

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 cozy Carloforte, on San Pietro Island, where a Pisan dialect is spoken and Napoleon left traces of his visit.
- Cycle along spectacular coastal roads, far from traffic, with the freedom to 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 turquoise-blue bays and relax on Sardinia's gorgeous sandy beaches.
- Savor local specialties made with fragrant vegetables, fresh fish, and pasta unique to Sardinia.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain and moderate hills, with long ascents and steep descents, making it ideal

for experienced cyclists. Rides take place on well-paved roads and dedicated bike paths. Expect rolling Mediterranean landscapes and coastal routes, with minimal urban riding and very little car traffic. On some days, winds—such as the mistral or sirocco—may affect your pace, and shade is generally limited. The itinerary includes two ferry transfers, each approximately 40 minutes, 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: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Beni Benius in Sardinia! / Ride from Marceddì to Torre dei Corsari / Move on Day

We recommend arriving in Italy at least one day before your tour begins, as it starts at 10:30 a.m.

Make your own way to Cagliari, where your self-guided adventure begins. For details, please refer to your *Vacation Preparation Handbook*.

Meet your VBT Local Host at 10:30 a.m. for your Welcome Orientation at Mediterras Bike Shop, along with any other VBT guests arriving on the same day. Please be dressed and ready for cycling.

Get to know your bicycle and ease into the rhythm of biking in Italy. After the meeting and fitting, enjoy lunch on your own—your host will offer recommendations—before boarding a private local shuttle to Marceddì, where your first ride begins. Upon arrival in Marceddì, you may use the bar and restroom facilities at Ristorante Da Lucio (Via Lungomare) before setting out. Don't forget to pack your swimsuit and towel for this ride. After dropping you off, the shuttle will continue on with your luggage to tonight's hotel.

Take your time on today's short, scenic ride. You begin at the vast Marceddì fishing lagoon, pedaling in the shade of tall eucalyptus trees lining the fertile Campidano plain. Not far away is the city of Arborea, once called *Mussolinia* when it was founded during the Fascist era of the early 1920s. It was developed as a planned urban center in reclaimed marshland. Malaria was only fully eradicated here after World War II, thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation. As you approach the lagoon and the old tower of Marceddì, you

may spot anti-aircraft bunkers built during the war. Your loop brings you back to the seafront of Marceddì—today a quiet fishing hamlet but once a key trading hub for obsidian, a precious volcanic glass used in ancient times for talismans and tools.

After crossing a narrow bridge and leaving the lagoon behind, you enter the Costa Verde, a colorful stretch of coastline. Your route opens to expansive views of Pistis Beach, where the massive dunes—shaped by the mistral wind—offer your first glimpse of Sardinia’s wild beauty.

Back on your saddle, a rolling ride along a ridge leads you to the beach, and eventually, to the village of Torre dei Corsari and your hotel.

Tonight’s accommodations are at Hotel Villa Belfiori, a charming Mediterranean-style villa perched above the sea. This peaceful, family-run hotel offers stunning views of the Costa Verde, lush gardens, and a saltwater pool overlooking the coastline. Its warm, relaxed atmosphere and traditional Sardinian hospitality make it a wonderful place to unwind after your first day of riding.

Before dinner, take time to stroll down to the protected cove and beach just below the hotel. You may wish to dine at the hotel’s restaurant, where delicious local cuisine—from fresh seafood to regional specialties—provides the perfect close to the day.

Today's Ride Choices

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

What to Expect:

The ride begins in the fishing hamlet of Marceddì, following flat country roads for approximately seven miles. A long, one-way bridge carries both cars and cyclists across a scenic lagoon. In the rare event the bridge is closed, your Local Host will notify you during the Welcome Orientation and arrange a shuttle to Santo Stefano instead of Marceddì. From Santo Stefano, an out-and-back option to Pistis Beach rewards you with stunning views and a short climb on the return. A rolling route then offers ridgeline vistas as you ride from Santo Stefano to the beach at Torre dei Corsari, known for its impressive dunes. Here, you can enjoy a swim and a refreshing beverage before the final short climb to the hotel.

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 a final glimpse of the sweeping 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 with minimal car traffic. After about 3.5 miles, you pedal into a uniquely Sardinian tableau, with soaring mountains to your left and the turquoise sea to your right—a spectacular view you'll come to enjoy often in the days ahead. Soon, the route offers two choices, one of which follows 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 a refreshment break at shaded picnic tables. Mine tours are available but are lengthy and may not fit into your plans.

