

Italy: Sardinia, Carloforte, Sulcis & Chia

Bike Vacation + Air Package

If you're looking for an off-the-beaten-path Sardinia cycling vacation with flexibility and support, you've found it! While most travel companies focus on Sardinia's heavily-trafficked northeast seaboard, this VBT adventure avoids the tourist traps to bring you the island's unsullied west coast. Here, our local experts have plotted out an itinerary of unhurried coastal byways with little car traffic—leaving you to pedal azure shores where you're more likely to see shepherds tending sheep than cars or trucks. Ride the ferry to San Pietro Island for a two-night stay in charming Carloforte—then hop to Sant'Antioco Island where you'll explore the ancient archeological site at Sulci. On this self-guided adventure, you have all the flexibility in the world to pedal at your own pace—and the peace of mind that comes from knowing you have 24/7 local support if you need it. Along the way, enjoy spectacular sandy beaches, restaurants featuring vibrant Sardinian seafood (including the freshest tuna in the world!), and the unique cultural traditions that make this island unlike any place else on Earth.

Cultural Highlights

- Stay two nights in the cozy Carloforte, on San Pietro Island, where Pisan dialect is spoken and Napoleon left tracks of his stay.
- Cycle spectacular coastal roads far from traffic and stop whenever you wish.
- Stay in the seaside town of Torre dei Corsari near the beach with the tallest sand dunes in Europe.
- Enjoy ample opportunities to swim in Mediterranean turquoise-blue bays at gorgeous sandy beaches.
- Taste local specialties with fragrant vegetables and fresh fish and pasta that you can only find in Sardinia.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginner and experienced cyclists. Rides are on well paved roads and dedicated bike paths. Expect rolling Mediterranean landscapes and coastal biking, with very little urban riding and car traffic. On some days, winds (mistral and sirocco) may slow your riding, while shade is everyday generally limited. You will have two transfers by ferry, of approximately 40 minutes each, to get from Portoscuso to San Pietro Island and from San Pietro Island to Calasetta. Please verify your bike selection for this tour as it is not always possible to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available if needed.

Tour Duration: 9 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 16-43 miles

Average Cycling Time: 2-5 hours

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

March 64°/48°, April 66°/51°, May 72°/58°, June 82°/64°, July 86°/68°, August 88°/70°, September 82°/65°, October 74°/60°, November 64°/50°

Average Rainfall (in.)

March 1.5, April 1.2, May 1.0, June 0.4, July 0.1, August 0.1, September 1.2, October 1.75, November 2

FLIGHT DAY: Depart home / Fly overnight to Cagliari

Depart for Italy. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in Cagliari / Travel to hotel

Make your own independent travel arrangements to your luxurious and centrally located hotel in Cagliari. For details, refer to your VBT Vacation Preparation Handbook.

Cagliari is a fascinating yet relaxing seaside city; an ideal location to recover from jetlag in your luxurious and quiet hotel with personalized service, a manicured garden, and a bar terrace.

Explore the city at your leisure. Dinner is on your own tonight.

DAY 1: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Beni benius in Sardinia! / Ride Marceddi' to Torre dei Corsari

Start your day with an included breakfast at the Hotel Villa Fanny. Stretch your legs to the nearby marina or medieval city center before your Welcome Orientation.

Meet your VBT Local host at 10:30 a.m. for your Welcome Orientation.

Get to know your bicycle and ease into the rhythm of biking in Italy. After the meeting and fitting, board a local private shuttle to Marceddi', where your first ride starts. Don't forget to pack your swimming suit and towel for your ride. After dropping you off, the shuttle will continue with your luggage to your first hotel.

Take your time on today's short ride. You start by the Marceddi' vast fishing lagoon and you will be riding in the shade of high eucalyptus trees lining the fertile fields of the Campidano plain. Not far is the city of Arborea, once called Mussolinia when it was founded during the fascist era of the early 1920s, a badly needed urban center amid a vast plain that the regime claimed from marshland. As you approach the lagoon and the old tower of Marceddi', you will spot the defensive anti-aviation bunkers built during the last war. Your loop takes you back on the seafront of Marceddi', today only a fisherman hamlet but once an important trading center of obsidian, a precious stone used in ancient times as a talisman and as a blade with which to make cutting tools.

Crossing the narrow bridge and leaving the vast lagoon behind, you enter the colorful Costa Verde. Your ride leads to open views of the long sandy beach of Pistis, and your first chance to marvel at the massive dunes that have been carved by the northwest wind, or mistral.

