

Spain: Barcelona & Costa Brava

Bike Vacation + Air Package

The hills along Spain's Costa Brava are a famous training ground for professional cyclists—and with this innovative self-guided cycling vacation, they're well within reach for riders of all levels of ability. In medieval Girona, you'll meet your local Spanish host who gives you an insider's view of Catalonia—and is available 24/7 if you need support along the way. From there, you're free to explore at your own pace—winding your way through quaint farming villages, perhaps even challenging yourself to crest some of Spain's legendary climbs if you choose. Pedal along the legendary Costa Brava, spinning through the coastal pine forest that astounded Ernest Hemmingway and Salvador Dali with its beauty. In the evenings, return to authentic boutique hotels where you'll enjoy splendid Spanish wines, seaside sunsets—and a sumptuous, included dinner in a Michelin-recognized restaurant.

Cultural Highlights

- Explore Girona's cultural treasures, including the old Jewish quarter, medieval walls, Gothic churches, and Romanesque architecture.
- Savor superb Catalan seafood and farm-fresh cuisine, complemented by excellent local wines including sparkling cava.
- Cycle through history, stopping to view Greco-Roman ruins at Empúries, Gothic gems in Girona, and charming medieval villages.
- Discover the most important Greco-Roman ruins on the Iberian Peninsula at the coastal archeological site at Empúries.
- Immerse yourself in authentic Catalan village life in historic Pals.

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 flat to rolling paved roads and bike lanes. The Mediterranean landscape of the interior has rolling hills. As you ride closer to the coastal towns, the roads will be flatter but busier. Some historic centers have cobblestone roads. 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 as needed.

Tour Duration: 9 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 18-31 miles

Average Cycling Time: 2-5 hours

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

March 61°/44°, April 64°/47°, May 69°/54°, June 76°/60°, September 78°/62°, October 71°/55°

Average Rainfall (in.)

March 1.6, April 1.9, May 2.3, June 1.6, September 3.4, October 3.6

FLIGHT DAY: Depart home / Fly overnight to Barcelona

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

ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in Barcelona / Travel to Girona

Upon arrival at the Barcelona Airport, make your own independent travel arrangements to Girona. For details, refer to your VBT Vacation Preparation Handbook.

Arrive in Girona this afternoon. You'll have time to soak up the city's ancient past as you stroll narrow cobbled streets past the brightly colored houses of the Old Town. The splendid cathedral boasts one of the world's largest Gothic naves. You might also cross the Onyar River to step into one of Europe's oldest Jewish quarters. Girona's main square offers a bounty of choices for dinner on your own.

DAY 1: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Ride Girona loop

After breakfast at Nord 1901 Girona and a morning at leisure, meet your VBT Local host at 1:00 p.m., along with any other VBT guests arriving on the same day, for your Welcome Orientation in the lobby. Please be dressed and ready for cycling. Your Local host will be carrying a VBT sign and/or wearing a VBT garment.

Your self-guided bike tour of Catalonia begins as you set off on your own, following your Ride with GPS app. Your first invigorating ride creates a figure eight, leading you northwest of Girona into the Catalan countryside and the gently sloping foothills of the Pre-Pyrenees. You ascend gradually, taking in lovely views of the village of Montcal below. As you ride, you can take inspiration knowing the Rocacorba climb

is nearby; this cycling ascent up Puigsou Mountain—named for the 12th-century sanctuary of Rocacorba near the summit—provides solid training for professional cyclists and hardy challenges for amateurs. For now, you turn south as rolling terrain takes you through the traditional Catalan town of Sant Medir, known for its candy festival in early March. Then enjoy an easy coast back to the center of Girona. Your hotel is steps away from the city's Old Town and pedestrian squares, rich with history and brimming with the excellent cuisine of the region.

Today's Ride Choices

Girona "Under Roca Corba" Loop — 29 km (18 miles)

What to Expect:

Depart along city streets and ride into the countryside on secondary paved roads. You will pass horse farms and small villages, then gradually ascend to the highest point just past Montcal. Enjoy stunning views of Girona and the surrounding mountains, which will be part of the next day's ride, followed by a rolling descent back to the center of Girona. This ride allows you to get your legs moving and still have time to explore Girona.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 2: Cycle Girona to Pals / Move on Day

Today you will cycle out of Girona heading east toward the Mediterranean. After winding your way out of the city, you have two options to get to the coast. One option contains a long climb favored by the many cyclists drawn to the region. You'll quickly see why, as you're surrounded by emerald-green hills and forests. Pause at the Els Angels chapel to admire its stonework along the way.

