

Guided Bike and Barge Via Girolibero Cycling Holidays Italy / Venice to 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 taster 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

- 8-days-7nights
- Full board (breakfast, self-made packed lunch, and dinner)
- Coffee, tea and other hot drinks on board
- Sheets and towels
- Complimentary courtesy kit (one per room)
- Daily short cleaning and mid-week cabin cleaning service and towel change
- Bike & bike helmet
- App including maps, points of interest and GPS tracks
- Digital tour information
- Two English speaking tour leaders
- Guided visit in Venice and Mantua with local tour guide
- Visit to a cheese factory with tasting of Grana Padano
- Visit to a Carousel and Street Entertainment Museum
- Visit to a historic glass factory on Murano Island
- Harbor charges
- Bus transfer from Ferrara-Zelo

NOT INCLUDED

- Air/ground transportation
- Beverages on board
- Museums, fees and extras in general
- Ticket for public transportation in Venice and lagoon (suggest the ACTV 72h-ticket, approx. 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 savor 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 – Pellestrina island (30 km/19 miles)

Leaving Venice behind after a gentle cruise in front of St Mark's square, our first stop will be on Murano island, where we will visit a historic glass factory, with a glassblowing demonstration by a master artisan. Then 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".

Staying on board:

The barge starts cruising to Murano, visiting the oldest Glass Factory. Then cruise 30 minutes to Lido. Cyclists will disembark in Lido. Participants can stay on board and cruise to Pellestrina, our stop for the night. The cruise will be more or less 1 hour 30 minutes, very nice. The barge arrives in Pellestrina in the early afternoon.

Self-guided options include: walking into fisherman town of Pellestrina, take a public Ferry to Chioggia, or take a swim in the sea. The group will arrive on board around 5-6 pm.

4. Pellestrina Island – Po Delta Nature Reserve – Adria (40 km/25 miles) (possible option to cycle up to 60 km/37 miles)

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 savory 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.

Staying on board:

Visit of Chioggia in the morning. The group will start cycling. The navigation is quite long today, 5 hours more or less. First part is nice, then a little bit boring, but participants can enjoy the sundeck. Adria is a small town, nice but not big.

Self-guided options include take a Taxi from Chioggia to Ferrara. The cyclists will arrive in Ferrara for lunch. Have lunch with the group and see the city. From Ferrara the cyclists will be transferred by bus to Adria, non-cyclists can take the bus back with the cyclists.

5. Adria – Ferrara – Zelo (35 km/22 miles by bike + 35 km by bus) (possible option to cycle up to 85 km/53 miles)

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.

Staying on board:

Navigation is 5 hours more or less, same as the day before. Mooring point for the night will be Zelo, small town not much to see/do.

6. Zelo – Mantua (50 km/31 miles) (possible option to cycle up to 65 km/40 miles)

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.

Staying on board:

Navigation is 4 hours more or less, but the last part (2 hours) it will be with the whole group and it's nice, entering Mantua

7. Mantua round tour (35 km/22 miles)

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.

Staying on board: WIFI: please tell those staying on the barge that during the navigation the boat is moving and the WIFI is sometimes not working because of the signal. A good book + iPad will help!

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 barge's captain.

Route profile

Total length: 190 km

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 barge 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 barge, to allow easier access onto cycling paths or simply to enjoy the cruise.

Leisure cycling in mostly flat areas, with only a few short ups and downs. Little effort required, suitable for everyone.

How to get there

Venice is connected with the following airports:

Venice: 10 km

Treviso: 30 km

Verona: 110 km

Bergamo: 240 km

Milan: 310 km.

Trains

For further information on timetables and prices you can consult the following websites: www.trenitalia.com.

Accommodations

AVE MARIA

The Ave Maria barge is equipped with:

- 4 Superior Double cabins (three of these can accommodate up to 4 persons adding 2 bunk beds) above deck, approx. 11 m²;
- 10 Standard Double cabins (three of these can accommodate up to 3 persons adding 1 bunk bed) below deck, approx. 11 m²;
- 3 bunk bed cabins (also available as Single cabins) below deck, approx. 7,5 m².

All cabins enjoy sizeable windows (the ones in the Superior cabins can also be partially opened), 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. Under the bed there is a 40 cm high empty space, where you can store your luggage.

Common areas

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 \$120)

Features:

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

All 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

Before your arrival, you will receive an email with the digital information material. It contains:

1. Link to download the App including maps, points of interest and GPS tracks (you can use the App offline, too)
2. Link to download the tour information material in PDF:
 - Tour notes
 - Final tour details
 - Travel guide with valuable information about the history, artistic heritage, landscapes and places of interest of the areas you pass through during your tour. Plus: local events, fun facts, suggestions on how to make the best of an extended break along the route, and tips on local wining and dining.

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.

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. They are experienced enthusiastic travelers who have a true passion for sharing their love of the outdoors, peoples, cultures and local food. Thanks to their 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 on how to correctly use the bicycle gears and whenever necessary they can fix a flat tire. As we like to say, our tour leaders are AOC (Controlled Designation of Origin), and will help you explore the land and live an unforgettable experience.

Staff support

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

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