Back on your saddle, a rolling route with ridge views takes you first to the beach and then to the village of Torre dei Corsari and your hotel. Simple and welcoming, this family-run hotel provides an exceptional introduction to the warm hospitality of Sardinia. Take the time to stroll down to the protected cove and beach below the property before dinner, perhaps at the hotel restaurant, where delicious local cuisine serves as the perfect close to your first day.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Marceddi' to Villa Belfiori — 27 km (17 miles)

What to Expect:

Marceddi' to Villa Belfiori:

The ride departs from the fishermen hamlet of Marceddi' on flat country roads for about 7 miles. A long one-way bridge takes cars and bikers to the other side of a lagoon. In the rare event that the bridge is closed, your Local host will advise you in advance at the Welcome Orientation meeting and shuttle to Santo Stefano Santadi instead of Marceddi'. In Santo Stefano, an out-and-back option to Pistis beach rewards with stunning views and a short climb on the way back. A rolling route provides ridgeline views from Santo Stefano to the Torre dei Corsari beach with its impressive dunes, where you can enjoy a swim and beverage before the short climb to the hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 2: Torre dei Corsari to Arbus / Move on Day

After breakfast prepared by your hosts, set out for a day of breathtaking landscapes and rolling miles. Leaving Torre dei Corsari, steal your last glimpse of the sand dunes that make this village and beach so distinctive. As you get underway, lentiscus, juniper, wildflowers, and Mediterranean scrub mark your path along a well paved road that sees very little car traffic. After about 3.5 miles, you pedal into a uniquely Sardinian tableau, with soaring mountains on your left and the stunning colors of the turquoise sea on your right. It is a spectacular view, the likes of which you'll admire quite often in the coming days. Soon the route offers two choices, one to follow a road along the beaches, where it's possible to stop for a swim.

Continue to Montevecchio, an important mineral mining center until as recently as 1991. Pause here for refreshment, served at shaded picnic tables. Mine tours are available but are lengthy and might not fit into your plans.

A few more miles down the road, arrive in the town of Arbus, home to a fascinating knife museum, where you can learn more about the obsidian of the region. Blades here date back to around 3000 BCE, many of them beautifully decorated. The knife remains useful here, especially for shepherds who spend days isolated in the mountains. So central is this tool to locals that their most coveted knife shares its name with the town: The Arburesa was once a popular engagement gift for brides-to-be. To learn more, you might visit the local bladesmith Paolo Pusceddu, who masters the art of crafting sharp knives with decorative handles and intricately etched blades.

Later this afternoon, relax by your accommodation's swimming pool before dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Villa Belfiori to Arbus challenging — 47 km (29 miles)

Morning: Villa Belfiori to Arbus moderate — 41 km (25 miles)

What to Expect:

Villa Belfiori to Arbus:

Departing your hotel, for both moderate and challenging options, the route is nicely rolling for the first 12 miles.

The challenging option includes an easy coastal stretch between Marina di Gutturru and Portu Maga, where you find a bar for a stop. Leaving the coast, you climb for about 3 miles with an average elevation gain of about 4%, but some peaks of 7-8% elevation gain. The surface is paved, but uneven in places.

Both routes join for the ascent to Montavecchio, where again you find a simple snack bar with basic refreshments. The route descends to Arbus where you may stop for lunch, snacks or drink, or visit to the knife museum or supermarket. A gradual climb of about 4 miles reaches your accommodation.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Arbus to San Pietro Island / Move on Day

After a copious breakfast, set out for a scenic coastal ride along Sardinia's unspoiled southwest coast. Start with an exhilarating 10-mile descent to the beach and Portixeddu. Here, your route follows the flat coastline, with a long sandy beach on your right. At the town of Buggerru, your rolling and breathtaking route climbs around a fjord, offering sweeping views of the sea.

The route continues through a canyon in the vast untouched mining region of Iglesiente. As you reach the coast, take in the astonishing sight right offshore – Pan di Zucchero. This massive white sea stack gets its local name for its resemblance to another famous rock formation: Sugarloaf, in Rio de Janeiro. But this is wholly Sardinian, part of the magnificent limestone headlands unique to the island's stunning Costa Verde. High up on the cliffs, is Porto Flavia, built in the 1920s, and one of the world's most impressive engineering feats. Tunnels carved into the cliff sides stretched from the harbor through the rock all the way into the mines. An underground transport belt conveyed the ore to the harbor and the waiting cargo ships below. Based on your time and energy, Porto Flavia tunnels are worth the visit.

