



# THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED - PUGLIA

**14 - 28 SEPTEMBER 2017**

AUD 7,970 PER PERSON (TWIN SHARE)  
AUD 8,960 PER PERSON (SOLO TRAVELLER)







The harbour in Trani

## OVERVIEW

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Since 2007, we've been designing itineraries for people who are, like us, fascinated by Italy and believe that a holiday is best experienced in good company. Our small groups (maximum of 14 people) and carefully chosen itineraries ensure you will have a delightful and authentic Italian holiday.

We travel at a relaxed pace so that you can make the most of your time in Italy without racing from one city to another. There is plenty of free time so you can explore that museum that really interested you, indulge in some shopping or just put your feet up and enjoy the view.

The tour begins in the quaint town of Lecce with its wide, pedestrian streets and intricately pretty baroque facades. We visit the area around Lecce known as the Salento and travel to the tip of Italy's heel to see where two seas meet. We visit fascinating museums to learn about a culture that dates to the Bronze Age and see the local art.

"We have visited Italy previously, once with a large group and twice independently, but Italian Tours was definitely the most enjoyable. The carefully chosen hotels, cultural visits and local food and wine experiences, combined with a small friendly group, were decidedly a bonus"

Paul (2013)

The Valle d'Itria, famous for the distinctive stone trulli dwellings will delight you and the spectacular coastal scenery means that your cameras should never be out of reach. We stop to watch local artisans at work and visit some producers to see how the local specialties and wine are made.

We'll be staying in just four hotels over the 15 days to ensure we minimise the time spent packing and moving. Our bases for the tour are Lecce (4 nights), the Valle d'Itria (4 nights), Trani (3 nights) and Mattinata (3 nights).

There are 5 lunches and 5 dinners included in the tour in restaurants chosen for their high quality food and wine that is typical of the area we're visiting. And we are always on hand to enjoy a meal together on other occasions.







Baroque architecture in Otranto

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1 - ARRIVE IN PUGLIA

Our tour begins with four nights based in wonderful Lecce, with its ornate iron balconies overlooking golden stone streets, its Roman ruins and the local 'Leccese' Baroque architecture. On day one we collect you from Bari airport or railway station and drive to you to our comfortable hotel in Lecce where we gather for welcome aperitivi.

Overnight: Lecce

### DAY 2 - EXPLORING LECCE

We spend the first morning wandering the atmospheric streets of this ancient town, which is even older than Florence, dipping into the churches to discover hidden masterpieces and enjoying coffee in the glorious central piazza.

This entire region is known for its artisan handicrafts including papier mâché, copper and ironwork, terra cotta, bulrush basketry and weaving and embroidery using the traditional olive wood looms. There are dozens of small workshops where these traditional crafts are still practised.

We'll pay a visit to one of these workshops in the afternoon to see a papier mâché artist at work.

Overnight: Lecce

### DAY 3 - PASTICCIOTTO IN GALATINA AND OTRANTO ON THE SEA

On our third day we head out to the small town of Galatina, which is famous for two very different things. The first is a relatively undiscovered gem: a beautiful fresco cycle by Francesco d'Arezzo, which depicts the Franciscan story of the new and old Testaments, in the church of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria.





For the sublime to the gastronomic, our second Galatinese gem is the local pastry, a sweet custard treat called Pasticciotto Galatina. We'll call into Pasticceria Ascalone where it was invented, to indulge ourselves. You might also like to try local pastries and shortbreads flavoured with quince paste, another local specialty.

We'll spend the afternoon at Otranto on the sea, a small fortified town completely surrounded by medieval walls overlooking water so clear that you can see to the bottom. We'll walk the walls and then visit the Cathedral of Santa Maria Annunziata to see the spectacular *Tree of Life* mosaic that covers three naves in the church. This mosaic is very old, dating from the twelfth century, and was made by a monk called Pantaleone. We'll also see his fascinating zodiac mosaic in the same church.

Overnight: Lecce

#### DAY 4 - LAND'S END AND THE TOWN OF GALLIPOLI

Our fourth day is dedicated to the spectacular Puglia coastline. We'll take the very picturesque road that hugs the coastline all the way down to Santa Maria a Leuca, small town at Land's End, and the original site of a Roman, then a Greek temple that looked out over the point where the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Seas meet. There'll be plenty of photo opportunities and beautiful long views. Leaving Santa Maria a Leuca, we drive on across the peninsula to the quaint old town of Gallipoli, with its fortified port and yellow sand beaches, where we stop for lunch before heading home.

