

Italy: Puglia, Alberobello & Lecce

Bike Vacation + Air Package

Chart your own course through Puglia's unique patchwork of Baroque churches, Roman ruins, and conical whitewashed trulli on this unforgettable spin from the Ionian to the Adriatic, through olive groves, vineyards, and sun-drenched villages perched above translucent blue seas.

Cultural Highlights

- Stay overnight in the dry-stone trulli dwellings of Alberobello, a UNESCO World Heritage site
- Cycle the Ionian and Adriatic coastlines at your own pace, stopping to explore whatever and whenever you wish
- Stay in seaside Gallipoli, Santa Maria di Leuca, and Otranto, rich in ancient history and legend
- Enjoy ample opportunities to swim at sandy beaches and Mediterranean coves tucked under limestone cliffs
- Ride into Lecce, known as the "Florence of the South" for its exuberant Baroque architecture

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 relatively flat paved roads and bike lanes paralleling the seacoast. Expect more rolling Mediterranean landscapes inland and semi-urban riding into historic centers. 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 if needed.

Average Daily Mileage: 15 - 32 miles

Average Cycling Time: 00:30 - 05:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Mar 55°/46°, Apr 60°/50°, May 68°/55°, Jun 75°/62°, Jul 80°/68°, Aug 80°/68°, Sep 75°/64°, Oct 68°/57°, Nov 58°/42°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Mar 3.0, Apr 1.7, May 1.0, Jun 0.9, Jul 0.3, Aug 0.3, Sep 2.5, Oct 3.8, Nov 2.6

FLIGHT DAY: Depart home / Fly overnight to Bari

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

ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in Bari / Travel to Alberobello

Upon arrival at the Bari airport, make your own travel arrangements to Alberobello. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook.

When you arrive in Alberobello, you might feel as if you've stepped into a fairytale, thanks to the city's many *trulli*. These round, white-washed, dry-stone huts capped with conical limestone roofs were constructed without mortar so they could be quickly disassembled when word got around that the taxman was on his way. Their original purpose was to store agricultural tools but they later became dwellings. Today, they are a carefully preserved symbol of Puglia and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Many have been beautifully restored for modern living, including the ones clustered within the hotel village that welcomes you today. Make yourself at home in your very own charming *trullo* house, relax after your journey, and stroll among these 500-year-old dwellings, some of their roofs marked with chalk-white symbols meant to bless their inhabitants.

DAY 1: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Loop ride Alberobello to Locorotondo

After breakfast at Trulli & Puglia, meet your Local host in the lobby at 1:00 p.m. for your Welcome Orientation, along with any other VBT guests arriving on the same day. Please be dressed and ready for cycling. Your Local host will be carrying a VBT sign.

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.)

Get to know your bicycle and ease into the rhythm of biking in Italy during today's ride. From the center of Alberobello, you will enter the rolling Itria Valley. Take your time on today's ride, stopping to savor the rustic landscape of ancient olive trees, small vineyards, and vegetable gardens interspersed among farmhouses and *trulli*. Your route brings you to the hilltop village of Locorotondo, rated one of Italy's "most beautiful villages." As you approach, it appears like a vision in white on a hilltop. Walk into its shaded, labyrinthine alleys, filled with Baroque churches and finely sculpted architecture, and find a *gelato* in its historic center or in a café overlooking the valley, before returning to Alberobello at your leisure.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 2: Travel to Ionian Coast and Cycle Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli / Move on Day

After breakfast, at 9:00 a.m. a 90-minute drive takes you to the Salento Peninsula on the magnificent Ionian Coast, where sandy beaches and the cobalt-blue waters of inviting inlets are sure to lure you in for a refreshing dip. Your initial destination is the seaside resort town of Porto Cesareo, overseen by a handsome 16th-century watchtower. From here, set out for a spectacular coastal ride, passing through villages that showcase the real Puglia. Get out of the saddle as the spirit moves you, for photos, or to poke into a shop. You'll find that conversations with locals come easily in this corner of Italy that sees few visitors!