From the highest point, you will be rewarded with fantastic views northwest to the Pyrenees and east to the Mediterranean. Linger a while to take it all in, then coast your way to a flat finish through scenic fields and farming villages. The two options come together in Madremanya, then roll through the villages of Monells, Corçà, Ullastret, Canapost, and Peratallada. Each of these centers is worth a quick stop to do some exploring and soaking up the rural Catalan character. You'll find this network of quiet country roads, all paved and with little traffic, to be a cyclist's dream as you crisscross this Mediterranean landscape.

The ride ends at your hotel, located just outside the beautifully preserved village of Pals. Set in a garden

surrounded by its own rice fields, typical of the region, you dine this evening in its Michelin-recognized restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Girona to Pals via Els Angels — 53 km (33 miles)

Girona to Pals through Foixa — 64 km (40 miles)

What to Expect:

Girona to Pals via Els Angels:

Begin cycling from your city center hotel on pedestrian and city streets. After 4 km (2.4 miles), you will be outside the city and ready to begin a steady ascent to Els Angels. The highest point is at 15 km (9 miles), after which you'll coast almost 5 km (3 miles) downhill with some steep sections into the lovely medieval town of Madremanya. Another 5 km (3 miles) of descent brings you to Monells, along flat farmland through several villages, and finally to your hotel just outside Pals.

Girona to Pals through Foixa:

Begin cycling from your city-center hotel on pedestrian and city streets. The route has some traffic in the first 8 km (5 miles) in Girona's outskirts, then follows quiet country roads with two ascents after 20 km (12 miles) before getting to the lovely medieval town of Madremanya. Another 5 km (3 miles) of descent brings you to Monells and rolling to flat farmland through several villages and finally to your hotel just outside Pals.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 3: Pals to Llafranc / Move on Day

Today's ride leads you to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and Spain's Costa Brava. You will start your ride along bucolic country roads, passing meadows and fertile farmland. Catalan *masias*, country houses like the one you stayed in last night, round out this picturesque landscape. Your first destination today is Calonge, past the outskirts of La Bisbal d'Empordà. This is the province of Baix Empordà, or Lower Empordà, where gentle agricultural plains are topped by small ridgelines—all of it interlaced with a network of small rural roads that stretch for miles, ideal for cycling. Spend all the time you like exploring the 13th-century towers and walls of the Calonge castle, taking in views of the Bay of Sant Antoni.

Later, continue your breathtaking ride to Palamós, home to one of the last surviving fishing fleets along these shores. This seaside town is a beloved beach destination. Next, cycle through a coastal pine forest, arriving in Llafranc, a seaside resort with a small sandy beach where Ernest Hemingway and Salvador Dalí were said to have spent time. On a bluff high above the town, the historic Saint Sebastian lighthouse warns sailors of the rocky Saint Sebastian point below. Once you settle into your hotel, take a short stroll to Llafranc's seaside promenade, where a range of restaurants awaits.

Today's Ride Choices

Pals to Llafranc — 49 km (30 miles)

Llafranc Challenging Loop — 21 km (13 miles)

What to Expect:

Pals to Llafranc:

Roll out of Pals on flat rural paved roads through tiny villages and farmland. You will ride past the town of Peratallada, around the outskirts of the larger town of La Bisbal d'Empordà, then return to un-trafficked rural roads. A gradual climb of about two km (1.2 miles) leads up to a ridge where views of the Mediterranean Sea unfold. At 23 km (14 miles), an easy descent winds into Calonge, where you join slightly busier roads as you approach the coast. You will encounter the most traffic of your trip near Palamós, but then you will return to smaller, quieter roads. End your rewarding day by winding your way slightly downhill to seaside Llafranc (and a very short but steep ascent to hotel).

