

Italy: Sardinia, Carloforte, Sulcis & Chia

Bike Vacation Only

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: 6 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

DAY 1: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation begins / Beni benius in Sardinia! / Cycle from Marceddi' to Torre dei Corsari / Move On Day

We suggest arriving in Italy at least one day prior to the start date as your tour begins at 12:00 p.m. Make your own way to Cagliari, where you will begin your self-guided adventure. For details, refer to your VBT Vacation Preparation Handbook.

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 golden sand beach of Pistis, the first of many opportunities for swimming – 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 takes you 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 little cove and beach at the foot of the property before settling into 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 — 25 km (16 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 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 let you know in advance at the first meeting and shuttle to Santo Stefano Santadi instead of Marceddi'. In Santo Stefano the route takes you to the Pistis beach and then back, with a short climb on the way back. A rolling route follows from Santo Stefano to Torre dei Corsari and your hotel. Mind the last half mile downhill to the hotel.

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

After a hearty breakfast prepared by your hosts, set out for a day of breathtaking landscapes and gently rolling miles. Leaving Torre dei Corsari, steal your last glimpse of the sand dunes that make this village and beach so distinctive on Sardinia. As you get underway, lentiscus, juniper, wild flowers, 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.

Continue to Montevecchio, an important mineral mining center until as recently as 1991. Pause here for lunch, perhaps at a local eatery where some local specialties and refreshing drinks are served at shaded picnic tables. After, you might tour the mines, but note that it takes a couple of hours and the tours' starting times might not fit into your plans.

A few more miles down the road, arrive in the town of Arbus, home to the 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. His shop is always open at the Museo del Coltello Sardo.

Later this afternoon, relax by the hotel swimming pool before dinner on your own.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Villa Belfiori to Portu Maga to Arbus to Arbus challenging — 41 km (25 miles)

Afternoon: Arbus to Hotel S'Ena — 9 km (6 miles)

What to Expect:

Villa Belfiori to Portu Maga Arbus and Hotel S'Ena:

Departing your hotel, you ride out of town coasting a wide beach with high dunes. The route is nicely rolling for the first 12 miles, and includes a very nice easy coastal stretch between Marina di Gutturru and Portu Maga, where you find bars 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. You ride up and down till Montevecchio, where again you find a kiosk with refreshments. It then descends to Arbus. In Arbus you ride uphill out of town, and then gradually ascends till your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

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

After a leisurely 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, where bars, beach clubs, and soft sands invite you to pause for a snack or a swim. Once you are in Buggerru, your route climbs around a fjord, offering sweeping views of the sea. Your ride here is rolling and breathtaking, leading you to the scenic Cala Domestica cove and sandy beach, where you may have time for a short break.

Your 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 Zuccherò. 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, Porto Flavia tunnels worth a 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. Perhaps a stroll along the promenade in front of your hotel will be in order.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel S'Ena to Nebida — 47 km (29 miles)

Afternoon: Nebida to Portovesme ferry — 22 km (14 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 well, based on your interests and ability to cope with some 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 maybe you don't want to miss the 7:00 p.m. ferry (there is a later one).

A long fun downhill takes you to Portixeddu's hamlet and beaches, where you can find bars and clubs to change into your swimming clothes. A coastal easy ride takes you almost all the way to Buggerru, where you have a first climb (with 7% elevation average grade) to go. In Buggerru you find several restaurants and gelato shops. After the fjord of Buggerru, you descend to the bay of Cala Domestica, where again you have the opportunity to swim and buy lunch. From the bay you have the hardest hill of the day to ride: 4 miles with 5% average elevation gain, with some peaks of 10-12%. You can rest on the nice downhill coastal ride into Nebida. In Nebida, don't miss the short walk recorded in RWGPS that allows you to take great pictures of the Pan di Zuccherò cliff and the relics 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 climbs again steadily and gradually for 2 miles, then descends till your ferry embarcadero. It's not a particularly interesting stretch and you may find some car traffic of locals or tourists travelling to the Island of San Pietro. The bar at the embarcadero may be closed, but there are toilets and vending machines for drinks in the ticket station.

Ferry ride to San Pietro Island:

It's a 30 minute ride. Your Local host gave you the ferry ticket for you and your bike at the first meeting. When you disembark, select the Carloforte pier to Hotel Hieracon RWGPS option to find your hotel, which is on the marina front, only 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 clifftop 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 Lighthouse — 42 km (26 miles)

Afternoon: Hotel to Tuna fish factory and backhouse to viewpoint to Hotel — 10 km (6 miles)

What to Expect:

Hotel to Lighthouse:

Plan the day as you like. The route is designed to give you options. If you feel energetic, ride the nice uphill road till the lighthouse. On the way, maybe stop at Cala Fico. From the lighthouse, you ride back on a different route allowing you to take a detour to La Caletta beach (best accessible sand and rocky beach on the island) where you can enjoy swimming. There are no restaurants or bars on your route – the best place to stop for lunch is the town of Carloforte.

Hotel to Tuna fish factory:

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

You can decide not to ride and rather 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 fascinating "ghost village" of Tratalias Vecchia. This tiny town was abandoned in 1971 after dam construction routed water into the streets. The town was rebuilt on a nearby hillside, and the original medieval structures in the old town have been lovingly restored. Take in its distinct ambience for a while before continuing 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. Refresh yourself with a swim here.

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)

What to Expect:

Calasetta to Sant'Antioco:

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). After you disembark in Calasetta, you follow a partly coastal and internal ride in the countryside, where the rest of the nuraghi and the ancient city of Sulci are (not visible). Your ride takes you in the city of Sant'Antioco, where we highly suggest a stop at the archeological museum. Depending on your interest, the visit can take from one to three hours. The morning ride ends in downtown Sant'Antioco, on the sea promenade, close to a grocery store, bars, and restaurants.

Sant'Antioco to Porto Pino to Lu' Hotel:

The ride out of Sant'Antioco is easy. Be careful on the bridge shared with cars. Then you follow a flat new bike path for about 5 miles, and then on country roads that take you to the coastal wetland of Porto Pino. A very gradually climbing easy route takes you to your hotel inland, in the village of Sant'Anna Arresi.

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 to see the nuraghi. The first part of the ride, for about 6 miles, follows the state road SS226, where bikers are frequent, and where you need to ride carefully. From there an internal country road take you to the coast. Then you will follow a very scenic rolling route, with a couple of moderate hills. During the summer pay close attention to cars parked on the road nearby 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 optional ride (and partial walk), that we highly recommend, allows 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 can park your bike at the parking. From the parking, walk till almost the lighthouse. Today the lighthouse of Spartivento is a hotel. At the hotel gate, you may continue on foot until you reach the lighthouse/hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

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.