

# Poland, Czech Republic & Slovakia: Krakow to Vienna

Bike Vacation Only

## Cultural Highlights

- Explore the heart of central Europe on an itinerary that crosses three borders and delves into the cultures of four fascinating countries. Relax in carefully curated accommodations in a serene mountain village, a medieval hilltop town, and Slovakia's capital, each offering a rich mix of traditional architecture
- Cycle beloved, beautifully maintained "themed" bike routes, from the Bata Canal to the Moravian wine road and on to the EuroVelo 6 along the Danube
- Explore the heart of two unique, UNESCO-protected landscapes: the foothills of the breathtaking White Carpathians and the amazing Lednice-Valtice castle/garden complex
- Celebrate the authentic winemaking traditions of Moravia, as you ride through vineyards and savor a wine tasting with traditional music in an authentic wine cellar

## What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists. Our VBT support shuttle is always available for those who would like assistance with the hills.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Cycling Time:** 01:15 - 03:30

## Climate Information

### Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 69°/41°, Jun 76°/55°, Jul 79°/58°, Aug 79°/59°, Sep 69°/46°, Oct 56°/46°

### Average Rainfall (in.)

May 1.89, Jun 2.44, Jul 1.89, Aug 2.0, Sep 1.65, Oct 1.06

## **DAY 1: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Valašské Měřížící to Velké Karlovice**

Meet your driver at 8:00 a.m. at the Krakow hotel, the Bachleda Luxury Hotel, and travel to Valašské Měřížící in the heart of the Moravian region of Czech Republic (approximately three hours, including a stop on the way).

Heading southwest from Krakow, your driver takes you through the Beskid Mountain range along the Polish and Czech border where you stop for lunch. The region reflects a perfect combination of natural beauty and centuries of rural life—a landscape of forested hills, orchid-filled meadows and unique folk architecture.

Afterward, your trip leaders will conduct a safety and bike-fitting session, followed by a warm-up ride along the Bečva bike path. The river will flow alongside you as you roll through small villages, countryside and the town of Rožňov pod Radhoštěm, with its traditional Moravian folk village museum.

At the end of your ride, around mid-afternoon, board your private coach for a short ride (approximately 30 minutes) to Velké Karlovice, your home for next two nights. Nestled among steep wooded hills, this picturesque village is best known for its natural beauty and original timbered houses and religious structures, including 28 chapels and bell towers. The Church of Our Lady of the Snows is a unique Baroque structure, constructed entirely of wood. This evening, gather in the hotel with your group for a welcome cocktail reception, followed by dinner.

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Afternoon:: Warm-up along the river Bečva — 21 km (13 miles)

### **What to Expect:**

This afternoon's warm-up ride is an easy roll along a continuous incline of the Bečva bike path. You'll follow the river all along the way, passing through small villages and bucolic countryside.

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 km (13 miles)

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 2: Cycle to Hovězí and back to Velké Karlovice / Wallachian culture / Wooden crafts**

Today's ride introduces you to the White Carpathian Mountains, a UNESCO-protected landscape of endangered orchids and a shepherd culture that is unique to Slovakia and Moravia. Shepherds here keep their sheep near huts where unusual dairy products are made and sold during the summer grazing season.

Depart the hotel this morning on a beautiful, easy ride framed by the famous Moravian Highlands. Enjoy vistas of forests and fields, hamlets and villages, as you wind your way to Hovězí. On your way back through this Wallachian fairytale landscape stop for lunch, hosted by a local family. Discover the hidden treasures of this little village and immerse yourself in its legends and traditions with your host. After lunch, you'll cycle back to the hotel on a gently sloping route.

This evening is at leisure to enjoy your hotel's spa and wellness area and have an included dinner at your hotel.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Velké Karlovice to Hovězí — 21 km (13 miles) | Hovězí to Velké Karlovice — 26 km (16 miles)

#### What to Expect:

This morning's ride departs from the hotel and follows a bend of the Bečva River, mostly on a bike path. Enjoy stunning views of a landscape quilted with forests and open fields and dotted with small hamlets and villages. Enjoy a similar ride back, with a little more elevation gain on the way to our host's home. After included lunch retrace downhill to your hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 — 47 km (13 — 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### **DAY 3: Cross the Czech-Slovakian border / Travel to Mikulov in Moravia**

The Moravian Slovakia region of the Czech Republic possesses a unique cultural heritage that blends Slovakian and Bohemian traditions. Your discoveries this morning feature Uherský Ostroh, the cultural gem of the region and Petrov, a unique Czech village of whitewashed homes steeped in wine-making traditions. This region is renowned for its colorful costumes, folk architecture, traditional music, and vineyards.

