



Puglia: Heel of Italy, Heart of the Mediterranean

*Discover the south-eastern 'heel' of Italy, unique countryside
between the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea*



TRIP NOTES 2019

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GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit Of Italy



INTRODUCTION

Stretching out for over 300 km along the Adriatic Sea, Puglia is Italy's easternmost region, divided from the Albanian coast by a mere 80 km strip of ocean. As only a very small part of its territory can be considered mountainous it is also the flattest region in the country and, therefore, especially suitable for bicycle touring.

For centuries Puglia has been under strong Greek and oriental influences, resulting in a unique mix of east and west that can be found in several aspects of the region's culture, from the typical 'pizzica' dance to the Greek and Albanian dialects still spoken in some of the area's most remote villages. From the 'trulli' of Alberobello over the imposing Castel del Monte at Andria, to the baroque 'palazzi' and churches of Lecce; from the Gargano National Park over the plains of the Tavoliere delle Puglie, around Lucera and Foggia, to the peninsula of the Salento in the south - Puglia has much to offer to the alert tourist willing to invest some time to explore and discover this region.

The tour will take you through the idyllic coastal regions along the Adriatic and Ionic Seas, past old gnarled olive trees, slowly threading your way down from north to south. You will make your way past typical stone architecture and rupestrial churches, visit pretty little towns like Ostuni and Gallipoli, and explore the limestone cliffs of the Salento region. Most of the cycling is done on flat, well-paved and traffic-free roads, with only a few ascents.

You will cycle past world-famous cultural sites and through pristine natural areas teeming with small country roads, passing through attractive countryside with vineyards and olive groves. You'll visit the region's main cultural attractions such as the town of Alberobello and its 'trulli', the 'white town' of Ostuni, the pleasant seaside resorts of Gallipoli and Santa Maria di Leuca, Otranto and Lecce, symphony of baroque architecture. Cycling through the green hills and wide plains you will pass through some of the nicest medieval villages in the area, where the traditional way of life is still evident and friendly locals will greet you with open hospitality. Puglia has good genuine local food and produces some beady wines waiting for you to enjoy.

The first few days you will cycle through the Tavoliere delle Puglie plain from Alberobello, near Monopoli, to Ostuni and Mesagne. Here you will explore the Valle d'Itria and stop in the vineyards to taste some of the local wine. At the Torre Guaceto Natural Park you can observe several species of migrating birds. After reaching Gallipoli and relaxing there, you continue to the Salento region and reach Otranto, with its impressive Habsburg castle, by way of the seaside resort of Santa Maria di Leuca. During the final days of your tour you will pass countless olive groves on your way to the city of Lecce, the capital of the Salento and one of Italy's hidden treasures.



Please note: this is an easy tour suitable even for those with just a basic level of fitness. Rides are not very long and generally include very few climbs, leaving plenty of time for sightseeing. Average cycling times: approx. 2,5-5 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 0 Bari (or Brindisi)

Arrival in Bari (or Brindisi) in case you arrive a day earlier. If you arrive one day earlier you have the chance to pay a visit to either Bari - where the church of San Nicola di Bari merits a visit - or Brindisi.

Day 1 Arrival at Alberobello

After your arrival at Alberobello you will settle in at your hotel and have the opportunity to visit the unique 'trulli' constructions, which have been on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list since 1996. In the evening you can go for a stroll through the town centre, taking in its very special atmosphere while looking for a place to eat dinner.

Accommodation: Hotel in Alberobello - BB

Day 2 From Alberobello to Ostuni

Your first ride takes you through the Valle d'Itria, passing several small hamlets characterised by the presence of one or more 'trulli'. You may arrive in time for lunch at Locorotondo, home to the 'Trullo di Marzìolla', the oldest in Puglia (1509 AD), and to the 'Cantina Sociale' (wine cellar) of the Locorotondo DOC wine. You can't leave here without stopping in the famous vineyards to taste some of the local wine, before continuing to Ostuni, marvellously located on three small hills at 8 km from the Adriatic coast. Ostuni is known as the 'white town' as the town centre's buildings are whitewashed. Before turning in at your hotel you can go for a short afternoon's stroll in the historic centre and visit the cathedral and medieval town walls, or simply lose yourself in its maze of small alleyways.

