

Spain: Barcelona & Costa Brava

Bike Vacation Only

Savor a free-spirited reel on Spain's Costa Brava. In the shadow of the Pyrenees, you'll set your own agenda on this inn-to-inn Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation among Catalonia's coastal ranges and medieval enclaves. Cycle into tiny villages dripping with atmosphere, pausing to explore narrow cobbled lanes and sip *café* to your liking in pedestrian squares. Thrill to exhilarating spins with glimpses of a scenic coast of sandy beaches and rocky coves. Pedal into former fishing ports loved by Hemingway and Dalí. And experience a biking paradise beloved by professional cyclists for decades.

Cultural Highlights

Explore Girona's cultural treasures, including the old Jewish quarter, medieval walls, Gothic churches and Romanesque architecture

Savor superb Catalan seafood and farm-fresh cuisine, complemented by excellent local wines including sparkling cava

Cycle through history, stopping to view Greco-Roman ruins at Empúries, Gothic gems in Girona, and charming medieval villages

Discover the most important Greco-Roman ruins on the Iberian Peninsula at the coastal archeological site at Empúries

Immerse yourself in authentic Catalan village life during a farmhouse stay in tiny Sant Feliu de Boada

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginner and experienced cyclists. Rides are on flat to rolling paved roads and bike lanes. The Mediterranean landscape of the interior has rolling hills. As you ride closer to the coastal towns, the roads will be flatter, but busier. Some historic centers have cobblestone roads. Please verify your bike selection for this tour as it is not always possible to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available as needed.

Tour Duration: 6 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 15 - 35

Average Cycling Time: 00:30 - 04:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Mar 61°/44°, Apr 64°/47°, May 69°/54°, Jun 76°/60°, Sep 78°/62°, Oct 71°/55°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Mar 1.6, Apr 1.9, May 2.3, Jun 1.6, Sep 3.4, Oct 3.6

DAY 1: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Ride Girona loop

Make your own independent travel arrangements to Girona. Collect your bags and clear customs then choose from several recommended transportation options or decide your own path. We suggest arriving in Spain at least one day prior to the tour start date as your tour begins at 10:00 a.m.

The Welcome orientation with your VBT local host includes:

- An overview of the itinerary
- Bike fitting and equipment familiarization
- Review of the Ride with GPS navigation app
- Important contact information in case you need to reach your VBT local host
- Safety briefing
- Local suggestions (restaurants, things to do, etc.)

After, set off on your own, following your Ride with GPS app. Your first invigorating reel creates a figure 8, leading you northwest of Girona into the Catalan countryside and the gently sloping foothills of the Pre-Pyrenees. You ascend gradually, taking in lovely views of the village of Montcal below. As you ride, you can take inspiration knowing the Rocacorba climb is nearby; this cycling ascent up Puigsou Mountain—named for the 12th-century sanctuary or Rocacorba near the summit—provides solid training for professional cyclists and hardy challenges for keen amateurs. For now, you turn south as rolling terrain takes you through the traditional Catalan town of Sant Medir known for its candy festival in early March. Then enjoy an easy coast back to the center of Girona. Your hotel is steps away from the city's Old Town and pedestrian squares, rich with history and brimming with the excellent cuisine of the region.

Hotel: Nord 1901

Today's Ride

Girona "under Roca Corba" loop: 28.8 km (17.9 miles)

What to Expect: Depart along city streets and ride into the countryside on secondary paved roads. You

pass horse farms and small villages, then gradually ascend to the highest point just past Montcal. Enjoy stunning views of Girona, of surrounding mountains including the next day's ride, and a rolling descent back to the center of Girona. This shorter ride allows you to get your legs moving and still have time to explore Girona.

DAY 2: Cycle Girona to Sant Feliu de Boada

Today you cycle out of Girona heading east toward the Mediterranean. After winding your way out of the city, you ascend the coastal range that separates Girona from the coast. This classic ride with its long climb is favored by the many cyclists drawn to the region and you'll quickly see why as you're surrounded by emerald-green hills and forests. Pause at the Els Angels chapel to admire its stonework along the way.