This morning, board VBT's private coach for the drive (approximately two hours) to Uherský Ostroh, a charming village where traditional architecture and elaborate folk costumes are preserved.

From here, mount your bike for an easy ride along a flat route through small hamlets and villages. Along the way, you'll be treated to views of the Strážnice and Petrov, where you'll see prime examples of *búdy*, above-ground cellars and wine presses, examples of unique vineyard architecture.

As you cross Slovak border, you'll enter the town of Skalica—a one of most beautiful medieval towns in the country. Here, the recipe for *skalicky trdelník*, a local grilled pastry, is protected as fiercely as the designation of AOC wines. You are invited into the home of a young couple who will proudly share their traditional folkloric dress and music as they reveal the secret of making this sweet treat. You'll enjoy the result over lunch, along with homemade herbal lemonade and wine made from grapes grown right on the premises.

You'll be well fueled for this afternoon's ride on small, narrow roads through White Carpathian meadows and beside a manmade reservoir separating the two countries. You'll also pass by a 15th-century Franciscan monastery with 18th-century Baroque interiors at the end of your ride.

Then, board your private coach and cross the border back into the Czech Republic. Your ride (approximately one hour) leads to the town of Mikulov, in the heart of Moravian wine country.

With its warm climate, rich soil, and rolling hills, the area surrounding Mikulov offers the perfect conditions for grape growing, and winemaking traditions have been revered here since Roman times. The lush vineyards that fan out throughout the region have earned the nickname "Czech Tuscany."

The town's long and storied past is also reflected in the beautifully preserved architecture of its historic center. Dominating it from high atop a hill is Mikulov Castle, an 18th-century gem that stands atop the ashes of the original Romanesque structure.

Due to Mikulov's close proximity to Austria, many Jewish people migrated to the town after they were expelled from Vienna in 1421. By the early 18th century, the town had the largest Jewish population in Moravia. Although the Jewish people were annihilated here during World War II, their proud culture is preserved in Mikulov's Jewish quarter.

Your local touristic guide will acquaint you with the highlights of Mikulov during a short walking tour (approximately 45 minutes) and offer suggestions for dinner on your own.

## Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Uherský Ostroh to Petrov — 19 km (12 miles) | Petrov to Skalica — 19 km (12 miles)

### What to Expect:

This morning, shuttle from Velké Karlovice to Uherský Ostroh, where you'll begin your ride. Most of your ride follows the Bata Canal bike path, an easy, flat route through small hamlets and villages. After a short stop at the wine cellars, cycle along small, narrow rolling roads through White Carpathians meadows and alongside a manmade reservoir between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. You will gain some elevation when climbing some short rolling hills to the border.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 — 38 km (12 — 23 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 4: Ride from Mikulov through Austrian and Czech vineyards / Valtice Castle**

Immerse yourself in the region's exceptional wine culture and vineyard landscape today—crossing the border twice this afternoon.

Roughly 95% of the Czech Republic's wine-grape plantings are in Moravia, which has earned a reputation for producing high-quality wines. Set on roughly the same latitude as Alsace and Champagne, Moravia is particularly renowned for its white wines, which account for nearly 80% of production. Of particular note are Müller-Thurgau, Grüner Veltliner, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, and Riesling.

In Lower Austria, you'll discover the beautiful Weinviertel. Characterized by gently rolling hills, countless vineyards, and charming villages, each with a pretty white church, the Weinviertel (meaning "wine quarter") is Austria's largest wine-producing area. Its most important grape variety is the peppery white Grüner Veltliner. This bucolic landscape is known for its wine cellar-lined roads called *Kellergassen*, meaning "wine-cellar street."

Departing from your hotel, you'll embark on a wonderfully easy, rolling ride along a designated bike route. From the seat of your bike, you'll view complementary landscapes of man-made and natural splendor, as you pass small lakes, wildlife areas rich in birdlife, a UNESCO-protected landscape of wetlands, rolling vineyards that might remind you of Tuscany, and protected landscaped gardens.

Your ride culminates at Valtice Castle, which—together with its sister castle, Lednice—were once the home of the Dukes of Liechtenstein and are today a UNESCO World Heritage site. The gardens surrounding this complex are among the finest in the world. You are welcome to explore this impressive Baroque masterpiece, if you wish (at your own expense). You will find many options for lunch on your own in the village that has grown up around it.

If you opt for more challenge this afternoon, you'll hop back on your bike for a rolling ride through Falkenstein, one of the most romantic wine villages in lower Austria. The main street is lined with "Heurigers," the typical taverns where winemakers serve their new wine with simple food to accompany it.

