

# Guided Bike and Barge Via Girolibero Cycling Holidays Italy / Venice-Mantua

## Aboard Ave Maria

Blending nature, culture and fine cuisine, this leisurely bike and barge tour along the waterways of the River Po offers more than just a taste of Northern Italy. It explores celebrated cities of art, one of Europe's prime Nature Reserves and a wealth of tucked-away rural hamlets along the route, rewarding our daily rides with authentic regional dishes back on board. From the glory of Venice, the lagoon leads us to colorful Chioggia. Next up, the natural wonders of the Po Delta, famed for its birdlife. Then Adria, once a key Roman port, and onwards to Ferrara and Mantua – once major city states crowned by the Italian Renaissance.



## INCLUDED

- 7 overnights
- Full board (breakfast, a self-made packed lunch, dinner)
- Coffee, tea and other hot drinks on board
- Sheets and towels
- Complimentary courtesy kit: soap, shower gel, shampoo, shower cap
- Daily short cleaning and mid-week cabin cleaning service and towel change
- Bike helmet
- Travel Guide, Maps, Roadbook
- English speaking tour leader
- Guided visit in Venice and Mantua
- Visit to a cheese factory with tasting of typical Grana Padano
- Visit to the Carousel and Street Entertainment Museum
- Harbor charges
- Bus transfer Ferrara-Zelo
- Boat excursion in the Nature Reserve of the Mincio Park

## NOT INCLUDED

- Beverages on board (wine, alcohol, soda, etc.)
- Museums, fees and extras in general
- Tickets for public transportation in Venice and lagoon (we suggest the ACTV 72 hour ticket, 40 €)
- Tips
- Everything not included in the “Included” section



## Day by Day

### 1. Venice

We welcome you aboard your new home-from-home from 4.30 p.m. onwards, and then regroup for the introductory briefing – at 6.30 – with your tour leader, skipper and crew, along with a first refreshing aperitivo. After

dinner we can savour Venice at night, now free of the crowds and at her most romantic: Benvenuti a Venezia

## **2. Venice**

After breakfast – and perhaps following a wander off the beaten track with your tour leader – we all meet up with our Venetian guide for a tour through the historic center. Christened La Serenissima ("The Most Serene"), the Venetian Republic held sway over much of the Mediterranean (and beyond) for centuries – both as a military power and a beacon of culture, her explorers reaching as far as China and Newfoundland. After your guided tour, you have the afternoon free to enjoy the city at your own pace.

## **3. Venice – Island Pellestrina (30 km/18.5 mi)**

Leaving Venice behind after a gentle cruise in front of St Mark's square, our cycling adventure starts on the Lido, the first of two islands we traverse today. Fashionable in high society ever since the Belle Époque, the Lido di Venezia is now home to the International Venice Film Festival and its galaxy of stars. A short island-hop by ferry takes us into another world: Pellestrina, where we ride past the picturesque cottages and boats of this humble fishing backwater. We rejoin our barge just in front of Chioggia – a bustling and colorful fishing hub known as "Little Venice".

## **4. Island Pellestrina – Po Delta Nature Reserve – Adria (40 km/25 mi)**

We open the day with a stroll through Chioggia, followed perhaps by a visit up the millennial clock tower – the oldest in the world – for some breathtaking views. Weather permitting, we can also bask in the sun at a fine-sand beach nearby: a dip in the Adriatic, a hot savoury piadina – and you are well and truly local! Then onwards into the delta of the life-giving Po. This unique wetland is the prime reserve in Europe for herons and home to a colony of flamingos. We moor for the night in Adria, a key Roman port, once washed by the waters of the sea which bears its name. Adria is also renowned for its Etruscan and Greek heritage. An after-dinner passeggiata into town for a well-earned grappa or gelato is in order.

## **5. Adria – Ferrara – Zelo (35 km/22 mi by bike + 35 km/22 mi by bus)**

After a short cruise we saddle our bikes and, following the Po through farmland and hamlets, we reach Ferrara. Under its ruling family, the Este, this city state attracted architects, artists and scholars for centuries, pioneering town planning principles that have been emulated worldwide ever since. To this day, Ferrara University ranks among the best, and the town is dubbed the "Cycling Capital of Italy". A private bus and trailer take us back to our floating hotel in Zelo, a sleepy village on the Canal Bianco, the waterway which runs parallel to the Po.

