

## Spain: Andalusia, Córdoba & Granada

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

Twirling flamenco dancers, the aroma of tapas, ruby red sherry, Pablo Picasso, and bullfighting bravado—this is quintessential Spain. From checkered fields of olive and orange groves through valleys framed by snowy peaks and ancient villages clinging to rocky hillsides, Andalusia is a cyclist's dream. The route explores this ancient Andaluz-Arab landscape dotted with Roman ruins, Moorish architecture, and Gothic cathedrals. Relaxing stops at wine taverns and organic farms fortify the body and mind. Our historic hotels include a medieval monastery that once hosted Christopher Columbus. Siestas or fiestas—the choice is yours.

### Cultural Highlights

Cycle along the Guadalquivir River for a Spanish picnic hosted by a local family  
Explore beautiful Cordoba on a guided tour, including a visit to the Mezquita  
Bike the Ruta del Vino Wine Road through olive groves and vineyards  
Ride the Via Verde rails-to-trails path through an incredible nature reserve  
Stay overnight in the San Francisco Monastery that hosted Christopher Columbus and drink fresh orange juice from 500-year old trees (when in season)  
Enjoy delicious cuisine: tapas, sherry, the best olive oils, goat cheese and sangria!  
Follow the bike path to Luque Castle, through peaceful farm country  
Gather for a delightful picnic lunch at a genuine cortijo, renowned for its olive oil  
Pedal through idyllic Zuheros, the perfect blend of Arab-Andaluz style  
Cycle downhill toward Spain's highest mountain range to enchanting Granada  
Free time for siestas, people watching in cafés, Arab baths, and great shopping  
Explore Spain's #1 site - Alhambra Palace for an included visit of the Palace and Generalife Gardens, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

### What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain mixed with moderate hills and is ideal for beginner and experienced cyclists. Our VBT van support shuttle is always available for those who need assistance.

**Tour Duration:** 10 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 18 - 45

**Average Cycling Time:** 01:00 - 04:00

## Climate Information

### Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Mar 70°/47°, Apr 73°/50°, May 80°/56°, Jun 88°/62°, Sep 90°/64°, Oct 78°/56°, Nov 68°/49°

### Average Rainfall (in.)

Mar 1.4, Apr 2.2, May 1.5, Jun 0.5, Sep 0.8, Oct 2.2, Nov 3.2

## DAY 1: Depart from home / Fly overnight to Seville

Depart from home and travel to Spain. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

## DAY 2: Arrive in Seville / Transfer to Palma del Rio

Upon arrival at the Seville Airport (San Pablo Airport), meet your driver outside the customs area in your arrival terminal. The driver will be holding a VBT sign. Then transfer by private car or van (about 60 minutes) to your Palma del Rio hotel.

The rest of the day is free to settle in, explore the city, and begin your Spain vacation. Choose a local restaurant for dinner on your own.

Please note: If you arrive early, your hotel room may not be available until 2:00 p.m. If you are early, you may store your luggage at the reception desk.

Please note: Due to Iberia Airline's limited flight service to Seville on Saturdays, some guests may fly from Madrid to the town of Jerez and then transfer by vehicle to our Palma del Rio hotel. This will avoid long layovers in Madrid's airport and allow you more time in Palma del Rio. Travel from Madrid on all other days of the week will be directly into Seville. Please refer to your air itinerary to determine which location will be your final destination.

For guests flying into Jerez: Upon arrival at the Jerez Airport, meet your driver outside the customs area in your arrival terminal. The driver will be holding a VBT sign. Then transfer by private car or van (about 2 hours) to your Palma del Rio hotel.

