Fascinating Puglia and Basilicata are located in southeastern Italy in the “heel of Italy’s boot” and offer extraordinary variety and beauty. The region is relatively unspoiled, breathtakingly beautiful and rich with archaeological sites recalling the region’s strategic importance to the ancient Romans and Greeks. White washed villages are nestled against the hillside vineyards; olive groves and wheat fields decorate the valleys. Puglia is Italy’s largest producer of vegetables, olive oil and wine. Fresh ingredients and legendary cooking skills combine to provide visitors with a first class culinary experience. Our tour begins with the Sassi of Matera in Basilicata, old dwellings and rock churches carved centuries ago out of the steep cliffs. Today Matera is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From Matera we’ll bike through the Itria Valley, also called the Valley of the Trulloes, where you’ll find thousands of “trulli”, limestone dwellings that are the architectural symbol of Puglia. We’ll cycle on to unique Alberobello in Puglia, capital of the “trulli” and another UNESCO World Heritage Site. From here we’ll pedal to Martina Franca, a real Baroque gem. All around you there is an explosion of color, olive trees and ancient farmhouses. Next is a visit to Castellaneta and its beautiful beaches on the Ionian Sea. From here we circle back to the mysterious land of Basilicata, through the rolling hills of the Bradano Valley and past the Lake of San Giuliano. We’ll reach Matera to enjoy a free afternoon of shopping and your farewell dinner. You’ll certainly enjoy your stay in this fascinating and picturesque region well known for the hospitality of its friendly people. Puglia’s warm, dry, Mediterranean climate is ideal for walking and biking in spring and fall.

Included

- 7 nights of double occupancy lodging in very charming, air-conditioned, 3 and 4-star hotels or family farms (agriturismo) with private facilities
- 7 breakfasts and dinners
- Bilingual cycling guide
- 24-speed hybrid bicycle
- Daily luggage transport
- Transfer back and forth to Bari Airport
- Technical and emergency assistance
- Guided tour in the Sassi of Matera
- Road book with directions

Daily Itinerary

**Day 1: Bari – Matera**

Our tour begins in Bari Airport with a transfer to Matera where you can settle into our first hotel. In the afternoon our guide will lead you into the ancient district of Matera to view the Sassi, one gigantic sculpture carved out of the rock along the side of the ravine. It is a labyrinth of winding streets, neighborhoods, squares, caves and rock churches, literally carved from the stone cliffs. The town has a unique legacy of 100 rock-hewn churches, whose magnificent Greek and Byzantine frescoes were inspired by the mysticism of solitary monks. Additional interesting sites to be seen are all conveniently located in the medieval and Renaissance parts of Matera, between the two sections making up the rock town.
There’s the unfinished 15th-century castle, the D’Errica Gallery of Neapolitan Art in Palazzo Lanfranchi, the churches of Purgatory, St. Francis of Assisi, S. Lucia and Materdomini, and the cathedral, one of the last buildings erected in the Apulian-Romanesque style and overlooking the two valleys of the Sassi. On our guided tour we’ll see a typically furnished old cave-dwelling that shows how the population lived here only 50 years ago, and explore various crypts and underground churches. At night, Matera becomes particularly fascinating which is why our first hotel is located in the historic center.

**Day 2: Matera to Alberobello – 43 miles (69 km)**

This morning we’ll start with your bicycle fitting and then depart for Alberobello. We’ll pass through the small villages of Gioia del Colle and Noci and view their characteristic white washed houses and narrow alleyways. Then we pedal on to Alberobello, the capital town of “trulloes” and a UNESCO world heritage site. Accommodation in the historical centre in a trullo dating from 1600. Visit of the city and overnight stay.

**Day 3: Alberobello - Cisternino – Martina Franca – Alberobello – 27 miles**

Today you will decide as a group between two different options of cycling loops:

- **Cycle Option no. 1:** Approx. 28 miles (45 km)
  The Itria Valley loop will bring you to Locorotondo and Cisternino, two of the whitewashed villages in the valley. Back to Alberobello for the overnight stay in your trullo.

- **Cycle Option no. 2:** Approx. 25 miles (40 km) – This loop takes you on a trip to the underground world of the Castellana Caves.

