

## Italy Bike & Boat: Venice to Mantua

### Bike Vacation Only

A unique combination of history and nature await you on this unforgettable Venice biking tour. By day, you'll cycle on lightly traveled roads and bike paths from pastel-colored fishermen's homes to Belle Epoch architecture and nature reserves. By night, you'll relax on your floating home, a refurbished eco-friendly barge, as you glide past natural and cultural landmarks. The trip includes guided tours of medieval districts and Renaissance battlements, as well as visits to a carousel museum, a glass-blowing studio, and a cheese factory for a vacation that stimulates all the senses.



### Cultural Highlights

- Enjoy stress-free cycling along quiet canals, a peaceful river, and through a tranquil nature reserve.
- Experience the captivating grandeur of Venice as you cruise the city's famous canals and lagoon.

- Absorb the history of Ferrara and Mantua, both UNESCO-designated Renaissance cities, on a tour with local guides.
- Sample delicious Grana Padano cheese originally developed by monks in the 12th century at a local cheese factory.
- Revel in the Carousel and Popular Entertainment Museum in the Strozzi Palace which is dedicated to itinerant folk shows.

## What to Expect

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:** 8 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 8 - 31

**Average Cycling Time:** 01:15 - 04:00

**Group size:** 30 max

## 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: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Embark boat / Welcome reception and dinner

Your tour starts at 4:00 p.m. at the Giudecca docks in Venice. At the dock you will meet the crew and have a chance to settle in to your berth. Later, everyone will gather for a welcome cocktail and an overview of the exciting week ahead, followed by a gourmet dinner on board.

At the dock you will meet the boat crew and have a chance to settle in to your berth. Later, everyone will gather for a welcome cocktail and an overview of the exciting week ahead, followed by a gourmet dinner on board.

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

Accommodation: *Boat Ave Maria*

Included Meals: Dinner

## **DAY 2: Cruise Venice Lagoon / Warm-up ride on Penisola del Cavallino / Glass-blowing demonstration**

Awake in romantic Venice and enjoy a hearty breakfast aboard the boat which will be your home for the week. From the upper sun deck you can marvel at the stunning views of St. Mark's Square and the fabulous churches and other monuments of Venice as you cruise to the Cavallino Peninsula. As you head towards your first cycling adventure, your crew will identify the various islands as well as the MOSE facility, the ambitious Venice flood protection system of mobile gates recently activated. The bike ride begins at Punta Sabbioni, where you will have a brief safety clinic before embarking on a warm-up ride with your trip leaders. Today's relaxed route will travel along quiet, flat, paved trails, past vast scenic salt marshes and carefully tended vegetable gardens. You will see the ancient hamlet of Lio Piccolo, home to many species of birds. The hamlet is home to the 18th-century Palazzo Baldu which features a chapel and elementary school which were left behind by the noble family that once owned the island.

You will have lunch on board the boat and then return to Venice with a stop on Murano Island to visit a glass-blowing studio. Glass-blowing is an ancient art that was imported to Venice from the Far East, but it has been developed and refined to the point that Murano's glassmakers were the leading artisans of the craft in Europe for centuries. In the factory, you can learn some of the techniques involved and watch skilled artists crafting samples for you. You will spend the rest of the afternoon on the island for independent exploration which can include a stop at the Glass Museum in Palazzo Giustinian to see samples dating back to ancient times. Your boat will return to Venice for the night with dinner on board featuring a specially chosen wine to accompany both the dinner and the sharing of stories from your first day of riding.

Today's Ride Choice:

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

What to Expect: Today's ride is a loop from our boat on quiet trails by salt marshes and the tiny village of Lio Piccolo which will give you a chance to get acquainted with your route notes and Ride with GPS and to get comfortable with the bicycle which will be your trusty companion for the rest of the trip.

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 km (12 miles)

Accommodation: *Boat Ave Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 3: Cycle Lido and Pellestrina Islands / Explore Chioggia 'Little-Venice'

After a hearty breakfast, your boat will set off for the island of Lido, crossing the old harbor of Malamocco en route. Today's ride will cover two narrow islands – Lido and Pellestrina - which separate the lagoon from the Adriatic Sea.

