

Italy: Valleys of the Dolomites

Bike Vacation + Air Package

On this exhilarating VBT itinerary, you'll pedal among Europe's most stunning mountain landscapes: snow-capped peaks, sweeping emerald-green valleys, charming hamlets, dense forests, and pretty apple orchards, on mostly flat and downhill routes that make exploration even more of a pleasure.

Cultural Highlights

Enjoy a thrilling, 1,775-foot descent on the Val Venosta Bike Path
Ride through isolated Ladin communities, found nowhere else but here.
Savor a picnic of local specialties surrounded by alpine peaks
Cycle flat and downhill paths among spectacular mountain vistas
Take in the stunning Pusteria Valley during an invigorating reel
Explore the South Tyrolean market town of San Candido
Sample barbecue specialties during lunch in the Aurina and Tures valleys
Browse the shops of Brunico's pedestrian zone
Pedal past rustic masi farmhouses along the Plan de Corones plateau
Join a guide on a tour of Bressanone's atmospheric Duomo and cloister
Marvel at breathtaking vistas as you cycle the Venosta Valley
"Take the waters" at Terme Merano's thermal baths

What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain and is suitable for beginning cyclists who are comfortable with extended downhill rides and riding on packed gravel paths. Additional miles on easy/moderate terrain offer options for more avid cyclists. Our VBT support shuttle is always available for those who need assistance with hills. Hybrid bikes are best for performance in this area. We highly recommend training on hills prior to this tour.

Tour Duration: 10 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 15 - 45

Average Cycling Time: 00:30 - 03:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 72°/49°, Jun 79°/56°, Jul 79°/59°, Aug 81°/61°, Sep 75°/55°, Oct 64°/47°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 2.8, Jun 2.5, Jul 1.5, Aug 2.6, Sep 2.2, Oct 2.7

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.

Hotel: Hotel Duodo Palace

Alternate Hotel: Hotel Saturnia & International

DAY 3: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins

VBT Air Package and Pre-Extension guests: Meet your VBT representative at 9:00 a.m. in the main lobby of your Venice hotel; he or she will be holding a VBT sign.

From the hotel, a water taxi will transfer you first to the mainland and the Venice Marco Polo airport,

where you'll board your private motorcoach and continue on to Cortina. The transfer will last about 2 hours, with a short stop on the way. Your VBT Trip Leaders will meet your small group at its arrival point and escort you to your first hotel, in Cortina.

You'll arrive in Cortina in time for lunch on your own. The hotel is located in the heart of the city, in the main shopping and pedestrian area full of life, elegant shops, restaurants and trendy cafés. After lunch, enjoy time to settle into your hotel. Later, your VBT Trip Leaders will discuss the rules of bike safety and provide you with specific tips for riding on sloped and gravel paths in the Dolomites. After, you join them for a warm-up ride.

Tonight, enjoy a welcome cocktail reception in the hotel's cozy bar, followed by a special welcome dinner in the elegant restaurant. Some local Ampezzan specialties like casunzei (crescent-shaped ravioli) will immerse you in culinary traditions influenced by both Austrian Tyrol and Italian Veneto kitchens.

Hotel: Hotel Ancora

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

Daily Options: 4 miles (6.1 km)

DAY 4: Cycle to Cadore / Picnic with Trip Leaders

After breakfast, set out on a downhill reel along the Boite River Valley on the Dolomites Bike Path. This invigorating descent begins at 4,100 feet (1,250 meters) and ends at 2,790 feet (850 meters), in Valle di Cadore. This scenic path was once a railway that connected the little villages of the Cadore mountain community. Le Tofane mountain range marks your progress. Soon you'll admire the towering pyramidal peak of Antelao to your left and the saddle-like summit of Mount Pelmo to your right. The latter is a nature reserve that protects many prehistoric fossils and dinosaur footprints.

You are now in the Ampezzan Valley, one of the four historic Ladin valleys. The Ladins—a population evolved from Celtic tribes and Roman soldiers—call this lovely pocket of Italy home. Long remote and secluded from the rest of Italy, they remain a proud people whose rare language, Ladin, is closely related to Swiss Romansh, Surselvan and Friulian. It is also still spoken in nearby Austro-Italian border regions.

The two Italian provinces of Trento and Bolzano are administratively independent from the rest of Italy, affording them a degree of autonomy. In particular, Cortina retains its own legislative system, one that is unique in the Dolomites: a council known as Regole d'Ampezzo. Under the regole and the ancient Celtic structure of property ownership, the 800 original families administer the community's common land,

which cannot be split or sold to outsiders or other families.

Enjoy a lunch of mountain specialties during a picnic in a panoramic setting along your route. Early this afternoon, you may shuttle or cycle back to Cortina, where you have time to explore on your own. Take an easy walk around Cortina or visit the Ethnography Museum to view its collection of antique tools and cultural artifacts. In the summertime, ride a gondola to the slopes of Le Tofane or Faloria to enjoy breathtaking alpine vistas. Or take a taxi and a walk to the open-air Museum of the Great War, set on the peaks of Rifugio 5-Torri, one of the most fascinating and moving excursions in the Dolomites. Dinner is on your own tonight; in the summer, you may opt to dine at a rifugio in the mountains.