Later, you'll glide into the Old Town of Gallipoli, the "Gem of Salento," a medieval fortified island city linked to the mainland by a 16th-century bridge. Gallipoli was a part of Magna Graecia, or Greater Greece, which included vast swathes of southern Italy and Sicily in ancient times. Once a center for olive oil, today Gallipoli is a lively city, full of boutiques, cafés, and vestiges from its Greek and Roman days. The fishing port still brings in the catch of the day and the surrounding walls, once a defense against centuries of invasions, are the perfect place to join locals in their sunset passeggiata, or evening stroll, before a well-earned aperitivo overlooking Sant' Andrea's lighthouse. After settling in to your hotel, you have numerous fine restaurants from which to choose for a freshly prepared seafood dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli — 32.3 km (20.2 miles) | Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli - Nardò Plus — 15.6 km (9.7 miles)

What To Expect:

Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli — 32.3 km (20.2 miles)

Departing Porto Cesareo, your ride stays mainly along the coast on a mixture of roads and dedicated bike lanes through populated areas, farmland, and open fields with the sea in the distance on your right. Rising after 13 km (eight miles), the day's steepest ascent is more than made up for by stunning sea views, after which you will veer inland for about five km (three miles). The route returns to the coast through some charming small ports and beaches before rolling into the center of Gallipoli and your hotel.

Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli – Nardò Plus — 15.6 km (9.7 miles)

Enjoy an optional visit of Nardò, on an almost 16 km ride in the countryside, into the heart of Nardò and returning to the coast. Nardò is rich in history and the monuments will offer you a cultural insight into its past. Breathe the authentic life of a back-country salentine village by stopping at the historical winery, Schola Sarmenti. Grab a snack from a pastry shop or enjoy lunch in a historical café in the main square. You rejoin the Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli route at that route's 16.7 km mark.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Gallipoli to Santa Maria di Leuca / Move on Day

Relish another day cycling along the Ionian Sea, where each crystalline beach seems more inviting than the last. You might want to plan on an early start so you can take as many swim breaks as you wish. There will also be opportunities to stop for true Italian coffee and to grab lunch at a seaside restaurant in Marina di Torre San Giovanni. And of course, an Italian cycling adventure cannot live up to its reputation if it doesn't include at least a daily stop for gelato. As much as you'll enjoy the culinary and swim breaks, it's the vistas and picturesque marinas that are truly inspiring in this breathtaking corner of Puglia. You will end the day in Santa Maria di Leuca—a beautiful destination perched on a low seaside promontory and steeped in ancient history and legend. This historic town was named for the white cliffs that have been providing the scenic backdrop to your ride (leukos is Greek for "white").

The locals claim that this is where the Ionian meets the Adriatic, although officially it is further east. Pause at Punta Ristola for sweeping views of the lighthouse, Italy's second most important, and the adjacent Basilica Sanctuary of Saint Mary—also known as De Finibus Terrae, or "The End of the Land," named when it was commonly believed that the earth was flat. The Basilica, built over a Roman temple and dedicated to the goddess Minerva, marks where Saint Peter is said to have started his long walk to Rome after crossing the Mediterranean from Jerusalem. Today, the devout follow in his footsteps along the Via Francigena pilgrimage route.

After a rewarding day, settle in to your exclusive enclave and enjoy an included dinner at your hotel.

Today's Ride Choices

Gallipoli to Santa Maria di Leuca — 51.7 km (32.1 miles) | Santa Maria di Leuca loop Plus — 14.5 km (9.0 miles) | Santa Maria di Leuca walk — 5 km (3.1 miles)

What To Expect:

Gallipoli to Santa Maria di Leuca — 51.7 km (32.1 miles)

indicate a slower speed limit for cars). You will pass many sandy beaches, marinas, and beach resorts with ample options for swimming, lunch, coffee, and ice cream, as well as many scenic viewpoints and ancient watchtowers. Along the ride, you have two options for additional discoveries in the hamlets of Torre Mozza and Torre San Gregorio. As you round the tip of the peninsula, you will pass the Devil's Cave, a natural limestone cave.

Santa Maria di Leuca loop Plus — 14.5 km (9.0 miles)

Enjoy a loop from the hotel heading inland on peaceful countryside routes with gentle ascents and descents. The route takes you into Santa Maria di Leuca before returning to rural roads leading to delightful views of the sea on your way down to the coast!

