

Italy Bike & Boat: Venice to Mantua

Bike Vacation + Air Package

Beauty, grandeur, and romance unfold before you on this uniquely crafted Venice biking tour. Exploring by bike, you'll delve into the variety of this region of Italy, from Renaissance splendor to humble fishing villages and from ancient trading centers to hushed country roads and a quiet nature reserve. And aboard your comfortably appointed barge, you'll cruise fabled canals and a serene lagoon to islands brimming with architectural and cultural treasures. Visits to a glass-blowing studio, cheese factory, and carousel museum add luster to a tour that perfectly balances exhilaration and leisure.

Cultural Highlights

Experience the romance and majesty of Venice as you cruise the city's famous canals and lagoon. Contrast Belle Epoque architecture with colorful fishermen's houses on a spin through two Venetian islands.

Learn about the ancient art of glass-blowing on Murano Island.

Visit the UNESCO-designated Renaissance cities of Ferrara and Mantua with local guides.

Sample delicious Grana Padano cheese at a local cheese factory.

Delight in the whimsical collections of a Carousel Museum.

Spin along a serene river, beside quiet canals, and through a tranquil nature reserve.

Reward your cycling days with delicious dinners prepared by your boat's chef.

Indulge in a glass of local wine with dinners on board.

What to Expect

The rides of this tour are easy on flat tow paths, dedicated city bike paths, and country roads far from traffic. Unpaved gravel surface represents less than 3% of the entire cycling distance. There are short city walks offered on two afternoons. This tour offers easy terrain on bike paths and roads through rural areas and on two Venice islands with little car traffic. Our VBT support shuttle is available every day at designated waypoints for those who need assistance.

Tour Duration: 11 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 6 - 29

Average Cycling Time: 01:00 - 03:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 73°/55°, Jun 80°/62°, Jul 84°/65°, Aug 84°/65°, Sep 75°/59°, Oct 63°/50°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 3.5, Jun 3.3, Jul 3.6, Aug 2.9, Sep 2.9, Oct 3.9

DAY 1: Depart from home / Fly overnight to Venice

Depart from home for Italy. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

DAY 2: Arrive in Venice

Arrive at the airport in Venice, Italy. Once in the arrival terminal you will be met by a VBT representative holding a VBT sign. He or she will be located just outside of customs and will assist you with your transfer by water taxi to the hotel. From the airport pier, you'll transfer (approximately 35 minutes) with our transfer company, Venezia Taxi, to your centrally located hotel in Venice. The rest of the day is free to discover and dine on your own with the VBT City Information as your guide.

If you are going to be delayed for more than 15 minutes at the Lost & Found desk due to delayed or lost luggage, please let our transfer company know by calling +39 328 23 89 661 (for a fee). You may also contact Allianz Global Assistance to advise of your delay, and they will contact our transfer service.

Please note: Your hotel room may not be available until 2:00 p.m. If you arrive early in the day, you may store your luggage with the reception desk.

Please note: VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. If you fly in earlier than the scheduled program dates, transportation from the airport will be at your own expense.

Hotel: Hotel All'Angelo

DAY 3: Embark boat / VBT Bicycle Vacation begins

After breakfast, enjoy free time to discover Venice on your own. Check out time is 11:00 a.m., but you can store your luggage at the front desk. At 3:30 p.m., be ready at your hotel to be transported by private water taxi to the boat, moored on Giudecca Island. Our trip leaders will meet you in the hotel lobby and will be wearing VBT staff garments.

At the docks, meet the boat crew and settle in. Later, gather with your fellow travelers for a welcome cocktail and an overview of the exciting week ahead, followed by a welcome dinner on board.

Please note regarding WiFi on board the boat: Internet access is available during the day only in the common areas, not in the cabins, and is quite stable. If stable Internet access is critical to you during the night, VBT recommends that you purchase your own bundle before traveling overseas.