Upon return, enjoy time to freshen up, then set out for a lively dinner in a typical Moravian wine cellar. A wine tasting and traditional Moravian music and dancing will be part of the festivities.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Mikulov to Valtice — 34 km (20 miles) | —

Afternoon:: Valtice to Mikulov — 19 km (11 miles) | Trough Falkenstein to Mikulov PLUS — 33 km (20 miles)

#### What to Expect:

Most of this morning's ride follows an easy, dedicated bike path in the UNESCO-protected Valtice and Lednice complex. Some stretches are on a packed gravel path bringing you close to the park's unique monuments. A variety of landscapes, from wildlife refuges, and vineyards to manicured gardens, will sweep past your gaze as you ride. Your ride culminates at the magnificent Valtice Castle. In the afternoon, you may opt for shorter and easier ride, with only one 3km (2-miles) long incline and mostly flat stretches to your hotel. If you choose more moderate ride, you'll cycle by way of the stunning wine village of Falkenstein, beginning with a 1-km (0.62-mile) climb followed by few other rolling hills, mostly along a bike path or side roads.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 — 67 km (11 — 40 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 5: Bike Mikulov to Lednice / Private coach to Bratislava**

Delve into this beautiful wine region further on today's ride to Lednice Castle. Departing from the hotel, you'll enjoy an easy ride along the bike path. Listen to the singing of a wide variety of birds as you spin past the reeds, grasses, and trees of Moravia's wetlands. Along the way, you'll pass Pohansko, an important archaeological site where excavations have revealed artifacts believed to date to the origins of Moravian settlement from the 6th to the 10th century. You'll also view abandoned World War II bunkers, an old oak forest, and a forest of plane trees on a floodplain at the confluence of the Morava and Dyje Rivers.

Before you meet your guide for the tour of Lednice, enjoy an included buffet style lunch. Lednice Castle is a part of the UNESCO World Heritage complex you visited yesterday. This stately structure is bound to impress you with its sheer size and magnificent, 19th-century Neo Gothic architecture. The enormous park that surrounds it is a genius of design, with its flower gardens, manicured hedges, tree-lined walks, charming lakes, and romantic fountains and pavilions designed to blend into the landscape. Enjoy time to take in its splendor before boarding VBT's private coach for the ride (approximately one hour) to the Slovakian capital, Bratislava.

Europe's youngest capital city is too often overlooked by travelers to the region. Yet its rich history dates to the Stone Age, and its Old Town is a wonderland of Baroque architecture and whimsical bronze sculptures. The city's music and dining venues are a delight, with some of its opera houses rivaling those of Vienna. On arrival, you'll discover the vicinity of your hotel on a short walking tour with your local guide, who will also offer recommendations for dinner on your own.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Mikulov to Valtice PLUS — 17 km (10 miles) | Trough Pohansko to Lednice — 33 km (20 miles)

### What to Expect:

Except when you're cycling through villages, you'll be following an easy, flat bike path today. Take in views of wetlands, oak and plane tree forests, and a significant archaeological site as you pedal along this scenic route.

Cumulative Distance Range: 33 — 50 km (20 — 30 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 6: Cycle from Bratislava along the Danube River on EuroVelo**

## Route 6

The Danube bike path is just a short walk from your hotel, and that's where you're headed first this morning.

From the end of World War II into the 1960s, then Czechoslovakia built a series of concrete bunkers—first in response to the Iron Curtain and later as part of a Cold War defense system against nuclear war. You will have the opportunity to view one of these bunkers at the beginning of your ride. To get there, you will pass by the UFO bridge (also called the New Bridge [Nový Most] or the Bridge of the Slovak National Uprising [Most SNP]), the world's seventh-largest hanging bridge. High atop the bridge you'll see the UFO Café, a restaurant and observation deck offering striking panoramic views of the city.

After crossing over the Lafranconi bridge, continue on the bicycle path along the Slovakian (south) shore of the Danube. After a short ride, you'll arrive in the town of Čuňovo, where you'll find a Danube lock and dam whose wall is perfect for a leisurely ride. Enjoy lunch on your own at one of the restaurants on the dam if the weather permits. Upon returning to the Danube shores, you may notice one of Slovakia's Olympian rafters practicing in the artificial rafting canal.

