



Independent cycling tour (BRPS)

Sassi, Trulli & Temples

a divine mix of culture & nature

Cycling across southern Italy: Puglia, Basilicata & Campania Cycling Tour



11-day 'inn-to-inn' cycling tour with bases in beautiful hotels



TRIP NOTES 2024

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INTRODUCTION

This tour offers some of the best biking through southern Italy's less-travelled South. Expect a rewarding ride every day - and along with the ride you'll experience the real 'Mezzogiorno', with intimate insights into southern Italian life every day. The tour zigzags along an intriguing route through Puglia, Basilicata & Campania, all different, but all breathtaking regions, and ends with a stunning ride along what is arguably the world's most beautiful coastline, the Amalfi Coast !

You'll cycle through areas and villages which, not without reason, have been nominated 'World Heritage' by UNESCO: the wonderful towns of Alberobello and Matera, the Cilento National Park and the Amalfi Coast. This tour gives you the opportunity to discover both the famous, and sometimes busy & touristy Amalfi Coast and Puglia and the quiet, peaceful Cilento & Basilicata.

Leaving from the now increasingly popular Puglia, on the shores of the Adriatic, you first cycle inland, passing through the magical Trulli region. There are many good reasons to visit Puglia, the heel of the Italian boot. Some come for the beauty of its olive groves carpeted with wildflowers, or the odd charm of its Trulli - houses topped by clusters of cone-shaped domes made of grey fieldstone. Others come for the region's Greek and Roman ruins scattered about a rugged, unkempt wilderness, long lost in the rest of the Italian peninsula. Then you enter the mysterious land of Basilicata, perhaps the essence of the real 'Mezzogiorno', where you will spend the next night in, Matera, the city of stone, Europe's 'Cultural capital' in 2019. On the next cycling day in Basilicata, on your way to Castelmezzano, feast your eyes on the vast cultivated fields, natural preserves, strange rock formations, and tiny ancient towns.

Then you have to tackle some great mountain scenery, heading towards the spectacular Cilento National Park, an area of stunning natural beauty and without the throngs of tourists. It has miles and miles of dense forests, great mountain scenery and a spectacular coastline, with clear water, pleasant beaches and coves. You'll enjoy encounters with friendly residents, typical local trattoria's, and great fish restaurants. All around you there is an explosion of colour, olive trees and ancient farmhouses. The rides vary between dreamy coastal scenery, wild mountain valleys, deep gorges, and attractive countryside with vineyards and olive groves.

You pass world-famous cultural sites listed as UNESCO World Heritage, such as Velia and Paestum, and visit some of the nicest medieval villages in the area, both along the coast and slightly inland, where the traditional way of life is still evident. All these attractions are connected by quiet roads, ideal for cycling. Of course there will also be plenty of time to enjoy the splendid beaches and wonderful food on offer.

And finally you'll end with a few stunning rides along what is arguably the world's most beautiful coastline, the Amalfi Coast!

Following the spectacular coastal road from Vietri sul Mare to Amalfi, you can admire the colourful tableware ceramics of Vietri, have a drink at the beach of delightful Cetara, visit medieval Atrani or walk on the seaside boulevard of Minori or Maiori. From your base at Amalfi you will be able to ride to stunning Ravello, and on the last day you'll ride along the amazing 'Fjord' of Furore, the little villages of Praiano and Conca dei Marini and mundane Positano to your final destination: the renowned resort town of Sorrento. And from Sorrento you can perhaps visit Pompeii & Capri too!

On this amazing cycling adventure, you will see for yourself that not only has the Amalfi Coast become, with good reason, Italy's most famous coastline, and that Puglia's rising star is well-earned, but also discover an entirely new and little-known, but equally beautiful part of Italy: Basilicata and the Cilento National Park. As cyclists to this undiscovered region of Italy, you'll enjoy all the above and more – on some of the quietest roads that Italy has to offer.

On request it is possible to make extra 'loops' through the area. For example, taking in the intriguing villages of Aliano ('Christ stopped at Eboli'), Craco, parts of the Pollino National Park, or an extra loop through the Cilento National Park. You can finish your tour also in Amalfi, or on the shores of the Cilento National Park (at Paestum).



DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival Bari – Transfer to Monopoli

Arrival in Bari and transfer to your beautiful hotel in the historical heart of Monopoli, a stunning whitewashed seaside village. After settling in our rooms we start to check our bicycles, do a briefing, and perhaps make a short ride (we recommend towards the beautiful village of Polignano). At night you can have dinner in one of the nice nearby restaurants (or eat at the fine restaurant on the premises of the hotel) and perhaps go for an evening stroll through the old town and along the old harbour.