From the highest point, you are rewarded with fantastic views northwest to the Pyrenees and east to the Mediterranean. Linger a while to take it all in, then coast your way into a very flat finish through scenic arable land and farming villages, including Madremanya, Monells, Corçà, Ullastret, Canapost, and Peratallada. Any of these centers is worth a quick stop to do some exploring and soaking in of the rural Catalan character. You'll find this network of quiet country roads, all paved and with little traffic, to be a cyclist's dream as you crisscross a typical Mediterranean landscape.

The ride ends in the beautifully preserved village of Sant Feliu de Boada in the region of Baix Empordà, surrounded by farmland and dotted with stone houses. In the heart of the village, admire the 16th-century church built in late-Gothic style that is believed to have been founded as early as the 11th century. Make yourself at home in a traditional Catalan *masia*, a sprawling stone authentic farmhouse renovated with all the comforts of a modern inn. It is ideally situated to stroll to either of Sant Feliu de Boada's excellent Catalan restaurants, where the region's specialties are prepared with locally sourced ingredients, and where crema *catalana*, the local custard dessert, is always a favorite finale.

Hotel: Can Barrull

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride

Girona to Sant Feliu de Boada via Els Angels: 49.6 km (31.0 miles)

What to Expect: Begin cycling from your city center hotel on pedestrian and city streets. After 4 km (2.4 miles), you will be outside the city and ready to begin a steady ascent to Els Angels. The highest point is at 15 km (9 miles) after which you'll coast almost 5 km (3 miles) downhill with some steep sections into the lovely medieval town of Madremanya. Another 5 km (3 miles) of descent brings you to Monells and

rolling to flat farmland through several villages and into the small medieval hamlet of Sant Feliu de Boada.

Girona to Sant Feliu de Boada through Foixa: 60 km (37 miles)

What to Expect: Begin cycling from your city center hotel on pedestrian and city streets. The route has some traffic in the first 8 km (5 miles) in Girona's outskirts then follows quiet country roads with two ascents after 20 km (12 miles) before getting to the lovely medieval town of Madremanya. Another 5 km (3 miles) of descent brings you to Monells and rolling to flat farmland through several villages and into the small medieval hamlet of Sant Feliu de Boada.

DAY 3: Sant Feliu de Boada to Llafranc

Today's ride leads you to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and Spain's Costa Brava. You pedal first along bucolic country roads, passing meadows and fertile farmlands. Catalan *masias*, country houses like the one you stayed in last night, round out this picturesque landscape. Your first destination today is Calonge, past the outskirts of La Bisbal d'Empordà. This is the province of Baix Empordà, or Lower Empordà, where gentle agricultural plains are overlooked by small ridgelines—all of it interlaced with a network of small rural roads that stretch for miles, ideal for cycling. Spend all the time you'd like exploring the 13th-century towers and walls of the Calonge castle, taking in views of the Bay of Sant Antoni.

Later, continue your breathtaking reel to Palamós, home to one of the last surviving fishing fleets along these shores. This seaside town did not miss its opportunity to also become a beloved beach destination. Cycle next through a coastal pine forest, arriving later in Llafranc, a seaside resort with a small sandy beach where Ernest Hemingway and Salvador Dalí were said to have spent time. High above the town on a bluff, the historic Saint Sebastian lighthouse warns sailors of the rocky Saint Sebastian point below. Once you settle in to your hotel, take a short stroll to Llafranc's seaside promenade, where a range of restaurants awaits.

Hotel: Hotel mas Pastora

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride

Sant Feliu de Boada to Llafranc: 45.7 km (28.0 miles)

What to Expect: Roll out of Sant Feliu de Boada on flat rural paved roads through tiny villages and

farmland. You will ride around the outskirts of the larger town of La Bisbal d'Empordà, then return to untrafficked rural roads. A gradual climb of about 2 km (1.2 miles) leads up to a ridge where views of the Mediterranean Sea unfold. At 16 km (9.6 miles), an easy descent winds into Calonge, where you join slightly busier roads as you approach the coast. You will encounter the most traffic of your trip near Palamós, between about 28 km (17.4 miles) and 30 km (18 miles), but then you will return to smaller, quieter roads. End your rewarding day by winding your way slightly downhill to seaside Llafranc (and a very short but steep ascent to hotel).