Santa Maria di Leuca walk — 5 km (3.1 miles)

The walk, roundtrip from your hotel, is about 5 km and takes you to the most important highlights of the village. You can find information about the embarcadero if you wish to enjoy the boat excursion along the coast from a sea perspective.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Santa Maria di Leuca to Otranto / Move on Day

Today's ride continues along the dramatic Adriatic Coast with the sea on your right for the entire day, descending into enticing crystalline coves. Later, some invigorating climbs lead to high bluffs with breathtaking views followed by exhilarating descents bringing you to quaint harbor villages. At today's highest elevations, you'll pass a series of ancient watchtowers where guards once kept an eye out for intruders approaching from the southern Mediterranean. As you ride, you'll find plenty of options for lunch

and snacks; perhaps you'll sample freshly prepared seafood or provola e mortadella. One final long and steady downhill brings you into Otranto, Italy's easternmost point. Surrounded by great ramparts, it is one of Italy's most scenic coastal towns, situated on the Strait of Otranto, which separates Italy from Albania by just 45 miles.

Otranto's Old Town is a rich amalgam of the history of past invaders: Greeks, Romans, and Turks among them. Exploring it all is a must, and stopping in its 11th-century cathedral is absolutely required. Behind the altar, the bones of 813 martyrs who fell in a 15th-century siege are encased in a glass cabinet. But the medieval mosaic floor, the largest in Europe, is the real draw: Created in 1163 by a resident monk, the "Tree of Life" spans 8,611 square feet. Back outside, you might find your own mosaics—and other crafts—among the bustling stalls that line the narrow lanes. Otranto's 15th-century castle is also worth a visit for its history and the exhibit devoted to the now-closed Neolithic caves in Porto Badisco that you passed on your way into town.

At dinnertime, you can stroll to the city's inviting waterfront with its wide terrace and lovely vistas.

Today's Ride Choices

Santa Maria di Leuca to Otranto — 52.1 km (32.4 miles)

What to Expect:

You will ride along the Adriatic Coast, with the week's highest elevation gains and losses. The route is high above the sea on bluffs and also dips down to charming harbor villages with stops for swimming, food, and drinks. The second climb of the day takes you to Torre Nasparo, with its spectacular views east and north. On a clear day, after the last big climb to Torre Minervino, before reaching Italy's most easterly lighthouse of Punta Palascia, you may spot Albania's Acroceurani mountain range and some Greek islands on the other side of the Adriatic Sea. A sustained descent brings you to Porto Badisco, Approdo di Enea, and then into Otranto.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Otranto / Stay Put Day

Enjoy a Stay Put Day to do as you please. If you just can't stay off the saddle, take a loop ride into the interior away from the sea, following quiet country roads. An initial slight ascent lifts you above Otranto and then flattens out as it winds through olive groves framed by stone walls. You may stop to ponder

ancient dolmens and menhirs, the region's mysterious prehistoric standing stones. Take your time on this scenic route, perhaps pausing to toast your good fortune at a local winery or stopping to observe a traditional weaving workshop. Back at Otranto's beach, reward yourself with a swim and a delicious seafood lunch along the port.

Alternately, you can join a boat excursion along the dramatic coastal cliffs and past spectacular grottos, stopping for swims along the way. You may prefer to spend the day on land, browsing Otranto's inviting shops, and the halls and grounds of its seaside castle, following our Optional Otranto walk.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Otranto to Lecce / Move on Day

Leaving Otranto today, you'll savor your last ride along the dramatic Adriatic coast. Ride along the Strait of Otranto before turning into a countryside of enormous olive and oak trees. This scenic route leads to the small Renaissance village of Acaya, one of Puglia's last remaining fortified cities. Its notable 16th-century grid of streets divides the town into rectangular "islands." After exploring, you'll join a bike path that leads into the center of Lecce. This beautiful city is constructed from pink-tinged local stone called *pietra dorata*. There is so much Baroque-period architecture with chiseled cherubs, angels, and saints, that Lecce has been called the "Florence of the South." As you explore, your week of cycling will no doubt bring a new sense of urgency to your gelato cravings; you'll have plenty of options to satisfy them here!