## **6. Zelo – Mantua (50 km/31 mi)**

This morning we head for the village of Bergantino, home of the distinctive Museum of Fairground Rides and its collection of street organs, all expertly restored (and thunderous!). But first things first: we are in the heartland of Grana Padano – the arch-rival of Parmesan – and after visiting the local cheese factory, we enjoy a degustazione of sharp and seasoned Grana, washed down with a glass of Valpolicella. After our customary picnic lunch, we leave Bergantino and follow the river to Ostiglia, famed for its medieval fortress and the fierce fighting that took place here in 1945, as the Allies and partisans drove Hitler's forces back. We ride on and rejoin our barge at Governolo Lock, where Mantua's River Mincio flows into the Po. Veering north, we cruise through the lush wetlands that finally emerge into the glorious "lakes" of Mantua.

## **7. Mantua round tour (35 km/22 mi)**

A day dedicated to the discovery of this little visited cultural gem, its three picturesque "lakes" formed by the Mincio, and its surrounding countryside – once a City State ruled by the Gonzaga family and now considered by many as Italy's "Sleeping Beauty".

This afternoon we meet our Mantuan guide for a walking tour of the historic center, and enjoy the rest of the day in town, at our own leisure.

## **8. Mantua**

Departure after breakfast.

**NOTE:** The program has been planned to feature navigation along the Fissero/ Bianco canal, which runs parallel to the Po and connects Mantua to the Adriatic Sea. Due to organizational reasons, weather conditions or provisions

issued by local authorities, the itinerary may be subject to some changes before and/or during the holiday. Issues with high and low water, as well as logistic obstacles such as officially ordered - previously not announced - repair work on locks or bridges can modify some of the daily stretches or overnight stays and may even request a transfer by bus. These decisions are only taken by the boat's captain.

## Route Profile

Total length: 190 km /118 mi

Total vertical up: 30 m

Terrain: 95% tarmac, 5% unpaved

This cycling tour is largely along the flats of the Po plains, and the daily stages vary from 25 to 55 km – mostly on tarmac cycle paths along rivers and canals, or quiet country roads. The boat is moored at night and typically sets sail after breakfast, meeting up with the bikes in the afternoon. Some parts of the itinerary are undertaken by boat, to allow easier access onto cycling paths or simply to enjoy the cruise.

Easy cycling in mostly flat areas, with only few short climbs and descents. Little effort required, suitable for most people.

## How to get there

Fly directly into Venice or one of the airports in the region (which may be less expensive) and take the train to Venice:

Venice: 10 km,

Treviso: 30 km,

Verona: 110 km,

Bergamo: 240km,

Milan: 310 km.

### Trains

For further information on timetables and prices you can consult the following websites: [www.trenitalia.com](http://www.trenitalia.com).

## Accommodation and meals

### AVE MARIA

Modern and highly appointed river barge, launched in 2011.

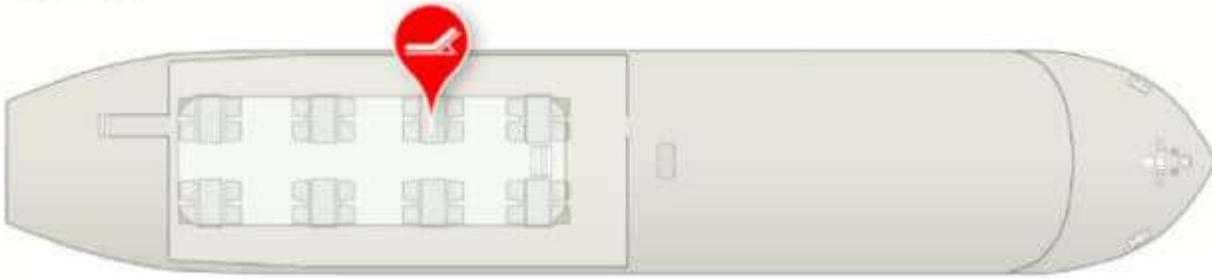
All cabins enjoy sizeable windows, comfortable low beds, en-suite facilities, air conditioning and safety box. Bed/bunk size is 2.00 x 0.80 m. Most of the double beds can be separated into two single beds.