A few more miles down the road brings you to the town of Arbus, home to a fascinating knife museum where you can learn about the region's obsidian and blade-making history. Knives here date back to around 3000 BCE, many beautifully decorated. Still a vital tool for Sardinian shepherds, the most iconic is the *Arburesa*, once a traditional engagement gift. To learn more, consider visiting local bladesmith Paolo Pusceddu, who crafts intricate knives with decorative handles and etched blades.

Tonight, you'll stay at Hotel S'Ena, a peaceful retreat surrounded by Sardinia's rugged natural beauty. After your ride, relax by the hotel's swimming pool before enjoying your included dinner at the on-site restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Villa Belfiori to Arbus (Challenging Option) — 47 km (29 miles) OR Villa Belfiori to Arbus (Moderate Option) — 41 km (25 miles)

What to Expect:

Departing your hotel, both the moderate and challenging routes begin with a pleasant rolling stretch for the first 12 miles. The challenging option includes an easy coastal section between Marina di Gutturu and Portu Maga, where a bar offers a good place to stop. After leaving the coast, you'll face a steady three-mile climb with an average grade of 4%, and occasional peaks of 7–8%; the surface is paved but uneven in places. The routes rejoin for the ascent to Montevecchio, where a simple snack bar offers basic refreshments. From there, the route

descends into Arbus, where you may pause for lunch, a visit to the knife museum, or to stock up at a supermarket. A final gradual climb of about four miles brings you to your accommodation.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

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. Begin with an exhilarating 10-mile descent to the beach and Portixeddu, where your route follows the flat coastline with a long stretch of sandy beach to your right. At the town of Buggerru, the route becomes more rolling, climbing around a fjord and offering sweeping views of the sea.

The ride continues inland through a canyon in the vast, untouched mining region of Iglesiente. As you return to the coast, take in the astonishing sight just offshore—Pan di Zuccheru, a massive white sea stack named for its resemblance to Rio de Janeiro's Sugarloaf. This distinctly Sardinian formation rises dramatically from the sea and is part of the striking limestone headlands of the Costa Verde. Perched high on the cliffs is Porto Flavia, a remarkable feat of 1920s engineering. Here, tunnels carved into the rock allowed ore to travel via an underground conveyor directly to waiting ships in the harbor. If time and energy permit, the guided tour of Porto Flavia is highly recommended.

From here, continue to Portovesme, where you board a ferry for the 30-minute crossing to San Pietro Island. Your journey ends in Carloforte, one of Italy's most beautiful villages, full of charm and color. Brimming with restaurants, lively bars, and boutiques, this cozy island town invites exploration. A stroll along the waterfront promenade is a perfect way to end the day.

You'll be staying for the next two nights at Lu' Hotel Riviera Carloforte, a modern and comfortable property located in the heart of town. Just steps from the port and promenade, the hotel offers stylish accommodations and easy access to Carloforte's vibrant shops and dining. This evening, perhaps reward yourself with a well-earned aperitif on the panoramic rooftop terrace—the hotel's lounge bar offers a relaxed setting with breathtaking views over the crystalline sea and bustling marina below.

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 Lu' Hotel Riviera Carloforte — 1 km (0.5 miles)

What to Expect:

Hotel S'Ena to Nebida

Today is a long ride day! We recommend planning your stops in advance based on your interests and your ability to manage ascents and possible winds. Keep in mind that you'll take a ferry to San Pietro Island at the end of your ride—you likely won't want to miss the 7:00 p.m. ferry (though a later one is available). The day includes several long climbs, along with approximately 25 km (15 miles) of exhilarating—and at times technical—descents.

A fun, extended downhill brings you to the hamlet and beaches of Portixeddu, where, in season, bars and restrooms are available if you'd like to change into your swimsuit. An easy coastal section leads you almost to Buggerru, where you'll face your first climb—about a 7% average grade. In Buggerru, take advantage of the grocery store or a bar stop. After the town's fjord, you descend to the bay of Cala Domestica before tackling the most challenging climb of the day: four miles with a 5% average grade and short sections reaching 10–12%. Your effort is rewarded with a long coastal descent into Nebida—please ride with caution. Once in Nebida, don't miss the short walk recorded in RWGPS to view Pan di Zuccheru and the ruins of the historic ore-loading docks.

