

Italy: The Dolomites, Bolzano to Ora

Bike Vacation Only

If you've ever dreamed of cycling the Giro d'Italia's Pordoi Pass, this is your chance! Of course, we've planned it so you won't have to do all the work: a shuttle to the top lets you coast down, navigating the switchbacks that have thrilled Giro d'Italia fans for years. Here, you'll feel the awe-inspiring presence of the Queen of the Dolomites—the mountain's highest peak. During your orientation meeting, your VBT Local host sets you up for independent exploration, fitting you with a well-maintained bike, a navigation app with route notes, and a number you can call 24/7 if you need support. Along the way, you'll spin along quiet bike paths through the high mountain valleys of Val di Fassa and Val di Fiemme—staying at quaint local hotels suffused with South Tyrol's famous culture, cuisine, and cycling.

Cultural Highlights

- Cycle from one small alpine city to another, taking in rich cultures steeped in remarkable histories.
- Ride the diverse landscapes of the Dolomites, from vineyard-blanketed hills, emerald-green valleys, and sylvan forests to dramatic foothills and a 7,000-foot mountain pass.
- Coast down a mountainside from Pordoi Pass, navigating 33 switchbacks as you descend for six miles along roads made famous by Italian cyclist Fausto Coppi.
- Revel in some of Europe's best-maintained bike paths, stellar routes that comprise 90% of this itinerary.
- Sample the culinary delights of South Tyrol, from alpine cheeses and *speck* (cured ham) to pinot noirs along the Wine Route.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills and is ideal for beginner and experienced cyclists. Rides are mostly on well-paved dedicated bike paths that are well maintained, well-marked, and very scenic. Expect riding gradually uphill for the first three days. On the day you bike down the mountain pass, expect 10 km (6.2 miles) of downhill on a large road that can be busy with cars in the summer. 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: 6 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 27-46 miles

Average Cycling Time: 3-5 hours

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 74°/49°, June 80°/55°, July 85°/59°, August 83°/59°, September 77°/52°, October 66°/42°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 3.2, June 3.2, July 3.6, August 3.6, September 2.6, October 2.2

DAY 1: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Bolzano to Bressanone / Move on Day

Make your own independent travel arrangements from Innsbruck to Bolzano, where you will begin your Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation.

If you arrive in Bolzano early, take a stroll downtown and admire the interesting architecture of the city. In the beautiful Old Town, explore narrow alleys, porticoed streets, and old manor houses. Many of the Romanesque and Gothic structures you'll see were constructed by the renowned Schiche brothers from Augsburg, Germany. With its youthful vibe (thanks to its trilingual university) and its pretty setting among green hills, you'll quickly understand why Italians have called it the most livable city in Italy.

At 12:00 p.m., meet your Local host in the lobby of the Parkhotel Laurin for your Welcome Orientation, along with any other VBT guests arriving on the same day. Please be dressed and ready for cycling. Your Local host will be carrying a VBT sign.

During your first day's ride, get to know your bicycle and ease into the rhythm of Italy and its efficient network of bike paths. Your route follows the Isarco River's deep valley to Bressanone. Along the way, as you approach the soaring Dolomites, admire the 1687 Abbey of Sabiona perched high on an outcropping, and maybe stop to visit the historical red-roofed village of Chiusa, where bike shops and cafes are available.

The charming medieval town of Bressanone (known as Brixen in German) is located in South Tyrol, part of Italy's Trentino-Alto Adige region. The province belonged to Austria until 1918. In fact, locals speak more German than Italian. This "Ancient Bishop's City" is nestled between two rivers and enveloped by mountains sloping down to vineyards and lush orchards. Its pleasant center is a lovely tapestry of narrow cobblestone streets, pastel-colored houses, and historic buildings and bridges.

This evening, pick a restaurant and have a taste of South Tyrolean cuisine. Local Alto Adige wines, cured

ham (*speck*), and cheeses, as well as handmade spinach-filled ravioli, river trout, local game, lamb, and of course apple strudel, are some of the many local specialties that you can find here.

Today's Ride Choices

Bolzano to Bressanone — 43 km (27 miles) | Bressanone City Walk — 2 km (1 mile)

What to Expect:

You ride from your centrally located hotel to Bressanone, along a well-marked and paved bike path with some short tunnels here and there. You steadily gain elevation throughout the day, but have never steep hills to climb. You hardly perceive the elevation gain. We suggest to stop for a visit and a coffee or snack in the picturesque small town of Chiusa after approx 30 km from Bolzano. We also recommend planning to arrive in Bressanone so you have time to explore this medieval town on foot, maybe following the walk recorded in RWGPS and specially created by our local expert guides.

