

## Portugal: Lisbon, Évora & the Algarve

### Bike Vacation Only

Shhhhh. The Eastern Algarve and Alentejo's high plains are Portugal's best kept secrets—for now. This is the Europe of yesteryear: charming, simple, authentic. Let us inspire you with fresh seafood, deliciously affordable wines, and savory Mediterranean cuisine with refreshing stops for gelato. Discover alabaster villages splashed with blazing blue and get lost in their maze of cobbled walkways and cozy cafés. The route meanders through ancient cork forests, vineyards, and olive groves, along beaches and quiet roads made for cycling. Embark on a river cruise bordering the Spanish Andalucia, pause for a bountiful picnic, and become inspired by rich history. There's nowhere like two-wheeling in Portugal.

### Cultural Highlights

Explore the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Évora and the Chapel of the Bones

Discover the charm of hilltop Monsaraz

Cycle past acres of cork and olive trees

Step back in time during your stay in the ancient town of Mértola

Follow the Guadiana River by bike and by boat

Relax at an elegant retreat in the scenic Algarve

Savor Portugal's traditional cuisine and wines

### What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of rolling terrain and moderate-to-challenging hills. Our VBT support van is always available for those who need assistance. Ideal for energetic beginners and experienced cyclists.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 11 - 37

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

### Climate Information

**Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

Mar 62°/46°, Apr 64°/48°, May 70°/52°, Sep 81°/60°, Oct 71°/55°, Nov 62°/49°

**Average Rainfall (in.)**

Mar 1.6, Apr 2.3, May 2.0, Sep 1.2, Oct 2.7, Nov 3.0

## DAY 1: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Évora

Meet your VBT Representative at the Pousada de Lisboa at 9:00 a.m. The hotel is located at Praça do Comércio, 31-34, 1100-148 Lisbon and the phone number is +351 21 040 7640 (Alternate hotel – Fontecruz Lisboa Autograph Collection). Please be dressed in your riding attire. If you are so delayed that you will miss the morning transfer from here, then we suggest you take a train to Évora at your own expense. There are direct trains departing from Lisbon's Estação do Oriente train station and the cost is approximately 13 euros – journey time is 1 hour and 30 minutes. From the Évora train station you may take a taxi (approximately 20 minutes) to your hotel outside of Évora. Cost of the taxi is approximately 20 euros. Please contact the Lisbon hotel to advise them of any travel delays or changes so the staff can pass the message on to your VBT Trip Leaders.

Your accommodation for the next two nights is in the Convento do Espinheiro, a Luxury Collection Hotel & Spa. The 15th-century convent is listed as a national monument for the many important noble figures who have met here throughout the centuries to shape Portugal's history.

This evening, join the hotel's sommelier in the Convent's wine cellar to sample some of the region's wines before enjoying a sumptuous welcome dinner in the hotel's historic dining room.

Hotel: Convento do Espinheiro, a Luxury Collection Hotel & Spa

Meals: Lunch, Dinner

Daily Options: 10 miles (16.8km)

## DAY 2: Historic Villages of Redondo and Monsaraz / Walking tour of Évora

After breakfast, shuttle from your hotel to the white-washed town of Redondo, home to a 500-year-old Portuguese pottery tradition. From here you will begin cycling across the plains of Alentejo, following scenic country roads bordered by cork forests. Our destination looms in the distance: hilltop Monsaraz, one of Portugal's oldest settlements, and its imposing castle. Enthusiastic riders may enjoy the climb into town; the VBT van will be available to shuttle you from Aldeia de Venda to Monsaraz if you need assistance or would like more time to explore Monsaraz.

With Monsaraz's ideal hilltop location and endless vistas of the Alentejo and neighboring Spain, it has been occupied by various civilizations since pre-historic times. After the town's Roman occupation, the Visigoths, Arabs, Mozarabs, Jews, and Christians settled here as well. As you explore its narrow warrens and admire its white-washed, red-roofed houses, you can marvel at the remarkable view of the Alqueva

Dam and the second-largest artificial lake in Europe. Enjoy lunch at a local café before shuttling back to your hotel.

Later, you will venture into Évora for a visit to the São Francisco and its eerie Chapel of Bones, constructed by 16th-century Franciscan monks. Your local guide will then take you on a walking tour of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Évora, wandering atmospheric alleyways past old patrician mansions and white-washed houses with bright yellow trim. Enjoy dinner on your own in Évora this evening.

Hotel: Convento do Espinheiro, a Luxury Collection Hotel & Spa

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Daily Options: 23 miles (36.5 km)

### **DAY 3: Baixo Alentejo Region / Mértola**

After breakfast, shuttle south to the small town of Castro Verde and other small villages for the start of your rides in the lower Alentejo region. Today's rides introduce you to the arid landscapes of the Campo Branco, or White Plains territory. As you cycle, you may pass shepherds grazing their herds on wide-open spaces. For lunch, we will stop at a typical Portuguese rural café for a farm-fresh meal with warm, welcoming hosts. After, shuttle or ride to the remarkable fortified hilltop town of Mértola and your hotel.

After settling into your accommodations, join a local guide for a fascinating exploration of Mértola. This town's history dates back to the Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Romans. The most important remnant from the 500-year Moorish occupation is the medieval mosque, the only mosque to have survived the period in Portugal. Today it is Mértola's main church, though it boasts many of its original Moorish features. This evening dine at your leisure in one of the town's restaurants.