Nebida to Portovesme

From Nebida, an easy ride leads to the small town of Gonnessa, where cafés and a few shops are available. Leaving town, the road climbs steadily for about two miles, offering stunning sea views to your right before descending toward the ferry dock. If you still have energy, consider a short out-and-back detour to the nearby Nuragic stone ruins, which offer expansive coastal views. 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 will have provided ferry tickets for both you and your bike during your initial meeting. The crossing to San Pietro Island takes approximately 30 minutes. Upon arrival, use the *Carloforte Pier to Lu' Hotel Riviera* Carloforte RWGPS route to reach your hotel, which is located along the marina—just 0.2 miles from the ferry 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 south to the Tunisian island of Tabarka, and eventually to San Pietro. The name *tabarchini* is still used today to refer to the local population, whose accent, customs, and traditions reflect their Ligurian—not Sardinian—heritage. Today, the major catch in the waters surrounding San Pietro is not coral but tuna, and an entire industry has grown around this prized fish.

Perhaps relax and wade at La Caletta, a partly rocky cove lapped by turquoise waters. Or head to Capo Sandalo on the island's western coast to visit its dramatic clifftop lighthouse and take in the breathtaking views. You might also enjoy roaming the quaint alleyways of Carloforte, stopping at family-owned eateries to sample the island's specialty: *linguine alla bottarga*, often served with some of the freshest bluefin tuna in the world.

Today's Ride Choices

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

Afternoon: Hotel to Tuna Fish Factory and Viewpoint Loop — 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—these routes are designed to offer a range of options. On this varied loop, you'll depart town along a short gravel bike path that runs beside the salt marsh. After a stretch of rolling terrain, you'll arrive at La Caletta Beach, one of the island's best accessible sand-and-rock beaches for a swim. The route continues to a scenic viewpoint at Mezzaluna, then on to Le Colonne, a fascinating stone formation rising from the sea.

Hotel to Tuna Fish Factory

This short ride takes you from your hotel to the tuna fish factory and a viewpoint overlooking Isola Piana.

It's a gentle, scenic route ideal for a lighter riding day.

Hotel to Lighthouse

This is the most challenging ride option, but it comes with big rewards: stunning sea views from Italy's westernmost point, the Capo Sandalo lighthouse.

Alternative Option

You may also choose to take a break from the bike and discover the island from the sea by purchasing an optional boat tour of San Pietro Island.

Included Meals: Breakfast

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

After breakfast, you board a short ferry ride to the island of Sant'Antioco, part of the Sulcis province, which also includes a large section of Sardinia's southwestern coast. The ancient site of Sulci reveals that this was once the most prosperous Carthaginian—and later Roman—settlement in Sardinia. You'll cycle through splendid seaside landscapes, passing the remnants of its basilica, necropolis, and several nuraghes, the round megalithic towers left by the island's Nuragic civilization. A stop at the archaeological museum just outside the town of Sant'Antioco is highly recommended.

After exploring the island's rich history and hidden corners, you return to Sardinia via an isthmus. Today, a newly paved bike path guides your way—but it was the Carthaginians who originally built the causeway connecting the island to the mainland.

Your route continues to the evocative

"ghost village" of Tratalias Vecchia, abandoned in 1971 after dam construction flooded its streets. From there, you ride peaceful rolling roads through Cannonau vineyards and artichoke fields to reach your hotel.

Tonight, you'll stay at Lu' Hotel Porto Pino, a western-facing property ideally positioned for enjoying spectacular sunsets over Sant'Antioco. Surrounded by tranquil countryside, the hotel offers a pool and comfortable accommodations—perfect for relaxing after a rewarding day on the bike.

This afternoon, you may choose to unwind at the hotel or take a scenic ride to Porto Pino Bay, one of

Sardinia's most breathtaking beaches. With 2.5 miles of pink-hued sand, intimate coves, and crystal-clear water, it's also one of the best places to spot flamingos wading in the nearby ponds.

Upon arrival in Sant'Anna Arresi, settle into your hotel and toast the day's discoveries over your included dinner—a delicious three-course menu served in the hotel's panoramic restaurant overlooking the Gulf of Palmas. As the sun dips below the horizon, enjoy local specialties paired with sweeping sea views.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Calasetta to Sant'Antioco and Lu' Hotel — 40 km (25 miles) OR Calasetta and Sant' Antioco Island Loop to Lu' Hotel (Moderate Option) — 57km (36 miles)

Afternoon: Optional Lu' Hotel to Porto Pino and Back — 22 km (13 miles)

What to Expect:

Lu' Hotel Riviera Carloforte to Calasetta Ferry

A 25-minute ferry ride takes you to the island of Sant'Antioco (open the *Lu' Hotel Riviera Carloforte to Calasetta Ferry* RWGPS route to find your way to the pier). Be sure to have your tickets for both you and your bike ready before boarding—your Local Host provided these at the first meeting.