Hotel*** - Monopoli

Optional Extra Day: Along the coast to north of Monopoli: Polignano and more (round trip)

In case you book an extra day it is possible to start with some flattish warm-up rides, along the nice coast of Puglia. We recommend to ride to beautiful Polignano, one of the most charming whitewashed villages of the area and then follow the coast further north, along the impressive monastery of San Vito to the small town of Mola di Bari. The return can either be made along the coast, or you can add some hills and discover the beautiful villages of Conversano and Putignano and perhaps visit the caves at Castellana.

*Hotel*** - Monopoli*

Distance: 30-65 km. – Cycling time: 2-5,5 h. (many possible options)

Day 2 – From Monopoli along the coast & up into the Valle d'Itria – past Ostuni to Alberobello

Today we have a great cycling day, heading for beautiful Alberobello, a UNESCO world heritage site, in the heart of the Itria Valley, a karstic depression filled with thousands of olive trees and many so-called 'trulli', odd cone shaped white washed buildings. A first 'warm-up ride' brings you along the coast in southern direction to the archaeological site of Egnazia, and the charming village of Savelletri, a nice place for a first coffee stop. After another coastal stretch you then head inland and start climbing up towards 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. This is a great place for lunch and you should 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.



You are now on the large rolling plateau of the Valle d'Itria, where you will be cycling from village to village, through fields of fennel and ancient stands of olive trees. Now you are really entering in the heart of the 'Land of Trulli', the concentration of these curious buildings becomes higher and higher, culminating in Alberobello, the capital town of the Trulli, where there even is a church in this shape. You first cycle through pleasant countryside to Cisternino, one of the other whitewashed villages in the valley, passing several small hamlets characterised by the presence of one or more 'trulli'. Then you continue to Locorotondo, home to the 'Trullo di Marziolla', the



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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 or to enjoy one of the best ice creams of the area, before continuing to Alberobello, your home for tonight.

Hotel*** - Alberobello

Distance: 75 km. (optional extra loops possible)

Day 3 – From Alberobello to Matera, the city of the 'Sassi'

Today we are heading for one of the most fascinating cities of southern Italy, Matera. We'll be cycling mostly through rolling hills, on the large plateau, known as the 'Murge'. We pass several nice small villages along the road, where we can occasionally stop for a coffee or a rest. The last part of the route goes through open fields, partly along the **Appia Antica**, the ancient Roman Road - en route to the amazing city of Matera, one of the most extraordinary spots on Earth. Matera, on UNESCO's official World Heritage List, is famous for its 'Sassi' (which literally means 'stones') style of housing. These dwellings were carved out of the stone sides of the cliffs and tell of a time when there were few options for the poor citizens of the region. After settling in at your hotel you have some free time to wander around or have an 'aperitivo' in one of the beautiful squares. You are free to choose from the wide selection of restaurants and pizzerias to for your evening meal tonight. And after that: a short evening walk through the Sassi is simply stunning! *Distance : 40 MILES (65 km.)*

Hotel*** - Matera

Distance: 67 km. (optional extra loops possible)



Optional Extra Day: Matera – Montescaglioso and Ginosa (round trip)

You could opt to make a beautiful roundtrip from Matera, to explore its surroundings, a large plateau, divided by several canyons, in which many cave dwellings and cave churches can be found. For this reason the area is now a protected area known as the 'Park of the Cave Churches'. You will ride through rolling hills, skirting the Park of Rock Churches, an amazing landscape, a veritable natural wonder – a series of ravines created by the erosive powers of rainwater. You can visit the beautiful hilltop town of Montescaglioso, home of a powerful and prestigious abbey, and swing through the small villages of Ginosa – a smaller version of Matera with a very similar cave dwelling quarter, and perhaps ride to Laterza – where you can visit a local bakery to sample the famous 'Pane di Laterza'. Then head back to Matera, but not without a stop on the plateau at the opposite side of Matera's canyon. From the Belvedere you have some stunning views on the city, which is only a short stretch away.

