

Hidden Italy Guided Walking Tour in Puglia, 2019

(13 days / 12 nights) - \$6,690 AUD per person

"Evidently, the God of the Jews didn't know Puglia, otherwise he wouldn't have given his people Palestine as the Promised Land": Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Puglia (1194 - 1250)

Clearly, Frederick II was a little biased, but he did have a point. Puglia, with its intriguing towns and great natural beauty, has lost of none of its fascination and yet, after 800 years, its castles, rolling plains, forests, spectacular coast and Baroque extravagance are still relatively unknown, with Puglia attracting less than 2% of Italy's total annual tourism.

Puglia rewards slow tourism. Highlights include: six half-day walks along country lanes and coastal paths; guided tours of old Bari and Lecce; visits to three UNESCO World Heritage Listed sites: Frederick II's dramatic octagonal Castel del Monte; the extraordinary cave city in the ravines below Matera and the enchanting 'trulli' town of Alberobello; a lazy day sailing on the blue Adriatic and last, but not least, Puglia's fine southern cooking. The tour will be lead by Simon Tancred

The walks:

Puglia is characterised by undulating plains and hills - no mountains or steps! The Puglia walks are probably the 'gentlest' of our guided tours. The walks are straight forward, following good lanes and paths that take you through some of the most beautiful country in Italy. They range from 3 to 14 kms and take from 1 to 4 hours. As always, you will have the choice of opting out of any of the walks and using the supports vehicles to rejoin the group for lunch.

The accommodation:

The accommodation is in very good, five-star boutique hotels: a classic hotel in the historical centre of Bari; an authentic 'trulli' hotel surrounded by olive groves and vineyards and with a large swimming pool; a luxurious private palazzo in the centre of our seaside base; a renovated patrician palazzo in the centre of Lecce.

The food:

Puglian cuisine is simple, rustic and cheerful, based on the abundance of its fertile plains and coast line. As Italy's wheat belt, pasta and a variety of excellent breads are pillars of the local diet, as is olive oil (Puglia has over 50 million olive trees, some over 2000 years old). There is also a vast choice of fresh vegetables, particularly in spring. Abundant fresh fish and seafood (eg the famous Taranto oysters and mussels) are drawn from both the Adriatic and Ionian seas, while the butchers of the Istria Valley are famous throughout Italy.

Tour Dates: 17 May to 29 May 2019

Tour Size: 7 to 15 people

Tour Cost: **\$6,690 per person**
(two people sharing a double room)
(single supplement for a double room for single use \$850)

Tour Inclusions: 12 nights' accommodation (see the itinerary for details) in 4-star boutique hotels
All breakfast, and all lunches and dinners listed in the itinerary
All land and sea transfers during the tours
All taxes and service charges at the hotels and restaurants
All paid admissions during the tour
7 guided walks
Services of a full-time, bi-lingual, professional tour guide.

Puglia Walking Tour itinerary 2019

Day 1

We will meet in the foyer of our hotel (a classic five-star hotel on the edge of the old town of Bari) and have an aperitif and a light dinner at the hotel's rooftop restaurant, enjoying views of the city and its port. Dinner.

Day 2

Today we will taken on a guided walk to explore the secrets of the medieval Bari Vecchia, the old town of Bari, a buzzing maze of tight alleys and small piazzas adjacent to the city's port. There are many star attractions but the real pleasure of Bari Vecchia is simply wandering the narrow lanes soaking up the vibrant southern life. After a delicious lunch at outdoor tables overlooking the central piazza, the afternoon and evening are free. (Lunch)

Day 3

This morning we start our exploration of Puglia with a 45 minute drive north (stopping for a coffee along the way) and an easy walk through forest and farmlands before climbing up to one of the most remarkable buildings in southern Italy: Castel del Monte, the mysterious, isolated octagonal castle constructed by Frederick II in the 13th century.

(40 mins, 3 kms, [grade 1](#))

After a visit to the castle, we'll have a light lunch, we drive across the rolling plains of Le Murge to the green hills and forests of the Itria Valley, to our base for the next four nights, staying in a beautiful hotel composed of restored 'trulli' (traditional conical dry-stone cottages) with a pool and surrounded by vineyards and olive groves. Dinner is at the hotel's fine restaurant. (Lunch/dinner)

Day 4

Today we walk from our base, through vineyards, cherry orchards and forests to a fascinating nearby town, the capital of the trulli district. There are over 1500 trulli crowded into the historical centre of the town. These strange ancient constructions are only found within a 10 kilometre radius of the town. (13 kms, 4 hrs, [grade 2](#)).