The air-conditioned living area measures 11 x 7.5 m and is divided into two parts: the Restaurant (up to 33 seats) and the Lounge (up to 28 seats).

Extra features:

- 2 sundecks
- Free hot drinks machine (including Italian ground coffee)
- Free wi-fi in the common areas
- Large 55" screen in the lounge for video
- Dedicated bike storage (for approx. 40 hanging bikes)
- Hair-dryers (limited number) available on request
- Complimentary courtesy kit: soap, shower gel, shampoo, shower cap

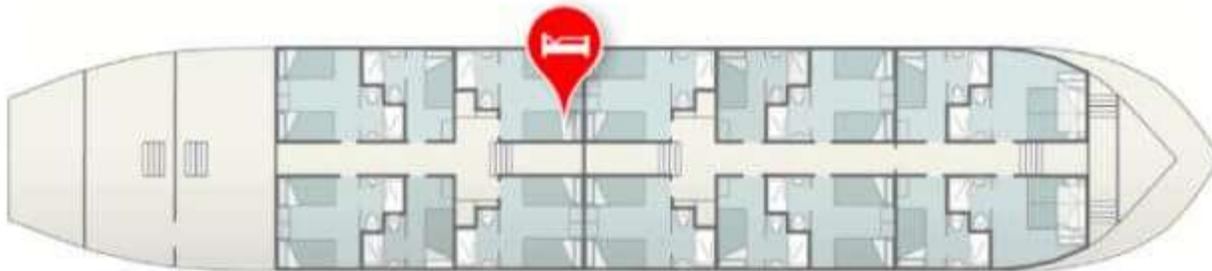
## SUN DECK



## MAIN DECK



## DECK A



## Bikes and accessories

Girolibero's Citybikes are available in various sizes in unisex models. At the moment of booking, you can choose from the following bikes:

- Unisex Citybike
- E-bike (add \$100)

### Features:

- aluminum frame
- mudguard
- rear rack
- comfort gel saddle
- anti-puncture Schwalbe tires
- ergonomic bicycle grips
- Speed Lifter system

### All rented adult bikes are equipped with:

- 1 cycle computer
- 1 Ortlieb one-sided saddlebag
- 1 water bottle (0.75 l)
- 1 combination bike lock
- 1 helmet suitable for head circumferences from 54 to 61

All our helmets have a certification mark according to the DIN EN 1078 (CE) European norm.

## Accompanying material

The Information Pack (one per cabin) includes:

### **Girolibero Greens booklets:**

- Travel Guide with valuable information about the history, artistic heritage, landscapes and natural treasures of the areas visited on the tour. Plus: local events, some great anecdotes, suggestions on how to make the best of an extended break along the route, and tips on local wining and dining.
- Detailed Maps of the itinerary: in color and scaled 1:75.000/50.000, an altitude profile chart and maps of any historic city centers you would visit.
- Roadbook describing the cycling route, stage by stage. Great on its own or in conjunction with the maps.

## By your side

### **Welcome briefing**

At your arrival on Saturday at 6.30 p.m., just before dinner, you will meet the tour leader and the crew. Every evening after dinner the guide will present you the cycling program of the following day. The tour leader will be always present during breakfast and dinner and will cycle every day with you.

### **Tour leader**

Our tour leaders are carefully selected and rigorously trained by Girolibero. They are all multi-lingual, and speak at least English and German. Smart, entertaining, caring and endlessly enthusiastic, they have a true passion for sharing their love of the outdoors, people, culture and local food. Thanks to a deep knowledge of the territory, they can give you useful hints and help you appreciate the place you are visiting. Of course, they love cycling and will be happy to give you some advice about how to correctly use the bicycle gears and whenever necessary they can fix your flat tire. As we like to say, our tour leaders are CDO (Controlled Designation of Origin), a real traveler's ticket to discover the land with ease and to live an unforgettable active travel experience.

### **Staff support**

For the whole duration of your bike tour, you can contact us:

- office +39 0444 1278430 from Monday to Friday 8:30-13:00 and 15:00-18:30
- Ave Maria boat phone number every day 8:00-20:00. The number will be specified in the Final Tour Details.