After dinner, we recommend a stroll in Cortina. In the summer, your visit might coincide with a cultural event, folk festival or classical music concert.

Hotel: Hotel Ancora

Meals: B, L

Daily Options: 16 or 33 miles (27.2 or 54.4 km)

DAY 5: Ride bike paths to Dobbiaco, San Candido and Brunico

This morning a brief shuttle takes you on the scenic Cimabanche Pass and Lake Landro, where you start biking an easy downhill and flat ride on bike paths to Dobbiaco and San Candido. The views on the way are spectacular: You'll pedal past Pomagagnon Mountain, Tre Cime di Lavaredo (the "Three Peaks"), and picturesque Toblacher Lake. En route, you might stop to pay tribute to the fallen of World War I at an intimate cemetery at the foothills of Monte Piana.

As you arrive in Dobbiaco, the landscape changes: rugged mountains skirted with green and roadside alpine lakes give way to open meadows and emerald pastures dotted with large, isolated farmhouses, or masi. Snow-capped peaks rise in the distance. This is the Pusteria Valley, a paradise for cyclists with its network of bike paths, bike hotels and bike shops aimed at promoting an environmentally friendly lifestyle and healthy discovery of the valleys.

Soon, you'll arrive in San Candido in South Tyrol, close to the Austrian border. After lunch here, there'll be time for a stroll in this millennium-old little city. Visit the ancient, Romanesque Duomo della Collegiata—the oldest monastery in the Dolomites—and drink at one of the many stone fountains in the cobblestone pedestrian area. The Pusteria Valley is rich in history and legend, as it was on the ancient trade route to Aguntum (now in Austria) from Rome.

Later, cycle along the Upper Pusteria Valley to Brunico through lush meadows, sylvan forests and charming villages, always following the course of the Rienza River. As you ride through the heart of South Tyrol, you'll experience a strong Austrian influence in the language (all signs are first in German and then Italian), the architectural features, and the local traditions. The terrain here is paved except for some short stretches in the woods. VBT offers both an easy and an easy-to-moderate ride.

Later, you arrive at your hotel in Riscone, beautifully situated at the foothills of the Plan de Corones mountain ridge. You're sure to feel comfortable and even spoiled here: The hotel features a large garden, an indoor swimming pool fed by pristine mountain springs, in-room waterbeds, and sauna options. Dinner is served at the elegant hotel restaurant and includes a large salad buffet of fresh, locally sourced produce.

Hotel: Park Hotel Schoenblick

Meals: B, D

Daily Options: 10, 20.8 or 33.4 miles (16.6, 33.4 or 53.7 km)

DAY 6: Cycle through the Aurina and Tures Valleys

After breakfast, begin cycling across the wide Plan de Corones plateau. On the way, you can admire the traditional masi farmhouses above Brunico. Later discover the beauty of the valleys of Aurina and Tures. About 90% of today's route follows easy paths along the Aurino River, by high mountains dotted with slope-hugging castles and cattle farms. Brunico was built in a strategic position at the crossroads of four valleys; the castles you see once watched and defended the territory. Ride past tidy hamlets of wooden houses, high steeples, well-manicured gardens and cattle pens.

Lunch is included today in a spectacularly scenic spot, a special barbecue meal of tasty meats and crispy vegetables prepared by our host, Mani. After lunch, you may take a short easy walk to the roaring Riva waterfalls, perhaps choosing to explore these lovely surroundings further and hike to the higher waterfall. After, bike back to your hotel or hop a shuttle and pamper yourself at the hotel spa. An optional easy-to-moderate loop is also offered if you feel energetic and wish to ride more!

If you're cycling back to your hotel, pause on your way to discover the city of Brunico and its pedestrian area, full of cafés, gelato shops and boutiques. Or visit Ripa Castle, once the summer residence of prince-bishops. Today, it is one of the five museum-castles that world-famous mountain climber Reinhold Messner has transformed into a cultural center dedicated to mountain people from four continents.

Dinner is at the hotel tonight.

Hotel: Park Hotel Schoenblick

Meals: B, L, D

Daily Options: 17 or 28.8 miles (27.3 or 46.4 km)

DAY 7: Ride the Isarco River Valley / Bressanone

This morning, join the picturesque Pusteria Valley bike path along the Rienza River and enjoy a beautiful ride through more forests, tiny villages and covered bridges. Your ride will end in Fortezza, where you will be in sight of the mighty fortress built under the Austrian Emperor Franz I, and the so-called Sachsenklemme, a place that had a significant role to play in the Tyrolean freedom fights of 1809. Before lunch, shuttle into the medieval city of Bressanone. Located at the confluence of the Rienza and Isarco rivers, the town was an important bishop town, evidenced by its cathedral, with its beautiful frescoed and sculptured cloister, the Hofburg Bishopric Palace, and the stone city gates. The narrow, porticoed streets and multicolored houses will capture your heart as you follow our local guide Gerdi on a walking tour. After the tour enjoy lunch on your own.