Please note regarding Ride with GPS: Due to the limited WiFi on board, VBT also recommends that you download your free VBT Maps & Route Notes from a WiFi zone prior to arrival on the boat or leaving home, if you wish to use Ride with GPS on your smartphones. During your vacation, you will be able to follow these route notes on your smartphone with turn-by-turn voice navigation as you ride. This option is offered in addition to VBT's traditional printed maps and route notes, which will be distributed on tour.

Hotel: *Boat Ave Maria*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Non-Biking Day: Board boat at 4:00 p.m. Your tour begins.

DAY 4: Cruise Venice Lagoon / Warm-up ride on Penisola del Cavallino / Glass-blowing demonstration

Awake in romantic Venice and enjoy a hearty breakfast aboard your boat—your home for the week. Then, move to the upper sun deck to marvel at stunning views of St. Mark's Square and a parade of monuments as you cruise to the Cavallino Peninsula. The crew will point out various islands as you pass by. Disembark at Punta Sabbioni, where a safety clinic precedes a warm-up ride with your trip leaders. On today's relaxed route, cycle along flat and quiet paved trails, passing vast scenic salt marshes and vegetable gardens carefully tended by local Venetians. You will also see the ancient hamlet of Lio Piccolo,

home to many species of birds and dominated by the 18th-century Palazzo Baldu; its chapel and elementary school were left behind by the noble family that once owned the island.

After lunch on board, your captain weighs anchor for a return cruise to Venice to moor overnight. Stop en route for an interesting visit on Murano Island. Glass-blowing is a centuries-old art that was imported to Venice from the Far East, but that here has been developed and refined to the point that Murano's glassmakers led Europe for centuries. In the factory, you can learn some of the techniques involved and see artisans crafting some samples for you. Later, remain on the island and continue exploring for the rest of the afternoon on your own, maybe stopping at the Glass Museum in Palazzo Giustinian to see ancient samples of glass dating to ancient times, before cruising back to Venice.

Dinner is on board tonight. The chef is pairing the evening's menu with a specially chosen wine, the perfect accompaniment for sharing stories from your first full day of riding.

Hotel: *Boat Ave Maria*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 km (12 miles)

Morning

Lio Piccolo Warm-Up Ride: 21 km (12 miles)

What to Expect: Today's ride—a loop from our boat on quiet trails by salt marshes—gives you a chance to get acquainted with your route notes and Ride with GPS and get comfortable with your bicycle, checking your brakes and playing with your full range of gears.

DAY 5: Cycle Lido and Pellestrina Islands / explore Chioggia 'Little-Venice'

After breakfast, your boat casts off for the island of Lido, crossing the old harbor of Malamocco en route. You ride today on the two narrow islands that separate the lagoon from the Adriatic Sea, Lido and Pellestrina.

Disembark in Lido and spend a while pedaling among the glamorous streets that straddle this barrier sandbar. Belle Epoque hotels mark your progress in this well-heeled world that hosts celebrities and other

elites each year for the Venice Film Festival. Later, board a ferry with your bike and breathe the salt air as you cross over to Pellestrina, where the atmosphere is decidedly more old-world. On this quiet, low-lying island, fishermen and gardeners live a peaceful existence as the Venice skyline floats on the horizon. You will ride into one village after another with sea views at either side, passing the colorful houses for which the island is known and perhaps seeing women busy with their lacework; bobbin lace is a typical artform here, created by weaving cotton threads unrolled from a spool onto a round cushion called a *tombolo*.

For lunch on your own, you might stop by one of Pellestrina's taverns to sample *chicheti*, Venetian small plates prepared with fresh fish from the lagoon. Delicacies include *schie*, or shrimp, eel, cuttlefish, mantis shrimp, and scallop, with vegetables plucked right from one of the gardens you may have passed earlier.

Later in the afternoon, embark for a crossing to Chioggia. The island town of Chioggia, also known as "Little Venice," is a charming and often overlooked village, linked to the mainland by a causeway, a true Italian gem. Stroll past the picturesque San Domenico and Lombardo canals, following a maze of narrow *calli*, or alleyways, and bridges. Medieval churches and buildings transport you back in time here: The Chioggia Cathedral dates to the 1620s, and the church of St. Andrew boasts a bell tower constructed in the 11th and 12th centuries, the oldest clock tower in the world. Accompany its caretaker, Luciano, to the top of this former lighthouse for magnificent views of the island and the surrounding waters. Peep through the imposing stone-sculpted Prisca gate, the door to the fish market, one of Chioggia's most important and ancient institutions. The multicolored stalls of fishmongers are closed and empty in the evening, but you can still catch the atmosphere of the place.