Hotel*** - Matera

Distance: 75 km. (optional extra loops possible)



Day 4 – Through the Heart of the Basilicata: from Matera to Castelmezzano

Today will be your longest ride. You start with an easy downhill section through the fields, towards the Lake of St. Giuliano. Then you'll follow the old road along the ridge, encountering a number of beautiful historical villages, like Tricarico, an old Byzantine capital and Grassano, before arriving in sight of the stunning 'Dolomites of the South'. You make a great downhill ride, but then you will have to gather strength for the last few hairpin bends uphill to your hotel in beautiful Castelmezzano, clinged to the sandstone rocks in an awesome position. And perhaps you still have the energy for a stroll around the village.

A walk up through the village to the remains of the castle and perhaps up the Norman steps is a must! In the evening you eat at the renowned restaurant belonging to the hotel.

Hotel*** - Castelmezzano

Distance: 95 km.



Day 5 – From Basilicata into Campania

Today, we are heading west into the Campania region. We'll cross the National Park of the Basilicata Apennines, a sparsely populated wilderness area, enjoying some stunning mountain scenery, but as well some pleasant village where time seems to have stood still. Towards the end of the afternoon, after a last challenging climb, we'll reach the top of the ridge between Basilicata and the Campania region. From here we will be cycling down into the Vallo di Diano, a fertile high plain with several beautiful towns. We settle just above the valley in a great hotel in an old castle in Montesano.

Hotel*** - Montesano

Distance: 90 km.

N.B. In order to allow more time for sightseeing -and a relaxed ride- this stage can be divided in two stages.



Day 6 – Through the Mountains of the Cilento National Park down to the coast at Palinuro

Today a beautiful downhill ride will bring you to Padula, a nice medieval town, but above all famous for its 'Certosa', the largest monastery in Italy. Those who wish can therefore pay a visit to the nearby Certosa – definitely worth it. From Padula a great route will then bring you, through the heart of the Cilento National Park, in the shadow of Mt. Cervati, the highest peak of the area, all the way down to the coast at Palinuro. First you follow a nice flattish route through the Vallo di Diano, then a beautiful quiet route to the village of Rofrano. From here you slowly cycle down through rolling hills, olive groves and vineyards. In front of you you'll have the towering silhouette of Mt. Bulgheria. An optional detour can bring you around the steep cliffs of Monte Bulgheria, towards the beautifully located village of San Giovanni a Piro.

Once you arrive in the village, lying directly underneath the steepest cliff, the hardest part of the day is behind you. Indeed, from here on you will enjoy an exhilarating descent towards the coast at Marina di Camerota – an ideal spot for a cup of coffee or a cappuccino in the delightful village square – and then continue along the beautiful coastal road to Capo Palinuro. This promontory, named after one of the helmsmen of the mythical hero Aeneas, is one of the most famous spots in the Cilento National Park. Its unique topography made up of dazzlingly high rock cliffs full of sea grottos, amongst which is the wonderful 'Grotta Azzurra', makes for a wonderful sight. You cycle through the little village of Palinuro and then wind down to the tiny port, where you settle in your beautiful hotel right on the beach. If you feel like it can make a short boat tour of the cape, visiting the caves, or just go for a nice swim.

Hotel*** - Palinuro

Distance: 90 km. (+ optional extra loops)

Day 7 – Along the beautiful coast of the Cilento National Park: from Palinuro to Castellabate

Today a great coastal route awaits you! From Cape Palinuro you'll cycle along the west coast of the Cilento towards the medieval hilltop village of Pisciotta. The road passes through fragrant Mediterranean maquis and centuries-old olive groves, offering fantastic views over the sea. At the end of the afternoon you reach Ascea, and descend to the coast, where you'll find the archaeological site of Velia, home to the Greek philosophers Zeno and Parmenides, and cradle of one of Europe's most ancient schools of medicine. Amongst its remains is the celebrated 'Porta Rosa', one of the first examples of the use of the vault in Greek architecture. After a short visit (optional) you continue for a few km through the coastal plain of the Alento River. You cycle past the beach resort of Casalvelino Marina, from where your trip continues along the hilly road running the length of the spectacular coast to Agropoli and Paestum. This is definitely one of the finest coastal rides in Italy, alternating wonderful views with charming seaside villages. You pass through the fishing village of Pioppi, where you can visit the small Sea Life Museum dedicated to the local marine fauna and flora. Pioppi is also famous as the second home of the American professor Ancel Keys, father of the so-called Mediterranean Diet. Then you could stop for a drink in Acciaroli, where, back in 1952, Ernest Hemingway spent some holidays and – some say – was inspired to write 'The Old Man and the Sea'. Some of the village's elders still remember having met the great author and may be willing to tell you an interesting tale or two. Your final destination for today is Ogliastro Marina, on the peninsula of Licosa, famous for its Aleppo Pines. Tonight you'll eat on the premises of the hotel.