Overnight: Lecce

#### DAY 5 - AN INTRODUCTION TO PUGLIESE WINE AND OUR MASSERIA

On day five we depart Lecce and drive first to Castello Monaci for a wine degustation at one of the highest quality wine producers in the region. This winery started out life as a castle and then became a monastery. Today the cloisters have been turned into an oasis-like garden filled with birds and palm trees and fountains. We explore the cellar and sample their wares - Philippa is particularly delighted with their rose! Well fortified, we move on to our fabulous masseria accommodation in the Valle d'Itria. Masserias are common in this area, and best described as fortified plantation-style farmhouses once owned and occupied by wealthy barons-farmers. Much of the accommodation is within the trulli, the famous conical dwellings that are particular to this region. The restaurant where we dine this evening is also located inside a trullo. There'll be time enough for a swim in

the pool before dinner. We are based in this very comfortable accommodation for the next four nights.

Overnight: Valle d'Itria

#### DAY 6 - MARTINA FRANCA AND ALBEROBELLO

Today we visit the lovely Pugliese town of Martina Franca in the morning. We'll enjoy the piazza, appreciate the elegant Baroque architecture and visit some of the most beautiful fresco cycles in Italy at the Palazzo Ducale. In the afternoon we visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Alberobello. This town has been listed because of its high concentration of over 400 trulli. Make sure your cameras fully charged for this delightfully pretty town!

Overnight: Valle d'Itria

#### DAY 7 - TARANTO AND THE MARTA MUSEUM

This morning we head off to visit Taranto, first colonised by the Greeks who arrived in 700 BC, and the location of one of the highlights of our visit to this area: the MARTA museum. Luca compares the collection and curation of this museum with the British Museum in London. The collection is of extremely high quality, partly because much of it was hidden underground and only rediscovered with the arrival of modern plumbing. Surprised workmen unearthed a cemetery laden with riches including gold jewellery, precious jewels, mosaics and a hoard of Greek and Roman artefacts. It is beautifully displayed with extensive, well written explanations in English.

Overnight: Valle d'Itria

#### DAY 8 - OSTUNI

Today we continue to explore the surprising towns of this region, driving first to the architectural jewel of Ostuni, the 'white city'. As we approach you'll notice the town from afar because all the buildings are painted white and it absolutely gleams in the sunlight.

This area also produces what many Italians regard as the best olive oil in Italy, some beautiful wines and huge crops of almonds. After lunch, we'll visit one of these producers and call into Loccorotondo, another lovely small town that's famous for its wine.

Overnight: Valle d'Itria

#### DAY 9 - BARI

Today we pack up and leave our masseria and head south to Bari. We'll explore this fascinating old city, with its atmospheric medieval centre with a local guide. We'll also visit the basilica of San Nicola, the original Father Christmas, who had a reputation for secret gift





giving. The church is often full of pilgrims and is a very special place to visit.

After lunch we drive on to Trani, a smaller and even more lovely version of Bari along the water, where we settle for three days. We'll be located in the centre of the old town, which is convenient for wandering, taking a dip in the sea and spending a little time relaxing. Trani's port was one of the embarkation ports for the knights heading off to the Crusades and as a result of this became the most important port on the Adriatic Sea.

Many of its churches reflect this history. We'll visit a particularly lovely example of these medieval churches on the edge of the sea tomorrow.

Overnight: Trani

#### DAY 10 - TRANI

Our morning begins with a visit to the cathedral, an exquisite limestone building built on two levels, boasting beautiful central bronze door dating from 1175 and a spectacular rose window. Walking with a local guide, we'll explore the city and pay particular attention to the old Jewish quarter. Trani was home to a Jewish population from the twelfth century, when Jews fleeing from persecution in Spain and France settled as merchant traders until the fifteenth century Spanish rule.

Interestingly a re-establishment of the Jewish community began about ten years ago in Trani.

There is free time in the afternoon for those who want to climb the tower of the cathedral, wander along the seafront to enjoy a coffee, watch the passing parade or do some shopping.

Overnight: Trani

#### DAY 11 - MATERA

We visit another UNESCO World Heritage site today: the ancient city of Matera – and also the location for Mel Gibson's film 'The Passion'! Matera is internationally famous for its ancient town, known as the Sassi, which translates as 'stones'. The Sassi began life as a prehistoric troglodyte settlement mined into the rocky face of a ravine but over the centuries many groups of people lived in these cavernous dwellings. The inhabitants were forcibly removed in the 1950s but today much of the area has been regenerated and there are small business, hotels and bars there. To see this area properly we'll be dedicating the entire day to our visit with a local guide.