In Lido you will start your journey by pedaling among the glamorous streets that straddle this barrier sandbar. Belle Epoque hotels line the roads of this prosperous island which hosts celebrities and other elites annually for the Venice Film Festival. From there, you'll take your bikes aboard a ferry 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 with the skyline of Venice floating on the horizon. Your ride travels from village to village, all featuring views of the sea and the colorful homes for which this island is known. Bobbin lace is a local art, created by weaving cotton threads from a spool onto a round cushion called a *tombolo* and you may see women working their craft as you ride.

You will lunch independently at any of Pellestrina's taverns, which are wonderful places 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 picked from one of the gardens you may have passed earlier.

In the afternoon, you'll return to the *Ave Maria* and cross to the island town of Chioggia which is known as "Little Venice." Linked to the mainland by a causeway, Chioggia is a charming and often overlooked town but it is a true Italian gem. You'll cycle past the picturesque San Domenico and Lombardo canals, following a maze of narrow *calli*, or alleyways, and bridges while admiring medieval churches and buildings which will transport you back in time. The Chioggia Cathedral dates to the 1620s, and the church of St. Andrew boasts a bell tower constructed in the 11th and 12th centuries, featuring the oldest and still working tower clock in the world.

Luciano, the caretaker of this former lighthouse, will accompany you to the top of the tower for an explanation of the amazing still working clock and magnificent views of the island and surrounding waters. Although the fish market is closed for the evening, you can look through the imposing stone-sculpted Prisca gate to view the multicolored stalls of one of Chioggia's most important and ancient institutions. The market may be closed but the atmosphere is very much alive.

Tonight you'll eat independently and you can choose between any of the local restaurants or simple osteria for your dining pleasure. Chioggia is very lively and offers a host of good cafes and restaurants,

both on the main street and the narrow vaulted alleyways.

### Today's Ride Choices

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 start your ride in the lively city center, surrounded by Art Nouveau buildings and you'll end in the quiet southern tip called Alberoni which is named for the tall poplar trees that pointed distant fishermen to the entrance to the lagoon. On Pellestrina Island, most of your riding will be on a bike path, with the lagoon on the right and multicolored fishermen's houses on the left. You will make the short trek between islands on a ferry which will accommodate your bicycle.

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

Accommodation: *Boat Ave Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 4: Po Delta Nature Reserve / Adria

Your boat leaves the Venice lagoon bright and early this morning and you'll savor breakfast as you cruise the side canals on the way to your destination.

Today your ride will cross the Adige River, the second-longest river in Italy. You will follow quiet country roads into the tranquil Po River Delta nature reserve, a spectacular expanse rich in flora and birdlife. Here, at the mouth of Italy's longest river, fishermen's stalls dot a bucolic landscape of vast lagoons, pools, and peaceful wetlands. You will be treated to a picnic lunch prepared by your chef and trip leaders before finishing your journey in Porto Viro where your boat is moored.

A lovely jaunt by boat will bring you to Adria. This gateway to the Po River Plain was important to ancient Greeks and Etruscans and gave the Adriatic Sea its name. You will be early enough for a stroll through the cobblestone streets and after today's cycling, you needn't feel guilty about stopping for a tasty gelato. 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 precious stones imported from the Baltics and traded here in exchange for local food such as oil and wine. The town is home to a fascinating archaeological museum with its impressive collection of pottery and jewelry dating back to the Greek, Etruscan, Roman, and Celtic times. If you request one in advance, VBT can reserve a guided tour for you.

Dinner is served on the boat tonight.

#### Today's Ride Choices

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 flat and paved terrain into the Adige and Po Rivers delta region and countryside weaving through small villages here and there. The ride is on paved roads except for one mile on a packed gravel path. The afternoon ride starts with a short ferry ride across Canal Bianco into Porto Levante and follows paved, flat country roads into the small city of Porto Viro, where you will board your boat. Remember to pack your sunscreen because there is very little shade on the route.

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

Accommodation: Boat *Ave Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 5: Cycle to Ferrara / Walking tour of Ferrara / Zelo

Early this morning, you will cruise out of Adria along the Canal Bianco. After breakfast, you will disembark for a rewarding ride along a bike path to the bicycle-friendly city of Ferrara, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site for its beauty and cultural significance. Bikes are so prominent in this historic city that large swathes are closed to cars. Enjoy lunch on your own at one of the charming cafes. Local culinary specialties include *cappellacci di zucca*, or dumplings filled with pumpkin and *salama da sugo*, a pork sausage cooked for hours in red wine and spices. You've earned the right to enjoy the local bread, *coppia ferrarese*.

