

ITALY – PUGLIA & THE SOUTH, ITALY'S BEST KEPT SECRET

8-day / 7-night one-hotel GUIDED walks & sightseeing from Altamura in the undiscovered south of Italy



This walking and sightseeing holiday explores Italy's best-kept secret, the rural region of Puglia, near the 'heel' in the south of the country. Fringed by the azure Ionian and Adriatic seas, the gentle rolling countryside offers wide-ranging views across the plains to snow-capped mountains. Walks in Puglia follow the trails of the Templars on ancient routes through wheat fields and groves of olive, almond and cherry trees. Discover Alta Murgia National Park, rich in birdlife and flora, and dotted with ancient villages steeped in history and year-round sunshine. Nearby in Basilicata is the truly impressive sight of Matera – *voted European Capital of Culture 2019* – a crevasse of hundreds of cave dwellings believed to be the World's oldest inhabited human settlement.

The rural charm and traditional cuisine of Puglia, the breadbasket of Italy, is amply displayed in its quaint trattorias and cafés. We stay in a restored *palazzo* in the historic town of Altamura, with its Romanesque-Gothic cathedral and distinctive cobblestone alleyways or *claustr*i which often end in small courtyards.

This is an ideal holiday for those who are interested in archaeology and the Palaeolithic and Neolithic eras of human history. We explore the ancient cave dwellings in the cliffs of the *Pulo* of Alta Murgia National Park and learn about the long history of the *sassi* of Matera. Close by our base in Altamura are renowned fossil sites with dinosaur footprints and the Palaeolithic 'Altamura Man' embedded in limestone.

Cost from: **\$4055** per person (twin share) Single room supplement from \$565

Departs: 6, 13, 20 & 27 May, 16, 23 & 30 September 2024

Tour includes: 7 nights in a comfortable hotel room with ensuite bathroom, 7 breakfasts, 7 evening meals, experienced walks leader, local transport to/from the walks.

Not Included: Meals and drinks not mentioned, any personal expenses, excursions on your free day, Airport transfers from/to Bari at set times can be pre-booked at extra cost – we recommend you take these - please ask for details when booking.

Accommodation: Our charming 4-star hotel dates back to 1741 when it was a *palazzo* of local nobility. It has been beautifully restored and is located in the centre of the picturesque old town of Altamura. It offers our guests traditional Italian hospitality. Guests take continental breakfast in the splendid, vaulted 19th Century 'Caravaggio' dining room. The historic town of Altamura is on the doorstep with easy access to its shops and attractions.

Meals in Altamura: We serve continental breakfast at the hotel and dinner at local restaurants with local specialities, including the *Pane di Altamura* and *Focaccia di Altamura* (local milled bread topped with tomatoes and herbs). The cuisine is rural and rustic and cooking methods simple and traditional. Puglia's native vines include *Negroamaro* (robust reds and fragrant rosés), and *Primitivo* (also known as Zinfandel) full-bodied reds

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Trip Grading: Easy to moderate walking with some steeper ascents. Easier walks of 8-13km on good tracks and paths, with up to 360m ascent in a day. Harder walks of 8-18km on good paths, with some rocky sections and up to 420m ascent in a day.

A typical European centre-based walking holiday offers a choice of up to two guided walks each day. You choose the walk that best suits your ability and fitness. Walks leaders make the final decision on which routes are offered; each evening they will brief you about the walks for the next day and answer questions you may have.

Suggested itinerary (Routes are determined by the walk leaders each day and are subject to change):

Day 1 Arrival day

Plan to arrive at the hotel in Altamura mid-afternoon. Transfers at set times from Bari Airport, about an hour away, are available at extra cost - ask us for details.

Day 2 Alta Murgia and the *Pulo*

We explore Alta Murgia National Park, near where prehistoric 'Altamura Man' was discovered. The *Pulo* is a doline, resembling a crater in the limestone, probably caused by a sinkhole collapsing, and its cliffs are lined with ancient cave dwellings. We have an opportunity to explore the ravines and caves of the doline. The area is a haven for wildlife and wildflowers, butterflies, orchid, crocus and cyclamen.

Day 3 Matera and the *Sassi*

We visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Matera, in the neighbouring region of Basilicata, where the cave districts or *sassi* have been inhabited for centuries. At the visitor centre outside town we walk through the limestone scenery on the north side of the deep Matera Gorge, enjoying views across the gorge to the city. We visit rock churches and troglodyte houses, accompanied by an expert local guide.

Day 4 Castel del Monte

Crossing Alta Murgia National Park by coach we start east of the castle and wander through olive groves and villages, past typical *trulli* houses, distinctive, white-washed dry-stone structures with conical limestone roofs. The 13th Century Castel del Monte was built by Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II.

Day 5 Free day

No walks are planned for today. Relax at the hotel or sip a coffee in Altamura's narrow streets. Make an excursion to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Alberobello, with its many famous *trulli* houses, or to Bari, with its mazelike old town, the Romanesque Basilica of Saint Nicholas, and the ancient market place.

Day 6 Archaeological sites near Gravina

We start in the walled town of Gravina. Crossing an ancient aqueduct we ascend to an Iron Age hill fort and a plateau strewn with archaeological sites (some occupied from the 5th Century BC). We explore the *sotterranea*, a maze of underground tunnels, churches and cellars.

Day 7 Mercadante Forest

Wander through the Mercadante Forest, a woodland of Aleppo pines, cypresses, holm oaks and oaks, then onto open heath, where we can stop at a *jazzo*, a drystone wall built as a temporary pen for sheep or livestock. We circle back into the forest and end at a *taverna* for refreshment to end the walk.

Day 8 Departure day

Tour ends after breakfast (set transfer to Bari Airport available at extra cost).

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

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