

Italy: Puglia's Undiscovered Coast

Bike Vacation Only

Value and connection are what set this incomparable cycling tour of Puglia apart from the pack. With our deep roots in the region, VBT takes you beyond the main tourist attractions to discover authentic rhythms of daily life at the heel of Italy's boot. As you pedal along Puglia's turquoise coast with your local trip leaders, you may find yourself stopping beside an ancient limestone trulli, where you're greeted by a sweet *nonna* with a basket of almond cookies to share—or pausing in the town square for an *affogato* as you watch the village wake slowly from its afternoon siesta. Best of all, our local connections love to go the extra mile for VBT guests. Why? Because we're family. Shop around and you'll see—the local values of VBT's Puglia cycling vacation outshine the competition, hands down.

Cultural Highlights

- Enjoy incomparable accommodations with six nights at luxurious *masserie*.
- Share a farm-fresh lunch and taste delicious olive oils with your *masseria* hosts.
- Bike from the ancient walled city of Acaya to the beautiful, rugged coast.
- Enjoy unhurried pedaling along rural pathways heading to the coastal town of Castro Marina.
- Refresh yourself with a swim in Otranto's crystalline waters.

What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain on low-traffic country roads and is ideal for beginning cyclists. For more avid cyclists, several days offer longer mileage options. All cyclists will thoroughly enjoy the scenic routes along the coast. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance along the road.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 4-41 miles

Average Cycling Time: 1-5 hours

Group size: 14-22 max

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

March 55°/46°, April 60°/50°, May 68°/55°, June 75°/62°, July 80°/68°, August 80°/68°, September 75°/64°, October 68°/57°, November 58°/42°

Average Rainfall (in.)

March 3.0, April 1.7, May 1.0, June 0.9, July 0.3, August 0.3, September 2.5, October 3.8, November 2.7

DAY 1: VBT Bicycling Vacation begins / Warm-up ride / Welcome reception and dinner

VBT highly recommends flying to Italy at least one day before the tour begins. This will allow you to rest and recover from jet lag before you begin sightseeing and cycling.

Meet your VBT trip leaders in the lobby of the first *masseria*. Readily identifiable VBT trip leaders will be in the main lobby beginning at 2:00 p.m. to answer any questions, provide assistance, and collect pedals you brought from home.

Masseria is the local name for large farms, which were fortified around the 16th century to ward off attacks by pirates and brigands. *Masserie* feature high boundary walls, angular towers, drawbridges, and watchtowers. Families worked and lived inside these walls with their own church, oil mill, and oven for baking bread. These farms also housed cisterns for water, storage rooms for tools and hay, stables, and everything else needed for day-to-day life. These days they are elegant country resorts, most of which grow produce and bottle their own olive oil.

This afternoon, take a short warm-up ride along quiet country roads, past 800-year-old olive groves to the fishing village of Savelletri.

Later, enjoy a welcome cocktail reception on the elegant hotel patio. Dinner is at the hotel restaurant and is prepared with local products and herbs produced on the farm.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-up Coccaro — 13 km (8 miles)

What to Expect:

Cycle a loop in the countryside on totally flat and paved terrain through the fishing village of Savelletri.

Cumulative Distance Range: 13 km (8 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: Olive oil tasting / Lunch at Il Frantoio farm

This morning, you will ride along the sea for a few miles, before looping inland to Masseria Il Frantoio, another award-winning country hotel famous for the quality of its food. The estate extends over 150 acres (61 hectares) and includes a “secret garden” planted with orange and lemon trees, as well as a well-preserved underground olive oil mill. Your hosts, Armando and Rosalba, have collected many interesting odds and ends over the years, from ancient dresses and hats to precious books and a gramophone. Each piece has its own story.

Your lunch at Il Frantoio is prepared using produce grown on the farm and is truly an experience for all of your senses. You’ll also have the opportunity to try a sampling of five different extra-virgin oils that Rosalba uses to flavor her focaccia, pickles, preserves, and delicious *laganari* pasta.