Accommodation: Hotel in Ostuni - BB

Distance : 40 km – Cycling time : 3,5 hours

Day 3 From Ostuni to Avetrana

Before leaving Ostuni this morning you may want to explore the town a little more. Several tiny but delightful churches and once-grand palaces wait to be discovered. After a coffee or cappuccino you will then cycle down to the Adriatic coast and the nature reserve of Torre Guaceto. Nature lovers will enjoy observing the various and abundant species of migrating birds in their nesting places. Alternatively you could simply enjoy the feel of the sun on your face and the refreshingly soft sea breeze. From the reserve, you then continue along quiet back roads lined by ancient olive trees in the direction of Mesagne. The historic centre of this town, located in the middle of the Salento plain, was constructed on a small hill and is the ideal location to taste one of the local specialties on offer in the local restaurants. Try the local 'stacchiuddi al ragu' (a type of homemade pasta) or the 'risu patani e cozze' (rice with potatoes and mussels), and don't forget to taste the local Aleatico di Puglia or Ostuni and Brindisi DOC wines.

Accommodation: Agriturismo in Avetrana - BB

Distance : 48 km – Cycling time : 4 hours

Day 4 From Avetrana to Gallipoli

From Mesagne it is only a short ride to the Ionic Coast, which you carry on alongside until the town of Gallipoli. This city consists of a recent part constructed on the mainland, and the old historic centre that lies on a rocky island a short distance away in the sea. They are joined together by a 15th-century arched bridge with fantastic views from both north and south. Nowadays Gallipoli is an important resort town, very busy and touristy during



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the summer season, but much more laidback and easy going during low season. You can watch the fishermen at work at the port, and visit the town's many churches, its colourful alleyways and the imposing castle. In the evening you have the opportunity to taste 'scapece', a local speciality based on fried fish, bread and saffron.

Accommodation: Hotel in Gallipoli - BB

Distance : 52/82 km – Cycling time : 4 - 6 hours

Day 5 From Gallipoli to Santa Maria di Leuca

After breakfast you can wander one last time through the town of Gallipoli and have a quick coffee break looking out over its port. You then set off for the southernmost part of the Salento at Santa Maria di Leuca. You will pass through luxurious countryside dominated by olive groves and vineyards. The little promontory of Punta Meliso near Santa Maria di Leuca is generally considered the dividing point between the Adriatic and the Ionic Coasts. Like Gallipoli, the generally quiet town of Santa Maria also transforms into a busy seaside resort in summer. Of particular interest are the luxurious 19th-century villas built in and around the town, all showing their own particular stylistic influences. Also worth a visit are some of the sea caves along the coast.

Accommodation: Hotel in Santa Maria di Leuca - BB

Distance : 50 km – Cycling time : 4 hours

Day 6 From Santa Maria di Leuca to Otranto

Today you will head up the south coast of the Adriatic Sea, reaching the city of Otranto in the evening. Cycling past the sea you enjoy wonderful views of the beautiful coast, and have the chance to visit the famous 'Grotta Zinzulusa', one of the few coastal caves open to the public. You will also pass through the spa of Santa Cesarea, known for its hydrotherapeutic cures and radioactive mud therapy – perhaps a good idea for a relaxing visit. When arriving in the city of Otranto, you will pass several coastal towers forming part of a once-sophisticated defence system along the whole coast of Puglia. You will enter the city through one of the gates in its massive walls and cycle through the old town dominated by the impressive Habsburg Castle.

