

Daily Itinerary

DAY 1

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

We suggest arriving in Italy at least one day prior to the tour start date as your tour begins at 10:00 a.m. Make your own way to Alberobello, where you begin your self-guided adventure. VBT provides several options for your travel to Alberobello in our Road Book, or you can decide your own path.

If you have enabled your iPhone or Android smartphone for use in Italy and provided your phone number, your VBT local host will text you to reconfirm meeting details and keep tabs on your progress.

Upon arrival in Alberobello, you just might feel as if you've stepped into a fairytale, thanks to its many trulli. These white-washed, dry-stone round huts capped with conical limestone roofs were constructed without mortar to be quickly disassembled when word got around that the taxman was on his way. Their original purpose was to store agricultural tools; 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.

Meet your VBT local host at 10:00 a.m. for your welcome orientation, along with any other VBT guests departing on the same day, in the lobby of the Trulli & Puglia (Piazza Gabriele D'Annunzio 2, +39 080 4324376). 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 enter the rolling Itria Valley. Take your time on today's first ride, stopping as you wish to savor the rustic landscapes of ancient olive trees, small vineyards, and vegetable gardens dotted with farmhouses and trulli. Your route delivers you to the hilltop village of Locorotondo, rated one Italy's "most beautiful villages." As you approach, it emerges as a vision in white on its hilltop. Walk into its labyrinthine shaded alleys adorned with Baroque churches and finely sculpted architecture and find a spot for lunch in its historic center. Whether you stop in a café or shop for a picnic for the ride back in this strikingly picturesque town, return to Alberobello at your leisure.

Today's Ride:

Alberobello Warm-Up: 24 km (15 miles)

What to Expect: A loop departing narrow town streets follows paved rural roads into ancient olive groves and past farmhouses before a gentle ascent to the village of Locorotondo (ideal for a late lunch stop). Lock your bike to explore the town on foot. Returning, there are some short ascents and descents, then the final gradual ascent back to Alberobello.

Meals: B (included for Self-Guided Air+ guests only)

Hotel Trulli & Puglia

DAY 2

Transfer to Ionian Coast and Cycle Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli

After breakfast, at 9:00 a.m. a 90-minute van transfer takes you to the Salento Peninsula on the magnificent Ionian Coast, where sandy beaches and 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 its handsome 16th-century watchtower. From here, set out for a spectacular coastal ride, passing through villages that reveal the real Puglia. Get off 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 foreigners!

Later, you 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 comprised vast swathes of southern Italy and Sicily in ancient times. Once a center for olive oil, Gallipoli today is a lively city full of boutiques, cafés, and vestiges from its Greek and Roman days. Its fishing port still brings in the catch of the day. And its 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:

Porto Cesareo to Gallipoli: 32 km (20 miles)

What to Expect: Departing Porto Cesareo, your ride mainly stays along the coast on a mixture of road and dedicated bike lane through populated areas, farmland, and open field with the sea in the distance on your right. Rising just after 13 km (8 miles), the day's steepest ascent is compensated by stunning sea views, veering inland for about 5 km (3 miles), then the route returns to the coast through some charming small ports and beaches before rolling into the center of Gallipoli and your hotel.

Meals: B

Hotel 33 Baroni

DAY 3

Gallipoli to Santa Maria di Leuca

Relish another day cycling along the Ionian Sea, where each crystalline beach seems more inviting than the last. You might want to plan on a longer day so you can take as many swim breaks as you wish! There'll also be opportunities to stop for true Italian coffee and to grab lunch at a sea-facing 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. By day's end, you arrive 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 adding a scenic backdrop to your ride (leukos is Greek for “white”).

This is where the Ionian meets the Adriatic, right at the southeasternmost tip of Italy's heel on the Salento Peninsula. 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 the common belief that the earth was flat. The Basilica, built over a Roman temple 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:

Gallipoli to Santa Maria di Leuca: 52 km (32 miles)

What to Expect: An easy ride stays almost entirely along the coast on a road or in shared-use bike lanes (in Italian, signs for *percorso cicloturistico* indicate a slower speed limit for cars). You 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. Just as you round the tip of the peninsula, you ride past the Devil's Cave, a natural limestone cave.