Later, you can opt to relax or continue cycling to the hotel along the ancient Traian road. An additional moderate ride option takes you up to the whitewashed city of Ostuni. End your day with a shuttle to the nearby small city of Savelletri on the sea. You are free to traverse the cozy pedestrian area to choose a restaurant for your dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel to Il Frantoio — 32 km (20 miles)

Afternoon: Il Frantoio to Hotel — 27 km (17 miles) OR Il Frantoio to Hotel PLUS (moderate) — 36 km (22 miles)

What to Expect:

Ride partly along the coast and then in a rural setting, passing through charming, small villages. An optional moderate ride will take you up to the hill of Ostuni and down toward the ocean again, before joining the Traian road back to the hotel. The regular afternoon ride avoids the hill and takes you through the countryside on the quiet, historical Traian road to the hotel.

Today may offer an additional independent ride for experienced cyclists. Ask your trip leader for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 – 68 km (17 – 42 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3: Cycle to Egnatia and Monopoli

After breakfast, you'll cycle along the coast on quiet roads, completely surrounded by ancient olive trees. Puglia ranks first in Italy in the production of olive oil, wine, and hay, and second for almonds. You'll stop on the way to explore the archaeological site of Egnatia, an ancient Messapian (and later Roman) coastal town of great economic and military importance in the 10th century. The museum on the grounds includes precious finds such as sculptures, jewels, funeral equipment, and *gnathia*, which is the distinctive local pottery that usually features figurative painting on the upper half and ornamental designs on the lower portion.

Later, continue to Monopoli, where you'll have the chance to visit the beautiful cathedral and old harbor. You'll have free time to stroll and eat lunch on your own. Walk the maze of pedestrian streets in Monopoli's old city center and see how they make the city so intimate.

Shuttle or ride back along the sea to your *masseria* and enjoy the amenities. Dinner is included at the *Masseria* restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel to Monopoli — 27 km (17 miles)

Afternoon: Monopoli to Hotel — 14 km (9 miles) OR Monopoli to Hotel PLUS (moderate) — 29 km (18 miles)

What to Expect:

The coastal terrain is flat. To explore Monopoli, you can follow a walk created by your trip leaders and recorded in RWGPS. The longer afternoon option provides an easy to moderate trek inland from Monopoli on a beautiful, long, and gradual uphill, followed by a rolling, hilly road and a very scenic downhill to our *masseria*. An optional additional challenging ride is offered in the afternoon to provide more fun to avid cyclists. Ask your trip leaders.

Cumulative Distance Range: 14 – 56 km (9 – 35 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Acaya / Cycle along the coast of Salento

Leave Savelletri and take a morning shuttle farther south to embark on another day of your stunning Puglia bike ride toward Salento. You'll begin at the walled city of Acaya and ride through the ancient city's archway on country roads that are free from traffic and marked as bike paths. You'll finish your morning ride at the rugged coast, where you will enjoy the spectacular view of Torre dell'Orso village, rising steeply from the sea and sandy bay. The village is a good spot to buy some lunch before either hitting the road again or taking a shuttle to the hotel.

The afternoon offers more fun cycling on quiet country roads and along the small Alimini Lakes as you head to your next *masseria*.

After settling into your cozy accommodations, enjoy the hotel amenities or simply relax with a good book. Dinner is at a nearby *masseria* tonight.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Acaya to Torre dell'Orso — 20 km (12 miles)

Afternoon: Torre dell'Orso to Hotel — 26 km (16 miles)

What to Expect:

Take a beautiful bike ride into the countryside, mostly on marked bike roads, to Torre dell'Orso on the sea, where you'll break for lunch. In the afternoon you'll have a choice of a shuttle to the hotel or cycling more lovely country roads with some easy rolling hills by the Alimini Lakes, followed by a final flat stretch to our *masseria*.

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 – 46 km (12 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5: Cycle to Otranto / Picnic by an organic farm / Discover Otranto

Bike from your hotel on country roads through sleepy villages, where a stop in a colorful local bar for an Italian coffee can be a wonderful diversion. Your route is shaded by big olive trees and towering oaks as you head toward the coast. By lunch, you'll reach an organic farm near the sea, where the friendly owners, Antonio and Marina, will open their private garden to host a picnic lunch prepared by your trip leaders.