Continue to Portovesme, where you embark a ferry to San Pietro Island. The 30-minute crossing delivers you to Carloforte, celebrated as one of the most beautiful villages in Italy. This cozy yet vibrant town is brimming with restaurants, colorful shops, and lively bars. A stroll along the promenade in front of your hotel is surely in order.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel S'Ena to Nebida – 44 km (27 miles)

Afternoon: Nebida to Portovesme ferry – 24 km (15 miles) | Carloforte pier to Hotel Hieracon – 1 km (0.5 miles)

What to Expect:

Hotel S'Ena to Nebida:

Today is a long ride day! We suggest that you plan your stops, based on your interests and ability to cope with ascents and possible wind. Keep in mind that at the end of your ride, you will take a ferry to the Island of San Pietro, and you likely don't want to miss the 7:00 p.m. ferry (although there is a later one). The day includes long climbs, but also a total of 25 km (15 miles) of exhilarating and sometimes technical descents.

A long fun downhill takes you to Portixeddu's hamlet and beaches, where, in season, you can find bars and restrooms to change into your swimsuit. An easy coastal ride takes you almost all the way to Buggerru, where you have a first climb averaging a 7% elevation average grade. In Buggerru, take advantage of the grocery store or bar. After the fjord of Buggerru, you descend to the bay of Cala Domestica, then commence the most challenging climb of the day: 4 miles with an average elevation gain of 5%, with some peaks of 10 to 12%. Rewarded with a long downhill coastal ride into Nebida, please exercise caution. In Nebida, don't miss the short walk recorded in RWGPS to view the Pan di Zucchero cliff and the remains of the docks where the mineral ore was stocked.

Nebida to Portovesme:

An easy ride takes you into the little town of Gonnese, where you find cafes and a few shops. From the town, the road again climbs steadily and gradually for 2 miles, rewarded by stunning sea views on your right before descending till the ferry dock area. If you have some energy left, the short out-and-back to the stone ruins of the Nuragic settlement provide expansive views of the entire coast. The ferry dock bar may be closed, but toilets and vending machines are available in the ticket station and on board the ferry.

Ferry ride to San Pietro Island:

Your Local host gave you the ferry ticket for you and your bike at the first meeting for this 30-minute ferry ride. When you disembark, select the Carloforte pier to Hotel Hieracon RWGPS option to find your hotel, which is on the marina front, only a half mile away from the pier.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: San Pietro Island / Stay Put Day

After breakfast, spend the day as you wish exploring the charms and treasures in and around Carloforte. This island hub was established in the 18th century by 30 families of coral fishers from Liguria, on Italy's northwestern coast. Their search for coral first took them farther south to the Tunisian island of Tabarka, then here. The name "tabarchini" is still used today to call the local population. Their accent, customs, and traditions are not typical Sardinian, but Ligurian. Today's major catch in the waters surrounding San Pietro is not coral, but tuna. An entire industry has grown around this coveted fish.

You may choose to wade into the turquoise waters of La Caletta, a partly rocky cove, or head to Capo Sandalo on the western coast to view the spectacular cliff-top lighthouse and its breathtaking views. Or simply roam the quaint alleyways of Carloforte, stopping at family-owned eateries to sample the freshest bluefin tuna in the world, perhaps served as part of the island's specialty, *linguine alla bottarga*.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel to La Caletta, Mezzaluna and Le Colonne Loop – 24 km (15 miles)

Afternoon: Hotel to Tuna fish factory to viewpoint to Hotel – 10 km (6 miles)

Afternoon: Hotel to Lighthouse and back – 26 km (16 miles)

What to Expect:

Hotel to La Caletta, Mezzaluna and Le Colonne Loop:

Plan the day as you like. The routes are designed to provide an array of options. On this varied route, depart the town along a short gravel bike path on the shore of the salt marsh and after rolling terrain arrive at La Caletta beach, which is the best accessible sand and rocky beach on the island for a swim. The route continues to a viewpoint at Mezzaluna, and then a fascinating stone formation in the sea known as Le Colonne.

Hotel to Tuna Fish Factory:

This short ride is easy and scenic, taking you from your hotel to the tuna fish factory and viewpoint of Isola Piana.

Hotel to Lighthouse:

The most challenging ride option provides big rewards with its stunning sea views from Italy's most westerly point.