Llafranc Challenging loop:

This short but challenging loop is for those who don't mind climbing (just over 1,500 feet [457 meters]) and want some more spectacular Costa Brava views. The route takes you north paralleling the coast, getting close to the seaside when possible, closest at the little port of Tamariu. After 11 km (7 miles), you turn inland and then loop south through the little massif of Begur, then coast mainly downhill past the outskirts of Palafrugell and back to Llafranc.

Optional Llafranc to Calella walk:

A stunning coastal out-and-back walk along the GR92 walking path departs Llafranc's seafront and hugs the rocky coast and cliffs with tunnels and stairs above the cliffs and tiny coves populated by fishermen's homes. Enjoy Costa Brava's most iconic and lovely viewpoints. The route is signed and has handrails in certain locations, but appropriate footwear (sneakers) is highly recommended. Use Ride with GPS Route Notes or ask your hotel for a local map.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Llafranc to Empúries / Move on Day

Today's ride takes you up and over the coastal range, through the gentle plains of the Costa Brava, then north from the Baix (or lower) Empordà to the Alt (or upper) Empordà, with ample opportunity to stop and explore. Your ride begins in a dreamy landscape of medieval towns and traditional *mas* farmhouses. You will skirt the town of Palafrugell—once a producer of cork harvested from local forests—and ride into the historic hilltop town of Pals. This remarkably restored medieval center boasts cobblestone streets framed with arches and stone balconies. Its 49-foot (15-meter) Romanesque tower—known locally as the *Torre de les Hores*, or the Tower of the Hours—was built between the 11th and 13th centuries.

Riding through rice paddies and orchards through medieval Palau-Sator village, you'll continue north to Torroella de Montgri, once an inland port for the Kings of Aragon until the Ter River silted up and changed its fate. As you continue cycling, you'll have the towering Montgri massif to the west. You are in the heart of Dali's native region as you enjoy an easy spin to the coast. Your hotel is conveniently located near Empúries, a fascinating archeological site of Phoenician and Roman ruins.

Today's Ride Choices

Llafranc to Empúries — 52 km (32 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride starts with an initial ascent away from the coast of about 2 km (1.2 miles), so you may want to pocket a croissant for after. You skirt the town of Palafrugell and some busier roads, partially following a bike path. At about 17 km (10.5 miles), you enter the hilltop town of Pals. After riding through rice paddies and orchards and medieval Palau-Sator, you encounter busier roads and the town streets of Torroella de Montgri. You are soon back to slightly rolling rural paved roads until you reach 46 km (28.5 miles) at Albons. A short hitch north along the coast leads to your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Empúries / Stay Put Day

Take today to kick back and enjoy your seaside hotel. You can paddle board or relax on the beach, then stroll through the former fishing port of nearby L'Escala. Anchovies were the main catch here and remain central to the town's annual October festival. If you'd like to visit the fascinating ruins at Empúries, there's a shared-use path next to your hotel that leads you there. Also worth exploring are the port of L'Escala itself, the Old Town, and the Archaeology Museum of Catalonia Empúries.

If you're up for more riding today, you can follow a scenic 49-km (29-mile) loop that leads you inland and gains some elevation, providing spectacular views of the Bay of Roses and the Pyrenees. After your descent, you will circle back, returning to the shore at Sant Pere Pescador, a pretty town along the River Fluvià near the coast. Take some time to enjoy the long sandy beach, explore the 14th-century castle, and find a café for a lunch of fresh seafood. Afterward, as you ride parallel to the coast, you will pass the archeological site at Empúries, the most important Greco-Roman ruins on the Iberian Peninsula. Pause here to explore, admiring the ancient Roman wall and some incredibly preserved mosaics.

This evening, consult our recommendations for a spot to enjoy a final dinner and celebrate your exploration of the Costa Brava. Restaurants in Sant Martí d'Empúries are a 10-minute walk away, while L'Escala is 30 minutes.

Today's Ride Choices

Empúries Loop — 49 km (31 miles)

What to Expect:

Ride inland away from the seaside, initially through rolling farmland. After an initial climb, ride along a high plateau with views of the Pyrenees and the Bay of Roses. A quick descent then turns quickly and ascends to the highest point of the day at around the 23.6-km (14.6-mile) mark. A sustained descent rolls through farms and villages, then traverse some rolling hills until the route flattens back out at the plain at Sant Thomas de Fluvià. At Sant Pere Pescador you cross the Fluvià River and turn south, paralleling the coast through the medieval town of Sant Martí d'Empúries and to your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel. The hotel can help arrange your transportation to Barcelona.