Tonight, pick a restaurant or a simple local osteria, to enjoy a fish dinner or maybe a local pizza for dinner on your own. Chioggia is very lively and offers a plethora of good cafes and restaurants both on main street and on the side narrow vaulted alleyways.

Hotel: Boat Ave Maria

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 9 - 22 km (8 - 13 miles)

Morning

Lido Island 13 km (8 miles)

Afternoon

Pellestrina Island: 9 km (5 miles)

What to Expect: Apart from climbing small low bridges, the ride is perfectly flat. On Lido, you will ride first

through the lively city center and by Art Nouveau buildings, to end in the quiet southern tip called Alberoni (from the high poplar trees that pointed distant fishermen to the entrance to the lagoon). On Pellestrina Island, you will bike mostly on a bike path, with the lagoon close on your right and multicolored fishermen houses on your left. You will ferry, with your bike, across the short stretch of lagoon between the two islands.

DAY 6: Po Delta Nature Reserve / Adria

This morning, your boat departs the Venice lagoon early and cruises on side canals to your cycling starting point. You will enjoy breakfast and a route review during navigation.

Your ride today crosses the Adige River, the second-longest Italian river, and follows hushed country roads into the tranquil Po River Delta nature reserve, a spectacular expanse of wilderness rich in flora and birdlife. Here, at the mouth of Italy's longest river, fishermen's stalls dot a bucolic landscape of vast lagoons, brackish pools, and peaceful wetlands. Pause for a picnic lunch prepared by your chef and trip leaders before continuing to your boat in Porto Viro.

Later this afternoon, you cruise to our next mooring site, in Adria. This gateway to the Po River Plain was important to ancient Greeks and Etruscans and gave the Adriatic Sea its name. There'll be time for a stroll through its cobblestone streets for a tasty gelato and perhaps a visit to the town's fascinating archaeological museum. In pre-Roman and Roman times, Adria was an important trade center and a river harbor town along a navigable branch of the Po. Amber was one of the most precious stones that was imported from the Baltics and traded here in exchange for local food such as oil and wine. The museum has a remarkable collection of pottery and jewelry dating back to the Greek, Etruscan, Roman, and Celtic times. VBT can reserve a guided tour for you in advance, if you wish.

Dinner is served on the boat tonight.

Hotel: *Boat Ave Maria*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 15 - 44 km (9 - 26 miles)

Morning

Cavanella to Albarella: 29 km (17 miles)

Afternoon

Porto Levante to Porto Viro: 15 km (9 miles)

What to Expect: This morning's ride from Cavanella d'Adige follows 2.7 km (1.7 miles) of flat, packed gravel terrain into the Po River delta region and countryside. Fishing valleys along the route offer the most scenic cycling. The afternoon ride starts with a short ferry ride to cross Canal Bianco into Porto Levante. It then follows paved, flat country roads into the small city of Porto Viro, where you board your boat. You will have little shade for the entire ride.

DAY 7: Cycle to Ferrara / Walking tour of Ferrara / Zelo

Early this morning, cruise out of Adria along the Canal Bianco. After breakfast, disembark for a rewarding reel along a bike path to the bicycle-friendly city of Ferrara, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site for its intense beauty and cultural significance. Bikes are so prominent to this historic culture that large swathes of the city are closed to cars. Enjoy lunch on your own at one of the charming cafes, perhaps sampling some of the local culinary specialties. There are several temptations, like *cappellacci di zucca*, or dumplings filled with pumpkin, or *salama da sugo*, a pork sausage cooked for hours in red wine and spices. Don't miss the typical bread, *coppia ferrarese*.