Meals: B, D

Hotel Approdo

DAY 4

Santa Maria di Leuca to Otranto

Today's ride continues along the dramatic Adriatic Coast with the sea on your right the whole day, descending into enticing crystalline coves. Later, some invigorating climbs lead to high bluffs with breathtaking views. Exhilarating descents deliver 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. Surrounded by great ramparts, it is one of coastal Italy's most scenic towns, situated on the Strait of Otranto, which separates Italy from Albania by just 45 miles.

Situated at the tip of Italy's heel, Otranto's Old Town is a rich amalgam 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 its 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 its exhibit devoted to the now-closed Neolithic caves in Porto Badisco that you rode over earlier on your way into town.

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

Today's Ride:

Santa Maria di Leuca to Otranto: 52 km (32 miles)

What to Expect: You 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, you can see Italy's most easterly lighthouse of Punta Palascia, closest to Albania's Acroceurani mountain range on the other side of the Adriatic Sea. A sustained descent brings you to Porto Badisco, Approdo di Enea then into Otranto.

Meals: B

Hotel Albania

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 tree 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 local craft at a 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. Or browse Otranto's inviting shops and the stalwart halls and grounds of its seaside castle.

Today's Ride:

Otranto to Uggiano la Chiesa: 30 km (18 miles)

What to Expect: A narrow road exits the center of Otranto. After an initial gradual ascent, the route flattens out on quiet country roads, rolling through olive groves and past stone walls, farms and hamlets. You may stop for a lunch and a tasting at a winery or for a visit to a weaving workshop along the way. Scattered throughout the landscape are prehistoric standing stones.

Meals: B

Hotel Albania

DAY 6

Otranto to Lecce

Leaving Otranto today, you enjoy your last ride along the dramatic Adriatic coast. Ride along the Strait of Otranto before turning into a countryside of enormous olive trees and oaks. 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 join a bike path that leads into the center of Lecce. This beautiful city is constructed from the pink-tinged local stone called pietra dorata. It is so flush in Baroque-period architecture and adorned with so many chiseled cherubs, angels, saints, and saviors, that it has been called the "Florence of the South." As you explore, your week of cycling will no doubt bring gelato cravings to a new sense of urgency; you'll have plenty of options to satisfy them here!

A stunning 5-star hotel in the heart of the pedestrian Old City welcomes you to Lecce, a fine finale for your trip. Settle in, then it's a short stroll to historic sites, including the Piazza Sant'Oronzo, the city's main square with its centerpiece Roman amphitheater. Pick either 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 peasant cuisine for which the city is known, such as pureed fava beans and broccolini and a robust primitivo wine. It's the perfect way to celebrate your ride around Italy's heel!

Today's Ride:

Otranto to Lecce: 50 km (31 miles)

What to Expect: After an initial ascent departing Otranto from sea level, the ride is mainly flat along the coast, then at around the 30 km (18 miles) you turn inland away from the sea after San Foca through olive groves and begin a slight sustained ascent to Acaya, a Renaissance fortified town, one of the best examples in Italy. From here, you join a bike path into the center of Lecce. Although Lecce is a bike-friendly city, please be aware that the urban riding will be very busy compared to the low-traffic riding of the week. Please exercise caution and, although not required, we recommend walking your bike for the last few kilometers to your hotel.

Meals: B

Patria Palace Hotel

DAY 7

Lecce / VTB Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation Ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel in Lecce and depart on your own for your onward travels. Depending upon your destination, it may not be possible to depart for the U.S. on the last day of the tour. Please check airline schedules carefully. If you plan to schedule return flights immediately following the tour's conclusion, please call your airline directly for specific check-in requirements.

Lecce has good train connections with all main train lines connecting to destinations throughout Italy (see Italy's national rail site: trenitalia.com/tcom-en, e.g., Naples, five hours, Rome five and a half hours). The train and bus stations are just under 1 km (.6 mile) from your hotel, a 12-minute walk.

Meals: B