After lunch, discover Otranto, a picturesque town on the Italian coast. Founded by the Greeks, Otranto is surrounded by great ramparts and walls. Starting in late spring, its atmosphere is enlivened by local craft studios selling clay whistles, baskets, hand-dyed fabric, and ceramics. The city's highlight is Otranto Cathedral's enormous, 8,611-square-foot (800-square-meter) floor mosaic representing the Tree of Life, which was created by a monk in 1163. A visit to Otranto is also your opportunity to switch sports and take a dip in the sea.

Today's ride ends on flat country roads, where you'll catch sight of menhirs and dolmens—ancient monoliths and tombs—before returning to your hotel. This evening, you can dine on your own at the hotel or shuttle to Otranto for dinner at one of the many outdoor cafés or restaurants.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel to Picnic Spot — 34 km (21 miles)

Afternoon: Picnic Spot to Otranto — 7 km (4 miles) | Otranto to Hotel — 9 km (6 miles)

What to Expect:

Most of today's riding is in the morning to give you time in the afternoon to explore the historical capital of Salento, the city of Otranto, and possibly go for a swim. The ride takes you inland from your *masseria* on paved country roads free from car traffic. The afternoon ride is a short and flat route through olive groves to your next *masseria*. An optional additional ride is an easy-to-moderate loop with undulating terrain starting from Otranto. Ask your trip leader for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 7 – 50 km (4 – 31 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6: Discover the eastern tip of Italy

After breakfast, you'll set out on one of the best rides in all of Italy. Starting in the interior of Salento, you'll follow gentle, rural pathways through little villages to the coastal town of Castro Marina. From there, you'll continue to Santa Cesarea, a quiet town set on the edge of the Adriatic Sea, where you can enjoy lunch on your own in one of the many cozy cafés.

Fortified, you'll follow the cliffs to the town of Porto Badisco, famous for its azure waters and prehistoric Cervi Grottoes, before continuing to Cape Otranto, the easternmost tip of Italy. You'll cycle back to the hotel in time to freshen up before an extraordinary farewell dinner with Puglia wines and specialties at your *masseria* restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel to Santa Cesarea Terme — 25 km (15 miles)

Afternoon: Santa Cesarea Terme to Hotel — 14 km (9 miles) OR Santa Cesarea Terme to Hotel PLUS (moderate) — 18 km (11 miles)

What to Expect:

This mostly coastal ride is probably the most panoramic bike ride of the week. There is one major uphill after lunch, which can be skipped with a short support vehicle shuttle. The longer afternoon ride has more coastal riding along a road with a bit more traffic and is rated as moderate.

Cumulative Distance Range: 14 – 43 km (9 – 26 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: VBT Bicycling Vacation ends

After an included breakfast, travel by private motorcoach to Lecce, arriving at approximately 10:30 a.m. at Hotel Patria Palace. From here you can take a taxi to the Lecce railway station or airport. The nearest airport is in Brindisi.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Masseria Torre Coccaro Hotel (Days 1-3)

The fortified Masseria Torre Coccaro was built in the 16th century and is known today for its watchtower and the centuries-old olive groves and carob trees that surround it. It has retained the simple and characteristic whitewashed look of old *masserie*, but this 5-star resort is a relaxing oasis of tranquility, where food is still artfully prepared from local produce grown on the property and the rooms have air conditioning. The onsite Aveda Health Club has a unique setting in a series of evocative caves. Its Jacuzzi pools are kept at different temperatures, and its *hammam* (Turkish bath) offers beauty treatments and relaxing massages. The private sandy beach with umbrellas and sunchairs is at your disposal, as is the beautifully designed swimming pool nestled among the olive trees and palms—perfect for a refreshing dip.

Masseria Montelauro (Days 4-6)

The Masseria Montelauro Farmhouse, built in 1878, was restored with full respect for its original design and architecture. Its gardens offer all the vivid colors that have traditionally adorned the countryside. You'll enjoy its modern amenities, too, including a swimming pool, which is set in the inner court surrounded by an inviting orchard, and air conditioning.