Calasetta to Sant'Antioco and Lu' Hotel

After disembarking in Calasetta, the route winds from the coast inland, passing through an area rich with underground ruins of nuraghi and the ancient city of Sulki. Learn more about these historic wonders at the Archaeological Museum, where a visit can take anywhere from one to three hours depending on your interest. The ride continues to the seaside promenade in the town of Sant'Antioco, where you'll find a grocery store, bars, and restaurants. Depart Sant'Antioco cautiously via the car-shared bridge, then enjoy a newly paved, flat bike path for about eight miles. The route concludes with quiet country roads through Cannonau vineyards and farmland, with a gentle climb to your hotel in the inland village of Sant'Anna Arresi.

Calasetta and Sant' Antioco Island Loop to Lu' Hotel (Moderate Option)

After disembarking in Calasetta, this longer route loops south along the coast of Sant'Antioco Island, offering stunning sea views, a few moderate climbs, and vistas of San Pietro Island. After crossing the island, the ride leads to the same seaside promenade in Sant'Antioco, with access to shops, bars, and restaurants. Continue as described above—cross the bridge with caution, enjoy the flat bike path, and ride

scenic country roads to your hotel in Sant'Anna Arresi.

Optional Lu' Hotel to Porto Pino and Back

This optional 22-km (13-mile) out-and-back ride begins in the village of Sant'Anna Arresi, following town streets and a smooth new bike path to the beach town of Porto Pino. Here, you can enjoy a swim or a beverage at a local beach bar before returning the same way.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6: Sant'Anna Arresi to Chia / Travel to Cagliari / Your VBT 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 region is a place of incomparable natural beauty—an enduring source of inspiration for artists. Along this unspoiled coast, overhanging cliffs alternate with soft, sandy coves. Your ride traces the shoreline past one spectacular beach after another, with ample opportunities to stop for a swim.

Pedal past Tuerredda, often ranked among Sardinia's top ten beaches. Its fine sand and shimmering waters resemble Caribbean panoramas. Continue to Campionna and Piscinnì, part of the Domus de Maria province, and Sa Canna, a popular spot for scuba diving. At the scenic coves of Capo Malfatano, pause to admire the Spanish watchtower overlooking the bay where Phoenicians once landed in the 6th century BCE. Nearby Porto Tramatzu offers a tropical setting of fine white sand and shallow, turquoise waters. If time allows, take a dip at s'Ottixeddu (locally known as *degli americani*, or *of the Americans*), where visitor numbers are limited in summer.

Your ride concludes in Chia, home to one of Sardinia's most renowned beaches. Surrounded by limestone and green hills, this stretch of coast frequently appears on lists of the World's Top 10 Most Beautiful Beaches.

Arrive in Chia well before 4:00 p.m. to enjoy one last swim at Su Giudeu Beach, famous for its emerald-green waters and picturesque islet just offshore. If you wish, wade or swim out for a final adventure. Behind the beach lies Spartivento Pond, an important habitat for native wildlife, including flamingos. If time permits, consider one last optional ride and short walk to the cape for a

panoramic farewell photo of Sulcis's dramatic coastline.

From Chia, a 60-minute drive

brings you to Cagliari, where your vacation concludes at the Cagliari railway station. 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 — 7 km (4 miles)

What to Expect:

In Sant'Anna, shortly after the start of the ride, pause in the town center to view the nuraghi. The first six miles follow state road SS226, which, while commonly used by cyclists, has enough traffic to warrant caution. You'll soon turn off the busier road onto a quiet country route that descends to the coast. From there, enjoy a stunning, rolling ride with a few moderate hills. During the summer, be especially alert near beach areas—cars may be parked along the roadside, and tourists or motorbikes often stop in the middle of the road to take photos. Consider a lunch stop just before Chia, either at the Tuerredda Beach restaurant or in the town of Chia itself. The short optional ride is highly recommended, offering time to explore Chia's lagoon with flamingos, the sand dunes, and Cala Cipolla Bay. This route includes a short stretch of sandy path and offers great opportunities to stop for a swim or simply take in the spectacular views.

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.

Lu' Hotel Riviera Carloforte (Days 3-4)

This Croatian boutique hotel is situated in the center of Carloforte on the Island of San Pietro, close to the ferry dock, and a stone's throw to the most beautiful beaches on the island. The hotel offers breathtaking sea views from the rooftop terrace bar, its spacious guest rooms include air conditioning and complimentary WiFi and provides guests with a rejuvenating blend of relaxation and romance.

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.