Accommodation: Hotel in Otranto - BB

Distance : 52 km – Cycling time : 4 hours

Day 7 From Otranto to Lecce

The last day of your tour takes you along the coast from Otranto to the baroque city of Lecce. You will notice several coastal towers again on your way. A top location to stop for a swim is the Torre dell'Orso beach surrounded by high limestone cliffs. In the afternoon you will arrive in the city of Lecce, capital of the Salento. Take your time to wander through the city's historical centre, which is full of marvellous baroque buildings. No other city in the Italy can boast such a wealth of churches and 'palazzi' in this particular architectural style. Don't forget to visit the Roman amphitheatre and theatre, dating back to the early empire, either. As this is your last night, you may well choose a nice restaurant for the evening's dinner in the old city centre.

Accommodation: Hotel in Lecce - BB

Distance : 48 km – Cycling time : 4 hours

Day 8 End of the tour

The tour ends in Lecce after breakfast today. A train transfer can take you back to Bari or Brindisi. A taxi transfer to other destinations can be arranged on request.



TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful, characteristic hotels or agriturismos (generally 3-star). All rooms have en-suite facilities. No dinners or picnic lunches are included. You will have plenty of opportunities to eat out each evening, choosing from several typical restaurants. Picnic lunches can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages you pass through.

Night 1: The first night is spent in a beautifully located 3-star hotel in the centre of the picturesque town of Alberobello. The hotel is within easy reach of all of the town's major monuments.

Night 2: Tonight you are staying in a cosy 3-star hotel in the town of Ostuni. From the hotel the whole of the historic town centre can easily be reached.

Night 3: This night is spent in a beautiful agriturismo near Mesagne, offering a taste of peaceful country life.

Night 4: Tonight you stay in a nice hotel in the seaside resort of Gallipoli. You can eat your dinner, based on local specialties, in any of the restaurants in the town's historic centre.

Night 5: This night you will stay in a beautiful hotel at Santa Maria di Leuca on the Ionic Coast. There are plenty of opportunities for eating out and having a pleasant after-dinner stroll.

Night 6: Tonight you stay in a cosy hotel in the centre of Otranto. Take a walk through the city before dinner to enjoy a pre-dinner aperitif.

Night 7: The final night of your tour you will stay in a 3-star hotel in the centre of Lecce. No better opportunity to admire the city's baroque architecture by night.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

It is possible to book an upgrade in some of the places en route. Details and prices on request.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderately easy (2): Mostly easy rides, with only a few moderate climbs. Most rides are no longer than 50 km. All roads are well paved and mostly quiet, with little traffic. Extensions or shortcuts are possible on some days.

Fitness: The trip requires a basic level of fitness. Some rides may be a bit longer (up to 60 km) but usually involve few climbs. Easy, flat roads mean you have plenty of time for sightseeing and sampling local culture, and cuisine.



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ON THIS INDIVIDUAL SELF-GUIDED CYCLING TOUR WE INCLUDE:

- Accommodation: 1 night Alberobello, 1 night Ostuni, 1 night Mesagne, 1 night Gallipoli, 1 night Santa Maria di Leuca, 1 night Otranto and 1 night Lecce in good *** hotels and agriturismos
- Meals: 7 breakfasts
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 50.000 scale (or better)
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport
- Private transfers as specified

Not Included

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of personal nature
- Bicycle rental (available on request)

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in ALBEROBELLO, which can be reached by private transfer from the train station of Monopoli. Monopoli train station is easily reached from Bari and Brindisi which both have international airports. **Tours start every Sunday during the trip season with a minimum of 2 participants. During the months of May and June tours can start on Saturday as well.**

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast in LECCE. By train Bari and Brindisi are easily reached.

TOUR VARIATIONS

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to include extra nights in any of the accommodations 'en route'. Extra cycling and/or sightseeing options can be provided! It is also possible to extend your tour with a few days in the Salento region and one of its major towns or in an agriturismo in the region's countryside. Details and prices on request.

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