

Daily Itinerary

DAY 1

VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Porto to Monte Real

We suggest arriving in Portugal at least one day prior to the tour start date as your tour begins at 10:00 a.m. Meet your VBT local host and any other VBT guests departing on the same day at 10:00 a.m. in the lobby of the Teatro Hotel in Porto (Rua Sa Da Bandeira 84, +351 220 409 620). He or she will be carrying a VBT sign. Your transfer to the historic village of Monte Real will take approximately two hours.

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.)

The natural hot springs in and around Monte Real have long been considered curative. Lucky for you, your palatial hotel draws on them for their soothing therapeutic spa treatments. Before you indulge, you might want to get acquainted with your bike during an easy loop ride, or take a stroll around the extensive grounds that stretch some 60 acres. Take your time and enjoy this beautiful property. An included three-course dinner is served at the hotel's fine dining restaurant. If you wish, take advantage of the Turkish bath, Jacuzzi, or indoor heated pool this afternoon. (Spa access and treatments are at your expense).

Non-biking Day

What to Expect: After your welcome orientation you may be ready for lunch at your hotel or in town. After, you may choose to enjoy your hotel's spa facilities (spa access cost of approx. 16 euros and treatments additional). The hotel is surrounded by easily accessible and signed walking paths.

Meals: B (included for Self-Guided Ait+ guests only), D

Termas de Mont Real

DAY 2

Monte Real to São Pedro Moel

Get your first taste of Portugal's coastal beauty as you cycle to the Atlantic. You traverse a route through pine forests and past fertile farms, arriving at the Ervideira Lagoon, with mirror-like waters where you might fuel up on a snack you may have brought along. You'll see why this is a favorite spot among local families seeking a calm alternative to the nearby beaches of the ocean.

You continue with a slight ascent up a small ridge, arriving at the white sands of the sleepy village of Pedrogão. Take a refreshing swim in the Atlantic if you wish. Then turn slightly inland to parallel the coast, passing the town of Vieira and its namesake beach. Later, arrive in the resort of São Pedro Moel, a graceful village tucked above the surf and sand in a protective cove. Pass its landmark Penedo da Saudade lighthouse, built on the rocky promontory from where a 17th-century widowed Duchess is said to have mourned her husband. After settling in to your hotel, take a scenic stroll along the boardwalks that trace the dramatic cliffs, the ideal place to observe a stunning sunset over the Atlantic. Choose from a half-dozen or more restaurants, some listed in your VBT Road Book, within a short walk of your hotel. Or take advantage of the ocean view from your hotel's dining room.

Today's Ride:

Monte Real to São Pedro Moel: 42.6 km (26.5 miles)

What to Expect: Today's route descends from Monte Real on paved roads through agricultural land, then climbs back up a small ridge before reaching the Atlantic coast. At the ocean, take a left and head south, paralleling the coast along a paved bike lane through the town of Praia de Vieira. Later, pass the Penedo da Saudade lighthouse en route to your evening's destination and hotel in the small town of São Pedro Moel.

Meals: B

Hotel Mar e Sol

DAY 3

São Pedro Moel to Alcobaça

You depart São Pedro Moel's cobbled streets and join a dedicated bike route through fragrant pine forests paralleling the coastline. Sections of this historic Atlantic pine forest were planted in the 13th century by King Afonso III to stop the degradation of the dunes. Later, during the Age of Discovery, they supplied the timber for Portugal's fleet of intrepid explorers as they sailed to distant shores.

Your route delivers you to the town of Nazaré, renowned for its long crescent beach and resort atmosphere, and celebrated as the place where surfer Garrett McNamara rode the record-breaking 100-foot wave at North Beach. You coast into this former fishing village on an exhilarating descent. You're sure to find a spot for lunch here; freshly caught seafood is always on the menu.

Later, you pass the marina and turn inland to follow the Alcobaça River on a dedicated bike lane. In the charming town of Valado dos Frades, admire the late 19th-century train station and its artful azulejo tiles, once voted the most beautiful train station in Portugal. Then gently ascend to the small city of Alcobaça, centered around the 13th-century Cistercian monastery, one of the country's most magnificent Gothic structures. It was originally built to commemorate the taking of Santarém from the Moors in 1147 and today holds the tombs of King Pedro I. Architecturally, it represents the first example of its style, with its unique portal and rose window. Take all the time you'd like to wander this UNESCO World Heritage site.

Conclude your ride at your resort, where you may choose to relax in its indoor pool, steam room or sauna. Savor an included dinner in the fine-dining restaurant.

Today's Ride:

São Pedro Moel to Alcobaça: 41.3 km (25.7 miles)

What to Expect: The route departs the town of São Pedro Moel along its cobbled streets and immediately follows an un-trafficked, paved, dedicated bike lane that alternates between pine forest and coast with ocean views. In Nazaré, use caution through town streets and along the beach-front bike lane. Then turn inland along a flat paved road and join the riverside bike lane, ascending gradually to the town of Alcobaça.