Overnight: Trani







*Castel del Monte*

## DAY 12 - AN EMPEROR'S CASTLE AND THE GARGANO PENINSULA

We drive on to our final destination today, Mattinata on the especially beautiful Gargano Peninsula.

First however we stop at Castel del Monte, 'a unique masterpiece of medieval military architecture' and the third UNESCO World Heritage site that we visit on this tour. Castel del Monte is located on a gentle hill that overlooks the surrounding flatlands. It comprises a 13th century citadel and castle built by Emperor Frederic II. Many people describe it as 'a copybook castle' because of its pleasing octagonal design, and perfect symmetry. Luca describes it as 'Essentially a medieval Stonehenge, in the middle of an otherwise empty landscape, with great atmosphere and a mysterious significance'.

Our accommodation in Mattinata, which means 'morning', is in self contained apartments with stunning views along the blue coastline from their balconies. While the area is a huge drawcard for Italians seeking sun and sea in summer, inland it remains a big agricultural area where they grow oranges, grapes, olives and a type of dairy cattle particular to the area. The Parco Nazionale del Gargano is a short drive away. Overnight: Mattinata

## DAY 13 - THE SHADY FORREST AND A PILGRIM'S CHURCH

This morning we drive up through the Parco Nazionale del Gargano to the Foresta Umbra (the Shady Forest) for lunch. The road takes us through brilliant green forests to a lovely tableland and then we take a short stroll through the forest to our lunchtime restaurant.

On the way home we call in to Monte Sant'Angelo, a pilgrim destination where the faithful came to visit the sanctuary of St Michael Archangel, built in 13th century by Charles I of Anjou, and now a World Heritage site. The sanctuary marks the place where St Michael appeared in 490, 492 and 493. Ancient pilgrims to the shrine travelled a route that began in Mont St Michel in France.

Overnight: Mattinata

## DAY 14 - THE GARGANO COAST

This morning we climb aboard our private charter boat and work our way along the coast to enjoy the stunning limestone cliffs and caves of the peninsula. We disembark at the typical fishing village of Vieste, where we have lunch overlooking the coastline. Weather permitting we'll have an opportunity for swimming in the dazzling blue sea of the Adriatic before we return to Mattinata for our farewell dinner.

Overnight: Mattinata

## DAY 15 - FAREWELLS

On the last day of the tour we provide a transfer back to Bari for your departure by air or train.







Alberobello



Luca and Philippa



Ostuni

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ◆ Experienced and bilingual tour leader on hand for duration of tour
- ◆ Transfer to Bari's international airport or train station at the completion of the tour
- ◆ Accommodation (on a twin-share basis) in charming 3 or 4 star hotels
- ◆ All breakfasts, 5 lunches and 5 dinners (wine, or something softer if you would prefer, is included with all lunches and dinners)
- ◆ All land travel in Italy in private, air-conditioned mini-coach
- ◆ Entry fees to all attractions listed in the itinerary (no hidden sneaky costs)
- ◆ Expert, local guides at many attractions
- ◆ All gratuities and local taxes (no surprise taxes at hotels as you check-out like many other tour companies)

## ARRIVING IN PUGLIA

On day one of the tour we will be meeting guests at Bari airport and train station in the mid-afternoon for the transfer to our first base in Lecce. Bari is well connected to Rome and Milan by plane and train. Please contact us for advice on arriving in Puglia.

## WEATHER

The end of September is a great time to visit Puglia - the days should still be warm without the scorching heat of high summer. Most days should be in the mid-20s, so very comfortable weather for travelling.

## PHYSICAL FITNESS

We don't place any age limitations on the tour and welcome anyone with a moderate level of physical fitness. Specifically, you should be comfortable on your feet for up to 3 hours with short breaks and confident on the cobblestones and uneven surfaces. We will always do our best to accommodate everyone, including offering alternative arrangements where possible.

## SINGLE SUPPLEMENT

We try to keep our single supplement as low as possible. For this tour the supplement is \$990.

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is compulsory when travelling on one of our tours. Please contact us if you need help arranging travel insurance.

## BOOKING

If you would like to book a place on this or any other tour, or if you have some questions about the itinerary, please don't hesitate to contact Luca or Philippa at Italian Tours.

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