

## Portugal: Lisbon, Évora & the Algarve

### Bike Vacation Only

Cycle into the magnificent heart of the Alentejo and Algarve regions. During your Portugal bike tour, VBT deeply immerses you in spectacular landscapes and a famously welcoming culture. You'll ride among stunning vineyard-laden vistas past cork forests and olive groves to remarkably preserved hilltop villages and scenic seaside towns. Sample farm-fresh cuisine as the guests of a farmhouse café and delicious wines from local wineries. Straddle the border with Spain when you embark on a Guadiana River cruise. The region's rich heritage greets you, too, in the UNESCO site of Évora, a stunningly preserved medieval gem, and in ancient Mértola, home to a Moorish mosque steeped in history. Authentic accommodations, including an elegant Algarve retreat, evoke the character of the region, enhancing this unforgettable adventure.

### Cultural Highlights

- Marvel at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Évora and the eerie Chapel of the Bones in the São Francisco Church
- Cycle Alentejo's stunning landscapes of sprawling vineyards, cork tree forests and olive groves
- Roam the hallowed halls of the Moorish medieval mosque in the ancient town of Mértola
- Pedal along the Guadiana River, then cruise its waters by privately chartered boat
- Indulge in the amenities of your elegant Algarve retreat, relaxing in a heated pool and savoring locally sourced meals

### What to Expect

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

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 16 - 37 miles

**Group size:** 22 max

## 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: 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. Please be dressed in your riding attire. If you are so delayed that you will miss transportation from here; we strongly recommend that 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 – 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. 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 VBT representative will accompany you by shuttle (approximately 1.25 minutes) to join your VBT trip leaders. You depart Lisbon via the expansive Vasco de Gama Bridge, the longest bridge in Western Europe, spanning the mighty Tagus River. Heading east, you arrive on the scenic plains of the Alentejo region, known for its stunning vistas and abundant cork and olive groves. Meet your VBT trip leaders for a bike-fitting and safety session. Afterwards, get to know your fellow travelers over lunch before departing on what is arguably the finest among Portugal bike tours. A warm-up ride traverses this scenic region of rustic farmland and gentle hills, delivering you to your hotel outside of the historic medieval town of Évora, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Your accommodation for the next two nights is in the historic Convento do Espinheiro Historic Hotel & Spa. Many important noble figures have met here throughout the centuries to shape Portugal's history, earning this 15th-century convent a place as a national monument.

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 historic dining room.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-up to Évora – 25 km (16 miles)

What to Expect:

After meeting your VBT trip leaders for a bike-fitting, safety session and lunch, you become accustomed to riding your bike on an easy afternoon warm-up ride. The scenic ride on quiet, well-maintained two-lane roads winds through the scenic plains of the Alentejo region with its patchwork of cork and olive groves and stunning vistas. As you near the outskirts of Évora, you pass through neighborhoods before arriving at your hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 25 km (16 miles)

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

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

After breakfast, shuttle from your hotel to the whitewashed town of Redondo, home to a 500-year-old Portuguese pottery tradition. From here you begin with a picturesque ride 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 support vehicle 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 its lofty locale, Monsaraz enjoys endless vistas of the Alentejo and neighboring Spain. It has been occupied by various civilizations from Romans, Visigoths and Arabs to Mozarabs, Jews and Christians. As you explore its narrow warrens and admire its whitewashed, red-roofed houses, there'll be time to 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 venture into Évora to meet a local guide for an enriching walking tour of this magnificently preserved UNESCO World Heritage site. Stop by the São Francisco Church to view its eerie Chapel of Bones, constructed by 16th-century Franciscan monks. Wandering atmospheric alleyways past old patrician mansions and whitewashed houses with bright yellow trim. Enjoy dinner on your own in Évora this evening.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Redondo to Aldeia de Venda and Monsaraz – 37 km (23 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride begins in the town of Redondo, a 45-minute shuttle from your hotel. From Redondo, begin riding towards the hilltop village of Monsaraz. Our ride consists of some short inclines and rolling hills, but the VBT support vehicle will be nearby if you opt to shuttle at any point. At the end of the short option in the town of Aldeia de Venda, our shuttle provides transportation to the historic village of Monsaraz, where you have ample time to explore prior to lunch. Today's long option continues from Aldeia de Pais through the scenic Alentejo countryside and finishes with a challenging 1.5 km (just under a mile) climb into Monsaraz.

Cumulative Distance Range: 37 km (23 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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

After breakfast, shuttle south to the small town of Castro Verde in the lower Alentejo region, or Baixo Alentejo. Today's rides introduce you to the arid, beautiful 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, you 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 rich history dates all the way back to the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Romans. Its most important remnant from the 500-year Moorish occupation is the medieval mosque, the only mosque from this period to have survived 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 inviting restaurants.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Geraldos to Mértola – 45 km (28 miles)

What to Expect:

After a two-hour morning shuttle south, begin today's ride in Geraldos, pedaling into the arid and beautiful landscape of the *Campo Branco*, or White Plains. The ride across the *Campo Branco* is on narrow, paved country roads with very little traffic and mostly level, easy riding, but promises an excellent workout if

there is a breeze. Stop to enjoy lunch in a farm café in Sao João dos Caldeiros. Following your meal, continue your cycling onto the main road to Mértola where the traffic increases as we near our destination. The VBT support vehicle is also available for anyone who would prefer to shuttle to the hotel after lunch.