Later, join a local guide for a walk through the Jewish quarter and medieval district, learning about the powerful House of Este, which ruled the region from the city's imposing castle and Ducal palace and transformed Ferrara into one of Italy's most splendid Renaissance treasures. Enjoy some free time to stroll the narrow alleyways and maybe visit one of the many superb palaces. Or maybe take a walk along the high city walls, the longest in Italy, before shuttling to tiny Zelo, where your boat awaits.

With about 300 inhabitants, a picturesque arched bridge, and a quaint church, the small hamlet of Zelo is your setting for your onboard dinner. After, you may stroll to the local pub, said to pour the best craft beers in the area!

Dinner is on board tonight.

Hotel: Boat Ave Maria

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 41 km (25 miles)

Morning

Bosaro to Ferrara: 41 km (25 miles)

What to Expect: You start biking in Bosaro along quiet country roads, then cross the Po River at Polesella, where the river separates the Emilia-Romagna and Veneto regions. Then, cycle a 7-km (4.3-mile) bike path, completely free from any car traffic, built on the Po River embankment. From Francolino, a newly paved bike path takes you into the green heart of Ferrara. The ride ends here at lunch time. In the afternoon, after a guided walking tour in the city center, you shuttle back by private coach to your boat.

DAY 8: Cheese factory visit / Street Carousel Museum

Ride easy country roads this morning to Bergantino. In this small provincial town, stop at the delightful Street Carousel Museum in the town's Strozzi Palace, where perfectly working carousel models from the late 19th century are preserved. A local expert leads you through this magical and nostalgic world, pausing so you can admire wooden horses, musical calliopes, billboards, and other objects from fairgrounds and merry-go-rounds of yore, from medieval times into the 19th century. Continue riding to a cheese factory to learn how Grana Padano is made. You are invited to sample this delicious local cheese, a rival in fame and flavor of Parmigiano Reggiano.

After, enjoy a picnic lunch in the shade of tall poplar trees. Back on your bike, ride toward Governolo, where you meet your boat and set off on a scenic stretch along the tranquil Mincio River. Its waters lead you into the city of Mantua, one of the greenest and most beautiful Renaissance towns in Italy and the European Capital of Gastronomy in 2017. You'll arrive well before dinner, so there'll be time to disembark and stroll the warrens of the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site. You have many restaurants to choose from for dinner on your own tonight.

Hotel: Boat Ave Maria

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 13 - 63 km (8 - 38 miles)

Morning

Le Calandre to Cheese Factory: 17 km (10 miles)

Afternoon

Cheese Factory to Governolo:: 33 km (20 miles)

What to Expect: You ride mostly on country roads this morning. In the afternoon you cycle mostly on the left embankment of the Po River. The rides are relaxing and far from car traffic, completely flat and with very limited shade. In Governolo you meet our boat, which casts off at 4:00 p.m. for Mantua.

DAY 9: Mantua lakes loop ride / Walking tour of Mantua

After breakfast, enjoy a loop ride outside Mantua. A trio of lakes, or *laghi*, and vast nature reserves surround the city on three sides. As you cycle along their shores, you will skirt the sylvan stretches of Bosco Fontana, the largest enclosed forest in the Po Valley. In August and early September, lotus flowers blossom in the Lago Superiore: The plant was imported from the East in the early 19th century and now thrives here. As you ride, you may spot more flowers, such as white and yellow water lilies. Indigenous plants like the edible water chestnut and lush reeds are still used to make handmade brooms and chairs. You return to the city center by lunch time. Cafes in Mantua's narrow alleyways are sure to tempt you into a delicious post-ride meal on your own. Be sure to sample the city's famed torta sbrisolona, a streusel-like almond cake, for a crunchy dessert.

After lunch, join a local expert for a walking tour of Mantua, an outstanding Renaissance city of battlements, towers, churches, cupolas, and elegant squares. The city prospered during the 16th century under the Gonzagas family, patrons of the arts and of the new ideas that were revolutionizing the way Europe viewed the world. Visit portions of the Ducal palace with its magnificent courtyards, the Castle of St. George, and the incredible *Camera degli Sposi*, the "painted chamber," richly adorned with frescoes painted by Andrea Mantegna during the decade between 1465 and 1474.