See D1 Bressanone walk for Bressanone suggested walking route, services, and points of interest.

DAY 2: Cycle to Brunico on bike paths / Move on Day

Linger over breakfast as long as you'd like. At your leisure, cycle out of Bressanone on a paved bike path, heading toward Brunico. You leave the vineyard-draped valleys and approach the foothills of the Alps. Short after Bressanone, you hit the impressive Abbey of Novacella, founded in the year 1142. Definitely worth a visit, the complex has been build over a span of 900 years and the different styles from Romanesque to Gothic and Baroque are represented in its buildings. In the same year of the construction, the monks also planted a vineyard so that the monastery winery is one of the oldest active in the world and the representative of an outstanding white wine area. Take the time to visit the winery and sit at the abbey cafe and restaurant for a drink or lunch.

From Novacella you have the option to follow a longer scenic route through Fortezza, where you can admire the imposing Franzenfeste fortress built by the Austrians almost two centuries ago to protect the borders, or a shorter way—both taking you into the Pusteria Valley, one of the longest east-west valleys in the Alps.

Once you roll into Brunico, ride directly to your hotel on the historic main street, the via Bastioni. The magnificent trees you see here occupy the strip of land once taken up by a moat that surrounded the

town's castle. Today, the old fortification is home to the Messner Mountain Museum RIPA, established by the famed mountain climber Rainold Messner. It's worth a visit if you have time. You might also explore the inviting shops and beautiful buildings along via Centrale and duck into the maze of vaulted narrow streets, where you can find local crafts and clothing such as felt hats, leather shoes, and even a Dolomites cycling jersey. As you plan your time, bear in mind that shops here close as early as 6:00 p.m.

Follow your nose—or the advice of your hotel—and pick a restaurant for dinner, perhaps sampling a South Tyrol specialty.

Today's Ride Choices

Bressanone to Novacella — 3 km (2 miles) | Novacella to Brunico — 35 km (22 miles) OR Novacella to Fortezza to Brunico — 43 km (27 miles)

What to Expect:

Departing Bressanone, your route primarily follows well-kept bike paths to Brunico. You will have a choice of two routes—one shorter and paved (ideal for road bikes), with a climb to the Novacella Abbey, the other one 3 miles (5 km) longer and including a panoramic stretch on a gravel path to the Fortezza fortress (less ideal for road bikes). After, you will climb very gradually to Brunico, with a few steeper hills. The path flattens out to your destination. Much of your ride follows the Rienza River.

In Brunico, a longer loop on mostly country roads leads you into a wide green valley and through typical local villages to Campo Tures. Your route loops around this village, then through it, to retrace the same path before you continue to Brunico. It's a scenic and relaxing ride with open views of the northern Alps. You can ride this loop tomorrow if you prefer to take time to explore Brunico today.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: San Candido to Brunico / Stay Put Day

After breakfast, ride to the nearby railway station and board a local train to San Candido in the Pusteria Valley. Your ticket is included, and the trains runs every 30 minutes from early morning. This ancient city on the doorstep of Austria rose up around its abbey, which was founded in 769. Visit the Romanesque Duomo della Collegiata—the oldest monastery in the Dolomites—and drink at one of the many stone fountains in the cobblestone pedestrian area. Consider browsing a local market or café for a takeaway

lunch that you can enjoy later.

Set out on your mostly downhill route, arriving at the beautiful Toblacher Lake, the ideal spot for your picnic lunch. Continue to Brunico along riverside bike paths, through picturesque villages and sylvan forests. As you ride, you will notice that the main language here is German and the architecture and culture reflect an Austrian influence.

A longer option leads you into the stunning Auer Valley and the charming old market town of Campo Tures, the Taufers Castle watching over from its perch.

We suggest you put some time aside this afternoon to take a funicular to the summit of Plan de Corones, at 7,464 feet (2,275 meters). The views of South Tyrol from the top of the plateau are incredible. If there is time, you can visit Lumen, the unique Museum of Mountain Photography at the summit. Set in a stunning modern building inspired by its alpine surroundings, this unique space offers fascinating exhibits. You may dine here if you wish. Check the time of the last funicular up and plan your day accordingly.