Your hotel in Palma del Rio is Monasterio de San Francisco. As the name suggests, it was a Franciscan monastery built in 1492 by the VII Señor de Palma's orders. About 20 years ago, it was turned into a

charming hotel that preserves the simplicity and tranquility of a monastery. The European discovery of America is part of the building's history, since the Franciscan monks founded American missions, took their language and customs to the New World, introduced the famous orange groves in California and opened the Mission de Palma del Rio in San Diego. Columbus spent time here before setting out for his journey, as the monastery was a strategic and powerful center of learning and culture. The cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego owe their names to the region's monasteries and holy places. Today, guests can drink the orange juice (when in season) from the garden's 65 orange trees, some of which are five centuries old.

VBT provides you with City Information that includes information and recommendations on what to see and do in Palma del Rio.

Hotel: Monasterio de San Francisco

### **DAY 3: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Warm-up ride / Welcome reception**

Meet your VBT Trip Leaders at the Palma del Rio hotel at 10:00 a.m. Please ask at the hotel's reception desk for the exact location of today's meeting with your Trip Leaders.

This morning, your Trip Leaders will host an informative tour overview as well as a safety and bike-fitting session, followed by a warm-up ride in the surroundings of Palma del Rio. You will be riding on the fertile lowland of the Guadalquivir River. Please be dressed in your biking garments when meeting the leaders as your warm-up ride immediately follows the safety talk and bike-fitting.

After the warm-up ride, you will have time for lunch on your own at the hotel or one of Palma del Rio's restaurants. Spend the remainder of the afternoon relaxing by the quiet swimming pool, strolling through the vegetable gardens, or exploring the town's sites.

Ambitious riders may opt for an afternoon ride.

Tonight, gather with your Trip Leaders and travel mates for a welcome reception, including tapas and sangria, two of Andalusia's regional specialties. You'll learn about the history of Spain and Andalusia before dinner is served.

Hotel: Monasterio de San Francisco

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 8 or 24 miles (13.2 or 40.3 km)

## DAY 4: Home-hosted picnic lunch with local family

En route to Cordoba today, you'll ride up to the foothills of the Sierra Morena Mountain Range and the Parque Natural de Horanchuelos. Following the Guadalquivir River you will make your way into the Campina Cordobesa – Cordoban countryside. Along the way, you'll stop for a picnic lunch at a cortijo – typical Andalusian farm house, to meet a local family.

Later in the afternoon, you'll arrive at your beautiful and centrally located 4-star Cordoba hotel. In the 11th century, this was the largest and most cosmopolitan city in Europe. A developed system for running water and street lights existed, along with vast libraries where Arabic, Latin, and Greek manuscripts were translated. Jews, Muslims, and Christians all coexisted in this cultural crossroads. Exceptional monuments like the Mezquita of Cordoba are a good representation of the blend of these different cultures. Famous sons of Cordoba include the philosophers Seneca (Roman), Averroes (Arabian), and Maimonides (Jewish). Cordoba has been inscribed in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites since 1984.

Your hotel is a few steps from the Mezquita in the Judería—the charming Jewish district and the very heart of Cordoba. It consists of ancient, private homes from the 17th and 18th centuries, with lovely patios and fountains. The property was carefully restored in 2009.

Spend the rest of the evening at your leisure enjoying all the amenities of your hotel or venture out and explore Cordoba's historic sites. Dinner is on your own this evening.

Hotel: Casas de la Judería

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Daily Options: 19, 29, or 40 miles (32.4, 47.7, or 65.9 km)

## DAY 5: Explore Córdoba

After breakfast, meet your local guide and set out on foot. Start by visiting a nearby synagogue and then continue to the Mezquita.

Originally built as a temple, lighthouse, and warehouse the Mezquita (mosque) was once the second-largest mosque in the world and later consecrated as a Christian church after Córdoba was captured by

the Spanish in the 12th century. Today, it is considered one of the world's greatest examples of Moorish architecture. Around the Mezquita, you'll see the Alcazar de los Reyes Cristianos and the Archiepiscopal Palais, the Roman Bridge with its 16 arches spanning the Guadalquivir River, and the Jewish synagogue built in 1315 in La Judería. Córdoba is also an excellent place to shop for pottery, silver work, *abanicos*, fans, cotton and leather goods, embroidered *mantillas*, shawls, and wooden crafts. There is also an interesting Bullfighting Museum.