Early this afternoon, shuttle to Merano. Your hotel is centrally located on the pedestrian Kurpromenade on the River Adige, opposite the historic Kurhouse. There'll be time before dinner to relax, perhaps enjoy the wellness center and pool, or indulge in the famous thermal pools for which Merano is known.

Like Cortina, Merano is a vibrant cultural city, offering concerts and entertainment on summer evenings. The city features great gourmet restaurants and fine wine bars.

Hotel: Hotel Aurora

Alternate Hotel: Hotel Meranerhof

Alternate Hotel: Hotel Terme Merano

Meals: B

Daily Options: 14.6 miles (23.5 km)

DAY 8: Venosta Valley

Today prepare for a particularly picturesque ride, as you gradually descend and follow the course of the river. You'll start riding in the Renaissance village of Glorenza, surrounded by mountain peaks, and you'll

cycle through dozens of sprawling apple orchards, for which Venosta Valley is famous. You'll also pass vineyards and castles adorning the slopes. In late August, you roll by many tractors and farmers tending to their fields. It's sure to be one of your more memorable rides. For lunch on your own, we recommend pausing at one of the restaurants that you find along the river.

If you feel energetic, you can ride all the way back to Merano. Otherwise, we have planned to shuttle you by local train (a 20-30 minute ride), a very popular and convenient option for bikers in this area.

Later tonight in Merano, raise a glass of Blauburgunder wine and toast our week over a farewell dinner in a local restaurant.

Hotel: Hotel Aurora

Alternate Hotel: Hotel Meranerhof

Alternate Hotel: Hotel Terme Merano

Meals: B, D

Daily Options: 22.1 or 37.5 miles (35.6 or 60.3 km)

DAY 9: Free time in Merano / Transfer to Verona / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

VBT Air Package guests: After breakfast, say ciao to your Trip Leaders and spend the rest of the morning discovering Merano. You can enjoy the amazing Terme Merano thermal pools in the beautifully designed building set in a 12-acre (five-hectare) garden (with 10% off your entry fee, compliments of your hotel). For more information, visit www.termemerano.it. The facility is just across the street from your hotel.

If you prefer, shop and stroll the historic city center. Or walk out of the city to visit the Truttmandorff Gardens and Castle, where Austrian Empress Sissi lived. The gardens' 30 acres (12 hectares) are beautifully landscaped and were voted Italy's Most Beautiful Garden in 2005. After lunch on your own, return to the hotel to depart at 1:00 p.m. on a private motor coach to your Verona hotel. You will arrive at around 3:00 p.m.

Our local Verona guide will meet you and host an informative introduction and 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 are visiting from mid-June to the end of August, don't miss the opera performances in the open-air Roman Arena, an unforgettable experience. Local opera lovers say the best seats (particularly for acoustics) are the very affordable "Unreserved Stone Steps in Sectors D or E (Gradinata D or E)." If available, you can buy these last-minute at the ticket office, but it is best to purchase them in advance

online at www.arena.it/arena/en. The Roman Arena is a very short walk from your hotel.

VBT Air Package and Post-Trip Extension guests: If you have chosen the independent Post-Trip extension to Verona, you remain at this hotel for three nights.

Please note: Italian museums are closed on Mondays.

Hotel: Hotel Giberti

Meals: B

DAY 10: 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.

Hotel Ancora (Days: 3,4)

This historic hotel in Cortina has been providing first-rate service since 1826. It's all thanks to the Sartor family, connected to this lovely alpine city—often called the "Queen of the Dolomites"—and to this beautiful hotel for generations. Throughout the hotel, intricately carved and painted interiors reflect the typical Ampezzano style. Its sunny terrace room overlooks the pedestrian promenade. And its vaulted dining room lends an airy feel to each elegant meal. The hotel has received many awards for its accommodations, and its menu has won international medals. Each room features a telephone,

television, safe, minibar and private bath with shower and hairdryer. The hotel is not air conditioned, but fans are provided in each room. WiFi is available throughout the hotel.

Hotel Giberti (Day: 9)

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.

Park Hotel Schoenblick (Days: 5,6)

Nestled at the foot of Plan de Corones Mountain and surrounded by sprawling green meadows, our Riscone hotel enjoys a spellbinding setting. It may remind you of a resplendent Austrian chalet, but its Italian hospitality is unrivaled. Beautifully manicured grounds and adjacent walking trails help you drink in the bucolic charm of the Pusteria Valley. After thrilling days of cycling, indulge in a spa treatment or swim in its atrium pool fed by mountain springs. In its restaurant, savor gourmet meals with South Tyrolean flair and a hearty buffet breakfast. Each room features views of the splendid grounds, as well as a flat-screen LCD satellite TV, telephone, in-room safe, and private bath with shower and hairdryer. The hotel is not air conditioned, as nights are cooler at this altitude but fans are provided in each room on request. Free WiFi is available throughout.