You may also choose to take a break from the bike and discover the island from the sea, buying an optional tour of the island by boat.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Carloforte to Sant'Antioco and Porto Pino Bay / Move on Day

After breakfast, you embark a ferry for a short ride to the island of Sant'Antioco, part of the province of Sulcis, which also includes a vast portion of the main island. Here, the ancient site of Sulci reveals that this was the most prosperous ancient Carthaginian and, later, Roman settlement of Sardinia. You cycle among its splendid seaside landscapes, passing what remains of its basilica and necropolis and several round megalithic towers known as nuraghes, the latter preserved from the island's Nuragic civilization. A stop at the archeological museum just outside the city of Sant'Antioco is a must.

After time to explore the contours of history and the hidden corners of Sant'Antioco, you bike back to Sardinia via an isthmus. Today, a newly laid bike path points the way, but it was the Carthaginians who built the causeway that links the small island to the mainland.

Your route leads to the "ghost village" of Tratalias Vecchia. This tiny town was abandoned in 1971 after dam construction routed water into the streets. You then ride rolling countryside roads through Cannonau vineyards and tended artichoke plots to reach your western facing hotel, perfect for sunsets over the island of Sant'Antioco. This afternoon, you may elect to enjoy your hotel pool or ride to Porto Pino Bay, a 2.5-mile-long beach of pink sands, intimate coves, and crystalline waters. This is one of the island's most magnificent beaches – and one place where you're likely to glimpse resident flamingos wading in nearby ponds.

Upon arrival in Sant'Anna Arresi, settle into your hotel. Raise a glass to your adventure over your included dinner this evening.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel to Calasetta ferry – 1 km (0.5 miles) | Calasetta to Sant'Antioco – 19 km (12 miles)

Afternoon: Sant'Antioco to Porto Pino to Lu' Hotel to Lu' Hotel – 42 km (26 miles)

Afternoon: Lu' Hotel to Porto Pino and back – 21 km (12 miles)

What to Expect:

Calasetta to Sant'Antioco and hotel:

A 25-minute ferry ride takes you to the island of Sant'Antioco (open the Hotel to Calasetta Ferry RWGPS ride to find your way to the pier). Make sure you have tickets for you and your bike ready before boarding (your Local host handed them out at the first meeting).

Short option: after you disembark in Calasetta, the route weaves from the coast and then inland, in an area of underground ruins of nuraghi and the ancient city of Sulki. You learn about these ancient wonders at the fascinating archeological museum, where, depending on your interest, a visit can take from one to three hours. The ride continues to the center of Sant'Antioco, on the sea promenade, where you find a grocery store, bars, and restaurants. Depart Sant'Antioco with caution on the bridge shared with cars, then soon relax on a new flat bike path for about 8 miles, and finally enjoy country roads that take you through Cannonau vineyards and farmland, an easy gradual climb to your hotel inland, in the village of Sant'Anna Arresi.

Long option: After you disembark in Calasetta, this longer route loops south along the coast of Sant'Antioco Island with more stunning sea views and of San Pietro Island. Crossing the island, the ride continues to the center of Sant'Antioco, on the sea promenade, where you find a grocery store, bars, and restaurants. Depart Sant'Antioco with caution on the bridge shared with cars, then soon relax on a new flat bike path for about 8 miles, and finally enjoy country roads that take you through Cannonau vineyards and farmland, an easy gradual climb to your hotel inland, in the village of Sant'Anna Arresi.

Lu' Hotel to Porto Pino and back:

A 20-km (12-mile) total out-and-back ride takes you through the village of Sant'Anna Arresi first on town streets then on to the new smooth bike path leading to the beach town of Porto Pino where you can enjoy a swim and beverage at a beach bar.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6: Sant'Anna Arresi to Chia / VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel in Sant'Anna Arresi, then set out for the most beautiful ride of the week.

The lower Sulcis is a place of incomparable beauty, inspiration to artists for generations. Along this unspoiled coast, overhanging cliffs alternate with coves of light soft sands. Your ride traces the shore past beach after spectacular beach, with ample time to stop for a swim break.

Pedal past Tuerredda, hailed as one of the island's 10 most beautiful beaches. Its fine sand and glimmering seas echo Caribbean panoramas. Continue on to Campionna, Piscinnì, an enclave of Domus de Maria province, and Sa Canna, a popular scuba spot. At the splendid coves of Capo Malfatano, pause to admire the Spanish tower overlooking the bay where Phoenicians landed in the 6th century BCE. Porto Tramatzu is a tropical paradise of fine white sand and shallow green and turquoise waters. Nearby, you might take a dip at the beautiful s'Ottixeddu (called *degli americani* – of the Americans), where a limited number of visitors are admitted during the summer.