At the end of the dam, the unusual Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum juts into the river. Enjoying a unique setting near Slovakia's borders with Hungary and Austria, the museum offers exhibitions of modern art from Slovakia, Europe, and around the world, both within its walls and in its sculpture park. Just as beautiful as its artwork is the museum's blend of architecture, landscape, and rooftop views of Bratislava, the Danube, and the Small Carpathian Mountains beyond. You'll have time to relax and savor a cup of coffee here before your return by small boat, enjoying views of typical local house boats and the cityscape, if the weather permits the boat ride.

Upon your return to the hotel, you'll have time to explore on your own. Perhaps you'll stroll the cobbled alleyways surrounding Michael's Gate. Browse the Slovak National Museum, lodged within historic Bratislava Castle. Or enjoy the view from Slavín, a hilltop memorial to fallen Russian soldiers who liberated Bratislava from occupying Germans.

This evening's farewell dinner will be a memorable event: a "guided journey" through the different regions of Slovakia led by a skilled Slovakian sommelier. During this gala feast, you'll compare local food and wine to those of Moravia, while learning about the different vintages and why these differences exist. Dinner will be held in a private room of your hotel—one of the most beautiful locations in Bratislava—and prepared by one of Slovakia's best chefs.

Today's Ride Choices



Morning:: Bratislava to Danubiana — 32 km (20 miles)

What to Expect:

Ride out from your hotel in the center of Bratislava along wide Danube. Following EuroVelo Route 6, an easy bike route, you'll visit one of the city's Cold War bunkers, then continue along the flat bike path to Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum.

Cumulative Distance Range: 32 km (20 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Travel to Vienna / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends**

Your Danube bike tour through the Czech Republic and Slovakia ends at the Hotel Stefanie in Vienna.

Important: Train departures from Vienna prior to 11:00 a.m. are not recommended. If you depart earlier, you are responsible for your own transportation arrangements from the hotel in Bratislava. A taxi ride from the Hotel Stefanie to the Vienna train station costs approximately €15/\$25 and takes approximately 20 minutes. A taxi ride to the Vienna airport costs approximately €30/\$50 and takes approximately 40 minutes.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **Accommodations**

May vary depending on departure date.

### **Grand Hotel Tatra (Days: 1,2)**

Set on a sunny slope in the protected Beskid Mountain region, this Alpine-style four-star hotel combines traditional architecture with modern comforts in natural wood construction and floors and local exposed stone throughout guestrooms and welcoming lounge areas. An inviting spa offers indoor and outdoor swimming pools and whirlpool bath and sauna. Walking paths from the hotel lead through the preserved village. The hotel's restaurant serves fine cuisine blending the traditional and contemporary, using fresh products from nearby farms, as well as an excellent cellar of Czech wines.

### **Hotel Volarik (Days: 3,4)**

Historic Mikulov Castle dominates the stunning views that await you at the Hotel Volarik, set just a five-

minute walk from the main square of this charming town. Completely renovated in 2017, this 4-star hotel offers a host of modern conveniences, including a wellness center and spa, indoor and outdoor pool, restaurant, wine cellar, and trendy lobby snack and wine bar. Free WiFi is available as air-conditioning.

### **Arcadia Boutique Hotel (Days: 5,6)**

Delight in an unforgettable two-night stay at the Arcadia Hotel, one of the Leading Small Hotels of the World and the first 4-star hotel in Bratislava. Set in the middle of the Old Town and close to the city's main attractions—such as the Opera House, St. Martin's Cathedral, Bratislava Castle, and Hviezdoslav Square—this lovely, carefully restored hotel exudes the romance of its 12th-century structure, graced with wrought iron from the Renaissance and Baroque eras. The foyer's arched hallways and painted-glass ceiling provide an artistic touch, and the 34 guest rooms are furnished in a classic historical style.

<br><br> Yet, the hotel also offers thoroughly modern amenities, including oversized marble bathrooms, free wireless Internet service, air conditioning, and the Arcadia Spa, featuring a fitness center, whirlpool, sauna, steam bath, and private Jacuzzi. While here, you might also enjoy the open fireplace of the 24-hour Library Bar and the relaxing lobby lounge.

### **Hotel Stefanie (Day: 7)**

Boasting more than 400 years of hospitality, the Hotel Stefanie is the oldest hotel in Vienna and also one of the most beautiful. Named after the wife of Crown Prince Rudolph, Princess Stefanie, the hotel blends modern comfort with traditional charm. Its superior location—near the Danube River on Taborstrasse, the main road into the very heart of the city—puts you close to such notable sights as St. Stephen's Cathedral, making it a great location from which to discover the city on foot. An area full of restaurants and shops is also nearby. Should you wish to venture farther afield, the hotel is well served by city transportation. An Internet connection is available in the hotel lobby and in your room. Rooms are air conditioned.