



Epic Cycling Climbs

Epic Cycling Climbs Route 11: Eight day ride from Varenna on Lake Como in Italy to Innsbruck in Austria



This **559 km journey, with around 15,400 metres of climbing**, begins on the shores of **Lake Como** in Varenna and crosses the mountains of northern Italy before finishing in **Innsbruck, Austria**. Along the way, it takes in the lower-altitude passes and climbs of the **Bergamo Alps** in Lombardy, before crossing into Trentino and continuing through the dramatic landscapes of

Alto Adige/Südtirol. The final Alpine crossing is the **Penser Joch**, leading into Austria and the Tyrolean capital of Innsbruck.

The route includes **fourteen climbs and passes**, making this a demanding journey despite its relatively modest distances. The lower Alpine passes can be particularly deceptive: although they do not reach the heights of the great Alpine passes, their gradients are often steeper, making for some surprisingly tough riding.

With around **2,000 metres of climbing per day**, an eight-day itinerary gives plenty of time to enjoy the scenery and the many tempting villages, cafés and mountain stops along the way. The stages are moderate enough in distance and elevation that stronger riders could shorten the journey to seven days, averaging around 2,200 metres of climbing each day.

The route offers a wonderful progression through the Italian Alps, from the lakes and lower mountains of Lombardy to the high valleys of Südtirol, with constantly changing landscapes, architecture and mountain culture. Among the many climbs, **Passo Crocedomini** and the **Penser Joch** stand out as particular highlights, providing a fitting finale before the descent into Innsbruck.

[See the complete route here](#)



[Stage 1 \(65km, 2,120m elevation gain\)](#): The route begins in Varenna on Lake Como, which can be reached by train. You may choose to stay on Lake Como before the ride and cycle up to the Madonna del Ghisallo from Bellagio, then take a boat across the lake to Varenna. The first

stage includes two climbs — Passo Agueglio and Culmine San Pietro — and offers stunning views over the lake before heading inland toward the Bergamo Alps. The day concludes in the village of Vedeseta.

[Stage 2 \(70km, 1,840m elevation gain\)](#): This is a more relaxed day of riding, featuring rolling terrain with steady climbs and descents. The route begins in the Vedeseta Valley and ascends the Zambra Pass via the Taleggio Gorge, passing through delightful scenery along the way. The day ends in the village of Darga.

[Stage 3 \(80km, 2,550m elevation gain\)](#): This is a tougher day, beginning with the completion of the ascent to the Presolana Pass before continuing along a rolling route to the climb of Passo Crocedomini. The Passo Crocedomini is demanding, with 1,650 metres of climbing and sections that reach double-digit gradients. The day concludes with a 20 km descent into Bagolino.

[Stage 4 \(97km, 2,040m elevation gain\)](#): The day begins in Bagolino and heads north towards Trento. There are four climbs on this stage, with the Sella di Andalo as the highest point at 1,134 metres. The route passes the beautiful Lake Molveno, which is well worth a stop to admire its setting. Towards the end of the day, there is a sharp ascent of around 300 metres to Sporminore, partly on gravel. The stage finishes in the village of Cunevo.

[Stage 5 \(76km, 1,940m elevation gain\)](#): This stage starts in Cunevo and finishes in Terlan in the Adige Valley, just west of Bozen. It includes two main climbs: the Gampenpass (1,517 m, with 557 m of climbing) and the Brezer Joch (1,399 m, with 492 m of climbing). The route also passes Lago di Santa Giustina and features rolling terrain, with continual ups and downs throughout the day.

[Stage 6 \(34km, 1,340m elevation gain\)](#): This stage runs from Terlan to Bozen, a distance of only 14 km along the valley cycle path. However, we take the longer and more challenging route via the Mölten climb, high above the Adige Valley. Although this is effectively a half-day of riding, the climb is fiendishly difficult, with 1,200 metres of elevation gain and gradients reaching up to 18%. Bozen is a beautiful town and well worth spending the afternoon exploring and recovering.

[Stage 7 \(57km, 2,010m climbing\)](#): This stage runs from Bozen to Pens. It is not long, but it is steep. We take a detour via Klobenstein, which is a superb 1,100-metre climb straight out of Bozen, before joining the Sarntal Valley and riding on to Pens, located halfway up the Penser Joch pass. This stage can be lengthened by including an ascent to the lovely Lake Vadurna which makes this [stage 78km long and climbs 2,560m](#).

[Stage 8 \(79km, 1,520m elevation gain\)](#): The final stage runs from Pens to Innsbruck and is a day to savour. It begins with the remaining 700 metres of climbing to the Penser Joch pass, a superb mountain road, before descending to the charming town of Sterzing. After a break in Sterzing, the route tackles a short climb to the historic Brenner Pass, followed by a descent along the old road into Innsbruck.

As an alternative finish, you could return to Bozen from Sterzing via the Eisack Valley. Although this valley can be busy, over 40 km of the route are on cycle paths, and there are several historic towns worth stopping in. [This variation would extend stage 8 to 104 km with 1,240 metres of climbing.](#)

Varenna and Innsbruck can be reached by train and returning from Innsbruck to upper Italy by train is reasonably straight forward but requires four changes and most of the day to reach Varenna (avoid the Frecciarossa fast train as that does not take an assembled bike). If you return to Bozen, transport will become a touch easier.

[You can check out the route on Komoot here.](#)

You can also scan the QR below:

Check out this activity

From Varenna on Lake Como to Innsbruck



↔ **561 km** ↗ **15,420 m**



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