Cumulative Distance Range: 45 km (28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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

After breakfast, set out directly from your hotel. (Those preferring a shorter option shuttle 15 minutes to the starting point of their ride instead.) Your morning cycling leads you into the Guadiana Valley Natural Park, one of 30 natural areas in Portugal officially protected by the government. Wind your way through small towns of beautifully preserved traditional architecture and coast down to the banks of the Guadiana River. The river's small port village of Pomarão was specially constructed for 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 Guadiana River. Your cruise delivers you right to your hotel dock in Mértola. Those seeking a longer ride and more challenging option after lunch may forfeit the boat excursion and cycle back to the hotel.

This evening, enjoy an al fresco dinner at your hotel overlooking the Guadiana River, weather permitting.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Mértola to Pomarao – 24 km (15 miles)

Afternoon: Pomarao to Hotel Museu (no river cruise) – 20 km (12 miles)

What to Expect:

Begin today's ride from the hotel. The ride begins with a steady climb on a national road with some potentially fast-moving traffic and trucks, however, if the climb and traffic is an issue there will be a shuttle from the hotel for approximately 15 minutes to where your trip leaders will have your bikes ready.

The morning ride takes you on small paved country roads through the less-traveled Guadiana Valley Natural Park. Although this morning's ride is shorter than those on other days, you will have some rolling hills to challenge you and a rather steep decline for the last two kilometers to the Guadiana River. After lunch, if you opt to ride back to the hotel and forfeit the boat excursion, the ride begins with a challenging two-kilometer climb that will reward you with bragging rights and stunning views. The last five kilometers into Mértola are on a national road that you share with fast-moving traffic and trucks. The VBT support vehicle is available throughout the day.

Cumulative Distance Range: 24 – 44 km (15 – 27 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 5: Travel to the Algarve / Guadiana River ride**

After breakfast, shuttle southward into the Algarve to the Guadiana River. The Guadiana is the fourth longest river on the Iberian Peninsula and serves as the natural border between Spain's Andalusia region and Portugal's Alentejo and Algarve regions. Today's lovely ride crosses a plateau of farmlands and quiet roads before descending to Alcoutim, a small port by the Guadiana River. After a delicious lunch and quick visit of this quaint little village, you'll continue cycling along the scenic Portugal river banks while enjoying stunning views of Spain across the river.

After, you shuttle approximately one hour to your lovely accommodations in the Algarve, the Vila Monte Farm House, and settle in to one of its 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 a delicious dinner in the hotel's charming restaurant this evening.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Gíoes to Alcoutim lunch – 25 km (16 miles) | Corte Tabelão to Foz de Odeleite Loop – 44 km (27 miles)

Afternoon: Alcoutim to Foz de Odeleite along river – 15 km (9 miles)

What to Expect:

Our ride in the Algarve follows undulating hills that offer beautiful vistas of the Guadiana River Valley and Spain's Andalusia region in the distance. Enjoy a brief stop in the port of Alcoutim for lunch. In the afternoon continue on a quiet country road along the Guadiana River to the Foz de Odeliete.

Cumulative Distance Range: 25 – 40 km (16 – 25 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 6: Cycle to Monterosa olive groves, Tavira and 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. Along the way we will stop to visit the Monterosa olive groves for some olive tasting and learn more about the production of olive oil. Next we cycle to the small Algarve city of Tavira with its medieval castle. Spend time exploring the sites and enjoy lunch in one of the many lively cafés at your leisure. After lunch continue pedaling to 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 shuttling to your resort for a late 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 Portugal bike tour and adventures during a fireside farewell reception, followed by a delightful dinner of regional Algarve cuisine made with the freshest of ingredients paired with local wines.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Vila Monte to Cacela a Velha with Monterosa – 41 km (25 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride starts from our hotel. You will cycle on less-traveled lanes through the Algarve countryside past lovely citrus, olive and avocado groves. There will be some city riding with heavier traffic within the city of Tavira. As we near the Algarve coast you will see the Atlantic Ocean in the distance before arriving at the seaside village of Cacela-a-Velha. Today's ride is less challenging with slightly rolling hills.

Cumulative Distance Range: 41 km (25 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Travel to Cascais / Begin Post-Trip Extension**

Enjoy breakfast before your drive to Cascais (approximately four hours). Your tour concludes at approximately 1:00 p.m. at the Cidadela Cascais Pousada & Art District Hotel in Cascais. 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.

Included 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.