

MATERA & UNKNOWN BASILICATA



Our **7 nights/8 days Basilicata trip** starts and ends at Bari Airport and covers some of the highlights of Italy's least known but fascinating Region. Known as 'Enotria' to the Greeks and 'Lucania' to the Romans, it is located in the instep of Italy's boot. In Medieval times the Byzantines, Lombards, Southern Normans, and Swabians favoured it and built great castles and religious complexes. On this trip we also sample its unique culinary and winemaking traditions. In wonderful Matera (a UNESCO WHS) we lodge 3 nights at a Palazzotto in one of the 'Sassi'. We are accompanied throughout by our expert local guide.

Day 1

After a morning meeting at Bari Airport (BA direct flight) we travel 1.5hr to Melfi in the north of Basilicata. Afternoon visit of this medieval town, seat of 6 Papal Councils from 1059 - 1137, its C11th castle and the excellent Museum on foot. We stay 2 nights at the comfortable modern 4star Hotel Il Castagneto, set on the wooded flanks of the Vulture volcano.

Day 2

We drive to nearby Venosa, the Roman Venusia on the Appian Way, in 65 BC birthplace of the poet Horace. We visit the Roman ruins and the Abbazia della Santissima Trinita', Basilicata's largest monastic complex. Wine tasting and light lunch at a small but excellent producer of Aglianico del

Vulture, the region's best known red wine.

Afternoon stroll around the wooded volcanic lakes in the Monticchio Nature Reserve.

Day 3

Today we travel southward to the hilltop town of Tursi, and 2 nights at the Palazzo dei Poeti. This 'Albergo Diffuso' was derived by restoring and linking 40 small private dwellings in the abandoned 'Rabatana', the ancient Moorish fortified quarter. On the way we visit 2 villages and sights: the Santuario of St Donato in Ripacandida, its wonderful frescos make it 'Basilicata's little Assisi'; and Acerenza, where we also lunch. The Cathedral, started in 1080 by Archbishop Arnald of Cluny, is one of Italy's most important Romanesque buildings.



Day 4

This morning we head to the Ionian Coast and the Museum of Policoro and the ancient Greek city of Metaponto to visit the remains of the C6th BC temple to Hera. We then drive to hilltop Bernalda for lunch. The village is famous for being the birthplace of the film director Francis Ford Coppola and has some great restaurants. In the afternoon we visit Craco on foot, this abandoned Norman town is perched on a rocky outcrop and has been the backdrop to many films. The whole area is criss crossed by eroded gullies known as 'Calanchi' and was first used as the setting for some of Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns.

Day 5

Today we travel to Matera. On the way we visit the vast Benedictine Abbey at Montescaglioso, built on top of the Greek acropolis. Once in Matera we check in at Palazzotto Residence & Winery for 3 nights. This very comfortable boutique hotel is centrally located in one of Matera's 'Sassi'. Afternoon visit on foot of the 'Upper Town' of this fascinating UNESCO WHS city, with an obligatory ice-cream stop.

Day 6

After breakfast we head out into the nearby Parco Nazionale della Murgia Materana for a visit of the 'Crypt of Original Sin'. This wonderfully frescoed, rock-hewn Benedictine hermitage dates from the C8th Lombard period. We then walk to visit more of the area's unique 'cave churches' cut into the surrounding limestone canyons. After lunch we return to Matera and resume our exploration of the fascinating city on foot. It achieved great wealth and power in Medieval times but the economy collapsed in the C17th forcing the exploding population to move into and inhabit caves once used as stores. The city clings onto the steep sides of two canyons, 'Sassi', and was the backdrop for Mel Gibson's 2004 film 'The Passion of Christ', not to mention Daniel Craig's last James Bond.

Day 7

We continue our visits on foot, exploring Matera's endless and unusual surprises. After lunch free afternoon to relax or wonder independently before coming together for dinner.

Day 8

Group transfer to Bari Airport