Your ride ends in Chia, whose sand beach is overlooked by green and limestone hills. This gorgeous stretch often appears on lists citing the 10 Most Beautiful Beaches in the World.

Arrive well before 5:00 p.m. so you can have a last dip in the emerald-green waters of Su Giudeu Beach. If you wish, wade or swim in shallow waters to the islet a short distance from shore. With its special charm, this beach is often chosen as a natural backdrop for films. On the back side of the beach, you find Spartivento Pond, a precious habitat for animal species, including flamingos. If there's time, take a final optional ride and walk to the cape for a final photo of Sulcis's ragged coast.

From Chia, a 60-minute drive takes you to Cagliari, where your vacation ends at Hotel Villa Fanny. We recommend spending a final night in this beautiful seaside town.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel to Chia finish point – 36 km (22 miles)

Afternoon: Optional Chia discovery to cape – 6 km (4 miles)

What to Expect:

Sant'Anna Arresi to Chia:

In Sant'Anna, shortly after the start, stop in the center of town to see the nuraghi. The first part of the ride, for about 6 miles, follows state road SS226, where although bikers are frequent, traffic necessitates caution. You soon turn off the busier road to a quiet country road descending to the coast. Then you begin a stunning rolling route, with a couple of moderate hills. During the summer pay close attention to cars parked on the road near beaches. Motorbikes and tourists stop in the middle of the road to take pictures. Consider a lunch stop just before Chia, at the Turredda beach restaurant, or in Chia.

The short optional ride is highly recommended, allowing you time to explore Chia, the lagoon with flamingoes, the sand dunes, and Cala Cipolla Bay. You ride on a sandy path for a short stretch and may stop for a swim or to simply drink in the views

Included Meals: Breakfast

DEPARTURE DAY: Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, if traveling by public transportation, allow yourself a minimum of three hours' transportation time prior to your flight from Cagliari airport; for details, refer to your VBT Vacation Preparation Handbook. This timeframe includes approximately 30 to 60 minutes of travel and around two hours of recommended pre-flight check-in time.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel Villa Fanny (Days 1-6)

Ideally situated in an upscale neighborhood, just steps away from the city center, this elegant boutique hotel was restored to combine contemporary refinement with historic touches like exposed beams and trusses. Yet, you'll enjoy a thoroughly modern experience, enhanced by warm hospitality and service. After your day of exploration, return to a relaxing ambiance, perhaps reading a book on the terrace, taking

a sip at the bar, or indulging in a massage at the onsite spa. Your air-conditioned room is beautifully furnished and features an LED satellite TV, minibar, telephone, pillow-top mattress, coffeemaker, and free WiFi.

Villa Belfiori (Day 1)

Relaxation is the priority at the Hotel Villa Belfiori, run by Giuseppina and her family, conveniently located in the heart of Torre dei Corsari. Special care is taken with the cuisine served at the hotel's restaurant, which features Sardinian specialties crafted from local vegetables, fruits, spices, and flowers—some grown right on the property. Surrounded by groves of oak, walnut, cherry, and maple trees, the garden itself is part of its charm and invites you to unwind. Or take advantage of the outdoor swimming pool. A sandy beach is only steps away.

Sena Hotel (Day 2)

Respect for nature permeates the setting of the Hotel S'Ena. Juniper, myrtle, and rosemary scent the air as you enjoy the hotel's lush grounds, including a lovely garden and sunny swimming pool. The hotel restaurant specializes in Sardinian cuisine, or choose from a variety of pizzas cooked in a wood-fired oven. Your air-conditioned room includes a minibar and free WiFi.

Hotel Hieracon (Days 3-4)

History surrounds you in the elegant Hotel Hieracon, set in an Art Deco building that once hosted nobility. That level of service and hospitality still prevails at the hotel, which pampers you with expansive sea views, a private garden, and an airy, artistically appointed interior. The building itself was renovated with biocompatible materials and a focus on renewable energy. Your air-conditioned room includes free WiFi.

Lu' Hotel Porto Pino (Day 5)

Conveniently located in the historic village of Sant'Anna Arresi, the Lu Hotel Porto Pino is steps away from an ancient stone structure, or nuraghe, dating back to the Middle Bronze Age. The hotel's contemporary design is sleek and minimalistic. Each guest room has a private terrace, air conditioning, and complimentary high-speed Internet access. The hotel also has a large outdoor swimming pool with stunning sea views, a verdant garden, a café, and a restaurant.