Llafranc Challenging loop: 21 km (13.0 miles)

What to Expect: This short but challenging loop is for those who don't mind climbing (just over 1,500 feet) and want some more spectacular Costa Brava views. The route takes you north paralleling the coast, getting close to the seaside when possible, closest at the little port of Tamariu. After 11 km (7 miles), you turn inland and then loop south through the little massif of Begur, then coast mainly downhill past the outskirts of Palafrugell and back to Llafranc.

Today's Optional Walk

Llafranc to Calella: 5.2 km (3.2 miles)

What to Expect: A stunning coastal walk, out and back, along the "GR92" walking path, departing Llafranc's seafront and hugging the rocky coast and cliffs with tunnels and stairs above the cliffs and tiny coves with authentic fisherman's homes. Enjoy the Costa Brava's most iconic and lovely viewpoints. The route is signed and has handrails, in certain locations, but appropriate footwear is highly recommended (sneakers). Use Ride with GPS Route Notes or ask your hotel for a local map.

DAY 4: Llafranc to Empúries

Today's ride takes you up and over the coastal range, through the gentle plains of the Costa Brava, then north from the Baix (or "lower") Empordà to the Alt (or "upper") Empordà—with ample opportunity to stop and explore. Your ride begins through a dreamy landscape of medieval towns and traditional *mas* farmhouses. You skirt the town of Palafrugell—once a producer of cork harvested from local forests. Ride into the historic hilltop town of Pals. This remarkably restored medieval center boasts cobbled streets framed with arches and stone balconies. Its 49-foot Romanesque tower—known locally as the *Torre de les Hores*, or the Tower of the Hours—was built between the 11th and 13th centuries.

Riding through rice paddies and orchards through medieval Palau-Sator village, continue north to

Torroella de Montgri, once an inland port for the Kings of Aragon until the Ter River silted up and changed its fate. As you continue cycling, you keep the towering Montgri massif to the west, in the heart of Dali's native region and landscapes, enjoying an easy spin until you reach the coast. Your hotel is conveniently located near Empúries, a fascinating archaeological site of Phoenician and Roman ruins.

Hotel: Hostal d'Empúries

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride

Llafranc to Empúries: 51.7 km (32.1 miles)

What to Expect: Today's ride starts with an initial ascent away from the coast of about 2 km (1.2 miles), so you may want to pocket a croissant for after. You skirt the town of Palafrugell and some busier roads, partially following a bike path. At about 17 km (10.5 miles), you enter the hilltop town of Pals. After riding through rice paddies and orchards and medieval Palau-Sator, you encounter busier roads and the town streets of Torroella de Montgri. You are soon back to slightly rolling rural paved roads until you reach 46 km (28.5 miles) at Albons. A short hitch north along the coast leads to your hotel.

DAY 5: Empúries

Take today to kick back and enjoy your seaside locale. You can relax on the beach, then explore the former fishing port of nearby L'Escala. Anchovies were the main haul here and remain central to the town's annual October festival. If you'd like to visit the fascinating ruins at Empúries, there's a shared-use path next to your hotel that leads you there. Also worth exploring are the port of L'Escala itself, the Old Town, and the Archaeology Museum of Catalonia Empúries. If you wish, you can partake of your hotel's spa facilities at your expense; the cost is 15 euros per person (price subject to change) and reservations are recommended.

If you're up for more riding today, you can follow a scenic 50 km (30 mile) loop. It leads you inland and gains some elevation that affords spectacular views of the Bay of Roses and Pyrenees. Then you descend and circle back to the coast, returning to the shore at Sant Pere Pescador, a pretty town along the River Fluvià near the coast. Take some time here to enjoy the long sandy beach of the bay, explore the 14th-century castle, and find a café for a lunch of fresh seafood. After, as you parallel the coast back, you pass the archaeological site at Empúries, the most important Greco-Roman ruins on the Iberian Peninsula. Pause here to explore if you wish, admiring the ancient Roman wall and some incredibly preserved mosaics.

