

APULIA



Undiscovered
Southern Italy



APULIA (PUGLIA)

MATERA & AMALFI COAST

Apulia is studded with interesting small towns, each with its own magical quality and something special to offer. Simply visiting these is a pleasurable pastime.

Little Known Region of Charm and Fascination

Apulia, along with many other areas of Italy beyond the usual tourist trails, is relatively unknown to outsiders. Therein lies its charm and attraction. Quintessential Apulia is the simple but memorable combination of geometric buildings in a landscape of hot sun, white rock, azure sea and ochre soil studded with almond groves, vineyards and ancient olive trees.

The attributes distinguishing this region - vernacular, Romanesque and Baroque architecture, the many surviving traditional crafts, one of Italy's best regional cuisines, local dialects and festivals - are greatly influenced by its strategic position and history.

Since antiquity Apulia has been invaded, conquered and colonised by a succession of major powers of the day, due to its location as a gateway between the Orient and Europe. Each occupancy has left its influence, evident in the pleasing blend of culture and the unique built landscape that is present day Apulia.

Exceptional Coastal Landscapes

Apulia's singular landscape is dominated by the surrounding sea and three main geographic features: the mountainous Gargano peninsula, a vast plain called Murge, and the rolling, raised plateaux called the Tavoliere. These provide a pleasing and often spectacular backdrop for ports positioned on cliff edges or on islands, for whitewashed hilltop towns and the large, old farming estates called masserie.

Naturally occurring limestone caves and ravines show signs of habitation from Neolithic times and were the genesis of a group of extraordinary troglodyte towns. Apulia is intensely cultivated but pockets of original oak forest and extensive stretches of natural coastal vegetation survive. Along with the influence of the dry, southern Mediterranean climate, these features lend themselves to a rich variety of unusual and arresting landscapes. The counterpoint of rich, red soil under a silvery green sea of ancient olive groves is one of the most potent images of this area.

Outstanding Regional Cuisine

The traditional diet, based on the local produce (grain, fish and shellfish, lamb, tomatoes, olives and almonds) is one of the outstanding Italian regional cuisines and provides genuine interest to those of an epicurean leaning. Equally pleasing is the variety of D.O.C. wines, such as the red Salice Salento and Primitivo di Manduria, the white wines of the Locorotondo area and some of the best Italian 'rosato'.

Dynamic History and Profusion of Archaeology

For the ancient Greeks, Apulia was part of Magna Grecia. Colonial cities shared the area with other prosperous local cultures like the Messapians and Daunii. Some time later the Romans conquered the area, naming it Apulia. In Byzantine times the region was heavily influenced by the proximity of Greek culture but also by the Goths and Lombards. Apulia by the ninth century was partly occupied by Arabs and in the late Middle Ages flourished under Norman, Swabian and Angevin crusading kingdoms, as seen in well preserved castles and several fine Romanesque cathedrals.

The influence of the long Spanish occupation is best seen in the proliferation of outstanding buildings in the southern Baroque style and Arabic influence in the regional cuisine. Interesting archaeological remains from earlier times are found throughout the region, such as temples, mosaics, pottery and jewellery from Greek and pre-Roman Italic cultures, and remnants of several Roman centres and roads.

The National Archaeological Museum in Taranto and other local museums have interesting collections where artefacts can be studied.

Unique Vernacular Building, Architecture & Art

Rather than being contained in galleries, the true art of Apulia is that incorporated into buildings. Fresco and carved ornament adorning both the inside and outside of buildings, are abundant. In Lecce spectacular decorated Baroque building predominates, but there are numerous excellent Romanesque and Baroque examples elsewhere.

Unusual vernacular architecture is a significant feature in Apulia. Here are found the trulli, round stone houses and farm buildings with conical roofs; the impressive masserie, solid rectangular farm houses; and the white towns on hilltop or coast, such as Cisternino and Otranto.

Grottaglia is a major centre of ceramics, traditional, colourful or contemporary, with over a hundred studios within walking distance, while interesting pictorial and contemporary art is presented in small provincial galleries.

Long periods of privation are a thing of the past in Apulia and the region has entered a period of prosperity. However, the Apulian people, now numbering about four million inhabitants, are still known for their famous hospitality and pride in their region.

San Paolo basilica - Otranto



White streetscape - Ostuni



Trullo farmhouse - Valle d'Itria





Main square in Lecce

your hosts The idea underlying our tour and itinerary is to offer a small group the opportunity to sample the authenticity of this fascinating part of Italy that is still largely unsullied by tourism, a decided advantage for travellers wanting to get off the beaten track.

John Anderson

A Kiwi architect living and working in Auckland, John was in practice in Rome for several years. He was introduced to Apulia by his Italian wife and her family, and has great fondness for the place. Also a graduate in botany, he has cultivated an interest in plants and landscape architecture, becoming a keen observer of the natural and architectural features of southern Italy.



Andrea Bassan

An Italian architect living and practising in Rome, Andrea is a veteran traveller both in Italy and abroad. He is fluent in English and combines a broad knowledge of Italian architecture and archaeology with a nose for finding places of special interest and character. Apart from his professional activities, he is currently engaged in a survey of decorated catacombs in Rome as a doctoral dissertation.



Stefano Cannata

An Italian biologist who teaches at the University Tor Vergata in Rome, Stefano is held in high regard amongst his friends for his culinary abilities. He has selected the recommended eating places for the tour and will also be on hand to organise the occasional picnic lunch. Stefano will prepare a traditional Apulian meal at the farmhouse near Rome.



why travel with us

Do you find being informed in an informal way adds to your appreciation of places visited? Enjoy elegance, without pretence in accommodation with wonderful regional fare each day? Seek unspoilt landscapes and genuine interaction with hospitable locals?