A stunning five-star hotel in the heart of the pedestrian Old City welcomes you to Lecce, a fine finale for your trip. Settle in and then take a short stroll to historic sites, including the Piazza Sant'Oronzo, the city's main square with its centerpiece Roman amphitheater. Pick any of the narrow streets that fan out from the square to discover charming neighborhoods—and to duck into any number of rustic eateries serving the hearty cuisine for which the city is known, including pureed fava beans and broccolini and a robust *primitivo* wine. It's the perfect way to celebrate your ride around Italy's heel!

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7: Lecce / VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

After an included breakfast, you have the day to explore the city of Lecce. Visit the Piazza Duomo, enclosed on three sides by the cathedral and other church buildings. Despite being one of Europe's largest squares, its surrounding buildings and many cafés create an intimate ambience. You can visit up to six of Lecce's intricate Baroque churches on one entry ticket.

Your VBT city information provides useful recommendations for exploring on your own for the rest of the day. Dinner is on your own tonight.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DEPARTURE DAY: Departure

After an included breakfast* this morning, if traveling by public transportation, allow yourself a minimum of four hours' transportation time prior to your flight from Brindisi airport; for details, refer to your VBT Handbook. This timeframe includes approximately 1.5 hours travel and around two hours recommended pre-flight check-in time.

The train and bus stations are just under 1.4 km (.9 mile) from your hotel, a 20-minute walk.

*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.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Trulli e Puglia (Days: 2,1)

Trulli & Puglia Resort is an exquisite accommodation built into a series of beautifully restored 500-year-old trulli structures. This is truly a unique and charming blend of classic regional design with all of the modern amenities, including air conditioning. The trulli are different from one another and spread out in the city center of Alberobello, some clustered in blocks of two or three together. The walking distance from the breakfast room and reception can be up to four minutes. American breakfast is a special treat here, prepared exclusively for VBT guests with fresh local specialties, and served in a separate central building. Our host Mimmo, a star of Alberobello, is the trulli resort owner and has been one of our local guides since 2003.

Hotel 33 Baroni (Day: 2)

Located just 1,000 feet from the historic Old Town, the newly opened Hotel 33 Baroni occupies the former palace of a Gallipoli nobleman. Today, the property combines traditional Italian hospitality, refined elegance, and the latest features in hotel technology and comfort, including soundproof rooms. The generous terrace offers splendid views of the Old Town and of the sweeping coastline; an ideal spot to close the day with a glass of Puglia's primitivo wine. Your air-conditioned room provides all the amenities you'll need for a comfortable stay. You're sure to find this a welcoming haven after a discovery-filled day on the Salento Peninsula.

Hotel Approdo (Day: 3)

Inspired by the lush and inviting Mediterranean Sea, the Hotel *Approdo* enjoys a prime location overlooking the scenic marina of Santa Maria di Leuca. This bright and airy air-conditioned hotel has been in the same family for three generations since Don Michele Rossi built it in 1964. During your stay, relax by the swimming pool surrounded by greenery, sip a local vintage on the expansive sea-view terrace as you recline under a canopy on a lounge, and savor a delicious meal of local specialties in the refined restaurant. *Approdo* is Italian for “landing,” and you’ll be glad to have found yours here.

Hotel Albania (Days: 4,5)

Centrally located near Otranto’s Old Town, the pretty public gardens, and the seaside promenade, the Hotel Albania is named for the Albanian mountains that are visible across the Otranto Strait on a clear day. Its whitewashed, brightly lit interiors provide a soothing setting while the Vista Mare Restaurant on the top floor offers stunning sea views. In the sun-bathed dining room, enjoy a generous breakfast of fruits from the owner’s farm, homemade jams, and locally sourced meats and cheeses. Air-conditioned rooms in this delightfully designed hotel have been completely renovated and decorated in light colors and simple clean lines.

Patria Palace Hotel (Days: 6,7)

The Patria Palace Hotel is enhanced by the Baroque scenery of the historic center of Lecce, called “the Florence of the South” for its beautiful buildings, churches, and squares. The hotel brings to life an 18th-century marquis palace. Each room is unique, personalized with original frescoes, and equipped with modern comforts like air conditioning.