Meals: B, D

Real Abadia Hotel

DAY 4

Alcobaça to Foz do Arelho

Depart your hotel this morning and coast down to the center of Alcobaça. Start your day at your own pace here, whether you revisit the monastery, enjoy a late morning coffee or early lunch at an outdoor café, and grab some snacks for the road. Any time of day is perfect for the delicious *pastel de nata*, the Portuguese custard tart pastry dusted with cinnamon. Then cycle into the agricultural fields that slope to the coast, following a bike route to the seaside town of São Martinho do Porto. Founded by monks in the 13th century, it was a favorite seaside resort of Portuguese nobility by the 19th century. Cycle along its protected unique scallop-shaped bay of fine sand, coming upon one of Europe's largest dunes at the far end: The red sandstone Salir do Porto soars to 160 feet. Continuing south, you rise to a plateau with magnificent Atlantic vistas. Then enjoy an exhilarating descent to the seaside resort town of Foz de Arelho, sitting on the beautiful Óbidos Lagoon where it opens out to the Atlantic. This stunning inlet shimmers under the Portuguese sun in varied shades of turquoise and emerald.

Here, a two-night stay allows for a beachside rest day or an easy loop around the medieval town of Óbidos. Dinner is on your own and if you wish, you may reserve a cooking experience with a resident Portuguese chef. Or some of the town's restaurants are a short walk away.

Today's Ride:

Alcobaça to Foz do Arelho: 44 km (27 miles)

What to Expect: Start by descending from Alcobaça to the river valley, joining a dedicated bike route to the Atlantic coast and the beach resort town of São Martinho do Porto. Follow town streets and bike lanes to the lane along the scallop-shaped beach, then ascend to a plateau that separates the Atlantic from the inland plain. You ride four rolling hills for about 10 km (6 miles) before an exhilarating descent to the Óbidos Lagoon and your hotel for the next two nights.

Meals: B

Hillside House Suites and Spa

DAY 5

Foz do Arelho (Stay Put Day)

Your Stay Put Day is full of possibilities! If you can't get enough of cycling, you can ride a loop around the remarkable medieval walled town of Óbidos, a great way to preview its splendors before arriving here tomorrow for your final overnight stay. Or take advantage of Foz do Arelho's unique setting on the seawater-fed Óbidos lagoon, the most extensive coastal lagoon system on Portugal's coast. Your hotel's staff can point you to a rental outfit where you can set out on a kayak, canoe, sailboat, paddleboard, paddle boat, or windsurfer. Relax in the calm waters of the lagoon or head out into the waves of the Atlantic, grabbing lunch at a seaside café along the way. Or simply relax on the beach or at your hotel's pool. The day is yours to do as you please as is the evening, to enjoy dinner at your hotel or seek out a nearby restaurant.

Today's Ride:

Foz do Arelho around Óbidos loop ride: 42 km (26 miles)

What to Expect: If you choose to ride today, cycle along the water on the north side of the Óbidos Lagoon, then approach the hilltop town of Óbidos and ride around it from north to south. There'll be some rolling hills as you head east. The route flattens out and you return along the lagoon to Foz do Arelho and your hotel.

Meals: B

Hillside House Suites and Spa

DAY 6

Foz do Arelho to Óbidos

Enjoy today's leisurely reel to Óbidos, one of Portugal's most finely preserved medieval walled towns. You ride out of Foz do Arelho, along part of the same route as yesterday's optional loop, following the northern shore of the lagoon and winding inland through a mixture of small farms, villages, and pear orchards.

So beautiful is this cultural and historic gem that King Dinis offered it as a wedding gift to Queen Isabel in 1282. Future kings followed suit—for 600 years!—and the hilltop town has since been known as the Casa das Rainhas, the House of Queens. You're equally likely to fall in love with its whitewashed houses, bougainvillea vines, and crenellated walls. It is a fitting end to your Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation.

The charming pedestrian center invites endless exploration. Narrow cobbled streets point to leafy shaded squares, rising gradually to the town's highest point, the 15th-century castle. If you'd like, you can walk along the top of some portions of its city walls and enjoy breathtaking views of the town's red roofs and surrounding countryside—though you might want to pass if you dislike heights! Staying in Óbidos overnight is a real treat. After the day trippers have left, a hush falls over the cobblestones as street lamps illuminate the townscape in a magical glow. After you settle in to your hotel, a former convent, you can step out into this mesmerizing atmosphere to enjoy a celebratory evening and dinner.

Today's Ride:

Foz do Arelho to Óbidos: 33 km (21 miles)

What to Expect: Today's ride leaves the streets of Foz do Arelho and leads to some rolling paved roads. You follow the Óbidos Lagoon on back roads and through villages, passing agricultural fields and pear orchards to the town of Óbidos. The hotel is located on the edge of the walled city up a cobbled street; it is advisable to walk your bike up the short but steep ascent.

Meals: B

The Literary Man

DAY 7

Lisbon/ VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel in Óbidos. A complimentary transfer of about one hour is provided to central Lisbon along with any other VBT Self-Guided guests. From there you may continue 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.

If you wish to linger in Óbidos and travel to Lisbon on your own, the train and bus stations are a half-mile (850 meters) from your hotel.

Meals: B