We hope the following will allay any fears for those of you who may have reservations about group or organised travel.

- **Concentrating on one Italian region** allows sufficient time to be properly immersed in the local culture and history of an area. Benefits of this form of travel include the short distances travelled overall on tour and on a typical day - some days with no travelling at all.
- **We aim to remove as many barriers as possible** to allow the fullest appreciation of the essential nature of Italy, that eludes many foreign travellers and to provide a similar richness of experience that Italians travelling within their own country innately know how to find and enjoy.
- **Benefit from the depth of preparation, attention to detail**, our broad local knowledge, and the network of delightful local people you will enjoy meeting. Our professional backgrounds in architecture, botany, art, and archaeology add an additional informative perspective that not every tour can offer.
- **Value for money.** We have taken care of the decisions which might impede your freedom to savour each moment to the maximum. Due to our years of research, experience and our professional background and dedication, Authentic Italy Tours enables the independent traveller to experience a trip in a way you could not achieve on your own.
- **Personally vetted and experienced restaurants**, trattoria, the occasional special picnics and meals at interesting private homes are all rated highly by our guests. Superb vineyard visits and wine tasting are highlights.
- **Cuisine** is often cited as a key to the understanding of local culture. We have given food and wine the greatest attention in order for you to sample the widest range of fabulous food of a particular regional cuisine in memorable settings.
- **Experience hand picked boutique hotels** known in Italian as 'charm hotels' including converted 'palazzi' or convents of character, interest and elegance without pretension.
- **Group travel** allows us to organise certain events or visits that are otherwise unavailable to the independent traveller. This assists in providing you with a richer and more varied adventure. A maximum group size of 16 travellers accompanied by two or three Italian and English speaking guides (depending on number in group).
- **A high ratio of return customers** attests to our efforts to make each day special and memorable. Every aspect of each day has been carefully considered. Over time we have scoured each region to find those special places, occasions, people and experiences that enable our guests to partake in an unforgettable journey.
- **A tour book given to each traveller** provides additional information and maps of the region, towns and villages visited. It is a great asset on tour and a lasting memento that people find very useful as a record of the itinerary.
- **We appreciate and enjoy** the ongoing associations and friendships made with our past travelling companions.
- **Our intention to stay small, family and non-corporate in nature.** A dedication to being good and courteous hosts, we will show you from different angles, an authentic slice of Italy.



The semi-abandoned historical centre of Matera

accommodation

Charming boutique hotels, convents and farmhouse-style accommodation have been carefully selected for their special character, varied settings and atmosphere; rural, town, coast, or inland hilltop.

We stay in a particular location for a few days at a time reducing travel time and enabling as much time as possible to best sample the delights of each region.

In Rome you will stay in a quiet, well appointed converted convent hotel located in the historical centre, in a quiet part of Trastevere. It is within easy walking distance of the Piazza Navona, the Pantheon, Campo di Fiori and the labyrinth of historical streets in these quarters of the historical centre. We begin and end our tours here.

Hotels are subject to availability at the time of final booking of each tour, however, are typically four star or equivalent if they do not fit the criteria for a star rating. Converted convents typically fall into this category.

sample itinerary

Day 3 - Cisternino: the Trulli District (B, L)

We transfer to the rural Villa Cenci hotel near the small town of **Cisternino** in the **Valle d'Itria**, also known as the Trulli District, an extraordinary and totally unique landscape, dotted with conical-roofed dwellings (trulli) amidst vineyards and fields partitioned by stone walls. We then stop at a typical farmhouse, **Masseria Minguccio**, and enjoy a home cooked lunch prepared by Stefano. Look through this large building and wander along the country lanes and visit an abandoned trulli complex. Later we take coffee or 'aperitivo' and enjoy a stroll in nearby **Ostuni**, a stunning town of stark whitewashed buildings with its stepped streets and alleyways reminiscent of a North African medina. Dine in Ostuni or back at the hotel.

Day 7 - Lecce: the most beautiful city in southern Italy (B)

While your luggage is transferred to our sea side hotel, we enjoy the day in **Lecce**, the capital of the southern baroque style. A sculptured and embellished city, Lecce is a particularly memorable place where you will witness the most intricate and fanciful stone carving ever expressed in the baroque style. You feel most strongly here the influence the Spanish had in this region. The graceful old centre is nicely sized for exploring on foot. We will visit some artisan workshops and browse in elegant boutiques. We then check in and dine at rural hotel/farmstay **Masseria dei Panzanari** at **Muro Leccese**.



Masseria Minguccio, the family farmhouse which is our base in the Apulia region.



Sea side hotel at thermal resort of Santa Cesarea Terme.



Our hotel in central Apulia. There is a large pool and some rooms are conical trulli structures common in this area.

Day 9 - excursion: Mar Ionico (Ionian sea coast) (B,D)

After a stop at the **Santuario della Madonna di Coelimanna** to view medieval Greek frescos and mosaics, we travel on towards the Ionian (Jonico in local dialect) coast, visiting an interesting Italian cemetery, where you can compare the wistfully beautiful yew-lined streets of old family mausoleums with an equally fascinating, if somewhat macabre contemporary adjunct. We drop down to the coast to lunch at the charming seaside town of **Santa Maria al Bagno**, then to nearby **Gallipoli** where we visit an antique underground olive press and enjoy a port side evening meal. This aptly named (kalli = beautiful, Polis = city) old port, with its Hellespont namesake, is of Greek origin.

enquiries

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