Take time on your own this afternoon to explore the many sites and shops of Córdoba. You might want to enjoy an ancient local tradition: an Arab bath in one of the nearby *hammams*. Immerse yourself in its warm waters, followed by a relaxing massage with essential oils.

Tonight, choose a restaurant for dinner on your own in Córdoba. You might visit a flamenco house in front of the Mezquita or one of the restaurants in La Judería, Jewish district, where you can also taste local specialties like *caldereta de cordero*, ragout of lamb, or sausages such as *morcilla*, *cana de lomo*, and *salchicon de Pozo Blanco*. *Salmorejo* and *flamenquines* are the most famous Cordovan dishes. Arab influences can be found in the sweet *alfajores* and *pestiños* with almonds and honey.

Hotel: Casas de la Judería - Cordoba

Meals: Breakfast

Daily Options: Non-Biking Day

## DAY 6: Ruta del Vino / La Via Verde / Wine & cooking demonstration

After breakfast, leave Cordoba and shuttle to the Cordillera Subbética and the Ruta del Vino wine road. As the name suggests, this hilly region is all olive trees and vineyards, producing and exporting excellent white wines and olive oils. One of the most renowned wines produced in this area is the Pedro Ximénez sweet wine, particularly recommended to complement local *postres* desserts. At lunchtime, stop at a beautiful *bodega* and taste locally produced wines with our meal.

Then, ride toward the Subbética mountain range, where you have the option of riding on the Via Verde rails-to-trails path. You may follow this trail to your hotel for the next two nights. Avid cyclists looking for some hills can opt for a more challenging route.

In the afternoon, arrive at the Hacienda Minerva. Dating to the end of the 19th century, it was found in ruins, restored and turned into a hotel. The old machinery of the olive-oil mill still serves as part of the décor. Enjoy time to relax by the pool, book a massage or indulge in the hotel's Arab baths (at additional

cost – please ask your leaders to assist in booking massages and the Arab baths in advance of your arrival to the hotel). Later, meet up with the rest of your group to learn the story behind the property, which also includes a library and a cozy *taverna* bar. Later, learn how to make one of Andalusia's popular dishes. Dinner will be served in the dining room of the hotel, once the pressing room of the oil mill.

Hotel: Hacienda Minerva

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Daily Options: 12, 24, or 33 miles (20.3, 39.5, or 54.9 km)

## DAY 7: Explore Zuheros / Organic picnic lunch / Olive-oil tasting

Today, you'll follow the bike path to Luque, passing peaceful farms, olive groves, and surrounding hillsides. As you pedal along the gently rolling path, keep your eyes open for a variety of birds, including two of the many protected species of this area: the peregrine falcon, symbol of the Natural Park of La Sierra Subbética, and the griffon vulture. Alternatively, you may cycle on a nearby paved road to Luque for additional mileage and a more moderate ride.

Near Luque, you'll stop at a *cortijo* for a picnic lunch made from local ingredients freshly picked in the garden of your host, Balbino. This *cortijo*, simply known as El Cortijillo is famous for its prize-winning organic olive oil.

After lunch, retrace your way to Hacienda Minerva on a scenic route, passing through the quaint white-washed village of Zuheros. Built onto a rocky promontory, Zuheros is considered one of the most beautiful white villages of Spain. It is also known for its cheese, olive oil production, and castle with spectacular views. Here you can enjoy the scenery, take in views of the castle, and wander through its picturesque little streets.

From Zuheros you can take the easy Via Verde bike path back to the hotel or continue on a more challenging scenic route for additional mileage.

Back at the hotel enjoy time to relax before your small group gathers to learn about the olive-oil industry and why it is the main business in the area. See how olive oil is produced and the steps required for extra-virgin olive oil.