This evening, consult our recommendations for a spot to enjoy a final dinner and celebrate your exploration of the Costa Brava. Restaurants in Sant Martí d'Empúries are a 10-minute walk away while L'Escala is 30 minutes. Or you may dine at your hotel's restaurant.

Hotel: Hostal d'Empúries

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride

Empúries Loop: 49.1 km (30.5 miles)

What to Expect: Ride inland away from the seaside, initially through rolling farmland. After an initial climb, ride along a high plateau with views of the Pyrenees and the Bay of Roses. A quick descent then turns quickly and ascends to the highest point of the day at around the 23.6 km mark (14.6 miles). A sustained descent rolls through farms and villages, then traverse some rolling hills until the route flattens back out at the plain at Sant Thomas de Fluvià. At Sant Pere Pescador you cross the Fluvià River and turn south, paralleling the coast through the medieval town of Sant Martí d'Empúries and to your hotel.

DAY 6: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Your tour ends after breakfast at your hotel in Empúries. Depending upon your destination, it may not be possible to depart for the U.S. on the last day of the tour. Please check airline schedules carefully. If you plan to schedule return flights immediately following the tour's conclusion, please call your airline directly for specific check-in requirements.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Can Barrull (Day: 2)

The lovely, restored Can Barrull is one of Catalonia's traditional *masia* farmhouses, steeped in history and updated with the latest amenities. Its charm is bolstered by its location in the tiny village of Sant Feliu de Boada. Despite the modest size of this hamlet, it boasts excellent Catalan restaurants that are just a short walk away. The property's intricate stonework, lovely gardens, and the ambiance all evoke a warm Spanish country home. The air-conditioned rooms are generously sized and boast large bathrooms. You'll be greeted with a smile by hospitable owners who provide a hearty homemade breakfast.

Hostal spa Empúries (Days: 4,5)

Situated directly on Portitxol Beach and on our route, overlooking the Bay of Roses, the Hostal spa Empúries stands on an ancient settlement, beside the Greek and Roman ruins of Empúries, and is within easy walking distance of the medieval towns of Sant Marti d'Empúries and L'Escala. The air-conditioned resort hotel is dedicated to sustainable tourism and also to the health and well-being of its guests. The property features lovely gardens of native vegetation, an outdoor terrace overlooking the sea, and landscaped areas to stroll through. Gym facilities are complimentary, and optional spa services and indoor pools are also available.

Nord 1901 (Day: 1)

Located in the historic heart of Girona, the Nord 1901 Hotel was completely renovated in 2009 to offer sophisticated flair and modern amenities while still preserving the ambiance of its Old Town setting. Intimate and family-operated, it is within walking distance of Girona's main attractions, including the colorful houses along the River Onvar, the Plaza Independencia, the Jewish quarter, the cathedral, and a wide range of popular restaurants and cafés. Enjoy breakfast on the garden terrace and take advantage of the only garden in the city center with a swimming pool. Each luxurious room is equipped with climate control, a safe, hot-water kettle for coffee- and tea-making, flat-screen TV, free WiFi, and a private bath with shower, bathrobe, slippers, and hairdryer.

Hotel mas Pastora (Day: 3)

Situated in the fishing village of Llafranc, Hotel Mas Pastora boasts a rich history as an 18th-century Catalan country house that once belonged to the noble Marquises de Cruilles. Its current family has owned the property since the 1930s and has lovingly created a beautiful, garden-like setting. This charming, air-conditioned hotel, recently restored as an eco-friendly property, boasts energy-efficient construction, solar panels, and rainwater recycling. Swim in the saltwater pool, or walk down to the beach, just a few hundred feet away. Wind down your day at the bar with a tapas menu and local wines. Your room offers all the amenities you need for a comfortable stay, including a private terrace overlooking the pool and grounds, providing a slice of Catalan countryside.