Today's Ride Choices

Hotel Post to Brunico train station — 0.6 km (1/3 of a mile) | San Candido to Brunico — 42 km (26 miles) | Brunico to Campo Tures out and back — 33 km (20 miles)

What to Expect:

Expect a 40-minute train ride to San Candido. It's easy to get your bike on the train, as the region's transportation infrastructures encourage an environmentally friendly and healthy lifestyle. Before boarding your train, validate both the Alto-Adige Guess Pass (handed by the hotel on check-in) and the bike ticket handed out by your host. Write your name and date of your stay on the Pass. Keep it as it will be valid for a week and can be used again for free of charge train rides and entry in several museums. There are dedicated machines with a blue button on the walls of the station. Your stop is also the end of the line. Your bike route today enters the picturesque small city of San Candido, where you can park your bike and explore, and maybe buy some lunch for a picnic. The ride is mostly downhill and well paved for the first miles, then slightly rolling after Monguelfo, where stretches on unpaved paths in the forest along river Rienza alternate to short paved stretches on country roads. The long option is quiet, flat and paved along country roads and through picturesque villages.

In the event you get tired and prefer to shorten your bike ride, you can board a train back to Brunico. You only need to validate your bike ticket again (which is valid all day). The Alto-Adige Guess Pass is valid for

several more days.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Pordoi Pass to Cavalese / Move on Day

After breakfast, depart at 8:00 a.m. for a 60-minute drive up to one of the four most famous passes of the Dolomites. The scenic Badia Valley leads you to the heart of the Sella Group, where the Campolongo, Pordoi, Sella and Gardena passes sprawl between majestic peaks.

There's no need to hop on your bike right away once you arrive at the Pordoi Pass. If you'd like, you can embark the funicular that takes you to Sassolongo Peak, at 9,400 feet. Take in astonishing vistas here before returning to the pass. Pordoi is a bit of a cult site among cyclists; many come to pay tribute to Italian cycling legend Fausto Coppi, five-time winner of the Giro d'Italia in the 1940s and 50s. To honor him each year, the race committee bestows the prestigious Cima Coppi mountain bonus to the first rider who reaches the highest summit of that year's route. In case of inclement weather, just ask the driver and remain on the shuttle till Canazei or further ahead – you can start cycling from any point along the way or not cycle at all, but spend the day at your hotel spa and strolling Cavalese.

As you descend, you'll be navigating the famous 27 switchbacks. Imagine that the champions cycle this mountainside uphill! The road is wide and the grade not too steep, which is a good thing because the dramatic panoramas of the Dolomites change at every turn and you'll want to take it all in! You conclude your invigorating coast at Canazei, where you pick up a scenic bike path to the day's final destination.

It's possible today that you will hear locals speaking a different language. Don't worry. It's not the altitude! They are speaking Ladin, an old language spoken only in four valleys in this corner of Italy—including Fassa and Fiemme, where you are today. Locals are wholly dedicated to keeping their rare language alive, even teaching it in the region's schools.

Nature and history interact in this region more than in other parts of northern Italy. The red spruce is king here. And most of the vast forests belong to the villages and to the Magnifica Comunita di Fiemme, an institution that ruled here for seven centuries until the 19th century as a sort of republic. Trees formed the basis of the economy back then. To some extent, they still do today as visitors come to enjoy nature, a clean environment and outdoor activities like cycling. The wood from these trees is used to build the finest violins and pianos in the world.

As you cycle the second leg of your ride along an easy path on the Avisio River, you're sure to notice the colorful culture in the painted buildings of picturesque villages, all flanked by the Catinaccio, the Latemar, and the Lagorai mountain groups. Your destination is the village of Cavalese at 3,000 feet. You'll have time to admire the Church of Assunta dating to 1112 and the Banco de la Reson, a sort of Parliament house of the Magnifica Comunita' di Fiemme.

After a memorable day in the Dolomites, relax your muscles in the hotel's fine spa and swimming pool, enjoying a superb view of Cermis Mountain. For dinner, try the hotel restaurant's local specialties, like the *cajoncie* ravioli and pasta made from organic durum wheat.

Today's Ride Choices

Pordoi Pass to Cavalese via cable car — 53 km (33 miles) OR Pordoi Pass to Cavalese via road — 55 km (34 miles)

What to Expect:

Your ride starts with a 10-km (6 mile) descent at an average gradient of 8%. The road is well paved and wide, with 27 switchbacks. Motorbike and car traffic, along with cyclists, may be numerous, so it's important to pay attention. The next 45 km (27 miles) are very enjoyable, with occasional small hills. You follow a bike path through typical villages and meadows and past waterfalls and even an artificial lake (Biolago) where you can stop to swim and have lunch. At ride's end, you have the option to ride gently uphill to Cavalese or take the Cermis funicular with your bike (open from mid-June to approximately September 25. Open until 5:00 p.m.).

