th century and completely refurbished in 1995, the Grand Hotel Ortigia preserves the original architectural lines and elegance of the Liberty style. One of the hotel's special features is the original foundational walls dating back to Roman times and other archaeological relics. This air-conditioned, seaside property is walking distance from Duomo square and Fonte Aretusa. From June to September, guests may take a boat and spend the day on the private hotel beach of Punta del Pero across the gulf.