Hotel: Hotel Museu

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Daily Options: 13 or 27 miles (21.1 or 45 km)

### **DAY 4: Parque Natural do Vale do Guadiana / Guadiana River Cruise**

This morning begin your ride cycling from your hotel. If you prefer a shorter option, you may shuttle 15 minutes to the starting point of today's ride. Enjoy your morning cycling through the Guadiana Valley Natural Park, one of 30 areas in Portugal officially protected by the government. You will wind your way through small towns of well-preserved traditional architecture and coast to the banks of the Guadiana

River. The river's small port village of Pomarão was specially constructed for the nearby mining operations. Here you may straddle the Portugal / Spain border with a foot in each country and half your body in Spain's later time zone! Savor lunch in a riverside café overlooking the marina. Then embark a privately chartered boat for a relaxing afternoon on the River Guadiana. Your cruise delivers you right to our hotel dock in Mértola. Those seeking a longer ride and challenging option after lunch may forfeit the boat excursion and cycle back to the hotel.

This evening enjoy dinner at your hotel overlooking the Guadiana River.

Hotel: Hotel Museu

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Daily Options: 10, 15 or 26 miles (15.9, 24.5 or 44.1 km)

## DAY 5: Transfer to the Algarve / Guadiana River loop ride

After breakfast, shuttle southward to the Algarve and the banks of the Guadiana River. The Guadiana is the fourth longest river on the Iberian Peninsula and serves as the natural border between Spain's Andalucía region and Portugal's Alentejo and Algarve regions. Today's lovely ride traces the scenic banks on the Portugal side while providing distant views across the river towards Spain. Those looking for more mileage today may extend their morning ride. At the end of your ride, savor a tasty picnic lunch served by your Trip Leaders.

After, we shuttle (approximately 1 hour) to our lovely accommodations in the Algarve, the Vila Monte Farm House, and settle in to one of breezy, elegant suites. Enjoy an authentic Algarvian countryside experience, removed from the bustle of coastal resorts and embraced by a distinctly Portuguese beauty and tranquility.

Enjoy delicious regional Algarve cuisine made with the freshest of ingredients during your dinner here this evening.

Hotel: Vila Monte Farm House

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Daily Options: 14 or 27 miles (22.2 or 44.4 km)

## DAY 6: Loop ride from hotel to Cacela-a-Velha / Farewell Dinner

After a sumptuous breakfast, enjoy a leisurely reel through the surrounding Algarve countryside with vistas of the sea in the distance. Our destination is the lovely whitewashed village of Cacela-a-Velha, perched on top of a hill with a view to the easternmost lagoon of the Formosa River. The village is home to the Fortaleza de Cacela located on the site of the original castle constructed during the Muslim period. Spend time exploring the village before enjoying lunch at one of the lively cafés. Alternately, you may have the hotel pack a picnic for you so as to enjoy lunch on the beach. In the afternoon cycle back or shuttle to your resort for an afternoon at leisure, taking advantage of the property's pools or spa.

This evening, join your fellow travelers and Trip Leaders to reminisce about your Portuguese adventures during a fireside farewell reception, followed by a delightful dinner with local wines.

Hotel: Vila Monte Farm House

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 20 or 40 miles (33 or 66.4 km)

## **DAY 7: VBT Bicycle Vacation ends / Transfer to Cascais / Begin optional Post-trip Extension**

Enjoy breakfast before your transfer to Cascais (approximately 4 hours). Your tour concludes at approximately 1:00 p.m. at the Cidadela Cascais Pousada & Art District hotel in Cascais or the alternate hotel Grande Real Villa Italia. Taxis are available at the Cascais hotel to take you to central Lisbon hotels, the Lisbon train station, or to the Lisbon airport – approximately 30-45 minutes depending upon traffic.

Important: Flight departures from Lisbon prior to 4:00 p.m. are not recommended. If you depart earlier, you are responsible for your own transfer arrangements from the last hotel in the Algarve to Lisbon's airport.

Meals: Breakfast

## **Accommodations**

May vary depending on departure date.

### **Convento do Espinheiro Hotel & Spa (Days: 1,2)**

The Convento do Espinheiro, Historic Hotel & Spa is steeped in history, it is listed as one of Portugal's national monuments for the many significant noble figures who met here to shape the history and

character of the nation. The 15th-century convent has been restored to offer all the amenities of a modern resort, including air conditioning, amidst a peaceful and inspiring atmosphere. During your stay, sample one of its five restaurants and bars, the indoor or outdoor pool, and health club. Enjoy a meditative stroll in the almost 20 acres of gardens, or a contemplative visit to its onsite historic church. The wine cellar features some of the region's preferred wines.

### **Hotel Museu (Days: 3,4)**

A standout property in Mértola, the Hotel Museu—a literal “museum hotel”—rests on a foundation that dates back to Roman times, as guests can see from a glance through the glass floor of the lobby. Onsite exhibits showcase additional artifacts from the Roman and Moorish period. Tucked between the historic center of Mértola and the banks of the Guadiana River, the hotel offers splendid riverside vistas. Air-conditioned rooms are simple yet boast all the amenities of a typical 3-star hotel, and more. Enjoy dinner on the scenic hotel terrace overlooking the river.

### **Vila Monte Farm House (Days: 5,6)**

Your hosts at the Vila Monte Farm House invite you to settle in to Portugal's picturesque seaside haven. At this unique and authentic resort, buildings are fashioned after the typical architecture of the Algarve with chimneys, terraces, and whitewashed stairways. Guests who are joining us on the post extension can indulge in the property's Junior Suites and Superior Suites, set among orange trees and offering all the amenities of an elegant retreat. The air-conditioned Farm House restaurant serves regional delicacies made from the freshest ingredients from local markets or from the resort's own gardens. Relax in one of the swimming pools or treat yourself to a massage in the gardens. The resort's Guest Assistants are on hand to help you customize your stay, whether you simply want to relax or explore more with several available optional excursions.