

PUGLIA



Our **8 nights/9 days Puglia trip** starts & ends at Bari Airport and covers some of the highlights of Italy's fertile 'heel' region but also less visited sites. From ancient times Puglia has been Italy's link to the Eastern World, crossed by the Roman Appian and Trajan Ways. Here the Messapians and Spartans settled, and Hannibal temporarily defied Rome. In Medieval times the Byzantines, Lombards, Normans, and Swabians favoured it building great castles and monastic complexes, and Crusaders embarked for the Holy Land. We lodge 2 nights by the sea in Trani, 2 nights in a lovely Masseria near Ostuni in Val dell' Itria, and 3 nights in Lecce and the Salento, finally visiting historical Bari for 1 night at the very end. Throughout we sample Puglia's unique culinary, winemaking and olive oil traditions.

Day 1

After a lunchtime meeting at Bari Airport (BA direct flight) we travel 1h along the coast to Trani 'The Pearl of Puglia's Adriatic'. The port city was a strategic outpost of the Venetian Republic and where Maritime Law was first drafted. Afternoon visit on foot of the medieval town with its Romanesque cathedral, Swabian castle, and picturesque port. We stay **2 nights** at a converted aristocratic palazzo overlooking the cathedral and the sea.

Day 2

We head inland, climbing to the UNESCO WHS Castel del Monte, built by Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in the first half of the C13th. This unique octagonal structure with octagonal towers on each corner is full of mysticism and a Medieval

wonder, considered by many the most beautiful castles ever built. After lunch at a nearby agriturismo we return to Trani for an ice cream and some free time to further explore this lovely seaside town.

Day 3

We travel south to Val dell'Itria and to Masseria Il Frantoio, just outside Ostuni, where we lodge for **2 nights**. This family-run farmstead, set among some of Italy's oldest olive groves, is very much 'rustic chic' and is renowned for its excellent, home-grown food. On the way we visit and will lunch in UNESCO WHS Alberobello. The latter is famous for its great concentration of 'Trulli', the traditional conical-roofed farm dwellings found throughout Val dell'Itria. Despite being very much on the tourist map it is well worth a visit.



Day 4

Today we visit Martina Franca, the biggest of the hilltop ‘white towns’ of this part of Puglia. The fine Baroque architecture is complimented by the light colour of the local limestone employed not only to build but also to pave. After a delicious lunch we shall continue to the wonderfully unspoilt coastal archeological site of Egnazia (The Greek ‘Egnatia’). The first settlement dates from the Bronze Age and the excellent attached museum is Italy’s best on Messapic culture. The latter was famed for its solar and fire cult, which was described by Pliny and ridiculed by Horace.

Day 5

Departure for Lecce, the headquarters of Puglia’s Salento province, where we lodge for **3 nights** at a lovely restored palazzo in the historical centre. On the way we shall stop in beautiful Ostuni, the southernmost of the ‘White towns’, for a visit, lunch, and rather good ice cream. Once in Lecce there will be time to stroll the walled city’s lively lanes, lined with boutiques and craft shops.

Day 6

We start the day with a ranger-led walk through the little visited but very interesting Riserva Le Cesine, southern Italy’s largest coastal wetland habitat and managed by WWF. We then head for the lovely seaside town of Otranto, on the Tyrrhenian Sea. Lunch is at a seafood restaurant on the water. We also stroll the city walls and view the cathedral’s unique Medieval floor mosaic depicting an exotic bestiary and ‘Trees of Life’.

Day 7

This morning we visit Lecce’s historical centre on foot, with its unique UNESCO WHS High Baroque style. We then head to the seaside town of Gallipoli on the Aegean Sea, for lunch and a stroll through its streets. In the afternoon we head inland to Galatina and the Basilica of St Catherine of Alexandria. This Romanesque-Gothic church contains Italy’s second most extensive cycle of Medieval frescoes after Giotto’s in St Francis’ Basilica in Assisi.

Day 8

Leisurely departure from Lecce towards Bari, on the way we stop to visit and have lunch in fashionable Polignano. In Bari we lodge for **1 night** in the ‘Liberty’ (Art Deco) part of town. Later afternoon stroll through the compact but monumental ‘historical centre’ with visits of the Romanesque Basilica of St Nicolas (The Patron Saint of the Russian Orthodox Church) and the Cathedral of St Sabino. In the latter’s crypt a rare C5th Byzantine mosaic floor has been recently discovered and is being restored.

Day 9

Time permitting possible independent stroll through Bari’s historical centre or along the seafront before transfer to Bari airport for flights home.