

## Italy Bike & Boat: Venice to Mantua

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

There is a side of Italy begging to be explored by bike and boat. Here, fishermen haul in their catch in the shadow of Venice ... the Po River Delta harbors an untouched wilderness ... Renaissance-era cities hide cultural jewels, from Grana Padano cheese and a carousel museum to grand ducal palaces. Uncover it all at an easy pace from a luxury boat as you cruise from Venice into its spectacular lagoon and up Po River tributaries to historic Mantua, going ashore to cycle dreamy Italian landscapes you never knew existed.

### Cultural Highlights

Cruise across the Venice Lagoon and marvel at the majestic city of canals from the water

Cycle on the peaceful islands of the lagoon past colorful fishermen's houses

Browse the stalls of the bustling fish market of Chioggia

Learn about glass-blowing in Murano

Explore two UNESCO-designated Renaissance cities with local guides

Try delicious Grana Padana cheese with honey at a cheese factory

Soak in the nostalgia of the Street Carousel Museum

Slow down and relax as you cruise by boat along Italy's quiet canals

Savor delicious regional dishes freshly prepared by the boat chef

Enjoy a glass of local wine with dinner while on board

### 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:** 11 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 15 - 30

**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 (at a fee). You may also contact our One Call travel 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.

We recommend that you purchase a multi-day transportation ticket (Venezia Unica citypass) to travel by vaporetto.

Hotel: Hotel Ruzzini Palace or Hotel Saturnia

## **DAY 3: Embark boat / VBT Bicycle Vacation begins**

VBT Air Package and Pre-Trip Extension guests: 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 water taxi to the boat, moored on Giudecca Island. Our Tour 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 the boat.

Please note regarding WiFi onboard the boat: Internet access is available during the day only in the common areas, not in the rooms, 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 onboard, VBT also recommends that you download your free VBT Maps & Routes 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 that will be distributed on tour.

Reference this handy guide, "From Venice to Mantua" by Oswald Stimpf and Girolibero, Italy ([bit.ly/venice-to-mantua](http://bit.ly/venice-to-mantua)) for further details about things to do, history, and more in this amazing region.

Hotel: Boat Ave Maria

Meals: B (for Air Package guests only), D

Daily Options: non-cycling day

## **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 and home for the week. Then move to the upper sun deck to marvel at the stunning views of St. Mark Square and a parade of monuments as you cruise to the Cavallino Peninsula. The crew will point out the islands as we 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, we weigh anchor and return to Venice to moor overnight. We stop for an interesting visit on Murano island: glass-blowing is a century-old art that was imported in 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 about some of the techniques and see artisans crafting some

samples for you. Later you can remain on the island and continue exploring for the rest of the afternoon and evening, maybe stopping at the Glass Museum in Palazzo Giustinian to see ancient samples of glass dating from the Egyptian times, and returning on your own to the boat, or cruise back on your boat.

Dinner is on board tonight. The chef is preparing the evening's specialty with a specially chosen wine, the perfect way to share stories from your first full day of riding.

Hotel: Boat Ave Maria

Meals: B, L, D

Daily Options: 13 miles (20.9 km)

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

After breakfast, we cast off to 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 vineyards and 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 your dinner on 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: B

Daily Options: 13 miles (20.9 km)

## DAY 6: Po Delta Nature Reserve / Adria

This morning, depart early to leave the Venice lagoon and cruise on side canals to our cycling starting point. You will enjoy breakfast and a route review during navigation.

Our 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. You pause here at a scenic spot for a picnic lunch, before meeting 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 stone that was imported from the Baltics and traded here in exchange of local food like oil and wine. The museum has a remarkable collection of pottery and jewelry dating back to the Greek, Etruscan, Roman and Celtic times. A guided tour can be booked in advance, by reservation, by contacting VBT.

Dinner is served on the boat tonight.

Hotel: Boat Ave Maria

Meals: B, L, D

Daily Options: 18 or 27.2 miles (28.6 or 43.7 km)

## 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 and try 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 traditional 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: B, D

Daily Options: 25.4 miles (40.8 km)

## 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 more objects from the fairgrounds and merry-go-rounds of yore, from medieval times into the 19th century. Continue riding to a

local cheese factory to learn how Grana Padano is made. You are invited to sample this delicious 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. We 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: B, L

Daily Options: 8.7 or 30.6 miles (13.9 or 49.2 km)

## **DAY 9: Mantua lakes loop ride / Walking tour of Mantu**

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 like white and yellow water lilies. Indigenous plants like the edible water chestnut and lush reeds are still used to make hand-made 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. 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 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: B, D

Daily Options: 13 or 19.6 miles (22.2 or 31.5 km)

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

VBT Air Package guests and Post-Trip Extension guests: 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 three nights

Hotel: Hotel Giberti

Meals: B

## **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: B

## **Accommodations**



May vary depending on departure date.

### **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.

### **Hotel Ruzzini Palace (Day: 2)**

Occupying a residence that once belonged to a prominent Venetian family, the Hotel Ruzzini Palace was built during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. It is listed in the Architectural Heritage Register of Venice for its historic and artistic value. The hotel overlooks Campo Santa Maria Formosa on one side and Rio del Paradiso on the other and to this day, it maintains a water entrance, which was once the main entry. The building has been lovingly refurbished to capture the original design and detailing. Admire the large portego (the lounge that stretches along the side wing), the exposed beams, and Venetian-style

floors. The pride of the Ruzzini Palace are its priceless paintings by Gregorio Lazzarini (1655-1730), teacher of Giambattista Tiepolo, in the Royal Suite. These lush frescoes depict mythological scenes such as “Juno’s Chariot” and “Zephyr and Flora,” commissioned to the artist by Carlo Ruzzini, the 113th Doge of Venice.