**Day 4: Alberobello – Castellaneta Marina – 43 miles (70 km)**

Today we’ll leave Alberobello and will head south to the Ionian Sea into Puglia’s Taranto province, cycling along deserted roads among olive trees and vineyards. We’ll pass through the “Land of the Ravines” and by the small villages of Mottola and Palagianello. The Ravines are deep precipices, often more than 100 meters deep, similar to canyons. This is a unique area with the olive tree as a symbol of a land “poor but generous” that is “kissed by the sun and washed by the sea”. Overnight stay in Castellaneta Marina, on the Ionian Sea or in a farm along the Bradano River.

**Day 5: Castellaneta Marina – L’ Orto di Lucania - 34 miles (55 km)**

Today we bike through some of the most fertile land in the Bradano River Valley among vineyards and orange trees. On our way we climb up to Montescaglioso, initially developed around the Abbey of San Michele Arcangelo (1079), rich in beautiful frescoes. We’ll take time to visit the abbey and stroll in the small streets. After our visit we glide down to the valley and overnight at a holiday farm specializing in vegetable production. On the farm measuring over 500 acres on the banks of the Bradano River, the owners grow organic wheat, maize, tomato, eggplant, artichoke, olives and fruit. Here you can relax in the swimming pool before dinner and take in the peaceful surroundings before our delectable meal tonight. Or today you might prefer to “visit the sea”. It is 14 kilometers to the Ionian Sea from Ginosa and you could avoid the climb up the Montescaglioso hill, making it a really easy day of biking.
Day 6: L’ Orto di Lucania
Today you have more time to enjoy the swimming pool and read that book that you brought along or you can choose from two optional circular bike rides.

**Cycle Option no. 1: The Ancient Via Appia – 22 miles** (35 km)
Riding along the ancient "Via Appia" (an old Roman road), you will pass through the charming village of Miglionico, with a nice view on the valley. Here you can visit the massive “Castle of the Bad Council”, built in the 9th century and enlarged in the 15th century to the Basiica of Santa Maria Maggiore where you’ll find a painting by Tintoretto

**Cycle Option no. 2: San Giuliano Lake and the Matera hills – 25 miles** (40 km)
This route will take you along the wonderful, deserted road around the San Giuliano Lake, a peaceful nature sanctuary, the destination of many migratory birds from Africa. Take some time to enjoy bird watching, spotting grey herons, cormorants, storks and fish hawks. Optional is a stop to the Crypt of Original Sin (with the oldest frescoes in the area).

Day 7: L’ Orto di Lucania – Matera – 15 miles (25 km)
Today we’ll bike back to Matera along the edge of the “Park of Rock Churches”. Here we’ll find crude and barren rocks with low-lying vegetation and scrub, deep and winding ravines and over 150 rock cliff churches that give testimony to the diffusion of religion in the countryside. We’ll leave our bikes to reach the Gravina Canyon by foot and picnic here in the caves of Cristo La Selva, an outstanding, intact example of a troglodyte settlement in the Mediterranean region, perfectly adapted to its terrain and ecosystem. Later we cycle on to our first hotel in Matera. The afternoon is free for sightseeing and some final shopping before our farewell dinner together.

Day 8: Breakfast and transport back to the airport in Bari.

Starting Point
You will be met in Bari Airport in the late morning. **Please let us know the arrival time of your plane or train at least one week before your trip!** For train schedules visit the website of the Italian Railways, www.trenitalia.com or www.raileurope.com.

Cycling
The daily cycling distance ranges from 15 - 43 miles per day on mostly hilly terrain. Level of difficulty is moderate. Good cycling experience is recommended to deal with a few up and down hills and periodically difficult Italian traffic.

Bicycles
24 or 27 speed hybrid bikes are included in the price of the tour. Bicycles come equipped with: grip shifters, panniers, cage and water bottle, optional bike computer. It is also possible to replace our pedals with your own “clip on” pedals. Helmets are not included; **please bring your own helmet!**

Not included
- Airfare
- Drinks at dinner, lunches
- Transportation other than scheduled transfers
- Entrance fees
- Gratuities for guides
- Support van (can be rented for additional supplement)