

## SPAIN: MÁLAGA & ANDALUCIA'S GREEN TRAILS **MOUNTAIN BIKING** 8-day / 7-nights inn-to-inn GUIDED cycling tour along three classic *Via Verde* routes



The *Via Verdes* in southern Spain was voted '*the best Greenway in Europe*' in 2009 and it continues to win recognition as a major off-road cycling route. It crosses the mountains in the north of the province of Cádiz and the south of the province of Seville. It links a series of old railway lines with forest, valley and mountain trails of Andalusia. By nature, the rail trails follow mostly level, even and traffic free paths that avoid steep gradients and make them the perfect destination for an active cycling holiday. This guided cycling tour offers a week of easy to moderate riding on well-maintained trails using mountain bikes that are ideally suited to the terrain. We explore three '*Via Verde*' by bike, passing through magnificent countryside and landscapes.

Firstly, we explore the rail trail from Jaén to Puente Genil, the *Via Verde del Aceite Greenway*, to discover viaducts, hilltop fortresses and picturesque villages over three easy days. The old Jaén-Campo Real (Cordoba) train line offers rolling terrain with a wonderful backdrop of olive groves, typical Andalusian farmhouses and spectacular viaduct crossings. Next, we travel to the *Via Verde de la Campina* and the historic city of Cordoba with a couple of days between Cordoba and Marchena beside the Guadalquivir River.

The last of the trails, the *Via Verde de la Sierra*, is in the southern most mountains of Spain, and is a well graded mountain trail between Puerto Serrano and Olivera. The area offers a maze of illuminated tunnels and viaducts that make the cliffs, valleys and river crossings easy and the views even more impressive. It is also home to a number of nature parks including the Peñón de Zaframagón, the largest vulture reserve in Andalusia and one of the most populated in Europe.

The cycling week starts and ends with a night in a comfortable villa just a stroll from the beach and near some of Spain's most popular Mediterranean holiday resorts. The rest of the week is spent inland, in rural hotel accommodation with transfers each day to guided bike rides. We explore the trails from rural farmlands to villages and mountains, visiting lakes and forests or national parks. The weather in this region of southern Spain is perfect **all year round** with an average of 300 sunny days a year.

**Cost from:** \$2350 per person twin share      Single room supplement on request - when available

**Departs:** **Every Saturday** year round (except July and August) subject to numbers

**Inclusions:** Return transfers from Málaga Airport, 2 nights twin share comfortable villa accommodation near the beach at Fuengirola with shared bathrooms, 5 nights twin share in rural hotels, breakfast daily, luggage transfers, mountain bike hire, guided mountain bike touring and local minibus transport each day

**Not Included:** Dinner and other meals or extra drinks, optional sightseeing or personal expenses.

**E-Bike hire is available** at extra cost, ask for details when you make your booking.

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**Suggested Itinerary:** Routes offer easy to moderate cycling on rail trails or mainly flat well graded paths over rolling terrain. Average distances per day are 40 - 50km. The pace depends on the wishes of the group: It can be fast and furious or slow and leisurely with the emphasis on enjoying the spectacular scenery and sunshine.

**Day 1:** On arrival at Malaga Airport, there is a transfer to the coastal villa at Fuengirola. The atmosphere is very relaxed and you have plenty of time to meet your guide and get introduced to your bike, before an evening at leisure, perhaps taking a stroll along the seafront in the evening into the nearby lively town centre.

**Day 2:** After breakfast, there is an early transfer to Jaén to start your first ride along the Via Verde de la Aceite. You will first notice the abundant sea of olive trees. The route, known as the *Olive Oil Greenway* follows the old Jaén-Campo Real (Cordoba) train tracks that transported olive oil and other produce between from Cordoba to the Port of Malaga. Enjoy the days cycling this undulating rail trail and end up in the village of Alcaudete with an overnight stay in a rural hotel.

**Day 3:** Today you continue along the *Via Verde de la Aceite*, cycling from Alcaudete to the village of Doña Mencía. Along the way, wooden bridges and tall metal viaducts built in the 1880s encroach on an endless landscape of olive groves with silvery-green leaves and golden-green fruit, stretching to the horizon. Overnight we stay in a rural hotel in Doña Mencía.

**Day 4:** The final day along the *Via Verde de la Aceite* cycling from Doña Mencía to Puente Genil. Leave the hills behind you and take your coach transfer to the historical city of Cordoba. Córdoba is an amazing place to explore with its narrow white washed streets leading to the market and The Great Mosque of Córdoba (*Mezquita de Córdoba*), one of Europe's finest examples of Moorish architecture, as well as the Mezquita, the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption. We spend the night in a hotel in Cordoba.

**Day 5:** Today offers new landscapes with a ride along the Via Verde de la Campina country trail from Cordoba to Elija. The Guadalquivir River Valley takes you along one of the most fertile areas in Andalucía, through a rugged landscape offering some quite remarkable views. End the days ride in Elija, a town that showcases many magnificent churches as well as numerous striking mansions, convents and the remains of fortified walls. Overnight we stay in a rural hotel.

**Day 6:** Another day along the *Via Verde de la Campina* riding through rolling, rural landscapes and rugged valleys we pass fields of sunflowers and cereals (especially beautiful in Spring) before arriving in Marchena. Along the way are villages showcasing Moorish architecture and historic sites such as the impressive Almodóvar Castle. Transfer to Montellano, a typical Andalusian pink marble village, a town of historical and cultural importance, dating back to the Bronze Age. Overnight in Montellano

**Day 7:** The *Via Verde de la Sierra* from Puerto Serrano to Olivera is along an old railway track built before the Spanish Civil war and never finished and now developed for mountain biking and walking. It passes through the mountains with over 30 tunnels (these illuminate automatically as you pass through), 5 old railway stations and 6 spectacular viaducts, for 34km. The route passes the Guadalete River and through the unique Zaframagón Vulture Reserve where vultures are often seen circling overhead. We then return by coach to the coastal villa at Fuengirola for your last night stay.

**Day 8:** The tour ends after breakfast in Fuengirola.

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**Outdoor Travel** offers self-guided or guided cycling tours in Europe, including the Inn River Bike Trail in Switzerland, the Camino de Santiago in Spain, Passau to Vienna along the Danube or Vienna to Budapest, in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, England and Scotland, in China, Japan or New Zealand.

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