Hotel*** - Ogliastro Marina

Distance: 60 km. (+ optional extra loops)



Day 8 – Along Castellabate and Agropoli down to the plain of Paestum

From Ogliastro Marina you cycle in northern direction towards the little town of Castellabate, beautifully located on a hill high above the coast. After a short steep climb, with stunning views, here you can visit the delightful medieval centre of the town, dominated by its castle, and have a coffee admiring the marvellous view of the coast in front of you. From Castellabate you can then follow a stunning road to Perdifumo and Vatolla, from where you cycle down towards Agropoli. In alternative you can skip Perdifumo and enjoy a swift descent towards San Pietro, after which you gently climb up again for a few km before whizzing down to the port of Agropoli. Alternatively you could head directly to Agropoli. The town's historical centre, located on steep limestone crags above the port, is well worth a visit. From Agropoli a few flat km take you to Paestum again. After arriving at your hotel you can freshen up and spend the afternoon relaxing in the hotel's garden, or head for the beach. Those who feel like it can visit the museum of the archaeological site, exploring its collections of prehistoric utensils, Greek vases and Roman sculptures. Not to be missed is the so-called 'Tomba del Tuffatore' (Diver's Tomb), a rare example of Greek funeral painting. You are free to make your own dinner arrangements tonight, taking your pick from the good choice of restaurants for your last great dinner, overlooking the Greek temples. stupendous Greek Temples of Paestum. Your hotel is just a few hundred metres from here, so you'll have the time to visit the archaeological site, dating back to the 6th century BC (UNESCO World Heritage!), where you will admire not only the temples, but also several other monuments. Or you could opt to relax at the swimming pool. Also the sea is nearby (5 minutes by bike), so that we can enjoy a swim, after all the mountain scenery. Tonight we'll eat on the premises of the hotel.

Hotel*** - Paestum

Distance: 57 km. (+ optional extra loops)



Day 9 – From Salerno along Vietri and Cetara into the heart of the Amalfi Coast

Today you have time to relax and pay a visit to the stunning Greek temples of Paestum. Perhaps it is a good idea to have lunch at a local buffalo farm, tasting the famous mozzarella. A private transfer will then bring you to Vietri sul mare, the gateway to the Amalfi Coast. Here you get on your bikes again and start riding one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline: the stunning Amalfi Coast, defined by some 'the most scenic ride in the world'. After a short climb up to Vietri, you'll follow the beautiful winding coastal road to the idyllic village of Cetara, named after the Roman 'cetus', tuna fish, which still produces some of the world's finest. Take your time for a cup of coffee or a cappuccino at the little bar near the tiny port of the village, overlooking the colourful fishermen's boats lying on the white sandy beach. Then it goes on to Capo d'Orso, the highest point of the road, and a wonderful outlook on the whole of the Amalfi Coast and Capri. After admiring the view it goes on, now downhill on a beautiful winding road through lemon groves, forests and dramatic cliffs, until you arrive at Maiori, the biggest town on the coast. A short stretch around the headland brings you to Minori, with its nice little centre and beautiful seaside boulevard.



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Along the coastal road you continue to Castiglione, once part of the defence system of the Amalfi Republic. Here you have the choice of cycling up to marvellous Ravello by bicycle, which is quite a climb, or continuing to Amalfi where you can leave your bicycles at the hotel and then take a bus to Ravello. After passing Castiglione you cycle through marvellous little Atrani with its whitewashed houses and arrive in Amalfi itself, your base for the night. In the evening you are picked up by private boat and brought to a nice restaurant located in a beautiful little bay nearby. After dinner you travel back to your hotel, gliding by boat over the glorious Mediterranean!