Later in the evening we'll be driven to the nearby coast (40 mins) to visit a wonderful masseria (or fortified farm complex), which is surrounded by ancient olive trees and is famous for its organic produce and cooking. After a tour of the masseria, we'll have an aperitivo and a delicious dinner. (Lunch/dinner)

Day 5

Matera is an extraordinary town, not only for its past but also its future: in 2019 it will be the European Cultural Capital. Although only a pleasant one hour drive across wide open plains from our base, Matera seems to belong to another world. Below the modern town in a deep ravine, are the famous Sassi, one of Italy's oddest urban settlements, a silent medieval cave city, with prehistoric origins. We will spend the whole day exploring this fascinating town, being taken on a guided tour through its twisting lanes, having a light lunch along the way. (Lunch/dinner)

Day 6

Today we do a beautiful walk out of our base, along country lanes through olive groves, orchards and oak forests, picking up an ancient stone path that leads us through hamlets and villages to a charming agriturismo.

We'll have a light lunch at the agriturismo and then head back to relax at our base. (12 kms, 4 hours, [Grade 2](#)) In the evening, we will drive to the nearby town of Martina Franca to join its famous passeggiata through narrow Baroque streets and enjoy dinner at a funky restaurant tucked away in a lane. (Lunch/dinner)

Day 7

This morning we leave the Itria Valley and head south to the austere beauty of the Salento Peninsula, the tip of the 'heel' of Italy, the eastern most part of Italy, the closest point to Greece. On the way we will stop to visit an historic winery, which has been producing 'Primitivo,' Puglia's classic red wine, for over a century.

After a visit to the winery's museum, will have a tasting of their wines and a light lunch. Our base for the next four nights is a perfectly preserved medieval port tucked behind 15th century Spanish walls above an idyllic harbour. Our accommodation is in a 5-star boutique hotel set in a 14th century palazzo inside the town's bastions. The evening is free. (Lunch)

Day 8

This morning we walk south of the town following trails along the coast passing a number of medieval lookout towers and the lighthouse that marks the eastern most point of Italy. After stopping for a coffee in a strategically placed 'agriturismo', we'll continue on down the coast to a lovely small bay, where you can swim before a delicious buffet lunch. (13 kms, 4 hrs, [grade 3](#)). We'll be given a lift back to our base, where the rest of the afternoon and evening are free. (Lunch)

Day 9

Today is a lazy day, taking two sailing boats to head down the Adriatic Coast to a small bay where we'll anchor and have lunch served onboard. There will be plenty of chances to swim in the blue water. We'll return to our bases later in the afternoon, where the rest of the afternoon is free. We'll regroup in the evening for a lovely fish dinner in the town's best restaurant (the female chef was voted 'best young chef' in Puglia in 2015). (Lunch/dinner)

Day 10

Today we drive across the peninsula across the peninsula to Puglia's oldest national park, for a lovely walk along the Ionian Sea. On the way we stop at a small town for a coffee and a visit to one of the artistic treasures of Puglia: the extraordinary 14th century frescos of the Basilica of Santa Caterina. We finish with a swim and a light lunch (6 kms, 2.5 hrs, [grade 1](#)) before returning to Otranto. We'll meet in the evening for our farewell-to-Otranto dinner at one of my favourite little restaurants on the edge of the old town. (Lunch/dinner)

Day 11

This morning we leave our base stopping in a nearby small town for a cooking lesson conducted by a team of local ladies, who will introduce us to the secrets of the 'cucina povera pugliese'. The class is hands-on, home cooking style with the preparation of a five course meal including wine, aperitif with a casual wine tasting during the cooking, the apron of the cooking school and printed recipes. After lunch, we carry on to Lecce, the 'Florence of the south'. Our accommodation is in a classic 5-star hotel in the pedestrian centre of the town. The evening is free. (Lunch)

Day 12

Today we will spend the morning exploring the centre of this elegant city, with a guided walk around the beautiful centre and finishing at an extraordinary private museum. The afternoon is free. In the evening we will have dinner in a small traditional restaurant in the heart of the old town, specialising in 'Leccese' cuisine. (Dinner)

Day 13

After breakfast, we'll be transferred back to Bari, which is well connected by air, rail and road to the rest of Italy and Europe.