Later, celebrate your week with your fellow travelers and new friends during a festive farewell dinner on board your boat.

Hotel: *Boat Ave Maria*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 32 km (19 miles)

Morning

Mantua Loop: 32 km (19 miles)

What to Expect: Enjoy a quiet loop in the relaxing and green outskirts of Mantua, mostly on bike paths. The ride ends in the city center of Mantua. There is no cycling planned for the afternoon; instead, you will enjoy a guided city walk.

DAY 10: Depart Boat / Discover Verona / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

After breakfast, say goodbye to your boat crew and trip leaders, then transfer 40 minutes to your Verona hotel.

When you arrive, our local Verona guide will meet you and host an informative introduction, followed by an orientation tour of Verona. The rest of the day is free to explore on your own with VBT's City Information as your guide.

If you have chosen the independent Post-trip extension to Verona, you remain at this hotel for two nights.

Hotel: Hotel Giberti

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 11: Depart for home

Early this morning*, transfer to the Verona Airport for your departing flight. Please ensure you are ready in the hotel reception area at the designated transfer time**.

*Please note: For guests with early-morning departures, breakfast at the hotel may not be available. Please check with the front desk to verify the times that breakfast is served.

**Please note: VBT recommends that you check your transfer time in your "Transfer Reminder." VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. If you extend your stay beyond the scheduled program dates, return transportation to the airport will be at your own expense.

Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel All'Angelo (Day: 2)

Location is the big advantage and highlight of this historic hotel: it is only 100 feet (30.5 meters) away from the basilica of San Marco and St. Mark's Square. In winter 2020, the hotel will complete the total refurbishment of its rooms and lobby in a more contemporary style. Set in a typical narrow alleyway, the hotel has its private gondola and water-taxi pier, on a side canal—a great convenience for guests. The hotel can also be reached by *vaporetto*, from the St. Mark's Square stop. Air conditioning and complimentary WiFi are available throughout the property.

Ave Maria (Days: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9)

The Ave Maria, sailing under the Italian flag, was totally rebuilt in 2011 to meet our guests' requirements. Only the hull of the original 1970s sand digger remains. Designed by a renowned Italian architectural firm, its shape, materials, and color palettes create a warm and sophisticated atmosphere. The two-deck motor passenger ship features 12 twin-bedded, 2 double, and 2 single cabins, each with a private bathroom and shower. All cabins have a large window; those on the upper deck can be opened. Hair dryers are available on request. The boat has climate control throughout. The restaurant and lounge provide large windows for viewing the passing scenery. Two computers are available for use. Two sundecks are on board; the large wooden sundeck is covered and has chairs and tables. Smoking is permitted only outside on the sundeck. The boat moors each night. Drinks of all types are available for purchase at the bar on board. Complimentary coffee, tea, hot chocolate, and fizzy or plain water are available throughout the day. Tap water onboard is drinkable. There is always plenty of ice. It is not

customary for guests to bring their own drinks or to use the bar facilities of the boat. Onboard meal menus are set, though the chef is happy to accommodate vegetarians and those on restricted diets for health reasons. Please note regarding WiFi on board the boat: Internet access is available during the day only in the common areas, not in the rooms, and is quite dependable. If dependable Internet access is also critical to you at night, VBT recommends that you purchase your own bundle before traveling overseas. There is daily short cleaning of the cabin and one full change of towels once during the week.

Hotel Giberti (Day: 10)

The modern Hotel Giberti is ideally located in the center of Verona, a half mile from the Arena and Piazza Brà. From its excellent location, all of Verona is at your feet, yet you will be far enough from the tourist path to enjoy an authentic view of daily Veronese life. The hotel features a classic and elegant décor, featuring spacious new bedrooms and bathrooms designed with Rosa Portugal marble. You'll enjoy a warm welcome from the smiling and efficient staff. Air conditioning and complimentary WiFi are available throughout the property.