Hotel* - Amalfi**

Distance: 25 km. (+ optional extra loop to Ravello)

Day 10 – Along the Amalfi Coast, Positano and Termini to Sorrento

Today you will explore the second half of the dramatic 'Strada Amalfitana' from Amalfi to the town of Sant'Agata sui Due Golfi, located on the very ridge of the peninsula and offering wide views both on the Amalfitan and Sorrentine coasts. You start with the short ride from Amalfi, through Praiano, to Positano, easily the most scenic – and mundane – of the towns on the coast. Shortly after Amalfi you will pass by the scenic 'Grotta Azzurra' sea cave which is open to the public and the spectacular 'fjord' of Furore, a deep canyon opening up to the sea in which a small fishermen's villages clings to the rocky cliffs. Make sure you cycle down into Positano to explore its scenic and colourful alleyways. On foot – as most of the small back streets you want to have a look at consist of stair ways! After Positano the coast becomes wilder and more rugged, and it is a good climb to arrive at the Colli di San Pietro, on the ridge that separates the Amalfi Coast from the rest of the Sorrento Peninsula. A short stretch along the ridge, with beautiful views to both sides, over the Amalfi coast, but also over the Bay of Naples dominated by Mount Vesuvius, brings you to Sant'Agata sui Due Golfi. You now cycle on the plateau high above the coast towards the end of the peninsula, Punta Campanella. From the very last village (indeed: called "Termini") you have a great view on Capri. For those who feel like it there is the possibility to descend towards the delightful beach of Marina del Cantone and up again. You then return along the northern coast, with wonderful views of the Bay of Naples and again Mount Vesuvius, through the charming village of Massa Lubrense. A last stretch then brings you down to the seaside resort of Sorrento, perched on high vertical limestone cliffs above the sea. After settling in your hotel, do go far a stroll and visit its city walls, the old town centre with its wonderful gardens and villas, and of course the stunning panoramic terraces, reason why Sorrento was elected the favourite resort town in Victorian times.

Hotel* - Sorrento**

Distance: 55 km. (+ optional extra loops)

Day 11 – Departure from Sorrento

The tour ends today after breakfast in Sorrento.



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TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

Accommodation is mainly on a half-board basis (depending on your choice of hotels – see inclusions) in good 3-star hotels and comfortable agriturismo's (comparable to a 3-star hotel). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

On the evenings that you will be free to organise your dinner, you have a wide choice of restaurants in the area. No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you'll be staying.

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

Moderate (3): Mostly moderate rides but with some longer climbs and some steeper uphill sections. All roads are well paved and mostly quiet with limited traffic except for some periods during summer and holidays. Extensions or shortcuts are possible on some days. On some of the stretches you may encounter some longer climbs. Rides are mostly not very long, leaving plenty of time for sightseeing.

Fitness: Experience with bicycle touring and a good general physical condition will certainly make your travel experience more enjoyable. You should be able to cycle for several hours a day also in hot weather conditions.

INCLUDED

- 10 nights accommodation in Hotels***/**** – BB/HB
- 1 night in Hotel**** in Monopoli – BB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Alberobello – BB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Matera – BB
- 1 night in Hotel**** in Castelmezzano – HB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Montesano – HB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Palinuro – HB
- 1 night in Hotel**** in Ogliastro Marina – HB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Paestum – HB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Amalfi – HB
- 1 night in Hotel*** in Sorrento – HB
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 200 000 / 1 : 50000 scale
- GPS tracks
- Luggage transfer (*for those who transport their own luggage - E-bikes/hybrid bikes only - a discount is available*)
- Private transfers as specified
- 24/7 h assistance



NOT INCLUDED

- Visas & Departure taxes
- Travel Insurance
- Tourist taxes
- Arrival & Departure transfers
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips & Items of personal nature

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in MONOPOLI; a pick-up service (included) will be arranged from the train station, which can easily be reached from Bari, the nearest city with an international airport.

Departure: The tour ends in SORRENTO. A frequent boat/bus/train service can bring you to Salerno/Naples, while a frequent bus service can bring you directly to Naples Airport. Several taxi services are available to bring you directly to your next destination.



TOUR VARIATIONS

This tour shows you the best parts of the unknown southern Italy – but there are several perhaps equally beautiful areas to be discovered. Therefore this tour can be adapted to your wishes – and special interests.

Bespoke tours can be organised. Shorter versions of this 'Coast-to-Coast' tour are also available: you can book this tour ending in Paestum on day 9 – or cycle from Puglia to Amalfi & Sorrento in 8 days (without the loops through the Valle d'Itria/Alberobello and Cilento National Park). Also could you opt for a different route and end on the coast in the southern Cilento (9 days): www.genius-loci.it/tour/italy_coasts_islands/puglia-basilicata-cilento-nationalpark-coast-to-coast-bike-challenge-tour

For those who think that parts of this tour might be too challenging; vehicle support can be organised along some of the harder stretches.

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to include extra nights in any of the accommodations en route. As well is it possible to extend your tour with a few days In Salerno, Naples, or along the Amalfi Coast. Details and prices on request.

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