Later, you will 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. You'll have time for some independent exploration of the charming, narrow alleyways or a walk along the high city walls which are the longest in Italy. A visit to any one of the many superb palaces or international art exhibitions held at Palazzo dei Diamanti will be well worth the trip before taking a private coach to where your boat is moored.

With about 300 inhabitants, a picturesque arched bridge, and a quaint church, the small hamlet of Zelo is a charming setting for your onboard dinner. Zelo boasts a local pub with some of the best local craft beers, perfect for a post-dinner nightcap.

#### Today's Ride Choice

Morning Bosaro to Ferrara – 41 km (25 miles)

What to Expect: Your cycling starts along the quiet country roads of Bosaro after which you'll cross the Po River at Polesella, a spot which marks the separation between the Emilia-Romagna and Veneto regions. From there, you'll enjoy a 7-km (4.3-mile) spin on a bike path which was built on the Po River embankment. A newly paved bike path will take you on the next part of your journey from Francolino into the green heart of Ferrara where you'll lunch independently. In the afternoon you'll enjoy a guided one-mile walking tour in the city center before taking a private coach back to the *Ave Maria*.

Cumulative Distance Range: 41 km (25 miles)

Accommodation: Boat *Ave Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 6: Cheese factory visit / Street Carousel Museum

This morning you will ride along easy country roads to Bergantino. Your visit to this small town wouldn't be complete without a stop at the delightful Carousel and Popular Entertainment Museum in the town's Strozzi Palace where perfectly working carousel models from the late 19th century have been preserved. A local expert will lead 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 dating from medieval times to the 19th century. You'll get back on your bike and head to a cheese factory to learn how Grana Padano is made and taste samples of this delicious local cheese which is similar in flavor and fame to Parmigiano Reggiano.

Enjoy the cheese but leave room for a picnic lunch provided by your chef to be enjoyed in the shade of tall poplar trees. Then, you'll bicycle toward Governolo, where you will board your boat and enjoy a scenic stretch along the tranquil Mincio River. Its waters will 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. Your afternoon arrival will give you plenty of time to disembark and stroll the warrens of the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site, while stealing a peek at restaurant menus for a night of independent dining.

## Today's Ride Choices

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

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

What to Expect: You will ride on country roads and the peaceful bike path which has been built on the left embankment of the Po River. The roads are flat and the rides are relaxing and far from car traffic, but remember your sunscreen because there is limited shade. In Governolo you'll re-board your boat which leaves at 4:00 p.m. for Mantua.

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 – 50 km (10.5 – 31 miles)

Accommodation: Boat *Ave Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 7: Mantua lakes loop ride / Walking tour of Mantua

After breakfast, you'll head out for a lovely cycling loop outside Mantua. A trio of lakes, or *laghi*, and vast nature reserves surround the city on three sides. Cycling 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 Lago Superiore. The plant was imported from the East in the early 19th century and now thrives here. Other flowers you might see along the way include white and yellow water lilies, as well as edible water chestnuts and lush reeds which are still used to make handmade brooms and chairs. You will return to the city center in time to enjoy lunch at one of the many cafes that line the narrow alleyways of Mantua. Be sure to sample the city's famed *torta sbrisolona*, a streusel-like almond cake, for a crunchy dessert.

After lunch, you will join a local expert for a one and a half mile 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. They were patrons of the arts and champions of the new ideas that were revolutionizing the way Europe viewed the world. Your tour will include 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 in the mid 1400s.

This evening, you will celebrate the conclusion of your cycling week with a festive farewell dinner on board the *Ave Maria*.

Today's Ride Choice



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. This will be our last ride together since your afternoon will be spent on a guided walking tour of the city.

Cumulative Distance Range: 32 km (19 miles)

Accommodation: Boat *Ave Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 8: Depart Ship / Discover Verona / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends**

After an included breakfast, you will say goodbye to your boat crew and trip leaders as the tour comes to a close. You need to leave the boat no later than 9:00 a.m. and you can share a 40-minute transportation to VBT centrally-located Verona hotel. If you plan to spend another day in Mantua, your trip leaders will be happy to assist you and help you book a taxi.

Included Meals: Breakfast