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Cavalese to Ora and Bolzano / Move on Day

Savor an excellent buffet breakfast on the hotel terrace, with sweeping views of the Lagorai group. Then head out to enjoy a beautiful new bike path to the Sanlugano Pass. This is a small pass that connects the Fiemme Valley with the Adige River Valley. Your route follows the former Vecia Ferrovia, an old railroad built during World War I by Russian prisoners and recently turned into a scenic bike path. Shortly after the pass, you ride through a thick forest and descend into a rare alpine wine region known for its pinot noir. Along the region's renowned Wine Route, stop at the wine village of Pinzano, admiring the frescoed houses and cobbled streets. This is a good place to get some lunch and taste the famous local wine.

The views open up as you enter the wide Adige Valley and approach the village of Ora. Here, you can opt to ride the last miles along the river on a flat bike path or take the local train to get to Bolzano more quickly.

The rest of the day is yours to enjoy the city from your centrally located hotel. Save some time to visit the Archeological Museum of Bolzano, where Oetzi—or “the Iceman,” the natural mummy—is displayed. About 5,300 years ago, a man was crossing the Alps when he was killed. His body was preserved by the thick ice, and it is possible to see it here, together with an interesting number of different research studies around life and humans 5,000 years ago.

Today's Ride Choices

Cavalese to Ora train station — 40 km (26 miles) OR Cavalese to Bolzano — 59 km (36 miles)

What to Expect:

After an initial gradual ascent departing Cavalese on car road, you climb some short steep hills to the Sanlugano Pass at 3,300 feet on a newly paved bike path. After crossing the pass, you ride on a long unpaved well-beaten bike path and through a biotop, with few stretches on paved country roads. You need to keep your speed well under control, since you coast mainly downhill until you are close to Ora. Before Ora, a good place for an informal lunch stop and restrooms is Imbiss Castelfederer, well visible on your bike path. The short option takes you to the Ora train station, where you need to buy a ticket for your bike at the counter, and validate it before boarding your train. Please use the Alto-Adige Guest Pass as your train ticket. Most trains run between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. and the ride is only 20 minutes. If you decide to ride your bicycle to Bolzano the bike path is perfectly flat and well paved, and delivers you to the main square of Bolzano and the Parkhotel Laurin garage.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel. Check-out is at 10:00 a.m. Depending upon your final destination, it may not be possible to depart for the U.S. on the last day of the tour. Please check airline schedules carefully.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel Krone (Day 1)

Conveniently located in the heart of the city, Hotel Krone boasts a combination of traditional and modern ambience. Its excellent location makes the Old Town and its myriad of cobblestone alleyways, specialty food shops, boutiques, restaurants, and historic sights easy to explore on foot. Plus, you'll receive a complimentary BrixonCard providing free public transportation, admission to more than 90 museums, a ride on the Plose gondola lift, and much more. Take advantage of the rooftop full-service spa with city views and the adjacent garden.

Hotel Post (Days 2-3)

Ideally located in the social and cultural hub of Brunico, the stylish Hotel Post was designed with inspiration from the great outdoors of South Tyrol and the Dolomites. Occupying a former post office, today it embodies an urban sophistication, with a welcoming lobby and bright, recently refurbished rooms with wood accents. During your stay, treat yourself to a spa treatment and enjoy an elegant meal or artisan drink in Cosmo. Breakfast is served overlooking the main square, where a weekly market takes place every Wednesday.

Hotel La Roccia (Day 4)

Located just outside Cavalese, but within walking distance, the Hotel La Roccia enjoys a spectacularly scenic location. Magnificent views of the Dolomites unfold from the breakfast terrace and infinity pool. The spa is constructed with the wood of Fiemme, locally beloved for centuries for its texture, warmth, and aroma. Rooms are designed in a mountain style and with furnishing designed by the renowned craftsmen of the Fiemme Valley. The onsite restaurant serves plentiful breakfasts. For dinner, try the restaurant's local specialties, like the cajoncie ravioli and pasta made of organic durum wheat.

Parkhotel Laurin (Day 5)

One of Bolzano's elegant properties, the Parkhotel Laurin occupies one of the most beautiful buildings in town. Its intimate bar is full of lush fresco paintings depicting the saga of King Laurin. The air-conditioned hotel houses other unique artwork, as well. Its collection includes around 200 original 20th-century works, from woodcuts to canvas pieces, from Impressionism to German New Objectivity. Exquisite works can also be found in the guestrooms and parlors and in the hotel's private park. The breakfast room is

adorned with decorative hand-painted wallpaper.