Upon arrival in Barcelona head to your hotel, conveniently located on Las Ramblas and a five-minute walk from the station. Leave your luggage at your hotel and set out on foot for lunch and a day of exploring the remarkable architecture and rich culture of this city. Stroll down the pedestrian-only Las Ramblas, wind through the nearby Gothic Quarter, or make your way to Port Vell, Barcelona's lively seafront.

Your VBT city information provides useful recommendations for exploring on your own for the rest of the day.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DEPARTURE DAY: Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, allow yourself a minimum of four hours prior to your flight from Barcelona airport.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Nord 1901 (Days 1-2)

Located in the historic heart of Girona, the Nord 1901 Hotel was completely renovated in 2009 to offer sophisticated flair and modern amenities while still preserving the ambiance of its Old Town setting. Intimate and family-operated, it is within walking distance of Girona's main attractions, including the colorful houses along the River Onyar, the Plaza Independencia, the Jewish quarter, the cathedral, and a wide range of popular restaurants and cafés. Enjoy breakfast on the garden terrace and take advantage of the only garden in the city center with a swimming pool. Each luxurious room is equipped with climate control, a safe, hot-water kettle for coffee- and tea-making, flat-screen TV, free WiFi, and a private bath with shower, bathrobe, slippers, and hairdryer.

Hotel Es Portal (Day 2)

Es Portal Hotel Gastronòmic occupies a lovingly restored 16th-century typical Catalan *masia* farmhouse. Situated in manicured grounds with a swimming pool, it is surrounded rice fields, a key ingredient in the

classic cuisine of the Empordà region served in its fine-dining restaurant. Spacious rooms with wooden floors look out onto its gardens. It is located about one kilometer (0.62 miles) from the historic center of Pals, with its medieval tower and narrow streets.

Hotel mas Pastora (Day 3)

Situated in the fishing village of Llafranc, Hotel Mas Pastora boasts a rich history as an 18th-century Catalan country house that once belonged to the noble Marquises de Cruilles. Its current family has owned the property since the 1930s and has lovingly created a beautiful, garden-like setting. This charming, air-conditioned hotel, recently restored as an eco-friendly property, boasts energy-efficient construction, solar panels, and rainwater recycling. Swim in the saltwater pool, or walk down to the beach, just a few hundred feet away. Wind down your day at the bar with a tapas menu and local wines. Your room offers all the amenities you need for a comfortable stay, including a private terrace overlooking the pool and grounds, providing a slice of Catalan countryside.

Hostal spa Empúries (Days 4-5)

Situated directly on Portitxol Beach and on our route, overlooking the Bay of Roses, the Hostal spa Empúries stands on an ancient settlement, beside the Greek and Roman ruins of Empúries, and is within easy walking distance of the medieval towns of Sant Marti d'Empúries and L'Escala. The air-conditioned resort hotel is dedicated to sustainable tourism and also to the health and well-being of its guests. The property features lovely gardens of native vegetation, an outdoor terrace overlooking the sea, and landscaped areas to stroll through. Gym facilities are complimentary, and optional spa services and indoor pools are also available.

Hotel 1898 (Day 6)

Discover a true treasure. Located in the heart of Barcelona, the historic Hotel 1898 was once home to the Philippines Tobacco Company. The structure was built in 1891 by architect Josep Oriol Mestres. Early in this century, hotelier Núñez i Navarro restored the property, preserving its historic splendor and 19th-century architectural elements and transforming it into the modern-day Hotel 1898. Today, this unique, colonial-style structure exudes a special personality that brings the best of Barcelona's rich past to its guests. Centrally located on Las Ramblas Boulevard and just a block from Placa de Catalunya, the hotel is an easy walk to all of Barcelona's important sites. The elegant rooms are equipped with air conditioning, free WiFi, and beautiful marble bathrooms. The rooftop terrace features a heated swimming pool, as well as a lovely indoor pool, fitness center, and spa in the tastefully designed basement of the hotel.