Hotel: Hacienda Minerva

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Daily Options: 12, 19, 20, or 35 miles (21, 31, 43.4, or 57.7 km)

## DAY 8: Transfer to Granada

After breakfast, you will start your journey toward the enchanting city of Granada and the land of moving borders between Christians and the Andalusí Kingdom. Start your morning ride in a small town of Benalúa de las Villas, starting out on a gradual descent through a valley with the Sierra Nevada mountain range in the distance. Rolling through towns that were heavily fortified in the Middle Ages prior to the final conquest of Granada in 1492, you will pass Colomera with its castle and towering church. As you continue on the Ruta de las Fortalezas, you will find traces of Roman influence, including a 2,000-year old bridge. Passing through little mountain villages, you can stop for lunch in one the cafés at your leisure. Leaving the mountains behind, enter La Vega Granada's main valley and finish your ride under the shade of the shade of pine trees and cool breeze of the Cubillas Reservoir.

This evening, join your Trip Leaders for a festive farewell dinner and sample some regional culinary delights.

Hotel: Hotel NH Collection Granada Victoria

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 15, 17 or 31 miles (24.7, 47.9, or 49.7 km)

## DAY 9: Alhambra Palace / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

After breakfast, you will meet your local guide and walk to the Alhambra Palace for an included visit of the Palace and Generalife Gardens, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

After your visit to the Alhambra Palace, the rest of the day is yours to explore. VBT provides you with City Information that includes information and recommendations on what to see and do in Granada during your stay.

Hotel: Hotel NH Collection Granada Victoria

Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 10: Depart for home

After breakfast\* this morning, you will transfer to the airport for your departing flight. \*\* Please ensure

that you are ready in the hotel reception area at the designated 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 when breakfast is served.

\*\*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. Transfer times are about 30 minutes to the Granada airport or 90 minutes to the Malaga airport. If you extend your stay beyond the scheduled program dates, return transportation to the airport is at your own expense.

Meals: Breakfast

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### Monasterio de San Francisco (Days: 2,3)

Monasterio de San Francisco was a Franciscan monastery built in 1492 by the VII Señor de Palmas orders. It was transformed into a charming hotel in 1985, yet preserves the simplicity and tranquility of a monastery. The refectory is now a quiet reading room, the ancient vegetable garden still supplies the kitchen, and the patios are the same ones walked by the monks in silent prayer five centuries ago. Only the large swimming pool shaded by orange trees is a reminder of the modern world. Today, guests can still drink the juice of the garden's 65 orange trees, some of which are five centuries old. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout the premises.

### Las Casas de la Juderia Cordoba (Days: 4,5)

Hotel Las Casas de la Judería is located a few steps from the Mezquita in the very heart of Córdoba. It consists of ancient, private homes from the 17th and 18th centuries with charming patios, gardens, and fountains. The property is air conditioned and beautifully restored, and exhibits a perfect blend of history and comfort. Free WiFi is also available.

### Hacienda Minerva (Days: 6,7)

Located in the geographic center of Andalusia, this enchanting property is close to Sierra Subbética Park and the famous Via Verde bike path. The hotel is surrounded by centuries-old olive trees and faces the charming "white village" of Zuheros. This historic 19th-century farm has been lovingly restored. Its unique



architecture is embedded in the landscape with all the modern comforts. The Hacienda has unique public spaces: a library with 10,000 books, a wine cellar, and a swimming pool. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout the premises.

### **Hotel NH Collection Victoria (Days: 8,9)**

Enjoy an ideal location in the heart of Granada and an elegant ambiance during your stay at the Hotel NH Collection Granada Victoria. The hotel is located near the Cathedral, Royal Chapel, and Alcaicería bazaar, in a bustling neighborhood of shops and restaurants. The Alhambra is just a 20-minute walk away. Savor traditional Mediterranean cuisine in the hotel's sunny restaurant or tapas at the bar. Your soundproof and air-conditioned room features a flat-screen TV, free WiFi, and private bath with rain-effect shower.